

Western Story[★]

Every Week

Magazine

Sept. 29, 1928

15¢
20¢ IN CANADA



Stockland, Buffalo

George Owen Baxter ~ Seth Ranger ~
Jackson Gregory ~ Max Brand

In next week's issue of Western Story Magazine

SANCHO KNEW HIS SHEEP

By Cherry Wilson

A story of a faithful dog, so brave, so piteous, so vivid, that it easily ranks with the great dog stories.

THE MAVERICK GAL

By Robert Ormond Case

If the road to a feller's heart is through his stummick, then along that said boolevard one woman shorely made dust.

HORSE THIEF? SURE

By E. C. Lincoln

"Where there's cows, there's horses," said "Limping Red," and sure enough, there was!

Other Features by

ROY W. HINDS

JACKSON GREGORY

ROLAND KREBS

GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

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At All News Stands

In This Week's Issue of

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

SOUVENIRS OF GUILT

By Herman Landon

A murderer shouldn't collect souvenirs, but these reminders of the past came in handy—for a while.

BARE KNEES

By Leonard Falkner

A shy young man meets up with a pants' robber—and accidentally "learns his onions."

THE CRIMSON CLOWN'S MATINEE

By Johnston McCulley

The Crimson Clown stages his own setting and puts on a "crackajack" act.

Also Features by

CHARLOTTE DOCKSTADER

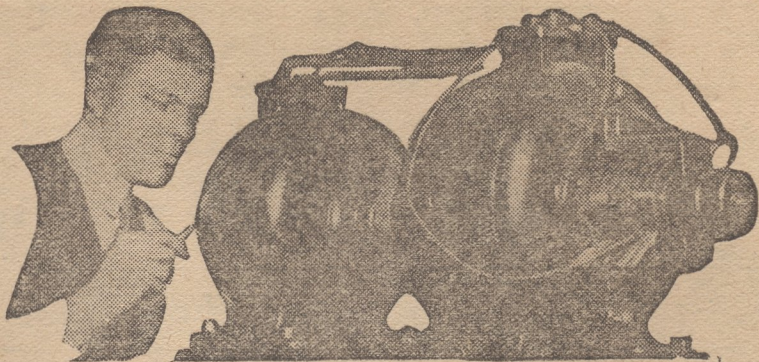
EDGAR WALLACE

ARTHUR MALLORY

ROBERT ORMOND CASE

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On the Stands Now



Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for \$5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and . . . forever . . . say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to \$50, \$60 and up a week in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you a practical electrician in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!

Learn on Actual Electrical Machinery in 90 Days

LACK of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers.

FREE Employment Service

Many of my students earn a good part or all of their living expenses and should you need this assistance we will help you. Then, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained . . . on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled . . . real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations . . . everything from door-bells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!

Not a Correspondence School

Learn by doing . . . all real actual work . . . building real batteries . . . winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring



Prepare For Jobs Like This

Here are a few of hundreds of positions open to Coyne-trained men. Our free employment bureau gives you lifetime employment service.

- Armature Expert \$50 a Week and up
- Substation Operator, \$65 a Week
- Auto Electrician \$60 a Week and up
- Inventor - - - Unlimited
- Maintenance Engineer \$80 a Week and up
- Service Station Owner \$60 a Week and up
- Radio Expert, \$60 a Week and up

houses, etc. That's a glimpse of how we help to make you a practical electrician, and fitting you to hold big jobs after graduation.

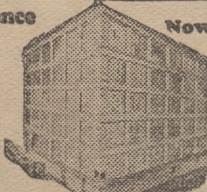
Jobs, Pay, Future

Don't worry about a job. Coyne training settles the job question for life. Big demand for Coyne trained men. Our employment department gives you lifetime service. Two weeks after graduation, Clyde F. Hart got a position as electrician with the Great Western Railroad at over \$100 a week. That's not unusual. We can point to many Coyne men making up to \$600 a month. \$60 a week is only the beginning of your opportunity. You can go into radio, battery or automotive electrical business for yourself and make \$3000 a year and up.

Get the Facts

Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 29 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs . . . facts . . . jobs . . . salaries . . . opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

Get this FREE Book



Now in Our New Home

This is our new fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars worth of the newest and most modern Electrical equipment of all kinds. We now have a larger amount of floor space devoted to the exclusive teaching of practical electricity. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

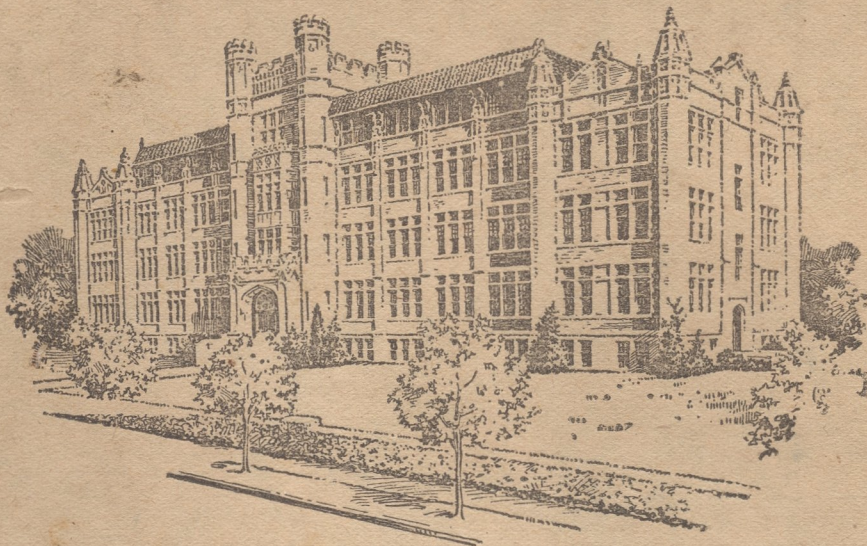
Mr. H. C. Lewis, Pres.
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. 68-45
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis:
Without obligations send me your big free catalog and all details of Free Employment service, Radio and Automotive Courses without extra cost, and how many "earn while learning." I understand I will not be bothered by any salesman.

Name
Address
City State

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
H.C. LEWIS, Pres., Dept. 68-45
500 S. PAULINA ST. Founded 1899 CHICAGO, ILL.

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Go to High School at Home

You can secure a high school education right at home by studying the splendid new courses recently prepared by the International Correspondence Schools.

These courses are equivalent to the courses given in resident high schools. They have been specially arranged for men and women who wish to meet college entrance examinations, to qualify for a business position, or to make up the education they missed when forced to leave school too soon.

The College Preparatory Course, the High School Commercial Course and the High School English Course include English, algebra, ancient, medieval, modern and U. S. History, physiology, literature, geography, Latin, book-keeping, drawing, geometry, shorthand, physics, chemistry, salesmanship, advertising, civics, trigonometry, economics, American business law, corporation finance, money and banking, business and trade economics, etc. A diploma is given at graduation.

The lessons are easy to understand and you will make rapid progress because you will be *in a class by yourself* and you will study under the guidance of instructors who are sincerely interested in helping you to get ahead and achieve the bigger things in life.

Just mark and mail the coupon and we will gladly send you interesting free booklets

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Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X in the list below:

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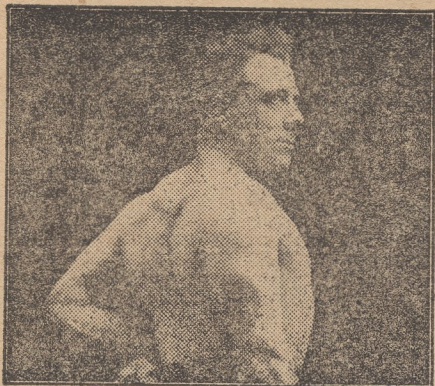
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"Rough? You bet your life I'm rough!"

George F. Jowett.
CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS

Don't read another word if you think I've got any time to waste on MAMMA'S BOYS. And don't read another word if you think my system of body building is any pink-tea affair for drug store sheiks or lounge lizards with a YELLOW STREAK a yard wide. I'll treat you ROUGH when you take my course and I'll tell you where you get off, doggoned quick, if you don't do what I tell you.

I'll Make You Strong

But when I get through with you, you'll say that George F. Jowett is the BEST FRIEND you ever had.

You will have muscles of iron and nerves of steel and every fibre of your being will be athrob with HEALTH and ENERGY and VITAL FORCE. The virile red blood of a conqueror will flow through your veins. Mentally and physically I will give you the POWER that is the foundation of SUCCESS!

Patented Dumbbells Free

To every person who takes my course I will give a pair of my patented Jowett Progressive Disk Dumbbells. They cannot be equalled for workmanship and muscle building.

Here's another important point—my course is laid out personally for each pupil. Every week you receive a new set of exercises in order of progression. You get Twelve Courses covering the Twelve Principles of Life. On conclusion of your course you receive an emblem showing you are a graduate of the Jowett Institute of Physical Culture.

Get My Big Free Book

All I ask is this. Send for my big free book, "The Thrill of Being Strong." You'll get a real kick out of it because of the photographs and because it shows how easily you, too, can have nerves of steel and muscles of iron. Remember—I GUARANTEE to build you up or refund every penny.

JOWETT INSTITUTE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

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 597 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Jowett:

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your illustrated booklet, "The Thrill of Being Strong."

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Fat Men

This new self-massaging belt not only makes you look thinner INSTANTLY—but quickly takes off rolls of excess fat.

DIET is weakening—drugs are dangerous—strenuous reducing exercises are liable to strain your heart. The only safe method of reducing is massage. This method sets up a vigorous circulation that seems to melt away surplus fat. The Well Reducing Belt, made of special reducing rubber, produces exactly the same results as a skilled masseur, only quicker and cheaper.

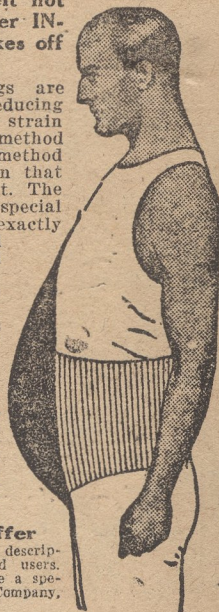
Every move you make causes the Well Belt to gently massage your abdomen. Results are rapid because this belt works for you every second.

Fat Replaced by Normal Tissue

From 4 to 6 inches of flabby fat usually vanish in a few weeks. Only solid, normal tissue remains. The Well Reducing Belt is endorsed by physicians because it not only takes off fat, but helps correct stomach disorders, constipation, backache, shortness of breath and puts sagging internal organs back in place.

Special 10-day Trial Offer

Send no money. Write for detailed description and testimonials from delighted users. If you write at once, you will receive a special 10-day trial offer. The Well Company, 489 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.



THE WELL COMPANY, 489 Hill St., New Haven, Conn.

Gentlemen: Please send me complete description of the Well Scientific Reducing Belt, and also your Special 10-day Trial Offer.

Name

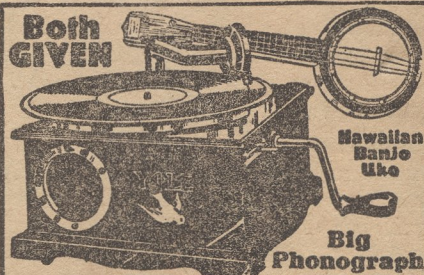
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NO JOKES TO BE DEAF



—Every Deaf Person Knows That I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They stop head noises and ringing ears. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address **GEO. F. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)**, 150 Hoffman Bldg., Detroit, Mich.



Most wonderful new Banjo-Uke and big up-to-date phonograph. Either one given for selling 12 boxes famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE or 25c each (beautiful art picture FREE with each box) and remitting as per plan in catalog. Send no money, we trust you. Write quick. Our 32nd year. We are reliable. Be first in your town. **THE WILSON CHEMICAL CO.** Dept. 75W TYRONE, PA.

I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big Pay Job!



L. L. COOKE
Chief Engineer

It's a shame for you to earn \$15 or \$20 or \$30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make \$70 to \$200—and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

Be an Electrical Expert Earn \$3,500 to \$10,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay \$3,500 to \$10,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution, thus assuring to every student enrolled, not only a wonderful training in Electricity, but an unsurpassed Student Service as well.

Get Started Now—Mail Coupon

I want to send you my Electrical Book and Proof Lessons, both Free. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Send in Coupon—NOW.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Engineer
L.L. Cooke School of Electricity

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L. L. COOKE, The Man Who Makes "Big-Pay" Men
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2150 Lawrence
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Send me at once without obligation your big illustrated book and complete details of your Home Study Course in Electricity, including your outfit and employment service offers.

MAIL COUPON FOR MY FREE BOOK

Name

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Occupation

Electrical Experts are in Big Demand!
—L.L. Cooke!

Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning



Makes \$700 in 24 Days in Radio

"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over \$700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from \$10 to \$40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."

FRED G. McNABB,
648 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.



\$70 to \$80 a Week for Jacquet

"Now I am specializing in autoelectricity and battery work and make from \$70 to \$80 a week and am just getting started. I don't believe there is another school in the world like yours. Your lessons are a real joy to study."

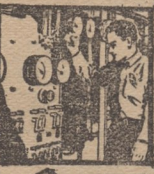
ROBERT J. COOPE,
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\$20 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booker. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than \$500 a month from my own business now. I used to make \$18 a week."

A. SCHRECK,
Phoenix, Ariz.



\$3500 A Year For Beckett

"When I began with you I was just a common laborer, going from one job to another, working for anything I could get and that wasn't much. Now my salary is \$3,500 a year and the Company furnishes me with an automobile."

C. O. BECKETT,
108 Maple Heights, New Lexington, Ohio

5 big outfits given to you—no extra charge

The Cooke "Trained Man is the Big Pay Man"

My Tires Cost Me Nothing!



This Little Invention Saves Me Enough Money to Buy My Tires... and then Some!

"THE money I save on gasoline more than keeps me in new tires. Figure it out—I was getting 13 miles per gallon on my Nash. With gas at 18c plus 2c tax it cost me \$46 to drive 3,000 miles. Now I'm getting better than 26 miles per gallon. It takes just half the gas and I save \$23 to \$25 every 3,000 miles—more than the price of a new tire."

No matter what make of car you drive, the Stransky Vaporizer is unconditionally guaranteed to give you 50% to 100% more miles per gallon or it costs you nothing. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for the Stransky Vaporizer to more than double gasoline mileage!

GUARANTEED To Save You Gas OR COSTS YOU NOTHING

world over. More than two million Stransky Vaporizers have been installed.

No bigger than a dollar coin —no more expensive than a

AGENTS

Men are making wonderful earnings showing the Stransky Vaporizer to car owners in spare time and full time. Sells fast under our guarantee. Foster made \$357 in two weeks. G. F. Fuller earned \$114 in 5 days. Eberlein sold 23 Vaporizers in 35 minutes! J. W. Cronk actually earned \$51 in an hour. Simply mail coupon at once.

good wrench—no more trouble to attach than a fan belt! Attaches to the intake manifold of any car in five minutes. Anyone can do it.

The vaporizer supercharges your gasoline after it leaves the carburetor. Completely vaporizes the gasoline. Under this ideal condition you get more complete explosion. Both power, pickup and speed are noticeably increased. Starting is not interfered with as the Vaporizer automatically shuts itself off when the motor is idle.

Make This Test

Mail the coupon below for full details, guarantee, and amazing trial offer, which is even more remarkable than we can tell you here. There is no obligation whatever. J. A. STRANSKY MFG. CO., L-901 Stransky Block, Pukwana, So. Dakota.

J. A. Stransky Mfg. Co.,
L-901 Stransky Block,
Pukwana, So. Dakota.

Without obligation send me full details of your free trial offer.

Name

Address

City State

() Check here for Distributor's Sample Offer and the selling plan.

Note These Records

Forty and eight-tenths miles per gallon from a Chevrolet, reported by F. S. Carroll. Forty miles on one gallon in a Ford, reported by J. T. Jackson, Michigan. Forty miles per gallon in a Dodge from Brownsville, Tex., to Tampico, Mex., reported by T. L. Brown.

Records like these are reported in every mail for every make and model car—from 72 different countries—the

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Follow this Man!

Secret Service Operator 38 Is on the Job

Follow him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Telltale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation. Just send the coupon.

FREE The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this. It may open your eyes to the great future for YOU as a highly paid Finger Print Expert. More men are needed right now. This school has taken men just like you and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. Big salaries. Rewards.

Earn \$2500 to \$10000 a Year
You study at home in spare time

No advance education is needed. Any man who can read and write, and think can make good. A wonderful book tells all about what others have done. Shows pictures of real crimes and the men who solved them. We'll send you a FREE copy with the free reports. Get our low prices and easy terms. Mail the coupon.

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Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me your new, fully illustrated Free book on Finger Prints, also FREE copy of operator No. 38's confidential report. Tell me about your low prices and easy terms,

Name.....

Address.....

Age.....

\$100 a Week is waiting for YOU

IF you want \$100 a week clear profit, if you want \$5000 a year without working as hard or as long as you do now, I'll show you how to get it. I'll prove to you that \$10 a day is easy, that \$15, \$20, or even \$25 a day is possible.

I will give you the same offer I made to Christopher Vaughn, whose earnings have reached \$125 in a week. You can do like John Scotti, who started without experience and made \$97 his second week. Or Mrs. K. R. Roof, who has two children and does her own housework, yet in her spare time has made \$50 in a week and \$15 in a single afternoon. Yes, profits like these can be yours. Do you want them?



Big Profits For Easy Work

All you need to do is to accept my offer to handle our dealings with our customers in your community. We have customers in a million homes throughout America—hundreds of them right around you. These customers of ours know and like and use "Zanol" Products—delicious foods, delightful toilet preparations, perfumes, soaps and household necessities—more than 350 different products in all.

But "Zanol" Products are never sold in stores. They are sold only through our own representatives. You can be one of them. Our representatives will make two million dollars as their profits this year, and you can have your share. You will be amazed at how easy it is, and how quickly the money rolls in. You will realize that \$100 a week is not hard if you are in the right line.

I Furnish Everything

If you want your share of these big profits, all you need to do is to write. We furnish all of our people with complete equipment free for doing business. We tell you in detail exactly what to do. We make it easy for you. You will be given the same

proposition that enabled G. C. Henry to make four times as much money as he ever did on a farm, and that made it possible for G. A. Becker, of Iowa, to earn more than he did in 22 years in the grocery business.

Send No Money

Just send me your name and I will tell you how to start. I will show you how to make \$100 a week, or \$3 to \$10 a day in spare time. It is the one opportunity you have been waiting for. It is your chance to get ahead. You are not risking a penny. You don't agree to pay anything or do anything. Don't wait until someone else gets ahead of you. Don't delay until it is too late. Mail the coupon now!



We want to help you in every way to make large profits and we offer to provide a new Hudson Super-Six Coach without any expense to you whatever. Mail the coupon for details of the plan that will give you this handsome closed car without expense and an income of \$100 a week, or more.

Mail This NOW

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
Dept. 664 Cincinnati, Ohio.
I want to make \$100 a week. Send me full details of your proposition at once. This does not obligate me.

Name

Address

© A. P. Co. (Write Plainly)

Bald Men Look!

FREE

One Full Ampoule of my amazing hair fluid which I discovered myself and which grew hair on my head. This ampoule is absolutely free. Don't send any money. There is No C. O. D. No charge whatsoever. All I want is an opportunity to show you how easily I grew hair on my own and hundreds of other men's heads.

Here is How I Looked When I was Bald

I was just as bald as this photo shows — But I grew my own hair with my wonderful fluid. I can grow your hair, too.

Bald Men Grow Hair! Bald Men Grow Hair! Bald Men Grow Hair!

What I accomplished on my own head and other heads I can do for you, provided you are under 45 years of age and less of hair was not caused by burns or scars. Anyhow, I must succeed or you pay nothing. No apparatus. My home treatment is simple, quick, inexpensive.

WRITE FOR FREE AMPOULE
Write today. I will send you immediately, one full ampoule of my marvelous fluid which I discovered, of which I hold the secret and which grew my own hair on my own bald head. Besides the Free Ampoule of Fluid, I will send photographs, names and addresses of men and women who successfully used my Wonder Fluid for Dandruff, Falling Hair and particularly for Baldness. Write for free Ampoules.

VREELANDS — 2776 EUCLID WINDSOR BLDG., CLEVELAND, OHIO

TYPEWRITER PRICES CUT

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

\$2 and it's yours

All late models, completely rebuilt and re-finished brand new. **GUARANTEED** for ten YEARS. Send no money—big FREE catalog shows actual machines in full color. Get our direct-to-you easy payment plan and 10-day free trial offer. Limited time, so write today. International Typewriter Ex., 186 W. Lake St. Dept. 9-Y, Chicago

Agents!—New Style Lines Just Out!

Make \$90 a Week

Men and Women! Write me today and by this time next week I can place you in a position to make \$2 to \$5 an hour in your spare time, up to \$15 a day full time. Simply introduce and take orders for amazing, new, fast-selling Lines of famous World's Star Hosiery, Underwear and Rayon Lingerie. Sold direct from Mill to Home—a complete line for whole family. Repeat orders. Permanent customers. Thousands of representatives making big money, with new special Plans. You can do it too. No investment nor experience needed.

FREE Everything to Start
Complete Selling Equipment, with beautiful, irresistible Catalog of advance styles, now ready! All FREE—no C. O. D., no deposit. Cash bonus, service awards, rapid promotion. Choice territories going. Write quick.

World's Star Knitting Co., 859 Lake St., Bay City, Mich.

-and They Started By Reading This Amazing Book!



300% Increase
reported by A. F. Thompson of Sioux City, Iowa, former creamery employee, after completing N. S. T. A. Course.

From \$8 to \$125 a Week was the jump made by Mark Barichievich, San Francisco, California who rose from dishwasher to salesman through N. S. T. A.



\$7200 A Year
or a 400% increase is recorded by L. D. Mather, former clerk of Richmond, Virginia thanks to N. S. T. A.



600% More Money
now being made by L. H. Lundstedt, Chicago, N. S. T. A. training helped raise him from a stenographer to the head of a business.

Where Shall We Send Your Copy...FREE?

A BOOK! Just seven ounces of paper and printers' ink—but it contains a most vivid and inspiring message that every ambitious man should read! It reveals facts and secrets that have led hundreds of men from every walk of life into success beyond their fondest expectations! So powerful and far-reaching has been the influence of this little volume that it is no wonder a famous business genius called it "The Most Amazing Book Ever Printed"!

This vital book, "Modern Salesmanship," contains hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about the highest paid profession in the world. It reveals the real truth about the art of selling. It blasts dozens of old theories, and tells exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen are achieved. And not only that—it outlines a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without spending years on the road—without losing a day or a dollar from his present position!

What This Astonishing Book Has Done!

The men who have increased their earning capacities as a direct result of reading "Modern Salesmanship" are numbered in the thousands. For example, there is E. E. Williams of Pomona, Cal., who was struggling along in a minor position at a small salary. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes to opportunities he had never dreamed of—and he cast his lot with the National Salesmen's Training Association. Within a few short months of simple preparation, he was earning \$10,000 a year! Today he receives as much in 30 days as he formerly received in 365!

And then there is J. E. Muzzall, of Hopkinsville, Ky. He, too, read "Modern Salesmanship" and found the answer within its pages. A former freight clerk and department head at \$200 a month, he recently reported yearly earnings running into five figures. B. F. Bollen of Columbus, Ohio, wrote that his work as a salesman brought him annual earnings of \$5000—\$7000, an increase of 300% over his former income as a decorator. And F. L. Real of Wheeling, W. Va., a former cigar-maker, stepped into a position paying him \$4800 a year drawing account alone!

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Any man with average intelligence can duplicate the

success that they have achieved. For their experience proves that salesmen are *made*—not "born", as some people have foolishly believed.

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If we were asking several dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. So get your copy now. Learn the real facts about the selling profession, and about the tremendous demand for trained salesmen in every line, to fill city and travelling positions paying up to \$5000 and \$10,000 a year. Last year this association received calls for 50,335 N. S. T. A. members from Wholesalers, Manufacturers and Jobbers. "Modern Salesmanship" tells the complete story in a vivid, inspiring way. A copy is yours for the asking, and your request entails no obligation. Simply fill out and mail the coupon. Do it now!



Dept. 581-M N. S. T. A. Bldg., CHICAGO, ILL.

National Salesmen's Training Assn.,
Dept. 581-M, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligating me in any way, send a copy of your Free Book, "Modern Salesmanship" and details of your System of Training and Free Employment Service.

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Sent for \$1.00 NO C. O. D. TO PAY

How To Order
Send \$1 with order and your choice comes to you prepaid no C. O. D. on arrival.
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Exquisitely hand engraved and pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring. Finest quality genuine blue white diamond. \$3.04 a month.

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CC2 - The "Princess Pat", 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD, engraved case. Accurate, dependable, 15 jewel movement. Genuine "WRISTACRAT" flexible bracelet, \$2.00 a month. \$25

CC3 - Nationally advertised, Elgin or Waltham, gentleman's strap watch. Handsomely engraved, Green or White Gold filled case. Warranted 20 years. Radium dial, accurate and dependable. Specially priced, \$2.12 a mo. \$26.50

CC4 Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched, finest quality blue white diamonds. 18K Solid White Gold mounting. \$3.96 a month. \$48.50

ESTAB. 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.
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Read His Letter for the Answer



"Two years ago I was bald all over the top of my head.

"I felt ashamed for people to see my head. I tried different preparations, but they did no good. I remained bald, until I used Kotalko.

"New hair came almost immediately and kept on growing. In a short time I had a splendid head of hair, which has been perfect ever since—and no return of the baldness."

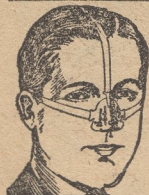
This verified statement is by Mr. H. A. Wild. He is but one of the big legion of users of Kotalko who voluntarily attest it has stopped falling hair, eliminated dandruff or aided new, luxuriant

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FREE Trial Box

To prove the efficacy of Kotalko, for men's, women's and children's hair, the producers are giving Proof Boxes. Address: **KOTALKO COMPANY, K-26, Station O, New York, N.Y.** Please send me FREE Proof Box of KOTALKO.

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Address



A PERFECT LOOKING NOSE Can Easily Be Yours

Trades Model No. 25 corrects now all ill-shaped noses quickly, painlessly and permanently and comfortably at home. It is the only adjustable, safe and guaranteed patent device that will actually give you a perfect looking nose. Over 90,000 satisfied users. For years recommended by physicians. 16 years of experience in manufacturing Nose Shapers is at your service. Model 25 Junior for children. Write for testimonials and free booklet, which tells you how to obtain a perfect looking nose.

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of good fiction is in

Sea Stories

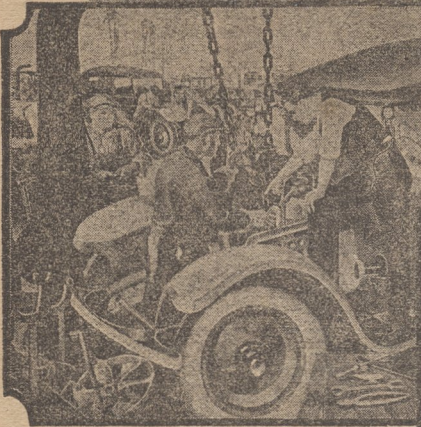
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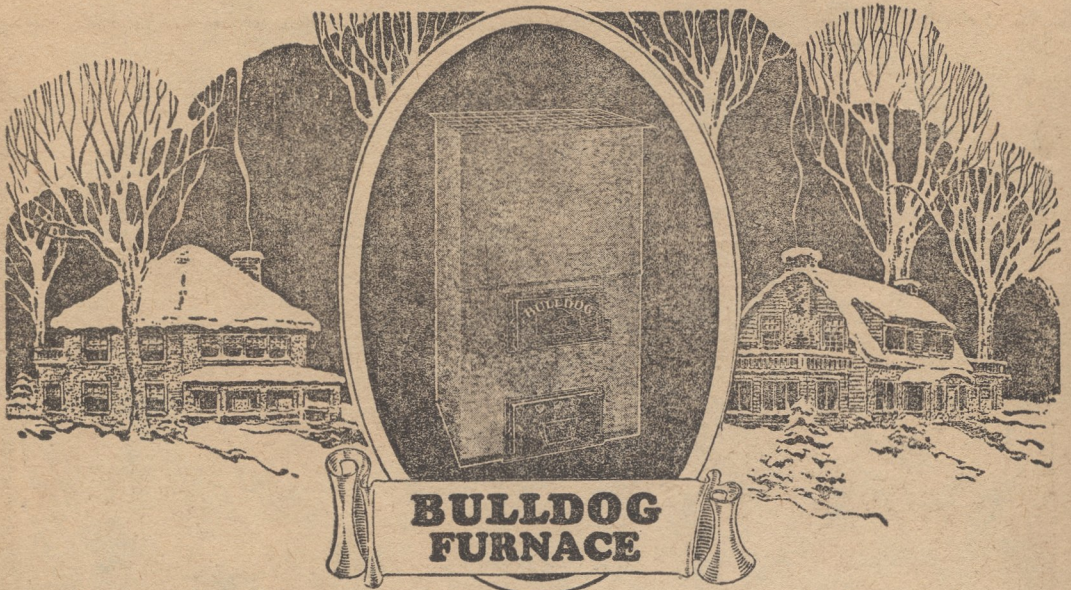
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Heats Home for 25¢ a Week!

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That's what the Bulldog does with about the lowest grade fuel you can think of. Here's what it does with coal:

After 6 Years—"Heats as Good as Ever"

"Our furnace has been in use 6 years and heats as good as ever."
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"Does the Work of 3 Stoves"

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Cuts Coal Bill in Half

"I had a hot air furnace in our 7-room house before I got the Bulldog and our house was always cold. With the Bulldog it only takes half as much coal and we had weather below zero, and the house was nice and warm in the morning when we got up. We never have the draft on more than half an hour at a time, and it has the place red hot. It keeps the fire all day in mild weather."
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Small Monthly Payments—Installed Almost as Easily as a Cook Stove!

The Bulldog is sent to you for *free inspection*. Then, if satisfied, you make only small monthly payments at our remarkably low price. Write today! *Don't miss this chance to cut down your fuel bills! Install a Bulldog Furnace.* It comes to you completely erected—goes through any door—fits any height of basement—and you install it yourself in less than two hours! In fact, you can install the Bulldog just about as easily as you

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Send for Free Book

Learn how to have all the heat you want—where you want it—and save money! Remember the Bulldog is *different*—and *better*! Complete combustion of gases save 25% of your fuel bill. Exclusive Gable-Top Radiator receives all the direct rays of the fire. Exclusive oblong fire-pot is not only ideal for coal, but enables you to keep a wood fire over night. Remember—the Bulldog is sent for *free inspection*—then small monthly payments at an amazingly low price! Send for Free Book TODAY!

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Have you a basement? Yes
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For the first time in the history of Magic the age-old, sacredly guarded secrets of the Mystic Art are being revealed. Now at last you can learn to be a Real Professional Magician. Yes, and you can learn this wonderful art *easily and quickly* AT HOME!—BY MAIL! You are taught the mysterious *Principles* by which the Professional Magician works. You are taught everything from wonderful impromptu effects to massive stage illusions.



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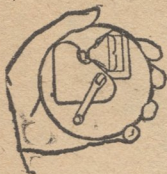
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Feels Like This**
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Marvelous Invention Makes Old Blades Keener Than New—Indefinitely! Gives Such Cool, Slick Shaves That Old-Style Methods Seem Like 16th-Century Torture In Comparison! See Valuable FREE OFFER Below! Get Details Today!

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SLICK, velvety shaves forever and no more razor blades to buy! That's what you can expect from KRISS-KROSS, the amazing *super-stropper* and blade *rejuvenator*! Makes new blades out of old a surprising way—week after week, month after month. Gives them a sharpness they seldom possess even when *brand new*! No wonder experts pronounce it one of the greatest inventions ever patented!

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Right now, to introduce KRISS-KROSS stropper which is never sold in stores, I am giving with it **FREE** a unique new kind of razor. Really 3 razors in one! Gives *sliding* instead of *pulling* stroke. Reduces beard resistance 45%. Send for details and offer today. No obligation. Just clip the coupon and mail it now!

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STROPPER**

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St. Louis, Missouri

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Name

Address

Town State

Check here if interested in becoming representative.

\$1.00 DOWN

Clip the coupon below. Write your name and address plainly. Pin a dollar bill to it—mail at once. We will ship immediately—all three rugs on approval in one complete neat package. No trouble to lay, if satisfactory, just send a dollar a month.

No orders filled in cities over 100,000 population

\$10.80 For All Three



The Gold Seal means complete satisfaction or money back.

Always look for the Gold Seal. There are floor coverings that look like Congoleum. Many are called by fancy "oleum" names. Often low prices are advertised on "seconds" or damaged goods.

But there is only one Congoleum. There is only one Gold Seal Congoleum. These three rugs are all Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum.

No. 57C2601 Dollar Down Dollar a Month All Three \$10.80 Rugs only

9 FT x 12 FT

Genuine Gold Seal CONGOLEUM Art RUG

Not just one rug, but three! Three Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs! The prettiest and most artistic Congoleum Rug pattern ever produced.

A great big, beautiful, room size 9 foot x 12 foot Genuine Congoleum Art Rug, and two companion rugs to match. All three rugs for TEN DOLLARS AND EIGHTY CENTS.

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Guaranteed Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs! All three Art

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The broad band of this oval border is a rich, velvety midnight blue. Imposed on this superb background is one continuous floral spray, dropping over into the center background in graceful clusters. Delightfully shaded pink flowers, with a stone-gray foliage about the color of Dusty Miller, forms the floral decoration.

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Waterproof—No Seams—Lies Flat—Never Curls Up—No Scrubbing

\$1.00 Down—\$1.00 a Month

All this for ten dollars and eighty cents, spread over a year's time—ON A YEAR'S CREDIT!

Shop around and make comparisons. Go wherever Congoleum is sold—and Congoleum is sold everywhere.

Our price includes two beautiful companion Rugs. Our price is a CREDIT price—you pay little by little. Our price includes a thirty-day free trial offer.

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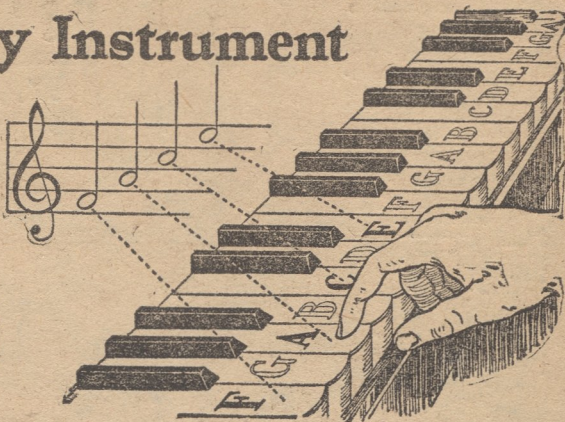
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Spiegel
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1280 West 35th St., Chicago

Easy as A-B-C !

You Can Play Any Instrument In a Few Months This Delightful New Easy Way!



Quickest because natural and pleasant. Grateful students say they learn in a fraction of the time old, dull methods required. You play direct from the notes. And the cost averages only a few cents a lesson!

Learning music is no longer a difficult task. If you can read the alphabet, you can now quickly learn to play your favorite instrument! A delightful new method has made it positively easy to become a capable performer within just a few months. And the cost is only a *fraction* of what people used to spend on the old, slow methods!

You don't need a private teacher, this new way. You study entirely at home, in the privacy of your own room, with no one to interrupt or embarrass you. And, strange as it may seem, you'll enjoy every minute of it—because the new method is *agreeable* as well as *rapid*!

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You don't have to know the first thing about music in order to begin. You learn to play from actual notes, just like the best musicians do. And almost before you realize your progress, you begin playing real tunes and melodies instead of just scales. There are no "trick numbers," no "memory stunts." When you finish the U. S. School of Music course you can pick up any piece of regular printed music and understand it! You'll be able to read music, popular and classic, and play it from the notes. You'll acquire a life-long ability to please your friends, amuse yourself, and, if you like, make money (musicians are rightly paid for their pleasant work).

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Do you sit "on the sidelines" at a party? Are you out of it because you can't play? Many, many people are! It's the musician who claims attention. If you play you are always in demand. Many invitations come to you. Amateur orchestras offer you wonderful afternoons and evenings. And you meet the kind of people you have always wanted to know. So don't miss this exceptional opportunity.

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Banjo	Hawaiian
(Plectrum, 5-String, or Tenor)	Steel Guitar
Mandolin	Harp
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Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson, and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

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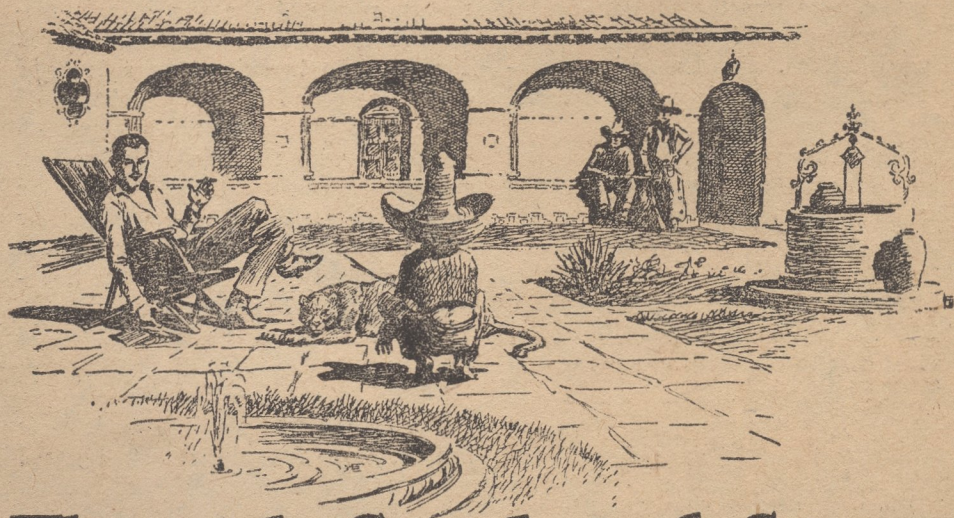
Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXXI

SEPTEMBER 29, 1928

No. 3



Through Steel and Stone

(A "Geraldi" Story) By Max Brand

Author of "The Bright Face of Danger," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO KINGS.



HE Casa Oñate lived under a double sway, like a kingdom with two masters. One king was San Luis; one king was Pepillo.

Pepillo was a young mountain lion, caught when he was a blind kitten, mothered by one of Oñate's cats, and then brought up to flourishing youth. He was wonderfully good-natured,

even when a drunken man blundered into his silken flank as he slept in the sun. But he was a thoughtful cat. Sometimes he would sit for a long time in a corner, lashing his sides with his three-foot tail, and glaring wickedly. But, as a rule, Pepillo was the quietest of domestic pets, with a wonderfully large vocabulary, and clean beyond belief in all of his ways.

Pepillo was one king of the household.

The other was San Luis, and San Luis was a tall billy goat, with long

wool of the creamiest, and a patriarchal white beard which fell deeply from his chin. His horns curved back from a brow which was continually wrinkled with a frown of impatience, and even while he was eating, San Luis' little bright eyes went forever from side to side, looking for trouble. He was ready to leave off everything for the sake of a fight. They called him San Luis because he was so spotlessly white and cream, and also because he was so brave in battle. He was the second king of the household of Oñate. Pepillo reigned indoors. San Luis reigned outdoors, as far as the bars of the corral where the horses were kept.

They met, as to-day, in the neutral ground, the no-man's land, of the patio. The rest of the house was falling rapidly to ruin. The stars looked through many a section of the fallen roof and the floors groaned underfoot. When Pedro Oñate stamped in anger, he was sure to strike up a cloud of the dust of rotten wood. But the patio was very much as it always had been. It was horse-shoe shaped, with ten columns and eleven arches inclosing a cloistered walk and giving upon the patio open court which was closed in, on the remaining side, by an adobe wall. All the pillars were intact. None of the arches had broken down. Standing there in the patio, no one could have guessed that the house was going to ruin except that one chimney had fallen and in its fall had beaten a hole in the roof. But that was a detail. It would be repaired to-morrow!

For the rest, it looked like a piece of the grand old days when Spain had newly found an empire in the West and filled it with a few masters and many slaves. The vine which covered the patio wall and hung thick over the arched entrance was rich with yellow roses. In the sun they looked like tufts of fire; in the shadow they were like tarnished metal. Other vines climbed

everywhere over the house. No matter where the sun stood in the sky, the patio swayed and drifted with shadows, like water, except at the single hour of noon. Then the sun descended a little from the central sky and burned the patio and shriveled the leaves of all the vines with white heat and made the very winds shrink back into the hollow ravines, so that nothing could be seen to stir.

Even San Luis, who scorned all things, respected the sun at this moment and kept to the shadow. Even Pepillo, who luxuriated in a bath of fire, exposed to the white shafts no more than the tip of his tail and his forepaws, with the talons unsheathed, sunk in the rain-moistened floor of the court. The two guards gave up their walk to and fro and stood in the shade of the arched entrance, with the hanging tendrils brushing about their heads. They leaned on their rifles and looked askance with awe at the motionless prisoner.

For Gerald lay in a deep rustic chair in the exact center of the court, exposed to the falling torrents of sunshine with only a cap upon his head. The waves of light were reflected from him. He seemed to tremble and quiver with the heat waves that were cast up from his body.

He had turned his hands palm up to take the sun. Of his face, only the eyes were shielded by the narrow visor of his cap, and his lips were seen smiling faintly in enjoyment of the blasting sun.

Little Giovanni came out to him. Giovanni was ten, but he looked older in face and younger in body. He had the olive skin of Italy, a sallow, unhealthy skin, and eyes of polished black.

"You'll be sick," he said to Gerald. "You'll be sick in the head and afterwards in the stomach if you keep lying out here in the sun at this time of day. My mother said so."

"Your mother is kind to trouble about warning me," said Geraldi.

"She isn't kind," said Giovanni, "because she hopes that you *will* get sick!"

"But you don't want me to be sick," said Geraldi, still without opening his eyes.

"If you got sick," said Giovanni logically, "you wouldn't be able to teach me to whittle, or to sing, or to throw a knife. But," said Giovanni, "my mother says that I am to talk to you no more."

"Then you shouldn't be out here talking to me now," said Geraldi.

"I'm not," said Giovanni. "I came out here to talk to San Luis and Pepillo. Luis, come here!"

He snapped his fingers. San Luis, his mouth filled with soft green tendrils which he had just torn from a vine, stopped his busy munching long enough to cast an impatient glance of contempt at Giovanni, and then went on eating.

"My mother," said Giovanni, in his bright, high voice, "says that I should hate you and try to kill you, because you killed my father."

"And what do you say to your mother?"

"I say to her that you are teaching me how to shoot and how to throw a knife. After you have taught me enough, then perhaps I could kill you."

"Yes, that is true," said Geraldi.

"But," argued the boy, "you didn't kill my father from behind, did you?" He added: "Come here, Luis!"

"No," said Geraldi. "I didn't kill him from behind."

"He was shooting at you when you shot at him?"

"He was."

"Then it was just a fight," said Giovanni, "and that's fair. Besides," reasoned Giovanni, "I'm only a little boy. I don't have to worry about killing people when they teach me how to fight and how to use a knife. Afterwards when I grow up—well, that's an-

other thing. Then I might have to fight with you, even!"

"I hope not," said Geraldi.

"But nobody could beat you," said Giovanni.

"And why not?"

"Because you could dodge a bullet. Because you could dodge a knife, even!"

Geraldi sighed, out of pure content with the dreadful heat of the sun.

"Come here, Luis!" commanded the boy.

"He'll never come when you call him like that," said Geraldi.

"Why not? He knows me very well!"

"Yes, perhaps he does. But he doesn't think it's respectful to call him by one name. He's a saint, isn't he?"

The boy laughed a little.

"He's only a goat," said he.

"He's San Luis," persisted Geraldi. "You'd better call him that way."

"San Luis, San Luis!" called Giovanni. "You see, he doesn't come! San Luis, you fool of a goat, come when I call you! Come here to me!"

"Look at him," went on the boy. "He says that he doesn't care what I want; he'll do what pleases him! What would you do if you were me?"

"I'd teach him to follow me."

"How would you teach him?"

"By being kind to him."

"Kindness takes a great deal of time."

"It lasts longer, however," said Geraldi.

"You'll see that I can make him come," said Giovanni.

He went to San Luis and took him by the reverend, snowy beard. The goat got up at the first tug and butted at the boy, but Giovanni smote him with his little fist between the eyes.

"I'll teach you!" said Giovanni.

Geraldi opened his eyes and saw San Luis led toward him, blinking, obedient in fear.

"You see that I didn't need to be kind," said Giovanni in triumph.

"I see that," said Geraldi. "But this means that he'll never come to you unless you take him by the beard."

"Yes, it means that, perhaps. San Luis is a fool. He ought to come when I call him."

"Let him alone."

Giovanni relaxed his grip.

"Come to me, boy," said Geraldi softly.

The big goat walked to him and butted at the arm of the chair—but gently, gently.

"He loves you," said the boy with wonder. "And you've only had a few days with him. My mother says that you use magic to make things love you. That's one reason why she hates you so much. You ought not to do such things, you see!"

"No?" said Geraldi. "But how about Pepillo? Will he come when you call him?"

"Pepillo is a devil," declared the child. "But I can make him do things. You watch him now!"

He called: "Pepillo!"

Pepillo crouched.

"He won't come," said Giovanni. "But I'll show him that I can master him."

He ran to Pepillo and caught him by the tail.

"Get up!" said Giovanni.

Pepillo sat up on his haunches and caught Giovanni by the shoulders between his armed forepaws. His lips grinned back terribly over his needle-sharp teeth. His head moved forward trembling—trembling with eagerness as if to drive those fangs into the throat of the boy.

"Down!" said Giovanni fearlessly, and smote the great cat on the nose.

Pepillo sank slowly to the ground and remained there, lashing his tail, but blinking in fear beneath the raised hand of the child.

CHAPTER II.

TAMING WILD THINGS.

TO watch this performance, Geraldi had deigned to open his eyes—shadows among shadows—and now he said: "Come here, Giovanni."

The boy came.

"Some day," said Geraldi, "Pepillo will want to tear your throat."

"He wants to every day," laughed Giovanni, "but he's afraid." He added: "Just the way that my mother wants to tear your throat, every day, but she's afraid, too! So Pepillo is afraid of me!"

"But you can't always be sure," said Geraldi. "Some day Pepillo might forget the whip and stroke you across the face with one of his paws, which have four sharp knives. And he might leave the knives out of their sheaths! Even your mother never would be glad to see you after that."

"I don't care," said the boy. "I'd rather be terrible to look at than beautiful. I've been practicing for hours," he went on, "and now I can hit a target with my knife one time in three."

"Let me see," said Geraldi.

The youngster ran into the house and came back at once with a block of soft pine which he put at a distance of a few steps. He took in his hand a small knife, short of hilt, narrow of blade.

It lay flat on his palm.

"You see?"

He threw the knife, and it stuck in a corner of the block.

"You're learning," said Geraldi. "But you're learning wrong. You must always throw with just a flick of the wrist. If you fling back your arm as far as that, everyone will see what you are about to do. But when a knife is to be thrown, Giovanni, it must be thrown in an instant of surprise when another man, say, is reaching for a gun to kill you. Suddenly a ray of light leaves your hand and runs into his

heart. He falls down without any sound—give me the knife!"

The two men at the patio archway turned and held their rifles at the ready. One of them even raised his gun still higher and took aim at Gerald.

He paid no attention to this. The knife glanced carelessly from his hand and stood fixed and quivering in the center of the block.

Giovanni began to groan and complain.

"I shall never grow up. I shall never be able to learn to do that!" he said.

"On the other hand," said Gerald, "you may grow up quickly enough—in one day! One day, one hour, one second even, may make the difference between a boy and a man. It made such a difference to me."

"Ah," said Giovanni, drawing in his breath as though he were drinking. "When you killed for the first time?" There was no chance for Gerald to answer. A woman ran out into the patio. She reached for Giovanni and clipped him loudly upon the cheek. He backed away from her, his face wry with pain, his eyes fixed maliciously upon her.

"Go into the house!" she shrieked at him.

"You have no right to cuff me," said the boy. "You're not strong enough to do it. I can throw a knife, now!"

She turned on Gerald. She was a fine young woman, still under thirty; but she did not look entirely healthy. There were dark shadows beneath her eyes, which made them seem larger, to be sure, but also made them sad. Now they flashed and blazed. Her lips trembled with emotion.

"You are putting a devil in him!" she said. "You never will stop until you have ruined my family—all of it."

"Giovanni, go into the house!" said Gerald. "Take your knife and go into the house. And if I ever again hear you speak to your mother as you have

spoken now, I'll give you no more lessons."

The boy tugged the knife from the block of wood; the two guards lowered their rifles and grinned a little to one another as they marked the black look which Giovanni cast at his mother.

But he retreated without another word into the porch and disappeared through the first door. But Bianca Strozzi remained before Gerald. He had raised himself from the chair and stood languidly before her.

"May I smoke?" said Gerald.

"Ah, bah!" gasped she. "Why are you always trying to play the grand gentleman?"

"I beg your pardon," said Gerald.

"Why are you always acting as though every woman is a princess and you a prince?"

He remained silent; he looked down to the ground as though abashed.

"You want me to think that you are paying attention to me," said she, "but I know that you are despising me. But not as much as I despise you, you gringo! You—you murderer!"

Her voice broke on the word. Even the two guards grew a little excited and looked savagely at Gerald.

He, however, gave no answer.

"Now you want to steal away my boy. But I am watching you. Heaven help me to punish you! Heaven help me to make you as miserable as you have made me!"

At the thought of her own sorrows, tears of self-pity rushed into her eyes, but she dashed them away and shook her head.

"I am waiting. I shall find a time!" said she, and ran back into the house.

Gerald then rolled a cigarette.

He felt in his pockets.

"A match, please—one of you fellows?" he asked.

They consulted together.

"Is it a trick?" said one.

"I dunno," said the other.

"You go, Dick. You gotta give him a light, anyway."

"You go yourself, Joe. I ain't guana. It ain't my job."

"All right. I don't welch on a little thing like that!"

So Joe approached and handed over a box of matches. Geraldini lighted the match, and as he waited for the sulphur to burn away and the flame to clear, he looked up through the shadow of his visor at the face of Joe. The latter grew uneasy. He even gave back half a step.

"Thanks," said Geraldini, and passed back the matches. "Smoke yourself?" he invited.

"Thanks," said Joe. "But not on this job!"

"You boys have a hard time," said the soft voice of Geraldini. "I'm sorry for you."

"We get double pay," explained Joe. "And we don't get paid for talking to you," he added by way of rough apology.

After that he withdrew hurriedly to the archway, and once there, he threw a glance of triumph at his companion, as one who has dared a vast peril and come from it unscathed.

"He looks pretty small when you get right up close to him," confided Joe.

"Does he? He's big enough, son!" said the other. "Suppose," he added, "when you was standing there he'd made a dive for you and snatched one of your guns!"

"I give him the matches with my left hand. I had my right hand on my gun, and the gun tipped up, coverin' him! But what would *you* have done if he'd gone at me?"

"I'd have put a bullet right through your back, hopin' to drop him."

Joe shuddered.

"Would you've done that?"

"Would I eat ham an' eggs?" snarled Dick.

They glared at one another, but after

all, there was a certain understanding in the face of Joe and he admitted: "Sure, it was a fool thing I done. I could've thrown him the matches. But I was sort of showing off, I guess."

"I guess you was," said Dick.

Geraldini had lighted his cigarette, and now slipped back into his chair, but, having been roused, he sat more upright and fastened his glance on the big cat in the shadow. He watched it for a long time with such a fixed gaze that Pepillo snarled with yellow-burning eyes. When Geraldini whistled, the big cat stood up, shook himself, and walked away.

He went as far as the archway. A second whistle stopped him, and he began to stalk toward Geraldini, sinking almost to his belly.

"You'd better look out, Geraldini!" said Dick, the guard. "That hellion'll jump you some day and tear your innards out!"

Geraldini did not answer. He whistled again, more softly. Pepillo came and crouched at his feet, looking ready to spring at his throat, but then, as though subdued by the outstretched hand of Geraldini, he finally thrust forward his big round head and rubbed it against the fingers of the man.

After that, he curled himself across the feet of Geraldini and basing his head on his paws, stared fixedly at the two guards.

"How the dickens did you do that, Geraldini?" asked one of them.

"I don't know. Power of understanding," said Geraldini.

"Power of something!" said Dick. "I wish I could make the brute act that way! I'm scared of it every time that I turn my back. Why don't they shoot it and take the hide before it rips somebody up?"

"I'll tell you why," answered Geraldini, leaning a little to stroke the silken fur of the back of Pepillo. "Men like to have danger around them, you know,

Something that'll kill others and pur for them."

"That's why they want women, maybe?" said Joe, who had been married and to whom the subject was a bitter one.

"Maybe it is," said Geraldi pleasantly.

Dick said suddenly: "You're gunna get an answer now, Geraldi! Here comes Rompier back, and the Frenchy looks like he'd been riding hard."

Hoofbeats came up to the patio gate, paused, and then a small, lean man appeared.

He walked quickly into the patio, paused and cast a gloomy side glance at Geraldi, and then walked on without a word into the house.

"You're out of luck, Geraldi, I guess!" said Dick. "I'm sorry for you, old-timer!"

CHAPTER III.

ROMPIER REPORTS.

HAVING passed Geraldi without a glance, Rompier entered the house and went up a shattered stairway to the upper floor. There he found a room with goatskins on the floor, and a couch covered with similar hides. On the couch was stretched a big man with blond hair and pale-blue eyes, reading and smoking cigarettes.

He put down the book and raised himself on one elbow as Rompier entered.

The latter remained near the door, hat in hand.

"Sit down, Lucien," said the big man.

"We've let ourselves in for trouble, my lord," said Rompier, taking a chair.

But even then he sat respectfully erect, his eyes continually on the other. His lordship nodded.

"Of course there's trouble," said he, cheerfully, "as long as Geraldi is living and breathing. He's born to cause trouble all over the world. He always has. He always will. Go on, Rom-

pier. Tell me what happened. You went down to San Felice?"

"Yes. Not straight down. I drifted from place to place where I could hear a little talk."

"Of course. You wanted to know what people were saying. If we're not subjects to public opinion," he added with a smile, "at least we have to consider it."

"I don't like the work and I don't like the place or the people," broke out Rompier. "I almost wish I'd never left Europe for this game."

"Almost," noticed the big man. "But not quite, Lucien."

"There's a chance of making a great winning," admitted Rompier. "But the proper place to work is in big cities. The people are sheep, there. Out here, every man is a wolf. One man is nearly as good a fighter as another; every man has a horse as tough as leather; every man knows the country; and every man would risk his life for a hundred dollars—for nothing but the fun! I like fox hunting, Winchelmere, but I don't like to be the fox!"

This expression of irritated opinion his lordship passed over in silence, smiling at his companion.

"These hunters had no good news for you, Lucien?"

"They want us," said the Frenchman, snapping his fingers. "They've been stirred up by that demon of a woman."

"Mary Ingall?"

"The old one, I mean."

"Ah, her aunt!"

"She's gone everywhere," said Rompier. "She's cabled even to England. Everybody in the world knows that Lord Winchelmere has turned bandit in the West!"

His lordship sat erect. But instead of answering, he made another cigarette.

"And you'd think," complained Rompier, "that an English peer is the natural enemy of all these people. They

actually thirst for your blood. She's drawn up long descriptions of you. She's guessed your weight to a pound. She's even drawn a picture of you that's an excellent likeness, while waiting for the real photographs of you to come over from England!"

Winchelmere rose and went to the window. He parted the hanging vines which partially curtained it in a green shower, and looked through them down upon the court. There he could see Gerald, with the mountain lion stretched at his feet.

He said at last: "I knew that I would have to pay for it when I stepped in against Gerald. Oh, I'd heard of him enough! But I didn't think that it would necessarily mean the end of my old life."

He turned on Rompier cheerfully.

"But let the old life go! Now I'm a citizen of no country. I'm free. And if perfect freedom hurts, it's only for a time. Prisoners miss their cells, but they don't miss them for long. Go on, Rompier. I understand this much, I'm a proved outlaw. I'm disgraced in my home country. So much the more reason for making this a rich haul! Now, exactly what did you do?"

"After I'd picked up what information I could—and stolen one of the posters which the woman published from her drawings of you—I went on down to San Felice. I entered the town by night. I thought it would be the most interesting way of going in," he added with a wry smile.

"They have your description, too?"

"They have. And along with it, they have that of Seyf Kalam, of course. And also, even Pedro Oñate's ugly face!"

"We are all marked down," said his lordship calmly. "Which simply means that we shall all have to stay by the ship that much more closely. We'll have to be good shipmates, Rompier. Go on!"

"I went into the town by a side lane and made for the hotel."

"A grand opportunity we missed in that hotel, Rompier."

"I know it. It was Gerald again. The devil is in him."

"He *is* the devil," said his lordship with a good deal of feeling. "You got to the hotel and there you found the two women?"

"Of course. I stopped long enough to make myself up as a peon in good circumstances. I put on the ragged beard and mustache. I wrapped my neck in a gaudy strip of silk and put a gun and a knife in another scarf at my belt. Then I went into the hotel and asked for a room. They weren't too anxious to have me as a guest, but I finally got an attic room. It was good enough for me. I only wanted to be under that roof. I didn't intend to spend too much time in my bed!"

"Of course not. You spotted the rooms of the two Misses Ingall?"

"That was easy. I was going to search those rooms the first chance I had, but then I learned that they had made a deposit in the safe of the town's new bank. After that, I wasted two whole days finding out all about the bank and its safe."

"And what did you find?" asked his lordship, with keen interest.

"I found nothing to make me any happier. The careful bank had put in one of the newest contrivances. It has a lock that would defy the expert. And it's guarded day and night by men who know how to shoot straight and who can't be bought off."

"Did you try that, even?"

"No," said the other. "But I had a look at them. Simply cow-punchers straight off the range, and that breed doesn't know how to be crooked."

"Of course they don't," said his lordship. "One would think that every ragged puncher was a millionaire, only interested in supporting the law. Ex-

cept for a few gun fights, here and there. Go on Rompier. Your story is dragging a little."

"There's enough to say when I come to it," said Rompier. "After I found out that it was no use trying the bank, I saw that we'd have to fall back on Gerald to buy the box, the diamond, and the emerald. I noticed that the two ladies walked out in the little garden of the hotel every evening, and that no one else ever did the same thing. When I was sure of that, I put myself in their way. The very next evening, when they turned the corner of the pine trees, I was in front of them. I took off my hat and bowed to them. The older woman wanted to know if I had something to say to them, or if they knew me.

"I said: 'You only know me by name and reputation. I am Lucien Rompier.'"

"Rompier, Rompier," chuckled his lordship, "you always were very keen after a dramatic effect."

"Not a bit," said Rompier, "I simply wanted to make that conversation as short as possible; and, besides, I'd had a little shock of my own."

"What was that?"

"The older woman looked about as usual. Hard as nails and as keen as a fox. But the younger woman looked as if she'd just got out of a sick bed. And got out too soon, at that! Hollow-eyed, my lord. And she used to be a beauty!"

"She's been grieving for Gerald, of course," said his lordship. "I'm almost sorry for her. Her father killed—and then her lover dropped under her eyes!"

"Almost sorry?" asked the Frenchman sharply.

"In these affairs," said his lordship, "it doesn't do to let your heart soften. Go on!"

Rompier stared at him for a moment.

"I come from a warmer climate than yours," he said at last, and then con-

tinued: "The moment Mary Ingall saw me she cried out: 'Jimmy! Jimmy!' And she clasped her hands at me.

"I said at once: 'He's alive, Miss Ingall.'

"She reached for her aunt and held onto her arm. Even that hard-faced woman said: 'Thank Heaven!'

"Then she asked me why I had come. I said that I wanted to make a bargain.

"I didn't have a chance to say any more. Mary Ingall broke in: 'You'll give us Gerald alive, and well—for the golden box, and the diamond?'

"'And the emerald,' said I, losing no tricks.

"'Yes, yes! Everything!' said she. And of course you shall have every thing. Oh, willingly, willingly!"

"I was a little touched, Winchelmere. She spoke from the heart. But two people in the world could have heard her without being stirred."

"One of the two is myself," said his lordship. "And the other?"

"Is Gerald! However, it was quickly arranged after that."

"They are to give us everything for Gerald?"

"Everything!"

"I told you," said his lordship, "that the game was worth the price. It will be done with in no time and we'll be started back across the Atlantic!"

"With Gerald alive and after us!" said Rompier bitterly. "That will give us a happy life! By gad, Winchelmere, if he goes back from us to them, he must go with a slow poison working in him!"

His lordship looked fixedly at the speaker.

"Like Cromwell," said he, "you're thorough, old fellow. Nevertheless, that's an idea. What do we do next?"

"Simply get a note from Gerald that he's alive and well. They'll pay for that note with the emerald. Then we can arrange the rest of the transfer!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE HENCHMAN OF HORUS.

THEY went down together to find Geraldi, and they found him seated with Pedro Oñate at a little table in a corner of the patio, playing two-handed poker. Geraldi was dealing. The whisper of the cards, for one second, was like the noise of a soft wind.

"An artist, an artist!" said Lord Winchelmere as he looked on. "Geraldi, if I could have you with me, we would lead the lives of two emperors!"

"As I remember," said Geraldi, looking up with a smile, "if two men claimed the empire, one of them had to be put under ground. Is that right?"

Winchelmere and Rompier drew up chairs.

"Lucien has arranged everything," said his lordship. "We simply begin by getting a note from you that you're alive and well treated, Geraldi. That begins things."

Geraldi nodded.

"After that," said Winchelmere, "inside a week, we'll be able to hand you over to them as safe and as sound as you are now!"

The widow of Strozzi came out into the patio, saw them, and cried out: "There's blood on the hand of every man of you if you make him a friend! Do you hear, Lucien? There is blood on your hand!"

She screamed it at them in such a terrible voice that the Frenchman started halfway from the table and then slowly lowered himself back into his place.

"You're talking like a great fool!" he said roughly. "We're bargaining now for your widow's portion."

"I don't want money!" cried she.

She ran at them with a clenched hand above her head. "I don't want blood money. I want that he should die, as my poor Giovanni died! I want——"

Lord Winchelmere raised his hand.

"You'd better go back to your work," said he. "We're very busy here, signora."

She gave him the blackest of bitter looks, but he prevailed upon her, and she went back slowly under the arches, stopping now and then to stab them with her glance of hatred.

"What would your first payment be?" asked Geraldi.

"The emerald," said Lord Winchelmere frankly.

"You get the emerald for a note written by me?"

"Yes."

"Then you return me to them safe and sound, and for that I suppose you get the box of golden Horus and the yellow diamond? Is that it?"

"Of course."

"Good people, aren't they?" asked Geraldi heartily. "What am I to them? But they'll give up a fortune to ransom me!"

"Aye," said Winchelmere, "and so we've brought this little squabble to an end. But before we go any further, Geraldi, I want to know if you can't come to terms of truce with the rest of us?"

"To give up the trail, you mean?"

"You see how it has come out before," insisted the Englishman. "Very heavy odds against you, old fellow, and though I know that you're as gritty as steel—you see what happens when the odds are so long?"

Geraldi nodded.

"Then we'll make a double bargain, Geraldi."

"For what purpose, Winchelmere?"

"That you and I come to an end of this argument, my dear fellow. It never can bring any good to either of us. I don't want your blood. Why should you want mine?"

"I want to remind you," said Geraldi cheerfully, "of a little picture that I once saw."

"Ah!" said his lordship, who seemed

enormously pleased by the turn that the talk had taken.

For that matter, Oñate and Rompier were not a whit less happy and looked at each other with every indication of enormous relief.

"It was the picture of a rather oldish fellow—forty-five or fifty, say. With all the lines of work and brains in his face, you know. The sight of him running forward through the evening, with his hands thrown out before him like a happy soul about to rush into the gates of heaven. And before him a nearly naked man with a loin cloth about his hips, and a headdress of a sham Egyptian style over his head, and his whole body glowing like burning gold. I remember that picture, your lordship. I suppose that you were the one who painted it?"

Winchelmere thrust his chair back from the table, bitterly disappointed.

"You're as bitter as a starved dog, Geraldi," he declared.

"You did the trick, of course," insisted Geraldi. "What was it? A sort of phosphorus that you rubbed on him? And the man it was rubbed on was Seyf Kalam, of course?"

"We'll talk no more about it," said Winchelmere.

"Certainly not," agreed Geraldi politely. "We'll simply speak of another thing—that same man, an honorable, kind, and upright fellow, lying flat in the dark of the trees with a knife wound—in his back. In his back, Winchelmere! In his back!"

He repeated it over and over, hardly above a whisper, and his dark eyes drifted softly from face to face.

They grew dreadfully uncomfortable. They shifted in their places and stared at him, at the ground, at the sky. Winchelmere sat with lips stiffened to a straight line.

"That man," persisted Geraldi, "was my friend. He was with me. He had saved my life, that same day. And

I've registered a little oath between me and whatever gods there are, that I'll have satisfaction for that death—five times over, Winchelmere!"

"You talk," said his lordship, "rather like a braggart. I won't be broad enough to say like a fool!"

"Look!" said Geraldi, leaning back in his chair. "You are confident now. You have me. Well, we shall see in the end!"

"Forget all this argument," said Winchelmere. "You can be as vindictive as you please. As for Ingall, after all, he stole the thing in Egypt."

"It's not true," answered Geraldi. "He found it. He took it away, we have reason to believe, simply because he wanted to restore it to what it ought to be, before he offered the proper share to the government of Egypt!"

"Very well," said Rompier. "Why the dickens do we have to argue about it still? Finish the bargain, Winchelmere, and then let Geraldi do his worst. We won't be sitting with our hands folded in the meantime. We'll be up and stirring a bit in the interim, I expect. Is that right, friends?"

"Of course it's right," said Oñate, who had not spoken before.

He was a Mexican, but he looked rather like a Japanese. He was always smiling, his face rising to a lump over either cheek bone, compelled by the smile, and his eyes lost except for slant glints of obscure light that came out now and then.

At this point, he was looking fixedly at Geraldi.

"Coming back to the present business, then," said Winchelmere, white with anger, "I ask you simply to write a note telling Miss Mary Ingall, or Miss Emily Ingall, that you are alive and that you are well. I don't suppose that you grudge starting the ball rolling? Not if you're as keen to be free and start on our trail, knife in hand, as I think you are!"

He spoke half sneeringly, and Gerald answered:

"You show the defect of greatness, Lord Winchelmere. The defect of greatness is too much logic. Open your mind a little, my lord. Open your mind, and then you will see why I can't do this!"

"You can't do this?" echoed Winchelmere, breathing hard.

"You can't do this?" said Oñate, his smile beginning to have a terrible significance.

"How could I?" said Gerald.

"Suppose you try to explain?" requested Rompier, his face discolored with his fury.

"Why, my friend, I am in the hands of a god," said Gerald. "How could I betray him?"

"He's out of his head," suggested Oñate.

"I suppose I understand," said his lordship. "You mean to say that you're in the service of old Horus, and that of course you can't betray him, and help to lure one of his jewels back to us—to say nothing of the whole box—and the yellow diamond. Is that what you mean?"

"You *have* an imagination," said Gerald, "once it has been properly stimulated!"

"I don't believe that this is your real answer," said Rompier. "You're not going to force us to cut your throat like a pig in a slaughter house!"

"No, no," said Gerald. "I never shall die like that!"

"What assures you of that?" asked Winchelmere curiously.

"I'm glad to tell you. The protection of the god, Lord Winchelmere. Horus, golden Horus of the two horizons, the creator of life, who shines in the double forehead of the night and the morning——"

"Rubbish!" cried his lordship. "Do you expect us to listen to such frightful rot?"

"Ah, Winchelmere, is that all you'll call it?"

"I'm going to be short with you, Gerald. I'll ask you to say yes or no. Will you let Miss Ingall know that you're safe with us?"

"By no means!"

"Then," said Rompier through his teeth, "I think I'll have the cutting of that throat!"

"Shall I tell you, Rompier, what the god reveals to me?" asked Gerald.

"Tell me, then. By Heaven, I do think that his brain is gone!"

"Simply this: That one by one they are going down. Not all at one stroke. Giovanni Strozzi is dead. The rest will go by degrees. I am sorry for you! By one and one you go down! Oñate, Rompier, Seyf Kalam, the thief—and finally his lordship. One by one, as sacrifices, shall I say, to golden Horus, Horus of the double sun——"

He smiled faintly as he spoke.

The others rose and left the table in horror.

"I've a mind to finish him, madman that he is!" said the savage Rompier.

"Hush, hush!" said Oñate. "See him laugh! See him laugh!"

For Gerald lolled in his chair and silently laughed.

"As if he were in heaven," said Rompier, grinding his teeth.

"He *is* in heaven," answered Winchelmere slowly. "He's in a paradise of swords!"

CHAPTER V.

FOUR MEN PLAN.

THEY convened in the room of Winchelmere—Oñate, Rompier, his lordship, and Seyf Kalam, the Egyptian.

"He refuses to send the note," said Winchelmere. "He probably would refuse to go with us and be saved. Seyf, suppose you speak first and tell us what we'll have to do?"

Seyf Kalam made a gesture with both hands, palm out. His sallow face was

not altered as he spoke, except that the strange, archaic smile of old Egypt always was on it.

"I have no voice," said Seyf. "I lost it when I was taken by Geraldi, and my life bought off for the price of an emerald. A high price for a man like me! But whatever the rest of you decide, I am ready to do. I now have a double price to pay," smiled Seyf Kalam.

Lord Winchelmere listened attentively.

"We've agreed to that," said he. "If this consummate demon Geraldi manages to take one of us, we are to ransom the lost man, if we can, at the price of one of the stones. We had to begin with the four emeralds and the golden box. Strozzi is dead. Seyf has been captured and has lost his right to one stone. There remain three emeralds. I have one," said Winchelmere, fondling his pipe with stronger fingers, "and Oñate has another."

The Mexican sat with crossed legs, now he nodded dreamily, and stroked with absent-minded unconcern the spurred heel of his left shoe.

"Rompiers has the third," said his lordship. "Our fat friend is now off on scouting business for all of us, and when he comes back, no doubt he'll want to have one of the stones in his own keeping."

"He can whistle for it, if you mean Edgar," said Rompier.

"When he comes back," insisted Winchelmere, "we'll have to match to see who gives a stone to Edgar. He's earned it, I should say. But, mind you, these emeralds are only in our keeping, individually, and when they're sold, the profits are divided equally among all hands."

"Five shares," grumbled Oñate, "out of three stones!"

"If we had the yellow diamond," said Rompier, "I tell you that we'd have a fat share for each of the five of us

that are left. But there is no hope of getting the diamond."

"We'll have it," said his lordship, "before three days are out."

"By turning in Geraldi for the stone?"

"And the box," said his lordship. "We'll have a clean sweep or nothing at all. The box, the fourth emerald, and the diamond are the ransom for Geraldi. And she'll pay it."

"And how are we to get Geraldi down to San Felice?"

"Tied in a sack in the tail of a buckboard, if necessary," said his lordship. "Rompiers, suppose you go down to the village and try to get us a buckboard there, and a span of horses."

"Is there no other way of persuading him?" asked Seyf Kalam. "It is hard to make him do things. I have been in his hands, my friends!"

"He'll consent to nothing to save his hide," answered Oñate.

"He's touched with madness—more than touched!" declared Rompiers. "Who could understand a brain like his?"

"I think I understand him perfectly," answered Winchelmere. "It is simply this way with Geraldi. He needs sensation—a great sensation. After all, there are millions of sensationalists in the world, and they all abuse themselves. They extract pleasure out of their nerves by putting a strain on them. There's the drunkard. He drinks not for the pleasure of the liquor, but to drug his brain with the fumes of alcohol. He loves to feel his reason tottering. And there is the glutton who stuffs himself to bursting for the mere pleasure of feeling that he has overburdened his stomach to the point of nausea—and still he can eat more than a normal man. There is the drug fiend. He has to have his breath of snuff now and then; or opium and a sleep full of good dreams."

"And Geraldi's like that?" sneered

Rompier. "He eats no more than a greyhound. He hardly touches liquor. Certainly he never touches drugs."

"And Geraldí is like the others," insisted his lordship. "He is a glutton, and what he eats is danger. To be under cover of a loaded gun is an exquisite pleasure to him. I know a man who hunted with Geraldí, and he said that Geraldí's one great delight was in pushing into thick brush after a wounded lion. Once, in the twilight, they gave up a lion which had slipped into a deep cave. Afterward, they missed Geraldí. Common sense had told him to give up the hunt, just as it had warned the others. But the picture grew up in his brain, clearer and more clear—to slip into that cave, to crawl along, feeling his way. At last to flash an electric torch and try to finish the big beast——"

His lordship paused. The others were watching with large eyes.

"He didn't take his heavy rifle. It would have been too clumsy. He went back armed with a single-action Colt, such as he uses here. He worked into that cave, and the lion winded him and charged. Geraldí was half-drowned by the roar of the brute, but he flashed on his light and fanned six shots into the king of beasts in a second or so. When the others arrived, having heard the uproar, they found that all six of those shots were in the head of the lion. But he wouldn't have been killed if it hadn't been that one bullet by luck crashed through an eye and found the brain. Otherwise, we'd be having no Geraldí to bother us here! And that, you see, is Geraldí. For my part, I wouldn't be in his boots for all the wealth of Midas. He never knows when he may be overmastered by some strong impulse to attempt the impossible! Danger is the air he breathes and the food he eats. But just as the drunkard wakes up some night and feels the craving in his blood, and fights against it, and prays that he

can resist but at last finds himself getting out of bed to dress; so Geraldí must wake up in the night and feel the spur and fight against it, and at last get up to try some terrible, some impossible adventure!"

"I think that's true," said Rompier. "For instance, he's essentially an honest man. But he's equipped himself to cheat at cards, at dice, and to fight like a tiger with any weapon. Simply so that he may be where danger is; I can see that in him."

"They tell a tale of him in Cairo," said Seyf Kalam. "He had a great enemy there—a jealous man—a gambler, who decided to get Geraldí out of the way. So he laid his plot, hired his killers, and sent an invitation to Geraldí to come and sit in at a friendly game of cards. One of the hired men played double—went to Geraldí and warned him. And what did Geraldí do?"

"He would go to the place, anyway," said his lordship.

Seyf Kalam opened his slant eyes wider.

"You've heard the story before, then?"

"No, never before."

"But that was what happened! He did actually go to the place. He sat down at the table. While they were playing, he won a good deal of money. And then, quietly, he told the story of how the man had brought the warning to him!"

"It must have been a glorious fight," suggested his lordship with a nod.

"It was a great fight," said Seyf Kalam. "I was there."

He said no more. Perhaps he was one of the hired killers; perhaps he was the jealous man. At any rate, he knew Geraldí!

"Get the buckboard, by all means," said Winchelmere. "Go down and get it right away, Rompier. We'll start to-night or to-morrow morning. And

Geraldi will have to go with us, even if we have to chloroform him to take him along!"

They agreed to that.

"I'll get a pair of horses to travel in harness, too?" suggested Rompier. "Yes."

"What should I pay for a buckboard and a pair of ponies?"

"You ought to get a good buckboard for a hundred dollars, if it isn't new," said Oñate. "And ponies? Two hundred dollars for a good span. A really good brace of mustangs."

Rompier stood up.

"After we get Geraldi down to San Felice," said he—"and he's a long distance from San Felice now—how are we to get the girl to come to him?"

"We might," said Winchelmere, "carry Geraldi in a sack straight into the hotel and leave him there in her room. She'd pay over the goods to us; she's already promised."

"Trust the word of a woman?" asked the Mexican sharply.

"Of that woman—yes," said his lordship.

"I," said Oñate, "never would do it. But—I think that this is going to be an adventure that we will all remember."

"Not all of us," put in Seyf Kalam softly.

"Now, what do you mean by that?" asked Lucien Rompier.

"Ah, well," said Seyf Kalam, "it is only a thought that came over my mind, and there is no good in making my friends unhappy because of it."

"We'll hear it," said Winchelmere.

"Well, then," said Seyf Kalam, "it occurred to me that some of us will die before the golden box and the diamond are in our hands."

Shoulders were shrugged uneasily.

"What the dickens put that into your mind?" asked his lordship with a frown.

"Your own words," answered Seyf Kalam.

"What words?" asked his lordship.

"I can tell you that, too. When Geraldi laughed in the patio, did you not say as you came away that Geraldi was living in a paradise of swords?"

"I may have said something like that—with a figurative meaning, of course!"

"Ah, of course! But in a paradise of swords, men must die, must they not?"

CHAPTER VI.

PEPILLO GROWS UP.

MANY strands began to be woven into the fate of James Geraldi, so that it is necessary to take them up one by one, and to begin at this point with San Luis, that noble goat whose courage was so resistless, whose strength was, indeed, as the strength of ten.

It has been said that the precinct of Pepillo, the mountain lion, was limited to the house, and that the patio was the neutral ground on which the two rivals met upon amicable terms. But surely it could not be said that fear of Pepillo for a single moment kept San Luis from the interior of the house. It was rather a series of kicks and whacks which he had received on his ribs and back during the period of his more sensitive youth that had convinced him, unwillingly, that it was not wise to pass the threshold of the house. Convinced of this, he philosophically gave up that whole region.

But if he had to give up the house, he tried to make sure that Pepillo had given up the great outdoors.

His superiority over Pepillo had been established during the kittenhood of the lion. And, as size and strength came to Pepillo, a few times he had used his claws on the goat—always with terrible results to himself.

For the goat could charge with the suddenness and almost the inescapable speed of a cannon ball, and at the first sign of anger on the part of Pepillo, San Luis' head went down—that head of iron, armed almost unnecessarily

with two huge, backward-bending horns—and the goat drove himself in a compact ball of combative courage straight at the enemy.

Once he had cornered Pepillo and almost smashed his ribs. Once, really horrible to relate, he had butted Pepillo full upon the end of his sensitive nose, and caused it to bleed for endless hours, and made it swell up to gigantic proportions. From that moment, Pepillo surrendered all thoughts of fighting with the white streak of danger. When San Luis put down his head and pawed the ground like an angry bull, Pepillo glanced around with wild, yellow eyes, and sought a means of retreat.

All cats, great and small, are cowards at heart. Perhaps the leopard or the black panther are exceptions. But in no cat is there the glorious desire of combat for the sake of combat, such as stirs in the heart of a fighting dog, say—or of a goat!

Despite his growing bulk, therefore, despite the fact that he now had sufficient power in his supple paw and forearm to smash the skull of San Luis or to rip out his ribs at a stroke, Pepillo never forgot those first two lessons, and he cringed when he saw the enemy.

Nevertheless, it was hard for him to be cooped up in the house. There was much to be gained by venturing out into the near-by fields, and the hills. He knew, for instance, all the arts of catching field mice—scraping up their habitations, buried shallowly under the surface of the ground. He was beginning to know the runs of the rabbits, and he had acquired the patience of his kind in waiting for a kill. For he had learned that one mouthful of wild-caught game is better than pounds and pounds of the butcher's choicest cuts. Rich in this knowledge, Pepillo began patiently to work up the possibilities of the territory around the house, full of squirrels, rabbits, mice, and—now and then—a chance-caught dog, as it strayed

up from the village and went sniffing through the brush!

So Pepillo grew stronger and warier and more intelligent. For he was entering upon that business of life for which instinct and a million generations of his ancestors had fitted him.

But there were embarrassing moments. Once, when he was returning to the house, licking his whiskers, terrible San Luis had come upon him and bumped him so heartily that every one of Pepillo's ribs gave under the pressure, and he rolled over and over. Before he could gain his feet there was another back-breaking thud, and Pepillo leaped up with a howl and fled screeching up a tree.

There he lay on a branch for hours, his eyes burning green with fear and yellow with rage, while San Luis insolently grazed beneath the tree, or lay down to chew his reflective cud. It was not until Bianca Strozzi came out and drove San Luis away, with shouts of laughter, that Pepillo ventured down to the ground and then fled away for the house with gigantic leaps.

Now, on this fatal day of days, Pepillo had watched San Luis leave the patio and afterward a scent of distant game came faintly to the nostrils of the great cat, and in his heart stirred the love of hunting.

He did not go out the patio gate. That would be inviting danger at once. Instead, he sneaked through the house and, through a lower window, sprang out onto the bank beneath, and so off through the brush until he came out into the open at the rear of the barn. There he crouched a moment, turning his big round head from side to side, searching everywhere with his yellow eyes. But there was no sight of San Luis, and there was no scent of him.

At last, contented, Pepillo ventured perilously forth. He always had been interested in the bottom rim of the barn, where the moisture of the earth

had rotted the boards. But at this particular spot, there was a sort of blind alley. That is to say, the harness shed jutted out on the one side and the tangled and dangerous mass of a heap of ruined thorns arose on the other. Between the two, there was a narrow entrance, and this, opening, spread out generously along the base of the barn.

To this spot Pepillo came and hesitated, lashing his sides with his long tail, and cursing San Luis as only a cat can curse. Delightful fragrance, at that moment, assailed him from the barn. With all his heart he yearned to investigate carefully that lower rim of decayed wood with his sharp, steel-hard and steel-bright claws. But, once entered into this natural trap, what if terrible San Luis should come in pursuit and block up all means of escape?

The heart of Pepillo failed within him. He turned and hastened back to the brush, but once there, he was haunted by the memory of that fragrance which meant meat, not plentiful, but young and tender!

At last, all the hair of his back bristling, he started up and went boldly forward.

The thing should be finished quickly. One stroke or two; and then he would spring back out of the trap—

With beating heart he slunk to the edge of the barn and a single stroke, as of half a dozen strong chisels, ripped the rotten wood away. Two nests of mice were revealed, and their squeals were extinguished first under the paw and then in the teeth of Pepillo.

There was still a frantic squeaking of fear—music to the cruel ears of Pepillo.

He sniffed, he strove to look. Somewhere, in a crevice between two beams, a full-sized mouse was trembling in an attempt to get at more perfect cover.

With tentative paw, Pepillo reached under, fumbled, failed. He tried again, and this time one of his natural knives

touched something incredibly soft and yielding. There was a pitiful shriek of fear, another of mortal agony as the knife blade was driven through the body of the mouse.

Then Pepillo drew out his paw carefully and looked down with pleasure at the small impaled body, still writhing. He licked it off with relish, and then turned to flee.

Behold, blocking the entrance, was San Luis!

With dread malice, the goat pretended not to see, and, half-turned away, he was cropping the grass. But his eyes were blood-red, and Pepillo knew in every thrilling fiber of his body what that meant!

He shrank back against the wall of the barn.

At that San Luis advanced a step or two. Innocent interest was in his bearing. But now he shook his head a little, as though feeling with pleasure the weight of his horns.

Pepillo frantically turned and leaped up against the wall of the barn. His huge claws sank into the wood, but this was too old and weak to bear the weight, and down he slid, spitting with fear and fury.

He turned about, his tail swishing from side to side, desperation in his eyes. There was no escape, and the courage of the frightened arose in the frozen heart of Pepillo. He would fight, because instinct said that it was better to fight and die than to surrender weakly.

San Luis advanced still farther, lowered his head, crouched a little. The strong muscles of his legs quivered with preparedness for the sudden, furious charge.

And up the nose of Pepillo to his very eyes sharp pains of reminiscence were darting.

San Luis charged!

Like a white arrow from the bow he drove at the big cat, and Pepillo stood

up on his hind legs with a cry of fear and struck out like a pugilist.

The blow landed on the side of San Luis' head. It came with a little less force than a grizzly could have used, but it was sufficient to fling the goat upon his side, utterly stunned, and with his cheek torn to shreds.

Pepillo looked down as upon a miracle. He could not believe that the terrible, hard head of San Luis had proved as soft as this.

But there was blood on his paw, blood on San Luis—and the goat lay helplessly upon his side, making faint, vague movements of his legs as though striving in vain, instinctively, to regain his feet.

It was enough for the big cat. Instantly, its teeth were in the throat of San Luis, and one brave life was ended.

No sense of guilt oppressed this murderer. He ate as never he had eaten before. Then he lay in the sun and cleaned himself; and finally he crept off into the brush and found a cool, shady nook, and slept. But all through his sleep his ears were twitching. He would drive his claws suddenly into the earth and his yellow eyes opened, hungry in his dreams for another such kill.

At last Pepillo had grown up.

CHAPTER VII.

A PRECIOUS PAIR.

WHILE Pepillo slept in the woods with crimson stains on his velvet breast, Lucien Rompier at last had left the house. Hardly had he mounted a horse and started down the road toward the village than he was aware of a fat man riding up the slope toward him, mounted on a stout mule, and playing a guitar with considerable skill, while he sang in a rich, baritone voice.

Rompier grinned with pleasure as he watched him, and concealing himself in some high brush, he rode out suddenly

with a shout when the fat man was a few yards away.

The latter at the first stir had dropped the guitar, allowing it to be supported by the sling which ran around his neck, and slipping down behind the neck of his horse with a wonderful agility—considering his bulk and his years—he covered Rompier with a Colt.

The Frenchman merely laughed, and threw up his hands in mock surrender.

"You've beaten me, Edgar," he confessed.

The fat man heaved himself up in the saddle again with a grunt of effort.

"You nearly laughed yourself into a bullet through the heart," said he. "I've been practicing, Lucien, and must admit that I shoot a little straighter than I used to."

That possibility, Rompier admitted with a smile.

"What have you done on your trip, and how are things in San Felice?" he asked.

"Sweeter than honey," grinned Edgar, shifting the guitar into his hands again, and fingering it softly as he spoke. "Everything goes well. I go up to report to General Winchelmer!"

"Will you tell me what you found, Edgar?"

"I had to go cautiously," said the fat man. "The day has come when I can mask my face, but I can't mask my stomach; however, I managed to get fairly close to San Felice and finally into it. I saw both the women, and I was satisfied. The older one is as hard as steel, still. She would fight things out to the bitter end, you can be sure. But the younger one is tired of life. She's in love, Rompier! It's like seeing a woman in love with a tiger in the jungles! Why should the pretty little fool fall in love with a Gerdali? But she's in love. She's grown pale. Her eyes are hollow. She starts at every shadow. Only," he added, "on the last day before I started, she seemed to have

regained a little life. I actually heard her singing!"

"Because she had seen me," said Rompier.

"You!"

"I'd been there before you, Edgar," said the Frenchman with satisfaction. "Do you think that a clever fellow like our Winchelmere would have given such a job as that to one man only? Certainly not. He sent the pair of us. You looked at the ladies! I talked to them!"

"I congratulate you," said Edgar, with no apparent jealousy. "I couldn't try the same thing. They both know me. My voice would be a poison in their ears. You, old fellow—you arranged everything?"

"I did my best," said Rompier. "I'm going down to the village now to buy a buckboard and a pair of horses. Geraldi refuses to be fairly exchanged against the box and the diamond and the emerald. We have to bundle him up and take him down by force!"

"I'll go with you," said Edgar. "Tell me everything as we go along."

They journeyed down the hillside, and Rompier told the details of the singular conversation between Geraldi and the rest, and the conclusion of the argument with Geraldi's derision of them all and of their plans.

"If I were Winchelmere," said the fat man with much earnestness, "even if I had to give up the golden box and the jewels, I'd put a bullet through the head of Geraldi and think that the richest day's work that I'd ever done."

"You've double crossed Geraldi," said the Frenchman rather brutally, "and he may be out for your scalp. But we can manage to keep away from him afterwards!"

"I double crossed Geraldi," admitted Edgar frankly and without shame. "But I'm the last one that he'll go after. First, he has to settle the account of the man who lured poor Ingall into the

wood—that's the Egyptian; then of the man that knifed Ingall from behind, and that man is——"

"Be quiet!" breathed Lucien Rompier. "You talk like a fool, or a woman!"

The fat man smiled.

"You agree with me, in your heart," he observed. "And you're right, Lucien. He'll have you in the end for letting your knife run into Ingall. And of course, when that's done, he'll want Oñate on general principles, and he'll be sure to take after Winchelmere as the choicest morsel of all, because Winchelmere engineered the general scheme of things. And after I hear that the last of you is dead, Lucien, then I'll begin to worry about the security of my own head."

Rompier regarded him with a savage silence.

Suddenly he said: "You're right, Edgar. We ought to do it. We really ought to do away with Geraldi now that we have our hands on him. But Winchelmere never would consent to that. And you hardly can blame him. The price of Geraldi is the golden box, man, and the diamond and the emerald. Winchelmere reckons that the price of the diamond alone would be a hundred thousand pounds!"

The fat man whistled, until his brown cheeks distended, and his fat chin quivered with emotion.

They rode on in the sun. Before them the village appeared, one winding street, partially fenced in with houses on either side.

"How are you people keeping Geraldi?"

"Like a king. Giving him everything."

"You'll be giving him the keys of the house, too," said the fat man in alarm.

"No fear of that. There was no use killing him with confinement in the cellar. We keep him there from dark to dawn. But when the day begins, we

turn him loose and let him walk about the patio."

"Good heavens!" cried Edgar, shaken quite from his philosophy. "You let him go free in the patio?"

"Not exactly free. We keep a pair of riflemen watching him, a pair of trusty men who'd as soon shoot out the whites of his eyes as not."

"He'll cut their throats—he'll cut their throats!" exclaimed the fat man, actually stopping his horse, so strongly had consternation seized on him. "He'll kill them and take their horses to ride away on!"

The Frenchman nodded.

"Possible, but not likely," he said. "We're guarding him in another way. We made a bargain with him. Every day he's to sit out there, but only if he'll give us his word of honor that he won't attempt to escape during the day."

Edgar mopped his red, streaming forehead.

"You gave me a frightful shock!" he said. "By heavens, Rompier, you've shortened my life ten years with the shock that you gave me. I tell you, man—it was terrible! But this is better. If you have his word, of course that will do."

He paused and looked up to the pale, sun-whitened blue of the sky.

"Because," he said, "I know that man, and I know that he'll never break his word of honor. And isn't it strange, Rompier, that a man no better than you or I will keep his promise like a priest—while we would break an oath for the sake of picking a beggar's pocket?"

"You speak for yourself," said Rompier.

"Ah, well," smiled Edgar, "there's always a limit to French honesty, as I've found before. And even a French thief feels, in his heart of hearts, that he's a noble fellow!"

He laughed, and went on playing the guitar, while his sides shook with contented mirth at his own thought.

Rompier favored him with the most savage side glance, and so they rode into the town in a far from amiable humor.

They inquired where they could find a buckboard and a few horses for sale, and the blacksmith whom they asked left his forge and came out, wiping his hands futilely on his leather apron.

"You want a bang-up, good-as-new buckboard?" he asked.

"We want a sound rig," said Edgar, "and it doesn't have to be new-painted, as far as that goes!"

"What's paint?" said the blacksmith with generous emotion. "Of course, paint don't count. You want the good hickory, and that's the main thing."

"And a spring or two?" said Edgar cheerfully.

"Springs?" said the blacksmith. "I never went in for them, none. They don't save nothin' but wear on the seat of the pants, and if your pants wear out there, you can put a patch on 'em, can't you?"

His grin made Edgar chuckle in a deep, cheerful voice. "Of course we can. Let's go over and have a look at this buckboard that you're talking about. Who owns it?"

"I do myself, you'd be surprised to hear," said the blacksmith.

"I am surprised," said Edgar.

"I'll show you the way," said the other. "Ride down the street and turn in at the first lane on the right. The first pasture gate is my place. I'll be waitin' for you there."

"Leave everything to me," said Edgar, as the two rode on. "I understand these people. I'll get it for half the price, and I'll have the fun of beating them down. I tell you what—even a Scotchman can't make money out of a Yankee!"

He struck a loud chord on his guitar, and he began to sing in his strong, clear voice, full of unction, rich with rhythm.

"You do the talking and the bargaining, then," said Rompier. "I was told I could pay a hundred for the buckboard and a hundred for each of the two ponies."

"Robbery!" said Edgar.

"All right," said the Frenchman. "Get them as cheap as you can. But mind that you don't talk more than you have to. That's your weakness, Edgar!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A HORSE DEAL.

THE blacksmith did not go straight to his little farm or to the gate that opened onto it. He went on the run, to be sure, but he stopped at the side of a house not far away—a modest little house, screened behind a few young poplars.

"Hey!" called the blacksmith.

A woman put her head out the window. She rested her sewing on the sill.

"How are you, Billy?"

"I'm fine," said Billy. "Where's the sheriff?"

"He's in the back room, havin' a bit of a snooze."

"Wake him up, will you? One of them fellers is come down from the Oñate place. The sheriff said that he wanted to have us let him know, the next time that some of 'em come around!"

"I'll fetch him right away," said the sheriff's wife. "But he's sure enjoyin' a good enough snooze. Listen, would you, how he's snorin'."

The blacksmith, uninterested, in the heartless manner of men simply added: "Tell him to hurry. There's a pair of 'em come to buy my buckboard. Maybe I can sell the buckboard and then use it for cartin' them off to the jail!"

He chuckled in appreciation of this brilliant possibility, and so he turned and struck off at a run again, covering the ground rapidly, for his legs were both strong and long. He took a pair

of fences in full stride, and so he came to the pasture gate and already was opening it when Rompier and Edgar walked their horses into view.

"Look at him panting," said Rompier, as they rode through the gate. "You'll have an easy job to make a bargain out of him, Edgar. He's keen to sell—very sharp to sell!"

Billy, the blacksmith, closed the gate and ran the bolt home into the guard. He remarked cheerfully that the weather was turning hot even for this season of the year, and then he hurried ahead to get to the wagon shed before them.

"We're not as hot as he is," said Edgar, a little more sober. "He hasn't run all the way simply to come here. Where has the fellow gone?"

"Nonsense," said Rompier; "you'd suspect a shadow in the clouds."

"I would if there were no sun in sight," said the fat man. "I don't like the look of that fellow. But—we've got to have a buckboard!"

The door of the wagon shed was pushed open, and the blacksmith pulled the buckboard out. It was, as he had said in the first place, not at all distinguished for its appearance. The paint had been boiled off its wheels and its body by the bitter strength of the summer suns and, in addition, at least half the top of the leather cushion on the driver's seat was gone, and the horsehair stuffing protruded.

Edgar and his companion dismounted, and Edgar took the wheels one by one and shook them—violently, and then with care.

All of them rattled!

"The nuts, they need to be screwed up a little," said Billy, gone anxious in a moment.

"Yes," said Edgar dryly, "they need to be screwed up a little. It might be quicker to put on new wheels, though!"

He finished his survey of the running gear, the shafts—marked with

long cracks in the withered surface of the hickory—and even the bottom of the bed of the buckboard.

"Well, sir," said Billy with a rather forced good cheer, "what do you think of her?"

"I should say," said Edgar, "that a man never would be lonely in the buckboard."

"No?" said Billy, willing to be pleased by every favorable comment. "And why do you say that?"

"Because it would always be talking to the driver!"

"A little rattling, what does that matter?" asked Billy. "The kind of roads that we got around here, how could a buggy help but rattle pretty quick? Joe Shaw, he got a swell rubber-tired buggy two years ago. It's all gone now. The kind of roads that we got, they're something awful! But this here—you take my word for it, she'll hang together. Look at her—strong, she is!"

He illustrated his words with a bit of proof, giving the near forewheel a tremendous jerk. The buckboard groaned and stirred, but the wheel remained upright.

"Look here, those wheels they all track as straight as a string," argued Billy.

He pulled the buckboard farther out as he did so, and demonstrated that what he said was true. The wheels, indeed, traveled in straight lines, with little wabbling.

"What would you want for that?" asked Edgar.

"Want for it? She cost a hundred and eighty-five, new," lied Billy, the blacksmith, thoughtfully.

"Listed at ninety-eight fifty, brand new!" said Edgar.

"Ninety-eight your hat!" shouted Billy, red with honest indignation. "If I didn't pay a hundred eighteen——"

He stopped. He saw that so quickly he had been trapped. He despised himself and hated the smiling fat man.

"And then I had a lot of extras that come to the hundred and eighty-five," he said, biting his lip, and turning sullen.

"I could throw away twenty-five dollars on the old rattletrap," said Edgar. "Not a penny more!"

"Twenty——" began the blacksmith. And then he broke into bitterly satirical laughter.

"Well, good-by, gents," he said, and picked up the shafts, preparatory to backing it into the shed. "Ninety dollars for to be givin' this here away!" he declared.

"I might raise to thirty," said Edgar, "but that's all!"

"You been raised in a hoss country. It's plain that you don't know rigs," said Billy. "Ask anybody, ask anybody in town if this ain't a good rig. They've all rode in it!"

"Thirty dollars!" said Edgar stubbornly.

The blacksmith seemed furiously endeavoring to back the buckboard into the shed, but he seemed too blind with anger to succeed.

"I tell you, it would be a gift, at seventy!"

"Well, we'll make it half of that. Call it an even thirty-five."

"Whatcha wastin' my time for?" asked Billy. "I'm a busy man, even if you ain't!"

He added: "I'd be robbin' myself if I took a penny under fifty dollars for it. But for needin' money, I wouldn't think of that!"

"Forty dollars," said Edgar.

"For the sake of makin' a trade and bein' friendly," said Billy, "make it forty-five and I'll give the wagon away to you."

"Come along," said Edgar to his companion. "We're wasting our time, as he says!"

Suddenly Billy capitulated.

"Forty it is!" he exclaimed. Then he added with a childish smile of

pleasure. "I raised you fifteen, anyway!"

"You would have sold it for the twenty-five," declared Rompier suspiciously.

"Sure. Or for twenty," said Billy. "It ain't been used for two years. But it's a good one. It'll never break down on you."

"And now a pair of horses?" asked the fat man.

"They're lookin' you in the eye right now," said the other, pointing toward the corral fence. "They like you, and they've sort of got an idea that you'd be wanting to take them home."

"How much for those bays?"

"You mean that fine pair over there? I was offered three hundred and twenty-five for that span last week, but I refused. But I'm in need of money, I don't mind sayin'. Seein' that you and me already have done some business, I would favor you by sellin' that pair for three hundred, partner."

Edgar rode up close to the corral fence, Rompier beside him. And the tall, gaunt figure of the sheriff emerged from behind the shed and advanced with Billy.

"You want 'em, sheriff?" asked Billy. "For heaven's sake wait till I sell that pair of bays, will you? They're a pair of suckers!"

"That pair you bought in for seventy-five bucks?"

"They was dead pore, then. I've got 'em fattened up, them ponies!"

He added again, sharp with vindictive curiosity: "You want 'em, sheriff?"

"Shut up," said the impolite sheriff. "Go on with your robbery. I'll listen."

"A hundred and a quarter for the pair," said Edgar, as the other came up.

Billy halted, shocked and hurt.

"I used up all my arguing about the buckboard," said he. "I've given you a bottom price, stranger!"

Edgar yawned.

"What are they good for?"

"Look at 'em," said the blacksmith. "You never seen a finer, prettier pair of hosses in your life."

"Or jack rabbits," said Edgar. "They'd never need a stable at night. You could just cover them by throwing a coat over the span of them!"

"You can have your joke," said Billy. "But quality is what counts in this here world. Besides, you look at a big hoss. He tires himself out carryin' his own weight up a hill, and he breaks his shoulders to pieces brak- ing his own weight going down a hill. Ain't that right?"

"I suppose it is," said Edgar. "I wouldn't mind paying a hundred and fifty for that pair of ponies, though."

"I'm always willing to meet a friend," declared Billy. "We could make it two hundred and fifty."

"Might I?" said Edgar. "I tell you, man, that span is not worth more than a hundred and seventy-five at the outside. Ask your long, skinny friend if I'm not right. You probably picked them up from gypsies for fifty dollars the pair. But I'm willing to be liberal!"

He had motioned toward the sheriff, and the latter now stood up and removed from his mouth the straw which he had been chewing with blank, bovine eyes.

"I got no very good ideas about hosses," he said. "And I wouldn't know within a hundred dollars."

"Hold on," said Billy in a panic. "I'll take a hundred and seventy-five!"

"And harness?"

"For fifty more——"

"Two hundred for horses and harness."

"You're grinding me down," said Billy, a grin of pleasure nevertheless breaking through in spite of himself. "I'll close with you, though."

"But about men," said the sheriff, "I'm kind of curious. Some of them have a price on 'em, you know!"

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SUBJECT OF FISHING.

UP to this point, the fat man had been relishing the bargaining. Now, as he heard this ominous speech from the lean, uncouth stranger, he did not turn his head, but he looked straight at Rompier, and the Frenchman looked back at him. There was much meaning in that exchange of glances.

"Some come cheap," went on the man of law, "and some are high-priced. If you can get the cheap ones wholesale, it's pretty good. But if you got a chance to catch even one of the high-priced ones, it's worth a gross of the small fry."

"Are you a man hunter?" asked Rompier.

"A fisher, you might say," corrected the sheriff. "I angle for 'em. Sometimes I catch a few."

He was looking over the distant hill, his eyes gentle with meditation, puckering to see his own thoughts.

"And what sort of bait do you use?" asked Edgar, having finished paying the blacksmith for the wagon, horses and harness.

"It ain't the bait that counts," said the sheriff. "It's the way that you handle it."

"There's a best way, of course," said Edgar Asprey.

"Of course there is," replied the sheriff. "Sometimes you lower into the water without raisin' a ripple, and sometimes you gotta throw the hook in with a splash. It all depends upon the kind of fish and what it'll rise to."

"I can understand that, in a way," said Asprey. "But what sort of fish do you mostly go after?"

"Oh, any kind," said the sheriff. "So long as they got a name! A fish that's got a name for being hard to catch is the kind that I like to try. Sometimes they're lean. Sometimes they're fat. Sometimes little and sometimes

big. You never can tell what'll interest me, as long as there's a name attached."

"You never go after suckers, I suppose?" said the fat man, still wonderfully genial.

"Why, I wouldn't have 'em!" said the sheriff. "If I get one of 'em, I pick it off the hook and chuck it back into the water. You never can tell. The sort of streams that I fish, sometimes the softest sucker in the world will turn into the hardest-boiled kind of a game fish."

He shook his head in innocent wonder.

Rompier began to back his horse, and so reached a position at a little distance and on the farther side of the sheriff. At that, the latter squared himself on the fence. He looked straight before him, but it was plain that he was keeping both men covered from the tail of his eye. At this moment, if either of the criminals had had any doubt as to the character of the gaunt stranger, it was removed by a little gust of wind which opened the coat of the sheriff and allowed them to see a tarnished steel shield attached inside the lapel.

"All right, all right," said Edgar Asprey. "I'd like to see you fishing, one of these days."

"And maybe you will," said the sheriff, "because, as I was sayin', sometimes I play for lean fish, and sometimes I play for fat ones."

Here he let his glance flash toward the fat Edgar Asprey, and the latter could not help changing color a trifle.

"We'll have to get on," said Rompier.

"We will," agreed Asprey.

He could not help adding to the sheriff: "I hope you have luck with your fishing, stranger. Big or little, lean or fat, I hope that you're able to fill your hamper. What sort of fish do you want to-day?"

"I want the bribery an' corruption fish," said the sheriff innocently.

"That's sort of speckled, isn't it? Like a trout?" asked Edgar Asprey.

"It is," said the sheriff, "but it ain't fit for no white man's table!"

"Well," said Asprey, "and what do you do with it when it's caught?"

"Cut the head off and feed it to the dogs," said the sheriff with a strange little undertone of metallic hardness in his voice.

"Feed it to the dogs, but not the head?" murmured Asprey, now pale indeed.

"That's it," said the sheriff. "Because the head of it would poison even a dog."

"Well," said Asprey, "so long!"

"So long," said the sheriff.

Asprey drove the buckboard. Rompier went beside it, leading the extra horse, and so they jogged through the gate, which was held open for them by Billy, the blacksmith, his face disturbed by a leering, evil smile.

They jogged through the village.

"What does it mean?" asked Rompier.

"Is he following?"

"No."

"No sign of him?"

"Not a sign."

"Nevertheless, he's coming after us—drifting along through the trees, perhaps."

"What was it all about, Asprey?"

"Couldn't you hear for yourself?"

Edgar replied gruffly.

"I don't understand all the dialect. It isn't the sort of English that I've studied and lived by."

"But maybe it'll be the kind of English that you'll worry and hang by, in the finish," said Asprey darkly. "He was working me up, Rompier. Dash him!"

"What do you mean by 'working up'?"

"I mean to say that he wanted to make sure that I was the man he wanted, and when he was sure of that,

he decided that he would wait for a better chance to take me!"

"What better chance? What do you mean, Edgar?"

"This!" said the fat man.

And, his face suddenly convulsing with rage and savagery, so that it became like a terrible mask, he caught out a revolver with wonderful speed and fired into the air. A low-flying crow wheeled barely in time. A tuft of feathers was detached and floated slowly down, and the bird flapped heavily away with a frightened cry.

"I mean that!" said Edgar Asprey, his teeth set.

"You mean," said Rompier, "that the sheriff would have arrested you if he had not been afraid that you were a quicker man with a gun and a straighter shot than he?"

"I always give even the devil his due," said Edgar Asprey. "The man isn't alive that that old fool wouldn't tackle. It's part of his principle to make himself fight any one in the world," said Asprey, bitterly angry. "But you were there, Rompier, and he knew about you, too!"

"What!"

"Oh, you have a reputation, my son! And you can place your money on the fact that that 'fisher' never foolishly risks his life. One man—yes. Two men—no. Not unless he can play safe. Courage—but not folly. That would be his motto!"

"He seems," said Rompier, more worried, "to be a mixture of wise man and fool."

"And why fool?" asked Asprey.

"Because he threw out enough warnings to drive us both out of the country."

"Did he? You don't consider, Rompier, that he wasn't at all sure of me. He wanted to talk to me a little—and *make* sure."

"Did he make sure?"

"How could I keep my face?" asked

the fat man indignantly. "A country lout, a miserable loafer, sits on a fence and begins to talk nonsense. How can I guess that that fellow is the sheriff, or the deputy, at least? I had no warning. Of course he saw in my face all that he wanted to read."

Rompier nodded.

"In France they do things in a different way. They arrest a suspect first, and they question him afterwards."

"They tie the hands of the law in this country," admitted Edgar Asprey. "And a good thing for me, to-day, that they do! But it's time for me to move along!"

"It is—that's plain! What did he mean about 'corruption and bribery'?"

"It's an old story," said Edgar Asprey. "Once I had my hand on a fortune. I could have been a very rich man. In order to play the cards correctly, I had to work the governor, and the governor of the State happened to be an honest fool who was in the hands of his secretary. The secretary was open to reason, of course. Well—and there you are!"

"What beat you?" asked Rompier.

Asprey turned ashen with emotion.

"The frigate bird!" he snapped.

"Ah, Gerald!"

"The same!"

"That's why you hate him so thoroughly, eh?"

"I'll be the end of him, too," declared the fat man. "Stop talking, Rompier. I want to have a chance to think!"

His thoughts were of such a nature that Edgar Asprey was purple in the face by the time he drove the buckboard up to the patio gate of Oñate's house.

There the two riflemen nodded at the fat man.

"You've got a pair of lucky-lookin' cayuses there," one of them remarked.

"Luck?" snapped Asprey. "There's no luck bred or born in this county!"

He strode into the patio, where Pepillo lay in the sun, eyes closed, fur ruffling to let the heat soak down to his skin. His white breast was now stainless and so were his paws, which were crossed one above the other, in absurdly human fashion.

Geraldi sat in another corner, half in sun and half in shadow, invincibly idle and luxurious. The fat man smoothed his face and approached the prisoner.

CHAPTER X.

A SPORTING IDEA.

It was very close and stifling hot in the patio at this hour. The wind could not stir. It was benumbed with the sheer golden weight of the sun. And from Asprey the moisture distilled into little rivulets that coursed steadily down his face.

But Gerald, immune from the effects of temperature, as it seemed, was stretched in pallid coolness in his chair. The big man lingered by him.

"What do you think of, Jimmy?" he asked. "While you lie there hour after hour, what do you think of?"

"'Rats and mice and such small deer,'" said Gerald, smiling.

Asprey looked at him with undisguised wonder.

"You're not worried, Jimmy? They're treating you well, here?"

"Thanks to you, no doubt," said Gerald, still genial. "You must have put in a few good words for me!"

Asprey went on into the house, whispering to himself: "Thanks to me! What's in his mind? Does he really hate me less? Who can understand him?"

He climbed up the stairs to the room where his lordship still lounged with his book. And Asprey paused in the doorway to consider the big, handsome fellow. He recognized in him at least one quality like that of Gerald—this ability to relax utterly and so, no doubt,

to be prepared for every crisis as it arose!

He walked in, locked the door behind him, and sat down in the window.

"You shut out the light, Asprey," said Winchelmere.

"I do," said the fat man. "I shut out the hope, too!"

"Bad news?"

"The worst. A long, lean hound of a sheriff has recognized me, and he's probably drumming up a posse at this moment to surround Oñate's place and comb it from top to bottom."

"That would make a haul for a country sheriff, wouldn't it?" murmured Winchelmere.

He thumbed the pages of his book, as though anxious for Asprey to be gone.

"You understand what I say," said Asprey. "He spotted me and he wants me. No doubt he wants some more of you."

"What are we to do, then?" asked Winchelmere.

"You won't take my advice. In fact, you don't want my advice. You've made up your mind already."

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said the younger man. "Don't think that I fail to appreciate you, Asprey. I know that you're worth all the rest of them rolled together. Of course I want to hear what you have to say!"

"Mind you, then, I mean this. I've weighed the facts. Let's get ourselves together. You already have three stones that are worth having; enough to reward you for your work and leave something over for us smaller fry——"

"Not at all," protested Winchelmere. "We split everything in equal parts."

This generosity made Asprey stare.

"That's broad-minded, to say the least," he commented. "But now suppose we go a little further. Suppose we become strictly logical, old fellow. You have the jewels. Almost half the value of the whole haul from Ingal."

"A good deal less than half," corrected his lordship.

"Also, you have Gerald, the price of the rest of the stuff."

"I love to hear a precise mind at work," smiled his lordship.

"Now, let me tell you what I seriously propose," continued Asprey. "Gerald is more dangerous than poison gas. Move him down into the subcellar. There is one, you know, dug under this old place."

"I know it. They used to keep wine there, in the palmy days of the Oñate family"

"Take him there, and quietly brain him."

"A cold-blooded business," said his lordship.

"I'd gladly do it," said Edgar Asprey.

"Would you?" murmured Winchelmere, and closed his eyes. Whether in horror or in mere thought, Asprey could not quite guess.

"And now let me tell you a little more."

"By all means, Asprey."

"The thing for us to do, seriously, is to thank Heaven that Gerald is a dead man. Take what we have. And leave at once for far fields."

"In short," said the other, "you take this country sheriff very seriously?"

Asprey frowned, and collected his thoughts, like a man who does not wish to exaggerate.

"There aren't many natural officers of the law," said he. "But this fellow that I've seen to-day is, I think, as patient as a snake and as dangerous as a rattler."

His lordship opened his eyes wider and looked straight up to the ceiling with a faint smile.

"Ah, ah," said he, "and that's what we have to deal with now? Asprey, I see that you're right in every respect."

"You agree, then?"

"Yes, that the sensible thing is for

us to put Geraldini out of the way and make off at once with what we have!"

The fat man smiled with sinister pleasure.

"But," went on Winchelmere, "I'm held back. Not by the usual scruples that a man might feel about such a business, but because it would give me an enormous amount of pleasure to use Geraldini as a sort of bill of exchange. It would be a blow—to his vanity—from which he would never recover. I enjoyed looking at him when I first made the suggestion. His face wrinkled as though he suddenly had grown old."

Asprey was silent, but intent.

"You like him, too," he remarked sarcastically.

"I hate him," said his lordship, "with a magnificent hatred. He has wrecked my old life, split me away from the chance of an honorable pretense at existence in England, and forced my hand in every respect. Besides that, he has been in my hands and has slipped out. He has taken a treasure out of my pocket, as you might say. And the result is, Asprey, that I can't be contented with an ordinary revenge. To lead him into a cellar and smash his skull! That would be quite sufficient for most men. But not in this case. I want to use him, as I said. And then I want to have him at full liberty to come on my trail again. I want to encourage him to match wits and craft, and strength against me, and then see what comes of it!"

"That," said Asprey, "is sporting."

"Thank you," said his lordship.

"But," went on Asprey, "there was a speech that the gladiators used to make to the emperors before they fought. You remember? 'We, who are about to die, salute thee!' You might wind up with that speech yourself, my friend."

"True," said the other calmly. "If I were alone against him. But I don't

intend to be alone. I intend to employ the strength and the craft of Oñate, and Rompier, and that yellow rascal, Seyf Kalam, and above all my most valued friend, Edgar Asprey, from whom I am learning something every day!"

The fat man pressed the plump, soft tips of his fingers together. Then he nodded.

"Pride makes a man foolish," said he, "but also it makes him wise. I wish you luck. But I think that this decision of yours is going to break your neck—and mine, also!"

He got up. As he reached the door, Winchelmere came to his feet in turn.

"Do you agree with me, Asprey, that it might be a great game?"

"There's only one thing that turns the balance in your favor," said Asprey, "and that is that I want to have you for a friend. For the sake of that, I'll stick with you to the end!"

So said Edgar Asprey, with a hand suddenly pressed against his heart, as though the last words had come with a sudden rush from that seat of the emotions.

He lied; and Winchelmere knew it; and Asprey was perfectly sure that the other understood. And still that lie came off with a certain grace.

To a degree, we are all children watching a play. And even when we know that the spoken words are unreal and rarely in earnest, still, we cannot help but applaud them and let our hearts be warmed by them.

Moreover, the acting of Asprey was so very good that his lordship was vastly pleased as a professional critic. He saw that the veil he penetrated might be far too thick for another person to see through.

So he bowed to Asprey.

"I'll never forget this moment," he said with a simple heartiness.

When Asprey was through the door, his lordship broke into silent laughter, and that was a mistake.

For no sooner was he outside in the hall than the eye of Asprey was clapped to the keyhole, and he saw the laughter with perfect clearness.

Edgar Asprey went on his way down the hall, moving with a wonderfully silent step in spite of his bulk; and, as he walked, he rubbed his soft, thick chin with the moist tips of his fingers and wondered if all was well.

"Jimmy," he said in the gentlest of voices, "I have something to tell you."

"Fat men never can bring bad news," said Geraldi.

"No, Jimmy, I cannot. After all the things that have passed between us, you'll be surprised to hear that I cannot help being fond of you."

"You have a big heart," said Geraldi.

"Jimmy, don't laugh at me. I want to tell you, now, that you have just passed a great danger. Your life has been in the balance. And now—you may thank your gods that the balance has turned the right way. You are safe! Your life is not in danger!"

"On which side of the balance did you throw your weight?" asked Geraldi.

"Jimmy," said the fat man in a soft voice, "can you ask?"

"Shall I thank you?" asked Geraldi. "Or shall I thank Horus? Golden Horus, Horus of the two horizons, of the evening and the dawn, Horus of the——"

"Tarnation!" exploded Edgar Asprey, and walked hurriedly away.

He turned at the pillars of the patio. Geraldi was smiling after him like a great, sleepy cat.

CHAPTER XI.

PEPILLO PASSES.

LITTLE Giovanni, earnest and eager, sat on the arm of the chair of Geraldi.

"They are going to take you away to-night," he said.

"Have you heard that?"

"I have heard them talking. From the room above them. It was just as you thought. I can crawl in there, and no one knows that I am there. And then there is a great crack in the ceiling. I can hear everything that they say. Sometimes I can see them, too!"

"You are my ears and my eyes, Giovanni," said Geraldi.

"But why have you let them keep you here?" asked the youngster, eyeing Geraldi with an almost impersonal interest. "Why don't you kill the two men at the gate of the patio and go away?"

"How shall I kill them, Giovanni?" asked Geraldi, gravely.

"That can be done easily. I shall first get the best horse from the stable. The great black stallion which Señor Winchelmere says is his horse, but which I know is yours."

"How do you know that?"

"Because when you call him he will come, even to the gate of the patio, and put his head under the arch and whinny to you."

Geraldi nodded.

"There would be a horse for me! You'd saddle him and——"

"And open the gate of the corral. Then, when you called, he could come."

"Of course. But still there would be the two men standing at the patio gate with their rifles!"

"Sometimes you sit just in the center of the patio," said the boy. "Move out your chair there, now. I give you, then, some of the little knives that I practice with. First, I have sharpened them until they are too sharp to see. And then I pass them to you. At the right time, you throw them. One sticks in the throat of the dark man. One sticks in the heart of the pale man. And you run through the entrance, calling to Peter. He comes. You are away, and you catch me up behind your saddle—"

what could we not do together, señor!"

"So!" said Gerald. "And still," he went on, "all of this is for nothing, because I can't break my word. And I have given my word that I shall not try to escape if they let me sit here in the sun!"

The boy snorted with disgust.

"They have no right to keep you!"

"Perhaps not."

"Then you have a right to get away."

"Besides," said Gerald, "I don't want to kill those two men, even if I could! They never have harmed me!"

"They stand here with guns!"

"That is true. But one must be reasonable. And every life that a man takes is a burden of lead, Giovanni, bent around your shoulders, to carry the rest of your days!"

Giovanni was not too young to realize that this was a metaphor; certainly he was old enough to appreciate the solemnity of Gerald. And finally the latter said: "Also, you could not leave your mother. Could you?"

"Perhaps not," admitted the boy. "I'm no use to her."

"You will be in a few years. And if you can't do her any good, now, you could break her heart by going away from her!"

Giovanni, pouting sullenly, scowled at the world and at all these new thoughts.

"It is very hard," said he. "It is very hard for a man to be free. Is it not? You, however, are free. You are the only man in the world who is free!"

"Why am I freer than others?"

"Because," said the boy with a sudden inspiration, "you are brave enough to live by yourself. All the other men—they must have wives and friends and children. You are by yourself! That is why you are free!"

Gerald contemplated this thought in silence, and it seemed to him so true

that he did not attempt to argue about it.

"What else did you hear in the room?" asked Gerald, bringing the talk back to its starting point.

"I heard the fat man say that you should be killed. There was no safety for the rest of them if you remained alive!"

"I thank him for that."

"Why do you smile?"

"Because I am thinking. Go on, Giovanni. What else did you hear?"

"I heard the big man——"

"His lordship?"

"Yes. He said that you must not die. He wants to trade you for something. As if you were a horse or a cow! Afterwards, he wants to fight with you."

For the first time, Gerald showed real interest and sat up in his chair.

"Did he say that? I'm surprised, Giovanni. I'm surprised! I see that there are good points about his lordship. I shall have to remember him a little longer than I thought!"

"And that is all that I remember. That is all that was important," said the boy. "Look at Pepillo sleeping in the sun! He's a lazy beast, isn't he?"

"Do you know why?"

"Because everybody pets him and nobody ever makes him do things—except you and me. I kick him in the belly or the ribs. That makes him move!"

"You'd better stop that. Some day, he'll be grown up!"

"What do you mean?"

"The reason he's so lazy, Giovanni, is because he's saving his strength for the day when he'll break away from this place. He wants to have fat on his ribs before he goes off into the mountains to live."

"Do you think that?"

"I do."

"He'll never leave. He doesn't dare. He's too afraid of San Luis!"

"One day," said Gerald, "he'll turn

and slit the throat of San Luis from ear to ear!"

"How do you know that?"

"Pepillo whispered it in my ear, one day not long ago."

The boy laughed, and he flung an arm around the shoulders of Geraldi.

"I wish they would not take you away," said he. "Afterwards, what will I do?"

"Away from my chair!" whispered Geraldi. "Your mother——"

But though Giovanni jumped fast enough, he was too late. Bianca Strozzi came running to them from the doorway, and swooped at Giovanni. He evaded her with ease.

"Come here to me!" she commanded.

"I won't!" said Giovanni. "I don't have to come—and you can't catch me!"

"You—you ungrateful——" she began.

Emotion choked her.

"Go to your mother!" said Geraldi sternly.

"She will beat me!" whined Giovanni.

"What if she does? Are you a man or a baby?" asked Geraldi.

Reluctantly the boy went toward Bianca, but her passion had altered its object in that instant. For she whirled upon Geraldi with a veritable devil in her eyes.

"You can make him do what you please—murderer!" screamed the widow. "You've made him despise everything and every one except yourself! I—I——"

She ceased again, impotent with rage under the calm and steady eyes of Geraldi. They were not unkindly eyes.

He said gently: "I know that you have to hate me. But remember that it was in the middle of a fight. It was at a distance. Bullets were flying everywhere——"

"A fight!" she shouted. "You never would have dared to stand before my husband. You would have turned and

run like a beaten dog! He was a man that——"

Her voice broke.

And at that moment little Giovanni called: "Look, mother!"

She turned her head instinctively and saw the boy standing beside the big cat.

"Look, mother! I can make Pepillo curl up into a ball!"

It was, doubtless, to do anything to distract the attention of his mother from Geraldi; now the boy rapped Pepillo in the ribs with his shoe.

Pepillo turned, indeed. But one paw was raised high in the air. Silently he snarled, furious, his face contorted, his white fangs glistening. And his tail began to lash with rage.

"Giovanni—darling—you little fool! Come here, quickly!" screamed the frightened mother.

"Bah!" said Giovanni. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

And he kicked Pepillo again, and this time straight in the unprotected stomach.

The reaction of Pepillo was swift and surprising. He had learned the force of his blow that same day. His muscles were fairly tingling with the electric consciousness of his powers, and he wanted to use them again. Can a millionaire let his money rest idle in a bank?

He struck as he had struck at the goat. But on that occasion his claws had been bared, and now the last vestige of fear and respect for human beings caused Pepillo to keep the claws buried in the velvet.

It was only the soft inside of the paw that struck. Even so, there was enough force to have broken the shoulder of a grown man. It was Giovanni's very lightness of body that, in part, saved him. As it was, he was hurled through the air against the nearest pillar of the patio, and he fell limp from that. Pepillo was on him at once. There was no remaining reverence in his furi-

ous heart now. He wanted his second kill, and his wicked eyes were on the throat of the boy as he sprang.

Now all of this had happened with dreadful suddenness. The two guards, with their ears filled by the wild shriek of the mother, had barely time to catch up their rifles and turn about. No hand was ready, save the hand of Geraldi. From somewhere in his clothes he brought out one of those little slender-bladed knives, heavy in the haft, with the steel drawing out to a mere ray of light.

It flicked from his hand, aimed at the exposed side of Pepillo just behind the shoulder. Even then chance was all against Geraldi, for if the little blade struck a rib, it would snap off and do little harm. Chance, however, flew with the flying knife. It found the tender surface between two ribs and slid home to the hilt.

Pepillo, with a death shriek, leaped on past little Giovanni and clutched the top of the pillar, clawing wildly to get up. In an instant, his hold relaxed and he fell with a loose thud against the ground.

A small puff of dust arose from the spot. Pepillo did not move. His mask still gaped, his lips still grinned back from his teeth. But even this ended. His head rolled a bit to one side, and his beautiful and dangerous life was ended.

The two guardsmen, grunting with excitement, came charging in and found Bianca Strozzi bent over the limp form of her boy.

She swept him into her arms. There was a streak of blood across his forehead. His face seemed very pale in contrast. And his poor mother crushed the limp body in her arms against her breast, crying: "Giovanni! Giovanni! Giovanni!" again and again with more heart-break in every cry.

"Is he hurt bad?" asked one of the men humbly.

"He's killed!" moaned Bianca Strozzi. "And you've let him die—under your eyes—under your guns!"

CHAPTER XII.

A PRISONER INDEED.

GERALDI had not risen from his chair to throw the knife. Now he sank back in it again.

"You'll stifle Giovanni!" he cautioned the woman.

She ran to him suddenly and laid the limp body across his knees.

"Save him, maestro!" sobbed Bianca. "You can! I saw you strike for him! Heaven bless you!"

She kneeled beside him in the dust; she caught his hand and kissed it.

The two riflemen stood agape, helpless, willing to assist, but clumsy-handed.

"Hush!" said Geraldi. "He's not badly hurt—I think. Stunned. We'll see to his head. Look! Only a cut in the skin. His shoulder—you see, the arm works freely. His legs are not broken. I think his ribs are sound, too."

Bianca Strozzi hung upon these words, as though by each separate declaration, Geraldi endowed another portion of the child with life and soundness.

Now Giovanni's eyes fluttered.

"Be quiet," said Geraldi to the woman. "Don't make any outcry. You see he's doing very well!"

The eyes opened wide. Giovanni looked up with unclouded gaze to Geraldi.

"You see, you were right!" said Giovanni, and laughed a little.

Bianca Strozzi raised her eyes and her clasped hands. But whether she adored Providence or Geraldi it would have been hard to say.

Giovanni sat up with a little gasp.

"What happened?" he asked. "Things are sort of a blur, as I remember them!"

Bianca picked him from the knees of Gerald.

"Come to see!" she said, and half carried and half dragged him to the limp, dead body of Pepillo.

"Look!" said she.

The boy drew out the stained knife and his eyes turned slowly to Gerald.

"And I told you!" cried Bianca Strozzi. "I called to you. I warned you. Little rascal!"

She struck Giovanni, but very, very softly.

"He threw it!" said Giovanni.

"He did!" said Bianca, catching her breath. "He gave you your life! Heaven bring him safe through danger! Heaven watch over him!"

The eyes of the child filled with tears, and his mother, seeing this, caught him again in her arms and carried him from the patio, sobbing as she went. Over her shoulder, with dim eyes, Giovanni watched the face of Gerald to the last moment.

"A proper job you done," said one of the guards to Gerald. "A finer or a slicker or a smoother thing *I* never seen!"

"Nor me!" said the other.

And they went back to the entrance to take up their posts. Then Gerald saw Lord Winchelmere loitering in the doorway of the house. He came slowly out and paused beside Gerald's chair.

"At your clever tricks again, I see," said he. "Corrupting the guards. Corrupting the women and the children, Gerald! And up to to-day, I thought that I need only worry for fear she'd put poison in your food! Ah, Gerald," he went on, "I admit that you have a certain way about you!"

"Thank you," said Gerald, but the slightest of shadows passed over his eyes.

The hope which had risen in him had been extinguished at its source!

"And so we go," said his lordship, who seemed to have interpreted even

that passing emotion perfectly: "The window no sooner is opened to us than it is slammed and locked and shuttered again. However, it was a neat bit of work, Gerald. Did you plan the whole thing? Did you put it in the mind of Pepillo?"

He smiled at his own preposterous question.

"It's time for you to turn in for the evening," he went on. "Before morning, I hope to have you on the way down to San Felice. There, Gerald, I expect to exchange you for certain articles of value in the hands of Miss Ingall and her aunt. I know," he continued, "that you have a romantic notion that your life should not be had for such a price. But, my dear fellow, you'll understand my viewpoint. I can't very well put a knife in your back. Neither can I afford to give you away for nothing! Will you go with us, or do we have to—take you?"

He asked with a little lift of the eyebrows. Gerald replied with silence, and the faintest of smiles, allowing just a white glimpse of his teeth.

Winchelmere waited no longer for a reply he knew he would not get, but sauntered on to the gate, looked out, and then back to the house.

He called to one of the men: "Joe: catch Peter for me this evening and put my saddle on him. I may need him before the morning."

He turned to Gerald as he said this and chuckled a little. For between them there was almost more rivalry over the subject of Peter than about all else put together. Then the big Englishman went into the house.

Shortly after this, Gerald was escorted out of the patio. It was dusk, and the vines along the walls began to look like long streaks and overlaid masses of shadows. So that the world seemed a soft and restful place to all but Gerald.

He was conducted through the house,

and then down a steep flight of stairs into the first cellar of the place. During the day he was allowed a vast deal of liberty, and it might be said that the two guards who watched over him were not so much actual preventatives of an escape, but simply to keep an eye on him as a matter of form.

At night, however, he refused to be bound by any parole. As he said to his lordship when the Englishman had proposed such an engagement: "One never can tell. If I give you a complete parole, then it means, of course, that I either have to give up all hope for my life or for my honor!"

"Between those two," Winchelmere had said with a caustic smile, "of course the latter would be your choice."

Geraldi had said nothing. He rarely spoke to his lordship. There was too great a gap between them, a void which neither could overleap!

But Winchelmere had said with a cold laugh that he feared he could not assure his prisoner of comfortable nights, and he set out to fulfill his promise. So, each night, they fastened Geraldi securely, as they had done on this occasion.

Around his wrists they wove a long piece of soft, strong baling wire, such as is laid on the middle of a bale, where the strain is the greatest. And, having secured the wrists behind his back in this fashion, they made security doubly sure by fastening another piece of wire from his elbows across his breast. After that, more wire secured his ankles together, and his knees, even, were bound fast.

Still this was not enough, and a final strand or two of wire ran down from his wrists, and across his knees and so to his heels.

This system was adopted because Lord Winchelmere in person devised and installed it. He declared that he would have no patent locks and irons put on Geraldi. Because, as all men

knew, Geraldi could read the secret of any lock, and open it with a breath.

More than that, he would not trust even a dog to ropes. A dog would gnaw them through; so would Geraldi—like a fire. But this tough iron wire was another matter. Soft and pliable, it could be worked well into the flesh above the wrists of the prisoner. It gripped to the very bone of the man.

And so he was forced to lie all night upon his face. His hands were behind him. And if he ventured to try to lie on either side, very soon it was as though his arms were breaking. So the nights were very long, indeed, and Winchelmere chose, with unnecessary cruelty, to confine his prisoner early in the evening and release him to his parole late in the morning. To the last of these long agonies, therefore, Geraldi was now taken, and his load of wire bent upon him with the harsh haste of people who forget what pain they can give. Winchelmere came in person to oversee the work. And when it was done, he said quietly to Geraldi: "Your last night, my friend. To-morrow we take you to market! Good night!"

CHAPTER XIII.

'TIS WELL TO HAVE A FILE.

THERE was a thin pallet of straw. It was not aired during the day, and therefore the moisture from the floor of the cellar had soaked through the mattress and gave Geraldi a moldy scent in his nostrils all the night long. He soon was disturbed on this evening. The door of his cell was of the heaviest oak, and outside it two men spent the entire night, one sleeping and the other waking, alternately in two-hour shifts.

This door now opened and, though he was turned away toward the wall at the moment and, therefore, could see nothing, he heard one of his guards rumble: "Be short and quick. The old man would take our heads off if he

knew that we'd even let you speak to him!"

Then the troubled, broken voice of Bianca Strozzi called to Gerald: "Giovanni sleeps and all is well with him. I have come to tell you that I pray for you, dear friend. Farewell, and Heaven help you more than I can help!"

"There, that's enough," broke in the man's voice roughly. And the door slammed before Gerald could make any answer.

He was instantly at work, however.

For, when Bianca Strozzi had raised her voice, it seemed to Gerald that his quick ear had caught the slightest sound of metal against stone, a smaller sound than the tinkle of water falling for an instant into a stone basin.

He could only move upon his side, wriggling like a seal deprived of flippers. But in this manner he worked himself across the damp floor until he was close to the entrance. There he began to move his face as another would have moved a hand, touching the skin lightly against the floor here and there.

For an hour he worked, and during that hour a thousand cramps came in the muscles of his neck, but he went on patiently, finally pressing his chin into the crevices near the wall.

There, at last, he felt something cold as the back of a snake. But as he touched it again with his chin, he noticed the harshness of the surface.

It was his hope. Bianca Strozzi had not left all to the power of prayer. She had committed some hope to this file she had managed to drop on the floor.

But next, to use it!

He turned his back to the wall and with his groping fingers found the treasure. Outside the door he heard one of his guards coughing. So perfectly did the wall fit and so thick was the wood that even at that close range, the sound of the coughing was stifled to the quality of a sob.

He managed to stand up, a difficult task! And then he worked himself slowly down the wall, which was composed of heaviest stone, laid up without mortar. The crevices between were what he searched with the tips of his fingers. At last he found one that suited him, and into this he wedged the file with all the iron strength of his hands.

It was of the finest steel. He knew that by the sharpness of the ridges on the face of the tool. He proved it an instant later as, standing with his back to the wall, swaying his body from side to side, he chafed through the wire that fastened wrists and knees and heel in a straight line.

With that wire severed, his activity was doubled. He turned his attention to the strands which bound his elbows in place, and these, too, parted at a few touches.

After that, he could thank a long gymnastic training for his next feat, which was to pass his bound wrists beneath his feet. And this he contrived with many a snaky wriggle and writhing motion.

This achievement placed his hands in front of him, and he could work now with so much added surety that it was almost like passing from light to darkness. He began to chafe the right wrist bindings against the file, and it was a delicate process, which meant keeping the same line of cutting always on the edge of the tool. But he felt the wires give one by one. The file had to sink into his own flesh to tear through the last few wrappings, but he set his teeth and even smiled at this small pain as he worked.

So, in another moment, his right hand was free. He paused in his work, but began again almost at once. In another instant his feet also were liberated.

But what had been gained, after all, by this liberation of his body? There was no grating through which he could cut with that same heaven-sent file.

There was only a solid wall of stones, and two keen-eared guards to listen to the first attempt he made to escape!

However, he had made up his mind long before as to what he would do. He lighted a match and picked out on the floor the largest of the great flags which covered it. With the hilt of the file, at the edges of this flag, he worked, and, since there was no mortar, the flag presently came up free, but heavily, in his hands.

He lighted another match. Below him appeared earth. He thrust his foot into it, tentatively, and the foot went through into emptiness.

It was as he had hoped; the sub-cellar opened directly underneath his cell.

The adjoining flag was soon up, using the ponderous first one as a lever, and with the earth beneath them beaten down, two edges of strong stone arches were presented. Between the two, Gerald dropped down to the floor of the room beneath.

By glimmers of match light he worked through the brief maze of the old wine rooms. He found what had once been a stairs, now an incline from which the steps had moldered and rotted away, and up this he passed to the level above. He saw the gleam of a pair of distant lanterns, and distinctly heard a man singing very softly as he walked back and forth.

Gerald smiled brightly. There were his guards, seriously employed in their work!

It was as though his ghost remained behind, imprisoned in the wire; he himself walked free, the file still in his hands!

He climbed to the floor above, and now he wasted invaluable time in going to the rear porch of the house where, as he knew, a bucket of water was standing. With that water he washed the mold and the grime from his face and hands, and dried himself with the

roller towel which hung against the wall, Western style.

Still further he delayed, to brush his clothes as clean as possible, and when this was done, he turned his attention back to the house, moving down the lower hall, and then stepping aside to the gun room.

Here all manner of tackle was kept, and his own equipment, which had been taken from him at the time of his capture, was among the rest. Scrupulously he took only his own—a bundle of oddly shaped keys; a thin case filled with slivers of steel of various sizes—more important to Gerald than all the keys in the world!—two single-action, old-style Colts, their sights and triggers filed away; and a pair of those slender knives of his, which fitted into a double sheath. He took also his own electric lantern, for this he would need before his work was done. Last of all, he strapped on his wrist watch.

And he smiled to himself to think that these professional thieves had not laid hand upon a single item of his property! What sense of delicacy was this? Or was it, by chance, that not one of them wished to have the first owner call in person to redeem his goods?

He thought grimly of that for a moment.

Then he went into the hall and passed down to that room which was occupied by the lord and master of the household—Pedro Oñate.

Of that silent, evil face he knew less than he did about any of the others in the house; for Oñate scorned conversation, feeling instead that action was more his vein.

The door of Oñate's room gave readily to the hand of Gerald. He opened it softly and slowly, preventing a creak. Then he crouched low and slipped in.

He saw the bed at once, with Oñate dimly outlined upon it against the starlight which entered by the window. He

lay face down, sprawling, like a dead body.

Geraldi dropped the cold muzzle of a revolver on the back of the Mexican's neck.

And he said in Spanish: "I come, señor, to relieve you of the thing which you have in trust."

Oñate lay perfectly still.

Finally he whispered: "And afterwards, Señor Geraldi?"

"Afterwards I put a safe and painless gag between your teeth. And I leave you here, unharmed!"

"In the heel of the right shoe," said Oñate without further bargaining.

So Geraldi secured him swiftly, deftly. He had experience in such business, and he used all his knowledge. In three minutes Oñate had less possibility of motion than a frozen snake in mid-winter.

Geraldi left him and went straight across the hall, carefully closing the door behind him. In the opposite compartment Rompier, he knew, was sleeping.

That door in turn he opened with as much care as he had used before. Instantly there was a rustle of bed-clothes.

"Who's there?" asked the guarded voice of the Frenchman.

Then he muttered: "The draft of wind, I suppose."

His bare feet sounded instantly on the floor and he advanced through the darkness until the iron hand of Geraldi caught him by the throat and the gun of Geraldi was clapped to his head.

"The emerald, Rompier!" said Geraldi, and relaxed his grip on the throat of his man.

"Certainly," said Rompier. "With the greatest of pleasure, my dear friend. In the heel of the Colt which is under my pillow. And I, Geraldi?"

"A gag and a few ropes, and my regrets," said Geraldi. "That is all that I can offer."

"I accept with thanks," said the Frenchman. "You've not the time, now, but will you write to me afterward and tell me how you managed all this?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WIND IS RISING.

THERE remained the last and the greatest obstacle.

Geraldi went down the hall and paused before the door of Lord Winchelmere. It was framed with a glistening line of golden light.

Geraldi stooped and tried the key-hole, but the key was in it from the inside and all vision was effectually blocked. So he rapped boldly.

"Come in," said the careless voice of his lordship.

Geraldi swung the door open and saw Winchelmere seated at a small table beside the window. A hooded lamp was near him, and he was writing busily.

"You're half an hour too early, Rompier," said he. "You shouldn't have disturbed me so soon—but, since you're here——"

Geraldi closed the door. And at the continued silence, his lordship turned his head. It brought it closer to the lamp. The blond locks seemed to turn to flaming gold.

He looked for an instant from the brightness into the dimness, bewildered. Then he narrowed his eyes. His voice was perfectly calm.

"So here you are at last, Geraldi."

"And a little early, I fear," said Geraldi. "Earlier, even, than Rompier?"

"Even earlier than Rompier," said the big man, "but always welcome to me, old fellow."

He waved to a chair. Geraldi sat down with the slightest of bows. He held the revolver negligently in his hand, the muzzle resting across his knee.

"And what can I do for you?" asked Winchelmere, with a smile that seemed far from affected.

"Lower your voice, and give me a little information."

"You have sensitive ears, then?" asked his lordship courteously.

"They've bothered me from my childhood," said Gerald. "They've brought me all sorts of bad news."

"You want to know about what, then?"

"The emerald, my lord."

"That I am keeping?"

"Yes."

"You have the other pair?"

"Yes."

"Then I couldn't afford to embarrass such a patient collector," said Winchelmere, with the slightest quiver of his voice as he spoke.

He opened a little drawer of the table and took out a twist of paper. This he undid and spilled the bright, green gem upon the palm of his hand.

"Is this it, Gerald?"

"The very one," said the latter.

There was a faint creaking in the hall, as Gerald thought.

"The wind is rising again," observed Winchelmere carelessly.

"Suppose you put the emerald on the top of the table," said Gerald, "and then face the wall."

"Certainly," said his lordship, and he rose from his chair, taking the lamp in his hand.

"Put the lamp down!" commanded Gerald sharply.

"Willingly!"

Winchelmere, with an obedient nod, nevertheless swung the lamp across the face of the window before he placed it again on the table.

"And that," said Gerald, "is a signal, I think?"

His lordship already stood with his face to the wall, in the corner of the room. He answered nothing as Gerald scooped up the jewel, with one

sharp glance to make sure that it was real and no sham.

His second glance was for the patio, and clearly he made out two men running through the patio gate and the glimmer of their rifles. It had been a signal, indeed, and his time was very short. Exit by the window, certainly, was stopped already.

He remembered the faint creaking he had heard in the hall, and he gritted his teeth. Perhaps that way of exit was also crowded with silent fighting men, waiting for the word of Winchelmere.

Desperately his glance swept the room. Through twenty chinks in those moldered walls, it might be that hostile eyes were now covertly watching him.

He gathered the three jewels in his hand and stepping back a little, his gun still leveled on Winchelmere, he thrust the emeralds into a deep crevice—far in, until his fingers gritted on the mortar.

"Winchelmere," he said, in hardly more than a whisper, "you've taken advantage of my generosity. If I'd known what was in you, a knife in the back might have settled you. As it is, I trust to chance. Good night!"

He stepped to the door and jerked it quickly open, leaping at the same time through the gap.

It was his hope that the very speed of his actions might disconcert any watcher in the hall; but he sprang into the grip of many arms. They crushed him with their weight and with their force. They bore him straight back into the chamber and smashed him against the wall.

He saw before him the contorted faces of Rompier and Oñate, and the expressionless eyes of Seyf Kalam. Lord Winchelmere loomed head and shoulders above this group.

"Tenderly, tenderly!" said his lordship. "There's no need to break him

in bits; simply secure his hands, Lucien. You can help him, Seyf."

It was done with the speed of science. The weapons of Geraldi were removed from him again.

"Up again, down again," said his lordship. "How unlucky you've been in the last stages of the encounter!"

"I trusted too much to you, Winchelmere," replied Geraldi, anger for once breaking through his self-possession. "If there is another time, I'll better know how to handle you."

"There'll be no other time," said Edgar Asprey, a huge bulk in the doorway. "Winchelmere, you've had a sufficient warning this time, I hope?"

"And here you are at last?" murmured his lordship. "Just when we need you, Asprey."

The irony did not escape Edgar Asprey.

"You trusted wire and walls to hold him," said he. "Have you lost anything?"

"Only what we'll quickly have again. But first, what happened to you, Rompier and Oñate?"

"A gun on the back of my neck!" said Oñate, "That was all. Then Seyf came and passed a knife through the ropes. Bah! I have the taste of the gag still in my mouth!"

"It was practically the same for me," said Rompier. "I thought that a wind opened the door of my room. *He* was the draft that budged it!"

"Seyf," said the leader, "we write down in red what you've done to-night. We write it down in red!" he repeated.

There was a single flashing smile from Kalam; then his dark face was as gloomy as ever.

"And now," added Winchelmere, "in what pocket are the emeralds?"

"I haven't them," said Geraldi.

"That's childish," said his lordship. "Will you make us search you through to the skin?"

"Do you remember the creak in the

hall—the rising of the wind, as you called it?" said Geraldi. "And when I glanced out the window I saw that two men were running for the house. I guessed that all ways might be blocked to me, and so I disposed of the emeralds, my lord."

"A pretty thin lie," said Oñate. "We'll take him and——"

"Let him be!" said his lordship curtly. "He's hidden them. That's obvious! Search the room, my boys. Search every crack in the walls!"

And he joined the search. A wall to a man, the floor to another, they went over the surface carefully and swiftly. Geraldi saw Edgar Asprey go past the crack into which he had thrust the gems. With a flashlight, the fat man probed the crack—and then went on, while Geraldi breathed more deeply with relief. It seemed impossible, unless perhaps a slight fall of mortar had powdered the emeralds over and so concealed them.

But Asprey went on. Perhaps to return, later, and try to steal the jewels for himself alone?

At last the search stopped.

"Not here," said Winchelmere decidedly. "Then he threw them through the window. Rompier, search the court, will you? Kalam and Oñate will help you."

They left at once. The fat man remained with the Englishman and Geraldi.

"Was it the woman?" asked Winchelmere good-naturedly.

Geraldi waved his hand and smiled in turn.

"Why do you ask me?" said he. "Is it impossible for a man to work even out of wire?"

"Yes," said his lordship. "Totally and absolutely impossible. But let it drop. Asprey, where's Bianca?"

"She and her boy have skipped out," he returned.

His lordship nodded.

"I guessed that, long ago," said he. "What do you suggest now, Asprey? We're not going to find the three stones, I take it!"

"Of course we're not," said Edgar Asprey. "There's only one thing to do, of course, and that's to persuade Geraldi."

He put a singular emphasis upon the word "persuade," so that Winchelmere frowned a little.

"You have a tender heart, Asprey," he said coldly. "But," he went on, "we have to be practical people. Geraldi is now our only remaining bill of exchange. We must turn him in for gold and diamonds!" He laughed as he spoke. "You mustn't singe a good bill of exchange, Asprey," he concluded.

And the fat man unwillingly nodded.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW.

IT was a little after midnight when they left the house. The order of their going was: Geraldi in the front seat of the buckboard, his feet lashed together, and his hands tied behind him, and fastened, in turn, to the iron rail which ran around the rear of the seat.

Lord Winchelmere held the reins, sitting beside his captive. In the seat behind was Oñate, a rifle across his knees. Behind the wagon were tethered big black Peter, with Winchelmere's saddle on its back, and a tall, thin, gray mare, the favorite mount of the Mexican.

Still farther to the rear rode Edgar Asprey, a very sure shot and a known fighter; he would keep the guard to the rear, while in front of the buckboard or to either side rode Rompier and Seyf Kalam, with eyes as keen as the eyes of eagles.

Asprey had advice to give.

"Drive hard," he said to Lord Winchelmere, "until we get through the two patches of woods. I have that lean

sheriff in my mind. He's been lying too low, too quiet this evening. So far as we can tell, Bianca may have skipped off and told him everything she knows, which is too much, and everything she guesses, which would be plenty to hang us all! I have in mind that the sheriff is doing something to-night. He'd be a fool to wait for the morning!"

His lordship agreed with this advice perfectly, and as he gathered the reins he said quietly: "Oñate, in case we run into a pocket of danger—then we can make up our minds that Geraldi will be no further use to us. In that case, a bullet through his head, if you please!"

Oñate grunted. There was no doubt about his willingness to execute that suggestion, and Winchelmere, sending the two ponies down the road at a brisk trot, added to Geraldi: "You understand my position, of course? I really hate brutality!"

"I believe you," smiled Geraldi, and looked away from his companion and up to the stars.

There was no more talk. They struck a twelve-mile-an-hour gait, the ponies stepping out freely in the chilly air of the mountain night, and in a moment they were in the thickness of the woods. The road was quite out of sight, most of the time. The trees were simply an added tower of blackness on either side of the way, and the road itself could barely be guessed at, the ponies finding their own footing.

Still Winchelmere drove as boldly as though full daylight showed him the ruts.

With a great noise the buckboard crashed on. Every board in it was loose, and the wheels rattled like snare drums. Still their choice was made, and Winchelmere, although he set his teeth, did not make a single objection.

He was very alert. A great part of the time, as they whirled through the darkness, he kept the span in check with

one hand, while the other rested lightly on a short-barreled carbine of large caliber which lay between him and the outside of the seat.

They had a full mile through the first stretch of the woods, and beyond these they were somewhat heartened to see the pale flush of the rising moon in the east, and then the rim of her disk pushing up.

Lord Winchelmere looked toward it with a nod. Rapidly it sailed up, first like a wheel, rolling up the side of the mountain, and then detaching itself like a great golden bubble, and floating up through the blackness of the sky.

Geraldi laughed softly.

"And why?" asked his lordship.

"Great Horus!" answered Geraldi, in a voice of pretended emotion. "Golden Horus, Horus of the two horizons! You see that he has sent his sister out to look after me."

Lord Winchelmere, in spite of himself, shuddered a little.

"You have the nerve of a lion, Geraldi," he commented briefly.

"Thank you," said Geraldi.

"Listen to me!" said his lordship, speaking low, without turning his head.

"I can hear you."

"Geraldi, you and I have been enemies, but not enemies of long standing. Now, my friend, I make a suggestion to you. The best that can happen to you is to make the end of this journey, be delivered like a dog to Miss Ingall, and let her pay your ransom. Most men wouldn't mind that. But I know that it's poison to your pride. The worst thing that can happen to you, on the other hand, is to have a bullet through your spinal column, fired by our attentive comrade, Oñate, on the seat behind us. But I have a suggestion to make to you?"

"Very well," said Geraldi without warmth.

"I'll set you free, Geraldi. We'll tap Oñate on the head, take Peter and the

gray mare—she's a speedster—and bolt away from these fellows—drift a bit of lead into them, if necessary—and then we'll go back to the house and pick up the emeralds which you left there. Mind you, I don't want a share in them. They'll be all yours. You've worked hard enough to get them. Afterward, my profit will come out of having you with me in future deals! Will you think that over?"

Geraldi thought it over, accordingly, while they climbed a steep hill, at the very top of which the broad face of the moon flared down at them.

"I should thank you for that suggestion," he said at last, "but I'll tell you, Winchelmere, if I were starved for water, I wouldn't take a drop from you!"

Winchelmere simply laughed at this bitterness.

"After all," he declared, "I really expected some such retort. I don't know why I knew—but I did."

They gained the top of the hill. Before them stretched a long slope, flooded with pale silver. Halfway down a woods began, ran for not more than a furlong, and then the open country waited to receive them into its safety.

"That one little spot of danger—and then we are free!" said his lordship.

He gave the ponies the whip, and they jerked the buckboard down the road at an astonishing clip, the iron-rimmed wheels bounding from the rocks and knocking out great sparks. Oñate cursed violently in the rear seat, but made no direct protest.

"Too much stomach to Oñate," commented Winchelmere to Geraldi. "And yet—he's a beautiful man for a murderer!"

The remark had its obvious point.

And in a moment they were shooting into the thickness of the woods.

The trees grew so close together that even the light of the full moon could only penetrate with dim streaks and

rays, here and there. Their huge trunks stood like grotesque forms drawn out of a wild imagination, and the roots sprawled and coiled like serpents by the way.

"One more instant—then the open!" murmured his lordship.

And straight before him a ringing, nasal voice called: "Stop! Name of the law!"

Winchelmere gasped, and catching his carbine under his arm, he pumped two shots in the direction of the voice, at the same time loosing the reins to the eager horses.

A flare and roar answered, and the ponies stopped, frightened by that outburst of noise and flame.

There was a violent wrench at the rear—big Peter had flung himself back in terror and, snapping his lead rope, fled.

Geraldi saw Rompier plunging away for safety to one side through the trees, and Seyf Kalam racing in the opposite direction. Winchelmere, rising, leaped back over the rear of the buckboard.

And why did Geraldi himself continue to live and breathe?

He twisted his head in time to see Winchelmere swing onto the gray mare and lift her away into the trees with bullets singing around his head.

But Oñate still remained in his place, slumped heavily to one side, his head hanging down upon his chest. He seemed to be slumbering deeply, but Geraldi knew that it was the sort of slumber from which men never waken!

In the meantime, there was a bold rush of men at the buckboard, and that high-pitched, nasal clangor overriding even the noise of guns as the sheriff yelled: "Hosses, hosses! And ride, men, ride!"

He drove up on a mustang, himself, and cut the ropes which held Geraldi.

"The gal told me about you! Good luck. Git a hoss if you can, and foller us!"

And he was gone, his men streaming after him, some on the trail of Winchelmere, and some riding hard after Seyf Kalam or Rompier.

But none, as Geraldi noticed, had turned back up the road. Fat Edgar Asprey had been allowed to slip away unpursued.

With that, Geraldi whistled loudly, and again, and again: A faint neigh answered him, then a crashing through shrubbery, and Peter, the big black horse, came careening back.

Hastily Geraldi snatched the rifle and the revolvers of Oñate. Another moment he was in the saddle, and sending the stallion flying out of the wood.

He did not ride forward or to either side, as the sheriff had suggested. Instead, he held his course to the rear.

The road was not straight enough for Geraldi, it seemed. He went across country as a bird flies on its way. Fences rose—the stallion flew them. He came to a wide gap of darkness, with a creek shimmering in the hollow heart of it. But big Peter flew that also, and so he drove on, and pitched headlong into a mighty forest of spruce, and wound along the trees, still at breakneck speed.

Running out from those shadows of danger, at the last he had the knot of buildings before him, of which the broken-backed roof of Oñate's deserted house formed the highest point.

Toward this he rode, but more slowly now, checking the stallion not toward the patio entrance, but to a copse in the rear of the house. There he threw the reins, dismounted from the panting horse, and was instantly through a broken window. He ran swiftly, noiselessly, down the hall and up the stairs until he came to the chamber which Lord Winchelmere had occupied. There, with no other light than the broad shaft of the entering moon, he found the crevice in the wall, thrust in his fingers deeply—and brought out three glimmering bits of green!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BETTER MAN.

HE was very impatient, but he controlled that impatience and made himself sit still, in the darkest corner. So still did he sit that presently a rat began to gnaw at the mopboard, making a great noise, and after a time it came out and went into the shaft of the moonlight. There it sat up like a kangaroo and brushed its whiskers and, with beady eyes, looked up into the face of Geraldi.

But the latter did not move. He remained as still as the stones of the wall, and the rat continued toward the table, beneath which he found something of interest that kept him running to and fro.

At last Geraldi raised his head. The slightest of movements, but it sent the rat shooting like a shadow for its hole. The entrance was small. It stuck there for an instant with a pitiful, choked squeal of terror, then scraped its way through, its snaky tail flashed out of sight, and it was gone.

Still Geraldi listened.

He heard the far-off beat of hoofs. He heard them pause near the patio entrance.

The sheriff, coming to search the house?

He leaned a little, and through the open window, he saw a bulky form enter the patio and hurry toward the house, its feet making no noise upon the ground.

Geraldi sat back in his chair. Still listening, he heard the faintest murmur, as of hinges stiff with rust, on the floor below. Then a soft creak—as from the stair.

He rose and stood against the wall in the corner. And at once a big form loomed in the doorway, hesitated, and then went swiftly to the wall and thrust a hand into the crevice where the emeralds had been concealed.

"They're gone!" said Geraldi. "Safely in my hands again, Edgar!"

The fat man turned with a gasp.

"Geraldi—you!" said Edgar Asprey huskily.

"It's the end," said Geraldi sternly. The fat man answered nothing.

"Ordinarily," continued Geraldi, "I never soil my hands if I can avoid it. But a sneak and a traitor—a liar and a murderer— By Heaven, Edgar, you're long overdue in the next world, and I intend to send you there!"

Asprey's trembling gray lips parted, but he could not speak.

"You have a gun. Fill your hand!" said Geraldi suddenly.

Asprey did not move.

There was a muffled exclamation of disgust from Geraldi.

And then Asprey answered, panting: "I'll never go for a gun, Jimmy. I know you're my master."

"I'll shoot you down, then," said Geraldi, "as I'd shoot a coyote—a sneaking, treacherous coyote!"

He added:

"You see that I give you a fair break. I have no weapon in my hand."

Asprey laughed. The sound was a harsh rattle in his throat as he answered:

"I've seen you juggle guns, Jimmy. I can't be tempted."

"I'll turn my right side away from you, Asprey. Will that tempt you?"

"If you mean to murder me, murder me," said the fat man. "But I'll never try to defend myself against you. I can't. I know that you're the better man, Jimmy!"

Something like a snarl formed on the lips of Geraldi.

He went across the room with one bound.

"Why can't I do it?" he exclaimed in a whisper through set teeth. "I ought to—Heaven knows you're overdue. But I can't—I can only—mark you!"

The thin blade of a knife gleamed in his fingers. It made a lightninglike cross in the air—

Edgar Asprey, with a cry, covered his bleeding face with his fat hands and sank upon his knees. He cried out again, wiped the blood from his eyes, and looked forth.

But Gerald was gone.

Like a shadow he fled down the hall, through a rear room, and dropped lightly to the ground.

He cast one glance back at the blank face of the house, and then entered the woods.

Black Peter waited for him, whinnying softly at his coming—then shrinking back with a snort of disgust.

So Gerald mounted and rode at last out of the copse and came into the full blaze of the yellow moon.

There was little superstition in him, and yet now he shivered a little, and putting his hand into his waistcoat pocket, he clutched with a convulsive grasp the three emeralds which belonged to the golden box of Horus, the hawk, the god of the two horizons.

Beneath the moon lay the mountains, veiled with moon mist, looking huger than by day; beyond them was the desert; and in the desert lay his goal.

He spoke softly to the stallion, and Peter stepped out with a long, easy stride, like the trot of a wolf, and headed across the mountainside.

The Adventures of Gerald Will Be Concluded in a Forthcoming Issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

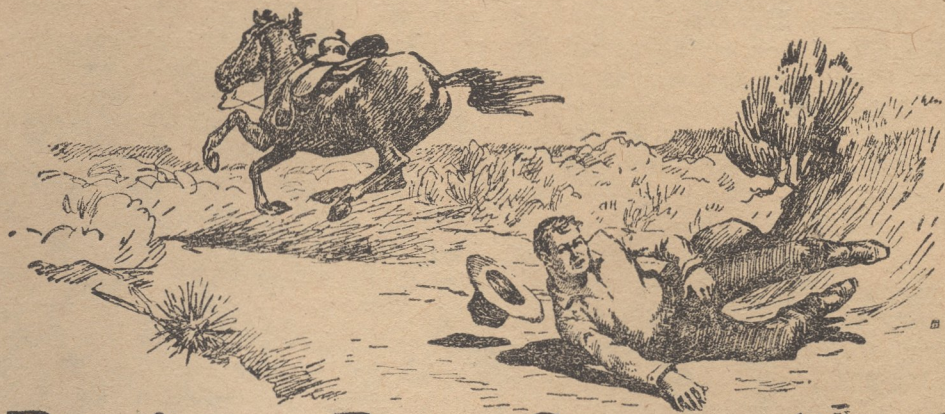


THE LURE OF THE YELLOWSTONE

ALTHOUGH the figures are obtained from a check-up of motoring parties who visited the Yellowstone National Park, it is said that the visitors came from all walks of life. It is as it should be that tillers of the soil, ranchers, herders, and fruit growers were the most numerous of these "walkers," their total being six thousand, three hundred and eighty, but the other pilgrims, though distinctly far behind in number, were by no means "nowhere." Among the visitors listed, in the order of their number, were salesmen, professional people, merchants, teachers, mechanics, laborers, students, people engaged in business or industry as executives or proprietors, clerks, and retired persons.

The "retired persons" came last in the list of visitors, though one might suppose they had more time for walking in the park than the others mentioned. The remainder of the visitors, though their activities were not specified, included, says the report, almost every occupation under the sun.

The above figures are given out by the American Automobile Association, who may very reasonably be supposed to have a kindly feeling for such a large and desirable acreage that omits to warn: No Parking Here!



Brains—But Scrambled

(A "Shorty" McKay Story) *By Ray Humphreys*

Author of "One Fighting Cock," etc.



WHEN Sheriff Joe Cook burst into his office, hot, dusty and weary, and found his deputy, "Shorty" McKay, holding the soft, delicate hands of the beautiful Señorita Dorothe and lispng to her in halting Spanish, the sheriff was not pleased, to say the least. Astounded at first at Shorty's audacity, the sheriff's amazement gradually gave way to anger, and eventually, when he could master his tongue, he let out a roar like a peeved bull.

"Shorty, what are yuh doin' now?" he demanded.

"Studyin' Spanish, o' course!" explained the flushing Shorty, releasing the señorita's little hands with evident reluctance. "I—I'm gettin' along fine, too, boss. I—I don't suppose yuh found no trace o' them four stage robbers, eh?"

The sheriff flung his hat on the desk and a small cloud of alkali dust floated ceilingward in a lazy spiral. The sheriff slapped the sleeves of his khaki shirt, and the señorita sneezed, and Shorty coughed. The sheriff shoved a fat black

cigar into his mouth and bit the end of it off savagely—then he was ready, it seemed, to answer Shorty's question.

"No—we didn't find no trace o' them four stage robbers, yuh Spanish onion!" snapped the sheriff, with a withering glare at Shorty. "But neither did we set in the shade an' exchange lovin' words in Eytalian or Yiddish or chink with a gal, either! We rode all over the Smoky Creek territory—rode until our hosses liked to give out from under us—that's what we did, ef yuh want to know!"

Shorty smiled—but it was a wary, forced smile.

"Jus' as I tol' yuh, boss," he remarked quietly, "lookin' fer them stage robbers in the Smoky Creek district is like lookin' fer a haystack in a needle—er, that is, I mean—"

The sheriff banged the table with a clenched fist.

"Yuh don't know what yuh mean, yuh half-baked, would-be Don Juan, settin' here learnin' Spanish while I'm out with a posse bakin' in the sun!" whooped the sheriff. "It's a good thing that young woman is here or I'd lose

my temper! Lissen to me, cuckoo! I'm goin' right out ag'in—me an' the boys. I want yuh to go rustle me up a fresh hoss an' about three good pack mules; git t'gether enough grub from the Diamond Hitch Grocery to last ten men three days; pack it on the mules and——"

"Yes, sir!" said Shorty promptly, and a peculiar light danced in his eyes. Then he turned to the gasping Señorita Dorothe, who had sat spellbound in her chair all through the scene, and he spoke to her—in rather lame Spanish, it seemed. She leaped to her feet quickly, however, took Shorty's offered arm, and the pair left the sheriff's office with more haste than grace. • The sheriff snorted.

"Learnin' Spanish—huh!" said the sheriff wrathfully. "He's just gone an' tumbled inter love with that black-eyed gal, an' he doesn't care ef the whole world goes to the bow-wows! Waal, let the pore sap suffer on! I kin git along without him this trip, an' when I'm back, with them stage robbers in tow, an' kin afford to hang around the office fer a while. I'll break in a new deputy—ef I kin find one with enough sense to know he's alive!"

The sheriff was very angry, there was no doubt about that. He had more or less of a right to be wrathful, however. Things had gone wrong the past week in Monte Vista. Four reckless, devil-may-care bandits had waylaid the Monte Vista-Coyote Wells stage, stuck it up, and escaped with four thousand dollars consigned to the Monte Vista bank, a lot of valuable mail, and all the cash and jewelry the five passengers on the stage happened to have along.

When the report of the robbery reached town, Sheriff Cook had shown more bravery than brains. The moment he heard the story he vaulted to saddle and rode down the Coyote Wells road like a mounted demon. He overtook the bandits at a bridge, but they had

rifles and they held him at a distance until he had exhausted his six-gun ammunition. Then they had gone on, while the sheriff had been forced to return to town, gather up a rifle-armed posse, and lose valuable time.

The bandits were not overtaken again, however. They seemed to have vanished into thin air, leaving no clews behind them. Although all roads leading out of the Smoky Creek region were soon guarded by armed men, the fleeing bandits did not appear. Then Sheriff Cook and his posse had plunged straight into the Smoky Creek bad-land country, determined to ferret out the outlaws at all costs. But that had failed. The country was cut up by arroyos, draws, deep-etched ravines, and shifting sands soon obliterated tracks. Despite hard days in the saddle the posses found nothing. The four daring bandits had dropped out of sight completely.

At first Shorty had ridden with Sheriff Cook, but after the hectic excitement of the chase had cooled, Shorty remained behind in Monte Vista, while Cook led the posse. The sheriff had decided that he had better leave his deputy in charge in town to handle whatever matters might come up while he himself was in the field. The sheriff had anticipated a protest from Shorty to this plan, but Shorty was strangely agreeable. It was only a day or so later that the sheriff learned that Shorty had enrolled as a Spanish pupil with the beautiful Señorita Dorothe Battelo, who had come to Monte Vista to open a school of languages. The sheriff figured he knew, then, why Shorty had quit the bandit chase so willingly.

"He's daffy over that raven-haired woman," said the sheriff, when he heard that Shorty was studying Spanish, but that had been merely a shrewd guess on Sheriff Cook's part. He wasn't until now, when he had caught Shorty in the act of squeezing the beau-

tiful Dorothe's hands, that the sheriff was sure his first guess had been right. The realization that Shorty had been engaged in no more strenuous pursuit than making love to the señorita while he and his posse had worn themselves thin chasing the elusive stage robbers had not particularly amused Sheriff Cook. He thumped the desk again and again now as he waited for Shorty to come back with the things he had ordered Shorty to fetch—a fresh horse, and three pack mules with packed grub enough to last ten men three days.

The sheriff was impatient to be off. This time he meant to stay in the Smoky Creek field long enough to comb it all over again, camping on the trail by night. He was sure—just as every one else in Monte Vista was sure—that the bandits must still be in that district. They hadn't gone out by any of the roads. That meant they were laying low—in the bad lands, of course. The sheriff buckled on fresh ammunition and oiled up his guns as he waited. He studied a few maps, too. But it seemed an age to him before he heard outside the thud of hoofs that might herald the approach of Shorty. The sheriff went to the door and flung it open to see a Mexican youth dismounting from a horse. Three heavily laden pack mules were there, too.

"Ef the Señor Sheriff please," said the youth, bowing, "the Señor Shorty say I should make haste to bring the hoss an' the mules up here. He say best he could get in town."

"Whar is Shorty?" asked the sheriff abruptly.

"I do know not," said the Mexican boy, shrugging. "He go away, I guess; but I hurry here with these as he say."

"Gone off sparkin' with the señorita, like as not!" grunted Sheriff Cook, as he flipped a quarter to the waiting Mexican youth. "All right, hombre, beat it! Danged ef I don't make an example o' that nincompoop Shorty

soon as this business is over! He used to have a little hoss sense, but, by golly, he is sure gone loco now—an' I reckon he's just been crazed by Cupid hisself! Waal, I'll straighten him out soon as I git around to it—the nitwit boob!"

And if the sheriff could have laid eyes on Shorty as that moment he would have been quite sure that Shorty was bereft of his senses. The sheriff might have been surprised to see that Shorty was not strolling somewhere, arm in arm with the pretty señorita. But the sheriff would have been dumfounded, anyway. Shorty, at the moment the sheriff was cursing him for a fool, was bent low over the neck of a galloping, sweating horse. Yes, it was Shorty—but what a changed Shorty! No longer the dapper, smartly dressed young deputy. Gone now the fawn-colored Stetson that was the envy of all the cowhands in the San Luis Valley. Gone, too, the gay yellow silk shirt, with the glittering deputy's badge upon it. Gone the fancy riding breeches and the high-heeled boots—gone even the curly straw-colored hair that was Shorty's crowning distinction. It was a ragged, grimy Shorty that rode rapidly toward the Smoky Creek district, urging a fast pony to its top speed.

Yes, the perplexed sheriff would have thought Shorty was certainly crazy had he been able to watch him on his ride. The deputy seemed to have flung all caution to the four winds. He still bent low over the running horse and he plied a quirt with nervous haste. Up grade and down, thundering across bridges, gliding around sharp turns on the alpine trails, straight into the heart of the Smoky Creek region went Shorty. He did not spare the paint pony he rode. In an hour he had put plenty of distance behind him. In two hours he was well along on his way. In three hours he had splashed across the crystal-clear Bear River and was headed into the deeper recesses of the

bad lands. At the end of five hours he had slowed up, and a few minutes later he swung the weary pinto into an aspen grove and quickly dismounted. Then he unloosed the saddle girth, switched off the saddle, slipped the bridle from the pony, hid both saddle and bridle in the brush, and slapped the pinto on one hot flank.

"Take yuhr time gettin' home, boy," he said soothingly. "You've sure earned a good rest; loaf—an' it'll be O. K. with me!"

And then Shorty did a strange thing. He flopped down and rolled in the trail, just as the tired pinto might have done. When he got to his feet he was dustier and dirtier than before, if such a thing were possible. He waved jauntily at the watching pony and then he struck out alone, on foot. The pony whinnied inquisitively, but as Shorty paid no attention the horse finally went to grazing.

Shorty stalked on with rapid strides. When he came out on top of the mesa, however, he began to show signs of fatigue. He started across the grassy table-land at a staggering run. He fell headlong several times, but he got up and pushed ahead. He was panting with exertion. He was perspiring. His heart was pounding against his ribs. And when he finally came up to the long adobe house that crowned the ridge where the lofty pine trees stood sentinel, he was breathless. He seemed about ready to faint when a shrill, suspicious voice hailed him from the adobe.

"Hello there, señor!"

Shorty threw up his tired head. An old man stood in the door of the adobe house—an old man, swarthy, but still tall and muscular. A Mexican, plainly. Shorty tried to smile as he slumped down on a log near the house. The old man came out to look at him.

"You are tired, señor!"

"Si," said Shorty, and put his head in his hands.

"Where you from, señor?" asked the inquisitive Mexican.

"A great distance," said Shorty in Spanish, and then, as he caught his breath, he began to speak rapidly in that tongue. Yes, he had come a long way, he said. His horse had given out on him down the trail. It was necessary that he have another horse quickly. The Mexican must procure him one—speedily. He would pay well for it. He must hurry on, to Grousemont—but first he must have a horse. The old Mexican listened with interest but he spoke with great caution, when at length he answered Shorty's pleadings.

"How you know I live here?" he demanded softly.

"I didn't know—I stumbled upon this place," said Shorty.

"Ah, what you pay for a good horse, eh?"

"Plenty—whatever yuh ask, in reason!"

So at last the deal was made. A refreshed Shorty mounted a well-built sorrel. A handful of crisp bills changed hands. The old Mexican waved Shorty off, and again Shorty rode like a veritable demon. Straight across the mesa, down the far trail, through another maze of canyons and ravines, over sand dunes, and across miniature deserts, until at length he came to Grousemont, a straggling village on Bear River. Here Shorty lost no time in looking up a smart Mexican youth. He had a short conversation with the boy, and then he sauntered into the first refreshment parlor he saw. Here, as he quenched his thirst, he boasted—and shortly a self-appointed committee of citizens clustered around the horse Shorty had ridden into town. They examined it. Soon after the town marshal had lodged the protesting Shorty in jail—and had Sheriff Cook been able to look across the miles and see his deputy laughing after the iron door had clanged upon him, the sheriff

would have been more convinced than ever that Shorty was indeed loco.

Shorty's sojourn in the Grousemont jail was not of long duration, however. In a comparatively short time a visitor came posthaste to the jail and was admitted to see Shorty. It was the old Mexican from up on the mesa. There was a brief conversation in Spanish, a few choice expressions—not of good will—and then the Grousemont marshal was made a party to the conference. There was more talk, more gestures, and very soon after three men rode out of Grousemont under the cover of darkness. The first was the old Mexican from the mesa, perspiring despite the fact that the evening was cool; the second was the marshal of Grousemont, who was so excited he could hardly speak; and the third man was Shorty—still dusty, still grimy, but with a satisfied grin on his boyish face. The three took the steep trails back to the Smoky Creek bad lands.

It was dawn when the three riders halted in a grove of trees far to the west. The old Mexican pointed toward the edge of an arroyo. The three, abandoning their horses, crept forward. Shorty, peering over, saw four men about a smoldering fire in the ravine. One, wrapped in a blanket and holding a rifle, seemed to be awake. The others were asleep. It was the old Mexican, at a prodding from Shorty, who cupped his hands and whispered into the draw.

"It is me—Juan Quijano!"

"Come on down then," said the man with the rifle.

The old Mexican went down cautiously. He did as he had been instructed to do. He seized the rifle of the watcher, and at that moment two other heads appeared above the rim of the arroyo. The startled watcher saw that four six-guns were pointed at him and he relinquished his rifle silently. While he held his hands up, as ordered, Quijano, the old Mexican, went around

the three sleeping men and gathered up their rifles. Then he woke them, gently enough, and they stretched their hands high as they found themselves looking into gun muzzles. Later they were bound, horses were caught up, black coffee was brewed and gulped down, and a cavalcade rode out of the arroyo and started at a lively gallop along the trail to the west.

When the sun came up that morning, Sheriff Joe Cook and the nine men of his posse, partaking of breakfast along the creek bottom, saw the approaching cavalcade swinging down the trail and hastily caught up their rifles. Seven men were coming along at a brisk trot. The sheriff and his men sought refuge behind trees and big rocks and waited breathlessly for the expected battle.

"Seven of 'em!" gasped the startled sheriff. "They must be a reg'lar army. It couldn't be nobody else but the bandits. We know they ain't no other posse out. It's a dog-gone cinch they've seen us, gents—best things we kin do is to hold our fire until we see what's comin' off. I don't quite git it yit, fellers!"

One of the posse men sang out suddenly.

"Looky, sheriff, thar's one o' them hombres drappin' out o' line! Look, he's turnin' back—yep, thar he goes, high-tailin' it back up the trail! What the heck! Shall we take a crack at him, sheriff, afore he gits out o' range, eh?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"No, leave him go—we kin round him up later, I reckon. He must be a coward, or else he's goin' fer reinforcements, ef such a thing is possible! Stand steady, fellers, they're gettin' close. We're ten to six now an' we oughta be able to——"

"Say," exclaimed another posse man excitedly, "four o' them hombres ain't carryin' no rifles! Say, four o' 'em is tied to their saddles—an'—an' that leadin' guy thar is—yes—that's Shorty! By

golly, sheriff, it's Shorty—Shorty himself!"

The sheriff stepped out from behind his tree. He put up a hand to shield his eyes from the morning sun. Yes, it was Shorty—a stained, travel-worn Shorty, but Shorty just the same! And at about that moment Shorty let out a whoop that reassured the waiting posse men. There was no mistaking that voice! The posse men surged out on the trail as Shorty rode up. Shorty grinned.

"Shorty, yuh're stained like a Pinte Injun!" gasped the old sheriff. "I wouldn't 'a' knowed yuh! An'—an'—who——"

Shorty jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

"This tall gent," he said, "is Bud Stewart, marshal of Grousemont! These other four are the gents that held up the Monte Vista-Coyote Wells stage the other day. We grabbed 'em up in an arroyo a while back—nicely hidden, too—an' now we're headin' inter Monte. Reckon yuh'll come along, boss, with yuhr men?"

Sheriff Cook was almost speechless.

"That—that feller that got away," he demanded, "who was he? The bird as rode back up the trail a minnit ago?"

"Him?" echoed Shorty. "Oh, he was jus 'a friend o' mine, sheriff, an' I promised not to say who he was. Yuh see, it was like this. After the first few days yuh an' me rode this Smoky Creek country lookin' fer these outlaws I realized that a whole army might hide out in this country for a year without us stumblin' on 'em in a blind search. I made up my mind to go at it another way, although I knowed yud'd stick to the old way. I found out that thar was a ol' Mexican—a rustler o' hosses—who lived in the Smoky Creek region an' who knew it like a book. I figgered that ef the outlaws was hidin' anywhar in the district he would know it. He might be furnishin' them with a hide-

out an' grub. An' then I learned that Señorita Dorothe, in town, was a granddaughter o' the ol' Mex rustler. So I began to study Spanish——"

Shorty looked around the circle of perplexed faces and laughed. Every one, including the four bandits, looked mystified.

"O' course, I knew Spanish before, but I took the lessons jus' fer a alibi to get chummy with the señorita. When I did, I let her know that I suspected her grandfather o' bein' a rustler in the Smoky Creek district. I knew he was too crafty to admit anything voluntarily, but I assured her I would help him instead o' harmin' him. In that way, I got out o' her jus' whar he lived, in an isolated spot. Then I stained up like a Mex, put on old clothes, an' headed for the old Mexican's place. I let my hoss go afore I got thar. I bought another hoss off him, the best he had, an' one on which I could see the brand was recently altered. I blew fer Grousemont, hired a Mex kid thar to go back an' tell the old Mex I had been arrested as a hoss thief an' wanted him to help get me out, an' then I started to brag so that the marshal here did pick me up as a hoss thief. I went to jail.

"When the old Mex arrived he readily admitted that the hoss he had sold me was stole, as I swore I knew, an' then he offered me money not to tell whar I got it an' involve him. That was enough. I had him hooked, an' I showed him my badge an' got a promise out o' him to lead me to the lair of the outlaws. He admitted he had been sellin' 'em food an' that they was layin' low until the excitement blew over. My badge convinced the marshal here that I spoke the truth, an' he came along to help me ketch the outlaws. Ain't that right, marshal?"

"It sure is!" agreed the marshal loudly.

"An' as a further price o' bein' led

to the bandits I promised the old Mex he could beat it an' not be prosecuted fer his past sins, provided he quit rustlin'," went on Shorty. "So yuh see, boss, everythin' is plumb rosy! I've got the bandits, recovered the loot, put a rustler on the straight an' narrow path, done a pretty señorita a favor, an' ain't half the fool yuh figgered I was just about twenty-four hours ago!"

Sheriff Cook nodded his head in agreement at that.

"Shorty," he said, "yuh sure has got brains—but they're scrambled! Yuh make a long detour to accomplish a thing, but as long as yuh succeeds I guess I has no kick comin'. Shake, Shorty!"

And the sheriff reached out a big hand.

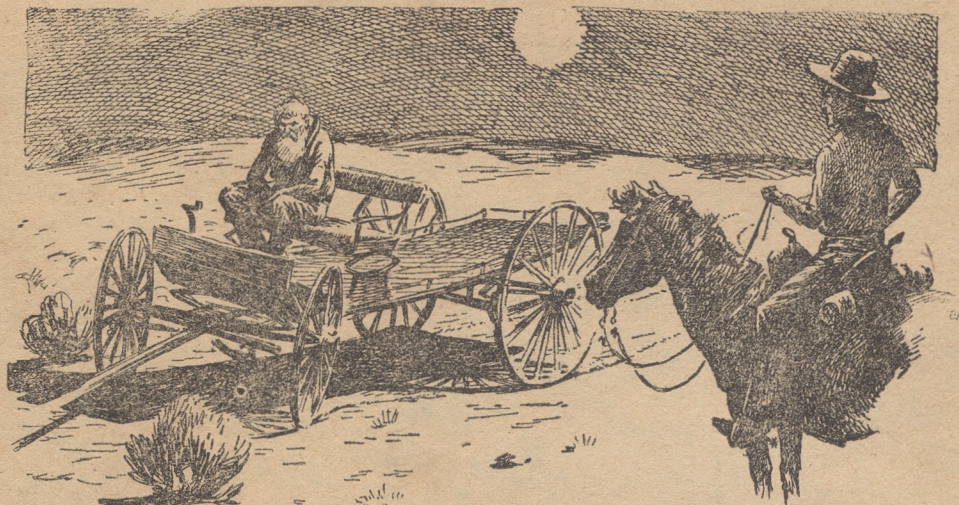


NORTHWARD, HO!

THIS would seem to be the year of the North, judging by all the interest which is centered there. Some are flying to it, others flying over it, and still others planning to delve into it. And when a country, like a person, has a "past," then it becomes really interesting, say the frivolous. But it is with no frivolous intent that the scientists are going to delve into the country. What they are after are cold, hard facts, and it must be said to the credit of these learned gentlemen that they have the knack of imparting interest to all their discoveries. Well, what they are after now are the antiquities of Alaska.

Under Henry B. Collins, Jr., the Smithsonian Institution is planning to send an archaeological expedition this summer into the arctic. Its purpose will be to discover, if possible, evidence of the migration of primitive man to this continent from Asia. Last year Mr. Collins was the leader of an expedition to Nunivak Island to make intensive excavations there and on the mainland for several hundred miles. The goal of his projected expedition is St. Lawrence Island and the coast of Seward Peninsula. It is reported that definite evidences of ancient villages on this island and on the Alaskan coasts have been discovered, and, in his search for them, Mr. Collins will avail himself of the help of Eskimos.

The small amount of excavation that has been done in Alaska has betrayed the existence of a still earlier culture, which in no way resembles the present Eskimo culture. Mr. Collins will attempt to amplify and confirm the existing knowledge on this subject. But his activities will be diversified by making such ethnological observations as his time permits, and he will also take physical measurements of living Eskimos.



The Island in the Desert

By Jackson Gregory

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

TO the Hacienda Escondida in Nacional comes Julian Hawk, gentleman of various titles and picturesque aspect. To El Topo, fat villain, Hawk bears a message from a dead man which brands one Blondino a liar. Hawk meets Señor Castañares, once owner of the Hacienda Escondida. This aristocrat of the scarred face is slightly mad, it seems.

In the gaming room, the beautiful La Guera, daughter of Pedro Perrigo, asks Hawk to marry her to save her from the hated Blondino, who holds her father in his grasp of terror. Hawk declines.

The two, talking together in the garden, are interrupted by Castañares, who sees in the white-clad form his dead wife. Perrigo rushes to his daughter, a knife flashes, a pistol cracks, riders are heard—and the cry of "Blondino."

CHAPTER V.

THE END OF A MONKEY MAN.

DOMINANT above the commotion rose one strong voice, bell-toned and mighty and deeply melodious. It was the ringing voice of command, of power, of supreme, dictating authority cloaked in fearlessness; the voice of a fierce and glowing arbiter of his own and many another destiny along the border—the mellow thunder of some untrammelled, golden Jove of sheer masculinity, as masculinity spells itself along the frontiers of countries and of man-made laws—the voice of Blondino.

"Stand back! Give way!" There was the sound of a blow, as Blondino plowed his way through the little knot of men like a bull tossing terriers aside. "What, La Güera! Some one has shot my La Güera for me——"

For she had thrown herself down upon the body of little Pedro Perrigo, and in the moonlight Blondino, seeing her there, made the logical mistake.

"No, no! It is Perrigo," cried El Topo, who, with the men from the gaming tables, had rushed out at the first sound of an altercation.

"What!" roared Blondino. "The little Perrigo? Some one has shot him? Stand aside, girl," and he plucked La Güera to her feet, as though she had been a doll, setting her

to one side while he stooped over the man on the ground.

Perrigo fell to groaning, and Blondino straightened up, looking about him.

"Who did this thing?" he demanded.

La Güera might have answered, but, seeing the way clear, she was again on her knees, catching Perrigo's head against her breast, calling chokingly upon him to tell her that he was not too terribly hurt, and then half fainting, as she feared that already he was dying.

So it was El Topo who answered to the best of his ability. Which is to say, he did as most men would have done in like circumstance, made a vivid patchwork of what he knew and what he guessed, and offered it as the plain truth.

"It was Castañares there. He and Perrigo have had words of late. Tonight they were quarreling when I heard them and ran out. It was all confusion, and in the fracas Castañares there shot him."

"So," said Blondino, after the fashion of a man rudely shaken and meaning to have a moment to grasp something which he found bewildering. "You, El Topo, with a man or two if you need them, carry Castañares to his room and keep him there until I come. You others to the stables with the horses."

Again he set La Güera aside and now took the little man up into his arms.

"We'll see how much hurt you are, little monkey man of mine," he said not ungently. "One shot only? What's one bullet to a grown he-man, Pedrito?"

"For the love of God," moaned Perrigo.

"There, there," said Blondino, for all the world like some big, stolid woman mothering a fretful child.

"Hurts, does it? Put your teeth through your lip, *Pedrito mio*; I'm going to take care of you. Hang on tight; you've ever had the trick of that, eh, *Cara de Mono*? And you can thank all your saints, amigo, that Victor Blondino himself chanced along at the right minute!"

He was a very big man, this Blondino, and one powerfully muscled. For him it was no task to carry such as the dwarfish Perrigo. The two passed in at the open door, others surging along in their wake; some one thought to get candles; a moment later, Blondino put his burden down on a bed and stood back, looking down at the wizened face, more apelike than ever now, with the queer look of panic in the small, hot eyes.

"Clear out, all of you," commanded Blondino. "Estrada, bring me some good brandy. La Güera, bring clean cloths and hot water. Go, now. Close the door! Leave that window open! Let the man have fresh air! Oh, what a pack of gaping, silly fools!" he grunted in a sort of good-humored, indolent tolerance.

At last he was alone with the man on the bed. Blondino, his big gauntleted hands on his hips, stood looking down on the wounded man compassionately.

"My poor little Perrigo," he said softly. "It hurts, then, eh? Never mind; you have been a good and faithful servant to me, little one, and I am going to take care of you now."

He had thrust his hat far back on his head; the candlelight revealed a profusion of little clustering ringlets, like a girl's, bright with soft golden lights, soft light hair, like flax with gold dust sifted through it. Here again, despite a tongue long used to the Southern speech, was an unmistakable Anglo-Saxon. An odd thing, perhaps—but then Anglo-Saxon blood has ever seethed upward into leader-

ship—that, of the two bandit chieftains come to the Hacienda Escondida tonight, both were American.

Here, as in that other adventurer who had come earlier, was a man of the North whom the country had striven to make over into a man of the South, physically if not otherwise. The ardent sun of Mexico, playing goldsmith to the fairer skin, had overlaid it with a thin layer of gold leaf. But the eyes remained as blue as sapphires. A small, thick mustache was brushed up fiercely at the ends. The man breathed animal force; he was like a dynamo, throwing out surging waves of power, or, among the common run of men, like a valiant stallion in a field of jaded, work-worn, spiritless geldings. He had never encountered the man whom he could not have lifted and strangled in his hands.

Fierceness in him was never to be overlooked, no matter what his momentary mood. Now, with his bright-blue eyes softening to pity, it was merely as though a transparent cloak were drawn over his savagery. A strange tenderness emanated from him, yet did not obliterate ruthlessness.

Perrigo tried to lift himself on an elbow, gasping for breath. He fell back again, his drawn face a grimy white, a sweat of agony on his brow and running glistening down the creases of his cheeks.

Blondino sighed compassionately; his eyes grew so gentle that it must be that tears were gathering.

"My little Perrigo," he said softly. "Be still. I am going to look at your hurt."

Over the table at the bedside was a small mirror. Blondino, stooping slightly, saw his own countenance in it. The mirrored reflection stopped him, held him. The look in his eyes altered; he brushed up his mustache more fiercely than ever. It appeared that he forgot Perrigo. He had not

seen a mirror for days. This one trapped him every bit as much as the ancient forest pool ensnared Narcissus. He became the vital, full-forced embodiment of Vanity. He admired himself openly, indifferent of pretense. He found himself the most perfect expression of manhood he had ever seen. It would have been with Blondino a weakness to strive to mask his own superlative self-approval. He reeked with conceit. "I am Blondino!" It satisfied him to be Blondino; he was infatuated with Blondino. A man of steel, he gloried in muscular perfection; strange admixture of Vulcan and Narcissus, he could never tire of noting how the little curls clustered about his brow, or how below the neck scarf his skin was soft and white.

Again Perrigo stirred and, stirring, moaned. Reluctantly, with a hint of a frown in them, Blondino's eyes withdrew from the glass. Then he became on the instant thoughtful of his henchman and more tenderly sympathetic than before. Taking off his gauntlets, he sought the wound. But Perrigo's nervous hands, into which the strength of his entire body seemed to flow, fought him off.

"The padre!" whispered the little man frantically. "Send him to me. Quick!"

Blondino's mighty hand exerted a gentle, reassuring pressure on the bony shoulder.

"Oh, it's not so bad as that, Perdito. This wound is nothing. It's too high up, amigo; too far to the side."

"I am dying!" gasped Perrigo, a terrible fear in his eyes. "The priest, for the love of Heaven, señor!"

Blondino patiently strove with him, doing all that a man could to banish the terrible dread which looked so wildly forth from Perrigo's eyes. He even tore the shirt away from the wound and then scoffed at it being in the least dangerous. He bared his

own chest and showed no less than three scars, swearing that the least of them had come closer to snipping the thread of life for him than Perrigo's wound could possibly do for Perrigo. But the wounded man would not listen. A fear, greater even than the fear of death, was on him. And Blondino, quicker than most men to read the other fellow, saw clearly to the muddy depths of Pedro Perrigo.

"A priest?" said Blondino sternly, standing straight. "You'd confess your petty sins, eh, Perrigo?"

"Send me the priest——"

"So you'd have a confessional! And, hurrying to get the stains off your own coat tails, you'd not care if others were spattered a bit, eh, little one?"

"You'd not have me condemned to the flames of hell, señor!"

"You think only of yourself, then? Not of me, Pedrito?"

Just here came La Güera, running back to them with a basin of hot water and a clean sheet.

"La Güera!" panted Perrigo. "Come to me. I am dying. But I cannot die before——"

"Fool!" stormed Blondino. "Be still! La Güera, do what I tell you." He took the things from her hands, set them down, and then thrust her out through the door. "Run for the padre! He is not far away, if my earlier orders were obeyed. Your little papa has need of him."

"Oh!" She shrank back in terror. "You do not mean——"

"He may be dying. Yes. Now, run."

She fled in the wildest haste. Blondino closed the door. Then he came close to Perrigo. All compassion was dead in the bright-blue eyes now, leaving them merciless.

"So, little coward, you would blab!" sneered Blondino. "Don't you know better than that?"

Now the third fear sprang up in Perrigo, and this fear wiped the others out; fear of Blondino towering over him.

Yes, he was afraid of death; he was more afraid of the flames of hell, after death; and most of all he was afraid of Blondino! Yet what could Blondino do to frighten a man who already thought that he was going to die?

Perrigo, shrinking back, nearly dead already, not from his wound but from his three mortal terrors, joined his hands in dramatic supplication, begging earnestly.

"Let me have peace at the end, Señor Blondino. I am not all bad; you know that, señor! The girl, señor—that has begun of late to haunt me. For, don't you see, she has come to love me like a father, and I—am I stone and iron, then, señor? You will let her come to me? Her and the padre—— I have served you like a dog—*have mercy!*"

He tried to scream but his voice caught in his throat. Again he reared up, trying to struggle out of bed, to get to his feet with the bed between him and his captain.

"*For the love——*"

Blondino struck as hard a blow as even he could deliver. His fist crashed into the little man's temple, hurling him out of the bed. Had it been a hammer, not merely a fist, striking him, the result would have been the same. Death must have been instantaneous.

Blondino looked at his own fist, as though to see if the skin were broken; he flexed the fingers, clenching them tight, opening them wide two or three times. Then he dragged Perrigo's fallen body back to the bed, straightened it swiftly, and jerked a blanket over it.

Only then did he remember the window. The door he had closed, the window stood open. He saw no one

there; a flood of mellow moonlight lay across the deep sill. Stepping softly, catlike for silence and quickness, he crossed the room. If any one had seen, Blondino would like to know now.

His shoulders twitched once spasmodically, as though he mastered an involuntary shudder; he saw no one, yet he was far from satisfied. Had it not been for the bars, he would have leaped through the window and investigated every shadow.

Then he heard some one at the door and stepped away from the window. It was the man, Estrada, whom he had commanded to bring some brandy. The man, seeing the blanket-covered form on the bed, stared incredulously. Then he fell back suddenly, crossing himself.

"Yes, he's dead," said Blondino coolly. "The bullet must have cut some major artery. Perrigo knew that his death was upon him. He had asked for the priest."

"It's too late now," said Estrada stupidly.

"Yes," agreed Blondino. "It's too late now. Whatever my little monkey had to say to the padre or to another has to go unsaid. Come, Estrada; you and I will drink the brandy. Then I must go to Castañares and learn how he takes it upon himself to kill my friends. As for you, go tell the girl that it's all over here."

Estrada, who had been one of Blondino's horsemen to arrive just after Perrigo fell, clanked away in the heavy spurs which he had not yet thought to remove. Blondino brushed his mustache upward with the back of his hand, set his wide sombrero at a belligerent angle, and, without any loss of time, strode off for his postponed word with Castañares.

El Topo had obeyed orders. He and Castañares were in the latter's room, a key turned in the lock. At

Blondino's command, El Topo opened the door. There was a look of perplexity in his eyes.

"I am not sure of anything any longer, *capitan*," he made haste to say, as Blondino, hands on lips, legs wide apart, stood staring at the man of the scarred face. "I am not even sure it was Señor Castañares who fired that shot. He denies it; we could find no weapon——"

"Tell me all about it, Señor Castañares," said Blondino.

There was a far-away look in the habitually sad eyes which Castañares brought to bear upon his questioner. He had been sitting dejectedly, staring at the painting of the long-dead Señora Castañares.

"You see, señor, all day I have been expecting her to return. It is growing late now." He sighed. "Well, I heard a voice outside; I was so sure that it was her voice. I ran out. There was some one on the edge of a moon-bright spot—— Was it really my señora, señor?"

"It was only the girl, La Güera," said Blondino, eying him sharply. "What happened?"

"I called out to her. The man Perrigo ran after me and tried to hold me back. I threw him off. He was beside himself, señor, acting like a man gone mad! What ailed him? I could not understand. We struggled; he had a knife and lifted it. I saw his eyes. They were terrible. He meant to kill me."

"Go on," said Blondino sternly. "He tried to knife you, and you shot him?"

Castañares grew impatient.

"What nonsense! What should I shoot him with? My finger? I had no weapon. No, I did not shoot him; he himself will tell you that——"

"He will tell nothing. The man is dead."

An exclamation broke from El

Topo. Castañares looked mildly surprised and murmured:

"Now I am sorry for that. I did not like the man, but to have him killed—and here at my place!" His old sad look came back into his eyes. "It seems to me, señor, that so much misfortune happens here," he added un- easily.

"If not you, then who shot my Per- rigo?" asked Blondino.

Castañares made his little helpless gesture, lifting both hands and letting them drop listlessly.

"But I have said already that I do not know who it was. It was too dark where he stood, under a big tree just beyond where she——"

"What's that?" cut in Blondino. "You saw a man there?"

"No. I cannot say that, señor. My eyes were all for her. I was so sure —— And it was so dark where he stood——"

"How do you know, then, that some one was there?"

"I saw the flash of his pistol, of course. How the others could have failed to see it, I don't even under- stand."

"So there was some one lurking in the garden, then? And he saw you and Perrigo quarreling and took it on himself to interfere? Now, I had a great fondness for my Perrigito, you know that. For more than twenty years, when I saved him from a very hasty hanging, he has been like a good watchdog to me. And some one has shot him!"

He turned to El Topo.

"Is this how you run my place in my absence?" he demanded, his blue eyes all of a sudden become blue fires. "Do you want me to slit your fat, greasy throat for you? Who has been here that could do this? What man has——"

He saw how El Topo stared back at him; less mole than bulky, human

toad did the man look now. Fear pricked him even as the first quick, true suspicion awoke within his mind. He knew that he was in danger.

"There was a stranger here to- night! A little before all this happened he went outside; to the stable, he said, to look at his horse! I suspected him of planning some evil—but not against Pedro! For the moment, I swear it, I had even forgotten him! May the devil fly away with me——"

"Sew up your button-hole of a mouth, fat fool!" stormed Blondino, in such an access of fury as to make El Topo spring backward and look wildly about him for an avenue of es- cape. "As to the devil flying away with you, that has a prophetic ring to it, *mozo!* One man dead to-night, and does it dawn on you that my little monkey may grow lonely already, and ask for the company of the man through whose negligence he is dead?"

El Topo began to look truculent now. Cornered, he would be not with- out courage. He began to bluster.

Just then Estrada looked in through the door.

"There is a stranger here, señor," he said to Blondino, "who asks for a word with you."

Blondino whirled about expectantly, demanding:

"A stranger? Who or what is he?"

Estrada looked to be both puzzled and touched by an exhilarating inter- est, as he answered:

"He names himself El Gabilan! The Capitan Colorado!"

"That is the one!" cried El Topo.

Blondino was mute a moment, frowning incredulously. Then he swore roundly and fluently, and then, at last breaking into a loud laugh, he flung about and stamped out to come to grips with the man who had shot a watchdog of his. What he had said was true; in a way, he had had a great fondness for little Perrigo.

CHAPTER VI.

A VANISHING HAWK.

SURPRISE had its shock in store for both men. When Julian Hawk and Victor Blondino confronted each other in the main *sala* of the old Hidden Hacienda, dark brows and blond brows rose sharply, prompted by like emotions; stern dark eyes and stern blue eyes, clashing, glinted with understanding of the remarkable thing which each had discovered.

Blondino spoke first, exclaiming curiously:

"Captain Colorado, eh? An American!"

"And you!" returned Julian Hawk. "I did not know that."

Blondino burst into loud laughter.

"I've heard of you, whatever your name is," he cried out. "And I quite naturally supposed you were Mexican. And here I find you— If you really are El Gabilan Colorado, and not some fresh bounder, playing jokes."

"My name happens to be Hawk, if you'd have the whole of it. Maybe you recall having heard it before now?"

"I'm no great hand for names," said Blondino indifferently. "It's the man that counts with me. Well, I'm honored," and he grinned impudently. "Just the same, it happens that this is a busy night for me. I ought to be in the saddle now for a good sixty-mile run of it, and so I'll ask you what brings you from your own hunting grounds to cross trails with me?"

"Maybe I'm riding the same direction—if it be to the Blue Smokes that you're heading!"

Again was Blondino frankly surprised.

"Now who's been whispering secrets?" he demanded, and looked not in the least pleased.

"A thing like that can't be kept secret," retorted Hawk.

"No, I guess not," grumbled Blondino. "Well, all the more reason to cut matters short. What are you here for?"

Julian Hawk once more had his cloak thrown over his shoulders; his sombrero was in his hand. He clapped it on, hooked his thumbs in his belt, and said coolly:

"I really rode by, tarrying a moment, to treat myself to the pleasure of killing you."

"What!" roared Blondino, and on the instant whipped out the heavy weapon tugging at his belt. In his time he had looked into many a grim and implacable face, but never into one more dangerously determined than that confronting him now. Had Julian Hawk, then, so much as twitched a muscle, he must assuredly have sealed his own death warrant; for Blondino was hair-trigger set for murder.

"Go ahead," he jeered, having the top hand now, and keen and quick and sure enough to keep it. "If you've mapped out any nice little playful evening like that for yourself, don't scrap it on my account."

"No, not on your account," said Hawk. "Certain considerations having suggested themselves, I am inclined to yield a point."

"To forgo your anticipated pleasure?" jeered Blondino. "Or, perhaps, merely to postpone it?"

"Ah," said Hawk.

Blondino stared and for a moment did nothing but stare.

"You're a cool hand, my friend," he said thoughtfully after a while.

Julian Hawk smiled contemptuously back at him.

"I have need to be," he agreed equitably. "In my business, you know."

"Now, I wonder if you're a nut? Crazy as old Castañares in there? In any case, I'm not going to waste a lot of time on you. If you think you

want my scalp, go after it! I'll take you on, you or any other man, and do no grouching about a few minutes squandered on a busy night. Pull your gun—or pull your freight. Which?"

"I'll be going presently——"

"Here, you," cut in Blondino, be-thinking himself. "About my little playmate, Perrigo: You're the man that killed him for me!"

"Don't be an ass, Blondino," grunted the other.

"What do you mean by that? Mean you didn't do it?"

"Of course I didn't. What's more, you know it!"

Blondino repeated himself in words, though with a new, suspicious meaning, as he rasped out:

"What do you mean by that?"

Julian Hawk shrugged most elaborately.

"One free captain, in the good old-fashioned parlance, doesn't need to stand for a lot of high-hand from another. I'm not here to answer fool questions. If I had a certain bit of business with you, or thought I had, I've done my thinking over from another angle. Maybe I've decided it would be fun to run you a race to the Blue Smokes——"

"You'll do nothing of the kind! I'm of a mind to have a free hand there. What if I drill you right now, square between the eyes?"

"First, I wish you'd call in your man, El Topo. I asked him to hold some money for me; he has about five thousand dollars of mine."

Again did Blondino stare. And then a second time he burst out laughing, though not in the least did his vigilance relax or his suspicion dwindle.

"You handed El Topo a wad like that to hold for you? And I just asked if you were crazy!"

"We had a dinky game at dice. El Topo lost all he had in his tin box and refused to dig any deeper. I thought

that when you blew in, you might not be as timid as he was. I'm only now in the position to learn at firsthand what sort of a man you are; but I've heard that you had been known to play for sizable stakes."

"Why should I hazard a wad that's already as good as mine?" Blondino chuckled.

"Meaning that you'd keep what El Topo holds and refuse to give me a game?" Hawk shrugged. "Very well."

"You don't mind losing a penny or two, do you? A mere five thousand—that's nothing to you, eh?"

"Right you are," said Hawk. "If I confess to disappointment, it is that I am deprived of the pleasure of cleaning you."

All this while they had had the big rooms to themselves. Those other men who had gamed here earlier in the evening, and who had been interrupted by the shot which felled Pedro Perrigo, had not returned. Evidently, of like minds to be free from any possible implication or even mere publicity, these gentlemen had quietly taken their hats and their departures. Nor had any of Blondino's horsemen entered; from the stables they would, doubtless, troop into that other part of the house where they might jog elbows along the cheap bar and drink of such liquors as were meant for them.

"I ask you again," jeered Blondino, "why I should risk what's already the same as mine? Five thousand may be nothing to you; I'll confess that I find it a fair day's wage."

A fuller, richer contempt stamped itself upon Hawk's features.

"I'm inclined to be disappointed in you," he said disgustedly. "If you feel that way, I don't know that I mind making you a present of the thing——"

"Oho! My fine fellow goes about tossing the thousands to those who chance on him in his generous moods!"

"I met up with a beggar last night. He asked for a couple of reales; I gave him a couple of thousand. Tonight I meet up with a fellow called Blondino——" He broke off to stare as insolently as ever Blondino stared at his most insolent best. "If you *are* Blondino," he added, as one beginning to doubt.

Men who live rough-and-tumble lives are very often boys even into the full surge of mid-manhood. Perhaps each one of these two men, each with a reputation of sorts, held some strange, distorted respect for the other; or, if not that, for something, some quality, in that other. If so, what more natural than that each should show the other the full of his contempt?

Blondino, without turning or withdrawing his watchful eyes from his visitor's face, shouted out at the top of his lungs, calling El Topo. And El Topo came at a run, not knowing what to expect.

"This man who names himself El Colorado," snapped Blondino, "says that you hold some five thousand of his money. How about it?"

"It is the truth señor. Here it is, too. He handed it to me just before he went out to the stable." The mole-eyes flickered; a grin twitched the small round mouth. "He was afraid that outside some one who knew might rob him!"

Julian Hawk stirred for the first time—to step to the table by the window and sit down.

"Give him his money," commanded Blondino. "Bring the dice. Bring the candles over here. See that all the doors are locked." He flung down a key which came from some inner pocket. "Bring me my strong box, El Topo."

El Topo hastened away with the key. Julian Hawk's eyes followed him expectantly. Blondino laughed.

"No, my friend, you're not to see where it's kept. Not in this room, you may be sure."

Hawk made no rejoinder. He seemed slightly bored, as he rolled his cigarette. Presently El Topo returned, carrying a small japanned box under his arm. He put it down on the table and, at Blondino's command, being given the second key, opened it. Hawk's eyes examined the contents in frank interest; Blondino's eyes never for a second left Hawk's face.

"One more thing, El Topo," commanded Blondino. "This game is to be of a few minutes only. Tell my men, we ride immediately to the Blue Smokes Mountains; which is to say, we cross the border into the States. Of course, you knew; but this Johnny Hawk might as well learn from me that we don't fear his own knowing! Before I go, by the way, I want a word with La Güera. And the padre is to await me."

"Si, señor," said El Topo and slowly withdrew.

All the while, Blondino held his weapon ready for instant use in his right hand. Hawk appeared to smile at his precaution.

"The dice, now," he suggested. "I've heard it's unlucky for a right-handed man to throw them left-handedly!"

"I'll take a chance," said Blondino.

They placed their bets, Blondino always left-handedly and a trifle awkwardly, with an equal mind toward high stakes. Hawk at all times kept his two hands above the table.

"To make a funny gesture," Blondino warned him, "is to get yourself drilled, Mr. Red Hawk. I wouldn't mind at that"—and seeming to grow in high good humor his grin broadened—"since that way I'd come by what your pile stacks in all honesty and without risk, merely annexing something without an owner."

"A thousand a throw?" suggested Hawk.

"Suits me," agreed Blondino.

For the second time that night, it appeared that luck stood at Hawk's elbow. He lost a bet now and then; he suggested doubling, and Blondino nodded; he won again. His five thousand became ten thousand. There was still money in Blondino's box. Blondino grew keener-eyed at every instant, tenser—more strongly tempted, one would have said. Blue murder shone in his eyes. Well, why not? There was not only before him a man who had threatened trouble; not only that man's money, but Blondino's own. And certainly Blondino had shown himself, not only to-night, ready for any act that furthered Blondino's own fortunes.

"Come again?" said Hawk in that cool, even tone. He rattled the dice thoughtfully; his left hand, too, Blondino made certain, was in full evidence on the table top. "Here goes, then; a real throw——"

As he flung the dice, he swung his arm out to the side so that the candles were swept clean off the table and thrown halfway across the room, which on the instant was pitch dark. To be sure, Blondino pressed the trigger even as the thing was being done. He fired three times before he paused. He even listened for a falling body. Then he fired again and bethought him to conserve his lead. For nothing was surer than that he had missed his man. With an almost incredible swiftness had he fired, yet with an even greater swiftness had the man across the table leaped to one side. Which side? Blondino, having tried right and left, saved his powder and moved swiftly himself, not to be caught by the other man's fire.

"El Topo!" he shouted. "Lights! Men! Oh, I'll wring your neck for you, my little red Hawk," and again

skipped aside in the dark. Yet no answering shot came.

So again he shouted for lights and men, and, a moment later, doors opened, candles appeared held cautiously, and a half dozen of Blondino's riders came into the room.

"Shut the doors behind you!" roared Blondino. "Don't let him run for it. A hundred pesos to the one that brings him down. He's hiding behind a sofa—in a corner——"

"He's nowhere!" ejaculated El Topo after the first flurry, and crossed himself hurriedly, muttering: "No man but the devil! I smelled sulphur when he came!"

"You'll smell sulphur in earnest in two minutes!" roared out Blondino, driving his men to the search again. Yet with six or eight men seeking another in any room, though large like this one, it was less than the two minutes which Blondino had given El Topo when others of the Mexicans crossed themselves.

There came a gasp from El Topo.

"The money, señor! That was on the table there. Where is it?"

And then even Victor Blondino, perhaps because of the electrified and superstitious men surrounding him, felt a pricking of the flesh like that which may come at midnight to a timid man passing a churchyard. The money, save a few scattered coins, was gone.

"The Captain Gabilan—oh, I have heard tales of him; of terrible deeds that no man on earth could do. They say of him that he is the devil himself——"

Blondino, in one of his most terrible rages, stormed up and down, his eyes red with a sudden rush of hot blood. In a burst of fury he shouted:

"Run through the house; look everywhere! He's slipped through some door. Through the gardens; you, Estrada, and Tonio, and Luis, run to the stables. He is not to get away. A

thousand, five thousand dollars to the man who gets him for me."

They sped swiftly enough, driven by fear of Blondino, drawn on by lust of Blondino's money. Through every room of the house, through the patio, through the gardens, into and around the stables. And, after a little while, Blondino found several of them huddled together, speaking in whispers, not a man of them willing to go alone to him with all that they had learned. But at last he had it from them all together.

Julian Hawk was gone. His horse was gone.

And that was not all of it. Of course, Blondino's money had taken unto itself wings. But there was more. Blondino's own favorite horse, ready saddled for him to ride to-night, was missing. And in their wide search they had stumbled upon another fact: La Güera, too, had vanished.

"It is the devil's work, you may be sure of it," they maintained.

They were treated to the rare spectacle of Blondino absolutely speechless with rage. He choked; one near him could hear the throat muscles working. He breathed with difficulty. They marveled that some blood vessel did not give way, bursting wide to such a surge of blood. He tried to speak and could not. And so it was with never a single word that he presently led the way to the saddled horses.

Once in the saddle, however, a sudden change came over the man. He pulled off his hat and sat straight, the moonlight brightening his head of flaxen hair, his eyes lifted toward the softly bright sky. He touched his spurs and rode at a gallop, his men straggling after him. And he gave them a sudden, rollicking burst of his laughter for them to think upon.

"A girl is gone, but she's only a girl," he cried out carelessly. "Same for a horse, same for a handful of

money. Who cares? There's more of all to be had—and, never fear, we'll come up with our Capitan Hawk in the Blue Smokes Mountains."

He began singing, and his riders, all of whom had drunk swiftly and well, joined in with him.

CHAPTER VII.

JAWN COBB.

THE silver sea that was the desert actually appeared to stir softly in little silent ripples under the white moon. It was a vast expanse dotted with its own tiny islands, dark clumps of mesquite, barren hillocks crowned with rust-red rock. There were places where the sand under the horse's hoofs was as white as the tender foam that creams along ocean beaches. The rider progressed slowly, having a thought to his horse and to the many waterless miles which extended before him; from a distance he would have appeared something dark drifting north with some quiet tide.

And such a tide did actually set in to-night, that of human endeavor and rivalry and, above all, lust for gold. A scant handful of men, far ahead, led the way, the very crest of an on-rushing billow which would lash some distant rock-bound slopes with a boom like that of thundering billows belaboring a coast of cliffs. If that rumor of gold were true, if such gold had been uncovered, as the tale had it, the on-rush of this first wave of humanity would be succeeded by others, mightier, even swifter; there would be the swirl of eddies in which men would drown, the dashing aloft of spume and spray; concussion and recoil, and all the attendant activities of that other ancient war of the seas against the dry land.

Much of what might occur Julian Hawk foresaw. If the tale were a true tale, word of it would travel mysteriously. Men would come from all

directions, all classes and conditions of men. He knew how it would be because he had lived through such times. Down in Mexico, far from the border, he had had his first experience with this sort of thing. That had been seven years ago. He had been the first that time; he himself had made the discovery, had staked the first claim, had sent word to his friends. And then, as now, a figure loomed on the horizon, sinister and evil and sheathed in might—the figure of Blondino.

Was human experience, which is to say history in detail, so limited and restricted that it must become parrot-like, repeaing itself here after those seven years ago in Mexico? Below the border or above, gold was gold, and men remained what they were. Given a wild, remote spot like the Blue Smokes, given the yellow temptation and the human tide setting in so strong, what could a man expect? Given a Blondino in the very van, a Julian Hawk riding implacably in his wake, the only question at stake must concern itself alone with the result of the clash. Blondino surrounded himself with his men; Hawk rode alone.

Hawk knew this country well enough to suit his present needs. He had even prospected it, somewhat superficially, passing through on his way down into the heart of old Mexico those seven years ago. Except superficially, few men prospected it these later years, for the land of the Little Mesa country and of the Blue Smokes beyond, and all those grim, forbidding desert miles which rippled and ran in between, had been given up by the fortune-seekers long and long ago. When one had left little, wicked Nacional a scant half dozen miles behind, he entered the desolate wastes. There were blazing, white stretches of sand, winnowed and riffled by the winds; pebble-lined gullies where some gaunt, gray vegetation grew; thorny, unlovely plants, small of

leaf and thick of bark, waging war against nature's law of evaporation, questing afar with iron roots for moisture hidden from man and beast; harsh jungles of greasewood—and long, dreary, sandy areas embracing it all. The prospector and his burros and caiteens had crossed and crisscrossed all this desolation, cursing it and standing up against its curse of him, and in the end had named it "Hell's Annex" and had done with it. All of which Julian Hawk, having served his own time at the game, knew full well.

And he knew, to, that the waste lands had their tricks, and gold its yellow mockery; that a region prospected a hundred times might reveal itself a bonanza at the hundred and first. Gold and water! Sometimes one, sometimes the other, was the precious and desirable, the thing for which men gave everything, their lives often enough. The desert and its mesas and mountains and fierce barrancas gave both, withheld both. Gave in silent mockery, withheld fiendishly. It forced men to trade in the two commodities; one who had started out to stake his life for gold might end the game, yearning to exchange a fortune chanced upon for a dipperful of brackish water missed.

Musing upon many matters, as he rode deeper and deeper into the vast hush of the desert, Julian Hawk never once entirely forgot Blondino, for nothing was more certain than that Blondino would not be forgetting him so soon. The Laughing Devil, though he spurred on in advance and, no doubt, at a harder pace, would say to himself that Hawk either led the way or followed. So Blondino would watch in front—and might well be expected to keep an eye toward the rear. He could spare a man or two, ordering them to drop back as a rear guard, always with a nice little ambush in mind. And so at every step Hawk rode wa-

rily, suspicious of all possible lurking places, keen-eyed for mesquite thickets and every crease and dimple of the rare, occasional hills. He was grateful for the moon for company.

And still other company, altogether unexpected, he was to have before long. Coming up over one of the low, gentle billowlike wells of earth, he stopped his horse to stare at the sight which the moonlight revealed. A rakish, long-bodied buckboard, which seemed to have no earthly business here, horseless and absurd, rested at the end of the scarcely decipherable wheel tracks which itself had made. An old man—Hawk spurring on again, saw the big, square, white beard, the long white hair—sat dejectedly humped over on the seat.

But almost at the same moment the old man saw him. At an abrupt end was all indication of age and despondency. At a bound the big boots struck earth; there was a whoop as of pure joy, and here at a run, arms waving, came he of the reverend beard. Hawk's horse rose promptly on its hind legs and, but for a severe grip on the reins, would have put its whole heart into running away. Whereupon the old man, though he still shouted, came forward somewhat more decorously.

"If both sane and sober," muttered Hawk wonderingly, "then what's the answer?"

"Man!" boomed a particularly deep and melodious voice, though just now vibrant with some tremendous excitement. "There's never again likely to be so lucky a meet-up among strangers! Your fortune's made, m' son! I'll lead you into the way of milk and honey and prime strong liquor to boot. Just light down; just let me have the use of your cow pony—then you come back at old Jawn Cobb for anything on earth, pret' nearly, and it's as good as yorn, hog-tied and delivered. Old King Richard raving about what he'd

hand over for a horse couldn't auction against me for two fast shakes. Stranger—*light down!*"

Hawk simply reined out of reach.

"Slow does it, old-timer," he said sharply. "You seem all worked up over something. I don't know that it's any of my business, but if it'll relieve you any, I'll listen."

"Americano, huh? Praise Allah for that! I was scared for a minute, taking you all in by moonlight, you might be Mex. Now we're well met, stranger, and all that; but we'll do our chatting about it s'me other moonlight night I'm horse-shy, and I'm horse-hungry. Light down. Put me up where you set now, pry yourself loose from some of your hardware—and I'll give you the world, m' son, with a red ribbon round it."

He started forward; Hawk backed his horse off, just out of reach of the long arms.

"As a rule, I don't swap horses in the middle of the desert," he said dryly. "Besides, I'm in a hurry. If I can do anything for you——"

"Man! If five hundred dollars is of any use to you——"

"It's not."

"No? Hm! Well—dammit," he bellowed forth, "old Jawn Cobb don't have to shoot nickels, no time. Name your price—and *light down!* Name your price, I say. Anything goes."

"No. I don't want your money, and I do want my horse."

"Don't happen to be one of the Rockerfeller boys taking a little *pa-scar?*" grunted old man Cobb.

"If there's anything I can do for you——"

"Haven't I yelled it into your ear loud enough? Haven't I——"

"Anything within reason."

Old Cobb—his name was John, but he would have repudiated that as a wishy-washy cognomen alongside a good he-man name like Jawn—rum-

pled his long white hair in evident distress. All he could think of to say was:

"I *got* to have a horse—and I'd like might' well to have a gun!"

"Where are your own horses? What are you doing way out here, in the exact dead center of nowhere, without horses? You didn't pull your wagon yourself, I take it! Turn 'em loose to eat sand and cactus? Let a desert wolf stampede 'em for you? Where are they, old-timer?"

Old Jawn Cobb, who, it appeared, when put to it, was the possessor of a remarkably forceful vocabulary, took a deep breath, put his head back, lifted his bearded face to the moon, and swore deep and long and resoundingly. Hawk in his time had heard men speak up forcefully, but never a man like this one. And through the barrage of profanity he began to get glimpses of the explanation, like darting, half-smothered flames in a thick smoke.

"Some one put you afoot? Stole your horses?"

The old man fell silent and remained silent a few moments. When he spoke again, it was quite calmly. He had relieved pressure. Briefly and unemotionally he gave his lucid account of what had happened. Several men, six or eight or so of them, had overtaken him here, riding like a bunch of drunken demons from the south. He expected them to yell and ride by; he even had his notion as to where they were going. Men didn't travel this trail every day in the week. But they didn't do what he expected. They bore down on him and, as they came, were busied tying handkerchiefs over their faces. Cobb started to reach for his rifle, but immediately thought better of it. Let them pick his pockets and ride on; he rather guessed he could afford to lose a slim purse to-night if any man could. And a hot chance he'd have had with a crowd like that!

"Blondino and his cutthroats, I'll bet," grunted Hawk.

"Hey? How's that?" The old man was all eagerness. "Know who they are, m' son?"

"Without the vaguest shadow of a doubt. But let's have it all."

They asked him who he was and where he was going. Informed by him that that was no never-mind of theirs, their spokesman indicated that he could guess. And he guessed right too.

"So you're headed for the Blue Smokes?" demanded Hawk.

For a moment old Cobb's profanity threatened to engulf him.

"Have I got everything carved in my face?" he bellowed in a voice to be heard a full mile. "Here you figure you know what I'm up to and all about it! Does the whole blooming world know what I'm up to?"

"If it has anything to do with gold and the Blue Smokes," returned Hawk curtly, "there's many a man that knows."

"Ah," muttered the old man and snarled in disgust, "Dan'l ever was a fool in his ways!"

"Dan'l?"

"He's my pardner."

"The man who discovered gold? And sent another man down to National to spread the news?"

"Well, he's spread it, I reckon! Anyway, everybody seems to know more about it than I do. Dan'l sent Chancy Burns down for me where he knew I was heading for supplies. Chancy found me all right—after he'd got drunk first! That's the way news takes its head start getting spread, m' son."

"And then, when Blondino overtook you——"

"Blondino? So it's a jasper by name of Blondino I'm looking up from this time on, is it? I'm obliged for the name; most likely I'll remember it.

Well, be he who he may, as the feller says, this Blondino played me a dirty trick. He said he'd like a little extra time himself in the Smokes before the crowd started in; guessed he'd have to put me afoot. Which he proceeded to do, spite of any small protest on my part, helping himself generous from my supplies, unhooking my ponies, and driving them off into yon dim-dam distances. And you can be sure, stranger, he didn't forget to frisk me for any hardware I might have handy, absconding with my rifle. And here he left me setting— Know what doing, stranger?"

"Swearing, I'd guess, now that I know you," observed Hawk.

"Some, yes. Just at first, though. Then praying! Says I to the Good Lord, 'Revenge is Thine, Almighty, and that's all right. Just the same, there's going to be a sort of deputy needed, carrying out the divine scheme o' things. Remember my application for the job is first in!' And then along comes you, stranger. And, having heard my petition, I cal'late you'll admit it fair and modest? Just the loan of a horse——"

"Sorry," said Hawk curtly. "Can't be done. But if you can suggest anything in reason, as I said before——"

The old man sighed windily. He seemed all resignation now. The face lifted toward the light seemed the most innocent old face imaginable. Hawk noted this, sensed what was afoot, and again wheeled his horse to a safe distance, just as John Cobb made a nimble leap toward the bridle reins.

"I lose," grumbled the old man and whipped out his pipe, calmly filling it and having it lighted and drawing smoothly before he had finished his few words. "Since it's not the first time I've lost, I quit gentle. But I'll take next best, asking if you'll do this: You're headed for the Blue Smokes,

hey? By way of the Little Mesas, I take it?"

"Yes."

"Been through this region before?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll know the watering place up there in the Little Mesas. There's a little ranch there, with a bit of live stock on it."

Hawk knew the place well. From here, looking northeastward, he could see the slightly broken country rising in small hills toward what was loosely known as the Mesa Land. Clearly outlined in the bright night light, was a tall shaft of rock which stood up as prominently as a church spire over a squatty village, a landmark for many miles in all directions, at the base of which, through a tiny narrow valley, ran a stream of pure water.

"Aye," said Cobb, noting the way he looked, "that's the spot! Sentinel of the Desert, they call the high rock. That's where my ranch is, curled around in the gullies up there. There's an old black mule, mean and devilish, but a good mule for all that; there's a big white mare. You'll tarry long enough to send those two back here for me."

"Which one will I give the message to?"

"Humorous gent, are you? Well, I hadn't guessed that until right now!" snorted Cobb. "Fu'thermore, there's a shack up there. Inside the shack, sleeping quiet this time o' night, you'll chance on old Sam. Wake him gentle, stranger, as old Sam's a shooting fool when startled. I give you that much warning for your sake as well as mine. Tell him I'm bogged down here and tell him why and how; mention the black mule and the white mare to him—and I'll go back to my wagon and set and wait and pray some more."

"Fair enough," agreed Hawk and rode away.

He went up over a sandy hummock

and had what he supposed was a last view of John Cobb, standing listlessly by his buckboard, sending up ghostly puffs of tobacco smoke. But, crossing a narrow depression, he rode on up a slightly higher ridge and, turning idly in the saddle, saw the old man again. Still standing, smoking, just as before. But no longer quite alone. Some one was approaching him from a near-by thicket of mesquite, some one who stopped abruptly and seemed to melt again into the earth, as Hawk came into view.

He halted and stared back. One of Blondino's men?

But John Cobb had caught sight of Hawk, too, and shouted lustily:

"Breeze on, stranger! Hop to it, can't you? Remember I'm stuck up here until you send old Sam back."

"There's some one there—at the edge of the mesquites," Hawk called back sharply.

A moment of silence. Then an impatient shout from Cobb:

"'S all right, Bright-eyes. It's just my passenger. I run sort of a stage sometimes. Drill on, can't you!"

So Julian Hawk rode on. But to himself he remarked dryly:

"Secretive old cuss! Stage? He's a liar, if I know what that means."

He ended with a shrug. What affair of his who Cobb's "passenger" might be, or why all the concealment? And yet though his thoughts went flocking back to Blondino and what might lie ahead in the Blue Smokes or elsewhere, now and again they flitted briefly again to the figure that had appeared to melt away into the desert sands.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD SAM, A SHOOTING FOOL.

THE desert has a thousand moods. It encompasses everything. Utter crushing loneliness, iron hate, savage desolation, venom, and fang, and thorn

—these are of the desert. And so are incredible blossoms from fierce, dry stalks; so are slender palms and hidden water holes. Bleached bones and gold, blazing sands and, above, such a glory of stars as shine nowhere else; through them all the desert cries out or whispers softly.

The Land of the Little Mesas, brooded over by the Sentinel of the Desert, was an oasis, or rather cupped an oasis, in its most delightful hollow. Flat-topped hills, mounting like irregular steps, gave direction and side walls to a steep, crooked ravine. Several large springs of sweet water gushed up at one end of this ravine and poured their precious crystalline fluid down to constitute a creek which ran for a full mile and then straightway vanished in the sands. At one spot, about midway, the ravine broadened considerably and the creek wound about a fertile level spot of some half dozen acres. Here grew enormous ancient cottonwoods, just now in full new tender leaf; here, at this season, the grass was a vivid emerald, and wild violets rioted. Just here the walls of the ravine became steep, sheer, rock cliffs; directly above the log house under the cottonwoods, rose the star-aspiring spire of brick-red rock. It was a place where the desert, in characteristic mood, set the barren and hostile in juxtaposition with the tenderly beautiful.

Julian Hawk, entering the widened mouth of the ravine from the south, stopped at the first clear pool and watered his horse. While the animal drank, the man looked about him with a sharp and suspicious eye for details. The freshness of dawn was in the air, a very faint, cool breeze ruffling the pool and making it glint darkly. The hills, naked of trees, clothed in wiry grass, revealed themselves distinctly; in many places they resolved themselves into bare rock, rock in gashes, rocks in

fantastic heaps, or standing about as huge individual boulders. If a man wanted to shoot another man out of his saddle, here was a rarely satisfactory place to lie in wait for him, sure that soon or late he would ride to water and along the ravine. Hawk spurred on, meaning to come to the log cabin while some shreds of dark held to the fringes of the creek.

Here under the cottonwoods, it was darker than it had been at any time during the night out upon the open desert. The house itself was just a black mass which, until he rode very close, refused to reveal door or window. As it happened, he chanced upon a window first. It was wide open and, leaning from the saddle, he thrust his head through, calling out:

"Hello! Anybody here?"

He should have remembered John Cobb's admonition: he was to "wake old Sam gentle, for he's a shooting fool when startled." For answer now, Hawk heard a wild, blood-curdling yell; with it the unmistakable sound of a pair of bare heels landing emphatically upon a plank floor—and Hawk whipped back just in time. There was a roar as of a small cannon, as a double-barreled load of buckshot came swarming through the aperture where, an instant before, Julian Hawk's head and shoulders had been. He touched his spurs and half circled the cabin before he drew rein to shout back angrily:

"You infernal idiot, what do you mean?"

So long was an answer coming, though he repeated his demand, that he began to fear that old Sam in his excitement had blown his own head off. But at last, in a thin, weak, and downright timid voice, came the response:

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"Just a stranger riding by. But with a message from your pardner, Cobb."

Again there was a long silence. Again the voice, as timid and hesitant as ever.

"Sorry, stranger, but I was dreaming, sort of. Pretty fierce dream it was, one o' the worst I ever had. There was me in a corner of a dugout, gun in each hand and a knife in my teeth, and there was the other gents, 'bout twenty of 'em, sashaying into me. I clean ripped two-three of 'em wide with my knife—holy Pete, but how they looked! Then I grabs my trusty rifle——"

"Only it was a shotgun," grumbled Hawk. "Well, I hope you don't get this way often—or, if you do, that you and I don't ever get into the habit of sleeping in the same room."

"It's just a sort of way I have," said old Sam faintly. "What about Jawn? But, say, first step along in. I'll get a light and put on a pot of coffee. Smell daylight coming up."

"Sure you're wide awake now?"

Old Sam tittered.

"Come along in, stranger; light down, hang your horse to a cottonwood, and step in. Safe as a church, 'specially as I let go with both barrels in my exuberance of spirit, and promise not to reload while you're here. I want to know what's wrong with Jawn."

Cracks of light appeared to indicate that a candle had resulted from the barefooted prowlings within which Hawk could hear all the while the invitation was being offered. Hawk rode to the door, its position betrayed by the same inner glow, and dismounted. The door was unlocked; he stepped in—and filled his eyes with the picturesqueness which was old Sam's.

A man looking upon him for the first time could easily be led into the natural error of thinking him what the side-show barkers would boast of as the tallest and stringiest man in captivity, but that was only because old

Sam was so amazingly thin and skeletal that he looked a foot or two taller than he actually was. Bald as an egg, and beardless, he wore an enormous white mustache which drooped about his mouth like a horseshoe. He had a pair of mismatched eyes, one larger and rounder than the other and of a lighter blue, both of a glassy appearance; you felt that one of them was actually a glass eye, yet it was hard to tell which one. You speculated, while appearing to do nothing of the kind; you arrived at the absurdity of suspecting both to be cheap, imitation eyes, purchased through a mail-order house.

Old Sam was garbed in a nightshirt which would have been none the worse for laundering; it came halfway down his long, lean shanks, allowing reedy calves and great, flat, bony feet to reveal themselves in frank and shameless abandon. In his hand he carried a lighted candle stuck in a bottle; the effect was that of illuminating and calling attention to his own unblushing charms, his pose absurdly suggestive of the Statue of Liberty.

"Sorry, like I said, that I came pret' near blowing you all apart," said old Sam in his dreary, wistful, almost tearful voice.

"Sorry I spoiled your dream," said Hawk, not to be backward in civilities.

"Can't be helped. Say no more." But he sighed, and his eyes—one eye, at least—roved wildly in reminiscence, "Let's call it quits and start friendly; neither man of us meant any harm. Now, tell me about Jawn. Wait until I get the stove going and some clothes on."

He put down his candle, thrust some dry twigs into the old stove, got a blaze going, and made no undue ceremony about dressing. He yanked on a pair of faded overalls, drew on a pair of lopsided boots; with one practiced gesture whipped off his night-

shirt and flung it up over a rafter; pulled an equally disreputable shirt on over his head, placed a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles crookedly on his thin, large-nostriled nose, clapped on a battered straw hat, and stood ready for what the day might bring forth.

"You see," he offered dejectedly, "Jawn's my pardner and all that, and against a pardner it's like a religion with me never to say a contrary word, yet the truth is, and ever was, and ever will be, that Jawn's a helpless sort of a feller, and I've got no more to do than let him out of my sight to know he's got in trouble somehow. Not married, is he?" he concluded rather sharply.

"Not that I know of," returned Hawk. "Had some one with him, but whether man or woman, I don't know. Said it was a passenger on his stage but——"

"Stage? Shucks! Not saying anything against Jawn, he's an awful liar, stranger. Passenger, huh? Now, if the old fool has got married—well, you got to take a lot off'n a pardner, but there's a limit somewhere. And Jawn, the old fool, he's always creeping up might' close to that same dead line."

"I thought that Dan'l, over in the Blue Smokes, was Cobb's pardner?"

"Dan'l is. So'm I."

"And Chancy Burns?"

Old Sam snorted.

"He's off and on, Chancy Burns is. Sometimes sort of a halfway pardner, most times not so much as that. Among us he's what you might call tolerated. That's the right word—tolerated. But let's hear about Jawn."

"First, tell me something: Have you heard any men ride by this way during the night?"

"Nary," said old Sam promptly. "Months at the time no man bothers us out this way. Here's a real place for a man, stranger, quiet and peaceful. No; nobody but you has been by

here, to my knowledge, for a good long spell. Why should they?"

Hawk ignored the question and gave old Sam the message from his partner, John Cobb. Sam, by this time, was busied over his stove; coffee and bacon and flapjacks were on their way. In perfect unconcern he received the news.

"Knew the old fool would most likely get involved in some sort of fracas," he admitted at the end of the recital. "Well, I'll go 'long and extricket him, same as usual. There's sugar in that can; no butter, of course. Jawn didn't say, did he, if he was bringing the butter?"

"No," said Hawk. "He didn't say."

"Pull up and dig in; bacon grease on flapjacks does pret' good. And he didn't say, did he, if he'd had any word from Dan'l?"

"Not directly," returned Hawk. "But it is pretty widely known in Nacional that Dan'l sent Chancy Burns down there with word to Cobb that he had found a rich vein of gold."

"That cup leaks, stranger. Jawn ought to bring in some more cups; I hate like poison, personal, to have coffee dribble all over when I'm partaking of it. So Dan'l struck gold at last, did he? Well, it's high time, if you ask me. Just like the old fool, too, to send Chauncy Burns with word of it. Most likely now there'll be a stampede before we're ready for it; trouble, too, I guess." His shiny eyes wandered away to the shotgun across the foot of his bed. "Well, I'll go get the horse and the mule and drag Jawn along home. Then I'll have to go lend Dan'l a hand. If the other boys had a mite o' gumption, things wouldn't go wrong like that."

"I'd judge," said Hawk, "that this isn't the first time you 'boys' have discovered gold."

Sam looked at him commiseratingly.

"Shucks," he grunted. "What do

you s'pose we been doing all our lives? Now, if I had a dollar for ever' time we've had a gold mine, I'd have a right-smart heap o' dollars. And we been dead certain for quite a spell we'd uncover it over in the Blue Smokes; yes, it's quite a spell we sort of knowed it was there."

"How long?" asked Hawk curiously.

"Offhand, I'd say twenty-thirty year," answered old Sam evenly. "That's why I bought me this ranch here, to be handy."

"I thought it was Cobb's ranch!"

"Mine. He calls it his; I let him. Awful liar, Jawn is, anyhow."

Sam finished his breakfast, gnawed off a corner of plug tobacco with stained and wolfish teeth, and went out, calling back casually:

"Make yourself to home, stranger. Stay as long's you like and help yourself generous to whatever you need, only shut the door when you leave."

Julian Hawk followed him out, saw him depart with a rope in one hand and a bait of a handful of grass in the other in quest of the horse and mule, and then went to his own horse. By this time, day was flushing warmly in the east, the moon was pale, the stars gone, and the rugged hills were bathed in the balmy glory of a soft spring morning. Now Hawk's first thought was for his horse, his second for himself, and only the third for Blondino. The golden sorrel was leg-weary, for there had been other miles before the departure from Nacional. Some few hours could be spent to advantage here in this leafy oasis; after all, there was no great need of haste in coming up with Blondino, who already had the head start and who would ride hard and must certainly come first to the Blue Smokes. Hawk himself could manage nicely with a bit of sleep.

He unsaddled, watered and picketed his horse among the cottonwoods, took his rifle, and climbed up out of

the ravine into the sunshine. From the top of the wall of cliff he had a rare view in many directions; just at his back, the Sentinel of the Desert towered up into the clear blue sky. Close at hand, the great rock resolved self into a broken, many-fissured, irregular shaft soaring three hundred feet above the flat top of the mesa, a colossal monument to the moods of the fierce land from which it sprung, broad-based, tapering and bulging, crowned at the top by a flat slab of stone. What a glorious view from up there!

He climbed up some fifty feet without difficulty, following a natural way that was like a man-made trail outworn and broken down by the ages. Perhaps, long, long ago, man had lent a helping hand. The second fifty or sixty feet were harder, slower going, but brought him to a comfortable resting place. On one side was the diminished shaft, rising still higher; on the other side, the steep wall of rock up which he had climbed, while between them extended a wide flat area scattered with fallen stone and finely weathered stone grit whereon grew scant grass. And here Hawk paused; a man might go higher still, perhaps to the top, yet that would be with considerable difficulty and hazard. This was high enough for his present purpose. From here, looking forth across many undulatory miles, he could see the Blue Smokes, rising abruptly from the desert, already revealed in that cu-

rious detail which in this atmosphere at early morning and late afternoon caused distant mountains to look as though near at hand, every cliff and scar, every canyon and barren peak standing forth clear and definite.

He saw more than the Blue Smokes. Small, straggling figures passing over a dreary waste of sand, looking no larger than jack rabbits, were Blondino's following.

"Dan'l is going to have company this morning," he mused. "I'd like to be there to lend him a hand, but then a man can't have everything. If Dan'l is all alone—well, no doubt he has managed to make out a good long while and can handle himself under difficulties as most desert rats can."

He turned away, though reluctantly, set his rifle against the rocks, found a grassy spot which would be for hours in the shade of the rocks towering above, and stretched out for a long-deferred sleep. From afar a high-pitched voice, though raised in imprecation as old Sam communed with a certain white mule, reached him like thin buglings from Elfinland. These were the last sounds he heard, dozing off.

The first sounds, awaking him, were of stones rattling downward, as some one climbed up toward where he lay. He got to his feet silently and took up his rifle. The sun was some hours high, so it might be either old Sam returned, or John Cobb.

It proved to be La Güera.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

THE KEEPER OF GOAT RECORDS

AN unusual position—even in a day when women do almost anything—is that enjoyed by Miss Claudine Bourland of Rock Springs, Texas, who compiles the family histories of Texas goats. As secretary and treasurer of the American Angora Goat Breeders' Association, she keeps the pedigree records of woolly aristocrats. The association consists of over two hundred ranchmen.

Another of Miss Bourland's duties is selling the mohair clipped from the goats for the members of the association.



A Cat's Way

By
Ben Jeris

Author of "Better Than Brawn," etc.



ISKEE, the lynx, the queen monarch of Roberval Swamp, was a fighter. So, also, was "Black Max" O'Hagan.

There was open enmity between these two—Miskee, the lynx, and O'Hagan, the man, who had chosen the swamp as a hiding place to evade the long arm of justice which sought him as a murderer.

There was really no good reason for the feud, if such it could be called. Miskee, if let alone, would have busied herself with her own affairs and paid the man little attention. But Black Max O'Hagan was at heart a killer. No living thing could cross his path without the perverted desire to kill coming unbidden to his thoughts.

It may be felt that this feud was an unbalanced one, with the balance preponderantly in favor of the man and his long, black rifle. Not so, however! Black Max O'Hagan did not know lynx. But Miskee knew men. Her acquaintance with men had begun at an

early age. When a half-blind, mewling kitten, she had been dug out of a den on the side of a hill by Hugh Stetson, whose father had first developed the little homestead grant that was now in the possession of Black Max O'Hagan. For over a year, Miskee had lived with the Stetsons in that now dilapidated cabin on the edge of the swamp. Then, Hugh Stetson had gone away to school.

Shortly thereafter, the Stetson family gave up the little homestead as a hopeless proposition and turned their efforts to less speculative investments. And Miskee had returned to the wilderness. It had been hard going at first, but she had soon adjusted herself to the new life. A resplendently whiskered mate sought her out during the first autumn of her new freedom, and she joyously entered the life for which she was destined by nature.

In the years that followed, Miskee had seen many men come and go. "Scotty" MacHaffie, the dour, but kindly old Scotchman, had replaced the Stetsons for a time; then had come

Jules LaBroe, the perpetually drunken breed; then Dan Cose, the blond, happy young fellow who had come to this wilderness in search of health. None of these, with the possible exception of young Cose, had been at all interested in their wilderness neighbors.

Miskee, although her attachment to man had long since been severed, came to know each succeeding occupant of that sturdy log cabin on the edge of the swamp very well indeed. Of course, with the exception of Dan Cose, it is doubtful if any one of them had as much as seen the big lynx. For hours at a time, she would lay stretched out at full length on a limb of the big beech tree just behind the cabin, subjecting the cabin and the occupants thereof, to silent, intelligent supervision.

She did not hate men as was true of most of her kind; neither did she fear them. Without those long, black sticks which meant sudden death, man was an amazingly soft and harmless thing—she knew. When, for instance, Dan Cose wandered away into the hills without his gun, she knew that, with her fur-hidden claws, she could start the life blood flowing from his tender body as easily as she could bring the death squeak into the throat of a captured rabbit. It had never occurred to her to try it in the case of any of the first four occupants of the cabin.

With Black Max O'Hagan, however, it was different. She hated O'Hagan with the sullen ferocity common to her kind; well hidden in the thicket of the swamp, she watched him furtively, biding her chance, just as she would have watched any other living thing—another lynx for instance, whose presence was a menace to her and hers.

Due to her knowledge of man, Black Max O'Hagan aroused in her little of the fear which human beings as a whole aroused in most of the other wilderness dwellers. The one thing which had many times stood between Black Max

O'Hagan and a terrible death, was the rifle, which weapon he was seldom without. Miskee knew better than to attack a man armed with a rifle.

The big cat's antipathy toward the man was of long standing. O'Hagan had crawled into the swamp, like a harried snake into its hole, one spring night at dusk. In the days that immediately followed, the sheriff and a posse combed the swamp from end to end, but failed to locate the fugitive.

Miskee could have told where the man lay hidden, half starved, shivering—a disconsolate, beaten creature, in the heart of a brier tangle in the center of the swamp.

Having just given birth to a litter of five kittens, her protective instincts led her to investigate thoroughly every unusual matter going on within that mile square span that was the Roberval Swamp. She had circled the brier patch containing the fugitive several times and she was convinced, somehow, that the man who lay in there was an enemy.

Her suspicions had all too soon been unpleasantly confirmed. Assured that their man had in some mysterious manner gotten away from them and had crossed the mountains, the sheriff and his posse returned to town. Within a day or so Black Max O'Hagan crept out of his hiding place and took up his abode in the Stetson cabin. Within a week, he had become a part of the scenery.

When finally assured that his hiding place in the swamp was as secure from discovery as though he were ensconced in an African jungle, he began to act his natural self, giving free range to his killing proclivities.

Every day he circled about through the swamp, rifle in hand, his snakelike black eyes forever on the lookout for something to kill. Dozens of plump, friendly old gray squirrels, which had occupied the swamp in peace and se-

curity for years, one after another fell victim to the killer's unerring rifle. Even the plump-breasted robins served as targets for his gun. He never made use of his slain victims for food or for any other purpose; the sole purpose behind his hunting was the desire to kill.

During the second week, he shot and mortally wounded Miskee's mate. The injured lynx, his hind quarters paralyzed by the bullet which had broken his back, crawled up the leaf-strewn slope to the den where Miskee and her five kittens awaited his return. O'Hagan, although no woodsman, easily followed the evident trail left by the male lynx. Straight to the den he came.

Miskee waited until assured that discovery was inevitable, then she ventured forth in a valiant attempt to distract the man's attention and led him away from the den. Her attempt might well have succeeded had not a lucky shot, sent in haphazard fashion after her fleeing form, creased her tufted head just at the base of the skull, knocking her, stunned—although really not badly injured—to the ground.

Applauding himself upon his marksmanship, O'Hagan assured himself in a casual manner that the female lynx was dead. Then, attracted by the squalls of the kittens, he took up the trail of the injured male lynx where he had left off.

Miskee had merely been stunned by the bullet. She soon came to and crawled away into the depths of a brier tangle where no mere man could ever have located her. Up above in the den, the male lynx died fighting to the last gasp, as is traditional with all wilderness people. The kittens, all five of them, fell victims to the clubbed barrel of Black Max O'Hagan's rifle.

When Miskee returned to the den late that night, she was confronted with this terrible scene of wanton killing. There was no question in her mind as

to the identity of the murderer. Not being possessed of that superlative intelligence accredited only to the human animal, she made no immediate attempt to bring the killer to justice.

From this time on, however, she looked upon the man as she would look upon any other object or thing that was a menace to her safety. Like Nenobausho, the black cougar, for instance: when Nenobausho journeyed down out of the hills into the swamp, Miskee watched her unnatural cousin with hostile eyes. But she was never foolish enough to attack openly this superlative fighter. Of course, if the opportunity presented, she would unhesitatingly have killed Nenobausho. She had as good reason to hate the cougar, as she had for hating O'Hagan.

A year since Nenobausho had, one moonlight night, surprised her and her family in the swamp. The cougar had killed three of her brood. Miskee had fought the killer with all the skill and courage at her command. Her ferocity, enhanced by mother love, had succeeded in discouraging Nenobausho, and he had reluctantly left the field of battle without partaking of the three choice morsels in the shape of three dead lynx kittens, with which his surprise attack had provided him.

Miskee followed Nenobausho's every move each time that the cougar visited the swamp; if, by chance, a hunter's bullet should find the cougar as O'Hagan's bullet had found her that very day, she would unhesitatingly have paid her debt by killing her enemy.

In exactly the same way did she look upon Black Max O'Hagan, the human killer. Whenever she came upon the man's tracks in the swamp she followed them, slipping wraithlike through the checkered shadows, always well out of sight, but always, through the medium of her delicate sense of smell, definitely advised of the man's movements. She knew, without confirmation of her eyes,

when the man carried the rifle. The acrid scent of gunpowder was unmistakable.

Knowing so well the death-dealing quality of that gun, there was never anything further from her mind than the possibility of attacking the man while he carried the rifle. However, if by chance he should have gone abroad, just once, without that gun, Miskee's caution would have been replaced by a ferocious courage. This single circumstance rendered Miskee, the female lynx, the most dangerous animal in the swamp, to man.

Most wilderness dwellers, even Scarface, the wise old grizzly, who lived up among the rocks on the edge of the swamp—although realizing that a rifle in a man's hand was a dangerous thing—failed accurately to gauge a man's killing power without that rifle. Old Scarface would flee whenever a man came near, whether that man was or was not armed with a rifle. Not so Miskee! She was thoroughly impressed with the fact that a man without a gun was an utterly soft and harmless thing of flesh and blood.

Black Max O'Hagan stuck out his involuntary exile for a year. Early in the second spring of his sojourn in Roberval Swamp, he grew restless. Perhaps it was because the living fuel for his insatiable rifle had diminished almost to the point of extinction; perhaps it was because, killer though he was, he craved the companionship of man.

At any rate, just as the new green things were beginning to sprout on the sunlit slopes, and the red-breasted robins were filling the snowless valleys with their happy caroling, Black Max O'Hagan, armed as always with his rifle, started northward over the mountains.

Two weeks later he returned—a furious, harried fugitive, the same as he had been the first time Roberval Swamp

had given him shelter. He was without the rifle, this time. He was sick, too. There were many wounds on his body. Miskee observed this home-coming with lively interest. She knew when the sheriff and his men appeared and began searching the near-by hills.

Of course, she had no knowledge that Black Max O'Hagan had killed a man in a drunken brawl at Turner Falls beyond the hills. Neither could she realize that the killer had escaped literally by the skin of his teeth. She knew, merely, that the man was now white faced and thin; that he no longer walked in the open, but skulked through the thickets like the hunted thing he was. Her observations were limited somewhat, due to the desertion of her mate and the necessity for finding food for four hungry little mouths, which, six weeks since, had blinked their way into a new world. She was arbitrarily alert, however, more so probably than she would have been at any other time during the year.

One day, quite by accident on his part, Black Max O'Hagan passed close to the new den in the heart of the swamp, wherein lay Miskee's four plump-bodied offspring. Unfortunately—for the man—just as he passed the spot, the kittens chose that particular moment to yowl for their mother.

O'Hagan's nerves were on edge. He started nervously, then seized a club and looked arbitrarily about for the source of the disturbance. If he had searched for hours, he might not have been able to locate these four tiny balls of fur. But Miskee did not consider this. She saw only the man, her enemy, thrashing about the spot wherein lay her young ones. She recalled vividly the havoc which this man once before had wrought.

White teeth bared in a silent snarl, razor-edged claws outspread, fan fashion, far beyond the borders of her hair-tufted feet, she crept close. O'Hagan's

first intimation of danger came as a sibilant snarl sounded almost in his ear, followed immediately by the gouging slash of claws, ripping like sharp knives through his coat and into his back. He yelled hoarsely and struck out blindly with the club. The stick missed Miskee's flat head. She slashed at an up-flung arm. Her white teeth struck to the bone of that arm before the frantic man could pull free.

Wildly, the man struggled, seeking to free himself of that clinging weight upon his back. Unweakened by his wounds, he would probably have been able to accomplish this. As it was, however, much of his great strength had oozed away through those man-made wounds. It was dark there beneath the low-hung alders in the swamp. His foot slipped into an unseen mud hole. He stumbled and fell.

Black Max O'Hagan's doom was sealed the moment his feet left the ground. Miskee's strong jaws opened, then closed strongly and surely about the back of the man's neck. Black Max O'Hagan screamed his distress and rolled over, seeking to crush that clinging weight beneath his body. If the man had adopted these tactics sooner, he might have saved his life. As it was, however, Miskee's strong teeth came together with a click upon that vital spot at the base of the man's brain, before he could put his plans into execution. A tremor shuddered through the killer's body, and then, that hated form went limp.

For a long minute, Miskee crouched beside Black Max O'Hagan's dead body. Then, a breath of spring-scented air brought disturbing news. Other men were coming and they were near—very near. They were shouting, calling to one another. A man with a rifle appeared at the edge of the clearing.

Pausing only for one last tentative sniff at the body of her enemy, Miskee scurried swiftly and silently away into

the brush clump. Here, by means known only to a mother lynx, she metamorphosed four hungry lynx kittens into four round balls of silent, motionless fur.

Although the sheriff and his men tramped around and around that brush pile for over an hour, not once did any one of those tiny balls of fur move so much as the tip of a pink nose. The sheriff and his men dug a hole. They lowered Black Max O'Hagan's body into this hole, then covered it with dirt.

After the strangers had gone, Miskee ventured forth and thoroughly investigated matters. That mound of freshly spaded earth interested her. She circled it numberless times. Just as the purple dusk gave way to the blackness of night, the big lynx lifted her whiskered snout to the black sky and yowled dolefully.

Up on the spruce-clad ridge top half a mile away, Sheriff Ed Crosley shivered involuntarily, and, although the night was warm, huddled closer to the cheerful camp fire. "Lynx," he said in a low voice; "told you so."

A young man, wearing a deputy's star, sitting on the other side of the fire, shrugged doubtfully. "Looked like a cougar's work to me," he said.

Once more the squalling sound floated up from the swamp.

"Lynx," the sheriff repeated. This time the young deputy shivered. "Guess so," he agreed; "yes, I guess you're right. It's a lynx, right enough."

For a long minute the two men sat there, pipes in hand, silent, heads at an attentive angle, listening. Then, for the third time, the cry sounded. It was different, somehow, this time. It was the same full-throated, vibrant call, but the heart-shuddering cry seemed, this time, to contain a note of exultation, a wild-ringing pæan of victory. Miskee the monarch of Roberval had killed her enemy.



Out With the Border Patrol

By Dick Halliday

Author of "Ground Fine," etc.



YOU know the kind of picture which flashes on your mental screen when you hear the Royal Canadian Mounted Police mentioned? Handsome, square-jawed, determined men with neat uniforms fitting snugly to the chin line. Hard, fast riding, a sensational chase, and a dramatic arrest, for they always live up to their unofficial motto—get your man. Yes, we are all familiar with that, but how many of us can visualize our own frontier police—the border patrol?

They have only been in existence for four years and there are but six hundred men on the force. Half of them are stationed up on the Canadian boundary and the rest are down on the Mexican border. You will see them in the Southwestern border towns, trim and trig in their natty, forest-green, serge uniforms with the sunlight flashing on their silver buttons and gleaming on the ivory and pearl hilts of their sixshooters. They are the most picturesque body of men in Uncle Sam's

service, and the record of their work reads like a romantic story of adventure.

Ex-soldiers, Texas Rangers, cowboys, and flying men, are all represented in their ranks. They wear a cavalry uniform and they ride and drive everything on wheels, legs, or wings which will carry a man.

It is a picturesque country, a sinuous, two-thousand-mile, cactus-lined strip of sun-scorched borderland along which this scant handful of men keep watch and ward. Down here, under the rays of a semitropical sun, the twentieth century and its ideals rub shoulders with a race who still, in thought and customs, live in the fashion of three hundred years ago.

In a country like this anything can happen—and it does. That is why the border patrol is down there. They are a body of irregular, semimilitary police under the authority of the civil service department. They wear a uniform, but they buy it themselves. A stiff-brimmed, olive-drab, Baden-Powell Stetson is their official headgear. A

blouse of olive-green serge of military cut with silver buttons and dark-blue facings is worn when on town and railway details. Riding breeches of English cut, with a narrow blue stripe down the legs, are usually worn. Most of the men wear leather puttees, but quite a few of them prefer to buy the trim, English-style cavalry boots.

The government issues side arms to them, the Colt 1917 model revolver, chambered for the .45 automatic, rimless cartridges fitted in half-moon clips. All the men in the Border Patrol are expert marksmen—they have to be, for they live with their guns in reach all the time, night and day. Many of them are just as expert with their six-guns as were any of the gun fighters of the old West. It takes good shooting to hit tin cans and smash bottles when you flash by them in a speeding car or on a motor cycle, but there are plenty of patrol men who can do it.

It is optional with the men to carry the government issue or buy their own guns. Many of them prefer to buy their own, some like the single-action Colt best, but usually the private gun-toters go in for a double-action Colt shooting the .44 special cartridge. These privately owned guns are mostly fitted with carved ivory or pearl handles and elaborately engraved. Good workmen always have good tools.

Besides their revolvers, they have 12-gauge riot shotguns issued to them. Those who carry rifles buy the Winchester 30-40 so that they can use the government ammunition. Wherever they go in uniform or civilians, their arms go with them. As Federal officers, they take precedence over all State police, rangers, sheriffs, and deputies.

Their duties are simple—very simple indeed. They have to prevent the illegal entry of aliens into the country from Mexico, and to prevent Americanos from running guns and cartridges into

Mexico. Besides this, they have to stop all smuggling on both sides of the line, and put a stop to the bringing in of liquor over the border. As the boundary line is over two thousand miles in length, and the force is usually under three hundred men, it may be surmised that they are kept busy.

As a matter of plain fact, they live in "the midst of battles, sieges, and alarms" and from one hour to another they never know what is coming off next. In less than four years they have captured over five hundred smugglers and apprehended ten thousand aliens who were trying to make an illegal entry into the country.

The captures are not always of humans though. Ingenious smugglers have taken advantage of the homing instinct of horses to get liquors and drugs over the border by taking the animals across to Mexico, packing a load on them, and turning them loose to find their own way back. If the animals get home with the load, their owners are that much ahead. If some inspector captures the animals, there is no proof to connect the owners with either the carriers or the cargo.

Literally speaking, the men of the border patrol along the Texas sector are under fire every night in the week. Most of the Mexican smugglers, especially when they are doped up with *marihuana*, are desperate men and will fight when cornered if they think they can escape by doing so.

Not long ago, Mounted Inspectors Douglas Pyeatt and Max Glasson were riding past Monument 3 on the New Mexico border when a party of Mexican horsemen suddenly opened fire on them. A running fight from the saddle ensued and, after the two officers had fired over a hundred shots, the Mexicans retreated. The two border riders followed them and captured a pack horse loaded with twenty gallons of liquor. Then, following bloodstains

along the trail, they found the body of one of their assailants. He had been mortally wounded and had died in the mesquite. The body had two bandoleers draped across the chest, filled with Mauser cartridges topped with dum-dum bullets.

Very often gun fights and wild pursuits take place in the streets of El Paso itself. The sheds and buildings of the Rio Grande Oil Co. are scarred and pitted by bullets fired by smugglers and officers in the last four years. On one occasion, a smuggler, driving a large car loaded with contraband, was being chased by three cars belonging to the border patrol. He drew ahead of the officers, deliberately unloaded his cargo, and built up a barricade across the narrow street. The leading patrol man, driving an open car, headed his machine straight for the barricade and crashed through it, wrecking his car but leaving the way open for his comrades. An exciting chase, accompanied by volleys of revolver shots, took place through the streets of El Paso, but the smuggler escaped, his car was too fast for the officers.

Every once in a while incidents happen which would be headlined in Eastern newspapers, but which scarcely get a mention in the blasé border press. There was the case of Josario Eliseo Martinez, for instance. Josario wanted money to get married and set up house-keeping with a pretty little señorita, but times were tight and work was slack so Josario went into "the wet goods" business. That is to say, he contracted with a certain Americano to carry thirty gallons of rum over the Rio Grande and land it on the El Paso side.

Now Josario was a thrifty soul and only owned one suit of clothes, the Rio Grande was slightly higher and a good bit muddier than usual, therefore, the usual way of crossing by wading was out of the question. But the night was dark, the crossing was safe, and the

lights of El Paso were gleaming, beaconlike, on the other side. So Don Josario stripped off his clothes, rolled them up, and hid them under a bush. Then he shouldered the first of his three loads of rum and started across the river. He made two trips in safety, stowing the rum at the spot agreed on, but at the end of the third trip, malignant Fate took a hand in the game. Two men of the border patrol were waiting for him and the unfortunate caballero found himself a prisoner. He and the rum were hurried to a waiting car, landed at the hoosegow, where he was locked up in a cell, still attired in the full costume of September Morn.

The jail officials were busy the next morning and somehow the fact that one of the prisoners was without clothes was overlooked until the case was called in court.

No spare clothes were lying around, so the jailer dug up an old blue jumper, which was tied around the prisoner's waist by the sleeves. Thus attired, Don Josario Eliseo Martinez appeared before the bar of justice. Imagine the sensation this would have caused in an Eastern court! The El Paso papers gave it exactly four lines. Nothing connected with Mexico, from a revolutionary battle down to a cow-stealing raid, is "front-page stuff" for the Texas border papers. They are case hardened to it all.

At the present time, there are no airplanes at the disposal of the border patrol and the smuggling in of aliens by plane is becoming a perplexing problem to the immigration service.

The Mexican border, comprising as it does some of the wildest, most rugged, and inaccessible territory in the United States, offers every opportunity for dodging aliens into the country by planes. The usual method employed is to start from a point about fifty miles below the border before daybreak, and land in some lonely spot in the desert

where the planes are met by automobiles. As a general rule, the aliens smuggled in across the Texas border are mostly Italian, Greek, and Spanish. The smuggling of Chinamen appears to be almost wholly confined to Lower California. Even with occasional help from the army flyers, the men of the border patrol, using horses, motor cycles, and cars, can hardly be expected to cope with airplanes in this vast stretch of country.

It might almost be termed the land the law forgot, this land that runs north and south of the Mexican border line, barren, rugged, waterless, and all but impassable except to horsemen. It stretches from sea to sea and on the seacoast there are often mysterious landings in sheltered coves, places from which caravans of pack horses, loaded with contraband, file north through the tangle of mesquite and chaparral, hiding out in the daytime when the big planes of the army flyers are scouting in the air.

The gray-green tangle of mesquite jungle makes a secure hiding place for the flotsam and jetsam of humanity—the dregs of the world—that can be found there. Chinese—not always of the coolie class—waiting stolidly to make an illegal entry and lose themselves in San Francisco's Chinatown. Japanese with pearls and drugs which will never pay duty. White men, black, yellow, and brown men, all on the watch to slip into the United States and harvest unlawful profits. And overhead, during the daytime, glide backward and forward the big airships, all unconscious of the *banditos* and *contrabandistas* hiding in the cover below them.

The few scattered Mexican settlements are usually dominated by one

man who is either hand in glove with the smugglers, or else is receiving tribute from them. The *contrabandistas* need horses, burros, cars, gasoline, and food for themselves. Where can they get these things save at some isolated settlement? These settlements are nearly always alike. You will see them wherever there is a water supply of some kind.

The house of the *jefe*; a *posada* or else a *fonda*—you will always find one of the two; a few cottonwoods scattered here and there among the cluster of pink and whitewashed adobe houses; goats, burros, fowls, and naked children. Men are scarcely ever to be seen except at nighttime. Cars which look as if they had been salvaged from the junk heap, but which, in reality, have been reëngined and doctored till they can do their seventy miles an hour, stand under *ramadas* thatched with cornstalks or yucca stems. Sometimes you will even see a tall, wireless mast standing by one of the houses.

Settlements like this are to be found on both sides of the border line and, between them, the wildest untamed lands of the Southwest. Stretches of malpais, belts of desert sand, miles of prickly pear, leagues of dusty, gray-green mesquite, and jungles of chaparral. This is the land which the law forgot—or ignored—until the boys of the border patrol moved down that way.

They can't do much at present, but they are the forerunners, the pioneers of the white man's law, and they will stay on their dangerous job until the border is tamed, policed, and law-broken. And when that time comes, we shall be as proud of our border patrol as our Canadian cousins are of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.





Riders for Fortune~

By *George Owen Baxter~*

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

RICARDO PEREZ, adopted son of a Mexican, is taken by William Benn to assist him in his "importing" business, which requires many strange helpers. Ricardo overhears a conversation between his patron and one Charlie Perkins, who is then dismissed for killing banker Ranger.

With Doctor Clauson's assistance, Benn schemes to make Ricardo appear a Mexican of good blood, nephew of Don Edgardo Mancos, their tool. The Perez brothers come in search of Ricardo. The youngest arrives in time to overhear Benn urge Ricardo to win the hand of young Maud Ranger—and her millions. Benn goes away and Juan remains in hiding.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FOSTER BROTHERS.

WHEN Juan had watched William Benn out of sight, and seen his foster brother turn again to his work in the summerhouse, he began to advance, but never a fox crept upon a rabbit warren with more care than Juan showed now—a rabbit warren watched by guardian men and savage dogs!

He crept from shrub to shrub, and at last he stood up outside the railing of the little house in such a position that a wooden pillar assisted by a young cypress shut him off from the view of any one coming toward him from the house. Rising there, silent as a shadow, Juan looked earnestly and curiously at the bowed head of his brother, and the sheets of paper and the books which lay before him, the

paper covered with swift, legible writing, and the books with their crowded pages of type. Juan had to close his eyes and look again, reassuring himself that the student actually was the Ricardo of their family, and that it was no fairy tale that the lazy, ragged Ricardo of the village was now this studious and gentlemanly youth!

He shook his head, and as he did so, Ricardo came out of his chair as a wild cat comes out of a nap at a scent of danger, head up, eyes fiercely alert.

He saw Juan, and the expression of his eyes changed a little, though it seemed to Juan that they remained equally impersonal and aloof.

But he caught Juan by both elbows and drew him into the house and forced him into a chair and stood over him, laughing.

How had Juan come there? How had he found him? How wonderful

it was that they should meet in this manner! How like Juan to have turned up like this, at the least expected moment!

But though these exclamations ran out fast as water from the lips of Ricardo, it cannot be said that Juan was satisfied. He remembered the real Ricardo of the old days, taciturn, speaking rather with a single glance, a single flashing word that revealed much. This conversation was not the same.

He said simply: "I saw William Benn come into this place, and so I followed him."

"And how long have you been here?"

"I've only just come," lied Juan, who never told the truth when a lie was available. "I waited near the house. When he did not come out of the garden, I followed down here, and at last I saw you in this little house just as he was riding away. Of course I came on again."

The gleam of satisfaction in the eye of Ricardo could not be disguised.

"You've only just come? Well, Juan, I have ten thousand things to tell you. But first tell me everything about mother and father and Vicente and our great Pedro!"

The voice had a little ring to it, but not the ring of truth; the cunning ear of Juan, sharpened by his own affection for all of those names, perceived the truth quietly. Ricardo was playing a part!

"Every one has been sick," said Juan. "All the money has been used up. Father is in the hospital, almost dead with worry and sickness. Mother is worn out. Vicente and Pedro can only get a scrap of work here and there. And of course where they can get little to do, I can get nothing. We have lived like dogs since you went away from us, Ricardo!"

Ricardo cried out softly in dismay and apparent grief. He seized a wallet

and cast it upon the table. He turned it upside down and shook it and out of it fell several notes.

"Here are fifty dollars, nearly. All that I have in the world. Take it back to them, Juan, and I'll find a way to send more after you!"

"This would be like gold from heaven to them," said Juan, taking the money with reluctant fingers.

He himself never had touched so much at one time. He looked gravely at Ricardo.

"I don't think that my mother would take this much from you," said he.

"And why not?" cried Ricardo, making words flow again. "Of course she will take it, and afterward I'll try to find a little more and send it after you to her. Of course I shall find more! Money? I'll make it grow on trees!"

And he laughed, but there was more exultant expectancy in his laughter than apology.

"And I wish to heaven that I could go there myself and give a hand in taking care of everything," said Ricardo. "But you see how it is with me, and that I'm as busy as can be. I work like a slave, Juan. Even our father never worked so hard in the old days when he was in the mines—you know how fond he is of talking about those hard times. But I have to be at it early and late."

"And what do you study, Ricardo?"

"Everything that will help me in my work for Señor Benn."

"And what is his business, Ricardo?"

"He is an exporter and importer. That means that he handles all sorts of things. I have to learn about them. And then there're mathematics, and such things—you see?"

He pointed to several sheets covered with figures.

"Poor Ricardo," said Juan, feeling the iron enter his soul. "Then you haven't found an easy place?"

"Ah, no, no!" said Ricardo. "I often

sigh for the happy, sunny, lazy times in the village. Often I'm about to throw all of this away and go back and play with you and the rest."

"And fight with the gringos?" asked Juan.

"The gringos? Yes, yes," said Ricardo hurriedly. "But now, let me tell you the best thing that you could do."

"Yes!"

"Go straight back home with this money. Assure my mother that there is more to come and——"

Juan rose and stacked the money in a neat pile, placed it on the table, and laid the edge of a book upon it to keep the bills from fluttering away.

"You're right," said he, "I must go back, but I don't think that I can take this money."

Ricardo frowned at him. There had been a time when the frown of Ricardo meant a great deal to Juan, but now grief and anger nerved him.

"And why not?" asked Ricardo.

"Because," said Juan, "as far as I know, we always have lived on honest money!"

The two stared grimly at one another.

"So!" said Ricardo at the last.

His foster brother did not answer. Already he had said enough. Now he held out his hand.

"I suppose we should say good-by," said he.

His heart ached more than ever; but he gathered his pride and his grief about him and spoke with dignity.

"Well," answered Ricardo brusquely, "perhaps you're right. Good-by, then, brother."

They shook hands, and Juan noticed that the grip of Ricardo, as ever, was soft as the touch of a woman, but with a subtle suggestion of steely strength in it.

Juan turned on his heel and went off, blindly, for his eyes were thick with tears. He had gone outside of the

summerhouse and reached the first hedge when a swift step came behind him and a hand fell on his shoulder.

He turned. He could not speak.

"Juan!" cried Ricardo, and threw out his hands. And Juan fell into his arms and wept heavily on his shoulder.

He was led back to the summerhouse, he hardly knew how. There he sat in a chair and wiped the moisture from his eyes. He heard Ricardo saying:

"You were here before. You heard William Benn talking to me?"

"I heard every word that he said."

"Well, then, you know that I lied to you."

"Alas, yes," said Juan bitterly. "I know that, and I know how many other things!"

"Tell me what you know?"

"I know what you are studying to be."

"Tell me what?"

"A scoundrel, and a thief."

He threw back his head, almost as though he expected a blow in return for his words, but Ricardo was merely nodding and smiling. There was infinite pain in his smile. It made him look older and too wise for his years.

Then Juan caught both the hands of his foster brother and cried to him: "Come back with me! Come back to us. We love you. This William Benn only wants to use you. I heard him talk. There is very little good in him, I am sure. Come back with me, Ricardo. *Dios, Dios*, how my mother would weep with joy to see you, and Vicente and Pedro! And my father would be well in one day! We have had no good luck since you left us. Neither have you, for I see what has happened to you and what you are trying to be here!"

Then Ricardo answered:

"What you say may be very true. But I'll tell you something, Juan. You have a great brain in your head. You will understand. It is a story some

one told me about a man who learned to breathe so extremely fast that at last he could live under water. Do you understand? He could live under water and breathe the air like a fish. But once he went into the water, he never could return to the dry land again. That is true of me also. I have learned how to be a bad man. You see and understand everything, Juan, and therefore you saw to-day that I had cut even you and my family out of my heart. I was determined to live only for the new life. And still I am determined to lead that life. Nothing that you could say would persuade me to do any other thing."

"Not if my father and mother and Vicente and Pedro and I all fell on our knees and begged of you?"

"Not even then! Heaven forgive me!"

"Ah," murmured Juan, "Heaven will forgive you, because even I can understand! You have become a free man. Because you are trying to do only one thing. You have given yourself up to follow evil and William Benn is your teacher."

"Ricardo!" called a voice among the hedges.

"Go quickly," said Ricardo. "That is the doctor coming. He is such a demon that if he saw tears in my eyes, he would guess everything. Good-by. Take this money. Don't say no, unless you want to break my heart. Tell mother and father that one day I shall come back and cover them with gold."

"Ah, Ricardo," said the other boy, "leave the gold behind you and only bring back yourself."

CHAPTER XVII.

ADVICE FROM THE DOCTOR.

WHEN the doctor came to Ricardo he said: "Do you know a man with bushy, sunburned eyebrows, and a scar puckering one cheek?"

"I don't know. That sounds familiar."

"There is a man like that at the house. He wants to talk to you. You had better see him, then, if he knows you?"

"How can he know me," said the boy, "if he asked for a Mancos?"

"That's true, of course. And he talks as if he had two meanings in his words. I had better tell him that you cannot see him to-day, but that to-morrow you will be happy—say to-morrow evening?"

"Very well."

The doctor went away, and came back where Ricardo stared blindly at his books, and made no headway.

Doctor Humphry Clauson always went quickly to the point. Now he said:

"You're invited to-night to a supper where there will be a crowd of young Americans and a few Mexicans."

"I don't like that," answered Ricardo. "When the crowd is chiefly gringo, there is——"

"You'd better not use that word," said the doctor dryly.

"I always forget. Well, when the people are chiefly American, they act as though they looked down on the Mexicans. As though we were not good enough for them."

"There you go again. Once I proved to you that there is not one chance in a thousand that you are Mexican."

"My mother and my father are Mexican," said the boy stubbornly, "and I shall not change my blood till they do."

"You are an obstinate young fellow," replied the doctor carelessly. "But I don't care for that. Only I don't like to see you get emotional like this."

"Very well," said the boy obediently. "What's to do?"

"The greatest thing you probably ever will have a chance to do. You're going to the supper and you're going to dance."

"Very well. I'll go, if it's important."

"You're young, Ricardo, and that's important. Young girls like young men, as a rule. At least at dances."

"Yes," said the boy, "I'm young."

"You're handsome."

"That's true," said Ricardo, not vainly, but accepting a fact.

"You dance well."

"Yes, I do."

"You can talk to girls."

"Of course."

"In addition, you come from the celebrated old family of Mancos."

"Of course," grinned Ricardo.

"You have a look of Benn, when you smile like that," chuckled the doctor.

"Very well. At this party you'll find among the guests Maud Ranger."

Ricardo grunted.

"Benn talked to me a little about her," he admitted. "How much money has she?"

"About seven millions, as nearly as we can work it out. Perhaps a shade more, not much less."

"That's three hundred and fifty thousand a year," murmured Ricardo. "A man could live on half of that."

"Heaven gave you a brain," smiled the doctor. "You can multiply seven by five and give away half to your friends!"

"Of course."

"Now, then, I want to tell you about this girl."

Ricardo exclaimed: "Do you know everything? If I ask you the name of a star, you can tell me. If I ask you a question out of a book, you always know. And yet you know about people, too. You even know about young girls."

"I send my mind," answered the doctor, "wherever my business leads me. But to continue with Maud Ranger. She's eighteen. She's a pretty thing and——"

"Rather lean," said Ricardo.

"All the better," said the doctor. "It gives her room to grow. A sleek girl makes a fat woman. You want angles in the young, Ricardo."

Ricardo scribbled on a piece of paper.

"What are you doing?" asked the doctor.

"I'm making a note of that."

The doctor merely laughed.

"Very well," said he. "You may smile at me all you want to, my lad, but let me give you some footnotes before you meet that girl."

"Yes," said Ricardo.

"She has seven millions. Every one knows it. Ever since her father's death she's been going religiously to parties, and yet, though she's been very kind to the young men, she's never become engaged; and in this century of quick action, that's a strange thing."

Ricardo waited.

"The young blades have fallen in love in rapid succession with her and her money," said the doctor. "But they have very bad luck.

"Three young fellows who have been courting her have died suddenly, and strangely, all of wounds received in gun fights—opponents unknown!"

Ricardo snapped his fingers.

"I see how it is," said he. "One of her lovers is blocking off the others, and using a gun to do it."

"A very good guess," said the doctor. "But though young men in love are capable of one murder, most of them hardly seem capable of three!"

"There's a difference between a fair fight and a murder."

"You can put it as you please. The point that I make is that the thing is very strange."

"Of course it is."

"But consider again how extremely strange it is. Three men dead. And not so many months in between. Consider another thing. This girl lived like a child at home till her father's death.

She never went out. Suddenly she begins to start abroad. She goes everywhere she's asked. She's very kind to all the young men. And what do you make of that, Ricardo?"

"It doesn't seem much of a riddle. Her father was a hard man, and kept a curb on his daughter. Some fathers do that, don't they?"

"Naturally."

"And so after his death, she's been enjoying her liberty. Isn't that an explanation?"

"That's a sort of explanation, of course."

"I suppose," went on Ricardo, "that she's like a filly that's been kept in a small pasture. Throw down the bars and she'll run all over the country."

"Everything that you say," answered the other, "is apt to be true in most cases, but it just so happens that in this instance you're completely wrong. This Maud Ranger is as quiet and modest a girl as ever stepped. She was tremendously fond of her father, and no one can understand why she should not have remained quietly at home and mourned for him during a longer period. In fact, it's quite a mystery. I'm warning you before ever you see her. Because, sooner or later, if she looks on you with any favor at all, you're going to step into trouble, my lad, and that trouble may be the end of you, unless Benn and I can be of help in the pinch. In fact, you're risking your life, as it appears to me, by paying your attention to the girl. You can draw out of the deal, if you wish."

"In fact," said Ricardo, setting his teeth hard, "I'm interested for the first time. I'll be there to-night."

"That's ended," commented the doctor abruptly. "And how has the work been going to-day?"

"There it is."

Clauson looked over the heaped papers, sifting them through his fingers.

"You did this to-day?"

"Yes."

"When did you begin?"

"At six."

"At six this morning!"

"Yes."

"That makes a long day. No rest?"

"Yes. Of course I spent a couple of hours in the hills, shooting."

"And books the rest of the time?"

"Yes."

"How does your head feel?"

"Clear as a bell."

The doctor whistled.

"Come up to the house with me," said he. "Benn is wrong in forcing you ahead so soon. Another year, and I'd have you safely ready for great things. There are plenty of brains in this old world of ours, but very few of those who own them are willing to work with them long hours every day. Work is the grindstone that puts an edge to the knife. By gad, I'm moralizing like an old woman. Come along."

They gathered up the books and strolled up the path.

"You're thoughtful, Ricardo?"

"I'm thinking of my family."

"Your family?" asked the doctor with a certain emphasis.

"Oh, whoever they are—my foster family, if you want to put it that way. At any rate, I'm thinking of them. I want to do something for them."

"A reasonable idea," agreed the doctor. "I'm glad that you have it!"

A sudden bitterness rushed upon Ricardo.

"Why are you?" he exclaimed. "You care nothing for any one. Why do you say you're glad I want to help them?"

"Because," said the doctor, with his cold smile, "a man who is all bad by that very fact has diffused his talents over too great a field. He lacks edge. Which you will have, my boy!"

And he began to laugh, but softly, and to himself; for in the midst of the most heated conversation, the doctor always seemed more than half alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RICARDO DANCES—AND FIGHTS.

IT was settled straightway that five hundred dollars should be dispatched at once to succor the family of Ricardo. And for that purpose this sum would be like a fortune to Antonio Perez. It would furnish him with a pair of good mules, pay most of his debts, and, in short, reëstablish him at a single stroke.

"If I can find some way of thanking you——" began Ricardo with emotion, when the doctor cut him off by saying, with the driest of voices: "Don't bother about the words, my lad. Save them for Benn. He's financing you. But now that you've provided for your family, take yourself in hand and prepare for Maud Ranger."

There had been frank doubts in the mind of Ricardo, but whatever scruples had troubled him before were now pushed into the background. And though, from some viewpoints, it was as wicked a piece of cold-blooded villainy as any youth could have engaged in, he partly salved his conscience by murmuring to himself that he was merely another in the countless army of fortune hunters. And as for the evil in the doctor and William Benn, he satisfied himself that men who were willing to rescue his suffering family in this generous manner could not be all bad.

So a political machine is run by a boss who carefully distributes little shares of kindness and favor until a whole district is bound to him by party spirit and by a sort of pseudo affection.

But the greatness of the result which they had in mind was enough to kill any scruples in Ricardo. When he walked into the house where the party was given that night, it was not only that strange red-gold hair of his that seemed on fire, but the whole man was in a flame; and when he saw Maud Ranger he told himself that he was

seeing not merely a woman, but seven millions of dollars!

She was paying a great deal of attention to a true son of the Western range—a big-boned man of toil, with the crooked legs of one who rides much. He had a sun-blackened face, with a sort of troubled redness breaking through on the cheek bones and the point of the nose. He had the look of a man who has fronted all sorts of weathers. He was quite dizzy with the attentions of Maud Ranger, and Ricardo observed her with the keenest interest. There was more to her than he had thought, more character, more keenness of eye, and more good looks, though her beauty was decidedly qualified by her independent, almost manish bearing. She looked able to rope a steer or ride a pitching broncho as well as any man. Her grip in shaking hands was like that of a man, and her eye was as straight and direct. She introduced her companion and the latter fixed upon the dapper Ricardo an unfavorable glance.

"Are you a Mexican?" he asked.

Ricardo smiled coldly upon the burly youth. For many and many a month, now, he had lived a strictly laborious existence, and if he were encouraged to go out among the youngsters of the town, it was always rather with the purpose of polishing his manners a little than of giving him pleasure. He was still at school, so to speak, when he went out to play.

But now he felt that the period of his novitiate was completed. He had been sent out by the doctor with only these final marching orders: "Do things your own way. Follow your own ideas. You're not in leading strings. But show the girl that you're a man."

This blunt question from the cowman now made the old flame leap in the heart of the boy, as it had leaped in the old days, when he ranged the

streets of the village like a tiger, looking for prey.

He turned upon the other and said: "It depends on what you mean by the word. When an American asks that question, sometimes he means Spanish—Castilian Spanish—and sometimes he means half-breed, and sometimes Indian, and sometimes—greaser!"

He set off the last word by itself, and spoke it slowly and softly, while a provoking smile of invitation appeared upon the lips of Ricardo. The man of the range stared fixedly at him.

"I'll explain things to you later on," he said pointedly.

"Thank you," said Ricardo, and smiled again.

He drifted away. He had no desire to talk to Maud Ranger, now; he was sunning himself in the promise of trouble that lay before him. It was almost by sheerest chance that he suddenly found himself face to face with the girl, later on.

She said to him in her direct way: "Are you going to have trouble with Dick Jones?"

"I hope not!" said Ricardo, but the light in his eyes belied him. It was as yellow as the flame of his hair.

They danced together. She wanted to know about his early life. She had heard that he was raised in the wilderness of Mexico's mountains. So he told her what Benn and the doctor had taught him to say. He told her about wild hunts—all imagined by William Benn and worded by the doctor. He told her of life in a rambling house in the wilderness, savage men, savage horses, dim trails, constant peril.

She listened to these tales with such interest that they sat out the following dance together.

"I want to tell you about Dick Jones," she said. "I hope you'll have no trouble with him. He has a name for being hard and—a little dangerous."

He thanked her for the warning, and watched her move away—and presently she was dancing with Dick Jones, and laughing up to that big, rough fellow.

Ricardo went out into the garden and sat down on top of a four-foot pillar. He leaped on it like a cat, and settled down with his knees hugged against his breast. He was more and more content. Life under the régime of William Benn had been very strenuous, but now the excitement was commencing, and the pulses of Ricardo were singing. He could have laughed aloud, but instead, he merely looked up at the stars and hummed softly to himself.

Others drifted through the garden between dances. They took little notice of him; for he had become known as a youth of naïve unconsciousness; but they pointed him out and chuckled as they went by. A wild young Mexican, said they.

Then a hand tapped on the foot of Ricardo. He drew back his thoughts from the stars and discovered that the garden was still, and the music was throbbing in the house once more. He looked into the face of Dick Jones.

"We could have our little chin now," said Dick Jones.

"We could," said Ricardo.

"About greasers," said Dick Jones.

"And gringos," said Ricardo.

"I could talk to you better if you was down here on the ground," added the cow-puncher.

Ricardo descended to the ground.

"How do you begin the talk?" he asked.

"With a straight left—to the head!" gasped Dick Jones, and drove a hand of iron at the face of Ricardo. But it missed by the narrowest of margins, as a striking hand misses a butterfly, or a whirling leaf. Then the two tangled together and spun about—separated—and Dick Jones staggered back and leaned against the pillar, his hands helpless at his sides, his head canted

over on one shoulder like a broken reed.

After a moment he gasped: "What's happened? Where've I been?"

Then he saw Ricardo, and his brain cleared a little. He put up his hands.

"You greaser yaller dog!" said Dick, and came in uncertainly. Ricardo knocked down the feeble arms and poised his right hand; a cruel keenness was in his eyes, but he forbore to strike.

"You'd better go home and wash the blood from your face," said Ricardo.

Dick Jones touched his face with his hand; it came away, wet and sticky.

"I guess you've made a mess of me," he said frankly. "You got a wonderful pair of fists, kid. I thought that a pair of wild broncs was savagin' me. I'd better go home before the girls see me. So long, Mancos! You done me up proper, and I got no grudge against you."

Ricardo accepted the proffered hand with a feeling of wonder. He could not imagine his own wild nature submitting with such careless ease, and yet he could not help admiring the attitude of Dick Jones.

He saw the latter start off, and then he returned to the house himself and washed the stains from his hands; and a mild and genial warmth of content filled the heart of Ricardo as he went back among the dancers. It was a cheerful party and most diverting. Then suddenly he was talking with Maud Ranger again.

"You're not dancing much," she said. "Are you having a dull time?"

"Not a bit," he answered. "I'm looking on and admiring."

"It's like a chocolate cake with the chocolate settled in streaks," she observed. "The Americans are foolish, and the Mexicans are grave. I haven't seen Dick Jones, have you?"

"I think some one called him away," said Ricardo.

"You've barked a knuckle of your right hand," she remarked.

"I brushed against a thorn in the garden," replied he.

He looked straight at her, blankly, but he could see that she understood, and he also could see that she was surprised and pleased. It puzzled Ricardo a great deal, but since he had come there, expecting to be baffled, he waited, ready to observe and try to solve the riddle. In the meantime, he was to be agreeable, but that was a small effort. For from the moment of his return to the house, Maud Ranger monopolized him. They danced together, sat out together, walked in the garden together.

And yet no man tried to interfere with this monopoly; indeed, it seemed to Ricardo that two or three youngsters cast at him glances of a grim content, and that he felt was strange. For certainly she was the prettiest girl at the dance. He considered her more critically, but still he found nothing wrong.

There was something rather masculine about her frank directness, to be sure, but that hardly could be held against her. She talked rather more like a friendly man than like a pretty girl; one did not need to make flattering advances to her. And she was trying to draw him out on familiar ground into talk about his native Mexico; then she told of her father's ranch, which must be much the same sort of country. Some day he should come to visit them. He would be delighted. Then why not soon? No reason against it. And in five minutes it was arranged.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNCLE WILLIAM SPEAKS.

THE doctor was complimentary when he heard from Ricardo what had been accomplished.

"You've opened the door," he said. "But you're too young to go inside alone, of course. We'll have to send

some one with you—and who shall that be? I must see Benn. Go to bed, my lad. You've done a grand bit of work. Go to bed. We'll do your thinking for you!"

With this assurance, Ricardo turned in and slept; and in the morning he opened his eyes to find the long, lean face of William Benn silhouetted against the light of the window. Ricardo braced himself up on his elbows.

"Hullo," said he, "why didn't you sing out when you came?"

"When you have a stake horse," said the other, "you never bother his sleeping time. When do you go to the post?"

"I ride out this afternoon."

"With her?"

"Yes."

William Benn closed his eyes.

"It's too good to be true," he sighed. "And how did you take with her?"

"I don't know what you mean by that."

"I mean—a boy and a girl catch, or they don't. Like a cold. What did she think of you?"

Ricardo considered.

"She thought that I might be useful."

"Is that all?"

"I suppose so."

"You can't make a stone statue warm up all in a minute," said the criminal. "Take your time, though, and keep the fire up. How did she affect you?"

"I don't know," said Ricardo. "I wasn't talking to a girl. I was talking to seven millions, of course."

"Ah," said William Benn, "that would spoil everything! Let me tell you something. You are falling in love! You are getting deeper and deeper in love every minute. Never forget for a moment you've got to convince her of that."

"I don't know how to manage that!" answered Ricardo.

"Perhaps not. I'll tie you to a fellow who'll tell you how to act."

He raised his voice:

"Lew!"

The door of the bedroom opened instantly and closed without sound. Inside it stood the hunchback, Lew, his pale, unhealthy face grinning at them. He jerked his head in greeting at Ricardo.

"Come here, Lew," said William Benn.

The hunchback came closer. He picked up a chair and put it down beside William Benn. Then he sat in it, always keeping his eyes fixed upon the boy. He had a face like a frog. He was more ugly than a Hun of Attila, and what made him more frightful than ever was the mirth which seemed to be struggling in him now.

"Lew is going out with you to the girl's place," said Benn.

"But I was invited by myself!" said Ricardo.

"That makes no difference. Of course you can't go anywhere without your man to take care of you. Lew's a valet, when he wants to be, eh?"

At this, Lew grinned a ghastly grin and winked solemnly at the boy. It seemed that he was laughing both with and at the youth.

"And he's a handy man, too," said William Benn. "He'll take care of you and take care of your horses. He'll always be near. You can take my word for that. Lew will always be near!"

They were both smiling—the evil smile of William Benn and the hideous grimace of the dwarf.

"I thought of sending Wong along with you," continued the director of operations. "But I changed my mind about that. The reason is that Wong needs a heavy hand to keep him in order. But Lew is always in order. Eh, Lew?"

Lew grinned still wider.

"The kid has to pretend to be in love

with her," went on Benn seriously. "How'll he go about it, Lew? You'll have to tell him from time to time."

"Sure," said the hunchback. "I know all about that!"

William Benn looked down at that lump of self-satisfied deformity, and even Benn shuddered a little.

But he said: "You boss Lew, Ricardo. You understand? But when it comes to a pinch, do what Lew tells you to do. Because he'll never be wrong!"

"I'll tame her for you in three days," said Lew. "I know all about women!"

This time he actually laughed, and his huge head rolled in glee.

"Go down and trim up the horses," said Benn to the dwarf.

Lew rose. He assisted himself from the chair by leaning a little and so rising to his feet with the help of an upward thrust of his finger tips. For his arms dangled a vast distance. He looked to Ricardo like a tall man who has been shrunk and doubled up in the trunk and bowed and deformed in the legs.

After he had left, Benn said: "You'll find him useful. Besides, he'll set you off. The uglier he is, the better you'll appear. Take his advice about everything. He's as wise as a spider!"

So Ricardo was prepared for his visit with much good advice, and when he descended and mounted the horse—Lew holding his stirrup—William Benn and the doctor both shook hands with him.

"We'll both be close at hand," they told him. "And Lew will always know where to find us. When in doubt, ask him to get us."

He went off from them, keeping his horse at a jog down the street. And Lew followed two lengths behind him, whistling shrill and small through his teeth. When they arrived at Maud Ranger's, they found that she was prepared to start; and with her was a

grim, gray-headed man already in the saddle. He was introduced to Ricardo as William Ranger, the uncle of Maud. He shook hands with a stiff grip and a straight, keen look. There was no doubt but that the girl had her manners from her father's side of her family.

The trail began to wind over the hills in broad loops, as soon as they left the white walls of El Real, and when they were fairly in the open country they struck on at a smart gait. All were well mounted; they fairly flew and put the long miles rapidly behind them.

At such a pace there was little chance for conversation, but it happened that swinging down a long slope the girl shot her horse well ahead, and her uncle drew up a little—Ricardo followed suit.

And suddenly he was addressed gruffly:

"Young man, d'you know why Maud has brought you out here?"

"Yes," said Ricardo innocently, "because she wanted to show me her ranch, which she says must be like the country where I was raised."

"Did she indeed!" muttered William Ranger. "Now, I'll tell you the truth. She's brought you out here because she wants to start you on a longer trail!"

"A trail?" echoed Ricardo.

"A trail that you'll never run to the end of, and if you do, Heaven help you. That's to put it shortly. The mischief is in the girl, I think. She imagines that one brave man can do what the law can't manage. Madness! Sheer madness!"

"I don't understand," said Ricardo.

"Do you understand that she had a father?" asked William Ranger, as bluntly as ever.

"Yes."

"And that her father died?"

"Yes."

"And that the man who murdered him was Charles Perkins?"

"I think I've heard that."

"Now then—the wisest man hunters that wear the badges of Uncle Sam have been working to get at Charles Perkins ever since the killing. And they've failed. They've never seen more than his dust as he rode out of range of their guns. One thing is certain—that the scoundrel is too clever and has too many friends to be taken easily even by expert trailers and fighters with all the resources of the law at their backs. But this ridiculous girl imagines that a single man might succeed where posses have failed!"

Ricardo nodded.

"I understand——" he murmured.

He could understand many, many things, in fact, which had been suddenly revealed by the impatience of Ranger. Maud was like a man hunting for cutting tools. That was why she searched among the young men—she had changed her way of living so that she might have greater opportunities of coming in contact with the youngsters of the county—and combing among them, she had attracted the ones who appeared to her to be fighting men. And when they were flattered to a point of high interest, then she would reveal what she hoped.

The pursuit and the death or capture of Charles Perkins!

Ricardo thought back to the interview which he had spied upon, between Benn and Perkins, on the arrival of the gunman; and he wondered what emotion would fill his breast if ever he should stand weapon in hand before that monster among monsters?

"You understand?" repeated William Ranger. "Then you see what a fool she's making of herself—and yet she'll try the same dodge with you. And I suppose you'll be like the rest of the lads, and sheer off from the adventure?"

"I don't know," murmured Ricardo. "Of course, there's this to say: The

posses have failed—but a posse makes a lot of noise when it's on a trail. Besides, Perkins would run from six men, but he'd never run from one!"

William Ranger drew his horse a little farther to the side. He scrutinized Ricardo with a savage disbelief.

"Young fellow," said he, "do you mean to tell me that you'd undertake such a work as that?"

"I don't know," said Ricardo. "The idea is just beginning to take hold on me."

CHAPTER XX.

CATS EAT RATS.

THE ranch was not a whit impressive. It was simply a wretched old shack onto which two wings had been built to give added room as it was needed. It looked at first glance as though no two boards were of the same dimensions or type of timber, and the rambling size of the house merely increased its appearance of poverty. The trampling hoofs of horses and cattle had ironed away all tokens of green life up to the very door of the place, before which stood two long hitching racks, the wood deeply gnawed and the ground pawed into holes beneath the crossbars. One would have said that a heavy wind blew constantly here and whipped out the very roots of the grasses before they caught hold.

The house did not stand by itself. A bunk house stood near by. There were a few sheds, two great barns, and no fewer than ten stacks of hay or straw, now with a winter-old cap of moldering brown upon each one. The winter feeding pens made a network of rusted barbed wire and staggering posts and boards near the stacks.

"We have to feed a lot in the winter if it comes a hard year," explained Maud Ranger to Ricardo.

She pointed about her. The mountains were like a sea chopped one way by a storm wind and another by a

current; they crowded their heads close together; the forest slipped from their steep shoulders; bald rocks glistened above timber line; and two summits were veined with white in the upper canyons, one was brilliantly capped with snow!

"You can see for yourself," she said. "The lighter snows generally are filtered down through the trees and not so many come down to the level of the lower valleys, like this one. But now and then everything is deep with snow; a thaw and a hard freeze, and we're apt to have thousands of cows on our hands. That's a hard job, you know. Do you know a good deal about cows?"

Ricardo hesitated an instant. He felt that now he was actually on a cow ranch, it would be dangerous to pretend.

"No," he said. "I don't."

She was as sharp and as rough as a man in her talk.

"But I thought that you came from a cow country?" she said.

"I do. But everybody in a cow country doesn't ride herd, you know."

She frowned, and looked squarely at him.

"What sort of work did you do down in your country?" she asked.

"A Mexican, you know," said the boy, "is supposed to grow up to be a gentleman, not a laborer."

"Ah?" she murmured.

She was not at all contented with this lofty reply, but she said no more about it, though once or twice her glances darted in a sort of honest indignation at Ricardo.

William Ranger had fallen back from the side of the boy and his niece. He appeared to find the hunchback more attractive for conversation.

In the meantime, they moved on to the house; after the first glance, the building itself was of less and less importance. The broken mountains filled the eye of the mind too completely.

"No one ever thought of working cows in this country," said Maud Ranger. "Every one was only thinking of breaking through from one side to the other. People simply cursed and hated this range; in the winter, for years, it was considered to be impassable. But my father came here and settled down. He was not afraid!"

She let her voice swell a little, as she said that.

"He's famous, isn't he?" asked Ricardo, with as much of an air of interest as he could summon.

"No, he isn't," she replied sharply. "He ought to be! See what he did. He showed the way. Now there are twenty big ranches scattered through these mountains. Thousands of cows. But he's not famous. When he went into banking he got a lot more notoriety, he had his name in the papers more. But this is his real work. And who cared about it? Who cared a rap about it? Bah! How many posses are out now, hunting for the murderer? And yet it isn't as if he were an unknown man. Every one knows that it's Charles Perkins. Every one knows where Charles Perkins is to be found, and yet no one will dare to go get him!"

She clenched both her hands. She was trembling. And Ricardo, braced and prepared as he had been for such a statement from her, was astounded now. He had put her down as a cool-minded girl, with a stubborn streak in her which wanted revenge for her father's death, but he had opened a door on a furnace to-day, a red whirl and leaping of flames.

"He did this!" said the girl.

She held out her hands in such a way that one would have thought she meant that her father had built the huge mountains, and she added at once: "No one would have lived with them, you see, if he hadn't shown the way. I was raised here!" she concluded. "In the old days, we were shut off all winter.

That was before dad spent so much to break a road through. I'm sorry he did. The old days were the best. You had to go isolated for months. No newspaper. No mail unless a rider struggled down through the lower passes once in a while. You were shut in, here. It used to be terribly cold. What fires on winter nights! The whole house used to shake, the flames went in such crowds, herding up the chimneys, and roaring! Every fire had its own voice. I could tell them apart by their muttering, and by their hissing!"

She laughed, and, her laughter breaking off suddenly, she struck her hands together. It was not as dramatic an act in the performance as in the description. But she had turned pale and her eyes seemed set in hollows of deep shadow out of which she looked sadly at the boy.

"I can imagine," said Ricardo stupidly. "Of course it was exciting to be winter-bound like that!"

"He did such things!" broke in the girl, riding over his comment. "He *was* such things! And what does the world care? Oh, what does it care? Every evening, Charlie Perkins rides down from the hills to Back Creek, and rides into it, and rules the place. The police know where he is. But they won't try to get him. They're afraid! They're afraid!"

Her uncle rode suddenly up to them. "You'd better hurry on, Maud!" said he in the bluffest of voices. "We can't loiter all evening on the road!"

She did not answer. Her head was pressed down a little so that the brim of her hat covered the upper part of her face, and Ricardo could guess that she was crying. He could remember, once, hearing a broken-hearted man sob—a brave and a strong man who, nevertheless, sobbed. It had been a moment of horror—a thing not even to think of. But the tears of that man affected

him with no more force than this moment's weakness in the girl. She was no weak type, letting sorrows flow through her to a ready expression. He looked at her in bewilderment, realizing that all he had thought of her was wrong indeed. Enormous passions worked in her. And Ricardo was quite overawed.

William Ranger pressed close to Ricardo and said to him ominously: "That's a subject that is going to wreck the brain of Maud one of these days. We try to keep away from it. Do you understand?"

"You try to keep away from it?" replied Ricardo, tipping up his head. "But why don't you do something about it then?"

A hot exclamation of anger came on the lips of William Ranger, but he suppressed it at once.

"You're a stranger," he said. "You don't know what you're talking about. Perhaps you've never heard of Back Creek before?"

And Ricardo had to be silent, admitting that the name was new. Besides, he received a sudden keen glance from Lew, which he took as a warning.

So they got to the house and tethered their horses at the rack. A negro boy came and led them away, Lew going along to give his matchless care to the span which were under his charge.

Then Ricardo was shown up to his room. It was at a corner of the second story. It looked full to the northeast, and as she led him to it, Maud Ranger pointed out through the window.

"There's Back Mountain. You see the snow on the top of it, turning to flame, now, like the hair on your head. That's Back Mountain. Back Creek lies on the knee of it. You can't see the town from here. But you can know it is there. Every day I look and know it is there. And every evening time I know that he's riding down into the place—waving his hand to his friends

—and laughing and joking with them—
—and asking for news—and scoffing at
the law and the fools who do what the
law bids! Every evening!"

She caught her breath, and hurried
suddenly from the room, and Ricardo
sat down on the edge of the bed and
rolled a cigarette and lighted it, and
looked vaguely out the window at the
head of Back Mountain, now like a
torch in the sky.

Lew, bringing up the pack, found
him there, and Lew sat down and
stretched.

"You brought her on," said Lew,
nodding. "You done a good bit of
work there. I thought you were play-
ing too dumb at first. But you were
right. Sometimes it's better to let them
talk by themselves if they've got plenty
to say! It'll come out sooner or later."

Ricardo said bluntly: "Do you think
she's sane? Do you think that she's
out of her mind, a little?"

"All women are," said the hunch-
back. "Their brains are no good. They
got wits, like a cat, but they got no
mind. Look at her. She's on fire like
Back Mountain!"

He jerked his thumb over his shoul-
der.

"Do you know about it?" asked Ri-
cardo. "Is it true that Perkins rides
down to Back Creek every evening—
and no one touches him?"

"Of course it's true," said the dwarf.
"Where else would he be going?
Where else would he be safe?"

"But how can he be safe anywhere?"
asked the boy.

"Cats eat rats," said the hunchback.
"They don't dine on one another!"

CHAPTER XXI.

BACK CREEK AND BACK MOUNTAIN.

HE would not talk any more about
Back Creek.

"You ask the girl to tell you about
it," said he. "That's the best way; be-

cause it'll show that you mean business.
I thought that it would take a little
time, but now you got the game in your
own hands!"

He rubbed his own bony claws to-
gether.

"I don't understand," said Ricardo
patiently.

"I'm gunna explain," remarked Lew.
"Don't you worry. I'll show you where
you stand. How is things now? Well,
the girl is kind of desperate. Her old
man was sacred to her. He died. No-
body took a scalp to get even. She
feels the way that an Indian girl would
feel. That's right and nacheral enough.
She was raised half wild. Now she
looks over to Back Mountain and it
makes her think of Charlie Perkins,
and she pretty near loses her mind.
You take a girl, and you'll always find
that she's more likely to carry on with
what her dad was doing. This girl
wants to do the same thing. She wants
to make the ranch flourish. But first
of all, she wants to revenge the death
of the old man. I seen through it all
to-day. She ain't really crazy, but
she'd pretty near sell her soul to plant
Charlie Perkins under the ground.
Now she's heated up so bad that you'd
better bring around a show-down
pronto. That's the best way! Right
after dinner you open up with ques-
tions. That'll make the uncle see red.
He'll try to force your hand. 'What
are you gunna do about this here
thing?' he'll say. 'I'm gunna go and
try to kill Charlie Perkins,' you'll say.
'Why should you do that?' the uncle
will ask. 'Because I love Maud
Ranger!' you say. 'Bah!' says the
uncle. 'You love her as much as seven
million dollars' worth, don't you?' You
stick to your guns. Play right out in
the open, apparently. That's the way
to bluff them."

Ricardo was on his feet, the cigarette
fuming unnoticed between his fingers,
his mouth twisted hard.

"It's too fast!" said he. "I can't rush on and talk like that. I hardly know her!"

"Of course you don't," said Lew.

He sat in the chair with his knees embraced in his long arms, grinning like an ape and rocking himself slowly back and forth.

"Of course, you don't know her! It was love at first sight with you. When you talk about her, she sets you on fire! You'll stand up before 'em all and tell 'em that. You'll pretty near convince 'em, because you got the makin's of a good, first-rate, hundred-percent liar in you! You lie smooth, nacheral, and easy. You gotta flow of words. That means a lot. It puts the brains to sleep!"

He laughed silently. It seemed to Ricardo that this creature was more hideous than William Benn, more terrible than the pale, inhuman face of the doctor. Yet he knew that this was only a demidevil, contrasted with the superior art and malice of the other two.

However, he was under orders to follow the advice of the hunchback, and he set his teeth and determined to pass through the ordeal.

At dinner there were four at the table—Maud, himself, William Ranger, and the latter's wife. She was a square lump of a woman with a great curved nose set in the middle of a red face. Her husband was a good-looking man; it seemed a miracle that he should be married to such a cartoon of a woman. Moreover, she had few graces, but like all the Rangers and those associated with that family she was wonderfully blunt and to the point in everything that she had to say.

She carried on the main burden of the conversation after dinner began, by telling how she had ridden up "The Five-mile Trail" on a balky horse.

"I could turn him around, but I couldn't start him ahead. I had a spade

bit on the brute and with that I could make him back. So, finally, I started backing him up that trail. He tucked his tail between his legs like a scared dog and still he had to back because that spade bit was murdering his mouth and jaw. I backed him up that trail for about half a mile, I think, and all the time he was pretty sure that he was only a step from falling over the edge. He'll never balk again. After I finished with that lop-eared fool, he stood and shook for ten minutes. When he had his legs under him I rode on. He'll never say no again!"

And she stabbed her fork viciously into a section of carrot.

"We'll do the Five-mile Trail to-morrow," said Maud Ranger.

"Who'll do the Five-mile Trail?" snapped her aunt.

"I was speaking to Mr. Mancos," replied Maud coldly.

"That's a funny name," said the older woman. "Mancos. That's a Spanish name. How'd you come by such a name as that, young man?"

"Mr. Mancos is from Mexico," said Maud.

"What? With his eyes—and his hair—and his pink cheeks?" said Theodora Ranger.

She put down her formidable fork and glared at him.

"Bah!" said Theodora Ranger. "Mexico my foot!" she added, still staring.

"There's the Castilian strain," explained Maud, coloring a little. "You know that there was a lot of Gothic blood in northern Spain——"

"Gothic foot!" said Mrs. Ranger, who seemed to reserve that expression as a sort of heavy artillery to express her scorn of the notions of others. "Young man, if you're not white, I'm an Indian!"

Ricardo was so angry that he was on the verge of telling her that she was almost the right color to belong to that

breed, and certainly she was more than sufficiently ugly to grace a tepee of the most savage Apache.

He said nothing. His face was pink, streaked with white, so great was his anger; for ever since the first conversation in which the doctor had pointed out the probability that he was an American, he had been extremely touchy on the point. He only felt that it was giving away his nationality; he could not think of it as a claiming of his real right.

"You'll ride the Five-mile Trail and break your two precious necks," said Mrs. Ranger. "Unless you take mules!"

"Leave them alone, Theodora," urged her husband. "They're not old enough to be argued with."

"You came out to see the place, did you?" asked Mrs. Ranger.

Ricardo nodded, and Mrs. Ranger leaned her powerful chin upon her hand and regarded him with leonine calm.

"You're fond of natural scenery, I suppose?" she said.

"Oh, yes," said Ricardo.

"And mountains?"

"Yes."

"And rocks?"

He saw that he was being baited and did not respond.

"Mostly the mountains, you like, I suppose?" said Mrs. Ranger.

And at that, he struck back at her with a smile on his lips.

"Back Mountain is a wonderful old peak," said he. "I like Back Mountain especially."

Mrs. Ranger glanced at her niece and bit her lip. Then, as covertly as she could, she shook her head at their new guest, but Ricardo had seen the girl shiver and jerk up her head. He went on blandly:

"I'd like to know about the village on it, too—and how it is that in such a place they can laugh at the law. Can

you tell me anything about it, Mrs. Ranger?"

She was so angry that she grew purplish, only the concern she felt for her niece kept her in control.

"I'll show you a map of the mountain *after* dinner," she said pointedly.

Maud Ranger clasped her hands on the edge of the table.

"I'll tell you all about it," she said in a slow voice.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," insisted Mrs. Ranger. "You go on with your dinner!"

Maud Ranger shook her head slightly.

"I can tell you," she said, fixing her glance upon Ricardo.

And he thought it was the strangest look he ever had seen on the face of woman or man, there was so much cruelty in it, and pity, and curiosity, and pain, and hope. And all these qualities were in her voice, though she kept that low, And Ricardo listened as to dangerous music.

"I can tell you all about it," she repeated. "The town of Back Creek is dumped down in a tangle of wild forest and rocks. Nearly all the people who live there are on the spot because they can't live any other place. There are always a couple of hundred scoundrels there. Several times a sheriff has taken a posse out there, but the wanted men scatter through the trees and the rocks, and the others keep them supplied with food. They're an organized community to protect crime. They *live* on crime!"

"You'd better postpone the rest of the story!" said Mrs. Ranger, giving Ricardo a dreadful glance.

"But how can they live on crime in the middle of the mountains? Do they rustle cattle?" asked Ricardo.

"They live on the money that the freshest of the crop bring in. The crooks carry their money with them. They pay for the protection they get.

And that money passes through the village. It's the blood that keeps it alive. And that's the reason that Charles Perkins went there!"

Mrs. Ranger pushed back her chair a little, and it screeched on the floor, for she was a heavy woman.

"Maud!" she exclaimed.

"Well?" said the girl.

"I'm not going to have you start that thing again!"

"Can you tell me why I'm not to answer questions about Back Mountain?"

"You know perfectly well what you're leading up to!"

Maud Ranger said nothing, and her aunt, growing more angry, pointed deliberately at Ricardo.

"Besides," she said, "you're losing your wits, appealing to a pretty baby like this!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MAUD RANGER'S PROMISE.

IT was a distinctly unpleasant climax.

Ricardo looked down at the table and wished for something to say. Dinner was at an end. Every one sat stiff and collected for trouble. Maud Ranger did not make an immediate reply to her blunt aunt, and the latter carried on with the attack which she began.

She said to Ricardo: "Young man, do you know why you've been brought up here?"

"Yes," said Ricardo. "We were talking about my own home country. It's a good deal like this. Miss Ranger kindly thought that I would be interested to see——"

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs. Ranger. "The truth is——"

"Theodora," broke in her husband, "I think that you've gone about far enough. There's no use dragging in the horrors at this point."

"I've started it. Now let me finish it," she insisted. "I'm not going to go through another dreadful farce. Mr. Mancos, will you listen to me?"

Ricardo watched her, making his expression as polite as possible, but all the time he was keeping covert watch upon the girl, to see how she took this affair, and he was hardly surprised to see that she was perfectly cool under fire.

"I know what Maud is up to," said the older woman, striking her clenched hand, though lightly, on the edge of the table. "You'll be shown around the place for a day or two, but after that you'll have the idea put to you in so many shapes that pretty soon you'll begin to take it seriously. Do you know what the crazy girl's idea is, Mr. Mancos?"

Ricardo was silent. After all, there was not much that he could say.

"It's simply this: That the sheriffs and the posses are helpless to get at Perkins because, when they come, their numbers send the warning before them. And then every one assists Perkins to get off into the tall timber. But if a single man went to the town, he'd have no difficulty in getting at that murderer! In one word, Mr. Mancos, she hopes that *you're* the man who will undertake such a job. She hopes that *you* are going to meet and stand up to Charles Perkins single-handed. And if that's not madness, I'd like to know what is!"

She went on angrily:

"Maud, I want you to say whether or not I'm right! Confess! It'll be good for your soul. You wanted to send this poor infant against that fiend of a Perkins. Am I correct?"

Ricardo looked keenly at Maud. She was staring down at her clasped hands as she replied in an even voice: "What else can I do, except to hunt through the world for brave men and see if one of them will fight for me, because I can't fight for myself?"

"Staring, raving nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Ranger.

"Theodora," said her husband

sternly, "you'll have to stop it. You mustn't carry on like this any longer!"

"What would you do?" she asked. "Would you have a pink-and-white softy like this boy sent out to have his head blown off his shoulders to suit the silly whim of Maud? But you see, Mr. Mancos, that she's honest enough to confess at once!"

Ricardo did not make any comment, he was too busy trying to arrange words in his mind for this critical moment.

And Maud Ranger gave him no rest. "It's true. I'd noticed you before, but I don't suppose that I would have been so very excited if it hadn't been for what happened to Dick Jones. They don't understand what I mean, but you do."

"What Dick Jones?" asked Mrs. Ranger in her harsh voice. "You mean that wild man from Montana? There would have been a possible man for you, Maud, I admit."

"He had a little trouble with Mr. Mancos," said the girl, "and when it was over, Dick went home."

"You mean he wasn't fit to be seen?" asked Mrs. Ranger, with her usual bluntness. "You mean that this boy whacked Dick out of shape?"

Maud looked at her aunt with the faintest of smiles.

"No, it just happened that he was called away. And Mr. Mancos had a barked knuckle—because he'd grazed against the wall in the garden——"

She paused and turned her glance toward Ricardo. All three of them stared at him. He colored a little, and then Mrs. Ranger burst out: "I don't know that that makes it any better. What's against nature is not to be admired. How *could* this boy beat Dick Jones, unless he's a freak? Oh, well, I don't want to insult him. But I wish that you'd tell me exactly what happened between you and Jones, Mr. Mancos!"

"We agreed," said Ricardo, "that we

couldn't agree. He—er—went home. That is all there is to it."

"Are you modest?" asked the blunt lady of the house. "But at any rate, that doesn't matter. You know about Charles Perkins, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And now that you know why Maud has brought you up here, what are you going to do about it?"

"I suppose," said Ricardo, "that I'd better go to have a look at Mr. Perkins, if I can!"

"You *can* easily enough," exclaimed the virago. "You can look once, at least. But——"

"I think you might stop bullying," said Maud Ranger. "You've dragged my affairs out into the full light of day. Now I think you might leave them there. You've done what harm you could do!"

This cold speech had no effect upon Mrs. Ranger, who exclaimed: "And if you *did* find Charles Perkins, what do you think you would do to him, young man?"

He answered gently: "I would kill him if I could."

"Kill him!" said Mrs. Ranger scornfully. "And with what? With a pebble from your sling? Do you carry a gun, perhaps, Mr. Mancos?"

"I carry an old gun for shooting rabbits," said Ricardo.

He had grown angrier and angrier as the scorn of Mrs. Ranger and her disbelief were poured out upon him.

Now he stretched out his hand and under it there appeared a Colt .45, which he laid on the table before his hostess.

The others were startled a little by this unusual gesture. But then they began to notice many points of interest about the weapon—as that it possessed no trigger, and the sights had been filed off, and the gun had a peculiar look of battered care, like a well-polished antique.

"Who gave you that gun?" asked Mrs. Ranger.

"I bought it new," answered the boy.

"Well," gasped his hostess, "it's like something out of a book. But it's a man's gun! You *are* a trained fighter, then? But what's induced you to come up here to fight for Maud Ranger?"

Crimson poured over the face of Ricardo.

He could not speak.

"Out with it!" said the cruel Theodora.

"That question—ah, well—it's because——"

Ricardo stumbled and blundered again.

"You have no right to ask that!" he said at last.

"Bah!" snapped Mrs. Ranger. "Haven't I? But I have, though! It's because you can see seven million dollars as clearly as any man!"

"Aunt Theodora!" cried the girl, starting from her chair.

Ricardo had risen also. He was white—the truth is sometimes a poisoned arrow—but he retained his dignity.

"It was not the love of money that made me want to serve her!" he said.

And the lie came gravely from his lips.

"Not love of money. Love of her, then?" mocked Mrs. Ranger. "Love at first sight, I suppose!"

Maud Ranger broke in: "Aunt Theodora, I won't stand another word of this. You've insulted me repeatedly. You've begun to insult an invited guest. I don't know what you're thinking of!"

"Great Heavens!" said the aunt. "If you had the wit of a blackbird, you'd understand! I was wrong. This boy is not a pink-and-white little fool. He's a trained fortune hunter. And he wants you!"

The tortured girl cried out in a passion: "And what if he does? And

what if he does? You and the rest sit quietly by. It doesn't matter to you if justice is sound asleep. You don't care. I've worked and prayed and hoped to find the man who would bring justice to Perkins. And if Ricardo Mancos can do it——"

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed William Ranger, rising at last in alarm. "What are you about to say?"

"What you've driven me to say!" she answered.

"I'm not driving you!" exclaimed Theodora Ranger. "Don't be silly. Don't say anything rash!"

But the girl hurried to Ricardo and stood before him very close.

"Are you honest? Are you fair and square?" she asked him.

He had to strain every ounce of strength in his soul to meet that searching glance.

"I hope I am," said he.

"Then—if you kill Charles Perkins—I don't know that you'd want me; but you could have me if you did——"

"Maud!" shouted her aunt.

"It's no use talking now," said the girl. "I've given my promise. You've badgered me and mocked me. And you know that there's one sacred thing in this filthy world, and that's my word of honor! Do you hear, Mr. Mancos? I confess everything. You're only a fighting machine to me. I got you up here, hoping that I could bribe you to take the trail of Perkins. And I'm willing to bribe you with all that I have and all that I am! I give you my word of honor. I swear to heaven that this is the truth!"

She turned and ran from the room and left a gasping silence behind her. Then William Ranger said: "Young man, you've heard that promise. But if you should ever attempt to hold her to that promise I can assure you we all would——"

Nothing irritates a man so much as to know that he has played a low part,

and Ricardo knew that he had lied, and been a grave-faced sneak. Now he took a quick step and caught Mr. Ranger by the wrist:

"I've been bullied and insulted by your wife," said he. "But she's a

woman. You're a man—at least, I hope so!"

And he left the room as quickly as the girl had done. He could hear Mrs. Ranger saying, as the door closed behind him: "There is poison in him!"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



AN OLD INDIAN TREATY

DESPITE the recent steps of the Federal government, guardian of the Osage Indians, to limit their expenditures in order to accord with their reduced income—for the oil wealth of the tribe is on the decline—they can still afford to purchase the less expensive automobiles. Two thousand dollars is the limit for this necessary article of transportation!

This gives particular point to a recent press dispatch in regard to the past and present financial condition of another tribe—the Quapaw Indians—who, although their royalties from lead and zinc mines give them now yearly a millionaire income—were once in such poor condition that the government allowed them the services of "a blacksmith to do their necessary work" in looking after their horses. The Quapaws remain as of yore lovers of horseflesh, and the present blacksmith to the tribe is kept very busy looking to the shoes of some one hundred and fifty horses, many of them exceedingly valuable. The blacksmith, William Long, holds his Federal job under the provisions of a treaty made with the Indians in 1833, when Andrew Jackson was president.

There are numbers of picturesque items of the past still lingering in this prosaic age, and it is fitting that some of them should attach to the tribes whose musical names would be sufficient alone to give color to any news concerning them. And we may be thankful also to know that the beneficiaries are no longer in the "impoverished and wretched condition" which it was the purpose of the treaty to relieve.



A Brute for Punishment by Seth Ranger

Author of "When Hardrock Softened," etc.



CAUSING in the act of saddling Tabasco, the mushing mule, "Poke" Tupper proceeded to observe what promised to be an interesting clash in the swamp a hundred feet below his cabin. To save themselves a long detour, the miners in the vicinity had built a one-way bridge across the muck. The bridge was three hundred feet long and a foot wide. The miners had quickly established a custom. The first man to start across the bridge, finished. Men coming the opposite direction waited.

Poke's partner, "Hardrock" Shipley, a sawed-off little Irishman with a fringe of brilliant-red whiskers running along his jaw, had progressed some thirty feet on the bridge when "Shark" Atwood loomed up in the opposite direction. Atwood had ridden roughshod over small men and small traders for so many years he saw no reason for waiting while this runt crossed. Let the

runt turn back or jump off into the muck!

"Tabasco," Poke said, addressing the mule, "I've long suspected you've got a sense of humor. If you have look down below, it's going to be rich. Shark Atwood don't know who Hardrock is, and Hardrock don't know Atwood."

It was Poke Tupper's boast he knew every one worth while in the North, and a lot of others who weren't worth their salt. As a young man, he had roamed the West with this same Hardrock Shipley. But both being youthful and full of fire, they fought often and eventually broke up. Hardrock had continued in various Western mining camps as a hard-rock miner. Poke had gone North. Believing that the years might have mellowed his old partner somewhat, he had written for Hardrock to join him. This, the little Irishman had done, bringing with him, a retired army mule, which the sour doughs had promptly named Tabasco.

Poke, Hardrock and Tabasco had

struck it rich almost immediately. The men did not look as if they could write a check for several hundred thousand dollars—and cash it. They continued to dress like miners, fight among themselves, look after their interests and grubstake any miner who struck them for a grubstake. Hardrock had become acquainted with many famous Northern characters. He knew “Flapjack” Meehan, “Tubby” Willows, “Dad” Simms and the Cold Deck gang; he had met Joe Hardy and his dog Tip, but he was meeting Shark Atwood for the first time.

Poke could see his partner bristle as he sensed the big man was violating the rule and figured to make him either step off into the muck or retreat. The fringe of red whiskers seemed to stand out stiffly. A swing of defiance came into his shoulders, and he brought the heels of his boots down with a bang. The pair met with a grunt and backed off.

“One side, you runt!” growled Atwood.

“I started across first,” Hardrock retorted, “and I aim to keep right along going!”

“Get off the walk, you runt!”

“I’m in the right. I started first. And there’s no man big enough to make me retreat!”

“You’re a liar. I started first!”

The next instant, Atwood grunted as Hardrock drove his gnarled fist into his abdomen. With his great paw, the big man cracked Hardrock under the chin, lifted him clear of the walk and knocked him back into the muck.

“You’ve got to hand it to Hardrock for trying, anyway,” Poke observed. He was amused at the situation, yet thoroughly angry.

It was so obviously unfair. He started down the hill with the intention of meeting Shark Atwood as he stepped from the bridge, but a wave of the hand from Hardrock ordered him back. Hardrock wanted no help in his fights.

As the determined little Irishman clawed and squirmed his way from the mire, he snarled at the other.

“You didn’t make me turn back anyway. Watch your step, you big cheese, I’ll get you for this. No, don’t turn pale around the gills, I won’t kill you. Killing a man is a dumb way of getting even. I’ll square this up, see. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Shark Atwood continued on his way. He had learned the most effective way of humiliating a man is to ignore him. He had brushed Hardrock aside as though he had been a mongrel pup.

Hardrock’s mission, whatever it was, was postponed until he could clean up. He fixed a dangerous eye on Poke as he neared the cabin.

“Say, son,” he said half threateningly, “did you see anything funny in what happened. Seems to me like there’s a smile around the edge of your face. If there is, you’d better wipe it off. Nothing’d suit me better than to bang my fists against human flesh right now.”

“I ain’t laughing—outside,” Poke replied.

“But you’re laughing inside. That’s all right as long as I can’t see it. But one peep or giggle out of you, and I’ll start in making you over. You never did suit me—exactly!” Hardrock calmed down somewhat. “Who’s the tough gent?”

“That’s no gent; that’s Shark Atwood, the trader!”

“Mmmmmmm!” Hardrock’s exclamation sounded like the whine of a high-speed motor. “So that’s Shark Atwood, eh? The likes of him can’t put a blot on my escutcheon and not pay for it.”

“Looks to me like you’d got more mud on your pants than you did on your escutcheon,” Poke observed.

Hardrock gave his partner a hard look, and his fists doubled up. “Are you getting fresh?” he demanded. “I think you are, but if you’re not you can

prove it by telling me what you think an escutcheon is!"

"A shirt, ain't it?"

"Blah!" Hardrock's fists relaxed. "In the old days families and tribes had shields, or escutcheons on which was painted things indicating what that particular camp did."

"I get you now. I suppose if we had one, it'd be the hind legs of a mule crossed. Just beneath, a gold pan and above a moose-hide poke representing me and a fringe of red whiskers representing you."

"Yeah, I suppose. Well, when anything disgraceful was done to that particular layout, it was a blot on their escutcheon and it had to be removed. Sometimes, there was bloodshed and plenty of it."

"You figure on removing the blot, eh?"

"You're darned tootin' I do. Now let's hear more of this lummox, Shark Atwood. All I know is the miners hate him."

"Sure they hate him. He's robbed them blind; started stampedes to creeks where there wasn't any gold just to unload stuff he couldn't sell. They've tried all kinds of tricks to get even with him, but none of them ever worked. He's slick—even if he is a shark."

"Did you ever try to get even?" Hardrock inquired sweetly. "No, that's a foolish question. You're like the rest; unless a man starts hitting you or shooting at you, you'll stand for it."

"He never shoved me into a swamp," Poke snapped pointedly. "If he had I——"

"Hasn't he got some weakness?" Hardrock inquired changing the trend of conversation. "Something or other a man could take advantage of?"

"The only weakness that man's got is his hoggish streak—and that's his strength. Do you remember the Samson Creek strike?" Poke asked.

"Yeah! Somebody salted the creek, didn't they?"

"Yes. No one could prove it, but we all figured Shark Atwood did it. He had a trading post up on Caribou River. They worked out the ground suddenly, and he was stuck with a stock of goods and no one to buy 'em. The stock was worth fifty thousand dollars at a fair figure, but it would cost more than that to take the stuff out.

"Somebody salted bars for several miles, and the stampede started. He moved his stuff forty miles from Caribou to Samson, and was ready for business a week after the boys arrived. He jacked up the price, sold his stuff for close to seventy-five thousand dollars and cleared out, leaving the boys to hold the sack. Even to this day, you can find cabins up there stocked with spoiled grub."

"So he's the bird that done that, eh?" Hardrock mused. "I'm beginning to get an idea how to take that cuss' measure!"

"Hah! Hah!" laughed Poke, intending by derision to stimulate his partner's best efforts. "You take Shark Atwood's measure. It'll take a better man than you!"

"I'll bet you a thousand dollars against a plug hat that I take him!" Hardrock exclaimed. In times of rage, he was apt to make reckless bets.

Poke Tupper opened a moose-hide poke, drew therefrom several smaller pokes containing matches, pipe and tobacco. It was this trick of carrying stuff in pokes that had won him his name. He filled and lighted the pipe. When it was drawing nicely, he observed. "I've given you a chance to cool off, Hardrock. Still want to make that bet?"

"Danged right I do!"

"Then, I'll take it! You're betting a thousand dollars against a plug hat."

"Yep!"

They shook on the deal.

Hardrock spent several days studying the habits of his man. Shark Atwood's business in Big Nugget was to pick up possible hints as to the next stampede. It made no difference to him whether there was gold or not. His business was to arrive with the stampede, skim the cream until other traders forced down the prices, then clear out and await the next stampede. If one did not come along in the course of several months or a year, he started one—always remaining under cover. The miners might suspect Atwood of circulating false reports, but could never prove it.

It was ten days after Hardrock was shoved into the mire before he outlined his plan to Poke. "It'd be pretty slick to start a stampede, get him there with a stock of goods, and leave him holding the sack, the same as he has done others so many times."

"Yes," Poke objected, "but how about the miners who would flock to the country and spend their time and money. They'd be stuck, too."

"That," Hardrock admitted, "is what's worrying me!"

And it continued to worry him for several weeks. Shark Atwood's continued presence in camp, his obvious contempt for the men who made his wealth possible, was a constant prod to Hardrock. He refused to admit defeat, however.

As so often happens, a solution came without warning, from an unexpected source and of a character he never dreamed of. By it he thought he saw a way of hooking Shark, and, what was more important, save those miners who stampeded from a loss of time and money. "They might even make a few hundred dollars, clear. Hey, Poke, I've got a way of removing the blot from my escutcheon. What do you think of it?"

"Shoot!" urged Poke. And Hardrock shot.

It must have sounded good to Poke

for he laughed several times and slapped his leg gleefully.

"And," said Hardrock in conclusion, "you round up the miners who need a little loose change while I clear out for the Lake Ingraham country. It's a tough trip and will take time, but, if it looks as good as it sounds, we'll have a lot of fun out of this."

The following day Hardrock and Tabasco set forth on a long mush. In due time, the mule found himself being sharpshod for a trip over Turnback Glacier—the toughest obstacle in the hard trail to the Lake Ingraham country. "Take it easy, Tabasco," Hardrock grumbled as they worked their way over the ice sheet. "No wonder people turn back. She's well named."

On the other side, Hardrock found himself in a new country. Lake Ingraham nestled like a precious jewel in a setting of rugged snow-capped mountains. He found countless beaver sign; the country was alive with game. A miner could eat moose until he tired of it, then change to ptarmigan or sheep. In season, there would be plenty of mallards. Of course, there were trout in the numerous streams emptying into the lake.

Ingraham Creek was the largest of these, and, in any country but Alaska, it would have been called a river. Hardrock opened a case of shells brought along for the occasion, loaded a double-barreled shotgun and blazed away at the different sand bars that looked as if they might contain gold. As each of these shells contained placer gold instead of shot, it was obvious that the little Irishman was engaged in the doubtful practice of salting a stream. He was very careful to retain the empty shells. These he secreted and buried from time to time.

That night Tabasco's load was lighter by many pounds, and Hardrock had but one shell left. This he fired at a convenient bar and observed the result.

"Guess I'll pan a little and see how it looks," he mused.

He panned the dirt where the nuggets had struck, and, when the job was finished, placer gold and black sand remained in the pan. He chuckled to himself and turned in.

"Better'n I expected," he informed Tabasco from his sleeping bag. "Yes, sir, you long-eared mocking bird, the situation was just made for this diabolical plot of ours. We're going to have a lot of fun out of this."

When Hardrock returned to Big Nugget, he discovered Shark Atwood had moved on to the next camp. At this place, the trader maintained a small post. There was no mining in the vicinity but a brisk fur trade with the trappers made the post profitable—after he had frightened out opposition.

"Suppose I'll have to chase after him, eh, Poke?"

"You can't hook a fish without going where it is," Poke answered. "I'm ready to start the stampede whenever you say the word."

"Give me a week," Hardrock said. "If I can't land him by that time, you win the thousand. But don't spend it until you win it. In the meantime, you might invest a few dollars in a plug hat."

Hardrock Shipley took a number of precautions as he neared Shark Atwood's trading post several days later. He had left the mule behind, and he went further and dyed his whiskers and hair black. It was a temporary dye that could be washed off without damaging the natural flaming red of his facial adornment.

Well satisfied with the result, he entered the establishment. "Want some grub," he announced. Then with the pardonable pride of the miner who has "struck it," Hardrock dropped a fat poke of dust on the counter.

Atwood's manner was that of a very large, hungry trout that has just ob-

served a fly. He moved from the shadows of the private office to the current of trade. "Hmmm!" Don't suppose you're saying where you got it?" He smiled and Hardrock was relieved. It was evident he did not recognize in this miner the man he had shoved into the slime.

"It ain't nothin' to get excited about," Hardrock said, "just a little better'n day's wages."

And that was all he said. It was sufficient.

"I believe," Atwood informed his man after Hardrock had departed with a small stock of grub, "it's time for a good healthy stampede. Just trail him and let me know where he goes. I'll be ready to freight in as soon as we know the conditions."

While the man, a trader named Skelton, was trailing Hardrock to the Lake Ingraham country, Shark Atwood prepared for the cruelest of all stampedes—the winter stampede. A part of this was the securing of gold which was similar to Hardrock's in color and stain. This would be displayed in Atwood's trading posts as "gold from the new placer strike."

Skelton was thorough in all he did. He trailed Hardrock to Ingraham Creek and saw the little Irishman cache his grub and commence the construction of a cabin. That indicated he expected to remain a while. He waited until the cabin was built, then took a number of photographs of the country, showing the cabin in the foreground.

All this was done, he believed, without Hardrock's knowledge. This accomplished, Skelton headed for home. His report, backed up by his photographs was brief. "The man went to Ingraham Creek, Atwood, built a cabin, and is prepared to stay a while."

"Good!" Atwood exclaimed. "These photographs will about settle the question. I'm ready. Got a pack train that

will start to-morrow. Give me a week's time, then spring the news. I'm taking in twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of grub, outside prices."

"If we can get 'em to go in without grub, that should be worth a hundred thousand dollars, eh?"

"About that!"

Neither Atwood or Skelton knew it, but Poke Tupper saw the pack train depart. He headed back to Big Nugget at top speed. Here he consulted his list of sour doughs. Each man on the list was a friend who had experienced more than his share of hard luck. One by one, he dropped a hint.

"Don't say a word to any one else, but get ready to take the trail. There's a chance for you to make a little money. Take about a month's grub. You can trap a little fur and pan a little. If the country looks good, you can send out for grub—or buy it there."

Three days later, Poke chanced to pass one of Atwood's stores. A gold pan containing an ounce of nuggets was set in a window. A sign read:

GOLD! NEW STRIKE!

The gold in the pan was recently received from the new strike on Ingraham Creek. Investigation by our representatives indicates this is another Klondike. Plenty of water and game! Ground enough for everybody! Provisions may be purchased at the Atwood post on Ingraham Creek. Travel light and get the best ground!

"That's the catch to make 'em leave their grub behind," Poke mused. "The old Atwood catch. Travel light, get there first and take your choice of the claims. What miner can resist that? He wouldn't be a miner if he didn't think he knew more about ground than any one else."

Poke did not delay, but hurried off to start his friends on the stampede. Personally, he did not take much grub, but there was enough mysterious equipment in packs to require several animals besides Tabasco.

Night found a healthy crowd of stampeders pushing through a light fall of snow. As yet the freeze-up was in the future. If they hurried, they might establish camp and perhaps pan a little gold before the first frost gripped the land.

A hee-haw of welcome from Tabasco informed Poke Tupper that Hardrock Shipley was coming toward them. The little Irishman was still wearing his black beard, but the mule knew his old master.

"I see you're here," Hardrock announced. "Got everything?"

"Sure have! How about the glacier? It looks tough!"

"It is tough," Hardrock answered, "but I've marked a safe course over it. I don't want anybody getting hurt in my efforts to pay off Shark Atwood." He grew serious. "I sure hope the boys understand I'm giving 'em value received. I haven't told a soul there was gold in this country. I just paid for grub with gold dust and figured to let Atwood's conscience be his guide."

"Exactly," Poke agreed, "and as he's got no conscience, he's being guided wrong."

"Atwood arrived a couple of days ago. They've got a townsite staked out and a log store up and ready for business. He went out and panned one of the bars I salted and got some fine gold."

"Did he stake any ground?" Poke inquired.

"No!"

"He never does! He plays safe and takes it from the miners. That kind never take a chance."

Hardrock led the way across. By the following day, the stampeders would be so thick that any one could cross by following the moving, human markers. As fast as one party moved on, there would be others in sight.

With the glacier behind Hardrock, Poke and the others made directly for

the cabin Hardrock had constructed. It was snug, warm—and permanent. "Why'd you build a permanent cabin?" Poke inquired.

"Wanted to make it look like I was here for good," Hardrock answered. "Now, until the show-down comes, maybe you'd better not be seen hanging around me. Somebody will see through these whiskers." He brushed the black fringe. "And we don't want to let the cat out of the bag too soon."

In spite of their efforts to beat the frost to the new strike, the miners lost. The temperature dropped with a crash a day after the first stampedeers arrived. They scattered along the creek and staked their claims, made plans to build cabins, cursed the fact Shark Atwood was the only trader, and speculated on what might be bed rock.

Three days later, rumors began to work their way along the stream. Some one had told some one else that the creek had been salted. It looked as if they were stuck and Shark Atwood was back of it. Others disputed this. "If Shark's back of this deal, boys," a miner said, "he's stuck. Most of us brought grub with us. We'll be home again before we're out. Shark can't make back his freight if we don't stay at least two months."

But rumors continued, and somebody called a miners' meeting. That somebody was Hardrock Shipley, but no one knew it. The night of the meeting, somebody dragged him to a food cache that was serving as a speaker's stand. "You're the cuss that started this. Now give us the low-down on this creek or there'll be a necktie party."

Hardrock was thankful the gloom prevented them from detecting his make-up. Flickering camp fires don't supply much light on a dark night. He faced them quietly. "I haven't told a soul there was gold here. Don't blame me! I found some and spent it with Shark Atwood for grub."

"Poke Tupper tipped me off," somebody said. The demand for Poke to expose his hand grew to a threatening roar.

Poke climbed to the platform his partner had just vacated. He held up his hand for silence. "What'd you boys be doing to-night at Big Nugget and other places?" He answered his own question. "You'd be setting around a fire spinning yarns or waiting for something to happen. Or you'd be cursing the fact you're broke. I said if you'd follow me, I'd give you a chance to clean up from six hundred to a thousand dollars in a month's time. That's more than most of you average a month year in and out!"

"That's more'n I've averaged a year in the thirty years I've been in Alaska," an old sour dough grumbled.

"Hardrock got a tip the authorities in Washington were to throw the Lake Ingraham game reserve open to trapping for thirty days. This was done on the game warden's recommendation and because it was pointed out the miner, who is the man that really opens up the country, needs fur to provide him with a grubstake. Each of you are entitled to trap twenty beaver. It's selling high outside, and that'll mean anywhere from six hundred to a thousand bucks for a month's work or less.

"This is done to help you boys out so that next summer you can prospect. Most of you'll shoot square, but those who don't, well, remember every pelt taken has to be stamped by a government inspector, and, if you've got more than the legal limit, the whole business will be confiscated. And that," said Poke with a wave of his hand, "is why I got you to go into this country. Most of you have a trap or two in your outfit, but those that haven't, see me. I've got nearly a pack train load, and you can have 'em at outside prices, plus the cost of bringing them in."

During Poke's speech, Hardrock had

worked his way to Shark Atwood's side. The expression on the man's face was worth all the trouble the little Irishman had gone to to partly square many accounts with this extortionist. It had cost so much to bring that stock of goods into the country that it was cheaper to leave the stuff than freight it out. He had counted on a number of things that experience in the past had told him he could count on. The first of these was frost.

His false stampedes were started in the fall so that the miners could not find what lay at bed rock until the break-up months later. None knew better than he the hope that was in each breast; none better than he that the lure of gold would hold them until the ground thawed and they could bed rock the creek. During the long winter period, they must eat. If they did not have the price to pay for their food, then they would trap. Atwood was always glad to take fur at his own price.

As Poke Tupper worked his way through the crowd, Shark Atwood caught his arm. "Tupper," he snarled, "I want to talk to you. Come over to the store."

"If that's a request, Atwood, I'll be glad to go along. If that's an order, you can go to the devil."

"It's a request," Atwood replied, though his manner was far from gracious.

Hardrock Shipley trailed along. This, after all, was his fight, not Poke's.

"What do you want?" Atwood demanded as Hardrock followed them into the log structure.

"Want to wash my face. You've got some hot water on the stove. Don't mind, do you?"

"No, wash your face! Be quick about it and get out!" As Hardrock turned to comply, Atwood scowled at Poke. "Why didn't you tell me this was a fur stampede not a gold stampede?"

"Why should I? You've spent years up here salting creeks and gouging the miners. Now go ahead and squeal! It'll be music to our ears. The boys will have their limit of fur within a month; many of them in a week from the looks of things. Most of 'em have grub enough. You've been gored by your own ox, so to speak. And it hurts. But don't give me credit for it. Give it to——"

Poke stopped. Atwood was not listening, but staring in amazement at the little Irishman. As he washed his face and head, his flaming glory of whiskers and hair was returning. Shark Atwood had never met Hardrock Shipley that he recalled and yet, somehow, his face was familiar.

"Yeah, it's me," said Hardrock cheerfully. "Me, Hardrock Shipley, the runt you pushed off in the muck that time. I wasn't big enough to beat you up, you hunk of cheese, but I figured I had a chance at your own game—a salted creek that would start a stampede. You swallowed the bait and were the first to stampede. I wiped a blot from my escutcheon, and I hope I taught you a lesson in politeness."

"You dirty little runt!" Shark Atwood advanced, and Hardrock picked up a stick of stove wood.

"Come on," Hardrock invited. "I can give you more if you want it!"

"You're not big enough!" Atwood swore. "I'll get you for this if it takes the rest of my life."

"It'll take just about that long, Atwood, now that I'm wise to the way you operate. I'd like to bet you a thousand dollars, even money, that I'll teach you another lesson in politeness within a year."

"I'll take it!"

While both were hot under the collar, the I O Us were made out and given to a miner. "First to put one over on the other wins," Hardrock scribbled on the bottom of his note. To

which Atwood wrote "O. K.," and signed it.

"Maybe," whispered Poke, "you're going too far. He's warned now, and he'll be on the lookout."

"Makes it all the more interesting. He's a brute for punishment, but I'll do my best to accommodate him."

"You won our bet, Hardrock! Come on over to camp, and I'll give you the plug hat. I brought it in with me. It's the first time, you might say, I admitted defeat before it was all settled."

That night Shark Atwood wrote a note to Skelton which he sent out by an Indian runner who got a bonus for making a record trip. The note read:

SKELTON: This is a fur stampede, and I'm stuck unless I can unload. Find somebody Hardrock Shipley is under obligations to and send him in. I want to sell my stuff to him.

ATWOOD.

Three weeks later, a new face appeared in camp. The man first called on Atwood and they talked at length. His name was Corrigan, and he came from the same place in Ireland as Hardrock's people. To such a man, Hardrock would give his shirt.

"But tell me," Corrigan insisted, "why you have to sell at such a price."

"I'm giving it to you at cost—just what the goods cost me outside. I'm in wrong with these men, and they won't buy stuff from me, understand? If I don't sell out, somebody will come in and I'll be stuck."

"Hm-m-m-m!" Corrigan considered. "I've only got a thousand dollars."

"Could you borrow the rest from Hardrock Shipley?" Atwood ventured.

"It's a good proposition. I might. I'll ask him."

"I wouldn't say what it was for. He's got it in for me, also. He might turn you down just to hurt me. Understand I'm not doing this because I have to. Know anything about the cost of bringing a stock of goods into this country?"

"No!"

"That's good," Atwood inwardly thought, then aloud he explained. "So you see you're being set up in business, and, in a month's time, can pay him back, be in the clear, and still have half the stock left."

Corrigan nodded. "I'll see Hardrock," he announced.

With no little nervousness, he approached the matter. "It's the matter of a loan, Hardrock," he explained. "I want to go into business for myself. I've looked into it, and I can pay you back in two months' time at the outside. Maybe sooner! Is my face good for it, and no questions asked?"

"One question. Where's this business located?"

"In Alaska, in a good mining camp. It's the only business of its kind. I'm getting in on the ground floor."

"What prices are you charging?"

"I'm making meself a profit, but I'm not robbing the boys. Or at least that's my idear if you'll trust me and advance me the loan!"

"It's yours on that Irish mug of yours, and no more questions asked," Hardrock replied.

"I'll give you a mortgage on the store to make it all regular," Corrigan promised.

"You don't need to unless it'll make you feel better," Hardrock said. "Here's my check. It's good anywhere in the North. I'll have Poke indorse it, too, and then it'll be as good as two government bonds."

An hour later, Poke Tupper came on the run. "Hardrock," he howled, "you're stuck. Shark Atwood has told all over camp that he's unloaded his store on your friend Corrigan, and you furnished the money."

"He did, eh? Let's have a look!"

As they emerged from the cabin they met Joe Hibler, the miner who was holding the I O Us. Atwood was with him. The trader was smiling in

triumph. A score of miners in the vicinity wanted to laugh, but could not enjoy a laugh when a man such as Atwood was the winner.

"Shipley," said Hibler, "Atwood claims he's put one over. He's unloaded the store onto a friend of yours and you put up the money. How about it?"

Miners were coming on the run. Most of them had trapped the limit of fur and were waiting to go out. A crowd surged around the building on which was freshly painted:

MICHAEL CORRIGAN, TRADER.

"Yeah," Hardrock admitted, "I advanced Corrigan the money and Atwood sold out. But what's the joke?"

"Why," Atwood spluttered, "in another week there won't be a man in camp to spend a dime."

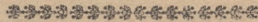
"I'm afraid you lose and I win," Hardrock returned. "When I was a lad at my mother's knee she said, 'Never be impolite to anybody, particularly your betters!' And I never have, and that's why I haven't pushed you in the mud several times when I had the

chance. She said something else, too. 'A man's a fool to try and beat another at his own game, but it is great sport if you succeed in doing it.' A great old lady was my mother.

"By the way, boys, don't be in too big a hurry to leave camp. When I was salting bars to start a grub stampede this way, I panned one or two of 'em. And—well—that gold I spent at your store, Atwood, wasn't gold I'd shot into the bars; it really was gold from Ingraham Creek, and I told the truth when I said you could make a little better than wages working it. You had better stay here until spring and see what's at bed rock. You'll find plenty of grub in Corrigan's store, and he'll take fur in trade." He paused, then added: "And the prices will be right, eh, Mike?"

"And they will that!" Mike answered.

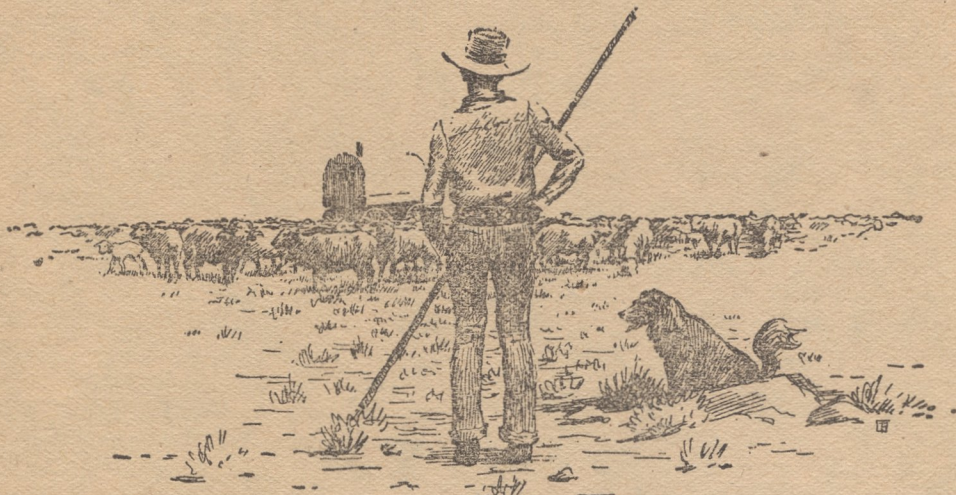
Hardrock extended his hand, and Hibler handed him the two I O Us. One he tore up, but Atwood's would be cashed, and the money sent to one of Hardrock Shipley's pet charities. "But the plug hat I'll keep to wear on Saint Patrick's Day!" he mused as he mounted Tabasco and started home.



A BISHOP OF THE PLAINS

A TRUE hero of romance was Dr. Ethelbert Talbot, whose death was recently reported—as picturesque a figure as ever decorated the pages of a story. For eleven years Bishop Talbot made his circuit by horseback and by stage, at a time when the Rocky Mountain region was regarded almost as a foreign field for the missionary. He preached to the men in the mining camps with such effectiveness that they begged him to stay and be their minister, and won the approbation of an earnest soul who, though not himself entirely sober, applauded roundly when the sins of gaming and card-playing, which did not happen to be among his own vices, were scored.

The bishop was a kindred soul to the men who formed his flock, he shared their spirit of adventure and was drawn even as they were by the life of the frontier. He loved his people of the plains and they responded. The pioneer spirit is an undying one and the memory of this valiant bishop is not likely to be forgotten.



Shootin' Wild

by *Harley P. Lathrop*

Author of "Cooped!" etc.



OWN Saltillo way in a grass-thatched adobe hut at the foot of a high mountain, Ramon Sedilla was born. His father, a short, squat man with a swart, mahogany complexion and burning black eyes, was a peon sheep-herder on the estate of one Don Garcia Lujan.

His own mother, Ramon did not at all remember. But he had a step-mother who was a tall, willowy built woman of a lighter cast. She had been a house *moza* under the supervision of the Señora Lujan until the elder Sedilla, after a short, tempestuous wooing, carried her off to keep his hut at the foot of the mountain.

According to the custom of the land, young Ramon, being of peon extraction, was likewise due, when age permitted, to become one of Don Garcia's vassals. By the time he was past twelve, Ramon could neither read nor write.

In fact, he had no idea there was any method of communication or expression save by the spoken word. And if you had told him the earth was round, he would have laughed you to scorn. For had he not been to the peak of the highest mountain in the range and seen with his own eyes the land on either side was as flat as a *tortilla!* Hola, yes!

To tell the unvarnished truth, Ramon did not care much for his stepmother. She was a querulous, complaining woman, always recounting the glory of Don Garcia's house and bemoaning the tiny hut that was their home. Once—Ramon could not have been more than ten at the time—he spoke up like a man when she was in one of her complaining moods:

"*Santos!*" he remarked with scorn. "Always you talk, talk, talk, like some scolding jay. If Don Garcia's house is so much to be preferred, why do you not return and let us men live in peace?"

Neither my father nor I would greatly care!"

"You are an unmannerly brat!" she retorted angrily. "Name of ten thousand saints, but I will make you eat those words!" This she strove to do with the aid of a large stick, but Ramon slipped away unscathed. Thereafter, there existed a marked coolness between them.

But his father! Ah, that was another matter! Now there was a man for you! A man who knew everything there was to be known about sheep! And strong! *Santos!* Once Ramon had seen him truss together two heavy ewes badly torn by a cougar and carry them home to doctor as easily as if they weighed no more than feathers. Moreover, he was a kindly man. He would call Ramon "my boy," and spend hours instructing him in the proper method of handling sheep. Ramon loved his father dearly.

Then one day, when Ramon was nearing fourteen, an armed force looted the *hacienda* of Don Garcia Lujan. While the main body was busy plundering, a small detachment came to the Sedilla hut. In command of this detachment was a tall ruffian with a pock-marked face and eyes that looked each in a different direction. He was called "Squint-eye."

Squint-eye gruffly interrogated Ramon's father regarding the whereabouts of other bands of Don Garcia's sheep besides the one he tended. The herder gave evasive replies for he did not know that this marked the beginning of a series of revolutions that would rend the country for a full decade. At length, Squint-eye's questions became more impatient, and the herder's replies more brusque. Even then it is doubtful if any serious consequences would have resulted had not Ramon's stepmother appeared at the door of the hut. As plainly as he could see the snow-clad peak of Hermanitas in the distance,

Ramon observed her smile invitingly at Squint-eye. Thereupon, Squint-eye cut the conversation short.

"Anyway, we'll take the sheep you are tending," he snapped brusquely. Ramon saw his stepmother smile provokingly at the officer a second time. "And your woman as well," Squint-eye added.

For a long time afterward, Ramon used to wonder why his father flew into such a sudden rage. He himself would have let the tall, light-complexioned woman go without protest, blessing the saints for being rid of her lamenting tongue. Evidently, though, his father viewed the matter in a different light, for, with a snarl, he reached toward the machete he carried at his belt. The moment his hand touched the hilt, Squint-eye casually shot him in his tracks.

Ramon had never seen a man killed before. Moreover, this was his father and the killing entirely unjustified. Giving way to an uncontrollable fit of rage, he snatched his father's machete, and attempted to exact repayment in kind from Squint-eye. But Squint-eye parried his random slashes with ease.

"Like father, like son!" He laughed. "Secure this young gamecock and lead him to camp!" he ordered his followers. "He will make a first-class servant with a bit of training."

So Squint-eye's men, after disarming Ramon, conducted him to the ruined *hacienda* of Don Garcia where the main force of revolutionists were encamped. Presently, when his fit of rage had turned to passive sullenness, they turned him loose.

All this took place in the forenoon, and mid-afternoon found Ramon piling loose rocks on his father's grave to discourage any stray varmints. He said a few Ave Marias, which was as far as his education in things religious had progressed, and thereafter stood for several minutes silently contemplating

the grass-thatched adobe hut that had been his home.

At last coming to a decision, he dragged within a huge pile of dried wood that had been accumulated for the family fire. This he touched off and stood watching until all that remained were the four uneven mud walls marking where the house once stood. An hour before sundown, he returned again to camp.

Now young Ramon possessed above all else a single-track mind. Simply because he had been thwarted in his initial attempt to claim vengeance for the murder of his father, did not mean that, thereafter, he would refrain from further endeavors. In fact, the resolve to exact a life for a life burned as strongly as ever. And being elemental to the last degree, Ramon went about the task in a perfectly straightforward manner.

After gaining camp, he located Squint-eye, which was no difficult task. He and the light-complexioned woman had set up housekeeping over a small fire near the center of activities. A short distance away, a ragged-breeched, high-hatted soldier was just finishing the cleaning of his rifle. Ramon approached him.

"Would the señor be kind enough to lend me the use of his gun?" he asked civilly.

"And for what, my boy?" queried "Big-hat." "Is it that you would go hunt the cougar in the mountains or the antelope on the plain?"

"I wish to kill a man," explained Ramon, his face perfectly stolid.

"And who, pray, may I ask?" inquired Big-hat, laughing aloud.

"He with the eyes that look each one in a different direction and whose face is pitted like the comb of honey," answered Ramon not bothering to explain the reason for his desire.

"Ho, ho!" Big-hat roared, then became thoughtful. He on different occa-

sions, had served in Squint-eye's command so had tasted the severity of his discipline and the heaviness of his hand. He didn't like him, he decided, and wouldn't object to seeing him killed. But this boy—

Presently beckoning Ramon to draw closer, he explained the mechanics of the rifle. It was an old German bolt action, and the manipulation was simple.

"Ayi!" Ramon exclaimed with satisfaction when at last he mastered its operation. "Many thanks. Amigo, I am greatly in your debt."

Ramon shot at Squint-eye ten paces away. The bullet missed him by feet, killing a burro grazing on the edge of camp. It was first proof that Ramon was born an execrable shot. Nor, it may be well to remark, did hundred upon hundred of rounds afterward fired in patient practice ever improve his marksmanship one iota. He was one of those occasional individuals who possess absolutely no eye for direction while looking down the barrel of a rifle.

But Squint-eye, unarmed at the time, and unaware of this deficiency, stood not on the order of his going. He left out of there on the swift dodge with young Ramon in hot pursuit. At length, when Ramon was finally apprehended by the camp guard, he had expended his full clip of bullets. Squint-eye was much winded from rapid running, and the camp was in an uproar.

The officer in charge of the guard hailed Ramon and his borrowed rifle in front of the commanding general for questioning. He told the reason for his rampage straightforwardly.

The general listened, his eyes twinkling. "*Santos*, what a bloodthirsty young whelp!" he exclaimed. "However, it is not good for a boy to seek to kill grown men. Come with me! I can find use for a boy about your size and age."

That night, after a period spent in close observation of Ramon, the gen-

eral sent Squint-eye away to join another force. Privately, he decided that the days of one of the pair were numbered providing both stayed in the same force, and, of the two, he preferred Ramon. So, with Squint-eye gone, Ramon settled down to the task of serving the general as servant and orderly.

Thereafter, several years passed, Ramon meantime graduating to the state of a real soldier. He was young, of course, but his youth was no detriment. It was size not age that counted, and he was by now a hulk of a lad, stolid, emotionless, with no more imagination than a rock. But his single-track mind was still functioning along the line of several years before. His chief aim and desire was to meet and dispose of the man who had killed his father.

Meantime, Squint-eye having transferred his allegiance, which was a very common occurrence among the rank and file of revolutionists, now fought opposite his old comrades. Ramon encountered him only once. And then, ten thousand devils, but bad luck still camped on his trail.

They met during a hot engagement on the outskirts of a village in lower Chihuahua. Ramon, as execrable a shot as ever, caught sight of his archenemy leading a platoon of the opposite side. He fired at him until his rifle was empty, then, with a snarl, casting it aside, resorted to his machete.

Forty yards, perhaps, separated the two at the time, and Ramon was half-way across the intervening space when a stray bullet from one of his own force, hitting him in the leg, laid him low. Thus did Squint-eye again escape.

After this, several years passed. Meantime, a firm hand had taken hold of his native country, and chaos began to be succeeded by a semblance of order. Unluckily, however, Ramon found himself on the wrong side of the fence, one of a small band of insurgents whom

the present powers decreed should be exterminated. So, one night, rather than continue on the dodge until fate in the form of a bullet ended his career, he, with several comrades, crossed the Rio Grande and found respite on the American side.

Now Ramon had developed into a big, heavily muscled, slow-moving fellow whose brain worked with the ponderous deliberation of the rest of his body. He took his time in arriving at a decision, but his mind once made up, he never deviated in the slightest from his objective.

The first day on the American side, Ramon spent hidden in the house of a compatriot and sympathizer. This man had lived long among the gringos and knew their ways. Ramon could see that at once.

"Listen, *cabrones*," he said the second night. Ramon did not relish being called a he-goat by such an insignificant-looking man, but he made allowance for the fact that he and his comrades had nearly eaten this *compadre* out of house and home. "Listen! These gringos have strange laws and many of them. One is that none may enter their country without a passport which none of you have. Therefore, it is best for you to scatter and make yourselves small. Else, before you know it, you will be seized and sent back whence you came, which would be unhealthy."

Much truth there was in this assertion, and Ramon knew it. For, during the last few months while every one was contemplating a refuge north of the river if worse came to worst, he had heard many discussions concerning this strange law.

"Now, listen," his countryman continued, "to the north and west of here lies another State. It is called New Mexico, and is inhabited largely by our countrymen who have lived there for generations. Once you gain there, you are safe. For none can tell from

your speech whether you are native born or not."

A full hour Ramon pondered this advice. He suspected the man might be lying, but, in the end, came to the conclusion it was of no great moment if he was. The farther away from the border, the less chance of being seized and sent back! A child could understand that. So Ramon the following night struck out north and west. Thus it came about that one mid-morning a few weeks later found him entering the tiny village of Casa Grande.

Ramon was growing charmed with this country. Although he did not know it, he had borne almost due west and was scarcely twenty miles north of the border at the present time. But he was among people who spoke his own language, while everything seemed peaceful and prosperous, much as he remembered existence before Squint-eye appeared and killed his father.

Ramon had eaten breakfast within a small mud house a few miles back, and now he sought the shade of a wooden awning over one of the town's few stores, and prepared to wait. He had decided that this was quite as good a place as any to make his home. And it was part of his philosophy to let opportunity hunt him instead of hunting opportunity. His life as a soldier had taught him this.

For an hour or more, nothing occurred save that quite the prettiest girl Ramon had ever seen entered the store, and, after making a few purchases, departed. She was a demure lass, and barely vouchsafed Ramon a single glance from under lowered lashes. But that one fleeting look caused Ramon's heart to begin a violent pounding. Then, an hour later Ramon's philosophy, concerning opportunity seeking him who waits its coming, was justified. For Dode Comstock, accompanied by his cook, old man Heymundo Gallegas, came riding down the single street.

Dode Comstock was a cowman born and bred and knew nothing else. That is to say, he had known nothing else until a short time previous. Now he was learning something about sheep. Dode didn't particularly relish the experience. But the bank to which he sometimes owed more than he cared to think about, had advised such a course.

"Only a fool carries all his eggs in one basket," the president had counseled. "Put in some sheep, Dode. Then in case the cattle market goes bad, the sheep may help you out."

Dode followed this advice, and now he had come to town in search of a herder to take the place of one recently quit.

Old Heymundo Gallegas anticipated little success as a result of the trip. Almost the entire male population of the village had departed some time since for the northern end of the State to labor in the beet fields. A thousand to one shot, they would find no one competent to care for a large band of sheep. But his family lived here so he welcomed the trip, anyway. He espied Ramon where he was roosting in the shade thinking ponderously of the señorita who just recently had glanced at him.

"Look thou, señor Dode," he said, indicating Ramon, "yonder sits a stranger to the town. Perhaps he knows something about tending sheeps."

"Go talk with him," said Dode. "Likely you can find out more than I can."

So the cook, detaching himself from his employer, rode over and addressed Ramon. For some few minutes, they conversed and then Heymundo returned to where Dode waited.

"He say he herd much sheep one time. But he not tell where. Me, I theenk he one of Villas' soldiers, seeking safety thees side of thee river. They no good hombres most of them. What say you?"

"Go hire him!" said Dode. "Those birds are all right. Ain't half the outfits in the country workin' 'em? Tell him the job's his if he wants it."

Thus it came about that, after a lapse of years, Ramon again returned to the job he loved best.

Several happy months rolled by. A score of miles separated Dode's cattle from his sheep. He visited his sheep camp weekly but lingered only long enough to take a count of numbers and compliment Ramon on the care he was bestowing. The balance of the time he spent with his cattle. Each pay day, he sent Ramon his wages by the cook, together with his monthly rations.

On one such occasion, Ramon detained old Heymundo: "Look you," he explained displaying his heavy belt, "I have much gold but am as ragged as a hail-torn cactus. Would you take my place for a day and night while I go to town and renew my clothes?"

Heymundo agreed readily enough. He rather liked this young man who was willing to sit quietly by and listen while his elders talked. You didn't often find that sort nowadays. Loose-tongued and overly anxious to air their own opinions, most of them were. Moreover, this would save him a long ride himself. He extracted his month's wages from his clothes.

"At the end of the street which contains the store you will find an adobe house built against a hill," he said. "'Tis where I live. Take you this money there, please. And tell my daughter Lola that I am well."

Ramon made a record trip into town, and it took him but a very short while to array himself like a Solomon. But, when it came to delivering old Heymundo's message, that consumed more time. For, oddly enough, the daughter proved to be the certain señorita who had caused his heart to pound most violently that first morning in town, and whose demure glance he had since then

recalled a thousand times while herding his sheep among the hills.

Their acquaintanceship ripened apace. From her father Lola had heard much that was good concerning this quiet, inarticulate young fellow. And, although women so far had played no part in Ramon's life, he felt entirely at ease in her presence.

"Me, I think I like to marry you," he told her in his blunt way when he was about to depart.

Womanlike, Lola was far from satisfied with such directness.

"Is it that thou desirest this more than anything else in all the world?" she asked hoping to fire Ramon's ardor.

"Nay," he answered after a period of thoughtful deliberation. "Nay, my greatest desire is to kill a certain man who hast wronged me grievously. Ayi, but that would give me pleasure!"

A sense of righteous pique provoked Lola's next question. "My, but thou art a great *bravo!*" she said sarcastically. "Who is this man thou wishest to kill?"

"His true name I do not know," Ramon told her. "But he has eyes that gaze each in a different direction, and a face that looks like a flat of mud pitted by a few stray raindrops. Squint-eye he is sometimes called."

The answer caused Lola's heart to take a sudden drop. She reflected a moment and resolved to hold her tongue. Assuredly, what this new suitor of hers did not know would never trouble him.

"Go thou now!" she commanded. "But come again when it can be arranged."

Ramon returned to camp resolving to make the opportunity as soon as possible. But this proved a difficult task for drought was slowly descending on this section.

Now this was a condition to be dreaded not only for itself but for the reason it forced the stockmen to move

their herds closer to the border where the only unfailing water was to be found. Thus were the cattle placed within easy-striking distance of possible raiders from below the line.

"You best start your sheep south," Dode told Ramon one day shortly after his visit to Casa Grande. "Take your time and don't hurry any faster than the lack of water compels. Directly, we'll be movin' the cattle down there, too. But they'll travel three miles to the sheep's one."

So, the next day, Ramon began drifting his band southward. He handled his charges so skillfully and with such judgment, taking advantage of every water hole, it elicited Dode's outspoken admiration.

"That Ramon's the best herder I ever saw," he remarked to Heymundo the cook. "I wish to goodness I could count on keeping him. I'd be tempted to stock heavier than ever with sheep."

"I thenk mebbe he stay," returned Heymundo wagging his head. The old cook had been home since Ramon's visit, and Lola had confided several things.

About the time Ramon arrived at the place that Dode had designated for him to make permanent camp, the cattle also arrived, two thousand head mostly aged steers.

The cattle were located on one side of a narrow valley, the sheep on the other and lower down. This valley bisected a wide sweep of mesa land where the stock grazed and contained living springs its entire length.

The distance to the border was barely five miles, the valley continuing straight on across the line. Dode, in fear of raiders, loose herded his cattle by day, bunching them a short distance up the valley from Ramon's camp at night. Well acquainted with the border, he was taking no chances. Also he furnished an extra man to assist Ramon with the sheep, although the danger of their

being driven off was almost negligible. Now this arrangement was cream on Ramon's tart. His assistant owned a horse which he was willing to lend. It was barely ten miles to Casa Grande, and his time was his own after the sheep were safely corralled for the night.

The first time he dropped into visit Lola she, while unaffectedly glad to see him, acted much perturbed. Her evident uneasiness aroused Ramon's masculine sense of jealousy.

"Is it that you expect a visit from some sweetheart?" he asked when Lola returned from the door where passing hoofbeats had called her. "Always at the slightest sound you seem as uneasy as the bird that hops from limb to limb."

"Nay!" Lola assured him earnestly. "Truly I have no sweetheart. It is because—because I wish to do something for my father and the Señor Dode. And listen, Ramon, *mio*. Promise me that, after this night, thou wilt not come here again until—until I send for thee."

But Ramon would give no such assurance. Just now his single-track mind was centered on securing this enticing young señorita for his very own, and he did not mean to let her forget he was in the running.

"Tell this caller whom you evidently expect that I am coming again soon," he rumbled. "And also warn him if he ventures near while I am here——" Ramon opened and closed his powerful hands suggestively.

He made two more visits on as many successive nights. The first was without incident, but the second bade fair to develop into a tragedy for this time another caller appeared. He came quietly on foot, and the first warning either of them received was when the door opened and a man slid into the room. Slow of perception at best, this time it took unusually long for Ramon's

brain to register the impression his eyes conveyed.

But when at last he sensed this cross-eyed man with the pock-marked face was no mere figment of fancy but a real flesh-and-blood being, he lurched to his feet with a bellow like a wounded bull. Lola was upon him, her arms about his neck before he had taken more than one stride. Meantime, over her shoulder, she called directions to Squint-eye—directions that in his great rage Ramon failed to comprehend. He could have freed himself forcibly, of course. But that was not Ramon's way. In spite of his size, he was as gentle as a woman. So, with as little harshness as possible, he removed her arms and set her down in a chair. By that time, however, Squint-eye had taken hasty departure.

It would have been only human had Ramon then turned on Lola and flayed her verbally for a philandering young miss. But such a thought never occurred to him. His one-track mind, leaving her, had jumped to its first great objective, and he was out of the house as fast as he could lumber.

"This *cabrone*, Squint-eye, always was a slippery cuss," Ramon decided after a vain search that took in the entire village. Never mind, though! Next time he would be prepared no matter what distance separated them.

With this idea in mind, instead of going back to his sheep, he headed straight for the cattle camp. He woke Dode Comstock shortly after midnight.

"It is because I wish a gun that I come to see you," he bluntly stated, advancing no excuse for the strangeness of the hour. "Also I desire much ammunition with which to load it."

"The mischief you say!" ejaculated Dode, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "A rifle and bullets, hey! What do you want it for, hombre?"

Thereupon, Ramon dissembled. He had learned considerable about gringo laws during the short time spent in this

country, enough to know that, when one man shot another, he generally got into hot water. Not that this made any difference to Ramon. He was resolved to get Squint-eye's scalp come what might. Still, if he tried to explain the whys and wherefores of his purpose to Dode, likely the señor would refuse the loan. So he took no chances.

"It is because of wolves, señor," he explained. "One wolf in particular harries my band greatly, and I desire to dispose of him."

Dode never questioned this assertion. Wolves were fairly plentiful throughout this section, and it was not unlikely some pack had taken to skulking in the vicinity of the sheep.

"Are you a good shot, amigo?" he asked crawling from his blankets.

That, Ramon reflected, was indeed a foolish question. For like many poor marksmen, he considered himself a born shot. Whatever his previous shortcomings might have been, they were easily traceable to the fault of a gun. In order to do a first-class job, one must have first-class tools. Ramon's confidence in his ability was supreme.

"Sure!" he answered with conviction. "Have I not spent many years fighting in the army? With a first-class gun, señor, I cannot miss."

In spite of his knowledge that, taken as a race, Mexicans are the poorest shots on earth, Dode was impressed. The exception only proved the rule, and every once in a while you ran across a peon who was a wizard with firearms. He crossed to a canvas-topped wagon and drew out a short-barreled .45-90 saddle gun.

"She's old, but up to a hundred and fifty yards she's as accurate as a die," he remarked passing Ramon the gun. "And here's a belt with a hundred rounds to go with it. I'll expect to see wolf hides all over camp next time I ride past."

"Seguro," said Ramon, and, with no

more words, made off into the darkness.

By the time he gained his own camp, it lacked possibly an hour till daybreak. He was in no mood for sleep. The fact that Squint-eye had likewise crossed the line, thus putting himself where he might at last exact vengeance for his father's murder, was a marvel that banished any desire for slumber. He stirred up the fire and sat beside it, fondling Dode's ancient gun.

Not more than thirty minutes elapsed after Ramon seated himself before he heard the pound of a pony's hoofs. Instinctively, he trained his rifle in the direction of approach, but hastily lowered it when Lola Gallegas rode within the circle of fire light. Her eyes were dilated with fear and anxiety.

"Tis well I saw thy fire gleam, Ramon," she said. "Else would I have ridden the mesa blindly till morning hunting thy camp."

Ramon hove to his feet, his slow-working brain grasping for the reason that might have called her hither. But before he could arrive at any conclusion or even open his mouth to question her, Lola set him aright.

"It is the one you call 'Squint-eye,'" she said hastily. "At daylight he with several companions mean to stampede Señor Dode's cattle and horses. The way lies down this valley and from thence on across the line. Last night, after you departed, Squint-eye came back and told me all."

Inarticulate, rumbling noises came from Ramon's throat. But incomprehensible as the sounds would have been to most, Lola translated them correctly.

"Silly!" she reproved, twining an arm about Ramon's neck. "Must I tell thee that thou art my own true sweetheart? Greatly have I fooled this beast, Squint-eye, because I suspected he had evil designs on the patron for whom both thee and my father work. So now that I have learned his schemes,

let us hasten to Señor Dode's camp and warn him that he may be ready to receive Squint-eye."

Possibly, under other conditions, Ramon would have followed just such a course. But not this time! For a period, he stood silent, his brain working with unwonted activity.

"You say this pig-whiskered *cabrone* plans to stampede the cattle and horses down this valley which lays in front of us?" he asked slowly.

"Most assuredly," answered Lola, evincing growing impatience. "Hasten, Ramon!"

He shook his head. As well as if he had evolved the plan himself, he knew exactly the course Squint-eye would pursue. For, during his years as renegade and revolutionist, he had engineered many such forays himself, and the method pursued was invariably the same. The horse herd would be first jumped, one rider taking the lead to regulate their pace. Following would come another rider and then the stampeding cattle, whooped on by the balance of the band. It was a time-tested method.

Invariably, these half wild border cattle would follow the lead of the galloping horse herd, thus being more easily kept within control. Moreover, with their horse herd driven off, the majority of the punchers would be left afoot and pursuit thereby blocked. Ramon could visualize it all as it was about to happen. Signs of coming dawn were showing in the east. He picked up his rifle.

"Come, little one," he said to Lola. "Together we will hand the rascal what he is not looking for. Santos, but the chance has been long in coming. But this time Squint-eye will go to join his ancestors."

There was so much assurance in Ramon's voice and so positive was his manner that Lola did not even think of questioning. What a brave man this

man of hers was after all! And the familiarity with which he handled the rifle. "Undoubtedly," she reflected, "he is a most famous shot."

Daybreak found them squatted at the edge of the valley where it narrowed bottlelike to a width not exceeding a hundred yards. Presently, from the vicinity of the cow camp, came the sound of shots punctuated by faint helloing, and, at length, the horse remuda bursting into view, came fanning down the valley. Fifty yards behind thundered the stampeding cattle.

Ramon, his rifle half trained, scanned the lead rider and shook his head. His next glance took in the figure sandwiched between the horses and cattle. This time he grunted in satisfaction, sighted long and carefully and fired twice in quick succession. On the heels of the shots, the horse catapulted over and over, flinging its rider from the saddle to the ground, where he lay outstretched face up. A moment afterward, he was engulfed in a wave of stampeding cattle.

Nor was this the only result. With no one behind to urge them on, the horse herd, angling to the left, broke for the mesa. The cattle following suit, scattered like a covey of flushed quail. This sudden disintegration of the herd, coupled with the shots Ramon kept pumping in their direction, caused the half dozen whooping raiders behind the herd suddenly to change their tactics. Veering in a direction away from Ramon, they fled south for Mexico and safety.

Possibly fifteen minutes later, Dode Comstock astride one of the mules angled up the valley and onto the mesa in pursuit of the horse herd. He stopped at Ramon's camp to make inquiry, for just what had happened to upset the raiders' plans was not yet entirely clear in his mind.

Ramon reenacted the scene for his benefit. "Here come this pig-whiskered

Squint-eye flying like he have wings. Bang! I shoot once. Bang! I shoot again! Down goes the horse, off goes Squint-eye! Both quite dead, señor, I assure you."

"Well, I'm sure in your debt," declared Dode heartily. "If there's any way I can repay it, just say so."

Here was Ramon's opportunity, and he struck while the iron was hot. "Me," he said, "I like to take the day off. Lola and I wish to find the padre and be married."

"Take it," said Dode quickly. "And if there's anything else——"

"The gun, señor. Much would I like to own it. Never have I shot so true with any other."

"Take that, too," said Dode again. "A good shot deserves a good gun!" He dropped a few more words of praise, then spurred off after the horses.

Ramon and Lola were some distance on their way to town when Dode, driving the remuda before him, came up the valley on his way to camp. Curiosity impelled him to dismount and examine both Squint-eye's body and that of his horse. Presently, he whistled long and loud. Neither one bore a single bullet mark. With no trouble, he visualized what had taken place. Squint-eye's horse had stepped in a hole, breaking a leg, the resulting fall stunning both horse and rider. The hoofs of the stampeding herd had finished them.

With a faint grin, Dode let his eyes stray toward the opposite side of the valley. There bullet-torn trunks of two small mesquite trees were plainly to be seen. Dode lined them up with the two bodies.

"Some shootin'!" he murmured presently. "Some shootin'! He must have missed both horse and rider by at least fifty feet."

But at that, although his employer would never know it, this was the closest Ramon had ever come to hitting what he aimed at.

At the End of the Trail

By Hugh V. Haddock

AT the end of the trail through the ranges,
Past the walls of the sun-painted stone,
Past the crest of that peak on the sky line,
Lies the land of the Dim Unknown.
Oft I listen with ears that are eager
To catch, through the city's dull roar,
The musical dash of its waters,
As they beat on the pebble-strewn shore.

For the land of the swift-flowing water—
That wild land of the water that's white—
Sends its call through the distance between us,
As I heard it there, once, in the night;
And I hear oft the roar of the rapids,
As the water is dashed into spray
On the boulders that hinder its rushing,
Though a dozen days' journey away.

For my heart holds the sound of its music
To refresh me when other things fail,
When the days have been weary and toilsome,
And I long for the wild, for the trail.
And I see oftentimes in my musings,
The rainbows and bridges of mist,
As they float in the sunlight of morning,
Like some beauty that cannot exist.

And the call of that valley comes to me,
As it came to me once in the night,
To come out past the ridge on the sky line,
To the land of the water that's white;
And I cannot resist its attraction,
For my heart would be out there, alone,
At the end of that trail through the ranges,
In the land of the Dim Unknown.





Old Black Sin

by *Austin Hall*

Author of "The Talking Dog," etc.



ME? I'm the cook. I've been a cookie so long that there ain't a waddie livin' who don't remember me as a vendor of biscuits. It's only me who kin go back tuh the day when I was a real honest-to-gosh top hand and as pretty a rider as ever straddled buckskin. Yeah! But yuh never know w'at's a-going tuh happen, I gettin' mine thirty years ago in the Texas Panhandle—a broken leg under a wall-eyed mustang what ought tuh had better sense. They set that leg in a wind-storm, and I guess they didn't allow for the atmospheric pressure, because it came out crooked, and I've been gimpy ever since. Well, I had tuh eat, and I had tuh have chow, and the only way I could get it was tuh go tuh cookin'. I've been at it ever since. It ain't a proud occupation, and you're just looked at; and if you're like me, it kinda brings a hot layer of blood up under your collar; also, it gives yuh

a soft sort of feeling for them that's down and out. Which is mebbe the reason I took a liking tuh that blanket stiff.

The blanket stiff, now—— But I'm getting ahead of my story.

It was over on the old Two Y, Billy Yerrington's crack horse ranch out there where the sun goes down. And if yuh know horses which is, yuh'll recognize the Two Y brand without my tellin' yuh. That year Bill had bred and reared the sweetest herd he had ever owned; and, on top of that, had imported this here six-thousand-dollar stallion from somewhere in Montana—a four-legged hunk of velvety beauty called Black Sin, who was everything that his name implied. Yeah! And yuh could no more ride that big baby than yuh could fashion yerself onto a flash of lightning. Sin! Say, that horse was dynamite!

But what a horse! He was so perfect and graceful, he just made your heart water. Yeah, and he had a pedi-

gree, too—a paper with a list of ancestors which was all dukes and high muckymucks of ridin' stock, surtopped with the disposition of an opera star!

The rest came when "Curley" Powers, the foreman, heads out on a trip tuh Los Angeles, goes tuh one of them movie lots, rescues a pretty actress, and loses his head. And I guess he kinda likes having that pretty blonde draping her pink arms about his neck, because he writes back immediate that "This is the life fer me, and if any of yuh horse wrestlers wants a job, just come out here and tie up tuh my rope." Also he sends a picture of the actress, and that settles it. They ain't no one left but me and Bill Yerrington, and I might have gone too if it hadn't been fer my gimp leg.

But that ain't nothing yet about the blanket stiff, is it? Well, just wait a minute, because these are just the settings that go with the picture.

As I said, it left Bill Yerrington and me alone, and yuh can't run a thousand head of horses with just one man and a cook. Bill Yerrington heads intuh town and is gone four days, coming back at last with a crew and a foreman—a long, lean individual with one eye asquint and the tops of his ears clipped off. I didn't like them ears, and neither did Bill; but the fellow was the only man in sight, and so why the kicking? Furthermore, he seemed tuh know all about horses, and starts in right where Curley Powers left off. The very next day, this here "Lop-ear" Watson runs the herd of two-year-olds down to the ten-mile pasture; after that, he goes tuh bustin' colts, and winds up with old Black Sin out in the saddlin' chute. Yeah! That's where he winds up. That's where they all do. First thing, one of the crew is draped over the corral fence. This here Lop-ear Watson takes his turn, but he ain't double-jointed, and he lands on his head.

Course, I ain't seen this at close hand, 'cause I'm watchin' from the cookhouse; but I hear a lot when they come in tuh chow. Lop-ear Watson is giving them the up-and-up on his merits as a horseman, and what he doesn't know ain't never been thought of. I get an additional view of his physiognomy, which I don't like; those little black eyes seeming vicious and scheming. Also, when they talk of horses, they's too much conversation about values, which is the mark of a horse thief; because who gives a darn about values when he's admirin' a bit of horseflesh?

Yeah! And I'm here tuh tell yuh that I know a horseman; I've seen 'em all the way from the Panhandle tuh old Monterey, and they're all alike. They's something crooked about this bunch, and I tell Bill Yerrington just what it is. But I can't get it down his neck. That whole crew is crooked, and I know it, and I begin tuh get additional information one day out by the corral. They's a board busted there, and I'm after kindling, when I hear this Lop-ear talking.

"Yuh bet," he's saying tuh one of that gang of his, "the whole thing's a cinch. When we signed up with the Two Y, we sure made our stake. Nothin' but an old man and a gimpy cook. That stallion, fer instance, is worth six thousand——"

But just then I see 'em edging around the corner, and I've heard enough; and so, after dinner, I hunt up Bill Yerrington, but he won't let me get started. What's the use of tryin' tuh crowd somethin' into an old fool's think-cap? It can't be done, and I let it go at that. It's his herd and not mine. I'm just a cook and an old woman, eh? Well, but it can't stop me from thinkin'; and while I'm a-doin' that, along comes this here blanket stiff.

Mind yuh, it's out on the old Two

Y, and that ain't no place fer a pedestrian. This here pilgrim looms out of the plain like a shoe button, traveling so slow that he just seems tuh stay with the distance, until all of sudden he swings out of the sage flat and trudges in toward the barns and the corrals; and then I see that he's got a roll of blankets, and is wabbling like he's got sore feet, and is lookin' fer a place tuh sit down. It's dinnertime, and I'm toting a mess of beans in tuh the crew, and so I lose sight of him; but when I look out again, there he is a-streaking it intuh the barn where Black Sin has his stall. He disappears, and the next minute he reappears again. Only—it's something like a mountain blowing up. They's a noise like a barn bustin' down, and I see this here pilgrim going out through the side, with three broken planks keeping him company and that roll of blankets twistin' around like a pinwheel. But it's a fortunate landing, because that bedding falls right, and this here stranger is draped in fashion fer a funeral. Bill Yerrington leaps up from the table and yells: "What the——!" And then the whole of us goes out tuh look over the remains.

Well, I'm tellin' yuh, right now, that that boy was handsome. But he was sick, awful sick—looked like he'd swallowed a bucket of doorknobs—yuh get that way, yuh know, when your wind's gone, and your lungs are plumb flattened—and he's twistin' his legs up tuh his ears, and his hands are reaching; and just then he gets a breath and pulls in some atmosphere, which he keeps in only long enough tuh frame the words:

"Huh!" he gasps. "Why, the son of a gun! Yuh watch me ride that horse!"

Game! I see right there that there ain't no one gamer than this here kid. He ain't a day more than twenty-two, and his twisty yellow hair is hanging

around his forehead, too fair to be anything but a tenderfoot and a complete pilgrim. And, on top of that, what was he a-doing on foot? It ain't natural, that's all! And him wantin' tuh ride that stallion!

Really, yuh couldn't blame any one fer laughing; this here Lop-ear Watson claps his side like he was readin' from the funny paper and goes intuh hysterics. Yeah! But me and Bill Yerrington pulls the kid up and heads him in tuh the table. After dinner, we gather the information that he had just landed in the West and is lookin' fer a job. Wanted somethin' tuh ride, and so he had come tuh a horse ranch. He'd do anything fer a start, even help the cook. Yeah! And Bill Yerrington is one of these here self-made gents who believes in beginning at the bottom. The kid's hired, and I get a swamper.

That's how it started. But it ain't more than a thousand seconds before I begin tuh feel that this here fairy stranger is something else than a pilgrim. My leg might have been gimped in the Panhandle, but my intuition wasn't cracked a bit. I know a man when I see one. This boy doesn't open his mouth, and he doesn't need tuh. When he has his belly full and gets a smoke, he steers himself out tuh the dishes and begins washin' 'em—which is displayin' sense fer a brand-new swamper! After that, he lugs hissself up tuh the tater sack and begins peelin'. The men are gone, and Lop-ear Watson and Bill Yerrington are riding down tuh the five-mile pasture. They ain't no one but him and me. It ain't no secret, and it ain't no boasting when he begins talking:

"This here stallion in the barn," he asks, "he must be a humdinger, eh? Ain't he never been rode?"

That kid has a simple way of speakin'; so much so that I'm completely deceived.

"Rode?" I says. "Say, kid," I answers, "they ain't nothin' but the wind ever been on that black shadow's back. I'll say he's a humdinger—sired by the devil and foaled out of the whirlwind. That's him!"

You'd 'a' thought that that would have scared the kid; but it didn't. He keeps peelin' them spuds and lookin' through the door at the blue line where the mountains join the sky. Finally, the taters is all scalped and he gets up.

"I'm a-thinkin' that mebbe I'd like tuh take a look at that stallion again," he announces. "I allus did like them kind of horses."

Now, they ain't a soul around; so I take a notion tuh go with him. Yeah! And when we gets tuh the barn, this here kid slips up alongside of Black Sin. They's somethin' spooky about it this time, which I can't account for. That horse stops sudden as though he had seen a ghost; yuh'd 'a' thought they was talkin'! But this blanket stiff doesn't say a word. Mebbe that's the way horse language goes. Yuh just stand up and look, and somethin' passes between yuh.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" the kid says tuh me at last. "He's sure a beauty, ain't he? They ain't a horse in America like him; and I said I was a-goin' tuh ride him, didn't I?"

Well, I didn't want tuh see no one killed; but, as I say, this here blanket stiff has a persuadin' way. I don't know why, but when he wants a thing, he seems tuh get it. I puts up my hand in protest; but, before I knows it, I'm agreein' tuh help him get Black Sin intuh the saddlin' chute, which ain't such a difficult job inasmuch as they's a door runnin' intuh it straight from the box stall. Mind you, they ain't a soul around! That black shadow hits out, and before yuh know it, me and this boy has hunted up a saddle. Yeah! Like two ornery kids. That boy ain't got a chance in the

world tuh ride him; but, somehow, he makes me take a hand in his game. And I know mighty well that when Bill Yerrington comes back, they's a-goin' tuh be a dead cook. Yeah! I said as how the kid didn't know nothin' about horses; but the minute he picks up that saddle I learns better. He's quicker than a cat, and as practiced as a cowhand. Before I know it, he's ready with the signal, and I lets her go.

And then they's action! I never seen a man nor a horse get off so fast. Did yuh ever see a small boy take a cannon cracker on the Fourth of July, light it, and throw it intuh the air tuh go off? Well, then yuh've got a picture of what followed. That there Black Sin horse just left the general whereabouts of the earth and ascended until he got at explodin' distance, and then everything happened at once. Yuh just couldn't see them two for what was goin' on—a sort of blur that was a combination of every line of bucking and contortion that was ever thought of. And it wasn't no drawn battle, neither. That kid is riding like a bird sitting on top of a cloud, meeting everything that that horse has got, and then some. While I'm standing with my mouth open, he rips off his hat and lets out a whoop. Then, dog-gone if he don't lean down and yank the bridle from old Sin! Yeah! I'm tellin' the truth. The kid has that stallion licked. And when he gets through, that horse is plumb tickled tuh death. I thought he'd be broken-hearted, but he wasn't. The kid leaps down, runs his hand along the big fellow's neck, and kisses him. After that, he leads him intuh the stall, hunts up a curry comb, and grooms him down. It ain't until after it's all done that he remembers me.

"Yeh," he says kinda bashful, "I kin ride just a little bit when I care tuh. But yuh don't want tuh tell this here

Bill Yerrington anything about it. I've got reasons fer startin' on this ranch at the bottom. But I'll tell yuh, cooky, that I don't like this here Lop-ear Watson. Howsomever, I ain't sayin' no more, because it's a smart dog who keeps his bark shut."

Well, after an afternoon of that sort, yuh'll admit that I have reasons for believing I have a remarkable swamper. I'm proud all over on account of him; and I'm still prouder that evening at the supper table. I've turned the blanket stiff intuh a waiter, and he's packing the doughgogs intuh that crew of renegades, and they're chewin' and having a heap of fun with the kid. A blanket stiff ain't supposed tuh have no rights, and when he's a tenderfoot on top of it, the limit ain't nothin' short of torture. They're kiddin' him about when he's a-goin' tuh ride the stallion, and all that sort of thing, and I'm laughin' up my sleeve. And that kid don't say a thing until one of them blackbirds gets up; he's a big fellow, who could pack off a cow, and he figgers, I guess, tuh lift the kid off his feet; so he walks up beside him and lets loose with a wild swing when the boy ain't lookin'. Only—that's where he is awfully mistook. They's something about this kid that's next door tuh spooky; he just seems tuh sense that blow a-coming behind him, shifts, and lets loose with his right. That big fellow goes down like an ox, and trouble breaks loose. This here Lop-ear Watson reaches fer his gun, but is brought up sudden by Bill Yerrington's brace of .45s. Old Bill is sayin' that which has hatched in his mind!

"No, yuh don't, Watson," he bel-lows, standing up at the end of the table. "I seen it all. And, by gad, the first man who offers tuh touch that kid gets bored! I'm boss of this here ranch until further notice."

And in face of arguments like that, this here Lop-ear ain't got a thing tuh

do but turn gentleman; but from that minute on, he begins tuh hate the kid. And he starts by arguing that he won't stand fer no pilgrim's a-cluttering up the dooryard. But Bill has got a notion by this time and allows that he still owns some of the Two Y. Jus'the same, he keeps him away from the big fellow, and I notice a few days later that he promotes the kid intuh goin' tuh town for the mail with the team and the buckboard. I get a smile at the harness stuff because—well, I know just how that boy kin ride. And when he ain't a-runnin' errands, the kid is helpin' me with the biscuits. It's a great secret with me, and I'm a-wonderin' what his game is, especially when I watch him with that stallion, Sin. Every day, the boy is out in the stable, and each time that horse falls down for his stuff; they ain't nothin' tuh equal it but love. Yuh wouldn't believe it!

Well, it wears along fer a couple of weeks, and comes Fourth of July. They's a he-man celebration in town, and the whole outfit is aiming tuh attend the doings. Bill Yerrington digs up a pay day, and every man is howling tuh go. The morning breaks clear, and the lop-eared one and the rest of the blackbirds escort the big boss intuh the works. That leaves the kid and me tuh take the buckboard. But I notices something just as soon as I get tuh the barn. The kid has a couple of saddle horses in the harness and is cooing them intuh behavin' themselves. It ain't the proper thing, I says—the boss won't like it—but he won't admit a word. Besides, he's busy with them two ponies who ain't neither of them ever been hooked up tuh a neck yoke before; he just moves over on the seat and I see a .45 laying beside him. I notice that it has several notches, and I have tuh ask.

"Yeh," he answers, "them notches are just what they look. They repre-

sent dead men. That gun used tuh belong tuh a killer."

And when I asks him about the bad man, he grunts again.

"He's dead," he says. And that closes the conversation. Yuh'll have tuh agree that this blond baby is a real puzzle. Then I notice a blanket slipping off something back of us—a pair of saddles—and I get tuh thinkin' again.

Anyway, when we reach the town, the celebration is a-booming; cowboys is racing up and down the street, and the place is runnin' wide. We spots the Two Y horses over by the Desert Queen and ride up tuh the rear. When the team is hitched carefully, the kid shuffles intuh the saloon. It's a hot day, and the boys is breaking the stuff out of their pockets tuh get at the liquids. Over near the end of the bar, is this here Lop-ear Watson and old Bill Yerrington, sympathizing and telling each other that they're the best and sweetest friends that ever was; but I see, immediate, that it's old Bill who has got the sheets a-flying, and that the lop-eared one is only sipping from the bottom of his glass. Yeah! And as soon as me and the kid steps intuh the place, our friend the lop-ear comes up. It looks like a thunderstorm in Denmark fer a minute; until the kid drives away the clouds with one of them smiles and a five-spot on the bar. And I guess, too, that old Lop-ear is too busy with Bill Yerrington. I see the boss wabbling around and wiggling a thick tongue, trying tuh find his accent. Finally, I see Lop-ear escortin' him out of the place. The other blackbirds follow, and pretty soon they are headin' fer the hitching rack; one by one they slip intuh the saddle, and start ridin' down the street. They're the soberest men in town; and it sure looks funny; but not near as strange as the kid sitting there on a keg. He waits until Watson, traveling

alone, comes out from the hotel, and then he goes back tuh the bar. Then this here Lop-ear rides down the street. When he is out of sight, the kid pulls a piece of paper from his pocket and says tuh yours truly:

"Go back tuh the buckboard and wait fer me. I'm goin' tuh see the boss."

And I watch him runnin' up tuh the hotel. A minute later he is coming back, walkin' easy; and he ain't in none too big a hurry. He calls me intuh the bar and asks me tuh partake of a red soddy. It ain't overstrong, but it's cool-in', and a heap better than straight alkali. The kid keeps his eye on the clock and whistles a tune. Funny, wasn't it? Anyway, yuh'd 'a' thought so if yuh was me. Fnally, the hands on the clock get around tuh a corner, and the kid straightens up; he motions me with his thumb and begins tuh walk fer the door, slipping around the building and back tuh where them saddle horses is pawing at that buckboard. By that time, he's already got the harness off, and is slinging on the leather, talkin' all the while.

"Yeh!" he says, yanking on the cinch. "I brought two of 'em. One fer you, cooky, and one fer me. Hop in that boat and wrap your gimp leg around the horn like a snake, because yuh're a-going tuh ride. And mebbe yuh'll get a chance tuh shoot."

And, with that, he throws me a belt and a brace of .45s. And I'm here tuh tell yuh that this old man begins tuh perk up. I ain't a cook no more; the feel of the leather under me is like a tonic, and them .45s make me think of the Panhandle. Yeah! It's sure a glorious Fourth. The next thing I know, we're riding out into the desert and heading fer the old Two Y. Straight tuh the corrals we go, coming up tuh the stall where Black Sin has allus been kept; but it's empty, and there ain't no sign of no horse. The kid takes a sigh of relief and hops in-

tuh the saddle again. As we start off toward the hills, he begins again.

"Yeah!" he's saying. "Well, this here Lop-ear Watson has pulled it off slick. Hey! He's stealing the greatest herd in the State; and it's been so easy that I'll bet he's getting plumb careless. And he's got old Sin. Yeah! He'll run 'em down tuh the ten-mile pasture and turn 'em intuh this Wild Horse opening. We gotta beat him tuh it. Cough up with the geography, cooky, and show me a short cut."

And that's just exactly what I kin do. I know that country like a book. They's a path straight over the mountain that cuts off eight miles; we ride tuh the dip in a long saddleback, climb over the summit, and skid down the other side. We're an hour ahead of the herd. The kid lights a cigarette and waits; and he's so cool yuh'd think he was waiting fer his grandma. We wait twenty minutes—a half hour; and then we hear the rumble of the herd. The kid slings a rein and gets ready tuh ride out of the cove; and just then here comes a black shadow that sweeps along the ground like the king of horses. It's Black Sin, the stallion—proud as an emperor, leading the herd. But when he sees the kid and hears a whistle, he answers with a loud neigh. The kid begins riding, and I do what I kin tuh keep up. And it ain't no easy job, I tell yuh. There's something between that horse and the boy that I can't understand, and they begin tuh come together, side by side, with the kid a-steering him intuh a little gulch. They're out beyond the rest, and the kid knows his business. I see him leap, grab the big fellow by the nose, and begin business. I wouldn't 'a' believed it, if I hadn't seen it. It's the fastest change I ever saw. That saddle is yanked on again quicker than I could take off my coat. And the kid is on the stallion.

Say, that kid was a strategist! And

they ain't nothin' like surprise tuh get your enemy. He herds the horses on, and keeps edging in for the drivers; until finally up comes one of the blackbirds what is stealing the herd. They ain't nothin' tuh it. He sees the kid on the stallion, and lets out a yell and pulls his gun. But the boy rolls h'm from the saddle. I catch the next one myself—and it makes me feel good, seein' as how it's the first chance I've had at the wild life since them days in the Panhandle. Yeah! And that was two of them. The next one sees old Sin with that kid on his back and turns up a side gulch. We missed him, and that was three. But we wasn't so lucky with the rest. Besides that, this here Lop-ear Watson refused tuh be knocked over by no surprise; and so he gets knocked over by something else. I'm riding fast, and I account fer the first rider, and the second. That's a good average fer an old man, ain't it—especially a cook? But the kid is heading fer Lop-ear Watson; he's riding straight, and this stallion is mad all over. I see the blackbirds' guns a-belching; but the kid's are going off too, and they are beating him to it. Lop-ear's guns spin out of his hands, and the next second the curly-haired blanket stiff is pulling the rustler from the saddle. And that's the first and only ride that Lop-ear ever got on old Sin. But even at that, he's a pretty sick bandit and almost totally unconscious.

We're heading out of the Wild Horse opening toward the lower ranch, when we see a number of horsemen coming across the plain. One of them is Sheriff Tom Boole, and another is Bill Yerrington; they spot the herd and us riders and come up with a rush. Bill is still a little blear-eyed and weary from that funny stuff that Lop-ear got him tuh drink; but when he sees the boy on the stallion, he lets out a whoop.

"Why, yuh ornery little son of a gun!" he yells, pullin' up tuh a wild stop. "Why didn't yuh tell us yuh was the 'Ride'm Kid'? Yuh—say——"

But the kid ain't doin' nothing but smiling; he's still got that soft speech he's had ever since he come tuh the ranch.

"Huh!" he says. "I just thought I'd let yuh find it out, Bill. That's all. So yuh got my letter, eh? Yuh must have, or else yuh wouldn't be here."

The crowd has gathered, and old Bill Yerrington is waving a paper. He rides over and shoves it under my nose.

"Got it!" he says. "Say, cooky, read this thing, and see what it says. This here young rascal has been deceiving us all the while. Yeah! He's a crook, that's what he is. Stole my letter, he did, and then when I go tuh sleep up in the hotel, he shoves it in on my chest with a postscript of his own about how this here Lop-ear has stolen the herd and for me not tuh worry. Yeah! That's the kind of a criminal he is. And he came in like a blanket stiff, he did. But mebbe he had reasons!"

But I'm reading the letter. The postscript Bill had mentioned had been written on the outside of the envelope, which showed that, while the kid might have taken the letter, he hadn't interfered with Uncle Sam's mail. It says:

DEAR BILL: I've just received information that the Ride'm Kid is heading out into your country. You will remember, I told you that this fellow is the only man who ever rode old Sin. That stallion is a one-man horse, and you'll never get another rider on his back—never. But if the kid comes your way, just watch him ride. And I forgot to tell you who this kid is. Well, he's about the greatest range detective we have. The Cattlemen's Association keeps him busy most of the time; and just now he's after a notorious rustler whose mark is a pair of clipped ears. If you see that fellow, you'll know him, too. As for the kid, you'll have to be pretty wise to spot him. He may come upon you in any

disguise. Only—if he comes—just watch him ride that stallion. Yours and regards,

TOM ANDERSON.

Bar B.

Well, that's about all. It's all over but the talking. I can't hear nothing but old Bill Yerrington.

"Yeah," he's a-saying, "this here kid fooled me completely. He happened tuh walk in on that stallion by surprise, and the big fellow treated him like he did everybody else. And so yuh rode him that very same day, eh? Yuh and the cook went out, yuh say? And I wasn't in on the works! But why didn't yuh tell me? I'd 'a' fired the whole gang right there. And——"

And then this here little blanket stiff gives his reason.

"Sure!" he says, with that soft smile of his. "Sure yuh would. Yuh'd 'a' fired them, and then I wouldn't 'a' caught no rustlers. And that happens tuh be my business. I didn't want tuh get nobody on suspicion. I wanted 'em in the act. Yeah! And so—well, I wanted tuh get 'em myself. And I guess I did—and before a witness. The cooky here had it coming. He stood by me from the start, and I happen tuh know a man when I see one. Yuh had ought tuh see him ride with that gimp leg of his! Bill, he was the only man on the ranch. Yeh! And—well, it's just another job, Mr. Yerrington—just another job. And I'm glad it's finished. Sure! And I'm proud of the chance tuh ride old Sin again. He's a good old horse, if yuh only know how tuh take him."

Am I proud? I'll say! We take the live rustlers in, and hunt up the dead ones. The kid left the day after, I guess tuh hunt up some more crooks. And Bill Yerrington ain't got through talking yet. It tickles him tuh think about how he took the greatest rider in the whole wide universe fer a poor blanket stiff.

The Round-up

WELL, folks, here we are again. Another week's slipped into the past, and you are the proud owners of a brand-new WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. We hope you like it, think it better than last week's number, that you consider it, in fact, the best WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE you've ever read. Honest Injun, whether we succeed or not, we do our everlasting, level best to make every number better than the one that went before. Old-timers among you will remember that we made this promise to you in the first issue, at the first gathering we ever had.

There were not many at that meetin', but those on hand were sure a most enthusiastic bunch. And were they WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE boosters? Boy! And then some.

Old-timers, there was another promise we made at that initial Round-up. We declared we would keep WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE clean as a hound's tooth. We said we might fail in making WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE the most interestin' publication that ever was printed, but there was nothin' to stop us from makin' it free from dirt.

And just now we got a letter from a gent as couldn't be with us to-night, and, if you'll bear with us, we'll read it to you. Thanks. Here goes, then:

"Dear Boss," writes this here gent, as only signs hisself, "Pete, Texas," "I have been readin' WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE since the first issue. There have been mighty few times when I wasn't on hand to get my copy, the minute the dealer slit the cord round his bundle when the mail clerk dumped them off the train at the station.

"But at that, I have read every issue,

though there have been some I've missed. How's that for an Irish bull? You see it's this way, when I'm back in the hills, say, and can't get in to get my WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and the one my dealer has held out for me, accordin' to my orders, has been swiped, well, I just buy me fifteen cents' worth of stamps and mail 'em on to you at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, just like you said to do, one time years ago, if we readers found ourselves unable to get the one and only magazine.

"Seein' as how I live some miles from New York, it takes almost two weeks before that stray number gets rounded inter my corral. And when I get it, I'm sure glad, for, you see, I can't read the serials till it comes. And don't I gallop right inter them serials and straight through 'em, when it does turn up!

"But, boss, what I want to compliment you most on is that you don't let any dirt get inter WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Now I'm a tough old cuss, I am. And I've done a lot of things and said a lot of things that I hadn't ought to have done and said. Also, I've been in a lot of places that could have stood a lot of cleanin' up, and no harm done.

"Guess that's the reason I'm so pleased to know of one place I can go that's clean, where I won't hear nothin' said, nor see nothin' done, that ain't clean. The stories are sure fine, and I thank yer for gettin' 'em and the authors for writin' 'em, but what I thank yer most for is keepin', jest like yer said yer would, WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE clean."

Pete, we'll keep the broom and the

mop goin' harder than ever after gettin' your letter. That's what we're goin' to write that gent.

But, do you know, folks, we had quite a time with some of the authors at first. We'd turn down a story, saying that, though it was a good yarn, we didn't print that kind. "What, do you mean to intimate that my story is an immoral one?" they'd yell.

We'd tell 'em, no, that that there story was not immoral, if it wasn't, but that it dealt with phases of life that we didn't touch on in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. We'd tell 'em, too, if there were some folks as wanted dirt mixed up in their fiction, there were plenty of places where they could find it, but that we didn't have none for sale, therefore we weren't in the market to buy any.

"Say, boss, can I edge in and ask a question?"

Sure can, city boy, let 'er come. What's botherin' yer?

"Well, boss, what I want to know is: How can I train my pony to stop and hold a cow when I've got the animal nicely roped? I loop the cow all right; then off it goes. And off goes my pony, too. Me? I'm hangin' on for dear life, pullin' on the reins, and yellin' to that little brute of mine to halt. I have to let go on the rope, or the pony and I'd bite dust."

We can tell yer how we've always done it. Here goes: Put a halter on your pony, also a saddle. Make fast your rope to the saddle. Then mount another horse. Take your pony on a lean rein; rope a cow with the rope that's fast to your pony's saddle; and let go your lead line, touch up your mount with the spurs, and give your pony and that cow plenty of room, for there sure is goin' to be some active action.

Off will go the cow and off will go

the pony—both, no doubt, in different directions. But, be that as it may, it won't be long before your pony will be done, and gettin' slung and dragged pretty well all over the range. After a while, the cow will play out, and you can get your pony free.

Do this a few times, or until your pony learns that he's got to be boss or else be in for a rough time. He'll find that the way to be boss is to keep his nose pointin' at that cow and to set back on his hunkies and hold hard. After that, you can ride and rope off that pony without fear. You'll find that when you rope a cow he'll get ready to hold, just as soon as he feels the rope tightenin'. Then, as he gets more and more onter the game, he'll prepare to hold, soon's he sees you've roped your cow.

There, go to it, and no danger to you, and very little to your pony. But, no doubt, some of the folks here has got better ways than ours, or, at least, other ways. We sure do wish they'd express them if they have.

"Boss, while you're handin' out information, please pass me, another city boy, the answer to this one: How can I get my horse to stop bucking? Please tell me, and I sure will be everlastingly obliged to you."

Well, son, this is goin' to be harder on you and harder on me than that other bit of trainin' was that we jest took up. My best method to stop a horse buckin' is to take him down where the ground is nice and marshy, get up on him, stick as best you can, and see if he don't stop pretty soon. Repeat dose with high hopes for a cure. Again, no doubt, there'll be folks here who has other ways to stop a horse buckin'. If so, please chirp right up.

Now for a song. What say? Right you all are. And let's make it: "The

Jolly Cowboy." Are you ready?
Right! Let her go:

My lover, he is a cowboy, he's brave and kind
and true,
He rides a Spanish pony, he throws a lasso,
too;
And when he comes to see me our vows we do
redeem,
He throws his arms around me and thus be-
gins to sing:

"Ho, I'm a jolly cowboy, from Texas now I
hail,
Give me my quirt and pony, I'm ready for
the trail;
I love the rolling prairies, they're free from
care and strife,
Behind a herd of longhorns I'll journey all
my life.

"When early dawn is breaking and we are
far away,
We fall into our saddles, we round-up all the
day;
We rope, we brand, we ear-mark, I tell you
we are smart,
And when the herd is ready, for Kansas then
we start.

"Oh, I'm a Texas cowboy, lighthearted, brave,
and free,
To roam the wide, wide prairie, 'tis always
joy to me.
My trusty little pony is my companion true,
O'er creeks and hills and rivers he's sure to
pull me through.

"When threatening clouds do gather and
herded lightnings flash,

And heavy rain drops splatter, and rolling
thunder crash;
What keeps the herd from running, stamped-
ing far and wide?
The cowboy's long, low whistle and sing-
ing by their side.

"When in Kansas City, our boss he pays us
up,
We loaf around the city and take a parting
cup;
We bid farewell to city life, from noisy
crowds we come,
And back to dear old Texas, the cowboy's
native home."

Oh, he's coming back to marry the only
girl he loves,
He says I am his darling, I am his own true
love;
Some day we two will marry and then no
more he'll roam
But settle down with Mary in a cozy little
home.

"Ho, I'm a jolly cowboy, from Texas now
I hail,
Give me my bond to Mary, I'll quit the Lone
Star trail.
I love the rolling prairies, they're free from
care and strife,
But I'll quit the herd of longhorns for the
sake of my little wife."

Fine and dandy. You all, each and
every one did noble. And we guess
that's a good one to hit the blanket roll
on. Right? Yes. Good night.



BREAK THE MATCH

NOW that the season for taking to the woods is drawing near again, a timely word from the Forest Service will be helpful to the thoughtless or inexperienced. The impulse of mankind out of doors is to flip away a match after it has been used. But the trained woodsman knows better than that and, as carelessly flipped matches are responsible for a large percentage of forest fires, it is good for the man in the woods to remember to shake out the light, feel the business end of the match with a finger to be sure that it is out, break the match in two, and then look for a safe place to throw it. A match cannot be broken with ease until it is completely out, so woodsmen and woods women, remember that there is an occasion when it is not only sportsmanlike but advisable to break off the match!



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.

THERE is a gold-mining camp in North Ontario that withstands the icy winds that sweep down from the Hudson Bay during nine months of the year, and, in many respects, this vast gold field resembles the Klondike region of Yukon, swept by the mighty blasts of the arctic. Both regions are rich in the metal that many an old-timer has searched a lifetime for.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: This is Timmins, North Ontario, and not so very many miles from Hudson Bay. It is "away up North," and you-all would certainly think so, too, if you were here and lived through the storms of this Northland for nine months of every year.

Hollinger is a gold-mining camp, and I understand that it is the second largest in the world. Yes, when you think of this gold field here in North Ontario, swept by the icy winds of the Hudson Bay, you may compare it with the Klondike region of Yukon, that tastes the cold breath of the arctic nine months out of the year.

Now if you folks want to know about mining in the Northland, or if you are interested in the wild life of the North, I'll do my best to give you some interesting information. This being a mining section, I'd like to exchange some yarns with the ranch sections of the country. And, folks, you mustn't be

disappointed that this Gangster who lives "away up North" among the "gold fields" is only a Gangster miss.

DAISY KENNEDY.

166 Spruce Street, Timmins, North Ontario, Canada.

North of El Paso.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: The Longhorn State has almost everything—desert, the mountain, and the valley. El Paso can also boast of all of these—the desert, the mountain, and the valley. And there is Juarez, just across the way, if you like old, picturesque things. I live in the shadow of the mountains, overlooking the valley with its river—they call it the silvery Rio Grande—and the farms. And out north of here is the desert, tall century plants against a background of purple, hazy mountains.

I've been in Arizona, too. I lived near the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. No mere word picture will describe that part of the country. I've also lived in California, and up in Oregon, close to the Klamath River. What a wonderful country that is, too! But the wonders of the West go on forever. You can never hope to see them all, no matter how much you travel.

I am twenty-five, and have lived in the West all my life. All of the out-of-doors appeals to me. I hope to hear from some of the Gang sisters who love the West as I do.

AVECE BROWN.

3118 Savannah Street, El Paso, Texas.

The Trans-Pecos country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There are some right good-sized ranches here in the Trans-Pecos country in the good old Longhorn State of Texas. Yes'm, I'm a Texan, and any one wanting to learn a few things about this big range land, north, south, east, or west, just come right ahead and I'll sure interest you by answering muy pronto.

TEXAN.

Care of The Tree.

The Longhorn State again.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Texas hombre, born and raised, and have been out of the State but once, when I went to Oklahoma and Arkansas, so you see I've only seen three of the forty-eight States of the Union. However, I hope soon to settle in the Oregon country, for I think that part of the country will appeal to me. I would like to hear from some of the homesteaders in Oregon, and would like to hear from every one from that part of the country.

I'm an orphan, so I may wander where I will. As to age—I can't lay claim to more than eighteen years.

LEE CRACKETT.

Route 2, Collinsville, Texas.

Ohioan takes the trail.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Several months ago I planned two trips, the first one a hiking trip to the Smoky Mountain National Park district. On this trip, covering several months, I took a complete camp outfit in my back pack. The second trip, which I hope to start out on soon, will be a canoe trip up the Mississippi River to its headwaters and then down to the Gulf of Mexico. If any of the Gang who live along this route will write me, I shall appreciate their suggestions, and, if possible, stop to say "Hello." I should like to have folks write me about any points of interest along this route, and any beautiful side trips—mostly by water—that I could make. My starting point is Cleveland.

HERBERT P. CARL.

688 East One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

Crooked River.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: This little place is called Crooked River, and it's a small town in western Saskatchewan. I am an English girl of seventeen years, and I came to Canada eight years ago. I'd like to hear from girls living in far-away places,

as I feel so lonely and far away from everything myself.

LILIAN E. MEEKS.

Crooked River, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Sagebrush sister.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have lived in lumber camps, on cattle ranches, and among the Apaches; in Arizona, New Mexico, and California. Needless to say, I understand the real West. I'm in Arizona at present, and would particularly like to get on a ranch somewhere around Prescott.

MRS. J. C.

Care of The Tree.



Searching for friendship is like searching for gold—one must be looking for what one expects to find. Look for the friend-maker badge if you are looking for a friend. Wear the friend-maker badge if you want new friends to discover you.

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.

East Texas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: Here's an echo from far-away Texas. About a year ago, I strayed away from dear old Colorado, and am now living in the sticks of east Texas, so, if there's anything you'd like to know about this part of the world, and I'm able to tell you, I'll be more than glad to do it, but don't ask about working conditions, for I know nothing about them.

Liberty, the little town in which I now live, is one of the oldest and most historical towns in the State of Texas. It was first settled by Mexicans.

VIOLETTE MOORE.

Liberty, Texas.

This Gangster is Eileen Rodgers, 303 Tyler Street, Pueblo, Colorado.

You bet, I'm from Colorado, and I say that Colorado is just a paradise valley. Just the same, folks, there is something that I would like to do, and that is go to Arizona!

Looking for a pal.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I plan to go out West this fall and would like to meet up with a good pard to go along. I would prefer that he be between twenty and thirty years. Gangsters, let me hear from you. G. S.
Care of The Tree.

Wyoming Gangster.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I am living at present in Plainfield, New Jersey, I am really a Wyoming lad, having been born in Barnum, Wyoming. From Barnum we moved to Denver, Colorado, and from Denver to Jersey. I'm a lonely boy of seventeen, and want to get acquainted with some boys of the West. HAROLD K. SCRIBNER.

41 Somerset Street, North Plainfield, New Jersey.

Rough country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like to hear from some pal who lives in the rough country out West. Somewhere in that wide land I know there is the sort of a pard I'm looking for—one who loves to spend a night under a desert sky, and who enjoys hunting, fishing, trapping, and the like.

Now, folks, please make room for a lonely young hombre from the East who intends to go some day to that rough country of the West. FREDDIE SMELTZER.

349 Troup Street, Rochester, New York.

Stockman's daughter.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Here I am! A Western girl, a stockman's daughter, and a lover of animals, especially horses. Our little ranch is in Del Norte, right in the heart of the sunny San Luis Valley, in Colorado. We have at the present about four hundred head of cattle, sixty horses, and some sheep.

Girls, there is one person in San Luis Valley who is waiting for you to be her Pen Pard. ALICE DAVIES.

R. F. D. 1, Box 54, Del Norte, Colorado.

This is the time to find your trapper pards, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young fellow of twenty-one, and am looking for some trapper pards of northern New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, or Canada. JACK NEWTON.

19 Bridge Street, Concord, New Hampshire.

A long way from Arizona.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: From Wickenburg, Arizona, to Waldport, Oregon, seems like being at the ends of the earth from home. My, but I'm lonesome for Arizona! Where are all you cowgirls from my home State? Will you take a little pasear over my way, please? MILDRED MARKLEY.

Care of The Tree.

To the old Holla.

H-owdy, sisters of The Tree!
O-ur Gang's a fine one, you'll agree.
L-ate in '23—November—
L-istening, I knocked. A member
O-f nearly five years' standing. How
W-e have grown from then to now!

T-hose who like music and good books,
R-ambles through friendly forest nooks,
E-ach lonesome lass, shut-ins, friends o'er the
sea—

E-v'ry one, ev'rywhere, please write to me!
SEMPER FIDELIS.

Care of The Tree.

Merrie, from Ohio, please send us your address.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I spend a good share of my time in the saddle, for I live on a ranch in Colorado. I'm nineteen, and will appreciate hearing from ranch girls my age. GERTRUDE CURLISS.

Route A, Olney Springs, Colorado.

"I would especially like to hear from a real-for-sure cowgirl," says Miss H. W., care of The Tree.

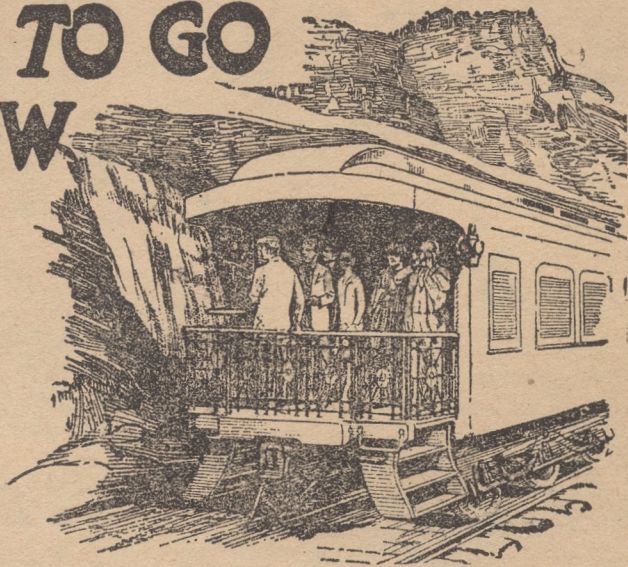
This Gangster is twenty-three, and is an Indianan.

"Lumberjack" Greenley, Care of The Tree, is a lonesome hombre who has never ridden a horse, but is mighty interested in the West. He would like to get in touch with some adventurous young cowboys.

Francis Smith, Mill Road, North Brookfield, Massachusetts, is looking for a trapper pard. Trappers, isn't a bit too early to begin thinking about a pard, and about your trap line for next winter.

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.

JOBS may come and jobs may go, but farming goes on forever. For that reason it's a mighty safe bet, as a certain California couple realizes. "My husband has been hearing some glowing accounts of farming in British Columbia, Mr. North," writes Mrs. O. N. T., of Los Angeles, California, "and he is pretty well sold on the idea of going there. However, we do not wish to make such a serious move without first finding out from a reliable source exactly what we would be up against.

"We are not entirely green, as my husband has had quite a lot of farming experience, some of it on a fruit ranch, and I was practically raised on a farm. We are particularly interested in the Okanagan Valley, and would like to have you give us all the facts you have about this region. What about climate, soil, and fruit growing? What are some of the likely towns? Can you tell us anything about Vernon?"

Well, nothing could give us more

pleasure than helping this sister out. The Okanagan Valley lies at from thirteen hundred to sixteen hundred and fifty feet above sea level and extends one hundred and fifty miles from the Canadian Pacific Railway's main line to the end of Okanagan Lake. In width it ranges from two to six miles. The winter climate averages twelve degrees of frost. The soil consists generally of light clay loam, with decomposed rock on higher levels, alternating on bottom lands in places with rich, black loam. All temperate-zone fruits do well here. Apples have been shipped to England, Australia, and the Yukon. The prairie provinces furnish a growing market for all fruit grown, and there is a large demand for vegetables, especially early varieties.

If Mrs. O. N. T. is a devotee of the great out-of-doors, she will be interested to hear that this valley abounds in lakes and small streams. Okanagan Lake, extending from near Vernon to

Penticon, is seventy miles long and one to three miles wide. The principal towns in the valley are Sicamous, Enderby, Armstrong, Vernon, Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland, Naramata, and Penticon.

The town of Vernon is located near Okanagan Lake on the Canadian Pacific Railroad forty-six miles south of Sicamous. It has several hotels, churches, schools, banks, a library, theater, and, in fact, all the facilities for an attractive community life. Its industries include a sash-and-door factory, sawmill, cigar factory, three livery stables, and motor liveries, a canning factory, two cider plants, a pickle factory, brickyard, and a brewery. The town has municipal water, and electric light and power systems. Vernon is the central fruit-selling agency for the valley, and is an up-and-coming place.

There is not space this week for more information about British Columbia, but we are sending Mrs. O. N. T. some addresses from which she can obtain additional facts. We shall be glad to forward these addresses to any hombres who are interested in this section of Canada.

Out-of-door occupations seem to be interesting more and more of our readers all the time, ranging all the way from fruit ranching to wild-horse chasing. The latter subject is one that is attracting the attentions of Jack M., of Houston, Texas, and, as this is ever a fascinating theme, I think many of you will be mighty keen about hearing the answers to his queries. "I've heard some rumors, Mr. North, to the effect that there's a war on wild horses down in New Mexico. Is it true that they are being rounded up?"

Yes, the day of the broomtail pony and the wild burro down on the ranges of New Mexico is nearing an end. This is due to the fact that ranchmen are finding it necessary to conserve grass for their cattle. The horse is not as

valuable as he once was, for much of his work to-day on farms and ranches is done by automobile, truck, and tractor. As a consequence, many horses have been turned loose on the open ranges from time to time. They have multiplied rapidly, although the stock has naturally deteriorated. No ranchman bothered about branding the colts, because he did not want to pay taxes on animals that had little market value, and so there are a number of broncos which are ownerless running wild on the ranges.

Some time ago, Montana decreed that the wild horses on her plains must be rounded up. Wyoming followed her example, and now the New Mexico Cattle and Horse Growers' Association wants a law which will clear the ranges in that State. So the war is on, and many wild horses are being rounded up and driven to reduction plants where they are sold for two to ten dollars a head.

And now comes another hombre out on the chase, but the quarry of Ben M., of Chicago, Illinois, is big game, instead of wild horses. "I'm taking some time off from my office job this fall, Mr. North, to indulge in a little hunting. Some of my friends have advised me to go out to Cokeville, Wyoming. What can you tell me about this town and the surrounding country?"

Cokeville is a little place of some three hundred and fifty people. It is the center of a rich sheep and cattle country, and the old-timers out there can tell some wild and woolly stories of the exploits of "bad men" during the town's early history. It is one of the entry points to the Jackson Lake region, which, as Ben probably knows, is hard to beat for a happy-hunting ground. In fact, western Wyoming, from Cokeville northward to Yellowstone Park, is no doubt the best big-game region in the United States. It is one of the few localities where the

sportsman may hope to add the highly prized head of a big-horn sheep to his hunting trophies. These hunting grounds are at some distance from the railroad, however, and Ben must make arrangements to camp.

Speaking of camping reminds me of the request of Ken T., of Omaha, Nebraska: "Do you know a ranch somewhere out in Montana where I could live in a tent and do light housekeeping, Mr. North? I'd also like some pack trips into the mountains. My doctor has advised me to take such a vacation, and I'd like some suggestions from you."

We think the Stecker Ranch, which is located in the Sun River Canyon, about twenty miles from the town of Augusta, on the Great Northern Railway, would hit Ken about right. The

main ranch building is used for headquarters for parties making saddle and pack-horse trips into the mountains, but he could set up housekeeping for himself in one of the log cabins or tent houses that are rented for this purpose. There are two fine trips made from this ranch. The first is the Wood Creek trip into the mountains among beautiful alpine scenery. The second is to Salmon Lake, a sixty-mile trip over the Continental Divide, returning by a different trail.

And now there's just space for one more remark about ranches. "If any of you chaps are thinking of small ranches on the beautiful Puget Sound, I can make some helpful suggestions," writes B. L. W., of San Francisco, California. All letters sent to this hombre will be forwarded promptly.



MONEY BY WING

THAT "money has wings" is no news to any one. If only our airplanes could "take off" with the surety and speed, the disregard of weather and distance with which dollars and dimes do, the whole world would be flying from place to place without let or hindrance. Until that day arrives, however, we can use airplanes to hasten the coming of pay day, for this is the method now adopted by the British government to bring the "treaty money" to the Indians in the north of Ontario.

The Indians assemble at one or other of the appointed places in the far hinterland of northern Ontario, and there await the coming of the flying boat, one of the fleet of the Ontario provincial air force, which comes with its precious load.

The trip was formerly made by canoe, but, of course, is done much more swiftly and expeditiously by the airplane. With the pilot are a "medicine man" and a police official; the former gives a quick examination of the Indian as he presents himself for his pay, and the man of the law takes care to see that nothing contraband is bought or sold at the scene of payment.

Some of the Indians come from very remote parts of the country to receive their treaty money, and make of their pilgrimage a festive occasion. Sometimes they are accompanied by all the family. Encampments spring up, old acquaintances are renewed, and many a story of past adventure is recounted over the peace fires as the tribes make up for lost time and long-enforced solitude by social enjoyment of their journey to receive the bounty of the "great white queen."

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 change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped, if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

PERCY.—Let us hear from you soon. Love, Mother, care of this magazine.

CROSBY, FRED M.—Please let me know where you are or come out to see me. Have left Memphis and live on a farm. Your loving sister, Mrs. Mary P. Sheets, Route 1, Box 33, Havenden, Arkansas.

SEER, RUDOLPH.—Was at Long Beach, California, in 1927. Please write to Alphonse Wallett, Natchitoches, Louisiana.

PATTEN, LILLIAN and HELEN.—Were in Denver, Colorado, in 1913. Please write to Leonard Puckett, 547 Walnut Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

RYAN, ROSE.—Last heard from she was in a hospital directed by Ida Pearson, M. D., at 284 Harrison Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota. Information appreciated by a near relative, Nix, care of this magazine.

SIFFERD, ROBERT and ROSE MARIE.—Last heard from in Mission, South Dakota, in November, 1927. Information appreciated by Mary, care of this magazine.

MOORE, PERCY, ALBERT, JIMMY, ARTHUR and ERNEST.—Our mother died in 1914, and we were placed in different homes in North Dakota. Would like to hear from any of them. I am eighteen years old. Wilfred Moore Slauson, Route 1, Banks, North Dakota.

HANEBRINK, MRS. MARY, nee WARNER.—Twenty-nine years old. A blonde. Last heard from in Gillett, Wyoming, in July, 1927. My letters to her returned. Believed to be working in a restaurant. Had talked of going to Billings, Montana, Washington or Canada. Information appreciated by Mrs. Laura Hanebrink, 224 South Ellis Street, Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

SHAFER, BENJAMIN BOLES.—Delora is worried. Please write to your pal, Bob Murray, 800 West First Street, Aberdeen, Washington.

BILL.—Am unhappy without you. I love you and need you very much. Please come back to me. Myrtle, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, CARRIE.—Last heard from in Miami, Florida. Please write to your old friend, Willie Howard Daniels, R. B. 2, Madison, Alabama.

FISHER.—Any one of this name living in Oklahoma please write to Private Marion F. Fisher, Thirtieth Infantry, Company C, Presidio, San Francisco, California.

LACY, JOE.—Am ill. Please write at once to Irene, 2222 Cary Avenue, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

THOMAS, STANLEY.—Last heard from when working in a lumber camp at Bowman, Manitoba, Canada, in December, 1927. Information appreciated by his mother and J. Merritt, 17 Forest Street, Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

WALLACE, THOMAS.—Born in Dundee, Scotland. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado. Please write to Blackie Joy, care of this magazine.

COLEMAN, BUD.—Formerly of Salt Lake. Worked with him on the Moffat Tunnel. Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Please write to Blackie Joy, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, ROBERT or EUGENE.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in 1910. Robert was on the U. S. S. "California" and the U. S. S. "Pennsylvania," and Eugene was with the marines. Their mother married a Mr. Draeskie, a druggist in Los Angeles. Information appreciated by Dorothy Brigham, 3749 Wilton Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

LEISURE, ALBERTA.—About twenty-two years old. Auburn hair. Last heard from in Grand Rapids, Michigan, five years ago. Information appreciated by Maria Fischer Krull, Brant, Michigan.

T. T. B.—Do you remember 99? Would like to hear from you. Please write to Betty, care of this magazine.

COWPER, HARRIET.—Formerly of Laramie, Wyoming. Performed for the K. O. A. in Denver, Colorado. Please write to your soldier friend, Private Gerald Mulloney, Eighteenth Sound Ranging Battery, Coast Artillery, Fort H. G. Wright, New York.

W. J. B.—We want you. Everything went wrong when you left. Please write or wire. Lulu 1799, care of this magazine.

NORRIS, MRS. MAMIE.—Of Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ruth Hopkins, 402 Bath Street, Santa Barbara, California.

BUTLER, W. O.—Of Nebraska City, Nebraska. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Ruth Butler Hopkins, 402 Bath Street, Santa Barbara, California.

INGLE, FRED.—Twenty-seven years old. A machinist. Last heard from in Pennsylvania. Please write to Eva V. D., R. D. 2, East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

J. W. P.—On my word of honor you are safe. Please send your address to Scotty, care of this magazine.

GILBERT, MRS. LAURA.—Last heard from in Inglewood, California. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. A. J. Bachus, Box 174, Mammoth, West Virginia.

HUMPHREY, ROY GILES.—Information concerning him appreciated by his sister, Doris Humphrey Poling, Route 1, Hillsboro, Iowa.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any buddy who served in the Bakery Company, No. 1, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, or in the B. & C. school from January to August, 1925. John Horn, 1417½ Bennett Avenue, Flint, Michigan.

GARCIA, CARMEN.—Spanish. Twenty years old. Worked for Lieutenant William Hunter, M. A. C., Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in May, and June, 1925. Information appreciated by John H. Horn, 1417½ Bennett Avenue, Flint, Michigan.

FAY, PAUL.—Formerly of Rochester, New York. Last heard from in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, in 1922. Information appreciated by Roscoe E. Moore, 1416 East Elm Street, West Frankfort, Illinois.

W. F. B.—For information concerning your father please write to T. B. O. Cast, Box 23, Lancaster, California.

WARNER, GAROLD KENRON.—Do you remember Kitty of Newport? I have not forgotten you. Please write to Kitty, care of this magazine.

MISS L.—If you wish to hear from Henry Adkins please write to his friend, B. A. G., care of this magazine.

PEARL OF GLASGOW.—Your cowboy still loves you. Please write to Willis Mare, Box 154, Lockwood, Missouri.

GRAY, EVELYN.—Blue eyes and brown hair. Last heard from in 1910, when living at 582 Lenox Avenue, New York City. Believed to have gone to Chicago. Please write to your brother, a World War Veteran, who has been ill for three years. Harold Gray, U. S. Veteran's Hospital, Sunmount, Tupper Lake, New York.

HOTEN, DOROTHY MEA.—Please write to the friend you met in Denver, Colorado. Henry Bieshenvel, care McCord Farm, R. R. 1, Lynden, Washington.

ROSS, BERTHA.—Has a son, named Murdo, who is twelve years old, and a daughter, named Alice, ten years old. If you are unhappy or ill please let me know and I will do everything possible to help you under any circumstances as I am all to blame. Murdo Campbell, Edmonton, Alta., Canada.

BURT.—Please let me know where you are. Tess has told me everything. Brother Ed, 25 South Street, New York City.

WELCH, WINFORD.—Please write to your anxious mother, Mrs. Minnie Welch, care C. B. James, Route 1, Box 700, San Angelo, Texas.

FRUHN, FRED.—We need you. Please write to Ethel and children, 206½ East Buffalo Street, Rawlins, Wyoming.

SLOAN, ROBERT.—Last heard from at Rockaway Beach, Long Island, in 1914. Please write to your sister, Mrs. S. A. Shield, 5 Olive Street, Sunderland, England.

SINCLAIR, ROBERT L.—Fifteen years old, a blond, five feet ten inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Left home April 6, 1928. You have done no wrong. We all want you to come back. Information appreciated by his father, A. L. Sinclair, 3419 Garden Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

GRIFFITHS, MISS.—Believed to be married. Last heard from thirty years ago in North America. Information appreciated by Mrs. Dows, 1 Dringles Buildings, Choppington, Northumberland, England.

JOHN.—We need you. Won't you let us hear from you? Everything is settled and nothing against you. Our love and faith are as strong as ever. Bill, care of this magazine.

TULK.—Would like to hear from a brother and sister of Mary Malessie Tulk Manley. Not heard from in thirty years. Please write to your nephew, Charles H. Manley, 600 Madison Avenue, Culver City, California.

PREACHER.—I was not able to answer you in the December number as requested. Please write to Charlie, Mission, Texas.

J. S. B., MRS.—Your mother is ill. Will work in Marysville, California, until fall. Please come back to me or write to J. S. B., care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, RUSSELL.—Lived in an apartment in Prentice Street with some other fellows two years ago. I still care for you. Information appreciated by B. E. P., care of this magazine.

HUFFMAN, ODIS GRANT.—Six feet tall, medium-dark complexion, dark hair and blue eyes. Stammers. Last heard from when on the British ship "Lennox," in 1916. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Joel Huffman, 2430 East Sprague, Spokane, Washington.

SHERLOCK, McNALLY or GILE.—Twenty-three years old. A blond. Has a son named Virgil. Information appreciated by David C. Gile, Box 1153, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

O'NEIL, BERT, or ALBERT GARR.—Am miserable and unhappy without you. Please let me hear from you, so that this terrible misunderstanding may be cleared up. Your wife, Mrs. A. C. O'Neill, care Hotel Selma, 1617 Cahuena Avenue, Hollywood, California.

LLOYD, VIRGINIA.—Last heard from in Newark, New Jersey, in October, 1917. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Fay Boswell, 18712 French Avenue, Harvey, Illinois.

CONNOR, EDITH and CAROL.—Parents were married in Bismarck, Illinois. Edith was born in July, 1912, and Carol in January, 1914. Please write to your relative, J. C. C., care of this magazine.

TRACY, EARL.—Thirty years old. Canadian. A blond. Was a boiler maker for a shipbuilding concern in Detroit, Michigan, in 1918. Information appreciated by his worried friend, Bertha Richard, care New York Lunch Room, 203 Missouri Avenue, East St. Louis, Illinois.

YOUNGS, CLAUD.—Formerly of Whitewater, Missouri. Worked for the Detroit Shipbuilding Company, in 1918. A blond and weighed at that time about one hundred and fifty pounds. We all love you. Please write to Bertha Richard, 203 Missouri Avenue, care New York Lunch Room, East St. Louis, Illinois.

WALKER, MONTE.—I love you and always will. Cannot be without you. Please write to me and let me know where you are and I will come to you. Your Bobo, Marion Walker, care of this magazine.

MORRISON, EDITH.—About nineteen years old. Last heard from in East Bound Brook, New Jersey, about thirteen years ago. Believed to have gone to Ashbury Park, New Jersey, with her mother. Information appreciated by Walter Edmonds, Box 174, West Union Avenue, Bound Brook, New Jersey.

HOPKINS, JEAN H.—About twenty-two years old. Light hair and dark-blue eyes. Was at one time a student nurse at King's County Hospital, Brooklyn, New York. Information appreciated by W. A. Elam, care A. B. Sexton, Sebastopol, California.

DEMPEY, JACQUELINE.—About twenty-three years old. A brunette. Formerly a student nurse in King's County Hospital, Brooklyn, New York. Information appreciated by W. A. Elam, care A. B. Sexton, Sebastopol, California.

COOK.—Would like to hear from some one who knew my father's people. His parents died in 1865, near Yazoo City, Mississippi, leaving two children, Wiley and Lonnie Cook. His father's name was Gifford Cook, and his mother's maiden name was Dickinson. Address, R. C. Cook, Box 4, Coahoma, Texas.

GIPSON, MINERVA.—Last heard from in Russ County, Texas, forty years ago. Please write to your brother, Mat Gipson, Neame, Louisiana.

LEONARD, WARD.—Was stationed at Vancouver Barracks, Washington, in 1925-26. Discharged from the army in January, 1927. Have good news for you. Please come and see me or write to Fay Wheeler, 1106 South Kay Street, Tacoma, Washington.

HERDRICK or BLAIR, CHARLES A.—Twenty years old. A blond. Has a red birthmark on his face. Has been married two years. Last seen at Keeper, Oklahoma, July 18, 1927. Please write to W. C. Herdrick, care M. L. Smith, Zephyr, Texas.

DIXON, ADELINE.—Was in Detroit, Michigan, in the summer of 1919. Would like to see or hear from you. Joe, care of this magazine.

HARDING, WALTER.—Please let me know where you are at once. Send a telegram to my brother's house at 2013 Fourth Avenue or write to Beulah, care of this magazine.

STONE, CLYDE.—From Peoria. Last heard from aboard the U. S. S. "Taleigh." Please write and forgive me if I have offended you. Am free now. Jule F., care of this magazine.

MARTIN, W. J.—Was on the U. S. S. "Kearsarge," in 1916. Discharged from the navy in 1921. Last heard from in Everett, Massachusetts. Information appreciated by a buddy, D. M. H., care of this magazine.

WILBOURNE, MRS. CATHERINE N.—Formerly of Portsmouth, Virginia. Her address appreciated by a friend, L. H. P., Box 300, Grafton, West Virginia.

LONG, ALICE, BILLIE EARL, and MAYME and BONNIE GRIFFIN.—Of Missouri. Please write to James R. Neilson, Company No. 38, Company D, 31st Infantry, Manila, Philippine Islands.

TIPTON, OPAL, and MAE WOOD.—The former of Owensville, Indiana, and the latter of Princeton, Indiana. Please write to James R. Neilson, Company No. 38, Company D, 31st Infantry, Manila, Philippine Islands.

JOHNSON, MARY, and MARY WALLER.—Last heard from near Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in 1918-20. Please write to James R. Neilson, Company No. 38, Company D, 31st Infantry, Manila, Philippine Islands.

GARRETT, H. M.—Last heard from in Spokane, Washington, in 1919. Please write to Grace Gilbert, 143 West G Street, Casper, Wyoming.

BOY.—Am broken-hearted. No answer to my letters. I love you and need you more than ever. Please write to Daddy, L. W. C., care of this magazine.

WORTHY, EARL BENTON.—An ex-radio man of the U. S. S. "Idaho," 1922-24. Information appreciated by his shipmate, Carl E. Sann, 1209 Winfield Avenue, Topeka, Kansas.

ROSE, JOHN HENRY.—Forty-three years old. A mechanic and painter. Six feet tall, dark complexion, and a slight limp. Last heard from in Kearney, Nebraska, in 1916. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mary. Address, Mary Rose, care of this magazine.

WELSH, JOHNNIE.—Twenty-eight years old. Last heard from in Niagara Falls, New York, in 1922. Please write to a dear friend, V. A. D., care of this magazine.

LITTLES, FRANK.—Thirty-five years old. Last heard from in Buffalo, New York, in 1925. Please write to V. A. D., care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Would be glad to hear from any of the old gang who worked on the Double "O" Ranch at Elba, New York, about fourteen years ago. I am the fellow who looked after the caterpillar tractors when the plowing was going on. Address, Bill, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any members of Company H, 348th Infantry, 8th Division, who were at Camp Dix during July and August, 1918, as I am anxious to obtain a photograph taken of the company at this time. Address, Fred Kuatschinski, 50 Journal Square, Jersey City, New Jersey.

M. A. Z.—Everything is all right at home. Please send me your address. O. Z., care of this magazine.

BOONE, DANIEL K.—Last heard from in Louisiana, in 1918. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. Bertie Sharpin Hale, Route 1, Box 194, Yazoo City, Mississippi.

PARKER, ELLA.—Last heard from in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1921. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to your sister, Louise, and aunt, Mrs. Bertie Sharpin Hale, Route 1, Box 194, Yazoo City, Mississippi.

SHARPLIN, JOHN.—Last heard from in McAllister, Oklahoma, in 1915. Please write to Mrs. Bertie Sharpin Hale, Route 1, Box 194, Yazoo City, Mississippi.

LOFFER, EDWARD or EVERETT.—My father. About fifty years old. Was raised near Columbus, Ohio. Six feet tall, blue eyes and brown hair. Last heard from in Nebraska thirteen or fourteen years ago. Information appreciated by J. C. Loffer, 426 North Wilhite Street, Cleburne, Texas.

MORAN, EDWARD H.—What is wrong? Why are you staying away? Please come home to us. I want you. Love, Margaret and children, care of this magazine.

EVANS, THOMAS M., JOHN, JEFF, AMANDA, PHITNA and ANNIE HILL.—My brothers and sisters. John and Annie are in Kentucky or Tennessee, the others are believed to be somewhere in the West. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Easter Phillips, Route 1, Evansville, Tennessee.

WALTER or BILL.—Congratulations for June 29th. Hope you are in the best of health. Please write to mother and sister, care of this magazine.

DEAN, CLAUDE W.—Lived in Pernel and Hugo, Oklahoma. Believed to have gone to Pocasset, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by his sweetheart of two years ago, Ruby Mae Richter, 522 South Campbell Street, Springfield, Missouri.

DAWSON, RAYMOND ED.—Last heard from in Wynonka, Oklahoma, in July, 1918. Information appreciated by Mrs. Lizzie Dawson, Stinnett, Texas.

NEVILLE, ELLA HARMON.—Of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Please write to your old friend, Edythe. Mrs. W. C. R., 292 Algonquin Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

MCCORMICK, T. FRANK.—Twenty-eight years old. Last heard from in January, 1920. Believed to be in the Middle West. Information appreciated by his sister, Laura V. V., care of this magazine.

HARNED, BENSON.—Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in January, 1926. Have been worried about you. Have not heard from sister Edie since January, 1923. Am married now. Please write at once to Mrs. Winifred Phillips Mize, Box 1325, Dumright, Oklahoma.

PETERSON, S. M.—Am holding mail from your mother and do not wish to send it back. Please send your address to V. F. P., care of this magazine.

ESCHERICH, LOUIS.—Last heard from July 13, 1918. Important. Information appreciated by Earl Gottschalk, 315 Homan Avenue, Evergreen Park, Illinois.

KING, I. M., or IRA MACK.—If you love Sydney please go to him. He is at Carlsbad, Texas, in a sanitarium. He has tuberculosis. He needs your love and help. Please go. Your wife, Stel, care of this magazine.

AL.—Please write to me unless you have gone back to Texas. Jean, care of the "Billboard," New York City.

McGUIRE, CHARLES A.—Last heard from in Ohio. Have news for you. The children need your help. Please write to Carrie, 904 Magoffin Avenue, El Paso, Texas.

MOONEY, BILLY or GEORGE L.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in 1926. Information appreciated by his mother. Address, Blue Mother, care of this magazine.

PIEARSE, MRS. CHARLES, nee CLARA KIMBALL ANTHONY.—Left Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1919. Last heard from in Buffalo, New York. We love you. Please let us know where you are and write to your worried sister, Leah W. Anthony, 68 Wood Street, Woodville, Massachusetts.

PIERCE, MRS. ANGELIA.—Last heard from two years ago when living at 936 Woodcrest Avenue, New York City. Have reformed. Have a good job and can send for you if you want to help me try again. Heartbroken. Address, E. J. P., care of this magazine.

RHOADES, WILL.—About thirty-five years old, brown hair, blue eyes and light complexion. Last heard from in Eightyfour, Pennsylvania, in 1907. Information appreciated by M. C., care of this magazine.

HARBOUGH, ROSCOE.—About forty-four years old. Medium height and light hair. Information appreciated by Mary, care of this magazine.

CROW, A. B.—Mattie has her divorce and you are free to come home, if possible, or write to Briece Crow, Box 344, Paragon, Oklahoma.

NEUMANN, SIEGFRIED BRUNO.—A baker. Believed to be in California. Left Minneapolis in 1905. Am alone in the United States. Please write to your grieving mother, Mrs. Annie Neumann, 227 North Twelfth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

CLAYTON, T.—Last heard from November, 1927, in Philadelphia. Please come home to your wife and three children, who need you and are lonesome without you. Please write to your wife, Ruth T., 426 East Railroad Street, Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania.

KITTERMAN, WILLIAM PATRICK, or J. S.—About fifty-two years old. Born in Crawford County, Indiana. Five feet eight inches tall, gray eyes and light complexion. When last seen weighed about 135 pounds. Last heard from in Davenport, Iowa, in May, 1910. Information appreciated by his son, Charles F. Kitterman, 609 Shattuck Avenue, Taft, California.

NORA K. G.—Have news for you. Please write to E. E. G., Conover, North Carolina.

REMINGTON, JOHN HAYWOOD, and JAMES H. LEWALLEN.—The latter left Weiser, Idaho, for Vancouver, Washington, in 1917 or 1918. Information appreciated by their cousin, Mrs. Nina Stonecupper Krutsinger, 135 Marvin Street, Centralia, Illinois.

ROBERTS, THOMAS D.—Lived at 4423 Park Heights Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland, in 1913. At that time he was employed at the Mules Brothers Printing Company, Pratt Street, Baltimore, Maryland. Information appreciated by his son, Clifton I. Roberts, 199 Woodlawn Avenue, Buffalo, New York.

REN.—Please write to Boo, 138 Madison Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

HIGHTER, JOHN HENRY.—Dark hair, eyes and complexion. Five feet nine and a half inches tall. Last heard from in Washington, D. C., in April, 1927. Information appreciated by his family, Philip M. Highter, 920 Pine Street, Clifton Forge, Virginia.

MATTEX, CLARA.—Five feet five inches tall, dark-brown hair, blue eyes, fair complexion. Has relatives by the name of Trotter in High Point, North Carolina. Last heard from in Greenboro, North Carolina. I need and love you still. Won't you please write to L. R. D., care of this magazine?

AUSTIN, ENOCH MARVIN.—Joined the army in 1911, and was sent to the Philippine Islands. Was discharged in 1916 and came back to Lakeland, Florida. Please send your address to a friend, M. A. L., care of this magazine.

LOFTIS, EDWARD MARSHALL.—Forty-three years old. Five feet eight inches tall, fair complexion, brown eyes and gray hair. Weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. A farmer or farm hand. Last heard from in Thurston or Burt Counties, Nebraska, in 1920. Information appreciated by Mrs. Luellie Canter, R. F. D. 6, Jackson, Ohio.

SUMMERS, EDWARD C.—Believed to be a farmer in Burt or Thurston Counties, Nebraska. May be near Walthill, Tekamah, Pender, Lyons or Rosalie, Nebraska. Present address appreciated by Mrs. Lucille M. Canter, R. F. D. 6, Jackson, Ohio.

WINTON, JESSE.—Five feet six inches tall, sandy hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Last heard from in April, 1927. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to your sister, Irene Winton, Wink, Texas.

GALLAGHER, MRS. EDWARD P.—Formerly of Salt Lake City. When last heard from she had five children. The three oldest were: Warren, Madeline and Marie. Her sister, who is ill, is anxious to hear from her. Information appreciated by her cousin, Mrs. William Rogoway, care of this magazine.

HENRY, BURMAN C.—Important. Please let me hear from you at once. Fred D. Cook, care C. C. Morrison, Odessa, Missouri.

FISHER, MRS. HANNAH, nee WASHBURN.—My grandmother. Married Mr. Fisher, in 1904. My mother's name before marriage was Julia Marie Washburn. Information concerning any of my relatives appreciated by E. H. Holtenbeck, care Mrs. J. C. Hurd, Box 325, Sayre, Oklahoma.

WOOLLARD, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1908. Owned a ranch there. Please write to your brother, who is anxious to hear from you. Charles Woollard, 69 Griffin Road, Plumstead, S. E., 18, Kent, England.

DRAPEAU, TONY.—Of Berlin, New Hampshire. Why have you never tried to find me? I know that they did not tell you the truth and kept all the letters I wrote to you. Nothing will ever change my love for you. I need you. Please let me know where you are and if you are all right. Betty, 1114 Sixth Street, Northeast, Massillon, Ohio.

BITTICK, or THRASH, FRANCES.—Anxious to hear about you and J. D. Please write at once to Mrs. A. B. Turmipeed, 2307 Avenue H, Wichita Falls, Texas.

RAY, ROY LEE.—Ex-sailor. Orphan. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, about four years ago, when driving a sight-seeing bus. Has an aunt living in Indiana. Information appreciated by Murrilla, 403 North Lynn Street, Champaign, Illinois.

LEU, JOHN ALFRED CHARLES or FRED LEE.—Thirty-nine years old. Born in Montreal, Canada. Last heard from in New York, in 1922. Information concerning him dead or alive appreciated by his father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Leu, 6341 St. Dominique Street, Montreal.



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