BIG, CLEAN STORIES OF OUTDOOR LIFE

Every Week — July 7, 1928

Western Story Magazine

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By BABY BEEF
Johnston McCulley

Stories by George Owen Baxter - Kenneth Gilbert - Harley P. Lathrop - Robert J. Horton - Other Features

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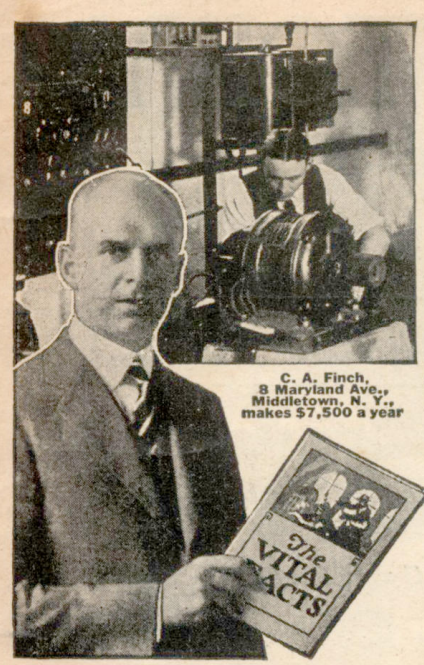
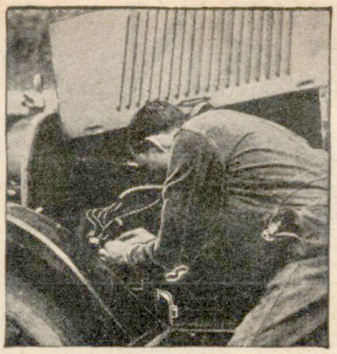
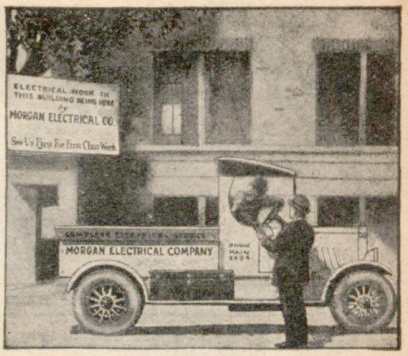


C. A. Finch, 8 Maryland Ave., Middletown, N. Y., makes $7,500 a year



Automotive Electricity pays W. E. Pence, Box 921, Palo Alto, Calif., over $9,000 a year



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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXIX Contents for July 7, 1928 No. 3

ONE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

THREE SHORT STORIES

TWO ARTICLES

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

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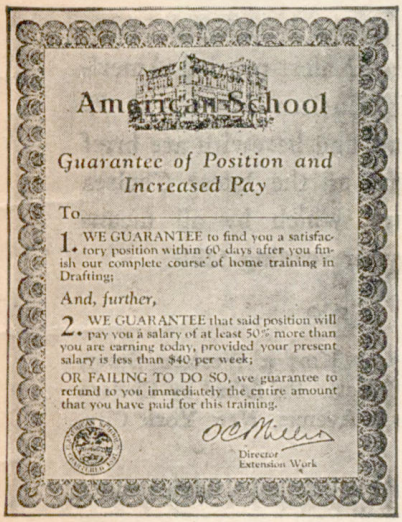

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

HE was the world's greatest electrical engineer. As familiar to him as his own bedroom were the dark ways of higher mathematics. He could, with the touch of a switch, hurl thunderbolts across the laboratory. To him from all quarters came the most distinguished men of science to sit at his feet and hail him as master.

He was Charles Proteus Steinmetz, chief engineer for the General Electric Company, and by all odds the most distinguished scientist of America. One might think that nothing but the most abstruse works would be found upon his reading table. And yet, as a matter of fact, the mighty Steinmetz in his moments of relaxation turned for escape to the writings of those who have stories to tell of the Great West, of detectives, of mystery, of romance on the high seas. With the utmost eagerness, this master mind would plunge into the midst of a yarn of high adventure, and nothing could distract his attention until the story reached its thrilling finish.

To-day, all across the country, executives in high places, leaders among the ranks of professional men, college presidents and college undergraduates alike, find the escape from life which Steinmetz found in the reading of good fiction.

For fiction gives the mind its needed vacation, the imagination its longed-for release. And whoever writes or distributes fiction in America is performing a priceless service for millions of his fellow countrymen.

Down in the heart of Greenwich Village in old New York one of the oldest and best established publishing concerns in the country brings the delights of fiction to millions of alert-minded Americans. This is Chelsea House, at 79 Seventh Avenue, and herewith are brief glances at some of the latest Chelsea House offerings, which by all means should be on your reading table.

THE QUICK-DRAW KID; a Western Story, by George Gilbert. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

If you have ever sat before a lunch counter in a wagon, or small hash house, and watched the man behind the bar perform his mystic incantations with coffee urns, gas burners and frying pans, you may have realized that a peculiar sort of genius is required for the swift service of a bunch of hungry men around noontime. Such genius was possessed in so outstanding a manner by a tow-headed kid behind the counter of an establishment in a mid-West city that it attracted the attention of a group of cowmen, come to town to sell their cattle. They were the men of the Box-9 Range. And after they had seen him work a bit they pronounced him "a machine-gun food slinger." And as Box 9 certainly needed such an expert, the cow-punchers proceeded to kidnap the lad and set him down in the midst of as colorful a Western ranch as has appeared in fiction for many years. How he converted his speed at drawing coffee into

Continued on 2nd page following

DON'T FOOL YOURSELF

Since halitosis never announces itself to the victim, you simply cannot know when you have it.

Halitosis may get you discharged

Employers prefer fastidious people . . . halitoxics not wanted

MORE and more, employers insist on having about them people who are fastidious. Sooner or later, those with halitosis are "let out."

The true reason for discharge, however, is usually hidden under such phrases as "Inefficient," "You can do better elsewhere," "We need a more experienced person," etc.

Realize these facts about halitosis. That, due to modern habits, it is much more prevalent than is suspected. That it is a definite liability in friendships, affections and business. That you can have it and not know it.

The one means of being sure that you are free from it is to rinse the mouth systematically with Listerine. Every morning. Every night. And between times when necessary, especially before meeting others. Keep a bottle handy in home and office for this purpose.

Listerine ends halitosis instantly. Being antiseptic, it strikes at its commonest cause —fermentation in the oral cavity. Then, being a powerful deodorant, it destroys the odors themselves.

If you have any doubt of Listerine's powerful deodorant properties, make this test: Rub a slice of onion on your hand. Then apply Listerine clear. Immediately, every trace of onion odor is gone.

With these facts before you, make up your mind to keep yourself on the safe, polite and popular side by using Listerine. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

Have you tried the new Listerine Shaving Cream?

Cools your skin while you shave and keeps it cool afterward. An outstanding shaving cream in every respect.

LISTERINE

The safe antiseptic

GOOD READING—*Continued*

speed at drawing guns, and the adventures that befell him out there, make as diverting and swift-paced a Western story as you have ever set your eyes on.

THE TUNNEL TO DOOM; a Detective Story, by Roy W. Hinds. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

A sudden crackle of revolver shots. Down the main street of the small sawmill town in the lumber region of the Northwest men were running. Out of the doors of the bank reeled a bandit, to fall dead on the street. Other holdup men jumped into a battered automobile and sped away. Away to the remote forest, where, unless one knows his woodlore, one is lost.

No one in town could identify the dead man. As to the other bandits, there was no clew save the fact that one of them had across one eye a black patch, held in place by adhesive tape. Acting on this slenderest of clews, husky Jim Persons, a newcomer in town, and more or less of a drifter generally, went with the man he suspected as camp boss for an oddly assorted collection of lumberjacks. And there came into a thrilling series of adventure. The big kick in this story comes when Persons discovers the weird death trap where the bandits slew their victims. But there are kicks aplenty scattered throughout all the story, and the whole yarn is a sure cure for ennui.

THE "GOLDEN DOLPHIN"; an Adventure Story, by Joseph Montague. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

As a rule, Mr. Montague devotes his abundant story-telling talents to Western yarns. This time, however, he shows his versatility by giving us a glorious romance of land-and-sea action. The curtain rises on an antique shop in a quiet New England town. The sign of the shop read:

"THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN
ANTIQUES
K. Whiting, Proprietor."

And there was in the shop window a very beautiful model of a ship which also bore the

Continued on second page following

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GOOD READING—*Continued*

name of *Golden Dolphin.* This it was that caught the eye of Jim Lyman, a sturdy sailorman wandering aimlessly about town, ready for any adventure that might come his way. Soon Jim discovered that K. Whiting was a very easy-to-look-at young lady, deeply immersed in problems connected with the loss of the ship, the model of which stood in her window. The *Golden Dolphin* had been her father's vessel, and the story went that it was stranded somewhere in the Southern Pacific. Jim volunteered to go in search of the lost ship, and soon found himself breast-high in romance. Through all the long call from the drowsy New England village to the tropical islands in the south, you follow Jim's adventures with breathless interest. For Mr. Montague has written a story in a thousand, and has put on canvas a memorable bit of word painting.

"LOOKOUT" LARAMIE; a Western Story, by Paul Bailey. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

It was a sorry moment for Bar Z Ranch when "Lookout" Laramie was accused of horse stealing by its owner. For out West you don't call a man a horse thief lightly. And so shaken was Laramie by the charge, that he went outlaw with a vengeance, resolved to "get" Madison, the ranch owner. As events turned out, however, the getting process was a most involved and exciting one. You will follow it through the galloping pages of this book, sometimes with bewilderment, sometimes with deep surprise, but always with the keenest interest, which only this sort of masterful writing is able to evoke on the part of its readers.

"Don't make a monkey of yourself"

cried Bob as I sat down at the piano

I was spending my vacation with Bob when I met his cousin, Helen. It was love at first sight with me. But unfortunately she didn't seem to feel the same way about it.

"You've got nothing to worry about," Bob insisted when I told him my tale of woe. "Just leave it to me. All you need is a little publicity . . . ."

The very next day he announced that he'd just had a long talk with Helen.

"Boy! What I didn't tell her about you!" he exulted. "Believe me, I boosted your stock sky high!"

"What did you tell her?"

"Well, she's crazy about music. So I conveniently forgot that you can't play a note, and told her you are *an accomplished pianist!*"

"But Bob . . ."

"Not another word! I've got you sitting pretty, now. If you're asked to play—just say that you've sprained your wrist."

That very night we were all invited to the Carews' party. On the way over, I sensed a big difference in Helen—a difference that made my heart beat fast with a new hope.

* * * * *

I Am Asked to Play the Piano

A little later in the evening we were all gathered around the piano, listening to the rather indifferent performance of one of the guests.

"I've heard so much about your talent!" cried Helen. "Won't you play something for us?"

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Please!" came from all sides.

With a smile I bowed low . . . and replied that *it would be a pleasure!*

Bob's grin changed to amazement. Calmly ignoring his frantic signals I walked over to the piano. Quick as a flash he followed me.

"For the love of Pete get away from that piano," he whispered excitedly, "don't make a monkey of yourself. If Helen ever hears you play she'll think everything else I told her is bunk, too!"

Turning to the guests, Bob announced, "Perhaps we should wait until some other time. His wrist was slightly sprained in tennis this afternoon, and . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing!" I broke in, and without any further hesitation, I began the first notes of Irving Berlin's famous "Russian Lullaby"! The tantalizing, irresistible strains seemed to throw a spell over the guests. I forgot Bob's astonishment—forgot the glow of admiration in Helen's eyes. On and on I played—losing myself in my music—until thunderous applause shook the room.

That brought me to myself with a start. For the rest of the evening I was the lion of the party.

Bob could hardly restrain his curiosity until we were safely home.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew how to play? When did you learn?"

"You never asked whether I knew how to play," I countered.

"Of course not! Last summer you didn't know one note from another—how was I to guess you'd blossomed into an accomplished pianist overnight?"

"Not overnight, exactly!" I smiled. "Although it almost seemed that way! Remember that Free Demonstration Lesson in music I sent for last summer? Well, when it came and I saw how easy it was to learn without a teacher I sent for the complete course. It's great! Why, almost before I knew it, I was playing simple tunes! I can play *anything* now . . ."

"So you really *are* an 'accomplished' pianist! The joke's on me, all right!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say 'accomplished'," I laughed. "But enough of a pianist to get a lot more fun out of life than I used to!"

* * * * *

The above story is typical. You, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument by this remarkable "at home" method. You don't have to know the slightest thing about music. First you are *told* what to do—then a picture *shows* you how to do it—then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could make it any clearer.

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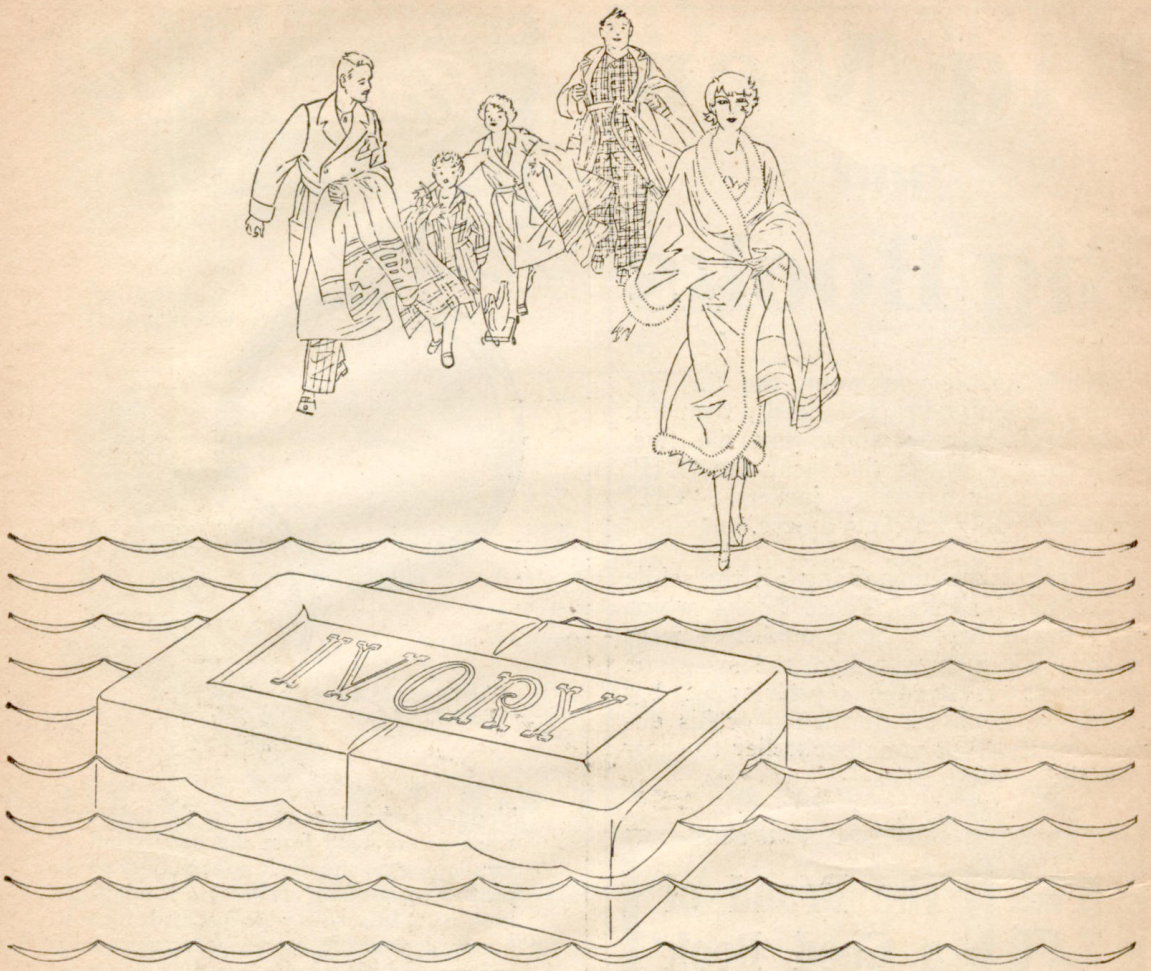


"WE'RE GOING FOR A BATH"

Here's a lot of people walking, and the artist says they're talking—they've already told him secretly, "We're going for a bath."

He says they seem so hopeful they will find tubs floating-soapful that he dares not give them *sinker*-soap because he fears their wrath.

So, dancing on their bath horizon, *there's* a sight to rest their eyes on! Now they'll change their bathrobes for an Ivory lather coat!

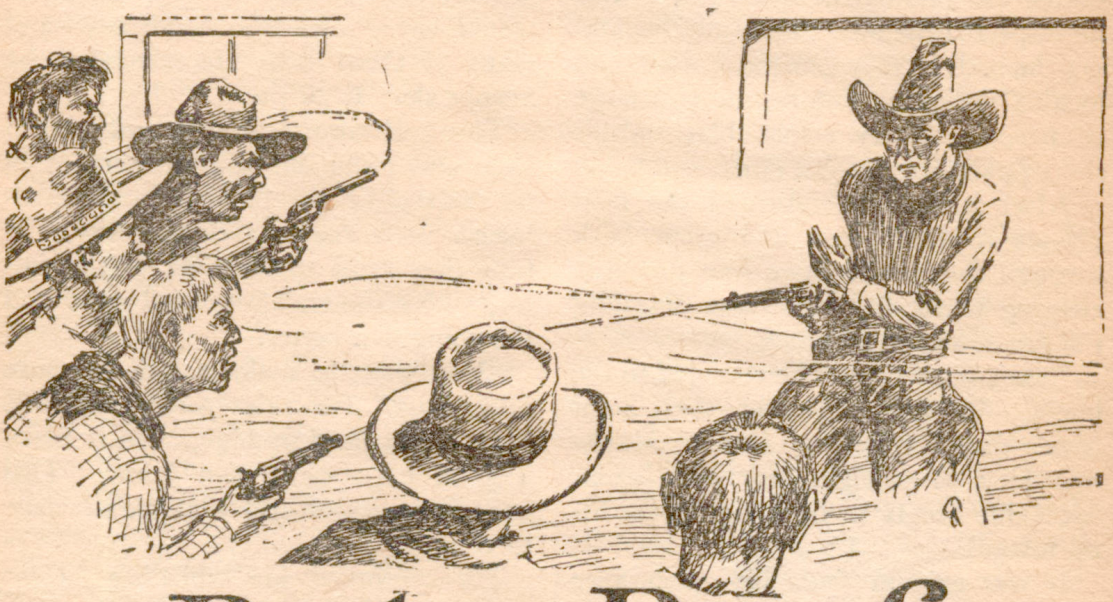
They'll have no more of bluish soap, of green or scarlet-huish soap—these *creamy* cakes alone will do, and every one will *float!*

Ivory is really the nicest soap to bathe with that's ever been made. Not only does it float right where you can see it and reach it, drop it when you will; but it quickly gives a lovely, creamy lather which cleanses thoroughly and then rinses off instantly.

KIND TO EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES

Western Story
Magazine
EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXIX July 7, 1928 No. 3



Baby Beef

By Johnston McCulley

Author of "Ride North!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

MR. STARR ARRIVES.

WHEN he came to a point about half a mile from the little cow town of Mesaville, the rider left the main trail. In a manner somewhat furtive, he guided his mount carefully through the brush for a distance of a hundred yards or so, until he reached a spot where he could not be seen from the road.

For a moment he sat in the saddle stiffly, his attitude that of a man listening. He peered around into the brush. Then he dismounted, trailed the reins, spoke to his horse and patted him on the neck, and crept away through the brush for a short distance until he came to the edge of a precipice. There he stretched flat on the ground and propped himself with his elbows. From a case on his hip he took field glasses.

Far below him, yet in the near distance, was the town of Mesaville. Focusing the glasses, this rider who had come out of the south inspected the town carefully. It was not much of a town, being only a trading point and recreation center for the few ranches of the district. But it was a rather

lively town just now, for this was range pay day, and ranchers and their families and their cow-punchers were in to make necessary purchases, greet one another, and have their fun.

The man with the field glasses surveyed the town well, from the one crooked street lined with business establishments to the little houses that dotted the side of the hill. For a time he inspected the street carefully, watching the men as they came and went, and located the general store, the two large resorts, the livery stable, blacksmith's shop, public corral, post office, and bank.

After a time he returned the field glasses to their case and crept back through the brush, came into the little clearing where his horse was muzzling the grass, and stood erect.

"She's not so bad," he confided to the horse. "In fact, old-timer, she's a lot better than I expected to find. Maybe our luck is changin' for the better. Mesaville seems to be a right nice little town."

It was evident from his appearance that the rider had been on the trail for some time. Now it was almost noon. His clothing was covered with fine dust. His horse was lathered. Yet neither man nor horse betrayed fatigue.

Not far from where his horse was standing, there was a tiny spring that trickled from the rocks. Disdaining the warm water in his canteen, the rider knelt beside the spring and drank, and then saw that his mount drank also.

Now he removed his neckerchief, soaked it in the cool water, and bathed his face and throat and arms. He brushed back his thick, black hair with his fingers and shook some of the dust from his clothes. He spread the neckerchief on a rock, where the hot sun dried it almost instantly. Presently he looped it around his neck again, returned his hat to his head and adjusted it at a jaunty angle, and got swiftly into the saddle. A moment later, under his guidance, the horse moved through the brush, out into the main trail, and resumed the journey to Mesaville.

The rider whistled a gay tune now. Nobody who saw him would have denied that he had been born to the saddle. He rode with an easy grace, slouching to one side. His age was perhaps thirty. He was tall, broad of shoulder, and lean of hip. Women would have called him handsome—and many of them had. He seemed to be keenly alert at all times.

The trail wound around and twisted back and forth like a great serpent in its descent of the hill. The rider allowed his horse to pick the way. In time they came to the floor of the valley, where the trail was used more and the going was better.

"You want to make a nice entrance now, hoss," the rider said, chuckling. "Hold your head up high. Got to make a good impression, you know. This here is a new world that we've come to conquer."

He continued his whistling as his mount loped along the dust-deep road. Taking a six-gun from the holster at his hip, he examined it carefully as he rode, made sure that it was loaded, whirled the cylinder, played with it as though it were a toy with which his hands were familiar. After a time, he returned the gun to its holster, fastened the flap, sat more erect, and focused his eyes on the town.

He was not far from Mesaville now. He could see the men who crowded the street, and here and there a flash of color that told of a woman's gown. At the end of the street he was approaching were the livery stable and corral. This newcomer to the town of Mesaville guided his mount straight toward the stable.

"Hoss, you're goin' to live in style in a reg'lar hoss hotel," he informed the animal that he bestrode. "You're goin' to have a rest and all that goes

with it, but I ain't sure for how long. So you'd better make the most o' your opportunities, hoss. Me, I'm goin' to do the same."

As he pulled his mount to a stop in front of the stable, half a dozen men who were hurrying along the street from the corral gave him passing glances. But they did not stop for a close inspection. Newcomers to the Mesaville district happened along every day or so. Some only passed through, others remained and got jobs, and still others remained forever in the local Boothill, because of hasty words and slowness in drawing their guns.

"Anybody around here?" the rider demanded, trying to peer into the gloom of the stable's interior.

A man came from the dark depths. He blinked his eyes at the bright sun and looked up at the newcomer. "I'm Burns," he announced.

"Yeah? That's fine! What am I supposed to do—give three cheers?"

"I'm runnin' this here stable, if that's what you want to know."

"Oh! Then I want to make a little dicker with you."

"I don't ever give credit to strangers," Burns told him, without hesitation. "I tried that out years ago, and I reckon that I learned my lesson."

"I ain't askin' for any credit," the newcomer replied. "You're too blamed quick jumpin' at conclusions. I pay my way, in money or otherwise. How'll you take yours?"

Burns, the stableman, gulped. "Money suits me, mister," he replied.

"The name is Gerald Starr."

"Yeah? It's a new one on me. I never heard tell of it before," Burns said.

"Maybe not. But you may hear it a lot hereafter. Now and then I meet up with some man who don't happen to take a fancy to that name o' Gerald. Here and there in our fair land are scattered a few misguided gents who have the opinion that any hombre with a name like that couldn't be a reg'lar he-man, and probably would be lady-like. But what's in a name?"

"Yeah!" said Burns. "What is? I think that Gerald is a right nice name."

"If you don't," Starr remarked, "we might waste a little time arguin' the point. I ain't had a good argument for several days, and I'm gettin' rusty."

"It's too hot to argue to-day," Burns said quickly.

"You'll kindly take proper notice of the brand on this here animal that I'm ridin'," Starr pointed out. "Maybe you never saw one just like it before. It comes from down Arizona way. I might mention here and now that this hoss is my very own."

"I ain't doubtin' it."

"See that you don't," Mr. Starr advised. "Yes, sir! This here is my very own hoss, and wasn't lifted careless out o' some other gent's corral. If anybody in Mesaville wants to know anything else concernin' me or mine, you just send 'em right along to headquarters."

"All right," Burns agreed. "Anything else?"

"Yeah! I've got a nickname, too. In other climes than this I am known as 'Shooting' Starr!"

"I'll remember it," Burns promised.

"See that you do! Sometimes I like that name better than I do the name o' Gerald, all dependin' on how I happen to be feelin', and I think every man ought to live up to his name."

"Yeah!" said Burns. "So you c'n shoot?"

"Please don't ask me. Mr. Burns, I want you to take this here hoss o' mine and treat him well. Give him your very best room with bath, see that he eats plenty, and let him run up a bill at the bar. I'll pay it."

"He'll sure get the best that I've got, Mr. Starr."

"It won't be a bit too good," Starr

told him. "He's a dandy hoss. I may want him come evenin', or I may not want him until to-morrow or next day. But when I want him, I'll want him."

"Yeah! I'll have him ready for you."

"You take right good care o' that saddle, too. I won it at a rodeo."

"Rider, huh?"

"I didn't win it playin' baseball," Starr informed him. "I'm leavin' all my trappin's, too."

"I'll take care of 'em, Mr. Starr. If you want somethin' to eat, try the Chinaman's, down the street."

"Thanks. How about drinks?"

"Two places, both good. Comes out o' the same barrel, I reckon. You'll find games runnin' at both places, too, this here bein' pay day."

"I seldom play poker, Mr. Burns, unless I need expense money, and I don't happen to need any now."

"Oh! You play some poker, do you?"

"Don't ask me. I don't like to brag."

"Uh-huh! Anything else, Mr. Starr?"

Gerald Starr got slowly out of the saddle, stretched himself, and handed the reins to the stableman.

"Where is the local Boothill?" Mr. Starr asked.

"Over there to the left, about a quarter of a mile from town," Burns told him. "Are you goin' to pick out a nice lot for yourself?"

"No," Mr. Starr replied, looking hard at him. "I just want to arrange to bury my dead!"

CHAPTER II.

SOME INFORMATION.

BURNS, the stableman, blinked his eyes rapidly for a moment, though that was the only show of emotion that he gave. He regarded Gerald Starr as something for which he felt an abundance of pity. When he spoke, it was in tones that sounded mournful.

"I'm gettin' on to be an old man," he announced. "I've been here quite some time. I've seen 'em come and I've seen 'em go, and some have gone a lot quicker than others. I reckon that you're one o' the quick jaspers."

"Oh, I'm quick enough! But just what do you mean?" Gerald Starr asked.

"Nothin' at all for you to get hostile about, Mr. Starr," Burns replied swiftly. "I'd sure and certain offer you a little advice, but you'd probably resent it."

"You've got me wrong. I'll listen, but I ain't sayin' as how I'll take the advice you offer. What's it all about?" Starr asked.

"You're a likely lookin' young feller and ought to get along. You're just feelin' your oats, I reckon. But there are a few bad hombres around these parts who like to meet up with young fellers as are feelin' their oats."

"Yeah? Meanin' that if I'm wise I'll step high, wide, and handsome?" Starr asked.

"I reckon. Somethin' like that. You don't have to stand back in a corner, but, on the other hand, you don't have to go around aggravatin' folks, either. I take it that you're a stranger in these parts."

"Sure and certain."

"Are you aimin' to get you a job hereabouts?"

"I was thinkin' somethin' along that line, if I can find a job that will suit."

"Good puncher?"

"Not many who know me well doubt it," Starr said.

"There are some jobs to be had, I reckon, if a man goes about it right."

"Yeah? Is gettin' a job here any different from gettin' one any other place? Suppose you put me wise to the neighborhood," Starr suggested. "It'd be a right friendly act."

"Well," Burns said, "about the biggest outfit hereabouts is the Box Bar,

what's owned and operated by Seth Carker. He aims to run this here end o' the range, but he's got opposition at times. He thinks that he's a sort o' cattle baron. He's got a foreman, 'Buck' Turbell, who's right-down bad."

"Yeah? I'll remember Buck."

"Yeah!" Burns said. "Then Hiram Gadley owns the Cross D. His outfit is almost as big as Seth Carker's. Hi Gadley is my idea of a real gent, and he's got a heart. A man would do himself some good to get a job with him."

"It sounds right down interestin'," Starr commented. "Any other outfits?"

"There's the Circle H, but I reckon that a man like you wouldn't be interested in that."

"And why not, Mr. Burns?"

"Because it's just about petered out. A girl named Cora Hallen owns the Circle H. Her father died a couple o' years ago and didn't leave her anything except the ranch, plastered with mortgages. She's been tryin' to struggle along, and I reckon that it's been a hard struggle. She lost a lot o' her critters in the blizzard last winter, and she was short on winter feed, and one thing and another has just about wiped her out."

"That's too bad," Starr said. "Nice girl?"

"The best ever!" Burns declared warmly. "She's about twenty-three and a dinger for looks!"

"Yeah? Then it's a wonder that somebody doesn't marry her."

"Oh, she's had plenty o' chances!" Burns explained. "But she ain't accepted any of 'em. Seth Carker, who owns the big Box Bar, has sure been after her, but it ain't done him any good. He's a crabby bachelor, about forty-five, and I don't blame her much for not lookin' at him twice. But it'll cost her somethin' to turn him down, I reckon."

"How's that?" Starr asked.

Burns stepped nearer and lowered his voice when he replied. "Seth Carker is the kind o' man who gets what he wants," he said. "He knows danged well that Cora Hallen will never marry him if she can get along somehow without doin' it. And I wouldn't put it past Seth Carker and that gang o' his to do everything possible to see that she don't get along."

"As how?" Starr asked.

"Well, my stars! Things can happen that look like bad luck and yet are made to happen."

"Uh-huh! Plenty!" Starr said. "This girl, Cora Hallen, got much of an outfit?"

"It's a right good piece o' property, though plastered with mortgages, like I said. But the buildin's are run down, and the fencin' not so good as it ought to be."

"How about stock?" Starr asked.

"She's lost the most o' it, like I told you. But Hiram Gadley did somethin' about that. Every rancher in the district, when round-up came, branded a certain number o' his calves for the Circle H, without Cora knowin' it. This last round-up, Cora found that she had a lot o' baby beef that never came from her cows. They made her accept 'em by sayin' that they couldn't be traced back to their regular outfits now. It was the only way they could do it, for she's proud and wouldn't take charity."

"Well, well!" Starr said. "So she's got a lot o' baby beef, anyway?"

"About five hundred head. If everything else goes all right, she can get through another year with 'em and maybe get on her feet," Burns explained. "There ain't much fancy eatin' at the Circle H. Dried-apple pie is a treat there, I reckon. She's got a foreman named Sam Labbock, but he's a pretty weak customer. Holds the place together, though. 'Daddy' Ryan,

one o' the old-timers in these parts, works there. And she's got a couple more second-rate punchers who hang out in her bunk house, and an old woman cook. That's all."

"Seems a shame," Starr declared. "Are all these parties you've been mentionin' in town to-day?"

"I reckon. I saw Cora Hallen about half an hour ago. Seth Carker and Buck Turbell are here, and old Hi Gadley. Either Carker or Gadley would be fine to strike for a job, though I'd rather ride for Gadley, if it was me. This here is all confidential, understand. I've been talkin' straight because you look good to me."

"That there confidence will be respected," Starr assured him. "It seems to me that the Circle H outfit needs a good hand."

"I don't think that Cora could put one on," Burns said. "She might not be able to pay regular."

Gerald Starr manufactured a cigarette, lighted it, and puffed a cloud of smoke upward.

"The entire situation sounds right down interestin' to me," he confided. "How come that the men hereabouts stand back and let this Seth Carker do a girl dirt?"

"Nothin' has been proved, understand. Carker even donated some o' the calves they gave her. But I'm willin' to make a bet that Cora never cashes in much on that baby beef. Too many things can happen out on the range."

"And you say that Carker's foreman, Buck Turbell, is the bad man around here?"

"Talk low!" Burns suggested. "He's plenty bad enough to be let alone."

"Got everybody around here scared, has he?"

"Go easy with your talk," Burns begged. "Buck Turbell might get wind o' it."

"Well, my good gosh! Suppose he does?" Starr said. "You reckon that every hombre in the neighborhood ought to shake and shiver at the mere mention o' the feller's name? Me, I'll have to look him up and see what he looks like. And maybe I'll decide to take him apart and see what makes him tick!"

"I was hopin' that you'd see sense," Burns told him, shaking his head in pity. "But I guess you're a headstrong young gent bound straight for Boothill."

Starr grinned. "Mr. Burns, I'm thankin' you from the bottom o' my heart for tellin' me all these here things," he said. "I'm glad that I understand the situation. Now I'll know just how to act."

"What you meanin', Starr?"

"If I meet up with this here Seth Carker, who's houndin' a nice girl, I'll probably feel like takin' a punch at his nose!"

"Don't you go to gettin' hasty, young man. If you did it, his foreman probably would shoot you."

"Yeah? I've done some target practicin' myself in my time," Starr replied.

"Say!" Burns cried. "Did you come to Mesaville just to shoot up the town?"

"Not exactly. Don't make any mistake. I'm just a young cowboy tryin' hard to get along."

"Yeah? I'll bet that you're a detective sent here by the Cattlemen's Association."

"You're wrong!" Mr. Starr said promptly. "What games I play are played for Gerald Starr and nobody else."

"Of course, I don't know anything about it," Burns said. "It ain't any o' my business. I'd hate to see anything bad happen to you, though. I'll take good care of your horse. What shall I do with him in case you meet up with an accident?"

"Accidents don't happen to me," Starr replied. "They generally happen to the other feller. Don't you go to gettin' the idea that I'm a professional bad man, though. I love peace and quiet. I'm all right unless some hombre steps on my corns or gets to pesterin' some friend o' mine."

"Is Cora Hallen a friend o' yours?"

"Not yet. I haven't met her."

"Well, young feller, I sure hope that you have good luck. I like you."

"Thanks," Starr replied. "You ain't such a bad hombre, either."

Starr turned around and started across the street without another word, and Burns glanced back at him as he led the horse inside the stable.

"There's somethin' peculiar about that feller," the stableman reflected. "I'll bet that he ain't as senseless as he talks!"

CHAPTER III.

STARR MEETS SOME FOLKS.

STARR started along the street in the direction of the nearer and larger of Mesaville's two resorts. The warped plank sidewalk was thronged with men and women of the range. In the general store, the proprietor and his clerks were busy with customers. Starr saw that the restaurant was almost filled, too.

Starr suddenly realized that he was hungry, and that his visit to the resort could wait for a time. He turned into the restaurant. His face was inscrutable, but his eyes seemed to be taking in everything. He took an empty chair at a table against a wall. Two other men at the table finished their meal and left as Starr arrived. He was alone for the time being.

He waited a little, and then the blond waitress came to him. Starr gave his order, smiling up at her as he spoke. She was quick to smile in return. Jennie Burch was a capable young woman who could flirt and exchange banter and yet retain the respect of men, and who was thoroughly able to take care of herself.

While he waited for his order to be filled, Starr scrutinized those in the place. The talk that he heard gave him no important information, for it was ordinary gossip of the local range and dealt with persons of whom he never had heard before. But his attention was attracted, presently, by three men who came in and sat at a table a short distance from him.

They commenced talking, and their first words were of interest to Gerald Starr.

"Labbock, I'd like to have your decision at once," one of them was saying. "I am not in the habit of offering a man a job and then waiting for him to make up his mind about it."

"I've been thinking it over, Mr. Carker."

Starr gave the three men all his attention as soon as he heard that name, though his manner did not betray that he was doing so. He stole a glance at them. So that was Seth Carker, the bachelor owner of the big Box Bar outfit, regarding whom the stableman had told him some things!

Starr decided instantly that he did not like Seth Carker's looks. The man had a substantial appearance and looked the part of a prosperous ranchman. But his countenance was that of one naturally mean, and his manner was arrogant.

"It's my last offer, Labbock," Seth Carker was continuing. "I want you with my outfit. Will you quit the Circle H, which you know danged well is on its last legs, and come to work for me at the Box Bar? Assistant foreman, I said. And at the wages I told you, which is a lot better than you are getting."

"Just how soon would you want me?" Labbock asked.

"Now! When I want a man, I want

him. This is the end of the month, and pay day. Quit the Circle H to-day and ride out to join the Box Bar."

"But wouldn't that be leavin' Miss Cora flat?" Labbock asked. "I want to do the right thing."

"Suppose you do leave her flat? What of it? Business is business. A man has to look out for himself, doesn't he—look into the future? How much longer will Cora Hallen be able to pay your wages?"

"I worked for her father four years," Labbock said.

"Yes. But he's been dead going on two years now," Seth Carker replied. "If you do not want to take advantage of this opportunity I'm offering you, just say so."

Labbock hesitated a moment. "I'll take you up, Mr. Carker," he said.

"Good enough! I am glad that you've finally made up your mind. I'll have Buck Turbell sign you on to-day, then. You see Miss Hallen, tell her that you've quit her outfit, and then move your things to the Box Bar."

Starr noticed that the third man in the group was not taking any part in the conversation. He had the appearance of an ordinary puncher, and Starr guessed that Seth Carker was the sort to have a bodyguard along with him all the time, and that this man had the job at present.

And Starr knew immediately, because of what Burns had told him, what was happening. This was Sam Labbock, the foreman of Cora Hallen's Circle H outfit, and the man upon whom she undoubtedly depended to a certain extent. Carker was getting him away from the Circle H. by offering him a good job with a bigger outfit and at better pay.

The blond waitress came with Starr's food, and seemed inclined to talk. Women generally had that inclination in the presence of Gerald Starr.

"You're a stranger in town, aren't you?" she asked.

"Well, you might say so, ma'am," Starr replied, "seein' as how I've been here not more'n an hour. But I think I'm goin' to like this town."

"Anything personal in that remark?" she asked, letting her eyes twinkle.

"There might be, at that," Starr replied. "I haven't had time to get well acquainted yet."

"You'll have a chance to-night. There's a dance."

"Yeah?" Starr said. "I'll make a little bet that you never go to dances."

"You lose!" she said. "We don't have many dances here, and we make the most of those we have."

"I don't blame you a bit," Starr told her. "Are your dances all taken for to-night?"

"I believe I've got a few left."

"Then maybe there'll be some chance for me. My name is Starr, and sometimes I twinkle." He knew quite well that Seth Carker and the men with him at the other table were listening to the conversation.

"I'm Jennie Burch."

"Fine! Now that we've been introduced," said Starr, "allow me to say, Miss Jennie Burch, that you're just about my idea of what a girl should be like."

"I've heard cow-town blarney before," she said.

"I don't doubt that a bit. How could any man help givin' it to you?"

"Are you going to stay around Mesaville?" she asked.

"That depends," Starr replied. "Maybe, if I can get me the right kind of a job, I'll stay. I'm commencin' to like some o' the people already. I'm able to ride and toss a rope and shoot a bit, so maybe I'll be able to connect with some outfit. And there ain't any sheriff or posse on my trail."

"Just ridin' around seein' the country?" she asked, as she gathered the dishes.

"Well, I never did quite understand

why I left home and took to ramblin'," Gerald Starr told her. "It was always a mystery to me. It always seemed like I was searchin' for somethin'—always searchin' and searchin'. But now that I've met you, I know the answer. All that time, I was searchin' for Mesaville, because you are here!"

The face of Jennie Burch flamed, because of chuckles that came from customers at tables near by.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" she snapped.

"Well, my good gosh!" Starr exclaimed. "I wasn't tryin' at all to make fun. I meant what I said. I was wanderin' around the earth like a lost soul or somethin', not just knowin' what I was lookin' for——"

Jennie Burch tossed her head and left him. Her face was still red. Starr made a cigarette, got his hat, paid his bill, and went out into the street. Carker and the other two men were still at their table.

Crossing the street to the general store, Starr purchased a package of smoking tobacco and made the acquaintance of the storekeeper. Starr acted now in truth like a man who was searching for somebody in particular, but he asked no questions, and he spoke to nobody except the owner of the establishment.

He stood to one side of the door and watched persons entering and leaving. He saw an old cow-puncher enter with a girl, and heard the storekeeper address the girl as Miss Hallen.

Cora Hallen, he saw at a glance, was the sort of girl that he had expected from Burns' description of her. She was vivacious, attractive, wholesome looking. He heard her call the elderly puncher "Daddy," and guessed that this was the old-timer, Daddy Ryan, also mentioned by Burns.

Starr made a point of bumping against Daddy Ryan a few minutes later and engaging him in conversation.

"I just got into Mesaville," Starr explained. "Came from Arizona originally. Goin' to look around for a job, maybe. It seems like a nice range."

"I'm workin' for the Circle H." Daddy Ryan made the announcement with pride in voice and manner.

"I've heard tell o' that outfit."

"Yeah? And maybe you've got a notion that it ain't a right good one!" Daddy Ryan said, his eyes glowing suddenly.

"I ain't got any such notion at all," Starr protested. "What do you want to go snortin' at me for, old boy? My good gosh! Every hombre hereabouts seems to be carryin' a chip on his shoulder. Any chance for a job at the Circle H?"

"I don't reckon so, not at this minute," Daddy Ryan said. "We are runnin' short-handed now. The outfit is in a bit o' temporary financial trouble. But only temporary! Don't think that it won't come out right! Cora Hallen will win in the end!"

"I've got an idea, Daddy Ryan, that you're a lot more short-handed than you think."

"How's that?"

"You're losin' a foreman."

"I reckon that you're all mixed up. Sam Labbock is our foreman."

"Yeah—he was!" Starr corrected. "While I was eatin' in the restaurant, I overheard him agreein' to quit the Circle H to-day and take a job with the Box Bar. Seth Carker was hirin' him. Labbock quits you to-day."

"Why, the low-down horned toad!" Daddy Ryan exploded. "Miss Cora don't know that and ain't expectin' it I never did trust that Sam Labbock. Desertin' just when he's needed so bad! And Cora's father picked him up and gave him a job when he was down and out and no other outfit would have him!"

"Is he a good man?"

"He knows the cow business, I

reckon, but he ain't what I call a good man," Daddy Ryan explained. "You please excuse me now, Mr. Starr. If Labbock has quit, Cora will want me to tend to a lot o' things. I hope I'll see you later."

Gerald Starr went into the street again. He saw Seth Carker, Sam Labbock, and the third man emerge from the restaurant and go into the largest resort, and followed them leisurely. He entered the place and stood back against a wall for a short time to get the glare out of his eyes and accustom them to the semigloom inside.

The place presented nothing new to Gerald Starr. He had seen similar resorts in scores of towns. It was the usual saloon, dance hall, and gambling den. All sorts of games were running, and all of them were well patronized. The bar was lined. Raucous laughter and loud jests filled the air as punchers and ranchmen had their recreation.

Starr saw that Seth Carker had gone straight to the bar with Sam Labbock and the other man. Despite the fact that they had just eaten, they were taking drinks, and Starr supposed that they were in celebration of the fact that Sam Labbock had left the Circle H to sign on with the Box Bar.

As Starr watched, another man thrust his way roughly through the crowd and reached Seth Carker's side. He had the look of a bad man about him. He was short, squat, bow-legged. His eyes were black and piercing. He and Carker held a whispered conversation.

"There's Buck Turbell talkin' to his boss," Starr overheard a puncher say to another. "I wonder what meanness they're cookin' up now? Buck's gettin' too much liquor to-day. He'll be poison by sundown."

Gerald Starr looked with renewed interest at the man who was talking to the master of the Box Bar. So that was Buck Turbell, Carker's foreman, and, according to Burns, the particular bad man of the district. Starr had seen his type before, too.

And now, as Starr watched and pretended not to be watching, he realized that he was the subject of the conversation between the two men. Carker looked through the crowd, saw Starr, gripped Buck Turbell by the arm, and whispered. Turbell turned and looked straight at Starr.

Men suddenly surged between them, and the inspection was interrupted. From the street had come another man, one with silvery hair and weather-browned face, whose eyes twinkled with good humor and whose lips wore a smile.

"Howdy, Mr. Gadley!" somebody called.

"Howdy, boys! Enjoyin' yourselves?"

Hiram Gadley, owner of the Cross D outfit, waved his hand at them, chuckled at their greetings, openly pleased. He was by far the most popular man in the district. Leaning against the bar, Seth Carker frowned as he witnessed this sincere welcome to his principal rival in the cattle industry.

Hiram Gadley replied to the greetings that were showered upon him. He refused drinks, refused to sit in any of the games, glanced around the place as though in search of somebody. He turned his head, and his eyes met those of Gerald Starr squarely.

For an instant, and in such a manner that nobody but Starr could see it, one of old Hiram Gadley's eyelids drooped as though in signal. And one of Gerald Starr's eyelids drooped for an instant also, as though in answer.

CHAPTER IV.

STARR MAKES SOME ENEMIES.

THERE was plenty of room at the bar now, for several men had left it to greet Hiram Gadley, and several others had charged to a corner of the

big room where a fist fight had started. Gerald Starr left the wall and walked leisurely toward the bar, leaned against it, and started to roll a fresh cigarette. After that one flash which had passed between him and Gadley, his face was inscrutable again.

He struck a match, lighted his smoke, and glanced along the bar at the convivial cow-punchers. These were Starr's sort of men. Hardworking in all sorts of weather, when the winter blizzards raged and when the summer sun beat down, they played just as hard when occasion offered.

A man appeared suddenly at Starr's elbow and spoke.

"Strange puncher, ain't you?" he asked.

Gerald Starr turned his head slowly and beheld Buck Turbell, the foreman of the big Box Bar, standing beside him, just as he had expected to find. Starr's face was a blank as he regarded the man.

"I'm a puncher all right, mister, but there ain't anything right-down strange about me," Starr announced.

Buck Turbell's eyes grew narrow and he drew in his breath sharply as somebody near him chuckled. "I'm Buck Turbell, foreman of the Box Bar!" he said, as though that announcement should mean a great deal.

"I can't help that, can I?" Starr asked, puffing at his cigarette again and deftly knocking some ash therefrom with the tip of his little finger.

"It seems to me that you're right-down sassy when a man comes up and starts to get acquainted," Turbell said.

"I don't aim to be sassy any," Starr replied. "I never waste time tryin' to be sassy. Actions speak louder than words—that's my motto. So, when I want to get real sassy, I cut out the talk and resort to action."

"Yeah? Man o' action, are you?" Buck Turbell said, a sneer appearing on his lips. "I had an idea that you was a stranger in these parts and was lookin' for a job. The Box Bar can always use a good man."

"And how do they use him?" Starr asked.

"Well, that depends a lot on the man," Turbell replied, his eyes narrowing once more. "Can you stack up with an outfit o' good punchers?"

"And that all depends on what you call good punchers," Starr told him. "I've always managed to struggle along on a job. I can ride a hoss if he ain't too frisky, and get my rope on a calf inside half a dozen tries, unless he's a mean calf whose main object in life is to run around and cut up."

"What's the name?" Turbell asked.

"Mine? It's Starr—Gerald Starr!"

There was a moment of silence, and then the face of Buck Turbell broke into a grin.

"Gerald, huh?" Turbell said.

"I knew it!" Starr exclaimed. "Cuss and dang it, I knew it would happen! Every time I go to some new locality and tell men that my name is Gerald, some jasper has to get to thinkin' that it's a funny name. I've always got to impress on 'em that I got a right to wear my name without men grinnin' at it."

"Against the law to grin?" Turbell snapped.

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as to say that it's against any law, except, sometimes, the law o' common sense," Starr told him. "There are times when it's safe to grin plenty, and there are other times when it sure ain't! This is one o' the times when it ain't safe, Mr. Turbell!"

"Are you tryin' to bristle up to me?" Turbell snapped. "You'd better get acquainted around here, Starr, before you go to pickin' quarrels."

"Hombre, I never pick a quarrel—but I end a lot o' them," Starr said. "And I don't need to get acquainted. I've done heard that you are considered to

be the official bad man in these parts. Shucks!"

"What do you mean by that last remark?" Turbell demanded.

"Are you aimin' to pick a scrap with me?" asked Starr. "If you are, just say so, and don't waste so much time runnin' around the corral. You ain't got me scared a mite, Mr. Turbell. I've seen a lot o' men worse than you. Ever hear o' Hank Sternine, down Texas way?"

"Plenty," Turbell answered. "What about him?"

"Then you know that he was a right-bad hombre. He had notches all over both his guns. Had a reputation for fightin' against odds, and they say that he could draw and shoot before the other man got his mind made up."

"That's true. What about it?" Turbell asked.

"He got bumped off last year. He was a mite too slow on the draw for once, after startin' a quarrel. I'm the man who bumped him off!"

Everybody in the immediate neighborhood of the two men had been listening to their conversation and discreetly getting out of the possible line of fire. Starr's statement was heard by many, and caused a chorus of gasps.

"You shot Hank Sternine?" Buck Turbell cried. "So that reputation o' his was all a fake, huh?"

Gerald Starr's eyes narrowed a bit at that. "I take it, Mr. Turbell, that you think lightly o' me," he said.

"I ain't wastin' time thinkin' o' you at all!"

"Then why are you standin' here talkin' to me?" Starr demanded.

"Newcomers to Mesaville are generally asked a few questions," Turbell pointed out.

"Yeah? Are you the sheriff or one o' his deputies? If it's information about me that you want, I'm sure and certain willin' to give it to you. I'm from Arizona; age, almost thirty-one, six feet in my socks, and weigh a hundred and sixty. I'm white, free, and a Democrat, except at election time. I smoke, drink, and swear, but don't chew. I can dance and play the accordion. I'm Heaven's gift to yearnin' female hearts."

"Yeah? Hate yourself, don't you?" Buck Turbell said.

"Certainly not! I like myself. Lots o' other folks like me, too. Now and then I meet one as don't. But, shucks! What do I care? Oh, yes! Before I forget it! I got a nickname, too. Down Arizona way they call me Shootin' Starr!"

"By way of a joke?" Buck Turbell asked quietly.

Starr's eyes narrowed again. "Well, now, I never thought o' that," he said. "Maybe they have been jokin' with me. That's for you to judge, I reckon—any time you feel like it!"

There was an instant of silence. Buck Turbell's face went purple with wrath. "Why, you——" he cried.

His hand went for his gun. But suddenly, out of nowhere, a six-gun had come into the hand of Starr. Its muzzle was pressed against Turbell's stomach.

"Easy! Put 'em up!" Starr said in a level voice.

Men gasped at the speed of that draw. They saw the expression in Starr's face and knew him for a man of steellike nerves, whose mind and muscles acted in unison.

"You don't want ever to act like that, Mr. Turbell, when I am around," Starr's calm voice continued. "Now look! Just suppose I had a mean disposition to-day. Where'd you be now, huh? Your friends, if you've got any, would have to stop havin' their fun and go out in the hot sun to Boothill and dig you a grave. Would that be nice?"

"I—I——" Turbell stammered.

"You'll what, Mr. Turbell? You

won't do anything! Shucks! You've just naturally got a mean way about you, Mr. Turbell; but it ain't right-down dangerous. Always ride a new man who comes to town, do you? Well, you tried it on me!"

Seth Carker stepped up to them.

"I'll attend to this!" said the master of the Box Bar.

"Pardon me, mister, but I'm attending to it," Starr said. "I don't need any assistance."

"I'm Carker, of the Box Bar, and this man is my foreman. I told him to question you and maybe offer you a job."

"Yeah! I saw you tellin' him," Starr said.

"Put up your gun, Starr! Buck, go outside and cool off! It ain't necessary for you two boys to go to shootin' each other. You're both good men, I reckon."

"One of us is," Starr agreed.

He glanced again at Buck Turbell and then returned his six-gun to its holster. Carker motioned commandingly, and Buck shrugged his shoulders and turned away, growling something that the others could not understand.

"Have a drink, Starr?" Carker asked.

"No, thanks! I just had me somethin' to eat a short time ago."

"Lookin' for a job?"

"I reckon. A man can't loaf forever. And I always like to be connected up with some outfit. It makes a man feel like he was to home."

"I can use you at the Box Bar, Starr. Usual wages. Report at the ranch tomorrow, if that suits you."

"But it don't suit me, Mr. Carker," Starr said.

"Oh, if you want a few days to play around in town first, that's all right!"

"It ain't that, but I don't believe that I want to hook up with you, sir."

"What's that? The Box Bar is the finest outfit in this section. Any man would rather work for it than for another outfit."

"I don't reckon that I would," Starr said. "Thanks for the offer."

"I see! On account of your little spat with Turbell? I'll see that it isn't carried any further. He's foreman, but I'll guarantee that he doesn't make things difficult for you because of what has happened."

"Shucks! I wasn't even thinkin' o' that," Starr replied. "I could take care o' myself if he started ridin' me, I reckon. It's that I've just got a feelin' I don't want to connect with the Box Bar."

"Then who are you goin' to work for?" Carker asked.

"How do I know? Your offer is the first I've received. I'll think about it."

"All right. I'll be in town until about midnight. There's a dance. Look me up if you want that job."

Carker turned away to speak to some other man. And then Gerald Starr did something that was a direct slap at the master of the Box Bar. Despite the fact that he had refused to drink with Seth Carker, and that he really did not want a drink then, anyway, Starr turned to the bar and held up his hand at the bartender.

"Your best stuff!" he said, so that all could hear, and tossing a coin on the bar. "I'm a little late gettin' the trail dust out o' my throat, but I was interrupted."

Half a hundred men were watching him, had been watching during his spat with Buck Turbell and his talk with Carker. They had heard him decline to drink with the owner of the Box Bar. And now he was handing Seth Carker the insult direct by drinking alone.

Seth Carker's face flamed with wrath. He made as though to step forward, but checked himself. His fists doubled and he breathed heavily. Without a word, he turned, thrust those nearest

out of his path, and strode angrily toward the door. But those who knew Seth Carker knew, also, that the affair was not at an end.

CHAPTER V.

STARR GETS A JOB.

CORA HALLEN had left the store to visit a friend in one of the little cottages on the hillside, so Daddy Ryan did not find her at once to give her news of Sam Labbock's desertion. Labbock himself, leaving the resort after taking the celebration drink with Seth Carker, searched for the mistress of the Circle H, and, when he could not find her, remained in the vicinity of the store, waiting for her to appear.

Daddy Ryan ran across the foreman there. "Labbock, I understand that you're goin' to quit us," Daddy said.

"Who told you that?" Labbock asked.

"Oh, I heard it! I heard that Seth Carker had bought you off."

"Carker offered me a better job at higher wages," Sam Labbock explained. "The Circle H is slippin', and you know it. A man has to look out for himself."

"Then you're leavin' us?" Daddy Ryan demanded.

"Yeah! To-day!"

"I'm an old man, Labbock, and can't put up the fight I did once," Daddy Ryan said. "Nevertheless, I'm tellin' you here and now that you're my idee of a skunk! Cora Hallen's father picked you up——"

"That's enough!" Labbock interrupted. "Like you said, you're an old man, and I'd hate to smash you; but don't go too far, or I may forget yourself."

"Where's Cora goin' to get a foreman? I'm too old, and the two boys at the ranch are youngsters and not capable."

"That's Miss Hallen's business," Labbock said. "She can get somebody, I guess."

"We sure and certain don't want anybody Seth Carker has got his dirty fingers on," Daddy Ryan declared. "Carker will be watched, don't worry!"

Cora Hallen came through the crowd on the walk at that moment and faced her two men.

"Sam, we'll stay in for the dance and ride out in the early-morning hours. There'll be a moon," she said. "I'll go out with Daddy Ryan in the buckboard, as I came in. Some of the town girls want me to stay."

"Sam is leavin' us," Daddy Ryan blurted out.

"What's that?" she asked.

"He's hired out to Seth Carker to ride for the Box Bar," Daddy continued. "He leaves us to-day, he's just been tellin' me. I was startin' to tell him what I thought o' him when you came along. I can't very well tell him in front o' decent womenfolks."

"Is this true, Sam?" she asked.

"Yes'm. That is, Carker has made me assistant foreman at bigger wages, Miss Hallen. A man's got to look into the future and do the best he can for himself."

"And you can't see any future in the Circle H—is that it?"

"Since you ask it, ma'am, not much of a future."

"You may be surprised, Sam," she said. "Things look dark now, but they may brighten up. I understand the situation perfectly. Seth Carker wants me to marry him, and I'd rather die! He thinks that he'll break me, and that then I'll be glad to take him. Not so long as there is a chicken on the ranch to eat, Sam, and I'll see that my chicken stock is kept up!"

"It—it's just a business deal with me, ma'am," Labbock said.

"I might remind you, Sam, how you came to this range sick and about all in. My dad picked you up and gave

you a job, kept you, made you foreman. Some men don't know the meaning of gratitude, Sam. You should make a good man for the Box Bar. I reckon that you are Seth Carker's kind."

"Now, Miss Hallen——" Labbock began.

"As you said, it's a business deal, Mr. Labbock. Go right down to the bank and get your money. You can get your things from the ranch any time."

Her head held high, her eyes flashing, her breast heaving, Cora Hallen passed him without another word and went into the store, motioning for Daddy Ryan to follow her.

"You order our stuff, Daddy, and see that it is packed," she commanded. "I promised some of the girls that I'd stay for the dance, and so I'll do it. We'll start back about three o'clock in the morning."

"You can depend on me, Cora," Daddy said.

"I know that, Daddy. You're a real man. We'll have to get along somehow."

"Come next beef round-up, them baby beef will be worth money," Daddy said. "You c'n buy some stock then. It'll take three or four years to get goin' strong, not havin' much breedin' stock to start with, but we'll make it."

"Thanks, Daddy. You're getting to be an old man——"

"What's that? I'll live to see you prosperous again, honey, and maybe married and with a family. And I'll bet that there won't be any Seth Carker hangin' around the house, either."

"That's a safe bet, Daddy. I'd get a job as waitress in the restaurant before I'd marry him."

"Now, what you want to do Jennie Burch out of a job for?" the old puncher complained. "I reckon that you'll go right on bein' a ranch owner."

They spoke to the storekeeper regarding supplies and made arrangements to get them at a late hour and stow them away in the buckboard. Cora Hallen was not buying heavily, though her credit was still good. When they had finished, they went outside again, and came face to face with Hiram Gadley.

Gadley had been a close friend of Cora's father for two decades. He had watched the motherless girl grow to womanhood. He had protected her from afar, to the best of his ability, though he did not betray this fact.

She smiled at him as he approached, removed his hat, and bowed before her as before a queen.

"Cora, you look troubled," Hiram Gadley said. "I don't like to see you lookin' that way."

"I've lost my foreman. Labbock has signed on with the Box Bar," she said.

A quick frown appeared on Hiram Gadley's face, and then a smile followed it.

"I thought that Sam Labbock was square," Gadley said. "A man never can tell. Maybe it's good riddance."

"I'll have to struggle along without him."

"You ought to have a good foreman, Cora. Daddy and them two youngsters can't do all the work. Seth Carker has shown his hand, I reckon, and we may expect almost anything from him now. I haven't said much to you about it, because I didn't want to bother you. But Carker is unscrupulous——"

"I understand the situation, Mr. Gadley," she broke in. "I reckon that everybody on the range understands it. That is one reason why I want to make the fight alone and win. I had to accept that baby beef—but I want nothing more. I'm going to make my own way, as dad would have done."

Hiram Gadley patted her on the shoulder, and his eyes suddenly were moist.

"I loved your dad, Cora, and I love

you," the old owner of the Cross D said. "I understand just what you mean. You'll make the fight, Cora, and you'll win! I won't force you to take my help. But I'm ready to help any time, Cora. I've got a passel o' punchers, remember. If the enemy makes a rank move that calls for violence, my personal army is subject to your draft."

"Thanks, Mr. Gadley. If it comes to violence, maybe I'll call on the Cross D punchers."

"You do it! But at first I reckon the enemy will move in the dark. Little, nasty tricks, maybe. You want to guard that baby beef, Cora. And you sure need a foreman. Will you take some advice from your dad's old friend?"

"You know it!"

"All right. There's a stranger came to Mesaville to-day, a man named Gerald Starr. He's from Arizona. Nobody knows that I know him. I'm tellin' you and Daddy, but don't let it go farther."

"I met him," Daddy Ryan said. "He's my idea of a man."

"Yeah? He's all of that," Hiram Gadley said. "Down in Arizona they call him Shootin' Star. He ain't vicious at all, but he sure is dependable. A little while ago he made Buck Turbell back down. He drew so swift a man couldn't see him. And he refused to drink with Carker. A man'd think that this stranger had a lot of beforehand knowledge about who was decent around here and who was not."

"You know him?" Cora asked.

"Just forget that, honey. I'll vouch for him, however. You hire him for your foreman. He refused to work for Carker."

"Then how can I hire him? If Seth Carker can't offer him enough to get him——"

"It wasn't the money, I reckon, in the case o' Shootin' Starr. Now, honey, you listen to me. I want Starr to stay in this locality, but I can't use him at the Cross D just now, 'cause he's a top-notch man and won't take an ordinary job. You hire him for foreman, and I'll pay half his wages——"

"Now, Mr. Gadley," she interrupted.

"I'm goin' to insist on this, Cora. You do as I say and don't ask any questions. Trust your father's old friend?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then hire Shootin' Starr for foreman. He knows his business. Him and me are strangers, remember, to everybody around here."

"Just who is he?" the girl asked.

"You ain't to ask questions. But I'll vouch for him."

"That is enough for me, Mr. Gadley. But maybe he won't sign on."

"He'll sign on," Hiram Gadlay said. "Daddy Ryan, look him up and bring him to Miss Cora. She'll be with me down at the bank."

Daddy Ryan went on the errand gladly. His old face was wreathed in smiles. With a man like that for foreman of the Circle H, things might happen. The good old days of action would come back.

He found Starr and drew him to one side. "Miss Cora Hallen, my boss, who owns the Circle H, would like to speak to you," Daddy said.

"When the ladies command, I always obey," Starr replied. "You lead the way, old-timer."

"I understand that you made Buck Turbell back down," Daddy said, as they went along the crowded street toward the bank.

"Shucks! That wasn't nothin'," Starr declared.

"Just the same, I'd keep my eyes peeled."

"Uh-huh! I got eyes in the back o' my head, old-timer. And they're always on the job."

They located Cora Hallen at the bank,

where she was making arrangements to pay her few men. Daddy Ryan introduced Starr to her.

"Mr. Starr, I need a foreman at the Circle H, and you've been recommended to me," she said.

"I don't know who in Mesaville could have recommended me, ma'am, but I'm right-down grateful to him," Starr replied.

Cora bit her lip. She remembered that it was to be understood that this man and Gadley did not know each other.

"My foreman quit me to-day," she explained. "The job is open, Mr. Starr. Sixty a month and found is all that I can pay just now. But there is a future at the Circle H."

"I'm willin' to bank on the future, Miss Hallen."

"Good!" Cora Hallen extended her hand and Starr took it. "There is a dance to-night, and I have promised to remain for it. Daddy Ryan will drive me back about three in the morning in the buckboard. I'd like to have you ride along with us."

"That'll be fine, Miss Hallen. Is it the correct thing in this part o' the country for a foreman to ask his boss to dance with him?"

She glanced up at him quickly and saw that his eyes were twinkling.

"Under the circumstances, I might give you one," she replied. "Remember that you are working for the Circle H now."

"Yeah! You needn't say any more, Miss Hallen. I've heard a lot o' gossip since I got into Mesaville, and I reckon I understand the situation. I'll take care o' myself, ma'am—and I'll remember that I'm workin' for the Circle H!"

Gerald Starr bowed and went out upon the street again. Daddy Ryan followed him.

"Any orders, foreman?" Daddy Ryan asked, grinning.

"Yeah! You just circulate around and accidentally let folks know that I've taken the job, especially Seth Carker and Buck Turbell," Starr replied. "I reckon that'll be all for now."

CHAPTER VI.

A BLOW.

STARR played poker for a time in the smaller of the two resorts, winning a little but not seeming to get enthusiastic or deep into the game. He listened to a lot of range gossip and made himself familiar with the locality, its history, and its present complications. He identified some of the Box Bar punchers, and some who rode for Hiram Gadley of the Cross D.

After that, he went to the general store, purchased a few things that he needed, and carried them down to the stable to put with his outfit. Burns grinned when he saw him.

"Cowboy, I understand that you're a right quick worker," the stableman said. "They tell me that you backed down Buck Turbell, refused to drink with Seth Carker, and got a foreman's job at the Circle H, all in an hour or so."

"Shucks! That ain't nothin'," Starr told him. "You ought to see me work some time when I'm warmed up and in good form."

"Uh-huh! Well, I ain't got anything to say," Burns remarked. "You know your own business. Them as lives by the sword generally dies by the sword."

"Well, my good gosh! You're sure a cheerful little playmate," Starr replied. "I'll want my hoss come three o'clock in the mornin', or maybe a little mite before."

"He'll be ready for you, Mr. Starr. I'll have to stay up anyway, since there's a dance."

"Oh, yeah! I almost forgot about that dance. And I've done arranged to dance with two girls already."

"Speedy stuff!" Burns commented.

"I've got to dance with my new boss, naturally. That wouldn't be any more than right. And Miss Jennie Burch, she as works down at the restaurant——"

"You goin' to dance with Jennie?" Burns interrupted, his eyes growing round.

"Why not? Ain't Jennie Burch all right?" Starr demanded.

"I reckon! Jennie is a nice enough girl, if that is what you mean. It wouldn't be any disgrace to dance with her, and she sure can dance, too. But, cowboy, it seems like you just go huntin' trouble all the time."

"How come?"

"You'll have Seth Carker down on you for takin' that job, and 'specially if you dance too much with Cora Hallen. But that ain't nothin' compared to how Buck Turbell will be down on you if you go to shinin' around Jennie Burch."

"How?" Starr asked.

"Buck has been sweet on Jennie Burch for almost a couple o' years, and a lot o' good it has done him," Burns explained. "But he's spoiled her fun, I reckon. Bein' afraid o' Buck, all the other boys have kept away from Jennie pretty much. Buck is bound to get her in the end, he thinks. It's an open secret that he's asked her a hundred times to marry him, and tired her out refusin'."

"So that's it!" Starr said. Don't the hombre know when he ain't wanted? Well, all that won't keep me from dancin' with her, if she wants to dance with me. It seems to me that this here Buck Turbell ought to be taken down a peg."

"Yeah! But the man as does it wants to move mighty careful," Burns warned. "You put Buck in his place to-day, I reckon, but don't think that he'll stay out o' your neighborhood 'cause o' that. Buck is right-down mean."

"I never did see such a town!" Starr complained. "Nothin' but trouble all the time. You may be sure, Mr. Burns, that I'll keep my eyes and ears open."

"I like you, and I'd hate to see anything happen to you," Burns said.

Starr grinned and turned to his blanket roll. He took out certain utensils, and shaved, using the ice-cold water in the trough at the rear of the stable. He put on fancy boots, and he changed his shirt, donning a silk one of rich blue.

"You're a reg'lar range dude," Burns commented.

"I always dress to please the ladies."

"Yeah? First thing you know, you'll have a lot o' fights on your hands. The men hereabouts are a jealous lot, bein' as how women are scarce."

"Understand me!" Starr said. "I don't flirt around with any other man's woman. I just circulate around and be sociable and don't play any favorites. I'm as liable to dance with a mother o' six as I am with some pretty, gigglin' girl."

"I hear what you say," Burns said, his face solemn. "I'll hope for the best."

Starr grinned and went out upon the street again. Dusk had come, and in all the buildings large kerosene lamps had been lighted. Lights flickered through the windows of the little homes on the hillside, too.

Gerald Starr journeyed to the restaurant and sat down where he could keep his back to the wall and face the front door. The restaurant was a busy place at this hour. But, after a time, Jennie Burch came to attend to his wants.

"I'm bankin' on a dance or two with you," Starr told her.

Jennie Burch beamed upon him. She had heard how he had handled Buck Turbell. But her smile fled, and a worried look came into her face.

"I don't know whether you'd better

dance with me," she said. "I wouldn't want you to get into trouble on my account."

"You meanin' Buck Turbell?" Starr asked.

"I see you've heard."

"Yeah! Only question is, do you want to dance with me?"

"Yes," she said, smiling again.

"Then what's to stop us dancin'?"

"Nothing," she agreed. "I understand that you're going to work for the Circle H."

"Yeah! I got me the foreman's job, that bein' the best one they had open."

"And they are saying that you refused to work for the Box Bar."

"That's correct, Miss Burch. You see, I'd a lot rather be a big duck in a little puddle, if you gather my meanin'."

"I gather your meaning, all right," she told him, "but I don't think that is the real reason."

"Then what do you suppose is?" he questioned.

"I am not supposing," she said.

She did not have time then for further conversation, for there were many demands on her. She brought Gerald Starr the food that he had ordered, and he gave his full attention to the meal. The Chinaman was a good cook, and Starr had the appetite of a healthy, out-of-doors man.

As he was finishing the customary apple pie and washing it down with strong coffee, he glanced over the rim of the coffee cup to behold Seth Carker making his way among the tables and bearing down upon him.

Gerald Starr continued to drink his coffee. Then he put the cup down and brushed his lips with a napkin, holding it in his left hand as he did so. His right hand dropped swiftly, unfastened the flap of his holster, and deftly hitched the gun around into a position where it could be reached swiftly.

The master of the Box Bar approached the table deliberately, and Starr searched his face. That countenance was inscrutable; at least, it did not show overpowering rage or anything of that nature. Starr judged that Seth Carker was going to talk to him.

Carker came up to the table and looked across it. "Starr, you got any objections if I sit down here a minute and chin with you?" he asked.

"None in the world, Carker," Starr replied. "Only that blond waitress may make you order something if you want to hold your seat."

Carker did not respond to the pleasantry. He sat down and very carefully put his folded hands on the table in front of him. Starr gave several swift glances around the room, at the front door and the kitchen door, but saw nothing at all suspicious.

"Starr, I offered you a job, and you refused it," Seth Carker began. "At first I thought that you were just an ordinary young puncher, and I offered you an ordinary job. Then you showed me that you had somethin' to you. I can do a little better by you, I think."

"I ain't open for a job, Carker."

"The Box Bar is the best outfit in this district, and I am going to build her up until she is a credit to the country!"

"That'll be fine," Starr said. "All foolin' aside, you sure have got a dandy outfit, and it's beginnin' to be heard from."

"If you are going to work in this district, Starr, the Box Bar will give you the best opportunity. Don't let your little run-in with Buck Turbell keep you away."

"Shucks! That ain't disturbin' me any," Starr replied. "I've seen a lot o' men like Turbell."

"Then why won't you work for me?"

"I've got a job."

"So I heard—foreman for the Circle H. Starr, you are a stranger here, and maybe you don't understand conditions. The Circle H was a good property

once, but she's gone to the dogs. The place can't pay expenses."

"I heard tell all about that."

Seth Carker looked at him closely. "Starr, you are supposed to be an utter stranger around here," he said. "Before you'd been in town two hours you almost picked a fight with Turbell——"

"I just didn't like him," Starr interrupted.

"And you deliberately insulted me. I don't mean about turning down a job. I mean by refusing to drink with me, and then, in front of everybody, ordering a drink for yourself."

"Oh, that just happened!" Starr said, as he started to make a cigarette. "I'm funny about drinkin'. I reckon I don't drink like the other boys."

"It looks to me, Starr, like you had come here determined to fight me and the Box Bar."

"Why should I do that?"

"That's what I want to know," Carker replied.

"I'm a funny young feller," Starr explained. "It'd be natural for most men to snap at a job with you, if they was goin' to work in this part o' the country. But I don't do the natural thing. Buck Turbell rubbed my fur the wrong way. I just didn't want to drink with you when you asked me."

"How much are you getting with the Circle H?"

"I believe the boss mentioned sixty and found."

"That's what she paid Sam Labbock," Carker said. "Starr, I'll give you seventy-five and found, and make you assistant foreman."

"Two objections to that," Starr said promptly. "I'd be Buck Turbell's assistant, which I can't see at all—and you've done hired Labbock for an assistant foreman."

"I'll take care of Labbock, as I promised. And I'll see that Buck doesn't make himself obnoxious to you."

"I'm not askin' any man to fight my battles, Carker. Why is it that you're so right-down eager to get all Miss Hallen's foremen away from her?"

Seth Carker glanced around to see whether he was being overheard. He bent closer across the table.

"For personal reasons, Starr, I do not want Miss Hallen to make a success of the Circle H," he said. "As a stranger, you can't have any interest in the thing. So why not act sensibly and take the best job you can get?"

"I've already accepted Miss Hallen's offer," Starr said. "I'm the foreman o' the Circle H right this minute."

"You can resign quick enough," Seth Carker remarked. "You haven't really started work yet."

"Your personal affairs are your own, Carker, but I wouldn't want to put myself in league with a man fightin' a woman!"

Seth Carker's face flamed with anger as Starr got out of his chair and reached for his hat.

"I'm offerin' you more money," Carker made a last attempt, "and you won't have to work so hard. We've got a live bunch at the Box Bar, too. Better think it over."

"I don't have to think it over, Carker. I'm workin' for the Circle H."

"Maybe it isn't the money that attracts you as much as the boss," Carker sneered.

A dozen men were watching them as they got to their feet. They did not overhear Seth Carker's words. But they did see the eyes of Gerald Starr narrow suddenly and his lips set into a grim, straight line.

Starting somewhere from his hip, Starr's right fist came up with all his strength behind it. It struck Seth Carker on the jaw. The master of the Box Bar went backward and crashed to the floor. The men nearest sprang out of their chairs.

Carker moaned and started to roll over; but the blow had been a strong

one, and the owner of the Box Bar was too weak to get up for the moment. Gerald Starr looked down at him and dusted his hands.

"Don't insult women when I'm around, you pup!" Starr said. "I don't see how the men in this part o' the country stand for a minute for a thing like you!"

Starr picked up his hat and went to the front of the restaurant to pay for his meal. Men got out of his way, looked at him in wide-eyed wonder. This stranger to the town of Mesaville certainly relished trouble. He had struck down Seth Carker of the Box Bar! And what would his punishment be?

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE THE DANCE.

THERE was a huge frame building in Mesaville called "The Hall," in which all social functions were held. Dances, lodge meetings, church sociables, and political talks took place in the building.

Lights blazed in the Hall as Starr emerged from the restaurant and started along the street. Men and women were entering the place already. These people danced when they danced—started as early as possible and did not quit until the dawn streaked the eastern sky with crimson.

Starr went to the store and bought a supply of ammunition.

"I'm to be foreman o' the Circle H," he explained to the storekeeper, "and I want plenty o' supplies."

"You may need 'em," the storekeeper said. "I wish you luck. I like Cora Hallen, and there are some others that I don't like. But I ain't talkin'. A business man has to keep his mouth shut sometimes."

"I reckon," Starr agreed. "You and me understand each other, all right. I'm a good-luck guy, they say down in Arizona. Any outfit I work for has good luck. I'm hopin' that's true."

"I wish all the ranch owners around here were men like Hi Gadley," the storekeeper said. "He's my idea of a real man."

"You're the second person as has told me that to-day," Starr said.

"Here comes Gadley now. I'll introduce you."

There was nobody else in the store. Gadley entered and greeted the storekeeper cordially. He requested that certain supplies be ready for transportation to the Cross D as soon as the dance was over. The storekeeper introduced Starr to him, and then went toward the rear of the building, where he had been putting up an order.

Gadley and Starr talked like two men who had met for the first time. Anybody watching from the street would have said that this was the case. But their words belied it.

"Watch yourself, boy," Gadley warned. "You certainly are starting in strong. Things played right into our hands when Labbock went over to the Box Bar and left that foreman's job open. But you smashed Carker in the restaurant, and he'll try to get you for that."

"I suppose so, sir. I'll have my eyes open."

"Watch out for Buck Turbell. His reputation isn't that of a clean fighter. Watch yourself during this dance. A lot of Carker's punchers are in town. They may try something."

"I'll watch, sir."

"If you need help——" Gadley began.

"It would look funny if you or your punchers helped a stranger," Gerald Starr interrupted, his eyes twinkling. "I reckon I'll get along all right."

"I ride over and visit Cora every now and then, and I'll see you at the Circle H. Just a hint—Carker doesn't use old methods, exactly. He mixes 'em with new ones. You know all the old

tricks and traps, but watch out for original ideas. You'll have to guard against those. Carker ain't the sort to do anything as old and raw as tryin' to make you out a rustler, for instance. He wouldn't raid the ranch and carry off Cora, either."

"What you reckon he would do?" Starr asked.

"He's liable to try anything. He wants Cora to marry him. He will do everything to make a failure of the Circle H. You are foreman o' that outfit now. If I was you, boy, I'd keep close watch on that baby beef."

"I reckon!" Starr said.

They shook hands in a natural manner, and Hiram Gadley went out upon the street again and turned toward The Hall. He always attended the local dances, and he always gladdened the hearts of the middle-aged women by dancing with them and treating them as gallantly as a youngster would treat the belle of a ball.

Gerald Starr rolled a cigarette and went out upon the street also. He sauntered along it in the direction of the stable. He was keenly alert, however. Here and there he spotted a Box Bar man, but he did not see Carker or Buck Turbell.

Burns was standing in the doorway at the stable.

"I got some stuff I want to put with my outfit," Starr explained. "I've been layin' in some ammunition."

"You're goin' to need it," Burns declared. "I just heard what you did to Seth Carker. There's a lot o' ways of committin' suicide, but you sure take the funniest."

"Yeah? I ain't aimin' to commit suicide."

"Might as well call it that," Burns said. "Maybe I'd better collect my bill now. You might not be able to pay it later."

"Well, my good gosh! Ain't you got a bit o' faith in me and my ability to take care of myself? I thought you was a friend o' mine."

"I aim to be," said Burns. "It won't be the first passin' of a friend that I've mourned. I'll see that there's a board at the head of your grave. I promise to sell your horse to somebody who'll treat him well. Maybe I'll keep him myself."

Starr, standing with arms akimbo beneath the hanging kerosene lamp, glared at him.

"Did you ever stop to think," he asked, "that a doomed man might get peevish and decide that he'd carry into the hereafter with him a bunch o' others just for meanness, startin' with whoever happens to be standin' closest?"

Burns moved quickly to one side. "Don't get hostile, mister," he begged.

"You quit your squawkin' then, old raven! What's this all about, anyway? I knocked down a man as passed a mean remark about a woman, that's all."

"Right and proper! But he was Seth Carker."

"Yeah! He might be a giant in armor to some folks, but to me he's only just another fresh jasper. Oh, I know that he'll storm and swear and try to get me! But I ain't just goin' to stand by and let him do it."

"I sure hope you win out," Burns said in lower tones. "You've certainly stirred up things since you came to Mesaville."

"Shucks! That ain't nothin'. Wait till I get started," Starr told him. "I may stir 'em until the pot slops over. Me, when I stir, I stir!"

"That's plain to be seen," Burns agreed.

"I wish you'd do one thing, you bein' a friend o' mine," Starr said. "I wish you'd keep a close eye on my hoss and outfit."

"Mr. Starr, that there remark is a reflection on my wisdom and common

sense. I'd already thought o' that. I might remark that your hoss is in a stall where nobody can get to him from the outside, and I'm here to see that they don't from the inside. Your outfit won't be touched, either, unless I'm put out o' the fightin' first."

Starr packed the ammunition and came back to the front of the stable again, just in time to see Daddy Ryan coming in from the street. Daddy had prepared for the dance, also. He had purchased a "store shave" at the little barber shop in the rear of the general store. The town blacksmith was barber on dance days. Daddy Ryan also had greased his boots and put on a clean shirt.

"Why, you old dude!" Burns cried.

"Bein' as how he's attached to the Circle H, he's got to live up to his foreman," Starr explained.

"And that's goin' to be a right-down tough job, maybe," Daddy Ryan remarked. "Mr. Starr, you sure and certain start things goin'. It's all over town how you knocked down Seth Carker. Cut his lip and loosened a mess o' teeth, I reckon."

"I was there and saw it," Starr said.

"Buck Turbell has been drinkin'," continued Daddy.

"He would be," said Starr.

"He's as mean as coyote poison, that hombre! There is a mess o' Box Bar punchers in town for the dance, too. I'm the only Circle H man here, but I'll back you up best I can."

"Thanks," Starr said, and meant it, because he knew that Daddy Ryan had meant what he had said. "Well, I reckon I'll go down to the dance."

"I'll come along, foreman," Daddy Ryan suggested. "They check all hardware at Mesaville dances."

"It sure must be a violent town," Starr declared.

They went up the street together, with Burns watching them from the door of the stable.

The Hall was crowded already. The people of the range and of Mesaville did not want to miss any of it. The two fiddlers were scraping and another musician was playing preparatory measures on an accordion.

The men had checked their guns at the door. The women had put aside their wraps. Cora Hallen, the center of a group of girls, the majority of them younger than herself and none of them with her responsibilities, was laughing and chatting. Hiram Gadley had been talking to her, and had given her all the news.

When Seth Carker approached her, then, she was prepared for the sight of his cut and swollen lips. Those same lips tried to smile as he came up to her. The other girls hurried away, some of them giggling.

"Cora, you're looking splendid!" Carker said.

"Thank you, Mr. Carker!" There was no warmth at all in her tone.

"I wanted a word with you, Cora. I realize that this is a time for merriment, yet feel that I should intrude enough to tell you some things you perhaps don't know."

"What is it?" she asked.

"I understand that you have hired a new foreman."

"Yes. Labbock left my employ today," she replied. "I understand that he was lured away to an easier job and higher wages."

"Now, Cora, don't hold enmity. Business is business," Carker said. "You really don't need a man as good as Labbock, and I had need of one."

"As you say, business is business. I can get along without Sam Labbock. I only hope that he doesn't show you the ingratitude he showed the Circle H."

"But this new foreman——" Carker urged.

"What about him?" she asked.

"Nothing to his credit is known about him, Cora. He comes from Arizona.

Down there they call him Shootin' Star. He murdered a man named Sternine, and that probably is why he is here."

"He killed Sternine in a fair duel. Sternine was a bad man and had many murders to his credit. Mr. Starr was applauded for killing him," she said.

"Possibly that's what he told you, Cora, but I've heard a different story. I wish that you would not endanger yourself by having such a man around your ranch."

"It might be interesting to know," she said, "just what you said to him that caused him to knock you down."

Carker's face flamed. "I cannot understand your attitude, Cora, unless it is that a mere glance at this man was enough to cause you to become infatuated."

Her face flamed in turn. "I am not infatuated with anybody," she said. "I don't believe that I am the sort to get infatuated quickly or easily. Must I call my foreman to have him protect me against you here at the dance?"

"I am talking to you for your own good, Cora. I'll deal with him for striking me."

"If you do it openly, the result should be interesting," the girl replied.

Carker fought back his anger. He did not want to antagonize her. "Please believe me when I say that you should be careful," he begged. "Starr is not the sort of man you should have around your ranch."

"He isn't the only one. I have Daddy Ryan and Fred and Jim, my two young punchers. They don't know an awful lot about the business yet, Fred and Jim, but they are willing and loyal. And Mrs. Brown, my housekeeper, makes a fine chaperon."

"You know nothing of this man Starr. He is a drifter. He is probably a schemer. Why should he take a job with you at less money than I offered him, unless he has some motive behind it?"

"He may have a motive behind it—I didn't question him."

"You pick up the first stranger who comes along and make him your foreman. You should have more sense than that, Cora."

"You stole my other foreman," she reminded him. "Mr. Carker, why beat around the bush any longer? You want me to make a failure at the Circle H. You'll do everything to help me fail. You believe that I'll change my mind and marry you if I can't make the ranch go. You might as well understand, Mr. Carker, that I'll never do it. I'd beg first."

Seth Carker's face went white now, and he struggled to speak and could not because of his rage. But he fought and conquered his wrath, and then the words came.

"I cannot understand why you should turn against me so," he said.

"I never did like you much. My father never trusted you."

"You must marry some time. Is there a more substantial man in the country?"

"Possibly I'll never marry. I may be ambitious to be known as the unwed queen of the cattle country," she said, laughing a bit.

"Won't you dismiss this man Starr?"

"Certainly not! I am not at all afraid of him, Mr. Carker. I am sure that he will make a good foreman. If he is such a wonder with a gun, that may come in handy in case the ranch or stock is bothered with—predatory beasts."

"Are you insinuating anything, Cora?"

"What does your conscience think that I should be insinuating, Mr. Carker?"

Seth Carker got up and bowed to her. "This new man seems to have hypnotized you," he said. "You'll be sorry if you depend on him too much. He has made several enemies since noon."

"Yes; you and Buck Turbell, and the Box Bar punchers, possibly," she returned. "I do not imagine that he is in the least alarmed. I do not want you to think, Mr. Carter, that I am utterly without judgment. I do not pick up the first man who comes along and take him into my confidence and make him my foreman—unless he comes to me well recommended!"

"But who could recommend Starr? He is a stranger."

"To this district, yes. But not everywhere. Possibly he was sent to me. He refused to take a job at the Box Bar, and he took one at the Circle H instantly, didn't he?"

"You didn't know you were going to need a man, Cora. You didn't know that Sam Labbock was going to quit you."

"And perhaps you did not know, Mr. Carker, that I intended to discharge Sam Labbock as soon as Mr. Starr got here. You are a man of your word, so you'll have to take care of Labbock as you promised. It has been expensive, and hasn't helped you any."

Miss Cora Hallen did not utter a falsehood exactly, though she implied one. It was a shock to Carker's pride to learn that he had lured away a foreman no longer wanted.

"You are declaring war on me and the Box Bar, Cora," he warned.

"I am not looking for a fight, Mr. Carker. I am going ahead attending to my business, trying to make a success of my ranch. But I'll fight if anybody tries to injure me. I don't believe we need talk any more just now."

"You'll dance with me?"

"Not just now, please. I'd rather you left me."

"Just one dance——"

Gerald Starr suddenly was standing at his elbow.

"Pardon me, Mr. Carker, but Miss Hallen requests you to leave her," Starr said. "As her foreman, I am here to enforce her orders, in case you won't comply with 'em."

"I'll settle with you, Starr!" Carker hissed.

"You're not makin' me shiver a bit," Starr said. "I reckon that you and your so-called power have been a lot overrated hereabouts. You fuss around me or around the Circle H, Carker, and I'll step on you!"

"I'm not the man to have for an enemy!" Carker threatened.

"I sure wouldn't want you for a friend," Starr said. "I don't want to spoil this here dance, with the music just gettin' ready to start, but I'll sure and certain create a fuss if you don't remove yourself from Miss Hallen's side. You are annoyin' her, and I can't have her annoyed."

Seth Carker looked him straight in the eyes for a moment. Carker's were flashing angrily; Gerald Starr's were twinkling. Carker bowed to Cora Hallen and stalked down the side of the room as the music started.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HECTIC DANCE.

CORA HALLEN danced the first dance with her new foreman. She could dance, and Gerald Starr was no amateur at it. They waltzed the length of the room, by far the most graceful pair on the floor. The men and women of the range and town watched them, questioned one another.

"His name is Starr. He just got into Mesaville to-day. He is the new foreman of the Circle H. He's quarreled with Buck Turbell, and he knocked Seth Carker down in the restaurant. They call him Shootin' Starr down in Arizona!"

"Ain't he handsome? And what a dancer! I hope that he asks me to dance. I wish he would run Buck Turbell out of the country! Wonder if he'll come into town much?"

Starr heard none of these comments, but perhaps he sensed them. He smiled as he danced; smiled at men and women alike. When the dance was finished, he thanked Cora Hallen and conducted her to her seat and found half a dozen men waiting there to claim the next dance from her.

Starr did not dance the second. He knew no other woman except Jennie Burch, and she had been claimed for the number. He stood against one of the walls, with Daddy Ryan beside him, and glanced over the crowd.

Seth Carker had left the hall. Buck Turbell had not put in an appearance. But there were several Box Bar punchers dancing. They glanced at Starr now and then as they passed him, but betrayed no particular hostility.

There were plenty of Hiram Gadley's Cross D punchers scattered through the crowd, and Gadley himself was dancing with a certain jolly widow who did dressmaking. Just an ordinary, jolly, cow-country dance, Starr decided.

He went to Jennie Burch when the next dance was called, and she smiled as she got up and took his arm.

"Young man, you're violent," Jennie said. "What you want to have a fight in the restaurant for?"

"There wasn't time to get outside," Starr told her.

"I was never so surprised in my life. I didn't think anybody had the courage to take a smash at Seth Carker. I know a lot of women who have felt like it."

"Uh-huh! He don't impress me as much," Starr said.

"You be careful," she whispered, as they danced. "Carker will not rest until he evens the score."

"He's goin' to be tired a long time, then."

"Don't get overconfident."

"Shucks! I ain't! That's just my way o' talkin'," Starr assured her. "I may sound like a lot o' brag at times, but I really ain't. I just talk the way I do because it's a lot better than to go around moanin' all the time."

"You're a fine dancer."

"Thanks! You ain't so bad yourself. You got any more dances that ain't taken?"

"Plenty," she said, her lips trembling. "The boys are afraid to dance with me because o' Buck Turbell. The last dance, I refused to dance with him, and he said that I couldn't dance with any other man until I did."

"And here you are doin' it!"

"Yes. I hope there is no trouble."

"Mr. Buck Turbell's got to be made to respect a lady's wishes," Starr declared. "He ain't constructed right, I reckon. You'll dance with me again?"

"If you wish. Won't Cora Hallen be jealous?"

"Shucks! She's my boss! She's got plenty o' men to dance with her. She wouldn't get jealous about a foreman, I reckon. I've known you longer than I have her."

"How much longer?" Jennie asked.

"Maybe an hour," Starr admitted. "You and me are old friends, and me and Miss Hallen ain't really acquainted yet."

"I think you're a flirt."

"There you go, makin' light o' me," he complained. "I ain't said or done a thing out o' the way, have I? Now, don't you go to fallin' in love with me and makin' yourself miserable!"

"Well, of all the nerve!"

"It has happened," Starr told her. "I never like to have a girl fall in love with me unless I fall in love with her first."

"How often have you done that?" she asked.

"Who? Me? Fell in love? I never have yet, really, but I've been mighty close to it. Matter o' fact, I'm right close to it now."

"You're just makin' fun," she ac-

cused, snuggling closer to him as they started back down the hall.

To state the truth, Miss Jennie Burch of the restaurant was the best woman dancer on the floor, though Cora Hallen ran her a close second. Many a puncher there wanted to dance with her, but disliked to call down upon himself a mess of trouble with Buck Turbell.

The dance came to an end, and Starr led Jennie back to her seat. Cora Hallen was there, too, and she introduced Starr to another girl of the range. Starr danced with her.

Then he missed a number, while he watched the others. He saw that Seth Carker had come back into the hall and was dancing with one of the women who lived in Mesaville. Daddy Ryan was not only dancing, but also was introducing some fancy steps that brought forth applause.

Starr claimed Jennie Burch again when the music started once more. She had danced with the storekeeper and with the banker, two ancients of whom Buck Turbell could not get jealous, and whom he dared not assail or criticize.

"Whenever you want to dance, you just signal me," Starr said. "You're too good a dancer and too pretty a girl to be a wallflower."

"But Cora will introduce you to all the girls, and you'll be kept busy," Jennie said.

"Nevertheless, I'll dance with you a lot. I like to," Starr explained.

"I wish I could believe half you say."

"Even that would be a lot," he confessed. "I'm ridin' out to the Circle H in the mornin', but I reckon business will bring me to town now and then."

"You're just leadin' me on," she said.

"I don't mean anything except that I want you to be my friend, and I like to see my friends often," Starr explained. "My good gosh! I ain't makin' love talk. I never do that first time I meet a girl."

"You wait until the second time, huh?"

"I never even do it then, unless I think that the girl wants me to," he said.

Her silvery laugh rang out. There was no pretense about Starr. She understood him perfectly. He would not make love to a girl unless he meant it, and he wanted her to understand that this banter was only by way of having a good time. So her laugh rang out, and suddenly stopped.

The music ceased at the same time. Starr turned to conduct Jennie Burch to her seat, hoping that he would get a chance to dance with Cora Hallen again.

Buck Turbell suddenly stood before them—a Buck Turbell who had been drinking until he was dangerously mean. His eyes were blazing. His lips were curled in a sneer. He was half crouched, his extended hands like talons.

"You—Starr!" he said thickly. "You're a stranger—maybe you don't understand. Jennie Burch is my girl! Nobody dances with her but me! Understand? Let go her arm and get out!"

There was sudden quiet in the room, save where men whispered to one another suddenly, planning Buck Turbell's swift removal from the hall. Gerald Starr led Jennie the two paces necessary for her to reach her chair, bowed before her, thanked her for the dance, and then turned to face Turbell.

"You're makin' a fool o' yourself, Turbell!" he said in low tones. "You've been drinkin' too much."

"Don't dance with my girl again!"

"She tells me that she isn't your girl. I know how you've told other men to stay away from her, and so she can't have any fun at dances. But whenever the lady feels like dancin', and

wants to honor me, I'm right here to be her partner!"

"You stay away from her!" Turbell snarled.

"I'm not takin' orders from you, Turbell! And let me tell you this—don't annoy Miss Burch when I'm around."

"What's that? Me annoy her? Why, you—you——"

"And be careful of your words!" Starr snapped.

"Come out o' the hall, and we'll settle this!" Turbell cried.

"Yeah? Have you got the Box Bar punchers posted all around outside to handle me? Because you couldn't do it yourself, Turbell!"

Buck Turbell gave a roar of rage and took a swift step backward. His hand darted beneath his coat, and came out holding a revolver. Women screamed, men surged forward, Daddy Ryan in the midst of them.

"I've a notion .to shoot you down!" Turbell cried. "You got the drop on me in the saloon, but I've got it on you now."

"And easy enough," Starr added. "I ain't got a gun on me, Turbell."

"No?" Turbell snarled.

"No! Gentlemen are supposed to check their hardware at the door o' the hall!" He stressed the word "gentlemen."

"Meanin' that I ain't a gentleman? Huh! Put up your hands, Starr! You march right out o' this here hall. When I get you outside, I'll tend to you."

"Thanks, but I prefer to remain here," Starr said, "and dance some more. You're makin' a nuisance o' yourself, Turbell—scarin' the womenfolks and disgustin' the real men. Put up that gun and go sober up!"

Buck Turbell jammed the muzzle of his gun into Starr's stomach.

"What's to stop me pullin' and blowin' you to pieces?" he asked.

He got his answer immediately:

"I reckon that this will stop you, Turbell!"

Daddy Ryan had crowded forward. And now the old-timer, too, had taken a gun from beneath his coat, and he jammed the muzzle of it against Buck Turbell's spine.

"Can't have our new foreman pestered," Daddy Ryan said. "I know that it's agin' the rules to pack a gun into The Hall, but I just had to do it. I knew that Mr. Starr wouldn't, and I suspicioned, Turbell, that you would. You go right ahead and shoot Starr, Buck, and I'll shoot at the same time. I'll put a bullet right through your spine, you pest o' the range! Any time you're ready, Buck!"

Again there was silence for a moment. And then Buck Turbell drew back a few inches, lowered his gun, and finally returned it to its holster.

"There'll be other times," he said.

Starr started to say something, but Daddy Ryan was before him. This was the first time for years that Daddy Ryan had enjoyed the chance of basking in the glare of publicity to advantage. The blood sang in his veins again as it had when he was young.

"Dang your hide, don't pester my foreman any more!" Daddy Ryan snapped. "You go sober up, Buck! You ain't got any right sayin' who can dance with Miss Jennie Burch. Me, I'm goin' to have the next dance with her, if she'll honor me. You've been pesterin' around and makin' a nuisance o' yourself for some time, Buck, and it's time we had a change o' tune!"

"Why, you old fossil!" Buck Turbell cried.

"Easy, man! I ain't put my gun away yet, you'll notice. Now you'd better go outside, Buck, and let the dance go on. And if I was you I wouldn't plan any shootin' through the windows, or anything like that. 'Cause, if you do, every saddle's got a rope on it, Buck!"

CHAPTER IX.

ADVENTURE ON THE TRAIL.

WITH the ejection of Buck Turbell from the hall, trouble ended for the night. The dance continued as though nothing had happened. Gerald Starr danced with his boss again, and several times with Jennie Burch. Several other punchers and a few men of the town also dared dance with Jennie, who thanked Starr with her eyes every time they passed.

Refreshments were served at midnight. Cans of coffee were carried from the restaurant, and the women had made heaps of substantial sandwiches and had baked cakes and pies. Refreshments at a Mesaville dance were not of the delicate variety. The men and women of the town and range took their entertainment seriously. They played as hard as they worked, and they certainly worked hard.

The resorts remained open, of course, and certain gentlemen partook of liquid refreshments such as were not served at The Hall; but that, also, was to be expected. Here and there a man imbibed too freely, and was led away to sleep or to bewail his fate to the stars.

Seth Carker did not remain long in the hall after his foreman had been ejected. But some of the Box Bar punchers continued to dance. They said nothing to Starr, but they did not look hostile. They might fight against him later, if that was the order of their employer, but it was none of their fight now.

Then the first streak of dawn lit the eastern sky. The musicians received their collection. Punchers commenced escorting town girls to their homes, then going to one of the resorts for a last drink, and then to the hitching racks for their horses. Yawning but happy, they started out the trails toward the ranches.

Starr had danced with Cora Hallen just before dawn.

"I have sent Daddy Ryan to get the team hitched," she said. "We'll be starting as soon as it is ready. I meant to start about three o'clock; didn't meant to wait for dawn. But this—well, it has been a dandy dance."

"I'll say!" Starr remarked.

"I want to thank you for handling Turbell as you did. Jennie is a nice girl, and Turbell has been tormenting her."

"I reckon the credit for that better go to Daddy Ryan," Starr replied, laughing. "That jasper sure got the drop on me."

"How could he help doing it, when you had no gun on? Get your horse and ride along with us."

"Yes'm. Here comes Daddy Ryan for you now, Miss Hallen."

"You're to call me Cora. All the boys do."

"Yes'm—Cora! Suppose you let me go to the stable and get my hoss and catch up with you?"

"You mean that you expect trouble?"

"A man never can tell. I wouldn't want to put you in danger. You needn't worry, ma'am—I mean Cora. I'm right-down eager to live to get to the Circle H and take up my new job. I got an idea that I'm goin' to like it."

He left her and met Daddy Ryan halfway down the hall.

"I'll get my hoss and overtake you," Starr said in low tones.

"Yeah! Out the north trail. You can't miss it. I didn't see Buck or Carker when I was out just now. I was expectin' to see Buck."

"They don't dare be too raw," Starr said.

"Some o' the Box Bar boys are scattered around town yet, o' course; but maybe they won't make a move. I'll be watchin' for you, Starr."

Gerald Starr went to the door and claimed the six-gun that he had checked.

Standing to one side of the door, he broke the weapon and examined it closely. The cartridges looked all right, but it was no time to take chances. He removed them and inserted others.

Then he slipped the gun into its holster, hitched it around in the most approved position, pulled his hat down firmly on his head, and stepped out.

The first streaks of dawn were in the sky. Elusive shadows played about the town. The dead whiteness of the early day made things look unreal.

Starr blinked his eyes and adjusted them to the outside light. He glanced around the building, then up and down the street. Men were at the hitching racks, but they seemed to be giving him no attention. He rolled a cigarette deliberately, lighted it, then walked briskly away from the hall and toward the stable.

No shot came from ambush. He turned once and saw Daddy Ryan and Cora Hallen just leaving the hall, saying their farewells to a dozen others. He hurried on to the stable, and found a sleepy Mr. Burns waiting for him.

"Didn't you go to the dance at all?" Starr asked.

"I went down the street and peeked through a window once," the stableman replied. "I left somebody here on guard while I did it, though."

"Dang it, I'd have stayed here a little while, while you danced," Starr told him.

"It's just as well. I wouldn't have wanted to dance with any girl except Jennie Burch, and I wouldn't have dared dance with her on account o' Buck Turbell, and I reckon that she wouldn't have danced with me anyhow. So it's just as well."

"I danced with her plenty."

"Yeah! So I heard tell. Made Buck back down again, too, didn't you?"

"Daddy Ryan did the most o' that."

"Uh-huh! It tickles me to see that old fossil kickin' up his heels. He's unburied dead!"

"Don't you like Daddy Ryan?"

"Him and me are old rivals," Burns explained. "We never agree on anything. Him dancin' and flourishin' a gun! Heavenly days!"

"You're both pretty good men yet," Starr complimented. "I'll take my hoss now."

"He'll be ready for you in a jiffy, Mr. Starr. I'm right down surprised to find you alive. I had figured on buyin' that horse for myself and payin' the money to your estate, if any. He looks like a right good horse."

Starr found that the horse was all right. Nor had his belongings been touched by tampering fingers. He prepared for the trail, then took a big drink of cold water at the trough in the rear, and filled his canteen.

"Daddy and Miss Cora just drove out o' town," Burns reported. "They're hittin' the trail for the Circle H. 'Bout all Daddy can do to handle them colts. They're as frisky as that old fossil thinks he is."

Starr mounted, after paying Burns, looked to his gun and his rope, and settled himself in the saddle.

"I might mention," the stableman said, "that some of the Box Bar boys are in front o' that biggest saloon, pretendin' to be fussin' with their saddles and bridles and sich. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised but what Buck Turbell was just inside the door."

"Uh-huh!" Starr grunted. "Thanks for everything, Burns."

"Yeah! If you live to get to town again, drop in and see me. I'll always take good care o' that hoss."

Starr grinned and rode out from the stable. But the grin disappeared as soon as he was outside. He rode slowly up the street, watching on every side, and particularly the group in front of the largest resort, where some men were down by the hitching racks and

others were grouped on the plank sidewalk.

Some of them glanced up as he approached, then quickly shifted their position. Starr noted these things. He saw that all of them had got away from in front of the open door.

He did not ride by them. He stopped his mount in the middle of the street and faced the doorway of the resort. His hands were resting on the pommel of the saddle, but in such a position that the right one could drop swiftly.

None of the men in front of him spoke, but Starr raised his voice.

"I'm right glad that I met some o' you gents," he said. "I'll be glad to meet up with you again. If you happen by the Circle H, light and have some grub."

He watched them closely, especially the Box Bar men. Some of Hiram Gadley's Cross D punchers waved at him by way of answer.

"Is Buck Turbell around?" Starr demanded.

That question seemed to stun them. Buck Turbell answered it in person, stepping from the dark resort.

"I'm here! What's wanted?" he shouted.

"Why, I just wanted to say, in front o' all these gentlemen, some of which don't ride for your Box Bar, that I'm goin' to swing my hoss and ride out the north trail. If I'm shot in the back, everybody'll know who did it and act accordin'."

As he finished speaking, and before Buck Turbell could make a reply, Starr wheeled his horse, presented his back to them, and rode away at a canter. Perhaps there was a ticklish sensation up and down his spine for a moment. But no gun cracked behind him. He only heard the loud curses of Buck Turbell. Starr had done the right thing to save himself. Turbell could not pretend a quarrel, a flare of temper, a shooting in self-defense, with Starr's back turned. And Starr had guessed that, if such a thing came about, there would be unexplained shots from inside the saloon, one or more of which would have brought him down.

He gave his horse the spurs and galloped swiftly out of the town of Mesaville. Far ahead, a cloud of dust showed him the progress of the buckboard. Starr rode fast to overtake it. It was half an hour before he did so. He pulled up beside the team.

"Everything all right?" Cora Hallen asked.

"Sure and certain, miss—I mean Cora! It's a right fine mornin'."

"There—there wasn't any trouble back in town?" she asked.

"Shucks, no!" He got around to the other side to avoid the dust. The colts were compelled to walk as they pulled the buckboard up a grade. "Are the two men at the ranch as good as Daddy Ryan?" he asked.

"Certainly not!" Daddy answered. "But they are right-good boys—Fred and Jim. Likely youngsters. They're willin' to work hard."

"They'd better be. With Miss Cora's permission, I'm goin' to make a real ranch out o' the Circle H."

"It will be slow starting," Cora warned, though she glowed at the promise of this man helping her.

"Oh, I don't know! How about that baby beef?"

"Five hundred head," Daddy said.

"Um! Not bad at all," Starr remarked. "Need cows and bulls?"

"Yeah!" said Daddy.

"Ever think o' tradin' some o' that baby beef for 'em?"

"That might be done," Cora admitted. "But I wouldn't trade with Seth Carker, and Mr. Gadley would try to make me a present of something. There is nobody else."

"Easy to drive," Starr said. "Some folks over the range might want to make a dicker. See about it later."

"You're planning, and you haven't even seen the ranch," she said.

"A ranch is a ranch. You've got to have cows on a cow ranch," said Starr. "How about feed?"

"Plenty now," Daddy put in. "Plenty on Cora's own land and heaps on the open range."

"Ever think o' sheep?"

Daddy Ryan exploded. "I've thought of 'em a lot, but what I've thought ain't fit for a lady to hear. Have I been consortin' with a sheepman?"

"Nope! I just wanted to see if you was a real cow-puncher," Starr explained, laughing. "Cora, I never saw a ranch yet where the folks didn't fail to make the most o' their opportunities. I'll bet I won't be workin' for you three days until I see some way o' makin' money outside beef. I'll bet that we make enough to stock the ranch up fine!"

"I hope so," she said.

They traveled at a better pace then, and talk was impossible for a time. Then they came to another hill, and the colts slowed down. Another trail ran into the main one here.

"How about this road?" Starr asked.

"Comes from town—a short cut," Daddy Ryan explained. "Got a lot o' bad spots in it. A man can make it on a horse if he is in a bad hurry, but you can't make it with a wagon."

"Much shorter?"

"A lot," said Daddy.

"Uh-huh!" Starr said nothing else just then; but he seemed to become more alert. He rode ahead of the buckboard, too, and gradually increased his lead until he was at least a hundred yards in advance.

Here was a jumble of rocks, frowning hills with broken sides, and dry watercourses that had carried torrents in some bygone day. The trail could not be seen clearly for more than a few hundred feet ahead.

A revolver barked!

A bullet whistled within a few inches of Gerald Starr's head. He wheeled his mount sharply to one side as a second shot came. He spurred the horse to the protection of an overhanging ledge.

He had seen a puff of smoke that told him from whence the shot had come. Now he dashed into the trail again and spurred his horse forward, bending low over the animal's neck. A third bullet came, but missed him by several feet.

He reached what he had seen ahead, a level space where he could turn from the trail and double back to his assailant. His horse showed quality now. Climbing like a cat, he carried Gerald Starr to the crest of a slope. Daddy Ryan had heard the shots, had seen Starr's maneuver, and had stopped the buckboard.

Starr beheld a man getting into his saddle. He bore down upon him as another shot went past his head. Starr whipped his gun out of the holster now, but held his fire.

The other rider circled for the trail, tried to cut in ahead of Starr. He managed to make it, but Starr was gaining on him rapidly. Down into the highway the assailant dashed, with Starr a short distance behind him. The man ahead turned and fired, and once more he missed his flying target.

Now Gerald Starr threw up his right arm. His revolver cracked. The man ahead of him lurched to one side, and his horse was brought to an abrupt stop. Starr's assailant toppled from the saddle into the dust of the trail.

Starr was upon him instantly, had vaulted from the saddle, and had kicked the gun out of the other's hand. The buckboard came up, with the ponies running, and stopped a few feet away.

"You're a rotten shot, Turbell!" Starr was saying. "You might be glad that I wasn't feelin' mean. I put that bullet through your shoulder on purpose.

I could have put it through your head just as easy, Turbell. You ambushin' swine! Get into your saddle and go on to the Box Bar and get that wound tended to."

"Shoot the murderin' hound!" Daddy Ryan urged.

"He ain't worth killin'," Starr remarked. "Come on with that buckboard, Daddy. Let's get to the ranch."

They went away as Buck Turbell got slowly to his feet and staggered to where his mount was standing. Luckily, Turbell had pulled the reins over his horse's head when he had fallen.

"He'll be all right," Starr said soothingly to Cora.

Cora Hallen's eyes were glistening. "I'm commencing to think that you're pretty much of a man," she said.

"Shucks! He's just a fool cowboy with too much liquor in him!"

"He's a mean, vindictive, dangerous man," she warned. "Don't make the mistake of underestimating him."

"I won't. But I'm glad I noticed that old road back there, and that Daddy Ryan said it was a short cut to town. Buck must have ridden hard to get ahead o' us."

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST BLOW FALLS.

FOR the first two weeks at the Circle H, Gerald Starr demonstrated how a man may work long hours and accomplish much. Fred and Jim, the two young punchers, were willing workers, and old Daddy Ryan did all that he could and gave much valuable advice.

Starr fitted into the scheme of things easily. He made a firm friend of Mrs. Brown, the elderly housekeeper. He showed Cora Hallen that she had a real foreman, and she wondered just who he was and why Gadley had suggested him. But Starr always evaded her questions.

Fences were repaired, and so were buildings. Corrals were made stronger. Outbuildings were whitewashed. Trees were trimmed in the ranch-house yard.

All this work had a subtle effect on Cora Hallen. The Circle H was commencing to look as it had in its more prosperous days. It was more like her old home, when her father had been a strong man and her mother had been alive.

She had long talks with Starr on the ranch-house porch in the evenings. Starr lived in the bunk house with the men. He seldom said much about himself. And he had long talks with Daddy Ryan, too.

"It's right-down funny to me that Seth Carker ain't made a move," Daddy said.

"To me, too," Starr admitted. "He's probably busy plannin' some moves, though."

"You want to be mighty careful when you go to town," Daddy warned. "I wouldn't put nothin' past Carker and his gang. When you sent me to town yesterday with that mail, I had some talk with that old pest of a Burns who runs the stable."

"Yeah? And what did Mr. Burns have to say?"

"Don't 'mister' that old pelican," Daddy said. "He ain't worth it."

"He called you an old fossil, too."

"Yeah? Him and me are due to mix one o' these days. Anyhow, Burns said that Buck Turbell's shoulder is well again. You made a mistake, Mr. Starr, when you didn't send that bullet through his heart. It would have been a sure case o' self-defense."

"I reckon, but I didn't want to kill him."

"He's been in town and pesterin' around Jennie Burch again. Bein' wounded gave him a chance to hang around Mesaville pretendin' that he had to see the doctor every day. My good gosh! In the old days men didn't run

to the doctor with a gunshot wound. They just wrapped it up and went about their business, else laid down and died and had it over with. Men ain't what they used to be."

"You meanin' anything personal by that remark, Daddy?"

"Now, Mr. Starr, you know right well that I ain't. You're a reg'lar man like the old-timers. I c'n remember when——"

"Don't!" Starr ordered. "We ain't got time for it now."

"Seems to me you've been writin' a lot o' letters lately," the old puncher went on.

"Is that any o' your business?"

"I reckon not."

"You're as curious as an old woman, Daddy. Them letters might mean a lot o' work for folks around this here ranch."

"We've got all we can stand now."

"Yeah? You ain't even warmed up yet," Starr declared. "You're to go into Mesaville again to-morrow and get the mail."

"We don't usually do that more'n twice a month."

"To-morrow, I said."

"Yeah!"

Daddy Ryan made the trip the following day and returned with a bunch of letters. Starr read them swiftly, his face broke into smiles, and he rushed for the ranch house, where Cora was sitting on the front porch trying to keep cool.

"Miss Hallen——" he began.

"Cora, please."

"All right! Cora, we're goin' to win out. And we won't have to wait for that baby beef to turn into cash, either."

"Have you been drinking, Gerald?"

"Only drinkin' in your smiles," he countered. "You listen to me, boss. You may not know it, but that lower meadow o' yours, where the creek runs, raises some peculiar grass."

"Father used to speak of that."

"Yeah! I ran across the same kind once over in Colorado, up across from South Park. It's a sort o' special brand o' hay, Cora. That ranch in Colorado bails it, and it's contracted for right on the ground and brings a staggerin' price per ton. It's shipped to racin' stables and breedin' stables. Best hay in the world for fine hosses."

"Why, Gerald, I am surprised! But how does that help us?"

"Well, my stars! What am I a foreman for? I've been writin' and dickerin' to certain men who know me. I even shipped samples o' the hay. And it's sold."

"The hay?"

"Yeah? Goin' to be bailed and shipped, and the money will come rollin' in."

"I'm sorry, Gerald, but we can't do it. I can't afford to buy a bailing machine and my credit is about gone. I can't afford to hire men——"

"You stop right there. I've made a regular deal. They were mighty anxious to get that hay. They're sendin' their own bailin' machine and some men to do the work. As fast as it is bailed, we collect right in Mesaville. They even do the cartin' away from here."

"I—I scarcely can believe it."

"I ain't wrong when I say that the hay crop from that meadow is goin' to bring you in more money than a small beef herd, Cora. And it'll be good year after year. You can buy breedin' stock and new machinery and —and everything!"

"Oh, Gerald! If this doesn't come true——"

"It'll come true, all right. The gang will be here with the bailer the first o' the week. We'll have to feed 'em. There's plenty o' room in the bunk house."

Daddy Ryan and Fred and Jim got the news and rejoiced accordingly. They were sworn to secrecy, too. When

the first of the week came, Daddy Ryan was sent to Mesaville to meet the men and bring them out to the ranch.

Watching operations from a distance, Seth Carker and Buck Turbell wondered what was happening. Their spies soon found out, for the hay men visited the town and talked.

Down in the meadow, the hay was cut and raked and bailed. The huge stacks grew. Starr watched, scarcely sleeping, urging the men to their work. Daddy and Fred and Jim did all the regular work of the ranch.

Pay day came, but none of the Circle H men went to Mesaville. They were too busy at the ranch. They promised themselves a short holiday after this was over. They were helping Cora Hallen win success, and that sufficed for the moment.

Carker and Turbell had made certain arrangements regarding that pay day, and those arrangements were wrecked when Starr did not appear. Buck Turbell made remarks regarding Starr's cowardice. He was afraid to come to town, Buck Turbell said. He was hiding behind a woman's skirts.

But Seth Carker made inquiries and figured what was happening at the Circle H. He saw Cora Hallen slipping out of his grasp. He no longer hoped to win her, but he had decided to crush her. Instead, she was on the way to becoming independent.

Starr was apprised of the remarks Buck Turbell had made about him. His face went white for a moment, and then the color came back into it, and he laughed.

"I'll tend to Mr. Turbell later," he announced. "There's somethin' more important just now."

He rode around the ranch with Cora, who looked stunning in her riding outfit. They watched the hay being cut and bailed. They looked over the baby beef, too, for to them both the hay was only an incidental means to an end; the real business of the Circle H was raising cattle.

Sunday came, and there was rest on the Circle H. The hay men were loafing around the bunk house, playing cards, singing, talking. Starr and Daddy Ryan had been guests up at the house for a Sunday chicken dinner. Jim and Fred had ridden out over the range for a look-see.

"There comes one of the boys!" Cora said suddenly. "He's riding as though something had happened."

Starr and Daddy Ryan went down the steps and stood in the middle of the lane, watching. When the rider came nearer, they could see that it was Fred. He was getting the utmost speed out of his horse.

He stopped in a shower of gravel in front of the porch, with Daddy Ryan grabbing at the reins.

"What is it?" Starr snapped.

"Baby beef—dead!" Fred gasped. "Found more'n a dozen."

"Where? What happened? Talk!" Starr commanded, as Cora ran down the steps to them.

"Over by the hills," Fred explained, fighting for breath. "They are scattered along by the trees."

"Shot?" Starr asked.

"Poisoned! A man could tell that quick. You know that drinkin' pool by the old line cabin? Water looks funny——"

"Carker has struck, I reckon!" Starr said. "Poisoned that spring and pool!"

They were all silent for a moment, stunned with wrath. That even Seth Carker or Buck Turbell would poison a pool on the open range was something almost beyond their thoughts. That any cowman would do such a thing!

"Daddy!" Starr cried. "Get a wagon, posts, wire! Take a couple o' the hay men and fence in that pool as quick as you can. Explain to 'em and they'll be glad to help. You change horses, Fred, and I'll catch up mine.

Jim will come ridin' in soon, and Miss Cora can give him orders."

"What are you going to do?" Cora cried.

"Fence that pool, first. Then we're goin' out to round up that baby beef as fast as we can, and get 'em in the lower pasture behind wire. We can feed 'em when the grass gets low. We can guard 'em there, which we can't do on the open range."

"It'll be a big job——" she began.

"Got to be done!" Starr said. "Cora, you put us up some snacks o' grub. Mrs. Brown can do it—anything. We'll have to eat in the saddle. Canteens, everybody! Don't drink any water out on the range!"

Daddy Ryan already had hurried away. Fred rode toward the corral to get a fresh mount.

"The fiends!" Starr stormed. "That's worse than shootin' from ambush."

"I can't believe that Seth Carker would do such a thing," Cora said.

"Poison in a pool don't just happen. And you ain't got another enemy on the range. Carker and Turbell did it. They've showed their hand. It's goin' to be a war to the finish, I reckon!"

CHAPTER XI.

STARR TAKES A TRICK.

THE pool was at some distance, but Daddy Ryan and the hay men had it safely fenced off before dark. Stock used to drinking there would have to travel down to the creek or find other pools. And there was the danger that other pools had been poisoned, too!

Starr wrote a note and got one of the hay men to ride with it for him, sending him away quietly so that Cora did not know. The note was addressed to Hiram Gadley and told him what had happened. Starr knew that Gadley would see red when he learned the news. Any decent cowman would.

Then Starr and Fred and Jim started collecting the baby beef and driving them to the pasture, where they could be put behind fence. It was a difficult job. The animals were frisky and badly scattered.

They worked as late as they could, waited through the night, sleeping fitfully, and commenced work again at dawn. They drove the young stock cruelly out of draws and across ridges. Daddy rode with them through the day and kept tally at the gate.

They found a dead calf here and there, and fenced one more pool they felt sure had been poisoned. Starr had investigated in the vicinity of the pools. He found ample evidence—hoof marks and boot tracks, even the paper in which the poison had been carried.

Half a dozen punchers rode over from the Cross D that noon, with Hiram Gadley at their head.

"I got word o' what has happened, Cora, and you've got to let my men help," Gadley said. "You want to get them baby beef rounded up soon as possible. Don't you get uppity now! This ain't an ordinary occasion. When they get to poisonin' water, every decent ranchman ought to help. Cuss and dang it, we gave you them baby beef, and we don't want our presents treated that way!"

The Cross D boys went out into the field and helped Starr and the others round up the baby beef and drive them into the pasture. They got all except a few that had strayed far up into the hills, and those would be safe there.

"If there's any more dirty work, Cora, send word to me," Gadley said, as he prepared to lead his men away. "I was your father's close friend. You're makin' a great fight. This hay thing will put you on your feet. And we ain't goin' to stand back and let rotten men wreck this outfit."

"There is no real evidence," she said.

"Don't need any! Nobody but Seth

Carker would do such a thing. Everybody on the range knows that he did it, evidence or no evidence. A little more o' that, and he'll be run out o' here. We're for decent men. How's the hay comin'?"

"The men'll be done in three or four more days, Mr. Gadley. I don't deserve any credit for that. It was Starr's idea."

"Um! You deserve some credit for hirin' him, don't you?"

"You suggested that. You seemed to know that he could be trusted."

"Well, can't he?"

"I reckon!" she said. "He never tells me anything about himself."

"He wouldn't, because he ain't that kind. But I know a lot about him, Cora. He's all right—good stock and a right decent young man. It wouldn't hurt if you took a good look at him, Cora."

Her face flamed red.

"Um! I see! You've looked him over already," Hiram teased.

"Now, Mr. Gadley——"

"It's all right! You c'n trust him, Cora."

"I hope there'll be no more trouble."

"You can make a little bet that there will be," Gadley said. "Carker and his gang won't stop now. But Starr can handle the situation, I betcha!"

Starr started out to handle it. He arranged for Fred and Jim to ride night guard on the baby beef, around and around the pasture. He and Daddy Ryan, therefore, had a lot more work to do in the daytime, but they did not seem to mind that.

The piles of bailed hay grew. A small fortune was represented by those stacks. Ten days later, that hay was to be carted away in huge wagons, mule drawn. The purchasers were to send the wagons and the mules. The hay would be weighed in Mesaville, and Cora would be paid at the bank there immediately.

"Now we'll dicker for some breedin' stock," Starr told her. "Next season, you'll want your own bailer, too, and some new mowers. And we've got enough regular hay left for the winter feedin'. Them baby beef are goin' to mean real money in a few months. It's all good stock, and the heifers will be worth their weight in gold."

"It seems too good to be true," she said.

"It ain't half good enough for you!"

"Why, Gerald! What do you mean?"

"Just that!" he said. "We've got to have more grub. I never saw men eat as much as that hay gang. You'd think that they was goin' away somewhere to starve."

"Mrs. Brown loves to cook for them."

"Yeah? I'll bet she'll be glad when they're gone. That'll be a couple o' days more. I'll send Daddy in with the wagon to get the stuff. The buckboard won't hold it. A couple o' the day men who want to go to Mesaville can help him."

"Whatever you say, Gerald."

He looked down at her as though he wished to say more, and then seemed to think better of it. But she put out a hand and touched his arm as he started to turn away.

"I—I don't know how to thank you," she said.

"Why, my good gosh! I'm only tryin' to be a good foreman. I'm tryin' to live up to my job."

"I wake up at nights sometimes, and think of it, and tell myself that it can't be true. I'm afraid I'll come out in the morning and find you gone."

"I wouldn't run away like that. Shucks! If I did, you could get another foreman, I reckon."

"But he wouldn't be you," she said. Then her face flamed, and she started to turn back into the house. Starr caught her.

"Cora," he said, "you've done it!"

"Done what?"

"Made me break my promises to myself, that's what. I always said that there wasn't a woman in the world who could really make my heart beat faster than normal. And I promised myself that I wouldn't ever let any woman do it. I lose!"

"What do you mean, Gerald?"

"As if you didn't know!" he said. "I reckon that I've said too much now. You'll be givin' me my time. I forgot for a minute that I was just your foreman. Forgive me, ma'am!"

"I can forgive you anything, Gerald, except blindness."

"Then that's all right! I reckon I can see well enough."

"I wonder," she said.

Before he could say more, she had darted inside the house.

Daddy Ryan and two of the hay men departed with the heavy wagon half an hour later. They would reach Mesaville before dark, get the supplies, and come back by the light of the moon, after spending an hour or so in town.

Starr got Fred and Jim out of their bunks a bit earlier than usual.

"You boys keep your eyes open tonight," he directed. "It's about time for the Box Bar crowd to make another move. Get them baby beef bedded down, if you can, and nighthawk 'em close."

The hay men came in and ate their evening meal. Fred and Jim left to take up their night vigil. Starr talked with Cora for a time, but in the presence of Mrs. Brown, and he seemed to be a bit self-conscious about something.

Then he went to the bunk house, but he did not prepare for sleep. Dressed for the trail, he slipped out and caught up his horse, put on bridle and saddle, and rode quietly from the Circle H.

He turned into the Mesaville trail and loped along slowly, riding easily, stopping now and then to listen. There was a full moon, and as much as possible Starr kept from getting in silhouette against the sky.

He made good time. He did not meet the wagon coming back. He supposed that Daddy Ryan had to wait in town until the hay men drank and played poker a little. He had not told Daddy to make speed.

Coming near Mesaville, Starr left the trail and circled the town, following the bottom of a dry watercourse for a part of the distance. He finally approached the town from the other direction, but he did not ride boldly into the street. He came to a stop in the rear of Burns' stable.

Tethering his horse there, Starr went around to the front. Burns was alone, sitting on a stool and smoking his ancient pipe.

"Howdy!" Starr said.

Burns jumped, then controlled himself. "Howdy, Mr. Starr!" he replied. "How are things with you? You must have as many lives as a cat. I been expectin' every day to hear o' your death."

"I'm still with you," Starr remarked. "Thought that I'd ride in and look you up. Daddy Ryan said you looked feeble the last time he saw you."

"That old fossil will be shovelin' coal in Hades a long time before I stop runnin' this stable," Burns declared. "He's in town now, I see."

"Came for supplies."

"Yeah! Some o' the Box Bar boys are in, too, consumin' liquor."

"Anybody I know?"

"I reckon. You goin' to start a massacre, Mr. Starr? I don't blame you for feelin' like it. Any man as poisons a pool——"

"I just rode in to look around."

"Uh-huh! Sam Labbock is in town."

"And how is Sam?"

"Seems to have somethin' on his conscience," Burns reported. "I don't think workin' for Carker agrees with

him much. He's probably wishin' that he had his old place at the Circle H. That hay trick was a slick one. Cora Hallen will make money."

"Yeah!" Starr agreed. "Is Labbock's hoss in your stable?"

"Nope! That's the critter at this end o' the hitchin' rack across the street. Sam left it there 'cause he stopped at the bank when he first came in. He'll be almost drunk by now."

"Come in alone?"

"Nope! Half a dozen o' the Box Bar boys are in. I'd say that they are collectin' a lot o' false courage preparatory to doin' somethin' devilish."

"Thanks, Burns. My hoss is at the back of the stable."

"I'll keep an eye on him, Mr. Starr. Please don't shoot up our town."

Starr grinned at him and then slipped across the street through the shadows. He made his way in the darkness behind the row of buildings until he came to the rear of the largest resort. He heard loud talk, laughter.

Peering through a dust-streaked and fly-specked window, Starr saw the Box Bar punchers. They were sitting around a table near the back door, some playing cards, the others drinking and looking on. Sam Labbock, erstwhile foreman of the Circle H, had a glass before him, but did not seem to be taking part in the conversation.

The hay men were at the front end of the place, and Daddy Ryan was urging them to leave. As Starr watched, Daddy prevailed, and they went out the front door and into the street. The wagon was in front of the general store, already loaded.

"Them jaspers have gone to take grub to the Circle H," one of the Box Bar men said, so that Starr could hear through the window.

"They think that they have. That grub will be scattered all along the trail, fine pickin' for coyotes," another remarked.

"Don't be so noisy about it," the first warned.

"It's just a little trick o' Carker's. Just to aggravate 'em. Wait until he springs the big trick."

"Yeah! Only him and Buck knows exactly what it is. He won't tell us until he's ready."

"And he wants to cover his tracks!"

"What's the scare? The hay men will be gone. Starr will get his. There won't be any hay, and there won't be any baby beef. That girl at the Circle H will learn not to turn up her nose at Seth Carker, I betcha!"

Starr drew away from the window. He hurried around to the street and found Daddy Ryan and the hay men just getting into the wagon. They were surprised to see the foreman.

"Get goin', Daddy!" Starr ordered. "And keep your eyes open. Some o' the Box Bar men are plannin' to spill your load."

The hay men were sobered instantly. They announced that they were armed. They were tough customers unless caught off guard.

Starr watched the wagon drive away. Then he hurried to the stable.

"You back again? And still alive?" Burns said.

"I'm leavin' in a minute. The wagon has gone."

"So I see. You c'n hear it creakin' from here. Daddy Ryan probably would grease them wheels some time if he wasn't so old and helpless."

"Daddy says somethin' similar about you, Burns. You two old coots really like each other."

"What? Me like that old pelican?"

"Sure and certain. If you didn't you wouldn't have been snappin' at each other all these years. You'd have shot it out long ago."

Starr got into the saddle, and this time he rode straight up the street. He stopped in front of the resort, noticing that the Box Bar horses were still at the

hitching racks. Starr dismounted. There was nobody on the street to see what he did. He untethered all the Box Bar horses, put up the reins, slapped them on their rumps, and started them wandering.

He looked through the open door. The Box Bar men were still at the table, half a dozen of them. Three or four citizens of Mesaville were standing at the bar talking to the bartender. Another man played solitaire at a table against one of the walls.

Starr's own horse was tethered so that one quick jerk on the reins would untie him. Starr glanced up and down the street again, and then stepped briskly into the resort. His heels rapped smartly against the plank flooring. He ignored the Mesaville men and made straight for the table around which the Box Bar men were sitting.

One looked up and saw him, cried his name, and all sprang to their feet. Starr's gun was out and covering them.

"Up with the hands, hombres!" he cried. "Make a move and I'll have a little target practice. I was listenin' to you gents a few minutes ago. Goin' to raid our grub wagon, are you? Goin' to scatter the grub and stampede the mules and maybe bump off old Daddy Ryan for fun? Not this evenin', gents!"

The fact that he knew their plans dumfounded them. For a moment they were stunned. Then it came to them that they probably would receive harsh censure from Seth Carker for their failure to embarrass the Circle H.

Somebody in the group shouted and whipped out a gun. Starr fired into the floor at their feet. Then he darted back to the door.

"Steady, hombres!" he cried.

But they had scattered now, were fan-shaped across the floor of the big room. The bartender got down behind the bar, and the citizens of Mesaville dropped to the floor. Starr fired again. A hail of bullets answered his gun's flash.

He darted through the doorway unharmed, jerked the reins free, and vaulted into the saddle. A series of yells came from his throat, a sort of war cry that startled the wandering horses of the Box Bar punchers. They rushed away through the night, Starr speeding them with more shots.

Then he bent low over his horse's neck and rode, reloading as he dashed down the street. Guns cracked behind him. But no bullet came uncomfortably near. He had caught the Box Bar men off balance, so to speak.

And he knew that they would not be able to capture their horses in time to catch up with the wagon and make the contemplated raid, knew that they would hold back from attempting it, thinking that other adherents of the Circle H might be waiting to catch them in ambush.

Starr spurred his mount and caught the wagon at the first hill. He related what he had done, and Daddy Ryan and the hay men had a laugh at it. But they were glad that Starr did not ride ahead, glad that he rode beside them through the moonlit night until the Circle H was reached.

CHAPTER XII.

SAM LABBOCK'S NOTE.

TWO days later, the hay men finished their work and departed. The wagons were due the following day to commence moving the hay. It stood in great piles down at the edge of the meadow, some distance from the ranch house.

The baby beef had not been molested. But Starr decided that he would maintain Fred and Jim as night guards. He knew that Seth Carker and the Box Bar men were smarting over the way he had outwitted the men in town.

And this was the logical time for

Carker to make a move, with nobody except the four men to guard the Circle H, and two of those working at night and sleeping in the daytime.

Early that afternoon, as Starr was working down by the corral, Cora Hallen walked down to him.

"I haven't seen much of you the last two days," she said.

"I've been right busy, ma'am. There are a lot o' things that need attention."

"You are a very good foreman, Mr. Starr."

"Thanks, ma'am."

"It was to be 'Cora,' I believe."

"All right, Cora. I was just mendin' this bridle. That big roan in the corral is due to have an argument with me some day soon, though maybe he don't know it."

"Can you break horses, too?"

"I can bust 'em all to bits," Starr declared. "Did you have some special orders for me, Cora?"

"Nothing in particular. It seems lonesome with all those hay men gone, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. We're back to normal again. As soon as you cash in for the hay, we'd better start dickerin' for some breedin' stock."

"Do you anticipate any more trouble?"

"As long as there are men like Seth Carker and Buck Turbell in the world, there'll be trouble," Starr said. "Don't you worry any, Cora. We'll tend to 'em!"

"I'm only worrying about you."

"My good gosh! What am I doin' to worry you?"

"It's your eyesight," she said.

"I can see, all right."

"You can't see beyond the end of your nose, and it is a short nose at that. It's a dear little stubbed-up nose."

"Well, my stars! I never had my nose talked about so before in all my life, not since I can remember."

"Your mother probably talked about it that way," Cora Hallen said.

Starr glanced at her and caught a tender expression in her face. He looked around quickly to make sure that nobody was near; then he stepped up close to her.

"Cora," he said, "I'm tryin' hard to be a good foreman, and I reckon that you're makin' it difficult."

"How?"

"You're takin' my mind off my work. Speakin' o' noses, did anybody ever tell you that you've got the cutest one in captivity?

"I believe not."

"And the prettiest eyes? And the loveliest hair?"

"Why, Gerald!" she cried, her eyes shining.

"Oh, dang it, I've been fightin' against it, Cora! It ain't right and proper for a foreman to look at his boss the way I do at you. I wanted everything strictly business. And now, dang it, I——"

"What?" she asked.

"You'll probably fire me when I tell you, and the hay not carted off yet."

"You haven't told me much yet," she said.

Once more he took a step toward her. "Cora, I'm lovin' you!" he announced. "I'm just achin' to grab you in my arms."

"I'm not strong enough to stop you, Gerald," she said.

"You want that I should grab you right here and now, and maybe kiss you?"

She nodded, blushing, and Gerald Starr sprang toward her. The horses in the corral unappreciatively snorted at this exhibition of violence and wheeled away.

"Together, we'll make the Circle H a great ranch," she said, after an interval.

"Yeah! Folks will be sayin' sassy things about you marryin' your fore-

man, though. And no doubt they'll call me a fortune hunter."

"We don't care," she said promptly. "Oh! Who is that coming?"

Starr turned to look down the lane.

"Looks like Burns, the stableman from Mesaville," he replied. "It's one o' his teams. Yep, it is Burns. He's got a woman with him."

"It's Jennie Burch, from the restaurant."

"She's probably come out to get a square meal," Starr declared.

Cora hurried toward the house, and got there just as Burns drove up and helped Jennie Burch down from the seat.

"Cora, you've invited me to visit you half a dozen times," the blond waitress said. "So I got off for a couple of days and got Mr. Burns to drive me out."

"You're more than welcome!" Cora Hallen said cordially. "We'll have a fine visit. If you had come while the men were here, we could have had a dance."

"No, thanks! I saw some of those hay men in town," Jennie replied. "From the way they talked, you'd think they never had seen blond hair before."

Cora was puzzled, though she did not show it. Her invitations to Jennie Burch had been mere words, though she really liked the girl. She could not account for Jennie accepting them now, unless—— She wondered whether Gerald Starr was the magnet, and a twinge of jealousy smote her. But she quickly laughed it aside.

"Mr. Burns, you must stay for supper," she said. "Take the team down to the corral. Mr. Starr is there."

Burns touched his hat and drove away. Starr met him at the corral.

"I brought Jennie Burch out, Mr. Starr," the stableman said. "I don't know exactly why she wanted to come, unless it was to see you."

"My good gosh! I ain't yearnin' to see her," Starr said. He did not want complications, now that he and Cora had reached an understanding.

"Are you right-down sure that you ain't been breakin' trustin' female hearts?" Burns inquired.

"I sure ain't," Starr replied. "Did she mention special that she was comin' to see me?"

"Matter o' fact, she didn't. But I was glad that she wanted to come. I was right eager to see you, and this gave me an excuse."

"How come?"

"There's somethin' afoot," Burns said. "I wouldn't be a mite surprised if Seth Carker and his crowd wasn't up to somethin' real devilish. I don't know exactly what it is, though."

"Well, how much do you know?"

"Them Box Bar jaspers are sure up to somethin'. I've overheard some whispers. They're out to get you, Starr."

"I reckon."

"And Carker is out to ruin Cora, too. He knows that he never can get her."

"And I know danged well that he can't!" Starr said. "I've got her myself! Only you ain't to mention it yet."

"Man, you sure are a fast worker! O' course, you ain't worthy o' her——"

"I know that! Tell me about the Box Bar gang."

"Carker, as near as I can learn, is goin' to make one big smash o' some kind. He don't care who knows it, either. He's been drinkin', which is somethin' new for him. Says as how he's the big boss in this neck o' the country. Ain't afraid of the sheriff or anybody else."

"He needn't worry about the sheriff. There ain't any too much law around here," Starr said.

"I reckon he'll try to ruin that hay and them baby beef. And while he is doin' it he'll ruin you personal, and probably all the rest o' your men, includin' that old fossil, Daddy Ryan.

Me, I got a good man to run my stable for a few days."

"What you mean, Burns?"

"I'm attachin' myself to the Circle H for the present, unless you run me off. No bunch o' murderin' polecats like Seth Carker and his crowd can come around shootin' up my old friend, Daddy Ryan!"

"How? I thought you hated him."

"You know a danged sight better," Burns said. "I might fight with him a lot, but I'll fight beside him when anybody else starts somethin'."

"Do you really know anything?"

"Not exactly. But I can smell trouble, Starr. I think maybe that Jennie Burch knows somethin'."

At that moment Cora Hallen appeared on the porch of the ranch house and called Starr. He left Burns to unhitch the team, and hurried up to the house. Jennie was sitting on the porch.

"Hello, cowboy!" Jennie greeted. "You haven't been in to see me lately, so I came out to see you."

"Yes'm!" Starr said, his face growing red, and realizing that Cora was watching him closely.

"I never got over the thrill of dancing with you."

"It's right-down nice of you to say so, Miss Burch."

"Miss Burch? I'm 'Jennie' to my friends. You seem to be awfully distant to-day."

"Why, I—I——" Starr stammered. "Are you tryin' to make fun?"

Jennie Burch laughed. "I am just teasing, cowboy," she said. "It wouldn't be my good luck to interest a real man like you. And I can tell by glancing at you and Cora that—well, that there would be no chance for me." There was a peculiar little catch in her voice that Starr did not notice. But Cora did, and kissed her.

"Jennie says that she has something to tell that will interest us," Cora said.

Jennie's face grew serious instantly. "Yes," she said. "The day Sam Labbock left the Circle H and joined up with the Box Bar, he came to me and handed me a sealed letter. He made me promise that I would keep it, and deliver it to Cora when he told me to, or if anything happened to him."

"Why, I don't understand!" Cora said.

"I don't, either. That's all he said. He was in town last night with some of the Box Bar boys. He looked pretty much run down."

"If he thinks that I'll take him back——" Cora began.

"He came into the restaurant," Jennie continued, "and asked me if I'd come out to-day and deliver the letter. He said something about getting word to the Circle H later about something."

"You say that he gave you the letter the day he left me and went to work for Carker?" Cora asked.

"Yes. It hasn't been out of my possession since. Better read it, Cora."

Cora Hallen ripped the envelope open and read the note. The expression of her face changed swiftly, and tears started from her eyes.

"Oh, Gerald!" she cried. "I have misjudged him so."

"How's that?"

"Listen."

She read the letter slowly:

"DEAR MISS HALLEN: I am writing this and will give it to Jennie Burch to be given you later. I am going to quit you and go to work for Carker. He has been after me for some time. I know that he is up to something, and maybe if I work for him he will get to trusting me and I'll find out what it is and can warn you in time. I'll have to act like I was a regular Box Bar man and against you. Maybe I'll even have to play a part in his schemes. So if this is ever handed to you, you'll know why I left like I did. I'm working for you, Miss Hallen, only in a different way. I couldn't do anything else, remembering what your father did for me. SAM LABBOCK."

"I want to shake hands with him!" Starr said.

"And I—I thought terrible things about him. I treated him like dirt that day," Cora added.

"But you didn't know. He's played it just right, Cora," Starr said. "Any other way, Carker might have got suspicious."

"He says that he'll warn us," Cora pointed out.

Jennie joined in the conversation. "There was always something about Sam Labbock that I liked," she said. "I thought it was funny that he took up with the Box Bar outfit. It's easy to say now, of course."

"If Carker makes a move, he'll get the worst of it," Starr declared.

"He has so many men," Cora protested. "He may cause us a lot of trouble. Oh, if we only knew what he is going to do!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD FRAUD.

STARR was nervous when night came. He did not know exactly what to expect, nor when to expect it; but he seemed to sense that there was trouble coming.

He sent Fred and Jim out to guard the baby beef, and he sent them well armed and warned them to watch carefully. He told Daddy Ryan his fears, and Burns also, and the two old cronies prepared for war. Starr himself made the rounds of corrals and buildings. The bright moon showed him nothing unusual.

He caught up his own horse and two others, and put bridles and saddles on, to have them ready for any emergency that might arise. Cora and Jennie and Mrs. Brown were at the house, talking in the front room. Starr paced back and forth in front, stopping now and then to listen.

Once he thought that he heard gunfire in the distance, but it was soon over. And then to his ears came the sounds of distant hoofbeats. As he strained his ears to listen, they came nearer. A strangled voice called something that he could not understand.

Starr shouted in answer. Daddy Ryan and Burns hurried from the bunk house. Cora and Jennie came out upon the porch. A horseman was riding wildly down the lane from the road.

Starr whipped out his six-gun and held it ready. He saw that the rider had fallen forward on the horse's neck, that he was unable to control his mount. But the horse wheeled and stopped when he came up to the house and saw the light streaming through the door. The rider fell to the ground.

Starr and the other men hurried forward. It was Sam Labbock, bleeding from a couple of wounds and unconscious. They carried him into the house, and Cora ran for water and smelling salts. Labbock groaned and revived.

"You're at the Circle H," Starr told him. "We've read your letter. Jennie brought it. You're with friends, Sam!"

Labbock smiled sickly. "They—almost got me," he said in a low voice. "They're comin'. Goin' to burn the hay—kill the baby beef. They're all drunk——"

"Burns!" Starr snapped. "Take one of those horses down by the corral gate—but not mine—and get through to the Cross D. Tell Gadley I said to get his punchers here. Gadley will understand."

"Can do!" Burns cried, running from the house.

"Daddy, go out and shoot three times, to warn Fred and Jim."

Daddy Ryan disappeared as swiftly as his old legs could carry him.

Starr got Sam Labbock upon a couch and tore off his shirt. He made a quick investigation.

"Two wounds—lost a lot of blood—come through all right," he snapped. "Either of you girls know what to do?"

"I do," Cora said.

"You and Jennie do it, then. Pull down all the shades and burn one light, and turn that down low when you've fixed Labbock. I don't think they'll bother the house. It's the hay and the baby beef they want to ruin."

"What are you going to do, Gerald?" Cora cried.

"Everything I can, honey!"

He rushed out of the house, closing the door carefully behind him. At the bunk house he got a rifle and a quantity of ammunition, also another six-gun. He hurried to his horse, mounted, and slipped the rifle into its scabbard.

Keeping to the shadows as much as possible, he circled the buildings, stopping now and then to listen, peering through the moonlight. He did not know from which direction the foe would come, nor when. Labbock had said merely that they were coming.

Daddy Ryan had got his horse also, and now he rode up to the foreman.

"Got a rifle, Daddy?" Starr asked.

"Yes, sir! And I hope that I get a chance to use it," Daddy said. "It's time that them Box Bar fiends was taught a lesson."

"The odds are pretty heavy, Daddy."

"Yeah! We'll keep movin' and pick 'em off."

"The baby beef is almost a quarter of a mile away, and the hay an eighth," Starr pointed out. "It's goin' to be a tough job. I hope that Burns gets through to the Cross D."

"Burns will get through," Daddy Ryan declared. "That old pelican could get through anywheres. I hope the Cross D punchers get back pronto."

They circled the buildings again. The night was quiet. It might be a false alarm, Starr knew. Perhaps Carker had changed his plans after Labbock had escaped him. For Labbock's wounds were mute witnesses to the fact that he had clashed with the Box Bar men. Perhaps they had suspected him, had caught him trying to ride and give the alarm.

"Daddy, we might have to split forces," Starr said. "One o' us had better stay near the house, no matter what happens. That'll be your job."

"I understand, Starr, and you c'n depend on me."

"If anybody pesters around the girls, shoot to kill."

"You c'n depend on that, too!" Daddy Ryan said.

Once more they circled the buildings, stopping now and then to listen and to peer through the bright moonlight.

"I heard a horse snort!" Daddy said.

"Seems to me that I did, too. May have been down at the corral," Starr replied.

"Nope! Over to the left," Daddy declared. "There it is again. Hear whispers, too. They're here!"

"We've got to do our best for Miss Cora, Daddy," Starr said. "If Carker has brought most of his punchers, he's got enough men so he can attack the hay and baby beef at the same time, and maybe the house, too."

Through the night came the crack of a gun. Then more shots. Flashes showed away to the left.

"They're after the calves. I'm goin'," Starr said. "You do your best, Daddy."

He gave his horse the spurs, something that he seldom did. The mount carried him swiftly along a well-worn trail. He could see more flashes in the night. And then cries came to his ears above the pounding of his own horse's hoofs, the cries of frenzied raiders.

Starr knew his ground well. He galloped along the creek and forded it, and bore down upon the pasture where the baby beef had bedded down. He spotted where Fred and Jim were firing from behind clusters of rocks,

and saw where their horses had been left to graze in the usual place.

So Starr held a minor advantage. He knew that anybody on a horse was a foe. His rifle cracked at a shadowy rider, and the rider fell. The weapon cracked again as Starr changed position, and a horse screamed with pain.

He saw raiders in the moonlight, a dozen of them, circling and firing at Fred and Jim, and into the herd of baby beef. The calves were up now, and milling. Starr rode like a madman, first in one direction, and then changing his course, firing whenever he saw another rider.

Bullets whistled past him. But the Box Bar men were compelled to use care. They knew that there was a hostile rider among them, but feared to shoot down one another. Starr made the most of his advantage.

He brought down two more riders, and then made his way toward Fred and Jim. He dared not get too close, for fear they would fire at him. And if he called to them, he would betray himself to the Box Bar men.

The calves were scattering now, crazed by the din, frightened by the gunfire. As he rode, Starr saw that some of them were down, that Box Bar bullets had taken their toll.

He heard somebody shout an order, and the riders who remained started a retreat from the field. Starr galloped after them, ceasing his fire so that they would think he was one of them. They were making for the hay.

Other Box Bar men were by the hay. Somebody was firing at them, and so Starr knew that Daddy Ryan had gone into action. That hay meant everything to Cora Hallen. It was essential to save it. Starr was thankful that it would be slow burning.

For he saw where a fire was being kindled. He shot as he rode, and sent a bullet near the men who were kindling it. He had gained on the others, too. And Fred and Jim, the danger to the baby beef heard at an end for the time being, had mounted and were coming after him.

Starr swung to one side and hailed them, and they galloped up to him.

"Right at 'em, boys!" Starr shouted. "Daddy is tryin' to stand 'em off, but he's got to watch around the house."

The three charged, firing as they approached. The Box Bar men scattered and returned the fire. It was uncertain shooting in that light, else Starr and his two punchers might not have lasted long. The Box Bar men probably were shooting poorly, too, because of the liquor they had taken.

The hay was blazing at one end of the huge pile, and a cloud of smoke was rolling upward. Daddy Ryan neared them, and Starr shouted for him to get back to the house. Fred and Jim followed Starr as he swerved to one side and directed a fresh fire at the raiders.

They followed him, too, as he led them in a retreat.

"Can't put out that fire now," he called at them. "It'll burn slow. Get to the bunk house. Pick 'em off through the windows!"

He led the way toward the bunk house, urging his horse to its utmost speed. Some of the Box Bar men pursued. In front of the bunk house, Starr, Fred, and Jim sprang from their mounts, and dashed for the doorway.

The bunk house was constructed of native stone. It had a number of small windows that could be used for loopholes. It was an ideal place to make a stand.

Fred and Jim gained the interior first. Starr hesitated a moment and glanced toward the ranch house. No lights were showing there. He supposed that the girls were safe, and that Daddy Ryan was on guard. He could trust Daddy Ryan.

Around the corner of the bunk house dashed a rider. A six-gun in his hand

spat suddenly. Starr felt a blow on his shoulder.

"Got you, Starr!" Buck Turbell cried.

Starr sprang aside as the horse bore down upon him. Turbell's gun spat again, but the bullet missed its mark. But Starr's did not miss. The Box Bar foreman toppled from his saddle and crashed to the ground.

Then Starr ran inside, and the door was closed and bolted. Jim was firing from one of the windows.

"You hurt, chief?" Fred cried.

"It's nothin'. Never mind about me! Get to that window and bring down a few of 'em!" Starr cried.

He reeled against the wall, then dropped to a bunk, as Fred obeyed. Nausea swept over him, but he conquered it. He knew that he had been hit in the shoulder, and that the wound was not dangerous. He tore off his shirt and made a rough bandage.

Then he went to one of the windows and began firing a six-gun. The Box Bar men were reckless, making targets of themselves. But they were reckless enough to have false courage, too.

Somebody was shouting at them to charge the bunk house. Nearer and nearer they rode. A bullet struck Jim in the elbow, and he reeled away from his window. Starr brought down the man who had shot Jim.

During a lull he heard shots up by the house, and knew that Daddy Ryan was in action again; and he felt a sudden fear for Cora and Jennie Burch, and the wounded Sam Labbock. Under ordinary circumstances, Carker would not attack the house. But Carker, in the face of a stinging resistance, might do anything.

Starr reloaded, and emptied his gun once more at flying horsemen in the moonlight. As he started to reload again, new sounds came to his ears. Fred was shouting at him, too.

"Help comin', chief! Listen to that!"

Starr was glad to hear it. He felt suddenly weak. He knew that he could not fight much longer. But he knew, also, that Hiram Gadley's Cross D punchers had reached the scene.

An hour later it was all over and stock had been taken.

The Cross D men had been led by Hiram Gadley himself. They had started as soon as Burns had reached the Cross D, and had lost no time in getting to the scene of action. They had slain some Box Bar men and had captured others.

They had pulled down bales of hay, scattered them, and stopped the fire before the loss had amounted to much. They had rushed a guard to the baby beef herd.

Buck Turbell had been found dead where he had fallen. Seth Carker had gone to an inglorious death from a bullet fired by Daddy Ryan as Carker had tried to get into the house. The evil influence of Carker and Turbell was dispelled forever.

Dawn found the bunk house a sort of hospital, though none of the Circle H men were badly wounded. Starr had fainted, but was himself again now. Jennie had remained at the house to care for Sam Labbock, but Cora Hallen was in the bunk house, assuring herself for the hundredth time that Starr was not seriously hurt.

Hiram Gadley was there, too, in a corner with Cora and Starr.

"Cora, you show a right down interest in this here foreman o' yours," Gadley said.

"Why not? I'm going to marry him."

"Say so? Congratulations to both o' you! Want to know somethin' about him, Cora?"

"I don't care who or what he is!"

"Well, good land! I do! You recollect last year when I went travelin'? I visited my sister down in Arizona. Her married name is Starr, and this young jasper is her only son."

"Your nephew?" Cora gasped.

"I reckon. I hadn't seen him since he was about twelve. I took a fancy to him right off. I told him about affairs up here, knowin' what to expect from Seth Carker. I instructed him to come when I sent for him, and keep his eyes and ears open, not pretendin' that he knew me. He was to get a job at the Circle H if he could. That's how he happened to separate the sheep from the goats so quick the day he came."

"Well!" Cora gasped.

"Everything worked out lovely, Cora."

Starr glanced at his uncle suspiciously.

"Um!" Starr grunted. "You're a fraud!"

"How's that?" Gadley demanded.

"Cora's father was your old friend. And you liked Cora. And you liked me."

"I reckon!"

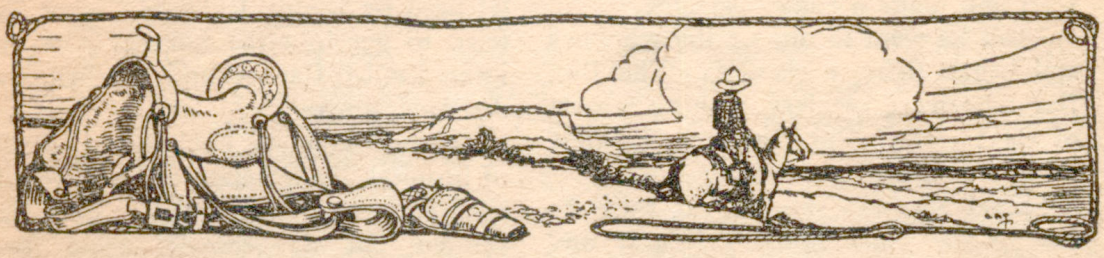
"You made me believe that you wanted me here to find out what Carker was up to, and maybe help Cora out if she needed help. You could have done all that by yourself, without calling on me at all, you old fraud!"

"You're commencin' to get a glimmer," Gadley said, chuckling. "Yep! You've guessed it. I'm a sure-enough good matchmaker, if I do say it myself. My old friend's daughter, and my pet and only nephew."

Cora kissed him, and Hiram Gadley's eyes grew misty.

"Never had any children o' my own," he said. "Had to mess around with other folks' children. But I didn't make such a bad mess o' things at that, did I?"

Cora kissed him again.



A HUNTER OF PLANTS

ONE would think that the hunting of plants would be the most peaceful and poetic of pursuits, but it must not be forgotten that even roses have their thorns. A plant hunter by whose expeditions the gardens of California and of Washington have profited, as well as those of his own country, is Mr. Francis Kingdon-Ward. His researches have now taken him as far afield as Assam, British India, and Tibet.

In the pursuit of new plants and flowers he penetrates strange countries, passes through various conditions of climate, endures the onslaughts of malignant fevers, and possibly the attacks of savage tribes. He also withstands lesser indignities inflicted by virulent insect pests which abound in the regions through which he has to travel. And the flowers he finds must not only be rare and beautiful; they must also be able to withstand transplanting under differing climatic conditions in other lands.

This intrepid explorer, who braves unknown dangers to brighten our lives, is an English naturalist. He has made nine expeditions to China, Tibet, and Burma. Among the more beautiful of his finds are the blue poppy, the giant primrose and thirty varieties of rhododendron. The explorer says his reward is "in the finding of dazzling flowers never seen before." Truly, not all the hunters are in pursuit of savage game.

Hearts and Oil

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Fenced Country," etc.

"HE'S the nicest man in the whole country, but it's pitiful how scared he is of girls," "Vinegar" Ann often told the other waitresses at the Miner's Rest. Now, Ann was in a position to speak with authority for the person to whom she referred had eaten steadily at her table for twelve months past.

"The best house man I ever had, and I've been runnin' gamblin' outfits for goin' on twenty years," asserted "Long Bill" Evans, without qualification. "He can keep a hall in order with less fuss than any one I ever seen, too."

"Chain lightnin' with a pistol and not a scary hair in his whole head!" was the word relayed from one tinhorn to another. "Don't try and monkey work where he's at and expect to get away with it."

"A soft-hearted guy that's always good for a touch," declared the fraternity of down-and-outers.

Now, taken by and large, these various opinions rather accurately described Quinn Carter, who was right-hand man to the owner of the Ace of Hearts, and who, this certain spring morning, was on the last lap of his journey from El Paso to Santa Rosa.

Because his leg was aching with so much vigor—only a week before the surgeon had, after much probing, removed a .45 slug carried there some three years now—Quinn had elected to lie over one night at this change station. On the map, the place was designated by the name Mineral City. But the "city" part at least was a misnomer of the rankest sort. Once there had been a general store here; but the proprietor, wisely deciding that there was no profit in a community where rattlesnakes and prairie dogs composed the major part of the population, had pulled up stakes. So now there was nothing to Mineral City except the adobe-walled stage station with its row of stables behind and the grinning skeleton of the abandoned general store across the way.

Quinn was sorry he had made the stop. For his makeshift bed had proved hard, its scant covering but sorry protection against the chill of the desert night, and, if anything, his leg ached more abominally than ever in consequence. Just now he sat within the combination bar and waiting room, his six feet of lithe, young manhood slouched deep in a chair, his troublesome leg stretched at length on another. Pain clouded his gray eyes; his hair was tousled, and, to put it mildly, he felt unsociable toward the world at large. So when the station tender, who from force of habit was mopping up the bar, affably remarked: "That new driver is shore bringin' 'em in late this mo'nin'," Quinn merely grunted and closed his eyes to ward off further conversation.

Presently, his leg somewhat ceasing to throb, Quinn dozed, and therefore failed to hear the rattling arrival of the loose-jointed Concord a short while later. Nor was he aware when the stock tenders unhooked the sweating horses. But their shouted commands and loud conversation as they struggled with the fresh four served to rouse him, and he came limping out as soon as he could secure his bag from behind the bar.

At once he saw that the hook-up was completed, and the half-broken horses, a stock tender clinging to each one's head, were fighting for freedom. From his high seat where with the reins double-wrapped about his wrists he was sawing manfully, the driver glanced down.

"You best get a hustle on," he growled. "These broncs don't aim to wait all day."

Quinn opened the stage door just as the stock tenders turned loose all holds, and the horses surged against their collars. Thereafter for several minutes, the ancient Concord lurched and tossed like a chip in a whirlpool as the horses staged their customary morning runaway. Meantime, so busy was Quinn protecting his person from knock or bump, and so dim was the interior of the vehicle with its drawn curtains that he failed to observe that he was not alone.

At length when the change station was a blot in the distance, and the team had quieted to an even trot, he chanced to glance across the aisle. Opposite him sat a young man whose garb proclaimed the Easterner. He was of slight physique, with the unhealthy look of one who has been burning the candle at both ends. The set of his mouth was willful and self-indulgent, and in his eyes lurked an apparent recklessness.

Now, necessity compels one of Quinn Carter's vocation to be a reader of character. Quinn was an adept. "A high-stepper on the down grade," he silently reflected. "Likely come out here to try and get in shape again." Then he let his gaze stray farther, and immediately grabbed at his hat. For the young man's companion was a girl. And such a girl, Quinn thought! She sat braced in the corner against the lurchings of the coach, and somehow her daintiness and exquisite coloring made Quinn think of a spray of cherry blossoms resting against grimy cushions.

Meantime, the young man had been carefully appraising Quinn's attire, from his boots, over which his trouser legs were drawn, to the wide-brimmed Stetson now resting beside him on the seat. Catching Quinn's eye, he held out his hand.

"It seems as though we are to be fellow travelers the rest of the way, so let's get acquainted," he said affably. "My name is Bryan Harding, and this is my sister Hope."

Quinn mumbled his own name, keeping his eyes straight ahead. Just then he would have given much to be back

in the change station. Company didn't appeal to him.

An amused smile flitted across young Harding's face as he observed Quinn's embarrassment. He had seen his sister affect young men in this way before. So with the intention of setting Quinn at ease and at the same time satisfying his own curiosity, he leaned forward and remarked: "If any one asked my opinion, I would venture to say that you are a cowboy whose horse had fallen and hurt his leg. I noticed you limping as you came out."

"Then you would be wrong. It's been two years since I hurrahed a cow, and I'm limping because I just had a .45 slug dug out of my laig," Quinn replied gruffly. He sincerely hoped this would end the conversation. For no reason at all, he had conceived an instinctive dislike for this young Easterner. But he had reckoned without the girl.

"Oh!" exclaimed Hope, her eyes growing large with interest. "Then you must have been shot. Do tell us how it happened!" The fact that she was seeing the West for the first time and through a romantic veil was plainly apparent.

Quinn was cornered. A more practiced hand where girls were concerned might have successfully dodged the issue. Quinn looked uncomfortable.

"The' ain't much to tell, ma'am," he finally stammered. "It happened a few years back. I was actin' deputy sheriff at the time and cornered the Cantres brothers back in the hills. One of 'em plugged me, and I been carryin' the bullet ever since."

"Did—did the bandit get away?" asked Hope wide-eyed.

"No'm," Quinn answered shortly. He did not tell her that both Cantres brothers lay buried back in the hills, nor did he go into any details of the fearful gun battle he had engaged in.

The coach rattled on, more slowly now as the sobered team began the upward climb into the green foothills. Bryan Harding, glad to have some one besides his sister to talk with, kept up a steady flow of conversation. He informed Quinn that they held an option on a certain small tract of land close to Santa Rosa. This lay, Quinn recalled upon description, in the exact center of an extensive mesquite flat and contained the only living spring nearer than the foothills.

"We intend to buy a herd of cattle and start ranching," Bryan explained. It's Hope's idea. Right now she's the moneyed man of the family. We started even on what dad left, but you know how it goes with a fellow! Money slips away easier than from a girl."

Quinn had justly estimated Bryan Harding as a flighty, unreliable youth who craved excitement. So it was no trouble to envision him expending both his money and his health with prodigal recklessness until he was shorn of both.

"The lad's got a gambler's make-up, and I'd be doing his sister a favor if I warned her to keep an eye on him," Quinn reflected. "Santa Rosa ain't no place for a tenderfoot with money on his person and an itch to gamble. Some wolf would take him sure." He considered this as the coach groaned and jolted steadily onward. Mid-afternoon found them passing the fork where a road leading from the mines above joined the main trail, and an hour afterward the coach clattered into Santa Rosa and pulled up at the Miner's Rest. Utterly fatigued, Quinn went to bed at once. So it was the following morning before he set out for the Ace of Hearts, where he was employed.

Long Bill Evans welcomed him heartily. "You're a sight for sore eyes, son," he cried. "How's the leg doin'?"

"Fine, Bill," Quinn assured him. "Be as well as ever directly."

Now, Long Bill Evans was genuinely fond of his capable young house man. Taking him by the arm, he turned him around for a better view. "You're lookin' mighty peaked, son," he declared. "What you need is a few days out of doors after bein' cooped up in that there hospital. The' ain't a thing stirrin' here just now. So you make up your mind to loaf around in the sun a few days. You'll feel a heap better for it."

Nor would Long Bill harken to any protests. Therefore, it came about that Quinn spent much time idling on the broad gallery of the Miner's Rest. He saw Hope Harding frequently. She, it chanced likewise, was stopping there for the time being. But Bryan Harding was seldom in evidence. He appeared to have made friends with some of the town's young bloods and was paying scant attention to anything but pleasure. Hope, however, was very enthusiastic over the venture that had drawn them hither. Soon after her arrival, she located a small rancher who was anxious to dispose of his cattle, and that very afternoon approached Quinn as he sat on the hotel gallery.

"I know you are an ex-cow-puncher, Mr. Carter," she began, "so I wonder if you would give me some advice." Then she described the certain brand that had been offered her, mentioning the price.

"I know the cows," Quinn told her after a moment's thought, "and they are easy worth the price. You wouldn't be makin' any mistake."

Hope thanked him sincerely and changed the subject. Little by little, as they sat chatting, Quinn overcame his habitual shyness. This girl was different, he assured himself. She possessed brains as well as looks, and there was no foolishness about her.

It was this conclusion as much as anything that caused him to take his courage in hand and warn her to keep a sharp eye on her brother in case he showed any propensity to gamble. "It's risky even in the Ace of Hearts," he explained. "Of course, we try to run our place square; that is to say, the house games. But we can't supervise the poker tables. Some shark might trim him there."

Hope's eyes grew round with surprise. "Are you a gambler?" she asked in utter astonishment.

"No, ma'am," replied Quinn. That is, I don't play none myself. I'm house man at the Ace of Hearts. Mostly, I run the place and keep order."

"Oh!" exclaimed Hope. "I didn't know. I thought you were in some—some legitimate business."

"'Some legitimate business!' Now I wonder what she meant by that?" Quinn murmured after she had left him. Queerly enough, he felt uneasy. The idea that gambling might not be considered respectable had not occurred to him before. In fact, previous to this he had given the matter no thought. He had been born and raised in a country where a man was judged solely by his squareness, courage, and integrity, and where an honest gambler was on a par with an honest minister of the Gospel.

The days ran on. Even after returning to duty, Quinn saw a great deal of Hope Harding. On numerous occasions he accompanied her when she went to inspect small bunches of stock she considered buying. Meantime, she had exercised her option on the Spring Hole tract and was only waiting for the deed to be forwarded by the Eastern owner before taking possession. Of Bryan Harding he seldom caught more than a glimpse; that is, until one night when he appeared at the Ace of Hearts.

The youth was with a man named Lehay and two of Lehay's associates. This Lehay had put in an appearance at Santa Rosa shortly after Quinn's re-

turn. He was a burly, red-faced individual, with a manner both aggressive and domineering. Quinn immediately classified him as one out to achieve his own aims regardless of method, the sort of man who would employ any means, either honest or dishonest, to attain his objective. And obviously that objective was wealth. His calling Quinn found it impossible to determine. He could hardly be considered a tenderfoot, yet, plainly, he was no cattleman or miner. Since his arrival he had with his two companions, one of whom he termed "professor," been riding the open flats just north of Santa Rosa. According to current reports, he had secured options on much of this country, including the entire mesquite flat surrounding the Spring Hole tract.

"Likely he's got the bug to go into the cow business on a big scale," Long Bill opined one day when the subject of Lehay's activities were mentioned.

"It'll make it hard on Miss Hope if he fences off the mesquite flat," said Quinn reflectively. "She was countin' on usin' that open country."

"I don't see how," Long Bill objected. "The Hardings control the only water. Providin' he does gobble all the grass, they'll be in shape to make a strong trade, water for grass. No, in my opinion, they'll still be settin' jerry."

"That's so, too," agreed Quinn upon further thought.

He recalled this conversation the night that young Harding came into the Ace of Hearts with Lehay and his group. The four men wandered casually about at first, Lehay bucking each house game in turn for small amounts. Presently Quinn saw him signal an attendant and make known his wish to play poker.

Now, Long Bill possessed ideas of his own regarding poker. He did not consider it a legitimate source of profit. So he employed no house dealers, nor did he demand a table rake-off. The tables were free to any one desiring to play. This the attendant explained to Lehay, waving toward a vacant table in one corner of the hall.

When Quinn next observed the party, three of them were playing, Lehay, young Harding, and one other. The fourth man had disappeared. For some time the game seemed no more than casual pastime. Then all at once as Quinn in the course of duty passed near the table, he sensed a certain tension, and Lehay, putting out a hand, detained him.

"I'd like your John Henry on this," he said, and indicated a document spread on the table.

Quinn examined the paper carefully and frowned as he saw that it was a deed to the Spring Hole tract. "What's the big idea?" he asked.

"I'm buying it from Harding, here, and would like you to witness the transaction," Lehay explained gruffly.

At once Quinn thought of Hope. Should he try and get word to her of what was taking place? A moment's reflection convinced him that such a course would lead nowhere. Moreover, he doubted seriously if her brother had any legal right to sign the transfer. "Likely it won't hold water," he thought, and, bending down, affixed his signature.

Thereafter the play grew stiffer, and Quinn noted as he occasionally passed the table that Lehay was a heavy winner. At length he observed young Harding excuse himself and go toward the back of the hall. A few minutes later Long Bill sent for Quinn. Evans was in his private office, and with him was Bryan Harding, disheveled and shamefaced.

"Now, here's the mischief," Long Bill snapped disgustedly as Quinn closed the door. "I just run into this young buck out back preparing to

bump himself off. Stopped him by the skin of his teeth. He says he's lost all of his own money to this bird Lehay and has got his sister in dutch as well. What'd we better do about it, Quinn?"

This same question was running through Quinn's mind. Very clearly he could foresee how the loss of the Spring Hole tract would affect Hope Harding. She had invested practically all her remaining funds in cattle and so would be unable to purchase any more land. With the Spring Hole tract in another's possession, she was without foothold in the country. The very idea gave Quinn a little sinking feeling, and there in Long Bill's stuffy office, with the game keeper's patter and the subdued clatter of chips echoing from the hall without, the knowledge suddenly came to him that he cared for Hope Harding; cared so much that at any cost he must protect her from her brother's misdeeds. His face grew grim.

"Will that transfer to Lehay hold?" he asked Bryan.

The youth nodded. "I had the right," he said defiantly. "While Hope's money paid for the land, the deed was made out to both of us."

Once more Quinn pondered, while Bryan shuffled his feet uneasily, and Long Bill puffed philosophically at his cigar. Presently he spoke again to Bryan. "Does Lehay expect you back? I noticed him still at the table when I passed."

"I told him I knew where I could get more money," Bryan explained. "He's waiting till I return."

"Good," exclaimed Quinn, "then he's rearin' to play some more!" Extracting several yellowbacks from his pocketbook, Quinn handed them to Bryan. "Go wave these under his nose," he directed. "Tell him you got them from a friend, and that the friend also wants to play, but he insists that it be in private. Then, if Lehay consents, bring him in here."

When, without questioning, Bryan left the office, Quinn turned to Long Bill. "I'm makin' this my private funeral, Bill," he said. "Is it all right with you?"

"Sure! Go as far as you like. I'll look after the hall," agreed Long Bill heartily, and we left the room.

At length Bryan Harding came back, with Lehay in tow. The big man's eyes narrowed when he saw his companion's friend, but Quinn forestalled any objections.

"I'm off duty and itching to play," he remarked carelessly. "So when Harding suggested I sit in with you two, I agreed. But I can't gamble in the main hall. It's against the rules for employees."

For a space Lehay hesitated, evidently a trifle suspicious.

Then Quinn played his only trump. "Of course, if it's not agreeable," he said, shrugging, "we'll pass it up."

This obvious indifference turned the tables. Lehay took a chair. "All right," he assented, "bring on your cards." So, with Quinn acting as banker, the game began.

Quinn soon determined that Lehay was no slouch of a poker player. His game was characteristic of his disposition, a driving, bull-dozing assault calculated to scare a weak-hearted opponent. Quinn himself was of another school. He played with a careful coolness that reduced the game to an exact science. With varying luck the game ran on, soon settling into a duel between the two. The hours passed. Lehay, in the clutch of the gambling fever, paid no heed when daylight came except to request that Quinn put out the lights. Meantime, Bryan Harding, utterly played out, had gone to sleep across three chairs. Once or twice Long Bill opened the door, glanced casually within, and then as quietly

withdrew. What a game it was! What a battle! Finally, the clock marked twelve hours of grueling play. Then Quinn's cool calculation and steady persistence began to show results. In desperation, Lehay began betting wildly, and that spelled his doom. When it lacked but an hour to noon, he pushed back the cards, flat broke. But the fever to gamble still persisted.

"If you'll cash my check?" he suggested thickly.

Quinn, however, shook his head and proceeded to put in effect the plan he had had in mind since the beginning. "I ain't in the business of cashin' checks for strangers," he declared coolly; "but I'll tell you what I will do. I'll buy back that deed for the Spring Hole tract so you can keep on playing, or I'll gamble the amount you paid for it against the deed on one turn of the card."

Lehay sneered. "Why, you ain't got money enough in this whole joint to buy back that land!" he said.

This answer hit Quinn like a blow. The possibility that Lehay would refuse to let go the deed had never entered his mind. For a moment his brain raced, but to no avail. Finally, in desperation, he resorted to bluff, pure and simple.

"All right," he said indifferently, pushing back his chair. "In that case you quit loser to the extent of fifteen hundred-odd dollars. But don't say I didn't offer you a chance to get it back."

The light of desire flamed in Lehay's eyes. He wavered for a moment, then nodded. "I'll go you," he said hoarsely. "One cut, the deed against your pile."

Quinn stacked his money beside the deed which Lehay extracted from his pocket. Lehay reached for the cards and cut—the king of diamonds. He gave an exultant cry. Quinn might have been made of stone, for all the emotion he showed. Stretching forth a hand as steady as a rock, he cut—the ace of hearts. "The lucky house card," he remarked calmly. "You lose."

Ten minutes later, after Lehay had transferred the deed, this time to Hope Harding alone, Quinn awakened young Bryan. Ahead loomed a most distasteful task. "Listen," he began, when Bryan got to his feet, "I'm goin' to tell you a few things for your own good. One is that you have no business staying in this country. As long as you're here you'll keep your sister in hot water."

To Quinn's surprise, young Harding nodded. "I've acted like a rotter toward Hope," he said repentantly, "and I'm sorry. If I had the money, I'd go back East and hook me a job."

"Well, that's what I was coming to," interrupted Quinn. "I'm willing to stake you to what I won from Lehay. That will see you along until you get a start. But first you take this deed to your sister. No need to tell her what happened, or why you're going. You understand that, I guess."

Bryan began uttering profuse thanks, but Quinn cut him short.

"Afterward come back, and I'll hand you the stake," he said curtly, and waved him out of the office.

For the week following, Quinn studiously avoided Hope in fear that, despite his warning, her brother might have related what had transpired in the Ace of Hearts. But this apprehension apparently was ill-grounded. When by chance he did encounter her, there was nothing in her manner to indicate such knowledge. So, at her request, he assisted her in buying her final bunch of cattle, secured her a reliable hand, and saw that all was shipshape on the Spring Hole tract.

Meantime, he was growing more and more discontented with his present means of livelihood. True, Hope had

never referred to it again. Still, he knew it loomed as a bar between them. So in the end he determined to tell Long Bill he was through. But before he could find just the proper opportunity, things picked up in Santa Rosa. The first knowledge of the boom was when a long string of wagons, heavily loaded with pipe and timbers, came creaking in from the nearest railroad point. Like wildfire spread the rumor—"Oil!" Lehay, it appeared, was the man behind the move. He was a wildcat operator, and the companion whom he called "professor" was a geologist of note.

With mixed skepticism and interest, the country watched the sinking of a test well on a certain section of the mesquite flat. Then one night the test blew the crown block off the derrick and came in wild. Bedlam ensued. Within a week's time, Santa Rosa grew from an insignificant cow town to a small-sized city. Operators, speculators, lease hounds, all flocked in, and on their heels came the riffraff of oil society. Night became as day, and law was observed only in the breaking. A month of catering to such as filled the Ace of Hearts sufficed for Long Bill.

"This outfit's too tough for me," he confided to his house man. "I got a chance to sell for a fancy price, so I'm goin' to turn loose and cut you in on a slice of the profits."

Long Bill was as good as his word. He sold the Ace of Hearts at an inflated figure and insisted that Quinn accept a share of the purchase price. Quinn, reluctant to buck another man's game, refrained from dabbling in oil and bought a herd of cattle. Long Bill, free at last to indulge a lifetime hobby, entered politics and was elected sheriff. Meantime, as well after well came in, the Spring Hole tract proved to be in the exact center of the new field.

With Quinn's assistance, Hope secured pasturage for her cattle in the foothills when the mesquite flats became untenable. She had numerous chances to lease the mineral rights to the Spring Hole tract, and submitted each one to Quinn for his advice. Eventually, she closed with a company whose offer was extraordinarily attractive, and soon a well was under way.

Much interested, Quinn kept his eye on operations. For the first few weeks a double shift was employed, and work was pushed. Then one day, while riding into Santa Rosa, Quinn stopped at the well and found the area about the derrick inclosed by a high plank fence. A guard curtly refused him admission. Much perplexed, he remounted and rode into town. An instinctive feeling that something was wrong possessed Quinn, and he had about determined to return and make vigorous inquiry when he espied, standing just outside a saloon, the night driller, a happy-go-lucky young fellow called "Shorty."

"Just what," Quinn asked him a moment later when they were lined up at the bar, "is goin' on out yonder? What's the big idea of fencin' in the Harding well?"

Shorty's face assumed a look of deep disgust. "I quit that crooked outfit yesterday, so I don't mind tellin' you they're fixin' up a steal," he answered.

"What you mean, a steal?" asked Quinn.

Shorty's explanation, which began with the backers of the company and ended with the driller now in charge, consumed a full half hour. "They're a dirty bunch of crooks every last one," he finished.

A cold rage gripped Quinn. "Is there any way to beat a game like that?" he demanded.

"Sure!" declared Shorty. "All it takes is nerve," and plunged into another long explanation.

For some minutes Quinn deliberated;

then he faced his companion. "Would you throw in with me and take a chance for a thousand dollars, say?"

"For nothing!" Shorty answered heartily. "Why, I'd give my right eye to get square with a bunch of crooks like they are!"

An hour later the two parted. "See you day after to-morrow," Quinn cried as he rode off.

"I'll be waitin'," Shorty promised.

Instead of returning home, Quinn took the road leading to the county seat. He arrived there about midnight and put up at a hotel. Soon after breakfast the next morning he sought the sheriff's office. He found Long Bill lounging in a chair, perusing last night's paper. His ex-employer was unaffectedly glad to see him.

"You got to be one of these here oil maggots yet, son?" he inquired genially.

"Not yet," grinned Quinn, then became serious. "Listen, Bill," he began, coming out at once to the point, "I want you to do me a favor for old times' sake. Make yourself scarce for a week. In other words, go some place and neglect to leave word where that place is at. Will you do that?"

Long Bill looked concerned. "I don't get what you're drivin' at, Quinn," he demurred. "But if it's in your mind to get me out of the way while you pull off some kind of a hijackin' stunt, you're barkin' up the wrong tree. Me, I always run a square place when I was in the gamblin'-house business, and I aim to run this office the same way."

"Of course," agreed Quinn heartily. "And because you're square I stand willin' to lay my cards face up on the table. I'm satisfied you'll consent when I tell you exactly why I'm askin' this."

"Then shoot, son," said Sheriff Bill.

"I reckon you remember the Spring Hole tract, the one Hope Harding bought," Quinn began.

"You mean the one you gambled away from that oil shark, Lehay, and slipped to her," interrupted Long Bill, his eyes twinkling.

"As you probably know," continued Quinn, "it's plumb in the middle of the new field. Hope held off some time before she leased it, but finally closed with a company that offered her fifty per cent royalty."

"Good girl," Long Bill commented. "That's what I call keen business."

"It looked so at the time, Bill," Quinn agreed. "But, as it happens, there was a joker in the contract that Hope signed. The lease runs for five years, but it seems the company is obliged to sink only one test well during that entire period."

"Well, one test should be enough," the sheriff grunted. "Common sense tells you they can't fail to get oil. And once they do, they'll spud fresh holes as thick as the law allows. Nobody's throwin' away good money."

"That's true," nodded Quinn. "But suppose this, Bill, suppose the test proves a dry hole? There's no way to force them to sink a second, and the lease still runs for five years."

"Such talk is all foolishness," gruffly asserted Bill. "You know they'll hit oil."

"Bill," said Quinn, leaning forward, "your sense of perception has gone stale since you became sheriff. I thought you would catch on, but as long as you don't, here's the lay. The company that holds the lease owns every foot of the adjoining acreage. Moreover, Lehay is the man behind the gun. He means to close down the test on Hope's land presently and declare it a dry hole. But he'll still hold a lease for five years. After that, he'll spud in offset wells on his own land as close to Hope's piece as the law will let him. It's a dead certainty he'll bring in these

wells. And you know how oil is. In five years they can drain every barrel lying under the Spring Hole tract, and Hope will be powerless to lift a hand. You see why his company offered fifty per cent royalty, don't you? Just as a bait!"

For some little space Long Bill remained quiet, while he revolved this information in his mind. Then suddenly he exploded:

"Why, the onery, schemin' scoundrels!" he cried. "The measly sons of guns! If I wasn't sheriff, I'd lay this bird Lehay so cold he couldn't wiggle a finger for a month. Anyway, I'll get after the district attorney. There's bound to be some way to stop such play. The idea of takin' advantage of a defenseless girl like that!" Long Bill jackknifed to his feet.

But Quinn waved him back. "Calm yourself, Bill," he ordered. "According to law, Lehay is in the clear. If you want to do anything, just say you'll evaporate for a week like I asked."

"What's the idea, son?" Bill asked, sinking back.

Quinn shrugged. "What you don't know can't be held against you," he replied. "I'll say this much, though. You're the only law I'm afraid of. With you out of the way, I'll be settin' jerry."

A minute perhaps, Bill pondered. "You and me are pretty close friends, Quinn," he said at length. "But if you're figurin' to blow anybody's head off without just cause or provocation, you'll look the same to me as any one else, and I'll be as hot on your trail. You understand that, of course?"

"Sure!" indifferently agreed Quinn. "I won't ask any quarter. But I ain't plannin' a trick like that, if the knowledge will relieve your mind."

Long Bill nodded. "In such case I'll be leavin' in the mornin'," he declared, "and if anybody can find me for a week they'll need wings."

The next day found Quinn back in Santa Rosa, where he immediately hunted up the driller, Shorty. "All set so far as sickin' the law on us goes," he said. "Now, how many men we goin' to need?"

"A couple," answered Shorty. "I'm satisfied both the roughnecks and derrick men will stick. A job is a job with them, and they don't crave that other outfit much, anyway. I don't know about the fireman, and we should have one more guard."

"Fair enough," said Quinn. "I'll get the guard, if you'll find a fireman. When'll we meet?"

"About dusk," answered Shorty. "We don't want to hit the rig till it's good and dark."

The new field was an inferno of noise, light, and ceaseless activity when the four approached it several hours later. On every side derrick lights twinkled like over brilliant stars; pipes clanged and ran; chains rattled metallically; pulleys squeaked their protest, and the hiss of steam sounded everywhere. At the far edge of the field, an uncapped gasser roared and moaned like a demon in distress. Close by, a gusher boomed steadily against its flow box. Like black, grimed gnomes, men scurried here and there, the sound of their voices little more than infinitesimal squeaks amid the uproar. Here was an oil field in the making.

Steadily the four forged their way into the very center of this bedlam, at length arriving at the Spring Hole lease. Fifty yards from the fence they halted. There were no signs of activity about the derrick.

"The crew are at supper about now," Shorty told Quinn. "Chances are there'll be a guard at the gate, so how'd we better handle him?"

"I'll attend to him," Quinn answered and leading the way to the gate, he pounded loudly, after motioning the others into the shadow.

A hoarse voice from within loudly commanded: "Cut out the rough stuff." Immediately after, the gate was flung open, and a burly individual whose face looked as though some one at some previous time had patted it with a spade made his appearance. "What the——" he began, but the barrel of Quinn's gun, stopping less than an inch from his nose, caused him to gurgle off in silence.

"Right about face and head for the cook shack," curtly commanded Quinn. At the door he turned the captive over to his friend whom he had secured to act as guard and, motioning Shorty to follow, stepped into the shack.

The crew were eating. "Hands up!" Quinn snapped. Jaws slackened and halted, while hands reached obediently upward. A half dozen pairs of eyes regarded the newcomers with mingled disgust and apprehension. The driller, a long, lean, snake-faced man, was the first to find his tongue. "If this is a stick-up, Shorty," he cried, catching sight of his ex-coworker, "I'll see you jugged, if it's the last act of my life."

"You'll hold your tongue," Shorty snarled back. Then he addressed the others. "This ain't no holdup, fellers," he began, "but this crook of a driller and his boss, Lehay, are figurin' to take advantage of a girl." Then he rapidly outlined the scheme as he had deduced it. "It's plain as the cat's meow," he finished. "This driller ain't gone down fifty feet in the last week. He's just markin' time waitin' for Lehay to say quit."

A chorus of nods greeted this assertion, and a floorman asked: "What's your lay, Shorty?"

"I'm goin' to bring in the well right under these crooks' noses," Shorty snapped back. "But I can't do it without help, so I'm goin' to make it worth while for whoever will throw in with me. Twenty dollars a day and a century bonus to each man when she gushes. Those that won't play will be cooped up till the show is over. How many of you will stick?"

One of the derrick men, a freckled young fellow, was the first to reply. "I'm with you, Shorty, providin' I can take my arms down," he declared. "They're about paralyzed."

Shorty said: "That's one. Now, who else?"

A mumbled discussion ensued, and presently all, save the snake-faced driller and the fireman, signified their willingness to transfer allegiance. Those two Shorty curtly ordered from the table.

"Get your blankets," he commanded. "From now till this hole starts to roar, you'll live in the tool house. If you keep quiet, you can sit around and deliberate on your sins. But if you get noisy and start a rough-house, I'll tie you up and give you a gag to chew on that would choke a cow. Now, forward march!"

Just before dusk, forty-eight hours later, Shorty called Quinn from the cook house to the derrick floor.

"We're in pay sand," he said. "Twenty feet more, and I'm figurin' to set a strainer and start bailin'. You reckon I'd better wait till mornin', or rig up lights and keep on after supper?"

Quinn considered. From daylight to dark, eighteen hours at a stretch, the crew had unstintedly driven themselves in a race against possible interruption. To the last man they were red-eyed and fatigued, worn almost beyond power to go farther. To ask them to continue would be inhuman. Quinn was on the point of saying so when the freckle-faced derrick man, high up on a finger board, interrupted with a hail:

"Here comes Lehay and another man ridin' a pipe wagon," he called. "Better stir your stumps."

Shorty turned to Quinn. "There's

only one thing to do, and that's grab him," he snapped. "I know th rat. Once he finds what is goin' on and discovers that the sheriff is away, 'll marshal a small army to take this pla back. We've been lucky so far not be in' interrupted, but now the sheriff's absence will work both ways."

"You're right, Shorty," said Quinn, and, leaping from the derrick floor, he joined the guard at the gate. Through a small aperture in the planking he watched the pipe wagon stop and Lehay and his companion clamber down. Presently Lehay demanded admittance in a peremptory tone that gave warning that his suspicions were aroused. Carefully keeping out of sight, Quinn flung open the gate.

Just what the crooked operator expected to find wrong was known only to himself. But it's a moral certainty that the welcome he received was entirely unexpected. For Quinn poked his pistol under the big man's right ear, while the guard covered his companion.

"Head for the tool house!" barked Quinn when Lehay began to bluster. "You've friends there who will satisfy your curiosity."

From their various stations the crew had taken this all in, and upon Lehay's disappearance they redoubled their efforts with one accord. There was no thought of quitting now. After a hasty supper, lights were rigged, and throughout the night the derrick was a scene of feverish activity. Shortly after daylight, Shorty halted operations long enough to adjust the Christmas tree, which is a complicated arrangement of gates and valves designed to control the flow of oil. With this in place, he began bailing.

Down and up, down and up, the bailer traveled its half-mile journey, and at every emptying, Shorty became more and more excited. For the fluid it brought forth was tinted with iridescent, filmy streaks of oil. "Directly, she'll bring up the pure quill," he promised Quinn, who was watching every move.

But his prognostication proved wrong to this extent: Once again the bailer descended. But it never reached bottom. The cable suddenly slackened as though held from below; then, before Shorty could reverse for the windup the bailer shot forth as if propelled from a gun. Following this, a blackish, golden stream spewed upward with a sudden deafening roar, drenching the derrick with a viscid, sticky coat. With a joyous whoop Shorty dived for the gate valve and shut off the golden flood. Then, grabbing Quinn's hands, he began an Indian dance. Another gusher had been brought in!

Within an hour the Spring Hole lease was deserted. The crew, including Shorty, had been paid off by Quinn and disappeared. Lehay and his companions likewise had vanished on some errand. And Quinn, after securing his horse, which he had left in Santa Rosa, was on his way to his ranch.

For some unknown reason he felt depressed. This was not because he feared any comeback on the part of Lehay or his associates. All they could do was to make the best of the matter now and go ahead sinking other wells. Hope, thanks to him, would soon be rich.

He had put up his horse and was preparing dinner when a knock on the door warned him of a visitor. "Come in," Quinn called gruffly. The door opened, and Hope Harding entered.

"I just came from town, where I spent the night," she said. "The news of Lehay's plan, and how you frustrated it is common knowledge now. I think you were so brave."

Oddly enough, Quinn's old sense of shyness returned. "I reckon," he at last ventured haltingly, "you'll be goin' back East soon."

"Back East?" echoed Hope. "Why?"

"Well, now you'll be too rich to fool with cattle," he replied.

"You're a dear!" Hope smiled and waved a paper she was carrying. "Here is your deed to the Spring Hole tract. I never had it recorded because —well, because I made Bryan tell me all that happened that night in the Ace of Hearts."

A dazed look came into Quinn's eyes. "I—I won't take it," he protest[illegible] "It's yours, you know, by all rights."

All smiling, Hope shook her head. "I won't take it, either," she declared. "So I only see one way to settle it. We'll have to call it ours."

"Ours?" said Quinn blankly.

"Ours!" repeated Hope. "Have I got to ask you outright, you dense man?"

Then Quinn saw the light. Forgetting his shyness, he took her into his arms.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Wood Ibis

IN its general size and shape the ibis is similar to the crane, being about four feet long and standing still higher when erect. It is white in color, with black-tipped wings and black tail. The head is peculiar, being entirely bald in the adult bird, and having an enormously thick, heavy bill, tapering a little and curving slightly at the end.

Particularly in the forenoon, these birds may be seen rising and circling about, much like the buzzards. It is said that these gyrations occur while the birds are digesting their food and continue until hunger forces them to alight.

The wood ibis feeds entirely upon fish and aquatic reptiles, of which it destroys vast numbers, much more than it can possibly eat. Apparently, it is not only the desire for food but also the spirit of adventure which urges the bird to kill more than it can consume.

In procuring food, the ibises wade into comparatively shallow water where there is an abundance of fish. There they execute what appears to be a dancing motion, which stirs the water to a muddy hue. The fish rising to the surface are struck by the beak of the ibis, which kills them immediately; after which the bird gobbles them up mercilessly.

The ibises are gregarious birds and are seldom seen alone, spending most of their time in each other's society. They are found in warm countries.

The carriage of the wood ibis is firm and sedate, almost stately; each leg is slowly lifted and planted with deliberate precision before the other is moved. In case of alarm they do not run, but take immediate flight by wing. They spring powerfully from the ground, bending low to gather strength, and for a little distance flap hurriedly with dangling legs, as if the weight of the body were a great load. But, fairly started, their flight is firm, strong, and direct. When proceeding in a straight line, the feet are stretched horizontally backward, but the head is not drawn in close to the body as is the method of the heron.

The eggs of the wood ibis are much like those of the heron. The shell is rough to the touch and covered with a flaky substance. The eggs are nearly three inches in length, and two or three are usually laid in a nest.

Four years are said to be necessary for the ibis to become full-grown. The female is considerably smaller than the male.

The Brass Man

By George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

WELDON visits San Trinidad and is offered two jobs; one by Cunningham, a border smuggler. Weldon asks if Francesca Laguarda, a dangerously attractive girl, is involved, and is warned by Cunningham against her. Doctor Henry Watts, a feeble old man, offers Weldon the post of protector to his patient, Helen O'Mallock. Weldon accepts.

Miss O'Mallock lives alone with a few servants. A beautiful, fair girl, she is dying of consumption. Her house has been entered by strange men. General O'Mallock's fortune, hidden in the house, has not been found since his death. An attempt has been made to poison Helen.

Investigating at night, Weldon finds the doctor creeping up the cellar stairs. Watts shows Weldon one secret hiding place of the general's wealth, now empty. He suggests that if Helen can be frightened away, the robbers can search the house at leisure. The two men adjourn to Weldon's room to discuss the case.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LIGHT TOUCH.

WHEN they came into his room, Weldon lighted the wood in the fireplace. The doctor, in the meantime, paced up and down the chamber. And as the smoke first rolled out and then the flame began to catch and sing, Weldon looked at the old fellow with increasing respect. Only the body of the doctor was feeble; his brains were lively enough. He was no hero, and yet he had courage enough to leave his own cottage in the middle of the night and come here for the purpose of examining the damp, cold, dark cellar of a house where, as he knew, there might be untold dangers!

Now, however, the doctor was not thinking of buried treasure and its possible hiding places. For he presently stopped in his pacing and said to Weldon: "There she lies, wide awake, listening to the night noises, praying for the daylight to come—and yet never uttering a single complaint!"

"Doesn't she sleep well at night?" asked Weldon anxiously.

"You will see! She sleeps hours in

the day. At night I'm sure that she hardly closes her eyes. I try to make her confess, but she will smile and say that the night passed off very well. However, I have ways of telling!"

He nodded his old head with a frown.

"What ways of telling, Doctor Watts?"

"The books she reads, and the number of them that she gets through," said the doctor. "You can't read big, solid volumes in a moment between sleeping and waking."

"Then why don't we see if she's sleeping now?" asked Weldon. "It's a frightful thing for even a strong man to lie awake night after night! It would fray the nerves of Hercules thin, not to mention the nerves of a sick girl. There should be some one to talk to her—amuse her in some way."

He stepped toward the door, but the doctor threw up his hand in haste.

"Wrong, wrong!" said he. "It must not be done, my dear Weldon! You must understand that though I'm not a Christian Scientist, I'm a great believer in the power the mind holds over the body. Oh, a great believer in that! What is it that keeps strength in her now? Simply the thought that she is not seriously ill! We talk cheerfully together. We plan the trips and the rides which we soon will be able to take together. It is always just a few days—and then she will be up! I talk to her seriously of her good progress."

"How long has she been in bed?"

"A few weeks now."

"And still she expects to be well almost any day?"

"And yet she's not a fool, you would say," interpreted the doctor. "Of course she's not! But hope is a blinding bandage across the eyes. Believe me, it is an opiate which puts the mind to sleep. She is filled with hope. That is why I never question her too closely about her sleepless nights. All is done with a light touch. I smile. I am very gay when I am with her. So we carry on the battle!

"But," he went on in a graver voice, "if I begin to make midnight visits to her, she will grow suspicious, distressed. She will be concerned for you and me, keeping vigils for her sake. Then her nerves will begin to give way in real earnest. Believe me, my dear young man, when I tell you that we are dealing with a creature as delicate as gossamer, a soul as fragile as petals of flowers."

"I do believe you," said Weldon, "and I'll offer no more advice."

For he was touched by this speech, though he could not help smiling at the thought of the old doctor being gay! Mirth for Henry Watts would be like a song from an owl!

"I would like to know," said Weldon, "just how the general died. Was it a long illness?"

The doctor shook his head. His face was sad.

"Young man," he said a little impatiently, "if it had been a long illness, he would have been able to tell us where he had put away his property, I take it?"

Weldon nodded. "A sudden death, then?"

"In the middle of the afternoon, in his chair in the library. You've noticed the big leather chair?"

"With a foot rest before it?"

"That's it!"

"And he died there?"

"He'd spoken a word about a bad headache the day before. That morning he remained in bed late. Ah, if I had had a chance to talk with him about his symptoms! But, as a matter of fact, it irritated the general to have any one suspect that he could be sick. He used to say that he had not spent ten hours in bed between sunrise and sunset since he was a child. He never was sick. He refused to be!"

He sighed and then went on: "These

men of iron, Mr. Weldon! I take it that you're one of the same cast yourself, in a way!"

"Not at all," answered Weldon; "next to being perfectly well there's nothing better than a fever, say. Clouds floating across your mind. The world made into another place. Voices sound like waves breaking in a cave. No, I have enjoyed a good many sicknesses, and the best part is the convalescence—lying weak as water, your body shrunk, and an enormous appetite beginning to gnaw at the insides like a wolf!"

He chuckled. "You see I'm the very opposite of the general!"

The doctor looked at him for a moment from beneath shaggy brows.

"You're a strange young man," said he.

"And the general's death?"

"No doubt he'd been weakening for months. But forcing himself on. Keeping the iron mask before our eyes. You see, he was over seventy——"

"But very fit, you said."

"No one is fit at seventy," answered the doctor with a touch of dryness, "and the fool who tries to be a young man at that age kills himself with the effort!"

Weldon was a little startled, but there were these flashes of unexpected bluntness in the doctor.

"He did spend several hours after sunrise in his bed on that last day," went on Henry Watts. "At lunch I noticed that he wasn't eating much."

"You were living here, then?"

"I used to come here for a shameless lot of meals. When I called the general's attention to the fact that he was not eating with appetite he was angry, and forced a large meal down his throat. You see the foolish pride of the man! Then, after lunch, when he should have lain down to rest—I suggested that he should—he snapped at me, and went into the library instead. No quiet reading for him. He picked up a history of the O'Mallocks. A very stirring thing. Well, age, bad digestion, much too heavy a meal, weakness which had been increasing lately, and then the shock of the stirring narratives in that book—all those combined to strike him suddenly. He died in his chair! We found his head fallen on his chest.

"'He's sleeping!' whispered Helen to me. 'Dear dad! How we'll tease him about this!'

"'We will,' said I.

"But after we were out of the room, I managed to slip back into it. I was not so sure about that sleep. There was something odd about the manner in which one hand was gripped and the other relaxed.

"I found him dead, and the body cold!"

"The heart?" asked Weldon.

"No doubt about that. The heart cannot stand the strain of all the foolish things that people will insist on doing to it. The heart must break at last. Fray the strongest cable for seventy years and at last even a small strain will make it burst. And yet it seemed impossible. I looked down at the bowed, dead head of the general. I could not believe that he was really gone from us. Even though I knew that his heart had stopped beating, I expected him to start up at any moment and laugh in my face. "'Death? Do you think I would surrender to death? Only for a moment—to show it that I despise it!'

"I really expected the dead body to spring up. You who did not know him cannot imagine his vitality!"

In fact, the doctor was so thoroughly overcome by the memory of that tragic moment that he placed a hand before his face and steadied himself by resting the other hand on the back of a chair.

"And you're sure," asked Weldon, "that there was no foul play?"

"Foul play?" gasped the doctor, dropping his screening hand.

"Poison, say?" suggested Weldon.

The doctor merely gaped.

"Of course, I know nothing about such things. I merely make the suggestion."

"Good heavens!" whispered the doctor.

He sank into the chair. He was so overcome by the horrible idea that he shook violently, and his lips parted and twitched.

"You see," explained Weldon, sorry for the shock which he had given Doctor Watts, "it seemed to me that it would be possible. And there would be a reason. Kill the general, so that the criminals would be left more free to search the house for the treasure they thought was in it. Then escape with the money which they found in that secret compartment you just have shown me. Afterward they come back again. By Heaven!" exclaimed Weldon, as the thought struck home to him. "There was the case of the poisoned water for Helen O'Mallock! You see how it fits in with the rest? They poisoned the general first. Now they return to see if they can't get some more spoil, and they're using the same methods in order to get rid of the poor girl!"

"Are you right?" said the doctor hollowly. "Can you be right? Ah, Weldon, right or wrong, you put a terrible burden on my soul! Suppose that crime was committed—and I in the house? Under my very eyes—and I with professional skill thrown away!"

He struck his hands heavily together and stared at the fire.

Then Weldon stood up from his chair and said quietly:

"We've got to get Helen O'Mallock away from this house."

"Ha?"

"We've got to have her moved. Let them rob the place! But let's keep her life. That's the main work."

"You'd kill her in ten minutes," said the doctor, "by even suggesting such a thing!"

"She's not as fragile as that, I hope," answered Weldon.

"You!" cried the doctor.

His excitement was growing great.

"I tell you," said Weldon, "this gloomy old place, and the memory of her father constantly coming back to her mind while she's in it, are enough to throw a strong man off balance, let alone a girl like her. She's got to have a change of place and a change of air!"

"Good heavens!" breathed the doctor. "Do you mean that you'd argue the point with her?"

"Would? I mean that I will!"

"I tell you," said Doctor Watts, "I forbid such a mad attempt! My dear Helen—my poor child—to be torn away from the house, taken I don't know where—the fatigue of the journey would kill her. Or, if not, to miss the things she has grown up with—to be placed in some sanitarium—horrible, horrible! Weldon, I know you mean well. But I repeat to you! As a doctor, with all my professional weight, I forbid such a thing!"

Weldon looked earnestly at him. No doubt Watts meant the best in the world for Helen O'Mallock. But suddenly it struck Weldon that it would be very odd if this man, so long divorced from active practice, should still retain any great ability as a physician. There was a great deal of talk constantly on his lips about nerves, tenderness, shock, and other outmoded catch phrases. In that moment, Weldon resolved that he would see to it that other medical advice should be called in.

CHAPTER XVII.

"COME FAST!"

HE determined that at least there was nothing to be gained by antagonizing the good doctor. He saw that worthy man from the house and said

good night to him. The doctor was very much troubled. He held Weldon's hand for a moment in both his.

"I have angered you, Weldon!" he said anxiously. "I've upset you. You feel that I'm tyrannical. That I perhaps am making great mistakes. Perhaps! I pray that I am not. Only, I must do what conscience and my professional experience tell me is best!"

Weldon said very heartily: "Doctor, I assure you I have every faith in your conscience."

He did not say "in your skill," but the doctor seemed relieved and went off with his rather rapid, fumbling stride. Weldon, watching him disappear, felt a touch of pity. He never saw the back of the old doctor, in fact, without a touch of that same emotion.

For his own part, he softly went around the house again. He did not try those dark, cold, reeking lower passages, but he toured around on the outside. He could not help feeling that it would be impossible to spy out the approach of skulkers toward the house. They had ample cover from the trees, and where the trees left off, outjutting rocks commenced. He himself would have guaranteed reaching the place even if a hundred eyes constantly scanned all the ground about the house.

He went on carefully through the dark, completed the tour, and came to the rear of the patio wall just as a thin sickle of moon sailed out from among the clouds and floated for a moment in the mysterious black sea of heaven. At the same time, something glistened on the side of the mountain above him.

He jerked himself about to face it, and saw—merely the glinting of some smoothly polished columns under the pale moonshine! He was surprised at that. He had not noticed such a structure before, when he came to the house in the sunlight. But, at that time, he had been directing all his attention to the house and the patio itself.

He went up the hill to the gleaming columns.

There were four of them, plain Doric affairs of granite; and their transporting to this place must have cost a bit of money. They held up a roof, or a pseudo roof. As a matter of fact, except for the columns, the place consisted of the dark rock of the mountain of Las Altas itself. This had been cut away, and when Weldon turned his bull's-eye into the place he saw at once what it was. A deep hollow had been chiseled into the face of the mountain, the columns inserted for the sake of supporting the entrance—or merely for ornament—and behind the columns there was a rather pretty scroll work of partially gilded iron to keep intruders—man or beast—from the interior. That interior contained a plain stone sarcophagus, undecorated except for a roll at either end. It was the tomb of the general, of course.

It looked so fresh and newly done that Weldon felt as though the old man must have been closed within that ponderous lid hardly the day before.

Then he turned back to the house, entered, and went softly up the stairs to his room.

It was three o'clock, and the rest of that night he spent in the library reading. It was not a pleasant session, at the best, with the wind occasionally stooping from the cold heart of the sky and crying out about the building. And his eyes grew heavy from following the print. At last he lay back and fastened his mind on the problem, for though he had no idea of trying to solve the thing by sheer inspiration, he wanted the facts to be ordered in his mind.

For this reason he restated everything and came to the odd conclusion that Francesca Laguarda was responsible for his presence in the O'Mallock house at that moment!

But then, his train of reasoning was not entirely absurd.

It was her dark and lovely face, her musical voice, which had started his heart beating at an unusual rate; and that in turn had made him look about for diversion—diversion which he found in heavy gambling in Cabrero's place; and the exploits at Cabrero's place, in turn, brought him to the notice of the good doctor, and the doctor brought him up the hill to the new adventure. So he reverted to Francesca Laguarda and wondered if he ever would see her again. He felt an odd surety that he would. No doubt she lived in the midst of dangers of the gun and the law, to say nothing of reckless automobile driving, and yet he was oddly sure that their trails would cross again.

"In jail, perhaps!" smiled Weldon to himself.

In the meantime, he had much to try to learn here. He wanted to push, if he could, the inquiry as to the manner in which the general had died. There was one fairly sure way of finding out. They could exhume the body. He remembered gruesome tales of bodies dead for ten years in which the presence of poison had been detected. Arsenic poisoning in every case, he thought it had been!

Suppose he could prevail upon the doctor to have the body ordered out of the grave? The thing might be managed without letting Helen O'Mallock learn of it. He nodded grimly to himself as he arrived at that step in his plans. In the second place, he could only hope that he would be able to entrap the next visitors to the house of O'Mallock!

With this in mind, he found that the dawn had come. It made a rich picture from the window as he turned the shutters back. The Rio Negro quite belied its dark name and became a river of fire. The windows of the two towns blinked at him like crimson lightning again and again, and gradually the rose faded from the sky and the strong sun sailed up the height.

Aunt Maggie came not long afterward.

She paused, with her broadest grin, on her way to the room of Helen O'Mallock.

"You ain't no sleeper, sir," said she.

Weldon retired to a bathroom to bathe and shave. When that was finished, he found breakfast waiting, and he ate it with a grand appetite. Matters seemed better to him this morning. The sun lifts the veil from our minds and carries away despondency. He finished his coffee, smoked his cigarette, and hailed Aunt Maggie on her way back from the sick room. She herself would take a letter for him when she went down to the market with her mule and cart.

So he sat at the library table and wrote the message.

DEAR BEN: Come up to see me at once at the O'Mallock house. You will find out in San Trinidad or Juniper where the place is. Bring along your medical kit, please, if you have one with you. If not, buy a new one. I mean, stethoscope, thermometer, and your apparatus for taking blood pressure. I have a patient here for you. Come fast!

He sealed the envelope and wrote on the outside "Doctor Benjamin Wilbur" and put down the name of the hotel in San Trinidad. He was reasonably sure that Wilbur would be at the place by this time. They had appointed a tryst for which Wilbur had been overdue even the day before.

He was a rare fellow, this Wilbur, doubtless as complete a scoundrel as any man that ever walked in shoes, and with a criminal ability that ranged from cracking safes to picking pockets. But he was a pleasant companion, always amusing, usually walking on the heels of some rare adventure; and when Weldon was in his chronic state of hunger for excitement, he was apt to call on Wilbur, as he had not long before and

asked for this appointment. But, in addition to his other qualities, Wilbur was a remarkable physician. Weldon himself had seen operations performed by him in the wilderness—delicate operations, when Wilbur had no more than a hunting knife and a pair of wire tweezers and a common needle and thread. He knew the human body and the frailties of the human mind, this educated crook, and this was a place where he could show his talents.

Weldon felt that he was stepping a little behind the back of Watts in sending off this letter, but he was willing to overstep the bounds of politeness far more than this if he could do good to the sick girl.

Then his bell rang, and he went in to see her.

She was in her chair beside the window, her hands and the page of her book in dazzling sun, her face half lost in the upturned collar of a bed jacket.

Had he slept well? Yes, very well. And she? She had had a good night, thanks to him—knowing that he was so near and that no harm could come to her! Had she been upset because of the way in which he broke down the door of her chamber? No, on the contrary, that was what had made her feel so secure. And her eyes looked at his hands, and then, slowly, turned up to his face, and she smiled at him like a child, with trust.

But as he left the room again, he heard a softly stifled yawn and knew that she had done what the doctor predicted—lain awake all night; and now she would sleep if she could, in the warm comfort of the sun!

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT HAD HE SEEN?

A LITTLE after midday, Wilbur arrived. Weldon, drowsing after luncheon, wakened at the sound of the man's step in the hall. He thought at first it was the old doctor, who had not made his appearance as yet. But, after a moment, he knew that Doctor Watts never could have moved with such a cadence.

Aunt Maggie brought the stranger to the library door and stood aside with the look of a watchdog until she saw Weldon take the newcomer's hand. Wilbur was drawn in, the door closed. They sat down beside a window and examined each other with faint smiles. They had been through much together. They were not really friends; but theirs was a mutual respect, and behind them lay much history which each had shared with the other.

"Is this game worth while, Lew?" asked the doctor.

"Ben, my boy," said Weldon, "this isn't a game. It's a three-ringed circus."

"You have to watch the three rings all at once, eh?"

"I have to if I can. But this show is all in the dark, and I'm straining my eyes to find out what's happening."

"Do I step in?"

"You stay out," said Weldon with decision. "There's no real need of your talents here, my boy."

"But this?"

Wilbur touched with his hand the little morocco case which he carried.

"Two rooms from this there's a girl ill with consumption," said Weldon. "You're to see her for me. Mind you, you're simply here to pay me a friendly visit. I hope that you will be allowed to examine her. You understand? She's a delicate thing."

"How delicate?" asked Wilbur.

"In every way. The brave kind, my boy!"

"Beautiful, of course?" said the doctor, showing a fine, white set of teeth as he smiled.

He would have been remarkably handsome except for the extreme height of his forehead, which made his entire face seem rather elongated.

"I've only seen one woman more beautiful," said Weldon.

"Then she can't be so delicate as all that," replied Wilbur. "Beauty is a light, Lew; it doesn't shine from burned-out lamps!"

Weldon brushed this idea quickly to one side.

"You're going to revise your ideas of women when you meet her."

"Is this a rich marriage, Lew?" asked the other, calmly turning his head and noting the contents of the room.

"She is going to die!" said Weldon, leaning a bit forward.

The doctor nodded, unmoved.

"I mean to say," explained Weldon, "the old fellow who's taking care of her believes that she'll never get out of this decline. A grand old man he is. But probably half a century behind the times in his medical ideas. Wilbur, if you save her I——"

He paused.

"As much as all that?" said Wilbur with his cynical smile.

"More, more!" said Weldon.

The other nodded with a brightening eye. "I'll do my best for her," said he. "As a matter of fact, I wouldn't miss a chance of doing you a serious good turn. It is bound to come back to me later on. I'm a gold digger, you know!"

He waved an airy hand, but Weldon knew that, in fact, it was a confession of faith.

"And have I been brought down here for this, Lew?"

"You have, for this job only. I'm sorry."

"Tush! It's nothing. Go ahead and prepare my way."

So Weldon went to the sick room and tapped on the door. A sleepy voice told him to enter. He apologized for disturbing Miss O'Mallock, but it had happened by a rare chance that an old friend of his had come to visit him—a truly great doctor. Would she let the physician see her?

She opened her eyes and looked up as though she were greatly frightened.

"Do you think I need any doctor other than dear Doctor Henry, Mr. Weldon?"

"Of course, Doctor Watts will cure you. But here's a fellow who might show you a short cut. And, after all, don't you owe it to yourself to take every chance?"

She closed her eyes to think.

"You're kind," said she. "If Doctor Watts could be asked about it first?"

Weldon bit his lip. It was exactly the thing which he had feared.

"Very well," he said. "But Wilbur is staying only a short time——"

"Won't you introduce him to me, at least? Then afterward—if Doctor Watts——"

Weldon went back to his friend.

"You're to be allowed to sit in her presence for a litttle while," said he. "But the old fossil has to be consulted before you examine her. Come with me and be agreeable, Wilbur. Wipe the sneer off your face and off your mind. Will you try to do that?"

He took Wilbur into the sick room. Helen O'Mallock lay in peace and smiled at the new medical man with perfect trust, while Wilbur led off smoothly and pleasantly with talk about Las Altas and the southern mountains, and weird burro trails which he had followed among them. Weldon thought that he managed it very well and he was surprised and disappointed when, at the end of a half hour, Wilbur announced that he must not tire the patient.

He promptly retreated to Weldon's room, where the latter said grimly: "You were just beginning to win her confidence, man! What do you mean by breaking off the talk like that before you had a chance to——"

Wilbur raised his hand.

"I was there long enough to find out all that I wanted to find out."

"You were!"

"I was."

"You know what's wrong with her, then? Do you really know, Wilbur?"

Instead of answering at once, Wilbur looked long at his companion.

"And *you* don't know?" he asked sharply at length.

"I? I'm not a doctor. How *should* I know?"

Wilbur dropped into silence again, walking rapidly up and down the room.

"It's serious—of course," suggested Weldon, following the other with gloomy eyes.

Wilbur shrugged his shoulders.

"It's fatal, man?" went on Weldon.

The doctor spun about, dropped his hands into his coat pockets, and stared again at Weldon.

"*I'm* not the patient," said Weldon. "Don't act as though you were studying a disease in me."

"Come clean with me," said the doctor. "You're in love with this girl?"

"I? No."

He answered slowly, looking carefully into his mind.

"I see," said Wilbur, and began to pace the room again.

"You see what?" snarled Weldon.

"But you're serious about this?"

"Entirely! Don't be so mysterious! Tell me at once: Can anything be done for this poor girl?"

Wilbur considered again, but once more he shook his head.

"Not by me," said he. "I couldn't help her."

"Does that mean that nobody could help her?"

"No, it doesn't mean that."

"Benjamin, I'm within an ace of chucking you through that window!" cried Weldon. He added: "Will you talk out to me?"

He was astonished to hear the other say calmly: "No, I won't talk out to you. I've said every word that I intend to say about her and her case."

"Will you tell me why?"

"I am not a Sir Galahad or a King Arthur," said Wilbur. "However, I'm a doctor, and there is such a thing as professional etiquette."

He shut his teeth together with a snap and Weldon, angry and confused, realized that there was no more to be had from him on that subject.

He turned suddenly to another theme.

"Very well, then. We'll let that drop. But tell me another thing. Is it difficult to discover if a man has died of poison?"

"It depends on the kind. And how long the man has been dead."

"Say arsenic—and dead one year."

"Perfectly simple," said the other.

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"Then go back to Juniper," said Weldon, "and return here after dark. Come as silently as a thief. Will you do that?"

"To make an autopsy, man?"

"Yes."

"Wait a moment, Lew. Do you mean to open a grave?"

"I mean just that."

"It's a horrible business," said Wilbur slowly.

"Listen to me," said Weldon. "If it's horrible for you, do you think it's not ten times more horrible for me?"

"True," nodded the other.

"You'll come, then?"

"I can't refuse you anything, Lew. But I would like to ask——"

"Ask nothing. Not a word."

"Very well."

"I'll expect you an hour or so after sunset . No, make it eleven o'clock."

Doctor Wilbur sighed.

"Friends," said he at last, "are expensive luxuries. Good-by!"

He left at once to ride back to Juniper, and Weldon watched him away. He was almost inclined to call back Wilbur at the last moment, for he was committing them to a course of action which might ruin them both. How-

ever, he finally snapped his fingers and turned away. Every nerve in his body was jumping.

For what had Wilbur, in fifteen minutes, seen in Helen O'Mallock? What was the thing which professional courtesy kept him from mentioning?

CHAPTER XIX.

SOME ONE BEFORE THEM!

WHEN Doctor Watts arrived later that afternoon, Weldon told him at once of the coming of his friend, Wilbur, and the old man listened earnestly.

"Heaven forgive me," said he, "if I should not see that everything possible is done for Helen! Send for the doctor again."

But Weldon excused himself. It was improbable, he said, that he could get Wilbur out to the house again.

"Did he see Helen while he was here?" asked Watts.

"He did—for a few minutes."

"And what did he make of her?" asked Watts, looking fixedly at Weldon.

"Nothing," said Weldon. "Of course, he simply sat and chatted."

"Sat and chatted," said Watts, muttering. "Sat and chatted! And he made nothing of the case? Tell me, Weldon, is that fellow really a good doctor?"

"A wonderful doctor," said Weldon with conviction.

"He made nothing of her—he made nothing of her," said Doctor Henry Watts half to himself. "Ah!"

He kept on nodding for a moment, as though this were a most extraordinary thing. It increased the bewilderment of Weldon almost to the point of expression. But he resolutely kept silence. There was about Helen O'Mallock something extraordinary which to the professional eye of a doctor revealed information of the greatest importance. In fact, Wilbur had thought it strange, apparently, that Weldon himself had not detected it, even with an unprofessional eye.

What could it be? He strained his mind at the problem. Watts went on to see his patient and Weldon followed him to the door of the room, in time to see the greeting, in time to hear her asking eagerly if he thought it a good thing that she should be seen by the new doctor.

"By all means! By all means!" said Watts. "If Weldon can get him up here again. Ah, my dear, you should have let him look you over even while I was away! Because two heads are better than one, eh? There are short cuts to a complete cure, at times."

Weldon, having heard enough, went back to doze in his chair in the library. He was much relieved when he discovered that Watts was not so narrow-minded as to wish to keep the care of the patient entirely to himself.

But what was it that struck Wilbur so forcibly? The beauty of the girl, of course. Her pathos, too. Her shadowed, wearied eyes, as well. But what beyond, so much that Wilbur had not credited that Weldon himself had not seen the thing? He determined that if Wilbur did come that night, he would tax him more closely and try to get at the meaning of his odd remarks and his still more odd attitude.

But, when the meeting actually took place, other things drove that question from Weldon's mind. Well before the appointed time he was waiting, walking impatiently up and down. The faint sound of crunching pine needles halted him, expectant.

From beneath the trees, the tall form of Wilbur stepped. He looked calmly about him, even as he came forward.

"What nights you have up here!" said the doctor. "What nights, eh, for a man in love?"

"We'll take our poetry a little later," said Weldon . "Have you everything?"

"I hope so."

He showed his case of instruments.

"I need a strong light, Lew."

"I have one here. It will throw strong light for an hour."

"That's time enough. Are you ready?"

"Ready as can be!"

He led the way up the hill toward the dimly revealed columns of the tomb of the general. At the gate he paused and fell to work on the lock with several long, strangely formed keys.

"How much danger of being watched at this game, old fellow?" asked Wilbur cheerfully.

"About two chances out of three of being caught."

The doctor whistled.

"That's cheerful," said he. "However—how's the tomb arranged?"

"I found out to-day from the cook. There's a top slab of stone. Under that is a plain coffin of thin sheets of granite, and the body is inside that, wrapped in lead."

"No metal clamps to hold down the outer cover?"

"It makes no difference. I have a saw here that will go through them as though they were butter and not iron at all!"

"Sing ho!" smiled Wilbur. "You always were a clever fellow, Weldon."

The door presently gave under the manipulations of Weldon, and he pushed it wide with a careful touch.

"Good silent hinges even on a grave," said Wilbur, "and that I call the height of luxury! Let me have that light a moment, will you?"

Weldon passed it to his companion, who sent a ray of the light on one of the hinges, touched it, and rubbed his finger tops together.

"Quite so! Quite so!" said the doctor. "They've been oiling this hinge, old fellow. By gad, they makes things convenient for ghosts here! Or ghouls, should I say?"

Weldon snatched the light and stared at the hinge in turn. The oil had been put on with care. Only by closely looking could one see a faint gleam, and then it rubbed off as grease on his finger tips.

"Black, too," observed the doctor. "So careful to keep everything right that they've even gone the length of blackening the oil so that it would look like a stain on the iron. Who takes care of these gates?"

Silently, Weldon went ahead. He passed under the canopy of the tomb. He stood beside the long, ponderous, sarcophagus.

"Hold the light," he said briefly, and then laid hold of one end of the topmost slab.

It was a ponderous weight, but it yielded at once to his strength of arm. The lantern was held ready by his companion, and as the stone moved, he darted a ray inside.

"Empty!" said he. "Quite hollow, old boy!"

Weldon replaced the lid. He turned slowly away, and without a word they left the grave and returned to the dark shadow of the trees.

"Some one went before us," murmured Wilbur cheerfully. "Oiled the gate to keep it from screeching, and having cut through the iron clamps that held the upper slab in place, they took out the body—and where are we, Lew? Can you tell me?"

"Was it done recently or long ago?" asked Weldon.

"Recently, of course. That oil hasn't been there more than twenty-four hours. It hasn't had a chance to thicken up yet."

"Recently!" murmured Weldon. "Then some one has guessed that I might come out here. Somebody has been here before me, and the place has been rifled so that I won't have a chance to find out the secret of the general's death!"

"It looks very much like it."

"Darn your smooth, smug way!" yawned Weldon.

He stretched himself and yawned.

"I like it better and better," said he.

"You do? I confess if I were in your boots, I'd like it less and less. Some one's watching you and reading your mind, old-timer. And if he can read your mind, he's clever enough to make all manner of trouble for you."

"Of course he is," said Weldon. "But suppose I play my game in my own way—let the fellow catch me if he can! That's what I propose."

"Cold steel in the hollow of your back, Lew. Think it over! Is it worth while? Would ten like her be worth the price?"

"Don't read my mind," Weldon protested dryly. "Leave that for the man who opened this grave to-day. By Jove, it must have been to-day!"

"Of course it was! And that means, this evening."

Weldon muttered softly.

"I'm going back."

"To the tomb?"

"Yes."

"Tell me. Do you need me any longer?"

"Not a bit. Can I let you have money? Are you short?"

"Your money would do me no good. There's not enough of it. So long, Lew!"

"How long are you here?"

"Until I hear from you."

"That may be never."

"Ah, well," said the cheerful doctor, "a man has to take the chances as they come to him. So long again!"

CHAPTER XX.

"I'LL TELL EVERYTHING!"

WILBUR went lightly down the hill, and Weldon, instead of going at once to the grave, as he had announced that he would, slipped softly through the trees behind the tall doctor. He had had a definite reason in wishing to send Wilbur away. It was no formed and solid thought, but a suspicion, which he wished to follow out.

It was a fair night overhead, the moon was not yet up, but the bright multitude of the stars gave a faint light. The wind did not stir. But the fragrance of the pines floated down in silent rain, drenching the air. Weldon took heed of all this as he slipped along behind his friend. For his mind could not be so occupied that his senses failed to perceive all that was around him.

The doctor, with a good deal of cunning, had lodged his horse below the house and to the left of it in a thick growth of trees. To this place Weldon softly followed him, and saw him untether and mount the animal.

Nothing stirred around him. Weldon himself crouched low in the shadow of the brush and he watched keenly, seeing that the doctor was safely getting away. Well mounted, he left the trees. The soft sound of the footfall of the horse, taking off at a walk, was quickly out of the ears of the listener—and then a form slipped from the brush just opposite him and started up the slope in the direction of the house.

Joy shot through the heart of Weldon, and for the first time he felt that he had his hand on some thread of the quiet mystery that lay in the atmosphere of the place. The form drew closer in passing—a woman!

He stepped like a panther after her and took her from behind by the elbows.

It was like putting hands on a wild cat. Twice she almost had writhed herself free. Twice he tightened his grip. At last she stood still.

"You're breaking my arms," said she quietly.

It was the first sound she had made. Afterward she was quiet again, panting a little. Her hair had fallen down. It rushed in a great wave over her shoulders, and the ray of a star glis-

tened on it. Weldon did not relax his grip, but waited a moment, thinking.

"Who are you?" he asked.

She was silent.

He had a sailor's habit of carrying knife and twine, without which a man is hardly a man aboard a ship. So first he worked his hold down to her wrists, slender, round, strong. He shifted both wrists into one hand, and he cautioned her gravely: "If you try to tear free now, I'll snap the bones like pipestems. I mean that, my dear."

Whatever she thought of the threat, she stood still, while he worked the strong twine round and round the wrists, binding them inextricably together. Then he freed her.

"Face me," said Weldon.

She turned toward him.

"Will you tell me now who you are?"

He hardly waited for the answer which he knew he would not get, and sent a flash from the bull's-eye across her face.

Francesca Laguarda!

Even those iron nerves of Weldon were a little unstrung. And then horror stiffened him.

"Who else is here with you?" he asked her.

"No one."

"You've sent them away then, have you?"

She did not answer.

"Before we go into the house," said he, "I'm going to ask you what brought you here?"

Again she was silent.

"Of course, it's a good game," said Weldon—"dumb when the questions come. It's the right game, as a rule. But I'm not a common dick. I knew you were crooked, my dear, the first moment I saw you. I've heard bits about you since, and they all point the same way. But until this moment I didn't guess what a pure breed of wild cat you are. Is that right, Francesca? Is there any streak of good in you?"

He chuckled at the thought that she might answer such a question.

Then he said gravely: "As a matter of fact, Francesca, there is something to be gained if you'll confess to me. I'm not ordinarily a stone so far as a pretty girl is concerned. I take a good deal of interest in pretty girls. A *great* deal of interest in them, as a matter of fact. And you're beautiful enough, my dear, to open my heart. I can't help wanting to go easily with you. I don't want to throw you into jail. I don't want to fit a rope around that soft little throat of yours."

He paused to let these ideas become planted in her mind, and then he continued more harshly: "But, my dear, it is very true that unless you give me information—a ton of it, Francesca—I'm going to do all those things. I'm going to take you down to the jail; and I'm going to sit in front of your door to see that you don't get away; and I'm going to see that justice is done on you—unless you'll give me a chance to do justice on your friends!"

He waited. Still there was no answer from Francesca Laguarda.

Anger began to rise in Weldon. He stepped a little closer to her so that the fragrance of her was in his nostrils, mixed with the pure sweetness of the pines. He snapped on the bull's-eye and sent a strong shaft flooding upward across his face and hers.

She was so close that they were almost touching, but there was no real fear in those shining black eyes of hers. Instead, busy thought was filling them. Actively her keen young brain was turning and twisting for a way of escape, just as her body had been turning and twisting a moment before in his grip.

"Look at me, beauty," said he. "Do I have the look of meaning what I say? Do I have the look of a fellow who will be able to push himself through to the finish of a deal? Can I be cruel?

Could I harden my heart against Helen of Troy, even? Look at me, my dear, and then tell me what you think?"

Long and straight was the glance with which she probed his eyes, his mind, even. And then her eyes closed. It was answer enough, and he snapped out the light with a harsh little laugh.

"You're right, Francesca," said he. "I'm a brute and a bully, and I'll treat you exactly like a man unless you choose to talk to me."

He heard her draw a breath and knew that she was weakening.

"About what must I talk?" she asked him faintly.

"One moment and I'll show you. Come with me."

He kept two fingers on her arm. It was true that she could not run away from him, and her tied hands could do nothing against him, but still he felt much safer when he was actually in touch with her.

He guided her beneath the face of the house, and through the trees, and toward the tomb upon the hillside. He expected that she would hold back, but she did not attempt to resist.

Straight up to the gate of the tomb he led her, and then said sternly:

"Francesca, what I do with you depends entirely on your frankness with me. Tell me from the shoulder! Who was it that helped you to open that gate, and cut the irons that held the upper slab, and steal the body out of the grave?"

She had been as steady as a rock up to that moment. Now she gasped quickly and reeled a little. He supported her, looking down keenly in the starlight, for he was reasonably sure that she was merely shamming. But there was something about her quick gasping for breath that convinced him. She was disturbed in all truth now!

"Good!" said Weldon. "A hard young woman you are, Francesca! When I first met you, I thought that you were simply a clever thief, a grand smuggler, a daredevil at the wheel of a car, and a very successful worker of men. But when I found out that murder and the rest were on your list as well—why, it dampened my spirits a little, Francesca. But now I begin to think that you may almost have a streak of conscience in you. Is that right, my dear? And if it is right, will you talk out and tell papa all about this grave robbing?"

She said faintly: "I'll tell you everything. I'll talk—I'll tell you everything. But will you give me—a little moment—to—to——"

"Steady, steady!" said he. "All the time in the world. No hurry, Francesca. Just walk up and down with me. Then we'll begin to open up the subject."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN A VITAL POINT.

THE moon came up suddenly as he walked her back and forth on the little level stretch before the tomb, so he led her back to the woods. Here, in a long, narrow clearing, they passed back and forth, into deepest shadow, and then again into the pale shining of the moon, by which he could see her face, doubly pale, and her eyes, doubly large and dark.

He talked to her carelessly of herself while he waited for her to grow calmer.

"I feel as if I know you very well, Francesca," said he. "I feel as though we'd walked this same ground before. Sentimentally walked back and forth and admired the moon, and the trees, and other things. I feel that we've been very fond of one another. I feel as if I've seen your face many times. But that's true of all the beauties. They open the heart and give one something important to think about. They connect one with great thoughts. Great crimes; great follies; great tragedies; great mer-

cies; nothing small should come from a woman with a face like yours. So that I'm glad, my dear, that you're in harmony; a soul as big as the soul of a man, inside, and the beauty of an angel, outside. It makes the picture good. How many things could ruin you! A voice like the voices of chorus girls. A foolish laugh. A loose tongue. Contemptible vices. But you have none of those things. Tush! You're all made of one piece. You are, in fact, a grand girl, Francesca! Sweet, sweet, Francesca; sweet poison! How much better to have you even the demon that you are, than to have you an innocuous little fool? In fact, my dear, clearly as I begin to see behind the scenes, into the darkness that might be called Francesca's soul, I could be in love with you. Mad with love; drunk with love! I could build pyramids—or wreck jails—for Francesca! However, I know of a flower that I hold up before my eyes, and it makes me safe from you. It makes me free of care, completely. She that lies in the house, yonder! Do you know her, Francesca? Answer me, because I'm curious."

"I know her," said Francesca faintly.

"Are you feeling better now?"

"Yes."

"But before we begin the other thing, tell me if you ever saw her face to face?"

"Yes. I've seen her face to face."

"And she saw you?"

"No. Not exactly."

"Are you being honest?"

"Yes, I think I am. She was going past me, absent-minded. But I was watching for her like a hawk."

"Good!" said Weldon. "Like a hawk! Of course, you're always like a hawk. Always really fierce. Do you ever soften, Francesca? Does anything ever cause you to open your heart?"

"Why do you ask me?" said the girl.

"Isn't it a fair question?"

She was silent, but she raised her head a little and he knew that she was staring angrily at him.

"A moment ago," said he, "I thought that even Francesca, even terrible and grim Francesca might be touched if she were to meet that dying girl in the house, yonder! But now I see that I was wrong! She could melt steel. But she couldn't melt Francesca."

The girl broke in sharply: "You're talking a great deal of nonsense. If you have something to get out of me, will you come to the point?"

"Thank you," said he. "I needed a touch of the whip. Now I'll try to keep the running fast and straight. In the first place, since we're working on the task of finding out all about these matters from the beginning—you had a hand in the killing of the general?"

"No, no!" said the girl.

Weldon listened, amazed. There was a burst of real emotion, real horror and disgust, in that soft cry. He did not dream of doubting her!

"You had no hand in the actual killing of the general, then?"

"No," she repeated with a shudder.

"But afterward you came into this job?"

"Yes."

"When you first saw the girl and she first saw you—that was when you entered?"

"Yes."

"You had been looking about for her, so as to see what you could do with her?"

"Yes."

"Now go on from that point, please. Who asked you to start on this business?"

"No one," said the girl.

"By Heaven," cried Weldon, "how can that be possible? The general was killed—you had no hand in it—but afterward you came into the case all by yourself?"

"Yes," she said.

"You admit that he was killed with poison?"

He heard the slight catch of her breath, and he went on: "But though you had nothing to do with that, you helped the murderers to steal the body away from the grave to-night? You knew that I suspected the murder, and that I intended to have a private autopsy performed. You knew that?"

"No."

"Come, come!" said Weldon. "Then why were you out here to-night?"

"It's useless for me to tell you. You're sure not to believe what I say."

"Try me, try me, my dear girl. I will stretch every point in your favor, if you like!"

"I've been interested in this old house for a long time," said Francesca.

"Good!" he commented dryly. "Artistic interest? Or did you want a quiet place for your old age?"

"Very well," said the girl. "If you intend to scoff at everything I say from the beginning, you may go on with the scoffing. But I'll not go on with the talking."

"You're right," he confessed. "I know you're right. Will you strike ahead then, Francesca? Tell your own story, straight out and uninterrupted; but if I find you lying, I'll start you for real misery on earth—because that's what prison life would be for you!"

"No," said the girl, "you never could keep me in prison."

"You're the clever lass who would melt your way out, is that it?"

"My life is always my own," said she.

And though she said it quietly, he knew that she meant it. It gave him a little touch of awe and respect for her. He even bowed to his prisoner.

"Francesca," he said, "I salute you. Continue!"

"I told you that I was interested in this house, in the beginning. The reason was that I wanted a place where we could arrange easy deposits of loads brought over the frontier. In the old cellars up here we could dump shiploads and they'd never be found. And a couple of safe men could guard them here. Then we could work from this side, distributing. This could be our shipment headquarters for goods going into Mexico, too."

"That's neat and probable," he said.

"There was no one in the house except the girl," said Francesca. "I wondered how I could get her out of the place."

"And then you had a clever thought—slow poison, eh?"

She started, but instantly she laughed, and the sound was quiet music under the trees.

"I *am* all evil to you," said she.

He was rather taken aback by her calm. She had regained entire possession of herself.

"Go on," he directed, rather ashamed of his suggestion.

"I didn't want to harm her. First I wondered if the place could be bought, but she's a fool. She put a sentimental value on the house and wouldn't take money for it."

"Poor girl!"

"Well, I wanted to play fair with her, Lew."

"You know that name of mine?"

"Yes. I know all about you."

She said it shortly, as though the information were not of much importance. "But since I couldn't have the house by fair means I made up my mind that I'd frighten her away. Ghosts—strange appearances—that sort of thing."

"Ah!"

"So I sent up some of the boys to just let themselves be seen drifting about in the interior—to do something weird, if they could manage it."

"And that poor girl an invalid! Go on!"

"They were both spotted. *Dio mio!*

Dio mio! What young fools they were!"

"Are you Italian?" asked Weldon.

"When they had both failed," went on Francesca Laguarda, leaving that last question unanswered, "I thought it would be a good idea if I tried my own hand. There are little tricks of making oneself up."

"You were going to show yourself to her, were you?"

"That was my idea. I came up the hill, and on the way I heard some one coming. I slipped behind some brush. It was a man who got on a horse and rode away. After he had gone, I started on for the house, and I hadn't made ten steps before you had me."

"That's the full truth?"

"Yes."

"And what was your make-up to be?"

There's a little metal box in the pocket of my jacket."

He found it, opened it, and the cold light of phosphorus was seen.

"Done up in this stuff, you would have killed her," said Weldon. "Go on!"

His anger was coming back.

"That's all there is to tell."

"How would you have got to her?"

"Not through your barred windows."

"You know about them?"

"Of course. While you were in the library, I intended to open the door of your room, get to the girl's, and slip in. After that——"

"When she screamed?"

"Sounds won't carry from her room to the library."

"You simply would have slipped out again?"

"I would have tried to."

"How would you have opened my door?"

"I have a key."

"Where?"

"In the same pocket."

He found it and flashed the light on it. His careful eye could remember the pattern; and it was identical with his door key. Certainly her story was hanging together.

"What spies did you use to learn all this?"

"No spy at all."

"Be careful, Francesca!"

"I am careful. I'm tell the truth. The negress can't keep from talking. When she goes down to market she lets everything out about what's going on in the house."

Weldon bit his lip. Certainly it was very possible.

"You had nothing to do with the removal of the body of old O'Mallock tonight?"

"Not a thing."

"Francesca, I'm sorry to tell you that you're a clever, calm, and quiet liar, but a liar nevertheless."

She made no protest.

"I wonder what would be the best first step!" murmured Weldon. "She's seen you before? I'm going to take you into the house, Francesca, and there I'm going to introduce you to Miss O'Mallock by name, and see what she can make of you!"

He knew by the electric start of Francesca that he had touched her in a vital point.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SLAMMING OF A DOOR.

HE was rather cruelly pleased when he saw that she feared this step, for her calm before this time had irritated him. She was totally in his power, but she had refused to show any signs of funk. Now she said, steadily enough: "What do you gain by that, Lew?"

"I'm not quite sure," said he. "But if it upsets you, my dear, I know that it's a good idea."

And taking her by the arm, he urged her forward. She did not actually press back against him, but she went with

slow steps, and he thought that he felt a tremor run through her. They had almost reached the door when she paused.

"What can I do to change your mind?" she asked him. "You have me at your mercy!"

He would have guessed that that speech never had been on her lips before.

"You could begin by telling me why you dread facing Helen O'Mallock so terribly."

"Is that enough?"

"I don't know. You might try. A good, logical story, Francesca, is all that I ask from you."

"It's as simple as could be," said the girl. "This is the way of it. I was sent to the States for my education, and I went to the same school that Helen O'Mallock attended."

It was, in fact, a simple explanation. He pondered it for a moment.

"Why not tell her that same story that you told me? She's as mild as milk, Francesca."

"And then stand by and hear you tell her how I planned to frighten her out of her father's house?"

"That's a point," nodded Weldon. "But—tell me—you were a great friend of Helen O'Mallock's at school. Is that it?"

"I was her best friend."

"And that, in the first place, was what made you know how she could be played upon?"

"Yes."

"Rather an unfair advantage to take of her, wasn't it?"

She was silent, but he saw her head droop a little, and it seemed wonderfully strange to him that she should be so troubled by what, in her wild life, must seem a small affair.

"Tell me one more thing. Had she ever harmed you in any way?"

"Never."

"Something that irritated you, Francesca. I mean to say: You were rather fond of some youngster who preferred a blond beauty to a dark one like you."

"Helen? She never looked at the men!"

She said it with careless certainty, and he bit his lip.

"No excuse for you, then? You see I'm trying to talk on your side of the fence," said Weldon. "I don't want to think that you're not only a crook but a cold-hearted crook, too. But you had no reason. Helen O'Mallock had something that you wanted. You set yourself to get it. You knew she was ill?"

"No," said Francesca.

But her answer was neither easy nor quick, and he shook his head.

"It won't do," said he. "You have to come with me, Francesca. Right up the stairs and into Helen's room, and then I'll watch you meet her."

He put his hand on her arm to urge her forward, but at that, it seemed as though the strength melted from her. She shuddered and then sank on her knees with something that was half groan and half sob.

It was a cruel thing to do, but Weldon was not bent on mercy just then. He was thinking of that pale and helpless girl who lay upstairs in her chamber, bravely fighting against despair, smiling gently on the death that lay before her. The bull's-eye flashed in his hand and shone dazzling on the face of Francesca. He saw it white and strained with fear and with grief, as well, and hopelessness stared up at him from her eyes.

He snapped the light out again, rather staggered. Even Cunningham, master of men that he was, had spoken of this girl as a grand spirit, a leader and a conqueror, as it were; and here she was on her knees. No matter how beautifully she might be able to act a part, this total dissolution of her will

power was not what he had expected. He was pinched for a moment with remorse.

"Francesca," he said, "there's no good funking it this way. Stand up, will you?"

He put his hands beneath her arms and drew her erect, but still she swayed a little, quite helpless in all seeming. She had begun to sob. She seemed to fight against that weakness, but the hollow sound still rose and broke in her throat.

"It's no good," he said again. "I don't like to push this thing through, but I have to do it."

She leaned against him; he supported her almost like a lover in his arms, the violence of her weeping sending a faint tremor through him.

"Lew!" she whispered brokenly. "I know about you. I know that you're fair and straight. Be fair and straight now. No matter what you think, I swear that you'll do no good by this thing. It will kill me as surely as bullets or poison—and it won't do Helen a whit of good!"

"It will kill you?" said Weldon. "How will it kill you? Is Helen a basilisk?"

She did not answer.

He shook her gently but impatiently.

"Francesca, if you want your second chance with me, you'll have to talk out. How will it kill you if you come before Helen O'Mallock?"

She stammered. The words were not clear to him.

"I didn't understand," said he. "Is it because she would know enough and, seeing you, she would be able to put certain things together? Would she know enough to put a hangman's rope around your neck, Francesca? Is that it?"

"Heaven help me!" was all that she said in answer, and her sobbing grew heavier than ever.

"Mind you," said Weldon, "I don't like the business. But I have to go through with it. Can you walk? No? Then I'll carry you!"

He picked her up in his arms and bore her rapidly toward the house. She did not attempt to resist. She did not plead any more, but turned her face to his shoulder and shook with grief and misery and helplessness until Weldon's teeth were hard set. He felt an overwhelming wonder that he had found the way to strike down this young tigress and unnerve her. He had not the slightest idea what made her so dread facing Helen O'Mallock; and he was burning with curiosity to find out. He knew then with a sudden and vast certainty that when those two stood face to face, all this mystery would be solved at a stroke—yes, even the death of the general, even the removal of the long-buried body! And yet he pitied Francesca Laguarda.

As he carried her into the shaft of yellow light that streamed through the open rear door of the house, he paused a moment. She was beautiful even now, with her masses of black hair streaming over her shoulders. Her face was covered, but he could see the throat, and that curve of the cheek which Italian painters of the golden age had known how to paint.

In that moment of pause, he had time to wonder greatly at himself. He knew that she was a criminal, that there was little good to be said of her. He knew that he was carrying her to a room where a pale, sweet-faced girl would strip Francesca of her mask and show her ugly, naked soul. And yet in the same instant, he knew that he loved her. The wonder and the sweet pain of love were in his heart.

Yet he went on quickly and entered the hall.

Aunt Maggie came out on him, carrying an armful of clothes which she dropped as she saw Weldon and his burden.

"Lord, Lord!" she said, "What you all got there, Mr. Weldon?"

"I've got an answer to several questions," said Weldon. "Come along behind me. I may need you!"

He went up the steps, the negress following with grunts of surprise, and he even heard her cry out with a sort of sudden amazement.

He carried her into the library. He was glad that Aunt Maggie had kept up a fire in the room; it gave it a welcome and familiar touch of comfort. He laid Francesca Laguarda on the couch. She turned her face again, until it was half covered by the upholstered back of the couch. She was not weeping, but she was trembling violently from head to foot.

It would not do to take her in this condition and show her to Helen O'Mallock. This wild, disheveled, storm-tossed form was enough to unsteady stronger nerves than those of that delicate child.

"Aunt Maggie," he said to the negress, "do you know how to pull this girl together?"

She stood beside him with her arms folded on her ample bosom, a scowl on her forehead, her lips compressed.

"What you gunna do with her?" she asked sharply.

"I'm going to try to make her presentable—with your help. And then I'm going to take her into Miss O'Mallock's room."

The cook started, with a gasp. Her black eyes glittered with emotion as she stared at Weldon. But she made no comment.

"You're right," said Weldon in quiet explanation. "It would not do to show her to your mistress in this condition. She has to be made presentable. What can we do?"

"She's gunna faint," said Aunt Maggie slowly. "I know by the tremblin' of her. A whiff of ammonia would do her a power of good."

"Where is the ammonia?"

"I'll get it. On the kitchen table, beside the door."

"Stay here with her. Watch her like a hawk. Her hands are well tied, and if she tries to get to her feet, throw your weight on her!"

Aunt Maggie looked down at the big, amber palms of her hands with a grim nod, and Weldon hurried from the room. He wanted to save time, and he wanted to get his eyes away from Francesca Laguarda for a few moments, for her beauty was like an opiate, stealing his senses.

He had reached the kitchen and picked up the ammonia bottle when he heard distinctly from above a loud, harsh cry, and then the heavy slamming of a door.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Breed and Half-Breed

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Brothers of the Barrens," etc.

DESCENDANT of a royal line of Irish spaniels whose legendary ancestor dozed beside the throne of Brian Boru, Shanagh Keno came out of a salal thicket and paused, his close-curled, brown body suddenly rigid, while a warning snarl bubbled in his throat.

Until that moment he had been merely a young dog who was hunting, as was his daily custom, through the pleasant-smelling, deep woods back of his master's tiny ranch in the Cascade foothills. Whenever it was possible, Cardigan took the dog on this daily ramble; but if the master was away, Keno hunted alone.

Not that he had a killing urge which must be satisfied. Rather, to him, it was an interesting and highly exciting game—this trailing of pheasants, rabbits, and squirrels. To read their trails by means of his marvelous nose, as though the invisible signs were an open book; to sniff long and earnestly at the end of a hollow log in which a rabbit lay, complacently chewing a wad of grass; to search out a mouse nest cleverly hidden beneath a clump of weeds, or to locate, still by means of his powers of scent, the dark form of a grouse or pheasant motionless among the thickly interlaced upper limbs of a conifer. Or, perhaps, with a vast show of mock ferocity, to pursue a chattering, red squirrel, until the ill-tempered little chickaree took refuge in a tree, there to heap abuse upon the dog below.

Fun it was, sheer fun, such as any pup would enjoy. Therefore, Shanagh Keno acted like a pup, although he was nearly two years old.

"Too playful" was the verdict of Cardigan's friends, when the owner told them that Keno was his entry in the big Northwest dog show to be held in the near-by city; and Cardigan was secretly of the opinion that they were right. Keno had class, breeding, and, when he chose to be dignified, he had style, without which no dog-show entry could hope to win first honors in the coming classic. A full-grown dog of two years whose antics were those of a pup must lack something in his mental make-up, wise dog fanciers would decide. Nor would Cardigan's explanation that Keno acted like a pup because he had been raised with his irrepressible sister, Shanagh Lady, suffice. Keno could win honors in the puppy class, but he was too old. Therefore, he seemed barred from all chances to win.

And Cardigan needed to have Keno win—needed it badly. He tried every way conceivable to harden the dog's character, but without avail; Keno, seemingly, would remain merely a playful pup to the end of his days.

But at this instant Keno did not appear puppylike. His beautiful modeled head, with the long, silky ears, evenly covered with tiny, brown curls, was lifted statuesquely, while his normal, mild eyes seemed to have a dangerous glint in them. He was poised in such marvelous fashion that any dog-show judge who could have seen him at that moment would have exclaimed in delight. He was, in fact, a full-grown dog in whom instinctive hatred had been suddenly awakened.

For he had just caught sight of a man slinking through the brush in a little swale just ahead. And Shanagh Keno recognized him for an enemy, Crowfeather, the thieving Yakima breed whom Cardigan had once caught prowling about the house, and had booted off the place. Keno had mistrusted Crowfeather from the start, and now he mistrusted him more than ever, for the breed was carrying a half-filled sack over one shoulder, and he had come from the Cardigan Ranch.

Keno's mental processes were plainly apparent at that moment. An enemy—carrying something which he had taken from the master's house. Keno moved forward, his growl deepening into a warning. And Crowfeather, startled, heard the sound and turned.

At best, the breed was a craven at heart. His conscience—if, indeed, he had one—was filled with reflections of what would happen to him if Cardigan discovered that he was the thief who had looted the ranch house. Cardigan was a widower, with a small daughter, Jane, and that day both were away from home, so that the ranch house was unoccupied. Crowfeather, after making sure that Keno was not about the place, had assumed that the dog had gone with its master. Therefore, he had entered the house boldly, helped himself to such articles as struck his fancy, piled them into a gunny sack, and had struck off through the woods.

Now, however, he had been discovered. The presence of Keno might indicate the presence of Cardigan himself. Crowfeather, with the memory of the booting he had received suddenly recurrent, did what was natural for him to do. He dropped the bag and fled.

When this happened, Keno came forward, and smelled long and earnestly at the bag. The dog recognized his master's possessions. He caught one end of the bag in his teeth, and sought to drag it, but the thing was too heavy. Dropping it, he seemed to ponder what to do. He walked all around the bag, sniffing at it, but apparently decided that it was too much for him to handle alone. At last, however, he seemed to make up his mind. If he could not carry the bag, he would at least remain here and guard it until his master arrived. Therefore, he lay down beside the bag, which the breed had dropped at the base of a tall cedar.

Presently, as Keno believed, Cardigan would appear. The master would be overjoyed to find that Keno had protected his belongings all this time. By and by Keno slept, giving himself over to pleasant dreams.

When he awoke, it was with the realization that the day was near its close; the shadows were growing long, and a marked coolness seemed to be settling down over the silent woods. And—the master had not appeared!

However, this gave the dog no cause for worry. Cardigan would not fail him. It was two miles to the ranch house, and the way was through dense, primeval forest, but Keno was of the opinion that his master would come directly to this spot. He waited on.

Darkness came at last, but no Cardigan appeared. Keno got up and moved about restlessly; but of all things, he was patient. Cardigan would come, eventually. Keno was hungry, but he settled himself once more to wait. Presently he dozed.

Then he awoke suddenly with the realization that it was darker than ever; and that out of the gloom no beloved master had appeared. Seemingly the dog was worried; nevertheless, his faith in Cardigan remained unshaken. Keno was now hungrier than ever; yet he must remain on guard.

Velvety shadows stole out of the thickets, deepening the gloom. There came to his ears slight rustlings in the leaves which carpeted the woods, and these kept him alert, while his nose sought to determine the makers of the noises. Vague fears disturbed him, for, after all, broad daylight in the woods, usually in company with his master, was vastly different from a night spent thus. Keno seemed to sense that this was the hour when the larger predatory animals were abroad, creatures such as he was not likely to meet during the daytime. It was one thing to be pursuing rabbits, squirrels, and grouse in the daylight, and quite another to be lying here wakefully, hardly daring to sleep, even though he had a desire to do so. Nevertheless, the sack was to be watched at all costs.

It seemed to him that he was surrounded by unseen enemies. For hours the woods remained breathlessly still; but at last a night wind came up and breathed through the tops of the tall trees in ghostly fashion. The moon rose, too, for which Keno was grateful; as the woods lightened, the hidden menace seemed to vanish, and he knew greater confidence. Presently, the wind died away and all was still once more, with the forest an enchanted realm of blue-black shadows and clear, little pools of moonlight in the glades.

Still, Keno had seen nothing. Of a sudden, however, his ears, attuned to unusual sensitiveness, detected a whisper of wings in the trees above him. Keno looked quickly to see a great, horned owl float downily to a near-by perch. Solemnly the owl turned its head, while its large eyes, from which the moonlight struck opalescent fire, regarded the dog. Then Keno was stricken with sudden alarm, for the owl had boomed its weird hunting cry at him.

The owl recognized him as an animal, but just what kind of an animal the bird had not yet made up its mind. Therefore, it did the thing which it was accustomed to do; it sounded its hunting cry, and if Keno had betrayed fear the great bird might have been tempted to investigate further. For the dog was screened in the thicket, and could not be seen wholly by the owl.

Instead, however, a growl deepened in Keno's throat, and the owl, after debating the matter a moment longer, winged away on hushed pinions.

Later in the long night the dog was again startled, so that he came up standing, watchful when he became aware that some creature which he could not see was very close to him, regarding him with malevolent eyes. Presently, a vagrant puff of air brought to the dog's nostrils the hated cat scent. Instantly, his curly body stiff, Keno rumbled defiance and stepped forth from the thicket, making directly for the spot where he knew the watcher was standing.

But when he got there the place was empty; and his quick eyes caught sight of a large, grayish-furred animal disappearing in the gloom. Keno knew then that his watcher had been a lynx, a terrible adversary when it came to a fight, but one which his show of courage had frightened off.

Keno went back to his vigil. After seemingly endless hours of it, the night

passed; dawn broke raw and gray over the forest. Perhaps the dog wondered why Cardigan had been so long in coming, yet his faith in the man-god was not weakened in the slightest. Sooner or later Cardigan would come, and Keno would be relieved of the duty of guarding the sack of loot.

But Keno was desperately hungry. It was now nearly twenty-four hours since he had eaten—and still there was no sign of his master.

He got up and trotted around the tree and thicket where the sack was lying; now and then he lifted his nose, as though hoping to get some clew of his approaching man-god. But the fresh, morning air of the forest held no scents save a certain dankness which pervaded the great woods at all times. Keno went back to lie down.

He had no sooner taken up his old position, however, than there was a subdued fluttering of wings, and through the trees came a dark, mottled grouse. The bird pitched down steeply, and alighted in the glade less than twenty feet from where the dog lay; it stood there for a moment, watchful, ready to take off again in a thundering flight should an enemy appear. But the grouse did not see the dog, and as the woods seemed to hold no immediate menace, the bird took to preening itself, and fluttering in a small patch of bare sand. This done, doubtless to free itself of parasites, the bird set out on a questing tour for food.

A near-by bush heavily laden with reddish berries attracted it, and it hopped into the air time and again, each time plucking a berry. Then it became interested in something crawling out of a clump of grass. A honey bee, one of the wild colony which had its home in a hollow tree a mile or so to the westward, had been overtaken by the cold and darkness the previous night, and tired and too chilled to fly farther, it had dropped into the grass clump, there to spend the night. Now, under the warming rays of the sun, it had come to life again and crawled forth, preparatory to taking flight. But no sooner had it appeared than the grouse struck swiftly, crushed the insect and swallowed it, all in a fraction of a second. Then, with a satisfied shake of its head, the grouse took several steps farther toward the thicket in which the dog was now crouched motionless and watchful.

Of a sudden, however, with a startled *quit, quit!* the bird abruptly spread its wings for a roaring take-off, for it had just seen the dog lying there.

Before that skyward leap, however, Keno moved with the suddenness of lightning. He not only plunged ahead, but he leaped upward, and his jaws clamped together. With a tremendous fluttering of wings, the grouse beat at the spaniel's head, but it was of no avail, and suddenly the dog found himself eating warm, red meat.

His very attitude, however, seemed to indicate great misgivings. Cardigan had taught him not to kill game, or to mouth it after it was shot. Here, however, he was violating the rules; yet it seemed necessary, for the man-god had forgotten him, and the spaniel was tremendously hungry. What Cardigan would say when he discovered it, was something to wonder about, but Keno could only hope for the best. As necessity knows no law, and necessity was great at this moment, Keno could not do otherwise than he was doing.

At last, the grouse reduced to a mere patch of feathers, the dog returned to the vigil. He not only was full-fed, but he had a feeling of confidence such as he had never known before. Instinct had told him the moment when to strike, and his prowess and quickness had brought down the game. He had a feeling of satisfaction that he was sufficient unto himself. With the coming of daylight, he no longer had any fears

of the woods or the enemies that the forest might contain. He had made his first kill, and the sensation was a gratifying one.

Half an hour later, after a close survey of his surroundings and deciding that the sack of loot was safe for a moment, he trotted away for perhaps a hundred yards to where a recent rain had left a small pool of surface water. There he drank quickly and came hurrying back. Making sure that the sack was safe, he lay down beside it and composed himself for slumber, for the night had been a long and sleepless one.

His thoughts at that moment doubtless were many and varied. First and foremost, of course, he missed Cardigan; he missed Cardigan's little daughter, Jane, also. Keno, no doubt, missed his own sister, the playful Lady, who like a doggish Topsy incapable of growing up was content to romp from daylight to dark. In the past, Keno had enjoyed playing with her, but if the truth were known such puppyish antics now seemed more or less beneath the dignity of a dog that had spent one night alone in the wilds. That single experience was hardening Keno's character; forming him along more mature lines.

Throughout the day, therefore, his hunger no longer troubling him, he dozed for long periods. Nor did he pay any attention to the smaller animals which were encouraged to show themselves by the utter silence and peacefulness of the woods. Chipmunks, squirrels, and small birds frisked or fluttered within a few feet of the thicket and the great cedar beneath which Keno lay, but he paid no attention to them.

Indeed, a cottontail rabbit, brownish-red in its summer coat, once hopped confidently forth, paused in the little glade, and sat up on its haunches to stare inquisitively at the dozing dog. Still Keno paid no attention. The responsibility of guarding the sack of loot lay heavy upon the spaniel, and he no longer had any desire to play. Inasmuch as he was full-fed, he would not attempt to kill the rabbit. By and by the rabbit hopped away, satisfied that the dog intended him no harm.

All at once, however, the spaniel was wide awake and sat up to sniff long and earnestly of the air which blew gently from the direction of the distant ranch house. It may have been that Keno scented something; it may have been that something he had heard aroused him; or, still, further, it may have been intuition which whispered to him. In any event, he stared expectantly in that direction, but did not bark nor did he offer to leave the sack.

He sat, changing his position but slightly, for more than an hour; sat thus, indeed, until the shadows grew long and the first hint of dusk stole through the deep woods. Once he pricked his ears sharply when from afar came what sounded like a faint cry, a call for help in a childish treble. But the sound was not repeated and he did not bark reply, although one observing him at that moment would have been convinced that he understood that something important was taking place.

Dusk deepened, and still the dog did not relax his watchfulness. He was hungry now, as he had eaten nothing since the grouse he had killed that morning. But he had no thought of food, apparently; he was content to wait and watch hopefully—for Cardigan, perhaps, although a less patient animal would have long ago become convinced the man had forgotten him.

And then abruptly from the gloom came a shrill, childish scream; a sound of feet pattering on the leaves, as into the glade burst a terrified, small figure, disheveled, and with face scratched from running through the brush. Cardigan's little daughter, Jane! She was fleeing in terror from some unseen thing following close behind her.

The spaniel, at sight of her, hesitated a moment as though in astonishment; then with a joyful bark of relief he sprang forward. But as she saw him and stopped also in amazement, the dog's quick eyes and marvelous nose detected something in the brush not far behind the little girl. Instantly, the dog, a menacing, terrifying figure, head lowered to guard his vulnerable throat, charged quickly past the little girl!

It had been late the previous afternoon when Cardigan and his little daughter, accompanied by Keno's sister and playmate, Lady, had returned from the near-by city. Cardigan's first discovery was that the ranch house had been looted. He did not know, of course, who had done it, but intuition told him infallibly who to suspect—the half-breed, Crowfeather. Diligently, Cardigan searched about the place, trying to find a clew to the direction the half-breed had taken. Losing the trail at last, it occurred to the man that Keno was also gone, and thereupon his fears were doubled.

Possibly the dog had surprised the Indian in the act of looting the place and had attacked him. It might well be that the Indian had killed the dog, thrown the body in the woods, and made good his escape. Cardigan immediately set out on a search.

But it was fast growing night, and he could not penetrate far into the woods before it would be too dark to see. Therefore, worried and anxious over the fate which might have overtaken the spaniel, and burning with indignation against the thief, Cardigan went back to the house, resolved to resume the search with more thoroughness the following morning.

A new angle had occurred to him, and it only served to deepen his anxiety. The spaniel had already been entered for the dog show, and the entrance fee paid. True, Cardigan's friends had told him that Keno could never win first honors because he acted too much like a pup, and he had been minded to believe they were right; nevertheless, Cardigan needed to win so badly that he was willing to chance it. Now, however, if the dog was dead, or had been stolen, there would be no opportunity to exhibit him. Gone would be the chance for Cardigan to better his fortunes. The show would be held two days hence, and assuming that the dog had not been killed but had been stolen there was no likelihood of its being recovered before the date of the show.

Morning came at last, and still Keno had not returned to the ranch. Cardigan believed then that the worst had happened.

He made a brief search of the woods but found no trace of the dog. It was a half-hearted search anyway, for if the dog were not dead and had not been stolen, it would have returned. Cardigan went back to the ranch without having come closer than half a mile to the spot where the faithful spaniel was standing guard.

But when Cardigan told Jane of the results of his search, that perhaps she would not see her dog friend again—for of the two spaniel pups, Keno was her favorite—the little girl said nothing. She stood for a long time in the back yard, apparently wrapped in thought, while her father went into the house.

Half an hour later he came out, and she was gone.

This, however, did not disturb him, for he assumed that she was playing by herself somewhere about the ranch. He set out for town, with the hope of finding some clew to the whereabouts of Crowfeather. It was afternoon when he returned. He found Lady, the other spaniel, in her pen, but Jane was nowhere in sight.

Slightly worried, Cardigan called, but there was no answer. Still, calling, he moved about the place, looking for her.

At the end of ten minutes he was convinced that she was gone.

But where? Then recollection came to him of what he had said to her that morning about the loss of the dog. It occurred to him that perhaps she had set out to look for Keno on her own account. That would mean that she had entered the deep woods which ran up to the edge of the ranch. The little girl had been told by her father not to wander far from the ranch, for Cardigan knew that wild country lay beyond, and while it seemed improbable that any ordinary animal which she might encounter in the near-by forest would harm her, there was always the possibility that some more savage visitor might have come down from the mountains to prowl about the ranch in hope of garnering for himself a chicken or young pig. Standing behind the corral, Cardigan regarded the forest questioningly, wondering if his small daughter had actually entered the woods in search of the missing dog. Then he saw something lying on the ground, and he knew that his premonitions were correct. It was a small, red ribbon, which he recognized as belonging to Jane. Unquestionably, the little girl had been there, and the only conclusion that he could draw was that she had set out in search of the dog.

Swiftly Cardigan returned to the ranch house, and for five minutes kept the telephone busy. He was summoning help, organizing a search party. He waited long enough for his neighbors to respond, and then at the head of a party of five which he scattered throughout the woods he struck out.

But only an hour of daylight remained when the search was started, and Cardigan's heart was heavy with misgiving at the thought of what might have happened, or even would happen if Jane were compelled to spend the night alone in the woods. Rapidly, yet searching thoroughly, the party moved through the forest, now and then calling to the missing child. But it was like looking for a needle in a haystack, and Fate decreed that they should start off at right angles from the direction she had gone.

On and on went the search; and darkness came at last, without sign of the little girl, or the dog, either, for that matter. In the face of Cardigan's new grief, Keno was all but forgotten for the moment. Even when the woods were shrouded in gloom the men continued the hunt, still calling the little girl's name, but getting no reply. Anticipating that the search might continue until after dark, Cardigan and the others had brought lanterns with them, and now these were lighted, while the scattered searchers wound their way through the forest, still calling. And at last they began to swing toward the spot where Keno guarded the sack of loot; and where, indeed in the gloom of the forest, a drama was being staged.

As a matter of fact, Jane had done just as her father had deduced. Grieving over the loss of the dog, she had eventually wandered a short distance into the woods, calling his name. She had received no reply and had stood for a long time debating what to do. She had no fear of the woods, but she remembered what her father had told her about remaining at the ranch. At the same time, too, she came to have the feeling that Keno was not far off and was waiting for her. She decided to go a little farther into the woods and call for him, knowing that if she could return home with the dog her father would, indeed, be proud of her.

A hundred yards farther she stopped again and called, but the silent woods gave back no reply. She decided to go on a short distance, as she thought she saw an opening in the trees ahead. Avoiding the brush as well as she could, she kept on.

At the end of some minutes she was surprised to discover that she had not found the opening she sought. Indeed, the place appeared to have vanished. This was mystifying, but it did not discourage her. She decided that after all it would be better if she went back home and waited until her father returned from town. Therefore, she struck off in the direction in which she believed the ranch house to be.

After a few minutes, however, she paused again, rather bewildered by the fact that she did not glimpse ahead of her the familiar buildings. She looked in every direction in the woods but there was nothing to be seen except the endless rows and ranks of great trees. Uncertainly she stood there a moment, looking around her and still wondering; and then it came over her suddenly that she was actually lost!

The thought was terrifying; indeed, grown persons have been terrified upon making that dread discovery. Her first impulse was to run at top speed, but she checked it. She would have liked to run, but at that moment she could not tell just where the ranch buildings lay. At last, however, she struck out, guided more by intuition than by anything else.

She went on and on, while the woods seemed endlessly unbroken. There was no question now in the little girl's mind but that she had been thoroughly turned around. Bravely enough, however, she did not give way to tears, although her lips trembled. She kept steadily on.

At last, when she had walked for hours, for the sun was straight over her head, she felt very tired and sat down in a cool spot on the banks of a small stream. Here was a friendly place; the ground was carpeted with needles of conifers, and overhead the spreading arms of cedars and hemlocks shielded her from the hot rays of the sun. She decided she would rest here a while before going farther, and so she stretched herself on the ground and pillowed her head on her arm. Almost instantly her eyes closed, as the tired little body demanded the surcease of sleep.

But when she awoke it was with a start and the realization that she had been asleep for hours; for it was the chill of approaching night which had roused her.

At her feet the little brook trickled as musically as before, winding away in the trees until it was lost to sight. A hush of breathless awe seemed to settle down over the woods; the sun was sinking behind the western hills, but as yet the breeze which comes at dusk had not arrived.

A little fearfully, she got up and looked around. She was desperately hungry, and some red berries growing on a near-by bush caught her fancy, but she did not eat them, remembering what her father had told her about eating the growing things which she found in the woods. At last, cupping her hands to her mouth she called, "Daddy!" several times at the top of her voice.

The echoes of her call went chasing madly through the woods; but quickly silence came and she knew that she had not been heard. Nevertheless, she had confidence that her father had missed her and had already set out on the search.

Instead of waiting here for him to find her, she would go toward the ranch house. The thought of spending the night alone in the woods was terrifying; at this moment she wanted nothing so much as to have her father rescue her from what had now become a fearsome place of lengthening shadows and ominous silence.

Far ahead, she marked what appeared to be an opening or glade in the forest, and she told herself that she would not lose track of it this time as she had done before. Just to the left of it she could make out the broad spread of a

big cedar, and this would be her landmark. She hurried on through the dusk.

The distance, however, was farther than she had realized; and at last she stopped, a little breathless from fighting through the thick brush. And as she stood there she looked back quickly in the direction from which she had come —for of a sudden she was afraid!

The woods were still silent; not a leaf or a twig moved to disturb the utter hush of the place. Nevertheless, the intuition of the little girl, a faculty which had been sharpened by the day spent alone in the woods, made her more sensitive than before. She could see nothing, hear nothing—yet she was afraid!

Moreover, it was growing darker; and as this realization came to her she was seized with panic. Turning, she raced off through the woods again, still headed for the great cedar and the clear space she could see not far ahead. She ran perhaps a hundred yards, then stopped abruptly and listened.

It seemed then that she did hear a stealthy rustle in the brush behind her; yet the maker of the sound remained hidden. She had a feeling, also, that burning, malevolent eyes were regarding her from ambush; that some unseen foe was contemplating her and her plight, regarding her with deadly intensity. The thought was so frightening that involuntarily she screamed and whirled to run once more at top speed; but as she did so, it seemed that she caught a glimpse of a shadow which had detached itself from the blacker shadows and was moving behind her. Whether or not it was a trick of her imagination, it had the effect of giving wings to her heels, and, crying, she literally raced through the woods.

She ran, indeed, until she could run no more; she was just on the point of flinging herself on the ground through sheer exhaustion and hopelessness, when she crashed through the brush and broke into the cleared space of the little glade, for the moment leaving the darkening woods behind her.

Then she caught sight of the long-lost Keno, mounting guard by a sack lying on the ground. Hardly had she observed this than she saw him bristle and come charging at her apparently—yet he went *past* her! Scarcely had she time to turn her head when an ear-splitting squall of rage and hatred smote her ears.

She had a vision of a fluffy, gray-furred animal with great, feathered pads, tasselated ears, and blazing eyes, half crouched with its back against the tree—and of the courageous spaniel leaping for its throat! Then with equal suddenness the big lynx—a wanderer of the glooms who had been haunting her—side-stepped nimbly and struck with knife-edged forepaws at the dog.

Any lynx is a terrible fighter, and this one, an old male of unusual strength and courage, was hungry as well as enraged at the prospect of being cheated of what to him would have been an easy kill. Had there been two dogs, the lynx would have fled instantly, but with only the rather small spaniel to face, the big cat was minded to stand and give battle. In him burned hatred of all dogs and human beings; and this was an opportunity seldom given to his kind. Therefore, he evaded that first lunge of the courageous spaniel and slashed at his foe.

The bite of the claws, however, only served to stir the dog's fighting spirit, and he charged so fiercely at the lynx that the great cat, intimidated for a moment, actually sprang backward. The lynx was too quick for the dog, but what Keno lacked in agility and size he made up for in sheer courage. Head lowered, that the lynx might not rip his throat, the dog lunged forward again, his battle cry joining with the

appalling scream of the lynx. And so sudden and abrupt was the charge that the cat was bowled off its feet and struck on its back.

This, however, was the favorite fighting position of the lynx, for it gave him opportunity to bring into play his long legs, armed with eviscerating claws. The first stroke of them ripped open the dog's chest, but the movement bared the lynx's throat, and the spaniel's fangs ripped a jagged wound close to the jugular.

The pain of it was so intense that the lynx for a moment seemed to go crazy. Doubling up like a ball, he rolled clear and gained his feet in the same movement, and crouched. His face, with its fur brushed smartly back, was a hideous fighting mask of blazing eyes, flattened ears, and wide-opened jaws. He tensed for the leap that would bear the dog to earth, and with two or three lightninglike strokes of claw-armed feet tear life out of the courageous spaniel. But even as the lynx's muscles tautened, a new and unexpected element entered the fray.

Too astonished and bewildered at first to realize what was happening, it had come to the little girl suddenly that her dog was being killed. She was mortally afraid of the cat, but she loved Keno, and she would not see him murdered. Moreover, she was a Cardigan, and the Cardigans were fighters. With a cry, she caught up a club and ran forward.

It was too much for the lynx. He would not hesitate to face one rather small dog, but two foes, one of them a human being whom he instinctively feared, sapped his courage. With an explosive cry, he leaped—backward! Seemingly with the same ease with which he would have sprung upon the dog, he cleared the top of a low salal thicket and was instantly swallowed in the darkening woods.

Dropping her stick, Jane ran to the dog who wished at that moment to pursue the fleeing lynx. She flung her arms around his neck, and the reaction of tears came while the overjoyed spaniel sought to cover her face with kisses.

Then there came to their ears the nearing shouts of men, and lanterns bobbed through the woods. Jane heard her father's voice, and called back to him; and Keno's joyful bark was added to the turmoil of the emotional reunion.

Back at the ranch once more, while Keno's wounds—which were minor despite the fact that he had fought a full-grown lynx—were being dressed, the playful Lady, overjoyed at seeing her brother again, scampered back and forth before him, inviting him to romp with her. For an instant, Keno's eyes brightened, as though he welcomed the suggestion to play. Then, with an almost disdainful look, his head held proudly and in his eyes the true look of eagles, he turned away. Puppyish antics were no longer for him; he had come into the dignity of his rightful estate.

Cardigan saw, and understood. In the fires of night, while standing guard over his master's belongings, and in the crucible of combat had the dog's soul been shaped and forged. In the fires of night he had found himself; and Cardigan, remarking the dog's apparent class and breeding, to which had been added the maturer touch that completed the picture, knew that Shanagh Keno, scion of canine royalty, had found fame for both of them.

The Forgotten Hills

By *Robert J. Horton*

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

ROGER HARTLAND, Eastern millionaire, visits Silver City, where he owns the Yellowjacket Mine, and finds himself inevitably entangled in the life there. He makes friends and enemies. Among the latter are the proprietors of The Consolidated, Mann and Gordon, who are also bankers, and "Butch" Allen, their gunman. He has for friends, Margaret Cram and her father; "Creeps" Hallow, a local character; "Monocle" Joe, his stableboy and scout; the Yellowjacket men, and others.

The town is on the verge of a boom, owing to Hartland's interest in his mine and consequent rival activities. Tempers are high and the county sheriff appoints a deputy.

An inopportune visit from Rose Raymond, an acquaintance of his pleasure-loving days, annoys Roger and may threaten his friendship with Margaret. He urges Rose to leave and quarters her at the hotel, but she suspects his changed feeling and refuses. The stage is set for trouble everywhere.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"WHAT IS YOUR PRICE?"

AS far as the main road, John Cram rode with Hartland and "Monocle" Joe. Here he left them and they followed down the canyon, guided by the deeper shadows of the trees on either side of the road, walking their horses, for there were many mud holes The animals had to breast the swollen stream with all their strength when they crossed the fords to avoid being swept off their feet. It was pitch dark.

At last they reached firmer footing and the horses splashed among the ruts at a trot. An opening in the shadow of the trees on the left finally indicated the west road. They crossed the bridge and walked their mounts close to the bull pines on the right until Joe's practiced eye detected the opening to the trail to the bungalow.

They rode single file into the narrow ribbon of path between the dripping pines. Here all they could do was to hold the reins loosely and let the horses pick their way. It was so dark neither could see a hand before his face. Joe's right hand gripped his automatic under his slicker. Suddenly both horses stopped.

"What is it?" Hartland called softly.

"Listen!" came Joe's excited answer.

Then Hartland heard a weird, moaning chant from somewhere ahead. It was in a high-pitched voice and occasionally drew out into a long silvery tenor note. The horses were fidgeting. The chant changed to a song that seemed to blend with the wind and rain, a mournful melody which, nevertheless, was strangely sweet. It was impossible to make out the words, but Hartland recognized the voice.

"Creeps" Hallow's troubled soul was sobbing to the spirits of the night.

The notes of the song drifted away and died. The rain drove against the pines with a soft, hissing sound as of escaping steam. It beat a dull tattoo on the stiff, boardlike sides of the slickers. The horses pawed impatiently.

"Go ahead, Joe, that's Hallow," Hartland called. "If he starts again, give him a whistle to stop him so he won't scare the horses."

They went on. Hartland continually stirred restlessly in his saddle. Creeps Hallow's song had had a disturbing effect upon his nerves. For the first time he doubted his wisdom in giving the half-wit a job as watchman. He had a madman prowling about his house through the night. Remembering what John Cram had said about the gorilla man, he realized why Hallow was ready to work for him; to protect his life and property. It was because he was a friend of Margaret Cram. Perhaps Hallow thought they were lovers! But, no, his mind would hardly leap to such a conjecture.

Lights glimmered ahead. They rode out of the timber and galloped across the meadow to the veranda steps, where Hartland dismounted and turned his horse over to Joe.

"You can take yours back to the livery in the morning," he told Joe briefly. Then he went up the steps and into the house.

Fredericks came to the dining-room door. "Will you have some coffee, sir?"

"Yes," replied Hartland, handing over his hat and slicker. "Any telephone calls?"

Fredericks cleared his throat ever so slightly. "Ah—Miss Raymond called twice, sir. I told her you were out to dinner and for the evening."

"And what did she have to say to that?" Hartland inquired.

"Ahem." Fredericks cleared his throat again. "Begging your pardon, sir, I think Miss Raymond was rather —ah—excited. She was quite emphatic, sir."

"Yes?" Hartland looked at his man with an amused expression. "In what way was she emphatic, Fredericks?"

"She—ah—told me she thought I was a—a—liar, sir," said Fredericks with great dignity.

"Well, there have been times when I thought the same thing," Hartland chuckled. "Bring the coffee and we'll call it a day."

Hartland had just finished breakfast next morning when he had a visitor. "It's Mr. Milton, sir," Fredericks announced.

Entering the dining room, Hartland saw a tall, young man standing near the closed outer door. A closer look, as he approached Milton, revealed the fact that the man wasn't as young as he thought. He looked into a pair of cool, gray eyes; noted the firm mouth and chin, the strong features, and a skin that retained the bronze of outdoor life despite work in the chill and dampness and darkness of the mine. He saw the cartridge belt through the opened front of the man's slicker.

"So you're the new deputy," said Hartland, offering his hand. "Well, I think Miller made a good choice."

Ross Milton smiled, and with his smile his face was transformed. Once more it was young, almost boyish. "Thank you," he said simply. "I'll try

to make good on the job. Miller said you intended to inspect the mines to-day, an' sent me down to bring you up."

Hartland waved him to a chair with a frown. "Does Miller think I have to have an officer of the law with me to get about?" he complained.

"No, sir," said Milton, "I don't think he has any such idea. "But the storm knocked a tree down up the road, an' it's necessary to take a short cut—a side trail. He sent me because he could spare me. I'll have to show you the way. You'll want to ride up to the Yellowjacket an' to the Huntley an' back."

"Something in that," Hartland confessed. "Are you going to try to hold your job at the mine and be deputy, too?"

"No, I'm leaving the mine to-day," Milton answered.

As Hartland was lacing his boots, he wondered if he should call at the hotel first and see Rose Raymond. He did not doubt but that Fredericks' hint that she had been drinking the night before was warranted. She was alone, far from the hectic life to which she was accustomed. Very possibly she was homesick. But she could go back. It was her place to go back. And he knew she would hardly be up at that hour of the morning. He decided to see her late in the afternoon after he returned.

The rain was still falling. Everything was wet, soaking wet, and wisps of mist hung over the valley, with fog shrouding the mountains. Joe brought Hartland's horse and he started off with Milton. He wasn't foolish enough to think that Miller had sent the deputy just by chance. His manager was doubtless prepared for any emergency.

They rode through the bull pines, across the upper bridge, down the road into town, and turned up the one leading to the Yellowjacket. Just below the point where the switchbacks began, they encountered a huge fir across the road which led through a box canyon. They turned off to the right into a narrow path which was barely visible and very steep. It led up to a shelf running along the wall of the canyon and eventually climbed to the top. They followed the crest of this wall until they could cross over to the first switchback. Here they were again in the road and in half an hour they reached the mine.

Milton looked after the horses, and Miller, who had been awaiting them, led Hartland into the offices, where he shed his slicker and hat and donned a blue, denim jumper and a cap with a miner's lamp attached in front.

The top of the Yellowjacket shaft was at the end of a tunnel which led straight into the heart of the mountain for more than a quarter of a mile. Ross Milton joined them as they entered the bore, and they walked along the tracks over which the ore cars were hauled. When they reached the top of the shaft they lighted their lamps before entering the cage. They dropped to the two-hundred-foot level.

Here was a tunnel and Miller showed Hartland where the ore had been stoped out. There was no one working on this level, nor on the three-hundred-foot level. The veins had petered out. But work was in progress on the lower levels, and Hartland saw the gleaming veins of silver ore both above and in the face. The tunnels were untimbered for they had been driven through solid rock and there was no danger of cave-ins.

At five hundred feet Miller first called attention to the copper stain. It was pronounced at six hundred feet—the depth of the mine—and here, Miller explained, the silver was rapidly thinning. They were finding patches or pockets of wire silver, however. That might mean anything. No one knew for sure what was beneath them. It might

cost a lot of money to find out—and it might be worth it. He deluged Hartland with technical information which the latter did not in the least understand nor care about. What were mining engineers for? he was asking himself. He had made his plans. The thing which impressed him most was the loyal attitude of the men. Most of them touched their caps as he passed or paused to watch them at work. They left the Yellowjacket after about two hours.

A ride of half a mile or so through the timber brought them to the Huntley. Miller pointed out on the way where he intended to cut a road through from the Huntley to join the Yellowjacket road. This was the right of way which he had refused to Gordon and Mann. In the Huntley offices, Hartland met Fred Crawford, a tall, spare, gray man of uncertain years but with piercing, black eyes and an aggressive personality. He went into the mine with them and Hartland at once saw furtive looks of hostility on the faces of the men.

"We'll send 'Sandy' Anderson over here as foreman," he told Miller, and the manager nodded his assent.

Ore was being taken out on only two of the three levels in the mine. Despite his inexperience in such matters, Hartland could see there was ample opportunity for development. Again he listened to Miller, and to Crawford, too, but vouchsafed no opinion.

When they returned to the Yellowjacket, Hartland was closeted with Miller in the latter's private office for half an hour. There was a gleam of triumph in Miller's eyes as he came out and beckoned to Milton to bring the horses.

"You're making no mistake," Miller said heartily as Hartland mounted.

"If I am, it won't be the first time," Hartland observed curtly. It was as if he felt disgusted with everything, and Miller watched him ride away with Ross Milton and wondered. The manager had heard about Rose Raymond.

Milton left Hartland when they reached town and the latter rode slowly up the street toward the road and home. Men looked after him from doorways and porches, and in the resorts tongues buzzed. For already it was known that Hartland had been inspecting his properties and this was accepted as a good sign. Mann smiled and "Butch" Allen sneered, and "that red woman" was no longer the chief topic of conversation. And at the moment Hartland was thinking of nothing more important than that Miller had promised to have a crew building a new bridge across the creek at the upper end of the street as soon as the water went down.

Then he saw Margaret Cram's horse standing in front of a store. She was in town; and she would talk with some of the women, of course; and she would learn the gossip which was going the rounds. Hartland spurred his horse cruelly, with the silent thunder again ringing in his ears.

It was half past two when Hartland returned to the bungalow. Monocle Joe was not around, so he put up his horse himself. He was in an irritable frame of mind. The cheerless, dismal, rainy afternoon matched his mood. The hot lunch Fredericks had ready, the glowing fire, a fine cigar failed to improve the temper of his thoughts. For the time being, mine matters need not be reckoned with. He knew nothing of mining, was sensible enough to realize this deficiency, and had sufficient common sense to know that his part was to leave such business to experts. That would be his policy. It would be much easier and more businesslike to make decisions from engineers' reports. The more he thought, the more sick and disgusted he became with everything.

Anderson had been sitting in the living room most of the day, Fredericks informed him. He went in to tell the

convalescent that he was slated to be the next foreman of the Huntley.

"Don't do it," Anderson warned. "Better take one from their own crowd. I wouldn't last long, anyway." He smiled wanly when he saw Hartland's look of surprise. "They'll have dynamite planted on ever level where it'll do the most good," he explained.

This gave Hartland something more to think about. It *was* quite possible that in event of dissension or serious trouble the Huntley crew, openly loyal to Allen, might attempt to ruin the workings of the mine. Hartland went back to the living-room fire and swore at himself for being fool enough to become involved in such a mess. And he had to visit Rose Raymond, confound it!—there was no way of getting out of it. Perhaps it would be best to bring matters to a show-down. He started with the potency of a new idea. Suppose he were to leave!

It was nearing four o'clock when he decided to go down to town. The rain had become a drizzle, the mists were lifting. But the skies were lowering and it promised to become dark early. He went out to get his horse but stopped dead in his tracks on the way to the barn. Rose Raymond was riding across the meadow from the trail through the pines.

"Couldn't stand it any longer in that dead hotel," she said lightly as she dismounted near him. "Good thing I remembered this was the West and brought riding togs along. Are we going to have tea?"

"Go into the house," Hartland ordered. He led her horse to the barn, frowning darkly. He was angry, tormented, disgusted—but he did not know what to do. As it was, fate was to decide the matter for him.

Fredericks was serving Rose with a highball when Hartland entered. The sight made Hartland furious. He strode toward Fredericks. "Take it away," he ordered in a voice the man could not misunderstand. "Miss Raymond is having tea."

Fredericks retired hastily, taking tray, decanter, and glasses with him. Hartland turned to meet a snaky gleam in Rose Raymond's eyes. "You're not even as hospitable as you were yesterday," she said. "Perhaps your dinner last night didn't agree with you."

"I don't thank you any for using insulting language to Fredericks over the telephone," he said sternly. "And you're not going to bring your drinking up here and indulge it at the expense of my peace of mind. I won't have it, and that's final! The thing for you to do is to clear out of town, and you *know* it. If *you* don't go, *I'll* go. And if the camp finds out, or suspects, that you were responsible for my going, you're liable to ride out sitting backward on a horse instead of in a train!" Hartland was altogether too thoroughly angry to talk reasonably.

Rose Raymond's eyes were flashing, her face had gone dead pale. "You wouldn't dare!" she cried, her nerves a-tingle from the effects of her indulgence of the night before. "You can send me away properly when the time comes, and you'll know best when that time arrives."

"I wouldn't dare?" Hartland forced an uproarious laugh. "My girl, for once you've picked the wrong game. I'm going to——"

He ceased speaking as he heard footfalls on the veranda. He hurried to open the door and there stood Margaret Cram. Her eyes held his for a space of several moments. Then he stepped outside and closed the door.

"Father sent me to deliver this envelope," she said, holding it out. Her voice had something dead, and gone, and chilling in it. The eyes were painfully accusing.

He took the envelope, stuffed it into a pocket. "Margaret, I want you to

come inside," he said thickly. Then, as her brows went up and she started to shake her head, he grasped her by the arm. "You *must!*" he said tremulously. "You must do this for me, Margaret. It's only fair to me, and later you will learn why. I want you to meet Rose Raymond from New York."

He drew her toward the door, and her astonishment and curiosity made her efforts at resistance feeble. He opened the door and led her inside, closing it after them.

Rose Raymond had put a cigarette in her holder and was lighting it. She looked up at Margaret Cram and subjected her to a cool inspection which caused the girl to flush.

"Margaret, this is Miss Raymond, of New York," said Hartland in introduction. "Miss Raymond, this is Miss Margaret Cram."

"Oh, why not just Margaret?" said Rose, holding out a slim, drooping hand. "I have a horror of last names."

Margaret took the hand gingerly and removed her fingers at once. Not for an instant had her eyes left Rose Raymond's. So this was the woman she had heard about in town—"that red woman," the townspeople called her. This was the woman who had come two days before, dressed all in red, holding her head high, sneering at the simple folk she met; who had stayed the night in Roger Hartland's bungalow; who had swore at the maid in the hotel the night before because there was no ice water. Rumors concerning her were flying thick and fast in town, and, though Margaret discounted them, there was something in Rose Raymond's cool, tolerant, appraising gaze that overcame the girl with revulsion. She could think of nothing to say.

"You'll stay to tea, of course," Hartland was saying. "I'll put your horse in the barn so your saddle won't get soaking wet."

Before she could protest, he was out the door and she was alone with the notorious visitor.

"You're a pretty girl," Rose condescended. "I understand Roger has taken a fancy to you. He has an eye for a pretty face and a neat form." She waved her cigarette holder and smiled knowingly. "You seem to be the only thing presentable hereabouts," she said languidly, "and if you play your cards right, he *might* marry you."

The woman's manner was insolent and Margaret was struck cold by the brazen nature of this casual remark. It was like a slap in the face—an insult. Yet this Raymond woman did not appear to intend it as such. But Margaret's cheeks flamed.

"Such a thing never entered my head!" she flared excitedly.

"No?" Rose smiled again. "Well, girlie, let it enter it now. You've got Roger off by himself, alone. Hook him while the hooking is good. I guess he rather expects some such thing and doesn't care a whoop. Cinch him while he's got his head down, as they say. Don't forget, child, he's worth a pile of money."

Margaret's face was white and her lips trembled. But when she spoke her voice was firm. "I don't know who you are," she said, holding the other's eyes with her own, "save for the name Mr. Hartland has given me; but I believe I know something of what you are. You can't be right or you wouldn't talk as you do. We're mostly *right* up here in these high, clean hills, open and aboveboard in our animosities, and right in our friendships. You do not seem to fit in with our notion of things, and I don't want those notions spoiled. I came in to meet you out of curiosity, and now that it's satisfied, I'll be going."

Rose Raymond's cold, derisive laughter followed her out the door.

But Rose was white with fury. The girl had circumvented her; placed her-

self on a pedestal that was unassailable with one simple little speech—*put her in her place!* Rose all but gnashed her teeth. No plain, silly, little mountain girl, this! And she was just the kind Roger Hartland would be liable to fall for. He was an ass, anyway. And she, herself, was a fool. The galling thing about it was that she *knew* it!

Margaret Cram ran through the drizzle toward the barn. Hartland caught her in the entrance and held her tightly by the arms. She looked over his shoulder, white-faced, cold as stone.

"Don't forget, I wanted you to meet her before she went away," he said, the words burning in her ear. "When you are ready, you can ask me why. I'm banking that you'll play the game."

He led out her horse. She mounted and galloped away like mad without uttering a word.

As Hartland entered the living room, Rose Raymond held back the hot torrent that was on her lips. Something in Hartland's eyes stayed her tongue. His look was one of triumph. He sat down at his desk as Fredericks brought in the tea and lighted the lamp.

"Serve Miss Raymond," he said crisply.

"I don't want any!" Rose snapped out, with venom in her tone.

Hartland opened the envelope Margaret had brought and found it contained John Cram's note for five thousand dollars. He put it in a pigeonhole. Then he turned to Rose. He looked at her so steadily that she shifted her gaze.

"What is your price?" he asked mildly.

Rose tossed her head. "I wouldn't put it that way," she said, struggling to regain her old composure.

"What is your price?" The words cut the still air of the room like knife-thrusts.

Rose Raymond saw him passing out of her life with that question. The mask fell from her face. She shed her shallow, artificial pose as she would throw off a wrap. "I don't know, Hartland," she said in a voice that was coldly insolent. "I'll have to think it over. Sweet little buttercups come high." For the first time he saw her sneer; realized how many things might have happened in New York. Wrested from her natural environment, Rose Raymond had reverted to type.

"I should have said, 'what *was* your price?'" he observed grimly. "Think it over to-night, Rose. Meanwhile, I've made up my mind. I'll get your horse."

He left for the barn and when he returned with her mount, which looked like the same animal Monocle Joe had ridden the night before from the livery, he found her on the veranda, ready to go. She *had* to get away from there; had to get back to the hotel, and get a drink, and think—*think!* She might be losing Hartland, but she intended to get a receipt.

She mounted and leaned down from the saddle. "Have you told the little violet about the big city, and your motor cars, and Europe?" she said mockingly. "That line ought to be good for a successful summer!" Her jeering laugh trailed back to him as she rode away in the gathering dusk, affecting him unpleasantly.

There was no mistaking the meaning of what she had said, and Hartland's blood boiled. He walked about the little park in the fine drizzle of rain, his thoughts keeping pace with his long strides. Darkness fell and he remembered the wild, weird dirge Creeps Hallow had sung the night before. He felt like something of the kind himself. A cold wind sprang up. He shivered and went in to dinner.

At nine o'clock he called the hotel to make sure that Rose Raymond had got back safely. He gave a startled exclamation when the clerk answered:

"Miss Raymond has not returned!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISSING.

HARTLAND hung up the telephone receiver and paced the room nervously. Could Rose Raymond have lost her way? It had not been dark when she started, and, in any event, the horse would certainly know its way home. He called the livery. He learned from the man in charge that Rose had hired a horse there that afternoon and that it hadn't been returned. No, she hadn't mentioned any places where she intended going. Yes, it was the same horse Monocle Joe had had the night before.

Hartland next called the Silver King resort and asked for Joe. After an interval Joe answered. Hartland instructed him to scout about town and look for signs of Rose or the horse. Joe knew the horse, and if he should see it anywhere on the street it would indicate the whereabouts of Rose. When he was ready to report he was to hire a mount and ride to the bungalow, if the telephone exchange was closed. Otherwise, he was to telephone for further orders.

An hour passed with Hartland moving about the house, sitting down before the fire, getting up to walk around again. He didn't know whether to be worried or not. Had Rose picked up an acquaintance or two? If she had become lost, and anything should happen to her, Hartland knew he would be in for harsh censure from the camp. Moreover, he would blame himself. Why hadn't he thought it wise to ride back with her, at least as far as the main road? He became genuinely worried and anxious as it occurred to him that she might have been kidnaped by Allen or some of his crowd. They could be depended upon to know that he would have to ransom her handsomely.

He went out on the veranda. The drizzle had stopped and a cold wind was blowing. Here and there a star peeped bravely through the scuttling clouds. The rain was flying away on the wings of the wild, weird night. There seemed to be a throbbing in the air, as if it were shaking off the dampness. Hartland went down the steps and walked a few paces out into the meadow. He whistled three times—sharp, imperative calls.

From the shadow of a clump of poplars another shadow disengaged itself. Hartland instinctively took a step backward as it glided toward him. He swore lightly under his breath. It was Creeps Hallow, of course. It was almost uncanny how the fellow kept watch on the house.

Hallow straightened unexpectedly as he reached Hartland and seemed to tower above him. "What is it?" he hissed hoarsely. He kept peering about in a disconcerting manner.

"Have you seen any riders to-night?" Hartland asked irritably. He would not have been surprised if the gorilla man shouted or ran or sprang at his throat because of the loud voice.

"No," replied Hallow. "You look for somebody?"

"Not exactly," said Hartland. "Joe may be along, though. You haven't seen a woman rider—a *woman,* Hallow?"

"No. You look for woman rider?"

Hartland realized with disgust that it was useless to ask the half-wit questions. And it would be best not to stir him up. He must have seen Rose Raymond, though, the night she arrived and came to the bungalow with Joe. He started to ask him if he had seen her, decided nothing would be gained thereby, desisted.

"That's all," he said instead, and went back into the house.

It was after eleven when Monocle Joe arrived. Hartland let him in and saw at once by the expression on the

cockney's face that he had learned nothing of Rose Raymond's whereabouts.

"Nothing doing, eh?" he said, frowning.

"Not a thing," Joe answered. "I combed the town, sir, an' couldn't find a trace. She hasn't showed up at the hotel an' 'er 'orse is still out. They think down at the hotel that she's up here."

"I wonder if she could have ridden up to the Crams' place," said Hartland, half to himself. "But, pshaw!—she doesn't know where they live, and if she did, she couldn't find the place in the dark and wouldn't be fool enough to try it. Joe, is Allen downtown?"

"I didn't see 'im," said Joe. "But I was playin' cards in the back of the Silver King an' 'e might have been in one of the other rooms, sir. I didn't see 'im anywhere else, either."

"Something's wrong!" Hartland exclaimed with conviction. "Joe, go saddle my horse."

When the cockney had left, Hartland went to his room and buckled on his cartridge belt. He examined his six-shooter to make sure it was loaded and slid it into its holster. His face was gray and grim.

"Anyway, whatever has happened will teach her a lesson," he muttered. "She'll be ready and willing to go now—if she's alive." He hadn't known until this day that she could ride, and he was considering the possibility of her horse having bolted, thrown her off, and run into the hills. These Western horses, he understood, had a way of making off for their old range the first chance that offered after they were taken away from it. The mount Rose had might be a new horse here. He would have to find out. Meanwhile, he proposed to start a search with Monocle Joe. No use rousing the Yellowjacket or the camp as yet. He hoped he would be able to find Rose without the business becoming public property.

They took a lantern and when they were halfway along the trail Rose had taken, through the bull pines, Hartland called a halt. He dismounted and while Joe held the horses he lighted the lantern and examined the trail. But he could make out nothing. Rain had fallen after Rose must have passed along it, and Joe's horse's tracks were the only ones that bore the appearance of having been recently made.

Hartland put out the light in the lantern and they rode on to where the trail left the pines and joined with the west road. Here they made another examination, with the same result. The only new factor was the sign left by a horse coming down from the west ridge, and those tracks doubtless were made by Creeps Hallow's mount when he had ridden down to take his nocturnal vigil at the bungalow.

"We'll ride up to the Crams' place," Hartland decided.

The wind had swept most of the clouds from the sky and the stars were shining brightly. They rode fast, keeping a sharp lookout along the road. At the point where the trail branched off to the Cram cabin, they again examined the ground. This trail was not so muddy and they made out clearly the tracks of a horse which had come out from the cabin and gone back. These would be the tracks of Margaret Cram's horse, made when she went to town, and Hartland's place, and returned. They rode on far enough to see that the Cram cabin was dark.

Then Hartland, thoroughly alarmed, turned about and they galloped down the road to town.

Rose Raymond had not returned to the hotel. They went to the livery and ascertained that the horse she had ridden away on had been there for a long time and was not an animal which would bolt, unless greatly frightened, even though an inexperienced rider might be in the saddle. Hartland was stumped.

He looked at his watch and found it was going on two o'clock in the morning. There no longer existed in his mind any fragment of doubt but that disaster had overtaken Rose. What to do next!

Monocle Joe read his thoughts. "We can't do anything to-night, sir," he pointed out. "We've got to 'ave daylight an' we've got to 'ave men. The only thing to do is to wait till morning an' start a big search."

"I guess you're right," grumbled Hartland. "Well, I'll go back home and you round up "Squint" Evans—he ought to be a good trailer—and rout Miller out at daybreak, and get Ross Milton on the job, too. And see if you can get a line on where Butch Allen has been to-night. I'll tell you frankly, Joe, I wouldn't put it past him to kidnap Miss Raymond, thinking he could get a bunch of money out of me. But keep that to yourself. It wouldn't do any good for *me* to start prowling around the Silver King and the other places that are open. It would only start a lot of talk. There's no use stirring up this beehive till it's necessary. If she should show up, or you should get word of her, get the news to me—and me only—as quickly as you can."

Hartland harnessed the liveryman's tongue with a gold piece. He passed a yellow-backed bill to Joe and told him to attend to the hotel clerk. But he was not figuring on the surest and swiftest means of sly communication in such a place as Silver City, especially where a strange woman was concerned. The chambermaids and kitchen girls had gone forth, after their day's work, with choice, new bits of gossip. The strange tale had found its way into the ears of waitresses and had been passed across tables and lunch counters for the edification of sundry and divers masculine patrons. Then it had spread like wildfire through the camp.

As he started for home, Hartland saw the light streaming from the windows and wide entrance of the Silver King. He checked his horse to a walk. He was worried and irritable. He hated the thought of going to the bungalow and sitting idly by the fire waiting for daylight. He knew he could not sleep. He wanted a drink. He felt he *had* to have a drink. The beams of light beckoned. Inside the Silver King there was life, movement, diversion. He might learn something there. He could talk with Big Mose. He could listen and keep his eyes open. He should be in town in the morning, anyway—shouldn't he?

Instantly acting on this decision, he turned in at the hitching rail in front of a store just above the resort, dismounted, and tied his horse. He sauntered back in the cool night air to the Silver King. Despite the lateness, or earliness, of the hour, the place was thronged. Hartland remembered that the day before had been Saturday and that this was Sunday morning. He assumed that all the men who did not have to work that day were making a night of it. Joe could have told him it was thus every day. He stepped to the head of the bar where Big Mose was keeping an eye on the activities of his three bartenders. Two men moved aside to make a place for him. He had come in quietly, with merely a casual glance around. But two pairs of keen eyes had observed him instantly. Butch Allen's face hardened; his black eyes gleamed with a vicious light of malice. It woud not be policy, because of his and Mann's schemes, to interfere with the Huntley—yet. But a *personal* altercation was different. He had a score along that line to settle. Squint Evans, who also had spotted Hartland the moment he entered, stood at the end of a roulette table where his fishy, faded, blue eyes could survey both Hartland and Allen. Others in the place now looked about, the talk died

somewhat, then swelled again. Silences were rare after the midnight drink hour.

Hartland ordered whisky and Big Mose went into his office for his private bottle, while the gleam in Butch Allen's eyes leaped into fire. The group about him had ceased speaking and fingered their glasses in expectancy. Allen had been making talk this night. He had not been drinking to any degree of excess. And he had been doing a great deal of thinking. His very soul rankled with Hartland's curt dismissal, the Yellowjacket owner's open contempt and disdain, his fearlessness. It was a moneyed man's bluff!

Allen put down his glass with a sharp rap. Men forgot their conversations and peered along the bar at him. Squint Evans was cashing in his checks.

"I hear you've lost your red woman, Hartland!"

A chilling breath of air seemed to rush through the place. Glasses went down, cards were held suspended in the hands about to play them. More than half the men in the place were strangers and they took their cue from the attitudes of the others.

Hartland met the challenge calmly. He put down his glass with its contents untasted, drew his gun, and slid it across the bar to Big Mose. None could ignore or misunderstand this action. He stepped back and strode toward Butch Allen. Outwardly he was cool, collected, although a bit white; his jaw was shut firmly; his eyes narrowed. But inwardly he was glowing with a fierce, burning joy. Here was come the outlet he needed to ease his troubled mind and relieve the tension of his nerves.

The men about Allen stepped aside. A figure streaked through the crowd. Allen leaped back from the bar too late. Squint Evans had his gun. Then the big man was whirled in a grasp of steel. He came up on his toes, snarling, his face purple with diabolical rage. His hands came up instinctively, through no apparent effort of his own. He might as well have tried to ward off the punishment with a wave of a silk handkerchief.

Hartland's right shot full and true to the gunman's jaw and landed flush with a crack that broke the sudden silence of the room like the report of a pistol. Allen was sent backward as if hurled from a catapult. His great body crashed against several who were behind him and knocked them sideways, backward, and to the floor. Allen went down on his knees, his head wagging groggily.

"Give 'em room!" It was Squint Evans, no longer the meek, watery-eyed gambler; but a man who seemed to have suddenly grown taller, whose eyes flashed with a green light, and who stood on the edge of the crowding semicircle of spectators with legs well apart and a gun in each hand. "I'll drop the first man that butts in, an' that goes for you, too, Mose!" He waved a threatening pistol at the Silver King proprietor, who had climbed on top of the bar and was shouting incoherently.

There was an uproar as tables were overturned, chairs kicked aside, chips flung this way and that, to the jingling ring of silver. Men stood the tables up and climbed upon them for points of vantage. Others stood on chairs, and were pulled down by others anxious to see. Curses and cheers rang in the place. Allen's friends and followers did not dare interfere since they were in the minority. Also, they were caught unawares by the suddenness of it.

Butch Allen leaned forward on his hands, gave a final shake of his head, came to his feet with a bound. Hartland's left came curving with sledgehammer force and caught the big man behind the right ear. Allen spun clear around, and then met another straight left on the jaw that Hartland sent with every iota of strength in his body behind it. Allen went down in a heap.

The newcomers cheered lustily, although they didn't know what it was all about. But they knew good work with a pair of fists when they saw it. And they had heard about Hartland and the red woman; had heard Allen's jeering challenge. Big Mose was waving the gun Hartland had pushed across to him. But Squint Evans was watching him. The green fire from his eyes shot in all directions. No one could mistake that message.

Allen stirred, licked the blood from his lips, rose on an elbow, and looked up at Hartland out of blazing eyes that were pin points of liquid fire between the narrowed lids. Now Hartland spoke for the first time.

"You can get up on your knees and say you were mistaken, Allen; or you can get up on your feet and take some more of what you've been needing for a long time. Whichever you want to do, you'll say you were mistaken, or I'll prove it to the crowd by knocking you cold and turning you over and *spanking* you!"

Hartland might have been more alert to his own words than to Allen's position, for the latter suddenly twisted like a snake, caught Hartland's ankles, and tripped him. They were down together, with Allen reaching for his enemy's throat. Hartland caught his wrist in both hands and twisted it until he cried out in pain. Allen rolled over, sinking his teeth into Hartland's upper arm.

This foul fighting drove Hartland into a frenzy. He released his adversary's wrist, rolled upon him, and before Allen knew what was happening a strong right thumb and forefinger were inside his lips, pushing them wide until they drew back white against his teeth. He clutched for that right wrist, but Hartland's left hand was at his throat. He tried to clasp that. Wider and wider his lips drew apart across his face—wider and wider! He squirmed, and twisted, and clutched to no avail.

"Nod your head that you're through and were mistaken and I'll let you up," Hartland panted hoarsely. "Nod, or I'll split your mouth from ear to ear!"

Allen nodded his head as best he could. Hartland released him and rose to his feet. "You can have more of that kind of fighting any time you want it," he said to the man on the floor. "And now there's some more of the other kind coming to you if you've got nerve enough to get up."

Allen got to his knees as Hartland backed away to give him room. He was beaten—beaten for the first time in his life! *Beaten!* The word surged through his brain. He leaped to his feet and lunged at Hartland. The vicious blow missed and his jaw cracked upward as it met Hartland's wicked left. He swung aimlessly—then came night.

He groped his way through dazzling mists and came out of them with his face on the dank floor. All the strength seemed to have gone out of him. There was a strange silence everywhere. Some one was shaking him, turning him over; cold water splashed in his face. He saw the eyes of a friend.

"Snap out of it," said a rough, familiar voice in his ear. "You'll have to get out of here."

He permitted two men to help him up and lead him to a back room, where he slumped into a chair, dazed. "They got my gun," he muttered. For the twentieth time since he had passed his insulting challenge to Hartland, his right hand dropped to his holster. Then he started, and stared straight ahead, licking his blood-stained lips. His gun was there.

Hartland had stepped to the bar and taken his weapon from Big Mose. He turned on the crowd, spoke slowly, evenly, in a tone which signified good faith. "It is true, gentlemen, that Miss Raymond, who is visiting me for a few days, is missing. She has either had an accident with her horse or has lost her

way in the hills. I'm starting a search in the morning and any who wish to join one of the parties will be welcome." With this brief, explanatory speech he was gone.

There was a full minute of silence. Then Squint Evans walked to the head of the bar. "Well, boys, we gave him a square deal," he said; "an' I reckon it's up to us to help him find this dame. I'm one that's going along."

He downed the drink Hartland had left untouched. And within two minutes fifty others had volunteered to ride forth at dawn to aid in the search.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MOON RIDGE FAULT.

WITH the first glimmer of the dawning day on that Sunday morning—the Sunday before the scheduled temporary shut-down of the Huntley—Silver City witnessed a sight that is not uncommon in the high hills: the grim, thorough preparations for a search for some one lost in the mountain fastnesses.

Ross Milton had taken charge of everything. Monocle Joe had found him within an hour after leaving Hartland and the young deputy had lost no time. He had visited the Silver King shortly after Hartland's departure; heard the story of the unmerciful beating the Yellowjacket owner had given Butch Allen; nodded his approval, and accepted the offer of scores of men to aid in the search. Practically every man in town who had a horse volunteered his services. Even Allen's cronies came forward to save their faces. But Allen had disappeared.

Milton didn't wait until morning to notify Miller. He routed the mines manager out and got the names of every Yellowjacket man who owned a horse. Then he sent word to those on the list who were in the mine, and to the others at their quarters and about town, to be ready to take the saddle at daylight. He had a talk with Squint Evans, who was notorious as a reader of sign on the trail or off—knowledge which was reported to have stood him in good stead when evading more than one posse—and it was agreed that Squint should have charge of the party which went west. Milton was going south and Miller was taking a third party north.

Each party would consist of thirty or more men.

Hartland had ridden home feeling better. He had driven the silent thunder from his ears; had effectively closed Allen's mouth. For no one would listen to the gunman after his ignominious defeat that night. Why, he hadn't landed a single blow! Nor had Hartland intended that he should land one. This had not required as much skill as Hartland could boast, but then Allen was more of a rough-and-tumble wrestler, an unfair fighter at best. He depended upon a formidable reputation and his gun, and would use his fists only when caught unawares. And Hartland had not forgotten Squint Evans' quick move in disarming Allen. The wise little gun fighter had seen what was coming. Probably Allen didn't know who had taken his weapon and then slipped it back into his holster when he was knocked out. So much the better, and if his cronies told him, what did it matter? But Hartland was not discounting Allen's cunning, his uncanny skill with his gun, and the powerful determination for revenge that would burn in his brain. The desire to get even with Hartland would be his religion.

Hartland called for coffee when he entered the bungalow. He would have welcomed a talk with Sandy Anderson, but did not want to wake him. So he sat by the fire, drank coffee, and smoked until the early dawn brought Monocle Joe with the news that the searching parties were forming in town.

Hartland rode into town with Joe to

find the street swarming with horsemen. They had hardly joined Miller, Ross Milton, and Squint Evans in the center of the milling riders, when the liveryman came running up the street, waving his arms.

"The horse!" he shouted. "Her horse is back!"

They moved in a body to the livery, surrounded it, and found that what the liveryman had said was true. The horse Rose Raymond had ridden the afternoon before had returned. The animal had arrived unnoticed, while practically the entire population of the town was giving its attention to the preparations for the search. No one knew from what direction it had come. Thus it was out of the question to back-track its wanderings. It was saddled but the bridle was missing.

"Might have snapped somewheres with the horse stepping on the loose reins," said the liveryman. "Might have caught on something an' been jerked off."

This explanation was received skeptically. It was more probable that some one had removed the bridle to facilitate the animal's return. The missing bridle strengthened Hartland's conviction that Rose had been kidnaped and he confided as much to Miller and the other leaders. But they scouted the theory. And then Hartland wondered for the first time if this could not be some kind of a new game on the part of Rose! He had no time to consider this at any length, for the horsemen were again moving into the upper street and the leaders were dividing the riders into three parties, each to take a different trail.

They rode uptown and on to the upper bridge. There they waited while Squint Evans and Ross Milton examined the trail which led through the bull pines to the bungalow. The only signs discovered were footprints, but these were found to be identical with Hartland's and were undoubtedly made by him when he had examined the trail by lanternlight the night before.

Both Evans and Milton shook their heads and gave it up. Here was mystery; but everything pointed to Rose having made the main road.

In such event, there were only two directions in which she could ride of her own free will or be taken against it, and those directions were up the canyon to southward, or down past town. Ross Milton, almost as good a trailer as Squint Evans, announced that he would go south. It was left to Miller's party to search below town and up the draws above the Yellowjacket road. The third party, led by Evans, was to go west into and up Moon Valley, and up the high ridges west, south, and north of it. All the riders were to return at dark unless trace of Rose Raymond had been found; in which case the riders finding the trace should camp in the hills for the night

Hartland chose to go west. He rode with Squint Evans at the head of thirty men. They crossed over the low ridge and rode down into Moon Valley. Here Evans divided the party into three groups of ten men each. One party was sent to the upper end of the valley with instructions to climb to the summit of the west ridge there and work back along the crest; the second party was sent down the valley to where the east ridge fell away and the stream flowed north of town, there to climb the west ridge and work back. The third party, with Squint and Hartland, was to follow the trail over the west ridge and on to the ranges beyond.

Before taking the trail, Squint and Hartland rode up to the cabin of Creeps Hallow. They found the door open and Hallow asleep in the single bunk. Hartland had explained that the half-wit had been up all night watching his place and therefore they were not surprised to find him in bed. But Squint woke him.

"Have you seen a rider up this way?"

he asked, as Hallow peered up at him out of small, beady, animallike eyes. "*Any*body on a horse or afoot?"

Hallow shook his head and transferred his gaze to Hartland.

"Oh, it's no use asking him," said Hartland. "I tried to question him last night. He got down after Miss Raymond disappeared."

"Well, we haven't lost anything by it, anyway," Squint Evans grumbled and they went back to their horses.

As they rode down to join the others of the party, Creeps Hallow threw off the covers and bounded lightly to the floor. He was in his stocking feet but fully dressed. He stole to the north window and looked down the narrow valley after his two early visitors. His facial muscles were working and he was muttering to himself. He watched until he saw the searching party going up the west ridge trail. Then he took a small telescope from a shelf and focused it on the crest of the ridge where the trail crossed it to descend the other side. He kept his glass glued to his eye until the party had crossed the ridge. Then he pocketed the glass, pulled on his boots, put on his hat. He reached under the bunk and drew out a good-sized pack. With this under his arm he hurried to the lean-to behind the cabin which served as a barn. He saddled and bridled the horse that was there, secured the pack to the rear of the saddle, mounted, and rode across the valley to the shelter of the pines along the west slope. Here he turned north down the valley, following along the slope, passed the trail, and vanished in the trees.

The sun climbed steadily to the zenith and started on its long glide into the west. The searchers led by Squint Evans and Hartland wound along tortuous trails up into the higher mountains, spread out fanwise in the narrow valleys, ravines, and meadows, and climbed and climbed until, in the late afternoon, Squint Evans called a halt.

"We're wasting our time going up here any farther," he said. "Look at those steep slopes, look at the shale rock. Any one who came up here would have to take this trail. But we haven't seen a sign of a track. Anyway, that horse couldn't have got back so soon from here. We're out of luck in this direction."

Hartland and the others could not but agree. They turned back, knowing it would be after dark when they reached town.

Rose Raymond rode away from Hartland's bungalow with rage swelling within her until it almost choked her. She realized that in some way Hartland had scored in introducing her to Margaret Cram, but just how the meeting had reacted in his favor she did not know; nor could she fathom his purpose in bringing her face to face with the girl, and permitting them to be alone together so that she could say whatever she wished. It did not soothe her temper to recollect that what she had said had not had the effect upon Margaret that she had anticipated. Ignorant, swell-headed, little mountain brat! was the way she thought of the girl. And Hartland was literally throwing her out so he could play his game with this little baby doll!

So intent was she upon her resentful thoughts that she hardly realized where she was until it began to grow dark. Then she found herself on the thin trail which led through the dripping pines. The stand of timber on either side—so close that she could reach out and touch the branches—was filled with sinister shadows, and vague, disturbing whisperings. Although she was warmly clad, she shivered. There was no sunset, for there was no sun; only the gray, darkening sky above her, and she could see but a thin ribbon of that through the trees. She began to peer about her and to look behind. A darker mass of

clouds drifted overhead and it became almost as black as night. She leaned forward to pass under a projecting limb which appeared low, and in the next moment something tightened about her shoulders and she was lifted from the saddle. A wild scream sounded hollow and dull in the forest and died in her throat as she fainted on the ground where she had fallen.

When she opened her eyes she saw a lone star that seemed to be hanging high above her. Gradually she recovered her senses and could think in orderly fashion. She must have struck that low branch and been swept from her horse to the trail. She was lying on her back with her head upon something. She raised herself on an elbow and looked about. It was still light enough to distinguish objects near at hand. There were the trees—but what was this? She wasn't in the trail, but in what appeared to be a small patch of gravel. The stones were hard, some of them sharp beneath her. Then a shadow loomed over her and her blood seemed to freeze in her veins. Two glittering, beady, animallike eyes regarded her; two long arms and hairy hands of atrocious size hung just above her; two rows of teeth that were more like fangs were bared below the eyes, above the arms. The rest of this monster's body was like some great, unwieldy shadow, half man and half ape.

She tried to scream, but no sound passed her lips. Then she trembled violently and struggled to ward off another fainting spell.

"Don't shout!" The warning came in a hoarse, guttural voice. The immense, hairy hands brushed her face; the small eyes gleamed, sparkled with red and green points of fire.

Rose Raymond went cold all over. She recognized the horrible creature who had looked at her over Monocle Joe's shoulder the night she had arrived, and Joe had come bursting into the bungalow after having been attacked. She could remember what the man was called: Creeps! Hartland and Joe had both mentioned him. The name seemed appropriate.

"Get up!" One of the hairy hands slid under her shoulders and raised her to her feet as if she had been a sack of fluff.

She stood wavering. Her horse was tied to a tree. There was another horse behind Creeps. He was coiling a rope. It fascinated her, that rope. He had—what did they call it?—*lassoed* her! What did he want? Why—— Suddenly she stiffened with an illuminating thought. This creature was in Hartland's employ and was obeying his orders! He didn't intend to buy her off; he proposed to frighten her away! This conviction gave her courage.

"What do you want with me?" she asked boldly.

A long arm shot out and a great hand crushed over her mouth. She thought it would push in her teeth, so great was the pressure.

"You keep still?" The voice was accompanied by a hot breath in her ear. "You keep still?"

She nodded as best she could, and when he released her she felt limp and faint again. She knew it would not do to speak again. And—did Hartland think he had absolute control over this beast? Had he considered what might happen if this human gorilla were given charge of a woman in these lonely mountains? She shuddered and grew sick with fear.

"Come!" The hand left her face, gripped her firmly by the arm, led her to the horse that was not tied. Before she realized what was happening she had been swung into the saddle, the man had mounted behind her, and they were making their way through the trees, following no trail in particular, as she could see, climbing—climbing.

They came to a swollen brook and

splashed up its bed for a long distance. The pines were thinning. They came out upon a bare slope of shale. They were very high now, almost to the top of the western ridge. Clouds were racing in the sky under a few brave stars. A cold wind drove across the rocky ramparts. Rose shivered with cold and fear.

They were on a table of rock at the side of the steep slope of shale. The bed of the brook and the rocky trail below would leave no tracks to follow. She was as completely isolated with this man-beast as if they had been in an open boat in mid-ocean.

He got off the horse and lifted her down. He dropped the noose of the rope over her shoulders, tightened it about her waist.

"You walk behind me—*close,*" he said in that terrible voice. "One slip an' you go"—he pointed down the long slope of treacherous shale to the rocks below—"an' if the rope don't hold, or *I* slip, we *both* go. I don't care. Maybe I hope so it will!"

He stepped out on an almost indistinguishable path—an old game trail leading across the shale. He held the coiled end of the rope in his hands. Rose followed close behind him, her heart pounding in her throat. If she could only close her eyes! But she didn't dare. Did he, after all, intend to kill her?

The horse was left behind as they crossed the shale. On the farther side they turned up again and climbed. There was no trail; just natural steps formed by boulders and blocks of granite. When the steps were too high for Rose, Creeps Hallow pulled her up with the rope. Her hands were cut and bleeding through her thin gloves; she skinned her legs, bumped her knees, tore her clothes. They seemed to be climbing to a solid wall of rock, but when they got up there a jagged opening showed. The entrance to a wide fissure in the rock was like a false front; it could not be seen from below or above. He led her into the defile and a natural cave opened. He pushed her into utter darkness.

After a time a match flared into flame, then a lantern was lighted. She saw some rough stuff like burlap on the rock floor of the small cave. The lantern hung from a sharp spike of rock. There was a rude bunk made with saplings, covered with pine boughs, over which were some blankets. There was a crude, high stool on which was a pail of water. A package beside it looked as though it might contain food. But the thing that held Rose Raymond's attention the longest was a square door fashioned of saplings, nailed close together so that only very narrow slits remained. Had it been steel, it might have been the door of a cell.

Creeps Hallow was fixing her with that terrifying stare out of his glittering, animal eyes.

"This is the Moon Ridge Fault," he said, with a hissing inflexion in his voice. "The fault in the rock only *I* know. Nobody find you here; nobody know how to get up here; you be good an' you be all right, an' we go *some* time. They look for you to-morrow but they won't find. Nobody know this fault but me."

Every word burned into Rose Raymond's brain as if seared there with a hot iron. She realized, with hopeless resignation, that what he said was true. No one would ever dream of the existence of this place unless he had been here before. There was no trail, and it would take a tall man of great strength to climb up those great rock steps. She was at the top of the world and she might as well be in the bowels of the earth—and completely in the power of this horrible creature.

"Did—did Hartland tell you—to bring me here?" she asked in a faint, faltering voice.

"Not!" His eyes glistened with tri-

umph. "He doesn't know. But he will be glad! When the rain fall the night you come, I listen outside the window an' hear what you say an' what *he* say. You no good! You come to make bother for him an' Margie. Now I take you away so you do no bother. You want a drink?"

He took a pint bottle half full of whisky from a pocket and put it down by the lantern and the package. "It keep out the cold an' you like drink. So you no good. I go back now."

She watched, numb with horror, struggling with the impulse to cry out in protest, as he took the door and, keeping on the outside, drew it snug against the rock on either side of the opening of the cave. It overlapped the entrance on the inside. Two bits of steel cable tightened on either side as he secured the loops to rock outcroppings on the outside. Thus it could be opened from without, but *not* from within. And Creeps Hallow was the only living being who knew where she was and could come to open that door!

She heard the dull echoes of his catlike tread die away as he walked along the narrow defile to the top of those dangerous steps. Then something snapped in her brain. She leaped to the door, and pounded upon it, and shrieked. The rock walls without took up her cries and flung them in reverberating echoes. The shrieks became wails and blubbering moans. She staggered to the bunk and fell upon it.

The lantern filled the place with its yellow light, but Rose Raymond was in darkness.

CHAPTER XXX

MADNESS.

ROSE came to, stiff with cold. Her scratched hands, legs, and knees smarted and burned; her head ached, her feet were sore. Her tense nerves tingled and she felt very weak. Her throat seemed raw from shouting. She sat up and stared at the lighted lamp, the pail of water, the small package, and the bottle half filled with amber liquor. She swung off the bunk, took a cup of water, and followed it with a drink from the bottle. The whisky sent a warm glow through her, soothed her twitching nerves. She took off her riding boots, poured water on her handkerchief, and bathed her cuts and scratches. Then she removed her riding jacket, took a cigarette case and holder from a pocket, put it on the foot of the bunk. She lighted a cigarette from the lamp, got between the blankets, and tried to consider her desperate situation in the cold light of reason.

First of all, escape that night was out of the question and there was no use in thinking about it. To shout and scream, even if she were not too hoarse to do so, would have been futile, for no one could hear her. She must wait until Creeps Hallow returned; she must trick him in some way. If he had told the truth and Hartland knew nothing of her predicament, he would doubtless start a search as soon as he learned she was missing. But he might not learn of her disappearance until late the next day. This thought made her very uneasy. What had Creeps meant when he had said they would go away after the search was abandoned? She had read too often of people being given up as lost in the mountains. Would it not be possible for Hartland and the townspeople to accept this explanation in her case? In fact, might not Hartland *welcome* such a turn in their affairs? Her uneasiness increased until she was again frightened. No, she couldn't be cool and calm under such circumstances. Had she been in danger in New York she would have known what to do. Here in the wild, wind-swept desolation of the mountains it was different. And suppose something were to happen to Creeps Hallow and he wouldn't be able to come back! Suppose those men he had routed when

Monocle Joe was attacked should kill him!

She sat up suddenly as a long, wailing cry came to her ears. It sounded like a baby in distress. Her heart pounded as she remembered having read somewhere that mountain lions gave such a cry. She couldn't be expected to know it was an owl. She was all ears, straining, listening, clenching her palms until her finger nails bit into them. A far-away moaning of the wind became louder, hissed like rushing water in the pines below, howled in the rock crevices of the fault, hurtled the ridge, and swept on, leaving a whine in its wake. She got up and poured out another drink from the bottle with a shaking hand. Then she lighted a second cigarette.

All the stories she had ever heard of bears, wild cats, and other dangerous animals came crowding into her memory. A bear might have cunning enough to loosen the cable loops which held the door on the outside. Then came the sharp barking of dogs. She did not know it was a lone coyote. The sounds heartened her. Could they be looking for her already—with dogs? She thought of bloodhounds. But the barking went the way of the wind, then the wind came again—then the long, wailing cry like a baby in distress.

She longed for daylight and looked at her wrist watch. It was only half-past ten! She lay back and drew the covers over her head to shut out the alarming voices of the mountain night. She was terribly tired; she yawned and dozed, and awoke with a start. What was that? Something—some one tapping at the door!

Again she sat upright, her heart pounding, every nerve quivering. The soft tapping seemed to come from the bottom of the door, where there was a narrow, open space its whole width. Suddenly a dark object streaked across the floor of the cave and through the open space. Her body went dead cold and her heart seemed to stop. A monstrous rat!

She shook until the bunk rattled its legs on the hard rock. This was the greatest shock of all. She became numb with fear, for she didn't know it was a pack rat and that they never attacked a human. Suppose they were to attack her! She looked wildly at the lantern, wondering how much oil it contained; wondering if there was enough oil to burn all night. She was afraid to take it up and shake it to make sure. It might go out and she had no matches. And what good would it do? There was no more oil to put in it. She looked at her watch again. Only eleven o'clock!

The tapping had ceased. She was too shaken, too tired to sit up. Her brain and her muscles were weary. She lay on her side so she could see the floor. Once more she dozed, and this time body and mind claimed their rest and she slept the deep, dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion.

She was awake before she opened her eyes; awake to the innumerable aches and pains of her body, and to a sickening, sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach; awake to renewed fears. She was afraid to open her eyes at first. She seemed conscious of a presence. Was some one there? Finally, the lids fluttered, she sat up, wincing with a stab of pain in her back, looked about.

The light in the lantern was still burning. The amber liquor in the bottle mocked her, nauseated her. What time could it be? Midnight? One or two in the morning? Never had she so dreaded the night; another like it, and she would surely go mad. She mustered the courage to look at her watch—stared at it in surprise and disbelief. The hands indicated seven o'clock!

Morning? Her gaze flew to the door, and joy and relief surged within her. Sunlight shone through the narrow cracks between the saplings and under-

neath. It *was* morning, and a fresh, bright day. Then her heart sank again. What did it matter to her that the weather was fine so long as she was the captive of a human beast! Still, he would be coming up there, wouldn't he? She must think of a trick——

She threw off the blanket and sat on the edge of the bunk. Her feet were so swollen that she could not pull on her boots. She donned her jacket against the chill. The burlap was cold against the rock floor of the cave as she walked upon it gingerly. She flung the bottle into a corner where it was smashed to bits, its contents forming a little pool which she covered with a piece of the burlap. Then, being ravenously hungry, she undid the package by the water pail and found sandwiches—meat sandwiches. She ate one and drank copiously of the water. This strengthened her.

A cigarette followed her scanty breakfast and she turned the wick in the lantern as low as it would go and still burn. She had to conserve the flame by which she could light her cigarettes. Even this trifling detail seemed a hardship to her dire predicament.

She peered through the cracks in the door, but could see nothing but the sunlight flooding the rock walls of the defile. There must be some kind of an opening or fissure in the wall to the right—the east side—which let in the sun. She thought she could see the place, at the end of the rock passage, where the steps led downward. It had been so steep there that Creeps Hallow had had to pull her up by means of the rope. She could feel the soreness where it had cut in under her arms. The recollection of that precipitous trail gave her an idea. If she could get outside with Creeps Hallow when he came, on the pretext of wishing to walk back and forth in the passage for exercise, and could entice him to the top of those steps, she might be able to push him over so he would fall headlong on the rocks below. At last she had it; that was the trick!

She laved her feet with the cold water, massaged her ankles; worked until, after an hour or more, she succeeded in getting her boots on. They hurt terribly, but she walked about the confines of the cave until they became easier. She ate another sandwich, drank more water. Slowly a measure of confidence returned to her. Creeps Hallow would not *dare* to harm her. He had kidnaped her because he thought she was interfering with Hartland's love affair with Margaret Cram. Of course all these people in these hills would be overjoyed to see Margaret catch the big prize. They would all expect to live off him, one way or another.

"The poor fool!" she exclaimed, her lips curling.

She wondered if Hartland had discovered she was missing. She could not know that three searching parties were scouring the hills for her at that very minute; that one party was coming along the crest of Moon Ridge and would pass above her. But members of this party could look down over the sheer rock wall and see nothing.

Ten o'clock came. This was late in the morning for those who lived and worked in the hills; early for those who gambled and frolicked away the nights. But it was Sunday, and this gave Rose more cause for doubt. She was sitting on the edge of the bunk, thinking of her plan for escape. When she had thrown Hallow down upon the rocks—where he would surely break his head or neck, or something—she could make a rope of the blanket and let herself down the steep, upper pitch. Then she could slide —anything to reach the bottom of that treacherous trail, and liberty.

A shadow darkened the slits of sunlight in the door. There was a rasp of the left cable loop upon the rocks outside. The door moved inward in the

grip of a great, hairy hand. Rose Raymond's heart leaped into her throat. Creeps Hallow stood before her, his enormous, awkward body framed against the dazzling light of the defile, his eyes gleaming and glittering, his lips drawn back against his yellow teeth in a gruesome, twisted smile.

"You all right?" The voice seemed normal. He did not wait for an answer, but stepped inside. He had a package —a rather large pack—under an arm. This he tossed upon the bunk and then, to her horror, he sat down beside her. She gave him a single, fleeting glance, and her confidence ebbed.

His furrowed brow under the shaggy hair was damp and streaked with sweat. He had a reddish growth of beard, in which his wide mouth showed like an ugly gash. But it was the eyes that held her, frightened her. They were not natural—that was it. They were not animal eyes, either. Then the first terrifying suspicion gripped her, left her body cold and clammy, her brain numbed. She shook it off. It couldn't be. But she dared not look again.

Hallow took up the pack and opened it. He put an orange on Rose's lap. Then he blew out the light in the lantern, put it on the floor, and piled eatables in its place.

"You want more to drink?" he asked.

"No!" The question made Rose angry. If she had had a gun, she would have willingly, gladly, shot him in the back. She looked to see any signs of a weapon on him that she could snatch and use; but apparently there was none. "How long am I supposed to stay here?" she demanded, her eyes flashing and her cheeks flushing.

The grin widened and the small black beads of eyes snapped. "Maybe to-morrow we go," he croaked.

"To-morrow!" she ejaculated. "Another night here? I *can't* stay here another night! And where do you think we're going?"

"I show you." His great head nodded violently. "I got a horse for you. Your horse go back this morning."

"Did you send it back?" she asked quickly.

"He go back by himself," was the answer. "They won't know where he come from. See? They're out looking for you now, but they won't find you. Only I know this place." He seemed proud.

"What do you think Mr. Hartland will do when he finds out what you've done?" she said in as stern a voice as she could muster.

Creeps Hallow laughed and his laugh had a queer ring to it which forced her to look at him again. What she saw caused her to turn her head away quickly.

"He maybe no find out," said Hallow. "He maybe no care. You come to make bother." His eyes glittered with red fire. "You want the money, then you want the man. I hear an' I see—through the window in the rain. You think you're smart, high-tones, eh? You're a fool. I stop you. You get no money, you get no man. Only me. I take you across the mountains an' up to where the rivers end. An' there you stay an' no bother the man or Margie."

This was the longest, most coherent speech he had made, and Rose caught its ominous significance. He was not threatening her; he was merely stating in a cool manner what was to happen.

Her heart was in her throat again. She got up from the bunk and he did the same, rising to his full height, towering above her.

"I—I want to walk back and forth out there in the sun," she said, her face very white. "I need exercise. I'm sore and cramped. Let me walk out there."

"Yes," he assented, "you walk."

He ambled along ahead of her to the end of the defile and stood there looking down at the piles of rock and slopes of shale above the line of trees.

He was at the top of the trail, above the perilous steps, *on the very edge!*

Her heart beat wildly and she shook and trembled as she came up behind him. He was looking off across the valley now, apparently oblivious of her presence. The time had come to put her plan into effect. He was so close to the edge! A single push, and——

She took a long breath to steady her nerves, drew back a pace, and threw herself against him.

Creeps Hallow didn't move a fraction of an inch. Rose gasped in chagrin and astonishment. A huge, hairy hand swept around and caught her about the arm. He swung her around in front of him and held her out over the edge of the cliff, his face leaning forward close to her own. She could feel his hot breath, see the gleaming lights in his eyes. She tried to scream, but it was only a queer, squeaking sound in her throat. Then she went limp, and closed her eyes.

He pulled her into his arms and carried her along the passage to the cave. There he put her on the bunk. Then she felt a wet cloth on her face and brow. He was muttering incoherently to himself and the sounds made chills run up and down her spine. She dared not open her eyes for fear of meeting his. She had read the dreadful truth in them when he had held her over the cliff. He might be a brute and a beast, but what made it so awful was the fact that he was not responsible. Creeps Hallow was mad!

"You better?"

The words stabbed into her tortured brain and try as she would she could not avoid opening her eyes. He was leaning ovcer her with a damp handkerchief in his hand. He nodded and grinned.

"I know you want to push me off onto the rocks an' kill me, but you can't do it." His eyes clouded darkly. "You be good!" The words rang sharply in the cave.

"Why can't we start now, if we're going away?" she asked faintly. Anything to get out of that place. She felt that she was suffocating with horror and dread.

"No!" He frowned heavily. "You be good. You no stay alone to-night. *I* come. You 'fraid of me?"

"No, Creeps." She managed the words, although they trembled on her lips. It would be best to humor him. It might me fatal to show how terrified she was. "But I think we ought to start away."

"I come to-night an' to-morrow we go." His tone was final.

He got up and started for the door. "I come back after sunset," he flung back at her.

"Leave me some matches to light cigarettes," she pleaded.

He hesitated. Then he drew some loose matches from a pocket and threw them on the bunk. He went out, pulling the door after him, and securing it with the cable loops. She heard his footsteps die away in the passage. Once more she was alone. But she drew a long, quivering breath of relief. For the time being she was safe.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SONG OF THE UNIVERSE.

IT was midnight.

Rose Raymond was sitting on the bunk. The oil in the lantern had given out, but she had found some candles among the things Creeps Hallow had brought, and one was burning on the high stool. Its flame flickered in the breath of air that stirred in the cave. Fantastic shadows danced on the rock walls. Outside, in the defile and about the higher rocks, the winds made carnival. She had been listening for more than an hour to these winds; now faint, murmuring, singing, and again harsh

and roaring, shrieking and dying away to a whimper as they fled over the ridge to the wild freedom of the peaks. At times they were hideous with sound multiplied tenfold by the acoustic properties of the peculiar rock formations.

She had eaten the food and oranges Hallow had brought, and refreshed herself with a bottle of milk he had been thoughtful enough to include. She had given up trying to fabricate a plan of escape. Her fears had reached a climax and given away to resigned waiting. She was powerless. Only the intervention of a kindly Providence could save her. She had forgotten to wind her watch and it had stopped. What of it! Time meant nothing to her. The thought that always nearly drove her frantic was that she was so close to safety—only the short distance from the bungalow in the park below to her rock prison—yet she was beyond all help. Once she had thought wildly of breaking the milk bottle and cutting her wrists with a piece of glass that she might bleed to death. Then she had laughed, and lighted a cigarette. Her luck would be sure to come to her rescue. Like all habitués of New York night life, she was superstitious.

And Hartland would pay for this!

She found solace in that thought. She had heard a maid speaking in the hall outside her room in the hotel. She had heard herself called "that red woman." Very well, she would *be* a red woman and extort her blood money. She could live comfortably in France on a small fortune. Her luck had brought her into touch with Hartland; it had kept her in luxury for more than a year; it had indulged in the ironical whim of setting her down in this mess—now it would pull her out.

So she had thought; but in this midnight hour she sat hopeless and dejected, without even the solace of tears.

She hardly looked up when she heard Creeps Hallow's footfalls in the passage. The left cable loop was loosened and he swung the door inward, let it hang askew by the other loop. He looked at her out of greenish eyes and licked his thick lips.

"You all right?" He stooped and peered at her searchingly. "Yes—you all right. That's good. They look for you but no find." His maniacal laughter filled the cave; sounded horribly harsh above the rioting winds. "They go back to town—*all* of them. Hartland, too. I don't guess he care."

He looked about and saw that she had eaten. "That's good," he said, sitting down beside her. "I got your horse down below. To-morrow we go. You bad girl, an' they say me bad man." He nodded and grimaced. "So we go together, like we belong—an' leave no bother."

"When do we start?" she asked dully.

"After you have some sleep," he said. "You feel sleepy now?"

She shuddered at the tone of his voice, which meant to be solicitous. "I slept some this afternoon and some to-night," she answered. "Why can't we start now?"

"You want to go quick?"

His hot breath was on her neck and in her hair. She risked a look at him. Then she screamed, struck him in the face, raked his swarthy cheek with her finger nails. Next her hands were caught as if in bands of steel. He leaped to his feet and jerked her up.

"You fight?" he cried hoarsely. "You want fight?" He lifted her in his enormous, hairy hands and flung her on the bunk. "You try to push me over the rock an' now you want fight!" The fingers of his right hand closed on her throat; closed just tight enough to let her know they were there. "You be good. You do as I tell. Then you be all right. I keep you all safe an' feed you good. I give you little love, maybe —eh?" He leaned over her and she fainted.

Strange music came to her ears as if from afar. It was like the sighing of waves, the wind in the trees, the tortured symphony of a soul in distress; it rose and fell in lulling and stirring cadences. She was conscious that she was listening; that the music was soothing. Her eyelids fluttered and opened. She looked out the entrance of the cave and saw the silvery moonlight flooding the defile. The dark form of Creeps Hallow loomed at the farther end. He was standing hatless and motionless. And he was singing!

Despite herself, Rose Raymond was thrilled by his voice. It rose and fell in perfect harmony, with every note clear and true. The extraordinary performance was so out of keeping with this monstrous man; the glorious tenor so different from the lunatic she felt him to be, that she was awed. She sat up and swung about on the edge of the bunk. Then he saw her. The song ceased abruptly. He came striding to the entrance of the cave, stepped inside, and took her by the arm.

"Come an' look!"

It was a command and she had no alternative but to obey. He led her to the opening above the steps and pointed out over the shadowy valley, with its silver ribbon of stream, to the east range and the gleaming summit of Old Baldy, bathed in moonlight.

"This is half the world," he said in a softer voice than she could have imagined he possessed. "To-morrow I show you the other half behind our backs. Then I take you where you can see *all* of it—*the whole world!* And there we stay."

She looked at the silent majesty of the mighty panorama spread out before her, and she knew why the loneliness of the mountains made men different, drove them mad.

"Go back!"

She went back to the bunk without hesitation, and lighted a cigarette. Creeps Hallow sang and the wind caught up the strains and carried them away. The words were unintelligible, but she would not have heard them for the soothing, soul-inspiring sobbing of that voice.

He was walking slowly back and forth now, his face held up to the wind and stars. The fierce, terrifying look in his eyes was subdued. Rose forgot her cigarette as she listened. She had a feeling as of one lost; as if she were floating out of life. Then Heaven granted her the blessing of a woman's tears.

When Hartland and the others returned to town about nine o'clock that Sunday evening, they found Miller and Ross Milton also arriving with their searching parties. No trace of Rose Raymond had been found. Milton was very much perturbed and said he would have to telephone Sheriff Currie about Rose Raymond's disappearance and the unsuccessful search. Miller frankly said he didn't know what to think. But there was something in the attitude of the two men that drew Hartland's attention. He tried to fathom what lay behind their manner toward him, and it was not until he was on the way home with Monocle Joe that he sensed the possibility of his being under suspicion. Could it be that they suspected him of having spirited Rose away—of hiding her in the mountains, or of something worse?

This thought left him in wretched humor for dinner, although he was very hungry. He ate hurriedly, his mind in a turmoil, and paced the living room afterward, smoking a cigar, and trying to think. What had become of her? What—what—*what!* Over and over again the simple questioning word asserted itself. He could get no further. He was worn and worried and bewildered. Finally, around midnight, he sought the cool air outdoors, and walked in the park.

A full moon was climbing the sky above the eastern range, trailing a white mantle of silvery light over the shoulders of Old Baldy. The wind ran wild and free, and Hartland felt its stimulus. He listened to it singing in the pines on the slopes of Moon Ridge. But suddenly he stopped walking and strained his ears.

Was that the *wind* singing up there?

He looked about him across the moonlit meadow to the shadows of the trees, eyes and ears and every nerve in his body alert. He whistled three times. The wind took up the echoes of the sharp, commanding signal and bore them down the sleeping valley. There was no response. Again he whistled, with the same result.

Thus Hartland knew it was not the singing of the pines he heard, but the tenor voice of Creeps Hallow, coming to him from somewhere on the ridge. He remembered the effect the storm had had upon the half-wit. But it was not a chant he was singing this night; it was a wildly weird and sweet symphony, the notes of which were exultant and embraced everything—the night, the velvet sky, the moon and stars, the shadowy ranges, the gleaming peaks, the streams and trees and flowers—the universe! That was it—a soul soaring in the freedom of the universe!

But why should Creeps Hallow be high on that ridge? The question answered itself in Hartland's mind. The crazy fellow had seen Rose Raymond arrive at the bungalow with Monocle Joe; he had looked at her over Joe's shoulder that night; he had most likely spied on them; he was jealous of her because she had come to Hartland, who was Margaret Cram's friend; he had decided she didn't belong there; he had resolved to carry her away so she could not cause trouble; he might be holding her a prisoner in some secret place on the ridge, and his joy in having taken her away without leaving a trace, his tumultuous thoughts now that he had her, were finding expression in this wild song.

Hartland ran for the bungalow, telling himself he was a fool for not having thought of this before. He found Monocle Joe taking tea with Fredericks in the kitchen and in short, crisp sentences told him what he had heard, what he suspected, and ordered him to get the horses.

"We'll need fresh mounts," he said, "and we'll ride up to Cram's place for them. Cram will have them. Then we'll make for the top of the ridge. Hallow may keep on singing for a long time if that twisted brain of his keeps bothering him. That'll guide us, or we may see him when daylight comes. A gun will make him talk—see if it won't!"

Within a few minutes they were riding through the pines on their way to the road up the canyon. Hartland had stood outside the barn waiting while Joe saddled the horses, listening to the faint notes of the song that came down to him from the high ridge. Only one thing could he determine. The singing came from some point north of the pass by which the trail crossed the ridge. But this was enough to start on.

When they reached the Cram place they found the cabin dark, as they had expected. Hartland knocked loudly on the door. In a short time a light showed in the front window, then a bolt was drawn, and John Cram opened the door. His right hand was behind the door, but Hartland knew it held a gun.

Hartland stated briefly what he wanted and why. He could not see Margaret, but he could almost feel her presence. He knew she was in the darkened dining room listening. John Cram invited him in, saying he would get busy at once, with Monocle Joe to help him, get the horses from his upper meadow, and saddle them. He insisted upon going along, as he knew the trail

along the ridge. But Hartland didn't go in.

Cram came out, fully dressed, in a few minutes and they made their way to the upper meadow, where Cram caught the horses. Soon they were in the saddle and galloping down the road. They did not ease their pace until they came to the trail up the first low ridge and down into Moon Valley. Here they halted and listened. There was no sound save the hurrying winds in the trees along Moon Brook.

But Hartland was certain the song had come from high on the ridge to northward, and they pushed on across the narrow valley and up the ridge, with the moonlight flooding the trail and landscape until it was almost as light as day.

They swung off on a side trail, with John Cram in the lead, and avoided the Pass, climbing to the crest of the northern end of the ridge above it. Here they stopped again and were rewarded by the telltale notes of Creeps Hallow's song borne up to them on the freakish winds from somewhere beyond and below.

"That's him," said John Cram softly, and led on along the rock-ribbed spine of the ridge.

Soon the three checked their horses as of one accord; for the swelling notes came up to them from directly below and very close. There was a precipice here, where the rock fell away sharply. They dismounted and Hartland whispered excitedly in John Cram's ear.

"You and Joe hold on to my ankles while I lean over and take a look down there."

Then, while they held him securely, Hartland crawled forward, and wriggled on his stomach until his head and shoulders were over the edge of the precipice. His heart leaped into his throat with excitement as he saw the dark, bulky form of Creeps Hallow moving back and forth in the narrow defile a scant fifty feet below. He had stopped singing. Hartland saw the light from the candle shining from the entrance to the cave which was concealed from above. There was no longer any doubt as to the whereabouts of Rose Raymond.

He wriggled back, aided by Cram and Joe, drew them away from the edge of the rock, and told them what he had seen.

"I brought a sixty-foot rope, thinking it might come in handy," said Cram. "You two can hold it and let me down there." He went to his saddle and took off the rope.

"I'll go down myself," Hartland insisted. "There's no danger. Hallow doesn't carry a gun and I have one. Anyway, I believe he'll listen to me. You can let me down easy and when the rope slackens you'll know I've hit bottom. If I shout up to you, stop lowering; if I shout again, pull up."

John Cram wanted to go down because he knew Hallow so well, but in the end Hartland had his way. They secured the rope snugly under his arms, found a rounded, smooth indentation in the edge of the rock over which he slipped, and then they began to lower him.

Hartland had his gun in his right hand. He was halfway down when Creeps Hallow, turning in the light which shone from the cave, looked up. A hoarse, wild, inarticulate cry came from the man's throat and he bounded to the spot just under Hartland. He recognized Hartland, who was covering him with a gun.

"Get back, Hallow, or I'll shoot!" Hartland's ringing command came distinctly.

Hallow cringed under the gun and backed to the edge of the entrance to the defile, above the steps. Rose Raymond came running out of the cave, queer sounds like hysterical sobs issuing from her lips. She recognized

Hartland's voice; she saw him at the end of the rope.

"Roger, Roger—*kill him!*" she shrieked as she got her voice.

"Go back!" Hartland shouted.

But Rose was in a frenzy of hope, relief, overpowering joy at the unexpected prospect of being freed. She plunged at Hallow just as Hartland's boots came down on the rocky floor of the defile. Hallow was standing limp, unprepared for the onslaught, staring with terrified, bulging eyes at the gun. Rose Raymond's body struck him on the left side. He toppled, slipped, and went over the edge of the rock.

A piercing cry came up to them from the void below.

To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

THE VAGABOND BANDIT

EVER filled with the urge to view new scenes, to experience new thrills, William Clark Quantrell was by nature a wanderer and adventurer. And from boyhood he showed his eminent ability to take care of himself, as far as shooting was concerned.

It is related that on one occasion, as a mere boy, he punctured both ears of a neighbor's pig, at a distance of two hundred yards, with a large squirrel rifle. The remarkable aspect of this incident is that he hit *only* the ears, and that the pig, after recovering from the first shock of surprise, was able to waddle away, otherwise uninjured.

Born in 1837, in Ohio, Quantrell lived in that State until he was sixteen. Then he went to Indiana, and studied civil engineering for a year. Moving on to Illinois, he worked at various jobs—school-teaching being one of them. He returned, then, to Ohio, and again taught school.

But, apparently, young Quantrell was not content there, for, in 1857, he went on to Kansas, with the intention of taking up a land claim. Unable to do so because of his youth, he became embittered against society.

After this disappointment, Quantrell spent the next few years in a gold-mining venture in Colorado and Canada and, at the end of that time, emerged with nothing to show for his efforts. Then came the Civil War.

At the beginning of the war, Quantrell served for some months with the celebrated John Brown. Later, he was the leader of a band of horse thieves in Missouri. His last venture was the organization of a guerilla band in the service of the Confederate army. It was while resting in a barn near Taylorsville, Kentucky, in May, 1865, that the band was discovered by a Federal guerilla troop under Captain Ed Terrell, a Confederate deserter. Quantrell attempted to escape but was shot in the back.

It is said that the famous Jesse James learned much of banditry from Quantrell.

Red Raiders

(Logan, the Mingo Nemesis)

By A. B. Searles

Author of "Mangas Colorado, the Avenging Apache," etc.

MUCH has been written about the atrocities of the red men during the stormy period between the time when the first white adventurers set foot on this wild continent and the triumph of civilization. In view of this, it is well to remember that, unfortunately, part of the blame lies on the shoulders of the hot-headed whites who incited the red raiders. The story of Logan shows this other side of the picture.

Logan, hereditary chieftain of the Mingoes or Senecas, was one of the sachems who entertained most friendly feelings toward the white invaders of his territory. He tried to abide by their laws and aid the incoming settlers in every way. And, indeed, his noble personality won for him the respect and admiration of many of the pioneers. Perhaps this friendly attitude is best demonstrated by quoting the words of a frontiersman named Brown, who wished to settle in the fertile land of Ohio, and first met Logan when he was searching for springs. When on the track of a bear, he became exceedingly thirsty and lay down to drink at a small pool.

"Upon putting my head down," says the pioneer, "I saw reflected in the water, on the opposite side, the shadow of a tall Indian. I sprang to my rifle, when the savage gave a yell, whether for peace or war I was not just then sufficiently master of my faculties to determine; but upon my seizing my rifle and facing him, he knocked up the pan of his gun, threw out the priming, and extended his open palm to me in token of friendship. After putting down our guns we shook hands. This was Logan—the best specimen of humanity I ever met with, either red or white. He could speak a little English and told me that there was another white hunter down the stream and of-

fered to guide me to his camp. There I met a man named Maclay. We remained in the valley a week, selecting lands, and laid the foundation of a friendship which never had the slightest interruption.

"We visited the camp at Logan's Spring, and Maclay and he shot at a mark for a dollar a shot. Logan lost four of five rounds and acknowledged himself beaten. When about to leave him, he brought out as many deerskins as he had lost dollars and handed them to Mr. Maclay, who refused to take them, alleging that we had been his guests and did not come to rob him; that the shooting had only been a trial of skill and the bet only nominal.

"Logan drew himself up with great dignity and said: 'Me bet to make you shoot your best—me a gentleman, and me take your dollar if me beat.'

"So Maclay was obliged to take the skins or affront our friend, whose nice sense of honor would not allow him to receive even a powder horn in return."

One other anecdote of Logan's great-hearted friendliness before we turn to the tragic aspects of his life. A Mrs. Norris remarked one day in Logan's presence that her wee daughter, who was learning to walk, needed moccasins. Shortly after, the chieftain begged Mrs. Norris to allow him to take the tot to his cabin for the day. The mother dreaded to grant the request, yet equally feared to refuse. In agony, she yielded, and the brave carried the child away. The long day passed; the soft dusk fell, and still the little one was not returned. Then, just as the sun was sinking, came Logan, the wee girl, fast asleep, in his arms. On her tiny feet were beaded moccasins, skillfully wrought by the great chieftain himself!

But trouble came to interrupt Logan's peaceful relations with the whites. A robbery and murder were committed in the Ohio country, and the crimes laid at the door of the Mingoes. Though the latter disclaimed the charge—and it is probable that they were innocent of the deed—the cry went up at once:

"Revenge upon the red dogs who have stolen our horses and murdered our friends! Revenge!"

Soon events occurred which precipitated a real war. A backwoodsman named Michael Cresap, an inveterate Indian hater, in company with another of his way of thinking, rounded a bend in the Yellow Creek one day, and saw approaching a canoe full of Indian women and children—only one man was aboard. Unarmed and unsuspecting, the redskins came on, full in the path of the ambushing frontiersmen. The whites opened a murderous fire upon the inoffensive party, and within a very short time every Indian had been killed. Three of the victims were relatives of Logan, the friend of the whites.

At the time of this tragic encounter, the chief had, at a council of his people, persuaded them that peace was better than war. His counsel had prevailed, but at the news of the massacre the matter was altered. This, then, was the manner in which the white man repaid the forbearance of Logan! Raising his tomahawk, the warrior swore that it should drink the blood of the whites until vengeance should be gained by a threefold expiation. The redskins made ready for a long and bitter campaign.

Frequent skirmishes took place in the surrounding country. Other tribes joined the Mingoes. Towns were pillaged, settlers murdered. But even in the midst of this carnage Logan's underlying nobility found expression at times. One incident shows clearly his magnanimity.

A white youth who fell into the hands of Logan's band was tried by the council and sentenced to torture at

the stake. In vain the chieftain pleaded that the prisoner's life be spared. The trembling captive was bound to the post, the fagots laid. Then Logan leaped into the circle of howling savages, scattered the burning fagots, flung a belt of wampum about the body of the man, and cried:

"I adopt him in place of my brother who was killed at Yellow Creek!"

A few days later the chieftain dictated a letter to this adopted kinsman. Written on birch bark with ink made from gunpowder and water, it was tied to a war club and stuck in the logs of a cabin whose owner had been massacred. A party of riflemen found it.

CAPTAIN CRESAP: What did you kill my people on Yellow Creek for? The white people killed my kin at Conestoga, a great while ago, and I thought nothing of that. But you killed my kin again on Yellow Creek. Then I thought I must kill, too, and I have been three times to war since; but the Indians are not angry—only myself.

(Signed) CAPTAIN JOHN LOGAN.

Thus Logan tried to exonerate his people from blame for the deeds which his longing for revenge had incited.

The soldiers who found this note, though impressed by its dignity, wiped out several Indian villages before returning to their base with a number of prisoners.

The redskins in their turn retaliated, and the whites then gathered an army numbering almost three thousand scouts and experienced frontiersmen. Under the leadership of General Andrew Lewis, this army advanced over one hundred and sixty miles of territory into the very stronghold of the rebelling reds.

The Indians were the first to attack. Two scouting soldiers were greeted by a volley from ambush. One returned to camp to carry the news; the other lay where he fell, dead at the first bullet.

Forthwith, two regiments of soldiers set out, under General Lewis' brother, to reconnoiter. They had gone less than a quarter of a mile when, with wild whoops of bloodthirsty ferocity, the savages were upon them. Colonel Lewis was mortally wounded at the very beginning of the skirmish; and with his dying breath he urged on his followers.

For a time it seemed as though the Indians would conquer. Over the din of the battle could be heard the voice of Logan crying: "Be strong! Be strong!" And when any savage showed signs of flight, one of the chiefs would strike the unfortunate down with his tomahawk.

Finally, the redskins began to give way, unable longer to withstand the onslaughts of the whites. The entire army had now come up, and General Lewis, mad with grief at the death of his brother, urged the soldiers to greater efforts.

But the Indians had not really retreated. The red strategists had prepared breastworks of logs which extended across a neck of land that stretched between the Ohio and the Kanawha Rivers. Moreover, on both sides of the stream braves had been posted so that had the whites been beaten, their retreat would have been cut off from the rear, and not one would have escaped. Now, when hard pressed, the warriors sought refuge behind the shelters which their forethought had provided, and from this vantage were easily able to hold the soldiers at bay.

At last, General Lewis hit upon a brilliant idea. Deploying three companies of his men, he sent them around behind the breastworks with orders to attack the Indians from the rear. The redskins, believing the enemy to have received reinforcements, retreated from the field of battle in the direction of their villages over the Ohio River.

The toll of battle was heavy indeed.

Fifty-two graves were dug for the slain backwoodsmen, and over one half the commissioned officers lay lifeless on the plain. As for the red men, their losses must have been as great as were those of the whites.

The Indians had been thoroughly cowed by this show of force. One of their chiefs, Cornstalk, upbraided them severely for having failed to follow his and Logan's first suggestions and keep the peace. "What will you do now?" he asked. "The whites are upon us, and we shall be killed. We must fight now, or we are undone." He paused for a reply and, receiving no answer, continued: "Now let us kill all our women and children and go forth and fight the palefaces until we die!" But to this brave proposal there was no acquiescence. At last he arose, and with a great blow struck his tomahawk into the post of the council house. "Then I will go and make peace," he cried.

Logan did not accompany Cornstalk. Indeed, he had been absent even from the councils of his own people. He remained alone in his lodge, brooding on his wrongs. The Indians said of him: "He is like an angry dog. His bristles are all up, but they are falling." When they asked him to attend the council he only muttered, "I am a warrior and not a counsellor."

Peace came to the Mingoes, but not to Logan. His star had set. To an emissary sent from the whites he voiced the bitterness in his heart—and the envoy wrote his message on the white birch bark and carried it to the camp of the soldiers where it was read aloud to the assembled palefaces.

"I appeal to the white man to say if ever he entered Logan's cabin hungry and he gave him no meat? If ever he came cold and naked and he clothed him not? During the course of one long and bloody war Logan remained idle in his camp, an advocate for peace. My countrymen pointed as I passed, and said: 'Logan is the friend of the white man.' I had even thought to have lived with you but for the injuries of one man. Captain Cresap, the last spring, murdered all the relations of Logan, not even sparing my women and children. There runs no drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. I have killed many. For my country I rejoice at the beams of peace; but do not harbor any thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan? Not one."

The remainder of the story of the sad old warrior is shrouded in mystery. Embittered by his grief, he shunned his own people as well as the whites, and, at last, turned to the treacherous solace of firewater. A drunkard, despised alike by white and red for what he was, honored not at all for what he had been, he sank lower and lower. He met his fate at the hands of a party of whites, but the details of his ignominious death are unknown. Perhaps Logan himself has written his own epitaph, but it is carved upon no monument. Only the sorrowful wind over the prairie carries the bitter refrain to an unmarked grave:

"Who is there to mourn for Logan? Not one!"

FAMOUS WESTERN STORY WRITERS

(JOSEPH B. AMES)

By D. C. HUBBARD

SOMETIMES the tree grows the way the twig is bent, but sometimes it doesn't. The parents of our well-known author, Joseph B. Ames, insisted that he should be an engineer. So dutifully, although somewhat reluctantly, he entered Stevens Institute of Technology and graduated from it, but not without showing his talent for writing, for while there he was made an editor of *Stevens Life,* a small paper that he and five other students published.

Born in Pennsylvania, and later moving to a small town in New Jersey, Joseph B. Ames had two desires which always projected themselves in front of his copy books. They were, to see the West, and to write. And of course, after he eventually spent some years in the West, he felt there was nothing quite so worth while to write about as the rolling prairie and the vast open range land.

After leaving Stevens, Mr. Ames, with a diploma under one arm and a degree—which he was too modest to mention—tacked after his name, went to work for a Jersey City gas company. Still with the writing urge strong within him, he wrote continuously at night. His first effort was a historical story for boys, which, he says, was declined by every publisher in the United States. Later, he went West and imbibed the spirit of cowboys, guns, and horses. The Southwest and Texas appealed to him most strongly, and it is here that most of his stories are laid. "Pete, Cowpuncher," gave him his first real success. Since that time he has divided his time between writing and travel. After publishing several juvenile serials, which have found a place between book covers, he sent a story to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE which found immediate favor.

JOSEPH B. AMES

Mr. Ames apologizes for not having shot up a saloon or "drilled" a man in a gun fight during those years spent in the West, nor has he ever been punctured himself by a .38-40 slug, the fashionable caliber at the time he was part of the Panhandle. But Mr. Ames isn't that kind of person. He is quiet, and really overmodest and retiring, but with a keen sense of humor and an interest in whatever may serve for the nucleus of a story. It is the builders of the future, the youth of to-day, that Mr. Ames particularly enjoys depicting, and, since the thing one most likes to do is the thing one excels in, we are glad, and I am sure the readers are glad, that Mr. Ames preferred writing stories to discovering leaks in gas pipes.

While the Rope Held

By Frank Triem

TAKING the envelope from the postmaster's gnarled hand, Stanley Rhodes turned it over questioningly. It wasn't often that he received a letter.

Rhodes was a tall, square man, with regular features, black hair, and dark, keen eyes. His hands were long and slender; they moved with a swift precision that was significant. As a matter of fact, he was a gambler.

His eyebrows knotted as he stared at the numerous post office marks, showing that the letter had been forwarded many times. As he tore it open, Rhodes realized that it must have been mailed nearly a month ago.

He drew out a slip of paper and read the brief message with suddenly narrowed eyes.

DEAR STAN: Come quick if you can do it. I need your help, and need it bad.

Yours, DAVE.

Stanley Rhodes' thoughts slipped back through the years. He and Dave Streeter had traveled long trails together. Once, in a little town in Lower California, Dave had saved his life.

Ten minutes later Rhodes stood in the local livery stable.

"I've got to catch a train," he told the proprietor. "Think you could take me over the short cut and put me aboard at Cactus Flats?"

The old-timer thought he could. What is more, he did it. Rhodes climbed the steps of the dusty coach just as the wheels began to turn.

Late the following day, he got off at a desert town not far from the border. It had the reputation of being a splendid place in which to learn to mind one's own business.

Adjoining the weathered station was the livery stable. Rhodes stared up the dusty street, then plunged into the cool depths of the barn. In the gloom ahead he could hear horses pawing at their stalls.

A leathery little man advanced toward him.

"I'm looking for Dave Streeter,

Rhodes said. "I wonder if you could tell me where I'll find him."

The other gave him a biting look.

"Be you a friend of his?"

"Sure am."

"Well—he's got a cabin about five mile due south. If you want to see him, I'd get out there *muy pronto!*"

"What's wrong with Dave?" Rhodes demanded in a voice that was suddenly hard.

The old man shook his head, but did not answer. Rhodes felt that the other was afraid to talk, and was sorry he had said as much as he had.

Five minutes later the newcomer had rented a horse. He was about to mount when the older man handed him a Winchester, in a worn saddle scabbard.

"Better let me lend you this," he drawled. "You can go out that door at the back. Chances are nobody'll see you."

In silence Rhodes strapped the .30-30 in place and afterward headed out through the door at the rear of the old building. Five minutes later the town was behind him. As the sun dropped toward its golden bed, he headed south.

Stanley Rhodes had gone between three and four miles when, far ahead, he heard the popping of guns. He listened, then urged his mount to a gallop. He dropped the reins behind the pommel and drew the rifle. A touch of the loading-gate told him that the magazine contained cartridges. He flipped the lever down and up.

Before him was a gentle, sage-carpeted rise. The shots came from just beyond it. Leaving his horse in a tangle of mesquite, he went forward on foot.

Rhodes gained the summit. He sank down behind a rock and studied the scene below him.

The sun had set, but the light was still clear and good. A hundred yards away stood a cabin. Among the rocks a scant forty paces below Rhodes, three men were hiding. These three were making their rifles smoke. Bullets spattered on the walls of the hut, and scattered about each of the trio glimmered many fired shells. Rhodes' thumb curled over the hammer of his rifle, uncertain of what to do. If only he could be sure——

At the broken window, he saw a face. It came and was gone in an instant; but the brief time had been enough for him to identify his old buddy, Dave Streeter.

Stanley Rhodes raised the rifle. With his first shot he drilled one of the three through the shoulder blade. Down went the lever, and up. As their comrade sprawled to his face, the other two whirled. One was just in time to get a bullet through the heart. He leaped erect, took two staggering steps, then collapsed.

The third was firing. A bullet droned past Stan Rhodes' ear. In the same split second he pressed the trigger of his weapon. The third gunman crumpled.

Rhodes went running down toward the cabin. The door swung open. Dave Streeter, tall and gaunt, staggered out. In the fading light, Rhodes saw that his shirt was drenched with crimson. As the gambler reached him, Streeter's legs gave way. Stanley caught him and lowered him to the ground.

Steps sounded within the cabin. Rhodes turned his head. A boy had appeared in the open door. He might have been nine or ten years old. He had a freckled face and tow hair. He was trying hard not to cry, but his lip trembled.

Dave Streeter opened his eyes and at the look in them Rhodes knew his old buddy was near the brink.

"You—came——" Dave gasped.

Rhodes nodded.

"Just got your letter," he said gently. "Take it easy, Dave."

Words came bubbling from the lips so soon to be silenced.

"Tried to ranch," Dave Streeter mumbled. "They—drug runners—wanted me out. Wouldn't go. Me and Jimmy here—we held them. He's my kid. Mother's dead. I—promise me you'll look out for him—Stan. Bring him up to be brave and—and a gentleman. Promise!"

Jimmy was crying, now, and Stanley Rhodes' eyes were misted. He nodded, not daring to trust himself to speak.

Ten minutes later it was over. Rhodes left the three smugglers and his old buddy to sleep their silent sleep under the stars. Taking Jimmy behind him on the horse, he rode into town and notified the coroner.

In the days and months that followed, Rhodes and his new buddy traveled through the arid Southwest. Rhodes made all the money they could use, and in his spare time undertook the education of Jimmy.

Man and boy were covertly studying each other. The child found this big, silent man a good companion. He was a true buddy, brave to a fault.

Yet there was one thing Rhodes feared, and that was—fire. Jimmy discovered this by chance. A livery stable in a town where they were staying had caught fire, and the boy wanted to watch it burn. He saw that his companion's face was white and set. Rhodes led him away and later explained that he had always had a wild, unreasoning fear of fire. It had been with him from babyhood, when he and his mother had narrowly escaped being burned to death.

They came at last to a little town down very close to the border. Stan Rhodes and Jimmy went at once to the hotel—an antiquated, three-story, frame building, from which the paint had long ago been licked by the hungry desert sun. Here Stan left Jimmy with a volume of "Treasure Island," then went out to have a look around.

That night, in the Blue Front Saloon, Rhodes played poker. Jimmy perched on a chair beside and slightly behind him, watched, round-eyed, the course of the cards.

The saloon was crowded with roystering cowmen. From the bar came the clink of glasses; there was a confused babel of many voices, and the air was thick with stale tobacco smoke.

Stanley Rhodes was playing a close game, and luck was with him. Out of the corner of his eye he had marked a short, stocky, young fellow dressed better than the rest of the men. This stranger seemed to be watching him. Presently, when one of the players pushed back from the table, the young fellow came forward and sat down.

As Rhodes shuffled and dealt, he noted the look of sudden apprehension that passed between the other two players. The blond young man, whose name was Jeffries, had a pasty face and unpleasant, gray eyes.

But he had money, and he was willing to use it. The four men played in silence for some time. At last Rhodes, who had been studying young Jeffries covertly, turned to Jimmy.

"Run along to bed, son," he said quietly. "I'll be up later."

He turned back, to find Jeffries' narrowed, unpleasant eyes resting steadily upon his face. The young fellow's thin lips were twisted into a sneer.

Luck was with Rhodes and he was playing even more carefully than usual. One by one, Jeffries' greenbacks slid across the table; and with each one, the wild youth became wilder. Rhodes noticed that the other two were playing almost mechanically. He saw, too, that many eyes were focused upon their table.

Then came the big hand of the evening. After the draw, Rhodes found

himself holding four queens. Jeffries bid; Rhodes raised him; the other two dropped out.

Swiftly the little pile of greenbacks in the center of the table grew, until Jeffries shoved his last twenty-dollar bill forward. After that came the show-down. The young fellow dropped two kings and three tens; at sight of Rhodes' four queens he leaped to his feet.

A snarling cry split the air. Then a funereal hush. Through the smoky illumination, white, tense faces were turned upon the four about the table. Jeffries was babbling unintelligible sounds. He had jerked from under his coat a short-barreled .38.

The other two players leaped precipitately back and melted into the encircling crowd. With his free hand, Jeffries reached out and began to stuff the piles of money into his coat pocket. His face writhed, his gray eyes blazed.

"I'm goin' to plug you, you sneakin', white-livered gambler!" he babbled. "Your game is crooked! Say your prayers, if you got any——"

Stanley Rhodes got quietly to his feet. His mind was clear and calm. Naturally, he carried a gun; but he could never hope to draw it before Jeffries fired.

His eyes never left the face of his adversary, yet he was dimly conscious of the silent crowd. They were afraid to interfere, he knew. Whatever happened was up to him.

"Take it easy, son," he advised. His voice had the ring of cold steel. "Remember, if you don't drop me with your first shot, I'll take you to eternity with me! Better think twice——"

There was a stir among the watchers. Jeffries laughed.

"Listen to him!" he jeered. "'If I don't drop him with the first shot——' Say, that's good! They don't stack your kind high enough to lick me in a gun fight!"

A man shoved through the crowd. Involuntarily, Rhodes glanced toward him. He was middle-aged and stocky, with a weathered face, and penetrating, brown eyes. His expression was stiff and wary as, deliberately, he advanced toward the young fellow with the gun.

Jeffries saw him. Slowly his expression changed; it became uncertain. The gun trembled ever so little.

A step at a time, the newcomer drew near. A confused murmur came from the crowd. As the portly man advanced, young Jeffries took a backward step.

"Nix, dad!" he whined. "This guy cheated me outa my roll——"

The big man's hand shot out. It fastened about the gunman's wrist. There came a sudden twist, a snap, a cry; the weapon thudded to the floor.

The stranger stooped and picked it up. He dropped it into his pocket and stared from Rhodes to Jeffries.

"All right," he said heavily. "Now, what's it all about?"

Stanley Rhodes told him. At the conclusion of his story, he offered the deck to the man who had saved him.

"You can see they're not marked," Rhodes said. "I've always played a straight game, if a hard one. This young man doesn't know as much as he thinks he does. He backed his judgment and lost."

The other nodded and turned to Jeffries.

"Give him his money, and be quick about it!"

Silently the lowering youth disgorged the crumpled handful of greenbacks. The stranger turned on his heel and headed toward the door.

Jeffries started to follow, but the other whirled.

"Stay where you are!" he said, in a level voice that carried to the corners of the saloon. "I've warned you—now run your life to suit yourself! I'm through with you!"

He disappeared through the swinging doors. Jeffries watched a moment, then slunk out after him.

Everybody was talking at once. As Stanley Rhodes picked up his winnings and began to count the bills, some one spoke to him.

"A narrow escape for you, stranger! Young Jeffries is lightning when it comes to gun play—and he meant to plug you. Lucky his step-dad showed up!"

Rhodes nodded.

The crowd quieted, and presently Rhodes was again sitting at a table. One by one the minutes crept past. It was nearly midnight when the swinging doors flew open and a man bawled something that brought every one to his feet.

"The hotel's on fire!" he cried. "Shake a leg, boys—she's burning like tinder!"

Stanley Rhodes was the first into the street. Behind him the others poured out. As he looked in the direction of the hotel he saw thick clouds of smoke rolling toward the sky. Streamers of flame licked along the powder-dry walls. A red, metallic glare showed through the windows; a crackling roar broke the stillness.

Rhodes said something through his teeth. He covered his eyes with one hand. Deep within him, his old fear urged him to turn and fly. And then, suddenly, a hideous remembrance struck, like a steel-shod hoof on his heart. Jimmy was in there!

It all seemed very much like a dream as, at the head of the mob, he raced up the dusty street and came to a halt before the three-story frame building. Wild-eyed men, their faces painted crimson by the fire, had gathered outside.

Among them he recognized the tall, stooped figure of the proprietor.

"Everybody's out!" he heard this man say. "Look at her go!"

The blood was singing in Rhodes' ears as he raised his eyes. Great tongues of fire flung themselves toward the night sky. Some one cried hoarsely:

"Start a bucket line from the well!"

Dozens of eager men formed in line. Rhodes saw others shake their heads. A modern, city fire department would have found it difficult to extinguish that raging furnace.

A voice—it must have been his own voice, he realized dimly—was raised above the howl of the flames.

"*Jimmy!*" he called.

Men were staring at him. He saw the proprietor suddenly stiffen, the color fade from his leathery face. Then again all eyes looked upward.

Rhodes stared up. A cry, thin and distant, quivered in his ears. A towhead was thrust from a window high above. Through the swirling smoke and the hungry streamers of fire, Jimmy and Stanley Rhodes gazed at each other.

"Get a blanket!" said some one.

They were holding Rhodes. Strong arms pinioned his writhing body. He was babbling entreaties, prayers.

A blanket was brought. A dozen men seized it, spread it out, held it taut. They surged toward the porch of the blazing hotel. Beneath that window, far above the street, where the child stood they halted.

"Jump, kid!" some one yelled.

An eternity of silence, while they saw the boy throw one leg across the sill. Then came a cry that brought a groan from half a hundred throats.

"I—I can't!"

Jimmy disappeared inside the room.

Stanley Rhodes was fighting his great fight. Fear of fire drove him back; love of the boy called him forward.

With a mighty jerk, Rhodes freed himself. Detaining arms were before him; he brushed them aside.

A tiny corner of his numbed brain was working. Adjoining the hotel was a one-story, adobe saloon. From the roof of this antiquated building he could reach one of the second-floor hotel windows—one which still was clear of smoke and flame.

Men were shouting behind him, and dimly, impersonally, he could hear the beat of pursuing feet. But no one could have caught him now, or held him.

He was on the roof of the saloon. A great plume of smoke belched down over him. Glowing sparks punctured the appalling blackness, like rivet holes in a furnace. Some of them settled on his hands and neck, and his tortured body shook and trembled. His deadly fear was as strongly upon him at this moment as it had ever been in his life—but something that was above fear or hope kept his mind clear. A will of steel held this quivering body, as an experienced horseman dominates and subdues a fighting, trembling broncho. The third-floor windows glowed red, he saw, as he glanced for a moment upward. Then he was inside the hotel.

Through a hall that boiled with choking fumes he ran. His sense of direction, always keen, saved him from utter confusion. He was driving straight for his own room—and Jimmy's.

He collided with a wall, turned, and began to feel his way along it. He could see hardly a foot ahead, but he remembered that the stairs to the third floor were at the front of the building.

At a staggering run, he went forward. A blank wall again, and the corridors bent to the left. As he rounded the corner he cried out, a hoarse protest that was lost in the howl of the fire. Before him was what looked like a solid wall of flame; through it he could see the flight of stairs, leading up.

With a mad rush, he flung himself through the curtain of fire. It bit at his hands and his face and his clothes. He held his breath, lest the searing flame be drawn into his lungs. A moan of pain wrenched itself through his gritted teeth. He slapped at his coat, which was smoking.

Then he was past the barrier. Three at a time, he took the stairs to the third floor. Evidently there were no doors open up there, now, or this passage would be a roaring chimney.

The hall above was cooler, though the smoke was as thick. The light up there was uncertain. He tried to remember which door was his, but couldn't. From one to another Rhodes groped his way, his fingers resting on the raised numbers on the panel of each.

Then he found one with a broken knob. He remembered that knob. With a prayer of thankfulness on his blistered lips, Stanley Rhodes turned it and pushed.

He was in the room. Through the eddying smoke, he could see the open window.

"Jimmy!" he called huskily. *"Jimmy—boy——"*

There was no answer. Fumbling in his pockets, he found a match. Coals to Newcastle, he thought, as its thin spurt of light flickered in the room.

There was no sign of the boy. He flung himself across to that open window and peered out. Far below was a sea of upturned faces. Above the moan of the fire, he heard them shouting.

"Has he jumped?"

Rhodes yelled the words, and listened. From an infinite distance came a chorus:

"No!"

With his heart pounding madly at his ribs, the gambler dragged himself back to the corridor. From the stairs came a red, flickering illumination; but the far end was in total blackness.

Shouting, he began to feel his way down toward that end. If Jimmy had gone into some other room, it might take a long time to find him. And there was no time to waste.

The smoke burned his lungs. He felt the building revolving slowly about him. Rhodes gritted his teeth. At this critical moment he must not lose consciousness!

"If only I can find—my—boy——" he heard himself say.

At the end of the hall he suddenly stumbled, and fell to his knees. There on the floor something was huddled. By the light of another match he saw Jimmy's tow hair and smoke-grimed face.

Gathering the boy into his arms, Stanley Rhodes stood up. Above him was a trapdoor. It must give upon the roof, he decided. But there was no ladder, and anyway he and his charge would be better off up there.

He started back toward the stairs. The red light from ahead danced and flickered. Past his open door he went, and on.

At the top of the flight, he halted, a sob of dismay on his lips. A solid bank of fire was before him; he knew that the stairs would probably collapse beneath him, even if he could force himself upon them. He could not escape the way he had come.

A long time later Rhodes was back in his room. He lurched across to the window, and stared down. There, far below, was the crowd. There were blankets on the bed, but Stanley Rhodes knew that any ladder he made of them would be too short.

"Two cowboys were staying in the next room," a voice whispered, deep inside Rhodes' brain. "Perhaps——"

Gently he deposited the unconscious Jimmy on the floor beneath the open window, where the air was fairly clear. He hurried into the hall, and down it to the next door. If it should be locked——

But it wasn't. He let himself in and struck a match. There beside the bed was a pile of gear; saddles, bridles, *lariats!*

His fingers closed around the ropes. His time was short. Somewhere in the doomed building below him came a great crash. The structure quivered, like a dying thing. At a stumbling run Rhodes made his way back to his own room.

Kneeling beside the open window, he knotted the ends of the two lariats together. Then he tied one end of the life line about the shoulders of the boy.

He lifted the little form and leaned far out the window. Grasping the rope in both hands, he swung Jimmy into space.

Below him, the crowd surged in toward the flaming hotel. Down, down went Jimmy, with Rhodes leaning back against the pull of the rope. A veil seemed to close between him and his boy. The knot where he had joined the lariats slipped through his fingers. Like an angry beast, the fire roared in the corridor behind him.

At last the pull on the rope slackened, and he knew that the boy was safe on the ground. There were still a few feet of hemp on the floor at his feet. As in a dream, he found himself tying the end about the rail of the big, cast-iron bed. With his heart pounding furiously, Stanley Rhodes let himself over the sill.

The sides of the building were scorching hot. Down, down he went. The rope burnt his hands. Below him, voices rose in a mighty shout that drowned the hungry roar of the fire. He dropped past the knot where the two lariats were spliced. And then, glancing down, he gritted his teeth.

A window was below him, and from it belched a great tongue of fire. Could

he lower himself through that searing breath? He doubted it; but he must try. His time was perilously short, Rhodes knew. He could feel the wall quivering and realized it was about to fall.

He slackened his hold on the rope and dropped; dropped like a plummet, straight through that flaming kiss. It scorched hs hands and face and neck; faintly he could smell burning cloth. He uttered a cry of agony.

Then he was below the window. The voices of men and the howl of the flames blurred in a confused roar.

He felt something happen to the rope above, and dimly realized that it had burned in two. He was spinning down through the smoke. A smashing, sickening blow was followed by an eternity of silence and blackest night.

"Pretty well shaken up, but he'll recover!"

Stanley Rhodes opened his eyes and blinked. He was in a sparely furnished but cheery room. Beside his bed stood a tall, stoop-shouldered man, who was at the moment removing a stethoscope from his ears. Perched on the edge of a chair was Jimmy.

The doctor nodded, smiled to his patient, and left the room. Rhodes raised one bandaged hand to his face, which was also swathed in white. Under the cooling dressings, his whole body throbbed and burned and ached. He had been badly burned.

He peered furtively at Jimmy. There was an awkward silence. At last the boy leaned forward.

"They got him—Jeffries, I mean," he said. "He confessed to setting fire to the hotel, so's I would be burned. He knew you an' me is buddies. The sheriff says he'll get about six lifetimes! But gee, pard, that was great, the way you saved me! Thanks!"

"All right, Jimmy," Stanley Rhodes murmured. "I'm always willing to do a favor for a buddy!"

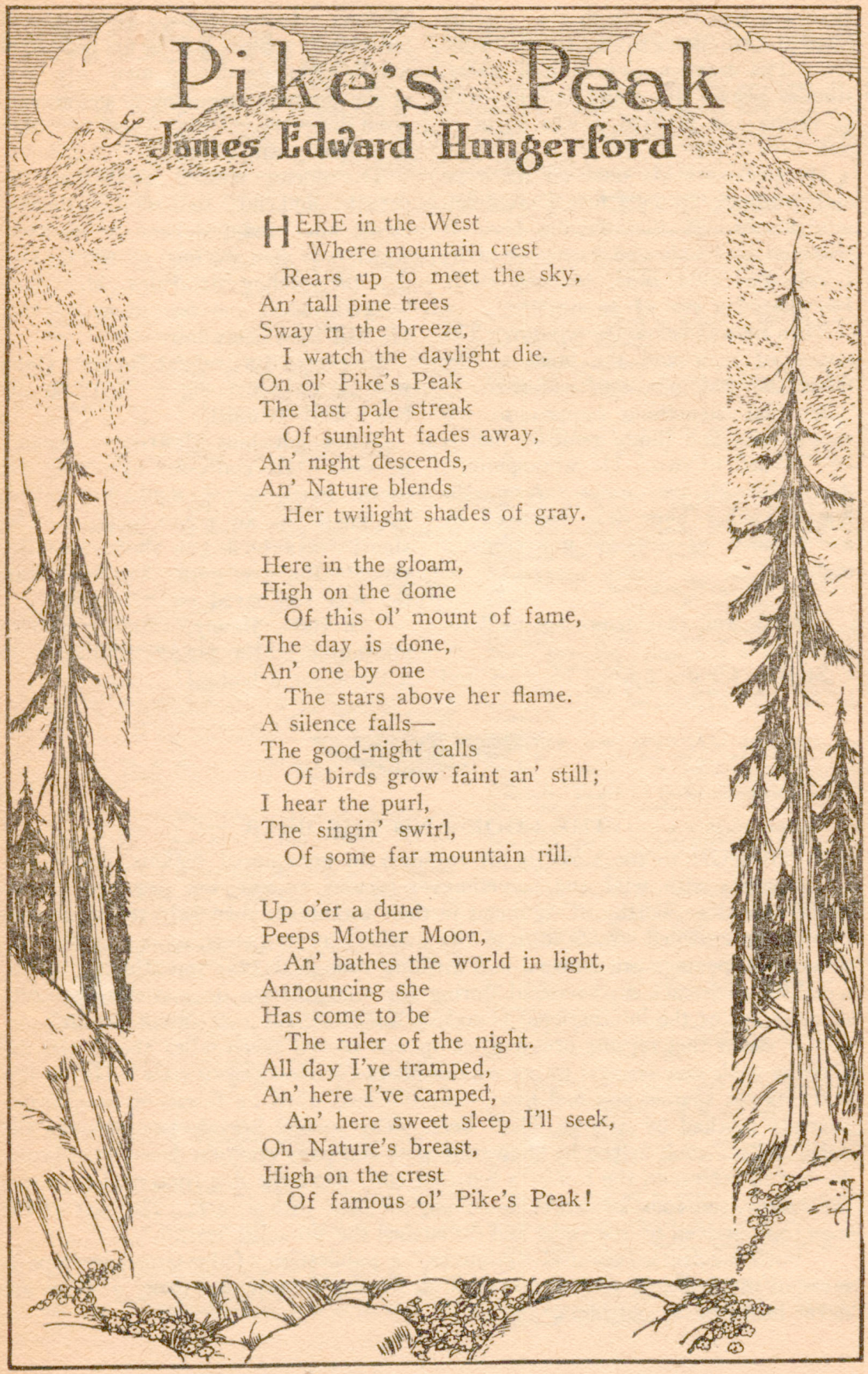
THE COOK AND THE BEAR

ALTHOUGH to the surveyor or engineer in unexplored regions, chance encounters with wild and sometimes ferocious animals are everyday occurrences, no more worthy of comment in their estimation than hairbreadth escapes in crossing crowded streets seem to city dwellers, nevertheless, some of these wilderness happenings are unusual and thrilling enough to bear repeating.

One such incident occurred during the triangulation by geodetic engineers of a section of the international boundary line along the forty-ninth parallel.

It seems that on one occasion, camp was moved seven miles ahead, and the Chinese cook was sent on to get supper ready for the hungry crew. He set out with his pet spaniel and had gone some distance when he found his way unexpectedly blocked by a large, black bear. The spaniel bravely rushed upon the bear, and the cook helped by showering pots and pans upon the bewildered bruin. Forced to retreat to the top of a ten-foot cliff, while the dog continued to worry the enemy, the cook succeeded in felling the bear with a rock. The rest of the men soon arrived on the scene and dispatched the wounded bear.

Such incidents, "Natural Resources," a publication of the Canadian Department of the Interior, assures us are all in the day's work, and many of them are never heard of by outsiders.



Pike's Peak

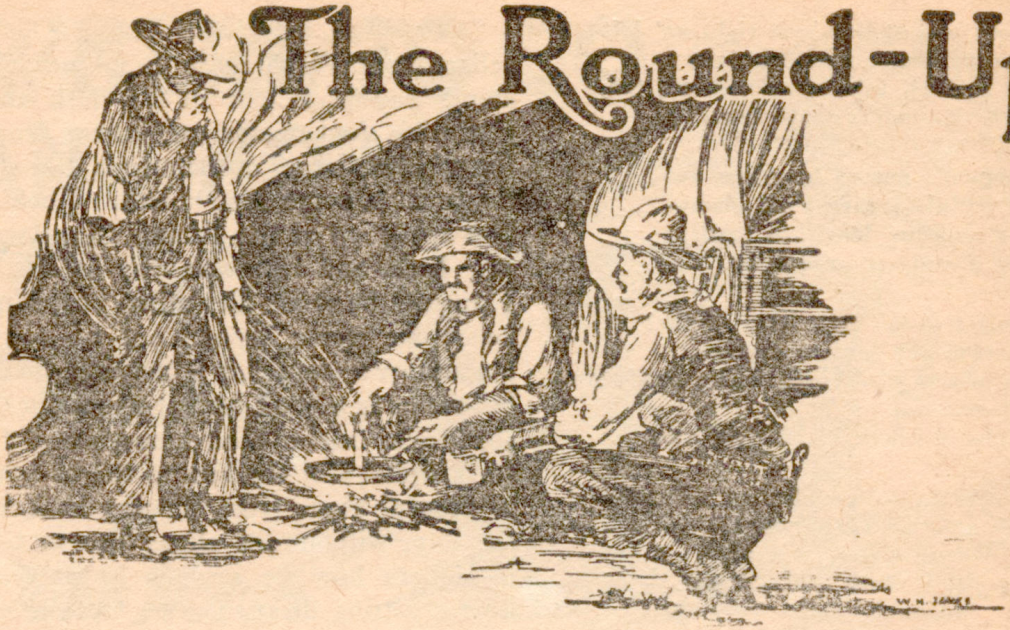
by James Edward Hungerford

HERE in the West
Where mountain crest
Rears up to meet the sky,
An' tall pine trees
Sway in the breeze,
I watch the daylight die.
On ol' Pike's Peak
The last pale streak
Of sunlight fades away,
An' night descends,
An' Nature blends
Her twilight shades of gray.

Here in the gloam,
High on the dome
Of this ol' mount of fame,
The day is done,
An' one by one
The stars above her flame.
A silence falls—
The good-night calls
Of birds grow faint an' still;
I hear the purl,
The singin' swirl,
Of some far mountain rill.

Up o'er a dune
Peeps Mother Moon,
An' bathes the world in light,
Announcing she
Has come to be
The ruler of the night.
All day I've tramped,
An' here I've camped,
An' here sweet sleep I'll seek,
On Nature's breast,
High on the crest
Of famous ol' Pike's Peak!

The Round-Up



BOYS and girls, men and women, there's a couple of you as has gone and got the feelin' as how they must bust into poetry or else *they'll* burst; so, not wantin' to have any human explosions around here, guess we'll let 'em bust so they won't burst.

Now, both of these here gents come from Texas. You decide which one gets the prize when they've said their respective little pieces. First come W. Robert Jenkins, 910 N. Fillmore Street, Amarillo, Texas. Let 'er go, W. Robert:

"I went to town, jest prowling round,
And a little old W. S. M. I found.
I tucked it away in my saddlebags,
And thought I'd show it to my pardner,
'Rags.'

But when my bronc was corralled and fed,
I found that hoss thief lying in bed,
And in his hand he held a book,
And read of 'Shorty' and old Joe Cook.

Then on that waddie, though he lay in bed,
I pulled my forty-five and said,
'I don't want to get smoky, but give me that book,
You low-down, sneaking, bow-legged crook.

'I rode forty miles for that book to-day,
And if I don't get it there'll be me to pay!'
And then old Rags he begs my pard,
And says I shouldn't take it so hard.

But then it's pretty hard, I guess,
To lose the thing that you love best,
And though old Rags is good as can be,
That little book means a lot to me."

Very good, son. You can bet we've got no kick comin' on that one.

Now for Jenkins' fellow Statesman, who is no other than L. N. Quinsey, Tahoka, Texas:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I always attend the Round-up, each and every week, and it sure is worth the money. But when I ran upon Miss Hilton's poem about Washington, I got sort of riled. Not that it wasn't a good one; it was that and then some. But, as I said, it stirred my blood. And, as a result, I 'wrote' a poem all my own about the Lone Star State. The same is as follows:

"In the southwestern part o' the U. S. A.
Is a terrible big hunk o' land.
It stretches twixt the Sandy Red
And the silvery Rio Grande.

Yuh craves a bit o' history, folks?
I'll give yuh a sketch o' the same,
'Twas in the war with Mexico
That Texas won her fame.

An' blood was spilled both right an' left
When cattlemen, square o' jaw,
Fought bandits, Injuns, an' rustlers, too,
An' the six-gun was the law.

An' once—it's not so long ago
That buffaloes pawed the plain—
Amid stampedin' longhorn herds,
Many a vaquero was slain.

Yuh quizes about the climate, folks?
It's downright hard to explain:
There's places o' drougth where sandstorms rage,
An' places where it's fog an' rain.

Yeah, there's climate, folks, an' climate—
There ain't no special one;
It's a shiver in a freezin' wind,
An' a sizzle 'neath a blazin' sun.

There's deserts an' plains an' hills an' trees,
Both good an' bad, gosh durn!
But if ever yuh wanders out o' the State
Yuh're always sure to return."

"Now that I have got it off my chest, I'll go on with my little say. I want to speak a word of praise to the authors of the various short stories. They certainly deserve credit for holding us readers spellbound. Shoot us some more! George Owen Baxter, Max Brand, and Johnston McCulley sure do push a wicked pen. Say, Boss, is Cherry Wilson a lady or a gent? It sure has got me puzzled, seven ways from Sunday. You can't tell the sex of these writer folks by their names—and meaning no disrespects.

"Yours to the last turn in the road."

We thank you for your poem, Quinsey; she's a nice one. Also, in the name of the authors you've been kind enough to say kind words about, our thanks and theirs. As to your question: Cherry is a lady, and some lady she is, too, believe us, bo!

Look out for this strong man. He's a blacksmith, Renzo Dare, Box 182, Junction City, Kansas:

"SAY THAR, BOSS AND FOLKS: That feller from Washington State needn't stand way back thar in the dark and giggle his fool noodle off, 'cause, from the way he shot off at the mouth, I kinda figure he is some shoe-horser. I heard him speak up at the Round-up, a long way back, and from the way he spoke I suppose he shoos flies off of horses or keeps the geese shooed out of some horseshoer's shop, for I honestly don't believe he is a good, honest-to-goodness, steel-back, leather-head horseshoer. If so, I would like for him to tell us how to prevent shoes from slipping back, in the city, without toe clips; also to tell us fellers how he intends to prevent horses getting drop soles on these brick pavements, if you whittle the toe down until a horse flinches every time he steps on a rock or pebble; also to show me one horse that wears his heels off by the small rubbing on a slick shoe. And, man a-livin', to weaken the wall at the toe with a view to start your said expansion, the foot would push out against the nail and your horse wouldn't go five miles without bein' lame. He talks like an apprentice.

"I am goin' to hold a conference with a couple of our young fellers which is startin' the business.

"'Hey, Hawk, you and Fritz come here. I want to show these people how well you are progressing. Now, Hawk, why has a horse four legs?'

"'Well, Musty Jim, one is to make you crack your knee, one is to step on your feet afore you git out of the way, and them two hind feet is to help boost you along, in case you can't walk after getting your feet messed up.'

"'That's the boy, Hawk, you'll make a shoer yet. Now, Fritz, why has a horse got a tail. You know?'

"'Yep, that infernal tail is to slap you across the eyes so you can't see fer a few minutes, and give him a chance to wallop you with them hind feet of his.'

"'That's fine. Now, Fritz, tell the class what is a shoe for?'

"'Heck, that's an easy one. A shoe is to burn your fingers on when you are in a hurry.'

"'Well, Fritz, you sure are improving fast on this horse-shoeing subject. Hawk, tell us fellers what a horse's foot is composed of.'

"'Gosh, I don't know unless it is a solid mass of hard stuff without feeling, 'cause I've seen you drivin' nails in 'em all the same as a carpenter does in a plank.'

"'Boy, you sure know a foot from Z to A. Now, Fritz, tell why we shoe horses.'

"'To collect in the dollars.'

"'Fritz, you make a hundred in your lessons to-day. Hawk, what is the proper method to shoe a horse?'

"'Well, if they git to yankin' you around too much take a pick-handle and shoo 'em out and tackle the next.'

"'One more question, Fritz, does the *os navicularis* lie between the *os pedis* and *as coronæ?* If so, why?'

"'Huh, I didn't know them things was anywhere near a horse. Must be some kind of disease or one of them bitin' kind of flies.'

"'I thought I'd unload a sticker on you. Hawk, you shoot.'

"'Gosh, I guess you've got me, unless it's something around the stables that you clean out every day.'

"'Well, boys, I guess you had better study up, and next week we might hold another session to see how your work is progressing.'

"'Look here, Musty Jim, if you intend to fire a lot of them jawbreakers at me, my feet'll sure start itchin', 'cause my shoes ain't big enough to carry what you say them words was.'

"'Never mind, now. You get busy and shoe that colt and don't break up the tools.'"

About snakes. Ace Harkes, Baldwin Park, California, will do the hissin':

"Boss and Folks: I have been coming to Round-up for a long time, and have never entered into any arguments; but when I listened to that hombre talk, a while back, about snake-poisoned auto tires, I had to laugh, being a desert auto mechanic myself. It is a good thing for that bird that he changed tires at once, or that poison might have worked through to the motor, and the pistons might have swelled and frozen in the cylinders; then what shape would he have been in?

"I can tell some snake stories myself, but what can an amateur do against a professional like that?

"Now it is a fact that we have some powerful liquor on the desert, but that man sure found some stronger than I ever have. I take a drink once in a while, but I never take a bath in it. Will say that neither I nor any one I know ever heard of such a thing as auto tires being punctured by snakes or cured by alcohol. Now, Boss, in speakin' up in Round-up, let's at least make our stories sound reasonable and not go to extremes.

"If that gent wants to argue the snake matter further for the present, I am in Baldwin Park, California, but in a short time I will be back in the middle of the Mojave Desert. But you'll hear from me again.

"Success to you and Western Story Magazine, first, last, and all the time."

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.

BRINGING up the subject of shooting irons reminds us that the Fourth of July isn't far off. In that old day of the Declaration of Independence the Western frontier had not yet come into its own. Not until 1830 did the pioneers begin to venture into that vast region that was later known as the Western frontier. Celebrations, however, usually go hand in hand, and the Fourth of July, the day of all days for the exhibiting of shooting irons, usually ushers in a frontier celebration of one kind or another.

Here's a hombre who's noted for his riding and shooting folks. We suspect that he's entered into many a Fourth of July celebration. Yes, he's ridden at the Frontier Days at Cheyenne.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: I was born in Wyoming and there's little that I don't know about said State. Have ridden at the Frontier Days at Cheyenne and used to be noted for my shooting and riding. If some of you boys would like to hear about my experiences with the old shooting irons, just come right ahead.

At present I'm in California, and any one who's interested in hearing about Bakersfield, the old Ridge Route, or about California in general, just let the letters fly. Here's hoping I have a stampede of 'em coming my way soon.

B. F. STOTT.

1309 East N Street, Wilmington, California.

Across the plains in 1856.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My folks were real old-timers. There weren't so many who were on the Western frontier ahead of my mother, who crossed the plains with the "gee-haw" ox teams in 1856, going from Missouri to California. If she would, she could tell a lot about those early days of the pioneer.

The pioneers were the trail blazers who paved the way for the riders of the purple sage later on. Yes, I was one of those range riders. I'll be glad to hear from some of the old-timers who can remember the Indian days, and from some of the range riders of Wyoming and Montana. I would also appreciate some news from Clark County, Iowa, as the last of our relatives were located in Iowa.

CHARLES PETERS.

1185 Alameda, Apartment 2, San Jose, California.

The Panhandle of Idaho.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are three lonesome cowboys out here in Sandpoint—the Panhandle of Idaho. No, we don't all hail from this here Panhandle a-tall. There's Tex. He's from the Lone Star State. There's

Two-gun—we'll let him tell you-all about himself by himself. And then there's me. They call me Missfire. If you folks want to hear about a cow country, about the Panhandle of Idaho, or about us, just send along a little notice to that effect and we'll sure oblige you, pronto.

HOWARD DAVIS,
FRANK E. MCLEOD,
FEITZ HELPHREY.

General Delivery, Sandpoint, Idaho.

The wilds of Cottonwood.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Cottonwood, California, is very much like the wilds of Africa—runs mostly to sheep and hogs, and some wild animals, such as coon, wild cats, and mink. Any Gangsters wanting to know about Idaho, the State in which I was born, or about Oregon or California, just let 'em ask me. Cottonwood is going to hold me for some time to come. J. B. MACKEY.

Box 136, Cottonwood, California.

Around Ketchikan, Alaska.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'd like to get in touch with some miners—hard-rock men—around Ketchikan, Alaska, or any other good mining town in the Northland. A change of scene and employment would bring me a bit of profit, I hope, and I've made up my mind to go to Alaska some time this year. Going to Ketchikan doesn't mean getting into the heart of Alaska, but it will be a beginning. I can travel north by stages, after I once get a start in that direction.

Now, you hard-rock men, don't disappoint me. And let's have a letter from every inhabitant of Ketchikan who's a he-man.

JOE J. RADEY.

Berne, Washington.

Come on there, sheep-herders. Where are your big outfits?

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would give a good deal to find out where in the West the big sheep ranches are located We hear about this and that range being a great cattle and sheep country but just how do we get in touch with these sheep outfits, folks? I'd like to get work one one of these outfits and would like to know something of what to expect, how much to expect in the way of remuneration, and how to get in touch with them in the first place. Come on there, sheep-herders. It isn't fair to hold out on us in this fashion. We're interested. BILLIE, THE COOK,

Care of The Tree.

Let the Coloradoans speak up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Colorado is the chosen stamping ground for me this summer, and I want to know what part of the State I should hit first. Should I aim for the open spaces and see the country life, or should I strike out for the towns? Let's hear what you have to say about it, Coloradoans. I'd like to follow your advice. I'm twenty-three, and hoping to start roaming pretty soon.

CYRIL HENSON.

810 Seventh Avenue, West, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Be sure that you wear your Hollow Tree badge on the day of the big celebrations—the Fourth of July. This badge signifies that you will be kind and friendly to all you meet.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

As far Northwest as Banff.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've been in about ten States, including Minnesota and North Dakota, and I've been as far West and North as Banff, Alberta, Canada. This summer I'm hoping to cover about eighteen more of the States and am planning to hitch hike to California. I would like to hear from the hombres all over the West, but especially from Utah, Arizona, and California. No, I'm not along in years—only seventeen.

ALLAN HARRISON.

716 De l'Epee Avenue, Apartment 4, Outremont, Montreal, Canada.

Nebraskan is interested in the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I hope you will be kind enough to inform the Gang, and any one else interested, that I'd like to hear from the big open spaces of the Southwest—the world, for that matter! I'm especially interested in legends, traditions, and folklore of the Indians. Don't disappoint me, folks.

E. LARSON.

Box 273, Stromsburg, Nebraska.

This gangster knows something of bronc busting in Montana and Wyoming.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'd like to make a few friends among the Gangsters who are interested in fur farming. At the present time I'm tied up here in a logging camp. Incidentally, folks, I know something about busting broncs in Montana and Wyoming. So come along with your letters. I'll not disappoint you as a Pen Pal.

GEORGE M. HOGUE.

U. S. V. Hospital 59, Tacoma, Washington.

From the North Woods.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've followed the trail for several years, and always alone. Now I've about made up my mind to settle down for a spell on my one hundred and sixty acres of clay soil! It's in Timmins, Ontario, this homestead of mine, and I'm figuring that if I can find a suitable pard, I'll go in for fur or poultry farming. If we go fifty-fifty on the outfit, my pard will own half of the farm.

Every one interested is asked to write, and Kentuckians will be welcomed with a big hurrah. Let's hear from yuh, boys.

FLAPJACK JOHN.

Care of the Tree.

The Missouri Ozark region.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have found that all of the beautiful scenery of our America does not lie in the region of the Rockies. I have traveled considerably throughout the United States, and especially the Western part, and a few years ago my travels brought me into the Ozark region of south central Missouri. The Ozarks are fast becoming recognized as a wonderful spot where one can enjoy health, pleasure, and make a beautiful living.

The town of Crocker lies in what is known as the land of the Big Springs. Numerous underground streams emerge and join such rivers as the Gasconade, Big Piney, and the Roubidoux. These watercourses are lined with bluffs and cliffs, many of them concealing numerous caves. The streams afford wonderful fishing. Gigging of large fish in the open season is followed by large numbers of excitement seekers. These Ozark streams are wonderfully clear at times and large fish can be seen in several feet of water.

Stock raising and general farming is extensively carried on in this part of the Ozarks. My little ranch of one hundred and sixty acres is located in the heart of a great, free, range country. I wonder if there is some reliable young family man who would be interested in a ranch in this part of the country. I would be interested in taking a partner in with me, and would in time give him charge of the ranch. I'll also be glad to hear from hombres who are thinking of taking up a farm of their own in this country where there is plenty of free range, good hunting, fine trapping, and the best of fishing.

Let an Ozarker hear from some of you folks. C. D.

Box 302, Crocker, Missouri.

Woodsman.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a woodsman—a logger by trade, and also a hunter, trapper, and packer. However, I have given up the hunting and trapping, as I would rather tame wild animals than kill them.

I'm twenty-two, Irish-American, and am a lover of the timber and everything in it. I can give any one information about any State from the Mississippi to the Western coast, and from Washington to Mexico. I'd particularly like to hear from Canada, and from some French folks, if they care to write.

LEWIS MARTIN.

943 Twenty-first Street, Santa Monica, California.

Young prospector.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a young man who's prospected all over the West, Mexico, and Central America. In my travels I've found many rare specimens of minerals and some jewel stones. I have a great number of clear, hexagon-shaped crystals. They are very beautiful, and it occurred to me that perhaps many of the Gangsters would like to have them. As long as the supply lasts, I would be glad to send them to any one who will inclose postage. If any of the Gangsters are interested in scientific research, I'll be interested in exchanging experiences. T. F. SMITH.

1289 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, California.

"I am a trapper, a hunter, and very much interested in the great outdoors," says Charles Duncan, R. F. D. 15, Lagrangeville, New York. This Gangster has traveled quite a bit.

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.

LAST week we intimated that we'd be glad to send to all sturdy hombres with a yearning to pioneer some facts about the public land available on the Western irrigation projects. So many requests for this information have come in, that we've decided to dedicate the department this week to this highly engrossing subject. O. P. M., of Memphis, Tennessee, is asking a question the answer to which I think many of you will find mighty interesting.

"I'd like some advice, Mr. North, on the subject of the opportunities available for the settler on Uncle Sam's irrigation projects. Where are the most desirable public-land farm units to be had at the present time? I think I have all the qualifications necessary for an entryman as to industry, experience, character, and capital. I expect and am willing to work hard. Please tell me which one of the projects you'd suggest as offering a man the best chance for success? How does one go about securing a farm? Is it necessary to inspect the land in person? What about climate, soil, and crops?"

That first question is a sort of a hard one to answer, as Uncle Sam has twenty-five irrigation projects located in fifteen of the Western States. However, word comes from the Bureau of Reclamation that there are a number of very desirable public farm units available on the Willwood Division of the Shoshone Project, Wyoming, applications for which are now being received. In case you folks don't know it, I'll just say that the Willwood is a new part of the Shoshone Project, which is located in northwestern Wyoming near the Yellowstone National Park. It lies in the north central part of the Big Horn Basin.

Irrigation works have been completed recently to irrigate about twelve thousand acres of the Willwood Division. The water for this division is diverted

by the Willwood diversion dam in the Shoshone River. In addition to having rights to a large natural flow in the river, the supply is supplemented by the Shoshone Reservoir, which has a storage capacity of four hundred and fifty-six thousand six hundred acre feet, so O. P. M. can see that there is no lack of water. Canals, laterals, ditches, and structures are constructed so that water can be delivered to each farm.

In contrast to conditions on some of the older projects where much of the land is privately owned, all the Willwood Division is public land, with the exception of a few tracts. The land is located three and a half miles south of Powell, and extends for a distance of about twelve miles along the south side of the Shoshone River. Powell, the principal settlement on the Shoshone project, is a modern town of fifteen hundred population, and here the newcomer will find all the facilities of a thriving community, such as stores, banks, schools, and churches.

If O. P. M. wishes to secure a farm, he should procure an application blank from the Bureau of Reclamation, fill it out carefully, and send it to the superintendent of the project, where it will be considered by an examining board. It is necessary for the applicant to appear before the board in person and to inspect the land before his application can be approved. One trip to the project will be sufficient to look things over, and to be looked over in turn. As there are special rates given to homeseekers, prospective settlers should make inquiry of the railroads before starting for the project.

You hombres are probably wondering just how one gets to this part of Wyoming. The two project towns of Frannie and Deaver are on the main line of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, between Denver, Colorado, and Billings, Montana. A branch line extends from Frannie through the center of the project and through the towns of Garland, Powell, and Ralston, to Cody, Wyoming, the eastern gateway to the Yellowstone Park. Those desiring to make the trip by train should get off at Powell, Wyoming, where the Bureau of Reclamation maintains its local headquarters.

And now for the important points of climate, soil, and crop conditions. The average elevation of the Willwood Division is four thousand three hundred and twenty-five feet above sea level. The average minimum temperature in winter is twenty-three degrees, and the average maximum in summer is around ninety-seven degrees. Frosts occur as late as the middle of May and again in the middle of September. Not much snow falls and that does not remain on the ground long enough for the use of sleds or sleighs. According to government bulletins, the soils vary from sandy to clay loam, and both types of soil will be found on many farms. All shallow soils over shale or gravel have been eliminated from the irrigable areas.

Sweet clover and alfalfa will be the principal crops on the Willwood Division until after these crops are broken up, when good yields of potatoes, grain, and other crops can be obtained. Both alfalfa and sweet clover are planted with a nurse crop of grain the first year. Stock ranges surround the Willwood Division, and systematic feeding of ewes, lambs, and baby beef has proven successful on the Shoshone Project. Live stock, outside of local requirements, is shipped to Denver, Kansas City, and Omaha. The settler will do well to keep a small drove of sheep or dairy cows to consume the sweet clover and alfalfa. There is a well-equipped creamery at Powell.

Sheep may be grazed on irrigated sweet-clover pastures, divided into convenient fields. This plan has the advantage of saving labor at the busy sea-

son of the year, increasing soil fertility, and fitting in with a good crop rotation. Small droves of sheep may be banded together and placed in the care of a herder on the range adjacent to the project, and removed to farms in the fall for winter feeding. As not enough poultry and eggs are produced in Wyoming to supply the needs of the Equality State, this is an open field. During the tourist season at the Yellowstone Park there is a good market for chickens, lambs, and berries. The climate of this section of Wyoming is especially well adapted to the raising of turkeys. Shoshone Project honey is noted for its flavor, and several carloads are shipped out each year.

It is a little too early in the game for the settlers on the Willwood Division to build schools and churches, but as Powell is so near, the natural thing is to take advantage of the modern consolidated schools and churches there. Nearly all the lands of the Willwood Division are in the same school district as Powell, where there is a complete four-year high school. In this town are also found many fraternal and social organizations.

Nor will the settler on this project lack for recreation. Farmers at Willwood are within half a day's drive by automobile from the Cody entrance to the Yellowstone National Park. Good roads penetrate the mountains in many directions and afford motoring as well as access to excellent fishing and camping grounds.

There is not space to talk more about this project now, but I shall be glad to send additional information to any one who is interested. Next week I shall answer the questions of T. B. C., of St. Paul, Minnesota, about the land available on the Pavilion Division of the Riverton Project, which is also in Wyoming.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you 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 changes 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.

SCROGGINS, WILLIAM.—Ruddy complexion, bald, blue eyes, and about six feet tall. Has a large scar on forehead and on back of head. Information appreciated by his daughter, Dorothy Scroggins, Island, Kentucky.

ANDERSON, HALDANE.—Last heard from at Sandy Lake, Manitoba, Canada. Information appreciated by Wilfred Zacharias, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Canada.

HUFF, EMMA L., nee **CARROLL.**—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in July, 1925. Do you remember the nineteenth of April and May? Have letters and news of importance for you. Information appreciated by Corporal George C. Nutsford, Headquarters Fifty-fifth C. A., Fort Ruger, Territory of Hawaii.

SMITH, HARRY L. or **WHITEY.**—Of Detroit. Wife's name is Mildred. Please write at once to S. V., care of this magazine.

FIEDLER, FRED.—Of Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by S. V., care of this magazine.

FITZGERALD, JEANETTE.—Please send your address to A., Route 4, Box 174, Coral Gables, Florida.

COURTS, JAMES H.—About thirty-eight years old. Was at one time a fireman on the S. S. "Yeinita," with headquarters in New York City. A World War veteran. Please come home for my sake, your mother, Mrs. L. S. Courts, R. F. D. 1, West Hamlin, West Virginia.

BROWN, GEORGE A.—Last heard from at East Peace River, Canada. Please write to Polly, Hodge, Louisiana.

HARRIS, CARL ALBERT.—Twenty-four years old. Auburn hair and blue eyes. Believed to have been in Denver, Colorado, or Fort Worth, Texas, in 1927. Information appreciated by Marion Brewis, care Olive M. Lockwood, 711 Fourth Avenue, Oakland, California.

PETER, D. A. M.—Of Toronto, Canada. Important news for you. Please write to Anna Snyder, General Delivery, Buffalo, New York.

WILLIAMS, JACK.—Traveled with the J. Douglass Morgan Show when it played in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, in March, 1928. Please write to Buck Pritchett, Box 502, Broken Bow, Oklahoma.

BARTON, J. F.—Sixty years old. Scar on neck and tattooed on forearm. Usually works in a mill. Left home in 1921. Last heard from in Gastonia, North Carolina. Information appreciated by B. E. M., in care of this magazine.

KEIFF, ED.—Sad news about your father. Your mother needs you. Please come home or write to your mother at 835 Lamar Street, San Antonio, Texas.

HOWARD, WILBUR.—About seventy-seven years old. Slightly lame. Last heard from twenty-three years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Rhober Nichols, 301 South Keystone, Stafford, Kansas.

COPSY, MARY.—Twenty-three years old. Formerly of Keighley, Yorkshire, England. Believed to have married a farmer in Canada. Please write to your schoolmate, O., care of this magazine.

GARRETT, CLINTON RICE.—Of Cabin, Kentucky. Visited my mother at Manchester, Ohio, forty-two years ago. Had three sons. Information appreciated by Elizabeth Sturgis, 425 Forest Avenue, Maysville, Kentucky.

GARRETT, WILLIAM and **MARY JANE DAVENPORT.**—My grandparents, who left Knoxville or Nashville, Tennessee, on horseback and settled in Cabin, Kentucky. Information concerning them appreciated by Elizabeth Sturgis, 425 Forest Avenue, Maysville, Kentucky.

STRUCK, EDWARD.—About thirty-five years old. His aunt, Jennie Taylor, took him to her home when he was six years old. Information appreciated by his brother, Willie, and his mother, Mrs. Mary Struck, care of Mrs. Payne, 107 East One Hundred and Twentieth Street, New York City.

WALTERS, FLORENCE.—Of Camp Benning, Georgia. Auburn hair. Information appreciated by James O'Rouke, 501 South Royal Street, Jackson, Tennessee.

JANSEN, CARL.—A native of Germany. Left East Rutherford, New Jersey, in summer of 1906 for Lower Lake, California. Please write to H. T. Haase, 718 Roanoke Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee.

BESSINGER, BUDDY.—Had a steel shop in Cleveland, Ohio. Last heard from en route for New York. Information appreciated by Evelyne, care of this magazine.

HIOETT, ROY H.—Thirty years old. A blond. Last heard from in 1920, when he was working in the Potash Mills at Antioch, Nebraska. Important information awaits him. Please write at once to Mrs. Ethel Ulm, Wolcott, Indiana.

HARVEY, JIM.—Formerly a superintendent of the Great American Warehouse. I need a man of your brains and courage whom I can trust. I own a goat ranch in Colorado. Am staying with Susie's girl until I hear from you. The good old days will come again. Please write to M. R. McCarthy, care of this magazine.

MATTHEWS, MARVIN.—Left Denison, Texas, in November, 1924. Last heard from in California. Information appreciated by Milly, care of this magazine.

PHILLIPS, MRS. J. J., nee **CORA HETHCOAT.**—Of California. Formerly of 1710 Rosewood Avenue, Austin, Texas. Information appreciated by B. Shipman, 629 Third Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

SMITH, CLYDE B.—Last heard from in Wasco, California. I still care. Please write to Marie Silva, Box 204, Milwaukie, Oregon.

DREHER, MRS. LOUISE, nee **SCHWENK.**—My aunt. Her husband's name was Ludwig and children's names were Gotthilf and Louise. Left Germany twenty-six years ago and moved to Battle Creek, Michigan. They were Seven Day Adventists. Information appreciated by her niece, E. Glombitza, care of this magazine.

McLEOD, HOMER.—Son of Daniel and Mattie McLeod. Last heard from twenty-three years ago near Cuthbert, Georgia. Information appreciated by J. R. McLeod, Box 384, Wauchula, Florida.

BROOKS, LEORA and **ROLLIE.**—Twelve and nine years old, respectively. Brunettes. They were adopted from an orphanage in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1921. Information appreciated by their father, F. H. Brooks, Box 667, Seminole, Oklahoma.

SAMPSEL, ALVIN.—Seventy years old. Last heard from in Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1912. Information appreciated by his brother, J. A. Sampsel, 309 Andre Avenue, Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

BARTLETT, R. S.—Last heard from two years ago. Family worried. Information appreciated by his father, L. J. Bartlett, Ischua, New York.

HARLEY, LOUISE.—Please write to the friend you met at "Harvey House," Barston, California, in May, 1924. Have you visited Comanche since 1924? Am still the same. Corporal B. T. of Hawaii, care of this magazine.

SAMPSON, ALICE.—A nurse maid. Left Montreal, in 1923, for New York. The one who left Montreal for South America at the same time would like to hear from you. Please write to Dave, care of this magazine.

DONLEY, ROBERT MELVIE.—Was city fireman in the Mobile, Alabama, fire department, in 1919. Served with Company F, 123rd Infantry, at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, in 1922. In 1924 he was in the Johnson City, Tennessee, National Sanitarium. Information appreciated by H. P., Box 255, Kreole, Mississippi.

CARTER, JAMES E.—J. E., Jr., is a darling and needs his daddy. We are desperate. Please send for us. Important letters for you held at this office. Address, A. D. C., care of this magazine.

LEAHY, JAMES.—Left Rochester, New York, twenty years ago. Brother Ed passed away twelve years ago. Your sisters, Bessie, Maggie and Mary, who are living in Detroit, are anxious to hear from you. Please write to your sister Bessie, now Mrs. Dwight Nash, 1093 Morrell Street, Detroit, Michigan.

WEINER, MARIE.—Formerly of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Last heard from at the Hotel Commodore, in September, 1926. Information appreciated by Peter Condon, 352 East Sixty-sixth Street, New York City.

.IBLET, EDWARD C.—Twenty-one years old. Of Canton, Ohio. Met him in Peru, Indiana, in March, 1922, and went with him to Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by his buddy, H. M. Layton, R. F. D. 3, Newton, New Jersey.

SCHROEDER, JOE.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in December, 1927. Have important news for him. Please write to your sister, Mrs. J. W. Austin, Route 5, Gage, Oklahoma.

HELEN.—Am at the Shiffington Hotel. Freda, Delbart and Sonny are anxious to hear from you, also your mother, Mrs. Mary Marcus, Route 1, Box 425 A, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

NINKIE, OTTO H. or **OLIVER.**—Last heard from in Gibsonburg, Ohio. Please write to Mildred Samworth, 1312 Utah Street, East Toledo, Ohio.

PIERCE, LAURA.—Information appreciated by your old friend of Motor Route A, Charley Naron, care of this magazine.

GRAYSON or **LAUGHAM, MRS. OVA.**—Formerly of Walters, Oklahoma. Please write to your friend, Mrs. Minnie L. Folwell, Clayton, New Mexico.

SEARS, BOYD.—Last heard from in Plainview, Texas. Believed to be in Mexico. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Mollie D. Sears, Clayton, New Mexico.

STEWART, LELIA.—A waitress. Was in San Jose, California, in August, 1926. Had charge of an apartment house. Information appreciated by A. B. H., Box 395, Ashland, Oregon.

MILLER, Corporal JOHN J.—Lived at 621 Palisade Avesade Avenue, Grantwood, New Jersey, in 1924. Information appreciated by S. M. Van Why, 415½ State Street, Binghamton, New York.

PLUMAS or **PLOUMAS, NICH.**—A Greek, about forty years old. Lived in the States of Idaho and Washington twelve years ago. Last heard from he was employed as a waiter in Chicago, Illinois. Married. Important news for him. Information appreciated by Edna Bostwick, care of this magazine.

NORMA S.—Will always wait for you. I love you only. Please come back or write to Lawrence, 220 South Dakota Street, Butte, Montana.

RYAN, JAMES.—Sixty-seven years old. Born in Cloneybrine, Portroe, Nenagh, County Tipperary, Ireland. Left for New York, in 1897. Worked for the Grand Trunk Railway, Chicago, and in slate quarries in Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Maria Ryan Maher, Tomlough, Killaloe, County Clare, Ireland.

WINEMAN, MRS. JOHN, and **JOHN MAHER.**—Of Statington, Pennsylvania. Please write to Mrs. John Maher, Tomlough, Killaloe, County Clare, Ireland.

HAYES, MARY A.—Of Poultney, Vermont. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. John Maher, Tomlough, Killaloe, County Clare, Ireland.

BOLYARD, F. A.—Last heard from in Elk Creek, California, in December, 1926, where he was connected with a mine. Served in the United States army at Fort Mills, Philippine Islands. Married Mary Colton, at Corning, California, in June, 1922. Parents lived in West Virginia and had one brother in Marion, Ohio, and another, in Kansas. Information concerning him or his family appreciated by Mary Reep, 1824 Brevier Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

ROGERS, MAMIE, or **JUANITA EVANS.**—Do you remember our trip to M. a year ago last June? I long to see you again. Am in Michigan and alone. If you remember me please write to Jack M,, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of my buddies of Company 19, who trained at the United States Naval Training School at Newport, Rhode Island, from April until July, 1926. J. J. Dougherty, 8 Spring Street, New Castle, Pennsylvania.

FRYE, JOHN H.—Emma needs you. Please come home at once or write to D., care of this magazine.

ARNOLD, M. L.—About fifty years old. Last heard from in Coburn, West Virginia, in 1920. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Dick Crawford, R. F. D. 2, Elmo, Missouri.

SHERRON, G. E.—Last heard from in Dora, Alabama, in April, 1927. Information appreciated by Charles Webb, Ola, Arkansas.

THOMASON, OSCAR.—You were wrong about G. E. Come home at once. Your work is being held for you. Lora, care of this magazine.

JONES, ARTHUR J.—Twenty-four years old. Last heard from at Port Jervis, New York, in 1924. Your father is ill. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. L. E. Lundman, Route 2-431, Santa Rosa, California.

ROSE, MRS. INEZ E., nee **SALLS.**—Am worried about you. Please come back or write to your husband, Elmore E. Rose, Box Drawer F, Palmer, Massachusetts.

REED, BURT D.—Thirty-five years old. Last heard from eighteen years ago. Please come home. I long for you. Your mother, Mrs. Anna Reed Spowage, 912 Fifth Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

MILLER, H. D.—Last heard from in Chriesman, Texas. Your son, Alvert, would like to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. C. J. Kedziara, Bowiegs, Oklahoma.

HARRISON, LOUIS EDWARD.—Last heard from when he was near Julesburg, Colorado, about six years ago. Information appreciated by his daughter, Ira Harrison, Box 243, Glasgow, Montana.

KURIGER, KARL.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Your three sisters miss you and want you to come home or write to Rosie, Mrs. James B. Flynn, care Station 12, 1134 Thirty-third Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

LONDON, J. V.—Eighteen years old. Last heard from in Smackover, Arkansas. Information appreciated by your friend, Agnes Rogers, Route 1, Twitty, Texas.

SHERLOCK, McNALLIE, or **GILE, OLLIE.**—Twenty-two years old. Born in Kentucky. Last heard from in Illinois. Has a son six years old, named Virgil. Information appreciated by David C. Gile, care of Western and Southern Life Insurance Company, 152 South Burdick Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

WILSON, JACK and **ANNE,** and sons, **JACK** and **LOUIS.**—Last heard from in Boise, Idaho. Mother is in Edgerton, Wyoming. We all love you and want to see you. Your sister, Mrs. Frances Durst, Winner, South Dakota.

THOMASON, OSCAR.—I am sorry for all things. I love you. Come home. Your work awaits you. Your wife, Mrs. O. T., care of this magazine.

HAMLIN, CHARLES PETER.—Forty-four years old. A prospector. Well educated. Last heard from in British Columbia, in 1911. Believed to have gone to Alaska. Information appreciated by his sister, Ada E. Hamlin, 1235 Myrtle Street, Oakland, California.

McNEAL or **TOOLE, EDNA LUTIE.**—Have news for you. Please write to your old friend, formerly of Company K, Eighth Infantry, Camp McClellon, Anniston, Alabama, Raymond Chambers, Battery F, First Field Artillery, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

HOOKS, EDWINA.—Eighteen years old. Last heard from in Durham, North Carolina, in 1917. Black hair and blue eyes. Information appreciated by an old neighbor, Private Melville Murray, Battery C, Thirteenth Field Artillery, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii.

LeMAY, FLOYD H., PHILLIP FRISKE, GEORGE CECIL, JOSEPH DOUCET, EUGENE De FOUCHE and **ARTHUR STAPLETON.**—Were at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, from 1916 to 1918. Please write to A. Buddy, 1222 Fifteenth Street, Hermosa Beach, California.

LOWRY, ARLUS H.—Last heard from in La Grande, Oregon. Would like to hear from you again. Your brother, H. P. L., care of this magazine.

MORGAN, W. R.—Last heard from in Alabama, five years ago. Information appreciated by Dorothy S., care of this magazine.

MILLER, CHARLES J.—Was twenty-four years old on October 4, 1927. Last heard from in August, 1927. Your curly-headed blond wife is worried about you. Information dead or alive appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Charles J. Miller, care of this magazine.

EVANS, BURNICE.—Last heard from in Oklahoma City and Pitcher, Oklahoma, in 1925. A miner. Forgive me. I still love you. Have changed my name since 1925. Please write to your first wife, Mamie Evans Carson, Route 1, Box 34, Porter, Oklahoma.

WENDELL.—Please write to your sister, Mrs. Justine Levy, 610 Webster Street, San Francisco, California.

O'CONNOR, ROBERT.—About eighteen years old. Last heard from in Grand Island, Nebraska, in 1923. Information appreciated by his friend, Ed. Pope, care of this magazine.

STEWART, LEE W.—Born in Nashville, Tennessee. A harness maker. Last heard from in Columbus, Ohio, in September, 1922. Information concerning him or his relatives appreciated by his wife and son, Billy. Address Mrs. Lee W. Stewart, 412½ West Second Street, Davenport, Iowa.

HILLIARD, C. O. G.—Of Columbus, Ohio. Please write to Mrs. Lavina Stewart, 412½ West Second Street, Davenport, Iowa.

CHRISTIAN, WILLIAM.—Colored. Left Bramwell, West Virginia, about twenty-seven years ago. Last heard from in Ardmore, Oklahoma. Mother and brother have passed away. Am alone and need you. Please write to your daughter, Ira Mae Christian, 635 East Warren Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

BUNN, MYRTLE HELEN.—Answered your ad, but letter returned. Yearning for you. Please send correct address to mother, care of this magazine.

L. I. E.—Who advertised for G. L. E.—We are holding letters for you at this office. Please send for them.

DAVIS, LAVERNE BROWN.—Last heard from in 1911. Information appreciated by his uncle, Charles A. Blagg, 247 West Twelfth Avenue, Denver, Colorado.

MARR, MRS. RICHARD, nee **IRENE FLEMMING.**—Of Port Elgin, N. B. Last heard from in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1912. Had two children. Information appreciated by her son, E. E. Marr, care of this magazine.

JOHN.—Everything is settled. We all understand and want you to come back. Please write at once to Bill, care of this magazine.

RUBY.—Have had no word from you since I left. Sent money three times. Please write to Daddy, care of this magazine.

THOMAS, LEONARD J.—Born in La Fayette, Rhode Island. Last heard from in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Believed to be in Camden, New Jersey. Aunt Abby mourns for you. Information appreciated by his aged mother, aunt and sisters. Address, Mrs. B. E. Brinkman, R. F. D. 2, Box 71, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

RIPPLE, CHARLES H.—About seventy-five years old. Formerly from Buffalo, New York. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado, in 1902. Information appreciated by H. G. Miles, 396 Valley Street, San Bernardino, California.

BIRNEY, DOCTOR HUGH.—At one time lived in Rogers, Arkansas. Last heard from in New York City about twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by Ralph Birney, R. F. D. 2, Manilla, Iowa.

SKELTON, F. T.—Last heard from in Willington, South Carolina, in February, 1936. Sad news for you. Please write to your brother, J. M. Skelton, 806 Chanley Street, Independence, Kansas.

CANTRELL, WALTER JAY.—Left Florida, in 1926, for Muskogee, Oklahoma. Believed to be in California. Information appreciated by F. B., care of this magazine.

BECKER, CONRAD K.—Forty-two years old. Wears glasses and is lame. Last heard from two years ago. Please write to your wife and son, John H. Becker, 213 Windom Street, Peoria, Illinois.

WHITE, CLIFF.—Born in Georgia. Dark hair, hazel eyes and quite deaf. Last heard from in Orlando, Florida, in 1922. Information appreciated by his sister, Mary, care of this magazine.

KOEPKE, FREDERICK GEORGE.—Born in Arkansas about thirty years ago. His father's name was Charles H. Koepke. Information appreciated by Carrie V. Graf, Borger, Texas.

SMITH, W. R.—Of Baltimore, Maryland. If you care to know what became of Grace Fultz write to M. M. B., care of this magazine.

McSEVERN, MR. and **MRS.**—Your friends of Riverside Park in Phoenix, Arizona, would like to hear from you. Please write to M. B., care of this magazine.

KIMBELL, L. W.—Please write to me, as I want you and need you. Am at mother's. Your wife, Marion, 364 Grande Avenue, South, Portland, Oregon.

BOMAR, CHARLES D., or **DANNY MATTHEWS.**—Left home March 7, 1928. Twenty-four years old. Right eyelid droops. Please come home, we need you. Your wife, Thelma, 5422 South Twenty-third Street, Omaha, Nebraska

BETHURAM, LILLIAN.—Believed to be in Michigan or Ohio. Please let your mother know where you are, as she has important information concerning your son, Maxine. Mrs. Sarah E. Fry, R. F. D. 1, Box 35, Middlesboro, Kentucky

FREEMAN, MRS. CHESTER, nee **ELLA WATSON.**—Information concerning her or any of her relatives appreciated by her son, Clarence Freeman, Route 2, Trent, Texas.

HAWORTH, MRS. FLORENCE, nee **EULEIGH** or **EULIE.**—About forty-five years old. Last heard from in Canada, in 1916. Information appreciated by her daughter, Mrs. Helen Thornton, 25 West Cedar Street, Eureka, California.

MARIE.—I will never forget you or the songs we used to sing. We bury our loved ones and time heals the wounded spirit, but to live these seventeen years as I have lived is a living wound that times does not heal. You will never know how I have needed you. Please write to Jim, care of this magazine.

SHERMAN, FRED.—Twenty-four years old, blue eyes and black hair. Mother and I are well. Please come home or write to your brother, Henry Sherman, 804 Bryant Avenue, North, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

LLOYD, MARTIN J.—Thirty-two years old. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Prior to this he was in Phoenix, Arizona. Family anxious to hear from him. Information appreciated by Mrs. James B. Lloyd, Route 20, Westfield, New York.

GRODA, MR. and **MRS. FINLEY.**—Please write to Mrs. L. A. Wilson, 904 Lamar Avenue, Wichita Falls, Texas.

COLE or **BUCKLEY, WILLIAM.**—Born December 21, 1902, in Beardstown, Illinois. Placed in the St. Louis Orphanage, in 1904. Adopted by John Bulkley of Hannibal, Missouri, on July 27, 1905. Shortly after this moved to Como, Colorado Information appreciated by his sister, Edna Cole Hoyt, 4921 Sherman Road, Chicago, Illinois.

KERR, BEN S.—Received your welcome letter. We have moved. Please write again to your sister, Ophelia Kerr, 4255 McPherson Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

BEAN, GODFREY and **ARTHUR.**—They were placed in an orphan's home in Wisconsin, in 1900. Please write to your sister, whom you have never seen. Marian Anderson, 910 Stewart Street, Seattle, Washington.

BEAN, JOHN.—Please write to your daughter, Stella or Marion Anderson, 910 Stewart Street, Seattle Washington.

SMITH, ROLAND WAYNE.—Last heard from in Detroit, Texas, in 1918. Please come home or write to your family, who are heartbroken over your absence. Thelma Smith, care of C. L. Smith, Box 157, Hawley, Texas.

GEANCOLA, MRS. LENA.—Have lost your address. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Betty Crawford, 51 Gardener Park, Rochester, New York.

HOELSCHER, CHARLES.—Married Anna Bogda in Chicago, in 1891 or 1892. Believed to be in Pittsburgh. Had a son, Henry, born November 1, 1893. Information concerning him or any of his children of a later marriage appreciated by H. L. West, 3620 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California.

POLLARD, RACHEL.—Last heard from twenty years ago. Please write to your sister, who longs to hear from you. Mrs. Ollie V. Baier, 1630 Lee Street, Salem, Oregon.

WELLS, DELBERT B.—Born in Republic County, Kansas. Would like to hear from him or any of my relatives. H. B. Wells, General Delivery, St. Petersburg, Florida.

IMBECK.—Will those who have this name please write to Mrs. John Imbeck, 626 Second Street, Vernonia, Oregon.

LUNDY, MORRIS RICH.—Last heard from twenty-eight years ago, when he was living in Denver, Colorado. Information appreciated by his sister, who longs to hear from him. Edith Amelia McCormick, 1518 Delong Street. Los Angeles, California.

CODE, ELLA.—Last heard from in Ada, Oklahoma. Husband's name was Art. Had two children, Dorothy and Bobbie. Please write to your old pal, Mary Poteet, Box 415, Mexia, Texas.

JIM.—Have answered all cards and letters, but received no reply. Will always love you. Please let me know if you are married. Marie, care of this magazine.

McMORTON, JOHN THOMAS.—Last heard from in Burnet, Texas, in 1889. Information concerning him appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Orie Longoria, 1517 South Fifteenth Street, Box 333, McAllen, Texas.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any members of the following companies who remember me: Company K, 116th Infantry; Company C, First Anti-aircraft MG. BN., and 277th Company, Military Police. William G. Layton, Sergeant Headquarters Company, 12th Infantry, Fort Howard, Maryland.

BOB M. L.—Please forgive me, and come back. I need you. Everything will be different for you. Haven't told a thing. Write anyway. Your Bill, care of this magazine.

CHURCH, GEORGE.—About forty years old. Last heard from in Coudersport and Sharon, Pennsylvania, seven years ago. Information appreciated by an old friend, M. E. Rayburn, Carrier's Mills, Illinois.

Customs Inspector—"Got anything very valuable in this trunk? . . ."
The Traveler—"I should say so . . . a whole carton of Chesterfields!"

THEY'RE MILD
***and yet* THEY SATISFY**