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By **JOHNSTON McCULLLEY**

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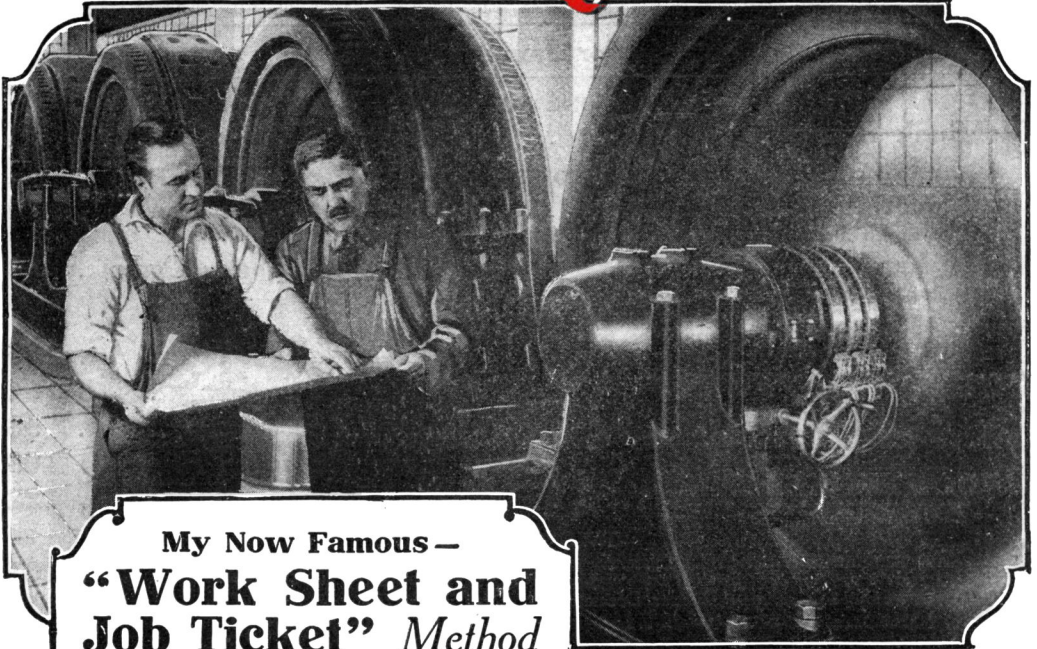
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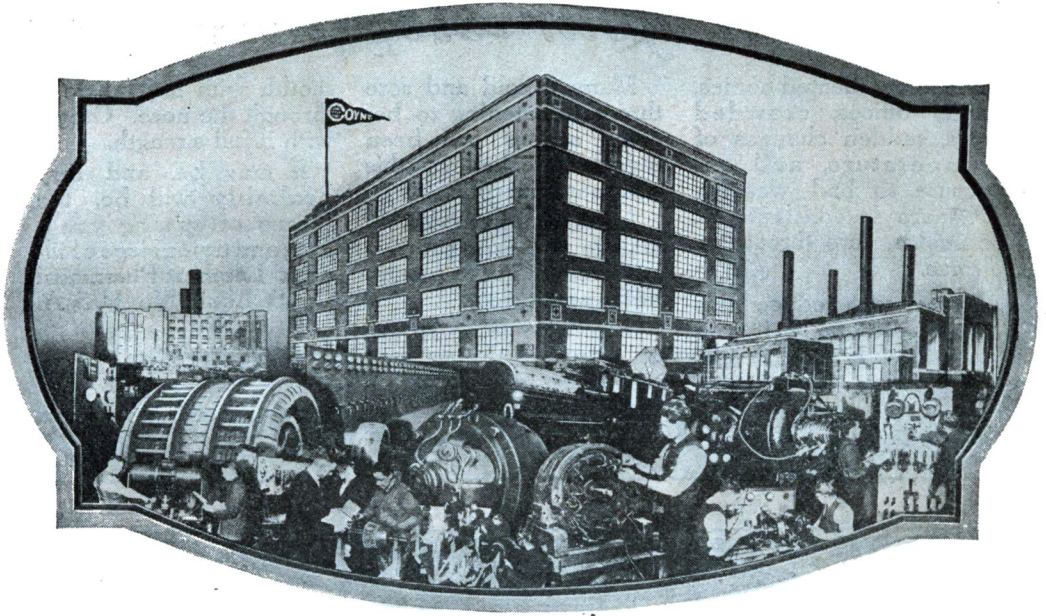
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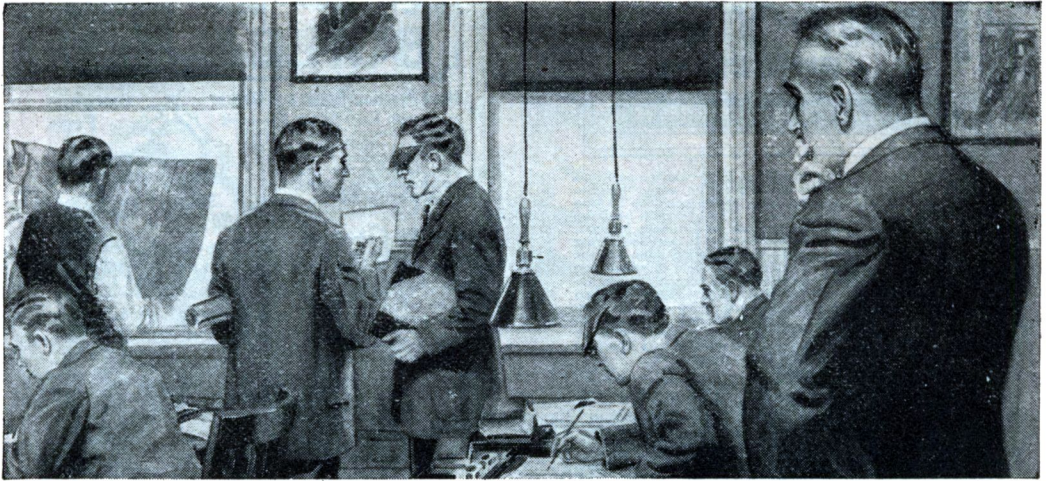
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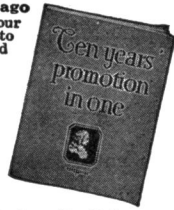
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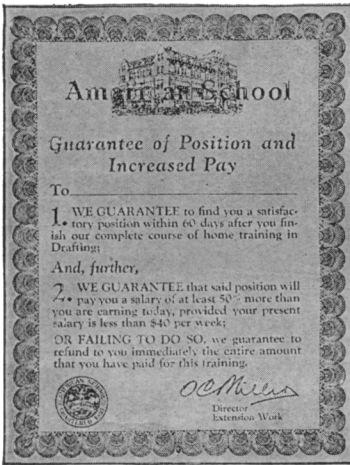
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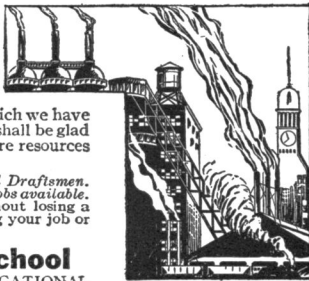
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\$8-\$18 A DOZEN decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

How to Entertain

PLAYS, Musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 132, Chicago.

Detectives Wanted

MEN—Experience unnecessary; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, George Wagner, 2190 Broadway, New York.

Wouldn't You Like to Have Your Own Business?

TO HAVE an extra, independent income? To work whenever it suits your convenience? Make a host of new friends and gain valuable experience from contact with other people? Have money to buy the 101 things you've always wanted but felt you couldn't afford? Know the happiness that comes from doing something really worth while? Then our easy money-making plan offers a splendid opportunity to gratify your desires. Hundreds of men and women, young and old, 95% of whom were inexperienced beginners when they started, are earning substantial profits. You can also. All you need is a few spare hours to take care of the new and renewal subscriptions for Sport Story, Picture Play, Far West Illustrated, and Complete Stories.

IMMEDIATE PROFITS

You begin earning money at once—the very first hour you start. Besides liberal cash commissions, you also receive monthly bonus checks.

If you feel at all interested send the coupon below. It costs only a two-cent stamp, but may lead to a substantial income. We're so sure you will succeed that we supply everything you need free of charge. Every day you delay is a money-making opportunity lost, so

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

STREET & SMITH CORPORATION
79-89 Seventh Ave., New York, N. Y.

Without obligation to me, please send me full details of your easy money-making plan.

NAME.....
STREET.....
CITY.....STATE.....



He Mailed a Coupon Like This

Rhodes Manufacturing Co., Dept. A-802,
1418 Pendleton Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Without obligating me, please send me illustrated description of
KRISSE-KROSS Stropper and your offer of a 3-Way Razor FREE.

Name

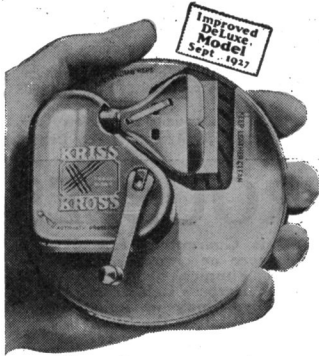
Address

City

State

Check here if interested in becoming representative.

and it Brought Him 1129 Cool Shaves from One Single Blade!



SHARPENS ANY MAKE OF RAZOR BLADE

KRISSE-KROSS works on practically any known make of razor blade, single or double edge (except Durham). Gives excellent results with Gillette, Gem, Valet Auto-Strop, Keen-Kutter, Enders, Ever-Ready, Darwin, Schick, Christy and over 2 dozen others.

Another Triumph for **KRISSE-KROSS**, The Most Amazing Shaving Invention Ever Patented! Mr. T. Liddle, of Illinois, Wrote Recently: "I Have Been Using One of Your Stropers Since May, 1924. I Shave Every Morning And I Am STILL ON MY FIRST BLADE!" Read Astonishing Details. Then Act At Once For Real Shaving Joy.

NO wonder **KRISSE-KROSS** marks such a radical advance in shaving comfort and economy! For now at last it has captured a secret that has baffled scientists for years! It actually reproduces mechanically the diagonal flip-flop master-barber's stroke that gives razor blades the keenest cutting edge that steel can take! Pressure decreases automatically. And in just 11 seconds you are ready for the coolest, slickest shave you ever had!

An Economy—And a Luxury, Too

KRISSE-KROSS not only introduces you to undreamed-of shaving luxury—but cuts shaving costs 83%. It makes your blades last almost indefinitely. Any number of cases are on record where a KRISSE-KROSS user reports over 365 keen shaves a year from the same blade! For example, C. S. Stephenson (Oklahoma) writes: "I have been using one blade continuously for one year and nine months and have no idea how much longer it will last." No wonder there are over a million satisfied users of KRISSE-KROSS in America today!

Get Free Offer

And now—to introduce this sensational device that makes old blades keener than new—we are giving you it free an amazing new kind of razor. Instantly adjustable to any angle. Comes with 5 new-process blades. Find out all about this astonishing introductory offer. No obligation. Just fill out and mail the coupon above today!

RHODES MFG. CO., Dept. A-802
1418 Pendleton Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

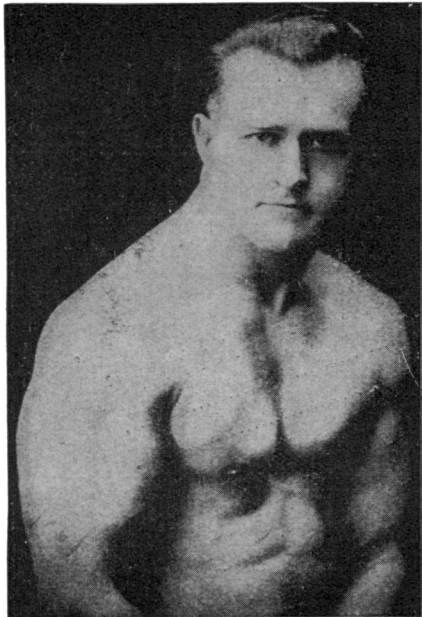
World's Largest Mfrs. of Mechanical Stropers

AGENTS! \$5-\$15 An Hour!

Make big money with KRISSE-KROSS! It is sold only through authorized agents who are making up to \$200 a week and, in some cases, even more! All you do is demonstrate and take orders for this unique invention which is heavily advertised but never sold in stores. Nine out of ten men want to own it as soon as they see how it works. B. S. Hopkins

(Michigan) made \$50 his first day. Spare time workers, factory men, mechanics, etc., often make \$6-\$12 extra a day just showing KRISSE-KROSS to friends and fellow-employees. Generous commissions and bonus. No obligation. Get details and liberal proposition today. Check bottom line of coupon above and mail it now!

DO IT NOW



EARLE E. LIEDERMAN—The Muscle Builder
 Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Hero's Health," "Endurance," etc.

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Can You Do These Things?

Lift 200 lbs. or more overhead with one arm; bend and break a horseshoe; tear two decks of playing cards; bend spikes; chin yourself with one hand.

Can you do any of them? I can and many of my pupils can. It is remarkable the things a man really can do if he will make up his mind to be strong. I have taken men who were ridiculed because of their frail make-up and developed them into the strongest men of their locality.

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These are the days that call for speed. In olden days it took years to develop a strong, healthy body. I can completely transform you in 90 days. Yes, make a complete change in your entire physical make-up. In 30 days I guarantee to increase your biceps one full inch. I also guarantee to increase your chest two inches. But I don't quit there. I don't stop till you're a finished athlete—a real strong man. I will broaden your shoulders, deepen your chest, strengthen your neck. I will give you the arms and legs of a Hercules. I will put an armor plate of muscle over your entire body. But with it come the strong, powerful lungs which enrich the blood, putting new life into your entire being. You will be bubbling over with strength, pep and vitality.

A DOCTOR WHO TAKES HIS OWN MEDICINE

Many say that any form of exercise is good, but this is not true. I have seen men working in the factories and mills who literally killed themselves with exercise. They ruined their hearts or other vital organs, ruptured themselves or killed off what little vitality they possessed.

I was a frail weakling myself in search of health and strength. I spent years in study and research, analyzing my own defects to find what I needed. After many tests and experiments, I discovered a secret of progressive exercising. I increased my own arms over six and a half inches, my neck three inches and other parts of my body in proportion. I decided to become a public benefactor and impart this knowledge to others. Physicians and the highest authorities on physical culture have tested my system and pronounced it to be the surest means of acquiring perfect manhood. Do you crave a strong, well-proportioned body and the abundance of health that goes with it? Are you true to yourself? If so, spend a pleasant half-hour in learning how to attain it. The knowledge is yours for the asking.

Send for My New 64-page Book

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IT IS FREE—Don't Send One Penny—Your name and address on a postal will do. It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over and marvel. This book will prove a real inspiration to you. For the sake of your future health and happiness do not put it off. Send today—right now before you turn this page.

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 Dear Sir: Please send me, absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

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Drives 40 Miles a Gallon for Five Years

"I have had one of your gas savers on my Ford for the past five years. I average about 40 miles a gallon,"—writes G. S. Higgins of New York. And he is only one of millions who have installed this amazing invention. It fits any car and can be installed in a few minutes. Guaranteed to double your mileage, and carbon troubles and pep up motor—free if it fails. Send for samples to test at inventor's risk. No obligation. Simply send name and address to J. A. Stransky, A-220, Stransky Block, Pukwana, S. D. Distributors wanted in every town.

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NEW PROCESS—DOUBLE STRENGTH
 Has served humanity for 40 years!
NOTHING LIKE IT! Thousands of Testimonials Prove its Worth. Relieves rheumatism, congestion, sore throat, colds, stiff joints, PAIN! Just rub it on. *Overlaid will convince you.* Sold by your druggist or general store or by our representatives. Price 60c. Send for generous **FREE SAMPLE.** National Remedy Co., 530 Washington St. Dept. 78, New York.

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Sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons without starvation diet or burdensome exercise, often at a rapid rate. Let me send you proof at my expense.

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ANDRE'S ACNE CREAM is Guaranteed for all Skin Troubles no matter how severe or chronic. Brings immediate results. Quickly ends Pimples, Blackheads, Eruptions on face or body. Eczema, Barbers' Itch, Scales, Crusts, Pustules, Enlarged Pores, Oily, Shiny or Itching Skin. Lightens Freckles, Softens and Whiten the Skin.

Full Particulars **FREE.** Write at once.
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Cleared up—often in 24 hours. To prove you can be rid of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body, Barbers' Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin, simply send me your name and address today—no cost—no obligation. **CLEAR-TONE** tried and tested in over 100,000 cases—used like toilet water—is simply magical in prompt results. You can repay the favor by telling your friends; if not, the loss is mine. **WRITE TODAY, E. S. GIVENS, 413 Chemical Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.**

When I first started making real important money I used to go down to the bank, draw out a roll—and just thumb it over in my office and grin! That's how good it felt to get success and big money, after years at a low-paid job.

Success and Big Money Were For Others, Not Me

Believe It or Not, That Was What I Thought of Myself—Just Twelve Short Months Ago

I'M TELLING YOU. just one year ago I'd never seen a hundred dollar bill in my life outside of a bank. You'd think I'm kidding you if you saw the fine Radio business I own now. But it's gospel truth. Just twelve months ago I was only a poorly paid clerk, and I thought success had passed me by.

All my crowd in those days—the fellows I met in the pool-hall and at the bowling-alleys—said a fellow had to have money to make money. They claimed there was no chance for a fellow whose family didn't have money or some business to start him out in. And I'd decided they must be right.

I guess at that time I had just about given up hope. I thought there must be some kind of a mystery about making a lot of money. But I was due for a big awakening. Did I get it? Oh, boy! Read my story and judge for yourself.

IT ALL started one day last summer, when Helen, the girl I wanted to marry, was leaving for the seashore. Of course I went to the station to see her off.

As I stepped onto the station platform Bob Oakes and Wilmer Pratt had just rolled up in their cars. They climbed out with their arms full of bundles—books, expensive candy, flowers, all sorts of things. Well sir, I wished I could have swallowed in one gulp the little box of drugstore candy I had bought for Helen—it certainly looked pitiful beside all that stuff.

We three stood there talking to Helen until train time, while Helen's mother looked me up and down. Like any young girl's mother would, she had my financial standing already sized up within thirty-five cents. Cheap suit, cheap hat, she took it all in. And you could see on her face all the time what a lot of nerve she thought I had to give Bob and Wilmer a run for Helen.

Well, to make a long story short, Helen was nice, but her mother stood there looking scornful whenever she glanced my way, and she hardly spoke to me at all. I felt about as welcome as the measles, and as uncomfortable as the itch. I began to wish that I and my cheap suit and cheap hat could sink through the floor, but I stayed there and stuck it out.

WHEN Helen's train finally left, I slunk home, ashamed and humiliated. I went up upstairs to my room and sat there with a lump in my throat, getting hotter and hotter and more ashamed of myself. Then I began to see red and redder. Finally I jumped up and banged the table. "I'll show 'em," I growled through clenched teeth. "There must be some way for a man to make real money!" An idea suddenly flashed through my head.

Hastily I began thumbing the pages of a magazine on the table, searching for an advertisement that I'd seen many times, but passed up without thinking, an advertisement telling of big opportunities for trained men to succeed in the great new Radio field. With the advertisement was a coupon offering a big free book full of information. I sent the coupon in, and in a few days received a handsome book, telling about opportunities in the Radio field and how a man can prepare quickly and easily at home to take advantage of these opportunities. I read the book carefully and when I finished it I made my decision.

WHAT'S happened in the twelve months since that day, as I've already told you, seems almost like a dream to me now. For ten of those twelve months I've had a Radio business of my own! At first, of course, I started it as a little proposition on the side, under the guidance of the National Radio Institute, the outfit that gave me my Radio training. It wasn't long before I was getting so much to do in the Radio line that I quit my measly little clerical job, and devoted my full time to my Radio business.

Since that time I've gone right on up, always under the watchful guidance of my friends at the National Radio Institute. They would have given me just as much help, too, if I had wanted to follow some other line of Radio besides building my own retail business—such as broadcasting, manufacturing, experimenting, sea operating, or any of the score of lines they prepare you for. And to think that until that day I sent for their eye-opening book, I'd been wailing "I never had a chance!"

NOW I'm making real money, own a good car, stand high in my town, can borrow money at the bank any time I might want it. I'm getting some real *fun* and



enjoyment out of life, not just existing from pay-day to pay-day.

And—just listen to this! Bob was in my place only the other day, and asked me for a job! Wilmer is still getting along pretty well on his father's money, but he'd trade places with me any day.

And Helen? Well—the honeymoon will be spent in Honolulu, starting two months from tomorrow!

HERE'S a real tip. Think it over—are you satisfied? Are you making enough money, at work that you like?

This new Radio game is a live wire field of golden rewards. The work in any of the 20 different lines of Radio, is fascinating, absorbing, well paid. The National Radio Institute—oldest and largest Radio home-study school in the world—will train you inexpensively in your own home to know Radio from A to Z and to increase your earnings in the Radio field.

Take another tip—No matter what your plans are, no matter how much or how little you know about Radio—clip the coupon below and look their free book over. The information it will give you is worth a few minutes of anybody's time. You will place yourself under no obligation—the book is free, and is gladly sent to anyone who wants to know about Radio. Just address: J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 1-A, Washington, D. C.

**J. E. SMITH, President,
National Radio Institute,
Dept. 1-A, Washington, D. C.**

Dear Mr. Smith:

Please send me your 64-page free book, printed in two colors, giving all information about the opportunities in Radio and how I can learn quickly and easily at home to take advantage of them. I understand this request places you under no obligation, and that no salesman will call on me.

Name
Address
Town State

DIAMONDS

The Old Reliable Original Credit Jewelers
Largest in the World

LOFTIS

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Address Dept. H-222
108 N. State St.
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Genuine Diamonds Guaranteed - CASH or CREDIT

Tremendous Diamond values! Buy from Loftis, the Direct Importer, and be sure of highest quality and most value for your money. Our ring mountings are the latest creations in 18-k white gold, elaborately carved and pierced. Satisfaction guaranteed or money back. Goods sent for your free examination on request.

CREDIT TERMS: Pay one-tenth down; balance weekly, semi-monthly, or monthly at your convenience. All goods delivered on first payment.

SEND FOR FREE CATALOG!

Big 132-page book, illustrating our Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry, Silverware, and gift articles for all occasions, sent absolutely free. Write today.

19-Jewel Adjusted Waltham No. 846-
14-k white gold filled; assorted patterns, \$42.50. \$4.25 down and \$1.00 a week.

Railroad Watches—
Guaranteed to Pass Inspection

HAMILTON NO. 992. 21 Jewels, adjusted to 5 positions. Gold-filled 25-year case. \$55

ELGIN'S LATEST RAYMOND. 21 Jewels, 3 adjustments. Runs 40 hours one winding. Gold-filled 20-year case. \$55

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HOWARD RAILROAD WATCH. 21 Jewels, 8 adjustments, 25-year gold-filled case. \$80

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WATCHES



No. 849
\$190
\$2.50 a wk.



No. 851
\$50
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\$75
\$3.75 a wk.



No. 857—Ladies' Wrist Watch, solid 14-k white gold, 15 Jewels.
\$27.50—\$9.75 a month



Wedding Rings
No. 824—The "Elite" \$7.50
18-k white gold.
Set with 3 Diamonds, \$22.50
6 Diamonds, \$32.50; 7 Diamonds, \$42.50; 9 Diamonds, \$52.50; 12 Diamonds, \$67.50
Our ref. any bank or banker in U. S.



No. 859
\$125
\$3.25 a wk.



I'll Pay YOU

\$100 a Week

Maké \$100.00 a week and up, selling our fine, made-to-measure, all-wool suits, direct to wearer. **Biggest values—positively sell on sight.** Biggest commissions paid in advance. We attend to delivery and collections. 6x9 cloth samples—over 100 styles—furnished FREE. Ambitious men write at once.

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EARN UP TO \$250 per month SALARY

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You'll be practically your own boss, see new faces and places each minute. You start at \$120 or more salary per month and rapidly increase. We train you in 3 mos. spare time home study. For over nine years, graduates have been offered definite positions a few days after graduation. Write today for free booklet and contract agreeing to refund tuition if position is not offered after graduation.

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Fascinating question and answer method. Used in High Schools. Every subject covered. Easy terms. Certificate awarded. Write for free folder.

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DON'T let nasal catarrh make you miserable this winter. Rexall Catarrh Jelly will give you relief. Use it for head colds, too, and clear that "stuffed-up" congestion. Rexall Catarrh Jelly is easy to use because of the patent nozzle tip. Sold only at Rexall Drug Stores.

SAVE with SAFETY at your

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You will recognize it by this sign. Liggett's are also Rexall stores



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\$2 and it's yours

World's best makes—Underwood, Remington, Oliver—prices smashed to almost half.

All late models, completely rebuilt and re-finished brand new. GUARANTEED for ten YEARS. Send no money—big FREE catalog shows actual machines in full colors. Get our direct-to-you easy payment plan and 10-day free trial offer. Limited time. Write today.

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Stop Using a Truss

Free-Trial Plapao—Free

STUART'S ADHESIF PLAPAO-PADS are surprisingly different from the truss—being mechanico-chemico applicators—made self-adhesive purposely to keep the muscle-tonic "PLAPAO" applied continuously to the affected parts, and to minimize painful friction and dangerous slipping. No straps, buckles or spring attached. Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. For almost a quarter of a century satisfied thousands report success without delay from work. Process of recovery natural, so no subsequent use for a truss. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Trial of "PLAPAO" will be sent to you upon request absolutely FREE. Write name on coupon and send TODAY.

Plapao Co., 22 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name

Address

Return mail will bring Free Trial PLAPAO

Play the HAWAIIAN GUITAR
Just as the Natives Do

FREE when you enroll
\$15 HAWAIIAN GUITAR and Case

Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.



Play in Half Hour
After you set the four easy motions you play harmonious chords with very little practice. No previous musical knowledge necessary.

Free Guitar
and Outfit in Genuine Seal Grain Fabricoid Case as soon as you enroll. Nothing to buy—everything furnished. No delay.

Easy Lessons
Even if you don't know one note from another, the 62 printed lessons and the clear pictures make it easy to learn quickly. Pay as you play.

Write at Once
You'll never be lonesome with this beautiful Hawaiian Guitar. Write for Special Offer and easy terms. A postcard will do. ACT!

OTHER: Tenor Banjo, Violin, Tiple, Tenor Guitar, Ukulele, COURSES: Banjo Ukulele under well-known instructors.
FIRST HAWAIIAN CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC, Inc.
9th Floor, Woodworth Bldg., Dept. 139 New York, N. Y.
Approved as a Correspondence School Under the Laws of the State of New York

WANT \$35-\$70 WEEKLY

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Railway Mail Clerk
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Learn with real tools on real equipment. No books, no lessons. Actual shop experience. Only a few short weeks fits you for a big-pay job—\$50 a week and up. Write for big FREE book on electricity and remarkable tuition offer, which includes R. R. fare and board—Address nearest school.

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Just help us take orders for amazing new Non-alcoholic Food Flavors. Always fresh. Three times the strength of bottled flavors. Big repeat business and profits, because not sold in stores. This is only one of 350 fast selling ZANOL Products that are bringing \$6 to \$12 a day to ambitious men and women. Big money for spare time. Old reliable company. Paid two million dollars to our representatives last year. Write for new Profit-Sharing Plan.

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62 Monmouth Ave. Cincinnati, Ohio



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Do you enjoy outdoor life close to Nature? Get Forest Ranger job; salary \$125-\$200 month and home furnished; make as much more fishing, hunting, trapping on the side; permanent, no strikes or shut-downs; vacations on full pay. For further particulars, write

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SELL PIONEER TAILORING
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Make \$12 a day from start—part time men \$5 an hour selling famous Pioneer tailored-to-measure, all-wool suits at \$23.50. Commissions paid in advance. Striking leather brief case containing 100 large watch samples furnished—other equally remarkable values at \$29.50 and \$34.50. We train the inexperienced. Men with determination and willingness to work for success write for this big money-making opportunity—today!

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GET ON "UNCLE SAM'S" PAYROLL



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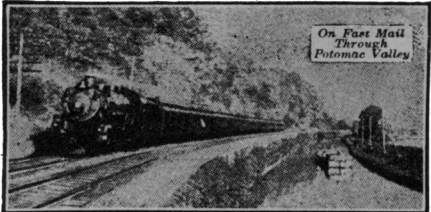
\$1140 to \$3300

A YEAR PICK YOUR JOB

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERK

Railway Postal Clerks get \$1900 the first year, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. \$78.06 each pay day. Their pay is quickly increased, the maximum being \$2,700 a year. \$112.50 each pay day.

TRAVEL—SEE YOUR COUNTRY



Railway Postal Clerks, like all Government employees, have a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). They travel constantly and see the country. When away from home they get extra allowance for hotel. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension.

CITY MAIL CARRIERS, POSTOFFICE CLERKS

Clerks and Carriers now commence at \$1,700 a year and automatically increase \$100 a year to \$2,100 and \$2,300. They also have 15 days' paid vacation. Many February examinations will be held throughout the country. City residence is unnecessary.



GOVERNMENT CLERK

(Open to men and women 18 or over)
Salary \$1,140 to \$1,860 a year. Pleasant clerical work in the various government departments at Washington, D. C., and other cities throughout the country.

GET FREE LIST OF POSITIONS

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once.
DO IT NOW—This investment of two cents for a postage stamp may result in your getting a Government Job.

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Dept. T273, ROCHESTER, N. Y.
(Not connected with U. S. Government)

Rush to me, free of charge (1) a full description of the position checked below; (2) Free Copy of 32-page book, "How to Get a U. S. Government Job"; (3) A list of the U. S. Government Jobs now obtainable; (4) Tell me how to get the position I have checked.

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 General Clerk (\$1140-\$1860)

Name

Address

Use This Coupon Before You Mislay It.



To daily divers

The desperate gentleman wearing the submarine millinery has climbed into his bath determined to go down among the molluscs and the octopi, if need be, on the trail of his cake of sinker soap.

If you have been compelled to plow along the tub-bottom in search of a cake of soap like that—

And if you do not own one of these fashionable deep-water derbies—

You can simplify, shorten and immeasurably improve the whole bathing operation

by investing a carfare in a cake of Ivory.

Ivory floats!

Perhaps it has already occurred to you that the function of a soap in the bath is to get you clean—comfortably, luxuriously, quickly and triumphantly—and not to be the object of a feverish search every time it slips out of your hand. Well, then, you will welcome a floating cake of Ivory as a shipwrecked man welcomes the approach of a fifty-foot yacht with dinner on the table.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY SOAP

99% PURE · IT FLOATS



Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXV

JANUARY 7, 1928

No. 1



The Bunk House Pest

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "A Snow-Bound Yuletide," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE COMES TO THE TWIN C.

QUT of a cloudless sky on a peaceful Sunday afternoon trouble came to the Twin C ranch, though it did not look like trouble at first, and it did not come because of the usual quarreling of Hank Swerle and "Stubby" Bane, as might have been expected.

Even Uncle Peter, the sage of the outfit, did not know that it was trouble when he first saw it, being too busy listening to Hank Swerle and Stubby

Bane arguing, and expecting them to clash at any moment.

Uncle Peter was sitting on a rickety bench on the shady side of the adobe bunk house. He puffed at a pipe almost as ancient as himself, and strummed an old guitar. That pipe was reserved for Sundays and holidays; at all other times Uncle Peter's indulgence in the weed was confined to the eating variety.

Uncle Peter was by far the oldest cow-puncher in the district. Men said he had been there to welcome the first calf. He was not much for looks, and he was a total loss sartorially. His face was the color of weather-stained leather,

his eyes squinted, his gnawed gray mustache was stained with tobacco juice, and he was almost bald. He had the thinnest neck and the biggest Adam's apple in the county. Years in the saddle had bowed his legs. His hands were gnarled.

But Uncle Peter was thoroughly respected throughout the range land by men who knew him. Uncle Peter had the knack of reading a human being, and he could take care of himself. In his middle age he had been a wicked hand with a six-gun, and he was not to be despised as a gunman now, despite the fact that age had dimmed his sight somewhat.

To suggest that Uncle Peter was merely a pensioner at the Twin C Ranch was equivalent to inviting a battle. Uncle Peter still did a man's work with the outfit, summer and winter. He also gave advice when requested to do so. Sam Wurst, the capable foreman, was not beyond consulting him at times. And Uncle Peter liked the youngsters, and many a budding cow-puncher had learned valuable things from him.

The regular Sunday afternoon horse-shoe-pitching contest had terminated an hour before, with Uncle Peter the victor as usual. The boys were inside the bunk house now. Some were resting, and others were slicking up for visits to neighboring ranches or to the nearest town, Lizardville, ten miles away.

From a sky that was innocent of clouds a blazing sun poured down and seemed to smother the Twin C outfit with its relentless heat. Black heat waves danced around the buildings. Little swirls of dust and litter skipped here and there, driven by a fitful hot breeze. In the calf pasture, baby beef hunted patches of shade. Down in the corrals, horses stood with drooping heads, lazily switching at flies.

Up at the big ranch house, which was constructed of adobe after the approved pattern in the district—three sides

around a patio and with a wall at the back—Hiram Cladlan, the owner of the Twin C was sitting on the porch in the shade with his only daughter, Mary. Cladlan was dozing, and Mary was reading a book as though she did not care very much about it, and lifting her head every few minutes to glance along the dusty highway that curved through the land like a dirty khaki ribbon.

Uncle Peter liked to sit out in front of the bunk house on Sunday afternoon and estimate the men with whom he worked. He was doing this now as he strummed the old guitar. He knew that Stubby Bane, the juvenile of the outfit, was impulsive and foolish at times. He knew that Hank Swerle was mean and not to be trusted. He admired Sam Wurst, the loyal and hard-working foreman. He liked the jovial old cook. And he believed that Hiram Cladlan, the owner of the Twin C, was one of the greatest men in the country.

Glancing up from his guitar, Uncle Peter beheld Sam Wurst walking toward him from the horse corral. Uncle Peter continued plucking at the strings as he watched the foreman's approach. Sam Wurst seemed to be bothered about something, Uncle Peter thought. He walked slowly, with his head bent forward, and his arms were hanging lazily at his sides. That was Sam Wurst's usual attitude when he was thinking of troublesome things.

Uncle Peter kept right on plucking the strings as the foreman sat on the rickety bench beside him. Sam Wurst did not speak at first; he sighed, and squinted at the burning landscape. He, too, was looking at the dusty highway that so much resembled a dirty yellow ribbon.

"Pete, stop fussin' with that danged musical instrument!" Sam Wurst said, after a time.

"Now, Sam, you don't mean that!" Uncle Peter said. "You jest want to blow off steam, and you're pickin' on

my poor old guitar. Music, says the poet, is soothin' to the soul."

"Maybe music is, but we never hear much of it around the bunk house!" Sam Wurst said.

"That's a right down nasty remark, Sam," Uncle Peter complained. "I've been playin' the guitar for goin' on thutty years."

"Might as well give up, then, for you'll never learn," the foreman informed him.

"Sam, you're a regular snappin' turtle to-day," said Uncle Peter. "Somethin' must be on your mind. Open your mouth and let the words come out, Sam. Get it off your chest and you'll feel better. What's the trouble?"

Foreman Sam Wurst sighed yet again. "I like to have a smooth-runnin' outfit," he explained. "It shows that I'm a good foreman, and it pleases the old man."

"Best outfit on the range!" Uncle Peter declared, with an unhesitating loyalty.

"All shot to hell!" Wurst corrected. "I had a sweet-runnin' ranch machine once—before that danged Daddley gang affair."

"My stars!" Uncle Peter ejaculated. "What's the Daddley gang got to do with it? Rustlers and murderers and hoss thieves! Didn't we all chip in and join hands with the sheriff and his deputies? Didn't we turn ourselves into a posse and round up that there Daddley gang? Ain't Joe Daddley doin' life in the pen, and the rest o' his hellions doin' all the way from three to twenty years? What in time you got to worry about regardin' the Daddley gang? Let them do the worryin'!"

"We never found the man who killed Silas Mentall," Wurst said.

"Yeh? We know danged well that the Daddley gang did it."

"But who was the actual murderer?" the foreman persisted. "Silas Mentall was a good man, almost as good as

Hiram Cladlan. His death ought to be avenged."

"Dang it, Sam, I know that! He was killed durin' the raid on his ranch. The Daddley gang made that raid. But the murder couldn't be pinned on any o' them, and slick lawyers saved them from stretchin' rope. That whole gang should have been strung up before the sheriff got his hands on 'em and carted 'em off to jail!"

"My sentiments," Wurst said. "But what happened simply happened. It's too late now. And we didn't get all of the gang."

"Stuff!" Uncle Peter said.

"Remember how Joe Daddley laughed when they sentenced him? 'You got us all but two,' he said. 'I'm lookin' to them two to keep you busy while I'm away. I'll be back soon!' That's what he said, Pete."

"Don't I danged well know it? Wasn't I there?"

"And he told the deputy who took him to the pen that the man who shot Silas Mentall was one of the two we didn't get. Pete, every man in the county has been watched. Not a stranger who's not accounted for. Joe Daddley told the truth."

"What about the two men, then?"

"They're somewhere around, Pete. They are under cover. They might be workin' as honest punchers on any ranch in the district—even on the Twin C."

"My good gosh, Sam! You mean to insinuate that one o' our boys could have been a member o' the Daddley gang?"

"It's possible, Pete."

"I'm right down ashamed o' you!"

"We've got to face facts, Pete," Sam Wurst declared.

"I can't believe it," Uncle Peter declared. "Yet there's a man with the outfit——"

Uncle Peter ceased speaking, and his eyes met those of the foreman squarely.

"Exactly!" Sam Wurst said. "We ain't mentionin' any names just now."

"And what about the other man? Joe Daddley said there were two. There is a certain gent who hangs around the town o' Lizardville, gamblin' and drinkin' and always havin' plenty o' money, but never workin'."

"I take it that you mean a gent by the name o' 'Brute' Heyberg," the foreman said.

"Maybe."

"Oh, he's been watched!" the foreman continued. "I got my suspicions o' him myself. Deputy Sheriff Bill Albison has had his eyes open."

"Bill Albison couldn't see the sunshine on a bright day," Uncle Peter remarked, with scorn in his voice and manner. "If Bill Albison is watchin' Brute Heyberg, then Heyberg is watchin' Bill Albison."

"Heyberg may be all right. He never did like to work. He won a pot at poker a couple of months ago, from a pilgrim who was passin' through the country. Fifty dollars will keep Brute Heyberg a long time, and he won several hundred. He'll get out his horse and ride around lookin' for a job when his money is gone. I ain't sayin' that he's innocent, and I ain't sayin' that he's guilty. What I am complainin' about is that Daddley gang affair is wreckin' the smooth-runnin' ranch machine that I've worked hard to build up."

"How's that?" Uncle Peter asked.

"Men takin' sides about everything, and it all started through arguin' about the Daddley gang. Men suspicious o' one another. How can I have a smooth-runnin' outfit with things like that goin' on?"

It was at that moment that loud voices poured through the open window of the bunk house. Hank Swerle was doing most of the talking.

"Stubby, with one hand I could take you apart to see what makes you run!" Hank Swerle was shouting. "I'm about

fed up with you and your wise remarks!"

"And everybody around here was fed up on you a long time ago!" Stubby Bane retorted. "Maybe you think you're runnin' this here bunk house. I got a right to express my opinion, ain't I? I'm sayin' that the two missin' members o' the Daddley gang are punchers on this range!"

"Got any names to mention?" Hank Swerle asked.

"Not just now. I didn't say I had evidence. I said it's my belief them men are punchers."

"That's a dirty crack at every man on the outfit," Hank Swerle said.

"The innocent ain't worryin' any about it—and makin' a fuss," Stubby Bane said, smoothly.

"You meanin' anything personal by that?" Swerle shouted. "Why, dang your hide——"

The foreman got inside the bunk house just in time. Hank Swerle was jerking his six-gun out of its holster. Stubby Bane was separated from his artillery by the width of the room. Wurst struck Hank Swerle's arm and knocked it aside in time to prevent a shot.

"That's enough!" Wurst snapped. "Put up that gun, Swerle!"

"You're the boss, Wurst, but since when did a foreman think it his duty to horn in on an argument?"

"None of your lip!" Sam Wurst said. "If you'd shot Stubby, and him without a gun on him, what defense would you have had? You don't seem to be in your right mind, Hank."

Swerle growled something and returned his gun to its holster. Stubby Bane, his eyes blazing, was crouching against the wall a few feet away.

"You bunch o' ninnies, listen to me!" Sam Wurst commanded. "You act like a gang o' infants who wasn't dry behind the ears yet! We've got some work to do on the Twin C. The outfit

is down to bedrock. I'm shy one good man right this minute. But, shy a man or not, if you two don't stop this cussed scrappin' I'm goin' to give both o' you your time and tell you to ride! Understand that?"

"Hank started it!" Stubby Bane said.

"I don't care who started it," the foreman replied, as Hank Swerle opened his mouth to voice a denial. "But I danged well know who'll finish it if it keeps up. Tryin' to turn the bunk house into a slaughter house, ain't you? Hank, you're considerable older than Stubby Bane. You quit pesterin' him. Stubby, you leave Hank alone. You two jaspers get down to business and bury the hatchet. Get me?"

They both nodded and turned toward opposite corners of the room. Sam Wurst glared at them, glanced around at the others, and stepped forth into the bright sunshine again.

Uncle Peter had not ceased strumming his old guitar. He looked up and grinned as Wurst emerged.

"Them youngsters are right down snappy," Uncle Peter observed. "Only Hank ain't so much o' a youngster. It ain't right to have a calm and peaceful Sunday afternoon spoiled by gun play. It takes away a man's appetite for his supper, and the cook is makin' apple pies."

"A little more of this nonsense around here, and I'll be goin' crazy!" the foreman said. "What's got into this here outfit? It was all right before that Daddley gang affair."

"Here comes a pilgrim," Uncle Peter observed.

"Huh?"

"Down the dusty road," Uncle Peter continued. "He's comin' along like it was a right nice day and he was takin' a hossback ride for air and exercise. In this heat! That jasper is loco, I reckon."

Sam Wurst shaded his eyes with one hand and looked down the highway. In

the near distance a horseman was loping along, swaying to one side of his saddle, and nonchalantly surveying the country. He had turned down the lane that led to the Twin C buildings, so there was no doubt as to his destination. The foreman's eyes narrowed slightly as he watched the horseman's approach, and it was not because of the bright sun, either.

"He looks mild and docile," Uncle Peter observed. "But he ain't got right good sense, I reckon, ridin' in this heat. Me, I wouldn't even ride for the doctor on a day like this, if my best friend was needin' him bad!"

Uncle Peter was at fault in his judgment for once. Mild and docile the newcomer looked, yet he represented trouble coming to the Twin C.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING BOB LANE.

HE was between twenty-five and thirty, and almost any woman would have called him handsome and entertained romantic thoughts concerning him. He was tall and lean. His smile seemed to light up his entire face. He was dressed in the habit of the range, but there was a touch here and there that stamped him a dude. He wore a sombrero with an ornate carved leather band and a chin strap with a silver buckle. His boots were things of beauty, and his spurs glistened in the sun.

Heat and fatigue had not stamped their evidence upon him. Even the horse he bestrode seemed to prance as though it had just come from the stable. And it stood to reason that the stranger had ridden from Lizardville, ten miles through the dust and heat of the day.

Neither Sam Wurst nor Uncle Peter said anything as this newcomer passed the ranch house with only a glance at the porch and guided his mount toward the bunk house. Uncle Peter continued

strumming the guitar, but he watched the stranger closely.

"Range dude!" Uncle Peter said to the foreman then. "But he looks like he might have something to him, at that. Probably lookin' for a job. Bet he thinks women were made just to fall in love with him."

"I need a man, but I'm particular," Wurst replied.

"He acts like a regular cow-poke," Uncle Peter observed. "Got a dandy outfit, too. That hoss ain't to be sneezed at."

The stranger came to a stop less than fifteen feet from the bench upon which Wurst and Uncle Peter was sitting. The punchers inside the bunk house learned of his arrival and filled the door and windows suddenly, curiosity in their manner.

"Is this the Twin C?" the stranger asked.

"You've arrived," Wurst replied.

"What a wreck she is!" said the stranger.

"What's that?" chorused a dozen voices from the windows and door of the bunk house.

The stranger glanced up and seemed to see the assembled waddies for the first time. He smiled. "Figure of speech," he explained. "I reckon some of you jaspers ain't much on rhetoric. I said 'What a wreck she is!' speakin' of the Twin C, and what I meant, of course, was just the opposite. 'What a wreck she is!' say I, givin' a light laugh. That means——"

"Loose with your talk, ain't you?" Hank Swerle snarled at him.

The man on the horse turned and eyed Swerle. "I don't know your name, hombre, and I ain't got time to find out now, unless you happen to be Mr. Sam Wurst, the foreman o' this ranch. He is the man I'm seekin'."

"Right here!" Wurst said, getting up from the bench.

The newcomer to the Twin C dis-

mounted and smiled again. "My name is Bob Lane, Mr. Wurst," he remarked "I'm from down Texas way. I'm a poor, young cowboy tryin' hard to get along."

"What can I do for you?" Wurst asked.

"I might be compelled to take a job at this here ranch, if everything is satisfactory."

"Can you ride and rope?" Wurst asked.

"O' course, that depends on what you call ridin' and ropin'," Lane told him. "I'm rated pretty good where I come from. But maybe you've got some regular he-champions hereabouts that'd make me look foolish. However, I doubt it."

"You doubt it do you?" snarled Hank Swerle, who was acknowledged the champion of the Twin C when it came to riding and roping.

"I'm handlin' this, Hank, so you keep out of it!" Wurst snapped. The foreman turned to face Lane again. "Know the game?" he questioned.

"I reckon! Born and raised on a ranch. My dad ran his own stock."

"From Texas, huh? I don't know the brand on your horse."

"It's a Texas brand. I've got a bill o' sale, if you've got any doubts about me havin' a right to be ridin' this animal. I'm dead willin' to show the same if urged. But I'd never feel quite the same afterward toward any man who urged me."

Sam Wurst blinked rapidly. "Bad, are you?" he said.

"That all depends on what you call bad," Lane replied.

"He's got a gun on, but it may be an ornament," Hank Swerle put in.

"Don't ask me if it is," Lane said, quickly. "Dog-gone it, two gents asked me somethin' like that durin' the last year, and where are they now?"

"Well, where are they?" Hank asked innocently.

"Not bein' Saint Peter, I ain't able to tell," Lane assured him.

"Can you shoot?" Wurst demanded.

"That there is a question open to argument. 'I've seen worse shots than I am, and I've seen a heap better, so you can make a guess at it."

"I need a man," Wurst confessed. "But he must be a regular, all-around cowboy, and not an imitation. We aren't strong for any imitations on this ranch."

Lane turned and looked at the punchers in the windows and door of the bunk house, then grinned.

"What you mean by that grin?" Hank Swerle cried angrily. "If you think that I'm any imitation, you——"

"Don't say it!" Lane snapped suddenly. The smile was gone from his face, his eyes flashed, and his hand dropped to the butt of his gun.

For once in his life, Hank Swerle did not go into action. He gulped and glared.

"Maybe you're the ranch bully," Lane observed. "I've met up with such before. You'll pardon me, but right now I've got some business with Mr. Wurst."

"You're hired!" Wurst told him.

"That is," said Lane, "you mean that you're willin' to hire me. Now, I'll ask some questions o' my own. How's the grub with this outfit?"

"Why, dang your hide!" Uncle Peter exploded. "The Twin C is noted from the Canadian line to the Mexican border as a ranch where the grub is ten feet above the ordinary, and maybe twelve."

"Uh-huh!" Lane said. "That's your opinion. However, I'm dead game to take a chance. Mr. Wurst, I reckon the bunk house is clean and sanitary?"

"Why, dang you——" Stubby Bane commenced, from one of the windows.

"Just wanted to know," Lane said. "I've glanced at you waddies, remember. I reckon that I'll take a chance, Mr. Wurst. I only got this one horse,

and I don't like to work him much. So I hope you've got plenty good horses. Of course, I don't expect anything special in the horse line."

"Cuss your hide, the Twin C is famous for its horses. We raise our own!" Uncle Peter snorted.

"Maybe that is what's the matter with 'em," Lane responded. "However, I'll look 'em over come mornin', and try to pick out mine."

"I hope you've got your own rope," Hank Swerle sneered.

"I have, thanks. And my own gun!" Lane said, his smile fleeing again. He turned to the foreman. "Well, Mr. Wurst, I'll give you and the Twin C a tryout," he continued. "Bein' as this is Sunday, I hope that the cook has somethin' special for supper. I'm used to a fancy Sunday evenin' meal."

"Can't we have somethin' extra cooked for you?" Swerle asked, sarcastically.

"Oh, I'll just take potluck to-night, since you didn't know that I was comin'! If I stay a week, I'll be acquainted with the cook by that time, and give my own orders. Cooks always take a fancy to me."

"You turn your mount into that corral and pack your blankets to the corner bunk," Sam Wurst said, suddenly, making an attempt to give a show of authority.

Bob Lane nodded to indicate that he had heard. He removed his blanket roll and carried it into the bunk house, the waddies getting out of the way to let him in. Not a word did he speak to any of them; it was as though for him they did not exist at present.

Then he went outside again and led his horse down to the corral, where he rubbed the animal down carefully, watered him, and turned him in. He stacked his saddle with the others and put his bridle on a peg in a corral post, then washed his hands carefully in the watering trough.

"He's right down clean, ain't he?" Hank Swerle said to the watching waddies.

Now it is probable that, under ordinary circumstances, Stubby Bane would have disliked the newcomer, because Lane was young and good looking, and Stubby did not want a dangerous rival for the affections of such young femininity as happened to be in the neighborhood. But the mere fact that Hank Swerle was showing open enmity for Bob Lane was enough to make Stubby Bane champion him.

"Suppose he is clean?" Stubby snapped. "That won't hurt this bunch any, will it?"

"Are you aimin' to stand up for this new jasper with his sassy ways, and take his part?" Hank Swerle demanded.

"I reckon that he don't need anybody to take his part. He looks all right to me," Stubby Bane declared. "I've seen a lot worse—and on the Twin C, too!"

"You meanin' anything personal by that remark?"

Foreman Sam Wurst came between them. "What did I tell you two hombres?" he demanded. "Lay off each other! You'll get your time if you don't. Can't I even hire a new man without you jaspers tryin' to stage a war about it?"

They subsided, and Bob Lane returned from the watering trough, his face wreathed in smiles again. He entered the bunk house and looked around it carefully.

"Not bad!" he admitted. "I've seen worse. Now I'm ready to meet all you boys and learn your handles. I always like to get acquainted real quick and pick my friends and enemies, so I'll know 'em and not make any mistake later."

Sam Wurst muttered introductions. Bob Lane seemed to take a liking to Uncle Peter immediately.

"A man can tell at a glance that you're a real old-timer," Lane said. "I'll

bet you've thrown lead and downed booze with the best of 'em in the old days. You look like a Texan."

"Montanny," said Uncle Peter.

"Ain't looks deceivin'? I thought at first you was a regular he-man. But, comin' from Montana that a way——"

"Say!" Uncle Peter choked, and the rest of the waddies grinned. It was the habit of Uncle Peter to herald Montana as the greatest State in the Union if not in the world. He had not been in Montana since his boyhood days, but bragging about the State was second nature to him.

"The further south you go, the better the breed, and Montana is away up at the northern boundary," Bob Lane observed. "But you can't help that, of course, Uncle Peter."

Now the waddies of the Twin C outfit beheld a strange thing. They expected Uncle Peter to put aside his guitar, stretch himself to his full height, take a deep breath, and lay out this newcomer oratorically. They anticipated the outburst. But none came. Uncle Peter looked at Lane and gulped, and turned away wordlessly. But Uncle Peter, a judge of men, had noticed a peculiar twinkle in the eyes of the latest addition to the outfit. He judged that Lane had some reason for the attack, and that it really was not an attack on him or on the sovereign State of Montana. Being puzzled, Uncle Peter would bide his time and keep his eyes open.

Stubby Bane proceeded to cultivate the newcomer, since he had championed him.

"Lane, we're hopin' that you can ride and rope and shoot," he said. "We need another good man. We have some high times in Lizardville on pay days, and pay day is Tuesday. We'll all ride in."

"Won't have any pay comin'," Lane said. "But I've got a little money, and I always like my fun."

"You'll have it if the M Bar gang feels ornery."

"What is the M Bar gang?"

"The M Bar is the next biggest ranch to the Twin C. Silas Mentall owned it. The Daddley gang got him a few months ago, and then a posse got the Daddley gang. Since Mentall was killed, his foreman has been runnin' the ranch for Mentall's daughter, she bein' his only heir."

"Well, what about it?" Lane persisted.

"The waddies at the M Bar think that they own the earth and want to run it. That don't suit the Twin C punchers at all."

"Well, my good gosh! Have I gone and got me a job in the middle of a range war?"

"Not exactly," Stubby Bane said. "There ain't much shootin'—not much—out o' respect for Miss Clara Mentall. But M Bar and Twin C men can't rub shoulders without somethin' happenin'. There are other ways besides shootin'."

"For instance?" Lane asked.

"Ropin' and ridin', for instance. They've got a couple o' good men, and they're always braggin'."

"Yeh!" Lane said. "I reckon that I know the rest. Little bets are bein' made continual, huh? And I gather that the Twin C bunch has been losin' regular."

"Not regular, but too much," Stubby Bane replied.

"You mean to tell me that the M Bar boys can put it over the Twin C ridin' and ropin' and doin' things like that?"

"Mostly they play tricks."

"Uh-huh! Well, what can I do about it?"

"Probably nothin'," Hank Swerle horned in. "I don't reckon that we'll be much better because you've joined up with the outfit."

Bob Lane turned and faced Hank Swerle squarely. His arms were folded

across his chest, and his feet were wide apart. The smile had left his face again.

"Swerle, for no good reason at all, you started to pick on me as soon as I got out o' the saddle," Lane said. "I reckon that you're goin' to keep it up. That means that we're goin' to have a show-down one o' these days. Just let me know, Swerle, when you want it!"

"Why, you——" Hank Swerle began.

Once more Foreman Sam Wurst got between two would-be belligerents.

"That's enough!" Wurst said.

"Swerle, you've been actin' nasty for a couple o' weeks. Lane is right. You started pickin' on him for no reason at all. I don't aim to referee personal scraps, but I sure and certain do aim to have peace around this ranch! The next man who tries to start anything gets his time and rides!"

Swerle and Lane glared at each other, then Hank Swerle left the bunk house slowly and wandered down toward the corral. Bob Lane began arranging his belongings.

"If there are any prizes hung up for ridin' and ropin', I'll probably win 'em," he said.

"Oh, yeh?" asked Uncle Peter.

"I generally do," said Lane. "And if there is any violence, you c'n count me in, too. I'm right down handy with a six-gun, if I do say it myself."

"That's mighty fine," Uncle Peter observed. "I'm right down glad that we've got a champion of the world of everything in the outfit. You could take a few prizes for ground and lofty talkin', too, couldn't you?"

"I never thought o' that! Maybe I could," Bob Lane replied.

Sam Wurst had wandered up the walk to the ranch house. Mary Cladlan had gone into the house, but Hiram Cladlan was sitting on the porch. Wurst went up to him.

"Well?" Cladlan asked.

"He's come," the foreman replied.

"I saw some man ride in, and was hopin'. What did he have to say?"

"He sure fits in with the letter you got. Said that he came from down Texas way. Sassy and boastful. Ain't that what they wrote you?"

"Yeh," Cladlan replied. "They said that the man they were sending was a peculiar duck. He wouldn't admit his identity or business, they said, for he always worked in his own way. He'd ask for a job as puncher, and we were to give it to him."

"I did," said Wurst.

"Then we're to make it easy for him to snoop around and do his work. We ain't to even hint to him that we know his business. He don't want any suspicion to get into the air, I reckon. He was to say that he came from Texas. It's his way to brag and boast and make himself a bunk house pest."

"He's sure and certain started in fine," the foreman said. "Hank Swerle started pickin' on him, but he didn't get far. I'm itchin' to give Hank his walkin' papers, but I thought that, under the circumstances, it would be better to let him stay as long as we can."

"Yeh!" Hiram Cladlan agreed. "Just keep your eyes open, Sam. What's the new man call himself?"

"Bob Lane."

"All right, I'll remember it. Just keep in mind who he is, Sam, and give him a chance to do his work. But make everything look natural."

CHAPTER III.

A SHOT FROM AMBUSH.

FOREMAN SAM WURST lived not in the bunk house, but in a tiny adobe building apart, as became his station. So news of what passed among the men in the bunk house came to him as hearsay.

The following morning, he was up at dawn as usual and issued orders promptly after breakfast to all the men

save Uncle Peter and Bob Lane. He told the latter to wait, and led Uncle Peter aside.

"Pete, you're old enough to have some sense," Wurst said.

"I've made most o' the mistakes and know better than to repeat 'em," Uncle Peter acknowledged.

"This new man, Lane, for instance. You got any ideas concernin' him?"

"Maybe?"

"As which?" the foreman asked.

"He's a right bright young man and ain't tellin' everything that he knows," Uncle Peter said.

"I reckon. Can you guess at some things he don't tell?"

"Maybe," Uncle Peter confessed. "I'd say that he don't depend on punchin' cows for a livin'. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he was one o' these bright young detective fellers who work for the Cattleman's Association now and again."

"If he was, Pete, what would he be doin' here?"

"Maybe he's after the remainin' two members o' the Daddley gang and the murderer of old Silas Mentall."

"Uh-huh! You've got sense, Pete. Hades! Do you reckon that it is as plain as all that to the others?"

"Nope! I been watchin'. The other boys think that he's just a fresh young waddy prowlin' around through the country and workin' here and there—a sort of dude range tramp. There are many sich. Me, I think his freshness is to cover up somethin'. I saw a twinkle in his eye, so I didn't ride him hard when he pestered me a mite."

"You've got it, Pete," the foreman admitted. "Now, you listen to me. His business ain't to be mentioned even to him. The old man got a letter sayin' he was a peculiar duck, but just to let him work in his own way. He's got an idea, I reckon, that even hintin' at his business might make folks suspicious."

"I reckon that I understand, Sam."

"I'm goin' to send him out with you, but you let him stray where he will. Don't mention this detective stuff unless he opens up about it first. Keep your eyes open and see if any of the other boys suspect. And—well, guard his back a bit, Pete."

"Yeh!" Uncle Peter said.

"Anything happen last night?"

"He riled Hank Swerle a little," Uncle Peter said. "Stubby Bane is his friend because Hank ain't. He grilled all the boys and made 'em think he's a bunk house pest."

"That's probably his wise way o' workin'," the foreman said. "The boys will get to thinkin' that he's a pest and keep away from him as much as possible. They won't take him seriously, and he can do his work."

"He talks a lot without really sayin' much," Uncle Peter reported. "Wise young lad, he is. I sure hope he runs down the man who shot Silas Mentall and finds out who the two Daddley gang men are. It gives a man the shivers to think he might be livin' in the same bunk house with one o' 'em."

"Careful!" Wurst warned. "Not even a hint about any suspicions you may have."

And so, a short time later, Uncle Peter and Bob Lane rode forth for the implied purpose of inspecting some fence around a calf pasture up the slope, a place from which Bob Lane could see the surrounding country and orient himself.

Uncle Peter chewed tobacco and refrained from conversation except to answer queries voiced by the newcomer. They inspected the fence slowly and found nothing wrong. Uncle Peter knew very well that the fence had been examined carefully only a week before.

When they reached high ground, Uncle Peter dismounted to inspect a saddle girth that did not need inspect-

ing, and gave Bob Lane a chance to survey the surrounding country.

"That's the M Bar outfit over there to the right," Uncle Peter said, as he got back into the saddle again.

"Uh-huh! It's a right nice place, from the looks of it."

"Silas Mentall was a good man, and I hope that they land his murderer some day," Uncle Peter offered. "Clara Mentall is an dandy girl, too. I reckon she'll sell out and go East to live with her aunt. There's been some talk o' it."

"Uh-huh!" Lane grunted. "The M Bar adjoins the Twin C, don't it?"

"Yeh! Hope no ornery jasper buys the M Bar. The two ranches can get along better if the men as own 'em are friends. We need their water at times more'n they need ours."

"I'd sure like to ride over that way and take a look some time," Lane said.

"We c'n do it right to-day," suggested Uncle Peter, remembering what the foreman had told him. "This here fence is all right. We'll ride around to the M Bar and cut home by the main trail, inspectin' a little more fence that side. It'll be all right with Sam Wurst. When you're out inspectin' fence for him, it means you're on a vacation mostly. Then he'll want you to spend to-day gettin' an idea of the ranch and the country. He always likes to have a new man know the lay of the land."

That fixed it all right, Uncle Peter thought. They rode across a natural meadow, down a slope, and approached the M Bar Ranch from the north. As they rode into the ranch house yard, Miss Clara Mentall came from the house, and the Twin C men dismounted. Uncle Peter performed the introductions.

"I'm right glad you happened by, Uncle Peter, because I want to send a note to Mary," Clara Mentall said. "I'll go into the house and write it."

She disappeared into the house. Uncle Peter suggested that he go down by the

corral and talk to a friend of his who happened to be mending a saddle down there, and that Bob Lane wait for the note. Uncle Peter thought that would give Lane a chance to talk to Clara Mentall, if he wished to do so. Uncle Peter did not know much concerning the methods of a detective, but he had a vague idea that a detective always asked a multitude of questions of folks.

As he talked to his friend, Uncle Peter observed that Lane held a long conversation with Clara Mentall, and Uncle Peter judged that it was a sort of business conversation. Neither Lane nor Clara Mentall acted or looked as though they were making small talk.

Peter waited until Lane mounted his horse and Clara Mentall disappeared into the house, then he rejoined the newcomer and they rode out to the highway and toward the Twin C.

"Miss Mentall gave me a note for Miss Cladlan, and said to deliver it to her special and personal," Lane said.

"You c'n do that as soon as we get home," Uncle Peter said.

"Miss Mentall is a right nice young lady."

"Yeh! She's all of that!" Uncle Peter said. "I hope they find out who killed her father. The man who found that out would sure stand high with Clara Mentall. She's sole owner of the big M Bar outfit now, too."

"Uncle Peter, you're tryin' hard to put mercenary ideas in my head," Lane said. "Would you advise a young man to marry for money?"

"Nope," said Uncle Peter. "But it ain't hard to fall in love where money happens to be around. Me, I never married. I reckon I was too particular—or maybe the women was."

Uncle Peter expected Lane to ask a lot of questions then concerning the slaying of Silas Mentall, but he did not. Probably knew all the details already, Uncle Peter judged. They rode slowly along the highway in the blistering sun,

their neckerchiefs up over their mouths to keep out the dust. Talk ceased. Uncle Peter was compelled to drop his neckerchief now and then to take a fresh chew. Bob Lane seemed to be surveying the country.

They came presently to a place where the trail ran through a jumble of rocks and into a tiny canyon a couple of hundred yards long. Uncle Peter rode ahead, and Lane followed fifty feet behind.

A rifle cracked. The crack was clear and distinct, and echoed and reëchoed through the little gorge. Uncle Peter heard Lane give an exclamation and turned quickly. Lane's hat was in the highway. Lane himself was tumbling out of the saddle.

Uncle Peter thought at first that he had been hit and was falling, and wheeled his mount to go back. But Lane had not been hit. He tumbled out of the saddle on the far side of the horse and darted to the cover of a bunch of rocks. He had seen at the first glance that he could not ride up the side of the gorge.

Six-gun in hand, Lane ran from rock to rock, attempting to reach the top. He made no replies to Uncle Peter's shouted queries. Uncle Peter sought cover without dismounting, and watched.

The rifle cracked again, and near the top a puff of smoke showed for an instant. Lane fired twice at the puff of smoke. Assured now that this was an attempt at assassination, and remembering what Sam Wurst had told him, Uncle Peter unlimbered his own artillery and joined the battle.

He shouted to his companion to mount and follow, and turned his horse down the trail. There were no more rifle shots. Lane got into the saddle and galloped after Uncle Peter. The latter knew the country, and turned his horse into a little trail that ran to the top of the rock wall beside which they had been riding.

It was a stiff climb. They reached the top in time to see a horseman disappearing in the distance. He was using his spurs and going fast. They had just a flash of him, and then he vanished into a depression in the earth.

"No use chasin' him now," Uncle Peter observed. "He can turn almost any direction there while he's out o' sight. There is a maze o' coulees there. Did you get a good look at the jasper?"

"I got a good look at his horse, and I'll know it if I see it again," Lane replied. "The horse was marked funny on the left hip."

"Yeh! Big white spot," Uncle Peter said, looking at Lane closely. Uncle Peter knew that horse, but he decided he would not volunteer information unless asked for it.

"What's the idea?" Lane said. "Can't a man ride through this danged country without somebody takin' a shot at him?"

"Don't look like it. Maybe he was gunnin' for me," Peter said.

"If he was, he's a mighty bad shot. That first one sent my hat into the dust. And he took another shot at me when I was out o' the saddle, and it didn't miss me much, either. If he had been shootin' at you, Uncle Peter, he'd have got you the second shot."

"Looks like it," Uncle Peter said. "You got any enemies hereabouts?"

"And me only arrivin' yesterday? You're givin' me credit for workin' mighty fast," Lane replied.

He said nothing more, but turned his horse and started down to the main trail, and Uncle Peter followed. There, Lane picked his hat up out of the dirt. There was a hole through the high crown.

"Four inches lower, and it would have been curtains for me," Lane said. "Dang it, it makes me mad! If somebody around this here part o' the country thinks that they're initiatin' me by playin' tricks like this, they're danged well goin' to have a fight on their hands!"

"You reckon that it was all in fun?" Uncle Peter asked, easily.

"I don't know, but I'm goin' to find out! I'll know that horse if I ever see him again, and I can hook him up with his rider. It might have been a Twin C man, or a M Bar man, or just some maverick prowlin' through the country." Bob Lane rode for a time in silence. "And that was my pet hat, too!" he added, as an afterthought.

CHAPTER IV.

POUNDING FISTS.

WHEN they came to the Twin C, Hiram Cladlan was talking to Sam Wurst down by the corral, and none of the other men seemed to be around. Bob Lane stopped before the ranch house.

"I can introduce myself, Uncle Peter," he said, "and give Miss Mary Cladlan the note Miss Mentall sent."

Uncle Peter rode on to the corral. He supposed that Lane wanted to ask a few questions of Mary Cladlan, too, and he did not want to be in the way. He joined the foreman and the old man, and related what had happened out on the trail.

"Did you know the jasper?" Cladlan demanded.

"Couldn't see very well. But I knew the horse."

"What horse was it?" Wurst put in.

"It was a big bay with a peculiar big white splotch on the hip," Uncle Peter explained.

Cladlan and his foreman looked at each other quickly. They both knew that horse. Cladlan had raised him on the Twin C.

"So it was Hank Swerle who shot at him!" the owner of the Twin C said. "Least, Swerle rode that horse out this mornin'. I saw him start."

"I hate to think that a man of the Twin C, even a mean hombre like Hank Swerle, could be one of the Daddley

gang and maybe the man who shot Silas Mentall," Wurst said.

"Well, he's under suspicion! But why should he take a shot at Lane unless he suspects that Lane is after him?"

"Hank is right down mean, and him and the new man didn't hit it off any too well right from the start," Uncle Peter explained.

"But they ain't got to the shootin' point," Cladlan declared.

"Want me to tell Lane who shot at him?" the foreman asked.

"No," Cladlan replied, after a moment's thought. "Let him attend to his own business in his own way. He may suspect Swerle and want to handle him in some fashion. We don't want to spoil his work. Give him a hand or help if he needs it. We don't want any man around here shot in the back or murdered in his bunk."

"If it comes to a show-down, I'll have to let Swerle go," Wurst said. "Maybe Lane is figurin' on that. He may think, if Swerle is fired, that he'll come out into the open."

"Sam, you just let yourself be guided by circumstances," Cladlan said. "Pete, where is Lane now?"

"Miss Mentall sent a note to Miss Mary, and he stopped to deliver it," Uncle Peter replied.

"I'm goin' to look at the rest o' these horses with Sam. You go back and get Lane and play around with him until night. Go over and look at the colt pasture fence. Keep him right here around the house. Don't leave him alone unless he acts like he wants it. I don't want him killed before he gets started."

Uncle Peter rode back to the house and found that Lane had gone inside with Mary. Lane's mount, the reins trailing on the ground, was making a meal off the grass Hiram Cladlan had planted in front of the house.

Uncle Peter dismounted and went slowly up the steps, his old boots making no noise. He hoped that Lane

would stay inside long enough to give him a chance to sit in the easy-chair on the porch for a time. Uncle Peter had moments when he wanted to rest.

He glanced through the screen door, and got a shock that almost stopped his heart. He saw Bob Lane standing with his arms around Mary Cladlan. They were oblivious of Uncle Peter's presence on the porch.

Uncle Peter was about to tear open the door and rush inside, but he hesitated because it appeared that Mary Cladlan was not putting up a struggle. He turned away toward the chair.

"That boy is certainly one who works fast," Uncle Peter said to himself. "I reckon that I'd better watch him a bit. The old man will shoot him sure if he fusses around Mary. He must be a wonder with women. Mary has been pretty standoffish with men."

He did not pretend to explain it to himself. Lane came out in a moment, his face inscrutable. He mounted and followed Uncle Peter to the colt pasture.

"Mr. Lane, I got somethin' to tell you, and it's for your own good," Uncle Peter said.

"Yeh? What's that?"

"It seems to me that you're a devil with women. I was watchin' while you talked to Clara Mentall, and dang my hide if you wasn't makin' up to her!"

"Nothin' o' the sort! We were talkin' business."

"And when I came up on the porch a few minutes back, I happened to glance through the screen door."

"And just what did you see?" Lane asked.

"You was holdin' Mary Cladlan in your arms. If it had been the old man seen you, you'd be buzzard food this minute. Mary Cladlan ain't a girl to be played with."

"Well, my stars! Who's playin' with her?" Lane asked. "I was talkin' after deliverin' that note, and she looked so

danged pretty that I just had to put my arms around her. We was laughin' all the time. It was just in fun."

"I'm right down glad o' that," said Uncle Peter. "Heaven help the man who ever plays around Mary Cladlan! There ain't a man on the range wouldn't go gunnin' for him."

"Cuss it, Uncle Peter, suppose she likes me?"

"In that case, you've got only one man to count, and that's her father. He's run away half a dozen youngsters as come sparkin' Mary. Seems to me you're in a mighty hurry. You meet her the first time and start makin' love."

"That's just my way, Uncle Peter."

"Uh-huh! Your way'll end in disaster one o' these days."

"You get this straight, Uncle Peter! I ain't the kind o' man that'd insult a woman. I ain't flirtin' around, either! Mary Cladlan won't ever come to any harm through me. She's a mighty fine girl!"

"Don't we all know it?" Uncle Peter snapped.

"I reckon you're jealous."

"Like a granddaddy!" Uncle Peter said. "I just can't understand Mary lettin' you get so familiar on short acquaintance."

"I reckon she liked me at first sight," Lane replied. "I'm sure glad that she did!"

"Well, I've warned you," Uncle Peter said. "You're a cow-puncher on the Twin C—far as I know."

"Yep; that's right!"

"If you've got any other business, it ain't any of mine. But I'd hate like sin to see the old man take out a six-gun and fill you full of holes."

"He won't!" Lane asserted. "What's all this row about, anyway? I just put my arms around her."

"Lane, you was a-kissin' her!"

"Did you see that, too? You've got pretty good eyes, Uncle Peter. Don't say anything about it."

"I won't if you behave yourself. I was young myself once, and kissin' a pretty girl came handy. But don't you go to makin' her love you unless you're the kind o' man Hi Cladlan would want for a son-in-law. You bust her heart, Lane, and a dozen men will be all set to bust you."

That was all was said of it, except that Uncle Peter, knowing Mary as he did, could not understand her swift surrender. Perhaps she had acted on impulse, Uncle Peter told himself. Or maybe Bob Lane was Clara Mentall's sweetheart, and for that reason had come here to find the man who had shot her father.

Maybe that was it! Clara had been away to school and had met a lot of men, undoubtedly. Perhaps she was secretly engaged to Bob Lane. Perhaps her note to Mary told Mary as much, and Mary in her delight had welcomed Lane with a kiss, delighted that he was to marry her chum.

"That must be it!" Uncle Peter mused. "Well, Clara is a nice girl. But if I was her, I wouldn't want my sweetheart kissin' my chum!"

Lane was rather taciturn as they rode back to the bunk house as night descended. They turned their mounts into the corral, and Uncle Peter hurried to wash up. Lane fussed around with his saddle, eying the horses in the corral.

"Who's that big bay belong to?" he asked Sam Wurst, who happened to be near.

"Belongs to the ranch string. He ain't owned personal," Sam Wurst replied. "He looks mighty good, but he's only an ordinary horse. Any time you want to buy a horse, we've got some in th upper pasture that'll look good to you."

"Uh-huh! Did anybody ride that horse to-day?"

"Hank Swerle had him out."

"Uh-huh!" Lane said.

He went to the trough to wash, taking

his time about it, as might a man who was thinking deeply. Going into the bunk house, he got ready for the evening meal. He talked to Uncle Peter and Stubby Bane, who was playing the part of a hero-worshiper, but not once did he look at Hank Swerle.

"Uncle Peter was sayin' that some jasper took a shot at you from ambush," Stubby said.

"Uh-huh! He plumb ruined a good hat," Lane replied.

"Tryin' to potshot a man!" exclaimed Stubby. "Got any idea who the jasper was?"

"Maybe. I ain't sayin' just now," Lane answered. "I don't like to have anything spoil my appetite for supper. You've got a right down good cook on the Twin C."

"Shouldn't think you'd have any stomach for supper after being that close to death," Stubby said.

"Shucks! As long as I ain't dead, I got to eat, ain't I?" Lane asked. "That jasper was a right poor shot. The distance wasn't so great, and he had a rifle, too."

"How'd you know that?" Swerle asked.

"Sound!" Lane replied, without looking at him.

"And he got away!" said Stubby Bane.

"He got away for the time bein'," Lane corrected. "Me and him are goin' to have words, I reckon, when the time comes. He sure started an argument, and I reckon I ought to finish it."

The cook's call came, and they trooped into the room where they ate, and got their places. Bob Lane was between Uncle Peter and Stubby Bane, and Hank Swerle was almost at the other end of the table. Swerle appeared to be rather uncommunicative. He grunted monosyllables in reply to words addressed to him, but that did not attract much attention, since Hank Swerle had his surly fits.

Uncle Peter studied the situation as calmly as possible, and decided that Lane would make a move when it pleased him. Sam Wurst, who took his meals at the ranch house, put in an appearance just as the meal was finished and the men were returning to the bunk house. Wurst had been a bit nervous.

"He knows that Swerle rode that horse," the foreman whispered to Uncle Peter.

"Yeh! There'll be hades poppin' before long, I'm guessin'."

"We'll let him handle it his own way," Wurst said. "But we'll see fair play."

There was nothing unusual in the foreman's paying a visit to the bunk house after the evening meal, for he did so often. He sat down at a table in a corner and watched a poker game between three of the men, who were betting in thousands because words cost nothing. They kept an accurate record, however.

"Pay day to-morrow," one of them chanted. "Then we'll have real money—for a few minutes."

"I suppose the M Bar bunch will be in town," Stubby Bane put in. "I lost my shirt on that fake horse race they pulled last month. Dog-gone that outfit!"

"But we've got a champion with our gang now," Hank Swerle said sneeringly. "Mister Bob Lane. He'll take 'em on, singly or in groups, for money, marbles, or chalk, at any old game they plan."

"I'd probably win if I did!" Lane said.

Hank Swerle choked. "You'll have the chance to do somethin', probably," he replied. "The crowd will be waitin' to see you perform."

"I always like to perform in front of a crowd," Lane said. "I like to do my shootin', for instance, out in the open where folks can see it."

An electric thrill seemed to run

through those in the bunk house. The poker players gave strict attention to their game. The others were very busy, suddenly, fussing around their bunks. Uncle Peter scraped at his Sunday pipe, and Sam Wurst breathed heavily as he watched.

Hank Swerle was sitting on the side of his bunk, oiling a pair of boots. Lane stood beside a wall lighting his pipe. He failed to meet Swerle's eyes. He glanced toward the poker game as though thinking about joining the players.

Swerle stooped to pick up another boot, and Lane stepped quickly in his direction. Hank Swerle's six-gun was on the end of his bunk. Lane placed himself so that Swerle could not reach the gun first.

"Swerle, if you can spare the time from polishin' that footgear, I've got a few words to say," Lane remarked.

"Yeh? To me? Go right ahead and say 'em."

"I just wanted to know, Swerle, what you meant by hidin' in the rocks and takin' a few shots at me late this afternoon."

"What's that?" Swerle cried. He sprang to his feet and whirled to reach for his gun. But Lane had whipped out his own six-gun and had him covered.

"Easy!" Lane warned.

"You—you've got me covered, so I reckon you can say anything you want," Swerle said, snarling.

"I'm askin' you a question, Swerle. Why did you shoot at me with a rifle? You tried to murder me, cuss it! And you ruined a good hat."

"What makes you think I shot at you?"

"I think so because I got a good look at the horse, and it was the horse you had out to-day. But mostly because I asked you that question and you ain't answered it yet. Maybe you didn't like me from the first, Swerle, but that ain't any reason for you tryin' to assassinate

me from ambush. That's a right down cowardly trick!"

"Are you callin' me a liar and a coward both?" Swerle yelled.

"A man who is one is generally the other," Lane replied.

"So that's the kind of man you are!" Swerle cried. "Get the drop on a man and then call him a liar and a coward! Maybe you'd not be so free with words if I had my gun."

"Back up!" Lane ordered, shoving the muzzle of his gun against Swerle's stomach. I just want to be sure that you don't make a dive for your gun, Swerle. I ain't goin' to use mine, either. I'm going to toss it to Mr. Wurst to take care of. And then I'm goin' to give you the dangest lickin' you ever got before or will get again! You ambushin' coward!"

Bob Lane tossed his gun toward Wurst as he ceased speaking, and an instant later slapped Swerle's face with such force that there was a sharp crack. Swerle's head snapped to one side with the violence of it.

He bellowed like an enraged bull and charged. Lane stepped neatly and quickly to one side and ripped across a blow that sent the bully of the Twin C reeling against the wall. Hank Swerle snarled oaths and came back. Standing on the balls of his feet, fists ready, Lane met him.

They mixed for a moment, and when they separated it was seen that Swerle's face was marked, and that Lane's was not. The waddies had got out of the way and were giving the combatants plenty of room. Hank Swerle was like a maniac. He depended more on brute force than science, for he was a strong man. Yet brute force availed him nothing now.

Every charge Hank made was met by a rain of blows, and Lane always managed to escape with a minimum of damage to himself and his clothing. His fists cut Swerle's face into ribbons and

closed one of his eyes. Swerle realized that he was fighting a losing battle, that the man before him could send him to the floor with a crashing blow whenever he willed, knock him out.

Hank Swerle had not been raised in a school that advocated fair play. To win was the thing, no matter by what method, he believed. Lane rushed again, and this time Swerle gave ground. He seemed to be retreating, throwing up his arms in front of his face.

"Got enough?" Lane demanded.

"No, damn you!"

Swerle had accomplished his mission he had maneuvered to get near his bunk. And now he made a dive for it, and for his six-gun there. A chorus of cries from the waddies and the foreman warned Lane. Hank Swerle intended murder.

But Lane had been watching for that. He crashed upon Swerle as the latter grasped the gun. He tore it away and hurled it across the room. One—two—his fists found landing places on Hank Swerle's head.

Hank Swerle collapsed on the side of his bunk and slipped from there to the floor. Sam Wurst went forward ahead of the others.

"Go outside and wash the blood off your hands and bathe them knuckles, Lane," the foreman ordered. "Then step right back here."

Stubby Bane gleefully got a bucket of water and threw it into Hank Swerle's face. Swerle regained consciousness, sat up on the floor, then got up on the edge of his bunk, where he held his hands to his head for a moment.

"Hank, you're done on the Twin C!" Sam Wurst told him.

"Yeh?" Swerle snarled. "Sidin' with the fresh newcomer, are you?"

"We don't want any bushwhackin' skunks in this outfit!" Wurst continued. "And we don't want a man who can't play fair. You went for your gun when

you knew you were losin'. It'd served you right if Lane had plugged you. Roll up your blankets. I'll have one of the men catch up your horse and get him ready. I'll see you in town to-morrow and give you your pay."

Hank Swerle did not argue. He snarled at the foreman and turned to collect his meager belongings. One of the men went to get the horse and put saddle and bridle on him. Bob Lane returned from outdoors.

Lane said nothing after Sam Wurst motioned to him to keep silent. He went to his locker and got out a bottle and anointed his knuckles. He behaved as though Hank Swerle had not been in the room.

"Your horse is ready, Swerle," the foreman announced. "Get on him, and ride! I'll give you your pay to-morrow, as I said."

"You'll give me the money that's due me—that's what you mean," Hank Swerle replied. "As far as my pay is concerned, I'll collect that myself, later!"

"Are you tryin' to threaten me?" Wurst demanded.

"I'm referring to Mister Lane—as he calls himself!" Hank Swerle replied.

CHAPTER V.

IN LIZARDVILLE.

THE M Bar punchers got to Lizardville first the following day, being approximately two miles nearer the town and getting an early start.

When they descended upon the town in old frontier fashion, whooping their range cries and shooting the air full of holes, one of the first things they saw was Hank Swerle, his face badly bruised and cut, walking down the street from the livery stable and going to Lizardville's favorite resort.

They thought little of the fact that Swerle looked as if he had been in a fight, for he fought often, but they won-

dered who had marked him. Crowding into the place after leaving their horses at the hitching rack in front of the general store, they were surprised to find that Swerle was not in the company of the other Twin C punchers.

Since Swerle was alone, they did not hesitate to bait him.

"What horse kicked you in the face?" one of the M Bar men asked. "Or was it a mule?"

Hank Swerle snarled at them and turned to talk to Brute Heyberg. He had been much in the company of Heyberg since getting to town the night before. Heyberg was still in funds, it appeared, and not eager to work. He hung around town, gambling and drinking and making a nuisance of himself. Deputy Sheriff Bill Albison watched the pair from a near distance.

"Looks like he'd been in a fight with a bear," an M Bar man commented.

Hank Swerle whirled to face his tormentors.

"If you waddies are so anxious to hear, I'll tell you," he offered. "I had a fist fight with a hombre who's come new to the Twin C. He is a dude waddy from down Texas way, and Sam Wurst seems to have taken a great fancy to him. Calls himself Bob Lane."

"Uh-huh!" the M Bar man replied. "I heard tell that you had a new hand."

"I got licked, if you want to know it, because Sam Wurst acted as a sort o' dry nurse to this Lane and wouldn't let me get at my gun. I got fired. Any more questions?"

"Evidence is all in," an M Bar man said. "It's right in front of us. He must be some scrapper."

"To hear him tell it, he's everything," Swerle replied. "He can ride and rope and shoot better'n any man on this range, he says. He ain't a bit bashful about sayin' it, either. We told him you M Bar men were pretty good and had taken us into camp a few times, and he passed the remark that things

would change, now that he was with the Twin C."

"Oh! Yeh?" the M Bar man asked.

Hank Swerle turned to walk to the rear of the place with Brute Heyberg, where they sat down beside a table near the wall, away from the others.

"Rib up them M Bar waddies, and they may take this Lane into camp," Hank said.

"They might seek to pester him some, but that don't mean it'll end in gun play."

"Gun play is what we want, don't we?" Hank asked, lowering his voice. "You'd better plug him, Brute. It'd look bad for me to do it, me havin' had that trouble with him. I'm a fool for missin' him yesterday!"

"You sure and certain are!"

"You can pick a quarrel with him and make it look natural. I'll be right on hand to swear it was self-defense. If he riles the M Bar punchers, they'll side in and say the same thing. We've got to get him out o' the way."

"Maybe he won't be able to do anything," Brute Heyberg said. "We got the tip that they was sendin' a detective down here, but that don't mean that evidence can be found. And we'd better not be too much together, Hank. Bill Albison has been watchin' me pretty close."

"All right, Brute! But you do your part. I'll stay away from you, but I'll be near at hand."

Swerle left the table and purchased one drink at the bar. For the benefit of Deputy Sheriff Bill Albison, who happened to be near, he remarked to the bartender that even Brute Heyberg was no fit company for a man. He was going to ride south and get him a job where there were some decent waddies, he remarked.

Into the place at that moment there shuffled an individual who appeared devoid of energy. He staggered to the end of the bar and came to a stop a few

feet from Swerle, and he was not staggering because of liquor he had taken.

He had been in town for about ten days, and he called himself Jim Bockton. He was tall and thin and white of face. His appearance was that of a man who has just recovered from a severe illness.

There was no mystery about Jim Bockton. He had told his story, and to Deputy Sheriff Albison first of all. He had done time in prison in a State to the east, he admitted, sent there for ten years for slaying a man. Now he was out, and his health was not what it should be. He had money, and he was resting and getting back his strength in a place where he was not known.

Albison seemed thoroughly satisfied, but he watched Jim Bockton now and then for a bit. The man did not try to make friends, though he talked when spoken to. He was rather inconspicuous. A man looked at him once, heard the story, and then seemed to forget Jim Bockton.

Bockton purchased a package of smoking tobacco and leaned against the bar to manufacture a cigarette, which he did slowly and with shaking fingers.

"You're pretty shaky," Hank Swerle offered.

"But I'm gettin' stronger every day," Jim Bockton replied. "My nerves are gettin' more steady."

"You lookin' for a job as puncher? The Twin C will be needin' a man."

"I—I ain't sure that I want a job punchin' right now," Bockton replied. "I want to get my mental balance first. I've been wronged and spent ten years in hell."

"I should think that you'd want to get square with the whole human race," Swerle suggested. The bartender had moved away and nobody could hear their conversation.

"Maybe I do."

"We're in the same corral," Hank

Swerle said. "If I knew you better, I might talk turkey."

"Yeh?" Bockton questioned.

"Have a drink," Hank offered.

The bartender served them, and they carried their drinks to a table in a far corner of the room, where they might talk without being overheard.

"You ever hear of the Daddley gang?" Hank wanted to know.

"Yeh," said Jim Bockton. "I heard they plugged two and sent the others up."

"Two they never got, accordin' to all report," Hank told him. "Them two are paradin' around somewhere now. And it's bein' whispered that there's a detective around these parts, too."

"After them Daddley gang fellers?" Bockton asked.

"Yeh! Old Silas Mentall was killed by the gang, and there's some folks think the man as killed him ought to be found. But what I was goin' to say is that there's an opportunity hereabouts for men as have nerve and no consciences."

"What's that?" Bockton asked.

"I'm right down sick o' workin' hard night and day, winter and summer, for any forty a month and found, and havin' some pesky foreman tellin' me when to wash," Hank said. "I think a he-man with guts ought to get out and handle things himself."

"I don't know but you're right."

"I know this here country," Hank continued. "Cows can be made to disappear mighty easy, and horses too. And a market ain't hard to find."

"I never did any cattle rustlin'."

"Maybe I haven't, either, but that ain't sayin' that I can't. But a man can't do such work alone. I know another good man. Three o' us might start somethin' that would make the Daddley gang look little. The Daddley gang would be goin' yet if Daddley hadn't got big-headed and started raids and killin'. Far as the law is concerned,

you've seen Bill Albison, and the sheriff himself ain't much better."

"Albison don't look any too powerful," Bockton assented.

"I've even got a hunch who the two remainin' members of the Daddley gang are, and we might join with 'em."

"I'll think it over, Mr. Swerle."

"You call me Hank! You ought to be sore at the world, the way you've been treated. Get square with it! I want to do the same!"

"This here detective you mentioned——" Bockton suggested.

"He showed up at the Twin C a couple o' days ago and got a job. Folks knew he was comin', and he ain't foolin' anybody. Calls himself Lane. He's the one I had a fight with—couldn't stand his fresh talk! Tried to say that I shot at him from ambush."

"Yeh? Did you?"

"I ain't sayin'," Hank replied, winking. "If I did, I'm kickin' myself for missin'. You good with a gun?"

"Yeh!"

"But jest now, you bein' sick——"

"I may be nervous, but not when I'm handlin' a gun. You may have noticed that I wear one," Bockton replied. "I can use it if I have to."

"You're a stranger. You never met this Lane. If you just accidentally got into a row with him, and plugged him, nobody could say it was because of old trouble. Understand?"

"Maybe."

"Certain parties might make it interestin' for you in a money way."

"I'm a lot more interested in what you said about startin' a gang, especially if we can side in with the Daddley boys. That'd be fun and profit and a chance for me to stay out in the air and ride and get strong again."

"All right! We'll talk about that later. But remember what I said about this man Lane. I'd plug him, but I've had trouble with him, and I'd never be able to call it self-defense."

Swerle left Jim Bockton and wandered out through the rear door. Brute Heyberg watched him go, and glanced with interest at Bockton himself. He could imagine the line of talk that Hank Swerle had been giving the sick stranger.

In from the north trail, at that juncture, came the Twin C boys. They came shouting and shooting, and ahead of them came a buckboard containing Hiram Cladlan, his daughter Mary, and Clara Mentall. The buckboard stopped in front of the bank, and the girls got out to go into the store. Cladlan hitched the team and went into the bank, and Sam Wurst followed him. The punchers dismounted, tethered their mounts, and prepared to receive their pay.

Sarcastic remarks greeted them from the sidewalks and the door of the town's resort as the M Bar waddies hailed their old rivals. Deputy Sheriff Bill Albison was much in evidence. Albison lived in the fear that one day these two outfits would go too far and start a genuine range war that would be hard to quench.

Bob Lane stood at one end of the hitching rack, surveying the single street of the town. He was looking for Hank Swerle, but he saw nothing of him. From the bank came Stubby Bane, always the first Twin C man to draw his pay.

"I'm buyin', Bob," he said.

"I ain't takin' anything stronger than lemon soda, and it's a shame to make a man pay for that," Lane replied.

"Yeh? You want to be stone sober, huh? Think that you're goin' to meet up with Hank Swerle?"

"A man never knows what or who he's goin' to meet up with," Lane said. "It's best to be always ready."

"Swerle is a mean hombre and don't always play square."

"I've noticed that, Stubby. I've got my eyes open."

"He sure went far when he took a

shot at you. And you watch out for them M Bar waddies, too. They think they're tough."

Uncle Peter came from the bank and headed for the store. Bob Lane fell in beside him and Stubby waited outside. The two girls were buying gingham at one end of the long counter, waited on by the storekeeper's wife. The storekeeper himself greeted Uncle Peter and was introduced to Lane.

Uncle Peter purchased a pair of overalls and some socks, laid in a supply of eating and smoking tobacco, refused to buy a new pipe, and then stepped aside. He kept his eyes on the door, in case Hank Swerle should appear. Peter had orders to see that Lane was not caught off guard.

Lane spoke with the storekeeper and passed over a bill. He received in return a huge box of candy. Carrying this, he headed for the two girls.

"I'd like to be bold enough to make you young ladies a present," he said, speaking to them both but looking only at Mary Cladlan. "I don't know how fresh this stuff is, but it's the only box in town."

They giggled and took the box. Lane walked out into the street with them. They were going to visit a woman who lived in Lizardville, and they suggested that Lane walk with them.

"There he goes!" Hank Swerle said, as he watched from the door of the resort across the street. "In the country two days and playin' beau to the two dandiest girls here."

"He's sure got his nerve with him!" a M Bar man said.

"If he marries Clara Mentall, you'll sure have a fine boss!" Hank said, with sarcasm in his voice.

"He might be a fine one, at that," came the reply. "What you tryin' to do, Hank—get us to jump this hombre? We ain't fightin' your battles any. We got scraps o' our own."

"Let him get fresh around me, and

he'll learn somethin'!" Brute Heyberg said, thrusting his way forward. "Who is he, anyway, thinkin' that he can come here and run the town and the range?"

"He been botherin' you any?" an M Bar man asked.

"I just don't like his looks!"

"Then tell him," the M Bar man suggested.

Now, the Twin C men, money in their pockets, were streaming across the street to the resort. The M Bar men retired inside. There was a regular ceremony to this. The Twin C men had the right to wash the trail dust out of their throats, and then sarcastic remarks would start flying. After that, anything might happen.

Some of the Twin C men nodded to Hank Swerle, but he only glared at them. Hank knew that he did not have a real friend in the outfit. He was not one of them now, and they had no sense of loyalty toward him. He was an outsider. He had shown lack of sportsmanship. Hank was a man to be ignored.

So he remained at the lower end of the bar with Brute Heyberg. They had untasted drinks before them, and they toyed with their glasses and talked in low tones, meanwhile watching the open front door.

Repartée already had started between the M Bar and the Twin C men. The trail dust had been washed completely away.

"You fellers got any new ropers or riders?" an M Bar man called. "Got anything but old women at the Twin C these days?"

"Sure they have!" Hank Swerle snarled from the end of the bar. "They've got a new waddy who thinks that he's champion of the world at everything. Wait till you see him. He's busy right now runnin' around with the women. Maybe he ain't the kind, though, to come in here and play with rough boys and drink and play cards."

"You shut up!" Uncle Peter cried. "He championed against you all right!"

"If you wasn't so old, I'd make you eat them words!" Hank said.

"Maybe I'm old, but I can hold up my end," Uncle Peter declared.

Swerle knew there was nothing to be gained by attacking Uncle Peter, who was a sort of range pet with all outfits. But Stubby Bane was different. The impulsive juvenile of the Twin C believed that his friend was being belittled.

"You can talk big when Lane ain't around!" he told Hank Swerle.

"And I don't want any nonsense out o' you!" Swerle snapped at him. "I'm about fed up with you, Stubby! One o' these days I'll take you over my knees!"

"Don't try to spank me from ambush," Stubby advised.

Hank Swerle roared like a bull and rushed toward him. Stubby Bane darted nimbly to one side and waited to see what would happen next. Swerle whirled to face him.

"Make funny cracks at me, will you?" he roared. "I'll take that gun away from you and ram it down your throat, you infant! For ten cents I'd——"

"Pardon me, but I reckon that this is my fight!" said a cool voice beside him.

Bob Lane stood there, smiling.

CHAPTER VI.

A PECULIAR GUN.

THEN another voice was heard. Deputy Sheriff Bill Albison was at hand. He had seen the storm coming and had determined to prevent bloodshed. He had his eye on Hank Swerle and Brute Heyberg, and he did not anticipate the sudden appearance of the new waddy from the Twin C.

"That'll be all!" Albison said, quietly, stepping between Hank and Lane. "I heard you men had some trouble out at

the ranch, and you ain't goin' to continue it here. If you want to fight fair, go out behind the place. You won't mess up this here establishment. You behave yourself, Hank!"

"Seems to me that everybody is takin' this jasper's part," Hank said. "Who is he—the governor or somethin'?"

"You heard me, Hank! Keep your hand away from your gun, or I'll do a little shootin' myself."

Hank Swerle did not crave a show-down with Lane. After what had happened a self-defense plea would avail him nothing unless Bob Lane really started trouble. And Hank was starting this himself. Perhaps Brute Heyberg or Bockton would take care of Lane.

Swerle growled something no man could understand, turned away, and went into the street and hunted up Sam Wurst. He got his pay and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Hank, you're a right good cow-puncher, and I'd like to give you some advice," Wurst said.

"Keep it!"

"All right, if that's the way you feel about it! I was just goin' to suggest that the biggest enemy you've got is yourself. If you could manage to lick yourself, Hank, you'd be quite some man. That is, if you haven't gone too far already and done somethin' that makes you an outsider forever."

"What's that?" Swerle demanded. "What you hintin' at?"

"Maybe nothin' in particular, Swerle. I'm just tellin' you," the foreman of the Twin C replied. "You're liable to feel sore because I let you go. You may have some idea of gettin' square with me and the Twin C. Better not try it, Swerle!"

"I wouldn't dirty my hands on you or your outfit," Swerle said.

He left the foreman and went into another, smaller resort, one patronized almost exclusively by Mexicans. The

habitues of this resort were a peaceful lot, and they did not like the idea of Hank Swerle coming there.

However, they attended strictly to their own business. Swerle stood at the head of the bar, slowly emptying a bottle and paying religiously for what he used. He made no attempt to talk to any of the others. He was drinking himself into a mean fit.

Over at the place across the street, Bob Lane had taken his lemon pop despite the laughs of his own outfit and the M Bar men. Brute Heyberg watched him from a distance. Jim Bockton was at a table against one of the walls, watching from half-closed eyes.

"Lane is there anything that you can't do better than anybody else?" an M Bar man inquired.

"I don't know. I ain't tried everything," Lane replied.

"Can you play checkers?"

"I'd strive to, if you made the first move," Lane said.

"How about poker?"

"Don't coax me," pleaded Lane. "Poker is my weakness, and I ought to save my money. Fact of the matter is, though, I generally win."

"Yeh?"

"Yeh! Somethin' funny about it. I play honest, too. Any man who knows me will tell you that."

"I'm right down willin' to contribute," Brute Heyberg cut in. "I ain't had a good game for weeks. Come on, Lane, as you call yourself, and we'll make up a game." Heyberg turned toward one of the tables, shouting for the bartender to bring cards and chips.

Uncle Peter whispered to Lane. "Watch out for him. He's Hank Swerle's pal."

"Uh-huh," Lane grunted. "Thanks! I reckoned as much from the way he acted."

Brute Heyberg scarcely could keep from showing his elation as they pre-

pared for the game. Heyberg was good with a gun. A poker game is always a good place to start an argument. What Hank Swerle did not dare do, perhaps Brute Heyberg could.

The game began in an ordinary fashion. Stubby Bane sat in, and a couple of M Bar men. Uncle Peter stood with his back against the wall, watching closely.

"I trimmed one pilgrim a few weeks ago for six hundred," Brute Heyberg boasted.

"I ain't got quite that much on me," Lane admitted. "You got any of that money left?"

"I've got about two hundred of it, I reckon."

"Then maybe I can start a bank account when we're done," Lane told him. "There's nothin' like a bank account to make a man feel substantial."

Heyberg glared at him and watched the deal. The game went ahead in a rather tame fashion. Lane neither lost nor won any large amount. Stubby Bane had the good fortune at the outset.

Then there came a time when only Heyberg and Lane remained in the game. Back and forth they bet. Heyberg held a full house, and Lane had drawn one card. That draw may have been a blind, Heyberg knew, with Lane holding fours. Or he might have filled a straight flush—such things happen at times.

Smiling, sure of himself, Bob Lane continued the betting. He met Brute Heyberg's frantic raises and tilted it always. Came a time when Heyberg hesitated—and threw down his cards.

"Shucks!" Lane said, as he raked in the chips. "We play poker down Texas way. I bet you had me beat, Heyberg."

"Yeh? Maybe I know when to quit."

"Then you didn't quit soon enough, I reckon. Stayin' as long as you did that way, you ought to bluff the limit."

"I had a full. I know when there are fours against me," Heyberg said.

"You had a full? And you sat there and let me get away with it? That was right down kind o' you, Mr. Heyberg."

Lane flipped over his hand; it showed nothing better than a pair of treys.

Chuckles came from those who watched, laughter from somebody back by the wall, and Brute Heyberg cursed and his face turned purple with rage. But this was not the time, he sensed, to play the hand he wished to play. The game went on.

Half an hour later Heyberg and Lane again were left alone to fight it out.

"And ten!" Lane said. "I believe mine are better than yours, Mr. Heyberg."

"And ten!" Heyberg snapped.

"Can't change my mind yet," Lane said. "Make it twenty this time. You want to see this hand twenty dollars' worth more, Mr. Heyberg?"

"Yeh, and twenty more!" Heyberg declared. "You bluffed once, but you won't get away with it again. You drew two cards. Your set o' threes won't beat mine."

"It wouldn't surprise me much if you had another of them full houses," Lane said, softly, as he counted chips. "Still, I'm stayin' right in this here game."

Lane raised again, and Heyberg tilted it. Lane seemed to stop and study his cards. His smile widened.

"I don't want to break you this hand, Mr. Heyberg," he said. "You ain't got many chips left. So I reckon that I'll just call you."

"Bluff didn't work, did it?" Heyberg said, exultingly. He started to reach for the chips.

"Better let me see your hand first," Lane cooed. "Uh-huh! King full on eights! I felt quite sure that you had a full house, Mr. Heyberg. But that don't beat four nines!"

Lane spread out his hand. Once

more a chorus of chuckles came from the men watching the game.

"I wasn't bluffin' that time, Mr. Heyberg. You ought to thank me for not breakin' you," Lane said. "And I sure felt certain that you had a nice full house."

"Yeh?"

"Yeh!" Lane said. "I saw you deal it to yourself!"

Brute Heyberg had the chance he wanted. He snarled like a beast at bay. Lane's hands were on the table, and he was fumbling with the cards.

But Brute Heyberg was not quite quick enough. Even as his hand made a swift dive for the gun at his side, he found himself looking into the muzzle of one that Bob Lane had drawn from beneath his coat.

"Drop it, Mr. Heyberg!" Lane commanded, his smile gone and his eyes blazing. "I figured that you'd do just that, too. I saw it comin' even before we started to play. Hands on the table! Stubby, kindly collect Mr. Heyberg's gun for me and extract the cartridges from the same."

Heyberg, muttering curses, did not dare make a move. Stubby Bane got his gun and broke it, scattering the cartridges on the floor.

"Mr. Heyberg, I'm right down surprised at you," Lane said. "You shouldn't cheat when you're playin' cards for money! At least you shouldn't try to cheat when you're playin' with a man as knows poker. Some places, Mr. Heyberg, you'd be shot down for doin' a thing like that. I'm right down startled to think these here boys would play with you at all. Maybe they won't, after this."

"I ain't done with you, Lane!"

"You ain't? I'm sorry for you if you ain't, Mr. Heyberg! I reckon you're takin' Hank Swerle's quarrel up for him. That was a friendly thing to do. But I didn't aim to be coaxed into a quarrel and get shot, Mr. Heyberg."

Bein' shot ain't pleasant, I've been told. I never have been, so I can't speak from experience. In all my gun fights the accidents have been on the other end."

Heyberg growled, but said nothing. He got up from his chair, and everybody there watched him. He started toward the bar as though to get a drink, but the bartender turned his back.

"Here's your gun—empty!" Stubby Bane offered.

Heyberg snatched it away and thrust it violently into his holster. He hurled a curse at the grinning Stubby and made for the front door.

"Bob, he'll plug you in the back if you ever turn it toward him," Uncle Peter warned.

"Then I'll have to be watchin', I reckon," Lane replied. "But I reckon he ain't as bad as he's painted. Shucks! Breakin' up our game that way!"

Then he did a thing that startled the bystanders. He broke the gun he had taken from beneath his coat, and from the cylinder extracted—a cigarette.

"I'm forever gettin' out o' cigarettes when I'm playin' poker," he explained. "Ain't got time to roll any when the game is fast and furious. So I always keep a few tailor-made ones around handy."

"You mean to say there's cigarettes in that gun 'stead of cartridges?" Uncle Peter roared.

"Sure and certain! Have one?" Bob Lane asked.

Nobody noticed that Jim Bockton slipped quietly from the room and followed Brute Heyberg.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIRTIN' FOOL.

HHEYBERG went to the other resort and found Hank Swerle, as he had expected. They got a bottle, took it to the rear of the flimsy building, and sat there beneath a window, the other men in the place leaving their vicinity.

In a few words, Brute Heyberg related what had happened.

"We've got to get that jasper!" he hissed. "Nothin' but him dead is goin' to satisfy me now. I can't play cards in Lizardville again. It's me for the open. How about you?"

"I'm ready," Swerle declared. "We'll pot him, and make a ride for it. I was talkin' to that Jim Bockton and tryin' to rib him up to pluggin' Lane. He might throw in with us and take to the hills."

"Looks too sickly, and we ain't sure of him."

"He admits that he's just out o' prison, and maybe he's on the prod right now. What do you want to do, Brute?"

"Kill Lane and ride."

"Then we're done, Brute. We won't be able to hide facts any longer, and they'll be after us."

"They've never caught us yet," Heyberg reminded him. "We were with the Daddley boys for more'n a year, and they never got wise. I've still got a few scores to settle."

"Me, too! One of 'em is with Sam Wurst. Shall we make for the place in the hills?"

"Sure and certain! That cave at the head o' Rattlesnake Gulch is good enough for us. One man can hold off a posse there."

"How about supplies?"

"Plenty up there. I ain't been asleep," Heyberg said. "I got a lot from the county seat and took 'em to the cave. And we don't need to worry about money. There are a few thousand up in the cave from that last hold-up. That posse did us one good lick when they got Daddley and the gang out in the open. I reckon that we inherit the Daddley fortune."

Hank Swerle laughed. "Want to take it and blow this part of the country?" he asked.

"Not just at first," Heyberg replied.

"We can have a little fun squarin' scores around here."

"Maybe we'd better go some other place."

"What you so nervous about?" Heyberg asked. "Nobody knows you shot Silas Mentall."

"Don't mention that!" Swerle snapped. "You never know who's listenin'. Yeh, I shot him, 'cause he got in my way. He recognized me that night we were raidin' the ranch. Couldn't do anything else after that. And we'll get this here detective out o' the way."

"There won't be any turnin' back when we go out in the open," Heyberg said. "Everybody'll know us for what we are."

"I'm satisfied, if I can get this Lane first."

"He's my meat, after what just happened," Heyberg declared.

"We'll both be in on it, then there won't be any fizzle."

"Get the horses ready," Heyberg suggested. "We'll have to ride for it, and we'll have both the M Bar and the Twin C gangs after us."

"Not unless Bill Albison swears 'em in as deputies. Lane is a stranger. It ain't as if he was a man who'd been here a long time and was liked."

"Yeh? Kindly remember that I ain't liked, either, and neither are you, and the boys would sure appreciate some excitement like a man hunt. No sense in bein' careless," Heyberg said.

"Well, Brute, what do you say?"

"We'll get the horses ready and wait until dusk," Heyberg decided. "The Twin C boys always stay in town until after dark. We can make more plans later. Meanwhile, stay out o' trouble. We'll both keep away from Lane, and from everybody else."

In the resort across the street, Bob Lane was refusing drinks offered as to a hero. He indulged in one lemon pop and took a cigar that was so old it al-

most crumbled in his fingers. Stubby Bane clung closely to him, basking in reflected glory. Uncle Peter was near, continually alert. Uncle Peter did not believe that Hank Swerle and Brute Heyberg were done with the newcomer to the Twin C outfit.

Sam Wurst, hearing what had occurred, entered the place and held speech with Uncle Peter.

"Maybe Lane knows what he is doin'," the foreman said, "and maybe he don't. He sure invites sudden death, the way he talks and acts."

"Playin' a game," Uncle Peter replied. "That boastin' way of his ain't natural. It's put on. He acts like he was laughin' all the time at the whole gang o' us."

"I wish he'd come right out and talk to me," Wurst said. "I'd try to give him advice and help him. But orders is orders, and the secretary of the association wrote special to the old man and said not to hint about his business. He works in his own queer way, the secretary said."

"And he works fast!" Uncle Peter added, thinking of the scene that he had witnessed through the screen door at the ranch house.

One of the M Bar men rushed in from the street.

"It's all fixed!" he declared. "We're goin' to have a dance to-night. The storekeeper will open the hall and the old fiddlers will be on the job. Mary Cladlan and Clara Mentall are both in town. Clara won't dance much, but Mary will. A dozen o' the town girls will be there."

Instant confusion followed the announcement. In the midst of it, Bob Lane managed to get away from the worshipping Stubby Bane and go out into the street. He was alert as he walked along it past the general store and to the place where a tiny trail ran to a group of small adobe houses on the side of the hill.

But as he passed the bank, Hiram Cladlan came forth and met him.

"You're Lane, aren't you?" Cladlan asked. "I'm your boss."

"Glad to meet you, sir," Lane said.

"How are you getting along?"

"Everything is lovely so far, Mr. Cladlan. Only a lot of folks seem to be pickin' on me for no reason whatever."

"Uh!" Cladlan grunted. "It doesn't seem to be bothering you much."

"Not much, sir."

"Well, take good care of yourself, Lane," Cladlan said, and went on toward the store.

Bob Lane grinned and turned up the tiny trail. At the head of it was the house where the girls were spending the afternoon. Lane had been invited to call and eat some of the candy.

He was welcomed eagerly at the door. The mistress of the house was cooking something in the kitchen, and it was necessary for Clara Mentall to help her, it appeared. Lane and Mary Cladlan were left alone.

"Did you come to see Clara?" Mary asked.

"You know right down better than that!"

"I never did see such a man," the girl said. "You've only been here two days."

"Three," he corrected. "I wish I had come sooner."

"Have you seen father?"

"We had a few friendly words as I came along the street. He seems right nice to me."

"Yes? He has chased away every beau I ever had."

"Well, he hasn't chased me away yet."

"Oh! Then you consider yourself my beau?"

Mr. Bob Lane crossed the small room swiftly. He clasped Mary Cladlan in his arms. He held her close, and kissed her rapturously, and she seemed to like it.

"Careful!" she warned. "Somebody may see us."

Lane went across the room and sat down.

"What would people say?" she said.

"The very idea of you acting this way, after being here only a few days!"

"I'm a man of impulse," he confessed. "When I see a thing, I know whether I like it or not. Is there any chance of me ridin' back with you in the buckboard?"

"Not a chance in the world."

"There's goin' to be a dance. How often will you dance with me?"

"Twice!"

"All night?"

"Only twice, no matter how long the dance lasts."

"That ain't any nice way to do. I'd like to have every dance."

"And have everybody talking and dad going gunning for you?" she asked.

"Shucks! I ain't afraid of your dad. He's a right nice old man. I'll bet that we get along fine."

Clara Mentall came back into the room, and Mary Cladlan laughed and went into the kitchen in her turn.

"Well, is everything settled between you and me?" Lane asked.

"I guess that it is, Bob," she said.

"I'm right down glad of that. When I see a thing that I want, I go right and get it! You're sure a great girl! I knew that the minute I saw you!"

"Go right on and flatter. I like it!"

"I betcha! All girls do. It's understood that we'll keep our secret, ain't it?"

"We'll keep it, Bob!"

"Good enough! Can I have a dance to-night?"

"I know that father would want me to enjoy myself. But I'll not dance much—just a few times. You may have one or two."

Lane grinned at her. "I betcha!" he said. "I've got to be goin' now. Tell Mary good-by for me."

He hurried from the house and went down the hill. Had Uncle Peter seen and heard what had transpired in that house, he probably would have shot Bob Lane. It sounded very much as though he had caused two girls to fall in love with him, didn't it? And inside three days? And that one, or maybe both, hearts would be broken? Wasn't that enough to shoot a man for?

CHAPTER VIII.

BENEATH THE WINDOW.

DUSK came to Lizardville.

In the business establishments huge kerosene lamps were lighted. Cow-punchers and townsmen thronged the dusty street. The two resorts were doing a thriving business. The one barber in town was trying to cut hair and shave with waiting customers shouting at him to show speed.

Lizardville had a building that was called The Hall, where its few social functions were held. It blazed with light, and two old fiddlers scraped the strings as they tuned up for the night's frolic, secure in the belief that hilarious punchers would not forget to drop coins in the box provided for that purpose.

Uncle Peter and Stubby Bane had eaten with Bob Lane at the town's one restaurant, which was run by an ancient Chinese cook who did odd jobs except on pay days. Two town girls acted as waitresses. They were kept busy.

"Bob, you don't want to get thinkin' that you've seen the last of Heyberg," Uncle Peter advised. "He is one mean hombre!"

"He looked that way to me," Lane admitted. "I'll just keep my eyes peeled."

"In Lizardville, they generally check guns at a dance."

"Yeh? Meanin' that I won't be armed?"

"You want somethin' better than a

cigarette-stuffed gun," Stubby Bane put in. "You can't work that sort of trick twice."

"I'll be danged if I understand things," Lane said. "I'm a stranger in this here country, and everybody starts gunnin' for me. Hank Swerle picked on me the minute I showed up, and Heyberg took up his fight. Close friends, I reckon."

"I reckon!" Uncle Peter said, with emphasis.

"Oh, well, I won't let it bother me any! There's a dance to-night, and that's a time to think o' fun instead o' fightin'."

"But the enemy may be thinkin' of fightin'," Uncle Peter said. "You want to be danged careful of a night attack. There'll be a few of us around to help if there ain't fair play."

"Shucks! Don't you go to gettin' into trouble account of me," Lane instructed the old man. "You goin' to dance, Peter?"

"Who? Me? What girl would dance with me?"

"I am. I've done arranged for dances with Mary Cladlan and Clara Mentall," Lane boasted. "Dances are my dish!"

Uncle Peter met his eyes squarely, and Lane grinned. If there was some sort of joke, only the latter knew it. Uncle Peter frowned.

They left the restaurant, Lane walking in the middle. For some reason, the M Bar men were not showing active hostility toward Lane, perhaps because he had exposed Brute Heyberg as a card cheat. They chaffed him a bit, and received repartee in reply, but that was all.

Neither Hank Swerle nor Brute Heyberg was in sight. Lane went with the others to The Hall, and at the door they checked their guns. Some of the town girls were there already, and had been claimed as partners for the first dance. Mary Cladlan and Clara Mentall had not arrived. They would be the belles

of the ball, and knew it, hence used their prerogative to be late.

Outside in the darkness, Hank Swerle went noiselessly around the building and found Heyberg waiting for him.

"He checked his gun," Hank reported. "He's our meat!"

"Yeh? He wore one gun on his hip and had another under his coat."

"The one with the cigarettes in it?" Hank asked. Heyberg swore. "I think he checked that one, too, but I ain't sure."

"His heavy one is checked, anyway," Heyberg replied. "And what chance will he have, even if he does pack a gun? We're goin' to take him by surprise, ain't we?"

"Yeh! Let the dance get warm first. We want to get a good start. We'd better get the horses now."

They slipped away through the darkness, went to the other end of the street, and so came to the public stable.

"We want our horses," Heyberg said. "We're goin' to quit this here town and go to the county seat. Got a line on a couple o' jobs down that way.."

The stableman said nothing, not wishing to court disaster. He had his private belief as to the reason for this sudden departure; he had heard how Lane had exposed Heyberg, and he knew that Hank Swerle had been discharged from the Twin C outfit.

They got their horses and paid the bill, acting like honest men who might happen along that way again. They did not mount, but led their horses out in the darkness, keeping away from the buildings, and going back of the row of them toward the dance hall.

Heyberg had been living in the hotel, which was a small building behind the general store, where four rooms were for rent. He got his blanket roll, and Hank Swerle got his also, which he had left in Heyberg's room. Then they sought the proprietor.

"We're leavin' pretty soon," Heyberg

reported. "Goin' to the county seat to see about a job. Ridin' to-night when it's cool. What is my bill?"

He was told, and paid it. The two carried out their stuff and went to the horses again, where they prepared for the trail. They had the blanket rolls strapped so they could drop them easily if the pursuit was too close and they had to throw off weight.

The horses were led to a spot fifty feet behind the dance hall and tied to a post in such a fashion that a quick jerk of the reins would unfasten them.

"You stay here, and I'll scout around a bit," Swerle said. "We don't want any fizzle in this."

"Lane is my meat, I said."

"You can have him. But be sure you get him," Swerle said. "I'll plug Sam Wurst at the same time, if it's possible. Hope we can get 'em together."

Hank Swerle crept through the darkness toward the dance hall. The windows were open. The fiddles were scraping and the dance already was in progress.

Mary Cladlan and Clara Mentall had arrived now. Bob Lane met them at the door, and immediately claimed Mary for his first dance. Almost every eye was on them as they went out upon the floor. Mary Cladlan was a favorite, and Lane a newcomer.

That Bob Lane could dance was the verdict of every woman in the place before he had been twice around the floor with Mary. When the dance came to an end, they were near an open window at one end of the room, and Bob stopped her there.

"May I have the next?" he asked.

"You may not!" she replied, laughing. "There are so few girls."

"But I don't like to have you dancin' with anybody else," he said.

"Jealous!"

"You can bet that I'm jealous," he said. "Love me?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Dog-gone! I've a notion to kiss you right here and now."

"Then dad would probably shoot you and everything would be ended," she replied. "You go dance with Clara now."

Lane surrendered her to an enthusiastic M Bar man and went in search of Clara Mentall. He claimed her and whirled her out upon the floor. Clara knew how to dance also. The other girls were watching Lane and hoping that he would seek introductions to them.

And when that dance ended, Lane stopped Clara beside the same window at the end of the hall, where they could not be overheard by any of the others.

"Happy?" Mr. Lane demanded.

"Sure am!" Clara Mentall said. "You've made me very happy. I can live as I want to now. Just wait until everybody knows it! Won't they be surprised!"

"But we're goin' to keep it a secret for a little while yet, you know."

"Yes, I know!" Clara replied. "What a sweet secret it is!"

Outside in the darkness, Hank Swerle slipped noiselessly away from the side of the building. He went back to where Heyberg was waiting with the horses.

"Man, we may not have to do it ourselves!" he said. "Wait till I tell you what I've overheard."

"Well, what?"

"This jasper of a Lane is makin' love to Mary Cladlan. And she's fallen in love with him. I heard her say she loved him. If Hi Cladlan knew that, we could save our bullets. Cladlan would shoot him down. And that ain't all, either."

"What's the rest?" Heyberg asked, showing sudden interest.

"He's makin' love to Clara Mentall, too. They were standin' by the window after they'd danced. He said to keep it a secret for a while, and she said what a sweet secret it was. Playin' with both

girls. If Cladlan and the boys knew that, they'd sure bump him off in a minute."

"Why not let 'em know it?" Heyberg suggested. "It'll save us a lot o' dangerous work."

Together they crept back to The Hall. Remaining in the darkness, they peered at the windows until they came to one where Hiram Cladlan was standing just inside talking to his foreman as he watched the dance. Swerle and Heyberg got close under the window and began to talk.

"Somebody ought to shoot that jasper of a Lane," Swerle said. "I don't mean just because I had a run-in with him, either. But when he gets to makin' love to two girls at once, somebody ought to do somethin' about it."

"What's he been doin'?" Heyberg asked.

"He had Mary Cladlan right by that window at the end of the hall and was makin' love talk to her. Not that I blame him for that. But ten minutes later he had Clara Mentall there too, and was makin' love talk to her. Wants to marry a big ranch, I reckon."

"Flirtin' with both girls, is he?" Heyberg said.

"He'll be breakin' their hearts," Swerle declared. "I may be a bad hombre at times, but I never fooled women like that!"

They moved away.

Inside the dance hall, Hiram Cladlan clutched Sam Wurst by the arm. "Did you hear that, Sam?" he asked.

"Yeh! Swerle and Heyberg," the foreman replied. "Don't let it bother you, boss."

"But they said——"

"Boss, I'm right down surprised at you. Of course they said it, and knowin' you were standin' here and listenin'. They're right down smart, huh? They want Lane out of the way, and they haven't been able to get him out. How nice it would be if they made you think

a lot o' things and you went and shot Lane for 'em!"

"You reckon that is their game?"

"Sure! And when it won't work, they'll try somethin' else," Sam Wurst said. "Lane better keep his eyes open. I don't know much about detectives, cattle or otherwise, but it seems to me that he works in a funny way."

"Got his own methods, I reckon," Cladlan said.

"Yeh! He may be tryin' to get 'em to make a move that'll convict 'em. But it's one dangerous game he's playin', if you ask me!"

"Well, my stars! Detectives are supposed to be playin' a dangerous game, ain't they?" Cladlan asked.

"Uncle Peter has his eyes open and is on the job. He's wise to Lane's business here. Not bein' a dancer, Uncle Peter is loiterin' around just outside the door of the hall."

"And they tried to rib me up to goin' gunnin' for the boy, huh?" Cladlan said. "I'd hate to see anything bad happen to him. He's a fresh young squire, I reckon, but I've taken a fancy to him. I heard what he did to Brute Heyberg."

"That freshness may be all put on for a purpose," the foreman said. "That's my idea. I only hope that he does what he came here to do."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEPUTY SHERIFF ARRIVES.

OUTSIDE in the darkness, Hank Swerle and Brute Heyberg waited in vain for sounds of violence and carnage. It gradually dawned upon them that something was amiss. Evidently, Hiram Cladlan had not rushed to the slaughter of the new puncher of the Twin C.

They lurked beneath the windows for a time, eager anticipation in their manner, but they did not see Hiram Cladlan or Sam Wurst again. They saw

Lane once, however. He came to a window for an instant with one of the town girls, but he was not making love to her. And before either of them could draw a gun and shoot, he was gone.

Heyberg and Swerle stepped back into the darkness.

"We've got to do it as we planned at first," Heyberg said. "Shoot him down and ride! Let's look to the horses."

They went back to the horses and made sure that the reins could be jerked free quickly. They drained a bottle Hank Swerle had in his coat pocket. Then they went back toward the dance hall, taking their guns out and inspecting them and then returning them to their holsters.

"We'll wait until just after a dance ends," Hank Swerle suggested. "I'm goin' to take a shot at Sam Wurst. You be sure to get Lane."

"I'll get him! Don't you think that I've got reason enough to shoot straight?" Heyberg said. "We can stick up the whole crowd in the hall. Not a man in there has a gun."

"Lane may have one. A detective would be a fool to be caught without one."

"We'll catch him off guard. We'll have the drop. I can get him before he gets a gun out."

They went out into the street and walked along it slowly, a few feet apart, passing various punchers making their way from the dance hall to the saloons. Nobody gave them much attention. Inside the hall, the fiddles were scraping and men and women were laughing as they danced.

Swerle and Heyberg walked slowly to the door, and stood peering inside. Suddenly they stepped forward to enter.

"Your guns, gents!" the doorkeeper announced.

"We ain't checkin' 'em!" Heyberg replied.

"Rules, gents!"

"But we ain't goin' to dance. We're

just lookin' for somebody," Swerle protested.

"Now, you boys know the rules. Check your guns or stay outside."

Swerle drew out his gun, and so did Heyberg. But they did not hand them over to be checked. They brushed the doorkeeper aside and stepped into the hall.

A dance number had just come to an end. Couples were walking to chairs and benches scattered along the walls. Bob Lane had danced his second dance with Mary Cladlan, and was leading her toward a corner of the room.

"Put 'em up, everybody!" Brute Heyberg yelled.

They whirled to face him, still laughing and talking, thinking that somebody was playing a prank. But they knew instantly that it was no prank when they saw Swerle and Heyberg.

"Hands up!" Swerle added. "You, Wurst!"

"Lane, step out and take it!" Heyberg yelled. "We'll put an end to one detective! Here's where I get you, you skunk!"

A woman screamed. Others rushed to the walls out of the way. Men howled. Unarmed, they were helpless to do anything to prevent a tragedy.

Bob Lane had whirled Mary Cladlan to one side. And now, as Brute Heyberg fired the first shot, he lurched to one side, and the bullet missed him by inches. Heyberg was throwing down again.

Bob Lane gave a cry that probably was of rage. His right hand darted beneath his left arm and came forth holding a weapon. Brute Heyberg fired a second shot, and Lane whirled halfway around from the shock as the bullet struck home in his left shoulder.

Another shot sounded as Swerle fired at Sam Wurst. The foreman, struck in an arm, rushed forward, inviting instant death, trying to get at his antagonist, for there was nothing else he could do.

The other men in the room seemed stunned, incapable of quick thought or action.

Then Bob Lane's gun roared twice. Brute Heyberg lurched to one side, dropped his gun, and collapsed to the floor. From the corner of his eye, Swerle saw his companion's downfall. He flung his gun hand around and fanned the trigger. The bullet went within a few inches of Bob Lane's head.

From the doorway another gun roared, and Hank Swerle pitched to the floor. Uncle Peter had gone into action.

Bob Lane, half crouched, held his gun ready, but neither of his enemies stirred. A sickly smile came over Lane's face. His arm sagged at his side. His knees seemed to give way under him. And then he toppled over.

Above the sudden din rang out a woman's scream. Mary Cladlan ran forward through the crowd and dropped to her knees beside Bob Lane.

"Bob! Bob!" she cried. "Tell me they didn't get you! Speak to me, Bob!"

She bent her head and covered his face with kisses. Men and women crowded toward her.

"Speak to me, Bob!" she cried. "They didn't get you! I—I can't lose you now!"

"Come away, girl!" Hiram Cladlan said, trying to lift her. "You don't know what you're doin' or sayin'."

"They've killed him!" she cried. "Dad, they've killed him! Can't you understand? I love him, dad!"

"Girl, the shock has been too much for you! You don't know what you're sayin'!"

"See, his eyes are open! Bob, speak to me!"

Bob Lane grinned. "Must—have fainted," he gasped. "What's all the fuss about?"

Uncle Peter thrust his way forward and tried to brush Mary to one side.

He knelt and lifted Bob Lane's shoulders.

"Help me up, Uncle Peter," Lane said. "It's only—through the shoulder. I want to get—on my feet."

Uncle Peter and another man lifted him. Cladlan was holding Mary back.

"Got 'em both," Lane said. "Sorry there was so much fuss."

"They jumped you," Uncle Peter said. "Swerle plugged Sam Wurst in the arm, too. Yep, you got 'em, Bob. Take a swig o' this!"

Uncle Peter tendered a flask.

"I'm all right," he declared.

Then Mary Cladlan managed to get near him again, crying, patting his wounded shoulder from which the blood was flowing, not seeming to notice that he winced with the pain.

"Bob! Bob!" she crooned.

"Sit down, Lane!" Cladlan commanded, putting a chair behind him and forcing him into it. "I'm glad you're able to talk, for there's some explainin' to be done, it seems to me."

"I love him dad!" Mary said. "Don't be cross!"

"Not with you, honey! But Lane is a man. He comes here to do detective work, to find out who shot Silas Mentall, and he makes love to you——"

"Dad!" the girl cried. "Bob a detective? There's some mistake."

"Detective!" Lane gasped. "That solves the puzzle. So Swerle thought that I was a detective and had come for him, huh?"

"Well, ain't you?" Cladlan demanded.

"Certainly not. I'm just a poor cowboy tryin' hard to get along."

"And you get along by makin' love to every girl you meet, do you? If you break my girl's heart——!"

"Dad, he isn't breaking it!" Mary cried.

"He's been makin' love to Clara, too."

"That's not so, Mr. Cladlan!" Clara Mentall said. "He has been a perfect gentleman."

"Dad, let me tell it!" Mary begged. "I met Bob three months ago when I was visiting down in Texas. And we—we fell in love, dad. And we had to consider you, of course. You'd always acted so terribly about men being interested in me. So Bob suggested that he come up here and get a job on the Twin C, and try to get you to like him, before we told you."

"So that's it! And there was a detective comin', and your Bob acted just like the association secretary said the detective would act, so we thought he was the detective. And who is this Bob, anyway?"

"Bob Lane is my right name, sir," the man on the chair said.

"But who are you? Are you a fit man for my daughter?"

Bob Lane smiled. The bodies of Swerle and Heyberg had been carried out of the room and he could see that men were busy covering the stains on the floor. Everybody in the room was crowding forward now, listening.

But it was Mary Cladlan who answered for him.

"Dad, Bob's father owns the big Triple Z ranch down in Texas, and Bob has a half interest in it," she said. "And he—he's got a good reputation, and everything like that. It's all right, dad."

"But I heard that he was gallivanting with Clara Mentall. They were talkin' about sweet secrets——"

"Mr. Cladlan, how dare you!" Clara cried. "If you must know, I'll tell you, though it was to be a secret for a few days yet. Mr. Lane has bought my ranch, so I'll be free now to go and live with my aunt in the East. He thought it would please you if he bought it, so he and Mary could be near you, and so the two of you wouldn't have to worry about water rights. And I—I think that Bob is splendid."

Hiram Cladlan sat down quickly in a

chair that Uncle Peter was thoughtful enough to provide for him.

"Hell's bells!" he cried. "Things sure have been mixed up. Me thinkin' that Bob was the detective——"

"I don't crave that kind of life, sir," Lane said. "I just want to settle down and be a good rancher—settle down with Mary. I hope you'll like me, sir, because I'm goin' to have Mary even if you don't!"

"From what I've seen of you, I believe you," Cladlan said.

"Uncle Peter thought that I was gallyvantin', too," Lane accused his friend. "I was just actin' fresh and playin' a part. Hank Swerle and his friend hurried things."

"Sure!" Uncle Peter said. "Swerle and Heyberg have been under suspicion as belongin' to the Daddley gang, and they thought you was a detective come to nab 'em."

"They sure and certain almost upset my plans," Lane said.

"And you certainly upset mine, young man!" said another voice.

Jim Bockton was standing there, a smile upon his face.

"Mr. Cladlan, I'm the association detective," Bockton said. "I ain't as sick as I look. That's just one of my little ways of actin' at times. I've been workin' around here for more'n two weeks, and I was prowlin' around the country considerable before that. I had the association secretary notify you to watch out for me, but I decided against takin' a job at the Twin C."

"My stars!" Cladlan gasped.

"I was just about ready to arrest Swerle and Heyberg. I had all the evidence I needed. They belonged to the Daddley gang, and it was Swerle who shot Mr. Mentall. I heard him confess it to Heyberg. I saw that they suspected Lane of being the association

man, and kept quiet, because while they were watching him they didn't pay much attention to me. Bein' satisfied that he was the detective, they didn't suspect me at all. Lane and Uncle Peter have saved the State some money; no trial necessary now."

"My stars!" Cladlan gasped again.

He indicated with a wave of his hand that it might be appropriate for the crowd to withdraw, and the crowd started to obey. Mary Cladlan was standing beside Lane her hands resting on his head, smiling down at him, proud and unashamed in her love.

Through the door rushed a breathless man.

"What is it? I heard shootin'!" Deputy Sheriff Bill Albison cried.

Hiram Cladlan whirled around to face him.

"Bill, you ought to retire," he advised. "You're never around when anything happens. We've had a detective in disguise, and a case o' mistaken identity, two criminals removed forcibly from the land of the livin', a real estate deal, and a love story, and you weren't here to see any of it."

"Anyway, I knew about the detective," Albison said. "Bockton reported to me ten days ago, and I helped spread that lie about him bein' an ex-convict. What's all this stuff about a real estate deal and a love story?"

"That's simple," Cladlan said. "Mr. Lane is goin' to be my son-in-law, and he's bought the M Bar to start house-keepin' on."

Albison blinked rapidly as Mary Cladlan gave her father a hug of thankfulness.

"Then I won't have to worry any more about a range feud between the Twin C and the M Bar," the deputy sheriff said. "That's some good come out o' this mess, anyway!"





Tobacco for Bears

By Austin Hall

Author of "Bear Bounty," etc.



YOU never can tell what is around the corner. At least, John Harper Adams, the bear man, couldn't.

On that particular summer afternoon he had been coming up the river with his old bear, Silvertip, when right along the river's edge and not ten feet up the side of the bank he had spotted the most likely looking piece of float that he had seen for years; so, without ado, he had set out to reach for the specimen. He had called the pet bear over and had balanced himself upright on the big bruin's back, stretching up with his hand toward the quartz, when everything seemed to happen at once. The bear grunted and scooted, leaving the old man with no support between his feet and terra firma.

Splash! He landed in the water on his head!

At the same moment another man, none other than old Sammy Cadman, friend of John's and an unannounced visitor, received the remainder of the surprise. In fact, he was the thing

around the corner. He had just rounded the bluff when, right in front of him, he had beheld a man standing on the back of a full-grown grizzly.

No one could blame him for stopping and letting out a yell of astonishment. The bear had given one leap, bumping the terrified newcomer off the bank and into the water behind John Harper Adams. Two men swimming about in the pool, trying to get their bearings! Coughs, snorts, and exclamations! Then, two heads swung around, and old John found himself looking into the eyes of his boyhood friend.

"Yeh!" He grunted as he spat out a mouthful of mountain water. "Yeh, you durn ole hairpin! So it's you, is it I might 'a' knowed it. Wonder you wouldn't ring a bell or something so's I'd know you was coming."

The other was choking over the effects of his sudden dive; when he had cleared his throat and recovered, he came back with his answer.

"John Harper Adams! How did I know you would be here? And, say, you old scalawag, do you suppose I'm a-going to be made a fool of by any

rangtankerous bear like that. I'll fix him! You see if I don't. You just watch me! Knock me in the water, will he? Dog-gone!"

The irate old prospector had climbed up on the bank and yanked out his .45. In his youth he had been a fiery red-head, and though his hair might have faded his temper was still on top. Old Silvertip had sneaked to the shelter of some willows and was watching out of his shrewd little eyes.

"Yeh," called Sammy Cadman, waving the gun.

But at that moment old John started up on the bank and made a flying tackle. Like a pair of fighting bobcats the two men went into the air and landed in the water. *Splash!* The water rippled and two heads went out of sight; in ten seconds they bobbed above the surface. Oaths, excretions, exclamations!

The two men bumped heads and then as by mutual accord began swimming for the opposite shore. When they reached the bank, Sammy Cadman's temper had somewhat cooled. He looked at John Harper Adams with a grin. Old John shook his head sagely.

"Same old hot-headed kid, ain't ye, Sammy? Allus ready to go off like a firecracker. But don't you ferget that that's my bear. It was your own fault, dog-gone ye, fer coming in so sudden. Besides which, I got a ducking as well as you did. So! Yeah! And now yo're grinning, which shows me that you've gotten back tuh your real and honest self. Seems to me that we had ought tuh shake hands. And after that's been done, why not come up to the cabin and partake of a little venison?"

An hour later, the two men, their clothes changed and their bodies glowing with comfort, were filling up on the last of a juicy rump steak. Outside, the evening had filled the big canyon

with a dusky peace; birds hummed and chirped, and fifty feet away the speckled trout were pecking at the surface of the pool. Old Silvertip, peaceful as a shepherd dog, was drowsing near the doorstep. It was time for a good smoke and the chat that goes with it. Sammy Cadman settled back in his chair while John Adams brought out a can of tobacco. First he passed it to his companion.

"This is what you calls bear smoking," he announced. "Yep. Regular bear weed. You see, Jimmy, that 'ere bear of mine is allus developin' new tastes and new ideas. Didn't know a bear would use tobaccy, did ye? Well, he will; only Silver didn't pick up the habit until a few weeks ago. Then one of them durn pesky tenderfeet come along one day and dropped a plug of this here sweet chawing stuff. Mixed with molasses or something like that. And Silvertip picked it up. He liked it so well that he tracked that feller almost to town lookin' fer more. And when he come back he was a confirmed terbaccy user. I been raisin' it ever since he was a cub, but he hadn't bothered it afore. But you had ought tuh see him go fer that patch. I guess I won't be able to grow any more of the weed at all from now on. And if I want to get him a-goin', all I've got to do is to give him a smell."

Whether the bear scented the can or understood his master's speech, Sammy had no way of knowing, but at that moment he had his little ears pricked up and was peering through the doorway. Old Sammy opened the can and stuffed his pipe. Then he lit up.

One puff. Two. Three!"

Phew! A strange look had come into his face; he turned toward his companion.

"Yeah!" He spoke in the accents of a man who has just been up against the real thing. "You raised this stuff,

didn't you? Oh, my gosh! My head! What—what did yuh fertilize it with, John—dynamite or nitroglycerin? Eh? It would knock down an ox. Holy Moses! No wonder your grizzly likes it—it's just about his size. Oh, my lord!"

If there ever was a man knocked out by a few puffs, that man was Sammy Cadman. The tip of his nose had turned white under his whiskers, his hands dropped limply.

"John Adams," he spoke faintly, "I didn't know you could be so cruel. I'm a-goin' tuh die. Honest!"

Which goes to show that a man may become accustomed to some almighty strong stuff. John Harper Adams had always persuaded himself that his own tobacco was about the sweetest and mildest in the world. But in two minutes, he was doing what the could to assist his friend, leading him to the creek bank and advising a dip in the pool.

"Best cure in the world fer tobaccy sickness," he announced. "I know, because that's the way I cured myself when I got sick on my first chaw. That was years ago when I was a kid; but it ought to work yet."

In another half hour, Sammy Cadman was out on the bank, refreshed, and ready to tell his story.

"You see," he began, "I was aiming on making you a visit; but as usual when I drop in on John Harper Adams something has to happen. First it was that fall into the river, and then it was this here tobaccy. Well, I thought I was a-going to die just a minute ago; but I guess I ain't. And I'm mighty glad of that, John, because I've at last come to the point where I can do something that I've always aimed at.

"You remember that sister that I was allus sending money to when we was younger? Hey? She was way back in the East, if you recall; and I allus let her get away with the notion

that I was rich. You know what these tenderfeet ladies of the East think about us rough necks out here—especially us gold miners. Rich! Of course we are! All we have to do is to dig the gold out of the ground. It's an awful joke tuh you and me; but tuh them it's serious.

"Well, I've let her think that way a good many years: and been ashamed of myself fer a durned old liar. And she's gone and had a daughter since then, and both of them have an idea that Uncle Sammy is about the wealthiest and toniest old gentleman in the whole United States of America. Which of course he wishes he was. So, them being the facts, I've allus kept on sending a bit of cash now and then; and living in the hopes that some day I could do the real act of a rich uncle. And that's just what I come to tell you about.

"I've struck it, John. Yessir. Honest, I have. I've hit the greatest vein of gold that a man ever looked on. Right up in Devil Canyon. I opened her up last week and she's free gold. So rich that inside of a few months I expect to be a millionaire. I felt so good about it that I went right down to the town and laid up a supply of grub to last me till I get finished. Also, I had to send a telegram to Sister Susie, telling her that she could look for me almost any old time."

Old John was listening; he cut in with:

"And did you send her any money?"

"Yeh; of course. I sent her the result o' the first day's digging. I told her to lay off and take a vacation. She and little Bess."

"Um-humph!" John grunted, as he went on smoking. "And I suppose you had to cackle the news all over town. Did you do any drinking?"

Old Sammy Cadman looked up as though he had been insulted.

"Me? If course I did. But I didn't

cackle, as you call it. Course, I had tuh tell somebody; but what of it?"

"Not a thing," said old John solemnly. "Only I know a lot of people in that 'ere town. They're just like everybody else what lives in a city. They think that any old time one of us fellers gets a stake, they've got a God-given right to take it away from us. But I'm awful glad that you sent that money while you had it. And take it from me, if you go back to your sister and niece, you just play the part of a rich uncle. Yes, indeed! Only, I'd like to see you dressed up in a stiff hat and tailor-made clothes, and acting the part. Here you, Silvertip, have a chaw."

Old John reached into a big box and tossed a handful of tobacco through the door. The big bear caught it in his mouth and sat up, for all the world as though it were the sweetest and most delicious morsel that he could wish. Old John chuckled.

"Beats heck, what creatures want in this old world of ourn. You want riches so you can go back and swell up. All I want is a little peace; and all Silvertip is looking for nowadays is another chaw."

Next morning Sammy Cadman disappeared over the ridge on his way to Devil's Canyon, and for a month John heard no more of him. In fact, he had almost forgotten about his visit, when one day a rider came up his own canyon, crossed the river, and drew up in front of the cabin. The newcomer proved to be none other than Sheriff Byrnes. And when the sheriff showed up, John usually had work ahead of him. However, on this day it seemed to be a different matter.

"Nope, John," said the sheriff in answer to the other's protest. "I'm on an errand of peace this time. I just come up here to ask you about Sammy Cadman. You see, there's a pair of ladies down at the office a-lookin' for

him. And I'm a-tryin' to hold them there. You see, I don't quite know where Sammy is located at; and of course I couldn't tell them. And that's where I'm a-tellin' 'em the truth. They're as sweet a pair as a man ever looked at. The mother is a feminine ringer for old Sammy; and the girl — Say! Well, she's got every young sprout in town shaved up and combed and walking past her window. And that pair is a-lookin' fer old Sammy. He's Uncle Sammy they say, and unless I dig him up, they'll be headin' into these here mountains on a hunt of their own."

"Yeah?"- Old John was scratching his pet bear on the back. He reached into his pocket and drew out a piece of leaf tobacco. The bear picked it out of his hand. "Well, you better not let 'em do that. Not with some of these hombres running around these here hills. I get what you're drifting at, though, and I suppose, as usual, you have put the tag on me and I'm 'it.' Well, it ain't hard work tuh go over the hills and tell him the news. In fact, it 'u'd be rather pleasant. How about them hard nuts down in town?"

"Fine," said Sheriff Byrnes, getting off his horse. "I've got 'em eating out of my hand. You needn't worry about them at all. That's the reason I want you to make the journey to Devil's Canyon. I'm needed at home to watch the wolves. If any of them get loose, I'll be right on their trail. If you can start in the morning, it will suit me just right."

And so old John had picked up an excuse for making a long trip among the mountains. By noon of the next day he and his bear, Silvertip, were far off among the weird summits, deep among the snows, and looking down at a puny world. Lakes, freshets, and glaciers lay about them. And on the other side, the deep series of canyons that were known as the Devil's Play-

ground. Over there, somewhere, was the canyon where Sammy Cadman had discovered his vein of golden metal. That night John slept under the shelter of a big pine and looked up at the stars through a frosty sky. A cold night to be sure, but John had a way of using his big bear for a pillow and enjoying himself. The only fear that he had was for a bag of tobacco that he had hung in the tree above his head. He had brought it along for Silvertip's use; while that which he kept for smoking was in a tin can in his hip pocket.

"Huh!" he muttered as he went to sleep. "Old Silver is just like one of these hopheads that they talk about down in the cities. He's just got tuh have his stuff. I'll bet he'd steal the whole thing if he could get way with it. Yeah—he—he—he——"

And somewhere along at that point he went into slumberland, to awaken about daylight with a crimp in his neck and no bear in sight. In fact, when he looked up in the tree, he realized that more than the bear had gone. The limb had been broken and the sack knocked off.

"Might 'a' known it," he muttered. "When they get like that, they're done. Just like a drunkard. Yessir! Now I'll have tuh make the trip alone."

Had he known it, old Silvertip was up on the mountain at that very moment enjoying a mighty chew, blinking, and watching the old man as he kicked the ashes after breakfast. In another hour John was on his way down a deep canyon, heading for the mouth of Devil's Creek. A man and a bear! Only the bear was traveling in the favorite manner of a grizzly, shuffling and trailing, taking in every detail of the ground. Likewise he was seeing and smelling more than the man could have possibly picked up. There was something evil in the place that made the bear doubly cautious. When John

turned up the last gulch, old Silvertip took to the mountain.

"Yep," said John. "This is the creek, just like Sammy said. He ought to be not more than a hundred miles ahead. It runs off the canyon right here."

Several hundred yards ahead, he came to a deep cup in the bank where a number of alders had grown around the turbulent little stream. Birds were singing in the treetops, and trout were scooting in the waters. Altogether, it was the very place for an old-timer like Sammy Cadman. John had just passed under a hazel-covered bank, when—all of a sudden—something landed on his head and flattened him out like a pancake! The world went out in a blur of blackness for a minute—and when he came to, he felt some one holding his arms behind him.

"Yeah!" He heard a voice say: "It's John Adams. Didn't I tell you? It's a good thing we spotted the old coot, or we'd 'a' been goners. He's the devil on the draw. What'll we do with him? We kin plug him right now and put him out, or——"

John knew at once that the voice was not that of Sammy Cadman. Also he realized that his friend must be in a pretty fix indeed. He heard another voice.

"No, you don't. You needn't pull anything like that! Not yet! Better take him up with the other duffer. We'll have some fun—if we don't have anything else. And we'll sure make 'em tell us where that stuff is hidden."

So that was it!

These men had sneaked in and were trying to intimidate Sammy Cadman. John had apparently arrived just in time. He was thinking of the sister and niece down in town waiting for their rich uncle. Apparently, unless he employed his wits to their utmost, old Sammy would never see them. In a trice, John decided that the best thing

for him to do was to play dead. One of the villains came up and caught him by the feet, while the other took hold of his shoulders.

"You sure did a good job of tying him up. Take it easy," said the first voice. "We got lots of time."

"Is that so!" the other answered. "Well, don't fool yourself about that. These two birds are dangerous every minute. And we ain't got a second tuh spare. When you're robbing, you want to get through and light out of the country. And besides, we ain't found the gold yet. I'm aiming on putting him with the other and trying out a little fancy work."

The first bandit chuckled. John opened his left eye to take in the surroundings. Also he was wondering what had become of his old bear. Somehow, Silvertip had always a habit of disappearing just as soon as he scented a stranger. However, if he lived up to himself, John knew that the bear would be watching. Then he saw something that almost made him yell.

Old Sammy Cadman behind a fallen tree trunk, tied hand and foot, his arms crossed behind his back, with his whiskers caught in a crack of the big log!

How he had been taken in such a position, John could not make out; but when he came closer, he saw that not only were his whiskers in the crack, but they had been clinched in by an iron wedge driven beside them. The knowledge of what was in store made John twist and straighten out. A blow on the head was the answer. John knew no more.

When he came to, he was in the greatest peril of his life. Not only had he been tied up and slugged; but on top of that the villains had seen fit to treat him even as they had Sammy Cadman. They had carried him to the side of the log and shoved his whiskers into a split that had been opened on

purpose. After that, they had driven in a heavy wedge to hold his beard securely. There he was, standing up almost on his tiptoes—held by the hair of his chin. He could hear the robbers talking behind him.

"Yeh! Just you wait till we get through with them—they'll be glad tuh tell. You bet. And by the looks of things, Adams is a-coming out of it right now."

Bang!

A .45 went off and a shower of bark splintered near John's shoulder. To say that he was coming out of his coma was to put it lightly. John got his senses with a bang!

"Hey!" he yelled. "Ain't you got no sense? What you tryin' tuh do!"

Bang went another shot!

But at that moment John Adams turned his eyes to the form beside him; he saw Sammy Cadman looking back. Old Sammy was as cool as a cucumber.

"It's only a bluff," he was saying through the side of his mouth. "They may kill you, but they won't finish me. Not until I tell them where the gold is hidden. And—and—I'm not a-telling. How'd you get here?"

But just at that moment a shot landed so close to Sammy that he began to think otherwise. His look took on a tinge of fear.

"Can't you think of nothin', John?" he asked. "Nothin' at all?"

As it happened, John Adams was thinking of a great many things:

"Yeah," he answered. "I've got a powerful mind; but it won't work. This is what I get fer doing a favor. That sister and that niece of yours is in town a-lookin' fer you. That's what I come over here tuh tell you. So, if you want tuh see them, and at the same time save a friend's neck, you better tell 'em where you hid that pesky metal. There's a lot more."

Silence was his answer; he saw a

light of tenderness flicker into Sammy's eyes.

Bang! went another shot—and another! Down in his heart, John knew that Sammy would give but one answer. He could almost hear him thinking.

"No," came Sammy's words. "I told my niece that I was a gentleman. And if I cringed like that, I could never look them in the face. You got tuh think of something else."

And that made John Adams testy; although on the inside he felt rather glad to know that Sammy was still the same.

"Why don't you think of something yourself?"

Bang. Still another shot—this time it was in John's direction, so close that it nipped the cloth of his jacket and drove it into the bark. At the same moment he heard one of the bandits laughing.

"You bet we'll make 'em talk! Where's that gold you hid? Talk! Durn ye! We mean business. Say, pardner! Do you see that tin in John's hip pocket? Well, the next time I'm a-goin' tuh plug the center."

And right there John kicked over. He almost lost his nerve.

"Say," he yelled. "You fellers are getting too fresh. What do you think? That's my tender part, and that can holds my tobaccy. Durn ye!"

"Tobacco!"

John heard the word spoken by three mouths simultaneously; but he noticed Sammy Cadman's exclamation the most. He heard him whisper over and over again.

"Tobaccy! Is it? Is it? You don't mean——"

But John had seen something else. Over in a clump of willows were two little eyes peering through the leaves.

Silvertip!

His old bear! And Silver had never failed him yet. He could hear the men

talking behind him, and Sammy Cadman muttering an imprecation. Came the words of the villain:

"Dog-gone! And I'm just dying for a smoke. Tobacco! Well, right here is where I defer action until I get a pipeful."

At the same instant, John felt the can being extracted from his pocket. Also he heard his pardner in misery chuckling. But only for a few seconds. Sammy Cadman suddenly stopped; John saw him wink. Then he heard him talking to the bandits:

"Well, I guess they ain't no use holding out no longer. You boys has got us where we can't get loose. If you want that gold, it's right over yonder in that 'ere crevasse. Under the boulder at the bottom. They's about twenty thousand dollars' worth. And I'm a-telling you the truth about where it is. All I'm asking of you is that you go over to the crevasse before you light that tobaccy. You see, I'm weak in the lungs and I can't stand it. Second: I'm asking you to dig up the gold before you let us loose. That ought tuh be fair enough for anybody."

After they had started, John heard chuckle again; but he had seen enough to realize that Sammy had thought of something. Only—Sammy was betting on one thing, and John on another. John was watching those eyes under the willows. He expected the men to leap into the crevasse, but instead of that they stopped at the edge and filled their pipes. The eyes under the willows were twinkling with a queer light.

Puff, puff, puff! went the pipes for two or three minutes. Then——

"Holy Moses!" cried one of the bandits. "What kind of tobacco! Say—— Whew! Hey!"

He threw down the can in disgust. The tobacco spilled out on the ground. At the same moment a mountain of fur bundled out of the willows.

The two men yelled. John saw them leaping into the crevasse. Old Silvertip calmly and without ado walked over to the tobacco.

Sammy Cadman's chuckle had become a gale of laughter.

"Didn't I tell ye?" he was saying. "That tobacco is as good as dynamite. First cousin to sudden death! It worked. Yeah, it worked. They ain't got a chanct in the world. I know because I been up agin' it myself. And, say, John, that's your bear. You got him trained. It's your turn to think of something."

And John did. It was no trick to get old Silvertip alongside and wriggle a cord over one of his claws. And when old Silvertip pulled his paw away, something had to come. In two minutes John was free, as far as his hands were concerned. After that he was able to draw himself up on the log and loosen the wedge that held his whiskers. He worked fast because there was always a chance of the bandits taking a pot shot from the crevasse. But apparently they were out for good; there was not a sound.

The whole thing tickled Sammy Cadman half to death; as soon as he was loose, he hurried to the cabin and dug up a gun that he had hidden. John cautioned him to be a little care-

ful; he was afraid of the bandits opening fire again. But that only brought another laugh from old Sammy.

"They can't, John," he chuckled. "Honest, they can't. I know. That was a dirty trick; but it saved me twenty thousand dollars. Those fellers are sick. And that crevasse is thirty feet deep. That bear scairt them into jumping, and now they can't get out."

And Sammy was just about right. With a couple of sharpshooters and a bear above them, the bandits didn't have a chance at all. When they had them out and tied up, Sammy clapped John Adams on the back.

"Didn't I tell yuh? Mebbe yuh kin smoke it, but they ain't no one else kin handle it without inoculation. I knew that when I got my first smoke. And did you watch Silvertip go fer it? Yeh! It's about his size. I'll say. Regular tobacco—fer bears!"

And right there John began to scratch his head.

"Mebbe you're right at that, Sammy," he agreed. "I may be used to it—inoculated, as you say. You see, I been using two kinds of tobacco in that mixture and I was blending it with a weed that I took fer perique. Only—mebbe—mebbe it warn't. I wonder!"

GOOD NEWS FOR THE ELK

NO more hard winters for the elk of Wyoming, if the Izaak Walton League of America can help it, is the good news sent from Washington where Paul G. Reddington, chief of the Biological Survey, announces the receipt of a deed to several hundred acres of land which has been presented to the government by the above organization—whose name in itself has import dear for many a Western reader. The land is to be added to the winter elk refuge in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where herds of deer are threatened with starvation when the much-dreaded hard winters arrive.

It is good to know that interest in the welfare of the elk is so lively, as is evidenced by the further announcement that \$36,500 for this purchase was raised by popular subscription. The fact that the animals feel the winters, too, is often lost sight of by our upright selves.



The Maverick of Marble Range

By Robert J. Horton

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

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

BOB BANNISTER, traveling cowboy, resembles The Maverick, "wanted" bandit. He is engaged by Florence Marble of the Half Diamond to supervise her affairs. He antagonizes Sydney Cromer, president of a new irrigation project, who admires Florence.

The neighboring ranchers oppose Florence's interest in Cromer's scheme. Bannister overhears Link, Half Diamond man, reporting to Cromer. Bannister tells Sheriff Campbell that he is The Maverick, but promises to give himself up if his secret is kept till the impending trouble is over.

Cromer tells Florence who Bannister is. He decides to propitiate the ranchers and calls a meeting to which Florence sends Bannister as her proxy. There is trouble and Le Beck is discovered hidden behind a curtain. Cromer realizes he has been unwise and vainly attempts to bribe Bannister. Their enmity increases. Half Diamond stock are rustled, and Hayes, former foreman, is suspected. Bannister, on the trail, is shot. He is nursed by Florence, and in delirium says he is The Maverick.

CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE LIGHT.



DUSK had fallen with the blue velvet skirts of the night flung over the land when a rider dashed out of the whispering cottonwoods and into the yard by the porch. He dismounted hurriedly, disengaged the handle of a black case from his saddle horn and walked briskly up the steps. Howard and Florence came out of the dining room to the front door.

"I'm Doctor Reynolds from Marble," said the visitor as Howard recognized him. "Mr. Cromer sent me down. I

couldn't come sooner as I had a minor operation up there that proved troublesome."

"That's a first-class lie," said Howard. "You go back and tell Cromer to go to blazes! He can't save his face this late."

"Howard!" It was Florence who spoke. She went out on the porch. "We don't need you *now*," she said. "We have our regular doctor from Prairie City. You can tell Mr. Cromer that I'm very sorry to have bothered him."

The doctor bowed. "I hope you understand *my* position, ma'am," he said courteously. "I am held strictly to orders according to my contract. Mr.

Cromer—ah—seemed very much put out.”

“I should think he *would* be,” Howard stormed. “Tell him he’s worn out his welcome on this ranch.”

Again Florence admonished the youth. Then to the doctor: “I understand your position. The only reason Howard had in going up there was that he thought he could perhaps save some time. Mr. Bannister is in a critical condition.”

“Well, since I can’t be of service,” said the doctor, “I’ll be going back.” He lifted his hat and went down the steps.

Later that night Cromer listened to his report in silence, merely nodding his head and waving him away when he had finished. Alone, Cromer swore roundly. He had missed a chance that morning to redeem himself, and his hatred of Bannister had caused him to throw it away. Now all was lost so far as the Half Diamond and its fair owner were concerned. There was but one thought that brought him any consolation. Bannister’s condition was critical, Florence Marble had said. He might die, then. Cromer wished with all his heart and soul that he would.

Meanwhile the nerve tension of those at the Marble ranch house was almost at the breaking point. Doctor Holmes was maintaining a constant vigil at Bannister’s bedside. Martha was officiating as nurse. Florence and Howard were in the living room. Strong as had been the potion the doctor had given her, it would not put the girl to sleep. He dared not give her more.

“But who did it?” she kept asking Howard.

“For the last time, Flo,” said the boy impatiently; “I don’t know. He had no chance to tell me how, where, or when it happened. He went down there looking for trace of the rustlers. Evidently he met up with some of them and the shooting started. They knocked

him down with a bullet, tied him up, and put him in that cabin. Now you know as much as I do.”

“Howard, go send Jeb to the Dome for Manley,” she ordered. “I’d send you, but I want you here.”

The boy went out and Florence followed him to walk on the grass in the lower yard. It was such a night as only mid-June can bring to the semi-altitudes. The air was soft and sweet, gently stirring. Myriads of stars hung low in the great arch of the sky and the new moon tipped saucily in the east.

Florence could not get out of her head the last words she had heard Bannister cry in his delirium. “I tell you I *am* The Maverick!” Over and over the words repeated themselves. But he had as much as told her he wasn’t the outlaw he was suspected of being. But, if he wasn’t, why should he make that declaration in his delirium? Truth will more often out than not under such circumstances, as she well knew. She bit her lip and forced back the tears. He had been injured in her service and might lose his life or his reason. She would never forget that. And she would never tell him what he had said if he recovered.

Monley came with the first glimmer of dawn to find every one in the house still up. He listened keenly as Howard told what had happened.

“I’ll take a dozen men an’ go in there,” he said grimly. “We may be able to track back from the cabin. Howard, get me a fresh horse an’ a fast one while I’m taking on some breakfast.”

Howard wanted to go with Manley when he departed, but Florence wouldn’t permit it.

Bannister’s condition remained the same all that day. He was delirious by spells, but his talk was all inarticulate and broken. Florence and Martha both got a little rest. Doctor Holmes never closed his eyes. He drank huge

cups of strong, black coffee and remained at his post. Late in the afternoon he discovered he was out of a certain strong sedative which he needed. He wrote a prescription and Howard was sent to Prairie City to have it filled.

When he rode into town on his lathered horse almost the first person he saw on the street was the former Half Diamond foreman, "Big Joe" Hayes. He passed him without a second glance.

Leaving the prescription at the drug store he rode on to the livery where he found that the horse he had ridden so hard the day before was all right. He changed mounts and thus had a fresh horse for the ride back to the ranch. When he returned to the drug store the medicine was ready. He stuffed the package into a pocket and started back.

The night was an hour advanced when he reached the river crossing west of the ranch. He thought he saw a shadow sweep across the road where it entered the trees. His heart leaped and he drew his gun. Then he drove in his spurs and dashed ahead. Leaning forward in the saddle, his eyes straining into the darkness, it was as if he deliberately rode into a noose. He was jerked from the saddle and landed in the road, stunned.

Vaguely, as though through a mist, he was conscious of hands fumbling at his pockets. Then the sky seemed to clear overhead and he saw the stars. He sat up. All was still. He could see the darker shadow of his horse standing to one side of the road. He put out a hand to rise and it touched the cold metal of his gun. In a flash he remembered. He felt in his pocket and cried out. The needed medicine was gone!

Howard wasted no time in conjectures. It was plainly another move against Bannister by Cromer or the rustlers. Some one knew he had gone for that medicine, and—

As he caught his horse and mounted

he trembled with outraged excitement. Hayes had seen him go into town and into the drug store. Could he have had his horse handy and got the start on him while he was at the livery? Hayes hated Bannister. He had quit the Half Diamond, and must now hate the Marbles, too.

Howard turned back in another dash for Prairie City.

This time when he reached town he ordered the prescription refilled and then made a hurried circuit of the various resorts where Hayes would be liable to hang out. He did not see him, nor had any of those he asked seen him that evening. He went to the livery and engaged a fresh horse, after which he hurried to the sheriff's office.

Sheriff Campbell listened attentively, scowling the while in thought.

"I'll send Van Note back with you," he said when the youth had finished. "And I'll have the town searched for Hayes. As for sending a posse into the river brakes, as I first contemplated, I think it would be useless. Your men know more about the bad lands than I do. We'll have to wait until Bannister can tell what took place and where. Get your horse and the medicine and I'll send for Van Note."

In a few minutes Howard and the deputy were on their way. When they reached the trees at the river they drew their guns and each kept a keen watch on either side of the road. But this time there was no attack. They rode on to the ranch and Howard hurried into the house with the parcel for the doctor while Van Note tarried in the kitchen for a cup of coffee. It was well past midnight and the deputy decided to get some sleep in the bunk house before going back to town in the morning.

Florence was asleep at breakfast time and, as she hadn't seen Van Note, Howard decided he would tell her nothing of what had happened the night before.

It would only add to her worries. The deputy started back shortly after breakfast. Next came a messenger from Manley with the information that they had made no progress in the search the day before, but were going out again.

Doctor Holmes took an occasional brief nap on the couch which had been placed in the sick room and at such times Martha or Florence kept watch at the bedside. These were trying periods for Florence, beset by doubts as to Bannister's identity, anxious for his recovery, conscious of the impression his personality had made upon her. She realized now that it was this extraordinary personality that had caused her to give way to the impulse to engage him. Yet she did not look upon him as any ordinary employee of the Half Diamond. In fact, to her surprise, as she looked upon the tanned features and the tousled hair above the bandage on the pillow, she realized that she hardly looked upon him as an employee at all! It was almost as though he were a member of the family.

When Doctor Holmes learned of the visit of the company physician he was disappointed because he had not seen him. Regardless of the feeling between the Marbles and Cromer, he would have liked to have had the other doctor in consultation.

Another day and night wore through with Bannister tossing and turning and muttering, and the doctor fighting the fever. The others tiptoed about the house and looked at each other fearfully. For sickness is an unnatural thing on a ranch; rendered the more so because of the isolation.

On the third day, Doctor Holmes announced the crisis.

Florence went out into the yard. There were her flowers; bright splashes of color against the green of sward and shrubbery. The tall, graceful cottonwoods nodded and whispered in a

scented breeze. Over all was the glorious, golden sunshine of perfect June.

But the girl saw none of this. She walked aimlessly here and there, unseeing; her mind in a turmoil of hope, doubt, perplexity. Old Jeb came to her for news.

"He'll make it," said the old man when he had heard. "He's too well made to go off with a scratch on the head. Damn! Miss Flo, Big Joe Hayes had something to do with this. I'd bet my last chaw of terbaccer on it! But he'll make it—you see."

Florence was startled. "What makes you think Hayes had anything to do with it?" she asked quickly.

Jeb tapped his head mysteriously. "A hunch," he answered shortly. "I've had hundreds of 'em an' they always come up to scratch. Hayes don't like Bannister an' he don't like us, an' he ain't the kind that'll light out without tryin' to get even. That's all I got to say an' I won't say no more."

Florence looked after him thoughtfully. The doctor came out on the porch. His eyes were sunken, his face drawn with weariness as he ran his fingers through his shock of gray hair. Florence hurried to him.

"He's sleeping at last," said the doctor in a tired voice. "The fever has gone down. When he wakes we shall know. His mind will be in darkness or in the light."

All afternoon Bannister slept and far into the night. At midnight Martha called Florence and Howard who were in the living room. They went upstairs. Two lamps were burning in the sick room. Doctor Holmes was bending over the bed, his arm under Bannister's head. He was giving him a drink of water.

Florence's heart seemed to come into her throat. Bannister's eyes were open. They were clear. He finished the water and murmured his thanks to the doctor from whose face all trace of weariness

ness had fled before the victory. Then he saw her and smiled faintly.

Doctor Holmes pushed them firmly out of the room.

"He'll be back to sleep in a minute and now you folks go to bed," he commanded sternly. "I'm going to catch a few winks myself. Do as I say. I'm boss here. Now hurry along."

In her room Florence knelt by her bed, her arms crossed on the counterpane. The moonlight streamed through the window upon her head. The wind played an anthem in the waving branches of the trees. A great peace came over her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRAIL TO HEAVEN.

DOCTOR HOLMES stayed another day, making sure that Bannister was out of danger, and then, after giving strict and implicit directions as to the care of the injured man, he left for town, promising to come out to the ranch regularly to change the dressings on the wound.

And now Bannister's magnificent physique and splendid constitution began to assert themselves. He mended rapidly. He was not permitted to talk for two days to any extent and when the doctor lifted the ban Florence sent for Manley so that he could be present when Bannister told in detail what had happened. Quite unexpectedly, Sheriff Campbell came out from Prairie City the same morning.

But Bannister could tell them very little. He explained how he had seen the fresh tracks on the river trail, told them as nearly as possible the location of the ridge upon which he had taken up his vigil, and of the rope, the firing, and the burst of flame in his face when he had been shot. That was all he knew until he regained consciousness in the cabin.

It wasn't much to go on, but Sheriff

Campbell left at once with Manley to get a number of Half Diamond men and explore the eastern terminus of the river trail.

Bannister didn't expect them to find anything and he proved to be right. He was much put out by the accident, complaining that it was his own fault, and that as a consequence the rustlers had been scared out and might not operate again all summer, thus lessening the possibility of their capture. He said nothing about his vague suspicion of Hayes, nor did Florence tell him what old Jeb had said about his hunch.

Both of them would have been interested in Howard's experience the night he went for the medicine; but Howard decided to keep the details to himself until some time in the future. The sheriff had told him that Hayes was not in town that night and Howard was convinced that Hayes had ridden out ahead of him, roped him and stolen the medicine, thinking thus to retard Bannister's recovery. The sheriff was noncommittal in the matter but he had done considerable thinking.

Meanwhile Cromer had postponed the grand drawing of plots in the project until July 10 and had put off the meeting of the company's board of directors until July 15. Howard Marble was responsible for this, as the blow which Cromer had received across the bridge of his nose from the gun barrel had caused both his eyes to turn black.

Looking as he did, it was impossible for him to go to the city in the South and such other places as would be necessary in order to complete his arrangements. He did not once think of reporting the matter to the constable stationed in Marble as he would have to tell the whole story and it would put him in a bad light or make him appear ridiculous. Therefore Howard heard nothing more from that quarter.

But Cromer still had a card up his sleeve that promised ill for Bannister.

When he heard that Bannister was recovering rapidly he thought more and more of this next move. It would be taking a chance, but Cromer was used to taking chances. Wasn't he taking the biggest chance of his life with the irrigation project? But this new move had to be put off until after the drawing and the directors' meeting because it meant a long ride for Cromer far to southward. But the idea was ever in his mind and he nursed it until it grew to such proportions that the plan seemed incapable of failure. During these days Cromer became more cheerful than in months.

His vindictive nature also whispered to him of the water in the river. If he were to open his intake full—— It was another weapon. But one that would have to be used with studied care. And what effect would it have on the Half Diamond? He would have to figure that out. He would make it count, and count big in *some* way. Florence Marble should be made to see that Bannister constituted a menace to her investments, her property, and her peace of mind. With these thoughts, and the prospects of big cash payments at the time of the drawing, Cromer became more cheerful than ever.

Summer came in a day, riding in on a hot wind with the sun a burning ball of fire in a sky of slate. The beef herd at the Dome was slowly moved northward along the creek on the east side. The herd on the North Range moved over nearer the creek and grazed both north and south. All the cattle now were on summer range.

Bannister was soon sitting up and it wasn't long before he could be taken out on the shaded porch. He chafed at the inactivity, but then, there really wasn't much to do. But he did not for a minute assume that the trouble was over. The very quietness of things was to him alarming—the lull before the storm.

He said nothing of what he thought to Florence or Howard. And he didn't know, of course, how soon the storm was to break, and how ferociously it was to rage, driving his future and that of the Half Diamond before it.

Then one afternoon when the heat waves were shimmering on the prairie, and Marble Dome was buried in a blue haze under a boiling sun, Howard told him about the night he had gone for the medicine; about Hayes' sudden disappearance from town, and what he suspected.

Bannister was silent for some time, his eyes gleaming from between narrowed lids. "You mustn't say anything of this to Miss Florence," he said finally. "You mustn't say *anything* about Hayes to *any* one. I think I have his number. Somehow I can't shake off the feeling that everything is going to break at once. But we've got to keep what we know to ourselves."

Howard pondered this remark, for he did not altogether understand it. But he went on to tell Bannister about Cromer's refusal to send the company doctor down the day Bannister was brought back to the house, and how he had to ride on to Prairie City.

Bannister merely smiled and reached over to lay a hand on his arm. "I reckon you saved my life twice that day," was his only comment.

Bannister spent most of his time on the porch now, although he could walk around the yard. He stood by and watched as Florence worked with her flowers. Her chief pride was a long, wide bed of pansies. She would work among them for hours and Bannister would sit on the grass and watch. They didn't talk much. Since his illness a peculiar situation had arisen between these two. They seemed to understand one another better; to have something in common, although Bannister never could determine what it was. Florence felt that she had needed more compan-

ionship on the ranch, and had found it in Bannister. She liked to have him around. She liked to look up from her work and see him sitting there, looking off into the distance dreamily; liked to have him smile at her and say something—*anything*. And Bannister liked to see her look up, her face flushed, the trowel tilted awkwardly, her eyes sparkling.

They would sit on the porch of an evening and at times their conversation would take on an intimacy by subtle instinct which left her breathless and wondering and a bit afraid. She never told him what he had said in his delirium. It gradually grew dim in her mind as she made the astounding discovery that she didn't care!

Then there came a night—Howard had been with them all evening, sitting on a lower step while they had sat on the upper. Howard had been telling of a girl he had known in Prairie City who had gone away to school and come back so high-toned that there was "no living" with her. They had laughed, and when he left Florence confessed that she had gone away to school herself.

"But it hasn't spoiled *you*," said Bannister quickly.

"It did the first year," she laughed. "But dad soon took it all out of me by saying that I had changed so he believed he'd sell the ranch and go East where I liked it better."

"I reckon you didn't take to that," said Bannister.

"Take to it? Well I should say not. I was born here. I'm just as much of the West as those cottonwoods. Dad had to argue some powerful to get me to go back that fall."

Bannister laughed softly. "Florence, you're a right good sort," he said, using her first name as if he had never called her anything else.

"That's a rather dry compliment," she observed, looking at the moon which

was edging up above the cottonwoods with its following of stars.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way," he said in a low voice, putting an arm about her shoulders. "You see, Florence, after this sickness and your—your kindness, and *yourself*, I'm traveling a dangerous trail."

She didn't understand him, but she thrilled at the contact with his strong, young body, at the manly, vibrant notes of his voice. It was as if she had suddenly found protection from something. From what? Loneliness? Danger? Then in a flash she remembered what he had said when the fever was afire in his brain.

"Why is it a dangerous trail, Bannister?" she asked breathlessly.

"Because it has no end," he answered slowly with a hint of despair. "It can take me nowhere."

Instinctively she leaned toward him. He drew her head to his shoulder and patted her hair.

"What is this trail?" she asked softly, her eyes on the drifting slice of silver moon. "Tell me about it."

"I reckon it's the trail to heaven," he said in that same slow, hopeless voice. "It's *you* Florence. You're sweet and dear—pure gold. You're the only girl I ever wanted, and I want you with my heart and soul and all that is me. I can have you maybe for a minute, but that is all."

She looked up at him out of eyes that were swimming wells of light. His arms went about her. He kissed her—and once again.

She drew away and rested a hand on the floor of the porch. Now she knew. She knew why she liked to look up and find him sitting there by the flower bed with that far-away look. She knew why she liked to see him come down in the morning with his hair ruffled up and a sleepy frown on his face as he went to the wash bench just off the kitchen. She knew why

his flashing smile thrilled her. She knew why she wanted to call him by his first name.

"A minute, Bob, isn't a very long time," she said almost in a whisper.

"In my case it is an eternity," he said, looking straight ahead. Should he tell her? Should he tell her all—*all*? And have her draw away from him as if he were some odious thing? There are limits to a brave man's courage. And would it be altogether fair to her after—after—

"Bob," she said, putting a hand on his knee, "do you want me to—to tell you something?"

It was as if he could read her mind and fathom what she intended to say. "No," he answered. "It would only make it the harder for me, Florence. The end of the trail just isn't in the pictures."

"But *why*?" she persisted, petulantly. "Why, Bob?"

He looked at her out of eyes brimming with pain. Wild oats come home in shock. He couldn't trust his voice to answer, even if he had known what to say.

She saw his look and her arms went about her neck. "Another minute, Bob," she whispered. "And there is no trail that has no end." She kissed him and ruffled his hair while he held her as if he would never be able to let her go.

Then she broke away, rose quickly and went into the house.

He sat there, stunned, gripping his hands until the nails bit into his palms. Then he rose and went down on the grass.

From her window, Florence watched him pacing the yard in the moonlight. In her eyes the white bandage which he still wore formed a halo about his head. She waited until she heard his step upon the stairs. Then she flung herself upon the bed and gave way to tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CROMER'S BIG PLAY.

WELL, folks," said Howard at breakfast the next morning, "I suppose you know what's going on day after to-morrow."

Bannister and Florence looked at him blankly.

"Haven't any idea as to the date, I suppose," he went on in a superior tone.

Florence glanced at the calendar on the wall near the window. "Why, it's the Fourth of July!" she exclaimed. "I had lost all track of the date."

"You're right," said Howard. "Day after to-morrow will be the Fourth of July and they're figuring on doing things up brown in Prairie City. Big celebration, rodeo, dance, and all the trimmings."

"You going in?" Bannister asked.

"That depends," said the boy. "I was wondering why you two couldn't drive in in the buckboard with me for an escort."

Florence shook her head. "I wouldn't go," she said; "and I don't think Bannister should be taking in any celebrations just yet."

Howard looked at Bannister with widening eyes. "Why, he's all right," he declared. "He don't have to ride any broncs, and I guess we could prop him up at a poker table in a pinch."

This brought a laugh from Bannister, while Florence eyed her cousin in evident disapproval. "Howard, you have a queer sense of humor," she said severely.

"How so?" demanded the youth. "I supposed you knew that Bannister plays stud like he made up the game in the first place."

"Howard!" It was plain that Florence was annoyed.

"Oh, well, if that's the way it is, I won't go in, either," said the boy in resignation.

"Go on in and have your fun," said Bannister sternly. "I'm not hankering to go in or I'd probably go. Go on in and see if that dame of yours hasn't got over some of her uppishness."

"That's what I intended to do in the first place," grinned Howard. "I was just entertaining with conversation, seeing as how you two seem to have forgotten how to talk."

Bannister looked at Florence but the girl didn't raise her eyes from her plate.

Martha appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Little evil eye is out here," she announced. "Wanted to see Manley, and I told him he was over north of the Dome. Then he said he wanted to see you, Miss Flo."

"It's Link!" Florence exclaimed. "Wants what pay is coming to him, I suppose. Well, he can have it and the sooner he gets off the ranch the better."

"Must have just got out of the hospital," Bannister commented. "Maybe he wants his job back. If he does, give it to him, Miss Florence. I've got an idea or two about that fellow. Just between us three, I wouldn't be surprised if he knew something about this rustling business. No—don't ask me any questions. It's just a hunch. But he'll hang himself with his own rope with the outfit quicker than anywhere else."

Florence looked at him intently. Here it was again. Hunches! Old Jeb had a hunch about Hayes. Now Bannister had a hunch about Link. And the pair had always run together. She thought she began to see the portent of these hunches. Hayes and Link were suspected of being implicated in the cattle thefts.

"Tell him to go round front," she said to Martha, finishing her coffee. "I'll see him."

Bannister and Howard dallied over their breakfast while she was gone. Bannister was not inclined to talk and Howard didn't press him. When Flor-

ence returned they both looked at her questioningly.

"That was it," she said, nodding to Bannister. "Wanted his job back. I gave him a note to Manley with instructions to take him on and sent him out to the camp."

Bannister was silent, thinking rapidly. Link wouldn't come back to an outfit that he knew was hostile to him. He must have friends among the men. Perhaps there were several of them working with Hayes. Bannister had surmised from the first that the cattle had been spirited away with the aid of some of the outfit. He was well satisfied to have Link back on the job, and he intended to acquaint Manley with his suspicions at the very first opportunity.

When they went out, Bannister told Jeb to saddle a horse for him. Then he pulled himself into the leather for the first time since he was shot. He and Howard rode for an hour and when they returned Bannister dismounted "on the run" with his old snap and vigor.

That night the bandage came off his head for good.

Howard went in to Prairie City early on the morning of the Fourth. He was commissioned to bring back a gun belt for Bannister, who luckily had an extra gun and holster in his pack.

"Keep your eyes open," Bannister told him, "and don't forget your promise and go against the white stuff. I've an idea we're going to have work to do before the moon gets dark."

Howard kept his word and came back to the ranch early in the morning of the fifth. He found Bannister, just returned from a ride, standing by Florence, who was working among her flowers. He appeared greatly excited.

"Now what do you think is up?" he exclaimed, signaling to old Jeb to take his horse.

"I suppose you and that girl over at

Prairie City are going to get married," Bannister drawled.

Howard looked at him scornfully. "She isn't in my class," he declared—which told them much. "No, it's another celebration—the biggest celebration the Marble Range country ever had!" He displayed a lurid handbill printed in red and blue with wide, white borders. "Cromer's staging it up at Marble on the tenth. They're going to hold a big drawing of farm plots and the folks who've bought plots will get 'em according to the numbers they draw. That's supposed to be so everybody will have an equal chance to get a good location. But that isn't half of it."

He paused, noting with satisfaction that his two listeners were showing considerable interest.

"He's going to stage a Fourth of July and rodeo celebration combined on the side," he went on enthusiastically. "He's offering prizes for bucking contests, roping, bulldogging, wild-horse races, shooting, and everything else that make the prizes at Prairie City look like glasses of soda water. Why, 'Buck' Adams and twenty other riders are coming down from Canada! He's got scouts out rounding up the worst bunch of end-swappers that ever was collected for a bucking chute. He's paying expenses for a flock of Indians to give the thing color. They're going to run special trains from south and east, and every wagon on the project and in Prairie City, and all the stages are going to be used to get the people up there."

He paused again, breathless, his eyes shining. "Go on, let's hear all of it," Bannister prompted. "You haven't got a part of it off your chest yet."

"You bet I haven't," sang Howard. "They're going to use all the loose lumber on the project for a big dance floor with a canvas top, and the stand for the drawing and such, and he's

bringing a ten-piece orchestra and a band from Big Falls. There's going to be a big display of fireworks. And people are coming from as far as St. Paul and even Chicago, I heard, to say nothing of Canada. He's ordered about a million tents and cots to put the people up and the celebration's going to run over to the eleventh and maybe the twelfth. All the men working up there are going to get a lay-off and the new bank's going to open and the first fifty depositors get a share of company stock free. I can't remember all of it, but that ought to be enough."

"That's plenty," Bannister agreed. "Where'd you get all this information?"

"From men that were in Prairie City from the project and—well, everybody was talking about it, and Cromer was in town spreading the news personally, although I didn't talk with him. Why, don't you believe it?"

"Of course I believe it," said Bannister. "It's his big grand-stand play. He'll get healthy deposits from all those who've bought plots and he'll sell what plots haven't already been taken. He'll sell a lot of stock, too. He'll rent gambling concessions and booths and all that sort of thing and take a rake-off. He won't lose anything. And he'll draw the biggest crowd and the toughest crowd that Northern Montana ever saw!"

"There's another thing," said Howard. "Sheriff Campbell is appointing special deputies right and left to preserve order and Cromer is buying the badges for 'em."

Bannister laughed. "I wonder if he'll pin one on Le Beck," he chuckled. "I know just about how much good a special deputy is in a pinch when the guns get hot. Did you bring me my belt?"

"I brought three of 'em," was the reply. "They're on my saddle. You

can take your pick and send the other two back."

"Fair enough," said Bannister, pleased. "I sure aim to take in this celebration."

Florence had been listening and reading the handbill at the same time. Now she looked at the two of them, her eyes wide. "Sounds like they figured on shaving the prairie," she commented, using a favorite expression of her father's.

Bannister and Howard both laughed.

"Well, Miss Florence, I reckon you'll have to go along with us," said Bannister. "You're a big stockholder up there and you've got to keep your eyes on the proceedings. An' I aim to deposit a dollar and get another share of stock whether they like or not!"

This brought another laugh, and excitement ruled the day on the Half Diamond. Nor was it confined to the ranch house. Manley came riding in that afternoon with a heavy frown on his face.

"I don't know what the idea was in taking Link back, but I took him on as you said," he told Florence. "Now he's handed out a piece of news that's got the men milling like a bunch of steers before a storm."

"I suppose he's told them about the celebration they're going to have up at Marble," Florence conjectured.

"You've heard about it then," said Manley in a cross voice. "Yes, that's what he's done. Spread the news all around about what a big time it's going to be, an' the big prizes offered, an' everybody going that can ride or walk an' such until the men are all worked up. They all want to go an' let the cattle take care of themselves, the way it looks."

Florence puckered her brows over this new problem.

"What's more," he went on, "we've got some men that can *ride*. Your dad an' Hayes an' I all saw to that in pick-

ing men for the outfit an' all those fellows say they want a crack at the broncbusting prizes or they'll quit flat. What am I to do?"

"You'll have to let them go," Florence decided. "I understand this affair is going to last two days at least, so to keep peace in the camp, let half of them go the first day and the other half go the second day."

"I suppose that's the only way out of it," Manley grumbled. And it was so agreed.

The morning of the tenth dawned hot and clear. Bannister and Howard were stirring before dawn. Bannister had been riding more every day and so far as he could tell had regained all his former strength. They brought three splendid mounts from the pasture, Florence having signified her intention of riding up rather than using the buckboard.

Old Jeb was going to trail along, too, and had laid out all his finery. He was as excited as a schoolboy on the day before vacation. Martha refused to go, saying that celebrations tired her too much.

They started shortly after nine in order to reach town before noon. They were a gay party, prepared and resolved to amuse themselves. But they still did not realize the stupendous nature of the entertainment enterprise upon which Cromer had embarked. Given carte blanche by his board of directors, he had gone the uttermost limit. In the last few weeks the great drawing and celebration had become an obsession with him. All other business had been swept aside. Almost the entire working force on the project had been recruited to make the preparations. And his agents had seen to it that the advertising angle was not neglected.

This morning of the first day, as Florence, Bannister and Howard reached the crest of a knoll south of the town, they checked their horses as

of one accord and stared in amazement at the panorama spread out before them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CROMER REMEMBERS.

THE newborn town of Marble was plumed in color like some gigantic flower that had suddenly come into bloom on the sweeping prairie. The white tents glistened like silver in the sunlight; the unpainted board buildings were splashes of gold; flags and bunting waved and fluttered, flaunting the colors of red and blue, and even at that distance the holiday attire of the women and the gay shirts and scarfs of the men who crowded the town added their flaring, flaming hues to complete the marvelous picture.

Off to the left a long line of wagons, buckboards, stages, and horsemen streamed into town from the west. Great corrals at the outer edge of the ring of tents were filled with horses. Conveyances of every description formed long lines still farther out. A great, golden cup on the east proved to be the stadium where the contests would be held. A miracle had been accomplished there in a vast setting of golden brown plain with the silver-crowned peaks trailing their robes of royal purple far beyond.

The three of them, Florence, Bannister, and Howard, caught their breath at this imposing sight. None of them ever had seen anything like it before. And, curiously enough, the same thought was in the mind of each of them—the matter of expense. Bannister was first to speak and he gave voice to what they were all thinking about.

"Well, Cromer's doing it up brown and then some," he said. "Still, flags and bunting don't cost such a lot, and they had all that lumber and can take down those things and use it again. And by the way that street has lengthened out I'd say he's renting about a

hundred concessions, which is more than enough to pay for everything and leave a snug profit. This jamboree is going to be a money-maker if I ever saw one."

The others nodded. It could hardly be anything else with all those people coming into the town with money to spend. Cromer was no fool. They all agreed to that. But the magnitude of the undertaking impressed them none the less.

They were suddenly aware of the pounding of hoofs behind them and turned quickly. It proved to be John Macy riding up the gentle slope. With him was a girl of sixteen or thereabout; fair to look at with her eyes lighted with excitement and wisps of golden hair flying from under her hat.

Florence greeted them and Howard waved his hand.

John Macy and the girl reined in as they gained the crest and both stared, wide-eyed, at what they saw.

"Well, I'll be——" But the stockman could not find the words with which to express himself. He stared in stupefaction, bewildered to the point where he could hardly believe his eyes. Then he looked at the others and caught Bannister's eye.

"Looks like he means business, eh?" he said with a wink.

"Looks so," drawled Bannister. "I reckon business is the word."

Florence and the girl were talking, and now Florence turned to Bannister. "This is June Macy," she said by way of introduction.

"I knew that the minute I saw her," said Bannister. "You've got your dad's eyes, June."

The girl laughed, and then Howard edged his horse in beside her.

"C'mon, June, let's lead 'em down there," he challenged.

In a moment the two young people were off, flying down the slope, with the others following. Long before they

reached the outskirts of the town the din from Marble's swollen street came to their ears. When they reached the south end of the street they saw at once that it would be impossible to ride in. The street was jammed; the dust from hundreds of feet soared in clouds; some of the great strips of bunting which had been stretched across it had come down and were being dragged along on the heads and shoulders of the throng; venders in the gayly decorated booths were screaming their wares despite the fact that they couldn't work fast enough to supply the demands of customers.

A man wearing a star and mounted on a big gray horse rode in front of them.

"You'll have to go around," he shouted, waving a hand toward the left. "The corrals are around there."

They rode around as directed and came to the corrals. There was a man with a ribbon badge stationed at the entrance to each.

"Right here," called a man at the first corral where there were but few horses tied to the rails. "Check your horses in. We feed an' water 'em."

They stopped and the man hurriedly adjusted tickets to their saddle horns, giving them checks with corresponding numbers before they could dismount. "Two dollars apiece an' leave 'em as long as you want," sang the man.

"This is a new one on me," said John Macy; "but I'm thinking it's a good scheme. Guess we better leave 'em. See that the cinches are loosened or take off the saddles," he finished, addressing the man.

"We'll take 'em off," said the corral tender. "Hang 'em on the rail. Ready when you come for 'em an' we'll put 'em back on."

They dismounted and left their horses. Then they walked up the line of corrals some distance and turned in between the tents to an opening which

led to the street. There they were caught in the tide of surging celebrants. There were men in business suits and women in smart frocks from the East; farmers who were unmistakably from the Middle West; stockmen in soft shirts without neckties, huge watch-chains across their middles, trousers tucked into riding boots, great, gray hats; ranchiers' wives and daughters in white with colored sashes and ribbons in their hair; cow-punchers and rodeo contestants in green, pink, purple, and yellow shirts and flaming scarfs, topped by wide-brimmed, high-crowned hats of gray and brown and black; girls with rouged cheeks and lips, eyes unnaturally bright, accompanied by pale-faced men whose glances roved furtively about the crowds; teamsters and laborers in mud-stained overalls; engineers in smart khaki uniforms; youths in mail-order, blue-serge suits—their Sunday best.

All were talking, shouting, laughing, calling out to one another, crowding against the booths where lemonade and soft drinks were being served; struggling for an opportunity to play the wheels of chance in the hope of winning one of the gaudy, worthless prizes; screaming for hot dogs or sandwiches; bombarding the ice-cream stands; buying souvenirs—making carnival to the point of pandemonium. And over all, the dust—and the hot, glaring sun.

The two girls, in their neat riding habits, attracted attention. Friendly salutations were flung at them. Their men crowded in about them to keep the party from becoming separated.

"Where *will* we go?" said Florence in bewilderment.

As she put this question they were passing the office of the Marble Dome Land & Irrigation Company. It was answered immediately. Cromer saw them from his station at the front window where he was surveying the long

line of people filing through the office, registering their numbers of plot-purchase contracts with the clerks so the company would know who was present and could later check up on those who had not attended the drawing and made their second payment.

He pushed his way through the line and caught up with them.

"Hello, Macy," he called, grasping the rancher's arm. "And Miss Marble! This is good. I thought maybe you folks would be up from the south and I've got three front rooms in the hotel saved for you and any other of the stockmen and their families who come up. Good place to rest and see what's going on in the street before the big show." His face was beaming with excitement and satisfaction. He looked like a different Cromer this day. But he took no notice whatsoever of Bannister or Howard. The pair winked at each other.

"Well, that sounds good," said Macy. "I reckon we'll take you up on it—if we can get to the hotel."

"It's right across the street," said Cromer. "Come, we'll make a wedge and push through."

With Macy and Cromer in front, Bannister and Howard behind, and the two girls in between, they fought their way through the crowd to the hotel and edged through the mob in the little lobby. Upstairs they found the rooms cool and quiet; the green window shades, drawn halfway, shut out the glare of the sun and the screens kept out most of the dust that swirled above the perspiring throngs below.

"I'll send a waitress up," said Cromer genially. "She'll bring you cold drinks and anything you want to eat. It's all arranged." He was looking at Florence, who regarded him coolly. So far none had spoken to him save Macy. And Macy it was who spoke now.

"Tell her to fetch along a barrel of lemonade or something," he said, tak-

ing off his hat to wipe his forehead. "It's hotter than Billy-be-damned!"

"Right!" said Cromer, smiling at the girls. He had not altogether given up hope that Florence would relent. Perhaps this show would have a favorable effect on her. For the first time he looked straight at Bannister. "I'm glad you've recovered," he said, booming heartily.

"Funny, but I was just now expecting to hear you say that," drawled Bannister.

Cromer's eyes clouded as he left the room. Bannister's veiled insolence and challenge caused him to remember. Never in his life had he hated a man so fiercely as he hated Bannister at that moment. His lips pressed into a white line and his eyes shone with sinister resolve as he went down the stairs to give his orders.

"Well, I don't hanker for any lemonade, exactly, but I'd like to take a look around, so I guess I'll go down for a while," said Bannister.

"Me, too," said Howard. "I'll go along, if it's all right with you, Bannister."

"I'll wait for the drinks an' then mosey down into the lobby," John Macy decided. "There's some others coming up from Indian River to-day an' I suppose they'll hit for the hotel. I'll steer the women folks up here."

In the street, Bannister's interest was quite apart from that of John Macy or the girls. He had no time for the colorful crowd, but led Howard through the dense mobs until they came to the entrance of a huge brown tent over which was a cloth sign reading:

DOME PALACE

They went in to find that a board floor had been laid, a long bar built of rough boards ranged the entire length of the tent on each side, and the center was strewn with gaming tables while in the rear were the roulette wheels,

crap games, faro layouts, and "twenty-one," or blackjack tables.

The tent was thronged with a milling crowd of men who were drinking and gambling. Big Stetson hats reigned supreme here. There were scores of cow-punchers and riders in colorful garb. There were rough-looking characters, too, and plenty of them. Here was a place for trouble to start.

"Made to order," Bannister muttered, thinking of that very thing.

"What did you say?" Howard asked.

"Nothing," said Bannister. Then he started. Cromer was making his way out of the place on the opposite side. Cromer didn't drink or gamble, so why should he come in here? To keep a check on his rake-off, probably. Bannister's lips curled scornfully.

They circled the place and when they were midway to the bar on the side opposite that from which they had entered, Bannister's face froze into an expressionless mask. Le Beck was standing close against the bar. With him were two men whom Bannister took to be Canadians. And at the second Canadian's left stood Big Joe Hayes!

If Howard saw them also he made no mention of it. The boy was excited and Bannister suddenly felt a desire to be rid of him. They went out of the place into the heat and dust. As they moved with the throng up the street between rows of tents and booths they passed a dozen other tent resorts, but none as large as the Dome Palace.

"Suppose we go over to the riders' camp," Howard suggested. "Some of our men figure on riding this afternoon."

"You go over and see 'em," said Bannister in a tone which virtually left Howard no alternative. "I'll meet you later at the hotel."

So Howard left him and Bannister turned back. Alone, Bannister's mood changed. He temporarily forgot How-

ard and Florence and the Half Diamond. His eyes gleamed and he thrilled with the rush of blood in his veins. Here was an element at his elbow that he knew well. Tough characters, wily gamblers, gunmen—lots of them. Stacks of gold and silver on the gaming tables. An avowed enemy at the head of it all. His eyes narrowed, his step quickened. Two fingers slipped into his holster against the cool cylinder of his gun. A man jostled against him and he gave him a belligerent look. Then his shoulders seemed to straighten more than ever. He plowed through the crowd and hurried through the entrance of Dome Palace.

CHAPTER XXV.

ONE WHO KNOWS

THEY saw no more of Bannister at the hotel before the time came to go to the rodeo contests. Florence inquired of Howard as to his whereabouts, but Howard suspected, and rightly, that Bannister wished to be left to his own devices. He suspected also that Bannister had gone back to Dome Palace, but he said nothing about this. He pleaded ignorance as to where Bannister might be, pretending that he had lost him in the crowd.

Although Florence said nothing more, she felt worried. She thought she knew something of Bannister's wild spirit. It was a trait which had first roused her interest in him. But it could be called interest no longer, she thought to herself with a flush. She was really concerned. Had the others not been there she would have gone searching for him. It would be so easy for him to yield to his passion for gambling and get into trouble.

She accompanied John Macy, Howard and June, and some others they knew, to the stadium to see the contests, hoping that she might catch a glimpse of him there. But while she

saw men she recognized as members of the Half Diamond outfit she saw nothing of Bannister. Nor were they to see him for some time after the contests and the big drawing itself were over.

As for Bannister, he had practically forgotten them. The moment he entered Dome Palace the gaming lust was upon him, gripping him with a hold he could not loosen. He yielded readily, but before slipping into a place at a stud-poker table, he walked to the bar and wedged himself in almost at Le Beck's elbow. He meant to give Le Beck every opportunity to start things this day or night. For he hadn't believed Cromer when the latter had said he had fired Le Beck. And he believed Le Beck had his orders. Bannister was in no mood to attempt to prevent him from carrying these orders out—if he were capable of doing so!

He caught Le Beck's glittering, snaky eyes regarding him surreptitiously, and his lips curled. Le Beck wet his lips and his gaze was shot with fire. For Bannister's look was like a slap in the face. He turned back to his drink and said something to the two Canadians, who forthwith stole a look at Bannister. Hayes kept his eyes straight ahead, although he must have known. Something seemed to whisper in Bannister's ears that the pair with Le Beck would be in on whatever play came up. He smiled grimly, though his voice had never sounded more cheerful than when he ordered beer.

He drank the stuff slowly, seeking every opportunity to catch Le Beck's eye. The gunman began to appear ill at ease and finally stopped stealing glances at Bannister as he talked to his companions in low tones. They were drinking the white stuff steadily and Bannister knew no good would come of that. Nor did he care what happened. The old reckless spirit was alive and throbbing within him. He was just beginning to become thor-

oughly angry over his wound and the theft of his horse and gun. If he had thought it would do any good, he would have called the turn on Hayes then and there—even to the point of compelling both him and Le Beck to draw! Florence Marble didn't know this Bannister who stood at the bar, sipping his beer, his eyes cold and hard, a storm gathering in his mind.

When his glass was empty, Bannister turned abruptly from the bar. He knew the eyes of the four followed him and he found a place at a table where he could see in their direction. Then he forgot them and everything else as the dealer shoved yellow and blue and red stacks across to him in exchange for the yellow roll of bills he had tossed on the table.

He had chosen a table where the play was high. He watched the deal closely and when he caught the eye of the man who had dealt he raised his brows slightly.

"Pass," he said, without looking at his hole card. The man frowned slightly. Others looked up. And at once it was understood that a man had entered the game who was well acquainted with all the tricks of the tin-horn and the professional houseman. The play changed somewhat.

Bannister watched every dealer in succession like a hawk. He discomfited them, took the cleverness out of their flying fingers; by sheer hypnotism, it seemed, he made the game a straight one. They caught him between the "pinchers" and he bet them to a standstill and raked in a hatful of checks. All that afternoon he played. The housemen changed off with men from other tables until the best professionals who had come for the clean-up were pitted against him. And still he won. It was uncanny, his opponents thought. He destroyed their poise. They became rattled and forgot themselves, showing their hands at

times in their faces. Spectators crowded about the table three deep.

He looked up from a winning hand, stacking his chips. He had a bulwark of yellows and blues before him. He glanced casually about him and his gaze froze on a face—a lean face, tanned to the color of leather; blue eyes, blond brows, a good mouth and a firm chin under a great black beaver hat. His head inclined ever so slightly in a move imperceptible to the others.

"Deal me out," he said crisply to the man who was shuffling the cards.

There was a stir at this but Bannister paid no heed. He quickly counted a stack to be sure it contained twenty chips; sized the others up to it and began pushing the stacks across to the man in the slot.

"Three thousand nine hundred and twenty," he said, "and an extra red." He tossed over the lone check with a short laugh, stuffed the roll of bills the dealer passed him into a hip pocket, and left the table.

Instead of going out the front entrance, he strolled back to the big rear entrance and walked out on the grass behind the tents. The short, blue-eyed, youthful-looking man who had caught his eyes at the table strolled casually after him. Bannister was waiting.

"Tommy Gale!" he exclaimed as the other came up with a glad grin on his face. "Tommy, how'd you get up *here*?"

"I've still got a hoss," drawled Tommy.

"Tell me, Tommy," said Bannister seriously; "are there any others up from below?"

"None as I knows of," was the reply. "I come by accident, you might say. Heard about these doings down in Billings an' as I didn't have anything else to do for the time being, I came along."

"Seen anybody here you know?" asked Bannister.

"Seen you, that's all," Tommy an-

swered. "Say, Bob, ain't you sort of takin' a chance?"

"Yes, I'm taking a chance," Bannister agreed. "But I'm all right if none of those danged star-flashers down there don't get wise to where I am. They'll see me soon enough."

"Eh? You goin' back?" Tommy appeared very much surprised.

"In time—when my work here is finished," Bannister said slowly. "Yes, sooner or later I'm going back. Did I get blamed for that Sheridan racket, Tommy?"

"You sure enough did," said Tommy with a scowl. "You get the blame for everything. I suppose you know that."

"Yes, I know it," said Bannister grimly. "They'll try to hang it on me right when they get me and I suppose they can do it."

"I dunno." Tommy appeared doubtful. "They're electing a new sheriff down there this fall. The present incumbent, old Ira Colton, isn't as popular as he was. He'll go out of office sure as shootin' this next election. The handwritin' is all over the prairies down there."

"Then maybe there'll be a chance for a square deal, or something near it," said Bannister. "Tommy, I'm sure mighty glad to see you. If you're not doing anything, as you said, maybe you'll stick around for a while. I can use you, Tommy, and you're the only man from down below that I'd trust. Oh, don't squint. This is all on the level; all clean as a bluebird's wing. C'mon. We've got to have a talk somewhere."

The two walked behind the tents until they came to an opening where they could gain the street. As the drawing now was in progress, the street was practically deserted. They walked up between the rows of booths and resorts and finally dropped into a drinking place near the end of the street. There were a few games in progress and at

the rear of the tent there were some tables and a small lunch counter. They sat down at one of the tables and ordered sandwiches and beer. Then Bannister began talking in a low voice intended for Tommy Gale's ears alone.

He told his friend from the South everything that had taken place from the time of his arrival at the Half Diamond and Prairie City to the present moment; explained how he had met Howard Marble and had the run-in with Le Beck; how he had met Florence and then Cromer; how he had come to go to the ranch; his visits to Marble; the irrigation situation; the rustling and his encounter with unknown persons he believed to be rustlers with the resulting loss of his horse and gun, and finished with the presence of Le Beck and Hayes in town this day, conniving, as he believed, in a plot against him.

Tommy took a bite of his sandwich, a swallow of beer, and looked at Bannister respectfully. "You sure can do it," he said, more or less in admiration. "You get more action for your time an' money than any man on earth! The only way I can have an adventure is to get drunk an' get in a fight. An' *then* I'm liable to get licked. I got licked once."

Bannister chuckled. "Well, it looks as though you could have an adventure up here, Tommy, if you want to trail along with me a while," he said. He hadn't seen fit to tell Tommy about the deal he had made with Sheriff Campbell, but now he decided to do so and accordingly did.

Tommy stared wide eyed this time. "Everybody's got their soft spots, I reckon," he observed. "Do you think *that* much of her, Bob?"

Bannister frowned. "Well, if you want to put it that way," he said, "I *do*."

Tommy whistled softly. "All right, I'll trail along," he said finally. "What do you want me to do first?"

"First and last I don't want anybody to see us hobnobbing together if we can help it," said Bannister. "Now it's getting along toward six o'clock and I'll have to show up at the hotel. Suppose you wait around up here till I get back. And say, Tommy, don't go against the hard stuff. We may have work ahead of us to-night. Somehow I've got a hunch that the pot's going to boil over."

"I hope so," said Tommy cheerfully. "Go ahead. I'll sit in a game till you get back."

When Bannister reached the hotel he ran into Sheriff Campbell. He addressed the sheriff at once, appearing pleased that they had met.

"Campbell, I suppose you know Le Beck is in town," he said in a tone of interrogation.

"I'm watching him—and you, too, for that matter," said the official.

"I'll stand watching, putting the meaning both ways," said Bannister with a frown. "I suppose you know he's in Cromer's pay? Well, whether *you* know it or not, *I* know it. He's been traveling with Hayes and two mean-looking Canadians all day, and I think they're hatching up something. Now, I'm playing square as a die with you, sheriff"—Bannister's tone was firm and convincing and he looked Campbell straight in the eyes—"and I'll keep my word. I've found out a few things and every move I make is in the interests of Florence Marble. I want you to know this and remember it: If that outfit of cutthroats starts anything with me, *I'm going to get 'em all!*"

With that he strode away, leaving the sheriff to stare after him.

He found his company in one of the rooms upstairs. To their questions as to where he had been he made evasive replies. But he knew by Florence Marble's look that she suspected what he had been doing. Her eyes were troubled. It thrilled him through and

through to think that this girl thought enough of him to worry about him.

"Are you going back with us after the fireworks, Bob?" she asked when they were together for a few moments near the door.

"No, Florence, I can't go back to-night," he answered. "Don't look that way, *please*. I'm investigating some things besides aces and kings. I've got to stay. But be sure you take Howard with you."

"Oh, I guess he'll want to ride back with June Macy well enough," she said. Then impulsively: "Bob Bannister, I don't want you to get into any trouble on *my* account. I—I can't stand the thought of it."

He laid a hand on her arm. "Don't worry about me," he said in a low voice. "That—that other down there was a blind accident. But I'm working for you, just the same—every minute. And, believe me, it's the one real joy of my life."

He moved away and spoke to John Macy. "I'm going down to see that the horses are being taken care of," he said, and went out.

It was already growing dusk as he walked through the crowd again thronging the street and made his way to the rear of the tents. He passed the long line of wagons and buckboards and corrals and finally came to where they had left their horses. The corral tender told him the horses had been watered at the ditch behind the corrals and he could see the hay on the ground himself. They were still eating. He lingered, talking aimlessly with the man, who was one of Cromer's teamsters. Something might slip out that would be of interest. But nothing did and he started back along the corrals in a twilight that was just on the verge of melting with the night.

Two men approached him. He paid no attention to them until one of them bumped into him with a force that

nearly threw him off his feet. He whirled as the man spoke.

"What's the matter? You blind? Or maybe you've got all this space rented for a sidewalk!"

Bannister recognized the two Canadians who had been with Le Beck and Hayes. They had seen him and had followed him. It all came to him in a flash. These two could pick a fight with him and get away with it, even if they killed him. They were strangers. Cromer could disclaim any knowledge of them. Le Beck and Hayes would keep silent. It was as raw as it was vicious.

Bannister didn't answer and he didn't hesitate to act. His right came up with the power of a sledge hammer against the man's jaw, knocking him flat on the grass. Before the other could move, Bannister brought his left crashing against his ear. He went down like a log. But he was out of it in a twinkling and getting up.

Bannister's eyes were flaming with the lust for combat. He met the man as he got to his feet with a straight right that he brought clear from the next county. The man stayed down this time. But Bannister caught a glint of metal just in time to leap aside as a gun roared. His own weapon was in his hand like a flash of light. Two thin tongues of flame licked at the deepening dusk and the other man grasped his right arm with a cry and dropped his gun. There were two bullets in that arm.

"When your friend comes around," Bannister drawled, breaking his gun to extract the empty shells and reload the two chambers, "you better hotfoot it for headquarters and tell 'em you're leaving."

That's all he said aloud. "Round one," he murmured to himself as he walked on along the corrals. "I wouldn't wonder if this would prove to be an evening."

Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks. A horse in the corral he was passing nickered. Somehow the nicker seemed familiar. He looked and stepped close to the rails. The nicker came again from right ahead of him.

He looked sharply and came near crying out.

There, tied to a rail within three feet of him, was his own horse that had been stolen from him the night he had been shot!

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Downy Woodpecker

WHILE there are over thirty varieties of woodpeckers, nearly all are marked with a bit of red on the head. The one having the greatest amount of this coloring, whose entire head and neck is red, is the red-headed woodpecker, which we have discussed in a previous issue. This downy fellow has but a small patch of this color on the back of his head, while the female has a patch of white instead. They both have white breasts and black wings, the female's breast being of rather a dingy white.

Sometimes this bird is called sapsucker, but not rightly so, for he bores trees for insects and not for sap. Often a tree will be found with several rows of holes tapped rather regularly apart where the woodpecker, with his uncanny knowledge, has drilled for grubs. Were he interested in procuring sap he would attack the birch or maple, which he seldom does, as these trees are usually free from insects. He is a very diligent little fellow and becomes so absorbed in his task of tapping a tree that one may approach quite close without deterring him from his work.

It is very amusing to watch the downy woodpecker court his mate. Ordinarily, there are two males vying for the companionship of the female. For hours at a time they will chase each other around until tired, when they will commence drumming on a dead limb trying to make each other believe that they are procuring food. Sometimes they will even chase the female bird. This is kept up until one is too tired to combat longer, and the victor in great triumph flies off with his mate. Then the two commence to build their nest, which consists in boring a neat hole in some tree. Often they will spend a day or two minutely examining the tree before commencing operations, and then if everything seems propitious a round hole is drilled just large enough for the body of the bird to enter. Then the woodpecker pecks in an oblique direction, for a few inches, and then works straight down for eight or ten inches. The cavity is as smooth and perfect as any cabinetmaker could make. In some cases, as long as a week will be consumed in making this home. There is no attempt to line the cavity; a few chips and some sawdust are left in the bottom, upon which the mother bird lays six eggs of a pure white color. The female helps to build the home, and the male feeds his mate while she is sitting on the nest. The birds seem to enter into a fifty-fifty plan for maintenance of the home and offspring.

The chief food of the woodpecker is grubs and worms, caterpillars, and insects. He destroys immense numbers of caterpillars which he feeds to his young. Occasionally he regales himself with fruits and berries. It has been observed that the trees in orchards which are most thoroughly bored by Mr. Woodpecker bear the largest and healthiest fruit.



Bad Men Both

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "The Golden Filly," etc.



AHOT, dry summer was merging into sere, yellow fall when young Vincent came to Commanche. At this particular time, the border country was raw so far as observing the little niceties of law were concerned, as raw as a fresh-plowed field. Almost every male citizen wore a gun at his hip, and the safest practice, in the opinion of most men, was to shoot first and inquire afterward. Homicide, if that harsh term is insisted upon, was seldom followed by a jail sentence. About the only deeds calculated to retire one permanently from the activities of life were stealing, offering an affront to a woman, or shooting another in the back. These three were the most heinous offenses on the local calendar. And in such cases the guilty party generally wound up his career by making connection with a near-by limb, the route being that of a three-strand, five-eighths inch manila.

To "Old Yellow Horse" Galloway belonged the honor of importing this young tenderfoot, Vincent. One day, finding himself burdened with a surplus of cash, Yellow Horse conceived the idea of starting a bank. So, displaying his usual keenness, he wrote for a competent, experienced man to some Eastern connections. In response, along came Vincent.

He proved to be a lean, angular, fellow with the face of a scholar, a stand-offish manner, and a slight stoop, which probably came, I expect, from constantly bending over ledgers. His voice was twangy and dry, with a pronounced nasal undertone.

"Sounds like a pulley in bad need of oil," commented Dave Sedburn, who was the first one to meet the newcomer.

Nevertheless, young Vincent soon demonstrated he was just the man for the place even if he did transact business in an aloof, emotionless manner. For he played no favorites. A common cowhand could borrow right up

to the hilt on his horse and saddle any time he went broke. There no longer existed any need to sell one's outfit way below par or to hawk it to the money-lending Sam—who also ran the saloon—at twenty per cent interest, compounded every thirty days.

By Christmastime Commanche had accepted the newcomer as a fixture, had quit marveling over the cut of his clothes and arguing as to whether it really was possible that a person his age needed glasses. But hardly had this come to pass when Sue Tingley arrived to furnish a fresh topic of conversation.

She likewise was imported by Old Yellow Horse, who, as father to six half-grown kids, had recently been elected chairman of a newly formed board of education. Not but what the town had always boasted a teacher, but heretofore they had been men, broken-down old relics as a rule, little fitted by education or general knowledge for their task.

"Now, this here gal," Old Yellow Horse informed the board upon assuming the chairmanship, "is a real honest-to-goodness sharp on learnin'. She's a friend of some of my wife's kin back up in Ohio. Been to college and learned all the fixin's. She'll open yore eyes aplenty or I miss my guess."

And so far as opening the eyes of the male inhabitants of Commanche was concerned, Sue Tingley did just that.

The stage always stopped to discharge passengers in front of Sam's place. And it was Sam's tones which this day announced that something out of the ordinary was transpiring. For his voice sounded ingratiating and suave as it did when he was attempting to persuade one to pay a bill or accept a two-dollar loan on a forty-dollar six-shooter.

A fairly stiff game was just then in

progress at the big table opposite the bar which was holding everybody's interest. Otherwise, despite a howling norther, most of those within the saloon would have been outside to see the stage unload.

So it happened that Abe Runyon, who had early gone broke, was the only one save Sam who was at liberty to view the unloading, and he only stepped to the front where he could peer through the fly-specked window. But when he ejaculated: "Gee whil-likeen cats, ain't she a beaut'!" and hastily took his stringy length through the door, there was a concerted rush to view the cause of the exclamation. For Abe was a soured old misanthrope who wouldn't allow there was a good-looking woman in the world. Therefore, his approbation carried much weight.

Now, it is perfectly safe to assert that there was not a single man in the crowd which boiled out of Sam's place but what heartily concurred with Abe Runyon's description. Sue Tingley was a little trick, with dark hair and eyes, and quick in all her movements as some small bird. She was, moreover, dressed in a manner foreign even to the imagination of the inhabitants of Commanche.

We got outside just in time to hear her say: "I rather expected Mr. Galloway to meet me. Do you know where I might find him?"

Any one of us could have told her that a person able to state offhand Old Yellow Horse's whereabouts deserved a medal of some sort. He had interests and cattle scattered from Dan to Bersheba, so consequently he hopped around like a flea on a hot griddle. And when he was off on one of his periodical jaunts he was as likely to be in one place as in another.

Sam, dipping and bending, was about to reply, when Reb Wilson took away his play. Now, this was

as unexpected as it was unusual, for Reb, as a rule, was a wordless fellow. A tall, well-knit figure, with a face which in repose was as expressionless as a mask, and eyes as cold and gray as a flaw in a cake of ice, he had achieved the reputation of being a killer and a bad man to cross. It was common knowledge that Reb could place six shots at fifty yards in a space which might be circumscribed with one's thumb and finger. And this, mind you, in the time it would take a person to draw his breath.

"I reckon, ma'am," he replied, and there was a curious softness in his voice that none of us had ever heard before, "Old Yellow—Mr. Galloway—is out piroutin' on the prairie somewheres. But his place is only a half mile from town. The stage driver will, I expect, take you on there."

This was quite the longest speech most of those present had ever heard Reb make. Like most men of his ilk, he was chary with words, limiting his conversation to crisp, monosyllabic sentences.

When Reb finished his explanation, the girl caught her lips between her teeth and her eyes narrowed in thought. She was still obviously pondering when young Vincent came across the street from the bank. He included us all in an impersonal nod and addressed himself directly to her.

"I am Vincent," he said, as cold as if he were talking to the Statue of Liberty. "Mr. Galloway was called out of town. But before leaving he directed me to see you safely to his ranch when you arrived. So, if you will come across to the bank, I will secure a conveyance to take you out."

He had faced her while delivering the message and now half turned as if to lead the way. But the girl, her uncertainty of a moment previous evidently crystallizing into determination, shook her head.

"But I have no intention of making my home with Mr. Galloway's family," she protested. "I would greatly prefer a boarding house. Isn't there one in town?"

There were, as it chanced, two. Neither one, however, was calculated to make an Eastern girl feel much at home. Anything might happen there, and frequently it did. It was not uncommon for some wild young rowdy of the saddle, plentifully stoked up on Sam's liquid provender, to ride his horse into the front hall of either house and demand feed and bed for both. And occasionally a midnight shooting scrape took place when two old enemies met. Moreover, the snores that emanated from these buildings from midnight to dawn were calculated to offend sensitive ears. Vincent knew all this, for he had tried both places when he first came to town.

For a moment he did not answer, evidently reviewing in his mind these drawbacks. "I expect," he said at last, "you could get room and board at the Widow McLean's. Hers is a private house, a nice place as places go in this country. I am staying there myself. If you would care to go with me and see——"

They walked up the street in the teeth of the whistling norther, the tenderfoot's tall, stooped form overreaching the diminutive height of the girl by some feet.

Every one watched their departure, still a little stunned by Sue's beauty, and a trifle envious of the tenderfoot's readiness to take command of the situation. Cale Kitcherner, a swaggering, coarse-mouthed bully who yearned for the reputation of being a real bad man, was the first to speak. He addressed himself to whoever would listen.

"Me," he said with a suggestive leer, "when I git hold of the money I aim to open up a boardin' house for the use of trustin' young female school-

teachers from back East. An' when I git it well filled up, I'll——"

"Shut yore big mouth." It was Reb Wilson's voice, snapping like a whip and shot through and through with the deadly menace those who knew him had come to associate with some one's sudden departure from this world.

Cale wilted ungracefully. His desire to appear bad had its limitations, it appeared.

Thereupon we all filed back into the warmth of Sam's place and the interrupted poker game was resumed. But somehow it seemed to have lost its savor for Reb Wilson, who until then had been a big winner. He played in moody abstraction and after allowing a decent interval for the others to win back what they had lost, cashed in and left.

"You reckon that he-wolf's gone and got stuck on the little schoolma'am right off the reel?" inquired a talkative young puncher from down the river.

No one answered the query. For, somehow, discussions concerning Reb Wilson's acts or doings had a queer way of getting to his ears, which didn't make it any too healthy for those participating.

However, time, and not a great deal of it either, answered the question to the satisfaction of every one. In a manner plainly perceptible to all, Reb began altering his habits. He still frequented Sam's, which was about the only real man's hangout the town afforded. But he eased up on the amount of burning liquor he consumed and refused to take part in any but a low-limit game. Moreover, he began to be seen at dances, which heretofore he had scorned to attend.

It was easy enough to figure the reason. For Sue Tingley likewise attended each one. At first she had refused, intimating she did not care for such affairs. It was Ma Galloway who

was instrumental in changing her opinion.

"You mustn't feel that a way, deary," she reproved the girl one day. "'Course the crowd may seem a little rough, but it's mostly on the surface. They're good boys near all of 'em. The bad ones don't last long. So you run along to the next one and you'll find you'll enjoy yourself."

But Sue appeared unconvinced. "Then how is it that this man Reb Wilson is still alive if the bad men don't last long?" she argued.

Ma Galloway looked at Sue keenly. "Now, who's been tellin' you things about Reb?" she asked.

But Sue refused to commit herself. The truth was her knowledge came from a little scene of which she had been spectator at one recess in the school-house yard. Armed with sticks to represent pistols, several pupils were reenacting some former gun fight. After sundry loud bangs, all of the group fell to the ground save one and he strutted proudly about, evidently immune to bullets. This immunity apparently piqued the victims, for one and all they protested.

"Well, I'm Reb Wilson, ain't I," the victor contended, "and nobody ever killed him yet."

During the resultant argument Sue learned that Reb had at least seven notches on his gun, and she accepted as gospel her brightest pupil's remark that Reb was as deadly as a rattlesnake and would as lief kill every man in the county as look at them.

So instead of committing herself, she asked: "He has killed seven men, hasn't he?"

"Nine," returned Ma Galloway dryly. "I heard the old man checkin' 'em up just the other night. But, deary," she qualified, "that's nothing agin' the rest of the boys or, for that matter, agin' Reb himself. He's got a place close to the river where nobody else will

hardly run cattle. And them he killed were all rustlers except one or two and they were gunnin' after him, mainly for the notoriety it would bring 'em providin' they bumped him off. Reb may be a killer but it's such as him that makes this country safe to live in."

Whether or not it was this that moved Sue to change her mind is hard to state. Likewise it is a question whether Sue was aware that to Reb was due much of the circumspection exercised by her partners. For if any young dare-devil after a surreptitious visit or two to Sam's place, would head in Sue's direction, invariably he bumped into Reb en route.

"Yo' ain't aimin' to dance with that schoolma'am to-night are yo'?" Reb would softly inquire. "But if yo' are," he would continue, "I'd advise yo' not to. She's sorta agin' liquor, I understand."

This warning, backed by the weight of Reb's reputation, invariably proved sufficient. Provided he was desirous of dancing with the schoolma'am, the culprit would forthwith eschew Sam's place whenever a dance was in progress.

Sedately enough, Reb would lumber about the hall with Sue three or four times during an evening. Still, try as she might, Sue could register but small success in the way of starting a conversation. This tall, taciturn, low-voiced man appeared more tongue-tied than ever in her presence.

"He's the most tantalizing person I ever met," Sue confided to Ma Galloway while visiting her one Saturday. "Just think of what interesting experiences he could relate if he would talk like a human being!"

"Well," said Mr. Galloway practically, "Reb's the quiet sort all right, but unless all indications fail, he'll talk to you one of these times. And I, for one, hope you'll listen him through."

Sue blushed, well knowing what Ma

was driving at, and the prophecy came true at a dance about the middle of February.

The tenderfoot, Vincent, habitually accompanied Sue to such affairs. More than one wager had been offered that in the course of time she would end up as the wife of the Galloway cashier. Tall, angular, unbending, Vincent would escort her to and fro. He danced but little, losing himself in the crowd and spending the evening discussing with some of the older cattlemen prospects and conditions of the market. A great hand for business was Vincent.

To this particular February dance Reb came dolled out in a new suit that palpably was no hand-me-down from old man Groggins' general store. About the middle of the evening, he asked Sue to get her wrap and step outside with him. He had, he told her, a new horse he wanted her to see. While she was admiring the horse which was tied outside, Reb summoned up his leaking courage.

"I was wonderin', ma'am," he asked her gently, "if yo' would consider marryin' me. I guess by this time yo' know I love yo'."

Sue shook her head, meantime groping for words to soften the reason of her refusal. It wasn't going to be so easy to make this suitor of hers understand her abhorrence of his reputation.

But with an intuition almost uncanny, Reb put his finger on the reason. "Is it," he asked in a strained voice, "because they call me a killer?"

Even then, she could not force herself to agree. Some little inner voice warned her that this would hurt the man unnecessarily. For he had been brought up to look at such deeds from a different angle and so could never comprehend her viewpoint.

"Or perhaps," Reb went on, misinterpreting her silence, "there is some

one else. If that's so, ma'am, I'll go away and not bother yo' no more."

As a drowning man grabs at a straw, Sue clutched at this excuse. "Yes," she murmured softly, "there is another."

So Reb went away down river to his ranch on the borderland of the rustlers' hangout and Commanche saw him no more for weeks.

Then one night in the teeth of the last norther of the season, Bill Hiller's boy, a lad of fifteen, came pounding into town. The usual crowd was gathered in Sam's place, the usual game was going on within the circle of warmth thrown out by a red-hot stove.

"You men git ready," he told them. His voice squeaked oddly and he was shivering with excitement and cold. "For Black Jack Oaks and his gang are ridin' this way to rob Old Yellow Hoss' bank."

A generous portion of liquor forced on him by Sam brought some warmth to the half-frozen lad and loosed his tongue.

"They stopped at our place an hour back and dad got wind of their plans," he continued. "So he urged them to stay for supper and sent me on ahead to warn you all. They're aimin' to hit in here about nine, shoot up the town, and loot the bank. Reb Wilson is ridin' with 'em too."

By virtue of his one-time service with the Rangers, Anse Tuttle assumed charge of the arrangements for the bandits' reception.

"The's five of us here," he said, with an appraising glance around, "that's all got long scores to settle with that gang. And there's six of 'em, countin' Reb. Jake, yo' top yore hoss and ride like blazes out and git Old Galloway. He'll want to be in this and that'll make things even. Tell him to come a-rushin' too. We'll be waitin' beside Mexican Joe's shack where the lower road comes into town."

The little group of men were waiting at the designated spot when Jake came loping back. "Old Yaller Hoss wa'n't there," he told them in a disgusted voice. "Looks like us five'll have to handle 'em."

Anse Tuttle swore in his disappointment. "Mebbe he's at the bank. I seen a light there when we rode past," one of the posse volunteered.

But a companion dashed this hope to flinders. "It's only that tenderfoot, Vincent, a-workin' on the books," he said. "I seen him there when I come back from supper."

The leader consulted his watch and turned a listening ear down the road. "Yo' ride back, Jake," he directed, "and tell the tenderfoot what's about to happen. An' also tell him I said ef he's got the courage of a jacksnipe, he'll join up with us. It's his bank we're aimin' to protect."

When Vincent came upon the waiting group a few moments later his teeth were chattering and the barrel of the sawed-off shotgun that ordinarily rested on top the bank safe was wabbling in eccentric circles. Save old Anse Tuttle, who on many occasions had seen a man's moral courage force his feet in paths of danger he had no desire to tread, all the rest thought the tenderfoot was trembling with cold. But Anse rendered commendation to his courage in softly uttered oaths.

"Yo' take yore place right here," he told the newcomer. "Then, when them birds come along, I'll say 'Halt!' 'Hands up!' Likely they won't obey, and that'll be our cue to start slingin' lead."

Ten dragging minutes elapsed before the pound of hoofs from the south warned the listeners of the bandits' approach. There was no need for Anse to utter his command. Two hundred yards from Mexican Joe's shack, the little oncoming group of six broke up, and five figures, dim silhouettes on

horseback in the pale starlight, uttering raucous yells designed to terrify the town, spurred forward.

Thereupon red flashes of light punctured the darkness, guns roared, swelling to a crescendo to die away at last. The beat of scampering hoofs sounded as what was left of the surprised gang took to the brush.

With a dull booming roar, in marked contrast to the whiplike crack of his companions' rifles, the sawed-off shotgun had spoken but once during the height of the mêlée. And this was by sheer accident due to a nervous pressure of the tenderfoot's finger. But it was not lack of nerve or fright which served to stay Vincent's hand. Things just moved too rapidly for him to adjust himself to the situation. But as the last clattering fusillade died away, he saw a lone figure fifty yards behind, still riding forward. With an effort of will he trained the sawed-off weapon in its direction and pulled the trigger. On the heels of the report, doubly loud in the deathly silence following the previous bombardment, the figure stiffened, swayed back a trifle, then slid from the saddle to the frozen roadbed.

The cashier did not wait to help gather up the four still figures from the road. Nor did he join in the riotous celebration in Sam's place a little later. The reaction had left him rather sick. He found it hard work to erase from his mind's eye the picture of what had happened following the final shot.

And the next day, going about his duties at the bank, he was quiet and evinced an unwillingness to enter into conversations dealing with the happenings of the night before.

His preoccupation stood him in good stead for it served to blind him to the fact that during the next few days those with whom he came in contact eyed him a trifle commiseratingly. There was in their glance the same sort of

pity which is reserved for one condemned to die.

It fell to the lot of Old Yellow Horse to break the news which was common property. And this he did in his usual blunt, straightforward manner.

"Do yo' know," he asked, "who it was yo' downed the other night?"

Vincent shook his head.

"Well, it was Reb Wilson," Yellow Horse enlightened him.

"I'm sorry I was forced to kill him," Vincent remarked in his stilted fashion.

"Hell, he ain't dead!" boomed Yellow Horse. "Yo' landed two buckshot in his left shoulder, that's all. An' ain't any of them others told yo' he was ridin' in with his hands above his head when yo' cut loose?"

"No one has told me anything," Vincent replied, a trifle puzzled.

"Humph!" ejaculated Yellow Horse, "well, he was. Seems them would-be bank robbers met up with him on the way to town and proposed he join on with 'em. When he refused, they got the drop and forced him to come along so's he wouldn't give warning of their intentions. He didn't have a weapon of any kind on him when he was picked up."

"I'm doubly sorry I shot him, then," said Vincent, looking more troubled than before. "I must go see him and tell him so as soon as the bank closes. Where is he being held?"

Old Yellow Horse let out a snort of derisive disgust. Take him away from his ledgers and this tenderfoot couldn't see beyond the end of his nose.

"Bein' held!" he rumbled. "Reb ain't 'bein' held' anywhere. His shoulder's kept him abed the last few days, but I understand he'll be up and around this mornin'. An' the last thing yo' want to do is to see Reb or let him see yo'. Yo' stick in the bank here till he leaves town. I'll have yore meals sent in and meantime I'll try and square

things. If I can't do that, yo'll be plumb up agin' it."

But young Vincent even yet failed to comprehend what his employer was driving at. The look of blank perplexity on his face told as much. So Old Yellow Horse explained in detail.

"This here Reb," he began, "is a plumb bad man to start slingin' lead at. An' that's just what yo' done. Mo'over, yo' potted him when he was ridin' in with his hands above his head. The fact that yo' didn't know his hands was raised won't cut no ice. Everybody else seen he was peaceable an' figures yo' did too. So the' won't be a finger lifted when he sets out to settle the score he holds agin' yo'."

"Has—has he said he means to kill me?" asked Vincent. His voice was husky and the question came with an effort.

"Not Reb," came Old Yellow Horse's quick reply. "That ain't his way. He ain't the sort that brags what he's goin' to do. But he's got back his guns that the Black Jack Oaks' gang took off of him and he appears quietlike and thoughtful, a sure sign he's red-hot inside. Just put two and two together. First yo' beat him to that schoolma'am, then yo' pot him while his hands are up. He'll be out to get yo' sure as preachin', after that."

The tenderfoot took off his glasses and wiped them thoughtfully. Meantime, two little lumps had formed at the base of his jaws. He glanced through a window, then crossed the room and fumbled in a drawer beneath the counter from which he unearthed a heavy caliber pistol pledged some time back by a wayfaring cowboy.

"What yo' aimin' to do with that?" Old Yellow Horse asked sharply.

Vincent passed from behind the counter, and had one hand on the door-knob before he replied. The answer came over his shoulder.

"I may be a greenhorn but I'm not a coward," he said in a strained tone.

Then the door slammed and through the window Old Yellow Horse saw what Vincent had noted some time before. With his left arm in a sling but with a scabbarded gun at his right hip, Reb Wilson was coming slowly down the street in the direction of the bank.

Although the sun was shining with dazzling brightness as the tenderfoot, leaving the bank steps, took to the middle of the street, it seemed to him as though he were hemmed in by a pall of murky gloom. There was a queer pounding in his ears and it was suffocatingly difficult for him to draw his breath. But with dogged persistence he forced himself to advance, holding his pistol in grotesque, stiff-armed readiness. Momentarily he expected Reb's uninjured right arm to whip downward. At the first flicker of such movement, he had determined to fire.

Reb, upon catching sight of the advancing figure, had stopped and continued to stand in an attitude of wary attention. Vincent could distinguish his eyes, gray, like a flaw in a cake of ice, fixed on him unwinking and watchful.

When fifteen paces away, Vincent slowed his step and ran his tongue over lips that had suddenly gone dry.

"Hands up!" he then commanded in a voice that from strain and excitement resembled the croak of a frog.

Instantly, Reb's right arm whipped skyward. Closing the gap between them with a few hasty steps, the tenderfoot removed Reb's pistol from its scabbard. After that he hesitated. Somehow, things had not turned out at all as he had expected. There followed a moment of tense silence, then Reb spoke:

"Just what," he asked in a dry voice, "is the big idea?"

The casualness of the inquiry, com-

bined with the utter lack of excitement in Reb's tone, served to calm Vincent's overwrought nerves. He relaxed and replied in a more normal voice: "I was told you intended to kill me."

Reb laughed. "For what?" he asked. "Because yo' landed a couple of buckshot in my shoulder by accident, or because yo' got the girl I wanted?"

Then he became serious. "Listen, son," he continued, "if I'd wanted to kill yo' I could 'a' done it any time after yo' left the bank steps and yo'd never know what happened. But that's neither here nor there. You've proved yore nerve, but at the same time yo've got yoreself in a right smart jack pot."

"What do you mean?" asked Vincent, thinking Reb had reference to some future meeting between them.

"Just this," said Reb and his voice was earnest with the wish to make the other comprehend. "When yo' started after me the' was a dozen persons loafin' on the street. But now there ain't a one in sight. The're all inside somewhere's a-watchin' what's takin' place."

The tenderfoot let his glance stray up and down the deserted thoroughfare. "What of it?" he asked, failing to grasp what Reb was driving at.

"Only that it'll soon be common knowledge that yo' took my gun off'n me, which means that when the word gets round the'll be a dozen lookin' fo' a chance to try yo' out. An' yo' won't have a rabbit's chance. The first one will kill yo' as sure as night follows day."

For a space measured by minutes young Vincent pondered. And by degrees came the conviction that Reb spoke the truth. Short as his stay had been in this border section, he had learned that one who bested a no-

torious gunman automatically assumed his mantle. A sudden revulsion toward Commanche and all its inhabitants swept him, and on the heels of it came keen pangs of homesickness.

"So ef I was yo'," Reb continued gently, "I'd pull my stakes. Yo' have proved yore manhood and no one can say different. Besides yo' got Miss—Miss Sue to think of. She as much as told me that she loved yo'. So take a fool's advice and go back where yo' come from."

Then, without waiting for a reply, Reb removed his gun from Vincent's unresisting fingers, thrust it into the hostler at his hip and strode off in the direction of Sam's. Within were several to whom he wished to speak a word of caution.

A few minutes later Vincent stood facing Sue Tingley in the parlor at the Widow McLean's. A great many things had come to him on the short walk hither. One was that he meant to follow Reb's advice and return home. Another was he could not bear to go alone.

Beginning with Old Yellow Horse's warning, he faithfully related to Sue all that happened since. "And this Reb Wilson is all man, through and through," he finished with evident conviction.

Sue's eyes were misty with tenderness, and Vincent misread the reason.

"I have determined to leave for the East to-morrow," he went on in much his usual manner. "So will you marry me right away and we'll make it our wedding trip?"

The misty tenderness was still in Sue's eyes as she shook her head. "No," she said softly, "no, I am going to stay here." And under her breath she added. "In hopes Reb will again ask me to marry him."





Sooner Land

By George Washington Ogden

Author of "Cherokee Trails," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

NOLL HOWARD and Jake Zickafoos assist in the settlement of the new town of Cimarron. Josie Morrison and her mother, restaurant keepers, and "Poke" Jones, mayor, figure largely in the life of the place.

Milt Everett, a scoundrel, is elected marshal. The better element are enraged, but helpless. Two of Everett's men try to escape paying for their dinner at the Morrises', and Jake disposes of them by throwing peppersauce in their eyes. Noll and Jake prepare to meet their vengeance.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MAN ON A ROOF.

DANGER is not so formidable by daylight as in the close-hemming mystery of night. One who has stood out against it in the dark, faculties tuned to the finest consonance, every sense quickened to almost painful activity, relaxes with the dawn, and finds sunrise reassuring as the coming of a friend. Mysteries dissolve by daylight, as miracles cease with enlightenment. When danger can be seen approaching from a distance, much of the terror of its coming is allayed, and the unknown that bulked upon the night-quickened imagination often shrinks to such mean proportions by daylight that it cannot provoke an apprehensive thrill.

Jake Zickafoos and his partner Howard were not different from other men in their unbounded confidence in the cheerful ally of daylight. The impending climax in their feud with the police of Cimarron did not appear so imminent when the sun rose next morning; their expectant watchfulness relaxed. They felt that the time was not yet; that they had been mistaken in marking the hour so early on the dial of events.

One side of the new barn remained to be painted and, as his train did not come along until eleven o'clock, Jake said he would improve the shining hours by spreading on a few squares of red adornment. The police force appeared to be in either forgetful or forgiving mood. Everett had not fulfilled his threat against Doctor Green; nobody had called at the partners' location to square accounts for the dos-

age of peppersauce, none of them had been seen passing on the street. Jake said he hoped he hadn't put their eyes out, for he was a tender-hearted man by rights, and would rather be killed outright, speaking for himself, than lose his eyes. Noll said he was of the opinion that Everett had fired the pair, and they had made a sneak out of town.

One thing and another contributed to their growing feeling of ease and relaxation of vigilance until when it came to the question of wearing their guns both men cast around for a little more argument to justify leaving them off.

"I never saw a man paintin' a barn with a gun hangin' on him," Jake said, as if the whole thing hung on an established precedent.

"I don't remember that I ever did, either," said Noll, fingering his mustache, and drawing his brows, as if struggling to recall such an incident in his experience.

"A feller'd look like hell swingin' a paint brush with a gun on him," Jake declared. "That's a job a gun don't go with, it's so dang peaceable and innercent. I tell you: le's hang 'em in the office, where we can bust in and grab 'em if we see any signs. I'll work on the ladder and you stick to the ground. That way I'll be up in the air where I can look around, and you'll be where you can hop to it when I grunt."

As Noll pointed out, the weakness in this arrangement was that Jake could see in one direction only. Yes, Jake admitted, that was so, but it was the calaboose direction, and all of them bunked in the calaboose. They'd be sleeping late; since the Longhorn opened they never were seen around before noon.

"What's more," Jake argued, "if they head this way lookin' for trouble it'll prove we're innercent and harmless if we have to run for our guns.

If we had 'em on, the jury might take it in their heads we was lined up expectin' a fuss. It's always better to play safe with one of them juries."

So they played safe, as far as any future jury was involved, hanging their guns inside the window of the barn office, out of public sight but well within private reach, and went cheerfully to work at their peaceable and innocent job.

Traffic increased in the street from straggling lines of laborers and artisans setting out on their day's work to a heavier stream of wagons transporting material to building sites, supplies from the railroad station, kegs of beer to the saloons. Buggies of real estate men and early grafters cut in and out through the sluggish traffic, alert as dragon-flies in the morning sun; small bands of cattle passed, jogging wearily from long drives in the night, headed for butchers' pens, to be turned into steaks and stews by evening, and served to the ravenous feeders who were making the clatter and clank of industry in Cimarron.

Wagons and single rigs were coming in from surrounding claims, many of them with an extra horse or two in tow. Business was proceeding actively at the horse market that had been established on the corner a few lots beyond Doctor Green's location, and here many of the led animals brought in from the country would change hands in the course of the day through trades and purchase.

Cheap creatures, these, weary and wind-galled, lean and lonesome, with here and there the wreck of an aristocrat among them. No material in that land for two enterprising young men to stock up a livery barn. Amid vast bargaining, sly raillery, much going off in pairs and groups to have a drink, these sorry nags would stand in the sun for weary hours, haggled over by a class of petty gamblers as distinc-

tive to the horse lot, as the very smell of horse itself.

Wagons loaded with water barrels came from the creek, trailing dark streaks of wet in the dust; women and boys passed bending under the weight of buckets filled from the same source of supply, water being the big problem in Cimarron, as it remained for a long time after the overpopulated condition adjusted itself and the town settled down on the basis of prosaic permanence. Well borers, well diggers, were at work like gophers all over town, throwing up earth everywhere, making holes down to shallow water which soon was to become contaminated and bring a visitation of disease.

The partners had contracted with a well borer, whom they expected that morning to begin operations. Jake became so centered on watching for this man, plenty of water close at hand being so essential to the business of keeping many horses, that he allowed the police to slip back to second place in his thoughts as well as in his vigil. Just about the time Jake was thinking of coming down off the ladder to shave and slick himself up for his trip to Kansas City, the well artist arrived.

This man had an auger of at least three feet in diameter, which was driven into the earth by horse power and hoisted for dumping by the same means. It was a common instrument in its day, much favored for sinking wells where rock was not encountered, and this auger gleamed bright as a plowshare in the sun from much business in Cimarron. Noll said he'd show him where they'd driven the stakes to mark the well, and Jake said yes, go ahead; he'd use up the paint in his bucket and then come down and scrape his face and put on his necktie and other pants. If there was one remaining thought in his head of power-usurping, vengeance-seeking policemen with cayenne pepper and vinegar in

their eyes, it was only a shred of a thought, indeed.

Jake spread the paint with limber wrist and calculative eye, the bottom of his bucket showing bare. He was working his brush dry, pretty well up to the top of the ladder, leaning and reaching to get at a bare spot between the rafters which projected to make overhanging eaves, when he heard Noll come back and stop at the foot of his perch.

"How long does he think it's goin' to take him?" Jake inquired, peering between the rafters, dabbing away at the unpainted plank ends which nobody but a nesting sparrow ever was likely to see.

"Pile down off that ladder, damn you!"

No, it was not Noll; Jake realized that at the first word without waiting for the last. No less important dignity than Milt Everett himself, in fact, as Jake's quick squint down the ladder verified. Everett was standing near the foot of the ladder, looking up with a most unfriendly expression in his red eyes, and his gun was ready for business again.

"Yeah, just leave me swipe the paint off of this brush," Jake replied, apparently unconcerned, as if innocent of his visitor's intention, hoping to gain a little rope for himself and give Noll time to come around the corner of the barn.

"Pile off right now! What do you think you're doin' buildin' a livery barn without a license? Do you damn fellows think you're runnin' this town? You're pulled. Pile down!"

Jake rolled his eye to see if Noll had heard the challenge and was on his way to their guns, letting each foot down slowly, feeling blindly for the rung below him like a man unaccustomed to being up so high on a ladder. Noll was not in sight, and there was a hammering of stake driving behind the

barn where the well auger man was setting up his machine. Noll couldn't hear a whistle over that racket.

Besides, there was the pale-haired deputy standing right where he'd see Howard the second he threw his leg around the corner of the barn. He was wearing smoked goggles to temper the sun to his inflamed eyes, and Jake knew as well as he was aware that his foot was dangling between rungs of the ladder that they had come there to kill him. They were only waiting for some kind of a break that could be construed in their broad code as resisting arrest, and then they'd let him have it. They never intended that he should see the inside of that calaboose.

It was a situation calling for some fast thinking, and Jake was doing it. There, or on the ground, they'd plug him, at the first move they could take for a sign of resistance. It would look better for them, Jake knew, if they waited until he struck the ground. Then they could say he had started to run.

A man can review his life in the fraction of a second, down to the most trivial events, to the inclusion of incidents long forgotten which leap up like figures revealed in the green lightning of a midnight storm. Any man who has felt the throttling waters at his gullet, or who has been given reprieve for this conscious recapitulation before the final clutch of death in any form, and has escaped to walk forth again in the sun, can testify to the verity of all this. It is an old tale to such a man, although there are some to scoff at it, and bend superior brows. And, as the imminence of death over one but a moment before vigorous and strong revives the memory, so the pressure of danger speeds the imagination and quickens the invention. A man can think a thousand miles a second when somebody is reaching for a gun.

Jake Zickafoos did all his thinking

and planning, and came to his decision, in that spare second when his foot hung between the rungs of the ladder. They were there to get him; they had enough laid up against him to overbalance any sense of justice or fair play they might accord to another man. As soon as his foot struck the ground they'd let him have it; Jake knew that as well as he knew that the sun was shining.

That was when Jake made a feint of slipping, and slung the bucket and brush at Milt Everett as if he had let them go to save himself a fall. Everett jumped back from the foot of the ladder to avoid being doused with red barn paint, as he supposed, and Jake, taking up the slack of the moment's confusion, ran up the ladder as nimbly as a squirrel and started up the long slope of the roof toward the comb.

Jake was wearing a pair of stiff-soled plowshoes, bought but a few days before, footwear not especially to be recommended for scuttling up the slope of a barn roof, let the pitch be even moderate as that one was. But Jake went up rather fast, with considerable clatter, the move taking him for the moment beyond sight of the two men below, as he had calculated. They were standing close to the building; they would have to back off to get a shot.

Jake's plan was to make it to the peak of the roof and over to the other side, where he would be safe for a few seconds, long enough to whistle the alarm to Noll. It would have taken something more than two men with guns to make him yell for help, pressing as his necessity was. A man's dignity had to be considered before his safety sometimes, and that was one of them, although Jake did not think of the figure he made scrambling up the long slope of that roof in the eyes of half the inhabitants of Cimarron.

The deputy whose eyes were still

burning from the douse of pepper-sauce pegged a shot at Jake while he was still ten feet from the peak of the roof; Everett came along with his as Jake rolled over the top. The first shot struck between Jake's feet, the second exactly where he had been not the fifth of a second before. It went zipping over him, not even nipping the shingles. Everett's gun arm was in working order again, for a fact.

Jake was hugging the shingles, thinking what next and that due any minute, when somebody on that side of the barn took a crack at him, not alone one shot, but several, throwing them so fast, that they seemed to be running in a stream. Jake didn't wait to count them, or see who was handing them along; he just made a heave and a roll and went back the way he had come, holding to the little fringe of upstanding shingles the carpenters had failed to saw off when they put on the finishing lap. He hung on desperately to this insecure handhold to keep from rolling down into Milt Everett's arms.

Then the deputy with goggles, who had started around to the other side as Jake rolled over the first time, saw that he had come back and began to pester him with lead. Taken all around, it was about the most uncomfortable and trying situation any sawed-off cow-puncher ever found himself in, although the peppersauce had something to do with his apparently miraculous escape from the bullets which tore into that brand-new roof all around him. It was pretty wild shooting, to say the best, but close enough to convince Jake that he ought to be up and on his way.

He considered the ladder; a glance to where it had extended above the eaves showed it gone. Everett had kicked it down, well enough satisfied to have Jake where he was, seeing that Howard had dashed into the barn

by the back door at the sound of the first shot and grabbed the guns. Jake heard the first shot from the office below, and raised a whoop to let his partner know he was still holding air.

But it wouldn't do to ride that roof, even with their attention called off as it was just then. How to get down was the question, for if he started toward the eaves to make the drop of twenty feet—enough to bust a feller's legs if he happened to land twist-in', Jake thought—he might get to going so fast he'd shoot off like a hailstone and smash himself flat. He thought of the beam projecting beneath the peak of the front gable, designed for hoisting hay into the loft. He might swing into the loft by that. Right then it looked like a trifling feat, but when he crawled to the edge of the roof and looked over he changed his plan.

The eaves projected eighteen inches, the beam was away down out of arm's reach and, if he happened to land on it safely he'd never be able to swing into the hay door, for the top of it would strike him about the knees, let him stretch his longest, which, Jake regretted as never before in all his days, was not overly long.

As he lay there peering and calculating, Noll Howard burst out of the front door, fanning away with both guns. Jake had only a glimpse of him before he was out of sight around the corner, heading for his own shack, Jake supposed, although it would not turn bullets any faster than the inch pine planking of the barn.

Jake could not see Everett and the man with goggles, and he had no way of knowing whether the entire force was present, or only the three who had taken cracks at him. From the sound of what was going on, he concluded that somebody had sneaked in on Howard from the rear and made it too hot for him in the barn. There

was a lot of shooting going on directly beneath him, but there was nobody out in the open trying to pick him off the roof. They seemed to have forgotten him in the pressure of business Howard had started.

This phase of the situation did not bring Jake either relief or assurance. He lay there panting and sweating, wrung by agonizing concern for his partner, cursing the mischance which cut him off from the battle like a squirrel on a limb. They'd kill Howard—from the sound of the guns all four of them must be in the barn cracking away at him—then they'd turn their guns on him.

Better to take chances with a broken bone or two than lie there and let them pick him off after they'd finished Howard. A man would look like hell rollin' down the roof and floppin' off to the ground, all limber and leakin' and drilled full of holes, Jake thought. Better go of his own accord, even if they got him after he landed. It wasn't the thing to get shot and tumble off a roof; it wasn't decent. That was the way Jake considered it as he began to let himself down, holding to the gable eaves to keep himself from going all at once.

As he worked down this way, going pretty fast, coming nearer every second to the hazard of the drop to the hard ground, Jake saw people running away from the neighborhood of the barn to give the wild bullets room. He thought it took them a long time to realize their peril, for it seemed to him it had been many minutes since he scrambled up the roof, although it could not have been much more than one minute, at the utmost calculation.

Some drivers whose teams were unruly had cut and left them; there was a tangle of traffic—interlocked wheels, jammed wagon-tongues, kicking, plunging, squealing horses—directly in front of the barn. Hell would be to

pay in that town in a minute, thought Jake, as he went sliding down the roof, all set to drop and take what might come of it, a big hope bulging his heart that he might hit right-side up and a-comin', escape falling into the hands of any of that gang, and be able, in some way beyond present contriving, to give that old shootin' sheepman partner of his a hand.

CHAPTER XXII.

PITCHED BATTLE.

NOLL HOWARD believed that Everett and his gang of so-called deputies had wantonly slain Jake Zickafoos. When he heard the shots, followed almost at once by the noise of the falling ladder, he was swept by such a hopeless feeling of despair that the day seemed to darken and the noise of life to fall away and cease around him as if he had been plunged into a vacuum. Jake was dead, and he had connived in the folly that had made him a defenseless victim of Everett's outlaw gang.

That was his first poignant thought: it was his fault that Jake was up on the ladder without his gun, while he himself was out there behind the barn as helpless to avenge him as a post set in the ground. Then he broke through that cloud of remorse and horror as if rushing into the sunlight and noise of human activity from behind a cataract, and jumped for the gun he had left, beguiled by the deceptive security of the autumn day, hanging in the office on the same nail with Jake's.

Milt Everett was coming around the corner of the barn that moment. He saw Howard cutting for the back door and threw a hasty shot as he came headlong after him. The bullet had no effect except that of hastening Howard both in his gait and in his desire. He galloped through the sixty-foot length of the barn, which seemed dark as a

cellar coming in so suddenly out of the sun, wondering what he would do and where he would go if they had seen the guns hanging in the office and taken them. Everett was inside, shooting wildly through the gloom, as Howard reached the office door. Two men flitted past the window making for the front to head him off.

The guns were hanging where he and Jake had left them, so near the window which the two men had passed that they could have reached in and taken them on the jump. Howard let go a vast pent breath of relief, slung the two belts over his shoulder, kicked the door shut behind him to keep Everett guessing and stood a moment listening, considering which way to go.

It would not be prudent to remain in that little box of inch-thick planks, with Everett boring in on one side of him, the rest of them in front holding their fire for a sound to tell them where to shoot. There was a pile of dimension lumber for stalls lying near the corner of the barn, about half way between the building and Howard's shanty. It lay end to the street, and was about four feet high. Howard believed he would have a much longer and brighter chance of settling Jake's account behind that pile of scantlings than inside the barn.

The office was in a front corner of the barn, on the side next to Howard's house. It was merely an inclosed corner, about ten feet square, with a window in the side wall, the door opening into the barn, through which Howard had entered, and another door giving entry from the street, after the plan of offices in livery stables the country over. The window was framed, but the sash had not been put in, leaving an unobstructed opening wide enough to let out a bigger man than Howard. It was about three feet from sill to ground. Howard was at the window, taking a cautious look outside, when

Everett arrived at the door which Noll had kicked shut but a few seconds before.

"Watch the winder on the side!" Everett directed his men in front.

Howard heard somebody come pounding around the corner of the barn heading for the window. It was a timely diversion for Howard, not considered by Everett when he yelled the command. At the same time Everett, taking a foolish chance in the confidence of numbers, started to open the inside door.

Howard flipped a shot through the thin panel, jumped to the front door, threw it open and burst out, while behind him Everett was drilling the other door full of holes and the man who had arrived at the window began to pitch angling shots across the corner of the office from his skulking position beside the opening. This man's caution about revealing himself doubtless preserved Howard's life as he made his exit through the front door. A bold man could have killed him with one fair shot through the window, but all the damage the shooter at his back accomplished was to knock splinters from the door jamb beside his head.

Boone McDaniel and the deputy, who looked like a cowman, were in front of the barn when Howard came out in the unexpected and dramatic dash that had won him the shout of enthusiasm from Jake Zickafoos, perched on the roof overhead. While Howard could not have made a passing grade as a two-gun man, he could get as much noise out of a weapon with his left hand as anybody, and he appeared in the front door doing very well in that particular.

The two men were not more than five yards away, standing not in front of the door Howard came out of, but in the wide entrance designed for vehicles and horses. This was on Howard's right. There the two of

them stood blazing away at him, their bullets cutting so close that he felt the wind of them fan his hair.

They were cautious about exposing themselves, keeping back a little inside the broad entrance, but Boone McDaniel stepped out from the shelter as Howard drew away from the door into the open, with a confidence in his past that cost him dearly. He dropped his gun and went stumbling in a peculiar tipping, sidling way toward the door, as if somebody had given him a vicious push. He was holding his right hand to his side, groping out with the other as if frantically feeling his way in the dark.

The other man made a jump after him, clearing it to cover in a bound. Howard heard Everett and the other shooting behind him as he cut a streak for the pile of lumber, his hide still whole as far as he could tell.

As he rounded the corner of the barn, Howard saw a man's leg going through the office window. He didn't trouble to fire at it, but scuttled like a chased cat behind the lumber. There he dropped to his knees and loaded the empty chambers of his guns, throbbing with the tremendous stimulation of battle, so intensely centered on vengeance and defense that public activities around him were only a distant blur.

He was conscious of great commotion in the street, the clatter of swift-moving wagons, the beat of running hoofs, the excited shouting of men, the strident shrieks of women cutting the commingled confusion like darting red flames of sound. But it was all incidental to him, aside and far removed from possible contact, it seemed. His world had contracted to the length of that lumber pile; the width of it was the distance between him and the barn.

Howard waited behind his barrier, excitement cooling in him a little as he began to consider how it was going to end. He had hit Boone McDaniel,

how seriously he could not guess, for a man sometimes goes spinning that way from nothing more than the clip of a bullet that knocks out his wind. His own skin was, marvelously, untouched, although gunmen never had a fairer target than he presented; or greater advantages in a difficult situation.

Booze and peppersauce had saved him, he knew very well. Few men can trust their shooting judgment after days of unstinted drinking. Howard had seen the lanky figure of Boone McDaniel reeling beside Everett more than once, and no later than yesterday. The other man was still fuzzy of vision, without doubt, from the dose of cayenne Jake had given him last night. But he was still in the fight, with Everett and the one who had slipped through the office window. Three of them left. And the fight was not over yet; it hardly had begun. He wondered what their next move would be, and whether they knew where he had gone.

Maybe not. None of them had seen him scoot behind the lumber. It might be they were thinking he had run into somebody's store, or hidden in a tent somewhere along the street, and would go looking for him. Such a move would only defer the moment of final reckoning a little while. They had started out to clean up on him and Jake; there could be no truce, no compromise, no peace. It must be ended, one way or the other, here and now.

Howard took off his hat and stood it on top of the lumber pile to let them know he was there, crouching low in expectation of a shot. But they were not shooting at empty hats. That would be a diversion Milt Everett would scorn.

But what next? Whose move was it? He could not lurk behind the lumber all day, and they wouldn't hang around the barn waiting for him to

come back. He crept to the end of the lumber pile and took a cautious look at the barn. There was a movement inside the window, a cautious movement of a man leaning to see. Howard fired; somebody answered the shot from the rear corner of the barn.

Somebody was working around there to flank him, and get in on him from the side. They had known all the time where he was, and from the way that bullet headed—it almost pinned his ear to the end of a scantling—he was sure Milt Everett was behind the gun. He was the steady one, the sure one. Booze did not shake him, or else he had sense enough to cut it out when he was planning a fight.

They began to shoot from the barn; Howard heard the bullets chug in the soft wood. The scheme was to make him hug the ground while Everett worked out from the corner of the barn and got him from the side. From his left, now, out in the street, somebody pitched in a shot that knocked dust not three feet from where he crouched. He whirled to that quarter; got a glimpse of a man wearing dark goggles, who ducked behind an abandoned wagon drawn by an indifferent team which even bullets could not seem to stir out of their indolence. Then, while his back was turned in the direction he had been watching for Everett, a bullet came reaming along a scantling only a few inches over his head.

Howard squirmed around to face that way again, exposing more of himself than his perilous situation warranted. Everett was standing near the corner of the barn, something in his alert, eager pose that suggested a ball player maneuvering to steal a base. One foot was advanced as far as his long leg would stretch, the other anchored near the safety line, ready to pull him back to the shelter of the barn at the first feint Howard might

make to put him out. He was as keen in his pursuit of that unfair combat and as zealous to win as if he played a game, indeed. To Everett, burned-out participant in the frontier's coarse revelries, it was nothing short of a game, in truth. Man-killing was the one diversion in which his vice-poisoned heart could still experience a thrill.

The man with goggles came up from behind the wagon long enough to throw two shots uncomfortably close to Howard's feet, as he stretched along the lumber pile trying to flatten himself against it like a leech. What the fellow in front of him was up to Howard could only make an anxious guess. He was quiet, but Everett began to play off his base, crouching, gun lifted, to throw a shot. Howard pitched one at him, making him skip and cut back to the corner of the barn.

Behind him, the fellow at the wagon was growing bold. He put in a shot that knocked dirt in Howard's face. It was so close to him that he felt the wind of it like the quick stroke of an open hand.

Howard began to perspire anxiously as the pinch of his situation tightened, and to cast around desperately for some way of getting out. He considered making a dash for his shanty as he pivoted around to drive the pestiferous goggled man back behind the wagon. The fellow flipped to shelter as quick as a fish at the first crack, and Howard improved the lull in the assault to reload.

Everett was out again, snipping at him over the top of the lumber pile, where his head incautiously lifted itself an inch too high. Splinters whizzed past his ear; something struck his cheek bone, tearing the flesh like a claw. It was with a deep breath of thankfulness that he saw it was only a long rough splinter. He picked the

end of it out of his face with such a feeling of relief that he quite overlooked the close shave it had given his eye. For he had thought at first Milt Everett had him that time. He felt that he could stop splinters all day, but he could not stop one of Milt Everett's bullets more than once.

It was time to be getting out of there. They were working it in a way to get him, one edging around on either side, one in front. There was not a great way to go to reach the shelter of his house, such shelter as its thin walls offered. About twenty feet—three good strides. But a man would loom as big as a horse going across that little stretch. And there was that fellow in front of the lumber pile waiting for just such a break.

But he knew they would get him if he remained there. On the other hand, if he tried to streak it for his own door they'd nail him in the back before he'd gone two jumps. He did not relish the notion of running, and pitching forward with a bullet between the shoulder blades, the whole town looking on. Vanity is a greater urge than courage, even desperation, in some situations, and Howard's was a situation of that kind. It would be undignified to run to fall on his face that way.

He shuffled his chances and his schemes, hard-pressed, desperate, the perspiration induced by the thought of his extremity streaming into his eyes. Worthless, every one of them! There was just one way out of it, and that was to get up on his legs like a man and fight it out. The resolution revived him like a cool wind. His cornered spirit leaped, the fever of harassment cleared out of his eyes. The world was clear in his vision again; everything was set in its right place, distance and proportion. The one way out was a man's way—stand up on his legs and fight.

He sprang up so suddenly in the

wild exultation of the resolution that he caught the goggled man out of cover, his gun swinging at his side. Howard snapped a shot at him as the surprised fellow recoiled, ducked, raised his hand to fire. He dropped at the wagon end.

At that same moment somebody who had come up behind Howard began to shoot with a big-bore gun. He got in two or three shots before Howard could even wheel around to meet what he thought was an uncounted ally of the police gang. Poke Jones was standing not more than twenty yards behind him, working a rifle as fast as he could flip the lever, his long coat blowing out in the stiff breeze as if he had come on the run and the skirts had not yet settled back to their somber decorum over his long bony legs.

Milt Everett's heel was disappearing behind the barn; the cowman deputy who had been holding the front was making a run for the shelter of the opposite end of the barn, and making it in extraordinary time. Jones had caught him farther away from his base than wily old Milt Everett had ventured to play. It looked like a hopeless case.

Just that moment Jake Zickafoos came tearing around the other corner of the barn, Doctor Green's long-barreled .45 in his fist. Jake had hit the ground hard when he dropped from the roof, so hard that the breath was jolted out of him as completely as any side-winder of an outlaw he ever had straddled had been able to do it. His senses were more or less dispersed with his wind; he had stretched there in complete collapse for what seemed to him plenty of time to die and get to whatever destination his ticket called for, when Doctor Green, brave man and good horse doctor that he was, came to his assistance in defiance of all the wild bullets that were flying around.

Doctor Green pumped some wind back into Jake's collapsed lungs, gave him a stiff jolt of whisky, felt him over for broken bones and, not finding any, pulled out his gun and put it in the place where a gun was never more needed in the days of any little cow-puncher from anywhere at all. Jake was up and going in a second. His legs felt a little tangled at the first few jumps, but he was traveling strong when he rounded the corner of the barn and cut across the front of the building, to get around where he could see what was going on and play his late hand for what it might be worth to that old shootin' sheepman partner of his.

And as he went pounding along that way, the noise of Poke Jones' big gun in his ears, Jake ran slam into another man who was getting out of the fracas faster than Jake was trying to get into it. They met at the corner of the barn near the lumber pile, coming together in a head-on collision that jarred their teeth in the sockets and piled them up in a clawing, kicking tangle. Jake was lighter by fifty pounds than the weight he had struck, and he was not traveling more than half as fast. As a consequence, he was on the bottom of the pile, and his gun was nowhere, and there was a sense of stifling in his lungs again, and of obscuration before his eyes, pretty much as had followed his drop from the roof a few minutes before.

Jake clinched with the man on top of him, for he had seen enough of him as they struck to recognize him as one of the enemy. He set his claws into the fellow like a catamount, pumped in a little wind, and squirmed to turn him before he could get to work with his gun.

Jake kicked and heaved and twisted, but the big beefy man seemed harder to move than a log. He was not putting up any fight—just sprawling there

as if knocked out entirely, but he still had hold of his gun. Jake put all he had into one mighty heave, turned the limp burden, scrambled to his feet, and grabbed the gun.

One look at the man's upturned face told Jake he would have no call to use the gun. The man was as dead as any person Jake Zickafoos ever had encountered in that condition, and they had not been few. He was leaking badly, as Jake could see; there was a blotch of red on his shirt, some of which had been transferred to Jake's own as they lay in the tangle of the collision.

Poke Jones was standing off a little way, a twist of smoke coming out of his rifle barrel; and Howard was coming around from behind the pile of scantlings, one side of his face covered with blood, a grin under that old sheepman mustache of his. Jake went to meet him, his heart giving a jump to find him branded, but up and a-comin' and frisky as if nothing had happened. The man with goggles was lying off to Jake's right a little way as if he had been spilled out of the wagon standing near. Milt Everett was not in sight

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOT A HANGING CRIME.

THE men of Cimarron got up from behind nail kegs, salt barrels and feather beds, grabbed their bulldog pistols and shotguns, and came pelting to the livery barn for a shot at Milt Everett, sole survivor of the bandit police force, who had taken refuge there. They came in such great numbers and so rapidly that Poke Jones and the two partners found themselves submerged in a throng that surrounded the barn on all quarters and pressed upon each other's heels with a foolish sense of security in their very density.

If Milt Everett had begun to shoot, he must have reaped a tremendous har-

vest in that packed field of human oats. They had that shallow bravery of curs and mobs which mounts only when the victim flees, or comes to bay in the hopeless folly of further flight. Nobody knew what part of the barn Everett was in, although many had seen him run into it and none had seen him leave.

As the crowd grew, the mob spirit, which is the most ungallant and ungenerous of all human moods, increased until it quickly reached a frenzy of determination. They would put an end to Everett's usurpation of authority, blackmail, and overbearing insolence, if they had to burn the barn over his head and drive him out.

This intention they announced, calling on Everett, with jeers and mocking ribaldry, to show himself. They seemed intoxicated with a kind of hilarious courage, rather than grimly determined to finish the gory chapter of events which had been three-quarters written before any of them thought of laying hand to a gun.

Some began to shoot into the barn, others to call loudly for a rope, the turmoil rising until all order was submerged and restraint seemed impossible. Too stupid to realize the danger, it seemed that they must sweep into the barn soon and try to drag their vanquished oppressor out to an end which few of the most compassionate would have believed unkind.

"They're goin' to ruin that barn!" said Jake, fuming with concern for the new planks and fresh paint.

Jake was standing beside Poke Jones, almost flattened against him, in fact, by the pressure of people all around. Doctor Green's pistol, which he had recovered fairly from under the hoofs of the first arrivals on the battle scene, and the fallen deputy's weapon, which he had confiscated, were thrust into the deep side-pockets of his paint-mussed overalls, and he was clamping

his shallow jaw with that vigorous dry motion of mastication peculiar to him in moments of determination.

"Yes, darn 'em!" said Howard, drawing his mouth in a sour expression of displeasure, hand at his oat-straw mustache, the two cartridge belts still slung over his shoulder like bandoliers, the two guns shoved out of sight under the apron of his overalls, behind the waistband of his trousers.

"They'll do us five hundred dollars' worth of damage if we don't put a stop to that fool shootin' into that new barn!" Jake declared with wrathful vehemence. "Dang fools! they couldn't hit that old cuss if they shot it as full of holes as a strainer."

"They're likely to kill somebody in the crowd, as well as ruin the appearance of your building," Jones said. "If you boys will go around and stop them, I'll bring Everett out."

Jake looked at him with a quick turning of the head, his admiration for this valiant mayor growing with every breath. Jake had settled it all with his partner in one grin. A man like Noll Howard was expected to do a day's work with a gun, but a mayor was only expected to run a post office, weigh out sugar and coffee, or engage his talents in some such gentle pursuit. That had been Jake's experience with mayors in one-wire towns—just a kind of ideograph, a concrete something representing the meaning of a word. But here was a mayor with a backbone as big as a horse, a man who came to the help of his friends when help was needed like overshoes in a blizzard. Jake couldn't quite make him out.

"He's layin' in there with his belly to the ground waitin' to throw lead," Jake said. "It'd be like puttin' your hand in a gopher hole after a rattlesnake."

"I'll bring him out," Jones repeated, with the quiet assurance of a man who

had pulled rattlesnakes out of holes before that day.

Howard handed Jake's belt to him, and buckled on his own, the people around them giving elbowroom when they recognized him as the principal on the defensive side of the fight.

"Cut out that shootin' at that barn!" Jake yelled, his high voice cutting the noise with authoritative crack. "Come on, pardner, you and me'll show 'em whose livery barn they're ruinin' with them damn fool guns!"

Jake started for the space at the corner of the barn where the body of the man whom he had met in a head-on crash still lay, and jerked the guns from his pockets, lifting them high as if displaying batons of authority above the heads of the mob. Howard, close beside him, raised his hand in a commanding gesture of peace.

"We'll take care of this situation, gentlemen," he announced in calm words. "This is our property, and we're here to protect it."

At the sound of Howard's voice, Milt Everett's fancy new sombrero appeared at the unglazed window in the side of the barn, not fifteen feet from where the partners stood. Some sports on the fringe of the crowd saw it and began to shoot with their stub-nosed guns. But as Milt Everett's head was not in the hat, and would not have had a hair disturbed by all the lead that was pitched toward it if it had been, the hat did not disappear. The hand that held it waved it frantically, and Jake Zickafoos turned to the shooting sports with a sudden menace of his two guns that drove them back as if a flame had lashed their faces.

"Cut out that damn shootin'!" he yelled. "Don't you see he wants to give up?"

"Howard! I want to talk to Howard!" Everett called from the place where he was hugging the floor beside the window.

"Howard! Howard!" The name ran through the crowd, men stretching and lifting to see. It was a familiar name, almost echoing yet among the tents and raw-sided new houses after the recent campaign, but few realized up to that moment that Howard was the lone man back of the lumber pile who had held three men off with his guns for the most exciting ten minutes Cimarron ever had experienced.

Now the word began to run through the crowd that Howard was the man for whose life several thousand palpitating citizens had feared during the three-cornered battle that had come to so sudden and dramatic close only a few minutes past. Howard—that was Howard—right over there—that every-day-looking man in overalls with a gun in his hand and another hanging on his hip. A good man to give plenty of room when he called for it. They surged back like an undertow.

Howard approached the window, but kept cautiously to one side, not knowing what vindictive scheme might have prompted Everett to call for him as if he wanted to open negotiations for surrender.

Perhaps the cringing old reprobate, knowing that all was up with him in that town, sensing the fate the crowd had planned for him, wanted to single him out and get a shot at him before throwing down his hand. It was unlikely, but not out of reason, considering the mean streak the old villain had in him. Howard stopped within arm's reach of the window and asked Everett what he wanted.

"I want to hand you my gun, Howard," Everett replied.

"Throw it out," Howard said.

Everett was keeping under cover, evidently not placing much confidence in his truce with the crowd, now ominously quiet—which had been expressing such jubilant determination to have his life, and trying zealously to

shoot it out of his skin, as the numerous bullet holes around him proved.

"I want you to pass me your word that I'll be permitted to leave this town in peace if I resign my office and hand you my gun," Everett enlarged on his first proposal.

"I can't make you any guarantees, Everett," Howard replied coldly. "The mayor is here; talk to him."

"Your resignation is accepted," Mayor Jones answered for himself, having overheard all that had passed. "Surrender your gun and come out."

"I'll hand my gun to Howard, and to no other man," Everett replied.

In spite of this great compliment Howard hesitated to accept the surrender, understanding now that the wily scoundrel had singled him out for no other purpose than to place him in the situation of defender. If Everett surrendered to him, Howard would be bound in honor to protect him from public vengeance. Monstrous thing that it was, revolting as was the thought of hundreds snatching at the life of a single man, Howard had no immediate feeling of pity for or desire to protect this old gristle bone who had tried his best to shoot him down such a little while ago that his gun-barrel must still be warm.

"All right," Howard seemed to agree, "but if you show yourself with it somebody's sure to plug you. Hand it out over the sill."

The gun came up promptly, reversed. Howard pantomimed to Jones, who stepped forward and took it.

Jake looked around to see how far things had proceeded, and grinned over his shoulder at the way his wise old partner had got out from under that obligation.

The crowd had shifted from other points around the barn to that side, the news of the impending surrender having gone among them as quickly as the wind. They gave the dead man more

room than he needed where he lay on his back at the corner of the barn, and drew back so discreetly before Jake's guns that the other one stretched out by the wagon could be seen, like some piece of wreckage that the retreating tide still washed but could not engulf again, nor hide.

"Come on out, and come a-steppin'," Howard ordered the man who had made the sight-unseen surrender.

Everett rose up, bareheaded, and threw his leg over the window sill. At sight of him the crowd growled and surged forward. Jake turned his back to the advancing wave and put up his guns. Everett threw one startled look around the threatening surge of wrathful citizens, and started to pull his leg back into the barn.

Howard was holding a gun on him. He indicated by a jerk of the head that Everett was to carry out his original intention. Everett came out with trepidation, cringing against the wall, the sweat of a great fear breaking on his high, narrow forehead and rolling down the steep slope into his eyes. The look he gave Howard was an arraignment for a base betrayal.

"I didn't take your gun, Everett," Howard explained. "You surrendered to the proper authority; you'll have to depend on that authority for whatever protection you're to get in this here town."

"This revolver is empty," said Mayor Jones, turning the cylinder of Everett's gun with his thumb.

"It's loaded all around!" Everett corrected him indignantly.

"And I fired the last shot in my magazine at this blackmailing villain's back as he ran around the corner of the barn," Jones continued, making a gesture of helplessness, looking around at the eagerly pressing crowd with an expression of utter defenselessness and appeal in his sorrowful eyes.

"Hang him!" somebody yelled.

"String him up!" another bawled in a bull-bass voice.

This was a blacksmith, under no telling what levy of blackmail by the stripped oppressor before him. There was the smut of the forge on his arms; his bifurcated leather apron was pressed with the mold of his heavy thighs.

The clamor for Milt Everett's life rose to a roar; the crowd pushed up to the barn and buckled against the planks, blocking the window at Everett's back. He looked around the narrowing space, a wild light of desire for life in his red eyes, a wild fear of losing it striking him white as the dead. Mayor Jones sighed, making that futile little gesture of resigned hopelessness again; Noll Howard was slipping his gun under the waistband of his pantaloons.

There were loud calls for a rope, and answering shouts that it was coming. Hands that never had closed on the stock of a pistol laid hold of this master gunslinger, who was so dumb with terror on the brink of that appalling mystery into which he had plunged so many men that he could not whimper one little supplicating plea. Men cursed him for his oppression, which had been extended far beyond the liquor trade in the last few days, as Everett's desire to make while the harvest was ready under his hand increased.

Nobody present except Jake Zickafoos appeared to have any uneasiness over the disgraceful end that threatened Milt Everett; there was not a line of compassion in any other face. Noll Howard was indifferent, probably a little inclined to boost the thing along; Poke Jones looked sorrowful and burdened, but that was only his natural condition, with which this terrible moment in Milt Everett's career had nothing to do at all.

Jake squirmed around, turned this way and that, looked at his partner,

looked at Poke Jones, fingered his guns, and bit hard on the impalpable quid between his teeth, his face almost as pale as Everett's. He took off his hat and rasped his hand across the upstanding hard stubble of hair that grew in a queer little peak almost down to his eyebrows.

"Now, look a-here, men," he said, squaring off to argue it as if the court had appointed him attorney for the defendant at the last moment, "it looks to me like you're pushin' this case a little too fur. I thought you was goin' to take this feller out and shoot him, decent and quiet, but when you square off to hang him, I tell you, gentlemen, I got my doubts about it. He ain't stole nobody's horse, has he?"

Jake looked around him, an appeal for information, rather than a challenge of the ethics of the procedure, in his face. There were plenty of replies, but no pertinent answers, according to Jake Zickafoos' code; many arraignments on serious charges, but all of them lame in the one essential particular of sufficient evidence for hanging a man, in Jake Zickafoos' primitive conception of crime and justice.

Everett had held up this man for thirty dollars; he had compelled that one's wife to wash and iron his shirts; he had eaten at this one's restaurant, and scoffed at the mention of settlement, as his deputies had done at Mrs. Morrison's board. He had levied tribute here, insulted women there; he had made a trail of oppression and crime so broad during his short reign in Cimarron that it could not be turned from the gallows tree by any force of argument or plea in mitigation that all the mistaken sympathy in the world could advance.

"Yes, but you don't say he's stole anybody's horse," Jake said, insistent on that point.

That was the only hanging offense in Jake Zickafoos' book of law. For

murder, a man might, and should, be shot; for many transgressions such as Everett and his men had been guilty of against his partner and himself, Mrs. Morrison, and Josie, a man deserved nothing less than to be shot. But Jake revolted at the thought of hanging a man for any of these crimes. If he stole a man's horse, leaving him without legs, then he merited hanging, and no other possible punishment that men could inflict. But Milt Everett had not stolen anybody's horse, at least since he had been in Cimarron. Why they wanted to rear up and hang him was beyond Jake's understanding of either morals or law.

"It looks to me like I and my pardner we've got more laid up agin' this feller than all the rest of this town," Jake said. "He ain't never gone out gunfannin' for anybody else, and I and my pardner we wouldn't want to swing him up for that. We'd hand him his gun and tell him to back off and shoot it out, and I'm here to settle it with him that way right now if you'll turn him loose and give us room."

Milt Everett braced up like a wilted cabbage plant at sunset. New life coursed in his fiery alcoholic channels with the outspoken plea of this late enemy. He said no, he wouldn't lift a gun against either Zickafoos or Howard, but give it back to him and turn him loose and he'd burn up everybody else in the whole damn town. They cuffed him when he made the proposal, and hauled him around, and shook him like a sack of wheat.

"Come on with that rope," they said. "Well, wait a minute, now," argued the man who had it; wait till he got the knot tied. "Damn the knot! Any kind of running noose would do. Come on with that rope!"

That was when Noll Howard elbowed around and lined up beside his sawed-off, bowlegged partner, and put his hand slowly toward the gun that

was swinging in the holster against his leg.

"My partner's right about it," he said, with the forceful conviction of a man who had made up his mind after due cogitation. "I don't believe the old devil's done anything to hang for, and we're not goin' to see him hung. He gave up his gun under the impression that he was handin' it to me, and I'm under just the same obligation of protecting him as if I'd taken it. Step aside, gentlemen; we'll take care of this man."

Howard's two guns leaped out with the words. On his right hand, Jake Zickafoos snaked his two weapons from his overall pockets and, back to back, Milt Everett between them, the partners stood in the cleared space that enlarged around them quickly. The man with the rope, which he had been doing up carefully in an elaborate hangman's knot, was left inside this widening circle, reluctant to see his handicraft in a fair way of going unused on Milt Everett's neck that day. He looked at the rope, and looked at the men who had been clamoring for it impatiently a few moments before, a sort of protesting disappointment in his face. Then he grunted his disdain for so much vacillation on the part of the crowd, threw the rope down, and went his way.

Poke Jones was twirling the cylinder of Milt Everett's gun again, giving it a keen scrutiny.

"Why, it is loaded, after all," he said.

Jones placed himself between the partners, thus making a three-sided wall around Everett, while the side of the barn made the fourth.

"Gentlemen and fellow citizens," said Mayor Jones in his accustomed rotund voice, "this demonstration must cease. As mayor of this city I command the peace! Disperse without further disorder. This prisoner is in

our hands; we will see that he gets the punishment his case merits."

Milt Everett went north on the eleven o'clock train, the one Jake Zickafoos was to have taken on his way to Kansas City. Everett left Cimarron a humiliated and chastened man, and he went without his gun, a condition in which he had not appeared in public for thirty years.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RETROSPECTION.

YES, I remember the time me and my pardner and Poke Jones shipped Milt Everett out of town with his neck stickin' on him the way it was made."

Jake Zickafoos spoke of the incident in Cimarron's history as if the lapse of years had dimmed the recollection of old-timers; as of something that had happened so long ago that a new generation had grown up, a new set of adventurers taken the place of the dusty crowd that had poured over the townsite on the opening day. He sighed with the contentment of one whose memories were pleasant to revive.

"He deserved hangin', if any man ever did," Mrs. Morrison declared, with such lively animosity as one seldom shows when speaking of an ancient grudge.

"Maybe," Jake allowed, "but I always was a tender-hearted man. When you consider what that feller's neck'd 'a' looked like after he'd been hung, it's enough to make you glad it never happened."

"I never saw anybody's neck after they'd been hung," Mrs. Morrison said, with a sort of reminiscent abstraction, as if the matter required a little consideration before she could be quite certain, yet did not make any especial difference at all.

"I have. They stretch something scan'alous," Jake said comfortably, as a

man had a right to feel whose own neck never had been subjected to that trying indignation.

"Seems to me like it wasn't more'n a couple of days ago," Jake mused.

"It must 'a' been eight or nine months," Mrs. Morrison sighed, as if that represented a quarter century at least.

"This is August; that was October. Dang near a year! Time's passin' so fast here in Cimarron we'll all be bald-headed before we know it."

"Well, none of us will ever make money as fast as we did in them early days," Mrs. Morrison sighed.

"Back in the old sooner days," said Jake reminiscently. To him it seemed an ancient time, indeed. "I used to call this Sooner Land in them times, but things sure have changed around. Well, me and you nor nobody else in this man's town can complain. Look at this hotel you've got here, all painted and paid for and money pilin' up in the bank, as high as the ceilin'; look at my livery and feed business, and my coal yard. I've got two stenographin' girls workin' for me keepin' books and takin' orders and answerin' the telephone. I took a new one on last Monday."

"I hope it was because you needed her, Jake," Mrs. Morrison said gently. "You're always takin' somebody in and givin' 'em a job. It's a wonder you make anything at all, helpin' as many bums as you do."

Jake did not answer this charge of indiscriminate charity, which any social settlement worker or community chest committee will tell you is most conducive to mendacity and entirely unwise, no matter how worthy the object may seem. Relief of human want on a purely scientific, deliberate business basis never had been studied by Jake Zickafoos. If a man looked hungry, or parched-up around the gills for want of a drink, he never had to bring credentials from an investigating com-

mittee to Jake before receiving something to mitigate the distress of his condition.

"Um-m-m," Jake hummed around his cigar, looking thoughtfully out the window at the passing traffic on sidewalk and pavement along Avenue A. "Um-m-m! Yeah! It always gits my gizzard to see anybody on the bum. But I needed that girl so bad I had to advertise in the paper for her. She's a new one from the business college up in Wichita. She puts paper around her wrists to keep from skinnin' her arms on the typewriter, same as cow-punchers used to wear leather cuffs when I was in the business a long time ago."

"Not so very long ago, I guess, Jake," Mrs. Morrison said, with the introspective reminiscent complacency of one who has made the hill and is looking back.

"Good while. More'n a year now. It seems to me like more'n ten years ago. Just look at all that's happened to me since then!"

They were sitting in the office lobby of the Hotel Savoy, not the original Hotel Savoy of Cimarron, but the building once occupied by the Longhorn saloon and gambling hall, in a quiet corner, the big pivoted window open to temper the oppressive closeness of the humid summer night. Electric lights and smooth asphalt pavement gave a metropolitan appearance to Avenue A, which the activity along it enhanced. An alert young man with an Elks' pin was behind the desk; guests came and went, and settled down in the comfortable leather armchairs to smoke their after-dinner cigars. For supper had been changed to dinner at the Hotel Savoy, along with the quick shifting of old landmarks and old institutions in those revolutionary days.

"I was offered twelve thousand for Josie's lot to-day," said Mrs. Morrison.

"You didn't take no twelve thousand for that lot," Jake said conclusively.

"No, of course not. I couldn't sell it, anyhow. It's Josie's, even if it is in my name. No, Mr. Jones advised me to hang on to it. He says it will bring fifteen inside of three months, the way buildin's boomin' in this growin' town."

"Yes, and it'll see twenty by next spring. And look where I'd 'a' been if that old sheepman pardner of mine hadn't stopped me when I was stampedin' past there that day of the openin' and handed me that lot. Just handed it to me, and said he'd feel insulted if I didn't take it! Then he went to the lawyer and made me out a relinquishment after he'd filed on it. Good as put twenty thousand dollars in my pocket, and me never doin' him twenty cents' worth of favors in my whole dang life."

"All of us owe a lot to Noll Howard," Mrs. Morrison agreed. "If he hadn't cleaned out that nest of gamblers Milt Everett brought in here this town wouldn't 'a' been a fit place for decent people to live. It'd 'a' gone down to nothing."

"Yes, it'd 'a' shrunk up and blowed away," Jake said soberly.

"And to think he was marshal only a week!" she marveled.

"That was plenty long enough," Jake said warmly, glowing with the recollection of that week's achievement. "Yeah, I remember how he studied it over when Jones wanted to swear him in the morning we shipped Milt Everett out on the 'leven-three. You know the way he puts his hand to his old sprangle-horn mustache and looks like he's half bashful and half insulted when you put anything up to him sudden. 'If you'll change the name of the office to city marshal, like it was when I run for it, I'll take it,' he says to Jones. 'Chief of police don't fit me,' he says. 'I couldn't be that important if I had

a star as big as the bottom of a wash-tub.'

"So Jones said he'd call the council to meet and they'd change it back to city marshal, and Noll told him he'd take the job without pay for one week, or maybe a day or two longer if I was away that long buyin' horses and stuff for the barn. You know I went to Kansas City the day after we had that shootin', and I didn't see the show, but I'd 'a' give ten cents if I could 'a' been here the night he shut up Purviance's joint and made him ship them girls out of town."

"They said he walked right in here facin' eight or ten men with guns on 'em and told Purviance to put out the lights and lock up."

"Yes, a feller was tellin' me about it the other day—he was tendin' bar for Purviance that night, man by the name of Rollins, drivin' a delivery wagon for one of the stores now. He said that old high-steppin' sheepman pardner of mine made a call on Purviance the day after he was sworn in and got the lay of the law, and notified him he could run till nine o'clock that night to git his business closed up and his girls packed up ready to take the one o'clock train north. 'I'll see you in hell!' Purviance told him. 'All right,' says old Noll; 'set your clock to keep the appointment at nine.' And when nine o'clock come, old Noll was there."

"Yes, he was there," Mrs. Morrison said softly, nodding slowly several times, as if the memory of that night still lay like a shadow on her heart. "When they told me how he'd walked in there in the face of that gang of dealers and gun-shooters Purviance had around him, I felt so weak I just had to set down and cry."

"And he never even pulled a gun. Rollins said when he walked in that door at nine o'clock the law looked as big as a rhinoceros to that crowd. I know it would to me if I saw that old

shootin' sheepman comin' toward me reachin' for his gun."

"Well, it's quiet enough now," Mrs. Morrison said and sighed contentedly. "Only six saloons where there was thirty then, and half of them not makin' money enough to pay the license, they say."

"A man don't never hear a gun pop around here these days," Jake sighed, but in a different key. "I like it peaceable, but not *too* dang peaceable. I doubt if that new jail's a-payin', or ever will."

"Who ever heard of a jail payin'? You talk like it was a hotel."

"I don't know, but I think even a jail ort to pay in this town," Jake ruminated. "I never saw no place I ever was in and went back to change like this town's changed. I was just thinkin' to-day, drivin' around, of all the tents that used to be here in the old sooner days. I don't believe you could count twenty now in the whole place. Hello! there goes old Parson Jones."

Jake pecked on the window, waved an elaborate salutation, and Jones uncovered, bowing to Mrs. Morrison, but holding steadily and solemnly on his way. He was dressed in the same style, although not in the same garments, as when he arrived in Cimarron with his huge bundle, as he was on that memorable day when he appeared with his rifle to relieve Howard's pressing necessity in the face of his enemies. Only his long black coat was of newer and fresher cloth, his somber black hat of a costlier make, but if one whisker had been added or one taken away during the months which had brought such mighty changes to Cimarron, the addition or subtraction was not apparent to the eye.

"Funny how I got that old feller down wrong when he was runnin' his campaign for office in the early days," Jake laughed. "I thought he looked

like a man that had murdered his wife. Well, since I saw his wife I said to myself he looked like a man that had a right to, anyway."

"Oh, you git out!" Mrs. Morrison protested, more shocked than amused by the native postulation.

"But he's as sound as a bale of hay, that old feller is. You know when that outlaw horse Doc Green was drenchin' reared up and broke his leg, Jones he went to him and he lent him the money to see him through till he was on his feet ag'in—didn't wait to be asked for it, just took it out of his pocket and laid it on the bed and walked away."

"Yes, Missus Green told me about it. I could 'a' hugged him for it."

"You'd 'a' had to stand on a box," Jake said, glancing at her with a provoking grin, "and his whiskers'd 'a' tickled your neck."

"Oh, you *git* out!" she said, giving him a dig in the ribs.

"But that old pardner of mine he always said he thought Jones was straight, and he don't make any such wild misses as I do when he sizes a man up. Well, I always think of him as my pardner, even if he ain't in the livery business with me any more. Since he sold out to me and went into the bankin' business with Jones and them Wichita millionaires I feel like one side of me's missin'. Reckon I'll git used to it in time, like a one-eyed man. He sure was a pardner for any man to have—or any woman, either."

"Yes," said Mrs. Morrison, smiling softly, sighing happily.

Jake pushed the window open a little wider, making that half-whistling sound peculiar to people when they burn their fingers, or desire to express excessive discomfort over other things, the weather especially.

"Don't believe I ever felt a hotter night since I come to Cimarron," he said.

"Well, it's cool in Colorado," Mrs. Morrison remarked, as if reminding him of something that merely recalling would tend to mitigate his present discomfort.

"Yes, and I hope he's got his coat off and his collar open and takin' it all in. He was a pardner in a million."

"But I never thought I'd see the day when he'd be away on a weddin' trip with my little Josie," Mrs. Morrison said, with unbounded satisfaction, incalculable pride.

"You didn't?" said Jake, in vast surprise. "Well, I did; I knew it from the time she come over to tell us about the jumper on her lot that first night here in Cimarron. Ye-eas! I read it in the cards."

And, gentle reader, or wild, uncurried, revolutionary reader; or green and gullible reader; or wise and sophisticated reader, or reader of any sort whatever, anywhere at all on this human-infested pellet in the cosmic mystery—so did you.

Adios.

THE END.



A NEW USE FOR MISSOURI SNAKES

THE locality around Springfield, Missouri, has lately been enlivened by representatives of the National Museum of Natural History, who have been hard at work catching snakes, lizards, water dogs, and other such animals, which are shipped to the museum. Snakes, however, are the prize specialty. As soon as the catches are made, the animals are placed in iced containers and prepared for shipment.



The Monarch Moose

by Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "King of the Blue," etc.



CROSS the moonlit clearing the two wolves came, running swiftly and silently, their bodies low-hung to earth, each swinging impulse of their powerful legs carrying them over the ground in amazing fashion. Not a sound did they make, for they were on the hunt, and it was not the time of year when wolves gather in packs and when the meat cry is uttered. They might have been merely gray shadows from clouds passing across the face of the moon for all that they disturbed the utter silence of the place. Their prey was not far ahead.

As a matter of fact, Mowitch, the giant mule-deer buck who had ranged these slopes of the higher Cascades for many years, saw the wolves the instant they broke into the clearing. He knew full well whose trail it was they were following; knew, too, by the furtive silence with which they came on, that they meant business. Yet instead of turning about and swiftly making his way

through the brush in an effort to outwit them, he trembled with rage, while the long hairs rose on his back as he shook his heavy antlers and stamped his forefeet.

For Mowitch, whose magnificent horns had been sought for year after year by human hunters, was at this moment afflicted with madness.

At any other season of the year he was shy with a cunning which enabled him to evade all enemies, whether man or beast. But now he was of a mind to battle with the whole world, if need be, to forestall what seemed to him to be a conspiracy to keep him from the side of the mate who, he believed, was somewhere in these wilds. Nevertheless, he did not court combat with the wolves; but, having it thrust upon him in this fashion, he would not dodge it. Therefore, he shook his antlers angrily, while his eyes glowed like live coals, as the wolves came closer. Indeed, he stepped forth from the fir thicket where he had been hiding, as though to welcome the marauders.

At sight of him they stopped as though in surprise. Probably they were somewhat impressed by the bigness and bulk of him; for they squatted on their haunches, tongues lolling, as they seemed to appraise him. As they sat there, ears laid close back to skulls, tongues hanging from mouths, while their long fangs glistened white in the moonlight, they might have been evil spirits of the wild, grinning in vast good humor over the situation. Nor did they appear to be in a hurry. Mowitch was a gigantic buck, bigger than any they had ever killed before. Yet, now that they had cornered him, their wolfish craft bade them make haste slowly. So they appeared utterly unconcerned, but in reality they were studying him with all the keenness of their lambent, green eyes.

Mowitch shook his antlers defiantly as though urging them to come on. Yet they were nowise impatient but continued to sit there and grin at him. Suddenly he lost his temper and took two steps forward while he whistled shrilly in rage. And at that instant the wolves went into action.

With a lightning-like spring, the dog wolf leaped as though to tear the buck's throat. But it was a mere feint to throw Mowitch off his guard, for the she-wolf flashed from behind in a murderous effort to hamstring him. These were old and well-rehearsed tactics on the part of the wolves and had brought death to many a cornered deer. But Mowitch, being a veteran battler himself, evidently suspected what the wolves had in mind, for he refused to be distracted by the threatening lunge of the dog wolf. Out of a corner of one reddened eye, Mowitch saw the she-wolf coming at him from behind. On four feet he pivoted like a dancer, and swung his mighty antlers with a low, side thrust. It was done so quickly and so unexpectedly that the she-wolf was caught unawares. Before she could

leap backward, one of the sharp-pointed tines had raked her side and she was flung into a near-by bunch of salal where she struck with a yelp of pain. Then, while Mowitch whirled to protect himself, the dog wolf, like a flash of a gray sword blade, leaped in, his long fangs gashing the buck's flank. It was a vicious stroke, and had the wolf's teeth gone deeper Mowitch would have been crippled then and there. As it was, however, the pain of the wound merely stirred new anger in the mighty buck and with an insane bawl he lunged at his tormentor.

The dog wolf gave way in a backward leap, and lay crouched there for a moment, knowing that his mate had disentangled herself from the brush and was trying once more for the buck's flank. But Mowitch was not minded to pause then; he charged. The she-wolf's leap fell short, while her mate dodged aside to avoid the low-held spear points suddenly thrust at him. As the dog wolf moved, Mowitch struck at him with a heavy forehoof. Luck seemed with the mad buck this night, for the hoof landed on the dog wolf's back, and the gray attacker went down.

The next instant the wolf's life was blotted out by the vengeful fury of the giant mule deer, who struck at his fallen foe again and again with forehoofs backed by nearly three hundred pounds of bone and muscle. So the dog wolf died, while Mowitch, as though scorning the surviving foe who circled madly about him seeking for an opening, devoted himself to driving out the last vestige of life in the stricken enemy.

At last, however, his vengeance was satisfied and he turned to look for the remaining wolf. By this time, she had moved off, as though convinced that the odds were too heavily against her. Mowitch blew a blast of defiance, and strode toward her, as though perfectly willing to continue the matter; but she melted into the undergrowth, and al-

though he waited several minutes and thrashed about the brush looking for her, she did not reappear.

After a time, Mowitch was minded of his search for a mate, and he moved off across the clearing as though disdainful of wolves and other enemies. In his heart was the same insane rage for battle which comes to his kind each autumn as the love moon rides high above the forested hills. It is possible that in this moment of triumph he might even have attacked a man, had one of the hunters crossed his trail. But they were searching for him in the lowlands, for seldom did they penetrate to the high meadow. No other enemies threatened Mowitch, and as for the smaller wild kindred, they discreetly kept away from him, knowing that he was in a dangerous mood.

It was just before dawn that fate again smiled at him, and sent him hurrying along at a swifter pace. For his keen nose revealed to him that the doe which was to be his mate had passed this way less than an hour before.

For five years Flagg had hunted in vain for the great mule-deer buck who roamed the slopes. The thing had become an obsession with him. Always a successful sportsman in pursuit of other game, the very fact that Mowitch eluded him so successfully made Flagg want more than anything else in the world to have the mounted head of the big buck over his fireplace. Each fall during the hunting season, Flagg went out into the range of Mowitch and industriously sought for him; but each time he came home with his rifle unfired. Although he had been given numerous chances at other bucks, he had sworn to take no trophy less than the magnificently antlered head of old Mowitch himself.

This year, however, Flagg, after giving considerable thought to the matter,

had decided upon a plan of campaign of cunning equal to that possessed by the great mule deer himself. A month before the hunting season opened, Flagg went over the ground, noting carefully all trails used by Mowitch; observing too, the spots where Mowitch loved to feed, where he would come for water, and the thickets where, once the night feeding was over, he would lie hidden and sleep throughout the day. So it was that after sizing up the situation in its entirety, Flagg finally selected a canyon down which Mowitch was wont to go in search of food and water. During the dark of the moon, Mowitch would come out of his covert only at dusk and at dawn. When the moon was full, however, he was accustomed to feed all night, returning to hiding at daybreak.

As the moon at this period of the month was no more than a yellow rind, Flagg, understanding the methods of Mowitch fully as well as did the big buck himself, knew that the regal old possessor of the finest head of antlers throughout all these broad reaches of the Cascades would be coming to feed and water at dusk and again at dawn. Flagg, therefore, chose a large fir stump behind which he could lie; and determined that he would wait there until Mowitch appeared, for sooner or later the buck would be sure to come that way.

Day after day, at dawn and again at dusk, Flagg kept his vigil with a faithfulness that revealed his earnest intensity of purpose. But for some reason Mowitch did not show up. Flagg, in his own shrewd way, guessed the reason for the deer's nonappearance. Mowitch was searching for a mate, and until he found her, it was possible that the ordinary routine of his existence would be ignored. How long this might go on Flagg had no way of knowing, but he was hopeful when, at the end of the week, he saw a trim, slender-legged doe

coming down the canyon to drink and to feed.

Flagg could have killed her easily but he had no intention of doing so. There were two reasons for this. First, it was again the law to kill any deer save a buck; and second, Flagg would kill no deer other than old Mowitch himself. So he merely smiled to himself and waited, confident that before many more days had passed Mowitch would show up. Nearly every day the man saw the doe come down the canyon, and each time he almost expected to see the regal lord of the wilderness following; but evidently Mowitch had not yet struck her track.

As time wore on, Flagg began to grow a little worried. The end of the hunting season was now not far off and still Mowitch had not appeared. Was it possible that the old campaigner suspected that some one was waiting here ready to kill him? This was hard to believe, for Flagg always kept well hidden. Nevertheless, the nonappearance of Mowitch could scarcely be explained otherwise.

Flagg was troubled by another possibility. There were many other hunters in the region now; one of them might have killed the magnificent buck, or the very presence of them might have made Mowitch unusually shy, keeping him to the higher hills until the hunting season was over. With the end of the deer-hunting season only a day off, Flagg became more and more convinced that Mowitch possessed a craft greater than that of any human being who might undertake to hunt him.

So it was that Flagg found himself at dawn of the day before the season closed, waiting as usual behind the stump, but more than ever convinced that Mowitch was making a mock of him. Flagg was still sitting there as the light of the new day grew stronger. For the hundredth time he looked up the

canyon expectantly. As he did so, he smothered a sudden oath.

For, another hunter had appeared. Probably a city chap utterly unused to the woods and out on his first deer hunt. His red-flannel cap was set rakishly askew, his bright red hunting shirt was open at the throat and as he swung along unconcernedly looking neither to right or left, he was actually *whistling!*

Flagg, in sudden rage, realized that the newcomer probably had destroyed any possible chance of Mowitch coming down the canyon at this time. Moving a little farther from behind the stump in order to catch a better look at this interrupter who was now less than three hundred yards away and in plain sight, Flagg exposed his gray-capped head to view; and it was at that moment the thing happened.

Mowitch, still following the doe's track, moved swiftly along, his recent battle forgotten. Across meadows, skirting thickets, and now and then plunging into the heart of the timber, he went tirelessly, for unlike his cousins, the white-tail and black-tail deer, he could carry on for long distances without pausing. Impetuous and headstrong, at that moment he would not have turned aside even for Flagg himself, had the hunter suddenly appeared before him.

And it seemed that all the wild kindred understood that Mowitch was not to be trifled with at this moment. A big, black bear, who was ripping apart a rotted log in an endeavor to garner himself a meal of grubs that he might lay up more fat on his ribs to carry him through his long, winter sleep, looked up as he heard Mowitch come crashing recklessly through the brush. Ordinarily, the bear would have stood his ground, being unafraid of anything that lived and moved in the woods. But something seemed to tell him that Mowitch would brook no interference at

this time; and that he would be a dangerous adversary at best. Therefore, the bear dropped to his forefeet and discreetly moved off, leaving Mowitch to go his own mad way.

A pair of lynxes, coming out suddenly at the edge of the brush, saw Mowitch approach and regarded him with interest. He was bigger game than either of them would have attacked alone, but together they were a formidable pair and had more than once succeeded in pulling down a deer. But now they took one swift glance at Mowitch and vanished back in the brush as silently as though they were shod with swan's-down. Nevertheless, the old male lynx bared his fangs in disappointment, for he was hungry and would have liked right well to have dined on a haunch of venison. Terrible fighters whenever the occasion demanded it, they knew that they would prove no match for this giant mule-deer buck on his love quest. Mowitch went on.

He came at last to a small creek, and paused while his nose explored the ground to make sure that the doe had crossed. Deciding that she had done so, he plunged into the stream, waded quickly, and picked up her trail again on the other side. He was now approaching familiar ground, for not far off was the canyon down which he was accustomed to go each day at dawn and at dusk to feed along the lower reaches of this same stream. He understood now that the doe was seeking the same watering and feeding place. He had not taken a dozen steps, however, before there came to his ears the sound of a distant shot.

Mowitch hesitated. Until this moment he had feared nothing, but in the report of the rifle there was an ominous warning which momentarily jerked him back from the mad, impetuous rôle he had been playing, and made him once more the shy and crafty creature he

was under normal circumstances. Yet only for a moment; then madness descended upon him again. He would not pause now even though he must run the gantlet of a dozen hunters. He struck off on the trail of the doe, but once more paused as a new and more terrifying sound came to his ears.

It was a high-pitched scream, not unlike that of a woman in mortal terror. It came from halfway up the slope Mowitch was climbing, and it sent a tremor of fear through him. It was the cry of an enemy Mowitch had been taught to fear from fawnhood—the squall of an old cougar who occasionally included these slopes in his range and who lived solely by hunting deer.

Again that curious change swept over Mowitch. Had he heard that dread cry at any other season of the year but this, he would have swiftly taken himself from the vicinity and put himself as far as possible from the killer who was the hereditary foe of all deer. Yet something in the cry, a peculiar note, told Mowitch that the cougar was not hunting him. It was a scream of disappointment such as the cat might utter when it had missed in its first leap. And that is exactly what had happened.

Tragedy loomed up there on the slope. As the doe which Mowitch was following had passed beneath the wide-spreading limbs of a big cedar, the cougar had dropped from his concealment in the tree as lightly as a falling leaf, but with the quickness of a lightning stroke. But he could no longer judge his distance as of yore, and besides, the doe had intuitively flinched, as out of the corner of one eye she saw him spring. Therefore, he missed, struck the ground, and uttered his shrill scream of disappointment and rage. But the next second he gathered himself for a second leap.

For disaster had overtaken the doe. As she plunged wildly away through a thicket, one of her small feet slipped off a half-rotted log, and she fell. As she

struggled upright again, she saw the cougar coming.

Cornered, there was nothing for her to do but fight, and she bravely accepted the challenge, although the outcome could never be in doubt for an instant. Rearing on hind legs, she lashed out with her slender, sharp-pointed forehoofs as the cougar closed in, and so desperate was her resistance that the cat paused, unwilling to try to break through her defense. He moved about her, seeking for an opening; but, fear-stricken, she kept her forefront protected. Still circling her the big cat knew that it would be merely a question of time before she would tire herself out.

Nevertheless, fear gave the cornered doe added strength, for each time he came closer for the leap and the death stroke, she met him with those driving forefeet.

Suddenly the cougar lost patience, and with a snarl bubbling in his throat, crouched flat, his long, rounded tail nervously whipping back and forth. The doe knew what was coming; knew that she was powerless to stop it, for she was tiring rapidly. Nevertheless, she made one more effort; but she could see the cougar's body stiffen as his muscles tautened for the spring.

Yet before he left the ground something intervened. There was a throaty bawl of rage, and between the crouching cat and the beleaguered doe loomed suddenly a tall, gray form of mighty, widespread antlers and fiercely blazing eyes.

Mowitch, who was hurrying up the slope when the cougar had uttered that first scream, saw the drama that was being enacted and, in his madness, never hesitated. He would give battle with the most dread foe known to deer, not excepting man. Nor was it as unusual as it seemed. The cougar himself, being gifted with wisdom as to these mad bucks during the love moon, carefully avoided battling with them, confining

himself to hunting unprotected does and fawns. Never would he drop out of the tree on a fighting buck when the latter was in his antlered prime. Even now, if the opportunity had been offered him, he might have effaced himself, hungry though he was. But before he could leap backward, the giant mule deer was upon him. The cougar, being no coward himself when thus cornered, caught up the gauge of battle in his own way.

Snarling hatred and defiance, he leaped nimbly aside, as Mowitch lunged at him, with low-held spear points. The next instant, the cougar shot in behind the buck's guard, and a down-sweeping forepaw, armed with knife-like claws, raked the deer's shoulder. The cougar had in reality struck at the buck's neck, hoping to lay open the great vein which ran close to the surface there; but Mowitch, being skillful in the art of war, had avoided the full force of the blow, although he could not escape it entirely. Even as he had vanquished the wolves, he pivoted on four feet and struck sideways at the cougar as the latter went past him. But the cougar was too quick and wary to be caught by this trick, and Mowitch missed. Yet without giving the cougar an opportunity to get set again, Mowitch once more lunged at him, and again the great cat leaped aside.

Wide eyed with terror, the doe watched them, probably too frightened to think of going to the aid of her champion, even though the odds of the battle thus far seemed to have gone against him. For that matter, Mowitch never noticed her, being concentrated fully on the battle and determined to give the cougar no opportunity for an undue advantage. A third time he lunged at the devilish thing crouched there on the ground before him, and as he did so, the cougar suddenly changed his plan of attack. Instead of leaping aside, he sprang over the low-held antlers of the buck.

The purpose of this move was plain. Once let the cougar land on the deer's back and the battle would end quickly. Long ago the cougar had learned how to twist a deer's neck aside with one forepaw hooked around it, snapping its spine instantly. Failing this the cougar could rip open the buck's throat and then leap backward before the deer could retaliate. As the cougar cleared the wide rack of down-pointed antlers, it seemed that the doom of Mowitch was sealed.

But as some heavenly power is said to preside over the destiny of those afflicted with madness, as the Indians firmly believe, so it was now that chance came to the aid of the hard-pressed buck. As the cougar leaped, Mowitch involuntarily jerked back his head so that the cat, instead of landing on the buck's neck, struck on the upturned tines and hung there for an instant, screaming in agony and rage.

With a mighty heave of his antlers, Mowitch dislodged the cougar, and the latter landed grotesquely on the ground almost at the buck's feet.

But even then the big cat was far from being dead, although sorely wounded. With a final effort he gathered his muscles and leaped aside to escape the forehoofs of the buck which came down with the suddenness and rapidity of twin trip hammers. Into a salal thicket the cougar crawled, with all fight gone out of it, and desiring now only to drag itself off to some secluded spot to die, or to nurse its wounds until it recovered. Thus vengeance was visited on the slayer of many deer—helpless does and innocent fawns. Even if it did not die, it would hereafter avoid all antlered bucks as it would death itself.

Yet Mowitch had not come off scatheless. He was bleeding from half a dozen wounds where the sharp claws of the cougar had raked him, and he swayed weakly on his feet, although

maintaining his fighting pose while waiting for his enemy, the cougar, to appear again.

But at last he became convinced that he was indeed the victor. He became aware, too, that the doe was standing there, regarding him with eyes in which there was wonder, as well as adoration. She trembled a little, as he moved closer and gravely touched noses with her; almost she seemed afraid of him, thereby paying him homage, as befitted the victor in such a mighty battle as she had just witnessed.

The fighting light had died in the eyes of Mowitch, and in its place was a softer expression. The fire of battle had gone out of him now, after his strenuous adventures of the night, and he craved water and food. Without another glance at the doe, he moved off through the woods that were now gray with dawn; nor did he glance behind him, for he knew that she followed. On and on down the canyon they went, while the sky grew lighter, until they were revealed plainly. Yet Mowitch moved with security. No other enemies appeared.

Suddenly, as he neared the big fir stump behind which Flagg was crouched, Mowitch paused, and blew a blast of alarm and defiance, the stiff hairs along his back rising warningly, while he shook his antlers.

Flagg was there, but the other hunter had vanished. In the weak light of the new day, Flagg's head, as he lifted it from behind the stump when the strange hunter hove in sight, had looked remarkably like a portion of a deer hiding there. Quick as a flash, the stranger threw up his gun and fired, and Flagg heard the bullet *spat* into the wood beside him. Then, at Flagg's shrill yell of astonishment and rage, the strange hunter, who had suddenly gone pale as he realized that he had nearly killed a fellow hunter, turned and made

his way swiftly out of the canyon, paying no attention to the imprecations Flagg hurled upon him.

When he was gone, Flagg, disgusted with his failure to get a chance at Mowitch, was minded to depart likewise. But intuition bade him stay and maintain his vigil. And scarcely, it seemed, had the strange hunter disappeared, when the giant mule-deer buck, leading the slender-legged doe, appeared at the head of the canyon and started silently down it.

Breathlessly, Flagg waited while they came on. The hammer of his rifle was drawn back; he could lift it instantly and shoot, and Mowitch was well within range. Nevertheless, Flagg hesitated, as though he wanted the big deer which had been the most sought-after prize in the Cascades for years to get closer that he might study him before firing the shot that would end the buck's career. Closer and closer Mowitch and the doe came, and Flagg held his breath in the excitement of the moment. Then, as he lifted the rifle noiselessly, the buck saw him; stopped, and whistled defiance.

With the gold-beaded foresight resting against the grayness of the buck's shoulder, Flagg's finger trembled on the trigger. For he saw something now which he had not observed before.

The cruel claw marks of the cougar appeared red and livid, although they no longer bled profusely, for nature was quickly making Mowitch whole once more. Yet the sight of them fascinated Flagg. He saw, too, the mild-eyed doe standing there, her large ears

pricked forward in curiosity, while her limpid brown eyes regarded him.

Somehow, Flagg visioned what had happened. He knew now why Mowitch had remained away so long—this beautifully modeled doe for whom he had been searching so long was the reason. Flagg could not, of course, know that Mowitch had battled the cougar in order to save her; but he did understand the habits of Mowitch and his kind well enough to know that there was some extraordinary reason why the buck had faced such a terrible adversary as the big cat, and had escaped with his own life. A monarch he was, but not until that moment did Flagg know that Mowitch possessed a true fighting heart within his deep chest.

Flagg, being something of a fighter in his own way, could appreciate that. Moreover, Mowitch was actually whistling defiance of him now!

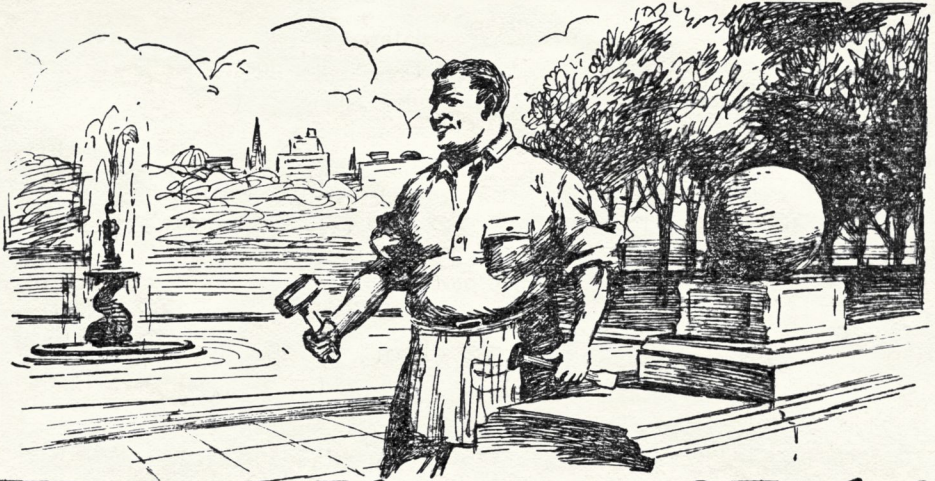
Flagg put down his gun, telling himself that the buck was wounded too badly about the head and neck to make a fit trophy now. But in his heart of hearts, he knew that that wasn't the reason at all. So he put down his gun, yet—

As Mowitch and his new-found mate moved off through the cool sweetness of the dew-wet morning woods, the buck whistled again. Thrice during the night he had displayed his madness—and thrice had fate spared him. He was ignoring his most resourceful enemy now, which was sheer madness. But the wood gods were with him, as the Indians believe.



A NEW USE FOR IOWA CORNSTALKS

SILK cloth, strong enough to be fashioned into clothing, is the latest product which the chemist's magic is extracting from the hitherto more or less wasted cornstalk. Samples of the fabric were recently exhibited by R. O. Sweeney, chemist of Iowa State College. It is said by the same authority that cornstalks might also produce adhesive, charcoal, solvents, and embalming fluids, as well as paper and lumber substitutes.



Western Pioneers of To-day

(Ray) Lambert, a Wilderness Exterior Decorator

By Edward H. Smith

Author of "Henry Worth Thornton, from Indiana," etc.



ONE of the most valuable characteristics of the pioneer is resourcefulness. Without it no difficulties are overcome, no situations saved, no hardships made sufferable. Thus the story of our West is in a large sense the story of men who made much out of nothing, who took the rawest and poorest materials and created wonder out of them—materials in the wild nature about them and materials in their own souls. This spirit is as much a determinant to-day as ever it was. Witness the case of Raymond Lambert, of San Antonio, the man who introduced the urban park and the artificial landscape to the frontier towns. In the Southwestern States there is probably no name better known than his.

Ray Lambert, to use the name by which thousands know him, was born at Beverly, West Virginia, in 1870, in a log cabin. His mother, the daughter of a headstrong Irishman, had been forced

to elope with the poor lad of her choice. The young couple had to begin at the bottom, and when a little son came to join some older sisters the parents were still desperately poor. While he was yet an infant, however, the family fortunes were shifted to a farm at Stanwood, Iowa, where a homestead and forest claim had been assumed. Here life was a little easier—free at least from the specter of starvation—but the children had to work about the farm from their earliest years and their new-found security soon broke under disasters. Ray Lambert's mother died when he was six, and not long afterward his father was crippled by a runaway accident and permanently disabled by sunstroke.

At the age at which most boys start off to school, young Lambert sold newspapers and shined shoes on the streets of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, earning fifty cents a day on week days but as much as four or five dollars on Sundays, when the local swains had to have their

boots polished for their sabbatical galletries, and many families paid five cents for the Sunday papers from Chicago. He lived, in these hard but illuminating years, with an elder sister, who gave him all the care and training that ever came his way. A few years later he was apprenticed to a stonecutter, with whom he had to remain for two years in return for his keep, such as it was, and one dollar a week. He was often without shoes and sometimes without stockings, even in the cruel Iowa winters. His toes froze and his body shrank under the torment, but he stuck it out and became a stonecutter.

When he was fifteen a one-horse traveling carnival troupe, consisting of a merry-go-round, a few doll racks and gambling layouts, a peepshow, and a lemonade concession came to town. The soft drink man picked Ray Lambert up and gave him a kind of partnership. The lad was to do most of the work and get part of the returns. It looked like Opportunity with a capital O, but it turned out to be something else.

"We got the exclusive lemonade concession at the fair at Burlington," Lambert recounted the other day, "and things looked good. There was going to be a balloon ascension the next day, and a hundred thousand people from all over Iowa were expected. A young couple were to be married in the balloon and its flight was to be their honeymoon trip.

"That night my partner and boss made me do a thing that might have been my ruin but turned out the other way. He sent me out to put soap into all the wells and water pumps on the fair grounds, so that the thirsty Iowa farmers would have to come and buy our lemonade. I did a good job on everything but the horses' drinking trough. All the other water on the grounds tasted like something no one could swallow. A farmer would take

a long, thirsty gulp of the doctored water, spit it out in disgust and exclaim: 'Gosha'mighty, there must be a dead cat in that well!' Before that day was done we were selling plain ice water at ten cents a glass.

"With fifteen hundred dollars of dishonest money in his suit case, that partner of mine checked us out that night for Galena. As he stood at the station window buying the tickets, he set the suit case on the floor beside him. When he turned and reached down for it, it was gone.

"To my impressionable young mind it seemed like the voice of God himself, shaming me for what I had done and depriving my boss of his defrauded profits. I got an attack of conscience and told him that I was going to Chicago to make an honest living, and I went."

In Chicago, Lambert finished his training for his trade and in 1888 he started out to see the country and make his way West. Working here and there for a few weeks or months at a time, he covered a great part of the Middle and Far West, eventually reaching San Diego. Here he was prospering at his trade, which was well paid, and in steady employment. But along came a gold rush. Some one had found ore in the Santa Clara Mountains, down in Mexico, and the newspapers of Lower California were full of it. Our eighteen-year-old stonecutter was persuaded to pool his capital with that of some others and set out for the gold. They bought three pack mules, a few tools, and a large consignment of food, consisting mainly of bacon. Thus they went forth toward the aureous lode.

By the time they had gone eighty miles over the mountain trails of Lower California their shoes had been cut to ribbons and they left a trail of blood behind them as the cruel stones tore their feet. Torrents of rain fell

incessantly, so that for five days it was impossible to light a fire. The adventurers lived on raw bacon and wondered what had ever induced them to leave San Diego.

To make matters worse, the streams were swollen out of their banks, putting these inexperienced explorers in grave danger of their lives. They pushed on, however, and in attempting to cross a particularly violent freshet met with a strange adventure. Their best donkey got caught in an eddy and was swept under. A big blacksmith, who was one of Lambert's trio, leaped in after it, pulled it to the bank, laid it over a fallen log, and made Lambert act as bellows along its chest and belly while the husky pulled the brute's tongue forward. This first-aid treatment brought the beast back to life, and so the travelers pushed on. But they found no gold and almost ate themselves into scurvy on their soggy bacon. At the first farm that offered food Lambert ate twelve eggs, besides duck and goat meat. He recalls the fact with a sigh for such prodigious youth.

After the gold fiasco, Lambert went back to stonemasonry in Denver and Colorado Springs, where several important buildings still show his handiwork. In 1892, however, he moved on to San Antonio, Texas, and went to work on the Bexar County courthouse, then being constructed. Again he saved a little money and looked about for a chance to get into business for himself. By conspiracy of circumstances, rather than any design, he bought out a saloon. Then and there his career began, subsequent laws and morals to the contrary notwithstanding.

Lambert was not the kind of a man that fancy generally associated with a frontier, sun-baked saloon. He was not a bad hombre nor much of a man with a six-shooter. Indeed, he was a fat, rolling, slow-and-easy sort of man, an excellent target for the fist or the gun,

and too portly to be much on the offensive. But Lambert had other qualities. He had a wide and healthy grin, a bubbling and inexhaustible good-nature, and a frankness and simplicity that disarmed everybody. Men came in to him with fire in their eyes and went out cool and smiling. He knew how to stop fights without fighting and he had, after the bad boys of the frontier got to know him, the kind of authority over them that wild men always yield to a leader whose brain works faster than theirs and yet in their own grooves.

The soul of this man grew in this grotesque setting. He sat there, on one of the outlying beaches of history, watching the ebb of one civilization turn into the first flow of another. All about him stood still the mementos of faded Spanish grandeur. Here were the old plazas built by dons from the Canary Islands, great squares walled in by low houses of adobe and white plaster, and at one end faced with some exquisite piece of primitive cathedral making—loveliness wrought out of the mud. These were the places that Crockett and Travis and Bonham had dallied in for that short interval before the Alamo.

Decrepitude had fallen on all this. The ambitious church was crumbling and melting into its original dust.

The old plazas had become Hell's Half Acres, bordered with low theaters, bordellos, and saloons. Here was the "Fatal Corner," the scene of more gun fights than ever broke the halcyon peace of Deadwood or Dodge City. The old Jack Harris place was there, where the deadly King Fisher went down at last under a volley of shots. And there were the Bella Union, the Gray Mule, the White Elephant, and sundry other bars whose story is part of the history of the Wildest West.

This was the cowboy's playground. Here he came with his pay, to paint the town red and shoot it up if need be.

Here, the cowmen did their circus stunts from the backs of their bronchos and mustangs, and here the crack riders among them made a business of breaking wild horses in the public squares at fifty cents a head. These were the innocent amusements of the boys from the range and the ranches. When they got ugly, blood was thin and life cheap.

Through all this turbulence the mason from the East and North made his smiling way without bloodshed or gunfire. He had rules of conduct for his place, and few had to be told twice to obey them. There were individuals who were not welcome in Lambert's bar and they didn't pay it any return calls. The man understood cowboy nature and human nature. He got along without broils and he steadily accumulated friends, gained ascendancy over humble men, and grew in reputation and influence. Before he knew it, he was in politics. Like a good many other and not-always-desirable saloon men in the old days, he found himself the leader of a ward, a man often capable of swinging a city election to one side or the other, a person to be reckoned with in choosing candidates and making issues. After a time, along came a candidate for the mayoralty who most decidedly needed help and went to Lambert for it. There were ties between them, and the smiling barkeeper promised to do what he could. His candidate was elected and presently he was asked to the city hall and told that he might have any reward within the mayoral gift.

"I want to be park commissioner!" said Lambert.

"Park commissioner?" asked the astonished official.

"'Park commissioner,' is what I said."

And that was what the man of the white apron and the genial smile became.

It was all very funny to many good citizens. The office of park commissioner in San Antonio was a comic-opera job anyhow, but with a rotund saloon keeper filling it— A most excellent joke.

Mr. Raymond Lambert, stonemason and vender of potables, had something to show the folks, however. In his days with the mallet and chisel he had dreamed of being a sculptor. And through those years in his barroom he had seen the fertile past, with all its color, under the dust and turmoil of those shaken plazas. There was artist hidden in the boniface and creator lurking in the politician. Half aware of it himself, he had carried a dream of beauty through the commonplaces of his necessitous life. He began to express it now, in the face of almost grotesque difficulties and limitations. And that is how formal gardening, beautiful parks, and prize-winning landscape work came to the cow country.

In 1889 the city of San Antonio had been deeded some river-bottom land, with the proviso that it should be made into a public park. The officials and citizens of San Antonio began at once to meet the conditions of the gift by using the land as a dumping ground, until it became a vast garbage heap, foul and fetid. It had been called Brackenridge Park, after the banking donor, and never did a worse insult repay generosity. The people called it something else, in their own inherently poetic way—The City of Everlasting Fire. This name arose, probably in the minds of Mexican squatters, from the fact that the city's refuse was burned there, being constantly refueled from the trash carts and kept glowing year in and year out to make sterile as much of the city's waste as would burn. The squatters from below the Rio Grande del Nord believed that this was to be an eternal process.

Brackenridge Park also offered the Mexican squatters some more substantial advantages. They erected their miserable *jacals* on the fringe of the burning heap, and filched from the flames discarded articles of all kinds. With junk of every conceivable sort they supported themselves. Perhaps no great maritime city with its cavernous slums ever had a more abject section than this City of Fires.

Some citizens protested and demanded that the land be improved and beautified. When the outcry got too vocal, the city fathers turned wearily to the project and summoned a landscape expert and park designer from the East. One after another, these gentlemen either disdained the job as impossible or made estimates of cost that sent shudders down the local spines. If it was going to take millions of dollars to get rid of a useful garbage dump and put into its place one of those effete Eastern parks, out of which no one would ever make a dime, then that was the end of it.

The amiable Park Commissioner Lambert turned his attention to the subject the day he assumed office. He let it be known that he was going to improve Brackenridge Park according to his own lights and plans, with no great cost to the payers of rates and taxes. He was greeted, as he may well have anticipated, with discreet smiles, stares of amazement, and shrugs of contempt. Hadn't those experts all said it couldn't be done without expending millions that the city would never vote for such unpractical purposes?

Just here the pioneering resourcefulness of Lambert came into play. He found a way to create beauty out of detestible ugliness and fine works out of absurd materials. He was presently observed out on the garbage dump, toiling with a swarm of Mexican navvies. Just what he was doing was a little

mysterious at first, but time brought a revelation. There was an abandoned quarry near the dump on the park land. Here were quantities of stone, from the size of gravel and rubble to the dimensions of sizable boulders. When all this loose stone had been hauled out and the interior of the old quarry cleared of brush and litter, there was found a large, circular amphitheater, walled on one side by a high bluff. At the lower end he began to construct a queer-looking building of the refuse stone, something between a mastodon's kennel and a powder house. But when it was finished and capped with a thatched roof of beautiful palm leaves the natives gasped a little to find themselves looking at an unusually attractive Japanese tea house. Their surprise yielded to more laughter, however, for what was this worth, in that wilderness of garbage and swampy bottom land?

Lambert went ahead and created an artificial lake in the bowl of the old quarry. When it was filled with placid water, stirred by a slow current from the river, he imported a Japanese gardener from California who knew how to grow lilies. The edges of the lake and all the borders of a stream that meandered from it through the rest of the park were soon crowded with the beautiful lotus blossoms of the lilies. Gardens, stone bridges, flower beds, a little Japanese villa, and other things began to appear. The great fire on the dump was extinguished and the refuse removed. The ground about the beautiful ancient trees was cleared, some walks were laid out and the river bank improved. Yet the only special outlay charged to the city so far had been for wire with which the palm leaves were made fast in thatching the roofs! The labor used came out of the regular appropriations of the park and street departments.

The city became aware of the park

but it was still not possible to get any money appropriated for its further improvement. Lambert was not discouraged, for it was a revolutionary thing to build parks in the great center of the Texas cow country. Men who had made their stakes out of longhorns and whitefaces would naturally look upon art with a jaundiced eye. He went back to work with such materials as cost nothing. The city garbage men were instructed to collect the discarded palm leaves and all the largest tin cans that were gathered with the refuse of the town. Before long there arose a long, low, stone *hacienda*, flanking a pleasant slope and brodered with picturesque cacti and overhung with century plants. The walls and supports of these Spanish-style buildings were wrought of the stone taken from the old quarry. The roof Lambert had sealed with the tin from the gathered cans, properly painted and pitched. Over this he had laid his thatch of the cast-off palm leaves. In the low quarters behind the *hacienda*, Lambert installed a family of Mexican caretakers, who were glad to get the place rent free. They were soon making *tortillas* and *tamales* for the consumption of the townspeople who began to swarm to the place, and pottery for the tourists.

At one end of the park there was still a great ugly field of bare rock that seemed hopeless. What would this resourceful man do with that? He answered by converting it into a zoo. Now, it is certain that Ray Lambert had never visited Hamburg and seen the marvelous natural environment created by Hagenbeck for his animals. If he knew anything of the Berlin animal gardens, or even of the bear dens in New York's Bronx zoo, it was by reading and indirection. He simply used his imagination. Dens for the lions and tigers were hollowed out of that great rock ledge, private citizens were persuaded to buy animals to fill

them, and presently the great cow town had a zoological park to compare with the famous ones, with all the animals kept in nearly natural surroundings, with trees and rocks and natural dens to be happy in.

By this time San Antonio and a good many other near-by cities were rubbing their eyes. Brackenridge Park was voted third among beautiful parks in a national competition, and this before it was complete. Local politicians realized that the park idea had caught on with the people, and money was now forthcoming. So Lambert had done his job. He had made various other parks and breathing spaces for his home city. Their total area is now more than nine hundred and fifteen acres. He had built three swimming pools for the children of the city, all of them so constructed that the San Antonio River flows through them with fresh water.

Not long ago, Lambert showed the city once more what resourcefulness will do. San Antonio needed lamp posts to beautify its streets and drives. The cheapest ones cost thirty-four dollars and were of rather poor design. Lambert collected tin cans again, melted them down, cast from them a mold of his own designing and poured concrete into it, using a metal base of tin-can meltings in the middle. As a result, the town has all the handsome posts it wants at seven dollars apiece. Such works and ways naturally struck many communities besides his own with wonder and an emulative spirit, with the result that Ray Lambert was soon both famous and in demand. Chambers of commerce, city-planning commissions, park planners, and others from all parts of the West and Southwest sent for him and listened reverently to his common-sense ideas and his truly original plans and suggestions. As the result of his teaching, hundreds of parks have been built, hundreds of beautiful

streets laid out, and numberless improvements made in scores of cities and towns that would, without his demonstration of economical methods, have remained for another generation as raw and homely as their pasts.

Lambert, naturally, has been offered a number of good jobs, where he might turn his talent into money, but he has refused them all. Neither does he take any fees from the cities and towns he helps from time to time. And, best of all, he refuses to lecture and give talks to public assemblages. He is no propagandist, no publicity-seeker, no self-advertiser. Whatever fame has come his way—and no name is better known in three or four of the biggest States of the nation than his—has been spontaneous. He continues, a fat, jolly, Falstaffian figure, doing his work and solving ideas, without much concern about opinions or celebrity. Men meet him and come under his peculiar spell. Artists now go to San Antonio from many parts of the country and use his Brackenridge Park vistas for their background. Hugo Pohl, a painter of considerable distinction, has put up his studio in the park with Lambert's permission, and paints there, opposite the zoo, in all seasons. Eastern cities have sent experts to consult with this self-

taught genius and get his ideas. He grins and chats with them and tells them how he did things and what he has in his mind, but he knows he is not an expert and he hates any pose or pretension. His work is instinctive as is his taste. Both were natural and sound, so he makes few mistakes.

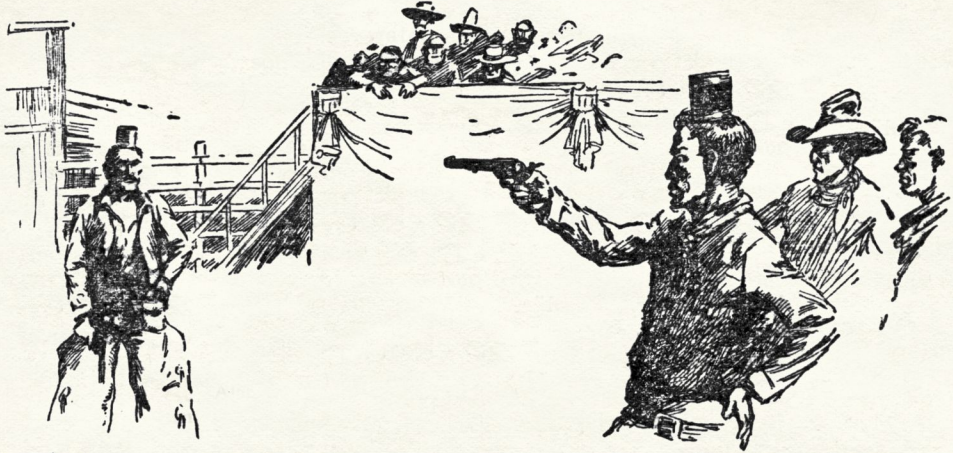
One of the latest projects of this outdoor decorator and man of practical ideas has been to clean up the city's waste land and outskirt property by planting them and putting them to work. There are flower beds and recreation grounds aplenty, but most of this land has lately been seeded to grow forage and vegetable crops. With the yield of this ground, which is vastly improved in sightliness by its cultivation, Lambert feeds the ruminants and other grass eaters in his zoo and the horses and mules that do the heavy hauling of the city park and street departments. He has been signally successful in every direction of his work.

At fifty-seven the one-time bar master shows no signs of weakening and manages to handle an ever-increasing number of demands, letters, requests, and responsibilities. If his fame is working him too hard it is his own fault. Men who love indolence must not dream over their beer.



WITH BOW AND ARROW

ARMED only with bows and arrows, a party of hunters started not long ago on a moose hunt in the forests of New Brunswick. The appearance of the hunters as they set out to stalk big game with the primitive weapons of the Indians was very picturesque, and that they carried stout hearts beneath their brave array is a foregone conclusion. But though they feared not moose they feared possible ridicule and refused to divulge their identity. The guide, W. Harry Allen of Penniac, reports that only if they are successful will they make announcement of their deeds. It is to be hoped that success will crown their efforts, for the bow and arrow remain the most picturesque and graceful of weapons, and somehow convey no sinister significance of their real purpose.



Flapjack and Sirup

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Saddles and Bridals," etc.



WANT to meet up with this camp's leading citizen; one that's got the good of the camp at heart; one that likes to see his feller men enjoy themselves; one that ain't against making a little money for the crippled kids, wounded soldiers or——"

"Homeless miners?" suggested one of the two men who chanced to be within earshot of the new arrival.

"Yeah, homeless miners if you've got any! Now, who's the leading citizen of this camp?"

"You've described 'Flapjack' Meehan fair to middlin' well," the other said. "He's Cold Deck's leading citizen; has the good of the camp at heart; has a likin' for men enjoyin' theirselves, and is always ready to dip into his pocket to help some down-and-out proposition. But listen, brother, if your proposition ain't on the level and holeproof don't waste your time—Flapjack's forgot an awful lot about the tricks wise hombres try to slip over on gold camps, but he

still remembers a few. What might your name be?"

"Oh, it might be Eddie Foy or Steve Brodie, but it happens to be 'Vag' Blucher. I'm—well, never mind what I am, before night you'll know all about me. Where does this 'Hotcake' Meehan hang out?"

"Name's Flapjack Meehan, and his place of business is at the New Deal Café!" The speaker watched Blucher out of sight, then turned to his companion. "Important cuss, eh?"

"Yeah, but it's all in his own head. I know them kind of jaspers. They're the kind that claim they know women or they got it straight that the last heavyweight championship battle was framed. Looks like Cold Deck was in for some fun. He's some kind of a drummer."

"Then he must be peddlin' horse linniment or soothin' sirup for cows; look at the rig he's got on!"

Vag Blucher wore a two-gallon hat, beautifully decorated; high-heeled boots, and a gaudy shirt. A man in

such an outfit is certainly not on an Alaskan gold stampede. Vag was slightly bow-legged, and his cowboy atmosphere was aided on occasion by a notched .44 and his trick of rolling cigarettes with one hand. He seldom mentioned the notches on his gun, leaving those who noted them to draw their own conclusions. There were two of them, made, no doubt, many years ago. Vag's face was florid and his mid-section was that of a man who ate regularly.

"Dad" Simms was the first to observe him as he entered the New Deal Café. Blucher winked at the waitress as if to say, "Me for you, sister!" The girl froze him with a glance. "Want Hotcake Meehan," he announced.

"If you mean Flapjack Meehan," Dad said tartly, "he's in—in—" To himself he growled, "What in tarnation is that word the office boy told me when I wanted to see that man in Seattle?" Then it flashed on him. "He's in conference!"

"Boy, tell him I'll wait," Vag said patronizingly, with a glance at Dad's white hair.

Dad stamped angrily across the room to Flapjack's office. He found the tall sour dough swapping yarns with Peter Dow, who had just happened in on his way Outside. "Fresh dude outside," Dad snapped, "wants to see yuh!"

"What does he look like?" Flapjack inquired.

"Kind of a cross between a reformed cattle rustler and a Mexican hairless dog!" From which Flapjack deduced that Dad was smarting under some real or fancied insult. As a rule, Dad Simms was the most genial soul in the world. He believed in live and let live.

"You must be wrong, Dad," Flapjack answered, "no cattle rustler ever reformed!"

"Then this cuss got chased off the range and went into the medicine-show business. He's got more nerve than a

government mule, Flapjack. You'd better hide your watch before you let him in," said Dad and stalked out and shot a hard look at Vag Blucher. "He's still in conference—he'll be through after a while."

"Thanks, son!" answered Vag.

Dad walked over and found the cat in his chair. Usually, he picked the cat up and held it in his lap, brushing its fur the wrong way and listening to it purr. Now he dumped the amazed cat out. "Get the heck out of here," he roared, "always around underfoot!"

"So you stand instead of sit in the chair," observed Vag.

Dad got the point. He bit off a chunk of tobacco twice the normal size and chewed with vigor. Blucher retreated toward Flapjack's office. At that moment Peter Dow came out. "Just a minute," Flapjack said, addressing Vag, "I'll talk to you." Slipping through the opposite door, Flapjack called "Tubby" Willows, his partner, who did the thinking for the pair. "Come in here, Tubby, a party is calling on me, but I want you to size him up. He started in by getting Dad so riled up he kicked the cat. We may have to take this cuss' measure."

"Just as well to have a witness," Tubby agreed, "never can tell what a man like that has up his sleeve."

A few minutes later Flapjack motioned Mr. Vag Blucher to enter. "I'm a cow-puncher and proud of it," Mr. Blucher announced. While waiting for this to sink in, he produced tobacco and papers and proceeded to roll a cigarette with one hand.

Flapjack winked at Tubby and then borrowed paper and tobacco from Mr. Blucher. Thereupon he proceeded to make himself a cigarette with one hand. "What have you got on your mind?" Flapjack inquired.

"As I said, I'm a cow-puncher and proud of it. You might say I was a

cow-puncher, but I'm still sort of working at it. I've got the Blucher Rodeo. I'm the first man with nerve enough to bring a complete rodeo to Alaska. In my outfit I have some of the wildest steers that ever roamed the Western ranges; a buffalo that no human mortal, bar one, can ride. I searched the cattle and horse ranges and gathered together under my management some of the worst bucking horses. Some of them are killers, Mr. Hotcake——"

"Flapjack," Tubby corrected, "Flapjack Meehan!"

"And I have——"

"Now, just a minute—er—Mr. Moocher!"

"Blucher, sir," Vag corrected.

"My mistake, Mr. Blucher. As I was saying, just what have you got? The speech you've been making to us sounds like the one you peddle to your crowds."

"Well, Hotcake——"

"Yes, Moocher!"

"Blucher, sir!"

"Flapjack, sir!"

"Ah, yes. In addition to outlaw horses, man-eating steers, and a blood-sweating buffalo, I have gathered together the finest human talent playing the rodeos to-day. There is, for example, 'Chuck' Foster, who can ride anything with hair on it. Nor do I except the buffalo. With Chuck is 'Duke' MacDougal, who can rope anything that moves and has head or horns. Besides this sweet pair I have Ray DeLay, who can bulldog anything with horns. And I myself am the championship pistol shot of the world."

"Championship is good," whispered Tubby.

"If I do say it myself," Mr. Blucher resumed, "I can hit anything that is visible to the naked eye."

"Say," Tubby ventured, "if this layout is so good why ain't you at the Pendleton Round-up, or down at Elensburg or Sumas?"

"Barred! Absolutely barred," Mr. Blucher admitted, "we're too good for them."

"I see," Flapjack muttered dryly, "their loss is our gain, so to speak."

"Exactly!"

"Now, just where do we come in on this?"

"Mr. Hotcake—ah, excuse me, Mr. Griddlecake!"

"Try again," Tubby suggested.

"Mr. Slapjack!"

"Let it ride," Flapjack said. "What's your proposition?"

"We come into a town, receive a guarantee from a few of the public-spirited citizens, put on our show, and split the profits with some worthy charity."

"Receive a guarantee," said Tubby pointedly. "It looks as if here was the catch!"

Mr. Blucher did not even deign to flush. "Exactly," he admitted, "that is the catch if catch there is. If we are guaranteed a reasonable fee, there is no hitch to the program. We put on a great show and naturally, if local men are behind it, the public gets behind it."

"The public," said Tubby quietly, "gets behind anything that gives it its money's worth. Let's see what sort of a contract you have. Cold Deck hasn't had any excitement in an age, and the boys will get behind your show. We can use the ball park and charge five dollars a head. That may sound high, but they'll pay it knowing the extra money is going to some charity. We'll turn it over to a fund here in Cold Deck that helps sick miners over the rough spots. A lot of the boys now in the money have benefited by that fund some time or other—they'll come!"

"And the guarantee?" Vag queried.

"You have my word," Flapjack answered, "that if you bring your rodeo down to Cold Deck and put on a first-class show you'll make expenses. If you don't, then I'll fork over enough

dust to make good. I know Cold Deck; it'll come through, but you've got to deliver the goods."

Mr. Blucher's manner indicated that he was all through, as he got to his feet. "I hardly think it will be worth while to bring the rodeo to Cold Deck unless we are assured a financial guarantee. I'm sorry, gentlemen!"

"Suit yourself," Flapjack answered, "I've offered to kick in enough so you'll break even, but we're not going to hand you a gift. Any giving that we do will be right here at home. I'm sorry, too, because I'm sure if you're as good as you say you are the first performance would break even and the second performance would jam the ball park. S'long, Mr. Blucher."

"S'long, Hotcake! No hard feelings!"

"None in the world."

After the visitor was gone, Tubby chuckled. "He figures you'll send for him."

"Well, I won't. He's got to come through Cold Deck to get out of the country with his show. He'll accept. What do you think?"

"Sure, he will," Tubby agreed. "I figure it's a few cheap cusses that have got together and are playing the North for suckers. They're not good enough for the regular rodeos so they've come up here. Maybe I'm wrong, and I hope so, because this camp is spoiling to see something different, but Blucher acts like a sure-thing man. Suppose he thinks a cowboy is a queer sight in Alaska. Why, dog-gone it, most of the real old-timers were on the range before they headed North!"

As for Vag Blucher, he faded from the scene in a sad state of mind. Three days later, when Chuck Foster, who could ride anything with hair on, appeared, Blucher's frame of mind was no better. "Somebody must've sent 'em word about us, Chuck," he complained, "I can't get 'em to promise

more than expenses. Flapjack Meehan, or is it Hotcake? Anyway, he says if we bring the show here he'll make up any loss."

"That means we'll look over the crowd and then use our own judgment on how much of a show we give 'em."

"What's hurting me the most," Blucher complained, "is that this camp is one of the richest in Alaska, and I can't see any way of separating them from their money."

"There's only one thing, and that's to accept Meehan's proposition," Foster said, "and then our sure-thing boys will find ways of taking the honest miners if we can't."

"And shall we split the profits fifty-fifty with the Sick Miners' Fund, or whatever they call it?"

"Sure, that's the only way we can get any profits ourselves," Chuck answered.

When Vag Blucher complained that some one had arrived ahead of him and given the camp the low-down on his show he was mistaken. Cold Deck knew nothing of the rodeo and when it heard it was coming the camp was hopeful. However, news of crooked deals always get around, and when the rodeo people and animals arrived two old-timers were on the same steamer. Winter was ahead, and they planned to hang around Cold Deck. "Sure," they said in answer to questions, "we saw the show!"

"How'd you like it?"

The first pinched his nose with his fingers and walked away. "Rotten," he said as he went.

"They're more interested in gettin' money than anything else," said the second. "Understand they got a guarantee out of the Big Nugget people, and some of the boys like 'Poke' Tupper and 'Hardrock' Shipley had to dig into their pokes. They wouldn't have minded only the rodeo was rotten. It's

kinda noised about that they'll play Alaska until snow flies, then hit for the States!"

"What do they plan to do with their cattle and horses? It'll cost money to ship them back!" Tubby Willows had come up at that moment.

"That's what us old-timers don't like," the other said, "they're going to sell the steers for beef after having sport with 'em all the summer and fall. There's no market for horses, so they're going to shoot the horses and ship back just the saddles and like o' that! You see it's money—just money with 'em."

"Flapjack," said Tubby, "this calls for action. We'll give 'em a chance to play square. But if they don't, you'd better take 'em in hand."

"I figure to give 'em action if I can," Flapjack answered.

But just what his course would be the tall citizen of Cold Deck did not know. And failing to see any logical course of action, he waited to watch the other fellow's game. Beating the other fellow's game is the most satisfying method of beating the other fellow. Incidentally, it stands the least chance of success. Flapjack was prepared to take a beating if need be to give Cold Deck's citizens a little fun.

Most of Cold Deck was on hand to watch the landing of the wild horses and man-killing steers. With ropes, they were handled easily enough, so easily in fact that some of the old range men had their doubts. The buffalo had a rather bad eye, Dad Simms decided. He had hunted buffalo with Buffalo Bill and thought he knew a thing or two about them.

Willing hands helped the rodeo men to take their charges to the ball park, where hay, Alaska-cured hay, had been provided. The horses, turned loose, soon gave indications of pep. The fall air was crisp and bracing. The men around camp took hope. "Maybe

we'll see some action," one of them observed.

"You'll see action," Dad Simms predicted. "Flapjack's working on things and I'm helpin' him out a little on account of Vag Blucher calling me a boy. I'm kinda hopin' they'll start something."

But that was the difficulty—they started very little. The crowd did not measure up to their expectations the first day. Vag was selling tickets and Flapjack taking them up, thus they were able to keep tab on each other. Presently the hour arrived. The grand stand was half full; there was no one on the bleachers. "See what they've got and if they've got anything we'll pack the park," was the trend of feeling.

A half hour passed and nothing happened except the appearance of twenty-five Siwashes recruited about the camp and decked out in the feathers and paint of Yakima Indians. They looked foolish and not at all noble. It is difficult for a Siwash to look noble at best.

"Well, trot out your man-eating steers and outlaw nags," yelled a miner vociferously.

And nothing happened!

"Tubby, their riders aren't going to bust, bull-dog, or even parade. There's no money in sight. The fools haven't got sense enough to know that the camp is waiting to see what they can do. I told 'em——"

Flapjack's comments were drowned by an angry demand for some one to do something. Presently a cow-puncher appeared and mounted an outlaw which bucked viciously for about six bucks, then the puncher fell. He forced a foolish grin and limped away. The miners who knew nothing of the range laughed. To them it had looked real, but the range men knew better. It was not cleverly enough done for that.

"Hey," bellowed a tough citizen, "Blucher, chase them drugstore cow-

boys off this range and bring on the real thing!"

"Keep it up," Blucher whispered, "if we can get these birds mad enough we may get some bets put up. Then we'll show our stuff!"

From one of the inclosures came a steer. He was snorting and doing the usual stuff a steer is supposed to do until he hears the gun and knows his act is over. Galloping furiously came Ray DeLay. He launched himself at the steer's horns and missed. As he picked himself up, a miner shouted, "Hey, Ray! What delayed yuh?"

Now, it happened that DeLay was the one man in the lot who believed in giving his customers, whether one or ten thousand, a square deal. He had made a real try and missed; not only that but the fall had hurt.

"That'll stir Ray up," Blucher exclaimed, "and there may be a fight. He's mad clean through."

"Who said that?" DeLay demanded.

"We all do!" yelled another voice.

"Listen, you jaspers," bellowed DeLay, "did yuh ever try bull-doggin' a steer? No, of course you ain't! Then don't make any cracks at a man that's got nerve enough to try it."

"We've got men," retorted the voice, "that can do anything you chechahcos can do—and do it better!"

Two minutes later Blucher pulled DeLay down from the fence. He had purposely let the man's fighting disposition respond to the crowd's jeers. DeLay was ready to take on any or all of them, while several in turn, realizing that the rodeo was a fake, were ready to work on him as a human symbol of the entire outfit. "Now, Ray," Blucher said in a soothing tone, "cool off! Don't pay any attention to those four-flushers." Blucher purposely lifted his voice. Several took the bait.

"Four-flushers? Saaaay!"

When the storm died down, Blucher lifted his hand. "The work these boys

do appears simple enough when you are sitting safe in the grand stand, but just try it once. If there's a man among you who thinks he knows this game let him step out. We'll ride, rope, bulldog, or what have you? And if we can't do it better than you can, we'll quit! We'll return your money to boot!"

"Flapjack!" Dad Simms spoke hoarsely. He was excited. "Now's your chance! He's left hisself wide open. Hit him where he lives—right in the stummick!"

"It's what I've been expecting," Flapjack answered, "I see his game plain enough now. Well, Cold Deck is going to set in on it." Flapjack stood up. "Blucher," he called, "we don't think much of your show, and we've said so. You've made us a proposition. Now, I'll make one. I'll make one that'll pack this old ball park till she bulges. We'll have a regular rodeo. There'll be teams from Cold Deck and teams from your boys. We'll compete on points. Say, the best buckner wins fifty points for his side; the best bull-dogger, the best shot, the best roper each fifty. The side that gets the most points will take all the gate receipts. You claim to have the best bull-dogger, the best rider, the best roper in the world. Well, we claim we can find men among the miners that with a week's practice will be as good! You claim to be able to shoot anything visible to the naked eye. As a sort of side show, you and I'll settle the pistol championship of the world right here in Cold Deck. And here are the rules. We stand twenty-five paces apart, facing each other. Each man has a quart can of maple sirup on his head. The man that puts a hole in the middle of the can wins!"

"And supposing you should miss the can and hit me in the head?" Blucher inquired.

"Then we would both lose," Flapjack

answered. "You'd be killed, naturally, and so would I, because your second, according to the rules of this particular contest, would have me covered, and the instant you fell he'd shoot me." Flapjack paused. "And, naturally, my second, who will be Tubby Willows, will have you covered in case you hit me!" Flapjack beamed. "And the winner adds one hundred points to his side. This will be the final contest of the day." Flapjack grew just the least bit hard. "Are you on, or are you just a four-flusher?"

"We're on," Blucher answered. "We'll show you what dead-game sports we are. We'll not only contest for the gate receipts, but we'll put up every cent we've got, including the show itself, against what Cold Deck can dig up!"

"Just a minute," Flapjack answered, "there's no time like the present. We'll draw up the papers and sign 'em right now!"

An hour later Vag Blucher called his men about him. "We're playing for real stakes now," he said. "Chuck Foster, I've said you can ride anything with hair on—now prove it! You've got to! Duke MacDougal, you've got to prove you're the best roper in the world. And you, Ray DeLay, have got to bulldog as you've never bulldogged before. That gate will be worth twenty thousand dollars. Besides that, Cold Deck is putting up ten thousand dollars against our show as a side bet!"

"Don't worry, chief," MacDougal answered, "you got 'em mad and they lost their heads! Right now I'll bet them sour doughs are kicking themselves for going into this thing so strong."

But MacDougal was wrong. "Them sour doughs" were already checking up and finding some very satisfactory talent. Only Tubby Willows was worried. "Listen, Flapjack," he said, "you're a fool to shoot it out with Blu-

cher! Suppose he misses the can and hits your head?"

"Then you'll shoot him!"

"You're darned right, I'll shoot him, but what good will that do you?" Tubby demanded.

"Why," answered Flapjack cheerfully, "I'll have his company to the Pearly Gates!"

About four thousand people packed Cold Deck's ball park on the great day. Word had spread rapidly and men came from miles around to see what was sure to be a finish fight. If there were buckers and bulldoggers in the group they were certain to do their best. A twenty-thousand-dollar gate was a rather sweet prize, and nothing had been said of charity. Cold Deck was also betting ten thousand dollars against the rodeo. Thus, including everything, the contest was a forty-thousand-dollar affair.

It began with a parade, it being the theory that neither side would care to parade after the contests were over. The Siwashes in the regalia of a nobler tribe; the gayly dressed cowboys, and the sour doughs in parkas all tended to make this rodeo one of the strangest that was ever staged.

In one corner of the grounds were several stalls containing Cold Deck's contributions to the rodeo's "stock." There was quite a mystery about what the stalls contained and the sour doughs had maintained a guard from the first to keep the rodeo people away. It was, however, admitted that Cold Deck's stock had been obtained with great difficulty.

A group of three men were acting as judges. One of them was Tubby Willows; another was with the rodeo, and the third had been chosen by the first two. Impartial decisions could be counted upon. According to the rules, each side had not only to ride its own stock but the other's as well. "This'll

make it interesting," Flapjack explained, "so if they ring in any trick stuff on us they'll have to ride, tie, and bulldog their trick stuff also. And the same goes with us."

The announcer megaphoned the first event. "Coming out of Number Twelve! Duke MacDougal up! MacDougal is the world's greatest roper. The championship is at stake!"

A ripsnorting steer, hopped up for the occasion, galloped into the arena. Duke was off like a shot. The line settled about the animal's horns and he came down with a thud. The horse knew his business and kept the rope tight. A few seconds later Duke's hands went into the air indicating that the steer had been tied. The committee inspected it and gave due credit.

"Coming out of Number Eleven! Dad Simms up! Simms is Cold Deck's entry," cried the announcer.

Dad got a rousing cheer, for it was known that in his day he was a great roper. He had roped when roping was a business and not an act. Dad did the job but required three seconds longer than MacDougal. His muscles were stiff and did not move as easily as the younger man's.

"Coming out of Number One! MacDougal up! MacDougal can rope anything with horns!"

Number One was one of the Cold Deck stalls. The crowd leaned forward, tense! From the inclosure burst a caribou! The animal, intent on gaining its liberty, leaped and bounded on its slim legs and with tossing antlers gave MacDougal a worried expression. He missed twice, and the caribou leaped the small fence and vanished into the open country beyond.

"Cold Deck will give MacDougal another trial," Flapjack announced. "We want to be fair! Blucher contends that MacDougal can rope anything with horns."

Blucher was swearing inwardly. It

looked as if he had caught a Tartar. He knew that MacDougal could not rope that caribou in four or five tries except by sheer luck. Nor did he.

Dad Simms missed the first chance he had when his horse stumbled. But the next caribou out was roped in quick time. Not only that, but Dad tied him. Then came the announcement that thrilled the old boy's heart. "Dad never roped a caribou until yesterday."

Some one started singing, "Old Dad Simms is better'n he used to be, better'n he used to be, better'n he used to be. Old Dad Simms is better'n he used to be, many long years ago."

"Heh! Heh!" chuckled Dad. Drafted into service, he had won fifty points for Cold Deck.

"Coming out of Number Four," the announcer sang. "'Rough' Rhodes up!"

Rough Rhodes was built like a bulldogger and knew the game slightly. From the stall raced a bull moose. He was an indignant bull moose and he did not like the roar of the crowd, nor the big man galloping so close on a horse. Suddenly he felt a tremendous weight land on his horns. He went down with a thud. Long he struggled to free his head from the mighty grip of the big man. "No man can do it!" several in the crowd muttered. "No man can do it!" Then, aloud. "Look out, Rhodes, he'll get yuh!" There was a rip of clothing, a cry from Rhodes, and the moose was free. Rhodes' arm seemed to be in a bad way.

Tubby galloped up. "What happened!"

"Got one of the points between my arm and breast. In getting free and still trying to hang on I pulled a muscle. I'll be all right. Sorry, but I'm out of the bulldogging."

Ray DeLay had watched the performance with interest. And he had noted a number of things. Five minutes later he launched himself through

space, gripped a young bull moose's horns, and brought him to earth!

The roars of the moose filled the arena. Rough Rhodes was a strong man, but DeLay was stronger. His face was twisted from his effort. His shirt split across the back and the great muscles stood out sharply. They seemed about to break from the strain. One moose hoof was dug into the sod. Suddenly it snapped free and a chunk of sod flew through space. The moose collapsed and yielded to the man. A mighty cheer filled the stands. They had seen a man bulldog a bull moose!

Flapjack Meehan was the first man to reach DeLay. "That was great!" he cried. "I'm glad you won! You're all right!"

DeLay glowered a moment. Being a man who had always given his best, the taunts of the crowd on the previous occasion had got under his skin. He was still resentful. Suddenly he caught the spirit of these Northerners. They were sportsmen first. The winning or losing of a bet was a secondary matter. Then he grinned. He accepted Flapjack's extended hand. "Thanks," he said.

The score now stood:

Blucher	Cold Deck
DeLay, bulldogging 50	Simms, roping ... 50

In quick succession there followed the other minor events. Blucher was better at breaking glass balls with a pistol than was Cold Deck's entry; while Mike Selover, whose legs were as long as Flapjack's, rode the blood-sweating buffalo, and the Blucher entry was bucked off Cold Deck's blood-sweating moose.

The crowd grew tense as the announcer ordered everybody from the track. "We don't want anyone hurt," he explained, "and what's coming will offer plenty of chance for busted bones. The next contest, for fifty points, will be a race between the Blucher stage-

coach and a similar method of transportation often used in the North."

Most of the crowd expected to see a dog team trot onto the track. But Cold Deck had an ace up its sleeve. From an inclosed building of rather narrow construction leaped a team of six reindeer that had come from the Broad Pass herds. Flapjack was driving, and from the expression on his face it was evident that he had his doubts as to what would happen next. He was certain of one thing—the crowd would be pleased. There could be no doubt of this. As the deer grew nervous, the crowd began to laugh. The laughter rose and fell like the roar of the surf. Wheels had been attached to the sled. It was just another act to give the crowd its money's worth, but the fifty points were mighty important to Cold Deck, nevertheless.

The gun cracked and they were off. Flapjack's reindeer humped up their backs, tossed their horns, and their hoofs sent clods of sod flying in a steady stream. Neck and neck the leaders galloped, while Blucher, who was driving the stagecoach, cracked his whip and tried again and again to gain an inch or two. His face showed the strain he was laboring under. It was not sport for him, as it was for Flapjack. It was money! His lips bared in a snarl and he tossed words from the corner of his mouth that were far from complimentary to Flapjack. "Hotcacke," he roared, "I've got you whipped, you dog, and you might as well quit!"

"Play the game," Flapjack retorted, controlling his temper, "you're old enough to know that the whine of a yellow dog is music to a man's ears."

The lash fell again and again on the horses. They forged ahead a dozen yards and held the lead. Dad Simms was dancing up and down. "Two more laps and the nags a-leadin' by thutty feet," he groaned. Then he had an

idea. "Gotta get more speed out of them deer!"

He ran below the grand stand and released five Malemute dogs that Rough Rhodes had brought along. As the deer came opposite Dad turned the dogs loose. "Sic 'em!" Dad ordered. "Eat 'em up, boys!"

"Hey!" Flapjack bellowed in protest, "stop those dogs, Dad!" The remainder of his protest was lost in the uproar. With a mighty lunge, the deer took the lead. Flapjack completely lost control of them. The team swerved as a dog leaped at the leader's head and the team cut across squarely in front of the horses. Only by a miracle did Flapjack escape being run down. Into the arena lumbered the team. The sled hit the fence around the buffalo. Frightened, the buffalo charged the opposite side and went through. In this inclosure were five caribous held in reserve for the roping contest. Regarding the charge as a personal attack the caribou milled about, found an opening the buffalo had made, and promptly quit the scene in a panic. Flapjack stayed with the sled until the team broke loose, then he was jerked into the air and slammed to the earth. He legged it for the grand stand and broke all jumping records of the day as he leaped the track and gained the stands two feet ahead of a bull moose.

The arena was filled with stamped animals. The five Malemutes were crazy with excitement. On every hand were legs to nip at; the dogs nipped. Vag Blucher with quick presence of mind drove his team across the finish and won his fifty points. And with equal presence of mind the committee spoke to the announcer and that worthy bellowed news of great importance to those assembled.

"Special event! Fifty additional points to the side that ropes and ties the most animals!"

The crowd was rocking with laugh-

ter. Ten pairs of eyes could not have seen everything. Ropes were whizzing through the air; animals bounding about, and in the midst of it all was Dad Simms attempting to undo what he had done by kicking the dogs back to their kennels. At the hour at which the rodeo was to have ended, a degree of order had been restored. The Blucher crowd, having the most experienced ropers, had taken that special event also.

"What's the score?" Flapjack cried, riding up to the judges.

Tubby Willows glanced at the sheet of paper and read:

Blucher	Cold Deck
DeLay, bulldogging 50	Simms, roping 50
Blucher, pistol shot 50	Selover, riding 50
Blucher, stagecoach 50	Special roping
Special roping event 50	Flapjack, broncho riding 50

"Total," concluded Tubby, "Blucher, two hundred; Cold Deck, one hundred and fifty. The next event is the pistol duel between Flapjack Meehan and Vag Blucher. The entries and their seconds will take places. Dad Simms, bring the cans of sirup. The winner of this event, which is one hundred points, wins the rodeo, Cold Deck's ten thousand, and the twenty thousand dollars in gate money."

Blucher was pale as he dismounted from his horse and took a place in front of the grand stand. He would willingly try to shoot the can of sirup off Flapjack's head. If he hit Flapjack, that would be the tall sour dough's hard luck, to Blucher's way of thinking. But the penalty of being shot for hitting his opponent was what worried him.

"You hold your guns straight up," Tubby was explaining, "and come down! When the starting gun is fired, that's the signal to begin. If you both score hits you split the points—fifty to each. That will give you the big pot, Blucher. Ready, Blucher?"

"Yes."

"Ready, Flapjack?"

Blucher looked at his opponent, tall, cool, with the old .44 up in the air. How small that can of sirup looked at this distance! His own can must look as small! He shuddered. Flapjack might hit him. Darned little satisfaction in knowing that Flapjack would be instantly shot if he did.

"Ready, Flapjack?" Tubby repeated the words.

"I'm ready whenever Blucher stops bobbing his head around. The rules state that we've got to keep our heads still. That means, too, we've got to keep 'em cool!"

Crack!

The starter's gun rang out sharply. Flapjack's weapon dropped, and Blucher looked into the barrel. It looked like a sixteen-inch gun. Fire belched forth and he ducked. But, instinctive as the movement was, it was not quick enough. He felt something splash over his face—thick, sticky, warm. Why didn't he fall, or why didn't his second shoot down Flapjack? The crowd was laughing, laughing at a man bleeding to death. The can was on the ground. He could see it, dented and torn; the contents spreading over the sod. He wiped his wounded head with his bare hand and looked at his fingers. They were warm and sticky—with sirup.

Dad Simms was chuckling. "Treated me like a office boy, but I fixed him," he said to himself. "I warmed his can o' sirup and he thought it was blood. Heh! Heh! Heeh!"

"I can't hit him," Blucher muttered, "if I do, I'll be shot! But I've got to or he'll win!" He looked at Tubby Willows standing by with drawn weapon. Tubby said nothing, but his eyes were eloquent. They said, "Go ahead, but be danged careful!"

Blucher lifted his gun once more, and slowly brought it down! The crowd was silent. Somewhere a baby

cried and the mother's "Shhh!" sounded like escaping steam. A man shifted his feet and the scraping rang out sharply. The interval seemed an eternity. Blucher looked at Flapjack—rigid, cool, waiting. Then he looked at Tubby—Tubby Willows with that stern warning in his eyes, that steady .44 in his hand. Slowly he brought his own weapon lower. It bobbed about. He waited for it to steady, keeping his finger off the trigger. He saw the can over the sights, but he could not shoot quickly enough. It was gone. He drew the weapon still lower, the can leaped above the sights, and he saw Flapjack's head. And he had almost fired! His nerves broke, he trembled, then in desperation he hurled the gun aside. "I can't do it!" he muttered. "I don't know why, but I—can't!"

"I know why," Dad Simms whispered to Rough Rhodes, "he's yellow! It turned out just as Flapjack figured it would. He knew that Blucher would never shoot if the penalty for hitting him was death!" The old sage nodded his head. "Yellow—just as we figured. But Flapjack will have to watch out, for Blucher's the kind that will lay for him to square accounts—lay for him when Tubby Willows and his six-gun ain't around."

The cheers had subsided; the wild animals had been released; the twenty-thousand-dollar gate had been turned over to the fund that helped sick miners over rough spots in the trail; the rodeo stock was fed and bedded down for the night. One by one the members of the rodeo appeared at their committee's office. "We're dead broke. How'll we get out of town?"

And to each the answer was the same. "You can make a stake working in Flapjack's mine. He's offered every one of you a job!"

One of the last to appear was Ray DeLay. He grinned. "Well, I made

my play for the big money and lost. How about going to work?" he said.

"You can't work in my mine," Flapjack replied quickly, "you're the only one of that bunch that tried all the time. I figure you've earned a special prize, donated by the New Deal Café. Here it is!" Flapjack handed the surprised bulldogger a moosehide poke.

DeLay almost dropped it. "What's in it?" he cried.

"Gold!"

"Holy smoke! How much?"

"Take it over to my cashier, she'll give you a thousand dollars for it, son," Flapjack said.

The committee chased Flapjack from the room and put their heads together. "Cold Deck has a rodeo and no place to put it," said the chairman. "Of course, we can't sell the steers for beef

and kill the horses, as Blucher planned. We don't do things that way. What'll we do with the rodeo?"

"I move we give it to Flapjack Meehan!" said one.

"Flapjack don't want it!"

"Of course he don't. But he's got plenty of money, which some of us ain't got; and he's got Tubby Willows to do the thinking for him, which we ain't got. I move we present it to him as a token of our esteem!"

"You mean steam!" said the chairman. "The motion is seconded and carried. The meeting stands adjourned to some place in the hills beyond the reach of Flapjack and his .44. And for one I'm going to show my esteem for Flapjack by digging out right now before he finds out he's inherited a rodeo."

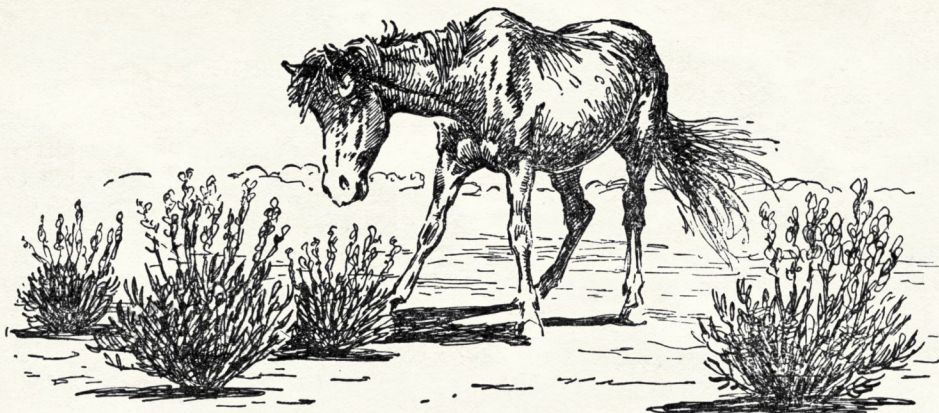


THE HOSPITABLE TIRE

IN former years when boys and girls left home it was no easy task to stage a family reunion; roads were bad, distances were great, horses were not to be spared from their work, the farmer and dweller in remote regions could not spend the time necessary to revisit the old folks and take the new generation to see gran'pa and gran'ma and the old homestead. Partings were for long, and good-bys were said with a sense of sad separation. But nowadays we have changed all that and for this change the automobile is to be thanked—the automobile whose good round rubber tires bring the young folks to the old ones and vice versa.

There were the pessimists who lamented that with the increasing means of transportation the home and the fireside were inevitably being broken up. Here is their answer! Good roads and automobiles are operating to bring people more closely together than they have ever been in the past. There can no longer be any "distant" relatives. Rich man and poor man are on all fours, if we may say it, in the matter of transportation.

The family reunion may take the form of a picnic to be held in some central spot where all the members can converge. What so pleasant as a drive of fifty or seventy-five miles over good roads, a gay al fresco meal, and then homeward bound again over the same flowing highway with no prospect of losing one's way—unless one wants to!



Loco-Scourge of the Range

By Charles H. Coe

Author of "Trick Roping and Spinning," etc.

STOCK on the open range, especially horses, cows, sheep, and goats, meet with more or less misfortune and occasional tragedy, from one cause and another. Sickness, starvation, freezing, treacherous quicksands or bogs, poisonous reptiles, all take their toll of lives. But one of the greatest causes of loss among live stock is from eating the poisonous loco weed. Thus, an animal affected by this plant is said to be "locoed," a common expression nowadays which has come to have many applications.

The term *loco* is of Spanish origin, meaning mad or crazy. There are three clearly defined poisonous species of the weed, all of which belong to the pea family. A destructive weed, so extensively distributed in the stock-raising States, should be generally known and easily recognized. Unfortunately, however, there are a large number of non-poisonous plants, belonging to the same family and closely resembling the poisonous loco weeds, which cause more or less doubt and confusion among stock raisers regarding their identity. The destructive species referred to are as follows:

The purple or "woolly" loco, known to botanists as *Astragalus mollissimus*, is often called the "Texas loco," because its effects on stock were first noticed in that, the oldest, stock-raising State. This plant, or weed, as it is commonly called, is about a foot in height and low-spreading. Its leaflets are ovate or egg-shaped, and are densely covered with woolly hairs. The blossom is deep purple, and the seed pods are short and black when ripe. It is not ordinarily abundant; that is, it does not densely cover the ground, but usually grows in isolated patches. It is found in parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska. It is believed to be more abundant in western Texas than elsewhere. It seems to be more destructive to horses than to other domestic stock, but this may be explained by the fact that horses seem to relish it more, and therefore eat more of it.

Another species is known as the "white loco" (*Oxytropis lamberti*), or "rattleweed." When dry, the seed pods give out a rattling noise, as one walks through it, resembling the rattle of a rattlesnake, hence its common name on

the ranges. The plants are about a foot high; the leaflets are olive-green, long, slender, or lance-shaped, and the blossom—in spikes or plumelike—is white, streaked with purple. The white loco is regarded as the most destructive of all, because it is the most abundant and its range the most extensive. It is found from Alaska to Mexico in the plains country, and as far East as western Minnesota; its western limit being about the middle of Utah and Arizona. It seems to be more generally fatal to all kinds of stock than other known poisonous loco weeds.

The third identified poisonous species is called the "blue" loco—*Astragalus diphysus*) also a rattle weed. In appearance it closely resembles alfalfa. It has a small, oblong leaf of a deep-green color, with purple flowers and puffed-up seed pods, the latter streaked with purple when ripe. Its range is restricted to parts of Arizona, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. It grows in abundance in most of these locations. Experiments have shown that this species is especially injurious to horses.

The first recorded deaths of locoed animals—believed due to eating the purple or Texas loco weed—were probably those given in a report of the commissioner of agriculture in 1873. But many stockmen and others doubted that the disease was due to any plants eaten by the stock. Early laboratory investigations upheld them in this opinion. Ten years later (1883) plants of the purple loco were sent from Texas to a Detroit chemist for analysis. The report was that no poisonous principle was found.

At the present time, however, there is no doubt about the poisonous character of the three loco weeds described in this article. But it is a remarkable fact that some animals seem to eat them, or one or more of them, with no ill effects. Few animals will eat loco

weeds if there is a plentiful supply of the regular grasses growing in the same localities. The exceptions are those that seem to have acquired an appetite for the plant; in which cases they eat it exclusively, with the result that sickness and emaciation followed, and death is only a matter of a few months.

The same symptoms are produced by all of the plants, viz.: lack of condition, emaciation, partial loss of control in walking, and defective eyesight. These are some of the more pronounced effects after prolonged feeding on the weeds. The movements of a badly locoed animal are erratic and unusual, especially noticeable when it is among unaffected stock.

In treating for loco poisoning Fowler's solution has been found best for horses. This is given in four to six dram doses, in water or feed, daily, and kept up for several months in the worst cases. The food should be alfalfa and grain, if possible. In many cases, simply removing the animals from a loco-infested range will effect a cure. Experiments with cattle prove that strychnine in one-twentieth grain doses, continued for some time, were beneficial and usually effected a cure. Prescribing should always be done by a regular veterinary or an experienced man. Hypodermic injections are given in the case of cattle.

The loco weeds described are usually found growing on arid or very poor soils. They can be destroyed by cutting the root just below the crown, say, two or three inches below the surface of the ground.

There are many poisonous plants in the West, but according to the United States Department of Agriculture—to which the writer is indebted for much of the information in this article—the number to be dreaded by stockmen is comparatively small. The true loco weeds probably cause more trouble than any others.



A Bear-Raising Ride

by Ray Humphreys



WITH an expression of mingled horror and disgust on his leathery, weather-beaten face, old "Whiskers" Graham, senior driver for the Wells Fancher Stage Company, Como to Fairplay and all intermediate points, shrank back from the Como barn boss.

"*What's that?*" he exclaimed, uneasily.

Jim Burgess, the barn boss, looked surprised.

"Why, gee whiz!" he said, in astonishment, "this here ain't nuthin', Whiskers, 'ceptin' one b'arskin overcoat, belongin', as yuh should know, to Joe McGraw, the superintendent, who left it stored up here las' winter, afore he was transferred to Fairplay, an' who wants it brung down to him on the stage."

Whiskers fixed watery, faded, blue eyes on the big coat.

"Huh!" he grunted, "ain't *that* the same b'arskin overcoat Bill Troy, Joe McGraw's uncle, had on the time he was shot through the head an' kilt by that rustler over on Elk Creek?"

The barn foreman shook the big, shaggy, black coat.

"Waal," he muttered, "supposin' so; what of it?"

Whiskers shrank back again, putting his hands up in front of him as if to shut out the unwelcome sight of the overcoat.

"An' wasn't Sam Reedy wearin' that same b'arskin coat when lightnin' struck him top o' Rabbit Ear Pass an' knocked him seventeen ways from Sunday?" demanded Whiskers.

Again the barn boss shrugged his shoulders.

"Waal, what ef so?" he grumbled, "I kain't see——"

Whiskers folded his arms and glared at the barn boss. No wonder such a dumb-bell as Jim Burgess wasn't fit for anything but to take care of the stage lines' stock in the Como terminal!

"Huh!" said Whiskers, with scorn, "what ef so, yuh ask. Has it ever sunken through yuhr thick skull, Jim, that this here b'arskin overcoat is bad luck, mebbe? Jus' like a dang black ket crossin' the road in front o' yuhr team, eh? Huh, I wouldn't wear that b'ar-

skin overcoat fer all the money thar is in——”

Burgess scowled.

“Who in Hail Columbia, Gem o’ the Ocean, is askin’ yuh to wear this coat, Santa Claus?” he asked, angrily, “I ain’t; I’m just a-carryin’ out the supe’s orders, which cum in by mail las’ night, sayin’ fer me to send down his b’arskin overcoat with yuh t’day—that’s all! He’s mighty proud o’ that coat.”

Whiskers grunted disdainfully.

“Dang, haunted, bad luck b’arskin!” he declared, “I won’t have nuthin’ to do with it, Jim—not me—I——”

Jim Burgess laughed out loud.

“Orders,” he reminded the old stage driver, “is orders; when the supe says fer me to send that b’arskin overcoat down to Fairplay with yuh t’-day, yuh takes it! An’ they ain’t no argument—they ain’t no exchange o’ words worth mentionin’.”

Whiskers Graham glared.

“However,” said the barn boss, deciding not to antagonize the old driver further, “I’m also sendin’ something else down with yuh o’ more interest to yuh, mebbe. I’ve booked that purty school-teacher who is goin’ out on her vacation fer yuhr down trip t’-day—she’s goin’ to Fairplay to see some friends.”

Whiskers smiled at that announcement.

“Miss Rosie Roach?” he asked, hopefully.

“The same,” said the barn boss, “an’ seein’ yuh ain’t sentimental about the b’arskin overcoat I’ll wrap it fer yuh an’ put it up on the seat with yuh, whar yuh kin watch it. The supe wrote he wouldn’t take twenty-five dollars for that b’arskin overcoat—so yuh gotta be keerful; ef yuh want, I’ll wrap up that purty schoolma’am, too—ef yuh’re bashful.”

The old driver shook his head.

“Leave her be,” he said, “but as fer the supe not takin’ twenty-five dollars

fer that b’arskin coat, sa-a-ay, I wouldn’t give him two-bits!”

The stage started for Fairplay fifteen minutes later. High on the driver’s seat, handling the reins on the six frisky mustangs, sat Whiskers Graham, known up and down the South Park district as not only the oldest driver on the Q-B lines, and the man with the longest, whitest whiskers, but the most fearless driver in Colorado as well. An expert, with half a century’s service on the mountain trails behind him, old Whiskers took delight in handling the meanest bronchos he could get in his six-horse hitch. He picked his teams for speed—and he let ’em run. That was why he always covered the long, winding Como-to-Fairplay route in faster time than any of the other drivers. He wasn’t reckless, but he “knew his onions,” as the bosses said.

Now, as he started his agile broncs and the big creaking stage out of Comb, old Whiskers was divided between two strong emotions. He was tickled to death, for instance, that right beside him, on the driver’s long seat, sat Miss Rosie Roach, yellow-haired, blue-eyed, dimple-cheeked, the fairest girl in the South Park region, and school-teacher at the Como school. She was his only passenger, but she made up in beauty and charm for lack of numbers. It was nice to have her along to chat with, but——

Whiskers cast a wary eye at a big package done up in tough brown wrapping paper that rested on the seat between himself and the pretty girl. That was Superintendent Joe McGraw’s b’arskin overcoat, which Whiskers was taking down much against his will. It wasn’t so nice to have that thing along! Dark thoughts raced through Whiskers’ mind as he stared at that bulky package, containing the tanned and dressed and tailored remains of what had once been a mighty big Colorado black bear.

“Tain’t right,” grumbled Whiskers,

under his breath, as cold perspiration broke out on his brow, "to make *me* take that *thing* down to Fairplay! It's bad luck, sure! Pore ol' Bill Troy was wearin' that when that Elk Creek rustler ambushed him an' plugged him right through the haid—ugh! An' Sam Reedy was wearin' it, havin' borrowed it, when lightnin' got *him*."

The old stage driver glanced at the heavens.

"Waal, it won't lightnin' t'-day, anyhow!" he said.

"I beg pardon?" the pretty Miss Roach said questioningly.

"I was jus' remarkin' foolishness to myself," explained Whiskers, shaking out the reins in an embarrassed manner and clucking hastily to his six-horse outfit. "How yuh like these hosses, Miss Roach, ef I may ask? Them roan leaders are sure fancy step-pers, ain't they? I got 'em off a Three H rancho grub wagon—they was too fast fer the cook—ran away twice."

"My goodness!"

"Ya," went on Whiskers proudly, "an' them swing hosses—them bays—purty, ain't they? That off bay came from Monte Vista. He was a outlaw until he was six year ol', too! Buck, my lands! But not any more—but he still kin travel some. His mate I got off a ore wagon from Central City, an' the wheelers, here, the blacks, I got from the circus was through here three years back—they was too gay fer the circus."

"My goodness!" said the young woman, shivering slightly, "an' are yuh sure they're—they're safe?"

Whiskers misunderstood the girl's shiver.

"Come, Miss Roach, it is kinda cool t'-day," he said, "yuh just take this here raincoat slicker an' slip it over yuhr shoulders. Thar now—yuh'll feel warmer—I should o' knowed it would be breezy up here fer yuh, an' yuh not used to it."

"Thank you!" said Miss Roach.

"Funny thing!" chuckled Whiskers, getting back to his favorite subject after a suspicious look at the paper bundle containing the b'arskin overcoat, "it was jus' a day like this, with the breezes driftin' down off Mount Baldy up yonder, in October er November, las' year, that them dog-gone bay swing hosses got to actin' frisky! That off hoss he kicks out one side o' the traces, scarin' my leaders, what start humpin' theirselves, while the wheelers, gettin' scared——"

The pretty school-teacher's face went white, and she gripped the edge of the seat with trembling hands, while her eyes went wide as saucers as she stared down on the sleek backs of Whiskers' six fast-trotting horses.

"Please, Mr. Driver!" she begged, "can't we—oh, I'm scared—don't talk any more about—about——"

"What?" asked Whiskers above the rumble of the coach.

"I'm frightened," repeated the girl, "let's change the subject from hosses to—to—well—the weather."

Whiskers put a hand to his ear.

"Hey?"

The pretty school-teacher became desperate.

"Let's talk about robbers," she suggested, wildly. "You know, sir—robbers—*r-o-b-b-e-r-s*—or anything else—but not, please, about these hosses! I'm really a 'fraidy cat, I suppose."

Whiskers caught the word "robbers" and grinned. He started to fish in an inner pocket of his old leather jacket just as the six-horse team took a sharp curve at a smart trot. The old stage-coach swayed dangerously. Miss Roach's face went pale. At that, Whiskers decided that he wouldn't do as he intended. He brought his hand out of his pocket—empty—and laid it on the trembling girl's arm to reassure her.

"Why, sister!" he bellowed, above the roar of the screeching stage, "don't be

so scared, gal! I ain't seen a robber up this road in ten years! O' course thar used to be some—like ol' 'Jagged Knife Keating,' who kilt them four men at Mesquite Town in the '80s—he was a bad aigg—yessir—I mean yes, ma'am! He was a tough cooky; an' then thar was 'Lame Pete,' that guy who——"

Old Whiskers broke off suddenly.

"But ef yuh're scared o' robbers, gal," he said, "we won't talk about 'em no more. I'll jus' tell yuh about the time I was comin' down this grade right here with a full load o' tourists, from the mines yonder, when that off roan sees a rattlesnake in the road ahead an' shies, an' a wheel comes off and I sure had to——"

"Please!" begged the unhappy, jolting girl, and at the same moment Whiskers' hand slipped down off her shaking arm and lit, for a fraction of a split second, on the brown paper package that rested on the seat. Whiskers jumped as if the rattlesnake he had just been telling about had struck at him. The mere touch of that b'arskin overcoat package sent shivers racing up and down his back. The girl's scream further alarmed him.

"What——?" he began, glancing at her, but at that moment both roan leaders jumped halfway out of their harness, skidding toward the far edge of the road, which overhung a deep gulch. The bay swing team shied, too, and jumped.

"Whoa!" whooped Whiskers, hauling back on his ribbons.

And at that moment, a couple of yards ahead of the roan leaders, a hatless, coatless man stepped from a clump of willows, a large gun in one hand. He waved the gun at Whiskers threateningly.

"Stop!"

The old driver was already sawing on the lines before he saw the apparition ahead. It was too late to disobey. He played in the reins, expertly, all the time

calling soothingly to his horses. The big stagecoach stopped within its own length, so that the stranger was waiting at the right front wheel hub.

"Say," he growled, gruffly, "good thing yuh stopped, ol'-timer! I'm sot on gettin' me a lift down the road a piece. I'm kinda bunged up—hoss stepped in a gopher hole back o' here a bit in the hills an' threw me—hurt my arm an' laig."

Whiskers was shaking like a leaf.

"Dog-gone!" he began, "I guess——"

The stranger waved the gun at him again.

"Yuh're guessin' outa turn, grandpa!" he cried. "Yuh clamp them teeth t'gether an' keep yuhr guessin' to yoreself. I'm comin' up—hold them danged broncs quiet!"

The man came up. He tossed a little, heavy bag into the stage seat and then came up himself, with a painful effort. He grinned at the speechless schoolteacher. Then he picked up a length of rope off the top of the stage and, without a word, tied Whiskers' feet together snugly. Then he tied his hands together in front. Then he pushed the old man rudely, shoving him along the seat.

"I'm sure lucky," said the stranger, holstering his gun serenely. "I wanted a nice ride in a hurry. I'll handle these nags fer a few miles, an' I'd throw yuh out now, ol'-timer, ef it wasn't that we might meet somebody an' it wouldn't look nice ef yuh wasn't along with us, but we'll pass 'em so fast that nobody will notice that yuh are trussed up like a calf fer brandin', an' ef yuh holler I'll——"

"Whar yuh want to go?" asked Whiskers miserably.

"That's my business!" snapped the stranger, reaching over to pat the cringing girl on one shoulder, "it's whar we're goin', honey, that really counts! I never figgered on finding a stagecoach an' a purty gal all to once, an' me need-

in' transportation an' charmin' company, too."

"Say, yuh!" protested Whiskers, bristling.

"Aw, shet up!" said the gunman, shoving Whiskers farther along the seat. "I ain't talkin' to yuh, Merry Christmas! But I'll tell yuh how far yuh're goin', brother! When we gits down around that red rock section me an' the lady here is gettin' off—an' yuh an' yuhr hosses are goin' on—over the cliff inter Big Muddy River—ef I figgers correctly. Yuh kain't drive tied up, an' ef I whack them nags after we're off—"

The girl screamed in terror.

"Waal, I might have knowed this!" howled Whiskers dismally. "Dog-gone that Burgess anyhow—that—"

Whiskers' eyes dropped to the bad-luck b'arskin.

"Ho!" cried the stranger, suddenly, "what have we here, folks, done up like a million dollars? Must be kinda precious seein' how ol' Me-Thuse-Lum here looks at it. Let's see!"

The gunman ripped the package open with an oath.

"A coat!" he yelled, delightedly, "*A b'arskin overcoat, an' me like to freezin' t' death, too!*"

He slipped into the big, shaggy coat. Then he sat down, between Whiskers and the girl, and took over the reins. He swore at the horses and swung the whip, and the big coach lurched forward suddenly. The pretty school-teacher put her little hands to her face in terror. Old Whiskers groaned aloud in his misery. Everything would go wrong now, with the bandit wearing that unlucky b'arskin overcoat! The whole outfit would probably plunge off the road at the first sharp turn and drop a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet into the Big Muddy River or onto the spear-like points of some pine trees in the canyon below. Pleasant thought! Whiskers shivered and cursed the su-

perintendent roundly, but silently, while the gunman swore at the six-horse hitch and whipped them forward. The stranger was evidently in a hurry.

Down the road whirled the stage-coach, swaying from side to side, all six horses at a gallop, with a madman in a great shaggy overcoat handling the ribbons. The girl began to sob, while Whiskers continued to swear over the b'arskin coat and to wonder where in heck the stage would land eventually. The old driver held his breath as the vehicle took the turns on two wheels, scraping the hubs on the jutting rocks in the cliff face. The stranger wanted speed, and he was getting it. The six horses were running madly. They seemed to sense that something terrible was wrong and they wanted to get away from it. The whip cracked over their ears. Curses urged them on.

"Giddap—dag-gone it all—giddap!"

And then the whip would crack again.

The stage covered the first mile in nothing flat, almost. There was nothing on the road, fortunately. The second mile took a trifle longer to cover, seeing it was up grade; but whatever time the bandit driver lost on the second mile he made up on the third mile, which was mostly downhill. How the stage did fly! It threatened, at times, to overtake the black wheelers and literally run over them. The wheelers had their tails tucked down between their hind legs and were running like deer, occasionally stumbling on the galloping heels of the swing team, which would have run faster if the roan leaders weren't in the way. The roans, bless their hearts, were not as excited as the other four horses in the hitch. They couldn't hear the ominous threat of the rumbling coach right on them, as the wheelers could, for one thing. And for another, the whip wouldn't reach their flanks, no matter how hard the bandit driver tried to make it stretch,

for the whip was short. Old Whiskers had never needed a whip for the speedy roans. He thanked his stars now that the leaders couldn't be reached. If they could—

Another mile spun under the shrieking wheels. Miss Roach was pale and her red eyes told their own story. The bandit was roaring profanity at the horses. Old Whiskers was mumbling prayers now, convinced that his time had surely come. With all his daring, he had never driven his horses along this stretch of treacherous road at such a breakneck speed! Another mile! Another! And another! The big coach scraped a sapling along the road and snapped it off clean. The coach swayed dizzily for a second. Whiskers' groan echoed loudly.

"Shet up!" whooped the bandit driver.

"Sufferin' cats!" wailed old Whiskers, hopelessly.

"Oh, please!" screamed the frightened girl.

"Shet up, both o' yuh, I say!" roared the wild driver, with a volley of oaths, and he shook out the reins again, so that the six-horse hitch fairly flew. But old Whiskers could not remain silent any longer.

"Holy mackerel!" he moaned.

"Say!" shouted the madman in the bearskin overcoat, glancing at Whiskers suddenly, "what ails yuh? Didn't I tell yuh to dry up? Ef yuh don't, I'll throw yuh off."

Old Whiskers blubbered in his fright.

"Mister!" he yelled shrilly. "I—I jus' kain't help it—I—that is—that off roan leader thar has the bit clean outa his mouth—another minute an' we'll smash."

The bandit peered at the roan leaders.

"Naw, he ain't!" he howled, "I kain't see—"

"He has!" wailed Whiskers, "he has! Yuh gotta fix it afore he gits in his haid

to jump off the road—he's a spirited hoss, anyhow."

The bandit sawed on the reins.

"I'll fix it," he cried, "seein' it ain't time fer the ol' trap to go over yit! But ef he ain't got that bit out, as yuh say, I'll come back here an' throw yuh off."

"Yuh look an' see!" insisted Whiskers.

Hauling on the ribbons, setting the big brake, the madman driver eventually brought the six-horse hitch to a panting stop. He lumbered down off the stage, after drawing the reins through the dash rail, and after pausing to plant a kiss on the white face of the pretty schoolteacher, who shrank back in terror from him. He looked like a great nightmare, in that huge, shaggy, black bearskin overcoat.

"Lissen, girlie," he purred, huskily, "I'll fix that bit, an' then we'll fly fer the next few miles; then yuh an' me will git off an' watch this ol' stage an' ol' grandpa here go skyrocketin' off the trail straight inter space."

Grumbling the man climbed down the side of the stage.

He groped his way along the steaming horses. The off wheeler, Blackie, started as the stranger passed him, and Whiskers grunted softly. Steve, the off swing horse, likewise jumped as the man passed him, and Whiskers grunted again, louder this time. He was gasping now. The man in the big coat reached the leaders and stepped quickly around in front of Bluey, the off leader. The roans saw that apparition simultaneously. A huge, shaggy, black bear, stalking on its hind legs! The roans were half frightened before they saw *that*, and now, just as the black monster stepped in front of them, came a wild yell from old Whiskers.

"Yip-pee-eee-yow-ow-ow-ecce!"

The roans jumped into their collars as if a bolt of lightning had touched their sensitive flanks. The bay wheelers plunged forward instantly. A roan

shoulder caught the walking "bear" and sent it spinning headlong off the road. The black wheelers tightened the traces immediately. The big coach shot forward like a cannon ball! A black something, shaggy and indistinct, went rolling down the rocky embankment, headed straight for the Big Muddy River. The six horses were running now—*running as they had not run before*—because that wild, "*yip-pee-yowie*," in that familiar voice, had been enough, to say nothing of the bear that had appeared under their noses! That yell they recognized as their master's war cry. They stretched!

Bracing his knees against the dash, old Whiskers worked at the tangled reins with his tied hands. The school-teacher, who might have been a help, had fainted. Eventually, he gave up the task and began to call out soothingly to the running team. Again and again he spoke to them, as he worked frantically to untie the knots on his hands with his teeth. It was a long job, but finally he got one hand free. It took but a moment to loose the other one. Quickly he bent and untied the rope from his feet. Then he got the reins and got them quick.

The school-teacher regained consciousness just as the big coach lumbered slowly across the bridge into Fairplay.

"Where—where is that—that man?" she asked, opening her big blue eyes anxiously, but Whiskers was at ease now.

"Everything is hunkydory," he assured her. "We're in Fairplay; be at the barn in a minnit—the stage station is thar—I'll help yuh off."

The six-horse hitch stopped of its own accord at the stage barn. For some reason, no one ran out to assist in the unloading, so old Whiskers himself helped the pretty Miss Roach down. She was weak and trembling. He helped her to a bench just beside the

stage-station door, where she sat down. Then Whiskers went back up on the stage for the girl's grip and the little bag the stranger had tossed aboard.

A man ran out of the barn.

"Hey, Whiskers, got my b'arskin coat?"

The old driver climbed down before he replied.

"No, Mr. McGraw, sir, I ain't got yuh b'arskin coat!" cried Whiskers, gruffly. "I lost it—in the Big Muddy River—eight miles back up the road."

"Lost it?"

"Yessir, lost it!" repeated Whiskers, sourly, "an' ut was a blamed fine loss, too, all things considered. That b'arskin coat was unlucky, sir."

"I wouldn't o' took twenty-five dollars fer it!" said McGraw angrily, "an' ef yuh lost it through carelessness, ol' man, I'll——"

Whiskers held up a protesting hand.

"I lost it through design an' deceit!" he cried, hotly. "Thar was a man inside o' it—a man with a gun—a danged outlaw who held me up, took over the reins, an' said he was goin' to wreck the whole shebang. He put on the coat. I happened to recollect that my roans had once run away on account o' seein' a b'ar, so I lied to him to git him down to examine their bits. I lost the b'arskin coat, boss, but I lost the feller, too, at the same time."

"Who?"

"I figger it was 'Demon' Bosler, a danged bank robber," said Whiskers softly, reaching into an inside pocket to pull out a circular. "I recognized him right off. It says here in this circular which I got six months ago that he's holdin' up banks right an' left an' that thar's a reward o' five hundred dollars on his haid. I'm goin' back to fish him outa the river."

"Bosler!" cried the young superintendent, "why, a man by that name held up the bank at Caseyville jus' a few hours ago—got away with three thou-

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sand dollars. They've offered a reward, too."

"He didn't git far," said Whiskers, holding up the heavy sack the bandit had left in the stage. "I guess this is it. I saved it, an' the team, an' the stage, an' the gal——"

The superintendent gasped.

"What gal?"

"Her!" said Whiskers, pointing to the school-teacher, and then he dived into a pocket, "but seein' yuh valued that dog-gone unlucky b'arskin so high I'll just pay yuh twenty-five dollars fer it, boss."

Whiskers counted out five five-dollar bills and looked up, holding them out to his boss. But his boss wasn't standing where he had been a moment before. Instead, the superintendent was ten feet away, his arms around pretty Miss Roach, who had run forward to meet him. Her head was on his shoulder. His face was all aglow with happiness.

Old Whiskers gasped.

"Dang sentimental wimmen!" he exploded. "Here it was me as saved her an' she collapses in the arms o' the *fust* young man she sees! Huh—here, boss,

I got twenty-five dollars fer that b'arskin."

The superintendent chuckled.

"Keep yuhr money, Whiskers!" he exclaimed, happily. "I don't care about no b'arskin coat as long as yuh brought Rosie here through safe, which she says yuh did with a awful lot o' trouble! Rosie was comin' to-morrow, I thought—an'—waal, yuh see, Whiskers, nobody knows it but yuh—she was—we are engaged—an' we're to be married right away an'——"

The old stage driver blinked.

"Waal!" he exclaimed, "it's a good thing I'm goin' to collect some rewards ef I got to buy a big weddin' present. Congratulations, boss—an' Missus Boss—but—but——"

"Yes?" asked the supe, genially.

"I kain't see fer the life o' me how a feller ownin' a unlucky b'arskin like yuh did could win a gal like—like——"

Whiskers stammered, stuttered, blushed, and turned away, while the superintendent and his bride-to-be smiled at him.

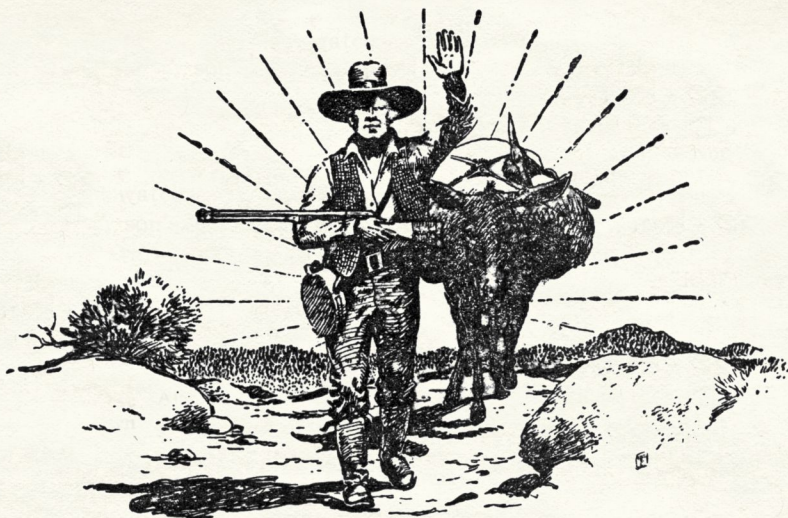
"Mebbe," admitted Whiskers, softly, "that ol' b'arskin wasn't so unlucky, after all!"



A SNOWPROOF HIGHWAY

WISCONSIN can now lay proud claim to a new kind of highway—one that is snowproof—which will be particularly attractive in a State that is subject to more than its share of the rigors of winter. This unique road, fifteen miles in length, has just been constructed in Marathon County, and is the first of its kind in the State.

The highway is built one foot higher than the country through which it runs. And engineers believe that this device will cause it to be windswept and free from snow for the greater portion of the winter. Hope is held out, however, for those who wish still to enjoy an old-fashioned winter in the fact that ditches are so constructed that they may be used by sleighs.



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 great mineral deposits of California occur in more or less well-defined belts. This orderly system of mineralized areas, spread in distinct zones throughout the State, is in sharp contrast to the irregular location of the mining districts in many of the large mineral producing States of the West. In considering the mining regions and the present mineral possibilities of California, the broad belting of ore-bearing areas—dependent to a large extent upon the general rock formations of the region—affords a rough guide to the prospector contemplating a search for metals in the more inaccessible and partially explored sections of the State.

Along the Pacific coast, from the

vicinity of Santa Barbara to Humboldt County lies the most westerly of these belts. The coast range of mountains, built up by the tremendous stresses of the earth's vast, subterranean forces from folded masses of sedimentary rocks, is a comparatively young structure, geologically speaking. The sedimentary rocks of which the range is composed are broken through in places by intrusions of igneous rocks such as the dark basalts. Yet, strangely enough, the mountains are singularly free from deposits of the ordinary metals. Instead of the ores which might be expected, a persistent belt of quick-silver minerals follows through the range and is at its best just north and south of San Francisco Bay. The

quicksilver ores are commonly associated with opal—the latter frequently in valuable quantity—and are found among other places in the Clear Lake region, and at New Almaden and New Idria in Santa Clara and San Benito Counties.

To the east of the central valleys lies the long and imposing block of the great Sierra Nevadas. They are chiefly composed of clayey and sandy sedimentary rocks folded and twisted by the enormous pressures involved in the sub-surface movements of the earth. They form a belt along the western part that increases in width toward the north. These sedimentary rock formations are of an early geological age and they have been broken into by enormous masses of granitic rocks which form another belt moderately extensive in the north but gradually widening toward the south until in Tulare and Kern Counties these intrusive rocks compose nearly the entire make-up of the range.

The famous gold belt of California is in reality a succession of astonishingly rich gold deposits beginning as a narrow fringe along the foot of the Sierra Nevadas but widening toward the north until in Butte and Plumas Counties it covers an area sixty miles broad. Along this belt are located many of the great gold-mining districts of the United States. Gold camps are dotted throughout the southern counties which touch upon this belt from El Dorado to Mariposa. The famous Mother Lode, and the Kennedy, the deepest mine in California, are both situated in this gold-bearing belt. Farther north in Nevada County the celebrated Nevada City and Grass Valley districts lie within the limits of the belt. Placer deposits abound. Lone prospectors work the draws and gulches, the hillsides, and the creeks inside the confines of the belt. The pickings are not always rich, but wages can be cleaned up in countless places. Colors,

or traces of gold can be found scattered throughout the whole length and breadth of the zone. The millions in gold bullion that have already been taken out are legion. The millions that may yet be produced from the belt cannot even be estimated.

Parts of the gold-bearing veins exposed in this area show signs of having been deposited at great depth, according to geologists and scientists. Perhaps the value of the gold lying below and far beneath the present workings will never be learned. The figure must be stupendous. Toward the northern extremity of the belt in Tehama, Lassen, and Plumas Counties the gold is covered by various types of volcanic rocks. The belt emerges from this great protecting blanket of rock above Redding and continues north to the Oregon line. It is from fifty to sixty miles wide in this section and includes the gold-bearing districts in Shasta, Trinity, and Siskiyou Counties, in what is generally known as the Klamath Mountain region. Both veins and placer gold deposits are widely distributed. Hydraulic outfits are numerous. Though as a rule the placer mines are the more productive, rich veins occur in the Coffee Creek section.

Toward the south of the State gold-bearing quartz veins appear in San Diego, Riverside, and Los Angeles Counties in the mountains which form a continuation of the Sierras of Lower California. However, with the exception of San Diego County where the Banner and Julian districts are fairly large producers the gold output from these deposits is small. The auriferous quartz veins occur generally in or near metamorphic schists which lie embedded in granite.

A less well-defined belt of copper-bearing deposits follows the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas and continues in a north-northwesterly direction into the Klamath Mountains. Economically

valuable copper deposits have been located in Calaveras, Placer, and Nevada Counties, as well as in the important Kemick and Bully Hill districts in Shasta County.

The section of California east of the Sierra Nevadas differs greatly from the rest of the State. The region is predominantly arid. Mountains occur in smaller detached ranges, generally with a pronounced northward trend. The mining districts therein are scattered, irregular, and fail to fall into any broad belting system as do the mineral zones of the rest of the State. Quartz veins carrying varying gold values are found throughout the Randsberg district in Kern County. In San Bernardino and Riverside Counties auriferous veins occur in granitic rock formations, but the districts throughout the desert range are isolated and comparatively unimportant.

Along the eastern boundary of the State are mineral-bearing veins carrying values in both gold and silver. These occur, among other places, at Hayden Hill, Lassen County, and in Alpine, Inyo, and San Bernardino Counties. Veins carrying silver values alone are found near the Mojave district in San Bernardino County.

Iron deposits are scattered throughout both the southern and northern parts of California, but as yet they have apparently little immediate economic

importance. Most of these deposits carry magnetite. They are found at Herault, Shasta County; Dale, San Bernardino County, and in the Eagle Mountains, Riverside County. In Madera County are the famous Minarets Mountains, long recognized as one of the most important reserves of iron ore in the west coast region of the United States.

To S. A. W., Yamhill, Oregon: Placer claims on government surveyed land must conform in shape, area, and position to the legal subdivisions established by the government. The lines must be run straight.

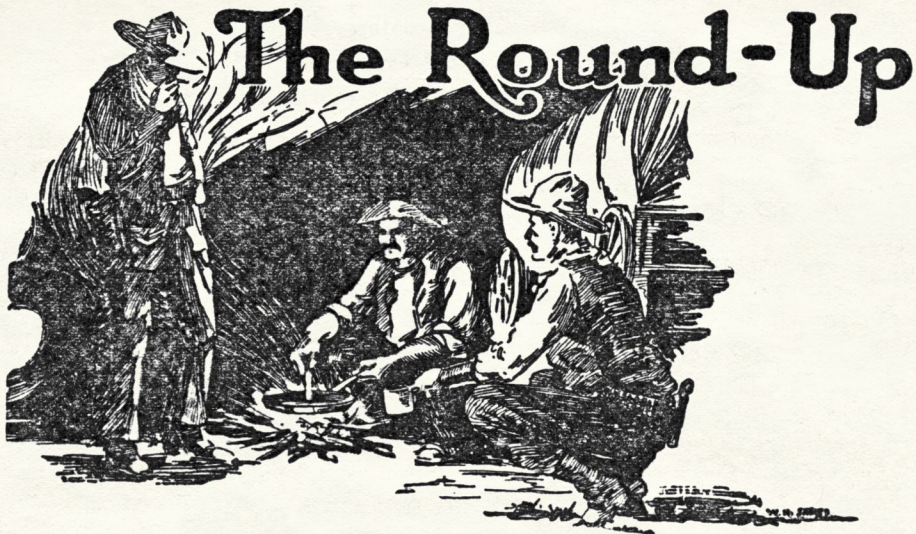
On unsurveyed ground placer claims may be of any shape necessitated by the topography of the country. It is not necessary to have a survey made before staking. Location posts and discovery shaft, however, must be so well identified and established in your report and affidavit that the limits of the claim will be made clear. The claim should be recorded at the office of the clerk of the county in which it lies within ninety days after discovery.

To J. M., Havana, Cuba: Strictly speaking, a ledge is a horizontal layer or stratum of rock, such as a slate ledge, or a shale ledge. A vein, or a lode that dips, that is, has a sharp inclination, should not be spoken of as a ledge.



THE HIGH VALUE OF ESKIMO DOGS

ONE is accustomed to the idea that Eskimo dogs are valuable; but a recent report of the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories reveals the really high valuation put upon the animals. The arctic-bred dogs—so the report goes—are worth so much that they may be exported from the Canadian arctic archipelago only for specific purposes and with the permission of the aforesaid commissioner of these territories.



IT has come again, folks, the beginning of a brand-new year. The promises, the resolutions, the hopes of last week are in the springtime of their fulfillment. As to the promises and the resolutions, they're up to us, folks, aren't they? As to the hopes—well, their coming true depends a lot, too, on our keeping promises and resolutions, but not altogether. For, while the realization of hopes may rest on many things, also, the "breaks" must be with us, if we are to get what we long for.

Now, we are sure that in the hearts of thousands and thousands of our readers there burns a great desire to get away from cities and towns and live in the country. While spring is far from being in the air, there is something about turning the corner on January 1st, with the days growing longer, and the first January thaw with us, that tells us spring is on the wing.

Something, at least, stirs our readers who are city-bound to thinking of breaking the ties that hold them fast to bench and desk. We may not be correct in our reasoning, but we do know that hosts of you sure get the longing at this time of the year stronger

than at any other. We know this because we are snowed under with letters asking for advice as to how best to make a safe retreat to freedom.

We are sure put to it to know how to answer some of you as to just what to do. However, we'll make here at this time some general remarks, and we hope that many of you who have also had experience in this matter will get up and tell us how you feel about it.

While we are the last who would want to advise any one, much less any of you who have been our friends and supporters for so many years, to do a foolish thing, we don't yell, as some do: "Don't! Stay where you are!"

On the other hand, we don't cry: "Sure, go to it! 'He who hesitates is lost!'"

No, we do neither of these things. We stay in the middle of the road. We say: Do you really feel sure that you would rather live in the country than in the city? Of course, you don't know for sure, but, in the circumstances, do you feel confident that you would like it better, and—what is just as important, if not more so—would your family be more contented there?

Let's say that you answer these ques-

tions in the affirmative. What then? First, remembering that you only think you would rather live in the country than in the city, you must now decide in just what manner you would be happier living there. Also, in just what way you would like to support yourself.

Having decided these two questions, try to discover if it is really possible for you to arrange to live in the country in the manner you would choose, and if you can get there the work you would like to do. Your problems are growing harder. How can you answer these questions? By making inquiry, and then if the questions can be answered to your satisfaction, by trying the thing out.

It is natural for old-timers to raise a cry of warning to those who would try country life if they have been long used to coddling city ways, to living like bees in hives, to browsing and working along with great herds of their fellows. The old-timer knows that the tenderfoot is in for trouble, real hardship. He looks back on his own struggles, and he feels compassion for those who would be pioneers.

But did these old-timers stop for a moment and do a little thinking, they would remember that it is a very human trait to think the other fellow's lot is far easier than our own. "A doctor makes his living so pleasantly," says the lawyer. "All a doctor has to do," ruminates the attorney, "is to drive round, make some calls, look down a few throats, and get paid for it." And then the doctor has his side of it; thinks that the lawyer has an easy time, and that his is the hard one. Thus, men who live their lives in the open, though they would not for an instant think of changing their mode of life, feel that the city man has a mighty soft time of it and earns his livelihood with little difficulty.

But to get back to those of you who

want to leave the city and go to the country. Don't think that because you may have a little more book learning than the open-air man you will be smarter than he is when it comes to making good, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." No, believe us when we tell you that if you want to go back to nature, you must learn how, for it is indeed a business that must be learned.

Our best advice is first to work for a man who is making his living in the country. By doing this, you'll discover one thing, at least, whether you like the country or not. Also, you'll be learning all the time about how a living is made in the country. Whatever you do, if you're a sure-enough tenderfoot, don't take your savings and buy a place. For if you do, the chances are a hundred to one that you'll fail, because you'll not have the slightest idea how to run it.

The chances of your making much money in the country, under the most favorable circumstances, are small. But this to us is a matter of small moment, for you'll have your freedom, be living where you want to live, and doing what you want to do. Also, you'll be almost sure to have better health, and if you have children they'll get a fair "break," which children surely don't get if brought up on city streets, for, rich or poor, there is really no place for them to play, save on the sidewalks.

There is this about the country, with your own place free and clear, you'll not starve nor freeze. Your living is right there, yours if you're man enough to get it.

Now, men and women who have experienced life in the country, please come forward and give your advice; and, as usual with all straight-shootin' Westerners, if you don't agree, even with one single word we've said, you say so. We know you will.

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 coming week. In the next issue, right here, at the end 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 is the meaning of "walking beaming"?
2. When a bucking broncho twists his body in the air so that the sunlight hits his belly, what is he called?
3. If a rider "blows" a stirrup, what is meant?
4. A scornful name for mild bucking is known as.
5. What are the roots of mesquite often used for?
6. Why is this possible?
7. The capital of Utah is.
8. Stirrups are usually made of what?
9. What is meant by hobbled stirrups?
10. What effect is obtained by using these?

Answers to last week's questions: 1. Leather straps hanging on either side from the rigging ring, other ends run through the cinch rings used to tighten up the cinch. 2. A small slotted leather flap on one or both sides of the saddle, usually at the base of the cantle or fork, or both. 3. To hold the long free end of the latigo through the slit when cinched up. 4. Stirrup. 5. Mound builders. 6. Great Salt Lake. 7. 1824. 8. Oats. 9. Sagebrush. 10. Saddlebag.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

WEAKLING OF THE WILD

By Max Brand

"Never rush a Dunlin—it don't pay." This utter calmness in the face of danger indicates that the speaker belongs to the reckless heroes whom Brand best pictures and WESTERN STORY readers most admire.

THE ROUND-OUT

By Seth Ranger

Describing his friend Poke as a man of many loves—a bee fitting from flower to flower—Hardrock reserves the wasp act for himself.

SHORTY'S VACATION DAZE

By Ray Humphreys

The sheriff complains that his jail is crammed with crooks, but none of them the particular crook he wants.

Also Stories by **HOWARD E. MORGAN HARLEY P. LATHROP**
ROBERT J. HORTON EDWARD H. SMITH and Others



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.

NOW that the holidays are over we can all settle down into our long winter's schedule. For some of us it will include skiing and skating. For others it may be a life of trapping. And for all of us it will mean long winter evenings. Letter pals can do much to fill these evenings for us. So pick your pen pals now. Here are a few to choose from.

Canadian cow-puncher.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: Here comes a young Canadian cow-puncher a-seeking friends. I live in central British Columbia, where a lot of ranching is carried on—sheep and cattle both. I break horses, and I love my work. I'd especially like to hear from some waddies in Oregon, Utah, Texas, New Mexico, and Montana.

Come on, folks, and fill the long winter evenings of a lonesome ho' here.

DONALD A. McDONALD.

Big Bar Creek Post Office, British Columbia, Canada.

From Holualoa.

DEAR GANG: I'm here to exchange news with all who care to drop a line far across the ocean to Aloha land. I'll tell all I know of our tropical wonderland, the paradise of the Pacific.

I'm an Hawaiian-born American of Japanese ancestry. I'm nineteen, and have just

finished high school. I've been captain of our high-school football team in my last year and am a lover of all kinds of sports. I can play the ukulele and the Hawaiian steel guitar.

Everybody, from all parts of the world, please write.

CECIL T. TANAKA.

Holualoa, Hawaii.

This Gangster knows the Peace River country.

DEAR BIG SISTER AND GANG: I was born in Alberta, twenty-three years ago. I've been in Victoria, British Columbia, Manitoba, and three or four of the States. If any of the Gangsters would like to find work in the west of Canada, just let them get in touch with me. I'm fond of riding, shooting, hunting, et cetera. I was in the Peace River country for about two years, and sure can tell of the grand life there.

LEONARD SWEENEY.

Box 529, Souris, Manitoba, Canada.

Looking for a prospecting pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder if there is a man in the Gang, twenty-five to fifty years, who would be interested in prospecting. I'm an old-timer and have something good in view. I'd like a good pard, one who loves nature in the rough and who would enjoy life in a log cabin far from the noise and confusion of the city. I'm a square-shooter. Would expect the other fellow to go fifty-fifty.

E. F. SHUTES.

617 Central Avenue, Nebraska City, Nebraska.

"Won't some of you hombres drop a line to a fellow who's working in the coal mines?" asks Eddie Wilson, Box 182, Coalwood, West Virginia.

Charles A. Miller, Star Route, Cold Springs, Kentucky, is a young man who served in the coast artillery at Pensacola, Florida, during the war. He is something of an amateur hunter and trapper and would like to hear from hombres interested in the out of doors.

"I have lots of time for pen pals," says Hershel Walker, Box 33, Alpine, Texas. All you folks who are looking for information concerning Texas had better get in touch with him.

Marjorie Dee is a young sixteen-year-old miss who would like to exchange city notes with some country lasses. She can be reached at 811 Sheridan Road, Chicago, Illinois.

"I've been through Yellowstone Park twice, and know quite a bit about the whole State of Wyoming," says Ernest Larson, Greybull, Wyoming, Box 256. Anyone seeking information about Wyoming had better get in touch with him. And any one who can offer information about Hawaii and Alaska are especially invited to be his pen pals.

San Saba Shorty.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a fourteen-year-old Texan kid who is living at present with my uncle on his ranch. I'm so small for my age that the Texas boys call me "San Saba Shorty." But that doesn't mean that I can't do lots of outdoor stunts. I can ride, shoot, and am a fair trapper. I'll be glad to hear from all the kids in the country.

RAYMOND DODD.

Patricia, Texas.

Hollow Tree book.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I want to tell you about my Hollow Tree book that I started almost a year ago. Every week I cut out The Hollow Tree section, and now I have almost enough to bind into a book. I have made many friends through the Old Holla,

and I like to look back at the dates and read the letters that my old friends once wrote in the dear Old Holla. Don't you think this a splendid idea, folks? Now I'm hoping to see my own letter in The Hollow very soon, and then I'll have a great many friends to trace back to that one little letter, if you'll all write to me. So don't disappoint me, folks. I want this latest addition to my Hollow Tree book to be the best of all—and to bring me a host of new friends.

I will exchange views and snaps with any of the Gang interested. FLORENCE HUNT.

104 Vineyard Street, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.



"I'm sending the small fee to be a member of The Tree," says Phyllis Field, 944 Tularosa Street, Los Angeles, California.

It costs nothing to belong, folks, but if you choose to wear The Hollow Tree badge, it costs you twenty-five cents in coin or stamps. Send it to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and state whether you want the pin style or the button for the coat lapel.

Information seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Is there a ranch near Cheyenne, Wyoming—about fifty or seventy-five miles out? If so, I'd like to hear from some of the cow-waddies there. I live in a town, but I sure do like the outdoor life. Just give me the mountains and turn me loose. I'm happy.

Hope to hear from some of you outdoor hombres, and will be overjoyed to get a line concerning this ranch outside of Cheyenne.

ANDREW C. KUBICK.

Box 156, Brownsville, Fayette County, Pennsylvania.

"I didn't get the chance to roam the wide-open spaces last summer as I had planned, so I am hoping to make some Western pen pals this winter to help me forget my disappointment. I'm seventeen. Would like to hear from some

hombres my age or older," says Joseph Halka, 17 West Poplar Street, Shenandoah, Pennsylvania.

Lee Cook, care of J. Puckett, Barnum, Wisconsin, is a hombre who is fond of hunting, fishing, and trapping. He likes all outdoor sports. Just now he's looking for some pen pals, so don't fail to get in touch with him pronto, folks.

This youngster is quite a rope spinner.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I'm only fifteen, I've been practicing a long time at rope spinning, and I can do quite a few stunts with a rope. Any new tricks that any one can tell me will be appreciated. I wish that some of the ranch boys would write to me. I'd like to get some letters from the Southwest. LOUIS KING.

914 East Forty-second Street, Gary, Indiana.

Winnipeg Gangster:

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Canadian girl living in Winnipeg, and wish to make friends with some ranch girls out West. I'll tell all I know about city life here in Canada in exchange for just a few lines of Western life. I promise to answer every letter.

ISABEL DAVIDSON.

481 Morley Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

"Is there space at the old hitching rack for my little black mare?" asks Peggy Burke, Box 144, North Little Rock, Arkansas. This miss would like pen pals from the West, from Australia, and from South America as well. She hopes to receive a bunch of mail, pronto.

"Just a lonely Gangster from Yakima, Washington," says Emma Pavlich, whose address is St. Elizabeth's Hospi-

tal. She would like to hear from girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty.

"I love the great outdoors and am planning on a hike to California next summer," says Violet Elaine Covy, Route 2, Grove, Oklahoma. This Gangster is nearly eighteen, and finishes high school this spring. She has been spending her summer vacations on a farm, and is used to the outdoor life. She would like to hear especially from girls who have worked their way West.

Nadine and Joyce Hoffman are two sisters, sixteen and eighteen, who live on a ranch in southern California. They ask for girl correspondents. Their address is Beaumont, California.

Some hombre's opportunity.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are a young couple living on a farm of one hundred and thirty acres here in Oklahoma. We want and need a young fellow about thirty years of age to help us—one who would like to settle down and work on shares with us. Let us hear from hombres, pronto.

MR. AND MRS. D. M. DECK.

818 North Fifth Avenue, Durant, Oklahoma.

"Is there room for another lonesome girl among the crowd?" asks Gladys M. Kaney, R. F. D. 2, Media Pennsylvania. This Gangster writes a nice letter and will make a good pen pal.

"I will be twenty-four this twenty-ninth day of January, 1928, and I'd appreciate a letter and card shower very much," says Pearl Leas, 2302 Shelby Street, New Albany, Indiana. This sister is a cripple and deserves your best letter. You will find her cheerful and very interesting, folks. She knows a great deal about music and can play several instruments. Don't forget the twenty-ninth, sisters.



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.

EVERY once in a while some pioneer mining camp of the West that every one has given up for dead comes to life again. This is happening right now out in Tombstone, Arizona. News of this resurrection has reached the ears of Bob Q., of Detroit, Michigan, and he is shooting some questions on the subject our way.

"I'm mighty interested, Mr. North, in the town of Tombstone, Arizona. To tell the truth, I was brought up on yarns of that old mining camp, for my dad hit the trail for that lusty site along in the late '70s. I reckon the town at that time lived up to the lugubrious name that old Ed Schieffelin tacked onto it, for according to dad there were plenty of saloon fights, gang brawls, and private quarrels. I used to like to hear dad talk about the thrilling days before the mines fizzled out, so to say.

"Now, the other day I ran across a piece in the newspaper that seemed to insinuate that Tombstone is coming to life again. Is this true? If so, what I am writing to you to find out about is

the climate and business conditions. The doctor has said that I've got to take my wife out to a place where the sun shines most of the time, and I'll have to land some kind of a job when I get there. What about the old mines? Are they being operated now? Just give me all the facts you can, Mr. North, and I surely will be grateful to you. If the climate is right, I'd like mighty well to make tracks for that Arizona town."

Well, we are mighty glad of a chance to air our knowledge of Tombstone, and it pleases us considerably to give a good report. I never could understand, anyhow, why anybody would go and christen a town Tombstone and expect it to live. It doesn't surprise us a bit that the mines were flooded and that the camp died a premature death. Now, however, in spite of its name, this old pioneer town is beating back. I think it would be hard to find another place just like it anywhere on the map. The old and the new keep company here side by side. Business and building are going on at a good smart clip. There is

talk of a new tourist hotel and a sanitarium, and Bob will be interested to hear that the celebrated Can-Can restaurant, one of the most renowned eating houses of the Southwest, has opened its historic doors again.

As for the climate. One citizen who has lived in Tombstone for a quarter of century affirms that it has the best climate in the Southwest. He swears it is never too warm and never too chilly. Old John Walker is quoted as saying that he lived in Tombstone after it became a deserted village because it had the best climate on earth. Well, the population is growing. Tombstone now has one thousand two hundred and seventy-eight citizens.

The mines are doing business again. Seventy men are laboring on seventeen leases of the Bunker Hill Mining Company. They are working the old dumps and shipping lead silver concentrates to Douglas for treatment. The Tejon mine at Gleason, twenty-five miles east, a silver mine of the '80s, has been bought by some Californians, who are retimbering the old shaft and getting ready for production. The Holmes Copper Company is also operating another old property which has a good history as a producer. Until recently, this mine had not been active since 1925. The last thirty cars shipped, however, were said to have averaged a return of twenty-five hundred dollars each in copper, silver and gold values. There are about seventeen hundred feet of shaft and eight thousand feet of drift work and crosscuts. It is said there are eight million tons of high-grade milling ore exposed and a similar amount running only about three per cent.

Altogether, we think Bob wouldn't be taking much of a chance to head toward this resurrected town of the Apache State. The climate would be good for his wife, and there should be a job for him.

Climate is a topic that is also interest-

ing Larry K., of Washington, D. C. "What kind of a climate has the State of Idaho, Mr. North? I'm thinking some of going out that way, and want to know what sort of weather I'd be likely to strike."

Larry must have been trying to get my goat when he thought up that tricky question. It's kind of a hard query to answer, for Idaho extends through seven degrees of latitude, or as far as from Indiana to Florida. In altitude, it ranges from about seven hundred feet to more than twelve thousand feet. Its northern end lies within the path of the rain areas which pass eastward from the north Pacific, while the southern portion lies well out of that path. As a result of these complex factors the climate is so diverse as to render description difficult.

The normal annual temperature ranges from about thirty-six degrees in the mountainous interior to about fifty-five degrees along the middle reaches of the Snake River. The coldest section of the State includes that part of the main range of the Rocky Mountains which forms a portion of the eastern border, together with the sparsely settled elevated regions in the interior, and the higher parts of the more important mountain ranges.

The plateaus and higher valleys, which make up a large part of the central and extreme eastern portions of the State, are somewhat warmer than the mountainous regions already referred to. The winters are cold and although the summers are short, they are long enough to enable the staple grains, grasses, and vegetables to come to maturity. The normal annual temperature in this section is about the same as that found in parts of Wisconsin. The great Snake River Plain, together with the lower valleys of the streams that join the Snake during its course across this plain, and a part of the region draining into the Great Salt Lake, possess

temperature conditions particularly suited to the needs of agriculture.

What T. F. D., of Springfield, Massachusetts, is looking for, however, is not only a temperature suited to the needs of a camper, but an ideal spot in which to pitch his tent or build his cabin. "I've camped in the open so much, Mr. North, that I'm plumb spoiled for living in any city," writes he. "Now I've got a plan in mind which I need a little of your good advice about. I've lived in California and liked it so much out there that I'm thinking of anking it back to the Golden State next summer. Can you tell me if it is possible to lease land in the National Forests out there? When I lived in California, it was

the usual practice of the valley settlers to load their children, pots and pans, and bedding into the old farm wagon and camp for the summer in the mountains. This was all right for one season, but I want if possible to lease some land and build a cabin on it that I could go back to every summer."

Well, we can understand that ambition. Yes, T. F. D. can lease land in California's national forests from the Forest Service. There are now in effect in the national forests five thousand permits for summer cabins, each occupying about a quarter acre of land. The two favorite summer home regions are in southern California and along the main roads across the Sierra Nevada.



AN ELEVATING RAILWAY

A RAILWAY that climbs from 4,541 feet above sea level to 8,437 feet in a distance of thirty-five miles may surely lay claim to the above title. This particular railway also has the honor of being officially cited by the Interstate Commerce Commission as the most difficult railroad to operate. This line of high distinction runs between Mack, Colorado, and Watson, Utah, a distance of seventy-five miles.

The Uinta line carries principally gilson, which, as most people know, is a very pure form of asphaltum which is obtained in large quantities in the Uinta Valley near Fort Duchesne. It is estimated that last year the railway carried thirty-five thousand tons of gilsonite from this deposit, probably the largest gilsonite deposit in America.

Crossing the precipitous Bookcliff Mountains, this short line railroad conquers some of the steepest grades and most acute curves known to railroad experience. Within a distance of twelve miles, from Atchee to Wendella, there are not fewer than two hundred and thirty-three bends, some of them attaining, it is estimated, the amazing curvature of sixty-six degrees. These abnormal curves, in which the road abounds, call for a specially constructed, rod locomotive. This type, it is anticipated, will eventually replace geared locomotives, which have hitherto coped with the steep grades.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers a 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 notices that seem 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 send 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.

FORGUS, WELLINGTON LEITH.—Please, Sonny, write to your "Ma," at 320 Cedar Street, Apartment 29, Seattle, Washington.

LEE, MABEL, and STONE, FLORENCE.—Mabel is as dear to me as my own child. Dear friends, please write to Mrs. Willie W. Royce, Solders Meadows, Gerlach, Nevada.

ELVIN, ALFRED.—We grieve because of your long silence. News of deaths and an unsettled estate. Write to your sister, Mrs. R. M. Sisk, at the old address or in care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, CHESTER J.—Was in Fresno last April. Write to mother, Noma, Alvin, and June, Route 9, Box 1874, Sacramento, California.

MEACHAM, WASHINGTON.—My grandfather's brother, who went out West from North Carolina. Information in regard to descendants and relatives appreciated by R. L. Meacham, R. F. D. 36, Ellerbe, North Carolina.

WALKER, CYRUS AUSTIN.—Last seen in San Angelo, Texas, in 1919. Five feet eight inches tall, weight a hundred and eighty-five pounds, blue eyes, curly, dark-brown hair. World War veteran, trained at Camp Bowie, in the Thirty-sixth Division. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. M. E. Keith, Hillland, Texas.

LOVE, F. A.—Nickname Chuff. Please write. I need you. Your Chubb, in care of this magazine.

EVAN.—Wherever you are, I send you best wishes and love. John B., in care of this magazine.

REICHEY, or DAVIS, BILLIE MAE.—Your old pal, trapper and woodsman, Ray, would like to hear from you. Post Office Box 442, Durand, Michigan.

DUNLAP, HENRY.—Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by Mrs. Bertie Cleere, Route 3, Blum, Texas.

HIBBERT, GEORGE W.—We are well, but wish you would write. Mrs. George W. Hibbert, R. F. D. 3, Cazenovia, New York.

SHERROD, GLADYS.—Last heard of in Knoxville, Tennessee. About twenty-five years old. Brown hair and eyes, five feet three inches tall. Information appreciated by an old schoolmate and chum, Miss Mary Davis, 919 South Twenty-first Street, Parsons, Kansas.

BERRY, F. L.—Last heard of in Sedalia, Missouri, in 1924. Tall, with reddish hair and eyes. A freeman. Write to an old friend, M. Davis, 919 South Twenty-first Street, Parsons, Kansas.

BURCHETT or BIRSHETT, GEORGE.—Has a sister, Maud Smith. Last heard of in fall of 1923. Please write to Miss Mary Davis, 919 South Twenty-first Street, Parsons, Kansas.

WILLIAMS, LILLIAN.—Last heard from in California. Please write to an old friend and schoolmate, G. L. B., at the old address.

J. F. J.—Please let me know where you are. I feel very differently about things now, and am very sorry. Write to Bess, in care of this magazine.

BREEDING or SHANER, Mrs. MYRTLE.—Also her daughter, Jessie, and son, Frank Shaner, by a previous marriage. Left Hendersonville, North Carolina, about 1912, for Frank, Pennsylvania, where Mrs. Breeding married again. Write to an old friend of Jessie's, Pinkie, in care of this magazine.

AERONDON, GILBERT, JOSEPH, IRENE, JOHN, CARL, MILTON, ADELIA.—Gilbert and Irene were last heard of at Dodge Center, Minnesota, about twenty years ago, the others at West Concord, Minnesota, at the same time. Information appreciated by Mrs. C. H. Case, Route 2, Akely, Minnesota.

BECTION, WALTER.—Colored. Left Omaha in April, 1926. Information appreciated by Miss M. L. Johnson, 5016 California Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

RUSSELL, COSTO.—Last heard from in Houston, Texas, in 1921. Dark, curly hair, and dark eyes, about five feet five inches tall, twenty-five years old. Information appreciated by Ella Mae Erskine, 705 Johnson Street, Amarillo, Texas.

KENNEDY, ALLAN DAVIDSON.—Formerly of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Please write to D. M., in care of this magazine.

RODEN, MARY ANN, MARGARET, ELIZABETH, and MICHAEL.—They left Cars Street, Cleone, Managhan County, Ireland, thirty-seven years ago, and came to America. Information appreciated by Thomas Hunter, 128 Henderson Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

ROBERT.—We are well, hoping you will grant that one wish. Please write to mother, Mr. and Mrs. C. T. L., of Jersey City, in care of this magazine.

FREDERIC.—I wish to find out who my parents were. When a baby, Mr. and Mrs. R. Burch adopted me and my sister, who is eight years older than I. I was born at Burlington, Iowa, in 1896; my mother died soon after, but my father may be still living. His brother, Al Frederic, of San Tama, Brazil, visited us when I was five years old. I am of Scotch-German descent. Information as to my relatives appreciated. Paul J. Frederic, 1220 Chestnut Avenue, Dixon, Illinois.

BROOKS, Mrs. HELEN BURCH.—Her husband, R. C. Brooks, a railroad engineer, was killed. Her daughter must now be thirteen years old. Mrs. Brooks was teaching school at Indian Head, Saskatchewan, Canada, when last heard from. Information appreciated by her brother, Paul Frederic Burch, now Paul J. Frederic, 1220 Chestnut Avenue, Dixon, Illinois.

SPARKS, BUSTER, RALPH WILLIAM, or EARL.—Letters returned from Sacramento, California. Write to an old friend, Orson, L. Teasdale, 1203 Iola Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah.

HEYMAN, JOHN HENRY.—How and where are you? You need not return, but write to your mother in Kansas. Mrs. J. C. H., in care of this magazine.

PARKER, MARY.—Mother, please write to me. Information appreciated by Johnnie Parker, P. O. Box 60, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

MCCOY, C. D.—You should care for Helen, who is homeless. Her mother has been missing since June, 1926. Write to L. M. K., 1203 Beardsly Street, Akron, Ohio.

VERDEN, JOHN.—Went to school in Forgan, Oklahoma, in 1924 and 1925. His home is near Oklahor, City. Send information to L. M. K., 1203 Beardsly Street, Akron, Ohio.

BRASHEARS, PAULINE.—Born 1910 or 1911, in Evansville, Indiana. Last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. Her father, Patrick or "Perry" Brashears, was a carpenter. Information appreciated by a cousin, Mrs. Beulah Bacon Churchill, 2817 West Congress Street, Chicago, Illinois.

MORRIS, MARY.—Formerly of Greenwood, Arkansas. Your daughter was born May 6, 1909, at Sparks Memorial Hospital, Fort Smith, Arkansas. Information concerning my mother, father, or relatives appreciated by Mrs. Robert Blakley, 628 East Jackson Avenue, McAlester, Oklahoma.

NEWT and BILLIE.—Ex-chief "Sparks," United States navy and wife from Honolulu. An old friend would like to locate them. R. L. I., care of this magazine.

ALLEN, LENARD ELBERT.—Have news for you. Write Mrs. Florence M. Shahan, 634 North Green Street, Henderson, Kentucky.

FLOYD, F. A. J.—Please send address home, so that I may get in touch with you. Dad.

WARR, GEORGE WASHINGTON or "SALTY."—Served on battleship "Missouri." Please send any information immediately to his uncle, Howard Sweitzer, Coalport, Pennsylvania.

BRADSHAW, CLAUD.—Left home March 7, 1927, because he was tired of school. Eighteen years old, five feet five inches tall, light hair, brown eyes, put red birthmark on left temple. Please send any information to his dad, Sam Bradshaw, Cardin, Oklahoma.

MOORE, Mrs. WILLIAM H.—Last heard of in San Diego, California. Has a half brother named Oberlie, who was a senator in the East. Address appreciated by Mrs. A. A. Siegel, 804 McAllister Street, San Francisco, California.

ARNOLD, ALTUS LEE.—Twelve years old. Black hair, brown eyes, and dark complexion. Gold crown on left upper front tooth. Scar on left thumb reaching from nail to second joint. Last seen at Eldorado, Nebraska, July, 1927. Parents anxious. Information appreciated by B. F. Arnold, 810 North Bourgeon Street, Altus, Oklahoma.

GEYMAN, MARY, MARY CONTAVE or WILLNAR TELL.—Last heard of at Allegan, Michigan, April, 1927. About forty years old. Serbian by birth. Information appreciated by Lester Geyman, Mauston, Wisconsin, R. D. 6.

BANEY, CLYDE, or DICK LAURIE.—Write to your pal, Frank Callaway, who is in Folsom. Box 14627, Repra, California.

COLEMAN, JOSEPH DANIEL.—Twenty-eight years old, dark, heavy set. Last heard from at Crestline, California, January, 1922. Expected to go to Mexico or Wyoming. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Louisa Coleman, 106 Thirteenth Street, Franklin, Pennsylvania.

HIGGINS, FRANK L.—Formerly of Headquarters Company. Sixty-second C. A. C. Your bunkie has searched two years for you. Information appreciated by J. H. D., care of this magazine.

BOB or BESS.—Please send mother one line. Live your own life. I shall not try to change it. Write A., 217 North Walker, Webb City, Missouri.

LISTER, Mrs. E. T.—Your son, who was placed in the Buckner Orphans' Home, Dallas, Texas, and left there in 1922 to enlist in the navy, is anxious to hear from you. Heard you were in hospital in San Antonio, Texas. Clevert C. Lister, Building 84, Mare Island, California.

LISTER, THOMAS P. and JACK W.—Please write to your brother, Clevert C. Lister, Building 84, Mare Island, California.

WESTCOTT, ERNEST and CHARLES.—Last heard from in 1911 at Medina, New York. Any information appreciated by Stella Westcott Houtman, 17 Wilmot Street, Glen Falls, N. Y.

C. G. L.—Am in training. Write me. Have news. Love can hide all faults. Punk, Kings Daughters Hospital, Waycross, Georgia.

FIELD, Mrs. NEVA M. or "LUCILE."—Last heard from two years ago, when we were living in Penn Yan. Mother anxious to hear from you. Mrs. Alvin Williams, 66 Evans Street, Geneva, New York.

SHARP, ERNEST B.—Last seen in Blackford Branch, Tennessee, in 1919, and at Stryker, Ohio, in 1920. About forty years old. Estate left by aunt. Only a few months left to claim it. Send information at once to M. E. S., Box 633, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FLEMMING, M. L. F.—Mother, seriously ill, wants to see or hear from you. Write at once to your sister Juanita, at Bethel, Kansas.

WALLACE, Mrs. VERLA MAY, and Mrs. BRADLEY.—Formerly of Dallas, Texas. Lost your address after you went to San Diego. Please write. Mrs. Bert Matheny, Cottenwood Falls, Kansas.

ROBERTS, THOMAS M.—Welsh by birth. Has been in the United States about eleven years. Believed to be in Springfield, Illinois. Please write to Owen R. Roberts, care of C. G. Gurney, R. R. 3, Paris, Ontario, Canada.

BARTHELME, JOHN P.—Last heard of through Red Cross at Sacramento, California, and Bradley, South Dakota. Was corporal in Company A, Thirty-eighth Battalion, United States Guards in the late War. Any information appreciated by H. M. May, 1329 Jefferson Avenue, Buffalo, New York.

FUNNY-FACE O. C. H.—Have no fear, but for mother's sake write soon. Menyo.

COLBURN, KENNETH.—Left home July 2, 1927, in a 1922 Ford roadster, Connecticut license. Tattooed skull and sword on right arm. Mother would like to hear from you. Edwin L. Colburn, Abington, Connecticut.

PEARSON, HUGO.—Last heard of in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1919. Have important news for you. Mrs. R. Pearson, 3526A Wyoming, St. Louis, Missouri.

AUSTIN, ELIJAH.—Had family of four girls and one boy. Moved from Sublette, Illinois, to Abilene, Kansas, in 1889. Last heard of in 1909. Information appreciated by Azariah Austin, Box 277, Deer Park, Washington.

DANIELS or MORRIS, EFFIE, nee BELCHER.—Lived in Waco, Dublin, Tyler, and surrounding country in central Texas. Information appreciated by 18.15.25. S., care of this magazine.

BLUM or BLOOM, MAX.—Tall, well-built, blond. About thirty years old. Born near Boston. Father a tailor. Last seen around Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by Mrs. Irving, care of Irving Shoe Company, Hollidays Cove, West Virginia.

PURNELL, JACK.—His son would like to hear from him or any of his relatives. Clyde Purnell, Sledge, Mississippi.

POLIC or POLLICK, FRANK.—Middle-aged, married. At one time was connected in real-estate game. Last seen around Cleveland and Elyria, Ohio. Please write to Mr. Irving, care of Irving Shoe Company, Hollidays Cove, West Virginia.

BLACK, S. C. or CRIT.—About thirty-four years old. Left Gray, Kentucky, eleven years ago for Covington, Kentucky. Would like to hear from him. John T. Black, Gray, Kentucky.

HARMER, HOWARD PAUL.—Born 1905, son of Fred and Loretta Harmer. Last heard from at Scotsguard, Sasatchewan, in summer of 1923. Estate to be settled. Write George C. Brown, Widdicomb Building, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

KNOCH, GLEN, or JACK McDONALD.—Dark hair and eyes. Six feet four inches tall, twenty-nine years old. Last seen at Tulsa, Oklahoma. Notify mother, Mrs. John Knoch, 915 Zern Street, Anahelm, California.

WHITNEY, WILLIAM.—Last heard of at Bertlesville, Oklahoma. Blond, medium height. Anxious to find you. Leonard Whitney, 2922 North Seventh Street, Saint Joseph, Missouri.

HILLAR, Mrs. PAUL or NAOMI.—Last heard from at Chicago, Illinois. Lived at Edwardsville, Illinois. Write to Mrs. Jack O'Brien, 10 East Ninth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MUNDICS, JOHN S.—Was stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in Battery F, 1st Field Artillery. Home in Dayton, Ohio. Have important news for you. Emery Goodrich, Ward 57th Infantry, Oak Forest, Illinois.

CRAMER, WALTER EUGENE.—Twenty-three years old, wavy hair, scar on left cheek and shoulder. Discharged from army, August 1, 1925, and went to Hendersonville, North Carolina, then to Spartanburg, South Carolina. Information gratefully received by his anxious mother, Mrs. Minnie Browne, 711½ Belle Street, Alton, Illinois.

TOMLINSON, I. B. and baby WINIFRED MAE.—Any information concerning them please write or wire Charles Shinn, Box 271, Astoria, Oregon.

TOM.—Please let me hear from my baby. Have been sick ever since you took her away. Ollie Tomlinson, Alder Hotel, Portland, Oregon.

DILTS, MARY.—Last heard of a year ago in Elgin, Illinois. Nineteen years old, blue eyes, red hair. Please send any information to her aunt, Mrs. Gladys Fischman, 1386 Paige Street, San Francisco, California.

FRANK OF EMPIRE 2668.—Please communicate with your wife at once. Mrs. H. F. W., 2087 Bush Street, San Francisco, California.

DEERFOOT, RICHARD.—Full-blooded Pawnee Indian. Last heard of in Louisville, Kentucky, traveling with the Royal Blue Shows Company in 1919. Was with the Missouri regiment at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in 1917 and 1918. Information appreciated by his worried sister, Miss Monaka Deerfoot, Station A Office, St. Joseph, Missouri.

HARRIS, ALFRED OVERTON.—Seventeen years old, five feet eleven inches tall, slim, dark. Quiet disposition. Left home September 15, 1927. Parents worried. Information appreciated by Mrs. Robert Harris, R. R. 4, Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

EDWARDS, NELLIE and HARVEY.—Your brother would like to find you. I was placed in an orphan's home in Kansas City, Missouri, June 26, 1909. C. A. Sams, Seenic, Washington.

DANIELS, J. E.—Letters returned from 3936 Wilcox Street, Chicago. Please write. M. Armstrong, Ivan River, Wisconsin.

GRIFFIN, MARVILLA.—Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. About thirty-five years ago you gave your baby girl away. Would love to hear from you or any descendants. Write to Garnett, care of this magazine.

SENK, CARL J.—Left home October 15, 1925. Last seen in Cincinnati, July 4, 1926. Was a baker. Please come home or write. Nothing to worry about. Send information to mother, care of this magazine.

MATRASS, MARIE.—Lived at 2915 Bush Street, San Francisco, California, in 1923. Please write to Norman R. Foster, 226 Baltimore, Middletown, Ohio.

ATTENTION.—Having served in the 135th, 136th, 139th, 140th and 54th Companies, Coast Artillery, would be glad to hear from boys who were in these companies from 1908 to 1915, inclusive. Thomas H. O'Neill, Box 215, East Hampton, New York.

ROBINSON, JAMES A.—At one time conductor on Mexican Central. Member of Conductors Union. Last heard of in Waco, Texas, 1912. His daughter, Carmen Jessie, would like to hear from him. Please write Mrs. M. Tashjian, 630 Keystone Street, Burbank, California.

PIERCE, CLAYTON.—Last heard from in Aberdeen, Maryland, February, 1925. Father ill. Write to him at 1729 Third Avenue, Arnold, Pennsylvania.

JEANEY, MARIE JOSEPHINE.—Native of Pollac and Seen Counties, Limerick, Ireland. Nurse. Was employed at 116 East Ninth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio, in March, 1923, also at 103 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey, in 1924. Nursed at West Hudson Hospital, Kearny, New Jersey. Information thankfully received by Crim Donlon, The Corner House, Longford, Ireland.

ERICKSEN, EMANUEL and OSCAR.—Last heard from in 1926. Your sister is anxious to hear from you. Violet Ericksen, Route 1, Box 51, Tyler, Minnesota.

BOB.—Is it because you are trying to forget me that you do not write? I miss you, and, if you still love me, write to Eva, care of this magazine.

KRAHE, HENRY.—Last heard from thirty-eight years ago. Must be about seventy years old. Daughter seeks information. Write Mrs. J. A. Turpen, 1206 West Tenth Street, Austin, Texas.

SCOFIELD, THOMAS.—Coal miner. Last heard of near Springfield, Illinois. English. Any one knowing where he lives or place of death please write C. E. M., Box 144, McKittrick, California.

REECE, TOM.—Left home thirty or forty years ago. Sister Lida and Brother John are dead. Please send information to Mrs. Charley Hartje, 2029 Harlan Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.

CROUSE, JOSEPH.—Please write to your old buddy. Have news for you. Am out of navy. Arthur DuBols, West Street, Mechanicville, New York.

BENNETT, TOM.—Tall, dark, seventeen years old. Last heard of at McCauley, Texas. Mother ill. Good job awaits you. Will send ticket. Any information concerning him please send to G. P., care of this magazine.

MUMSY.—What do you want? Am traveling. Write to General Delivery: Galveston, Houston, San Antonio, Beaumont, Wichita Falls, and Terrell, Texas; also to 1405 North Main Street, Fort Worth, Texas. Daddy.

BILL Mc.—Last heard from in Flint, Michigan. Come home at once to anxious mother and father. Write us without fail. Mrs. A. J. McArthur, 5049 William Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

MORGAN, ISAAC or FRED.—Can you assist one who helped you thirty years ago in your direct need. Skinner, 94 Empress Crescent, Toronto, Canada.

SKINNER, WILLIAM ALFRED McCLYMONS.—Communicate with Brother Fred, 1116 King Street, West, Toronto, Canada.

CHARLES HAY.—Come home. Mother still loves you and wants you. Mrs. Alice Stanford, Beloit, Michigan.

PAUL.—Why don't you let us hear from you. It is important. Your wife and baby. Mrs. P. R.

THOMAS, RAYMOND.—Come home. Letter for you. Please send address to Mrs. E. W. King, care of this magazine.

SMITH, WILLARD PERKINS.—I received your letter from Junction City, Kansas. Did not let mother see it, as her heart is bad. Let me know where you are. I may need you any moment. Write at once, in care of this magazine. Your sister Vera.

NELSON, BILL.—Left Quitman, Georgia, in 1914. Last heard of in St. Cloud, Florida. Information will be appreciated by Mrs. Mettie Lucille Williams, R. A. Box 39A, Branford, Florida.

AVERILL, MYRON L.—Was in Miami, Arizona, before and after the war. Any one knowing his present address please notify Mrs. Fred H. Nielsen, Box 302, Ragan, Nebraska.

NELSON, MR. and MRS. M. Z.—Left Jasper, Texas, in 1922. Last heard of in depot at Meridan, Mississippi. Any one knowing about them please write to their nephew, L. B. Eirby, Horgor, Texas.

MYERS, DAVID.—Twenty-two years old. Last heard from July, 1926, en route to Sourlake, Texas. Any information concerning him please send to Miss Fannie Eirby, Horgor, Texas.

DRUMMONDS, MRS. ELLA, nee QUIMBY.—Last heard of fifteen years ago in Knoxville, Alabama. Information will be appreciated by her daughter, Mrs. L. B. Eirby, Horgor, Texas.

GARNER, MRS. ANNIE, nee QUIMBY.—Last heard of in Birmingham, Alabama. Information concerning her will be appreciated by her sister, Mrs. L. B. Eirby, Horgor, Texas.

QUIMBY, MATTHEW, WILLIAM, and BURRELL.—Last heard of fifteen years ago. Matthew and William were then in Cottondale, Alabama, and Burrell was in Bellamy, Alabama. Information will be appreciated by their sister, Mrs. L. B. Eirby, Horgor, Texas.

DRULLINGER, ROBERT L., MRS. DRULLINGER, and MRS. HIRMAN McMAHON.—Formerly of 1548 Eastern Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio. Information will be greatly appreciated by a relative, Edna May D., in care of this magazine.

SEVISTOWITCH, FRANK JOSEPH.—Born in Austria. About sixty years of age. Married in United States. Last heard of in New York State, fifteen years ago. His nephew would like to get in touch with him. Please write to J. A. A., in care of this magazine.

TRISTRAM, EDWARD.—Fifty-three years old. Left home in 1902. Write Sister Augusta, care of this magazine.

DIEROFF, LOUIS.—About sixty years old. Last heard of in South Africa, 1912, at either Kimberley or Cape Town, probably making for Australia. Write to F. W. Dieroff, 301 Gibson Block, Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

ELLERS, DORIS.—Lived in White, South Dakota, in 1918. Later moved to Bushnell, South Dakota. Would very much like to hear from you. Your old pal, Ann, care of this magazine.

MILLER, HELEN.—If you were at Klinger Lake during summer of 1924 and at one time lived in South Bend, communicate with me and you will be pleasantly surprised. Old address. Bob.

NOBLE, DICK.—Anxious to hear from you under any circumstances. Please write me. Mother.

SULLIVAN, MARY.—Mother's maiden name, Mary Lako. Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Information greatly appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Margaret Sullivan Muss, 5549 Maxwell Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

BOYCE, HARVEY.—Please write to your father. We are grieved almost to death over you. S. L. B.

FRANK.—Sorry you have a hard feeling toward baby and me. Am selling out everything January 1, 1928, and leaving here. Wish you good luck. Always, Martha.

PARDEE, FRED S.—Last seen in 1915. Please write to your niece, who was married in 1916. Mrs. Frances Mitchell Johnson, 1304 North La Salle Street, Chicago, Illinois.

HOUSE, MRS. NINNIE BELL.—Last seen in Ebstwatlle, Alberta, Canada. Had a daughter married to Mr. Brown. Write care of this magazine. A friend.

BORNEMAN, ALBERT.—Last heard of in Polk, Missouri, three years ago. Brunette, heavy set. Send information to Fred Borneaman, 814 Forest Avenue, Omaha, Nebraska.

HARRIS, ALBERT, CHARLEY, and J. S.—Please send any information to their niece, Miss Buelah Carlile, Lakin, Kansas.

McCALLAND, PRESTON.—Forty-one years old. Employed as blacksmith for Santa Fe shops, Winslow, Arizona. First two fingers on right hand missing. Write to his wife, Mrs. Florence McCalland, General Delivery, Nashville, Tennessee.

HOLTHAUS, ROY.—All letters sent to you have been returned. Write to mother or come and see her. Al.

MONTGOMERY, WRIGHT, or TRYON, ROSCOE.—Last heard of eleven years ago. Please send any information to his sister, Mrs. Opal Basey, or his mother, Mrs. E. Tryon, 1821 San Fernando Road, Globe Auto Court, Los Angeles, California.

BILL.—Do you remember the girl you met the night of January 17, 1927, on the ferryboat from Oakland to San Francisco? Wrote you at Red Wing, but letter was returned. Write to Miss Grace Gilmore, Lankershim Hotel, Fifth and Market Streets, San Francisco, California.

WERTZ, HARRY E., JR.—Last heard from in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Information concerning him appreciated by Miss Ethel Richardson, 899 Wentworth Avenue, Toronto, Ohio.

FRITZ, KARL.—About twenty years old. Last heard of in Bath, New York. Was going to New Jersey. Caddy for well-known Chicago golfer and sets pins in bowling alleys. Write to Ralph E. Utter, Box 461, Evanston, Illinois.

FRED and SHORTY.—The two soldiers who had a furlough in August, 1927, and were going to St. Paul. "Shorty" from Chicago, who showed you where to eat in Kansas City, would like to hear from you. Ralph E. Utter, Box 461, Evanston, Illinois.

STAMPER, LUCIEN.—About nineteen years old. From Wolfe County, Kentucky. Folks live in Ohio. Was in St. Louis, April, 1927. Last heard of in Kansas City. Important news. Write Ralph E. Utter, Box 461, Evanston, Illinois.

BILL.—Of 3005 West Lake Street, Chicago. Do you remember the night of July 30, 1926, when you put me on the N. Y. C. train east? I tried in vain to forget. Come back or write. Will always love you. Your own D.

BENDLE, HERBERT A.—Would like to hear from him or any one knowing about him. Left home April, 1925. Write Mrs. W. G. Marsh, 60 Ashford Avenue, Westview, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

HUTCHINSON, J. A.—Please write to wife or mother. Very important news. Mrs. Frank Costello, 1157 North Nineteenth Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

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