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Western Story

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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXIV

DECEMBER 24, 1927

No. 5



When Santa Hit Big Nugget By Seth Ranger

Author of "The Golden Dream," etc.



HERE seems to be some kind of a racket going on over there," said "Hardrock" Shipley, as he stopped his mushing mule, Tabasco, and peered intently at a snow-covered thicket. Hardrock was a good-natured little Irishman who would either fight or lend a man a hand. He preferred helping, but was rather keen for a

battle at times, holding that a good fist fight toned up the system. He usually battled his partner, "Poke" Tupper, who was standing at his side listening. Tabasco, the mule, turned his long head toward the sound and flipped his ears forward, also listening.

Hardrock, Poke, and Tabasco were on their way to the mining camp of Big Nugget to spend the Christmas holidays. It was the first time in their

existence that Christmas found them with plenty of money. They were out to buy some one, aside from each other, a present. Tabasco was to receive a box of the most expensive candy, something he relished. Poke planned to buy Hardrock a new pipe. In turn, Hardrock expected to buy Poke a silk shirt—something he had wanted for years. But their main purpose was to locate some children or even grown-ups who expected Santa Claus to pass lightly by. This done, they planned to do the Christmas business up in their usual first-class style. "Just where a couple of sour doughs and a mule figured as Santa Claus and his reindeers is more than I know," Hardrock muttered, continuing to study the thicket and ponder on the problem, "but luck may be with us. Hello! There's that noise again. It sounded just like some human being had got kicked in the stomach by some animal."

"Guess we'd better meander over there," Poke said, "it's only a couple of hundred yards off the trail." He led off plunging through a drift to his armpits, and emerging on frozen ground covered with snow to a depth of several inches. A fringe of snow-laden spruces concealed what was taking place beyond. But it was only a fringe and almost immediately he was looking down upon a natural arena.

He jerked his thumb toward the scene, then looked back at Hardrock. "Poor devil's missed too many boats!" Now, in Alaska this is a way of saying that a man has remained in the territory too long chasing gold and has gone crazy.

"Kind of a queer form of insanity," Hardrock said, not without sympathy.

A young man was attempting to harness two caribou to a sort of sleigh. It was a heavy sleigh, but the creatures could have dragged it had they desired. However, they were strong, vigorous caribou in the prime of life,

and very obstinate. It was the heel of a caribou that had caused the sound similar to a man being kicked in the stomach.

The pair approached. "Some men play checkers for sport; others clip coupons from bonds, and some fall in love, but bustin' caribou to harness is a new one." Hardrock observed as he stopped.

The young man looked up. "I'm not doing this on a bet," he growled, "I'm doing it because a girl wants me to."

"Wars have been declared for the same reason," Poke said. "Why don't you tell this girl to go jump in the lake. Any girl that'll make a man harness caribou to prove his love ain't worth having."

"I'm in love," the young man confessed, "and you know how it is——"

"I don't know how it is from personal experience," said Hardrock, who was a confirmed bachelor, "but I've seen plenty of sad cases. Let's hear the story while you and the caribou are resting."

"Big Nugget's never had a real Christmas," began the young man, "since the stamp mills have been working steady and the men have brought in their families and the big clean-up is over with, Miss Maude Kirk, she's the bookkeeper at the mill, said we should have an old-fashioned Christmas. They held a meeting and she was made chairman of the Christmas Committee with the power to ask for help whenever she needed it. She figured we could put it over together and said if I'd rig up a Santa Claus sleigh with a couple of caribous she'd do the collecting of presents and money. She collected the money and—— Well, if I fall down she won't speak to me. It won't be because she don't love me," he continued, explaining the situation, "but it will be because she's disappointed in my inability to make good on

a duty assigned. I started with six caribou. I killed two to keep from being killed myself. Their horns are hanging up in that tree. Two got away, and that leaves these two. It seems like they are the toughest in the bunch." He sighed sadly, for Christmas was rather close and progress seemed to be lacking. I'll see what I can do."

What he did was plenty, but it was not along practical lines. One can't be practical with a caribou. It was his idea, sound enough, that they should be broken to a heavy sleigh, then hitched to a light vehicle later on. A day before Christmas he planned to make a trial trip, as one would with a steamer or plane, to be sure everything was in working order. This was to take place at midnight so that there would be no spectators about to frighten the caribou—or laugh at Santa Claus if things went wrong.

Having heard the young man's tale, Hardrock expressed his sympathy and left him to his task. He rejoined Poke, to whom he recounted the story, and the partners found their interest aroused to such an extent that they made it a point to look over Maude Kirk and decide whether she was worth the trouble young Mr. Ken Morgan was taking to keep in her good graces. "What do you think of her?" Hardrock inquired after a long, lingering look at her blond head and rosy cheeks.

"I'd train a caribou for her any day in the week," Poke answered.

"You're a cussed piker," Hardrock snapped, "I'd train a whole band of 'em."

Having arrived at this decision, the pair approached the young woman and throwing back parka hoods, because they did not have hats to remove, Poke said: "If there's anything you need, Miss Kirk, to help Santa Claus along, just count on me and Hardrock. He'd make a good Santa."

"No doubt," she said, "but I have

the best man picked out for Santa Claus. His name is Kenneth Morgan. Perhaps you know him?"

"Heard of him," Poke admitted.

"He's one of the most determined boys I know, and he's working on a reindeer plan I thought of. I just know he'll succeed." She was all enthusiasm.

"Well, of course," Poke began, with the intention of making things easy in case Ken Morgan fell down, "he might fail——"

"Oh, but he won't! You don't know Ken. He's the type that accomplishes everything he undertakes. There is a grimness about his determination that thrills me. Ken will succeed at anything he undertakes. He can't fail."

"Well, if you need any more money," Poke suggested, "me and Hardrock's got our poke strings untied."

"Well——" she said thoughtfully.

A poke of dust landed on her desk. "And there's more where it came from," Poke added. "We've got so much money we're almost not respectable."

She outlined their plans for Big Nugget's first Christmas. "As you perhaps know," she explained, "they've melted down the first gold at the mills. It is in bricks, eighty thousand dollars' worth. Every one is happy because they've enough ore blocked out to keep running for ten years. It means that the homes of the workmen are permanent and that steady prosperity is ahead. So you see, it will be a real Christmas, with no worry of lay-offs or where the next meal is coming from. And we can afford, this year, to give some of the foolish little things children like rather than the practical clothing and books. The storeroom is filled with gifts shipped in from Outside. The company built a community house with a chimney big enough for Santa to come down. Now, we plan to have Ken act as Santa Claus and drive right

up with a sleigh load of toys. Everybody will see him and the children have been told that he's coming."

"Pretty slick!" agreed Poke.

"Slick," echoed Hardrock. "I hope nothing happens to spoil the kids' fun. It's tough enough to be a grown-up and be disappointed. Me and Poke will be around if you want us."

The old poem, "The Night Before Christmas," was running through Poke's mind when he left his room at the road house just on the outskirts of Big Nugget and started down trail. Hardrock was behind him. It was midnight and the camp was quiet. In the distance could be heard the roar of the stamp mills. Twenty-four hours a day they ran, but a twenty-four-hour shut-down was promised for Christmas. Only the watchman would be kept on the job. And even he was promised relief so that he could see half of the Christmas program.

"Stop mumblin' that poem," Hardrock growled, "it ain't the night before Christmas—it's two nights. Listen, it's about time for Ken Morgan to try out his caribou!"

Presently the light fall of hoofs was heard. It seemed to be literally raining hoofs. "Either he's hooked up a band of caribou," Poke said, "or else he's *coming*."

"He's coming!" yelled Hardrock. "And look at him come!"

The caribou were stampeding. Their flying heels sent a steady stream of snow clods into Ken Morgan's face. They broke from the trail, tore across a field, knocked down a fence, and upset a dog kennel, which fortunately was empty.

"What do you think?" Poke inquired.

"It don't look so good for Ken," Hardrock answered. "If that pair of synthetic reindeer act like this on a quiet night, what'll they do with crowds around, bells on their harness and,

maybe, several malemute dogs yapping at their hoofs?"

"Got any bright ideas?" Poke inquired.

The little Irishman thought hard. "Of course, a mule ain't a reindeer, but I was thinking, if the worst happened, that we might hook Tabasco onto the sled and——"

"Huh!" Poke snorted. "Always pulling for that mule!"

"That mule's always pulling for me," Hardrock retorted, with conscious humor. "And whether you like it or not I'm going to have Tabasco handy toward the end of the trail—in case something happens to Santa Claus."

"And just to get even for that near-humor you pulled about your mule pulling," Poke returned, "I'm going to say that if they can make men into Elks why can't a mule be made into a reindeer?"

"Bull" Hyde and "Shorty" Richmond were new arrivals at Big Nugget—so new in fact that no one, particularly the marshal, knew of their presence. They were holing-in a mile from the camp, having established a temporary camp on an island in the river. A husky man could wade that part of the channel between the island and the shore, but as no one had any business on the island and no one was wading the stream as a winter sport they were safe enough. They waded it each night, but they were not hanging around Big Nugget on any sporting proposition. They were there on business and, not believing in Santa Claus, were making plans to do their Christmas shopping rather late—on Christmas Eve to be exact.

"Eighty thousand dollars in gold is more'n we can pack around in our pockets," Bull growled, "and the hard part of this ain't goin' to be the gettin' but the gettin' away."

"Yeah," Shorty agreed—he stood six

feet two and for that reason was called shorty—"but if we've got the fastest dog team in camp, how're they going to catch us? It should be snowing and— Humm! Suppose the gold weighs four hundred pounds, that's a rough guess, but near enough. The dogs will snake that along fast. If we get to the mountains we can stand off an army. Beside, didn't you tell me that the whole town would be at the Christmas doings?"

"Yeah! We've only got one watchman to handle and he'll be thinkin' more about Christmas than about the eighty thousand. Got the soup ready?" The "soup," of course, being the explosive that was to open the strong box.

"The soup's ready! The dogs are ready and so are we; now if Christmas just arrives on time this job will be a push-over."

Bull and Shorty had accomplished considerable since their arrival in the North. Several jobs in the States had aroused the police to white heat, and the pair had headed North where they were not known. Like most city crooks, they regarded Northern people in general and Northern peace officers in particular with contempt. Also, they were amused by the enthusiasm with which the camp was preparing for Christmas. "You'd think they'd never had a Christmas before," Bull growled. Which was about ninety per cent true. Christmas had been merely a December day for most of them. Their all had gone into the hardrock mine at Big Nugget, and now the mine had rewarded them. Bull and Shorty figured there was plenty more in the ground, and while waiting for the excitement in the South to die away decided they could make a good haul by declaring themselves in on the first dividend.

Ken Morgan gave Maude Kirk a pleading look. "Please run down to the community building, Maude, and

wait for Santa Claus to arrive—I'll handle the caribou; the sled is loaded with the presents and everything is ready."

"But Ken, I want to see you start off. I'm so proud of what you've accomplished. Just think, dear, you've taken those wild creatures and tamed them!"

"If I was only sure of it," Ken fervently told himself. Then aloud, and with defeat in his tone. "Well, stand right down at the corner and watch me dash past. Then you can go into the community house the back way while I go through town, as per plan."

Very gently, oh! so gently, Ken harnessed the caribou to the loaded sled. For the past two days he had always worn the Santa Claus costume when around the caribou, so that they would not be frightened to death at his appearance on Christmas Eve. From the harness came a low jingle of bells as he adjusted it. A very light flurry of snow was in the air; sounds carried far, but this evening it seemed unusually quiet for the big stamps were silent.

"On Prancer! On Dancer!" he called. The deer broke into a trot. "*Cling! Cling! Cling! Cling!*" The bells jingled merrily, and the animals seemed to be entering into the spirit of the occasion. Ken smiled. Just around the next corner Maude was waiting. What a long struggle he had gone through to bring this about. "*Cling! Cling! Cling! Cling!*"

A malemute dog lifted his nose and caught a scent. Many generations back his ancestors were wolves and had chased caribou. When on the trail he had caught the scent many times, but efforts to respond had always been quelled by an alert driver. Now he was free. He came forth with speed and manner comparable to a trout after a fly. From down the trail came two other dogs. They obeyed the latent instinct of attack—two in front to

worry the creatures, the third behind to hamstring and render the prey helpless.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Ken. Then, with his voice filled with rage, he yelled, "Mush!" The dog continued his onrush. The caribou leaped aside and left the trail. They raced through a back yard; knocked down a fence; came out through the front yard, and into the street. In the distance Bull looked at Shorty. "Santa Claus is on time," he said. "I turned a couple of dogs loose and— Listen to them bells ring! The caribou must be stampedin' plenty."

Maude Kirk heard them coming. She looked eagerly up the trail, but they came not from up the trail, but across the trail. "Ken!" she screamed, "be careful! Don't drive like that!"

"Aw, go to the devil!" snapped Ken. He had been tested to the limit. He had made an attempt to lower his voice, but in the rage of the moment he had not lowered it enough. Maude had heard his retort.

"Kenneth Morgan——"

Crash! The deer had struck an obstacle and spilled the sled. The harness broke; presents were scattered all over the snow; caribou and dogs disappeared in the distance; the madly jingling bells grew fainter and died.

"Kenneth Morgan," she cried, "I hate you! You've failed miserably! After all the time you were given you had to fall down on your part of the program. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself. And then on top of it all you cursed me. Oh, don't think I didn't hear what you said. The garb of politeness you've so carefully worn in my presence slipped from your shoulders and I saw the real man revealed. Thank Heaven, I saw it in time!"

"Yes," he retorted, "and I lived to see what impractical ideas a woman can have. It was your fool plan that I train a couple of caribou and play Santa

Claus. I'm through!" He ripped off the gaudy, fur-trimmed garments and hurled them on the snow. "Be your own Santa Claus."

Smarting under his outburst of words, she had but one answer. "Quitter! A quitter is one who starts something, then fails to finish it. It seems to me, Mr. Morgan, you fill the specifications perfectly."

"Aw, dry up!" he growled, and stalked off.

Hardrock Shipley and Poke Tupper stepped into the situation the moment the girl was alone. They had witnessed much that had taken place and heard everything. They were followed by Tabasco, the mule.

"In trouble, sister?" Hardrock inquired.

"You're no diplomat," the girl snapped, "or you wouldn't make any such fool remark as that."

"Yeah," Hardrock agreed, "I ain't no diplomat. I'm a hardrock miner, and it ain't in the cards that the two should go together. And you're no diplomat either or you wouldn't have made a mean remark when a feller had done his best. Now, let's save what we can from the wreckage. Santa Claus will be about ten minutes late!"

Miss Kirk tossed her chin up in the air and walked away, but presently she lowered it somewhat and grew rather thoughtful.

While Poke Tupper was hurrying around picking up the packages of presents, Hardrock was righting the sleigh and harnessing Tabasco to it. This done, he proceeded to fit a pair of caribou horns to the mule's head. Tabasco had grown accustomed to the various schemes upon which his owner embarked. Nothing surprised him any more. If he did not like it, he kicked things to pieces. If he did not want to take the trouble to kick, he stood for it. For this very purpose Hardrock had worked the mule until he was

in a meek mood. When everything was ready, Hardrock donned the Santa Claus outfit that the angry Mr. Morgan had just hurled aside. "Giddap Tabasco!" he ordered. Poke twisted the mule's tail, and they were off.

The North has seen some rare old sights but this was the first instance on record that a mule, sporting a pair of caribou horns, had been seen driven by Santa Claus. Poke was about to follow at a rapid pace when he stopped dead in his tracks and chuckled. "Things are about due to happen! Here comes 'Old January' Becker with a skinful of Christmas cheer!"

Becker was the type of drinker that is always swearing off—a week from some Tuesday. Finding his cheer in the bottle, he was practically the only person in camp not attending the Christmas tree at the community hall. He had paused to take what he termed a "fair to middlin' snort" when the jingle of bells caught his ears. He stopped and stared. He had never seen a mule with horns, nor a caribou with a head the length of Tabasco's. He rubbed his hand across his eyes and took a second look. Then he shook his head violently to clear his vision. "There ain't no such animal," he muttered, "and there ain't no Santa Claus! Dang it! What's the matter with my eyes!"

He stepped into the road for a better look and was almost run down. There was no further doubt in his mind. He hurled the bottle of moonshine as far as he could. "They always said I never knowed when to quit, but I always claimed I'd quit when I had a good reason. When a man sees a horned mule and Santa Claus, it's time to quit. I'm going home to sleep it off."

And, not to break the spell, Poke Tupper remained out of sight until the old fellow had passed.

Poke followed the same short cut that Maude Kirk had taken. Therefore, he arrived at the community hall

just ahead of Hardrock and Tabasco. The partner had figured that the children would take most anything for granted, even a horned mule. Not having seen either Santa Claus or a herd of reindeer their doubts could not take form. The mayor of the camp was making a speech. "It is indeed Christmas," he was saying, "Christmas not only for the children, but for us grown-ups who because of our long-deferred hopes were beginning to doubt the existence of Santa Claus. But we know he does exist, not only in our hearts, but in fact. Up at the mill there are eighty thousand dollars in the strong room, and on January first we will declare our first dividend. We—ah, here is Santa Claus!"

Who knows just how much a mule knows? Perhaps Tabasco was enjoying the situation in his own way. The doors were flung wide and into the room loped the mule. He came to a stop, and Hardrock Shipley, his red fringe of beard concealed by a great white one, laughed merrily.

"The cuss can be good-natured when he wants to," Poke muttered, "that laugh proves it. If he's not more cheerful from now on around the cabin I'll take it out of his hide."

He began calling the names of the different children and in the midst of the affair Hank Jennings softly left the room. He was to relieve the mill watchman so that the latter could see half of the entertainment. He broke into a run, because he was a strong man and in perfect condition. The sooner he got there, the sooner Matt Hough could see the fun. He expected to see Matt standing in the doorway, ready to run, but the door was open and there was a smell of stale gas in the air. There had been an explosion.

Hank turned on his flash light and the white finger darted about and suddenly came to a stop. "Matt!" he called.

"Hank! They shot me. Robbed the box. Eighty thousand— Asked 'em to tie up my wound. They laughed, Hank—they—killers." He had spoken swiftly, marshaling all his strength, as if fearing he would not live to finish his story. He had attempted to aid himself and had partly succeeded. Hank fixed him up, then ran for the community house.

He did not shout the news. No need of throwing cold fear into those gathered on Christmas Eve. A few picked men might overhaul the robbers and bring the loot back. He spoke to the doctor first, then to the marshal. "Safe's been robbed. Matt about killed. I found their tracks when I came back. Dog team, loaded, two men running."

But some one had overheard the words. From mouth to ear the news traveled. It was like a dark cloud sweeping over a flower garden bathed in sunlight. The light of happiness in the adult faces grew dim and died.

The marshal spoke sharply. "I'll need men not afraid to die. It's undoubtedly Bull Hyde and Shorty Richmond. If so, they are killers of the worst type from Outside. I was sent word to be on the lookout, but not a strange face has appeared and so—" He hurried away with a half dozen men at his heels. This would be a finish fight. Some of those who left that Christmas tree might never see another.

Poke Tupper felt some one tugging at his arm. It was Ken Morgan. He was still fighting mad from the combination of disappointment, failure, and Maude Kirk's stinging words. "Listen, Poke, lend me your gun. I'm going to take the trail. Most of those fellows are married. I'm not. Nobody here gives a hang about me anyway."

"You're too hot-headed, son, but I like you," Poke answered. "Coolness

is the only thing that will beat that pair. I've heard of 'em."

"But if they get away to the mountains—"

"Exactly. And you can bet they've got the fastest dog team in these parts," Poke answered.

"There's one thing faster—your mule if you can make him go!" Ken Morgan said. "If we crowd 'em—"

Poke waited no longer. He stepped close to Hardrock. "Santa Claus, come a-running!"

Hardrock caught something in the tone. He followed the pair outside. "I could tell there was something wrong by the people," he said, "what is it?"

Briefly, Poke explained. "The kid's got a plan," he concluded, pointing to Ken.

Ken Morgan talked fast and, as he talked, he borrowed a gun from Hardrock Shipley and led the pair outside. Santa Claus nodded his head at the conclusion of Ken's speech; then he hurried into the building. "Good night, children," he called, "I'm going to get some more presents." Under his breath he muttered, "Something for the big folks." He waved gayly, then leaped into his sleigh.

Bull Hyde stopped the dog team. "Listen!" he said.

Shorty Richmond listened. Steam hovered over the dog's backs, for the pace had been fast.

"It's the caribou!" he said. "Them dogs will run 'em till one or the other drops. Coming this way."

"Yeah," said Bull, "but we can't take chances!" They pulled aside; then, with guns drawn, they waited.

Tabasco burst from the eddying snow, flashed across their vision, and was gone. "They've shaken the dogs," Bull said, "but that sleigh is still with 'em."

"There was only one," Shorty answered, "the dogs probably pulled

down the other. Let's go. For a minute I thought it was a posse."

"No chance. Even if they have found the watchman, which ain't likely, it'll take 'em time to get organized and started. Let's get to the mountains."

They had gone a quarter of a mile farther when a voice rang out sharply: "Hands up, and no funny business!"

Bull Hyde's gun was in his hand. He fired at the sound of the voice, and the next second some one rammed a red-hot rod into his arm.

Shorty Richmond's hands went up instantly.

From the brush came Ken Morgan. He was still fighting mad. "I'll show her," he muttered, "I'll show her. I can't train caribou, but I can go out and die and not have it worry me none. I'll show her."

Hardrock Shipley and Poke Tupper pulled up the mule almost at the same moment. "We've lost Ken off the sleigh. Better go back."

"We've lost the trail, too," Hardrock said.

Tabasco, snorting and puffing from the pace, swung around. A few moments later Hardrock again stopped the mule. "Jumping Junipers," he cried, "the kid's got 'em!"

They came up. "Well, Ken, what's your orders?"

"Shake 'em down for guns while I keep 'em covered," he answered. "I'd planned from the first to roll off the sled the first time the dog team turned aside. I figured they'd get off the trail to see what the noise was about." He was still fighting mad. "They did. I waited until they came along. I wanted to get 'em singlehanded or die. I'll show her!"

Poke and Hardrock placed the gold bricks on the sleigh. Then they lashed the prisoners on the load. Hardrock pulled his Santa Claus suit off and put it on Ken Morgan. "Now mush," he said, "we're right behind you."

And they were right behind him until he drove up to the community house. Then he stepped aside. Ken Morgan walked to the platform. "Merry Christmas!" he said, and his voice gave Maude Kirk the thrill of her life. "I'm bringing you a couple of prisoners and eighty thousand dollars in gold. Good night!" He stalked past Maude. "I'll always be a quitter," he muttered, "I'm quitting now before they start to thank me."

Hardrock and Poke rescued Tabasco several minutes later. They stood watching the community house. Happy people were beginning to return home. "I guess, Poke, about everybody in the camp is happy to-night. Kids and old folks believe in Santa Claus."

"Everybody but a couple," Poke answered. A young man and a girl had just passed each other. Their shoulders had stiffened, their chins had gone up, as they passed.

"Something ought to be done about it," Hardrock said.

"You little red-headed runt, what do you know about love?" Poke asked cruelly.

"I ain't never been a husband, but I've been a pardner off and on for a good many years. Married life is a pardnership—give and take." He walked over and caught Ken Morgan's arm. "You're coming with me, young fellow. You've just found yourself to-night and you'll go a long ways with the right kind of backing. I'll have the backing in front of you in about a minute." He dragged the young man over to the girl. "Maude Kirk," he said, "you get that chin down; I'm doing you a favor. Here it is Christmas Eve and you two youngsters in love with each other and acting this way! Neither one of you is a saint and you can be glad you're just plain humans and make mistakes. Ken, you had no business telling her to go to the devil. Maude, when he told you that you de-

served it because you'd jumped on him after he'd done his best. In a way, it was a good thing for both of you, but it won't be unless you meet each other half way. Now, for'd march."

And youth and maid stepped forward at the same moment. "That's better," chuckled Hardrock. "Merry Christmas, kids!"

"Merry Christmas, Hardrock," said Ken Morgan.

"Merry Christmas, Hardrock," echoed Maude Kirk, "and here's a present for you!" With that, she kissed

him squarely on the mouth. Hardrock blinked, rubbed his lips to see if it was real, decided it was, and grinned.

Poke Tupper swore. "First time I ever saw a peacemaker get the best of it. Hey, you little red-headed runt, Merry Christmas!"

"Same to you, you long-legged wampus," retorted Hardrock, with what was for him a surprising degree of affection. They looked toward the mule. "Merry Christmas, Tabasco!"

Tabasco lifted his upper lip. "Hereeee! Onk! Onk! Onk!" he replied graciously.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The American Goldfinch

THERE is quite a resemblance between the goldfinch, which is also known as the thistle bird and the yellow bird, and the canary. Many persons have attempted to pair the two but with generally unsuccessful results. Goldfinches fly in deep, curved lines, alternately rising and falling, after each propelling motion of their wings, uttering two or three notes with each ascension. In this manner their flight is prolonged to considerable distances when migrating, which is accomplished during the daytime.

When a party of these birds are awing they occasionally are hailed by one of their kind who may be perched upon a near-by limb, bobbing his black-capped little head, and making it evident that he wishes them to stop and chat. The invitation is immediately accepted, and with cries of acknowledgment the goldfinches fly about their newly acquired relative who sways and pivots before them with a great deal of pride, evidently trying to impress upon them the beauty of his plumage and graceful manners. They are very sociable and seem to prefer to live and sing and frisk about in small flocks rather than in couples.

Goldfinches have the faculty of raising and lowering their notes in pleasing cadences that sometimes are as soft as humming bees and again as strong and throaty as the song of a canary. They can be quite successfully caged, like canaries, and quickly become reconciled to captivity.

They have a great fondness for gardens, because here they may obtain delicious seeds, especially oily ones, which are their favorite diet. Thistle seeds are perhaps the greatest attraction, and they may be seen burrowing their eager little bills into the thistle, throwing a shower of milk-white down about them in an eager and intent desire to satisfy their appetite. Nor are they easily disturbed when enjoying these noxious weeds. Sometimes the finches fail to discriminate, and destroy lettuce and flower seeds, and so are disliked for that reason, but it is believed that their fondness for destructive weeds quite counteracts any damage they may do. Their nests are built of strips of bark and root fibers, lined with thistledown and cow hair.

The goldfinch belongs to a group famous for its docility and aptitude to learn, and has been known to do a number of tricks when trained for this purpose.



The Mystery of Indian Mound

By George Gilbert

Author of "The Kid and the Killer," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BULL BUCKS A BULLJINE.



HE lone-hand, red, two-year-old bull cocked his ears apprehensively. That cavalcade approaching meant just trouble to him. But he did not commit the folly of charging away through the brushy growth. Instead, he stole away like a deer through a cedar thicket.

"Now, if yo' jump him, don't let him get onto them rails," Bill Moseley warned Harkness, one of his riders. "He's been seen, an' he always gets away. He's a sleeper, all right."

"Funny how he got missed, first as a calf, then as a yearling," Harkness said. "Some one nicked his ear, but he hasn't got airey a brand on him."

"Well, once in a while, some get missed. It's cut-up land in he'e, and his mammy probably had a streak of Sonora red in her. That kind grows wild calves sometimes, just like deer for stealth. We'll go along. Meet yo'

near that whistlin' place for the Two Bar. If yo' jump him, keep him a-comin' toward the round-up. He's gold on the hoof, sleepin' out this a way till he's got size and weight like an elephant."

So Scott Harkness detached himself from the Long T Cross outfit and proceeded down the ridge to the slot between two rolls of land, where he exclaimed in delight to his Baldy hoss:

"He sure was bedded down right he'e, Baldy. Now, we'll take the sign and worry him out. Those other fool punchers cain't run sign for a li'le mite, Baldy. Don't yo' see it?"

Of course, Baldy hoss didn't see it. But he knew how to read the waves of human influence that came from rein, knee, and hand. Leaning far over in the saddle, Scott read the sign aloud to Baldy:

"Yes'r, he stole away, easy and slow-like. Those kind are the most cunning. Took his time, too. Just stole up between these two rolls of land, then went up the right-hand one. Right on

top, he went out of sight, like a flash, behind that next ridge. Now we're over it, too. Take her easy, Baldy hoss, we don't want t' make him think he ain't fooled us."

So Scott worked out the sign. Here and there he heard cows clattering away—other cows. They were the usual kind, yielding easily to human dominance. He hardly gave them a thought. They were part of the job, to be sure, but they acted just like cows. They would take care of themselves. Baldy hoss, famed as a circle expert, would take care of them, anyway, if any of them showed signs of wanting to get away, instead of moving toward the big flat where the round-up was appointed for that afternoon.

Finally, after riding slowly for several miles, Scott sighted a thick patch of scrubby growth on a flat about half a mile distant. Beyond that the ground was free of good cover for a long way ahead.

"He's in that motte," Scott told Baldy hoss, "but we'll pretend we're ridin' by. We'll angle toward the corner of it, as if we aim t' pass it by, and then we'll jump right into it on the run and get him going. If he gets into the open, I'll lay a rope onto him. He'll never go toward the round-up without being skull-drug, and if he gets t' the round-up he'll be a nuisance. I'll rope him down right he'e and brand him after he's hawg-tied. It'll break the law, but what's the law when breaking it don't steal any one's beef? He's a Long T Cross critter by right of eminent domain and a hot spur-shank will brand him by hand as good as a Long T Cross stompin' iron."

By this time Scott was well across the open space. Baldy hoss angled for the corner of the scrubby growth. Just as it seemed they were about to pass it, Scott lifted Baldy hoss and he crashed into the motte, startling a number of birds into wild flight, a coyote

into a frenzied lope, and the red bull into a terrific burst of speed. He had been watching, but with half an eye. The rider seemed to be fooled—to be going on his way, deceived and out-figured. Now he had crashed into this seemingly safe refuge.

The bull emerged from the motte, tail up, head down, all four feet slamming the ground hard, all four legs working like piston rods.

All this was duck soup to Baldy hoss. He knew the game. He flashed after the red bull. The red bull displayed surprising speed. He was lean and long-gearred. He did not turn and stand to fight, or dodge, or bawl. He just kept going, straightaway. He had the speed and stamina of an elk and the strength of a buffalo.

"Go git him, Baldy hoss," Harkness urged. Baldy hoss was doing well. He was gaining. The chase, at that speed, couldn't last long. But the bull had a good start and he meant to get away from where he was, and in a hurry, too.

The red bull disappeared into another motte, a bigger one than that which he had been concealed at first. Baldy wasn't far behind then. He felt the check on the rein, light as it was, and drew down to a light lope.

"Fence on the other side this motte, Baldy hoss," Scott crooned to him. "That'll stop that fool bull."

But it didn't! A crash told of something hurled against the fence. Scott reached the place to find the sagging wires, the two broken posts, that told that the red bull knew where the weak spot was in that big pasture fence. It was the fence that kept the Long T Cross cattle off the open range that was traversed some way ahead by the railroad. The red bull had found the weak spot.

"He knew right whe'e t' hit that fence. Well, we'll go after him," Scott told Baldy hoss.

To that end he swung down and stepped on the fence, which had enough slack to permit him to get the wires to the ground when he put his full weight on the broken post. Baldy hoss stepped over and Scott swung to the saddle. The red bull was far away now. Baldy hoss went after him grimly. He gained rapidly, for the red bull was tiring and wanted to skulk into some thicket and rest. The other riders had let him have breathing spells when he had played at hide-and-seek with them, but this rider seemed to anticipate his every movement.

The red bull lumbered up a final ridge and topped it, sliding down it right onto the railroad track.

This was the crisis of that red bull's life. He had an ingrained instinct for flight, but to-day he was r'iled to the bottom. All his favorite stratagems had been as nought as against the cunning of the oncoming rider. He had fled and turned and dodged and ducked till he was tired of it. Now he resolved to fight. Bearing down upon him was a railroad train, the whistle sounding, the bell clangingly insistent that he depart.

The bull lowered his head, gored the ties, and charged.

The cow-catcher struck him on the frontal plate, just between his horns. The train did not seem to lose momentum, although a crash vibrated from engine to tender and tender to express-baggage car and thence along the line of passenger coaches.

The bull was hurled off to one side and came down with his neck broken neatly.

The fireman, leaning from the cab window, yelled. The engineer had set the brakes. The train came to a grinding stop. Passengers began to pile off, asking foolish questions that trainmen answered with the bored air of the long-suffering employee paid to be polite to patrons.

Scott Harkness and Baldy hoss topped the ridge and viewed the remains disappointedly. Baldy snorted; Scott said to him:

"Now that bull, he done made it possible for him t' be missed out of that round-up again. It got t' be a habit with him that he couldn't break, even in death. Let's go down and file a claim for the death of one high-pedigreed bull. No railroad ever killed a common cow, if yo' can believe what the damage claims have written on them, and Long T Cross isn't going t' be bashful, either."

So, while the passengers and crew looked at the *corpus delecti*, Scott rode down, frowning indignantly as the angry conductor faced him.

CHAPTER II.

BALDY IS STOLEN.

SAY, what d' y' mean, rounding up on our railroad?" the conductor demanded. "Yo' almost wrecked this train."

Scott sagged over so that most of his weight was on his right stirrup, and proceeded in silence to sift makin's out of a little sack onto a bit of brown paper.

"Making this train be late, too," the conductor added peevishly. "I've got to put this in my report book."

By now Scott had the smoke going well. He pinched out the match head and threw the match down. Now, from his lofty seat, he spoke:

"That was a ten thousand dollar prize bull yo' killed," he drawled.

"Is that all? We kill common bulls like that every day. Was there ever a bull or cow or calf killed by a railroad that was worth a mere hundred dollars?"

"No, because the railroads pick out all the choice ones. That bull belongs t' the Long Cross T. He was going about his lawful business when yo'r

old bulljine bucked him into beef-steak."

"You can present your claim through the regular channels," the conductor bawled. "As soon as the engineer looks over those pony trucks to make sure all the wheels are on the rails, we'll move."

Scott edged Baldy off to one side. The passengers eyed him curiously. For the moment he was a bit apart from them. He saw a girl stealing down the steps of the last car—the Pullman. She came along the track quickly. When she came opposite Scott she looked up at him and smiled.

Her face was rather long, oval; the eyes were dark, swimmingly luminous with excitement, and her cheeks were deeply flushed. A man leaned out of the Pullman window and shouted.

She said to Scott in low tones:

"Is it far from here to Shortwell?"

"Say twelve mile, miss."

"Right south, isn't it?"

"Yes'm," and Scott's heart began to pound suddenly at the appeal that flashed from her dark eyes. She started toward the center of interest, where the dead bull was being inspected. Scott got down and started after her. He now saw the man who had shouted from the Pullman window down on the right of way, coming toward him. Baldy snorted when the safety valve suddenly popped, and started to crow-hop, but quit it because there was no real weight to buck against with Scott off the saddle. Scott came back to Baldy.

"Fooled yo'rse'f that time, old-timer," Scott told him.

Baldy subsided with a grunt. The girl rounded the engine. The man who had shouted after her kept right on toward the front of the train.

"Probably she's his only daughter, wealthy and haughty. Shucks, Baldy, she wouldn't ever look at us again. We're just two interesting animiles

she's seen on her trip t' the Gold coast, and when she gets to snivelization again she'll tell about seein' a really-truly cowboy and broncho; eh, old fox?"

The man went around the top end of the train.

"Easy t' see he's bent on catching up with her," Scott said to Baldy. "Look-it, that's her footsies, on the other side, coming down along the train. Golly's sakes, I'll look at yo' off fore hoof now, for some reason."

He bent as if looking at the hoof in question, but his eyes were on those twinkling ankles and pretty feet winking along on the other side of the car. He followed them till they were lost to view. Then came the big feet of the male pursuer. The girl came around the back of the train and looked up the track. She boarded the Pullman at the rear. Soon she leaned out of a window, looking up along the line of cars. Other people were boarding the train. The engine bell began to clang. The conductor gave his warning:

"Awwwwl a-huh-board!"

The man boarded the rear of the Pullman, as the girl had done. The girl had disappeared from the window. Scott was now erect again, beginning to think about Baldy and what he might do when the train got rolling again. A preliminary clank from the engine warned him. Baldy was uneasy. Scott mounted and headed him up the incline to the ridge. The engineer seemed to be having some trouble getting started.

"Woosssh!" said the engine, as she spurted steam on all sides.

"Harrumph!" grunted Baldy hoss, going right up into the air.

Scott, occupied with trying to get one more glimpse of the girl, was taken off guard, for once in his life. He went out of the saddle, landing on his shoulders. The train gained headway. Baldy bucked down the ridge enthusiastically. Scott Harkness remained

prone. The girl dropped off the front end of the Pullman, landing all doubled up. The car passed her and she straightened. Harkness struggled afoot, dazed, seeing a dozen trains and girls and bucking horses. Baldy had ceased his efforts to get rid of the saddle. He, too, was dazed by his victory over Scott, so unexpected. He eyed Scott from a distance, with reproachful glance. Scott started for Baldy. So did the girl. Being undazed, she got to the horse first, grasped rein and horn and landed a-fork, snugging her skirts up high to make the skilled and successful effort in mounting. Scott yelled, she whacked Baldy with the slack of the reins, and he bolted south like a frightened deer. Scott half drew his gun, then slapped it deep into its holster.

Scott gazed after the horse and rider and began to say hectic, weird, and wonderful things to the landscape.

"A she-male hoss thief! Set afoot by a girl! And I thought pretty well of her, too, of a sudden. What is it all about? I didn't want t' shoot a girl, either, even if she is a hoss thief."

The train was gone; horse and girl had vanished. Scott was alone. The round-up was a good five miles away. The bull was beef.

"I sure feel like a jass-ack at the end of a perfect dry-stretch trip after gold that wasn't found," said Scott, as he began to limp along the ridge. He shouted for joy and waved his hat.

Coming along the ridge from the east, was a rider who perked up at once and lifted his horse to a lope. He came to a circus stop and drawled:

"Scott, how-come yo're afoot in a strange land? Has Baldy hoss performed the impossible?"

Scott's thoughts went around like pinwheels in his brain. Jerry Tinker would tell the joke, unless some of it were passed on to him.

"I done left him tied t' the ground.

Train came along. I think it hit that sleeper bull I was hazing. I got off t' peek over the ridge and see, and Baldy hoss done walked away, whipping up the bridle reins, like the fool that he is."

"I suppose before he went he daubed that dust all over yo'r shoulder and bumped yo'r eyebrow?" Jerry jeered.

Scott permitted his eye to fall before this rebuke.

"Yo' ought t' see the bull," he offered.

"All right," and Jerry started his horse.

"The'e's a train due; yo'r hoss will paw the sky," Scott warned.

"Like Baldy hoss did," Jerry jeered again. But he slid down and started to the ridge. Waiting till he was well away from his horse, Scott mounted Jerry's nag and called:

"I'm goin' after Baldy hoss, whiles yo' look at the bull. I'll be back right off pronto."

Jerry said nothing.

There was nothing to say, his friend had outguessed him. So he went to look at the bull, while Scott, urging Jerry's horse, circled out and away to pick up the sign of the horse thief.

"The round-up's about four-five mile, in case I don't get back in time t' suit yo'," Scott yelled back.

"All right; we'll settle this later," Jerry shouted, realizing then for the first time that he had been outguessed by his long-time friend and tormentor.

Scott, however, was already getting to be hull-down on the horizon, which was the next line of ridges.

CHAPTER III.

SCOTT IS SURPRISED.

THUNDER BALL, Jerry's horse, wasn't Baldy, but he had good points or he would not have been in Jerry's string. He knew Scott well, had carried him often, and knew that

no liberties were to be taken. Some urgent business was at hand. Thunder Ball kept an eye out for the cow that might be jumped or the calf that needed hazing. Seeing none, he settled down to a long stride that was effective in putting distance behind him.

Scott had no trouble in running the sign of the strange horse thief. He talked to Thunder Ball the while:

"She'll get hers! Old Baldy was plumb stomped when she forked him that a way. No skirt ever slatted against his hull before. He was plumb tired, too, after that run chasin' that foolish bull and that buckin' streak. Of course he'll get his i-de-as later and buck her off. I'll find her hung up in a bush or pickin' cactus thorns out of her skirts and then it'll be duck soup for me. I didn't want Jerry in on any picnic like gettin' her back. I can make it take her all the rest of the day t' get t' the round-up. She had no business stealin' my hoss that a way, either. But say, Thunder Ball, the way she crawled onto that broncho was sure a caution for rodeo queens. What did she want Baldy for? And she a she-dude, hoppin' off a train that a way! She must be crazy. She asked how far to Shortwell? And she's started in that direction, too. She'd never ride twelve mile, on a bet. If she does, she must have a mighty big reason."

He saw where Baldy had asserted his manhood against feminine domination and had proceeded to buck. The buck had begun at the foot of a ridge.

"We'll find her over in the next dip, all spraddled out and cryin' for hellup. I hope she don't get hurt much. Baldy won't get ornery once she's off the hull. He'll go t' nipping grass."

He topped the little roll in the land and looked for the piled-up lady in the dip. Instead he saw where Baldy's sign had gone on straight.

"Shucks, she rode out the buck! And

maybe my stirrups don't anywhere near suit her, either. I plumb forgot t' notice if she's long-laigged or not; all I saw was her face and eyes and hair."

The sign was plain for all to read. The girl had just gotten Baldy together out of his spell of kettle-raw bucking and started him south again. The sun was high now. Scott had started after the fool-idea-ed bull early; all that had occurred since then had gone by rapidly enough. A goodly share of the day yet remained. Scott had no notion of letting a horse thief, even if she were good-looking, get away with Baldy, not to speak of his saddle, bridle, rope, and all the other stuff that Baldy carried.

She may have confederates off somewhere in the open country, was Scott's thought, but he put that aside, because how was she to know that a horse was to be beside the track at that particular time and place?

"She didn't look like a hoss thief, but that big fellow that followed her up and down around that train sure did," Scott soliloquized, as Thunder Ball settled down to a nice hand-lope. The inborn caution of the true horseman lest he set himself afoot by exhausting his horse came to Scott. He knew that Baldy hoss would outspeed Thunder Ball, if well managed, and he was sure by now that Baldy hoss was being well managed.

"Of course, Baldy's not fresh, but the girl knows how t' ride, too. She'll maybe run him off his feet."

But not far along he found she had stopped and tightened cinches and let Baldy hoss blow. The bits of dried lather on a small shrub told that Baldy's neck had been rubbed off with a wisp of dried grass, and the marks of her two heels, well set together and deeply impressed, showed where she had used all her strength against the cinch and thus forced her heels deep into the dust.

"She sure surprises me," Scott had to confess; "first by crawlin' old Baldy's hump that a way; then by ridin' him at all; then by settin' out his buck, which is none too easy, and then by showin' she can dismount and cinch up fresh and get a-goin' again and Baldy hoss not putting up any skits on his own. She sure surprises me a whole lot, every move out of the box, she does."

The trail still kept to the south. The ridges had disappeared and more level country was at hand. If the thief knew the country she could not have kept a better course, always due south, allowing for the slight difficulties of the route.

Presently Harkness struck into a path, the beginning of the main Shortwell trail from that region. The tracks of Baldy went right down the trail. No one else had been along there that morning.

"Will she stay in Shortwell?" Scott asked himself. "Every one in that town will know she's on a Long T Cross hoss and will take her for a visitor. No, they won't; they'll wonder what she's ridin' a man's hoss for, astraddle, when she's not dressed for it. Some one will know my hoss. If she was a sure-enough hoss thief, she'd ride around the town. It's a queer layout, anyway."

He kept Thunder Ball rolling down that trail. He hoped he would meet with some one that he could question as to the identity of the strange woman rider of the stolen horse, but he saw no one. The trail leading from the Long T Cross region into Shortwell was not the main trail—that came in from the west and ran southwest from the town. This was just the main ranch trail, used by the few people north of the trading center and county seat.

Harkness came into Shortwell on a pretty keen lope. And he came with

his eyes both in use and his ears well open.

Down the street, before a squat adobe, was Baldy hoss, ears down, head down, sides heaving, tail tucked in. Thunder Ball came to a halt beside his friend and Scott leaped down, vaulted over the hitch rail, and jammed himself through the door of the adobe building, over whose door was a sign:

COUNTY RECORDER AND CLERK.

Behind a long counter at the rear of the room a man with a pen behind his ear was just finishing some business with the horse thief. She was saying, a bit tremulously, it seemed to Scott:

"The paper is now filed, regularly and officially?"

"Filed, stamped and timed, miss, and on record."

"I thank you, sir; keep the change, if you like cigars."

"Which I sure do."

By this time Scott was halfway to the horse thief. She wheeled about and faced him, at first puzzled, then she began to smile most engagingly and walked toward him:

"I'm afraid I did something pretty raw."

"I'm afraid yo' did, miss. Why the hurry?"

"I—I had to be here before some one else."

"Well, if it was as bad as that, I'd let yo' take my hoss."

"I didn't have time to ask. How did I know you'd let me take a horse?" Her dark eyes were swimming with mischief and excitement.

She walked with Scott outside. She went to Baldy hoss and began to stroke his neck.

"He's a good broncho, all right."

"But yo' sure rode him, buck and all."

"I had to, cowboy."

"And not rigged for it, either," said Scott, with a glance at her much rum-

pled skirt, which she at once began to smooth out a bit, but without lessening the number of latitudinal wrinkles thereon perceptible.

"No," she agreed blushing, "not dressed for it. A riding dress would have made it easier to make that flying mount."

"You never learned to mount and ride that a way back East."

"Who said I did?"

"You was on that limited from Omaha."

"Well, it stops a lot of times between Omaha and the coast, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so," replied Scott, gulping down his surprise at her cool way of meeting all his questions.

"Why, of course, cowboy, if it didn't stop once in a while the train wouldn't pay expenses. If it only took passengers from Omaha to Los Angeles, that wouldn't be enough to pay the wages of the trainmen, let alone coal and oil for the engine."

"I'm afraid yo're making a josh onto me."

"I'm sure you're enjoying it, though, cowboy."

She turned and looked at the clock in the window of the store next to the recorder's office. It marked one o'clock.

"That stage from Perry will be in in an hour?" she asked.

"Yes, if it isn't later than that."

The girl started as if to go down the street. Scott spoke restrainingly, and she paused.

"Yo' seem t' be pretty well wised on everything around this place. Live close by? I ain't never seen yo' at any dance, have I?"

"I never was here before."

"But yo' seem t' be wise on everything, directions, time of the stage comin' in, and so on."

"A body might have heard of all those things, mightn't they?" she asked, with a disarming smile.

"Yes——"

"And if you want pay for the use of your horse——"

"I ain't in the livery business." Scott was offended.

"Well, thank you for the use of him. He is such a dear." She gave Baldy hoss a pat. Baldy by now had gathered himself together and was taking notice. He nipped at her hand; she drew it back quickly.

"Hey, yo', Baldy," Scott earnestly warned. Thunder Ball took notice, too. He nipped at Baldy hoss and kicked. Scott had his attention taken up for a moment, to the enjoyment of several people then passing. When he had gentled the two misused steeds, he looked for the lady. She was just disappearing in a quick-draw eating-place down the street. Scott smiled sourly to himself, then saw the bright side of it:

"As long's I'm in town, I'll get me some makin's and gun-feed and laze around a spell. I've got a good excuse: had to chase my hoss all over creation. Jerry will walk t' the round-up and lie for me. It'll come out some time that I ran that bull onto the tracks and had my hoss stole. Some one on the train must've seen it and will tell it t' some one that'll tell some one that lives around close by. Wonder what kind of a story I can tell t' explain how come I'm in town with Jerry's hoss and my own and Jerry not in sight?"

Scott bought what he wanted and proceeded to sit on a bench where he could see the length of the main street. He knew he should have gone away. He had no plan for punishing the girl for borrowing his horse. He wanted to see her again, though, for some reason he could not well define to himself.

Presently the girl came out of the eating place and strolled carelessly up the street toward Scott, Baldy, and Thunder Ball. She seemed to be at peace with the world and somewhat

amused, for she smiled from time to time. Several men made tentative efforts at bowing, but they straightened back at the cool, level glance she gave them.

Scott, on the bench, she passed with a nod, and started back down the street. At the far end, a dust cloud began to take form—away out where there were no houses to line the roadway. From this soon there emerged the laboring, lumbering stage. Men began to take notice of it. One, close to Scott, voiced the opinion to a friend lounging in a doorway:

"Well, if 'Mesquite' ain't a-comin', hell for leather!"

"Fi'st time he's been ahaid of time since who-come-across."

"He's hardly ever on time, let alone ahaid of it. If it wasn't so late in the history of mankind, I'd say, offhand, that the Apaches was after him."

The girl was strolling back toward where Scott was. The stage came on. The lounge said to his friend:

"Why, Mesquite ain't stopping at the stage office down below; he's comin' right up this way."

The girl passed the recorder's office, then turned, as the stage came to a stop before the adobe structure. The door was jerked open and a big man flung himself out and into the recorder's office. He slammed the door with much force after him. The girl strolled back, smiling and seemingly having a good time all by herself. A dozen men hurled themselves at the stage to question Mesquite Hank on the strange behavior of the stage and the reason for stopping at the recorder's office, instead of at the usual place below. Mesquite, with the importance of a man with a secret in a small town, pretended he did not understand. He got out his plug and proceeded to bite off a chew and adjust it in his capacious maw; then he discovered that there was a fly on the off wheeler's back that needed

flicking off; then he had to talk to the startled mules to get them out of the prancing fit caused by the unexpected popping of the whiplash as it smashed the fly. All this time the curious ones were shooting questions at the old stage driver with speed and accuracy but with small results.

CHAPTER IV.

SCOTT HIRES OUT.

BEFORE Mesquite was ready to talk the big man came booming out of the recorder's office, visibly annoyed. He had a large, legal-looking paper in his hand, and the red seals on it showed plainly as he slatted it against his leg. He glared around, saw the young woman who had stolen the horse. She was now close at hand. He started toward her, his face purpling with mounting rage. He shook the red-sealed paper before her face:

"You did a smart thing, Virginia, filing your paper like that!"

"I thought so. But my paper was filed first."

"You'll be sorry!"

"Perhaps."

The big man bolted into the stage, and slammed the door in the faces of the curious. Mesquite whirled the mules around and the stage started down the street. The curious started after it, to get the end of the scandal or whatever else was to be had. The girl remained, smilingly triumphant, before the recorder's office. Then she walked to where Scott Harkness sat and spoke to him:

"He didn't seem pleased?"

"I'll tell a man!"

"Well, he wasn't. He's my uncle, that is, my stepuncle, Silas Jaynes, of Omaha. We're not related by blood *in the least*," she said with emphasis.

"Never heard of him. Hope I won't again," said Scott amiably.

"I had a paper that he didn't know

I had. He had one that I knew he had, and I knew also that he intended getting off the limited at Perry, so that he could come here, to the county seat of San Blas, and put it on record. I knew that Perry was twenty miles from where I stole your horse and that by riding due south I could get to the county seat first and file my paper. I did it."

"Oh, that explains a lot. But suppose yo' didn't get a chance t' steal my hoss?"

"I was determined to get to Shortwell first and file my paper first, somehow. When I saw that horse, the idea came to me that I'd ask you for it, or get you to take the paper to Shortwell for me. But he saw me get off the train and followed me. I thought I'd get away from him by walking up and around the train. But he kept right after me and so that chance was lost. I kept right on through the Pullman, to the head end. The vestibule wasn't closed. I slipped out just as your horse bucked you off. I decided in a flash that I would take the horse. I ducked low, so the car would pass without any one in it being able to see me easily. As you started for the horse I did the same. I got there first. You know the rest."

"Which I sure do," Scott grinned, "but yo' could've had the hoss without stealin' him."

"Oh, that wasn't stealing. I just borrowed him. I saw you weren't hurt much. Being bucked off doesn't kill a real cowboy."

"No'm, or we'd none of us live long. Isn't that yo'r fat friend comin' this way again?"

He pointed down the street. The big man was coming toward them. With him was another man.

"That's Sheriff Price with him," Scott announced.

"Oh, the sheriff of this county, eh?"

"Sure."

She sat on the bench beside Scott in silence.

Over at the hitch rail at the recorder's office Baldy hoss and Thunder Ball nipped at each other playfully.

"I guess your horse has recovered from that hard ride I made on him?" the girl asked.

"Oh, Baldy, he gets over things like that easy."

"That's good. Does his master?"

"Why, yes, I'll tell a man."

"What do you suppose that sheriff is coming for?"

"I ain't done anything—recently, that is."

"Neither have I, except to borrow your horse."

"No harm in that, as long as I know all about it."

"No, no harm in that that I can see. But you don't know my stepuncle."

"I don't admire to, miss."

The big man was pointing at her now and the sheriff came forward with him, his face somewhat red with embarrassment.

"I'll have t' arrest yo', miss," he almost stammered.

"What for?" demanded Harkness, standing up like a ramrod.

"Waste your breath," the big man said bitterly; "what is it of your business?"

"I can speak for myse'f," Scott declared.

"I'll do what speakin's necessary," Sheriff Price headed him off sharply. "I'm high gun in this town as long's I wear this silver star."

"I'm not disputin' that, but I asked a question," Scott replied.

"She give you the right to ask it?" the big man asked rudely.

"I'll do all the talkin'," Price cut him short. "Yo' charge this young lady, Miss Virginia Blarcome, with stealin' certain papers from yo' when she left the train between stations about twelve miles north of this town."

"I deny that I took anything of his," Virginia declared; "I left the train so I could cut across country and get a paper of my own on file before he got here. It is the deed to the Lone Star Diamond Ranch, left to me by my father. Jaynes held something over my father and got a deed from him, but in his last hours father whispered to me that now that he was dying he did not fear Jaynes, and he had me get him a blank deed and smuggle a notary into his room. He lived with me in Omaha, where I had worked as a stenographer for a big packing firm. He had retired from all ranch activities several years back, as some of the older men around here may remember, and rented his place. I have never seen the ranch since I was a small girl. Mother was not a range woman and got lonesome in the big, open country and asked father to let her go to Omaha, where I was brought up. He visited us and when mother died he remained with me. Jaynes appeared suddenly and asserted some secret power over my father, and father secretly gave Jaynes a deed that was not to be filed till after father died. But, as I've said, father gave me a deed and his will confirms it. The will is with a friend in Omaha. Jaynes thought I didn't know what he was coming down here for, but I did, for father warned me, and I determined to file my deed first. I've done it and that gives me title, as I understand the law."

"Yes, it holds, but things may happen," Jaynes snarled.

"I feel that you're capable of a great many things," Virginia replied steadily, "but meanwhile the ranch is mine. I don't know what a man of your wealth wants with a ranch. You have banks and street railroads and a lot of other valuable things back East, but from the day you visited my mother, when I was a little girl, you've kept trying to get that ranch. Father wouldn't sell. You

dogged him about it, offering small sums in cash, but he wouldn't sell. Then you schemed to get it by forcing father to deed it to you, but father gave me the second deed—and that's on file."

"I'll law this out," Jaynes exploded in great wrath. "I'll sue to have your deed set aside. My deed says it was given for a sum of money and other valuable considerations. A man can't sell and deed the same property to two different persons and have it hold in law. The courts will decide which of the two deeds is legal. The recorder won't take mine, as he says he can't take two deeds on the same land. I'll law him, too, and get a mandamus to force him to take my deed. Sheriff, arrest that girl!"

Price cleared his throat and stared at Virginia steadily. The girl smiled at him.

"If it was a case of gun play, I'd know just what t' do," Price grumbled, "but, shucks, arresting a pretty gal don't seem right!"

He looked at Jaynes, who scowled harder than ever. A murmur went through the crowd which was increasing every moment. Scott started to shoulder his way forward, as a number of men had surged between him and the sheriff and Virginia and Jaynes. But she solved the difficulty by offering her arm to the sheriff:

"Please escort me to the jail, Sheriff Price. You are only doing your duty. I will meet this charge in court."

"You can get bail, no doubt," Price replied, visibly relieved. "Come along and I'll have the Mexican cook rustle you a nice lot of fried holes, bacon, and coffee. We just cleaned out the calaboose and no one's been in it for six months, so yo' won't suffer the li'le while yo're in it arranging for bail."

The crowd started after the sheriff and the girl. Jaynes, however, remained behind. Scott Harkness had

eyes only for the girl for a time. He found Jaynes eying him appraisingly. The big man spoke, his voice honey-sweet:

"Hello, young fellow! She put it over you pretty neat?"

"Meanin' who?" Scott asked, glad to have an opponent then.

"That tomboy. Why, that trick of hers, stealing that horse——"

"Borrowing, friend," mildly corrected Scott.

"Put it that way, if you like. Now, can we have a few words?"

Scott glanced keenly at the floridly handsome big man. The jut of his jaw and the heavy, straight-lined brows told of dominating force. Scott asked:

"Is there anything in it, for me?"

A cunning smile crept around the big-lipped mouth:

"Sure, a nice big-denomination yellow boy."

"All right. No one is about. Let's sit right here," and Scott sat down on the bench again. Jaynes followed suit, but glanced all about before he opened the subject:

"I'm trying to get every hold I can on that girl."

"Yeah? I don't blame yo'; she's a cute trick."

"Isn't she?" said the big man, his eyes glittering. "She fooled me for a time with that fake deed she's filed. But I'll even up yet," he cried savagely.

"That's right; don't let her run in the rope too much. It might get t' be a habit," Scott replied, his face expressing keenest sympathy for Jaynes in his predicament.

"I like to hear you talk that way, young fellow. Now, to come to the point of it all with you. I want you to swear out a warrant against her for horse stealing."

"But she just borrowed the hoss. He's right at the hitch rack."

"But she took him, without your

leave. You pursued her and now take back what was stolen. If you want it so, you can make it a case of horse stealing, and that's a pretty serious offense out in this country I've heard and read."

"I know a worse one," Scott said blandly, leaning back a bit, and balling the fist on the side opposite to that against which Jaynes snuggled ingratiatingly.

"What's that?" eagerly cried the latter.

"Putting up jobs on a lone girl," said Scott and swung that balled-up fist over neatly. It collided with Jaynes' jutting chin and he fell limp on the bench. Scott got up and walked away.

A crowd of men began to gather. Jaynes was carried away. Scott wandered about town, his head going around like a pinwheel inside, trying to think up some way of helping Virginia out of her trouble. He finally wound up before the jail. Sheriff Price stepped out and put his hand on Scott's broad shoulder.

"Well, I'll have t' arrest yo', too," he said. "Jaynes has sworn out a warrant against yo' for assault and battery."

"Yo' goin' t' lock me up in the'e, whe'e she is?" Scott asked happily.

"Sure."

"Turn on yo'r wolf, sheriff. Lead the way in."

"But yo'll be in the steel pen and she'll be in the main room, just off my office, with Mrs. Price comin' t' gossip once in a while."

"Well, everything cain't be just as yo' want it, sheriff. Lead me into jail and make me happy."

"How about those two hosses?"

"Please have 'Chihuahua' Pete, at the wagon yard, take care of them for me, same as he does for the other Long T Cross hosses."

"Sure. It seems queer t' lock up a man for assault and battery, when the

man assaulted and battered has got two good fists. The country must be degeneratin' fast."

Scott was led inside, a very cheerful and willing prisoner. He saw Miss Blarcome, who stared at him inquiringly.

"I thank you for coming to see me," she said.

"Oh, I really had t'," Scott laughingly remarked.

"Had to?"

"Yes, old Jaynes leaned too awful hard with his chin against my fist and he claims that I assaulted him."

Her eyes blazed with interest:

"You mean you—well, hit him?"

"Oh, no, like I said. He leaned against my fist too hard."

"I'm glad. I ought to say it was not right to fight, but in a case like Jaynes' I——"

"Exactly, miss. I'm in, a prisoner, same as you."

Sheriff Price, with a pretense of force, hustled Scott into the regular steel pen for prisoners and left him there. Scott could chat through the bars with Virginia, who, on a comfortable seat, was as much at ease as if she had been in her own home.

"What're yo' goin' t' do about bail?" Scott asked.

"I don't know. This is the first time I've been in jail. Next time I'll know more about it."

"Any friends around these parts?"

"No, unless yo're one."

"Oh, I am—say, call me Scott, won't yo'?" he pleaded.

"All right, Scott. What's the rest of it?"

"Scott Harkness of the Long T Cross. That is, I was of that ranch, but most likely goin' away as I did, right in the round-up season, I'm out of a job by now. But that doesn't signify much."

"How would yo' like t' work for me?" Virginia suggested smilingly.

"Say——" Scott couldn't express his liking.

"I don't know what is at our old home ranch now. Dad rented it for a small yearly rental. I haven't seen it for years and he hadn't been back there for a long time, either. The rent came, sometimes, and then it didn't. Dad let the tenants stay on, on their plea of poverty, although I've understood the property was a good one when dad ran it on his own account."

"Did he sell off the stock when he left it?"

"Yes, rented just the land and buildings. The money from the stock he banked and that kept him. He claimed he used to run five hundred cows on it, and that with the land went certain water rights. It is all so long ago that it is misty in my head now."

"Excuse a personal question, miss, but how did yo' learn t' ride, if yo've been away from hosses as long's yo' say?"

"I haven't been away from horses. I could ride as a tiny girl and when I grew up in the East I kept a saddle pony. I made extra money in Omaha as an instructor in a small riding academy. It gave me a lot of pleasure to gentle the half-broke range horses that the owner of the riding school bought. He paid me well for gentling them for the use of women customers. I have ridden everything from a Shetland pony to a range outlaw, and I like it, too."

"I'll bet those skirts bothered yo' some."

"When I stole your horse? They did, but I am used to riding astride. Your stirrups were just about right for me. I'm pretty long from the ground up——" She broke off, blushing.

"Well, yo' ain't short, none. I wouldn't figure much on a girl that was too short——"

"You seem to figure on short notice?" a bit coldly.

"Well, if yo've got t' figure, the shorter the better."

"What're you going to do about the case Jaynes has against you, Mr. Harkness?"

"I don't know that name. Sounds too old-fashioned."

"Well, then, Scott."

"That's better a heap sight. Oh, if I get called up before the justice of peace and fined, I'll pay the fine. I'm guilty and it was worth a ten-dollar fine just t' hit him once."

"I'm puzzled about my case. I took nothing of his."

"I wish I was on the jury; I'd make them all think the same way."

"Yes, but this time it's a case of something else. Jaynes is persistent and he will try his best to make some kind of a charge stick, although what he expects to gain is more than can be seen now."

CHAPTER V.

TWO HATREDS JOINED.

AS for Jaynes, he watched while Scott Harkness was jailed, and then went to the Cattlemen's Favorite where he proceeded to engulf a huge T-bone steak, smothered in onions, and a lot of trimmings. As he ate, gobbling his food, his little eyes were piggishly active. Strolling into the public room of the hotel, he bought a handful of the best cigars and began to join in the talk, handing out cigars to several hangers-on. These were taken with the greediness customary to those who are getting something for nothing. Jaynes entered into the small talk, but did not once refer to his own affairs. He joked and laughed and soon had a number of new friends who were answering all his questions about the region, the ranches, and the number of cattle each ran. He seemed well posted on ranching matters, although he avoided specific details about his own past experiences along that line.

Gradually, as one skilled in handling human tools, Jaynes narrowed his circle of confidence to two or three and from them got full details about the Lone Star Diamond. One man who had answered his questions easily from the first, he signaled out for special attention. The group broke up, but this one man remained, although Jaynes craftily suggested several times that he wanted to go out and look up a lawyer, if there was one in town.

"Well, the lawyer here is a plain crook," the long-winded fellow informed Jaynes. He had a curious way of looking at one aslant.

"If he knows law, that's all I ask," Jaynes replied, lowering his voice a bit.

"He knows so much law that he's never bothered in his crookedness," his companion went on. "Mart Cuthel is his own best friend."

"Where is his office?"

"Right down the street, over the chink laundry, in that li'le board shack. Smelly up the'e, over Gin Lee's wash-tubs, too. People say that Gin washes dirty linen below honestly and Cuthel washes dirty linen upstairs but without regard for honesty." Now for the first time the speaker met Jaynes' gaze and his gray-green eyes, catlike, showed pupils that contracted curiously. He quickly looked away.

"What is your name?"

"Trotter, Anse Trotter."

Jaynes continued to study the man, remaining invitingly quiet the while. Trotter fidgeted, then leaned over and whispered:

"I don't suppose you've got much love for that cowboy that hit you that nasty wallop?"

"No man would, understand that."

"No, a man wouldn't. Well, I hate Harkness and that's whatever. He did me and some friends dirt not long back."

"In what way?"

"I'm not saying. But he's too officious. Hired out to an outfit that claimed they were losing stock that was sold to town butchers. He pretended that I had something to do with it. Nothing was proved. But it made a mean situation for some of our best citizens."

Jaynes winked and leered:

"And I suppose that those town butchers had to *buy* their beeves off the *real owners* after that? Hard lines, brother."

"Say, you talk like a range man——"

"I may have been, once. Come to my room. We may have something of mutual interest to talk over."

"I think so. I hate Harkness and so do you. I'll show you a way to get even with him."

"Just get even?"

"Well, it will satisfy, I think, unless you're hard to satisfy. Harkness has been too numerous since he came here from Texas several years back, and some of us think it's time he was taught a lesson. I'll help you all I can. Of course, I'll expect a little expense money."

"The sky's the limit, provided I get what I want."

"You'll get it. I won't be alone in this, either. My friends are nervy and we've got a little organization that's got a long, long arm. We've been waiting for a chance at Harkness, and I think it's come, right now."

"So do I. Let's go to my room."

In the sparsely furnished room, Jaynes motioned for Trotter to sit in a chair close to the window. Jaynes sat so that he had Trotter's face in the light, while his own was half in gloom, as he teetered his chair on its hind legs, this turning it into a makeshift rocker.

"Now, Trotter," Jaynes said impressively, "how far will you go to get even with Scott Harkness?"

"A long way."

"Why don't you go at it man-fashion?"

"Well, he's too fast. He's got every one around here buffaloed. And he's a Long T Cross man, too. That outfit would not let it pass if he got killed in a way open to suspicion."

"Trotter, what sort of a man is it that's the tenant on the Lone Star Diamond place?"

"Strayern is his name. He's got three sons. The mother is dead. Strayern and the boys batchit and run a mighty dirty joint."

"Is he honest?"

"Well, they average two or three calves for every cow, some folks say."

"That's a pretty good average, it seems to me. They'd ought to get rich at that rate."

"No, they're just mean, sly, and never scheme for more than to-morrow's tobacco and drink and snuff. Lazy and shiftless. The old man is the worst."

"Hum-m-m-m!" Jaynes rubbed the bump on his jaw that Scott had put there with his balled fist. "I suppose when I take possession there, as I intend doing, he'll want to make trouble?"

"He's often said that he'd been let stay so long without paying rent that he considered he owned the place by a sort of squatters' right."

"I guess old Blarcome was pretty easy with him?"

Trotter did not reply to that. He was looking out the window. He exclaimed:

"There's Lawyer Cuthel, now."

"Motion to him to come."

Trotter leaned out of the window, at which Cuthel glanced at the sound of its being raised. He changed his course at once upon catching Trotter's beckon and soon they heard his rasping tread on the stairs. He came in slyly, glancing from right to left. In Jaynes' big paw the white, slender hand

of the newcomer seemed lost. His voice was low and rasping, and when he sat down his faded black suit seemed to scrape on the chair.

"Mr. Jaynes, do not be too hard on Shortwell, because of the ruffianly behavior of this person, Harkness," he at once said. "Harkness represents a rough element in the range country outside. In the town we shall know better how to appreciate your worth."

"Oh, that's all right. Cut down on the big-sounding words," Jaynes said roughly. "I want to consult you on what I should do in a certain contingency."

"Ah, yes," whispered Cuthel, rubbing his thin, dry hands together; "but what is the contingency?"

"I had what I thought was a good deed to the Lone Star Diamond place, near here. Know about it?"

"Where Strayern and his cubs live?"

"That's the place. Owned for years by one Blarcome. He owed me money. To secure me, he made me out a deed of the place. We are distantly related. He died in Omaha. I came on, with his daughter, and intended to file the deed giving me possession. She got off the train about twenty miles east of Perry, stole a horse, cut across country to Shortwell, and filed a deed to the place. She has hinted that she has a will, left with a friend in Omaha, that gives her the place by will, as well. Your recorder wouldn't take two deeds to the same place, from different persons. What shall I do?"

"You can do nothing. The first deed filed will hold, unless you can show fraud."

"But will you begin a suit of ouster? Anything to keep the thing in the air, so she won't get possession?"

"She is in jail now, as I've heard."

"Yes, and if I can keep her there, she'll remain."

"I'd like to think this over. It has many knotty points." The lawyer

made a sign to Trotter that Jaynes did not catch. "I'll see you again this evening."

"All right. Think it over. I can pay well," said Jaynes, and at that the lawyer's tongue rasped over his thin, dry lips. He got up and left the room. Trotter, watching him from the window, told Jaynes that he had gone to his office. Soon Trotter and Jaynes went downstairs, and Trotter excused himself on the ground that he had important business to transact. Jaynes again spent some time in the public room of the hotel, nursing his bruised jaw and trying to make friends with the men lounging there.

Trotter, once free of Jaynes, went down the street. He dodged furtively up the stairs to Cuthel's office over the Chinese laundry and let himself through a mere crack of the battered, weather-beaten door. Cuthel, behind a whittled, rickety desk, greeted him with a grim smile:

"Trotter, what is that rich man so interested in a small ranch for? I never heard that old Blarcome got rich off it."

"That's what I'd like to know about."

"Trotter, this may turn out better for us than the game that Scott Harkness spoiled on us."

"Yes, I can see that. Jaynes wants that place. He'll go any length to make his point."

"He's the type that will do that, but he won't go himself."

"No?"

"No, he'll want some one to do the real work."

"Well, I'd as lief be the one as not."

"And if he gets where we can get a li'l hush money afterwards for what he asks?"

"Well, hush money talks loud when we spend it, Cuthel."

The lawyer laughed soundlessly, rubbing his dry hands together. Then he said whisperingly:

"I wonder if Harkness ever met that girl before?"

"I don't think so. She just happened to take his horse when the chance offered; that's all."

"Well, he's a handsome rat and she's pretty. Brought together like this, in romance, they'll not waste time falling in love. Young fools do that sometimes. I've been thinking things over since I left Jaynes. He hasn't much show, with that deed on file prior to his own. I'm going to pack him full of ideas that will lead to delays till we can see what he wants with that ranch. We'll make a sound like we were helping him till we can see our way clearer."

Trotter chuckled. Cuthel laughed soundlessly, then he spoke again:

"How do you stand with Sheriff Price?"

"Well, he don't cotton to me none yet, after that sketch that Scott Harkness put on against our crowd, but he isn't openly hostile."

"Go visit him at the jail; get him to smoking good cigars, and draw him out. I'll meet Jaynes at eight o'clock in his room in the hotel. Pretend to sympathize with the girl and find some fault with Harkness, to keep up appearances. If you seem to like Harkness of a sudden, Price will smell a rat and won't talk."

"That sounds to me all right. We'll meet at eight," said Trotter, as he left.

A little before eight o'clock Cuthel appeared at the hotel. He made a sign to Jaynes, who soon detached himself from the knot of talkers downstairs and went with Cuthel to his own room. Here they sat down, without a light. Cuthel whispered that he expected Trotter with news soon. They heard him coming up the stairs and spoke to him to let him know they were in the room, although no light showed. Trotter entered and found a chair.

"I've had Trotter down at the jail,

trying to worm out information for our use," Cuthel whispered.

"That was a good idea. What did you find out?" Jaynes asked.

"That that girl has hired Scott Harkness as a hand, and that she intends to take possession as soon as they get out."

"Hired him! They won't get out, if I can help it," Jaynes burst out angrily: "I'll have the law on him, plenty and strong."

"This Harkness is quick on the trigger," Cuthel whispered, and at once Jaynes calmed down.

"Well, I've smelled smoke myself," he snarled.

"But this is a case where smoke won't do it all, not in open, public style," Cuthel whispered again.

"What do you mean?" asked Jaynes savagely.

"Why are you so interested in that small ranch?" Trotter inquired.

"That's my business. Sentiment, call it. My stepsister lived there once. I visited there."

"Oh, yes, family sentiment; I wondered at the reason," Cuthel said; "but that explains it, all right."

"Sure does," Trotter commented warmly.

A wild, wolf yell sounded outside on the street.

"That's old Strayern," Cuthel whispered; "in for one of his benders."

A wolfish chorus now sounded.

"That's his three sons," Trotter added.

Again and again and yet again the human wolf pack sounded in their ears. Jaynes strode to the window and opened it quietly. Before the hotel, goggling at the brightly lighted windows, were four men on shaggy ponies. The four were long, lantern-jawed, with long, rippling, black whiskers. They each had a long gun in their saddle sheaths. And they had two big guns each—short ones. Their ponies

were hardy beasts and they were hard themselves. They went down the street whooping and yelling.

"They'll buy some supplies and get out. They never do any real harm, as long's they're not molested," Cuthel explained. "Sit down, Mr. Jaynes. I've got this pretty well thought out by now."

Jaynes shut the window carefully and sat down again. Cuthel whispered cautiously:

"What do you think those Strayerns will do to any one that comes to oust them?"

"Fight," Trotter replied.

"They're mighty bad men," said Cuthel in his mysterious whisper.

"Are they killers?" Jaynes asked.

"No one ever proved a killing on them yet," replied the lawyer, with a dry chuckle.

"No one proved it?"

"No."

"But they've been suspected?"

"Sure," Trotter replied.

"Now, suppose we let Harkness go. You withdraw that charge, Mr. Jaynes."

"But I'm not going to let him go."

"He's hired himself to that girl. He'll try to take possession for her. The Strayerns won't like that."

"But if they kill him, or he them, the ranch won't be mine, will it? How will I get rid of the girl's deed which is already on file?"

"Perhaps not. But there are Trotter's friends, and Trotter. Now, suppose Harkness fights the Strayerns, and loses, by being killed. Her only protector and friend here is gone. Suppose Harkness kills the Strayerns. He's in trouble again. But he won't. They'll shoot him in the back. That's their way. There's no stock on the place, to speak of. The girl has romantic ideas about returning to the old home and all that. All right, let her. You have your ideas, too, Mr. Jaynes,

as you've said. We'll clean up any ends of old Lone Star Diamond stock on the ranch; the Strayerns will take their runts. With the place bare of stock, she'll not stay long. We can invent a dozen ways of making her sick of the place and ready to sell cheap. We'll talk it over more in detail."

"Well, it seems better now that you put it in that light," Jaynes agreed. "What else have you to suggest? But all inside the law, for us."

The other two chuckled low and raspingly; the big man joined in their amusement.

CHAPTER VI.

A GREEK, BEARING GIFTS.

SHERIFF PRICE came in with morning coffee for Scott, who sat on the edge of the steel bunk, rumpling his hair. "Ma" Price had taken Virginia Blarcome under her wing for the night and the girl had been only a nominal prisoner.

"I'm goin' t' get bail for that girl," Price told Scott; "she has no friends in town——"

"Ain't forgettin' me?"

"Nice question! You've no deeded land or other property, so your bond won't go in cou't, son."

Scott continued to rumple his hair.

"As for your case, yo'll be arraigned before Justice of the Peace Barnes and fined, as yo' deserve for hittin' such a defenseless critter."

"Well, it was wo'th ten dollars," said Scott, grinning widely.

There came a rattle at the outer door of the jail. Price went out along the short passage. He opened the door and admitted Silas Jaynes, who came in, his face wreathed in smiles.

"How are the prisoners this morning?" he asked.

"All right. Miss Blarcome stayed with my wife last night."

"I'm glad of that," said Jaynes,

beaming; "I was—well, hasty. I was angry because she beat me in a game of wits. I intended to give her the ranch homestead all along, but I wanted to do it in my own way. She suspected me of trickery, I know. I'm going to prove that I bear no ill will by withdrawing the charge against her."

"Still, the papers are on file in my office docket. She might want t' lay a charge for illegal imprisonment."

"May I see Miss Blarcome?"

"Yes. I'll call her in here."

"And I want to withdraw my charge of assault against that cowboy—what's his name? Harker, Hooker—"

"Harkness."

"Oh, yes, Harkness," said Jaynes carelessly, as if the real name mattered little. "I want to withdraw my charge against him, too."

"Seems t' be a day of gladness," Price remarked. "Sit down in the office and I'll see about all this."

He disappeared and soon returned with Virginia and Scott, who eyed Jaynes suspiciously. The latter cleared his throat gustily before speaking:

"Virginia, you've won. I'm going back to my business. I had a sort of sentiment about that home ranch of yours. But if you want it bad enough to go there and live, my pity on you. I'm withdrawing the charge against you and want to close this incident."

"All right, Uncle Sile," said the girl warmly, "if you feel like that, we'll let things go as you say."

"Now, Harkness," continued Jaynes, looking at Scott directly and openly, "you socked me plenty, but I'm letting that go, too."

"I was willin' t' pay ten dollars damages in cou't," Scott drawled. "I've got socked myse'f, and never held any hard feelin's, as long as I was socked fair."

"You socked me fair on the button, young man. You pack an awful sock." He got up and asked Price if he could

withdraw the charges without further formality.

"This assault case against Scott is a minor matter, t' be settled before a justice of the peace," said the sheriff. "If yo' don't appear, the case will be crossed off automatically. Scott can go his own way, right now; I'll explain t' our justice. This case against Miss Virginia is more serious, being a matter of valuable papers, but if you'll make a statement, signed and witnessed by me, that yo've found those papers, or something, the circuit court will most likely just let the case slide."

Jaynes drew out his pen and scratched off a few lines setting forth that he withdrew the charge against Virginia, signed it, and handed it to Price, who witnessed it.

"I can take that t' our justice, who would have had t' remand Miss Virginia t' the circuit cou't otherwise, and it will give him grounds for crossin' the charge off his books; and as it never will get higher than his local court, that will end it," Price rejoiced.

"I'll shake hands all around and go now," Jaynes said.

He gave Virginia his big paw, grasped that of Scott heartily, and slapped Price on the back, going out in a gust of seemingly hearty feeling.

"Now, that's what I call a man," Price said; "a bit hasty, but give him time and he comes around all right."

"He seems t' have good second thoughts," Scott agreed.

"Neither of you know Uncle Sile," the girl reminded them; "there was a line in one of my schoolbooks that I can't just quote. Something about being aware of Greeks bearing gifts."

"Yo' think he's reniggin' with reverse English on the cue-ball?" Scott spoke up delightedly.

"Or coppering his play?" Price cut in.

"I guess it all means the same thing. So I am free?"

"Yes," Price replied.

"Mr. Harkness, can you tell me some way we can get out to my place? It is about twenty miles, about south, as I remember."

"That's her," Price said; "fair trail. Better take a buckboard, as yo'll have t' tote out plunder yo'll need."

"I think we could ride out better and quicker and get back int' town before night. We'd ought t' look over the layout and see what's wanted," Scott suggested; "that Strayern crowd yo've told me about as being on the Lone Star Diamond probably've been keepin' a pig's nest. We may need lumber for repairs and a freight-ark t' carry things before we get through."

"That will be better," Virginia agreed; "if I can get a horse."

"Take my Baldy hoss; he let yo' do pretty well on him yesterday. I'll keep right along on Thunder Ball. My friend Jerry won't worry none if he doesn't see him right on the dot."

"Well, if yo'll lend me Baldy, all right. I won't have to pay ready money out then. To tell the truth, I haven't got much cash. Father's long last illness took most of our money. I put up a big front to make Uncle Sile think we were all right, and after the funeral I told him I'd come West with him. I knew he had that deed and wanted to file it; I thought that by keeping right with him, I'd have him in sight, at least, and I trusted to my wits to get my paper on file first."

"Well, those wits didn't deceive yo' any," Scott laughed. "I'll go get the hosses and sandwiches for lunch."

"And I'll get a more suitable riding costume than the one I wore when I stole Baldy." The girl laughed ringingly. "Keep moving, cowboy. It will be good to be riding just for fun, on the open range, on a good horse. I came so fast yesterday that I didn't have time to look at anything but Baldy's ears. But to-day I'm going to

look at things—mesquite, greasewood, brockle-faced calves, and maybe a road runner. I remember all those things from my childhood days on the old Lone Star Diamond and I want to see them all again."

"I think yo're goin' t' stay out West, this time," Price said, with a glance toward Scott.

"I think so, too," Virginia replied promptly.

"With good deeded land in yo'r possession, yo'll get credit, all right, t' make a start," Price reminded her, as Scott went out.

"Yes. Say, sheriff, is Scott—well, is he nice?"

"Oh, he'll do t' take along, anywhere. Why?"

"I just wanted to be sure. I've hired him as a hand, you know. I'll have to get a housekeeper later, and perhaps another cowboy. I don't know just how it will work out."

"Maybe it'll end with you for housekeeper. Scott is as good as two ordinary cowboys—"

"There," cried Virginia, her face flamingly pretty. "I wasn't talking sentiment."

"Still, a li'le of it ain't any ha'm, miss."

"No—I suppose—not. I'll go buy my riding togs now."

Half an hour later Scott rode up to the jail on Thunder Ball, with Baldy lightly tiptoeing in the lead. Soon Virginia appeared from the sheriff's office, clad in a tweed knicker suit, a pretty flannel shirt with a soft roll collar, a gay red and black neckerchief, and a wide-brimmed felt hat. She had tan riding boots, with pretty little spurs, and a plain belt, in which she carried a long-barrel, light .32.

Scott looked her over admiringly:

"Now, that's better. Nothin' t' do but ride, eh?"

"I bought the gun because I want to shoot, as I did when I was a girl. I

had a little .22 target short gun then and often killed small game about the place and kept down the rattler population. Once I killed a coyote that got into the chicken yard and couldn't get out because there wasn't room for him to get a start to jump over the fence going out."

Scott started to swing down to give her a hand up, but she was in the saddle before he could do it. Baldy began to display a bit of misdirected energy, but Virginia treated him firmly and he settled down, snorting with disappointment.

"Yo've found it didn't pay, Baldy," Scott warned him; "now, behave."

Virginia let Baldy try his milder paces up the road, testing the stirrups. Sheriff Price beckoned Scott to lean over, as he whispered:

"Got lots of gun feed?"

"Yes."

"Don't trust those Strayerns. Old Strayern will shake yo'r hand and hold it and shoot yo' with his left. Don't give him an inch."

"I'm going to pretend we're the'e t' look the place over, not t' take possession, till I see how the land lies."

"That's right; don't play anything for a sleeper with them. Keep that girl out of trouble. No one will bother about any Strayern that gets killed."

Scott nodded and rode to join Virginia, now quite a distance up the street. He soon overtook her and they rode out into the open, side by side, seeing nothing of Jaynes on the way out.

Once away from town, Scott, following directions that Price had given him, swung south. Virginia began to look for familiar landmarks, but had to confess that her girlish memory was at fault.

"Never mind; we'll get the'e," Scott encouraged her. "Now, I'd like for t' know how come yo' rode out with me this a way and me almost a stranger."

"Well, I asked Ma Price a lot of questions about you and I'd hate to tell you what she said for fear it would make you vain."

Scott did not remark upon this. He was shy of being praised, especially by a woman. He shifted the talk at once:

"Those Strayerns are a loose lot. We'll not tell them at once that we're goin' t' take possession. We'll just ride out as if t' look the place over. Yo' tell them who yo' are and make no talk about rent or takin' the place. I'll size them up and see what's needed t' make that place fit for a nice woman t' live in. We'll ride back this afternoon. Then I can decide what measures need t' be taken t' get rid of them."

"Will they fight?"

"They have that reputation, miss."

"But will you fight for the place for me?"

"I'll do what's needed, miss," Scott spoke gravely.

"I don't want you to get into trouble."

"I said I'd do what was needed," he replied, a bit shortly.

Virginia, understanding the way of the men of the West, was silent. She knew that this lean, bronzed cowboy had taken up this job and, as it was in the line of duty, meant to do it as well as he could; and that she, as a woman, was out of the rough part of it.

She became silent, glancing from time to time at Scott, whose level eyes were on the scene ahead as if he were estimating the chances of an adventure that might have a grim ending.

CHAPTER VII.

INDIAN MOUND.

I BEGIN to recognize things now," Virginia exclaimed, after they had put half the twenty miles behind them. They had left the plainer trail and now followed what seemed to be the faint

marks of an old cattle trace. The land was more rolling, some of the rolls breaking on the eastern edges into bluffs. The grass was sparse. Virginia looked at the cattle they passed and began to read brands with increasing success.

"It's just like old times," she said, and her cheeks had taken on a high color. Her dark eyes were alight with excitement.

"Sure must be," Scott agreed.

The horses kept side by side easily, for so had Scott and his pal Jerry ridden on many a social trip through the surrounding range country.

"What for house is it at the Lone Star Diamond?"

"Cowboy, it isn't much of a house, as I remember it. Stone, quarried from a sandstone ledge not far from the house, along the wall of the little bench it is on. The stone is soft when it comes out to the air, but hardens when exposed. *Zachuiste* thatch roof. Nice matched-wood floor; everything cozy inside."

"It'll be a hawg's nest now, I'm a-thinkin', with those Strayerns in it so long."

They left the rolling land and came to flatter country that suddenly broke away over a low escarpment and then rode through a little notch toward the lower level. Now they were in a nook of good grassland. Virginia long before this had taken the office of guide, knowing the landmarks surely.

"There, cowboy," she said, pointing one slim gloved finger toward the rounding sweep of the bench to their right, "is the house. I'm taking you down this flat because I want to go to Indian Mound."

"What's that?"

"See that little hill or rather big knoll in the center of the flat, opposite the house? We always called that Indian Mound. I made up a legend that a big chief was buried there, and spent

many happy hours playing on and around it."

Scott said nothing. He was observing everything about them. From a little thicket they jumped a big, old steer. He lumbered away. Virginia shouted enthusiastically:

"See, he's got the Lone Star Diamond on him. Dad always said that some stock was overlooked and Strayern reported at first finding a few of our cattle, but dad said to let them stay for seed, as he called it. It gave him comfort to think that some of our old cattle were here yet."

"I'll bet those Strayerns never let them increase any with your dad's brand. Theirs is the Lazy S, which about describes them."

From time to time Scott glanced at the house on the little bench. It seemed snug enough, to outward appearance, and he thought of how neat it would look if cleaned of all Strayern slackness inside. He wondered that no one of the Strayern crowd appeared, as they had a reputation of resenting all intrusion on their domain.

He noted the round corral near the house, the big corrals far down the flat, the very few cows. They came to the foot of the mound, and Scott looked at the regular formation in silence. Virginia led the way up and soon they came out on top. The top was flattened and afforded a bit of good grazing. Here Virginia swung down and Scott followed suit. From the top they could see details of the valley below more clearly. They ate silently, thankfully, for youthful health and good spirits had made them ready to enjoy the snack.

"Roll your smoke, I know you want it," Virginia said encouragingly, leaning back with her hands under her head. She relaxed, while Scott smoked with quiet enjoyment.

"I'm sure wonderin' whe'e those Strayerns are." Scott broke the silence.

"It ain't just like them t' let us squander all over their home pasture and not ask whyfore."

"They may be off hunting strays."

"They'd let them go till round-up time and then collect when they got sold and the inspectors gave them credit at the market."

"I hope they're home, so we can let them know that I am here."

"Remember what I suggested about not telling them right off that it's only a trip t' look things over. There'll be a fight later t' oust them, but I want t' handle that, man-style, and with no woman mixed in it." Scott's mouth set to a straight, firm, white line.

"I'll remember."

They mounted and angled down the mound's side again. Scott turned and looked at it curiously. The girl mused aloud.

"I wonder what's under it? Is my Indian chief buried there?"

"I don't think so. These Indians out in this region most likely buried their dead in the mountains, in rock caves, or old cliff dwellers' ruins, if they had time. If they were killed in war, they maybe buried them anywhere, or not at all, although Indians generally always tried t' cover up their dead folks some way. If the'e's anything under that hump of dirt, it's not an Indian chief. It is a funny formation, though," he agreed, turning for a last look at it as Thunder Ball and Baldy hoss rode across the little flat and toward the bench.

They found the path, and zigzagged upward. The horses came over the brink with a final grunting surge of equine force, and they started toward the house. All was clear on all sides of the stone structure. They rode up to it.

The door swung open; the interior was dark. The sun was behind the house. Virginia was about to swing down, when Scott signed for her to remain in the saddle.

"H'lo in the'e!" he called. "Will yo'r dawg bite?"

The silence was unbroken. Scott glanced about. The well sweep was up; the bucket yet was moist, though, on the stone curbing. A wet spot still showed on a stone flag before the well curb. There were no horses in the little round corral. A pig pen behind it had sagging posts; a remnant of chicken coop leaned, bulging ruinously.

"Nobody home," Virginia decided.

Scott said nothing for a moment, then suggested:

"Let's get a drink now, and some for the hosses. They can drink out of my hat; I wouldn't water whe'e those Strayern hosses drink; might be glandered."

Virginia still looked toward the house yearningly. Scott remarked casually again about getting a drink before they looked over the place.

"Yes, the horses need the water," she agreed, and turned her horse about, slowly surveying the scene as Baldy hoss wheeled.

"No horses about; ours didn't whicker," she said, as they came to the well curb. "Perhaps we'd better put our horses in the little corral while we look about the old place."

She glanced at Scott then as he studied the surroundings with the level, appraising gaze of the out-of-doors man. His lean, bronzed face was alight with interest in all that his blue eyes beheld; his light-brown hair rippled out from under the brim of his sombrero. The strong column of his neck, the delicate grace of his hands as he toyed with the bridle reins, the swaying of his body as he turned, she observed with a sudden, sweeping admiration that entirely surprised her with its rushing force. Her eyes danced with evident pleasure.

"I dunno," Scott drawled, in a low voice: "I watched Baldy hoss, and he don't like something about that house."

"Why, if any one's home they wouldn't harm us?"

"One of them Strayerns might be inside, asleep. He might not've heard my hail. They're drinkers and hop-hays, lazy and shiftless, all in one. See that spot on the well stones. That water wasn't spilled long ago."

"They might have ridden away not long before we came."

"We've been whe'e we could've seen them going. We've been on that mound or comin' toward the house longer than it would take for spilled water on solid stone t' dry in this climate."

"Then what do you think?"

"While we were under the verge of that bench, comin' up toward this house, some one came out of that house and got a drink and scooted inside again. He didn't mean t' spill water that a way."

"But they can't mean any real harm, can they?"

"I'd rather be sure about it than sorry."

Again his lean forefinger pointed to the wet spot on the well stones. He glanced toward the open door of the house, that now seemed to the girl to hold some mysterious threat for them both.

"Let's go away, Scott——" she began; "I feel a warning——"

A flash of orange-red came from within the dark recess of the doorway.

Scott pitched over Thunder Ball's withers, falling heavily.

The girl's horse snorted and danced. Virginia tugged at the gun in her holster. A huge, bearded man, rifle smoking in his hand, stepped to the threshold and shouted for her to surrender. The gun stuck in her belt. The bearded man and three others came bounding toward her. She was seized and partly dragged from the saddle while one of them got her gun. Then she was straightened up in the saddle with savage force. The oldest of the crowd

abused her roundly, the others seized her horse and started away with her. Baldy they caught and led away, after one of the sons had taken Scott's guns.

"Tobe, you're told off t' bury that carrion," the old man said to one of his sons, jerking his thumb to where Scott's still body lay; "don't shirk that job none, either. Jupe, step back and give the signal."

Jupe stepped off to one side, drew a bit of white cloth from his pocket and waved it over his head several times. Then he rejoined them. Old Strayern spoke with satisfaction:

"I held right for his temple and the blood was coming out of it in a steady trickle, like it will when a man's shot in the brains. Lucky we got that tip from our friends what these two were comin' to this ranch for."

"What was it for?" Virginia had the courage to ask.

"Never mind; we've been tipped off that yo're kin of old Blarcome's and that he is a goner and yo' want t' turn we-all out. Yo' needn't stick up yo'r pretty nose at the Strayerns. I knew yo'r dad. He killed a man once and I knew about it. That's why he let me stay on he'e without rent and why he knuckled t' old Jaynes. Jaynes ran with a hard crowd once and I knew him, too. He thinks I'm fooled, but I remember him. Jaynes knew about yo'r dad killing Tad Rayburn and about that old indictment against him for it in Nebraska."

"What are you going to do with me?" Virginia asked.

"Yo're going to be kept a prisoner till yo' sign a quitclaim deed, givin' us this place," old Strayern boasted. "Tobe, turn back and attend t' yo'r part of the job. Search him, an' if he's got anything worth while, take it. Stick yo'r knife in his gizzard, t' make sure he's all daid, too. Or use yo'r gun, anyway, t' make sure he's not got some spark of life in him."

Tobe left them, and the girl was hurried forward. Once or twice she looked back.

She tried to listen for the sound of a shot, the shot that might be used to finish what had been begun, the shot that would be fired to make sure that the first one had done its fatal work. She heard nothing.

"No use lookin' back," Strayern jeered. "No one ever put dirt onto a Strayern and got much comfort out of it."

"Let me go back and say a prayer at his grave?" she pleaded pitifully.

"Prayer! We don't want none of that in this deal," he snarled savagely; "prayers are for those that live accordin'; we don't."

"But this deed—I can't sign anything like that."

"A friend that knows law has told us what t' do t' get full control of this place. We mean t' do it, too."

"Old Jaynes thinks we don't know why he wants it," Jupe laughed, "but we do. We spied out on that geologer he had sneaking around that Indian mound——"

"Jupe, yo've got a mouth like a barn door, shet it!" old Strayern growled, cuffing the big son roughly as if he were a mere child. "No more talk out o' you!"

Now they went forward silently and grimly along the brink of the bench. The girl could see the bulk of the mound down on the flat and the few cattle there. Finally they passed a little motte of timber, and there, in a small corral, were horses. The trio began to saddle.

"We can make Bear Cave by three; Tobe ought t' be with us by that time," old Strayern said. "This soft girl will do as we say soon as we get her in that big cave, where she won't have any hope of rescue and we can have our own way with her, without fear of interruption."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BODY AT THE WELL.

AS the white cloth was waved by young Strayern, a big man who was behind a butte about a mile northwest of the stone house called out:

"That's the signal; they've made it."

"No doubt about?" said another who stepped from behind the butte.

"I caught it clearly," the man atop the butte called down, "with these glasses."

"Come on down, then, and get the horses going. I wonder how they did it?"

"Shot him, I think," said the man who had clambered down. The butte was perhaps fifty feet high, and from its top a good view of the country could be had. "I think old Strayern did it. But it's too far to make out particulars, even with the glasses. I saw them start away with the girl, Jaynes. I want to make sure that Harkness is done for."

"We'll ride right along, then. Cuthel, what sort of a legal tangle will it be if the Strayerns extort a quitclaim deed from her, as you suggested?"

"One in which the longest purse will win," said the man of law dryly. "They're ignorant of law," he went on; "they think a legal paper with a lot of red seals means something. They haven't figured yet that they have to explain how they got that paper. And with this murder they've just committed to be held over them, they're not going to come very near a court. They haven't figured that far into the future yet," he ended, with the dry cackle that was his laughter.

"Still, her deed is yet on file," Jaynes protested.

"We can attend to that later, eh, Trotter?"

"That's your job, Cuthel."

"Let's get those nags out of that bunch of brushy stuff and ride," Jaynes

ordered, striding nervously toward the place where their horses were concealed. The two thus left in the rear exchanged glances of understanding, and Cuthel whispered to Trotter:

"The girl has no kin. Her deed will stand. With no kin, the land will revert to the State, providing she leaves no will, and be open to sale by the State."

"And if we're not able, with your political pull, to get first whack at buying it in, I'm a coyote," Trotter whispered, and they exchanged nudges as they hastened after the impatient Jaynes who already was in the thicket. In two minutes they all emerged, mounted, and rode toward the stone house.

As they rode they were out of sight of the house at times, then sighted it as they came to more open spaces along the bench's edge. They came to the cleared space around the stone cabin at a quiet gait.

"Right at the well!" Jaynes exclaimed, pointing.

The silent form there on its side, with the limbs curled up under the hips in a tragic, slumped posture, was awesome to them. This sudden sight of the results of their plot to kill struck them dumb for the moment. A broad sombrero covered the face of the man; red stains were on the stones.

"That's Harkness," Trotter whispered; "that's his hat and gloves. He had a new pair. See that lone star on the cuffs of them. He was a Tejano, blast him! That's his gray flannel shirt and blue pants——"

"Wonder they didn't get rid of it," Cuthel rasped.

"Lying there for almost an hour now!" Jaynes whispered.

The place seemed to have a sinister quality about it, a touch of horror, with that bit of dead clay there.

"Let's go in," Trotter said.

"Yes, come on in," a voice boomed

from the house; "dad told me t' come back and bury him, but I ain't got around t' it, yet."

"That's one of those Strayerns," Cuthel whispered; "in the house."

The door, wide-swung, gaped invitingly for them. They started their horses toward it, swung down, and went in.

Inside, they glanced about, their backs to the door. The big man who had swung the door open for them stepped to the threshold behind them, letting his hand drop from the latch to his low-hung gun:

"Reach high, hombres, and keep them up till I say 'when!' I want yo'r guns first, then a talk to check up on what I've learned from Tobe Strayern."

CHAPTER IX.

THE INDIAN MOUND'S LURE.

FIRE glints were in the depths of Bear Cave. Lounging against the low entrance, Jupe Strayern held his long rifle in the hollow of his arm.

In the cave, Virginia Blarcome sat near the fire opposite old man Strayern and Hite, the third son. The men had a legal-looking paper, with big red seals. The girl's ankles were bound; her arms were free.

"Now, yo' sign that," old man Strayern was urging her; "I've got pen and ink, right here. Sign it."

"But a deed like this, extorted under a threat, won't hurt me; it won't hold in court. I can go to law and overset it," Virginia replied courageously.

"Won't, eh? We've got the word of a right sma't lawman that this deed will hold. It conveys all right and title t' this ranch t' me an' my boys," old man Strayern insisted.

"Who is he?" Virginia demanded.

"We ain't splittin' on our best friends. Here, sign this."

He tried to induce her to take the paper. At first she refused. Then she

spread it on her knee and began to read it.

"Waste no time readin' it; it's all O. K.," Strayern cut her short. "Sign, right off, now! We want title t' this ranch and that Indian mound."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Yo'll never go out of this cave alive, then." The voice was like the growl of a great bear.

"No, and we've got other ways t' bring a right pretty gal t' time, too," Hike Strayern threatened.

"I refuse, though," Virginia exclaimed, with a sudden jerk of her wrist flipping the paper into the fire. The paper blazed, the sudden flame illumining the interior of the rocky cave like the explosion of a flash light. Strayern leaped around the fire, and grasped her by the shoulder. Hite started for her, clawlike hands clutching in deepest rage.

"What's goin' on inside?" Jupe shouted from his station at the cave's mouth. "Tobe's comin' now."

"I'm glad he is; he's the best of the lot of cubs I've got," old man Strayern replied. "This filly's turned broncho on us, and is raising a rookus."

"Slat her, good. Tobe must be asleep or drunk; he's ridin' all slopped over and his hat's down over his face."

"I thought he had a bottle cached somewhe'e about the house. Now, yo' fightin' she-cat, quit this tryin' t' get away."

For the moment the girl quieted down. The two men holding her laughed. Hite passed one brawny arm around her shoulders and drew her to him:

"I guess yo'll sigh and pine, another day, if yo' don't sign another paper that we'll have drawn up by our friend. He'll be at the stone house by now."

"Yes, she'll not cut that caper on us again."

"Tobe, what's the matter?" Jupe called outside.

"What's wrong?" Old Man Strayern asked, alarmed at Jupe's tone.

"Tobe, why're yo' slouchin' over in the saddle that a way?"

The crash of a .45!

Old Man Strayern leaped for the entrance. As he emerged, a heavy gun barrel thudded against his hard head and he went down. Hite, in the cave, threw the girl from him. A big man came hurtling in. The fire, lighting the half gloom, revealed Hite against the wall, reaching for his gun. The newcomer threw a shot at him; the roar of it rolled in the hollow cave like thunder. Hite slumped down, coughing. The newcomer caught the girl, who at first shrank from him, then relaxed against his strong body as he said:

"Virginia! I was in time! I wore young Strayern's clothes, first to fool Jaynes, Trotter, and Cuthel, then to get close to the cave without being fired on, so I'd have a chance. I don't know half what this all means, but when we get these men tied up, I'm going to find out some things."

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE INDIAN MOUND.

THREE wounded captives in the saddle preceded the girl and her rescuer as they started back toward the stone hut. The captives rode ahead. On the lean thighs of the captor Old Man Strayern's long rifle rode, the hammer up, a lean finger on the trigger.

"And remember that this repeater can stream lead, when it's used right," Scott warned them.

"We ain't tryin' anything," Old Man Strayern whined; "and if yo'll be easy on us, we'll tell yo' what's under that Indian Mound on the flat."

"We'll see about that later. The other side may offer more. They say yo're the chief conspirators."

"We ain't. We'll tell everything, if

yo'll get us a light sentence," the old man pleaded.

"Shut that claptrap now and ride," came the crisp order.

Just at dusk they reached the stone house again. Old Strayern, in the lead, managed to lag back beside his sons and whisper:

"When we get down off the hosses, we'll get a chance t' get our hands onto him."

Hite replied: "My shoulder's hit, but my left hand is O. K. yet. Jupe, how're yo'?"

"I won't be able t' do much," Jupe replied.

"Well, I will. He run a blazer, tellin' us he had his friends he'e and they would come right after him if he didn't show up on time. No one's he'e—get ready, when we light down. We'll manage t' bunch and fall onto him when he cuts the ropes t' free our feet from under the hosses' bellies—once he goes down under one of us, the others roll onto the pile and use knees, teeth, heads t' butt with—anything."

"Better not make any plans to start anything; my friends down at the corral have yo'-all covered with rifles, right now," the captor said decisively.

They looked toward the corral for the first time. Three men were leaning against three of the posts, within easy shooting range.

"I guess we cave," Old Strayern whined; "it's all up, boys."

"Best way; now yo're talking," the captor said. "Yo'-all will get down, one at a time, and each stand apart a bit from the others, so there can be no shenanigan. And when I tell yo' to march, go down toward that corral, but keep away from my friends that're coverin' yo' with their guns. They might shoot. Each pick out a nice post t' lean against, too."

The thoroughly cowed squatters obeyed without a murmur. In a few moments they were tied up, each to a

post. Then the captor stepped back and spoke to old Strayern:

"Cuthel, he says he helped yo' in this as a lawyer and friend, and that yo're t' blame."

"He lies in his throat. If yo'll promise t' be easy on me, I'll tell yo' what's under that Indian Mound, that is, what I suspect. One of those expert geologists was here six months ago——"

One of the men tied above began to make queer noises.

"That gag won't let yo' talk so it can be understood, Jaynes," Scott spoke sharply. "Mr. Strayern will tell me what I want t' know."

"That geologist told me he was hired by a man named Jaynes. He got drunk while he was he'e. We got him so. He let out enough so we suspected what was up. He said the formation fitted oil——"

The man against the fence post farther up choked and gurgled violently, as old Strayern went on with a confession of how he had been promised full title to the ranch if he could force Virginia to sign a quitclaim deed.

"Who told yo' that and drew it up?"

"Lawyer Cuthel, that we allus depend on t' get us out of trouble. He helped us when Trotter got us into stealin' cattle and usin' our ranch for a rustlers' halfway house for keeping stolen stock till it was drove south——"

The other two men above began to gurgle and splutter behind their gags. The captor drawled:

"Now, Miss Virginia, if yo' can make the ride back t' town before it's too late, get ready t' start. Get Sheriff Price t' fotch a posse. They can fotch yo' most here, perhaps all the way, on the regular trail, in a light wagon. The moon will come up soon and it will be easy riding for a girl that can ride like yo', and old Baldy will carry yo', nice as a pin; he's a good night-hoss, Baldy is."

With the sheriff's men, Virginia came back under the blankets they used

to make soft the wagon box for her. Price drove carefully under the mellow rays of the southwestern moon. . . Sitting on the far side of the bright fire that illumined the six erect forms bound to the fence posts of the corral facing the stone house, Scott Harkness, his head tied up with a handkerchief sat, rifle across his knees.

"Well, this is quite a layout for justice," Price exclaimed. "Miss Virginia told me all about it on the way over from town."

"And I've been egging more and more out of them, setting each faction against the other till I've got aplenty to send them all to prison," Scott replied. "They'll all get well, except Tobe. When he came t' finish me off, I was mighty weak, after getting the grazing wound across my temple that sent me off Baldy, but by that time I was coming to myself, and when he reached for me with his knife to stick me and make sure I was done for, I got a grip on him and pulled him down. I got his gun. I had t' kill him, sheriff."

"Yo're word's good, son. Now we'll herd this crowd back t' town and check up on it all."

In the outcome it was proved that Jaynes, thought to be very wealthy, really was so involved in crooked financial schemes that he was almost penniless. In a last desperate effort to recoup himself, he had plotted to get hold of the Lone Star Diamond Ranch, where, he suspected, another Spindletop was to be found, under the Indian Mound. Over Virginia's father he had held the secret of an old-time range feud and killing and had extorted from him the deed to the ranch. All the culprits were convicted and sentenced to

long terms. The longest term was given Cuthel, who was proved secret head of the range thieves over a wide territory. The Strayerns' testimony at the trial forged the chains of guilt on the town men, but they did not escape, for in revenge, Trotter and Cuthel revealed many crimes of the old squatter and his wolf-cub clan.

One spring morning twelve months later, Scott Harkness, sitting before the old stone house with Virginia, noted an unwonted excitement among the well-drillers on the Indian Mound. The rigging swayed off to one side and began to topple; the workers fled. With a roar, Indian Mound gusher No. 1 came in, flinging high in the air a stream that was to be pure gold for Mr. and Mrs. Scott Harkness.

"Whoop! I never expected more than mebbe a hundred barreler," Scott yelled; "she's come in, big as a flood! I've got t' split the breeze for town and wire for stuff we'll need and get men out t' make a dirt bank t' hold that overflow in a pond till we can get a pipe line in from the lower fields to carry it off."

"Well, don't go crazy altogether; give me a kiss before you go," Virginia checked him tenderly; "and don't forget to hire your friend Jerry and Sheriff Price. We want them to run the ranch while you manage the oil end of it. I always felt something good was under Indian Mound, even when I played there as a child. Didn't you believe there was something good there?"

"Yeah—lemme go—gimme a chance t' fork old Baldy hoss and make him roll his tail for town. I want t' hire men and buy tools and order a piano and rugs and—oh, everything any pretty wife and mother needs."





Santa Claus Takes the Air

by Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Flapjack Meehan Turkey Trots," etc.



HALF dozen men in the New Deal Café paused in their dining, as "Flapjack" Meehan announced "Metz is coming!" It was evening, nearly the middle of December, and outside it was snowing. Within, the room held something akin to Christmas cheer. It was a large room, well lighted, and the odor of broiling moose steak came stealing temptingly from the kitchen as the waitresses passed through the swinging doors.

In one corner there was a rather novel stove. It had been made from an oil drum. One end had been cut open and a door affixed; thus permitting long sticks to be shoved in as fuel. When its sides glowed red, as they did now, it was comfortable in the entire room regardless of the cold outside. In the warmest corner sat "Dad" Simms nodding in a battered rocking-chair. Some day a tourist would offer a big sum for that rocking-chair for it was an antique, older even than the ancient sour dough who occupied it so many

hours and dreamed here of his younger days.

A lot of people made the mistake of thinking that Dad was asleep most of the time and dull all of the time. But nothing escaped his old ears, and those who really knew him were ready to swear he had one of the keenest minds in the North. "Metz is comin' eh?" he muttered, his eyes popping open suddenly. "Metz, eh?"

"I thought that'd get a rise out of you, Dad!" Flapjack replied. "He should be here to-morrow or the next day."

"Metz, eh?" As Dad repeated the words most of the diners stopped talking and eating and listened. If any man in the North had ever done a noble act or double crossed a friend, Dad Simms knew all of the details. He wasn't a gossip by any means; rather he was an accurate source of information. Presently Dad began speaking: "I don't stick up for any criminal. If a man commits a crime he should be punished; and a man shouldn't say nothin' agin' those that's enforcin' the

law, but just the same they's two kinds of peace officers. One's the kind that goes out and gets his man in the usual way; either by beatin' him to the draw or gettin' the drop on him after doing some clever work in roundin' him up. The other's the kind that don't go out so much because he's a law enforcer as because they's a reward for capturin' the outlaw. He don't care a hang about the law—all he's thinkin' of is the money. Usually he works tricks that the average peace officer don't think much of."

"For example, Dad?" some one said.

"Metz is an example of that kind of a officer. He works here and there, whenever there's a reward. He's never taken a chance in his life. He always figures on some kind of a scheme. I mind how he caught Bill Gayer. Bill wasn't a sweet citizen, but he did love his wife. It was gettin' her the things she needed that got Bill into trouble. Then one thing led to another and Bill kept gettin' in deeper until there was a reward of three thousand dollars on his head and it didn't make no difference whether he was brought in dead or alive. Then Metz showed up and in a week he had Gayer in a hospital badly wounded and the three thousand in his poke. He found out that Gayer was crazy over his wife. Then he bribed one of Gayer's friends, gave him five hundred dollars, they say, to get word to Gayer that his wife was dying. When Gayer, just about crazy, came in, Metz was waiting for him. When those old boys what framed the Constitution mentioned it being unlawful to inflict cruel and inhuman punishment I figure they had cashin' in on mother love and the love of married people in mind. That's Metz. He's got so many crooks that now he thinks he's a kind of a Mountie—always gets his man. But I know what the Mounties—real man hunters—think of him. You'll notice he never gets a

chance to work on their side of the border."

"Do you think he'll capture Grady?" Flapjack asked.

"Well, that's what he's here for. There's a five-thousand-dollar reward for Grady. Trouble with Mike Grady, he started something agin' the wrong crowd. When Mike shot Phil Silvester he was poppin' lead into money and influence."

Most of those present knew the story. Grady had opened up some coal claims in a district that was later closed as a conservation measure. When the district was reopened to entry, Grady was on the border ready to be first on the land. It was the only way he could cash in on the work he had already performed. And he would have won out, too, but for a fake row with several men that Silvester had planted on the trail to delay him. When Grady arrived on the land, Silvester was sitting there with a rifle across his knees. Grady had tackled a German machine-gun nest, single-handed, in France and one man with a rifle didn't seem like much. He shot Silvester, then gave him first aid. He packed him to the nearest cabin, then cleared out. At the cabin. Silvester was nursed back to life while a posse was rounding up Grady. Twice they had him cornered, but each time he shot his way out. It was noticed that he did not kill any one in the shooting. Silvester, with revenge in his heart and money in his pocket, offered five thousand dollars' reward. Grady, broke, knew that he could put up a mighty poor legal battle with so much against him, and had become a phantom. His wife and four-year-old son lived ten miles from Cold Deck. Watch had been kept at this cabin off and on, but Grady was too wise to visit it. Now Metz was coming to try his hand. And Metz usually succeeded.

Cold Deck greeted Metz curiously. Dad Simms ignored him, but Flapjack Meehan and his partner, "Tubby" Willows, gave him the courtesy usually accorded to visitors. "He don't do business our way," Tubby observed to Flapjack, "but he ain't tromping on our toes none."

"No," Flapjack admitted, "but just the same, the Christmas season is a poor time to pull a man hunt. Unless a man was positively dangerous, I'd make it a first-of-the-year job. How'd it be if Metz come dragging Grady in ironed, or dead, the day before Christmas? It'd kill Mrs. Grady, I'm afraid, and little Bobby Grady, young as he is, would never forget it."

"But he hasn't started yet," Tubby answered, "and there's a lot of country for Grady to hide in, and no man is going to squeal on him. Metz might have bribed one of Gayer's friends, but he'll be knocked into a cocked hat if he holds any money under the nose of some friend of Grady's."

Metz was a dark, alert man, whose keen eyes were set a little too close together. He had what Dad Simms called a "hair-trigger" smile. It was just a little too ready to be genuine. If he had any special method by which he expected to trap Grady, he did not mention it. He made a number of inquiries that apparently had little to do with man hunting, then he dropped in on the editor of the *Cold Deck Nugget*. The latter was an old-time newspaper man named Rainier. Unlike most newspaper men, he had made a small fortune in the game. A lover of the North, he elected to remain there; doing what he could to boost the country that had given him comfort in his declining years.

"I'm here to bag Grady," Metz began, by way of becoming acquainted with the editor, "but there's plenty of time and, naturally, I want no publicity." This was a lie for Metz was

a front-page hound if there ever was one. "It did strike me," he went on, "in view of the Christmas week that is approaching, that we might make things interesting for the kiddies, the darling little kiddies. Why not, Mr. Rainier, arrange a half hour each night at your radio station for the exclusive use of the kiddies? Let them, say, go to the microphone and tell Santa Claus what they want him to bring them. The theory being, you understand, that Santa is listening in on the radio." He smiled. "The parents, listening in, will naturally enjoy hearing their children's voices on the air. It's good business for you and will bring no end of happiness. Each night, say, you can broadcast the list of children who will speak the following night."

The editor nodded solemnly. "That is a good idea, Mr. Metz, I think perhaps I'll carry it out. Of course, I'll give you credit for it."

"Please, don't!" Metz protested. "I don't care to cash in on that sort of thing. It's just a little idea that occurred to me. If I can be of any assistance, why——"

"You can't tell a few bedtime stories for kids, can you?" Rainier inquired.

Metz thought fast. "Sure, I can!"

"Good, figure up something. Come around to-morrow night. We're going to have a Christmas tree this year as usual."

"Don't ask me to be Santa Claus," said Metz hastily—almost too hastily, in fact, for he noticed that the editor looked up quickly.

Rainier answered, with a smile, "Well, Mr. Metz, you're hardly the build for Santa Claus, and we have a man right here in Cold Deck who's pretty much in demand. His name is Tubby Willows. Have you met him yet?"

"Yes—at the New Deal Café! Genial, but a bit—ah—slow-witted, is he not?"

"Some have made the mistake of thinking so," the editor answered.

They parted with smiles. But it was the editor who was the most thoughtful. "One of two things," he muttered, "either he's the salt of the earth or—just what's his game? I notice he didn't want to be Santa Claus."

Metz continued to smile as he hurried down the street. "So far, so good!"

The New Deal Café, obeying the demands of the time, boasted a radio receiving set. Tubby Willows had become a distance hound. All kinds of noises came from the set when Tubby began fumbling with the dials, but this was always done when no one was around. When others were present for the purpose of enjoying a program, Tubby was one of those rare souls who tuned in on a good station and let it ride instead of jumping all over the air.

The local programs were always tuned-in on as a matter of civic pride. But on this particular night Tubby not only tuned-in with exceeding care, but also called in his partner, Flapjack. "Metz is going to broadcast, Flapjack," he explained, "and he don't look like a bird that cares a hang for kids. He looks like a man who'd pat a little kid on the head and call him sweet names when company was around, then knock him end over end the moment they were alone. Of course, I may be wrong. Two heads are better than one, so that's why I'm dragging you in to hear a bedtime story."

"*Eeek! Yeeow!*" cried the loud speaker, then: "Good evening, kiddies, this is your Uncle Dan speaking! Your old uncle has just come down from the north pole, and who do you suppose he saw there—Santa Claus! Santa is working hard this year, kiddies, because there are so many places he has to go. Now, he wants you to do him a favor.

He wants all of you to come down to the *Cold Deck Nugget* studio and talk into the radio and tell him just what you want. I saw his workshop and he has a loud speaker right on his workbench so he can hear what his little friends say, while he keeps on working on toys. Now, you can't all come at once, so those of you whose last names begin with A, B, C, D, or E, will come to-morrow night. The next night we'll take those whose names begin with F, G, H, I, J, and K. Now, think hard so that you will be ready to talk to Santa. And, listen, he told me he was coming down to Cold Deck on Christmas Eve to greet you-all, so all you kiddies plan to be at the schoolhouse Christmas Eve. Now, I'll tell you a story about the cross old black bear and the festive skunk. Once upon a time there was a cross old black bear who lived in a hollow cedar snag. About a hundred yards from the snag there ran a fine creek. Now, at certain seasons of the year salmon came up to this creek, and the old black bear, being hungry, would go down to the creek and knock the salmon out with one swipe of his paw; then he would wade back to the shore and eat them. Most of you Alaska kiddies have seen bears do this.

"It so happened that living near this trail was a festive skunk named Casper. Now, Casper was the father of a large family and they kept him busy bringing in food. Tired from many hours' search for food, Casper was coming up the trail one day when who do you suppose he saw?"

It was at this break that Flapjack nudged Tubby Willows. A little half-breed boy who sometimes played around the café was standing behind them. In the vernacular of the day, he was "eating it up!" Every muscle was tense, his bright eyes were worried for he knew that the skunk and the bear were about to meet and he knew also that

the bear was cross. Without doubt the youngster was pulling for the hard-working skunk.

"It takes a master hand and a fine voice to hold a kid's attention like that," Flapjack whispered.

Tubby nodded. "Maybe we're wrong about this man Metz. Still, Dad Simms knows him."

The voice from the loud speaker resumed. "Standing in the middle of the trail was the bear. He let forth a low growl as he saw Casper. Casper stopped, tail erect, beady eyes shining. The bear was in an angry mood. He was hungry, and he did not want to go through the thick brush to reach the creek. He came closer and closer, his teeth bared, a terrible roar coming from his throat. And then—what do you suppose happened? Remember, children, Casper, like most skunks, would give way to no other animal. What do you suppose happened?"

The little breed boy was pop-eyed.

"Why, the bear remembered that a skunk can not be bluffed and so he stepped into the brush and let Casper walk safely by." Came a pause, then. "Now, bow your little heads and we will have a good-night prayer. 'Now I lay me down to sleep—'" Metz sang in a soft, pleasant voice and the little breed boy, carried away by it all, bowed his head and with folded hands, listened.

There were other listeners that night besides Flapjack Meehan, Tubby Wilows, the little breed boy, and the children. A broad-shouldered man of medium size, heavily bearded, and with eyes containing the alert light of the hunted, crouched close to a small set, earphones clamped tightly over his ears. A small fire burned in the center of the shelter he had made, and the smoke circled through a hole in the top, Indian fashion. The shelter itself consisted of boughs and sod hastily

thrown up. Falling snow covered it all; and there was not a track leading to the place, for the man only left this refuge when snow was falling rapidly enough to cover his trail. A half dozen ptarmigan hung from a peg in the wall; near by were a dozen frozen moose steaks.

"The kids' hour," he muttered, "how I love it! I'd give ten years of my life to hold little Bobby in my arms for a minute—ten years for a minute and worth the price! Listen—there's the bedtime story. What a big-hearted man Uncle Dan must be? Bobby listening in! I know it! I made the set before I got into the Silvester mess! Bobby will be worried about that skunk. Uncle Dan has made even a skunk attractive. If the lad only knew that things come out all right for kids. If things only broke right for grown-ups! Ah! The bedtime prayer. I taught Bobby that prayer and I know he's shutting his eyes and I can see Grace looking down on him with that look a mother always has for her children. And I'm away from it all!" He closed his eyes tightly, but the tears trickled through.

He reflected on the past. He was morally right in every step he had taken. Silvester had tricked him out of the coal property. Broke, he could not have ousted Silvester by process of law. Yes, he made a mistake by his direct action, but they'd taught him that in the army—to go get 'em. He had made a mistake when he shot his way through the posse. But he had taken good care not to kill. His bullets had kept them ducking; they had hunted cover. It was the sort of fighting he had learned Over There. And he had nicked a deputy marshal. In that, he was wrong. As for the rest, he had no regrets except that it kept him from Grace and Bobby. He had served a hundred sentences in the separation. And how they had hunted him

at times—like a dog! Silvester money back of it. He knew that, for he had in his possession a notice:

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS
REWARD!

Five thousand dollars will be paid for the arrest of William Johnson Grady, wanted for attempted murder. This is applicable to others as well as police officers.

PAUL SILVESTER.

And what could a man who was dead broke do against Silvester money? If he could get out of the country, why— But every port was watched. He could only dodge and trust for a favorable break. Anything to avert Bobby's seeing his father dragged from the wilderness in irons. And yet what wouldn't he risk to hold the little fellow in his arms for a moment; and to whisper to Grace that all would be well some time. They were going to permit the children to tell Santa Claus what they wanted. Perhaps he would hear Bobby's voice. Yes, he was sure Grace would see to that! His lad's childish voice, filled with faith, leaping the trackless, snow-bound land, finding his father's ears—something man had not succeeded in doing. Not to-morrow night, but the next, would they reach those children whose names began with G. The hours would drag.

In Cold Deck, Metz had returned to his room. It was a warm, steam-heated room, built to accommodate the tourists who came through the country. The old-timers avoided steam heat when possible. It seemed as if they caught cold in rooms so heated. Metz relaxed. Presently he rang for food. There was a vast contrast between the surroundings of Metz and Grady this night. Presently Metz wrote:

DEAR SILVESTER: I have investigated thoroughly. I find that Grady is somewhere in the back country with little chance of being captured until spring unless strategy is resorted to. Things are progressing favorably. I find Grady is wrapped up in his son.

I have also learned that he is a radio fan and I half believe some one is keeping him posted by radio in some manner. To-night I pulled the kid stuff. I'm kindly old Uncle Dan, and before I left the studio messages were coming in approving of my stuff. Yes, Silvester, things are looking up. Incidentally, the entire country is watching my efforts to capture Grady, as the matter has previously attracted some attention because of the unusual details.

I half expected to have Willows and Meehan as rivals. They have quite a reputation as man hunters, but they seem not interested.

With best wishes and assuring you that I will soon turn over our man to the authorities,
METZ.

Metz sealed, addressed, and mailed the envelope.

The following day he sauntered into the New Deal Café for lunch. Tubby was overhauling a Santa Claus outfit.

"Getting ready for the Christmas doings, Mr. Willows?"

"Yeah. Can't disappoint the kids," said Tubby, and went on with his work. Metz, however, lingered and learned further details, particularly the time of Santa's arrival. Then he seated himself and motioned to a waitress.

Grace Grady and little Bobby had listened in just as Bill had figured they would. She had heard the announcement that children could send their voices to the north pole where Santa Claus would be listening in. "Can I, mama?" Bobby had asked instantly. Gradually the news had been broken to the lad that Santa might not be able to find the humble cabin out of Cold Deck. Now the lad saw a chance, young as he was, to avoid such a disaster. Grace Grady suffered as only a parent can suffer on such occasions. "Can I, mama?" the boy repeated.

"Yes," she said at last. Her thoughts had suddenly taken flight, moved with the swiftness of radio itself and centered on the man wandering somewhere in the white vastness that was the mountain range between Cold Deck and the

Pacific Ocean. "I wonder if he would hear; if his set is working. He once said that if anything went wrong to broadcast it and he would come in. Would it cheer him to hear Bobby's voice? Yes," she suddenly repeated, "we'll go, Bobby. It won't be our turn to-morrow night, but the night after."

"And will we see Uncle Dan?"

"Yes, we'll see Uncle Dan," the mother promised.

Metz was all smiles when Grace and Bobby timidly entered the studio. The boy's big eyes filled with wonder and curiosity as he looked upon the "Uncle Dan" who told such wonderful stories. Metz had known that Mrs. Grady would come. She would come to please the boy, and, perhaps, knowing Bill had a receiving set, she might come for personal reasons. There she was, nevertheless, proud, no doubt, that her boy was above the average; worried over the disappointment that awaited him if he asked too much; wondering if Bill would hear; if Bill were alive, even.

It was an interesting study in human emotions for one of Metz's type. "Don't ask for too much, Bobby," she said. "You know Santa has so many little boys to look after." She smiled, then bit her lip. Her eyes glistened.

Metz closed the door behind them, but there was a glass partition which permitted the visitor to see what was going on and, incidentally, lent confidence to the boy because he could see his mother. "Now, Bobby, listen to your Uncle Dan," he said, patting the boy on the shoulder. "You tell Santa Claus to bring something to mother, and to daddy too!" He watched sharply to note the effect of the mention of daddy's name.

"My daddy's gone," Bobby said.

"Oh, that's too bad. Suppose we ask Santa Claus to bring daddy with him this year? It would only take a minute because reindeer travel fast,

Bobby. Now, tell me what you are going to say, then we'll fix it so you can tell Santa Claus. It's almost like a telephone, Bobby."

Bobby repeated his request several times, then Metz spoke into the transmitter. "It will soon be the night before Christmas when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. Remember those old days, the days of our youth, old folks? Now our children are growing up, too. Remember how we used to gather around the fireplace and carefully hang up our stockings in the hope that Saint Nicholas would soon be there? Father in his easy-chair, smoking his pipe, mother darning socks, and we kids playing around. Once again the great day is here, and our own children are sending word to Santa to-night by radio. Once more we'll be by the old fires, but now we are the grown-ups. The first kiddie to speak to Santa Claus to-night will be Master Bobby Grady. Now, Santa, be sure and remember what Bobby says. All ready, Bobby?"

The man crouched in the snow-covered hut, in the back country almost ceased to breathe. Every nerve was strained to the utmost. "Yes, Bobby dear," he whispered, "Santa is listening. If you only knew how hard he is listening!"

Then the childish voice came through the air, even the excited intake of the breath came distinctly. "Santa Claus, my mama said not to ask for much because you have to go to so many places."

"God!" The man in the snow spoke from a tortured soul.

"Santa, I want a pup, a train that goes when you wind it, and—and—bring mama a coat; and—and—if you see my daddy bring him along—too. And—that's all."

"A pup," Grady repeated, "a train that goes when you wind it, and a coat for mama. Yes, Grace, poor girl, probably needs a coat. That coat was some-

thing she would have had if I'd re-located those coal claims. And—Bobby wants me. My little boy—God! Please let me take him in my arms once more—please—God!”

When Bobby left the room, Metz stepped to the transmitter and added a note of his own. “Yes, Santa, be sure to remember little Bobby. He’s not been feeling well lately and we can’t disappoint him. The next little boy is Johnny LeDuc. Come on, Johnny, step right up and tell Santa all about it.

Another man was listening intently that night when little Bobby Grady broadcasted his request. “A pup, eh? A train that goes, eh! By gosh, he’ll get ’em!” Tubby Willows’ jaws almost clicked. “And Metz, eh? Law or no law, he’s as dirty as they make ’em. For five thousand dollars he’s playing on a father’s heart and a child’s belief in Santa. Well, he’ll not get that five thousand.” Tubby was thoughtful. “No use in avoiding the issue, Grady’s got to stand trial. What’s the matter with my collecting that five thousand, so long as somebody’s going to? Metz is figuring on Grady’s love for his boy bringing him to their cabin and he’s planning to be there. Well, so’ll I!”

Tubby Willows was very much in evidence the day before Christmas. A gang of men had mushed out and cut a fine Christmas tree and erected it in the schoolhouse. Most of the children were ready hours before the time to appear. The continuous darkness, except for a very brief period, made the time seem unusually long to the youngsters. Tubby checked over the presents. He knew every child in the vicinity of Cold Deck, and he was seeing to it that each one got what he wanted, if possible.

Metz, also, was checking up. As Uncle Dan, a number of children had asked that he be present at the Christmas tree. He promised them that he

would “try.” Midday found Grace Grady and Bobby mushing over the trail for Cold Deck. Tubby Willows had invited them to be guests of the New Deal Café. That insured them a number of good meals while in town, and Tubby had a strong suspicion that Grace Grady had missed several during the winter. She was a proud young person and assisting her was a difficult matter.

Metz had chanced to pass them as he headed for their home. He had stepped aside to avoid answering questions and possibly arousing suspicion. A wave of doubt surged through him. Could it be that Bill Grady had visited his family ahead of time? Probably not. Either he had not come in, or he was dead, or possibly he had not heard the radio broadcasting his son’s message. “That broadcasting was worth taking a chance on and got me a lot of popularity,” said Metz complacently. “When they get next to the real reason, it’ll be different. But—the fools!”

He carefully circled the Grady cabin at a distance of a mile. No tracks led in and none led out except those of mother and son. He noticed that the lad had walked for a hundred yards up a steep hill—evidently the Grady dogs were not in the best condition. Metz entered the cabin without hesitation. From his pocket he took a piece of heavy paper which was a silhouette of Grace Grady’s head. This he pasted to the curtain. He then arranged a chair and book near it, and lighted the lamp. Then he stepped outside to survey his work. It looked as if Mrs. Grady were reading and her profile cast a shadow on the curtain. This done, Metz drew his automatic pistol; again assured himself that it was in working order, then made himself comfortable to wait. It might be for one hour or for five. He imagined that if Grady came at all it would be early.

He would be afraid to remain long and would therefore come early in order to find his son awake. Presently Metz picked up a book and began to read, but his ears were alert for the slightest sound.

Bill Grady moved down the valley with the silence of drifting mist. He kept to the ridges, watching the valleys in the gloom of the winter day, and as he drew near the cabin his caution redoubled. He finally sighted the light and a thrill swept through his being. "Home! Christmas Eve!" For a moment he was off guard, but caution came with a rush. He resisted the desire to race to the light. There might be watchers. He began to circle, moving carefully, watching the snow for signs of a track. It was agony, that light; so near, yet so far. Christmas Eve—and hunted! A slight movement in the brush caused him to whirl, crouching. But it was only snow falling from a leafless limb. He breathed once more, and then—

"Put up your hands, Grady. Don't try to escape. You're in the open. I'm under cover and I've got a six-gun on you." The voice was cool, decisive, with a familiar note that he could not quite place. "Come closer. That's it! Keep your hands up!"

"Santa Claus!" Grady gasped. "Santa Claus packing a six-gun. That's a new one!"

"Where's your gun?"

"Here! A little farther over and you'll feel the butt. It's not loaded. I didn't want to—kill. I don't want to kill any time. I won't on Christmas Eve!"

Santa Claus threw back his hood and jerked off his whiskers. "Tubby Wil-lows!" Grady cried. "I can't figure you hunting—me! Listen, Tubby, it's Christmas! I came in to see my boy. Don't let him see me ironed. I'll promise by all the oaths known to man not

to try any funny business, if you'll just let me see him, then take me out of town."

"That's what I came for!"

"I want to hold him—tight! It's funny, and you can't understand, but it seems as if my arms fairly cried to hold him at times. I *had* to come in. You see, I heard him ask for me over the radio and—he's sick. Uncle Dan said so."

"Uncle Dan is Metz!" Tubby answered.

"Metz—that bloodhound! I wish I'd loaded my gun. Tubby, can't I run over?"

"Your wife is at Cold Deck!" Tubby answered.

"But—I can see her shadow against the window!" cried Grady. Suspicion flashed into his eyes as he pointed to the profile.

"That's something I can't explain," Tubby answered. "I know she's in town! And I know that shadow hasn't moved. How much nerve have you got?"

"Enough for anything that's necessary for me to see Bobby!" Grady answered quickly.

"They're laying for you at your cabin, and you'll be recognized anywhere along the trail or in town, Grady. You've got to play Santa Claus. You're about my size—not so fat, but a few pads will fix that. I've got everything ready!"

The pair worked swiftly. Tubby led the way to a secluded spot, where secured to a tree were four reindeer shipped down from one of the Eskimo herds. They were harnessed to a sleigh loaded with presents. "I'll drive those deer to camp, but you'll have to drive 'em from there to the schoolhouse. I'll be hangin' around ready to help you out. And don't forget you're my prisoner and I'm paroling you. Word of honor?"

"Word of honor!"

"Presents are all marked, and don't forget that while you're Santa Claus to the kids you're Tubby Willows to the grown-ups. I guess that's all."

Two hours later a cheer went up from the miners standing on Cold Deck's main street. Santa Claus had arrived, and he was only fifteen minutes late. They saw him drive on to the schoolhouse, which was brilliantly lighted and packed with children and their parents. Scores of dog teams waited about to take the crowd home when the entertainment was over. There were several snarls and lunges as the reindeer galloped past, for wolves have ever chased caribou and dog and deer are first cousins to wolves and caribou. The instinct of the chase is there.

Grady, in the garb of Santa Claus, walked out on the platform of the schoolhouse. An iron nerve was to carry him through. Tubby Willows would have changed his voice; so did Grady. That and his disguise reduced the element of risk. His eyes eagerly roved round the room and finally found Bobby. Hungrily he looked upon his son, then he began calling the children by name and handing out presents. And every little while he would take a youngster on his lap, thus paving the way for what was to come.

"Bobby Grady! Is Bobby here?"

Beaming with excitement, Bobby slipped from his seat. His mother followed to lend him her support, for Santa Claus was holding a Malemute pup as big as Bobby. Besides that there was a train—a train that would run!

"Bobby, my boy, Bobby!" Santa whispered the words and clutched the lad to his breast. Wonderingly, Bobby looked up. His eyes met Santa's and slowly the strong arms relaxed. Grace Grady was standing near. "Grace!" Santa whispered. "Easy—girl! Your control is perfect. If I could only take you in my arms for a moment! Here,

take the pup!" His hand closed over hers for an instant and in the pressure was a renewal of eternal love and loyalty.

"Bill. Oh, Bill, take care of yourself! I can't bear the thought of seeing you in irons—nor to have Bobby see you so. Five thousand is so much money, Bill, and Silvester is so relentless." Grace whispered these words anxiously as she helped Bobby to take the dog; then she passed on to make room for the next child.

Bobby looked into his mother's eyes. "Why did Santa Claus cry, mama?" he said softly. His big, expressive eyes were demanding a reason.

"Bobby, Santa Claus mushed so fast to-night that the snow hurt his eyes. He'll be all right in the morning—yes, he'll surely be safe in the morning."

Presently Santa Claus was gone. Lightly he chuckled; joy welled from the depths of his heart, for he had once more held fast his own. "A Merry Christmas to you-all and to all—good night!" he had cried, as he vanished from sight.

A mile from town he stopped the reindeer. A short, heavy figure stepped from the brush. "You made it, Grady?"

"Yes! Aren't kids nice and warm, Tubby, specially your own kids? Bobby—I could feel the heat of him clear to my heart. And Grace—she knew. Well, Tubby, what next?"

"You can't beat the game, Grady. You've got to stand trial. There is justice, and you'll find it in the North, with the help of a good lawyer. And, besides, I want the five-thousand-dollar reward for a special reason."

They swung toward the United States marshal's office. Tubby entered. "I'm here to claim that check that Phil Silvester left. Just write Tubby Willows' name in the blank space. Here's Bill Grady, and we're starting to-night

for Valdez, with your permission. There's a good lockup there and that's where he'll be tried."

The marshal handed Tubby the check and the authority. Then, with Flapjack and the Meehan-Willows Malemutes on the sled, they set-off for the long mush. At Grady's cabin, Tubby swung aside. "Might as well come along, Bill, and see the fun." He knocked. Metz opened the door, gun in hand. "Hello, Metz, you might just as well call it a day. I captured Grady early this evening. The reward has been paid."

"Yes," said Grady, "and get out of my house, Metz! Willows has told me

of the sneaking plan you had. It would have worked but for him."

Metz was stunned. Five thousand dollars lifted right from under his nose. He stepped out into the night and the crisp air felt good on his hot cheeks.

"I'm ready," said Bill Grady, after a glance about the familiar cabin.

"Just a minute," said Tubby, "I'm indorsing this check over to your wife—it might come in handy when you hire the lawyer." Tubby indorsed the check and tucked it in the toe of Mrs. Grady's stocking, which was hanging ready near the chimney because Bobby was certain Santa wouldn't "forget mama."



THE RADIO AND BARLEY

RADIO waves make plants grow, says the chairman of the Federal Radio Commission, under whose direction a crop of barley was planted beneath the towers of the high-power radio station at Arlington, Virginia, to fertilize the soil for subsequent gardening. The barley rapidly grew so high that a man walking through it would be lost to view. "This," says Admiral Bullard, "was undoubtedly caused by the electric energy released from the waves due to the vibrations between the lofty antennæ and the ground." A similar effect has for some years been obtained by a large American fruit concern that uses electric currents to control the degree of ripeness of various kinds of fruit for the market.



DO YOU WANT A BUFFALO?

THE Interior Department has announced that buffalo for zoo or other exhibition purposes or for slaughter may be obtained from the Yellowstone National Park. The herd, which normally should number eight hundred and fifty animals, has increased to such proportions recently that there is a considerable surplus.



The Maverick of Marble Range

By Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Bad-weather Vanes," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

BOB BANNISTER, newly arrived cowboy, resembles The Maverick, a bandit "wanted" for murder and robbery. Florence Marble, owner of the Half Diamond Ranch, engages him for some unspecified duties. He helps to free her young cousin, Howard, from debt to Sydney Cromer, president of a new irrigation project, and arouses the latter's enmity. Sheriff Campbell boldly intimates to Bannister that he is The Maverick, but gets no satisfaction.

Bannister gets a hostile reception from Hayes, Half Diamond foreman. Florence asks Bannister to befriend Howard and watch her interests. The neighboring ranchers interview Florence regarding her interest in the irrigation project. She defends it and offends them. Having invested in the development, Bannister visits the Marble Town headquarters with Howard, and overhears Link, one of Hayes' men, reporting to Cromer. Bannister is set upon and escapes, believing he has shot Link. He and Howard ride off furiously.

CHAPTER XI.

A THREAT.

WHEN they reached the ranch and were looking after their horses, Bannister told Howard about the fight in the dark and gave it as his opinion that two of Cromer's men had seen him peering in the office window and had attacked. They must have known who he was, or they wouldn't have fired. Undoubtedly the irrigation head, eager to get him, had given orders to certain of his henchmen to do the job if they

had the chance. The firing, of course, brought out Cromer and Link, the other two had shouted his name, or Link had seen him in the dim light from the window, and opened up.

"Anyway, I hit him, for I recognized his shout, and now, I suppose, there'll be the devil to pay," he finished. "May gum up the works. More'n likely Campbell will be hotfooting it down here; Cromer'll want to know why I was looking in his window, and he'll know that I heard what he said about getting me, and who he thinks I am—dog-gone if I don't believe it's a mess!"

"Why so?" Howard asked. "They

were shooting at you first; and I don't believe Cromer'll want anything said about the window part of it because you heard him tell Link to get you down here any way he could. How's Cromer going to explain why he wants you bored?"

"Well, there's something in that," Bannister conceded. "But, on the other hand, he can deny he ever said any such thing, an' how'm I going to prove he did?"

"Didn't I see 'em blazing away at you?" Howard countered. "Still *that* doesn't prove anything, either. We'll have to wait an' see. Let's grab a wink. We'll sleep in the house, so they can't surprise us in the bunk house if they come."

Bannister thought that a good idea, and they stole into the big living room where Howard dropped upon the sofa and Bannister took one of the huge easy-chairs.

But no one came, and Florence found them there, sound asleep, in the morning. The pair avoided mention of the shooting of Link and talked evasively of their visit to the irrigation town. No, they hadn't seen Cromer, as he was in Prairie City. Yes, the bank building was coming fine. Yes, everything was going good.

Something in the manner and tone of their casual replies aroused Florence Marble's curiosity and fed her suspicions.

"I know!" she exclaimed in triumph. "You two have been gambling! Did you lose much?"

"Not a thing!" sang Bannister, with a sly wink at Howard.

After breakfast they went out to the bunk house.

"I don't understand," said Bannister. "You'd think Campbell would come down, wouldn't you? Or somebody? I never like it when it's quiet. I hate mystery. What would they do with Link if he isn't dead?"

"Isn't *what*?" This from old Jeb White, who had suddenly appeared in the doorway.

"We heard Link was shot up in Marble last night," Bannister answered casually. "Was wondering what they'd do with him if he was just wounded."

"They'd take him to the company hospital," said Howard. "They've got a place where they take care of their men who are hurt."

"Waal, horns of Hades!" old Jeb cried. "If he's just hurt my day's ruined, even if the sun's shining. That little black-faced double crosser ought to have been wearing more holes in his hide than a Swiss cheese long ago. How come?"

"No one's come down this morning with the details," Bannister replied, avoiding an explanation. "Maybe this is somebody now."

They hurried to the door in response to the thundering of hoofs, and saw that somebody, indeed, had come. It was the foreman, "Big Joe" Hayes. He spotted Bannister at once, literally leaped from the saddle, flinging his reins to Jeb White, and confronted him just outside the bunk-house door.

"So ye tried to knock him off, eh?" His eyes were bloodshot, his thick lips drawn inward, rage was in every inch of him.

"Off what?" Bannister drawled. "A fence?"

"You're sharp, you damned spy," Hayes roared. "You shot Link up there last night."

"Did I kill him?" Bannister inquired suddenly.

This infuriated Hayes beyond reason. He flung his huge bulk forward with extraordinary agility for so large a man. But Bannister's side step was quick and sure as a cat can whirl. He went under Hayes' rush, met it with an uppercut to the jaw. This merely snapped his opponent's head back a bit. And as Bannister went through, a huge arm

caught him and hurled him backward several feet.

Howard was jumping about excitedly, and Jeb White was leaning with his hands on his knees, his eyes shining, his mouth wide open.

Hayes rushed again. This time Bannister did not try to hit him. He danced away. Hayes swung wide and so viciously that he threw himself off his balance. It was Bannister's opportunity. He darted in like a flash. Hayes saw the blow coming—a tremendous straight right—but he was not set to avoid it. It landed flush on his jaw, and he swayed and stood as if looking vacantly at some distant object. Next he was in the dust, sitting there, with his hands on the ground behind him, a silly smile on his face as if he had just that moment thought of something funny.

But in another moment the smile was gone, and the eyes were darting hate. He rose slowly, leaning to the left, and as his right hand came up off the ground, Bannister's voice spoke sharply:

"Now, don't try *that!*"

Hayes glared as he saw that Bannister had drawn leisurely and was swinging his gun up and down.

"I'll try to get you for this," said Hayes, on his feet.

"Well, my friend," Bannister drawled, "don't try too hard."

Hayes stalked angrily around to the porch, and rapped loudly on the screen door. Florence Marble answered.

"Where's Manley?" he demanded gruffly. His jaw was swelling.

"I don't just know," Florence answered. "Your voice sounds kind of rough, Hayes; why don't you try cough drops?"

"I didn't come here for jokes, Miss Marble, but on mighty serious business. Since Manley ain't here, maybe *you'll* hear what I've got to say."

"I'm always ready to talk to my foreman, but I won't allow him to be the

least disrespectful," she answered. "Come in."

Hayes' manner now underwent a change. He removed his hat and sat down. Then he spoke seriously.

"Miss Marble, Link was shot down up in Marble last night."

"Link—shot?" she asked in startled tones.

"Shot down in the dark," he answered. "He's in the company's hospital up there. He may pull through."

"Who did it, Hayes?" she asked anxiously.

"That's it," he said somewhat eagerly. "We know, or they know up there, who did it. It was that new man, Bannister. He's had it in for Link ever since he got here. But Cromer won't let us do anything about it because he thinks it might hurt your feelings or something."

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed emphatically. "Bannister was with Howard up there last night."

Hayes shrugged. "I suppose he was, but would *that* stop him being recognized? The men don't like it, Miss Marble; they think he's not all on the square. If he was anything at all, why did he take this job—if you can call it a job—acting as young Howard's chaperon? That's no man's job."

"That's enough!" said Florence sharply. "It's a man's job if he makes Howard the kind of a man I want him to be. And you just remember that he might have taken the job because I asked him and——" She paused, colored, and bit her lip. She couldn't tell any one what Bannister's job was. "No, I didn't mean that," she continued. "Later on, he may do something else; but right now he's traveling with Howard."

"That may all be," said Hayes grimly, "but the men are complaining. They're threatening to quit an' go to work on the project if you don't ditch him."

"Then they can quit!" cried Flor-

ence. "Are they and you coming down here to dictate to me how I'll run this ranch and whom I'll employ?"

"I wouldn't say, ma'am," he said in a hard voice, rising and taking up his hat. "I was merely tryin' to tip you off."

"Then you can go back to your range!" she said, pointing to the door.

He left without speaking.

Florence hurried furiously out the porch and called for Howard. When he came she assailed him with rapid questions.

"Did you see Link up there last night?" she demanded.

"No, I didn't," he answered.

"Did Bannister see him?"

"I don't know if he did or not, for sure."

"Well, Hayes is trying to tell me that Bannister shot Link," she said sternly. "And in the dark, at that. Do you know if he did or not?"

"Can't say as I do," replied the boy; "but I know one thing. While I was getting the horses there were a powerful lot of shots being fired at Bannister. And I know another thing. This outfit don't like him because they're afraid of him—*every last one of 'em!* He just licked the tar out of Hayes, out in the yard, because when Hayes accused him of shooting Link he started to kid him. Then Hayes made for him. He gave Hayes what he well an' good deserved an' pointed the way to the house with his gun. Hayes went."

For a time Florence was silent. "Tell Bannister I want to see him—*no*, don't do that. Anyway, you can go now."

"Bannister's worth the whole crew of them," was Howard's parting shot.

Florence sat thinking. What kind of a man had she hired? He had the lure of an engaging personality. Next minute he was a raging, fighting demon. He had probably saved Howard's life

against the gun terror, Le Beck. He had turned Howard from the treacherous saloon bars through sheer logic. He would do his job, she knew.

And, deep in her heart, she believed he *had* shot Link. The thing that amazed her was the fact that she didn't seem to care!

CHAPTER XII.

SHORT-HANDED.

BANNISTER and Howard left soon afterward for a tour of the bad lands, that wilderness of twisted ridges, ragged gulches, "soap holes" with their treacherous sands, and timber patches which reached for miles below the ranch along Indian River.

Howard led the way, explaining the various trails so that Bannister could become acquainted to some extent with the district. For all Bannister knew of it was the wide Marble Dome trail leading to the widest and best ford in the bad lands where he had first crossed. But Howard showed him many other fords and cross trails and one trail in particular that led along the river under a hanging bank. They didn't follow this trail, as it was time to eat, the sun having crossed the zenith.

"We'll go to 'Old' Luke's cabin," Howard announced. "There's few of 'em that know where it is."

So they went back within half a mile of the Marble Domé trail to where a huge cottonwood tree leaned out over the plain. Howard led the way in behind this tree and through a screen of bushes. Here they came upon a dim trail that was well concealed. They followed it for about a mile and suddenly burst upon a small meadow at the farther end of which was a cold spring, by which stood a small cabin, a corral, and a three-sided horse shelter.

"Old Luke once lived here alone," Howard explained, "and everybody thought that he rustled cattle."

They ate their lunch and then followed a trail across the river to the south side. Here they proceeded northward until they reached the big Marble Dome ford where they crossed again. Then they headed for the ranch. They had hardly arrived there when Manley came galloping in from the Dome Range. Florence came out on the porch, astonished, because Manley very seldom rode so furiously. He brought his horse to a rearing stop below the steps. Bannister and Howard came running.

"The men!" exclaimed Manley. "Every man's man of them has gone. North, I suppose, perhaps because they can get better wages up there."

"Hayes threatened that they might do that this morning," Florence explained, her face paling.

"Well, he's gone with the rest of them," said Manley, bitterly. "There's something behind this besides more money for the men."

"I reckon I'm the cause of it," said Bannister. "He doesn't want *me* here. He's made that clear. And we had some trouble this morning—a fight in the yard, and I licked him."

"May be," said Manley, "but I can't help believing there's more to it than your being here. Anyway, we'll have to look after the stock till we can pick up a new crew."

"There's three of us to see that they don't stray too far," said Bannister, "and Old Jeb can come along and cook."

"Yeh, an' I sure kin do more'n that," said Jeb, who had come up to find out what it was all about. "I'm still able to sit on a hoss, an' I'm still able to ride one. So's there bein' only four of us, I kin help out on the range 'tween times."

"And meanwhile," said Florence in a determined voice, "I'll ride to Prairie City and pick up what men I can. I'm sure of getting a few, anyway, even if I have to ask them to come for a short

time as a favor to me till we can fit out an outfit."

"Just the thing!" Manley explained enthusiastically. "You can go up in the morning. Sure you can pick up some men; you can do it better than I could. You ought to be able to get a dozen. If it wasn't for this irrigation business—us being for it and him being against it—we could borrow some hands from John Macy."

Florence shook her head. "We can't do that," she said.

"You know, I'm wondering," drawled Bannister, "if there might not be some one who prevailed upon Hayes to entice the crew away."

"What do you mean?" asked Florence, with a puzzled look.

"I say, I'm just wondering," Bannister replied. "Maybe, later on, we'll find out something."

"Oh, you and your mysteries!" Florence exclaimed, stamping her foot. "I like men who come right out in the open with what they think."

"That's all right, too," said Bannister, lifting his brows, "but I'm not going to make any accusations I can't back up. I just put that in because later you will recall the remark."

"Well, we've had enough parley," said Manley impatiently; "now let's get back to the cattle."

"After this, Bannister," said Florence in a tone of annoyance, "if you can't tell me what you're talking about, don't try to confuse me with veiled hints and mysteries."

Bannister bowed as she flounced into the house.

"Would you mind *my* asking what you were driving at?" asked Manley later, when they were saddling in the barn.

"Not a bit of it," Bannister replied, drawing him aside, "as long as it doesn't go any further. I think Cromer had a hand in it. I think he wants to bring pressure to bear on the Half Diamond

for personal reasons of his own. That's all I'll say."

He turned on his heel, leaving Manley with a thoughtful look on his face, and went for his horse.

In a few minutes the quartet was on its way to Dome Range, where they arrived at dusk. Jeb found the cook wagon in good order, with no supplies or utensils missing, and went to work at once, preparing supper. Manley arranged the night watch shifts, and, despite the situation, they were cheerful at supper.

"I'm going to bring down a couple of men from the north range tomorrow," Manley announced, "and a couple from the lower herd. So we won't be awful bad off, after all. Miss Flo is sure to bring back a few from Prairie City, and then I——" He stopped short and looked keenly at Bannister. "Could you take charge of the outfit for a few days? I mean, do you feel capable?"

"I reckon so," Bannister drawled.

"Then you can take hold for a few days, and I'll go out and rustle men and a foreman," said Manley. "Oh, we'll come out all right. It isn't so hard to pick up a crew for such a ranch as the Half Diamond. We've got too good a reputation."

"I reckon so," Bannister said again.

Next morning Florence Marble was off for Prairie City with the first faint light of dawn. Before noon, she had gathered nine experienced hands—all that were available in town. She stood their dinner at the hotel and started back with them right after the meal. Several of them had no mounts, but she borrowed horses, as she could easily do, and they would get their remudas at the ranch.

They passed above the ranch house and headed straight for the Dome. There she turned them over to Manley, told him to look after the borrowed horses and see that they were returned,

and then rode back to the house, well pleased with her day's work.

"Hayes try to cripple *me!*" she exclaimed to Martha, her housekeeper. "Why, I should have got rid of him long ago!"

Manley was in rare good humor this day. They now had a good emergency working force for the Dome Range, and he sent the men he had borrowed back to their stations in the north and south. He planned to take a trip in a day or two to pick up more men, leaving Bannister temporarily in charge. The latter already had successfully demonstrated that he was a cowman from the high heels of his boots to the crown of his Stetson, and he was more than ever a god in the eyes of Howard Marble.

This was the situation on the morning of the second day when Bannister and Manley stared in surprise at a whirling cloud of dust in the north.

"What the——" began Manley.

"Those are your men coming back," Bannister told him mildly. "Remember I mentioned that there might be somebody besides Hayes mixed up in this?"

"The devil!" Manley exclaimed. "Well, Hayes will never work on *this* ranch again."

"Don't worry," said Bannister with a cryptic smile. "He won't be with the bunch. Anyway, Manley, it's just as well they don't see me. I'll streak for the ranch and tell Miss Marble. I've a reason in going back, too. Sure it's your crowd?"

"Sure as shootin'," Manley responded. "I could tell that mob of Indians just by their dust. All right, go ahead. And tell Miss Flo that if Hayes is with them I'm going to fire him and to pay him off. I reckon she won't have any objections."

Bannister was off like a streak. It all was as clear to him as day. Cromer, working hand in glove with Hayes, had told him to take the men away. Now

the men were coming back. Cromer would ride down to the Half Diamond ranch house and tell Florence that he had refused to hire the men, knowing that she needed them, and had compelled them to return. Her foreman had been furious and had refused to return. He was sorry. It was a well-laid scheme to further his interests in her favor. Bannister laughed outright and loped whistling into the yard. He reined in his horse.

"Morning, ma'am," he said with a great sweep of his hat as she came out on the porch, wearing a wondering look.

"Well, did you come on business or just to pay a call?" she said. She couldn't forget his innuendo the last time she had seen him.

"Business," he sang cheerfully, dismounting. "And I am the bearer of good tidings. I bring a message of cheer, and later I shall make a prediction—a prediction, Miss Florence, which I would bet my horse, gun, and money belt will come true."

"Stop that nonsense," she said with a pretty frown. "I know what your tidings are. The men have returned to the Dome."

He arched his brows in mock surprise. "A mind reader as well as a rancheress!" he exclaimed. "Yes, they have returned, pack and parcel."

"I'll *not* take Hayes back!" she said in a determined voice.

"And Hayes will *not* be with them," he declared.

"How do you know?" she asked. "Oh, I might have known. You've seen them, of course."

"No, I haven't seen them—except coming in like a fury on their sturdy, and I suspect, Half Diamond beasts," he said. "But I don't think he'll be with them because—well, because I don't think he'll be along."

"Another mystery," she said disdainfully. "I'll soon know without your help."

"Are you interested in my prediction?" he asked in a plaintive voice.

"If it has to do with my business," she returned.

"Very well," he said complacently. "You will receive a visit, probably this very morning, from a Mr. Cromer, who will explain that he refused to engage your men and sent them back because he knew you needed them. He will say that your foreman was angry and quit, and he will express his sorrow because of the fact."

Her face had flushed, and then set in stern lines. "Just what do you mean by that, Bannister? You must not forget that there are lines beyond which hands on this ranch cannot pass."

"Exactly, Miss Florence," he said with a bow, "and that's why I'm going to stop at this one. There! You see? Dust on the north trail. I've got to look after my horse."

He left her staring northward where a golden streamer proclaimed the approach of a rider.

CHAPTER XIII.

"PRETTY WORK!"

THE dust spiral lost its golden luster as horse and rider reached the top of the bench and dropped down the winding road to the ranch house. They disappeared for a few moments around a bend, came into sight again, trotting through the wind-break, and then drew up in the yard near the porch.

Cromer dipped his hat with a smile to Florence, slid out of the saddle, and called to Bannister.

"Take my horse," he commanded abruptly.

"I *have* a horse," Bannister returned innocently.

Cromer halted on his way to the porch. "I say, aren't you working here—or do I have to put my horse up myself?"

"Oh, o-h!" drawled Bannister. "Put

him up. That's different. I thought you was trying to give him to me. Sure I'll put him up, Mr. Cromer. Glad to do it. Take good care of him, too. See he's been ridden powerful hard. He'll need a blanket and a rub-down—and he'll get it. Don't worry—go right in."

Cromer bit his lip under his mustache, and glared. He was being made a fool of and insulted into the bargain; but there was no comeback because of the way in which Bannister had put it. He whirled on his heel and went up the porch, a smile of genuine pleasure routing the scowl.

"Florence, you look prettier than any flower in your yard," he said, taking her hand.

"As a brazen flatterer, you are even more able than an engineer," she returned, although any one could have seen that she was pleased. "Come in, Mr. Cromer." It was noticeable that while at all times she addressed him by his last name, he invariably addressed her by her first.

He tossed his hat on the table and dropped into an easy-chair. "Well, you may think it is flattery, but it isn't," he protested. "You are beautiful, and some day I'm going to tell you just how beautiful you are, and how dear you are to me. But not to-day, Miss Spitfire, for I see it is not the time, and—we are both so busy." He laughed, and, to his unmitigated satisfaction, she laughed with him.

"I didn't think you came here to tell me things like that," she observed.

"I could, though," he asserted. "I could tell 'em all day. What do you think I came down for?"

Florence remembered Bannister's prediction of this visit and his forecast as to its nature. Well, it was merely a guess on *his* part, and *she* couldn't by any means be sure.

"I haven't the slightest idea," she told him.

"I come with glad tidings—if you haven't heard," he said with a smile. Florence started, for Bannister also had stressed glad tidings at the start. "Your men are returning to work," he said impressively.

"Yes, I heard they were seen coming back," she said.

He seemed a bit set back at this, for it rather robbed his announcement of its drama. "They came up on the project and asked me for work, and, while I surely need men, I turned them down flatly."

Florence nodded and waited expectantly.

"I could have used them," he went on, "but I realized that you needed them more than I did. So I shooed 'em home where they belonged."

"That was very kind of you, Mr. Cromer," said the girl soberly.

He glowed with satisfaction. "Oh—nothing," he protested, with a dramatic wave of the hand. "Florence, I'd do anything for you!" He paused for just the proper interval. "But I'm afraid I am also the bearer of bad news as well as good." His brow wrinkled with concern.

She remembered again what Bannister had predicted. Why, the interview was progressing just as he had said it would! She could think of nothing to say to this at the moment, so remained passive, merely lifting her brows a trifle.

"You see," said Cromer, clearing his throat, "that foreman of yours, Joe Hayes, is accustomed to having his own way—you know?" She nodded. "Well," he went on wryly, "he became very angry when I refused them work. Said they could make more money up there—which they could—and that I needed men, and why should I discriminate?"

"He was always bull-headed," Florence observed.

"I started to tell him that his place

was here on the ranch and that, in any event, he and the others of the outfit should not quit, if they *had* to quit, until after the beef shipment. That's as far as I got. I never received such a cursing—well, I haven't received any cursings, to my face—in my life. He called me everything he could think of. I took it all calmly and told him he was taking advantage of me because I couldn't, in my position, afford to get into a brawl with him." He paused at this point.

"And I see where you're right, Mr. Cromer," she said with spirit. "I suppose he quit the outfit. Well, I would not have taken him back under *any* circumstances."

He stared at her a moment and then sighed with relief. He even wiped a few imaginary drops of perspiration from his brow. "You don't know what a relief that is to me," he said. "I was afraid you might think I was in some way responsible for his quitting—that I kept him and sent the others back, or something of the sort. And I'll try my best to help you get a man to take his place."

"No," said the girl, "you've enough to do. Manley will look after that. Don't you bother. Of course, you'll stay to dinner." She rose and went to the dining-room door. "Martha! Martha! Oh, there you are. Mr. Cromer will be with us for dinner."

She came back to find him sitting with a gloomy look on his face. "You look like the start of a rainstorm," she observed. "What's the matter? *Don't* worry about Hayes! Or maybe it's something about your work?"

"No, it's neither," he returned, "although, goodness knows, I have enough responsibility on that job up there. No, it's something else, Florence; but the trouble is, if I tell you, I know you'll think I'm trying to edge in on your affairs."

"Not at all, Mr. Cromer," Florence

declared, intrigued by his hesitant manner.

"I'm not so sure," he said dubiously. "No, I don't believe I better speak of the matter in my mind—" He looked at her as if he had suddenly become imbued with a fresh idea. "Why, certainly I'll tell you," he said loudly. "It's my duty to warn you. I hadn't thought of *that* angle of the case before."

"Do tell me!" she said, very much interested.

"Well, Florence, did you ever hear of an outlaw called The Maverick?"

"I—think so," she answered. "I don't pay much attention to such things."

"Well, all I need to say is that he's a bad man. Bandit, gunfighter, and killer. A deceiving cuss into the bargain, as you'd never know what his—er—calling was to look at him. He's notorious and dangerous."

He paused just long enough to permit his words to make their impression upon her. When he saw by the look in her eyes that his end had been accomplished he resumed:

"A short time ago a young man—this gunman is young—arrived in Prairie City. Deputy Van Note spotted him first and saw that his description tallied perfectly with that of the outlaw. He told Sheriff Campbell, but the sheriff scoffed at him because Van Note had sent him on so many false clues. But then something happened that caused the sheriff to sit up and take notice. He sent for this newcomer to interview him, and the fellow—with just such sheer audacity as The Maverick would have shown—sent word back that if the sheriff wanted to see him he was at the hotel."

Cromer paused again as if he were getting his narrative all straight in his brain. Then he continued:

"This fellow baffled the sheriff, evaded his questions in a clever man-

ner, and finally told him in a menacing way that if he thought he was this Maverick before he did anything to prove it, 'he'd better be sure first'—or words to that effect. He was bold, insolent, and exceedingly clever. As the sheriff didn't want to put the wrong man in jail—having been fooled before—and perhaps get himself in a mess of some kind, he let him go. The fellow then proceeded to gamble in the various resorts, and he made the most accomplished professionals in Prairie City—and there are some good ones there—look like abject beginners. There was another point. The Maverick is a notorious gambler."

Again Cromer hesitated. He wanted the gambling point to sink deep.

"His next step was to drift out into the country, and after a bit he showed up in Marble. Sheriff Campbell was up there and looked him over again. Now he is almost *sure* he is the man known as The Maverick—a ruthless killer, with a price upon his head."

Cromer stopped, shaking his head.

"But what has all this got to do with me or the Half Diamond?" asked the interested but perplexed girl.

"Now we come to the point," said Cromer earnestly, leaning forward in his chair. "This is why I *must* tell you. This fellow is the man who drew on Le Beck that night when Howard got into the mix-up. His very lightning draw showed him up, and he *didn't* draw so much on Howard's account as to get Le Beck into a gun play—for gun play is his very heart's blood. You know what he has done since, and you can bet he has had an object in every act he has made. That man is the man right here on your ranch who calls himself Bannister!"

Florence held her breath. Horror, perplexity, fear were all commingled in the look in her eyes.

"You—you think——"

"We all have reason to believe that

Bannister is none other than this Maverick," said Cromer soberly. "Now, why would he take this job here when he can make so much at the green tables? Undoubtedly he has a money-belt containing thousands. I'll tell you, Florence, why I think he's here. He's masquerading as an honest person, but he's just hanging around until we open that bank up there—you know we are going to carry an enormous amount of cash. Do you see?"

"Why—doesn't—the sheriff take him then?" she asked.

"He's not an easy man to take, and he has to be taken through a ruse," was Cromer's reply. "I got most of this from the sheriff last night. He has a plan, and we're keeping him on ice, so to speak. Oh, he won't touch any of us till he sees he can make a big haul. But there's no question but that he shot Link. He *didn't* like him. It was just luck—dim light—that he didn't get him."

"This is awful," said Florence. "What should I do? Here he's going around with Howard and——"

"Fire him," said Cromer sternly. "Give him no reason, or think up a reason, anything—but let him go. He'll probably head straight for Marble, and there's where we're going to get him."

"He doesn't look like such a man as you describe," said Florence, the first flicker of doubt showing in her eyes.

Cromer shrugged and stood up. "As you wish, Florence; I've only told you because, as I said, I considered it my duty."

"But, Mr. Cromer, he has good eyes, and he stopped Howard from drinking, and Howard worships him. Wouldn't he show his true self in some way to Howard?"

"Perhaps he has, and Howard hasn't noticed it," replied Cromer. "Anyway, think it over, Florence. Great guns, girl, you don't think I'd *lie* to you, do you? And I'm all-fired hungry."

"No, I don't think you'd lie to me," said the girl. "And I'll see if dinner is ready. I believe it is."

When they came into the yard after dinner, Bannister, who had eaten his in the kitchen and listened to every word Cromer had spoken, had the latter's horse ready.

"Pretty work," said Bannister, as Cromer mounted.

"What's that?" snapped Cromer.

"I say, pretty work," Bannister repeated.

"Meaning just how much?" demanded Cromer with a scowl.

"I mean pretty work up on your irrigation project," said Bannister. "I've a notion to buy some more stock!" With that he walked toward the bunk house.

Cromer nodded to Florence, gave her his hand and a significant look, and rode away. Florence hadn't looked at Cromer in farewell, but had stared, awed, fascinated, and fearful at the broad shoulders of the retreating Bannister.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STOCKMEN'S DEMANDS.

FOR some length of time Florence remained standing in the yard after Bannister had entered the bunk house. She was stunned, bewildered, half afraid. In her present state of mind she would never have talked to Bannister. Indeed, if he had come out at that moment, she would have fled precipitately into the house. And now she did start for the house, but as she neared the porch, Howard came thundering in from the east.

He brought up near her. "Where's Bannister?" he asked eagerly.

"He's in the bunk house," she replied.

"Good!" cried the boy. "I was afraid he might have run off somewhere without me. The bunch is back on the Dome Range. I guess he told

you that. Hayes isn't with 'em, thank-y. They didn't need me, an' I came back. I'm coming in to get something to eat soon's I can put up my horse. Old Jeb's following, but he don't ride very fast."

He rode on to the barn, and Florence went into the house. She'd clear up one or two items, anyhow. Howard must be some kind of a judge of character. She decided to question him. But when he sat down at the table she found it hard to start. She asked him some questions about the condition over at the Dome, and finally managed to include one about Bannister.

"Sure did, an' he had the nerve to tell me I was a reckless rider," the boy replied with a grin.

"Why, he's one himself, isn't he?" Florence queried.

"He's *everything*," said Howard enthusiastically.

This gave Florence the opportunity she desired. "*Everything!*" she said incredulously. "I suppose he's an outlaw, too?"

"Nope. He isn't that. But I'll tell you what, Florence: if he ever started out to be one, he'd be a terror!"

"Listen, Howard," said the girl in an earnest voice. "We don't know much about Bannister; in fact, we don't know *anything* about him. And he's a stranger who is being talked about. I've heard hints—I won't tell you where or from whom—that he is an outlaw, and came up here to get away—well, things were getting too hot for him, and——"

Howard had put down his knife and fork. "That's enough!" he cried. "Tell me who's been saying these things an' I'll put a slug of hot lead into him! It's a danged lie! Don't you think I'd know if there was anything wrong, as I'm with him so much? I know a little about men, if I *am* under age. He's clean as a whistle. He's faster than a bat out of the hot place with his gun,

but that doesn't make him an outlaw. Just you tell whoever made these statements to ask Bannister if they are true. Ever think of *that*? Sneaking around behind a woman! An' you listening. They're afraid of Bannister, an' what's more, an' the big thing, *they're jealous of him!* Now *please* don't talk any more such nonsense to me. You'll spoil my digestion."

Florence left him at the table and went into the living room. She felt a little thrill as she realized that she believed every word Howard had said to her.

Came a clatter of hoofs—many hoofs. A shout or two. Florence hurried out on the porch to see six men—stockmen, they were, for she knew every one of them. They were led by John Macy who was dismounting.

"Howdy, Miss Half Diamond," he boomed facetiously. "An' how's the world treatin' you?"

"Cannot complain," she answered, smiling and taking his hand as he came up on the porch. She had always liked John Macy better than any rancher in the Indian River district. "Won't you come in?"

"Waal, we haven't much time, Miss Flo; I reckon this will do. We're a committee from the Cattlemen's Association on our way to Marble to interview the great high lord of this here irrigation project, Mr. Sydney Cromer. We want to find out how we're going to be treated on this water question this summer. You were named as a member of the committee, with full power to talk, vote, take drinks and sech. Will you go along?"

"John Macy, I can't," she said earnestly. "And I wouldn't be of any good, anyway."

"All right," boomed Macy, "that's just what I expected you to say. We had you pegged right, an' we provided for it. This being a committee, an' not an association meeting, we decided you

could send a proxy. Now, who do you want to send?"

Florence's heart leaped. In a second she made up her mind. "I'll send Bannister," she said. And then she added to Howard, who had heard them and was at her back: "Go tell Bannister to get his horse and ride up here."

Macy and Florence chatted a few minutes until Bannister appeared on his mount. John Macy stared at him intently and slapped his knee.

"Why, I know you," he roared. "You stopped at my place on your way up here an' wouldn't take a job with me on a bet. Then you come on up here an' Miss Flo here hooks you. Waal, I can't say I blame you, young feller."

"Bannister," said Florence, her face flaming, "these men represent a committee from the Stockmen's Association to confer with Mr. Cromer as to the water rights in the south. I was named as a member, but do not wish to go. You are to go as my proxy, do you understand?"

"I reckon so," Bannister drawled.

"Then let's go," John Macy thundered, clambering into his saddle.

They rode northward at a fast pace, Macy riding with Bannister, kidding the life out of him, and Bannister firing it back at him. "But I'll bet you'd make a danged-good man to run that ranch," was Macy's parting shot as they trotted into town.

They put up their horses and sought Cromer's office, which was in the little building of the Marble Dome Land & Irrigation Company. As they approached it, Bannister, who was well to the right of the others, saw a figure behind the office. He was so startled that he stopped on the instant. Then he hurried on with the rest, his lips pressed firmly together, a cold, hard look in his eyes—a complete change of expression which vanquished the cheerful, youthful lines, and clouded the clear, frank eyes. He was glad he had been ac-

corded the opportunity to attend this meeting.

They entered the front office, and the clerk there called Cromer, who came out with a cold smile on his face.

John Macy explained who they were, what they represented, and why they had come.

Cromer actually bowed. "I'd been expecting you gentlemen," he said courteously, although there was a certain hard reserve about his manner. "Let's go into my office where there is more room.

They passed into the rear office, and Bannister saw at once that Cromer had anticipated their visit. He had moved his desk to the back of the room near the rear door. There was a screen about the washbasin on one side of him and a coat rack on the other. In front there were several chairs.

Cromer went around behind his desk. "Sit down, gentlemen; I guess there are enough chairs."

They all seated themselves, Bannister keeping near Macy, as seemed natural since he was the only one present he knew to any extent. And now Macy rose and addressed Cromer.

"As you know, we represent the Stockmen's Association, and you represent the Marble Dome Land & Irrigation Company. This meeting needn't be long. All we want to know, Mr. Cromer, is what protection us ranchers south and southeast along the Indian River are to have for water this summer."

"That will depend," Cromer answered vaguely.

"Depend on what?" asked John Macy, while the others stirred in their chairs.

"It will depend on the season," said Cromer. "We shall take our stipulated allowance under our acquired water rights in *any* event for our project. If it's a wet season, you people will get more; if it's a dry season,

you'll get less. So you see it really isn't in our hands. It depends on the weather, and we cannot control the weather."

There was more stirring in chairs and faint muttering at this, and John Macy turned a warning eye on the other members of the committee.

"You mean there is no provision for a certain amount of water to come down Indian River to us?" he asked.

"None whatever," replied Cromer coldly.

A committeeman rose at this, but Macy waved him down.

"That's one thing the Stockmen's Association wanted to find out," he said. "Now, according to that, there could be such a thing as Indian River going dry?"

"That's highly improbable, and you know it," said Cromer, scowling. "Now, listen here; we know you people are sore; we know also that you are hostile to our enterprise; we know other things. You don't like the idea of farms in here, and you won't recognize the fact that this project will increase the value of your land——"

"It can't increase the value of our land when there isn't enough water to go round, can it?" Macy broke in sourly.

"Of *course* it can," Cromer declared angrily. "On natural principles it will to begin with, or, at least, within a year. But the water supply can be increased. We haven't tapped all the streams in the hills and——"

"You talk like a fool," Macy scoffed. "How much water could you get out of those little streams? Middle of August, when we need it most, you couldn't get a hatful! You don't talk like a practical irrigation engineer, an' you're *not* one. Just the same we want to know *one* thing: Are you going to protect us for water?" Macy, using his very best English, striving to keep himself in control, looked Cromer straight in the

eye. The others leaned forward in their chairs. Bannister himself was tense.

"To a certain extent," said Cromer sharply; "but we're going to protect ourselves *first*, you can lay to that. However," he added in softer tones, "if things get *too* bad, we—I'm not saying we *would*, understand; for we pay high for our water—but we might *sell* you some."

Every member of the committee was on his feet in a second.

"*Sell* us some!" shouted Macy, pounding a fist on Cromer's desk. "You'd take our water—the water we've always had—and *sell* it to us, eh? Or let our cattle starve? You're a dirty, rotten skunk, an' I believe your company is a fake!"

"Don't say any more!" said Cromer loudly, his face white.

But Macy's anger had got beyond his control. "You'll give us our share, you sneaking scoundrel, or *we'll take it!*" he shouted.

"You threaten violence, do you?" said Cromer, with an evil look. "There's a law in this country; don't forget *that!*"

"Law, hell!" cried Macy. "The only law *you* know about is the two hundred rifles you've got stored up here."

"*You're a liar!*" shouted Cromer.

Bannister leaped to Macy's side and struck his hand from his weapon, and it was into the bore of Bannister's gun that Cromer looked.

"*Drop it!*" Bannister commanded sharply.

Cromer's gun clattered on the floor, and Bannister made a flying leap for the curtain about the washstand. He ducked low just as a shot rang out, jerked the curtain down from below, and had the right hand of a small, dark-faced man in his grip in an instant. Another gun clattered on the floor. Bannister thrust his own in its holster. Macy was covering Cromer.

"You see this man," cried Bannister. "Why was he there? Why did he fire at me? Because he's Cromer's gunman—just imported." He shook the smaller man, whose eyes were darting pin points of light. "This, gentlemen, is the notorious Le Beck!"

Cromer was shaking like a leaf with rage and chagrin.

Then Bannister deliberately caught Le Beck up, rushed across the room, and sent him hurtling through the window as though he were only a sack of wheat.

"Out!" cried John Macy, pointing with his gun toward the front office and the door to the street. "Out! The meeting is over!"

CHAPTER XV.

A SURPRISE.

IN the street the members of the committee hurried toward the hotel in a bewildered, flustered state of mind, unable to comprehend but two things: Cromer didn't intend to protect them for water when they needed it, and Bannister had disclosed the fact that Cromer had hired an infamous gunfighter—and had routed that gun artist in a way which, if it got about, would make him the laughingstock of Marble Range.

"Boy," said John Macy, "you sure made him look like something a coyote had left on the prairie. I'm right proud to shake your hand."

"You do not quite understand what I did," said Bannister slowly. "Of course, this won't happen for a time—but it will come. I made it absolutely impossible for Le Beck not to meet me in a gun play. He has to do it to redeem himself, don't you see? And don't you ever get it into your heads that he's not fast. He's one of the fastest gunfighters north of the Missouri River, and I don't care how far north you go. But I wanted to estab-

lish, before reliable witnesses, the fact that Cromer *had* hired a gunman."

"Well, son," said one of the others, "if anybody was to ask me, I'd say you sure enough did it."

They laughed at this—all save Bannister. He did not laugh. In his case, it wasn't so much Le Beck that mattered as it was the look on the faces of the cattlemen when Cromer had announced he would sell water to them. He knew that look, and he knew full well its portent. It was the last appeal they would make to Cromer. They meant to fight!

A water war would certainly involve the Half Diamond. That meant it would involve Florence Marble. He didn't like the idea of that. He knew—and it worried him not a little—that Florence was heavily involved in Marble Dome Land & Irrigation Company stock. She stood to lose unless—unless—

His lips closed in a firm line. He might be able to carry out what he had in mind, and he might not. But he'd try. Bannister told himself that he would do *anything* for Florence. And before he would see Florence marry Cromer, he would *kill him!*

"What do you think of it all?" asked John Macy as they entered the hotel dining room for supper before their return home.

"I think he's a crook!" said Bannister abruptly.

"An' that's the end of it," Macy agreed. "What do you intend to tell Miss Marble?"

"I'll tell her what happened, and what the conference amounted to, and that's all—which will be enough, I reckon," replied Bannister with a grim smile.

"Are you going to make any suggestions?" asked Macy, curiously.

"Yes," replied Bannister grimly. "I'm going to suggest that she keep out of it as far as possible. And in

making the suggestion, I know danged well she can't keep out of it. But I want you to remember, Macy, that I like you and all that, but I'm following Miss Marble's orders. So don't count me in on any of your schemes unless you have her sanction."

"Schemes?" said Macy. "We have no schemes."

"But you *will* have them," said Bannister with sinister conviction. "I know your breed like a book. You mean to fight. And, while I won't come right out with it and embarrass us both, I'll say that I know your first move. I'd bet my life on it."

They were silent after this.

Soon after the meal the stockmen made their preparations to return. But Bannister lingered. He wanted to encounter Le Beck to ascertain if Cromer had given Le Beck orders to get him. In such event Le Beck would draw on sight.

Bannister, while he had the advantage of the little gunman in weight and muscle, realized that he had a worthy opponent in that same small man when it came to the expert use of shooting irons. Le Beck was as dangerous as dynamite; more so, perhaps. He had notches on his gun from butt to front sight, and was not adverse to filing in a few more.

So Bannister wandered in and out of the resorts of the town until finally, in a large tent, he saw his man. He passed close to him; stood and drank near him; gave him every opportunity to promote hostilities. But Le Beck did not notice him. This showed, in Bannister's opinion, that Cromer was not ready to start things; that he had another card up his sleeve.

But if Cromer was not prepared to start anything at that time, Sheriff Gus Campbell was.

When Bannister returned to the hotel he found Sheriff Campbell and Deputy Van Note awaiting him. Campbell

greeted him civilly and invited him into the little parlor of the small, new structure.

"Bannister," he said briefly, "I'm being criticized."

"No doubt," scowled Bannister. "All men in public office are criticized."

"But I'm being criticized on your account," Campbell said.

"Yes?" drawled Bannister slowly. "Through the good offices of our friend Cromer, I suppose. And you have to listen to Cromer because he doubtless commands a lot of votes. Is that it?"

The sheriff flushed. "No, that's not it," he declared. "And I'm not up here catering to votes. In fact, none of these men working here except a very few *have* votes. The criticism started in Prairie City. There are a lot of people there who insist that you're this Maverick and a dangerous person to have around."

"So *that's* up again," said Bannister, with a smile that was very much like a sneer. "I suppose when the people around here get a thing in their heads it can't be pried out with a crowbar."

"It isn't a question of what the people think," said the sheriff with a show of irritation; "it's a question of what *I* think; and I've come to think pretty strongly that you're The Maverick."

"There's two or three things I want to ask you, sheriff," said Bannister, with a cold gleam in his eyes. "First of all, it looks pretty much to me as if Cromer was urging you on my trail, and dictating to you in general. Is that so?"

"Absolutely *not!*" cried Campbell in indignation, while Van Note also murmured a denial.

"Then why is it," Bannister demanded, "that you pick on me and let this Le Beck, who is Cromer's hired gunman—and you know it—run loose?"

"The minute I get anything on him he'll be roped in," the sheriff asserted.

"Have you got anything on me?" asked Bannister mildly.

"If you're the man I think you are, there are people who have got plenty on you," the sheriff replied grimly. "That's the difference."

"Another thing," said Bannister, leaning forward in his chair. "Do you like Florence Marble, owner of the Half Diamond?"

"I think the world of her," Campbell declared. "Her father was one of the best friends I ever had."

"Then I suppose you'd be willing to help her in an emergency," said Bannister. "Well, let's see; no, I've no more questions."

"Well, I don't know what you were getting at," growled the sheriff, "but I know *one* thing. You look enough like this Maverick, and you've shown enough of his characteristics, to warrant being arrested on suspicion. Bannister, I've got to take you in."

"No, sheriff," said Bannister, smiling and shaking his head. "You can't do that."

"And why not?" Campbell snapped out angrily while Van Note moved in his chair.

Bannister was on his feet like lightning. His right hand flickered and held his gun. His face was a different face, cold and stern; the eyes were narrowed, shot with a dangerous steel-blue light.

"Because," he said in a voice of ice, "*I am The Maverick!*"

Campbell and Van Note sat motionless, staring at him. It was as if an altogether different person had suddenly been put into the place of Bannister. Here was a man who fairly radiated menace. The sheriff, who had encountered many bad men, almost shivered as he looked into the eyes of The Maverick—reputed the worst of them all.

"Now, sheriff," The Maverick's words fairly cracked in the little room,

"you and I are going to make a deal. Are you willing to talk it over?"

Sheriff Campbell considered. "Yes," he said finally, seeing there was no way out of it.

The gun went back into its holster, and the faces changed like magic. Again the man Bannister sat down before them.

"First of all, sheriff," came the old, smooth voice, "my real identity must be kept a secret among us three, and I'll continue to be known as Bannister—which, by the way, is my real name. Now, sheriff, you can't take me; there isn't a chance in the world for you to take me unless I'm willing. Maybe you don't know it, or believe it, but I'm as safe right here with you as if I were fifty miles out on the prairie. I just *won't* be taken, and there's plenty that know that."

He paused and looked steadily at the sheriff, who grunted.

"But there is a way you can take me," Bannister went on. "Now, Miss Marble is going to have trouble. There's no doubt of it. The irrigation forces and the stockmen's forces are going to clash. I went to the conference between the two here to-day, as her representative, and I *know* it. Also, she has Hayes against her. And, while she may not realize it, she has Cromer against her. And the Half Diamond is directly between the two factions. Do you see what I am getting at?"

The sheriff nodded slowly and thoughtfully.

"Now, Miss Marble has hired me, not so much as a companion to Howard, as most people think," Bannister continued, "but to keep an eye out and protect her in this dangerous situation. That is what I want to do, sheriff. It's the first big thing in my life, this helping Florence Marble, and I'll be absolutely loyal. Look into my eyes, sheriff, and tell me if you believe me."

Sheriff Gus Campbell knew men. "I believe you," he replied readily.

"Good," said Bannister in a satisfied tone. "Now here is my proposition, sheriff, made in all sincerity. I want to be of what assistance I can to Florence Marble during this trouble. I'll serve her faithfully and will indulge in no activities of any kind or description outside of those required in her interests. I'm not The Maverick, understand, but Bannister of the Half Diamond. Lay off of me and permit me to do this, and I give my word and promise that *when the trouble is over I'll come in and lay my gun on your desk!*"

Sheriff Campbell sat silent for a space of fully two minutes. Not once did he take his eyes from Bannister's. Finally, he looked away, out the window into the sunshine. He turned quickly.

"It's a deal!" he said, holding out his hand.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



A DINNER FOR IOWA BIRDS

MILLIONS of flying ants have recently driven residents of Englewood, Iowa, to a state of fine frenzy. The ants, apparently driven from their nests by the intense heat, have been thick enough to obscure the sun. While they were descending on the homes of residents, hundreds of sparrows, in their turn, descended, and enjoyed a protracted feast.

The ants penetrated every home where there was an open door or window. The phenomenon was attributed to the unusual dryness and heat of the season.



The Lad Who Found Christmas

by **Cherry Wilson**

Author of "Montana Rides," etc.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!" sang the colorful, polyglot throng that packed the snow, as it fell thick and fast into the street of Lac Renard. "Merry Christmas!" Gay voices kept it ringing, along with the responsive chime, "The same to you!" For the miners, trappers, traders, of assorted races, who inhabited this isolated post in interior Alaska were all welded into one great brotherhood of man by the spirit that is reflected the world over on the eve of this day of days.

But one there was who did not find it merry, who did not know that it was Christmas, or what Christmas was. He only knew that he was hungry. And he knew this, not as a symptom of a periodic need to be supplied and so forgotten, but as a bitter, gnawing, ever-present ache.

He was hungry—this boy, Romey, helpless, hapless, little vagabond of the North. And, hungrily, he pressed his wan, pinched face against the dining-room window of Chaudett House, from which issued ravishing smells. And the great dog, Jap—whose gaunt and snowy frame hugged the boy's frail body, even as his quivering muzzle flattened on the glass—was hungry, too. The madness of hunger was upon both boy and dog. As diners filed into the room, seating themselves beneath green garlands, it was from the agony of it the two watchers trembled, and not the bitter cold. And they swallowed quick and painfully as weighted trays appeared, and, all irresistible, the scent of food came out.

The dog whimpered, and his forefeet beat impatiently on the snow. But the boy wound restraining fingers in the frosted mane.

"Wait, Jap!" he moaned. "Wait until

the plates are emptied off a little. Men do not throw their first bites to a dog!"

Eyes wistfully following every lifted fork, they waited, while unheeding, gay, and smiling, the bundle-laden Christmas crowd went by. But the crowd paused at a sudden screech of frost-kissed steel, a rush of padded feet, a great up-swirl of snow, to cheer the arrival of the dog-stage from White Rapids, as it pulled to a dramatic halt before the door of Chaudett House.

"Merry Christmas, Pierre!" they greeted the French-Cree driver.

Warmly, he gave their greeting back, and importantly, under so many eyes, unearthed his solitary passenger from a mountain of smothering robes, depositing him on the curb, with a:

"Merry-Christmas, monsieur!"

The man—a chill, grim, gloomy man, with ash-gray face and beard—cast a disdainful glance at the bleak little huddle of buildings veiled in falling snow, at the curious folk that watched him, and irritably snapped:

"Merry—hades! I'm apt to be merry here—in this jumping-off place of the world!"

His voice repelled them all, and the crowd gave way as he moved across the sidewalk to the door of the hotel. Half-way there, he saw the boy and dog. Full in the path of the yellow light streaming from the window, he saw the boy; and the boy's starved gaze was full upon him. And, strangely, the man fell back, his face ghastly above his high, full collar, his gloved hand going in a fierce clutch to his breast.

"Heavens!" he gasped. "Those eyes!"

"You are ill, monsieur!" cried the driver, springing to his support.

But the man was his hard, cold self on the instant.

"No," he said harshly. Then, contemptuous of what these people might

say or think, the truth burst from him. "I am haunted!"

"Hold!" he commanded, as, with a fervent "*Mon Dieu!*" a ludicrous expression of dismay that he had trusted himself to a haunted man on the lonely trail, the driver backed away. "Where can I find a missionary?"

"De missioner? At St. Michael's Mission—de beeg white building wit' de cross, on de lef' as we come."

"Pardon!" spoke up a bystander, with the comradery one feels on Christmas Eve. "The missioner is in town. I saw him but a moment since—sending out a great sled-load of presents for his poor charges. Sir, do you stop at Chaudett House? Good! Then I'll locate the missioner and send him here."

The stranger thanked him briefly, as one accustomed to such favors, and passed within.

Now the boy was hard put to it to restrain the dog's impatience or his own. And, judging that the diners were in a mellow mood, he spoke a low word to the dog, and, when the door swung again to admit a patron, released his hold.

With tail down, eyes wary, Jap slunk through the door. The boy's burning eyes watched his progress from without. Unseen as yet, the big dog moved among the tables, his nostrils working, as if to locate the one that held most promise; his eyes roving, as if in search of the face that was most kind. And, having selected his table—the very one, as it chanced, at which the haunted man, with several others, sat—he sank back on his haunches, and made doggish eloquence with beating tail, and pleading eyes. Who can eat with any enjoyment when a hungry dog beseeches? For dogkind has lived for untold generations on man's bounty, and has made of beggary an art!

An old Scotch trader felt those eyes come between his lips and the food he

lifted. The bite he took choked him, and he tossed the warm roll to the dog.

Seeing this, from without, the boy's eyes glistened. Then, seeing something else, they darkened in despair. For the proprietor had stepped from his wicket and was moving hospitably among his guests. If he saw Jap—

Under Jap's mute, accusing eyes, the Scot's every mouthful continued to reproach him, and to be rid of him, so he could eat in peace, he threw him his last roll. The proprietor caught the movement, saw the dog begging from his guests, and bore down upon him, tearing his hair, and raving in true French fashion:

"Jean! Jan! Baptiste! Ees eet yet a kennel dat I am maintain! T'row heem in de street!"

Not waiting for his servitors, coming at a run, he drew back his arm to strike the dog, when—

The boy beheld a miracle!

"It is Christmas," interposed the old Scotch trader softly.

And the angry proprietor smiled, the hand that had held a blow an instant back descended on Jap's head in a pat, and his face grew tender.

"Eet ees Christmas!" he said.

As he moved away, the men at the table watching the dog, marveling that he had held his ground, now saw at his relaxing movement why. For he had eaten neither roll, but was shielding them instead.

Swiftly the trader glanced toward the window, and saw the wild, dark features of the outcast gleaming through.

"'Tis the same!" he told his companions. "'Tis the wandering Indian lad I heard of in White Rapids, who has trained his dog to beg—aye, and steal—for him!"

"You mean," exclaimed the haunted man, shocked out of his reserve, "that he *eats* the morsels the dog takes to him?"

"Aye, and it tastes good, I warrant!" smiled the Scot.

"Horrible!" shuddered the stranger, fastidiously pushing his plate aside.

"The need is—I grant," the Scot said soberly. "But the act—were you never *hungry*, man?"

An indignant glare was his only answer. Unperturbed, the trader took the great knuckle of ham on his plate and gave it to Jap. "It's Christmas. Here! Take this to your laddie, dog!"

In obedience to this command, or having begged all he could manage, Jap quickly gathered all his gleanings in his mouth, and, watching his chance, made his exit with a patron.

The boy was gone. But, picking up his trail, the dog rounded a corner, found him huddled in a dark doorway, and proudly laid the burden at his feet.

"Good Jap!" praised Romey, making fair division of the spoils. And, assigning half to the dog, he fell ravenously upon his share. It was the first food to pass his lips that day, and it was so little! It seemed to make him hungrier still.

But he sat on there with Jap in the lonely dark, pondering over the miracle he had seen. They had caught Jap begging, and had not beaten him into the street. "It is Christmas!" the kind man had said, and the angry man repeated. "It is Christmas!"—and his heart was soft. What was this Christmas that they had in there, that he could see in every window, that they spoke of in the street?

They had not had it in the Cree camp on the Beaverkill where they had lived till he was eight, and Jap was one, and they both had run away. Nor had they found it in their five-year wanderings since. They had not even had it at the Indian village, so very near Lac Renard, where he and Jap had stayed last night, and been cast out ere they could beg,

for there were more dogs and children there already than there was food to go around.

What was this Christmas? One spoke its name, and the lips smiled, blows were stayed, and the heart was kind. It must be a charm!

Ah, *he* had a charm! Through his tattered caribou coat, his ragged, deer-skin shirt, Romey felt the charm, flat and chill against his heart. The Indians had stolen it from him when he was little. But the traveling missionary, who had drifted to their camp when he was six, had seen them with it, and questioned them, and told them it was his, Romey's, totem, and they must not touch it more, must not even look upon it, lest—like their own totems—it shrivel their eyes, and it would be always night!

They had obeyed the missionary, for they feared to anger totems. The old squaw, Nika, who had cared for him, had the caribou for hers. It was her mother, she said, and she had its picture painted on her breast. And she would not kill, or eat, her totem, though she die of hunger—as she did.

And the missionary had called him to his side, and hung the charm about his neck inside his shirt, and bade him ever keep it so. He told him to let none see it, lest they steal it, to never part with it, nor sell it even, for the money it would bring would vanish like a flake of snow in summer.

"But if you find the man I name, or those who name him," the missionary had said, "and show it to him, you may go to a land where it is summer always, and men do not want for food."

He had been doubtful if a boy so young could hold the name in memory. But Romey had been so sure he could. And he *had* remembered. Much he had forgotten, but never the name that could make it summer always.

Now, in the cold and dark, so far from summer, he said it to himself, just

to be sure. And he pressed his hand against his heart till he could feel again the outline of the charm. It was a gold box—oh, so little!—and there was a picture in it, and, outside, there was writing in the gold. But he had never found the man the missionary named, though he and Jap had journeyed so far to find him. And he feared the missionary had been mistaken in the charm.

But this Christmas charm— He was so hungry. He might send Jap into the hotel again to beg. Perhaps—perhaps, even he might go inside and warm himself. But he must test first if it *was* a charm. For, while they could only beat the dog, they might pick him up and put him in a school, as they had done at Frazer, and kept him there a whole week before he got away. Wild thing that he was, Romey preferred the pain and hazards of the open trail to this kind of protection.

Rising, he pulled his fur cap forward, throwing the dark locks about his wasted face. It was a warm cap, and new. Jap had brought it to him from a cabin, and to show his pleasure he had let Jap eat all he had begged that day. His moccasins, too, Jap had brought him, on different days. One, so small that his foot thrust through it. One, so large that he must bind it on, or lose it in the snow. "Good, good Jap!"

Back in the lighted street, he paused before a window, bright with Christmas greens and Christmas toys that nevertheless were paled to nothing by a sled—a red sled, with yellow stripes and gleaming runners! And the sled held him, lifted him for seconds out of his misery. Such a sled! It could skim the frozen tundras faster than the fastest wind! It would never lag or tire on the trail! With such a sled and Jap—

The familiar pang assailed him, reminded him to test the charm. Seeing a merry trio of trappers coming, he held

out his hand, and piteously, with face bent to the stinging snow:

"For Christmas!" he begged.

Sure enough, it worked! A coin dropped into his hand.

But once proved nothing. He must try again. As footsteps neared, he reached his hand toward the newcomer, and, faintly:

"For Christmas!" he begged again.

And instantly drew his face down in his collar, and pressed back against the window, for the man he begged of was a missionary, and it had been a missionary who had put him in the school!

"For Christmas!" repeated the missionary, in a voice that was most kind. "For Christ's sake! For the sake of Him who was poor and friendless, and had no place to lay His head. For the sake of Him who was born this day! A strong plea that, my friend! Could you resist it?"

"I could, and will!" declared the one who had stopped with him. And a trembling seized the boy—strange, though it was the haunted man. "To his kind the name is but a tool of trade—to work upon the sympathies of better folk. I'll wager he does not know the meaning of the word!"

Gently, the missionary asked, stooping to peer in Romey's face, "Do you know, son, what Christmas is?"

In his eagerness the boy almost forgot to keep his features hid. "No," he said, with a wistful catch in his voice, "it's—inside!"

The grim man laughed shortly, but the missionary's eyes shone wet.

"God help you—it *is* inside!" he answered. "But you know that this is the birthday of Christ, the Son of God!"

Short, almost sullen, in his anxiety to be away, the boy muttered, "I don't know God!"

And the stranger ejaculated, "Godless!" Then, impatiently, to the missionary, "Come! You forget your talk!"

But there was something about the lad that held the missionary.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

Romey was instantly all craft and cunning. He had learned how best to thwart questioners. "With the Indians," he said, pointing. "Out there."

The missionary looked in the direction of the Indian settlement just outside the post, and his face was sad. He was always sad when he thought of it—and helpless, too. For he had come into the barrens expressly to help them, but they would have none of him. They feared, mistrusted, and were hostile toward him, and he could never learn the cause. To work with them, alleviate their misery, was the one ambition of his life? And his one great sorrow was his inability to gain their confidence. This boy was one of them.

Taking his shoulder, the missionary held him back, and looked searchingly into his face. "You are an Indian, son?"

"Yes," Romey lied, and his condition, the gloom, and the coat of grime that hid his features made plausible his claim.

"What is your name?"

"Romey," the boy wrestled in his grip. "Let me go!"

The missionary released him, moved on a troubled step, and stopped. "There's something wrong here!" he told the stern man with him. "His eyes——" He was startled by the other's violent start, and hoarse, almost angry query:

"What's wrong with his eyes?"

"Nothing," said the bewildered missionary. "Only they are not Indian eyes—they're *blue*!"

The stranger laughed unpleasantly. "And what of it? The white blood he has is nothing to boast of, surely!" And he stared contempt at the dirty little bundle of rags before him, at the dog growling menace between it and him.

and, taking mean advantage of his manhood, sneered at them: "Mongrels—both!"

The boy's eyes blazed on the man, and the man shrank from him in nameless horror. Haunted, truly! Haunted by the indelible memory of having seen defiance in just such eyes. But the boy's defiance lasted but a second, might almost have been imagined, for he cowered now, a helpless little target for further scorn and spite.

"Son," the missionary turned to the window full of toys, "those are Christmas things. Now of them all, which do you like best? Ah!" as he saw the lad's gaze fix. "The sled! Would you like it for your own?"

The boy's lips parted in breathless wonder at the thought, and his hands caught eloquently at his ragged breast. But he shook his head, saying dully:

"No." Nor did he, consciously. One doesn't want the sun, the moon, the stars! Only things attainable, be it ever so remotely, figure in our wants.

"A hardened, ungrateful little wretch!" the cold man declared. And to the missionary, "Come! You waste your time—waste *mine!*"

"Patience!" The other frowned. And he pleaded with the boy, who interested him so strangely, to come to the mission in an hour's time.

"Christmas is there," he said. "You can come inside, and find it."

The boy was sorely tempted. "Could I go—then?"

"I promise!"

"Then I will come."

But as the men walked off, he followed them. The missionary was kind. He would give him something to eat—might even let Jap and himself sleep in the warm indoors that night. He represented the boy's two great needs, and so must not be lost to sight. And the other—the man whom he feared and hated—drew him no less strongly.

The snow had ceased to fall. A bitter wind whipped Lac Renard. Sledge dogs howled with it monotonously. And through the street, over the drifted trail beyond, a dark, silent, unseen, little wraith dogged the steps of the haunted man!

So they came to the great, shadowy structure with the cross on top, shrouded all in darkness, save for a light that gleamed from out the west wing, where the missionary's quarters were.

"The tree is ready for the lighting of the candles," the missionary was telling his strange guest. "I have only to put the presents on it while they sleep. Poor eager, little ones! They'll need no waking gong on Christmas morn."

He opened the massive storm door and led the way into a hall. Here, he helped his visitor divest himself of his outer garments, while he rambled on of Christmas plans. And, drawn resistlessly by the heat that came out, the boy and dog slipped by, without their notice, and through the open door of the lighted study that opened off the hall.

Behind the big, red-bellied stove, the boy lay down, with his dark face pillowed on Jap's steaming coat, his wasted, undersized little body spread to catch the warmth. And he was already in a half doze, when the two men entered, and, unaware of any presence but their own, drew their chairs up close.

And faint and far, getting farther every moment, Romey heard the cross man telling of some errand that had brought him North. Of a daughter, Sharon, whom he had cast off, and who had written him from up here to beg forgiveness, and whom he had not answered, because he had not forgiven. But it was long since any letters had been received, and he had come to seek her. From Nome across to Dawson, he had been, to Fort Laird even, and back

to White Rapids, and so here, to Lac Renard.

"What was her sin?" the missionary asked gravely, "that you renounced her?"

"She disobeyed me!" the man said sternly, as though that were the unpardonable sin, indeed. "She married against my will—beneath her—a man of no standing, no family, no wealth. A man who would drag her—*did* drag her—over the sordid hem of earth!"

"May God forgive you!" exclaimed the missionary.

"Me?" the guest bent forward, stripped of all complacency by his astonishment. "You blame—*me!*"

"Most severely! She followed the dictates of her heart, but you sinned against nature, when you shut your heart to her! You could not have done that had you loved her."

He saw the man's face work, and was reminded of a granite mountain disintegrating before the force of some mighty inward temblor.

"I did love her—I do!" was the broken protest. "I never was one to show affection, but I gave her all my heart. I have never known one happy moment since she left me. Love her—*Sharon*—"

Deeply touched, the missionary said earnestly, "Then pray to God she is not dead!"

"She is not dead!" the gray-faced man muttered, as though it were a line repeated oft by rote. "She is not dead!"

His eyes, filled with awe, fixed themselves upon the missionary. "I have heard she was, that *he* was, but that is sheerest folly! She was too young, too strong, too beautiful to die; and he—curse him—of too common stock to kill! But, years ago, I got a letter saying both were dead, and had left a child. And I have been haunted since, though I know it is not true."

"Who sent that letter?"

"An illiterate miner, who signed himself Jack Taite."

At that the missionary's face seemed to set in granite, too. "If you found this daughter——" and his voice was hard—"did you bring forgiveness?"

His guest's eyes wavered, then his square jaw firmed. "No! What I have said, I do not unsay—though it kills me. I merely seek the truth—to make sure no impostor rises to fight over my estate when I am dead."

"And who are you," demanded the missionary in a terrible voice, "that every will and life that touches you should bend to you? *You* are not deity—scarce human, even! You are a man of iron, and you must be broken!"

"She made her bed," stubbornly declared the father, though the icy hand of fear laid hold upon his heart, "she can lie in it!"

"She *died* in it!" Crossing, the missionary stood over him, resolved to spare him nothing. "She died alone—save for her year-old baby. She survived her husband by a week. She died horribly—of the plague—in the midst of squalor, attended only by poor but kindly Crees. Jack Taite—and did you know the North, you would know better than to doubt his word—told me the tragic story of the beautiful young woman, Sharon Chalmers, who died in a wretched Indian village on the Beaver-kill!"

The man cried out in such anguish that the missionary thought the granite mountain forever leveled then. His gray head fell on his breast, and stayed so, while the wind moaned about the mission like a lost soul, and the weary boy slept on.

At last the man raised his head. Deep suffering lined his face, but there was no lessening of selfish pride.

"Then," he said coldly, "I must find the child."

The missionary stared at him curiously. Had he been mistaken?

"A big mission," he rejoined, resuming his chair. "Consider! The land is vast, and the years have been—how many? Twelve! The lad would be thirteen, if he still lives. But I doubt it. For I made inquiries when I heard the story. Already many years had passed, and I could find no trace."

"I must find the child." Again that cold, uncompromising statement.

"Are you sure you want him?" the missionary probed. "Think! You are a proud man. And this boy may be such a child as that poor waif we saw to-night."

He was unprepared for the fierce uprush of anger, born of injured pride, that the man betrayed.

"Sir," his guest said haughtily, "I respect your cloth—but you are impertinent! Poor, homeless, the boy may be, but he has my blood! It would keep him from beggary and vice—from anything comparable to the state of that Indian wretch we saw."

"The proudest blood may sink under such a weight of adversity as the North inflicts!" said the missionary, who knew that well.

"Not mine!" the man said stiffly. "But you mistake my motive. I have no interest in this boy, except to establish the fact of his existence, so that I may take the proper steps to protect myself from a claim of kinship later. I do not intend that any unacknowledged heir show up to claim the fortune of Jason Stone!"

Behind the stove, deep in slumber, the boy, Romey, stirred. His face relaxed, was boyish, as in green fields where summer dwelt perpetually, he romped with Jap. For he dreamed he had heard the name—the name of the man to whom he was to give the charm!

So vivid the dream, it woke him. And he rose, to the amazement of the

missionary, and a strangled cry of dread, of terror almost, from the lips of the haunted man.

"Is it an hour?" drowsily, the boy stumbled forward. "Can I find Christmas yet?"

"So! You waited here," said the missionary, smiling. And glad to be rid, even for a moment, of the man whom he had heard in horror, he said brusquely, "Excuse me, sir, while I keep my promise to the lad."

Taking Romey's hand, he led him down a long dark hall, and into a dark room at the farther end. Here he paused and, striking a match, held it to the wick of a great oil lamp bracketed in the wall, and there all at once, before the boy's dazed eyes, was Christmas!

"It is a tree!" he whispered, staring at the tall Sitka spruce, adrip with star dust, and flaming with more colors than the brilliant bars of light that swept the Northern sky.

But the missionary smiled a negative.

"It is little candles!" guessed the boy, as the missionary lit for his enjoyment the countless, tiny tapers crimped on every bough.

"These are but the outward symbols, son. Christmas is inside the heart. It is a thing we feel, and call a spirit—the Christmas spirit. It fills our hearts with love, and makes us want to give, and give: to give to those nearest our heart, to give to those poorest, and most in need of giving, to give, that we may show our gratitude—for to us, much was given."

To his great wonder, the boy said simply, "That is the charm!"

Perceiving that here was rich soil for the seed of truth, the missionary sat down with him on a long bench before the blazing tree, and as eyes that were not Indian eyes drank in every wondrous detail he told him of that first Christmas Day. He began, as he saw that Romey had not a rudimentary idea

even of what the great feast meant, at the beginning of all things—God, and led up, in simple language, to the night when angels appeared unto the shepherds, watching their flocks on Judea's plains, and proclaimed the birth of a child whom they would find in a manger, and who would redeem mankind.

Not once did the boy make comment, but the missionary could feel the little hand within his tighten, and knew his words struck deep. He would hardly have been human had he not hoped that through this boy he might reach all that hostile Indian camp to which the boy said he belonged. However, it was not from this motive that he took such pains with him, but for the boy's own sake, because of the great appeal he made. And knowing that the Christmas spirit comes quickest in the doing, the missionary said:

"You shall help me, son, to prepare Christmas for my boys."

And he told Romey to sit down at the great heap of bundles beneath the tree, letting him unwrap each gift and hold it for him, while he checked off on his list the name of the child for whom it was meant, telling Romey, as he tied it on the tree, a bit of that child's history—all were poor, friendless children, whom he had rescued and taken in—and anticipating its joy when it should wake and find the present there. And the missionary was most careful to miss none, "lest any little heart break, to think itself forgotten on Christmas morn."

With hunger all forgotten, and the great dog watching, Romey worked happily, until he came to a bundle much larger than the rest. Then his heartbeats pained him, and his frail hands trembled as he pulled the wrapping off. For it was the sled—the very sled he'd looked at in the window, or its twin—red and yellow, with shining steel, and swift, clean speed built in every line.

There on his knees, with reverence in his touch, he hugged the sled that was as far from his as heaven's stars, and lifted his glowing eyes to the missionary.

"The boy—who gets this," his voice shook like his hands, "he will be glad!"

"I hope so, son," the missionary said gently, "for that boy is you."

Through gloom and grime, Romey's face gleamed white. "*Me!*" He was numbed by the marvel of it—his first Christmas gift.

Then the missionary pressed on him a bag of candy—hard and bright. "And now," he said, snuffing the candles out, "it grows late, and boys should be abed. You have a long mile home."

Home! Bed! To a boy that had no home! Who, once he quit that roof, would be as homeless as the wolf, whose bed would be the snow-free space beneath some porch or stair, a packing case behind some store, or the bare floor of some Indian hut, as it had been last night.

All the warm glow left Romey's face. He had an impulse to tell the missionary he had lied. But some lingering vestige of fear lest he be kept here restrained him, and, with a last, wistful look at the darkened tree, he picked up his sled, summoned Jap, and reluctantly followed the missionary down the quiet hall.

"Come again and see me, soon," the missionary invited, as he opened the outside door to the bitter cold. "Mission doors are never locked." Then with unconscious irony, "Merry Christmas, son!"

And now to Romey the cold was twice as cold, and the lonely dark more dark and lonely, and he couldn't go. It was as if the mission held enchantment—which it did. For it held all the happiness he had ever known.

Full of it, he dragged himself beneath some stunted balsam firs beside the mission, and sat down on the sled,

his arm about Jap, trying to tell Jap what Christmas was.

"It is a spirit, Jap," he whispered, "that makes you want to give—and give!"

The hunger of his heart appeased, Romey forgot physical hunger, and in the warm heart-glow was immune to other cold. Unmindful of the freezing wind that whipped his ragged jacket, he sat on, thinking of all the beautiful things he had heard and seen, thinking big thoughts—big thoughts for Romey, helpless, hapless vagabond of the North, big thoughts for any one!

By slow degrees a change came over him. His body grew tense. All that was boyish faded from his face, and back to his eyes came the light of craft and cunning that had been there before the missionary's talk.

Furtively glancing in all directions, he slipped through the snow to the window of the study, chinned himself on the high sill, and looked in. There, still brooding by the fire, thinking—God knew what—sat the haunted man. But Romey didn't see the missionary. Nor did he see him when he peered in at the window of the room he had just left.

"Wait, Jap!" he told the dog. "Be still!"

Stealing to the mission door that was never locked, he turned the knob softly. And as it swung back on silent hinges, he slipped in and down the hall, noiseless as a shadow, gliding past the open door of the study and on into the room where Christmas was.

Stopping before the tree, he glanced cautiously about him, listened for a moment, then feverishly began to take the candles off, taking one here, one there, where they would not be missed; and surely they would not, for there were so many. And when his pockets were crammed full, he surveyed the tree for other things.

Reaching for a bright horn dangling in the green, his hands jerked back as though the contact burned, and his face clouded with despair. This he could not take, lest any little heart break to find it gone. Then his eyes fell on some packages as yet unwrapped upon the floor. They must be extra presents, intended for some unexpected visitor like himself. Kneeling, he was filling his arms with these, when—

His heart leaped to his throat; frightened blood drummed in his ears. For his arms were caught and pinioned with their guilty load, a voice cried, "*Thief!*"—and he was struggling with wild fury in the grip of the haunted man!

"Here is gratitude!" cried Jason Stone, as the missionary rushed in. "He bites the hand that feeds him! See! I caught him stealing. I told you, your time was wasted on such trash!"

"Romey! Romey!" The missionary was soul-sick at this treachery. "Oh, how could you do this thing to me?"

But Romey made no answer. Wild, shy, unused to speech, he could not put his thoughts in words. There was agony in his eyes as he saw the missionary's distress but, oddly, there was no shame.

"Sullen little monster!" The self-constituted judge passed on Romey's guilt. "Well, is he to be punished, or set free to grow in crime?"

Ignoring that, the missionary took the parcels from the boy and replaced them on the floor. Still with no word of censure or reproach, he ushered Romey out, and shut the door upon him.

Long the boy stood in the dark out there, uncertain what to do, for his first resolution burned still hot within him.

"I have the candles," he murmured, patting the pockets where they were. "But I must have the others, too."

Going back to the sled where the dog waited, he passed the window and could see the men within. They had moved

to the far end of the room and stood, with their backs to the Christmas tree, talking earnestly—no doubt of him. Gripped by a new idea, Romey went on to the sled and lifting the bag of candy the missionary had given him held it out for Jap. Eagerly the dog sniffed it, then whining softly started to the door, as if he knew exactly what the boy desired.

And when Romey noiselessly opened the door for him, Jap slunk in. Down the hall he crept, his body hugging the floor, his claws withdrawn so that his padded feet fell absolutely with no sound. Once in the room, he kept the tree between himself and the men, still conversing, till he came to where the bundles were. Noiselessly seizing one in his teeth, he sneaked out as cautiously. The door was opened for him, and he laid the package at Romey's feet.

"Good Jap!" quietly praised the boy, giving the dog his usual pat. "*More Jap!*" And he held the door ajar for Jap again.

But this time the dog's performance was observed. Sighting him in the big mirror he chanced to face, Jason Stone called his host's attention to Jap's actions, and together they watched the dog and second bundle disappear.

"They told me at Chaudett House," Jason Stone said sternly, "that he had taught the dog to steal! Now you see it yourself. Why don't you stop it? Does it become you—of all men—to encourage crime?"

"It becomes me to show mercy," the missionary said uncertainly.

"To whom—the criminal!" the other scoffed. "Better pity society on whom he preys!" And he would have stormed out on Jap when he returned but for the missionary's compelling gesture.

"Wait! There's something behind this, and I must know what. He can have no earthly use for what he steals.

Were it food, I could understand, or clothing; but he cannot covet these—presents for children much younger than himself. He must be punished, but I'll not jump in the dark. The boy has unexpected deeps——"

"Of villainy!"

"Of good!" corrected the missionary, stern himself. "But they may easily be perverted to villainy by some rash act."

So they kept their backs turned on Jap's thievery and their eyes upon the glass until all the bundles were gone and they heard the soft thud as the door was shut. Quickly blowing out the light, the missionary groped to the window to see Romey's little figure working out there in the lesser dark.

"He is hitching the dog to the sled!" His tone was vibrant with interest. "He is undoing the cord about the bundles and is using it to lash them on. What can he be going to do?"

"What any burglar does——" was the sardonic answer, "take home his stolen gains!"

But an instinct that never lied told the missionary that this boy was not depraved. And an impulse he could not deny seized him as the boy trudged off up the trail toward Lac Renard.

"Now what?" asked Jason Stone, as the missionary stepped into the hall and took his coat down from its peg.

"I'm going to follow," was the short response. "Make yourself at home here. Do not wait up for me."

To his dismay, for he had no wish for such an escort on an errand as delicate as this, his guest insisted, "With your permission, I will go, too. I'm not good company for myself to-night."

Reminded of the great shock this man had just sustained, the missionary softened and said quietly, "As you will."

But he had the queerest feeling, when, warm-clad, they faced the arctic night, that there was something personal in

this man's dislike for Romey—that he would be glad to see his first opinion vindicated, and the boy proved a thief. The idea was ridiculous, preposterous. Yet was it more so than that a man of apparent wealth and culture should stoop to active malice against a wretched, half-caste waif?

They had no trouble keeping the boy in view. With obvious weariness he toiled on in advance of the sled, holding steadily to the trail, passing through the post, and on toward the bleak, broken hills where the Indian village was. What his own actions would be when they arrived there—where unrelenting, inexplicable animosity had been so often shown him—the missionary had no idea. Some inner voice had bade him come. That voice would be his guide.

To his surprise the boy didn't halt at any of the huts but circled past, until he reached a timbered spot, a hundred yards from the last poor dwelling. Here he left the sled.

Wary now, themselves, the two men held back and watched him search mysteriously among the trees. At last he stopped before one—a little spruce that stood, all straight and sturdy, by itself, spreading symmetrical boughs over the smooth purity of snow—and they heard him call to Jap to bring the sled.

With growing wonder, they saw him unleash the bundles and range them in the snow beneath. This done, he busied himself about the tree. In their anxiety to see what he was doing, they crept nearer, keeping the trees between themselves and him, and, in this way, lost sight of him for a time. But, crouched in a snowy clump of evergreens, not twenty yards away, they saw a match flare in his hand, they saw its feeble, yellow flame dart here and there, and—

Understanding dawned!

For, before their spellbound eyes, there in the wild and lonely dark, a

Christmas tree sprang forth! No tortured thing of artifice, but *real*—real as living spruce, as natural, clinging snow, as the stark reality of the wild sky and wilder land could make it! And the snow upon the spruce glimmered, shimmered, in the light of Romey's candles, and the million gems of frost—God's tinsel!—frothed and danced. The tree was a thing of incredible beauty, a thing of glory; holding the missionary enthralled and throttling the sarcastic utterances on his companion's tongue.

While they still were thus spellbound, they heard the boy bid the dog stand guard, and saw him vanish quickly in the gloom.

"What Christmas magic is this?" Jason Stone whispered hoarsely, when Romey had been away some time.

The missionary answered, "Hush!"

For the boy was coming back. With him were children—ragged, shivering, pitiful children, Indian children, from the hut where he had stayed last night! Slowly, they approached the glistening tree with the flickering tapers, not with childish exclamations of "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" but with a solemn gravity that masked their wonder. And in the Indian tongue, which the missionary interpreted to Jason Stone, they heard the boy cry:

"*See!*" He spread his arms out to the tree, shedding its soft luster over Jap and him. "It is as I told you! The spirit said to give and give, to give to those I loved—those poorer. But whom had I to love? No one but the missionary, who had all! And who was poorer? Then I thought of you. And you were poorer—for you did not know what Christmas was!"

"*We know!*" In hearts touched by the pathos of Romey's speech, a deep and guttural voice resounded, with an unexpectedness that made them jump. And now they saw the speaker, a big Indian, standing just beyond the half

circle of dark faces, his arms folded across his breast with deceptive calm.

"It is their leader—Shelik!" whispered the missionary tensely. "The man I've tried so hard to reach. But he won't listen—was deaf—to any entreaty or appeal of mine!"

"The Indian knows," said Shelik, with a passionate intensity that thrilled them, "what Christmas is! It is the day when the rich trader gloats over the Indian whom he has cheated of his furs! It is the day when he seeks to buy the Indian's favor with tawdry gifts, that he may rob him a season more, that he may exchange for the furs that are the Indian's only riches, garments that do not warm, so that my people sicken when the cold comes, and die!"

"No! No!" protested the boy fiercely, the Christmas spirit glowing in his heart. "It is God's day—when every one is glad—because it is the birthday of the Babe who came to save the Indian and the white! It is the day when God enters even the wicked trader's heart and makes him kind, when God enters the hearts of the rich, and they help the poor, and the poor love those who do them wrong. It is so—for the missionary has told me!"

His eyes on Shelik, the missionary saw the red fires of hate leap from his somber eyes.

"The missionary lies!" Shelik spat out the words. "He is the tongue of the trader! He seeks to win the Indian's trust that he may keep him in the trader's power!"

The missionary's fingers sank deep in the arm of his companion. "That is why they distrust me! They think I am allied with the dishonest traders!" And fervently, there in hiding, his eyes on that weird, unearthly scene, he prayed:

"God, put words in Romey's mouth!"

"He is the tongue of God!" cried Romey, with an inspiration that could only be an answer to the missionary's

prayer. "In his heart it is always Christmas. He wants nothing but to give, and give! That is why he keeps the mission—to make a home for poor, hungry Indian boys! He wants nothing but your love. No more do I! See! Because Christmas is in my heart, I give you all!"

Whatever the effect of this on Shelik, it had a marvelous effect on Jason Stone. All the Christmas Eves the man had ever known went by him—a dim and shadowy host. Only this one was real. Only this one had power to move him. And its spirit entered his frozen heart through the crevice grief had broken, humbling, humanizing him, making room for shame. For he was shamed by the nobility of this boy he had abused.

As tensely as any, he watched as, with face transfigured, the boy took up the parcels one by one, and with childish indiscriminatio n doled them out. A boy of eleven was presented with a doll, and an air-gun was pressed on a papoose in arms. But all were happy, for the spirit of Christmastide was there. Then the last bundle was bestowed, and two pairs of little hands were still outstretched.

The boy's face was the picture of despair, and the missionary agonized with him, as did Jason Stone. But with quick resourcefulness Romey gave to one the bag of candy the missionary had given him, and to the other the coin he had begged in the name of Christmas, and the watchers' relief was as heartfelt as Romey's own. Then the children vanished, silently, as they had come. But again the watchers' hearts despaired with that of the boy!

For still waiting, as simple-hearted, in as simple faith as any child, was Shelik. It was the very mood and moment for which the missionary had yearned.

"Oh, if he had taken but another!" he

groaned. "If he had taken every blessed thing upon the tree!" For he could see his chance of a lifetime slipping, nor could he move to stop it, lest Shelik suspect Romey of collusion and all his good work be undone. Any trinket, now, might win the Indian. And the boy had nothing left to give!

But he little guessed the deeps of Romey's soul, sounded by the Christmas spirit!

Now the men saw him slowly bend, and rise to face Shelik with his arms laden.

"So that there is no heartbreak," he said, his own heart breaking, "I give—the sled!"

Swift pleasure lighted the face of the Indian as he took it. He moved away, and turned back to the lad.

"The missionary speaks true," proclaimed Shelik gravely. "I feel the spirit. Let him speak again, and the Indian will listen!"

But, as Shelik stalked proudly off, all the joy was experienced by the missionary. Sinking in the snow, the boy sobbed out his heart, while Jap sought to comfort him with frantic tongue. And, watching, the ice of years broke up and melted in the heart of Jason Stone.

To him, the boy's act had been sublime, heroic. He had given—all! What possible sacrifice could *he* make that would equal this? The lad was inherently fine and noble. His sins, at least—in begging, stealing the things to maintain life—were *human* sins! But Jason Stone's—Meanest, most bitterly regretted of them all, was his un-called-for persecution of him this night.

"I will make amends!" he vowed, loudly. "I will make it up to this boy, as sure as my name is Jason Stone!"

And out of the lonely dark Romey heard the name! No dream about it now. His head turned toward the men coming from concealment, and his eyes

were luminous with an eager, questioning light. Which of the two had named it? The man who hated him, who held him equal with the dog!

Reluctantly, yet true to a command laid so earnestly upon him when he was but six, the boy got to his feet, his hand groping tremblingly among his rags.

"To Jason Stone, or those who name him," his humid, dark-blue eyes appealed to the gray man with piteous hope, "I am to give the charm!"

Jason Stone shrank from the golden glitter the boy held out. He could not bear to touch it, to look upon it even, as if fearful that he—like the Indian on beholding a strange totem—be stricken blind.

But the missionary took it, looked long at the lovely, pictured face of the girl within it, closed the locket, turned it over in his palm, and—"Sharon!" he said, as he read the writing in the gold.

Then, excitedly, he drew from Romey such fragments as he could remember of his life among the poor Crees on the Beaverkill, all that the other missionary had garnered and repeated to him, and the story of his wanderings since. And he exclaimed reverently on what a Christmas miracle was this.

"He is your grandson!" he told Jason Stone. "A trip to the Beaverkill will settle it beyond all doubt." Remembering, then, this man's resentment at the thought that his grandson might be even *like* this little vagabond, the missionary's spirits sank.

Great was his astonishment to see Stone's arm go about the lad, and hear him say in deep contrition:

"I need no proof! I seemed to know it from the first. He has *her* eyes! I hated him, because he was the living symbol of my remorse. But that is past. I love him now, for he is like—*her*!"

"Then you claim him!" the missionary cried joyfully.

"If he will let me," said Jason Stone,

"I will take him home, give him my name, make him my heir. I will do for Sharon's son what I cannot do for her. And she will forgive me, for she will know."

The missionary could only marvel at the gentleness with which he knelt and drew the boy to him, and at the humility with which he asked:

"Romey, will you go home with me?" he asked.

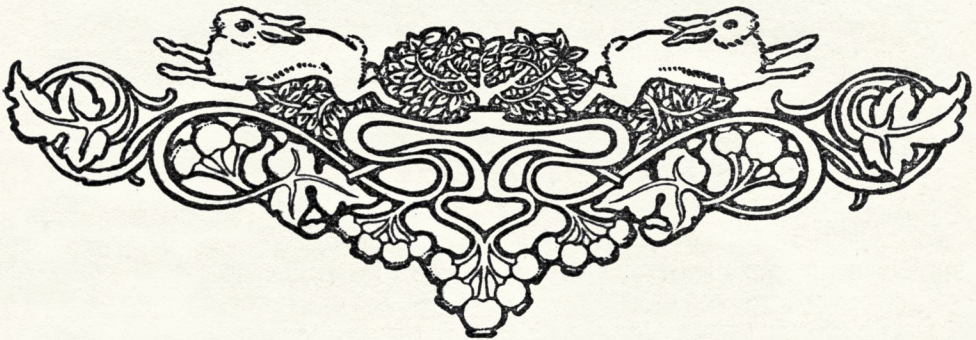
The boy's dark face was rapt as he asked, "Where it is always summer?"

"In Pasadena," said Jason Stone, "there is no snow."

"With Jap?" was Romey's loyal condition.

"With Jap!"

Back to the mission went the missionary, whose lifework was ready to his hand, the man who was a haunted man no longer, the boy, no more an outcast, and the great dog, Jap, to spend the merriest Christmas of all their lives, up there, in "the jumping-off place of the world," at Lac Renard.



A BATTLE WITH BEARS

MOST people would consider it sufficient occupation for one day to have to kill one bear. But there now comes to light the story of a Colorado rancher, one George Ramsey of Buzzard Creek, who, in a recent single casual encounter, got the best of four of the animals. The bears had been making inroads upon Ramsey's stock, so he took his gun and went forth—the idea of revenge being uppermost in his mind. First, he came across two yearling cubs, each weighing about two hundred pounds. He shot and killed these instantly, but immediately after was charged upon from a thicket by another bear.

Surprise forced the rancher to run, the bear following in hot pursuit. Finally, however, he managed to get in a shot from cover of a bush. Fortunately, for Ramsey, this shot killed the enraged mother bear. But the poor man's troubles were by no means over, for by this time the father bear had appeared to seek his revenge.

Ramsey would have liked to shoot; but his gun was empty, so he again took to his heels. After a long and exhausting run, the rancher attempted to club the animal with the butt of his rifle, which led to a terrific hand-to-hand encounter in which the bear was forced up a tree. As if this were not enough, a fifth bear rushed forth. But timely help arrived on the scene in the shape of a cowboy neighbor, who finished that adversary. Meantime, Ramsey managed to get the father bear from his arboreal retreat.

It is estimated that one hundred gallons of bear oil will be taken from the five animals.



Sooner Land

By George Washington Ogden

Author of "Cherokee Trails," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

NOLL HOWARD and Jake Zickafoos become partners in the rush for government land. They assist Josie Morrison, a young girl who is holding the adjoining lot for her family. The Morrissions start a restaurant, with instant success.

Howard finds himself candidate for marshal, with one "Poke" Jones running for mayor on the same ticket. The partners are skeptical about Jones' honesty. Howard is nominated. He realizes that Jones has mistaken him for some notorious gunman. Jake's lot is jumped by a vituperative old woman, but his claim is already filed. Her tent catches fire and she is forced to flee, leaving Jake victorious.

Evans, the editor of the *Evening Star*, prints a vicious attack on Howard. The latter forces him to print a denial and distribute copies of it personally.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RED-EYED MAN

PROKE" JONES said it was all right; he was better pleased that Howard was not Ol Howell. He had known all the time that Ol Howell was a horse thief and a night-riding scoundrel, and it gave him unbounded pleasure to be assured, and have the public assured, that the candidate for city marshal on the People's ticket was a clean man, even if a less notorious one than the villain who had terrorized Caldwell under the cloak of an officer of the law.

It took a load off his mind and conscience, Jones declared. While he had been fully cognizant of the passing value of a notorious name on the ticket for the most essential of all offices, he was better pleased to have an honest man, a straight one who valued his reputation to the point of such valiant defense. And so Jones talked on, to great and wordy length, trying to get out from under the responsibility as gracefully as he might.

It was early morning when Howard visited the People's party candidate for mayor at his furniture store, which he called The Emporium. He was determined to catch Jones before he could

go abroad and scatter some new sowing of what he might consider vote-getting forage.

Now Jones was touching up a large chiffonier which he was to deliver that morning to Mrs. Morrison of the Hotel Savoy. He explained that Mrs. Morrison had taken it as the next best substitute for a sideboard, desiring something to lend elegance to her dining hall. She was going to use it to stand pies and cakes and such dainties on; the elegant mirror—Jones polished it with his big blue handkerchief with luxurious stroke—would at once give a sense of depth and spaciousness to the room, and multiply the display spread in front of it in the eyes of hungry diners.

A far-seeing woman, Mrs. Morrison; a most desirable neighbor, with a most desirable, altogether lovely, daughter. Yes, indeed. Mrs. Jones made her appearance from the dark interior of the shop about that time, as if jealous of too much enlargement upon the charms of females apart from that household. Jones presented her. She was a high-standing woman, bony, austere, sour; with a hard intolerant look about her.

Mrs. Jones glanced at Howard with a sort of cold approval. She said she was glad somebody in that town had the courage and manhood to compel that slandering editor to swallow his libels without grace.

"She's taking a whack at me," Jones explained, quite unnecessarily, giving Howard a slow, ponderous wink. "But I'm an old campaigner; my hide's thick. I don't squirm every time a tick bites me. A man that's busy as I am can't turn aside to run down every campaign lie that spreads about him. I'll have my day after election—we'll all have our day then, eh, Howard?"

"If we win," Howard said, not at all as certain of the outcome as Jones seemed to be.

"Well, if we don't, what's a lie more

or less?" queried the philosophic, thick-skinned Jones.

Howard said he supposed it wasn't so much when a man got used to it, but he was new to the game and a little ticklish in that particular. Mrs. Jones gave her husband a scornful look and an audible sniff. She retreated to her kitchen, whence came the aroma of coffee, and a sound of hissing as if the pot had boiled over.

Jones said the campaign was booming, although he didn't believe they were going to have a walk-away, speaking for himself and the other candidates exclusive of Howard. The publicity he had made for himself in forcing Evans to issue an extra paper retracting his libelous charges would carry Howard in with a whoop. As it stood that morning, with election still two days away, Howard overbalanced the rest of the ticket like a sack of flour placed against a pillow. It made him a valuable man; his word was worth more in the public ear than the combined ballyhoo of all the rest.

After he made the delivery of the chiffonier to Mrs. Morrison, and got things lined up for the day in the store, Jones was going out with the band, he said, for another noise spree. Of course, Howard would join them and lend his voice to the cause?

"No, I'm not going to ballyhoo any more, Jones. It would look too much like makin' an exhibition of myself to parade around with the band to-day. I'm through; I've done all I can do. If they want to elect me, all right; if not, the disappointment won't kill me. Go to it, you fellers. I've not got the nerve to go handshakin' around to-day."

"Evans will think he's bluffed you, Howard. You can't go on editing that paper with your gun indefinitely, nor even expect to put a bold stroke like that over Evans a second time. He'll have a gang of deputy United States marshals in his office to protect him,

since the soldiers refuse to interfere. I saw Milt Everett hangin' around there this mornin' when I went to the butcher's, gun on him like he was doing a sentry-go. He's a red-eyed man, Howard; you want to look out for Milt Everett."

"I don't expect to edit any more papers for Evans," Howard said, "but I don't suppose his skin's any more bullet-proof than mine. Well, I'll take a little splurge with you to-night, Jones, and put on my act. But let me off for to-day—I want to finish my house."

This promise cheered Jones. It wasn't such a bad idea, taking a day off to finish his house. Jones said it was evidence of Howard's permanent interest in the city, proof that he was not a floating speculator. Jones would draw public attention to the house, standing as Howard's proxy in the campaign work of the day; he would read the retraction and apology forced from the editor of the *Evening Star*. It might be a good move—it *would* be a good move—to withdraw from the public eye for that day.

"And where is our candidate for city marshal?" said Jones, squaring off oratorically, his deep voice rising loud and mellow, his melancholy eyes sweeping an imaginary crowd with stern questioning, as if he knew somebody present had made away with the candidate in vile and secret violence. "Gentlemen, he is at home, laying the sills of his domicile, bracing the roof-tree of his permanent abode. If you will listen you will hear the stroke of his hammer, drum-beat in the march of progress; if you will hearken, you will catch the symphony of his saw, sweetest music the hand of civilized man ever drew from a—from a——"

"Piece of Arkansas pine," Howard completed the flight.

Jones laughed; Howard laughed, and from the back of the furniture store there sounded in disdain of such politi-

cal trumpery, a sniff as loud as the snort of a horse.

Howard stopped in at the office of his neighbors, the contesting lawyers, on his way home, to have the relinquishment to Jake's lot properly drawn. Messrs. Wrigley & Dye, who stood ready to contest anything for anybody, had advanced with Cimarron. They had mounted from their little tent on the wings of retainers and incidental fees, not to any great altitudes, indeed, but to a respectable height.

A queer little shanty with plank roof and unsawed planks protruding at the corners, a most lopsided, open-jointed, cross-eyed alignment of carpentry, result of the combined effort of the firm, now sheltered their few books from the weather and their own legal brains from possible hydration under the ardent sun. The canvas sign was tacked securely above the door, just inside of which, at plank desks of their own contriving, Lawyer Wrigley waited on this hand, Lawyer Dye on that, ready to contest with spirit to the court of last resort any claim within the bounds of the new territory.

Lawyer Dye was engaged with a red-faced customer who had every appearance of being a highly contentious man, and so it fell to Lawyer Wrigley, a small earnest man with shriveled neck, to draw up the relinquishment. He had a typewriter, of that ancient variety which printed nothing but capitals, on a box beside his chair. To this he turned, clasped the box between his knees to hold it steady, and drew up the paper in due and legal form.

Jake had moved the tent to the middle of his lot. He had transferred some of his belongings to it, and lashed the jumper lady's shotgun to the ridge-pole. This weapon he had confiscated as liquidated damages, and swore he would hold it against all the one-legged sooners in Cimarron, unscrupulous fat women who jumped tender-hearted

gentlemen's lots, writs of replevin, and all claims whatsoever. He drove two stakes deep into the earth, nailed his bootjack to them, and squared off to show everybody he was there to stay.

When Howard gave him the relinquishment, the valuable consideration duly acknowledged therein, Jake hung fire in spite of all his homemaking preparations. He rubbed his hard hair, and clamped his shallow but determined-looking jaw very hard, his short, even teeth meeting as precisely as the jaws of a steel trap.

"I never give you no valuable consideration, pardner."

Jake turned up his sharp, tight-lidded blue eyes as he spoke, looking very much like a perplexed, slightly bow-legged, little man waiting for an answer.

"Sure you did."

"When?"

"Right along, Jake."

"It ain't right, it ain't honest, it ain't square," said Jake, looking at the paper, shaking his head in full conviction of the small part in the transaction his partner was trying to make him play. "I *can* give you a valuable consideration, pardner—I ain't like the little man that couldn't—and dang my neck if I ain't a-goin' to do it!"

Jake opened his vest—he always wore it tightly buttoned, even slept in it, at least since he had been in Cimarron—hailed out a very competent, well-fed wallet, and bared an amazing collection of yellow-backed money to view. I'm not like the feller that can't give a valuable consideration, and I'm here to do it," he said.

"Put that damn money up!" Howard spoke sharply; there was a belligerent look in his clear blue eyes.

Jake jumped at the words, hard and explosive in his ears like the crack of a gun. He shut up the wallet and jammed it into his pocket.

"Now, look here, pardner," he argued placatingly. "I wouldn't 'a' had no lot

if you hadn't 'a' stopped me when I was staggerin' along like a wabby calf, winded and done up, left behind by the herd in the stampede, and nowheres to go. I wouldn't 'a' had no more lot 'n a rabbit if——"

"Jake,"—Howard laid a hand on his shoulder and looked him hard in the eyes—"if you ever draw money on me again I'll take it the same as if you'd pulled a gun. I say I've got a valuable consideration for the lot. Put that paper in your pocket and say no more."

Jake folded the paper small, standing contemplatively, his feet wide apart, got out the wallet, stowed it among his plentiful store of high-figure currency, looked up at Howard's grinning face seriously, and put out his hand.

"Pardner," he said, shaking hands solemnly, "there'll always be a rig ready for you, free as the air over your head, at Jake Zickafoos' livery, feed and sale stable, horses boarded by the day, week, or month."

"It'll come in handy if I have to leave in a hurry some time, Jake."

"Yes, if you ever have to leave in a hurry," Jake discounted the thought.

The matter of the lot being settled without violence, Jake went on with his moving, picking up the few scattered articles belonging to him from the site of last night's camp. As he went across lots, a bright-figured, joyful shirt dragging on an arm, his shaving mug in his hand, Jake felt moved to express his feelings in song. And this was the song he sang:

"N-n-n-ow Jesse was a man and a friend to
the pore,
And for money he never suffered
pa-a-a-in——"

Jake insisted on bearing a hand with the carpentry on the new house, which he had begun the day before. He would keep a weather eye on his lot, although he didn't expect anybody to try any further tricks with it, and he was all

set to throw hot lead around any jumper who might have the nerve to attempt it, let it be lady or gent of any size, shape, of color whatsoever; that being Jake's most favored and most impressive word.

They got the roof on before supper time, and most of the siding up—plenty to shelter a man if rain didn't come on a slantways wind, Jake said. They were standing off contemplating the result of their labor when a boy came by crying the *Evening Star*. Howard sat on the doorsill of his new house to read his copy; Jake cross-legged on the ground near by to look for new slander and libel in his.

Neither of them had very far to look for what both expected. Whether Evans had operated under guard of Milt Everett, candidate for city marshal on the Liberal party's ticket, Howard had not taken the trouble to confirm, but he thought, from the boldness of Evans' new outbreak, that Poke Jones' report of that eminent individual standing sentry before the editor's door must be true.

Evans had headed his comeback "Shotgun Extra." Under that caption he related how the armed ruffian Howard, had invaded the peaceful precincts of the *Star* office, dictated, and compelled, by threat and intimidation, publication of the apology and retraction appearing in last night's extra edition of the *Star*.

While Evans did not repeat the charge that Howard was a sooner, or that he was attempting public deceit by parading under false colors, he slung "four-flusher" and "coward" around with the reckless confidence of a man who did not fear any future demand for accounting. The editor of the *Star*, Evans said, had acted as any prudent man would have done under the conditions, faced by an armed, blatant, blustering coward who had the drop and would not hesitate to take a coward's advantage and use it. The enforced

retraction had been given public circulation, and the public could take it for what it was worth, knowing the facts in the case. Evans did not go so far as to say he withdrew it, but he did all that he could to nullify it.

He drew attention to the fact that Howard had been wordy and windy in denying that he was Ol Howell, or that he ever had given sanction to the report circulated by the more or less dishonorable Poke Jones, of Wichita, that he was the famed marshal of Caldwell. In regard to his past, where he came from, what he had done, and what station in life he had filled, this swaggering bully, this gun-toting four-flusher, Howard, had nothing at all to say. Having blown up as a bluffer and pretender, he was now trying to gild himself with the glamour of mystery.

Every man had his reason for keeping still about his past, but no man up for public office had a right to hide it. Milton Everett, familiarly and affectionately called Milt by all who knew him, former sheriff of Ford County, Kansas, had something to say that might throw a little light on Howard's past. There followed a statement by Milt Everett, duly refined by the editorial hand, so much refined, in fact, that it all appeared cut from the same cloth.

Milt Everett said he had a distinct recollection, as sheriff of Ford County, of taking a man to the penitentiary at Leavenworth who was an exact ringer for Howard. The fellow had been convicted of highway robbery in Dodge City.

The editor printed Milt Everett's reminiscence with all the gravity of truth, in full-face type, doubly indented, and continued on his own account to say that a man under the shadow of such a grave accusation had no standing before the public until he came forward and proved himself innocent of all suspicion. It was an affront, a public insult, for this openly accused con-

vict to parade himself asking the suffrage of honest voters. The rest of the People's ticket was bad enough, but Howard was especially repugnant to every sense of decency. The editor had known communities where such a brazen scoundrel would have been ridden out of town on a two-by-four scantling, his carrion body decorated with a coat of tar. He had complete confidence in the manhood of Cimarron.

Howard sat staring abstractedly over the top of the paper after reading this latest denunciation leveled at his altogether inoffensive head. It was vile and scandalous; Evans had taken a shadow and worked it up into the very substance of fact. It might be difficult to prove before Election Day that he hadn't been in the penitentiary, with only one day intervening between him and that event. Certainly there was not anybody in Cimarron who could vouch for him, and the charge was so hollow, vapid, and dishonest, campaign trumpetry of the lowest, that it did not merit the trouble of wiring to the warden of the Kansas prison for denial.

He did not want to take his gun and go after Evans again. One play of that kind was plenty; pushing it too far, as a regular habit, would bring public reaction of the very kind Evans was playing for. He would just have to take a tannin bath and thicken his hide, like Poke Jones.

But Jake was on his feet, tightening his cartridge belt, looking around for his hat. He grabbed it up from where it had lain all afternoon, shook the sawdust out of it, and fixed it so firmly on his lumpy head that it bent down the tips of his small, pointed, satyr ears.

"Goin' somewhere?" Noll inquired, trying to show himself untouched and indifferent, although Evans' persistent ridicule and slander hurt him more than the treason of a friend.

"Um-m-m," said Jake.

He was glum, and white around the

gills. He turned his face away, as if he would hide his intention from his partner's eye, cinched up his belt another notch, thought better of it, and turned back again, his tight little eyes as bright as two embers in a wind. He was holding the newspaper in his hand; the defamatory article in the folds. He tapped the paper with the forefinger of his gun hand, fast, like a woodpecker on a sycamore limb.

"Evans is callin' on the public to step out and say something about it," he said. "One of the public's goin' to go over there to his joint to tell him something, and to put it in his ear with a gun!"

"I appreciate it, old feller, but I don't believe I'd do that."

"This is out of your hands, pardner," Jake replied, flushed and hot. "He puts it up to the public, and the public's goin' to blow his head off! I don't want you to git it that I'm one of these hombre fellers, pardner," Jake appealed rather than explained, letting his voice down almost to its natural tone, "for I ain't. I'm a bow-legged little runt of a cow-puncher from the Panhandle, but I know when to step out for a friend."

"You do, Jake," Noll replied most earnestly, "but I wouldn't go and shoot him off just for that. They always lie about a man when he's up for office, you know."

"Many a good man's been in the pen!" Jake said with asperity.

"Sure they have. But the joke of it is, old feller, I never was."

"You'd be all right with me if you stepped out yisterday. No man's got a call to slam a pardner of mine the way that feller's a-slammin' you."

Jake gave his hat a pull, yanked it down over his eyes, and started off on his vengeful and undoubtedly earnest undertaking.

Noll went after him on the jump, stopping him by a hand on his shoulder.

"Wait a minute, Jake—here comes

one of the lawyers, and he looks like he's got something on his mind. Anyway, let's get his advice on the case."

It was Lawyer Wrigley, and he had a lot on his mind, being little less indignant than Jake. He said that he had read the defamatory article in the *Star* and resented it not only as a lawyer but as a citizen. Besides being basely and criminally libelous, it was a plain incitement to riot.

"You can shoot a man for that, can't you?" Jake asked.

"A man would be justified in going that far, even," the little lawyer replied, nodding judicially, slowly. "But a better course is to have him arrested for criminal libel and incitement to riot. He's plainly making a vicious effort to incite the public to violence against you, Howard. If you'll say the word, Howard, I'll go to the chief deputy United States marshal and take out a warrant for him."

"N-n-no," said Howard thoughtfully. "I don't believe I'd do that, judge."

"Moreover," Wrigley continued, greatly pleased at the sudden elevation to the judiciary, "this man Milt Everett is going around making the boast that he'll drive you out of town before the sun goes down."

"Is that true?" cried Jake. The news seemed to delight him; he brisked up quickly, took hold of his belt end and tried it for another notch, but it was as tight as it would go. "You hear that, pardner?"

"So that's what Evans had in mind; that's what he was hintin' at," said Noll.

Wrigley nodded, or bowed, rather, so solemn and sweeping was the gesture.

"We can get a warrant for Everett, too," he said.

"I think I'd rather await the outcome, judge."

"Just as you think best, Howard. But this man Everett's a bad customer—I know his record. He was deposed as sheriff for malfeasance in office, and

he's a killer; the kind that kills for the morose pleasure of seeing a man drop. You want to be on your guard for that man, Howard."

Noll measured the sun with a glance. It was going down sullenly red as a pomegranate; it looked as if a man could not have slipped his hand between it and the prairie that seemed to tip up in the hazy distance to meet the horizon, like the sea. He turned to Jake and the lawyer, hand to the long horn of his mustache, that queer look of bashful, embarrassed hesitancy in his face.

"I wonder if I'd have time to eat supper before I have to start?" he said.

A little flash of some emotion, maybe admiration, perhaps satisfaction, wavered across the lawyer's worried, dry face.

"No man would ever pick you as the kind to run, Howard."

"He'd be a poor picker if he did!" said Jake.

"But a warrant would be the prudent way to stop this thing," Wrigley continued. "If it comes to a show-down and you have to shoot, don't shoot to cripple, Howard. Everett has laid down your defense in advance; you can go the limit. And if you need any help—of a legal nature, a legal nature——"

"Certainly, certainly," said Howard, relieving the lawyer of his hurry to correct any misunderstanding of the assistance he proffered.

"Sure, legal nature, judge," said Jake. He was standing by, rubbing the grip of his gun as if he had an ache in his side. "Legal nature—sure thing."

"I'll be right on deck," Wrigley carried his offer to a conclusion, appreciative of their ready understanding.

"I hope it'll not be necessary to draw on you for your services in this case," Howard told him gravely, "but I'm sure they'd be a comfort to any man in a hole, and of the highest order."

"I'd bank on it," said Jake.

As Wrigley hastened back to his office, the partners stood looking at each other, Noll with a grin that seemed to serve no purpose whatever except to disturb the set of his features and hide his true emotion, like a flurry of wind across a pond; Jake all eager and alert, ready to jerk his gun and jump to it, and burning for the chance. The sun was half down, the sharp line of the world's edge across its sulky red face.

"It looks to me like Milt Everett ain't a man of his word," Jake said. "You might as well go on and eat."

"Wait till the sun's down, then we'll go together for once—what do you say?"

CHAPTER XV.

CIMARRON LAUGHS.

EDITOR EVANS had won a reprieve from Jake's vengeance for a little while. Jake was altogether absorbed in the outlook for combat before his own door, his only concern being that there would be enough of it to go around. If Milt Everett should come alone, Howard would have the first whack at him as a matter of right. Jake was disturbed by the thought that Everett might attempt it single-handed for the glory of his name.

They waited until the sun was down, fathoms down, behind the sharp line of distant prairie that lay within the westward scene beyond Cimarron. Then Howard led the way to Mrs. Morrison's door.

"The definition of a four-flusher seems to be Milt Everett," he remarked. "His enthusiasm seems to have cooled down with the day."

"It'd be a great way to git rid of a feller that's runnin' agin' you for office, though," Jake commented, bow-legging along with his cowboy hobble beside his tall partner. "Um-m-m! I smell baked hog. When I'm hungry, give me hog."

Jake's nose was a true interpreter of

the menu at the Hotel Savoy. There was baked hog and apple sauce, and room at the counter-table for the partners to sit and refresh themselves on its delights directly inside the open door. Josie, full of bounce and grins, was racing between stove and table, glowing with the prosperity that had come to her deserving door in such flood that enlargement of the establishment was already being planned.

Mrs. Morrison came over between cuts to congratulate Jake on getting rid of his jumper and laugh about the incident, which she said she had been too heavy-headed with sleep to know anything about until the best part of it was over.

"I saw her runnin' down the street and heard the tin cans rattlin' after her, but I'd 'a' given a nickel to see that little horse doctor out in his night-shirt squirtin' her with that big syringe."

"It sure was some show, ma'am," Noll assured her solemnly, "worth travelin' miles to see. I've been kind of worried about the old catamount, though, wonderin' if she was burnt very much."

"Not a blister more than she deserved," said Jake unforgivingly.

"No, not a blister more," Mrs. Morrison upheld him, with the hard judgment of her kind for an erring sister. "You've got to fight the devil with fire, so they say. It was a bright thought you had, Jake, when you set that grass afire."

"Me?" said Jake, astonished. "You're givin' me credit for more brains than I ever had. I never thought of it. Some fellers passin' by lightin' their se-gars or something dropped the match that roused her."

"Roasted her, you mean," a man along the table a little way spoke up, leaning forward to make the correction, bringing himself into view beyond the intervening guests. "That's no way to treat a woman, jumper or no jumper."

"If you've got any objections to make, put 'em in writin'," Jake retorted.

He threw his hind leg over the bench and got up, ready for action, but Noll restrained him while his hand was going for his gun.

The man who had spoken for the chivalry of Cimarron was rather besotted in appearance, his face marked by blotches of congested veins. He was an older man than Jake, yet not more than forty, thick-haired, short-necked, stocky, with the avid mouth of the drunkard.

"I'll put it in writing, all right," he replied to Jake's challenge, and he did not appear greatly disturbed over the imminent prospect of facing a gun.

"Sit down, Jake; let him alone," said Noll.

"Any man that 'sinuates I set that grass afire is a liar!" Jake proclaimed.

"I don't pack a gun," the stranger said contemptuously. "Any man that does has got about a foot missin' out of his backbone. I can take care of myself in any company without a gun."

He rose, threw down fifty cents beside his plate, glared sullenly at Jake, who was half standing, one leg on each side of the bench, and started for the door.

"I'll take it off," Jake proposed, beginning to unbuckle with hasty hand. "I'll meet you outside and measure len'ths with you! I'll climb your frame and then I'll——"

Noll laid hold of Jake and slammed him down, a-straddle of the bench as he was, where he sat biting so hard on nothing that they could hear the click of his teeth. Mrs. Morrison interposed.

"Go on out of here," she advised, waving the stranger toward the door. "Don't stand around here insultin' my friends."

The customer did not resent this invitation to take himself off, for it was evident from the change of his coun-

tenance that he did not relish Jake's hearty preparations to meet him without any advantage over him in the matter of armament. When he hit the door he cut a streak for the street and disappeared with astonishing celerity.

"Dang a man for buttin' in on my supper that way!" Jake muttered, turning again to his baked hog.

The man nearest Jake laughed.

"He seems to be in a hurry to get it down in writin'," he said. "Do you know who he is?"

"I don't know him from a rabbit," Jake replied.

"He's Frank Stark, reporter on the *Star*."

"He fits his job to a T," Jake said.

"Is that who he is?" Mrs. Morrison inquired of her customer, a mild-mannered large man who looked like drugs and sundries.

"Yes, I used to know him in Wichita. He's a disreputable old soak, can't get a job on any decent paper, couldn't hold it if he had it. But he can write just about as ornery as he looks."

"If he puts any of his scandalous lies about me or my place in that paper this town won't hold him!" Mrs. Morrison declared.

Jake growled about being stopped in his charitable work of doing away with a public nuisance, and Noll replied that it would have been ungenerous, if not ungentlemanly, to kick up a row in Mrs. Morrison's place. A man must have a stronger reason than Jake's to pull out his gun and go mussing things around in a friend's house. Jake declared he was as reasonable as he was unreasonable, and he could see a hole in a shirt as quick as any man when it was p'inted out to him. He wouldn't muddy up the water in Mrs. Morrison's water hole for nearly anything, but he did resent 'sinuations and tree-toad looks in a man.

Of course, agreed Noll, but advised him to go ahead and eat. So Jake

buckled down to it again, soon restored to his appreciation of the baked hog and tart sauce, and the other good things which Josie brought them as especially favored guests, and almost men of the family.

They were scraping their plates, Josie sitting on an upended box across the table chinning them in the good old railroad way, the supper rush being over. It was beginning to grow dusky in the house although it was still bright outside, the time between sunset and dark being long in that land. Mrs. Morrison suggested that Josie light the lamp, and Josie said "yes, in a minute, ma," and went on chinning Jake, with a good many bright bursts of sudden laughter and a lovely flush of prosperity and contentment in her cheeks.

All of this was going on, comfortably and happily, when Josie's bright color fled from her face suddenly, as if she had been struck by mortal agony. Her eyes widened, her lips parted for the words which she seemed unable to utter.

At the same moment Noll Howard, looking into the mirror of the new chiffonier, which stood directly behind Josie, a noble spread of pies on its golden-oak top, started and stiffened as the face of the mirror became suddenly peopled by a converging of many men before the door. Josie's back was reflected in the mirror, and the face of Jake Zickafoos as plain as a tintype, and around them, in the perspective of the doorway, this sudden development of strange faces as if they had been brought out in the glass by a breath.

Jake was staring at Josie, trying to account for her sudden consternation, unconscious of the change in the scene. Noll touched his arm, lifting a finger in quick, cautious gesture toward the glass.

"Hello!" cried Jake. "He's got all the voters in the Liberal party with him!"

"Look out! He's got a gun!" Josie warned, finding her tongue and her legs at the same instant. She jumped up, knocking the box over with a noise that seemed a crash in the strained quiet of the moment.

Mrs. Morrison was sitting on a box, also, in the fairway of the back door for the refreshment of the cool evening breeze after her day's work. She turned, caught the significance of the crowd about to enter the house, snatched the knife from the pan where the remnants of roast pork were being kept hot on the back of the stove, and started for the door, where she came face to face not with Frank Stark, reporter for the *Star*, as she had expected, but a stranger with a naked gun in his hand.

Noll and Jake had all but dismissed the chance of Milt Everett's appearing in any attempt to carry out his threat, or had put it down to a false rumor that had reached Lawyer Wrigley's ears. They were filled to the gills with the good things Josie had set before them; even Jake's belligerent soul was soothed to a condition of slothful ease. But the sight of that man holding a gun trained on them as they sat, backs to him, on the bench made them jump and begin to fume. They had been lured by good eating away from the duty of vigilance, and now it looked as if Milt Everett had them where he wanted them.

"Leave them guns where they're at—put 'em up and keep 'em up!"

They put them up at Milt Everett's command, and kept them up, like discreet men who had been in a tight corner before. Josie, crouching as if to duck under the table, hand over her mouth to hold back a scream, eyes big in her white face, watched the stranger fearfully as he took away her friend's guns.

"Turn around and stand up!" said the man with the gun, not loudly nor blusteringly, but in a voice low and

hard, something inexorable, driving, relentless to the very extremity in its tone.

Noll and Jake, hands lifted high, swung their legs over the bench, faced their captor, and stood. Howard looked at the fellow, who could be nobody but Milt Everett, he knew, although he never had beheld that notable person before.

Everett was a tall man, almost incredibly thin, with a long neck which he thrust forward in a craning, inquiring, suspicious way like a rooster at a barn door. His face was sharp, his countenance meager and morose, his shaggy, red mustache heavy and long, with a sullen droop to it that curtained his mouth.

He appeared to be nearer fifty than forty, and seemed a man who had known prosperity and fat days at some remote period of his career, for he still carried the pouch of what had been a double chin. He was a type of the old-time saloon-dance-hall proprietor, of the kind born without conscience or pity, incapable of generosity or remorse.

"What do you mean by comin' here an' holdin' up my guests?" Mrs. Morrison demanded, the knife out of sight under her apron, in true railroad strategy.

Everett ignored her, not even giving her a glance. He stood there craning his long neck and goggling, his eyes fixed on Howard, gun held in a limber-wristed way, ready to flip a shot at the first move.

"What have they done? Are you an officer?" Mrs. Morrison inquired, turning a look at Howard as if she had begun to harbor some suspicion and doubt.

Everett made a motion with his head toward the door, the captured guns in his left hand, well practiced in the policy of ignoring women, let them rail or implore. Noll and Jake moved slowly toward the open door, edging off a little, almost imperceptibly; each with his own

thoughts and plenty of them; each with his own plans and calculations, widely divergent as they might be, but both watching, watching, straining, and waiting, for the first little break in Everett's guard, the first little wavering of his wrist, the first fleet withdrawal of his eyes.

In the door, thought Noll; that would be the place for a quick feint, a rush, a blow. Milt Everett was a serious man, an experienced man, and, as Jones had described him, he was a red-eyed man.

In that manner they moved toward the door—from which they had not been distant more than six feet at the beginning—slowly, with provocative purpose in their deliberation as well understood between them as if they had planned it all in advance. Everett turned with them as they circled toward the door; turned without thought of the little, white, sharp-faced woman with brilliant dark eyes, who stood so near him that the elbow of his gun arm almost touched her as he pivoted on the ball of his foot, all set and keen to throw lead, give him only half an excuse.

As he turned, slowly, elbow almost touching her, Mrs. Morrison flashed the long knife from under her apron, made a pass like a fencer, and pinned Milt Everett's gun arm to his side with a true thrust through the muscle, the point of her weapon grating against his rib.

The assault was so unexpected, the pain of the thrust so startling, disconcerting, and acute, that Milt Everett gave a yelp that split the roof. Noll Howard's fist caught him in the mouth before the yell reached its crescendo, and the captured guns, as well as Everett's own rattled to the floor around him as he fell.

Jake darted like a lizard into the tangle of long legs and thrashing arms and came out of it with the guns. Two of these he retained. He stood facing the open door, elbows close to his ribs,

making quick little half turns like a revolving turret, covering the crowd outside.

"Keep your seats, gentlemen, keep your seats!" said Jake, spraying them with a threat of his guns; one of them Milt Everett's own.

Mrs. Morrison picked up the knife, holding it away from her. Billy Morrison, who had been busy attending to his team after a day of draying, came tearing in at the back door to see what the racket was about; Josie came around the long table to look at the upset gunman where he sat jarred and jangled on the floor, Noll holding him by a twisted handful of shirt collar at the back of his bony neck. Outside the front door, the friends of this enterprising candidate, who would have eliminated opposition by the unethical but effective procedure of driving the other aspirant to office out of town, were shifting around and backing off uneasily before Jake's guns.

"He's leakin' all over the floor!" said Billy Morrison, properly resentful as became the man of the house. "Drag him out, mister."

Old Milt was leaking rather profusely, not only from the stab in his wing, but from the corners of his mouth, due to the tooth-starting slam Howard had given him. Milt was holding his wounded arm, trying to shut off the drain, making no effort to get up, looking pretty well frightened and very much concerned.

Mrs. Morrison was standing by, holding the knife away from her dress, in what perhaps appeared a threatening posture to the humiliated politician. The knife looked long enough to go through him twice. He put his hand inside his shirt, and made a startled exploration.

"Take me to a doctor!" he begged, looking up at Howard from the depths of unheroic consternation his face blanched by the terror of his anticipated end.

Howard upended him and propelled him toward the door, greatly concerned over the bully's condition. He did not know how badly the man was wounded but he did not want the old runt to die, not out of any compassion for him, but because it might turn a certain amount of public feeling against Mrs. Morrison.

Jake went ahead of them, sweeping a way with his threatening guns. Everett had announced his humorous exploit, as he had anticipated it would be, with swagger and jest. His most intimate friends and supporters had accompanied him; hundreds of disinterested voters, keen for diversion, had come pelting along behind, a little cautious until they were assured no bullets were going to go humming promiscuously around. Now other droves were kicking up the dust, pouring in from all directions, promising a gathering of spectators such as had not been assembled for any single event since the founding of Cimarron itself.

Jake inquired, but not very loudly nor eagerly, if there was a doctor in the crowd. There did not appear to be. Noll said he'd take the old soak over to his place. He asked Billy Morrison to run ahead and call Dr. Green. Jake moved in state ahead of them, making a broad lane in the crowd with his guns, looking altogether more grim than jubilant, for the humorous side of Milt Everett's entertainment had not appealed to him.

"A horse doctor's too good a doctor for any old rangamatang like him," Jake growled, marching on ahead a few feet, swinging his guns in that revolving turret movement which made the most effective broom ever seen in operation by any housewife who looked on and admired from her place in a wagon on the edge of the crowd.

Dr. DeGarmo Green was at home, being a circumspect man who allowed his neighbors to look after their own troubles. He was outside his house

watching from a distance, chuckling to himself at sight of his two neighbors having emerged from this enterprise with the upper hand. He went in to get his instrument case and Billy Morrison darted back to see the show.

Noll steered the spiritless Everett to a nail keg and sat him down. Everett was nerveless and limber. He was breathing short, and perspiring as if the agony of dissolution had overtaken him. He looked up at Howard, rolling his eyes.

"I'm a dead man!" he declared. "She stuck me in the liver!"

Jake was greatly concerned to hear this and to see the pallor of the man. He looked around the several acres of people, as he estimated them roughly, to satisfy himself that he might take his guns off them for a little while. There did not appear to be any disposition of great friendship or sympathy for Everett, as far as he could see. People were talking in hushed voices to each other, the news having gone around quickly that Milt Everett had met with disaster and was coming to his end. They tiptoed and strained to see, shoving and crowding forward from the rear, but they kept clear a wide space around the three central figures.

Everybody was intent on seeing what was coming next, but nobody seemed disposed to start anything of his own since Everett's high scheme had come to such uncomfortable failure. The one busy man in the crowd was Stark, of the *Star*. Whether he was getting news or trying to start something, Jake did not know.

"You look like you're about all in, feller," Jake said anxiously. He prodded Everett with his gun to see how much life there was in him.

Not a great deal, it seemed. Everett looked sick and miserable, and he was as pale as if the last drop of blood had flowed from his wounds.

WE "I feel like it, pardner," Everett replied in solemn despair.

"Yes," Jake agreed, "you're goin' to pass away. I've seen the signs in many a man's face, and I read 'em in yours. It's a purty solemn piece of business to pass out of this world leavin' a lie standin' again a man's reputation that may blacken him all his life. Don't you feel like you've got something to say before you go?"

"I'll say anything you ask me to say, if you'll make it short," Everett replied. "My inside is afire. You'll have to cut it short."

"Sure," Jake agreed with grim briskness. "Where's that reportin' animal that reports on the *Star*? Shove him through there," he cried, sighting Stark at his insidious activities among the crowd. "Kick him out here to me, some of you men."

It seemed an automatic motion of expulsion by which the crowd forced the unwilling reporter to the front. Jake reached in after him when he struck the shallows at the edge and tried to claw himself back to deep water, hauling him into the clearing, which was narrowing momentarily around them since Jake had put up one of his guns.

"Pardner," Jake said, and prodded Everett again with his gun, with little effect on his drooping, listless posture, the other hand nailing Reporter Stark to the spot.

"Let the old cuss alone, Jake," Noll remonstrated gently, genuinely concerned over the probability of the knife having penetrated Everett's vitals.

"Can't you see, he's about all in?"

"Yes, and I'm a tender-hearted man by rights, pardner," Jake replied severely, "but I didn't see no signs of this feller goin' easy on me and you when he had the drop on us a little while ago. Never mind feelin' over him right now, doc"—this to Dr. Green, who had been obliged to fight his way through the crowd to get there, and arrived panting after much delay—"he's got to

have a little session with me before you take him over, for better or worse. You can have him in a minute."

Dr. Green was looking at his subject sharply, with little favor in his wise and worldly eyes. He put his case down, never removing his eyes from Everett for a second as he stooped and straightened.

"All right, Mr. Zickafoos, go ahead," the horse doctor said.

"I want you to git this, every last word of it," Jake instructed the reporter, whom he released to give elbow room for the task.

Stark was not a valiant man, not even an insolent one when the power of the press seemed a thing so impotent and far-away as now. He got out a mussy fold of newsprint paper and a pencil, ready to put down what was coming.

Jake put the back of his hand under Everett's chin and sharply lifted his dejected head.

"Did you ever see this man, Oliver Howard, before you saw him on the streets of this town of Cimarron?" Jake demanded.

"I'll give it to you straight, pardner, I never did," Everett replied.

"Did you ever take this man, Oliver Howard, to the pen at Leavenworth, or to any other pen?"

"I never took him to no pen no-where," Milt replied faintly. "Oh, doc! Can't you stop this blood?"

"Say it louder," Jake prompted, prodding Everett with the gun.

"I never took him to no pen no-where. Can't you leave me alone?"

"All right, doc; you can have him," Jake said, turning the patient over indifferently as he would have thrown away an empty bottle.

Dr. Green came into prominence then. He unscrewed the metal top from a pint bottle of red liquor, filled it, and held the charge of revivifying spirits under Everett's nose. A whiff of it

seemed to revive him like a breeze from Elysium. Dr. Green emptied the little jigger of whisky into the channel where rivers of it had gone before; it gave old Milt a grip on the slipping strand of life as if somebody had put sand on the rope. Dr. Green screwed the top back on the bottle, looked at Jake Zickafoos, and winked. And Jake, being an understanding man, kept the confidence to himself.

"Now, you old grubbin' worm," Jake addressed the reporter for the *Star*, "the rooster overlooked you when he was scratchin' in the sand pile the day you was hatched, but I'm not goin' to overlook you if you leave one word of this feller's speech out of your paper to-morrow. That'll be all for to-day; you're excused."

Dr. Green had laid Everett's wounds bare with Howard's help, cutting off his outer blue woolen shirt adorned with large mussel-shell buttons, laying open with the scissors the sleeve of his violently red undergarment down to his bony wrist. There was a wound—something more than skin deep, to be sure—in the corded biceps of Milt Everett's arm, which was almost as hard as dried beef; and a little knife-point puncture that the good old horse-size rib had stopped from going on into that organ which Milt spoke of so frequently.

There was nothing at all in any of his hurts to give a man that expression of extreme misery; not a thing that a real man would not have walked off with and borne without a murmur. Doc Green put a piece of sticking plaster over the little cut in Milt's side, and some criss-cross strips of it on his arm. Then he said "five dollars" as naturally as any well-regulated little horse doctor with a turn for appreciating the ludicrous could have said the words, and Milt Everett somehow got the good news into his bony old head that he was not going to die.

It didn't seem to please Milt very

well; he appeared to think he had been imposed upon, somehow, and played a shabby trick. He glared around, his red undergarment little more inflamed than his face, realizing that he had figuratively both legs shot from under him and could only go a lame gait in Cimarron from that hour forward.

"They drugged me in that joint!" he said solemnly.

Somebody laughed. The word went through the crowd of what Everett had said to account for his overthrow and belief that dissolution was on him, and the noise of growing laughter came back from the tents across the street.

"I'll burn 'em up!" Milt said, glaring around savagely. "Give me my gun—I'll burn 'em up!"

"Five dollars," said Dr. Green, with inflexible persistence.

Milt got the money out and paid him, and stood on his long legs considering whether to resume putting on his shirt. The big crowd—there must have been three acres of people by that time, Jake estimated—was becoming boisterously mirthful, as the true account of Milt's wounds, and his ante-mortem statement, which had been passed along solemnly as it came from his mouth at the prompting of Jake Zickafoos, began to circulate.

The state of Milt Everett's outer shirt, as he held it up now and thought of putting it on, sent another gust of merriment through the crowd like a wind running over a field of grain. It would have been equal to piecing out a puzzle to assemble that garment again. Milt surveyed the mutilation, holding the shirt before his eyes at arm's length. Then he rolled it in a compact wad and tucked it under his sound arm.

"Give me my gun and I'll burn 'em up!" he said, turning to Jake.

Jake looked a question at his partner through the deepening twilight.

Noll nodded. "Let him have it," he said.

Jake handed the weapon to Everett, not at all troubled over the chance of his turning it against them at once, for he had broken it while the doctor worked over Everett and now returned it to him empty.

Everett started toward the crowd, which was already thinning and dispersing, his naked gun in his hand, his wounds forgotten in the hurt of his humiliation and degraded pride. Nobody quickened a step to get out of his way, nobody trembled at his approach, but laughter ran ahead of him as he stalked on, his white skin gleaming in the dusk through the slit in his red undershirt.

CHAPTER XVI

A MAN'S PAST.

THAT settled him," Jake said, with satisfied finality. "He won't git nine votes."

"I thought the old cuss was hurt worse than that," Noll ruminated, feeling and looking pretty well sold to the whole affair.

"No, I had my eye on that knife; I knew it didn't hit his gizzard any more than it did mine. He's one of these fellers that can stand the sight of anybody's blood but his own. I've seen plenty of 'em in my time. Lot of these gun-slingin' hombres"—Jake always pronounced the *h* in that word with contemptuous defiance of the entire Spanish Academy—"that used to keep a couple of men busy buryin' 'em 'd faint and fall back in it if somebody give 'em a red nose. This old flannel-neck he's one of that kind: mean with a gun—you can take my word for it he *is* mean with a gun, pardner—but no good without it. You could 'a' knocked him over with a feather when he put his hand in his shirt and saw that blood."

"Still, I don't know but old Milt's a better-qualified man for the job of city marshal than I am," Noll reflected,

looking off through the dusk in the direction Everett had gone.

The gray shallows of twilight were merging with the deep waters of night; three lots away people appeared indistinct, mistily enlarged. The crowd had dispersed completely, the partners were alone in front of Howard's half-sided house; even Billy Morrison having been called home to help in a rush of business that had filled the table, chance customers lured in by the sweet savor of baked hog. Milt Everett's show had turned out profitably to everybody but himself.

"No, he's one of the old-style fellers left over from the gun-blazin' days of Dodge and Hunnewell and towns like them. No place for a man like him to go since them cow towns cooled off and died out. Milt wouldn't know how to handle a new modern town like Cimarron, where nothing worse than a lit-up granger or carpenter ever's goin' to git loose on the streets. Well, I don't know what there is goin' to be for a city marshal to do here—tame town like this."

"Jones thinks there's liable to be trouble enough. He picked me because he thought I was Ol Howell, and I don't know just what his feelin's must have been when I put him straight. He couldn't very well dump me then, he'd talked me up so strong already, so he acted pleased and made the best of it. Got away with it pretty smooth, for a man with a beard like that."

"I don't know how good a man Ol Howell was," Jake said, "but I'd bet money you could give him cards and spades and beat him at his own game any day. I was in Caldwell more than once with herds from Texas when it was wide open and woolly, and I'm here to say that any man that cut his eyeteeth in that town ain't got nothin' to learn."

Noll had settled himself comfort-

ably in his door, and was loading his pipe; Jake was sitting on the ground, back against the house, legs stretched to take the kinks out of them, dribbling smoke through his short nose. Noll regarded him in silence a little while as if debating something in his mind, his operations with the pipe suspended. Then he struck a match, chuckling a little between puffs, the rising and falling light revealing a glint of humor in his eye that Jake did not turn his head to see. Noll put out the match before dropping it, remembering the grass fire that had burned the jumper woman's tent.

"Jake, I never was in Caldwell until a few months ago," he said. "I guess it was because I told Jones I used to range around there that he got me tangled up with the other man. Yes, I had a job on the railroad up at Caldwell this summer. I quit it to make the run."

"Plenty of good men's had to take a railroadin' job for want of something better," Jake said, but not as vehemently as he had contended for good men who might have had the misfortune to serve a little term in the pen.

Noll glanced at him again in a pause that might have been deliberative or hesitant, as if he considered the wisdom of saying more. If Jake could have seen his features closely through the gloom, he would have read there an expression of secret enjoyment such as plays over a man's face when he is withholding a joke.

"Before that," said Noll, still watching Jake, pipestem withdrawn from between his lips—"I was out in Wyoming herdin' sheep."

Jake started, leaning forward as if to jump and run.

"The hell you was!" he said.

Noll nodded, grunting an affirmative around his pipestem, now firmly set in his jaw. Jake stared at his, rising slowly to his knees, as if to penetrate the de-

ception or get a line on the joke. He must have seen something in Noll's face that told him it was simple truth, for he began to look around with concern that was very close to consternation.

"Don't let it git out on you, pardner!" he appealed, with the strained anxiety of a man who realized that the case had gone beyond mere caution.

"I hesitated to tell you about it, old feller, knowin' the way you cowmen feel toward a man that runs sheep. But there are plenty of decent men in the business, both herders and sheepmen. I've met a lot of them."

Jake was not disposed to argue that, his great concern lying another way.

"Don't let it git out on you!" he repeated, his voice low, intensely earnest. "It'd ruin your chance in the 'lection if it ever got out on you."

"No, it wouldn't make a bit of difference, Jake. They don't think of sheepmen in this country the way you Texas and Western cowmen feel about them. Even the cowmen that used to graze this range, and the range up in Kansas, never had any feelin' against sheepmen. They didn't know anything about them, never had to compete with them like you fellers. Anyhow, the majority of voters in this town are farmers. I expect I'd stand a better chance with them of bein' elected on the reputation of sheepman than gunman."

"But if it ever gits out on you after you're elected, you'll be ruined. Nobody's goin' to turn any handsprings gittin' out of a sheepman marshal's way."

"They wouldn't in a Texas or Wyoming cow town. Here it's different, I tell you, Jake."

Jake got up, took a little turn this way and that, circling a bit, coming back, feeling easier when he made certain nobody was lurking around listening.

"You don't look like a sheepman, and

you don't act like one," Jake said, hope creeping through his perplexity, as if he began to see some palliation in the offense, probably inexperience or youthful folly. "You was just takin' a whirl at it for vacation, or to git money to go somewheres on, wasn't you, pardner?"

"No; it was a regular job. I worked at it for two years, a little over two. I was aimin' to start out for myself in time—well, I gave it up."

"Sure you give it up," said Jake, picking up the lead eagerly, intent on the absolution of his friend from the taint of sheep. "You wasn't cut out for a sheepman. You was green; somebody humbugged you into it. I know them sheepmen—I know 'em right."

"They didn't humbug me into it, but they certainly humbugged me out," Noll confessed, almost as serious now as the little cow-puncher from the Panhandle who had been given such a jolt by the intimate revelation.

"If you can prove you was green, and they humbugged you into it and then skinned you—if that's what you mean, and I'll bet money that's it, knowin' sheepmen as well as I know 'em—if you can prove that, nobody can hold it agin' you pardner."

"I was runnin' a little band for a man up around Casper on shares—no pay, just my grub and half the increase."

"And when you come to figger it up, there wasn't no increase," Jake said. "I know 'em."

"Well, it wasn't exactly that way, but it amounted to the same thing."

"Sure it did. Tell me about sheepmen! I know 'em."

"It looked pretty good till war broke out up there between the sheepmen and cattlemen—you've heard about it; goin' on yet."

"Yes. Cowman from up there in Wyoming wanted to hire me to go to that range and help clean them sheep-

men and nesters out. He offered me five dollars a day and five dollars a head for every sheepman and nester—he called 'em rustlers, said every damn one of 'em *was* a rustler—I nailed. Well, I didn't take the job. I figgered s'pose I cracked off some innercent fool feller that'd been humbugged into herdin' a band of sheep. That's the way I figgered. And s'pose I'd 'a' went to that range and took a shot at some feller, and that feller 'd 'a' turned out to be you? Funny how we miss gittin' mixed up in things sometimes, ain't it?"

"Darned funny," Noll agreed soberly, thinking how it might very well have turned out that way.

"How'd that sheepman work it on you?"

"Why, the cattlemen hired a lot of Texas gunmen—from the Big Bend, most of them—on the same terms they offered you. I was runnin' my band on disputed range, and I got into it that way. You know, Jake, the cowmen up in that country have got a playful habit of burnin' a sheepman or herder in his wagon if they can slip up on him while he's asleep and throw coal oil over it. A good many of them have gone that way."

"I'd draw the line there—right there I'd draw the line," Jake protested.

"Of course you would. Even the cowboys up there wouldn't go that far—that's why the cowmen brought in that gang of handy thieves and smugglers from the Big Bend. We-e-ll, a bunch of them tried it on me one night."

"The-e-e hell!" said Jake.

"I wasn't sleepin' in the wagon, wasn't sleepin' much at all, anywhere, those nights, so I was kind of braced and all set. Anyhow, while I was fannin' part of them away from the wagon the rest went down among the sheep and clubbed about a hundred of them to death. After the—the——"

"Inquest," Jake prompted, encour-

agingly, as knowingly as if he had been right there.

"Yes, and all the incidentals of that kind——"

"How many did you git?"

Jake made the inquiry eagerly. He had come up close to the door where his partner sat smoking, and he was breathing quickly, as if he had just come through a brush with sheep-killing cowmen on the far Wyoming range.

"They—that is, most of them, all but two—got away. And then that sheepman——"

Jake was offering his hand in what might have been belated congratulation.

"Oh, well! If you was *that* kind of a sheepman!" he said.

They shook hands as if they had settled a long enmity. It was plain by the change in Jake's voice, the lack of constraint in his manner, that Noll had won back to his regard and stood as high, or higher, than he had been rated before.

"And that sheepman charged you up with the ammunition you used that night." Jake said, with as much certainty as if he had seen the bill.

"Well, he didn't check it up against me," Noll replied, with his dry little chuckle, "but when he counted the sheep that were left he said it was my share that had been killed."

"Sure he did! That's sheepman figgerin'. Did you throw a shot through his old splay foot and cut off his ears, or did you let him live on?"

"I didn't have anything in writing with him to prove my arrangement about shares, so I—I—collected two hundred dollars off of him and left that country."

"You done purty good to git that much," Jake allowed. "Lucky it turned out that way, or you might 'a' been a sheepman, and you're too decent a man to go that way."

"Oh, I don't know, Jake," Noll

laughed; "I've met some mighty decent sheepmen. A lot of the cattlemen up there are going in for sheep now altogether. They cost less to handle, and the profit is bigger. Some of them are runnin' both cattle and sheep on the same range."

"Yes, I've heard of them half-and-half cowmen," Jake said. "And I've also seen pictures of fellers that was half man and half horse, and I'm here to say it's a damn pore combination."

"It's all in the way a man's been raised, I suppose," said Noll.

"Yes, and I'd 'a' swore on my oats and inflammation, as the feller said, that you was born in a sod house and raised in cow camps, and took your first stand in 'up meal off of the tail of a chuck wagon."

"It was a log house, Jake, down in the Kaw Valley. No, I never followed the range, except for that time in Wyoming. I ran away from a farm and went to railroadin' when I was just a kid. Railroadin' is about all I know. I used to be boss of an extra gang up on the Santa Fé main line. I had an old tarrier workin' for me that Mrs. Morrison and Josie know well."

"The-e-e hell you did!" said Jake, very much interested, indeed. "Well, if you can handle a gang of railroaders, you can handle anything you'll ever meet loose in this man's town."

"I'm hopin', Jake."

"By Henry! I never paid for my supper!" said Jake, jumping as if his conscience were as sharp as a thorn.

"I was just thinkin' about it. I didn't either. I guess the rush has thinned out now so we can go back and express our appreciation to Mrs. Morrison for that jab she gave old Milt. Where would we have been by now, Jake, me especially, if she hadn't been a quick-thinkin' lady with lots of sand?"

"I expect we'd 'a' been settin' around here gabbin' about the same as right

now," Jake replied confidently. "I saw a good deal of figgerin' goin' on in the edge of your eye, and I was grindin' off a little myself. I aimed to climb that feller's frame before he got out of that door."

"Yes, and I saw Josie with the peppercorn bottle in her hand, all set to give him a dash of it in the eyes," Noll added.

"She was? Yes, and she'd 'a' let him have it, sure as red blankets! The more I see of that kid the more I like her, and I ain't a feller that falls for women right along, neither."

A burst of sound—it would almost pass for music, distance muting the most painful discords—rose from the direction of the People's party headquarters, and Jake began to prance to the time of the measure like a circus horse, his spirits were so light and gay.

"Them boys is gittin' good," he approved. "Old Brother Jones is trainin' in 'em so they can carry a tune most every time."

"They're warmin' up for the big show to-night, and I promised Jones I'd step out with him. I don't know, though; I don't feel much like paradin' around to-night."

"You better go on and show the rest of 'em Milt didn't chase you out of town," Jake counseled.

"I think nearly every voter in town was here, Jake."

"Some out on the edges don't know about it. Do you suppose old Milt will keep on runnin' for office?"

"I expect he will. The *Star* will come out to-morrow with some explanation of it to his glory, and slam me in a new place."

"I'm waitin' to see that paper to-morrow," Jake said portentously.

"You'll come in for your share; don't fret. I wonder what kind of a past Evans is goin' to fix up for you?"

"He can say I stole the chicken off a dead Chinaman's grave and go on

livin'; but if he says I'm a sooner I'll slap his jaw. Well, le's go over and pay Josie, and thank her ma for something more than any supper that ever was dished up before any man."

"Something that money can't pay

for," said Noll, warmly supporting his partner's generous confession of obligation to Mrs. Morrison and her long bright knife.

"No money that ever was made," said Jake.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

THE DINOSAUR TRAIL

ONE of the most picturesque of the many expeditions recently undertaken is that on the fifteen-million-year-old trail of the dinosaur. The Charles L. Bernheimer Expedition of the Museum of Natural History has returned from Arizona bearing in triumph examples of the spoor. The largest of these is six-tenths inches long and has a twelve-inch spread. It was the curious haunting of an unanswered question that led Mr. Bernheimer to revisit these old traces, which he had seen and examined previously, and this unsatisfied curiosity had its reward, for it led on to other and newer discoveries—one of the fascinating attributes of the study of prehistoric man being its apparent inexhaustibility. The new discoveries of the expedition were in the Neskla Nizadi Canyon and Dog wo tse Boco. It was in the canyon that new puzzle worlds were found to conquer—or remain unconquered. On ledges traversed by long-dead dinosaurs were found markings which baffled the ingenuity of the expedition's experts. Footprints were clearly deciphered, and tail marks, but some peculiar formations which could not have been made by either refused to yield their secret. So Dame Nature still holds fast to her woman's privilege to say the last word.

Two other objectives of Mr. Bernheimer—both of which he was successful in attaining—were further information about the dwellings of prehistoric man, and a natural bridge reputed to be as fine as the Rainbow Bridge of Navajo Mountain. The location of this bridge—which was regarded as sacred by the Indians—was kept secret and only recently did Mr. Bernheimer learn from a Ute Indian that it was in Monument Valley. This Indian—"Old Mike" by name—volunteered to act as guide, and led the delighted explorers to the massive rock. In structure resembling the vaulting of an unfinished cathedral window, the arch rises at the extreme end of Box Canyon and soars two hundred feet above rich grazing land. The difficulty of the approach to the arch tends to enhance its sacred character and leaves it remote from invasion by mere sight-seers—a true sanctuary for the reticent red men.

The third discovery, intensely interesting in itself though lacking the poetic and spiritual quality of the heaven-seeking bridge, was the human habitations of men in the period of the Basket Weavers, who antedated the Pottery Makers—picturesque names recalling the titles of some of the medieval European guilds. The houses were circular, built in pairs, and joined like the loop of a figure eight. It was possible to enter them only by crawling on all fours.

The interest of this exploration is boundless and the information acquired of the greatest value. The report tells us that there were in the expedition, besides the pack animals, "eight men and forty horses"—and these brief words have import clear, as the poet almost says, to those good men and true who ten years ago, went on another expedition—and left a long, long trail awinding Over There.



A Snow-Bound Yuletide

By Johnston McCulley

Author of "Plotters of Gopher Gulch," etc.



DOWN from the lofty peaks of the range to the north came a brisk wind that carried with it millions upon millions of needle-pointed particles blown from snow-laden and ice-covered branches of towering trees.

Black night shrouded the mountains as the deep snow had covered the trails. The biting, blizzardlike wind had crusted the drifts. Trees creaked and groaned and cracked. Even the night life of the forest-covered hills was not abroad.

Yet a man fought his way from drift to drift, ever onward toward the distant village of Mossy Pine. His snowshoes seemed like things of lead. Despite warm dressing and continual action, his knees were cold. Almost continually he beat his mittened hands across his breast. He was breathing through the woolen hood which enveloped his head; yet the air he drank in seemed to pierce his lungs.

He seemed to be acquainted with the

trail, though there was no trail at all now because of the heavy snow. He carried a flash light, a strange thing there far up in the mountains where the scattered villagers possessed few of the appurtenances of civilization. Now and then he flashed a beam through the swirling snow at a tree, got his bearings so, and floundered on.

There did not seem to be anything despondent about him. This perilous journey through the blizzard seemed to be one that he liked, something that he had taken upon himself willingly. He chuckled at times, as though well pleased. He could not deny to himself the discomforts of the night, yet certain knowledge he held seemed to more than offset them in his own mind.

"What a Christmas Eve!" he muttered, as he stopped for a moment to rest. "Ice, snow, raging wind, thousands upon thousands of living Christmas trees decorated by Nature! Only a few things are needed—a blazing log fire, human companionship, food, the spirit of giving!"

He was less than half a mile from the town of Mossy Pine, and the remainder of the journey was down an easy slope where the crusted snow was like a carpet, and where there were few trees. The forest there had been denuded to supply firewood for the village. So John Canderson hurried on, the cold wind stinging, but a warm glow within him.

There were many empty cabins at the edge of the town. John Canderson knew the town's history, and he had kept in touch with recent events there. The ore in the district had petered out, and the boom days were gone. Mossy Pine was not one of the ghost towns of the West, but something more pitiful—a town to which a few persons still clung, lacking the courage or means to move.

There were not more than a score of inhabitants in Mossy Pine now. In the summer they raised a few vegetables. They fished and hunted, cut fuel from the forest, and let a few razorback hogs run wild in the woods. A tiny store catered to their meager wants. In winter, they were snowed in for weeks at a time, cut off from the world.

Mossy Pine was snowed in now. For more than three weeks there had been no communication with it. This Christmas Eve found the villagers with little cheer. They had only a few presents to give, and those of home manufacture. But John Canderson, knowing the people, knew that the genuine Christmas spirit would be there in spite of this fact.

He stumbled and staggered past the empty cabins and found the end of the town's one crooked street. In the distance he saw a light in one of the buildings. He was surprised that it was not in the little log church, for he had anticipated finding the villagers gathered there for an old-fashioned Christmas tree. Then he saw, as he drew nearer, that there was a faint light in

the church, too, and that the other light was in the little store.

John Canderson went on down the street. He peered through a window of the church after scraping off some of the encrusted snow that covered it. For a time he looked inside, his eyes wide with wonder.

One kerosene lamp burned in the church. The Christmas tree was there, decorated but dark. Only one person was in the little church. He was a man who sat with his back to the window, his feet cocked upon one of the benches. He held a bottle in one hand. With the other, he was making an effort to beat time while he gave utterance to a muttered song, the words of which were not appropriate to the time nor the place.

John Canderson watched through the window for a time, and then left the little church and went across the snow-choked street to the store. There he gazed through another window. The citizens of Mossy Pine were there—men, women, and children. There were no men of vigor in Mossy Pine—only the aged, the immature, or the middle-aged variety, lacking in determination and courage.

The watcher told himself that there was a peculiar Christmas Eve gathering. The pot-bellied stove was red hot, and the townspeople were sitting around it, their faces long and mournful. They were talking but their voices were low.

He had not expected to find anything like this and he did not pretend to understand it. He had anticipated walking into the church into the midst of Christmas Eve merriment. He had hoped to mingle with these villagers to laugh and talk and caper with them to find the true spirit of Christmas here in the little snowed-in mountain village.

Canderson had been in Mossy Pine before and knew its people well but he had left it two years ago. He al-

ways had intended coming back and he thought that Christmas Eve would be an appropriate time to do so. But he had not expected to find himself suddenly confronted with a mystery.

He shrugged his shoulders as though to indicate that it was all beyond him—the intoxicated man in the church sitting before the dark Christmas tree, and the sad group here. That group impressed him as mournful rather than mourning. There was nothing to indicate that some tragedy had dimmed the luster of the Christmas season.

John Canderson spent no time in idle speculation. It was entirely too cold for him to stand there and make wild guesses as to what had happened. He went around to the front door, kicked some of the snow off his boots, opened the door, and entered.

Every man, woman, and child in the store whirled to face him. Canderson closed the door against the force of the storm and turned to them. They were like so many persons turned to stone. Some of the men were breathing heavily, and in the faces of some was fear.

The newcomer unwrapped his muffler and stepped toward the stove.

"It—it is John Canderson!" a woman cried.

Then everybody spoke, but Canderson noticed that their tones were low, as though they were afraid of being overheard by somebody. The fear did not depart from their faces, either.

One woman got out of a chair and rushed toward him, her face aglow.

"John! I knew that we'd see you again some day!" she cried. "Some of them did not believe, but I did."

"I thank you for that, Margaret," John Canderson said.

It was Margaret Bolen who stood before him, a woman of twenty-seven or so, who lived with an aged aunt and taught the village school.

"How did you get here?" one of the men cried.

"I came from the county seat," Canderson replied.

"But we're snow-bound! We have been for almost a month."

Canderson laughed. "I know it," he said. "Yet, I came. My snowshoes are outside the door. What's the trouble here? I expected to find you making merry, celebrating."

"Tell us about yourself, John," Margaret Bolen put in.

"There is little to tell," he replied. "I have been gone almost two years. I said that I would come back some day—and here I am. I—I wanted to celebrate Christmas with you. I made up my mind that nothing would stop me. And then, Margaret Bolen, perhaps it was you who drew me back. I am not ashamed to say so here before our friends."

"And I am not ashamed to have you say it, John. I—I have missed you so."

"I found out, after I went away, that I loved you, Margaret. But I had nothing——"

"That made no difference to me, John."

"I came to Mossy Pine about three years ago, a whipped man. The world had licked me. I had lost a fortune—my place among people of means and rank. I had made the mistake of keeping love out of my life, because I always had said that I would not think of marriage and a home until I was rich. Then I lost everything, and crept away to die."

"But you did not die, John," Margaret said.

"I did not die!" he said. "You people of this little town took me in, befriended me, felt sorry for me. You nursed me back to health and strength. But you did something far greater than that—you renewed my belief in myself."

"You always believed in yourself," Margaret Bolen corrected. "You were just in poor spirits for a time."

"I told you all that I had been a man

of means and prominence, and that I would be again some day. Some of you did not believe, and I cannot blame you for that. I said that I was going away, to go back into the world and make a fight. But, win or lose, I would come back to see you."

"We are glad to see you, John," Margaret said, her lips trembling. "Whether you have succeeded or failed, we are glad to see you."

"But you must hide, Canderson!" one of the men cried, rushing forward. "If he finds you here——"

"What do you mean?"

"The 'Kalispell Kid,'" the man said.

"The outlaw? What of him?"

"You met him here once, if you'll remember, and rebuked him for profane talk. He almost killed you then. He'd kill you now, the way he feels."

"The Kalispell Kid is here?" Canderson gasped.

"Why do you think we are in the store instead of in the church having our Christmas tree? The Kalispell Kid has killed another man, and the sheriff and a posse were after him. He came down through the woods just as the big snow started. He's been here since. He's running the town!"

"It has been terrible, John," Margaret Bolen said. "He takes what he pleases from the store. He drops into any cabin at any hour and orders a meal cooked. He has a store of liquor somewhere, and drinks all the time."

"Worst of all," another man put in, "we can't have our Christmas tree."

"Why not?"

"The Kalispell Kid never bothered us while we were getting the tree ready," Margaret said. "He just laughed at us and said that it was a lot of foolishness, and that he never had such things when he was a boy."

"Perhaps that is why he is the Kalispell Kid," Canderson commented.

"And to-night we all went to the church and found him waiting. He

drove us across the street and into the store. There would be no Christmas celebration, he told us. He would have the tree and everything on it all to himself. If he caught one of us out of this store before morning, he would shoot to kill, he told us."

Canderson's face was like a thundercloud. "And that is why you are here?" he said.

"Yes, John," Margaret replied. "And you must hide. He will torture or kill you if he finds you here. He will be enraged, for he will think the sheriff can get through, if you can."

"As bad as that?"

"Yes. They are after him this time, John, with the determination to get him. There is a reward of five thousand dollars for him, alive or dead. He shot a mining engineer."

"Hide in the back room, Canderson," the storekeeper said. "I have plenty of blankets, and I'll keep you supplied with food."

"Hide?" Canderson cried. "I expected to have a cheerful Christmas with you. Am I never to have anything in life that I want?"

"You have me, John, if you want me," Margaret Bolen said. "A success or a failure, it is all the same to me. What do you care about the great world, John? Live here in Mossy Pine and be happy! Why, John, I—I'd marry you to-morrow if we could get out to the county seat."

"You mean that, Margaret? If I have come back whipped by the world again——"

"I mean it, John!"

He put an arm around her, held her close, brushed her hair with his lips.

"See here, you two!" the storekeeper interrupted. "We've got to watch out for the Kalispell Kid. He comes sneaking across the street every now and then to see what we are doing. If he finds you here, Canderson, he may——"

The door was hurled open. Into the

room came a blast of snow-charged wind. The door was slammed shut again. The Kalispell Kid was facing them.

His face was red from cold and drink, red and brutal looking. His black eyes glistened, his lips were curled in a sneer. Mean and evil he looked as he stood there, half crouched, blinking in the light.

He brushed the snow off his face with the back of one hand and leered at them. He still clutched a partially filled bottle in the other hand, but now he tossed it upon the counter of the little store and lurched forward as though scarcely able to keep his feet.

The women and children retreated, the latter whimpering with fear. The men, white-faced, held their ground, but made no move. Facing them, the outlaw volleyed oaths. He had the town at his mercy, had held it so for some time. There were no violent men in this town of Mossy Pine, and the Kalispell Kid had his way about things.

"I thought that I heard you cuttin' up in here," the Kid said. "I don't aim for you to be havin' any fun. I been lookin' at your Christmas tree. Lot o' foolishness! Ain't a present on it worth havin'!"

None of them answered him. He staggered forward a few steps, and suddenly saw John Canderson. For an instant the Kalispell Kid looked as though he had seen a ghost. He brushed a hand across his eyes again. Then swift caution came to him.

"You! Canderson!" he snarled. "What are you doin' here? Answer me quick!"

"I came here to spend Christmas with my friends," John Canderson replied.

"How'd you get here? The trails are blocked. If the sheriff is with you——"

"Can't you see that I am alone?" Canderson asked. "I am the only outsider in this room."

The Kalispell Kid seemed to breathe

more easily. He seemed to relax a bit, but he did not forget to be cautious. He opened the door and went out without a word, but was back again instantly. In that black night outside he could not have seen them, had there been a hundred men within an eighth of a mile of him.

"So you came here to spend Christmas, did you, Canderson?" the Kid sneered. "I had a little run-in with you about a couple o' years ago, and I'd have plugged you then if I hadn't been in a hurry to get away."

"Yes; the sheriff was on your heels," John Canderson said. "And he is after you again, I hear."

"Yeh? He won't get me, if he is. He can't get here with the town snow-bound. And when the road is open, I'll be away, up in the hills, before he reaches Mossy Pine."

"I managed to get here," Canderson reminded him.

"Yeh! And it's a sorry thing for you, I reckon!" the Kid retorted. "Now that you're here, I'm sure and certain goin' to have a little fun with you!"

As he finished speaking, he whipped a revolver from a holster beneath his coat, an old-fashioned, sure-fire weapon with several notches cut into the stock. Margaret Bolen shrieked and clung to Canderson.

"So that's why you came trampin' back through a blizzard—love stuff!" the Kalispell Kid sneered.

"Yes," Canderson replied. "I don't suppose that you can understand that, though. You don't know the meaning of love, Kid—of any kind of love. I feel sorry for you!"

"Sorry for me, are you?" the Kalispell Kid asked. "You'd better be feelin' sorry for yourself. Before I get through with you——"

"I never did you a wrong, Kid," Canderson interrupted. "And this is Christmas Eve."

"A lot I care about that!"

"And I haven't a gun on me, Kid. You wouldn't shoot an unarmed man."

"Yeh? Who says that I wouldn't? If you ain't got a gun, that's your fault."

"Well, what are you going to do with me, Kid?" Canderson asked.

The Kalispell Kid did not seem to know exactly. He brandished his revolver and glanced around at the frightened citizens of Mossy Pine, and particularly at Margaret Bolen and John Canderson. His brain seemed busy trying to evolve some new sort of cruelty.

"Kid, you're the same as a dead man," Canderson continued. "You'll either be killed in a fight with a posse or you'll stretch rope after being tried and convicted. But you'll probably die game, Kid."

"When the time comes, which won't be for a good many years!" the Kalispell Kid assured him.

"And you're a gambler, Kid."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You like a game, don't you? With fancy stakes?"

"Want to gamble with me for your life? I reckon that ain't necessary. I'm the boss here. What's to stop me if I decide to shoot you down?"

"Nothing!" said John Canderson. "Except, perhaps, your pride."

"Better talk sense," the Kid hinted.

"It won't sound good, Kid, to have it told that you shot down an unarmed man. Men will say that your weak spot showed at last. They may hint that you were afraid to give me a break."

"Yeh? I ain't afraid o' anything!" the Kalispell Kid declared.

"Whereas, if I shot myself——" Canderson insinuated.

Margaret Bolen gave a little cry of fear, but Canderson silenced her with a gesture.

"What do you mean?" the Kid asked. "If you're tryin' to play some smart trick on me, you'll be sorry!"

"I'll be sorry? When you have sentenced me to death already?" Canderson said, laughing a bit. "Kid, if you simply bump me off here and now, your fun will be over in a jiffy. You won't get much satisfaction out of it."

"I'll be satisfied, all right!"

"And you might have a little fun out of it," Canderson went on to say.

"Talk straight, or I'll plug you right now!" the Kid declared.

"All right! We'll have a little game, Kid. Three hands of draw poker. The man who wins two out of the three—well, he is the winner."

"What about it?"

"If I win, Kid, you can shoot me down."

"If you win? What kind of a game is that? You get shot if you win?"

"Exactly! If I win, you shoot me down, shoot down an unarmed man and earn the curses of everybody in the country. But if you win, Kid——"

Canderson seemed to be unable to continue. Perhaps he was listening.

"What about it?" the Kid snapped.

"If you win, Kid, I shoot myself. Then you can say that I was a coward and committed suicide, and they never can say that you shot down an unarmed man."

Margaret Bolen gave a cry of protest, but once more John Canderson silenced her with a gesture. The Kalispell Kid roared with laughter.

"You fool!— You lose either way!" the Kid cried. "We'll play! But if there are any tricks, I'll open up my artillery on the crowd, and I'll shoot your sweetheart first, Canderson!"

There was a small table a few feet from the stove, and they sat down opposite each other at it. The trembling storekeeper tossed a new pack of cards on the table, and the Kalispell Kid broke the seal, took the cards out of the case, and shuffled them, continuing his laughter, watching alertly those near him. He kept his revolver in front of

him on the table, ready to grasp it at the first sign of treachery.

Canderson cut, and the Kalispell Kid dealt. Canderson discarded and called for two cards. The Kid took two also. For a moment their eyes clashed, and then Canderson spread his hand upon the table. He had three tens.

The Kalispell Kid laughed harshly and tossed his hand into the discard.

"You win the first, Canderson," he said. "It's sure a funny game. If you win the next, I shoot you!"

The men and women of Mossy Pine had crept closer to the table, while the children remained whimpering at one end of the counter. John Canderson shuffled the cards as though this were an ordinary poker game. The Kid cut, and Canderson dealt the cards slowly.

"I'll take three!" the Kid cried. "Sometimes I match these up."

"Two here," Canderson said.

"It'll be expensive for you if you win," the Kid reminded him, laughing raucously. "I never heard tell o' such a game. Heads I win, and tails you lose! I reckon that you're not right bright, Canderson!"

He spread his cards upon the table. He had three kings.

"Sometimes I match 'em up," he said.

"A pair of sevens here," Canderson said, in low tones. "I held up a lucky nine, but I didn't catch. That's a hand each, Kid."

"Yeh! And this next one will tell the story," the Kid replied.

"It will. If I win, you shoot me. If you win, I shoot myself."

"Just a fancy way o' committin' suicide," the Kalispell Kid complained. "You're sure right down eager to make the acquaintance o' the hereafter."

The Kid glanced around the room at the others as he shuffled the cards. He enjoyed the agony that some of these people of Mossy Pine were experiencing. The Kid liked to hurt others.

John Canderson's face was inscrutable, except that it softened for an instant when his eyes met those of Margaret Bolen. Margaret thought that he was trying to flash her a message of some sort, but she couldn't be sure.

Again the cards were dealt, and this time each of the players drew three.

"Time for the result o' the race!" the Kid announced, as he picked up the cards and glanced at them. "What you got, Canderson?"

John Canderson sighed. "Nothing except a pair of aces," he answered.

"You win!" the Kalispell Kid cried, laughing wildly. "Here's my hand. Nothin' better than a pair o' nines in it. You win, Mr. Canderson, and so I reckon I have to shoot you!"

Margaret Bolen gave a cry and sprang forward. She threw her arms around Canderson, and her eyes blazed as they looked into those of the Kid.

"You shan't shoot him!" she cried. "He never did you any harm. You—you beast!"

"After you sayin' that, I reckon that I'll shoot him quick," the Kid retorted. "Canderson, get away from that woman and take your medicine like a man!"

"Suppose—we go outside," Canderson said, his voice a monotone.

"Don't want to mess up the store, huh?" the Kid roared, laughing again. "Don't want your girl to see you shot! Well, I'll do that much, Canderson. Just step outside, and I'll end it quick enough!"

The Kid sprang to the door and prepared to lift the latch. Canderson got to his feet, with Margaret still clinging to him.

"Fight for time!" he whispered to the girl.

She left him and ran to the Kid. She begged, pleaded, and the outlaw merely folded his arms and laughed at her. It pleased him to have a woman beg him for a man's life. It gave him a distorted sense of power.

"You're a right pretty little woman, and I'd like to oblige you," the Kid said. "But a bargain is a bargain. I never did like this hombre. He said a few harsh words to me once because I was cussin' out some old coot who got in my way. I never did like him, and now I'm goin' to take him out into the blizzard and shoot him full o' holes."

"Please let him go," Margaret begged. "Would you commit a murder on Christmas Eve?"

"It's the same as any other evenin' to me," the Kalispell Kid declared. He beckoned to Canderson. "Come along, hombre," he continued. "When I jerk open the door, you go out. I'll be right behind you, and you'll get it mighty quick!"

Canderson braced himself, and the Kid jerked open the door. In came a burst of the storm, a strong gust of wind that carried stinging particles of ice and snow that made the lamps in the storeroom flicker.

And with it came, also, certain men who fell upon the Kalispell Kid while the stinging snow was yet in his eyes, who fell upon him roughly and brutally, wrenching away his revolver, holding him on the floor.

Handcuffs snapped.

"There we are!" said the sheriff, getting to his feet.

The cursing Kid was jerked to his feet also.

"End of your rope, Kid," the sheriff said. "You've shot your last man. But this was a close call for you, I reckon, Mr. Canderson. We were outside, listening, ready to make a move at the right time."

Men and women crowded forward.

"What's it all mean?" the storekeeper cried. "How did you get through?"

"Knew that the Kid was snowed in here," said the sheriff, "and doubted that we could get in after him. Then along came Canderson. You want to tell it, John?"

"Yes," Canderson replied. "I came here once a broken man, broken in wealth and health, and the people of Mossy Pine took me in. Some of them doubted that I ever had been a man of importance, but even those were kind to me. My faith was renewed here. I went back into the world with my sleeves rolled up. And I fought."

"And he won," the sheriff put in. "But you tell it, John."

"Yes, I won. I turned upon the men who had ruined me. I made a new fortune. And I never forgot Mossy Pine. So I thought that it would be a great thing to return on Christmas Eve as a sort of Santa Claus."

"And he got to the county seat and found that Mossy Pine was snowed in," the sheriff took up the story. "He spent money like water and hired a crew of men. He loaded a truck, and we fought to get it through. He and his men tackled drifts, moved mountains of snow——"

"Until we came to within half a mile of the town," Canderson said. "Then I came on ahead, leaving the others to follow with the truck. When the Kid appeared, I knew that it would be necessary to keep him occupied until the men came with the truck. Now we can have a real Christmas. There is a reward of five thousand dollars for the Kid. Sheriff, you and my men will divide that."

"I'll put the Kid in one of the abandoned cabins and let him think of his sins, and I'll be back right soon," the official said.

In some strange manner, John Canderson took command of the situation. He herded the citizens of Mossy Pine across the street and into the log church. His men unloaded the truck after caring for the eight mules that had been hitched to it.

John Canderson's presents to the citizens of Mossy Pine were heaped around the tree. There were presents for all

he had remembered, and extra ones in case somebody had been forgotten.

There were toys for the children, and candy and oranges and nuts such as they never had eaten before. For the men there were tools, warm clothes, batches of fishing tackle, rifles, ammunition. There were dainty things for the women, and some substantial things also, including several sewing machines. John Canderson had brought the kind of presents that the people of Mossy Pine would most appreciate.

Nor was that all. One half the truck was heaped with food—solid, substantial food for the most part, but with plenty of delicacies, too. There were frozen turkeys ready for the oven, geese, suckling pigs, flour, potatoes, canned vegetables. The impoverished village of Mossy Pine was treated to affluence.

"I want everybody in town to have a feast to-morrow," John Canderson said. "And I want somebody to invite me to dinner. Don't all speak at once.

I suggest that the sheriff act as Santa Claus."

The sheriff obliged, and as he commenced his duties John Canderson slipped to one corner of the little church with Margaret Bolen.

"Are you glad that I won out, dear?" Canderson asked. "It isn't only the money, you see, but the satisfaction of renewing self-respect and faith."

"Yes, I am glad," she said.

"Money is a responsibility, Margaret. I have plenty of it, and probably will have a lot more. Much good can be done with it, Margaret. I want some woman to help me handle it, some woman that I love. You said, when you first saw me to-night, that you'd marry me to-morrow if the road to the county seat was open, and we could get out."

"Yes; I—I remember," she said.

"The road is open," John Canderson pointed out.

And the sheriff had to shout at them half a dozen times before he could attract their attention.

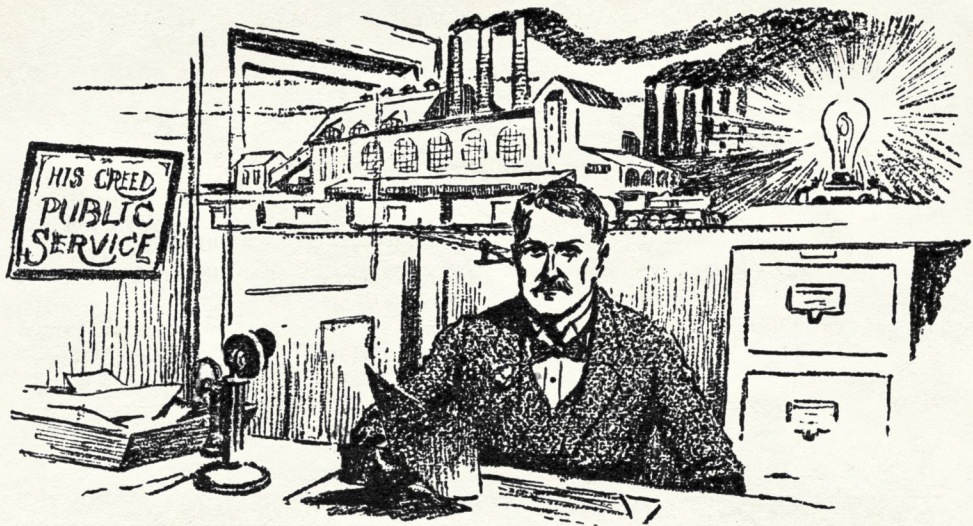


THE METHOD OF A WOLF EXTERMINATOR

IN the struggle that the ranchers and homesteaders of the West endure to keep their domestic animal property reasonably free from the menace of wolves, one Charley Cummins of DeSmet, South Dakota, plays a very prominent part. This wolf-hunter's methods are so effective that he has become something of a celebrity not only in his own but in adjacent States, where farmers suffer losses of chickens and live stock from the coyote. Recently, for instance, Cummins received an invitation to hunt wolves in the sparsely settled ranch country of southwestern Nebraska; and, in a short time spent there, accounted for one hundred and fifty of the varmints. So hospitality in the form of free chicken dinners and the like comes to the wolf killer in greater abundance than he can properly appreciate.

His method is to pursue the offending animal in a specially constructed touring car—a large box built on the chassis taking the place of the rear seat. This box is divided into two compartments, each with barred windows and doors. The doors open by lever from the driver's seat, enabling Cummins to release his large greyhounds while the car is going full speed. The dogs have been trained to the work. And the car has special wheels and balloon tires, which fit it for travel over rough ground.

Cummins allows two dogs to a wolf, and accounts for others with his gun, which he can, if necessary, shoot with his left hand.



Western Pioneers of To-day

(Mr. Creed and His Creed) ^{By} Edward H. Smith

Author of "John Stoughton Dennis, C. M. G.," etc.



A NATIVE of California is Mr. Wigginton Ellis Creed, who was born in Fresno on February 8th, 1877. To-day he is the chief public-utility man of northern California, lumberman, banker, lawyer, steel magnate—in short, one of the genuinely important persons on the Pacific coast.

Wigginton Creed's parents were William Henry and Georgia Ellis Creed. The father was a lawyer and once district attorney of Fresno County. He was never a rich man, nor even more than mildly prosperous, but he occupied the position that lawyers do in smaller communities, irrespective of money or achievement.

When the son was six years old, his parents moved to the larger city of Oakland, and there little Wigginton began his public-school life. In the course of those blissful years of our lives between infancy and manhood, most of us dream of being firemen, soldiers, actors, crossing cops, loco-

motive engineers, circus performers, lion tamers, aviators, bartenders, bandits, and the like. There is, however, no record that Wigginton Creed ever aspired to be anything but a lawyer. He was still a young lad when his father took him to court one day to watch two locally celebrated legal lights fight out a murder case. Between the thrill of that experience and a boy's natural admiration for his father, there was no room left in the mind of young Creed for any occupational vagaries. The law had him from the start.

Thus, as soon as he had won his way out of high school, Creed, junior, enrolled at the University of California in the law school, from which he was graduated with the class of 1898. Not satisfied to hang out his shingle with nothing better behind him than a degree of Bachelor of Laws from a Western school, and unwilling to ask for further contributions from his father, the young graduate went to Fresno and took a job teaching in a grammar

school of which he presently became the principal. The money earned went toward the purchase of law books and the payment of tuition fees.

Creed's standing at the university had been high, and he had been well known to his professors and the authorities of the institution. There is a popular prejudice to the effect that such students usually wind up with small university jobs and lives of futile puttering. In Creed's case it turned out just the other way. Old Darius Ogden Mills, founder of the Bank of California and the great Mills fortune, happened to want a secretary and turned to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler of the university for help. Wheeler recommended Creed, and so the young schoolmaster and Bachelor of Laws went under the expansive wing of Mills and was presently whisked away to New York and shown how the wheels go around in big business.

While in Mills' employ, Creed was able to attend the New York Law School at night. But by day the famous old banker and money baron taught him more of the real inside of the business of success than one can read in all the reports, codes, compiled statutes, and pamphlets on the law shelves. Mills, it will be recalled, had quite a lot of good California gold and thus a finger in many pies, cakes, and other industrial bakings. What the young Mr. Creed didn't find out about the ways in which money is made belongs to the deeper science of cashing in.

Eventually, Darius Mills felt the years heavy upon him and heard the not-too-distant footfall of death. He decided to retire. Not needing a secretary any longer, he determined to place young Mr. Creed where the lightning of opportunity and wealth would be fairly certain to strike him. But Creed had determined on a success of his own, and he meant to have it in the law. Both his achievement and

legal complexes working at full steam ahead, he went back to California and was admitted to the bar. This in 1900.

Now, he might have gone to work in the office of almost any leading light of the San Francisco bar and done that gentleman's deviling for him, but Wigginton Creed wanted to be somebody on his own account. He opened his own law office and made no further concessions to prudence than to form a connection with an older firm headed by the late Louis Titus. It didn't take this older attorney long to see that Creed, besides having had excellent contacts and chances to observe things, was able and energetic and determined. In 1902 Creed was invited into partnership, and his name was added to the firm of Titus & Wright. This association continued until 1907, when the firm became Titus & Creed. In 1915 Titus retired, and the firm became Creed, Jones & Dall. And in 1922, having become one of the most successful corporation lawyers in the State, Mr. Creed retired from the law altogether and went into the utilities business. But this is anticipating.

It was a lawsuit in which the old People's Water Company was engaged that really swung Wigginton Creed out of the law business. On the first of June, 1907, when the younger lawyer's reputation was still in the making, Garret McEnerney, one of the most celebrated attorneys California has produced, walked into Creed's office and said bluntly that he couldn't handle the company's case in the litigation between it and the city of Oakland.

"You're young and strong, and I've recommended that you take my place," said McEnerney. "It's agreeable to the company. How about it?"

This was an extremely complicated piece of litigation, and one that called for much physical energy, and that was why McEnerney, no longer in his vigorous youth, had abandoned it. Worse

yet, it was set for trial in about two weeks. But Creed went at it, and worked night and day studying the case and getting ready for court, preparing for the fight of his life against the experienced and able lawyers of the city. There were some who smiled a little sardonically when they saw this thirty-year-old barrister march in and take the place of the famous McEnerney, but Creed not only won his case, but so favorably impressed his clients that he was a marked man from that day forward.

He had won the case and kept the city from taking over the water company, but that was far from solving the underlying difficulty. The company was overcapitalized, undervalued and going to the financial bowwows. Besides, it had earned the cordial dislike of the cities and citizens it served. It was, in other words, the kind of public utilities company usual to American cities of twenty years ago and still by no means rare. It was out for what it could get.

Accordingly, it was small wonder that the People's Water Company was shortly seeking the lawyer who had saved it from dissolution, begging that he reorganize it, save it, put it on its feet, and, generally, take charge of its affairs. As a result of these entreaties, Wigginton Creed reorganized the company in 1914 and made it over into the East Bay Water Company, taking in a number of smaller companies, and undertaking to supply water to most of the communities on the east shore of the bay, across from San Francisco. Of the new organization, Creed became president in 1915, reserving, however, the right to practice law. Thus he was half in and half out of both the law and the public-utilities business. But he found time to handle both and to put the East Bay Company firmly on its feet, establish it as a paying concern, extend its business, and make its cus-

tomers regard it with less wrath and suspicion.

Here Mr. Creed found himself heir to a situation. California had been, since its early days, the child, the slave, and the appanage of the private interests and the big corporations. The Southern Pacific Railroad, most conspicuously of all, had fairly run the State, acted as a stern and greedy parent to it, bought legislatures, bribed or owned officials, defied public inquiries, ruined all who dared rebel against it, driven men from the State, and run things with a high hand.

What the railroad company hadn't managed and controlled, the Bank of California did. It dominated the State from a financial point of view, and only such men and such business projects as fitted in with its policies and the interests of its owners could get any money with which to proceed.

Below these giant institutions were scores and more of smaller corporations—land companies, lumber companies, navigation companies and, above all, the companies that supplied water, gas, electricity, and transportation to the growing cities of the great Pacific Coast State. Their inefficiency was endless, their greed boundless, their tyranny unendurable.

Finally, the people all up and down the State became heartily sick of corporations, as they did, a little later, of union-labor impositions. There was a general rebellion all along the line; the companies were thrown out of power, the old corrupt reign came to an end, strict and sometimes unfair laws were passed against corporate interests, and many of the businesses that had once carried things with so high a hand were forced into bankruptcy, reorganization, or public ownership.

For a time the companies, not yet fully realizing the depth of the public feeling nor willing to give up their old powers and looting perquisites, tried to

work under cover to achieve the same ends as of yore. There followed the era of wire-pulling of expensive lobbies in the legislature, of heavy donations to the politicians, and all sorts of behind-the-back maneuvers to maintain themselves in their ancient position. The people of the State, once so submissive and timid, had, however, had a permanent change of heart. All this guerilla warfare did the corporations no good, and they were having a hard time to maintain themselves in the face of the demand for State and municipal ownership.

Finally, it dawned on a few of the most sagacious corporation officials that the way around or through the difficulty was to address the people, not the politicians who misrepresented them. Perhaps if one gave the customers some part of what they called for at some sort of reasonable or semireasonable price, it wouldn't be necessary to hire so many lobbyists, runners, lawyers, political fence fixers, and the like. Now, this is an old idea in running a grocery or a butcher shop or a shoe store. But the notion of give-and-take was revolutionary in the utilities business.

Among the first of the officials of the big California companies to realize the hostility of the people to corporations and the need of healing the breach was Wigginton Creed. He understood, as did no one in the West before him, that it would be necessary to give better and more service at lower prices. But he saw also that this alone would not do the work, for the lowering of rates to hostile customers was certain to mean merely a further call for reductions until the companies would be ruined. Some method must be found of reconciling the public-service corporations and their public.

Creed's cure was customer ownership, which has been tried in the East in connection with other kinds of com-

panies. If, reasoned the new head of the East Bay Water Company, he could persuade some hundreds and then some thousands of the people who used his water to buy the stock or the bonds of the company, to become interested in it, to know its problems and needs, he would have just that many boosters among the water-using public.

Also, Creed hired an energetic and able press agent. He would do his lobbying among the people and not among the legislators. To-day the public relations bureau of the Creed corporations has grown into one of the most important branches of the business. The man at the head of it has made himself a leader in civic enterprises. He takes part in all popular movements, he serves on committees, and he becomes acquainted with every one. Through him the people get to know the companies he represents, and they no longer feel like outsiders, about to be devoured by the demon corporations.

To be sure, President Creed installed a capable management of the property, built a new dam and filters, saw that there was plenty of excellent water for the mains of his cities, and put the whole business on an efficient basis, so that much of the former criticism died away of itself. In short, within a few years he turned a decrepit, discredited and hated corporation into a successful, efficient, and popular concern, making more friends and more money every day.

Meantime, other pieces of business had fallen into the hands of this hard-working and straight-seeing young man. His wife was Isabel Hooper, the eldest daughter of one of the pioneer lumber magnates of California. In 1914 old C. A. Hooper had died, leaving no son to take over his lumber mills, timber lands, ranches, and other parcels and varieties of riches. Creed had been elected president of the C. A. Hooper Company and found himself immedi-

ately immersed in a tangle of different and confusing affairs. He was soon engaged in lumbering, banking, steel-making, exporting, farming, and a few minor occupations. At this time he still had his law business to conduct. How he managed to do it all and not neglect any of it is for those to say who can.

And there was worse waiting for him around the corner. His success with the water company had naturally attracted the attention of other utilities concerns that were not flourishing. One of these was the big Pacific Gas & Electric Company. This was a corporation furnishing gas and light and power from hydro-electric plants to San Francisco and most of northern California. It was as unpopular as it was large, and as unwieldy and rickety as it was unpopular. It needed some of Creed's kind of medicine badly. In the spring of 1920 some of the directors of the company, together with bankers and allied business men, approached Mr. Creed and asked him to become president of the Pacific. He thought of the innumerable things he was already doing and declined the honor. A month later the impressive gentlemen were back with fresh urgings and arguments. They told him it was his duty to assume the presidency and thus protect the public and the private ownership as well. There was a great agitation afoot for the public control of the water power of the State, and it would take heroic measures and painful compromises to prevent the people from voting the corporations out of their franchises and fees for good and all. Under these circumstances Mr. Creed accepted.

It is asserted that this required of him some sacrifices, and the facts seem to bear this out. He had no interest in the Pacific Gas & Electric Company. On the other hand, he did have considerable stock in his water company; he had his lucrative law practice,

and he had the affairs of his wife's family. In order to take over the Pacific business and its heavy labors, he had to give up his law practice entirely, practically to desert the water company, and to delegate the Hooper family affairs to the hands of assistants. All these things he did, and in July, 1920, he took over his new job, immediately reorganized his executive and field force, gathered a new personnel about him, and set to work popularizing the Pacific as he had the East Bay. He got rid of waste and inefficiency. He made up an organization that ran smoothly. He put his press department to work, and told the people that they were going to get better service and better rates.

But, once more, the customer-ownership idea was the big thing. The first step, of course, was to advise and encourage users of gas and electricity throughout the company's territory to buy the stock and become partners in the business. Next, a method of popularizing this stock ownership was devised by Creed and his subordinates. They decided to encourage large numbers of their stockholders and of utility users who did not own stock to attend a series of annual meetings, supplemental to the regular and legal stockholders' meeting. These sessions were held at various central points throughout the territory of the corporation. More than thirty meetings were held in the summer of 1921, and nearly twelve thousand persons attended and were entertained. There were addresses by the company officials, reports by the various division chiefs, and music to furnish entertainment.

The customer-ownership idea flourished like the rose. More and more of the preferred and common shares were sold to users of the corporation's commodities until to-day about fifty million dollars of the stock is held by perhaps forty-five thousand individual owners, nine tenths of whom live in California.

So far as restoring the corporation to public favor and general popularity is concerned, this small-stock-ownership plan has been a huge success. There are at least forty thousand people with some voice in the affairs of the State that no longer detest the utilities companies, but, especially after dividend days, actually love at least one of them.

Mr. Creed has, of course, done much more for his company than to publicize and popularize it. He sees the reporters in person whenever there is anything doing, and has the faculty of making himself well liked to the profession, but he also builds, and on a large and promising scale. He has gone in heavily for hydro-electric power development, using the almost boundless water energy of his mountainous State to drive the wheels and light the homes and offices and works of the district.

The Pacific Gas & Electric Company has recently completed its Pit River project near the northern boundary of California, which supplies energy for a two-hundred-thousand-volt transmission line reaching all the way to San Francisco. This line is the longest transmission system on earth at the moment of writing, and it carries the highest commercial voltage on record. Perhaps it is not necessary to explain to the reader that electricity supplied by streams and waterfalls means cheap power to turn the wheels of industry. This is important enough in the East, but in California, where good coal has to be brought from distances at heavy expense, it is a godsend and ought to have the same effect on the development of mills and works that coal had in the older Eastern States.

If Wigginton Creed is doing important constructive work in this field, he has not neglected another, namely, the steel business. Until the most recent years, California and the Far West generally have had to get their pig iron from the Eastern States—hauled great

distances and over mountain ranges by train, or sent roundabout by sea—or it has had to import it from the Orient. This not because there is no iron in the West, but because the fortunate conjunction of coal and iron has been unusual, and there have, accordingly, been no furnaces.

Creed and some others started the Columbia Steel Corporation. Their parent plant was put up at Pittsburg—California, of course—in Contra Costa County, about twenty-five miles from San Francisco. There foreign pig iron has been converted into usable steel castings and forgings. But in 1924 the company opened the first blast furnace in the Pacific coast region at Provo, Utah. In a short time the Provo plant was furnishing large quantities of pig iron to the Western steel and iron works, in successful competition with the Eastern and foreign manufacturers. That was a move that meant a good deal to the independence of the West.

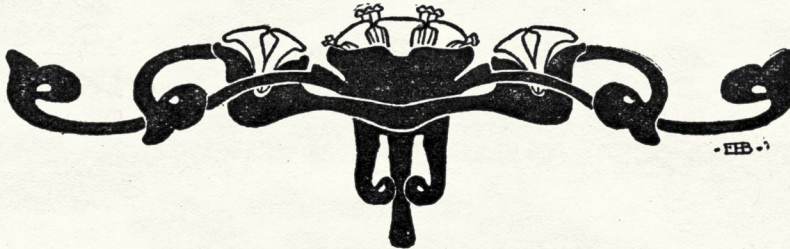
The corporation which Creed founded now has plants at Pittsburg, at Torrance, near Los Angeles, at Provo, and at Portland, Oregon. It makes and distributes pig iron, but it also is engaged in the steel business from ore to the finished article, like the biggest companies in Pennsylvania. So that, in addition to all his other affairs and interests, this lawyer-businessman is also the head of the steel industry in the West.

Mr. Creed, aside from his business activities, is interested in art and in his family. He is especially fond of etchings and is said to be an amateur of no mean taste in his chosen field. He lives with his wife and four daughters in a beautiful home at Piedmont, near Oakland, one of the most charming of the residential towns in all that beautiful section fringing the bay from which the Golden Gate gives into the Pacific. At the age of fifty he is one of the most powerful personages in the West.

As a matter of fact, almost nothing happens in California in which he is not somehow concerned. He has, to be sure, amassed a fortune for himself, which was one of the things he set out to do. On the other hand, he is a businessman of the new order, the new generation, the new understanding. He realizes more clearly than most that the good old days are good and dead, that

the old morals of business have been improved, and that the fortunes of this day are being made by men who give something for the public's money.

It seems supererogatory to add that this man, with his great diversity of activities, his industry building, his power projects, his steel mills, his lumber interests, and all the rest, is one of the present builders of the West.



DISCOVERY OF LOST TRADING POST

AN ancient trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, old Fort Halkett, which was abandoned almost a century ago, has been found. The post has been the object of many fruitless searches for the past forty years. Finally, however, it was discovered by a trapper, John Dalzell, who was aided by a tip from friendly Indians.

An old root cellar gave him the first clew, as he explored the region near the mouth of Coal Creek. He followed a well-defined trail three miles long to a lake, nine miles long by three miles wide. On the south bank of this lake stood an old cabin of squared logs, the windows of which were covered with parchments of caribou skins. Among other things, a quantity of lead for bullet molding was found. The trapper is bringing from the fort interesting mementoes of the past.



AN INDIAN'S BONES

CAVE explorers in Monroe County, Kentucky, have recently unearthed what bids fair to be the largest skeleton of a man ever discovered in Kentucky. This skeleton is more than eight feet in length, according to a measurement of the bones fitted together after being taken from the cave.

The skeleton is in a good state of preservation, and is believed to be that of an Indian. There is, however, the faint possibility of its being the member of an unknown tribe, known to have inhabited that part of Kentucky before the Indian.

The man had been buried on his left side, with his knees drawn close to his body. The skeleton was about three feet under a cave level entrance. About it were scattered a great number of bones.



The Slang Brander

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Injin Trick," etc.

DOG-GONE!" exclaimed Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista pushing his spectacles along his sunburned nose, and adjusting his gaze on an unsigned letter he held in one hand, "here's another one o' them unanimous letters with no signature a-tellin' me to wake up, that devilment is goin' on right under my nose an' I don't know nuthin' about it——"

Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay sighed and looked out the window, catching sight of a passing pedestrian.

"Gee," said Shorty, wistfully, "ef I only had a pair o' trained pups like Horace Stewart out thar, I'd be happy!"

Sheriff Cook was interested in dogs. He raised his eyes and looked over the top of his glasses and scrutinized the passing pedestrian with marked attention for a moment.

"Shucks!" he said, "*that dance hall sheik* got two trained pups. What are they—Gordon setters er——?"

Shorty laughed. "Now, I meant he was a swell dancer, boss!"

"A swell dancer?" questioned the mystified sheriff. "But yuh mentioned he had two trained pups——"

"Sure, I did," said Shorty, "but what I meant by that was that he was a jim-dandy hoofer; that is, he has a pair o' syncopatin' dawgs—dawgs meanin' feet—an' lately, popular slang has changed 'dawgs,' meanin' feet, to 'pups,' meanin' the same thing—so a feller with a pair o' trained pups is a guy with nimble gunboats—er jazz hounds as some say."

The sheriff thumped on the desk with a closed fist.

"Syncopatin' dawgs—trained pups—gunboats!" he exploded, angrily. "Popular slang! Slang! How I hate slang! Nuthin' but slang, slang, slang, an' a feller has to be two-thirds crazy to get the drift o' most o' it. Goodness knows I been a-studyin' up on it—to the pool room, to the depot, an' to the livery stable—but I'll be blamed ef I kin figger——"

"Tingle-ling-a-ling!" went the telephone.

"Yes," said the sheriff, picking up the receiver, "yes, this is me! This is me, I said!"

There was a moment's pause.

"This is the sheriff hisself talkin'," yelled Cook louder, "what is it yuh want—eh—talk up, talk up!"

Another pause.

"Yuh say does I know about them four hosses gettin' struck by lightnin' over in Larry Spect's pasture?" repeated the sheriff. "Why, yes, I does—what about it?"

The sheriff frowned darkly.

"Yes, I read in the paper about them five mules over to Brookview farm gittin' kilt by lightnin', too, but what——"

Another pause while the voice at the other end buzzed.

"Yes, I know the lightnin' has been killin' off a lot o' stock in the Monte Vista district this year, sure—but what about it?" persisted the worried sheriff. "Yes, mostly hosses an' mules, I admits, but what——"

The voice on the other end grew more confidential.

"*What?*" boomed the sheriff.

The voice repeated its whispers.

"Yuh say fer me to investigate the lightnin'?" cried the sheriff, his eyes widening. "*Investigate the lightnin'?* Why, man, what do yuh mean? Lightnin' always kills hosses an' mules this time o' year! Should be stopped, yuh say? Up to me to stop it, yuh say? I kin ef I want to, say? Why, lissen, brother, are yuh drunk or are yuh plumb nuts? Stop the lightnin'— say, *who is this talkin', anyhow?*"

The sheriff gasped at the answer to his question.

"Who?" he repeated, in unbelief.

He got the name again.

"*Mr. All Wet?*" cried the sheriff, while a hot red flush spread over his leathery face. "*Mr. All Wet?* Say,

brother, fer two thin dimes I'd slap yuh in the jail house!"

Bang went the receiver.

The sheriff glared at Shorty.

"Some fresh bird, callin' hisself Mr. All Wet, wantin' me to check up on all this lightnin' killin' stock!" boomed the peeved sheriff. Tryin' to kid me, the crazy galoot! Thar's some more slang fer yuh! I may not be up on a lot o' it, but I knows what all wet means, an' I'd be good an' all wet ef I went investigatin' lightnin' an' snoopin' on the rain an' probin' thunderstorms an' checkin' up on wind clouds—I should oughter have told that smart Aleck to call the weather bureau in Denver!"

"Mebbe——" began Shorty, slowly.

"This letter," said the sheriff, getting back to the subject he had started some minutes before, "is the third we has got here this month tellin' us about somethin' goin' on illegal an' us not knowin' it," said Sheriff Cook, "an' it's got me worried, but I'm beginnin' to see daylight."

"Yeh?"

"Yep, I'm beginnin' to smell a rat," said the sheriff, "an' I did it all by myself, ef I do say so. We know thar ain't no rustlin', an' no robbin', an' no murderin', an' no bootleggin' goin' on, but *what do we know about that strange hombre down to the Lone Spruce Hotel, eh?*"

Shorty gulped.

"Why, he's from Denver——" he began.

"*That* don't make him no angel," barked Cook. "I figger he's the nigger in the woodpile we gotta watch."

"Fer what?" asked Shorty.

"Fer anything," said the sheriff, waving the letter. "This hombre what is sendin' us these letters o' warnin' may know this stranger is a crook, an' up to some slickerin' biz here in Monte; I figgered that out myself, an' I'm goin'——"

Shorty was apparently troubled.

"But this Mr. All Wet has telephoned—" he began.

The sheriff gave Shorty a withering look. Was it possible that the practical joker, All Wet, had impressed his dumb deputy, the sheriff wondered, and he wondered out loud, so that Shorty flushed with humiliation. Then the sheriff devoted ten minutes to branding slang with its proper brand. Then he scolded Shorty for falling for such gags as Mr. All Wet had attempted to put over, and then he issued an order to his deputy.

"Go over to the Lone Spruce Hotel!" he commanded, "an' keep an eye on that stranger, Bruce Rustin, as he calls hisself, until I comes an' relieves yuh; from now on, seein' we got this third warnin', we shadders that Rustin until we finds out just what he's up to in this town! He ain't cracked nuthin' to nobody an' that looks bad! Yuh git me, Shorty?"

Shorty nodded his head.

"I got yuh, boss!" he declared.

So Shorty strolled over to the Lone Spruce Hotel. His mind, however, was far from his business. He kept thinking of lightning and the man who had called Sheriff Cook up and given his name as Mr. All Wet. That was funny! It was more than funny, it was peculiar. The more Shorty thought about it the more he scowled. He was deep in thought when he entered the hotel and he planted himself in an easy-chair to think some more after he entered the lobby. Finally he went to the telephone booth, entered, and then emerged without making a call. His eyes were brighter now. His scowl had vanished. He sought out Max Hines, the proprietor of the hotel, and asked where he could locate Bruce Rustin, the mysterious guest.

"Is he a bad aigg?" asked Max, anxiously.

"I—waal—I dunno," said Shorty vaguely.

"Huh!" grunted Max. "I suppose he'll be skippin' out without payin' his bill ef I don't watch close; waal, thar he is over thar under that palm—in the chair—an' by the way, that palm——"

"Yes?"

"That palm cost me four dollars and eighteen cents, freight an' all, from Denver, only las' March," said Max. "Yuh don't suppose that feller is a sneak thief, do yuh? I gotta watch that palm——"

Shorty sat down where he could keep his eyes on Rustin, and while he did keep his eyes on the man he didn't keep his mind on him. He kept thinking of that lightning and Mr. All Wet, and his scowl came back. Eventually—after ten or fifteen minutes of fidgeting—Shorty got up and approached the stranger, Rustin, and asked him for a match. Then he sat down beside him, on the arm of the chair, and remained there for all of three minutes. After that Shorty got up hastily and left the hotel lobby with rapid strides.

Two minutes later the stranger, Rustin, jumped to his feet with an exclamation and made for the desk where Max Hines was sitting, watching him sourly. The stranger was excited, it seemed.

"Who was that bird I was jus' talkin' to?" he asked Max.

"Why—who—what bird?" countered Max, clumsily.

"That feller was jus' in here!" cried Rustin.

"Why, I didn't see no feller," lied Max, smoothly, but the stranger suddenly reached over and grabbed him by the coat lapels.

"Out with it, yuh snake!" whooped the stranger, who was plainly annoyed. "Spit it out! Yuh saw him! Yuh know him! Now who was he? Answer me that before I get real mad."

Max shivered in the man's grasp.

"That was Shorty," he said, chokingly.

"Shorty who?"

"Shorty McKay!"

"An' who is Shorty McKay?"

"He's—he's the deputy sheriff!" gasped Max.

The stranger released the grip on the hotel man's coat. His eyes went wide as saucers. His face twitched strangely.

"A deputy sheriff, eh?"

"Yep," said Max, regaining his composure.

"Sure o' that?" asked the stranger.

Max was angry now. It was seldom a guest tried such rough tactics on him and got away with it. This man had been rough. Further, Max had just had his coat pressed, price fifty cents, and this hombre had jerked it all out of shape.

"Yes, I'm sure that he's a deputy sheriff," said Max, with a glinty look at the stranger, "an' I'm also sure, too, brother, that he'll nab yuh ef yuh so much as look twice at that palm—it cost me four dollars and eighteen cents, freight an' all, from Denver, las' March, to say nuthin' o' the value o' my time in waterin' it since, day in an' day out, week in an' week out."

The stranger grunted and turned away disgustedly.

Meanwhile, Shorty McKay had not lost any time in getting to the Elite Livery barn, where he kept his saddle pony. He was mounted and off in a hurry, thereby utterly disregarding the sheriff's late orders that he hang around the Lone Spruce Hotel and keep his eye on the suspicious stranger. Shorty spurred out of town and took the West Alameda road, riding hard for Larry Spect's pasture southwest of town. It was there, Shorty recollected, that Mr. All Wet had mentioned the lightning striking four horses, in his conversation over the telephone with the sheriff. Somehow, Shorty was more

interested in that lightning business than he was in watching strangers in hotel lobbies. He made Larry Spect's place in no time at all, and found Larry himself at the ranch house.

"Heard yuh lost some stock by lightnin'?" said Shorty.

Larry nodded, with a long, woe-begone face.

"Four hosses—heavy work stock!" he grunted.

"Whar was they?" asked Shorty.

"Down thar," said Larry, pointing, "wanta see 'em?"

Larry led Shorty down a willow-lined lane, over a bubbling creek, and into a far pasture. There, at the far end, near a knot of stately cottonwoods, were the bodies of four dead horses. Shorty shook his head and approached closer to look them over. The hides were burned in spots and there were traces where flames had licked out through the tall dry grass to all sides. Shorty shook his head again.

"Lightnin' bad this year?" he asked.

"Sure is," said Larry, miserably; "them hosses was worth two hundred dollars apiece to me jus' now, too."

"Insured?" asked Shorty.

"Yea, fer half their value—four hundred dollars," said Larry.

Shorty departed from Spect's place soon afterwards. He rode over to Jim Doyle's place, next door, and asked Jim if he had suffered any lightning losses. Jim said he had. Two brood mares had perished in the thunderstorm the day before, at the same time, approximately, that Spect had lost his four work horses. Shorty rode on. He visited place after place, astounded at the great loss of horses by lightning. His eyes grew narrower and narrower, as he went on. At last he turned down a shady lane that led to a deserted farmhouse. He was grinning broadly now as if at some huge joke, then he happened to think of Sheriff Joe Cook, and

his face sobered instantly. What would the sheriff say if—

There wasn't much doubt what the sheriff would say when he found out that Shorty had disobeyed orders. As a matter of fact, the sheriff was saying it right at that precise moment back in the Lone Spruce Hotel lobby at Monte Vista. He was leaning over the hotel counter, muttering deep grumblings on the shortcomings of his deputy, while Max Hines, the hotel man, was rapidly giving him an earful of news.

"Ya, Shorty watched him fer about six minutes," Hines was panting, "an then he goes over an' seems to git chummy with him an' then he beats it, fast, an' purty quick the stranger jumps up an' comes over, demandin' who in heck that feller was that just went out? I pretends to play dumb, tryin' to avoid exposin' Shorty as a officer, but this Rustin hombre he ain't easy to handle. Fust thing I knows he's leaned over an' got both paws on me, threatenin' to shake me to tatters ef I don't answer, so I answers—I tells him—"

"Huh!" said the sheriff, "an' Shorty never come back?"

"He never come back," affirmed the hotel man, "an' that was plenty long time ago, too. I've been scared stiff all the time since because that stranger, Rustin, has been settin' over thar mumbly to hisself, bitin' his finger nails, tuggin' at his collar, an' actin' dog-gone suspicious—"

"Yeh?"

"Yeh! But I got him figgered out," said the hotel man, "he's a dang sneak thief, that's what! I know what he's here fer, too. He's here to steal that palm plant I got in Denver las' March, sheriff, at a hull cost o' four dollars and eighteen cents, what with freight an' all, not to mention my time every day since waterin' an' lookin' after it generally—"

"Yuhr palm?" demanded the sheriff.

"Sure, that's it!" said the hotel keeper, stoutly. "After Shorty left so fast I accused that hombre o' aimin' to steal my palm, an' it just knocked him speechless, that's all. His face went white and then went red! Ef I ever saw a guilty pusson it's him; yuh better take him inter custody, sheriff."

Sheriff Cook nodded his head thoughtfully.

"Ain't nuthin' goin' on in Monte Vista but *this* bird," he said, looking at the stranger seated in the chair beneath the palm, "an' these here unanimous letters with no names signed to 'em that I've been gittin' says *thar is somethin' goin' on* right under my nose—it must be him—ef yuh're dead sure, Max, that he was aimin' to get yuhr property."

Max straightened his shoulders.

"I saw him lookin' hard at that palm yesterday!" he said.

The sheriff unbuttoned his coat, so that he could go for his gun with greater ease and speed if the occasion demanded. He stalked toward the fidgeting stranger in the chair beneath the four-dollars-and-eighteen-cents palm. The hotel man followed.

"Howdy, stranger!" said the sheriff.

The man who had registered as Bruce Rustin looked up.

"An' who in heck are *yuh*?" he asked peevishly.

The sheriff flashed his star from his vest.

"I'm sheriff here," he said, gruffly, "an' I've come to talk to yuh, brother, on a little matter o' importance. Who are yuh, sir, an' what's yuhr idear in castin' covetous eyes on this here hotel palm?"

"*Palm*?" roared the stranger, "yuh talk about palms when—when—"

The sheriff's heavy hand fell on his shoulder.

"Brother, yuh come along with me," began Sheriff Cook, but at that moment there was a commotion at the

entrance. Shorty and two men entered hurriedly. One man was Larry Spect. The other man was a stranger. At sight of Shorty, Rustin, the man that Sheriff Cook had just arrested, let out a wild whoop.

"Yuh—yuh—yuh thief!"

Shorty grinned at the charge, reached into his pocket and drew out a black bill fold, which he tossed to Rustin.

"Yuh'll have to pardon me, Mr. Rustin," said Shorty, "I had to do it. Yuh see, I'm deputy sheriff here, an' yuh was under suspicion, an' I had to get the dope on yuh. I asked yuh fer a match, an' then came close an' pretended I was tryin' to sell yuh a bottle o' booze while I plucked yuhr wallet outa yuhr pocket. I had other business up the road in a hurry, so I examined that wallet on the way out—found yuhr papers an' credentials—I apologize."

"Well!" said Rustin.

"What in——" began the sheriff.

"Mr. Rustin is all right, boss," said Shorty, easily, "he's an insurance man from Denver up here on a little business matter, that's all. I read his private papers an' know it's the truth. Yuhr suspicions on him was all wrong, boss, but I got the goods on somebody else—this Larry Spect here."

The sheriff looked at Larry and started when he saw that Larry's wrists were braceleted with Shorty's handcuffs.

"Larry here," said Shorty, proudly, "is the man Mr. Rustin is lookin' for, I reckon! Larry has lost a lot o' hosses by lightnin' lately, an' they was all insured, an' Larry has been collectin' on 'em. Larry went around the country buyin' hosses cheap an' leavin' 'em whar he bought 'em, to get 'em later, but before he could return fer 'em, lightnin' got 'em. However, he had already insured 'em, so——"

The sheriff choked.

"Lightnin', yuh say?" asked the

sheriff. "Shorty, yuh been investigatin' lightnin', like that bird All Wet said.?"

"Yes," said Shorty, "an' I arrested Larry fer fraud. I found out from Mr. Rustin's papers that the insurance company was suspicious o' all Larry's losses. But I was wise to the lightnin' biz before I—borrowed—Mr. Rustin's wallet. I had looked in the telephone book in the hotel booth here, see? So I started fer Larry's, after stealin' Rustin's wallet. Larry thought he was pretty cute. He had a good game. He bought hosses cheap, insured 'em fer more than their value, an' then, blooey, lightnin' struck! But this is the way it struck! Larry got an ol' inner tube out of a big truck tire an' vulcanized one end o' it air-tight, makin' a sort o' rubber bag which he slipped over the hosses' heads. They smothered to death, o' course, leavin' no mark o' violence. Then he took a blow torch an' burned little spots in their hides, like whar lightnin' had struck; then he burned little patches o' grass around the bodies, to make it look all the more like lightnin'."

The sheriff took one look at Larry's guilty expression and he realized that Shorty surely had the goods on Larry.

"But—but yuh say yuh got all *that* dope outa the telephone book?" cried the sheriff.

"Indirectly," said Shorty, grimly. "Yuh see Larry *did* have a purty good game, seein' we have had a lot o' thunderstorms lately. Mr. Rustin here was down investigatin' Larry an' Larry's losses, but he didn't get no place, seein' that Larry had really fixed things so it looked like lightnin' was to blame."

"Correct!" spoke up Rustin, crisply.

"But Larry wasn't so bright after all," said Shorty, "fer a couple o' times while he was killin' his stock to make it look like lightnin' had done the job, he was seen workin' with a blow torch an' the inner tube. The man who seen

him got suspicious, o' course, but didn't like to make no charges. He was a stranger in these parts, an' didn't know yuh, sheriff, nor me, so he wrote yuh some letters, tryin' to tip yuh off in a vague sort o' way without actually spillin' the beans."

"So?" said Sheriff Cook.

"Yes," said Shorty, "but the letters didn't do no good. So this mornin' he got his nerve up—this feller I'm speakin' o' did—an' he called yuh up, mentionin' that lightnin' business right out. Yuh got mad an' thought he was kiddin' yuh. Yuh asked him who he was an' when yuh thought he said 'Mr. All Wet' yuh figgered it was some more o' this slang biz an' hung up, but——"

The sheriff took off his hat.

"But the telephone book, Shorty," he said, "what had that to do with all this exposure?"

"Easy," said Shorty, "I got to thinkin' about this Mr. All Wet business. I looks in the telephone directory an' I finds a name 'Mr. Earl Watt', listed for the old Two B rancho. I went over thar to-day an' sure enough, he's ther feller that telephoned yuh. He admitted

it quick enough, told me about what he had seen Larry doin', an' so I arrested Larry an' brung him in——"

The sheriff looked at the stranger who had come with Shorty and Larry. The stranger was smiling broadly.

"An' who is this man?" asked the sheriff.

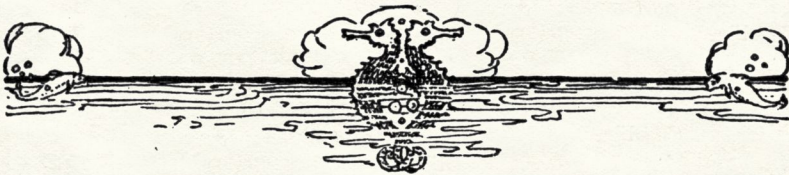
"Why," said Shorty, "that's Mr. Watt, Earl Watt, boss, the man yuh thought said he was 'Mr. All Wet.'"

The sheriff ingratiatingly stuck out a huge hand.

"Shake, brother," he said, "I'm glad to know yuh. I guess ef thar's anybody all wet around here, as the old slang phrase goes, it must be me."

"It's *me*," wailed Max Hines, the hotel man, breaking in, "it's *me* that's all wet! Here I was worryin' about that four-dolla-r-and-eighteen-cents palm o' mine gettin' stole an' I plumb fergot that I had it insured fer ten whole bucks—shucks, I would o' made money ef it had been stole!"

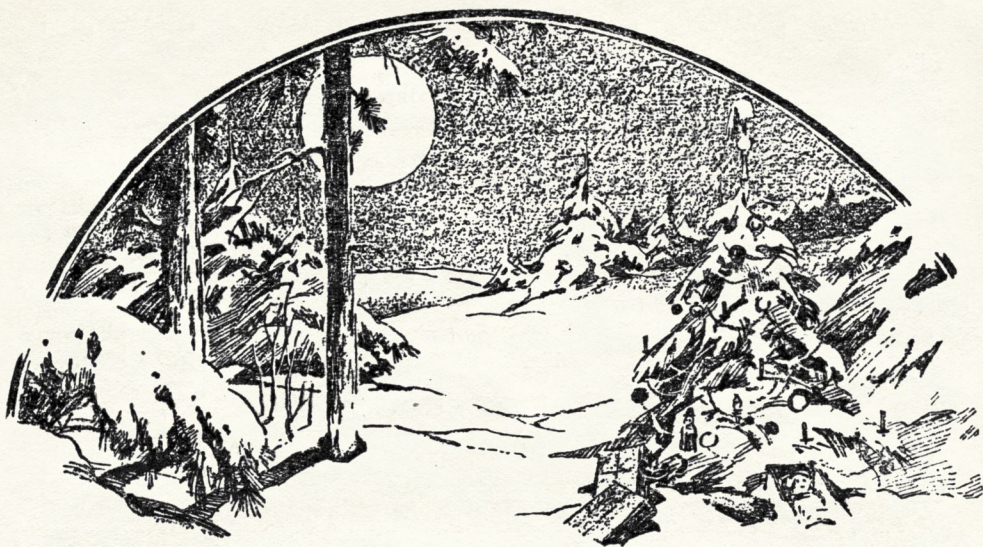
Rustin, the insurance investigator, scowled at Max, and made a mental note of Max's statement. Just let Max ever try to *collect* insurance for that miserable palm.



THE PINE CONE INDUSTRY

RESIDENTS of Wood County, Wisconsin, and various adjacent sections of the State have discovered what bids fair to be—during the proper season—a very lucrative industry. Pine cones, just ripened and in which the frost has not killed the seeds, are shipped in large quantities to various Sturgeon Bay nurseries, which for years have been doing a large business in sending cones to the Eastern States as well as to various European countries. There the cones are used in seeding tracts for reforestation.

The price obtained for the work is relatively large, although the work itself is not without its element of danger. The hazard arises from the fact that one has to climb a tree and shake the cones to the ground, where a fellow workman gathers them up and puts them into sacks for shipping.



“Surly Pete” Plays Good Saint Nick

By D. C. HUBBARD

“SURLY PETE,” of the Ranch Bar C,
Dug his heel in the ground,
Muttering curses under his breath
For he had to go to town.

The boss' daughter, Mrs. Case,
Was due on the train at noon
To spend the Christmas holiday
With her dad, and bringing June.

June was her little, brown-eyed girl,
She'd been to the ranch last year
Before the advent of Surly Pete,
The man who had no cheer.

Hands were short on the Ranch Bar C,
Times were not easy and so,
None of the others could well be spared.
That's why Pete was asked to go.

“Be sure to stop at the store,” they said,
“And pick up the parcels there,
Christmas stuff for the boss and us,
And grub for to-morrow's fare.”

As his team broke into a gallop,
The punchers waved adieu.
“Now, don't fergit to be perlite,”
They cried as he rode from view.

Arrived in town, Pete tied his steeds
And found that the train was in;
But what he met at the station
Filled him with deep chagrin.

Standing alone on the platform,
A doll tucked under her arm,
Stood little five-year-old June Case,
Her brown eyes filled with alarm.

“Mummy had to go back,” she said,
“Auntie was taken ill,
So I came on here all alone.
Can you be my Uncle Bill?”

“Nope, I'm just Pete,” his voice went low,
And his smile was not very gay.
He seemed to see his own small child—
And the wife who had run away.

As often little children will,
She put up a trusting hand,
Slipped it into his knotty one
With a look of, “I understand.”

“To-morrow's Christmas, Pete,” she said,
“Will we have a Christmas tree,
Covered over with shiny things,
With presents for you and me?”

Surly Pete didn't answer her
As he clucked for the team to start.
“Too much fuss made over these kids.”
The old wound began to smart.

Perched on the high, uneven seat,
Her voice rose above the noise,
Asking Pete about Santa Claus;
Hoping he'd bring her some toys.

Pete was forgetting to listen,
His practiced gaze scanned the sky.
The long-delayed snow was coming—
If only his team could fly.

Hoping he might beat the snowstorm,
At least to a place they could hide,
Pete gave a glance of discomfort
At the patient child by his side.

Just as they reached some green fir trees,
Down came the snow in a whirl;
There in the shelter they waited,
Pete, and the tired little girl.

Wrapping her snug in a blanket,
Clumsy, but tender, 'tis true,
Trembling with fear for the future,
Wondering how they'd get through.

On came the snow with a fierceness,
Blotting the landscape with white;
Glad was old Pete for the fir trees,
Since here they would spend the night.

"I'm sure that Santa won't miss me,
I've been very good for a year.
I know when he drives out to granddad's
He'll look down and see us right here."

Nonsense, thought Pete in derision,
This Santa Claus stuff is a joke.
Falling asleep by his fire,
'Twas one o'clock when he awoke.

The fury of snow had abated,
A clear moon shown down on the pair—
Old Pete and the child who expected
Saint Nick to surely stop there.

Pete knew the boys at the bunk house
Had started a search hours ago,
But it might be late in the day
'Fore they could plow through the snow.

The kid would be disappointed,
Her brown eyes would fill with tears
To find that Santa had missed her;
This was the worst of his fears.

Pete was ashamed of his feelings.
"I'm soft," he said, with a grin,
"Actin' jest like an ol' woman,
Me—allus cranky as sin."

Morning came early to June, who
Awaked with a happy cry,
Spellbound she gazed at the object,
The beauty which greeted her eye.

There stood a tree in the clearing,
Slender and straight as a queen,
Glis'ning with snowflakes and tinsel,
Bearing a proud, regal mien.

Over a space from the fir tree,
Roaring and blazing up high,
Pete had a great fire glowing,
Sending sparks up to the sky.

"Wasn't I right about Santa?"
June called out in childish glee.
"Come, Pete, let's open the presents,
See what he's left you and me."

"He only left presents for you,"
Said Pete, trying hard to smile,
"And a few for the bunk-house boys,
I looked at 'em back there a while."

"I'm sure he wouldn't forget you
When you've been so good to me,"
Said June in a voice that wavered,
"Let's look again, Pete, and see."

Just then came a loud, "Merry Christmas!"
The Bar C boys circled about
Led by "Big Danny," their foreman.
"Three cheers for Pete!" was their shout.

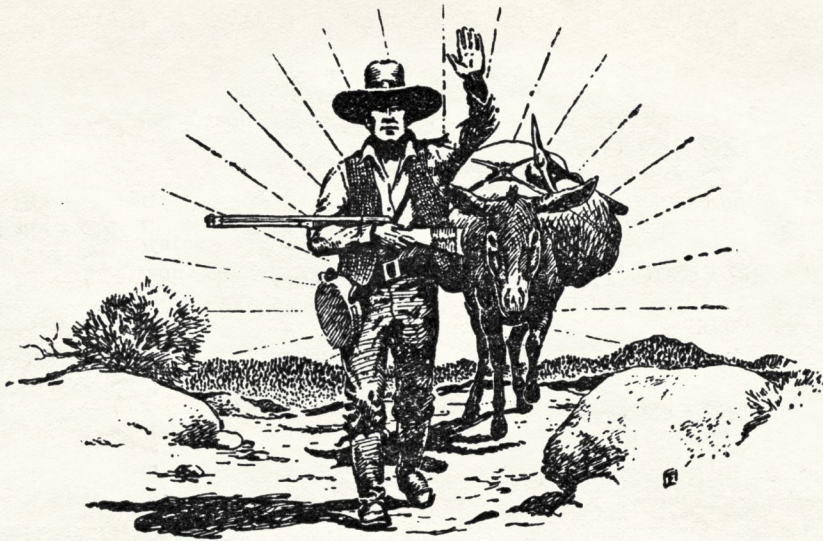
Then, June stole up to the foreman.
"I think there is some mistake.
Did Santa leave it with granddad,
Something for Pete—pie or cake?"

"You just bet granddad's got something
For Pete when he brings you back
And hears how he stopped old Santa
And got him to leave his pack."

Danny was right, for the boss said,
Pete never need to roam.
As long as he wanted to stay,
The Ranch Bar C was his home.

All day June stayed by her hero,
And Pete was pleased as could be;
He who had left behind laughter,
Drew cheer from a Christmas tree.





Miner's Potlatch

BY J. A. Thompson

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE desires this department to be of real assistance to all who are interested in the practical side of mining. Questions pertaining to field conditions, mining equipment, mining territories, mining laws, prospecting and general geology will be answered.

Address all communications to J. A. Thompson, mining expert, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE use of timber in the support of mine workings and the underground exploration of mineral-bearing veins has already been discussed in this department. Mention has been made of methods other than timbering which are common practice in subsurface support of mine workings, but they have not previously been treated in detail.

Aside from the employment of timber, pillars of ore or waste rock constitute one of the most important forms of mine support. Pillars were, naturally enough, one of the first forms of support used. Except when their use means curtailment of the mine output, or when natural pillars are not strong enough to hold up the workings, they present the most obvious and

economical means of support obtainable. Apart from the loss of valuable mineral sometimes involved, the chief objection to pillars is that it is difficult to insure their proper formation and location. To obtain the maximum benefit from any type of support it is necessary that the supports be symmetrically and systematically placed. This is difficult in the case of natural pillars. Either rich ore occurs where a pillar should be, or some irregularity in the vein requires a shifting of the location of the pillar, and the result is a seriously irregular system of supports.

Another disadvantage of pillars is the dangerous habit they foster of gradually cutting away the mine's supports to secure a few more tons of ore. This

habit, if indulged in to extremes, leads to an alarming and dangerous condition underground. In moderately inclined deposits, pillars may stand from twelve to fifteen feet high. Normally, their diameter may be from fifteen to twenty feet. Yet cases have been observed in which the pernicious cutting away has reduced the diameter to three or four feet at the middle. Pillars in this condition soon deteriorate under the enormous stress thrust upon them, and develop vertical cracks, often extending to the whole height of the support.

Another form of mine support that is widely used, and in keeping with the modern industrial trend of utilizing waste to advantage, is the system of filling worked-out slopes with waste rock. Variations of the filling method are rapidly being extended and are successfully employed in many mines throughout the country. Broken ore is also frequently used as a filler, for reasons of efficiency as well as for economy of support. Where this type of filler is used, the ore is broken in the underground excavations or stopes, but is not drawn off, except as is necessary to afford room for the working of the mine. In broken ore, there is a thirty-to-forty per cent increase in volume, and it is evident that some of the ore must be drawn off after every round of shots fired, to give room for subsequent work at the ore face. That portion of the ore not drawn off may be allowed to remain in the mine, forming an ore reserve.

Briefly, the advantages of using broken ore as an underground support are: 1. A large force of men may be employed in breaking ore. 2. Less danger from falls of rock, owing to the rapidity of working along the ore body. 3. Easy control of production and uniform output. Furthermore, work at the face of the deposit is facilitated. The ore serves as a platform on which the drills may be mounted, and, while stored in the stopes, it acts as a support for

the workings, reducing or completely eliminating support that would otherwise be essential.

The widespread application of the use of waste fillers as support is an authentic indication of how well received that method has recently become in sound mining practice. There are three main sources of waste. Waste may be secured from the actual mining operations, being sorted from the ore, or obtained from portions of the walls that have to be broken down in cutting out the ore. Waste rock may be secured from special excavations cut into the vein walls. Materials from open cuts on the surface, or tailings may also be utilized. The first source mentioned is perhaps the most important, as comparatively little labor is required in placing the waste in the excavation to be supported.

This is particularly the case in instances where but a small part of the ore vein is valuable, and the majority of the vein content can advantageously be used as filling.

The use of waste chutes is a common method of getting waste from the surface to any portion of the mine desired. Where underground excavations have been made solely for the purpose of securing waste, great care must be taken to prevent cave-ins, which lead to disastrous results and may start because of weakening due to the excavation, unless the ground rock is particularly strong.

One of the disadvantages of the use of fillings for support in place of natural pillars or timber is the tendency of the filling to become loose and to flow under pressure. Moreover, shrinkage of the filling at times causes serious trouble by disturbing the whole workings of the mine.

Under skilled supervision, indirect methods of support are sometimes resorted to. A natural arch formed by intentionally caving ground may fre-

quently be employed to good advantage in the temporary support of some workings. By thus arching the roof, or hanging wall, it is often possible to hold it with practically no artificial support. Naturally, the character of the rock formation is the governing factor in determining the feasibility of this type of support. Some formations will stand with comparatively long spans and low arches, whereas others are so weak that they will not hold up even under short spans and high arches. The famous Homestake and Alaska-Treadwell Mines are often cited as successful instances of the use of arching for support in strong formations.

To L. P., Brooklyn, New York, G. B. H., El Paso, Texas, and others who have inquired about the recent regulations for the prospecting and leasing of potash deposits in the United States:

The General Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C., has issued regulations covering potash-mining leases and prospecting permits under the act of February 7th, 1927, "To promote the mining of potash on the public domain." In the regulations it is stated that a prospecting permit will be granted for not more than twenty-five hundred and sixty acres of public lands. As a reward for discovery of potash thereon within two years, the permittee will be issued a mining lease.

Part of the text of the regulations is printed herewith: "Permits may be issued to (a) citizens of the United States, (b) an association of such citizens, (c) or a corporation organized under the laws of any State or territory thereof.

"A permit may be issued for not more than twenty-five hundred and sixty acres of public lands of the United States in reasonably compact form, by legal subdivisions if surveyed; if unsurveyed, by metes-and-bounds description. The permit will confer upon the

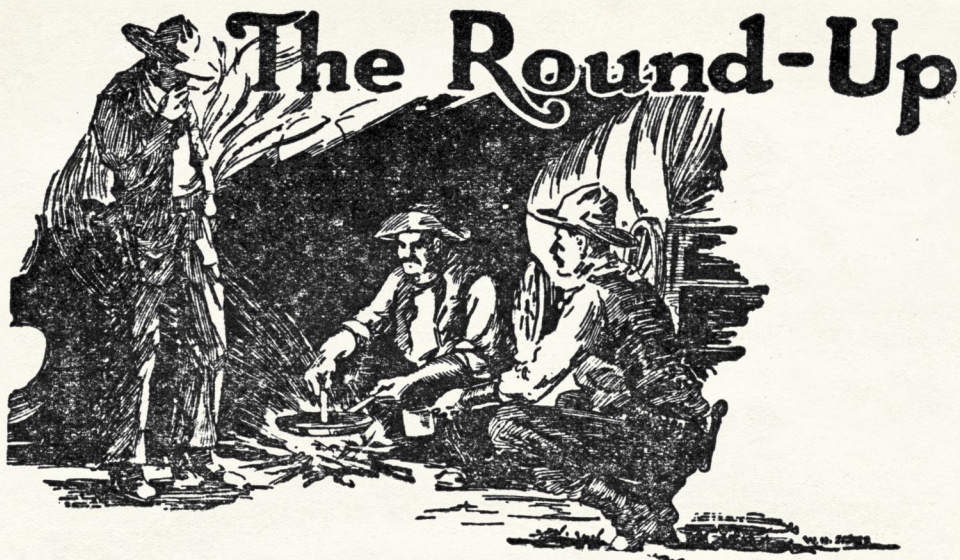
recipient the exclusive right to prospect for chlorides, sulphates, carbonates, borates, silicates, or nitrates of potassium on the lands embraced therein. In the exercise of this right the permittee shall be authorized to remove from the premises only such material as may be necessary to experimental work and the demonstration of the existence of such deposits or any of them in commercial quantities.

"A permittee who shows that he has made a discovery of valuable deposits of potash within the area of the permit and within the two-year period for which it is issued, is entitled under Section 2 of the Act to a lease of any or all of the land embraced in the permit containing such deposits and chiefly valuable therefor, the area to be taken in compact form.

"The lease will be issued at such royalty and acreage rental as may be fixed pursuant to Section 3 of the Act. A discovery of a valuable deposit of potassium shall be construed as the discovery of a deposit which yields commercial potassium in commercial quantities.

"Under authority of Section 3 of the Act, unless otherwise specified in the permit when issued, a permittee who makes the first discovery in any district and becomes entitled to a lease will be granted a lease at the minimum royalty of 2 per cent of the quantity or gross value of the output of potassium compounds and other related products, except sodium, at the point of shipment to market, and at the minimum rental of 25 cents per acre for twenty years succeeding the issue of the lease."

To K. H., Vancouver, British Columbia: A strike of gold has been reported on the former military reservation on Nome River at Nome, Alaska. Three test shafts were reported sunk, and all were said to have showed placer gold present.



A HAIL of friendly greeting from our fellow man is the most welcome of all gifts. No other is so enduring, no other so brightens with use in the giving and receiving. Yet, while there is no comradely hail, in word or gesture, that fails to fan a warm, fraternal feeling in our hearts, there is one, above all others, that brings with it a joy beyond compare. It's

Merry Christmas!

We give it to you now, Merry Christmas! And again and again we call the sweet refrain—Merry Christmas—that the wind may take it up and bear it gayly to the four corners of the earth, whistling it with glee to each and every one of you.

To each and *every* one of you. To the line-rider and his mount, breasting the stinging gale. To the prospector and his faithful little burro, plodding over the desert waste. To the boys and girls, dancing gayly under the mistletoe. To the dear old folks at home, sitting before the soothing blaze while the gentle, feathery flakes blanket their home under a downy comforter. To the sailors on the rolling main, below and aloft, may the wind send our mes-

sage, singing it through the rigging and down the hatches. Near and far, over the plains, to the herder and the herd, let the yuletide greeting wing its way.

Up the mountainside and into the canyon deep, Merry Christmas!

How fortunate we are that Christmas comes to cheer us in the dead of winter, to gladden and warm our hearts as they are gladdened and warmed at no other time of the year. And what a wonderful thing, wonder of wonders, is Christmas, when winter's sleet, and snow, and bitter cold, only build a charming, cheery frame for the beautiful picture of Christmastide. All that the elements accomplish by lashing themselves into a fury, is to fan the spirit of Christmas into a warmer, ruddier glow. And that is the answer to the "why" of Christmas. For Christmas expresses the very best that lies in man. And the more wicked the elements, the more the pure, sweet love, the kindly acts, good will to men, show in glorious contrast to the wicked things that would destroy. But Christmas can't be destroyed, for Christmas is the very essence of life, the spirit of virtue, love, and truth. The divine fire that never dies.

It's our notion, that when Christmas

Day comes every day, then will man be saved from drudgery, worry, and despair. There is One who came to earth on Christmas Day and made His acts at all times the acts of a good man. And so it comes that on one day in the year, at least, His memory and His acts are kept green and glorified.

Too many forget what Christmas really is, what it really stands for, and what makes it stand alone so smilingly in a naughty world.

There has come to us another Christ-

mas, another chance of chances to be happy—happy in the only worth-while way, by bringing happiness to others.

A hail of friendly greeting from our fellow man is the most welcome of all gifts. And there is one, above all others, that brings with it a joy beyond compare. We give it to you now, and from you we ask the same.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Here is something about one of our popular authors.

KENNETH GILBERT

By D.C. Hubbard

WHEN a man has never been farther East than Chicago, he must be a sure enough Westerner. Born in a little backwoods Wisconsin town, Kenneth Gilbert literally grew up with the wild, and has never had any desire to taste the effete East, the night clubs and the lights of Broadway. He even admits that until he was fifteen years old, he was pretty much of a little savage. As long as he behaved himself, his parents didn't insist upon his doing anything but what he wanted to do. They knew that he was gaining strong muscles and knowledge from the woods that he could not gain elsewhere. His friends were the woodsmen, hunters and trappers. From them he learned the rudiments of woodcraft, and an understanding of the minds and manners of wild animals.

At the time when most children are barely leaving their babyhood behind, eight years in fact, Kenneth Gilbert was the owner of a 12-gauge shotgun, a .44-40 rifle and a canoe. Of course he was obliged to attend school, but vacation days were spent almost entirely in the woods. He loved "living off the country," and one time remained in the open ten days alone, with nothing but a box of cartridges for his gun, matches and a little salt. Game was plentiful and he was unafraid of the wild creatures. It is

said that animals sense fear in human beings and will readily attack any one who is timid. We fear what we do not understand. Gilbert feels that with his long and close contact with wild things, he understands them and so does not fear them.



KENNETH GILBERT

"But," adds Gilbert characteristically, "to correct any error of judgment on my part, there is always the old .45 on my right hip.

At fifteen, Gilbert started westward. Some of his time he spent in the Dakotas, and the old gold-camps of Montana. Nearly three years claimed him in China, Japan, Manchuria, Siberia and some of the Pacific islands. Then he returned to the Pacific Northwest, where he has established himself, content with occasional trips to Alaska and more frequent forays into territories nearer home.

Mr. Gilbert feels that the glamour of the West is still present and there are plenty of "great open spaces" where the old romance is still rampant. In a little shack which he has built in the Olympic foothills he often retires.

Here his only neighbors are bear, deer, cougar, wild cats and the great silence of the wilderness. It makes the shivers run down our back to hear him tell about how he likes to prowl through the woods on a moonlight night, matching wits in craft and silence with the wild things.

Successful writers always tell of the things they know most about. They steep their very souls in the subject matter they are handling. This is the reason that their work bears the ring of truth. Because Kenneth Gilbert has lived and still lives the life he writes about, he is successful; he knows whereof he speaks.

THE WEST

And What Do YOU Know About It?

Here is a chance to test, and, at the same time, increase your knowledge of the West. Take these questions now, one at a time, and write your answers down during the coming week. In the next issue, right here, at the bottom of the last page of the Round-up, you'll find all of the questions in this week's issue correctly answered. Compare your answers with the right ones and mark yourself accordingly. If you have read your WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE with care during the past years, you should have little trouble in getting mighty good marks on these questions, for nearly all of them are based on information given in articles and stories that have been printed in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Then get your best-thinking Stetson on, your pencil out, and go to it.
More questions next week.

1. What are the stirrup leathers to a cowboy's saddle?.....
2. What part of the saddle is a seven-letter word beginning and ending with "s"?.....
3. To what use are they put?.....
4. What parts of a saddle are also parts of an automobile?...'.....
5. Describe them.....
6. The rigging of a saddle is what?.....
7. What are the broad under-leathers which go next to the horse called?.....
8. What is a cinch or cincha?.....
9. Its purpose is.....
10. A rubber cinch is.....

Answers to last week's questions: 1. A tree. 2. A frame of wood covered with rawhide. 3. Horn. 4. The high pommel of a saddle, formerly of wood, now of steel, covered with rawhide. 5. Fork. 6. The curved portion or underside of the fork. 7. Cattle. 8. The leather side extensions of the seat. 9. Skirts. 10. Skirts. the uppermost broad leathers joining behind the cantle.



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.

MERRY Christmas! Heap the yule logs on the hearth, folks; it's Christmastide! And since Christmas comes but once a year, let it come with more good cheer than ever before. Now, good cheer, folks, is everything that serves to gladden us. Santa brings tinsel gifts to gladden the hearts of the little folks. Grown-ups gladden each other's lives through an exchange of good wishes. The old Holla is brimming with yuletide messages from one Gangster to another. Listen, folks, while we read some of them out. This may be for you.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: A Merry Christmas from a cow-puncher! I've been a top hand on my father's fifty-four-thousand-acre ranch at Paso Robles, California, for eight years. We run close to three thousand head of shorthorn stock, and consequently we run a crew of six to fifteen cow waddies, according to the season. I take pride in saying that I believe that our ranch, the Estella, is one of the finest in the State of California. Now this is the season for letter writing, folks, and I'll be glad to hear from you-all. Is there anything in particular that you'd like to know about ranch life? You'll sure get an answer pronto! DEWAYNE HILLMAN.
Estella Ranch, Paso Robles, California.

Homesteader.

DEAR GANGSTERS: I'd like to horn in long enough to wish you a Merry Christmas. This greeting comes from a homesteader in Cane Beds, Arizona, and there's nothing I'd like so much as a few sincere Pen Pals to help me to while away the leisure hours. If there's any advice that a homesteader can give you, don't hesitate to ask, folks.

G. BRUCE MCDANIEL.

Cane Beds, Arizona.

More advice to the workers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Now, I'm not out to knock the State of Oregon, for it is a beautiful section of the country to live in, but I want to warn the working class of folks that they can't live on scenery. I've lived in Oregon for seventeen years; most of the time in the Willamette Valley. I've also lived down on the lower Columbia River, and in the logging camps at Bend. I've also lived in Walla Walla, Washington, and want to say that eastern Oregon is practically the same as eastern Washington. I know the problems of the working class from the coast clear through to the eastern State line. And I'm right here to say that those who have a home and a good position had better stay with both.

I'll gladly give information to any one who'll accompany their letter with a self-addressed return envelope.

MERTIE B. COOK.

912 Fourth and Center Street, Newberg, Oregon.

Rancher.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: Merry Christmas! It will surely be a merry one for me if I can find a pard who will take over my ranch and run it for me.

This ranch, known as Ghost Ranch, is between Banff and Calgary, in western Alberta, Canada, and is on an elevation above the Bow and the Ghost Rivers. It consists of two hundred acres, and is but twenty miles from the Rockies.

In 1923, the government built the Banff-Windermere-Calgary trail, which runs right through my ranch. We have now turned the place into a dude ranch, and as I am a World War veteran and unable to run the ranch myself, I want to find a pard or a man and wife who would be able to take charge of things for me. They must know about dairying, trapping, raising chickens, and be familiar with the care of horses, pack outfits, et cetera. To the right pard I'll put the undertaking on a good paying basis.

ROGER MORTIMER.

Care of The Tree.

In the forest service.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm in the Kootenai National Forest, and am a forest service lookout. I'm twenty miles out in the sticks, by trail. Any of you hombres want to relieve the monotony of this lookout life by dropping me a few letters? Thanks, buddies.

RAY MESSMAN.

Libby, Montana.

Rambler.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: Merry Christmas! Is there any one who would like to know something about the Jackson's Hole country in Wyoming? There are probably a dozen ranches in Jackson's Hole, and the Lazy S. S. is one that I worked for some time back. There are only two ways of getting into Jackson's Hole. One way is through the Teton Mountain Pass, from Victor, Idaho, and is thirty miles of mountainous trail. The other entrance is through the Hobart Canyon, and is ninety miles from the Northern Pacific Railroad. Of course, the Jackson Hole country can be entered through the hills, but that is a very dangerous undertaking, because of the landslides in those parts.

I aim to return to that country some time. In the meantime, is there any one who wants to hear more about it?

RAMBLER.

Care of The Tree.

"I should like to live in a Western town," says L. L. I., care of The Tree, "but if I depended upon myself to locate, I'd probably land in the middle of a desert." This young miss appeals to the Gangsters to offer suggestions to her about where to locate. She is self-supporting and must be located somewhere that clerical work is to be found. She also plays the pipe organ, and can teach music. Letter Pals will be cordially welcomed by this Sister Gangster.



Don't let the New Year find you without a friendship badge, folks. Resolve to order one now if you haven't one already.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps, sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Mrs. Beatrice Smith, of Manchester Depot, Vermont, has three small boys, the oldest aged seven, and she would like to find a place to work where she can have her children with her. Is there a Gangster who can help this mother?

McLennan County Gangsters, please come forward.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: First of all, a Merry Christmas! And next, is there any one living in McLennan County, Texas, who will write to a lonesome buddy? I'm hoping to hear from my ol' stamping ground.

SAMUEL C. BEERMAN.

1321 North Tenth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"I live in Rayne, the rice city of America, down in the good old Mississippi Valley," says Sidney L. Ross, Jr.

Address this Gangster's letters to Rayne, Louisiana.

"I live in one of the loveliest parts of Ontario, the garden of Canada," says Golden, care of The Tree. This Gangster is eighteen and is planning to visit the West next summer. Any suggestions as to the best trips to take will be much appreciated. She will also exchange snaps with the girls who have them to offer.

Foot-loose Gangster.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'd like to hear from hombres in Oregon and Washington, or from fellows who've traveled or worked their way across the country. I'm a foot-loose hombre of twenty-nine and have traveled about a bit and worked at almost everything. I must say I like the outdoor occupations best. I've been through a dozen States, but have yet to find one that surpasses my own State of Maine for beauty and variety. Come on with your descriptions, Westerners!

R. G. OSIER.

493 Hudson Street, New York City.

"We would like to hear from any one who can give us information concerning the working conditions and opportunities in southern Missouri and Arkansas," say Mr. and Mrs. R. D. Personette, 815 West Washington Street, Plymouth, Indiana. They would like to locate in a place where steady employment can be found, and where they can afford to own a small piece of ground.

Adventurer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like very much to run across a real, honest-to-goodness prospector who would like to take a little trip into New Mexico or Arizona, or perhaps take a look down across the border. I'm thirty, am looking for some good hard work, and know a little about prospecting, as I've mined around Joplin, Missouri, and Pitcher, Oklahoma, a bit.

Now, prospectors, if you feel lucky, and want to waste a little of your life's time picking around, just get in touch with me.

ADVENTURER.

Box 635, Anson, Texas.

Grass Valley, California.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I know you-all will be interested in the romantic beginning of this town called Grass Valley. It was during the year of the great gold rush, '49, that my great-grandfather led a band of pioneers northward from Sacramento. At the place now called Grass Valley, my grandfather ordered the party to make camp, and the following morning there was a great stir when it was discovered that the horses and oxen had strayed. A long and tiresome search on foot ensued, and at last when they came upon the animals they found them feeding upon tall, luscious grass that covered a beautiful valley. The pioneers then named the place Grass Valley, which has remained its name to this day.

And, now, if there's anything more you'd like to know about this lovely little valley, I'll be glad to have you make me your pen friend.

EILEEN HUGHES.

233 Rhode Island Street, Grass Valley, California.

Old-timers, please write.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was born in Butte, Montana, but when I was three years old my folks moved to Snowing, about sixty miles from Lewistown, where I lived until I went overseas and got into the World War. As a result, I'll never be able to ride again.

I'd like to hear from some of the old-timers. My father lived in the good old days of riding herd.

FRANK QUINN.

15½ Third Street, S. W., Rochester, Minnesota.

Billie Thompson, of Warford, West Virginia, would like to correspond with some hombres west of the Mississippi. He is seventeen, a high school student, and is interested in all sports, especially boxing, football, and track.

"I live in one of America's largest rubber-manufacturing cities, Akron, Ohio," says Ray Sherman, 543 Winan's Avenue, Akron, Ohio. Miss Ray is eighteen, and will tell the Gangsters all she knows about Akron, the old Indian town that celebrated its one hundredth anniversary two years ago.

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.

RANCHING has always been one of the most popular topics of our correspondents. Whenever the sons of the West get together, talk of cattle and horses is sure to follow. I don't know whether Paul K., of Butte, Montana, is an old-timer or a novice along this line but he's asking some questions that I think will interest a lot of you hombres.

"Can you tell me, Mr. North, where the most ranching is carried on up in British Columbia? I'm interested in this industry and would like all the facts I can collect about it. Can stock remain out all winter up there? What kind of cattle are found on the ranges? What about government grazing leases? And also what does government land cost in that region?"

Cattle and horses are ranged on the elevated bunch-grass areas on the North and South Thompson, Nicola, Cariboo, Lillooet, Chilcote, Windermere, and Boundary districts. Paul K. would also find areas suitable for stock-raising

along the line of the Grand Trunk Railway, especially in the Francois Lake region, and to the north in the Parsnip River and Peace River districts. Stock may remain out all winter without shelter in the south, but winter feeding with hay for some months is a necessity in the case of cattle all over the province. Horses are mostly small, but are being improved to meet the increased demand for heavier farming stock. Many well-bred Hereford and shorthorn cattle are on the ranges. Government grazing leases can be obtained at from three to five cents per acre. Government land in the north and central range districts costs five to ten dollars per acre.

If Paul makes a trip up that way to look the situation over he'll find that many of the ranchers go in for sheep in flocks ranging from five hundred to two thousand; and apart from the coyote nuisance these animals do very well. There's always been something mighty peaceful and pleasant to us in

the sight of a flock of sheep a-grazing on a hillside. I reckon it hits a lot of chaps the same way. At any rate Ike W., of Boston Massachusetts, shares our feeling, but like a good Yank this New Englander is also giving a thought or so to the money-making side of the business.

"What part of the Northwest is best suited to sheep-raising, Mr. North?" queries Ike. "The Willamette Valley of Oregon has been strongly recommended to me. What about this section? Are feed and land expensive? How is the winter climate out there? Are there many blizzards? What brands would you recommend? Also I'd like to know if there would be much loss from sheep-killing dogs? Is there a near-by market? Does sheep-raising in Oregon pay well?"

According to M. M., an old-timer in Oregon, wool can be produced at less cost in the Willamette Valley of Oregon than in any State east of the Rockies. This is due to three facts. In the Willamette Valley sheep require less feeding than in States with a colder climate; land can be had for one half the price of grazing land in the central States; and there is much less disease. They require almost no dry feed as there is but little snow and that generally melts in a few days. It is in fact the mild winter climate of the Willamette Valley that produces these most favorable conditions for the sheep industry. There are no blizzards or severe storms to drive them to cover. They can be pastured on winter-sown grain or turned in on orchards after the fruit is harvested.

Many men who are in the sheep business claim that there is nothing that will pay a farmer greater dividends and require less work than a flock of sheep. Shropshires, Oxfords, and Hampshires are preferred. We are glad to report that there is no loss to any extent from sheep-killing dogs. They

have a dog tax out in Oregon, and when sheep are killed by dogs they are paid for out of this fund. Yes, Ike, there is a near-by market, for Portland is the greatest wool center in the United States, with the exception of Boston.

Sheep-raising in the Willamette Valley is not an experiment, but is one of the oldest and best established industries in that part of the West. We don't know whether Sam K., of Cheyenne, Wyoming, is in this business or not, but he evidently follows some line that keeps him out of doors in a cold climate.

"I suffered some last winter from snow blindness, Mr. North," writes he, "and am wondering if you have any remedy to offer for this trouble?"

We know snow blindness can be prevented by wearing amber glasses, which are said to be the best, or by cutting down the amount of light that reaches the eyes by using smoked glasses. When glasses are not available black net may be used. And if a hombre has nothing else handy charcoal rubbed around the eyes and the sides of the nose will decrease the glare from the snow.

Speaking of weather, Bert A., of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is looking for a place where it is always warm. "I have had a nervous breakdown," he writes, "and have been unfit for anything much for a year. The doctors advise me to get out into the open climate that is mild the year round and where there is plenty of sunshine. I can't do any hard work but I'd like to do something to help myself along as my funds are limited. Somebody suggested Tucson, Arizona, to me. Is this a good place for a sort of invalid to go in the hope of recovering his health? How are living conditions there? What are the industries? Is it easy to get employment?"

From all that we have heard, this Arizona city is hard to beat. It is

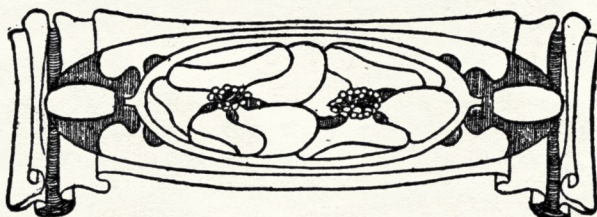
blessed, you know, by what's called the "sunshine-climate," and the warmth, clear skies, and bracing air are said to work wonders for sick people. Tucson is surrounded by lofty mountains and rests upon a half-mile-high plateau covered with grass, shrubs, cacti, palo verde, and mesquite trees.

In this city of Tucson, the days are literally filled with sunshine from October to May. There is no fog and very little wind. Every outdoor recreation is at your command there, from horseback riding to big game hunting. Living conditions are favorable and a modest income is said to be sufficient in this climate.

Tucson's industries are somewhat

limited. It is, of course, the center of production for the mining and cattle-raising industries in this part of Arizona. There are a few small factories, also. It is not always an easy matter for the newcomer to obtain employment, and it is well to be in a position to finance oneself over a period of several months.

And, now, before we sign off we want to state that we've had so many inquiries lately from campers for simple recipes for field cooking that we've become quite a chef. We are now prepared to tell you *hombres* the best way to prepare anything from "beans in the hole" to rabbit pie. Send your inquiries along



ONE OF THE MORE DIFFICULT MOUNTAINS

THE main six-day trail ride in the Canadian Rockies from Banff to Mount Assiniboine has recently been completed by a group from the United States and Canada under the direction of Colonel Philip Moore. This annual ride to the so-called Matterhorn of the Canadian Rockies serves to recall the story of other attempts to scale this most difficult twelve-thousand-foot peak. The peak is named for the Assiniboine Indians, who inhabited the region. The word really means "stone boiler," referring to the tribe's practice of cooking their meat by means of dropping hot stones into the water containing it.

Assiniboine was first visited by a white man in 1893, when R. L. Barrett, with the famous Tom Wilson as guide, made the ascent. There was a period after that, however, when would-be climbers came to camp around the base of the peak and issued the decision that the peak could not be climbed. This ultimatum did not deter others from making the attempt—with the result that various parties narrowly escaped death in snowstorms that came up unexpectedly while the attempt was being made.

In 1901, however, an Englishman, with some valiant companions, managed to reach the top in six hours and twenty minutes. Mount Assiniboine has since been visited by many people, and is now an objective for camping parties. The ascents attempted and accomplished, though, are few and far between. Sometimes they are successfully undertaken with the aid of a Swiss guide; but storms persist around Assiniboine, and the way will always remain difficult.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN 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. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you give it.

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.

ATTENTION.—Men who served in Detachment O. M. C., 13th Cavalry, Fort Carr, Texas, between July, 1919, and August, 1920, please get in touch with an old buddy, W. E. E., P. O. Box 1035, Jenkins, Kentucky.

WILLIAMS, JOE.—He was separated from his sister in Texas, when they were small children. Information appreciated by her, Mrs. Ada Williams Woods, 462 South Templeton Street, Tromington Park, California.

MCCORMICK, JAMES.—Left my mother, Lou Ann, in Jefferson County, Illinois, in 1881. Age about seventy. Last heard of in Mexico. Please write to Mrs. Robert Brakey, De Kalb, Illinois.

IREDELL, WILLIAM O.—During 1922 was in Manila and Philippine Islands. Last heard from August, 1922, at New Orleans, Louisiana. Sometimes known by stepfather's name, S. Merton Harding. Important information. Address Willett, in care of this magazine.

CRAIG, CLAIR.—Last heard of in Fort Wayne, Indiana, three years ago. Please get in touch with "Vel" Browne, 646 Benton Street, Detroit, Michigan.

WHITE, BEATRICE NORMAN.—Last heard of in 1904, at 16 Paradise Street, Portsmouth, England. Then eight months old. Mother's name was Julia White, nee Hughes. Information sought by her brother Leonard Hawtreay White, Canadian Legion, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

SCOTT, Mrs. LOIS; BRODT, Mrs. FRED, and HALE, HOWARD.—Cousin, sister, and brother of Merle Farmer Milano, called Billie. Also any one knowing Merle please write for information regarding her. Daniel Milano, Apartment 5, 301 West 118th Street, New York City.

DAVIS, EARL.—The girl with whom you spent the Fourth of July, 1926, at Newport, New York, wishes to hear from you. Information appreciated by Miss X. T., in care of this magazine.

BILLINGS, FRANK L.—Please write. I will understand. Worried sick. Hazel, in care of this magazine.

SMITH, WILLIAM J.—Last heard of in Oakland, California, in January, 1926. Home was in Attica, Indiana. Information appreciated by Rudy Belberle, 227 Richard Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FULLER, FRANCIS LOUISE.—Born in Rosedale, Hanson County, South Dakota, March 27, 1877. Her father, George Fuller, took her and her baby sister to Ireland. They returned some years later. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. Mary Louise Fuller, Route 1, Miami, Oklahoma.

HAYES, WILLIAM.—Station agent. Last known address, Ionia, Kansas. Write to a relative, Mrs. Carrie Hayes Livingston, 311 South Washington Street, Elkhorn, Wisconsin.

HAYES, GEORGE and SAM.—Twins; lived on a farm in Kendall County, Illinois. Write to a relative, Mrs. Carrie Hayes Livingston, 311 South Washington Street, Elkhorn, Wisconsin.

GONZALES, CHARLES R.—Born in Connecticut; lived on Purchase Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts with his mother and Doctor Silver. Address Joaquin Freitas, Jr., 1622 Clark Street, San Leandro, California.

O'BRIEN, THOMAS G.—A soldier at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, Company E, 9th Infantry. May be in Springfield, Massachusetts. Address Joaquin Freitas, 1622 Clark Street, San Leandro, California.

OSWALD, NED.—Moved from Bolivar, Tennessee, to Whitesville, Tennessee. Information appreciated by W. F. O., in care of this magazine.

GARLAND, MYRTLE.—Chicago Fred not here. O. married a girl near Burg. Send address, or friend's address, to General Delivery, Enid, Oklahoma.

CATHERINE.—It will make me very happy if you will write to one who has been trying to find you for five years. John Wojcik, General Delivery, Denver, Colorado.

MARTIN, SILVESTER.—Last seen in Chicago twenty-seven years ago. Forty-five years old. Mother's name, Maida Martin. Information appreciated by Oscar Blass, 1311 State Street, Lockport, Illinois.

STERNE, WILLIAM A.—Born in Iowa, February 22, 1879. Spanish-American War soldier in Company C from Beatrice, Nebraska. Enlisted in World War, in Company B, 21st Engineers from El Paso, Texas. Address L. F. Brown, 320 North 15th Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

WILLIAM T. H.—Must cash out on insurance. Can't keep it up longer. Need you. F. L. A., Hitchcock, South Dakota.

DONALDSON, EMERY L.—Or any one working with Cory Construction Company at Nampa, Idaho, in 1923, knowing William Hatcher. Address Maud Hatcher, 206 Sixth Street, Brookings, South Dakota.

NEWTON, FRED.—Last heard from in Vancouver, Washington. Please write to your mother and sister, Nora, in care of this magazine.

JACK H. or L.—The children miss you. News. Please write to E. L., in care of this magazine.

QUIRK, JAMES.—Born 1905, in New York City. Please write. Information appreciated by his mother and brother, Arthur Quirk, Horton Avenue, in care of Witmer, Valley Stream, New York.

KOPPE, AUGUSTUS C.—Twenty-seven years old, six feet tall, blue eyes, dark hair. Plays the violin and banjo. Last heard of in Missouri and Kansas. Information appreciated by Ruth Horn, 1528 East Fiftieth Street, Terrace, Kansas City, Missouri.

MILLER, HARRY JAMES.—And small son, Andrew. Mr. Miller is also the father of Anita Jeannette. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Carrie T. Miller, 1050 Que Street, Fresno, California.

DADDY.—Letters sent to Box 614 returned. Worried. Please write to your mother, or to Babe, in care of this magazine.

DAVIDSON, JOSEPH and MARTHA.—Born February 8, 1913, and December 12, 1915, respectively. Taken from Child Saving Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, in March, 1920. News appreciated by their father, Joe Davidson, 108 Block P, Pueblo, Colorado.

POOLE, HOWARD L.—Do you remember Charlie and Juanita in Minden, Louisiana, in 1919? Sad news about Charlie. Please write to Babe, in care of this magazine.

HARRIS, MELVIN D.—Please get in touch with your wife, Isa Harris, 2002 Avenue F, Galveston, Texas.

SHERMAN, FRED.—Called Hymie and Pete. Twenty-four years old, blue eyes, black hair and brows. Mother and I are well, but would like to see you. Write to your brother, Henry Sherman, 816 Emerson Avenue North, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

CORTEZ, ANITA.—Left home in July, 1926. May have amnesia. Five feet four, dark complexion, thirty years old, weight one hundred and seventy. Easy-going disposition, likes to dress in white and red. Information appreciated by Juan Cortez, 621 West End Avenue, New York City.

LAMBERT, SADIE ELISABETH.—Born in 1894, in Harrisburg, Arkansas. Last heard from at Detroit, Michigan. Please write to an old friend, A. Martin, 574 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts.

MARTIN, GUS.—Born in St. Johns, Newfoundland. Last known address, 39 South Portland Street, Brooklyn, New York. Write to your brother, Anthony Martin, 574 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts.

LARSON, JOHN NORMAN.—Please write to your daughter, Irene Dressel, 1226 Chestnut Street, Clarkston, Washington.

FEINSTEIN, MORRIS.—Five feet six inches tall, dark hair and eyes, twenty-three years old. Last heard of in Chicago, four years ago. Mother is seriously ill and wishes to see you. Everything else is all right. Write immediately. Information appreciated by his father, J. Feinstein, 968 Studer Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

GIFFORD, BENJAMIN.—Last heard of in a school in Lackawanna. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Mary Cook, Morrisville, New York.

GIFFORD, MILFORD.—Last heard of in Buffalo, New York. Write to your sister, Mrs. Mary Cook, Morrisville, New York.

DAY, JAMES G.—Born at Rosetta, Mississippi, about forty-nine years ago. Write to your nephew, Charles King, Box 740, Fort Benning, Georgia.

MISKA, EMANUEL and JULIA.—Please write to your cousin, Doctor Hattie Vit, Box 28, Bruno, Nebraska.

GRIFFITH, MILDRED.—Formerly of Birmingham, Alabama. Please write to C. L. T., at Box 15, Careywood, Idaho.

MATHER.—My son has been gone five months. Last seen in Spokane, Washington. Five feet ten inches tall, black hair and eyes, weight about one hundred and eighty pounds. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. La Hoagland Mather, Box 115, Kettle Falls, Washington.

BOSWELL, MRS. ANNA.—Last heard of in Comanche, Oklahoma. Information much appreciated by T. B. A., in care of this magazine.

HEFFERNAN, WILLIAM J.—Called "Spider." Performer, clown, and acrobat. Stage names, Bixley Lorella, W. J. Lorella, J. J. Waldo. Father is no longer with us. Write to Sister Nellie or Margaret, Mrs. Thomas J. Driscoll, 24 Dawes Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts.

McGOWAN, JOHN or JOE.—Am trying to locate John A. Rea through his uncle, John McGowan. Rea was born in Cleveland, Ohio, January 16, 1880. Mother's maiden name, McGowan; father's name, Michel Rea. Information appreciated by Mrs. B., in care of this magazine.

WILSON, MATTIE, nee DANIELS.—Married J. M. Wilson at Clinton, Tennessee, about 1893. Now in Kentucky or California. Important news. Address J. E. Williams, 1309 Murphy Street, Shreveport, Louisiana.

MELCUM, Mrs. GILLIE.—Possibly in Orr. The barber who boarded with her twenty-three years ago, and worked in Larned, Kansas, would like to have news of her. J. E. Williams, 1309 Murphy Street, Shreveport, Louisiana.

DINEHART, ROLLAND L.—Last heard of in California. His family would like to hear from him. Address Mrs. E. Edward Dinehart, 5407 East Covent Place, Duluth, Minnesota.

INGRAM, HOWARD WILSON.—Lonely since we last met in June, 1923, in Norfolk, Virginia. Write me in care of B. B. Publishing Company, New York City. Grace, in care of this magazine.

STHAY, WALTER.—Last known address, Green Bay, Wisconsin, about 1910. Managed a theater in that city. Important news. Write to Bob Norwood, care of Horn, 1659 Avenue A, New York City.

ROUST, OLSEN.—Father's name was Enar; he came from Roustan Farm, Norway, changing his name to Olsen upon arriving in the United States. His two brothers settled in Chicago; probably went into the furniture business. Information in regard to them appreciated by Fred Olsen, Homestead, Oregon.

EDWARDS, ROBERT THOMAS.—News of him appreciated by Avis Leamon, Hotel Sacramento, Sacramento, California.

R. L. L. or J. A. M.—Am at Plaza Hotel, Fourteenth and Howard Streets, Omaha, Nebraska. Come at once. I love you. Your wife, F. C.

BROWN, E. S.—Formerly of Joplin, Missouri. Please communicate with C. W. L., or in care of this magazine.

DADDY AL.—Write to your wife and daughter, Hillary Lorena, three years old. Address Mrs. Al C. W., General Delivery, Neosho, Missouri.

BARBER, CLAYTON.—If he cares for his mother, he will get in touch with her soon. Mrs. Joe Beckman, 606 East 14th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

PETTY, JAMES FRANK.—Married my mother in 1868, but left her before I was born. Home was in Marshall County, Iowa; was in the Civil War. Would be very old if living. News of him or his relatives appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Mary Flanagan, Box 95, Odessa, Texas.

KENNETH.—Please write to the same address. Gladida B., Cambridge, Ohio.

BISHOP or SMITH, CLAUDE E.—Was in 318th Engineers. Returned home after the War, in 1918. Light hair, blue eyes. Please write to your brother, Charlie, in care of this magazine.

BOYER, MERALD.—Railroad man. Dad, please write. I have two sons now. Mrs. Opal Sunday, 2138 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

HOWARD, WILBUR.—Only son of H. C. Howard; last heard of on way to Glass Mountains, Oklahoma, twenty-five years ago. About five feet five inches tall. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Rhobra Nichols, 301 South Keystone Avenue, Stafford, Kansas.

CLICK, SLYKS.—Last seen in Glass Mountains, Oklahoma, about thirty years ago. About six feet tall, blond, with protruding lips. Information appreciated by his aunt, Mrs. Rhobra Nichols, 301 South Keystone Avenue, Stafford, Kansas.

GARDNER, STANLEY URBAN.—Last letter from Mr. Duke's place, 75 North 3d Street, Portland, Oregon. Left for St. Louis, Missouri, in January, 1913. Information appreciated by his only daughter, Mrs. Ethel Moon, 4 Soudan Terrace, Windsor, England.

LONG, WILLIAM BARTLY.—Age twenty-four. Discharged from the United States navy, 1922, with the title of Ex-Pharmacist's Mate, Third Class, United States navy, and living afterward at Waxahachie, Texas. A half sister, twenty years old, whom he has never seen, would like to hear from him. Letha Mae Long, 5328 Rowena Street, Dallas, Texas.

KELLAD, JOHNNY.—Worked in West Palm Beach, Florida, at the Plaza Cafe, in 1922. Some one you know there would like to hear from you. L. B., in care of the Word Nash Motor Company, Dothan, Alabama.

HESTER, HENRY and J. B.—Last heard of in Maytown, Florida, in July, 1925. His mother lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and his father in Perry, Florida. H. L. H. and Bill have made up. Former is buying out of the army. Information appreciated by Mary Jane Rhames, 17½ North Lawrence Street, Montgomery, Alabama.

CHAGNON, JOSEPH, JOHN, WILFORD, and ADELORE.—Also my sister, Rose Pidgeon, whose husband was a piano tuner in Auburn, New York, when last seen. Please communicate with William J. Chagnon, Gothenburg, Nebraska.

J. F. J.—Please let me know your address. Feel differently now, and very sorry. Write to Bess, in care of this magazine.

PHILIP.—Get in touch with your mother at once. Very important. Betty Pallingor, 620 East 141st Street, Bronx, New York.

NOTICE.—News of T. J. Dinwiddie or Dinty, G. S. Kenemer or Rebel, M. V. Costello or Red will be appreciated by an old friend and shipmate, Jim Silvers, 1512 Newport Way, Seattle, Washington.

HOOK, Mrs. HENRY or Miss MABEL.—Last heard of nine years ago in Kansas City, Missouri. Before her marriage she was a waitress in Styles Cafe, in Kansas City, Missouri. Information sought by her sister, Mrs. Mildred Williams, 216½ North 3d Street, Muskego, Oklahoma.

ATTENTION, SAILORS.—Any of the boys trained at Hampton Roads, Virginia, with Company 10, in July and September, 1924, please write to an old salt who was there. L. R. Sudderth, Battery E, 18th F. A., Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

SAXTON, MABEL.—Tell Bill that Mary was married three years ago. All is O. K. Write to Mrs. Rose Saxton Olson, Dodge Center, Minnesota.

CURLY and MURRY.—Very important that I know your address immediately. Write to F. M. D., General Delivery, Huntington, Indiana.

WALTERS, FLORENCE.—Of Mobile, Alabama. Have been true, and always will be. Please write. Information appreciated by James O'Rourke, 412 South Cheyenne Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

HELGESON, MELVIN CLARENCE.—Five feet five inches tall, wavy red hair. Last heard of in a California lumber camp. Address desired by Miss Irene Ferguson, 71 Woodward Street, San Francisco, California.

BERNICE.—Your neglect is killing mother. Please write to her before too late. Lottie, in care of this magazine.

FLO.—Please come back. Every one thinks you have gone home on vacation. I am keeping everything as you left it. Write to Honey-Boy, Box 314, Muskegon, Michigan.

TIMBLE FLOYD.—Weight a hundred and fifty pounds, height five feet three inches, scar under left eye. Last seen May 28, 1926. All want to see you. Write to S. A. G., in care of this magazine.

SMITH, JESSE J.—Joined the army; last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Sarah D. Smith, in care of R. M. Ankrom, Pennsboro, West Virginia.

RICHARDSON, V. P.—Served in the Great War. About thirty-two. He left me with my grandfather, Mr. Grindstaff, in Oklahoma, when I was two years old. Send information to his son, Philip Allan Richardson, in care of Mr. J. S. Grindstaff, Weslaco, Texas.

MARTIN, J. H.—Last heard of in Butte, Montana, May, 1925. Nineteen years old, tattooed on both arms. If you still love your sister, Bobbie, please write to her, in care of this magazine.

BURTON, CHARLES S. E.—Left Mason City, Iowa, before July 4, 1927. Brown eyes, dark hair, slender, five feet nine inches tall. Salesman for a magazine. Please write. Worried. Information appreciated by Mrs. Charles S. E. Burton, in care of this magazine.

BALLARD, ROLLA WAINWRIGHT.—Missing since January, 1919. Please write to your sister Kate, Mrs. Kathryn Ballard Lee, 11109 Romeo Street, Los Angeles, California.

- WHITEHEAD, FRANK**.—Born in Brooklyn, New York, thirty-five years ago. Brought up at Norborne, Missouri. Six feet tall, sandy hair, ruddy complexion. Last heard of in 1926, at Big Bend, Kansas. Write to your brother, Henry Whitehead, 833 North La Salle Street, Chicago, Illinois.
- THOMPSON, ROLAND**.—All forgiven. Worried. Please come home. Write to R. T., in care of this magazine.
- NAYLOR, MARGUERITE, ALBERTA, and IDA**.—Married names of two of these sisters are Brown and Reed. Brother's name is Cleorick, and grandfather's name is Crosby. Information appreciated by Mrs. F. Lane, Wabuska, Nevada.
- BAILEY, HERBERT PARK**.—Formerly of Manchester, England. Please communicate with B. H., 21 Mayfield Road, Levenshulme, Manchester, England.
- CUTLIP or CUTLER, ANNA MAY**.—Five years old about May 4, 1918. My mother, Mrs. Walter Davis, took care of her for a year in Jefferson, Iowa. One of seven children. Returned to her mother in Des Moines, November, 1918. Information appreciated by Florence Davis, 20 4th Street, Northwest, Mason City, Iowa.
- HARTER, CHARLES H. or LA VERNE**.—Information as to the name and whereabouts of his wife and daughter will be greatly appreciated by C. H. Knapp, Duquesne, Pennsylvania.
- INGLES, JAMES R.**.—None of us against you. Please write to M. I., in care of this magazine.
- HILL, FRANK**.—Last heard from in Pittsburgh. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Augusta Ahlquist, Florenón, Minnesota.
- HERRING, JOHN**.—Resident of Greensburg, Pennsylvania. A widower with thirteen children. In 1815, he married Mrs. Margaret Lopes. If any descendants have records prior to this marriage, please communicate with Mrs. F. M. Johnson, 721 North Main Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma, who is trying to complete some family records.
- LEONA**.—We must have a settlement. Get in touch with Mack, in care of this magazine.
- ANDERSON, CORA**.—Any one knowing her whereabouts please write to W. C. R., in care of this magazine.
- TERRELL, W. A.**.—Lots of news for you, Bill. Don't forget those days of 1919 and 1917. W. C. R., in care of this magazine.
- STUCHEY, GEORGE**.—Information as to his address will be appreciated by his daughter and two sons. Address Mrs. C. M., in care of this magazine.
- BARRETT, JOHN THOMAS and AMOS**.—My father, John Thomas, may be living in Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Louisiana, while my uncle, Amos, is somewhere in Arkansas. His living children are Chester E., Edith B., Ora, and Lydia. Information appreciated by Chester E. L. Barrett, 2340 South Phoenix Avenue, West Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- VAIL, THOMAS**.—Please write. Worried. Your sister, Pearl Vail, in care of Lonkey Ranch, Merrillville, California.
- WEINHOLD, HERBERT**.—In 1920 and 1921, in Brooklyn, New York, under General John P. Storz, U. S. army mine planter, as first officer. Born in 1889. Please write to Mrs. Harriet Knill, 3287 West 38th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.
- JONES, MAUDIE and STELLA**.—Last heard of at Gainesville, Texas, at the time of the death of their mother, Charlotte Karr, only daughter of Reverend Henry Karr. An uncle and a cousin would like to hear from them. Mrs. Josephine Karr Atkins, Route 3, Box 30, Jennings, Oklahoma.
- WILLIAMS, GEORGE and JOSEPH**.—Formerly lived on a farm at Rothschild, Wisconsin; later lived in the village and worked in a paper mill. Write to an old friend, G. Russel, Glennon Hotel, Kansas City, Missouri.
- OSBORN, DORA and Children**.—Information appreciated by Mrs. Nettie Heffley, Route 2, Seminole, Oklahoma.
- PHILIP**.—Write to your father, who is now at work helping you. Edgar, in care of this magazine.
- KING, JOSEPH**.—Birthplace and home of parents, 9 Dearborn Street, Salem, Massachusetts. Six feet tall, light hair, blue eyes, dimples. Mother seriously ill. Information appreciated by Mrs. M. King, 9 Dearborn Street, Salem, Massachusetts.
- KRUSE, ADOLPH**.—Last heard of at the Panama Canal, in Battery C, 65th C. A. Please write to G. A. Diaz, 1st Infantry Band, Fort W. A. Russell, Wyoming.
- DRAKE, ADAM**.—Born October 18, 1778, in Sussex County, New Jersey. Served in Captain Vanclevs Moore's regiment in War of 1812. Died in 1874 at Drayton Plains, Michigan. Any one knowing his father's name please write to his granddaughter, Mrs. Ethel Tara, 54 Mott Street, Seabright, California.
- SHERLOCK, McNALLY, or GILE, OLLIE**.—Twenty-two years old, light blond hair. Came from Kentucky; last heard of in De Kalb, Illinois. Information appreciated by David C. Gile, Box 935, Kalamazoo, Michigan.
- HORTON, FLOYD**.—Tex seriously ill. Please write to Mrs. D. Petty, 650 Margaret Street, Belvedere Gardens, Los Angeles, California.
- MATTHEW, EUGENE or DICK**.—Sad news about Maude. I'm still in Louisville and waiting. Ada, in care of this magazine.
- MOY, ED.**.—Last heard from in January, 1927. Have been sick. Please write to Sis, in care of this magazine.
- TENNISON, JOHN**.—Of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Blacksmith. Discharged from navy hospital in 1917. Important news. Information appreciated by E. M., in care of this magazine.
- EVERSOLE, AMOS NED**.—Worked at the Elcar Motor Car Co. at Elkhart, Indiana, in 1918; then moved to 49 North Wood Street, Battle Creek, Michigan. Last heard from in 1920, at Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Please write to Dorothy L., in care of this magazine.
- GROVE, HAROLD and sister EVA**.—Formerly of Elkhart, Indiana. Eva moved to Chicago, and Harold joined the army in 1918 or 1919. Information appreciated by Dorothy, in care of this magazine.
- ALEXANDER, HATTIE**.—Wife of Leon Alexander, deceased, and daughter of John Romlines. Had five children—Susie, Charles, Verdie, Birdie, and Oscar Lee. Valuable news for her or children. Address information to Mrs. L. E. Alexander, Box 388, Burnet, Texas.
- LIGHT, JOHN ARTHUR**.—Rita asks for you. Please write to Mrs. J. A. Light, 1710 East Twenty-seventh Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.
- PARKER, R. A.**.—Last heard from in Garibaldi, Oregon. Information appreciated by a relative, Esther Parker, in care of this magazine.
- GEORGE**.—Please come home. Everything will be all right. Sister Elsie, in care of this magazine.
- BUSTER**.—Please let me know where you are. Worried. Mother, in care of this magazine.
- SMITH, JAMES**.—Found letter but hoped you did not mean it. If you write, send letter to same city you located me in over seven years ago. Pard, in care of this magazine.
- MALONE, SIMON**.—Of Cleveland, Ohio. At Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D. C., in summer of 1917 or 1919. Write to an old friend, Pat, in care of this magazine.
- LORENZO, ANGELO or JACK**.—Age twenty-six; of Italian parentage. Lived in Huntington Beach, California, in 1924 and 1925. Relatives in Benton, Washington. Follows oil-field work. Information appreciated by Mrs. Etta Chambers, Garden Grove, Box 103, California.
- JONES, BAYARD**.—Fifteen years old, slender, curly blond hair. Last heard of in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1924. Thought to be in Canada. Please write to an old friend, Bayless Martin, 1205 North Saint Francis Avenue, Wichita, Kansas.
- KENNEDY, JIMMIE**.—Last heard of in Oklahoma. Interesting news. Write to your old pal, Mrs. L. Hilmie, Caroline Hotel, Houston, Texas.
- JOHNSON, CHARLES**.—Last heard from at Granada, Colorado. Blue eyes, brown hair, six feet tall. A cowboy; follows rodeos. Will his friends, Bud Hammond and Cliff Joye or others, please send his address to Miss Tina Honea, General Delivery, Craig, Missouri?
- SHORT, LAWRENCE**.—Did as you asked, but without success. News. Tell me where to write. Mother M. A. Brown, in care of this magazine.
- BYKOUSKI, OTTO L.**.—Last heard of in New Haven, Connecticut, in summer of 1926. Write to a former pal, Dan, in care of this magazine.
- MARTINEZ, HUMBERTO**.—Electrical engineer, last heard of in 1913, when living at 1641 Arapahoe Street, Denver, Colorado. Information appreciated by R. B. H., in care of this magazine.
- CLARENCE P.**.—Have left W. W.; am now at West 2628 Sharpe Avenue, Spokane, Washington. Please write to Gladys A.
- BABB, PEARL**.—My mother. I was put in an orphan's home on Kansas Avenue, in Topeka, Kansas. Birth date was March 26 or 27, 1901. Mr. Sherman knew all about me, but died before he could tell me. Information appreciated by Luther Babb, in care of this magazine.
- KIDWELL, DOUGLAS E.**.—Last heard of in Louisville, Kentucky. Write to an old pal, Private John E. Brown, Company L, Twenty-seventh Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- F. V. P.**.—I need and want you. Address M. D., in care of this magazine.
- ATTENTION**.—Buddies in Troop H, 4th U. S. Cavalry, from August, 1919, to September, 1921, also Troop F, from September, 1919, to July, 1922. Please write to your old cook, Red. C. Sevens, 93 River Street, Greenfield, Massachusetts.

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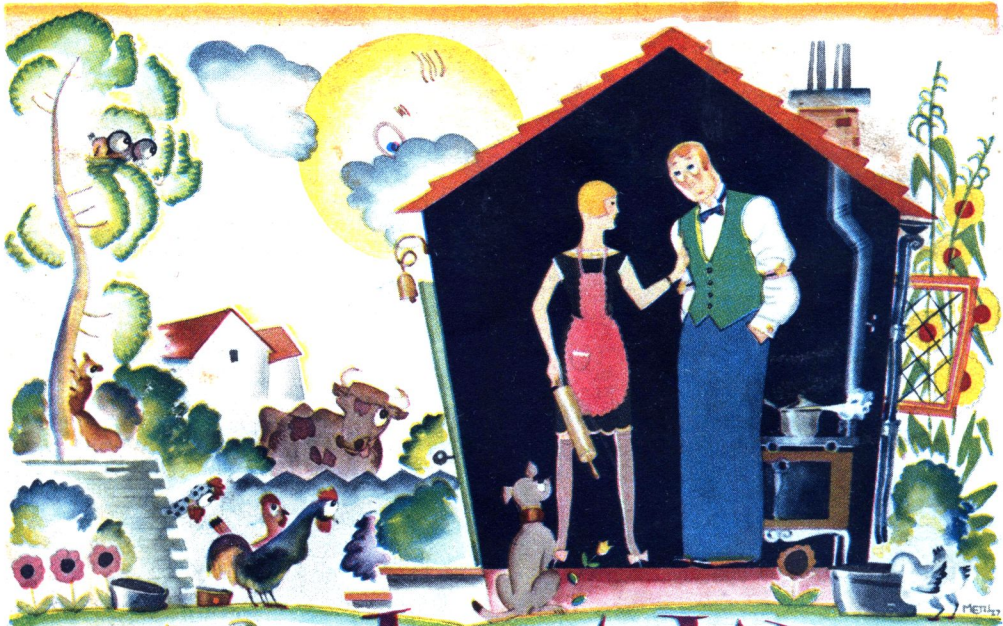
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