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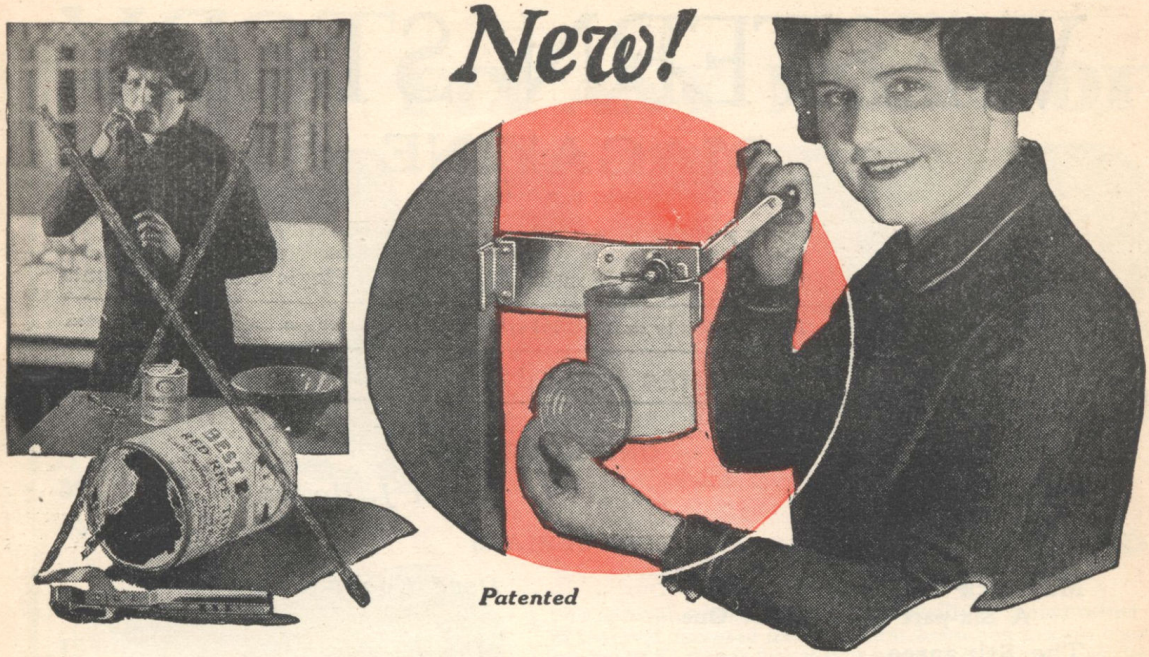

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You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder salesmen everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

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The Speedo holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make up to $10 an hour.

Generous Free Test Offer

Frankly, men, I realize that the profit possibilities of this proposition as outlined briefly here may seem almost incredible to you. So I've worked out a plan by which you can examine the invention and test its profit without risking one penny.

Get my free test offer while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about others making $75 to $150 in a week. I'll also tell you about another fast selling item that brings you two profits on every call. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

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Vol. XCVI Contents for July 5, 1930 No. 5

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MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

Give all to love;
Obey thy heart;
Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse—
Nothing refuse——

—EMERSON.

One need not take the command of the poet too seriously—poets must have their licenses—and "to give all to love" might cut considerably into one's time. There is, however, this much truth in the sentiments expressed above—namely that for those in love, there is little else in the world that matters.

And for those who choose love for their theme, it is indeed necessary to give all they have in the way of artistic ability to the achievement of recapturing "the first, fine, careless raptures" of young hearts in deepest love.

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But there was still another moth, whose wings had carried him into an atmosphere far different from that which surrounded Ursula and Glenn. This was Andrew Cameron, the vaudeville singer. He, too, loved Ursula, and for his sake she left the luxuries of her Washington Square home to take up with Andrew the fantastic life of the road.

And then there came into their lives adventure that carries the reader along in breathless pace to the thrilling climax.

"The Dancer in the Shadow" is a story of New York of not so long ago and of love and of high romance with a quality about it which is indeed distinguished.

BLONDY'S BOY FRIEND, by Leatrice Homesley. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price, 75 cents.

"A dizzy blonde." It was this flip epithet which Irene applied to herself.

But a lot went on beneath her golden hair that escaped the notice of the casual passer-by, and when the real test came with Irene's awakening to love, she rose to a tremendous crisis in magnificent fashion.

Irene finds herself in a strange out-of-the-way estate in Connecticut, surrounded by a sinister group of men and women. These have a common object of hate in the shape of an overbearing Englishman, who on a night of storm is found dead in his bed. Murdered!

Continued on third page following

Not one out of ten escapes this social fault

Can you be sure that you never have halitosis (unpleasant breath)? Are you certain at this very moment, that you are free of it?

The insidious thing about this unforgivable social fault is that you, yourself, never know when you have it; the victim simply cannot detect it.

Remember, also, that anyone is likely to be troubled, since conditions capable of causing halitosis arise frequently in even normal mouths.

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*Though safe to use in any body cavity, full strength Listerine kills even the Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) and Bacillus Typhosus (typhoid) germs in counts ranging to 200,000,000 in 15 seconds (fastest time accurately recorded by science).

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GOOD READING—*Continued*

And any one of seven or eight might have done the deed. Swiftly the suspicion fastens upon the man who has found the way to Irene's real self, and as swiftly Irene undertakes the desperate task of tracking down the culprit. The complications pile up, the story gathers pace and momentum until at length you come to the astonishing climax and reluctantly set down the book, convinced that here you have come upon that rarest of combinations, a real love story and a stirring mystery yarn.

PARTY GIRL, by Vivian Grey. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue. Price, 75 cents.

The title of this book has already become a part of the vocabulary of the modern youth. "Party Girl," one who pets and runs away—all froth and glitter and veneer.

"Party Girl" was what they called Carol Sprague, and, of a sudden, she awakened to all the implications surrounding that title. It was love that had awakened her, but the awakening was too late. The man to whom she surrendered her heart was Kent Mayburn, and he would have none of her.

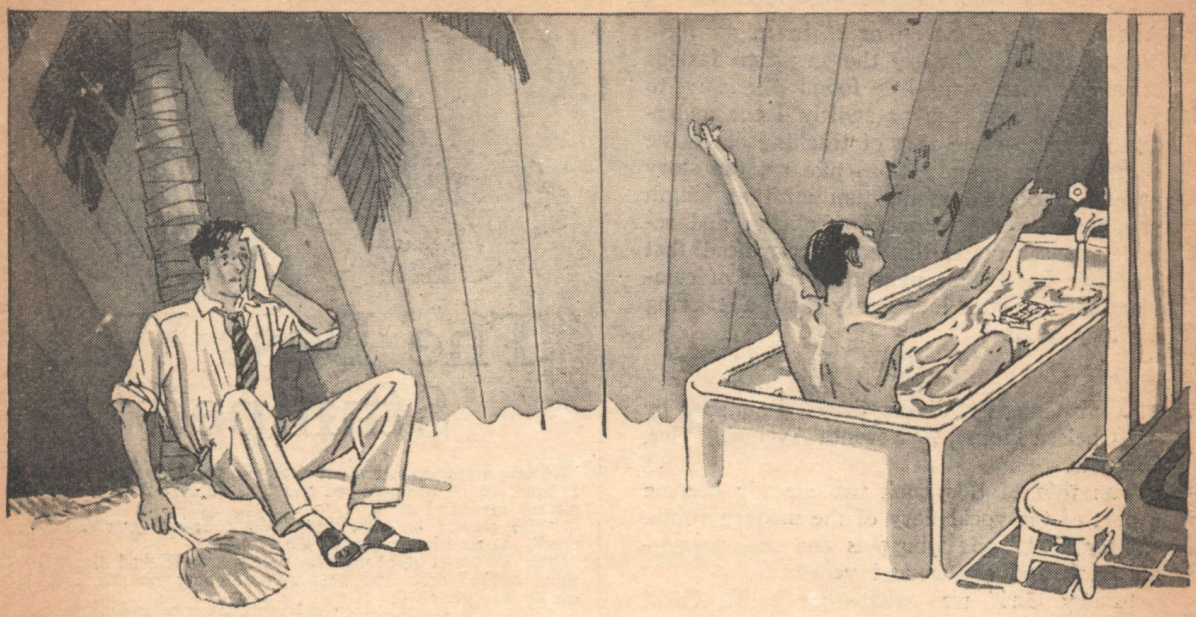
For poor Carol, spurned by the man she loved, turned away from her luxurious home by her irate father, things were dark. For a breathless moment it seemed as though she would accept the hand of "Broddy" Estabrook, superficial scion of a wealthy family, but then came her chance to make a supreme sacrifice, a sacrifice which she knew would intensify Kent's distrust of her. Bravely she accepted fate's challenge. And in the end there came real happiness far different from the gayety that she knew in her "Party Girl" days and far deeper.

Here is a love story that is as modern as your morning newspaper, and yet is as eternal as the hills. "Party Girl" is a genuine work of art.

THE HUSBAND HUNTER, by Beulah Poynter. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price, 75 cents.

"Supposing." Supposing you were a highly eligible young woman, without a cent to your name and of a sudden you were left enough money to travel in quest of a wealthy husband. And you set out deliberately to ensnare the unsuspecting male. And then supposing you found that you were in love in spite of yourself and with a man who by no means met the qualifications of your quest. What then?

That's the fascinating theme of this unusual book, which takes its readers to Algiers and Cairo and through a world of colorful adventures.



Fair *and* Cooler!

When it's too hot to stir and your skin seems to ooze and your clothes feel too tight and your feet fit no shoes—

Then steer for the nearest bathtub! Disengage yourself from every clammy stitch of this summer's fashions. Renounce all worldly possessions except the purest thing you know—it's white and it's big and it always floats!

For immediate relief, go right into a heart-to-heart consultation with Ivory Soap. Spread a snowdrift of Ivory foam richly over your entire architecture. You will instantly feel as cool as a sprig of mint in a tinkling glass of iced tea! Then duck your shoulders under tne water as a hint for every Ivory bubble to rinse away.

And then, take your choice . . . stretch out for a 10-minute rest cure . . . or splash about as if the tub were your old swimming hole. In either case the results are the same—a completely revived American!

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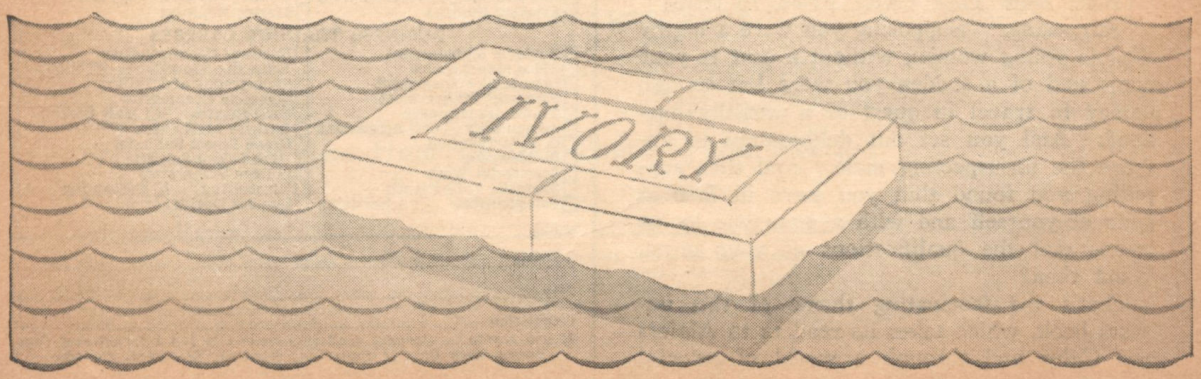

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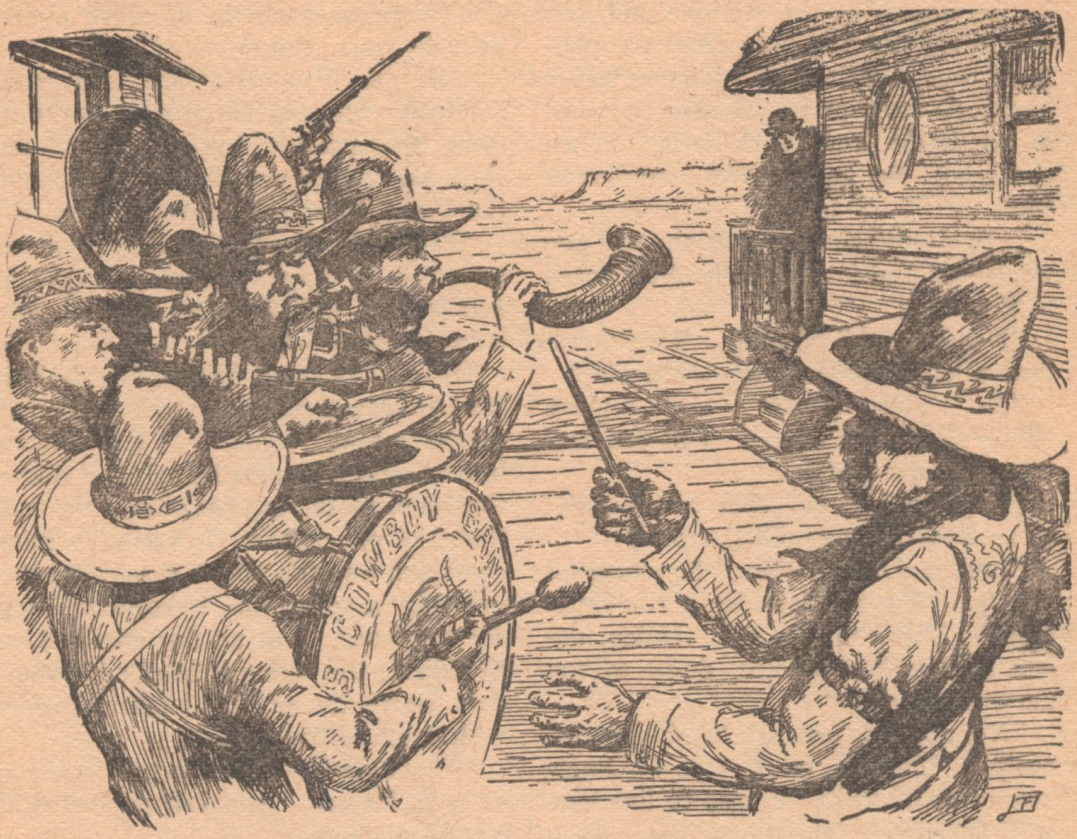


Maverick Makers

By Dane Coolidge

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT MISTAKE.

IT was freezing cold when No. 9, westbound, rumbled down out of Puerco Pass and whistled to stop at Bitterwater. Cold, with snow on the ground—and a sand storm a thousand feet high rolling in from the dry river bed beyond. The air was full of grit, and spitting with electricity, and the sun hung red in the west; but down at the station a hundred cowboys were waiting, and when the engine stopped for water they cursed.

A bass drum boomed twice, some one emptied a six-shooter, and then on the rear platform a lone man appeared, leaning out to look ahead. All they could see was a big wolfskin overcoat, and the top of a brown derby hat.

"Is that him?" yelled a dozen eager voices at once; and a big man answered contemptuously:

"Heck, no! Can't you see that cady hat?"

But the man in the derby drew a pistol from his belt and slipped it into his overcoat pocket. He had expected something like this.

The train jerked forward and rumbled slowly down the track, to deliver

its passengers at the station; and Jeff Standifer, still watching from the platform, was conscious of a woman beside him. A very pretty woman, gowned in the latest New York style. When she beheld the huge crowd, she shrank back.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, as another gun went off. And involuntarily she glanced at Standifer.

"Never mind," he said. "They won't hurt a lady. That bunch wants me."

"No, they aren't!" she replied. "They're waiting for me. Did you ever make a great mistake?"

He glanced at her over his shoulder as he sized up the milling crowd.

"Lots and lots of 'em," he answered grimly. "But this last one is the worst of all. That's the Rustlers' Union, unless I'm badly mistaken, down to run me out of town."

"No, no," she insisted, laughing nervously. "They're good boys—I know every one of them. I used to live here at Bitterwater. And they've come down to welcome me. Only—— Oh, I'm in a terrible fix!"

She gazed at him appealingly, but he did not respond. She doubted if he had even heard.

"I—I don't know you," she went on, "nor what your mistake was. But mine was a thousand times worse."

"You're wrong," he said, drawing back. "That crowd is out to kill me."

"Why, you're crazy!" she cried, almost in tears. "Can't you hear them shouting, 'Annabelle!' And, oh, they've got a bull fiddle!"

She clasped her hands in horror as a raucous roar went up, and the man looked the crowd over again, doubtfully.

"Well, maybe you're right," he admitted. "But there seem to be two different outfits. And I just got a telegram, on the train, warning me not to get off at Bitterwater. That being the case, and with a fight on my hands, I don't suppose I can be of much assistance to you. But——"

"Oh, yes, you can!" she exclaimed, suddenly clutching his arm as the train came to a grinding stop. "Just let me walk along with you until we get to the hotel and I'll never, never forget it!"

"Yours to command!" he responded gallantly. "Play your cards and I'll follow suit. Only just take my left arm, lady, in case——"

His words were lost in the sudden din of cowhorns and the jangle of a restaurant triangle. Resin-boxes brayed, and trumpets blared, and above the boom of the big bass drum the bull fiddle let out a roar. It was a frontier charivari, and the porter dropped down grinning to place his upholstered step for the bride. But all this was lost on Standifer, for, looming head and shoulders above the crowd, he saw a man with death in his eyes.

"That's Jack—Jack Flagg!" spoke a voice in his ear. And Jeff nodded, still watching his man.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I'll protect you, whatever happens."

"But I am afraid!" she faltered, clutching convulsively at his arm. And as she spoke, Flagg started toward them.

He was a tall man, nearly six feet six, with broad menacing shoulders and spidery legs which disappeared into a pair of slim, high-heeled boots. He was a handsome man, too; but his face was flushed with drink, and there was a dangerous glare in his eyes. It was a look which Standifer had come to know, and he dropped his right hand into his pocket.

The roar of the bull fiddle had suddenly ceased, the drums and horns were stilled; and in the silence Flagg spoke.

"Hello, Annabelle!" he greeted, barring their way. "Who's this?" And he pointed to Standifer.

For a moment, she stood mute, her eyes searching desperately for some

friendly face in the crowd. Then she glanced up at Jeff with a swift, radiant smile.

"Why—why, this is my husband, Jack."

Standifer started, and for an instant his poker face changed. Then, reading the fear in her dark, appealing eyes, he drew down his lips and said nothing.

"The heck it is!" jeered Flagg, looking Jeff over insolently. "So you married this thing, eh? A New York dude, with a cady hat and everything! Well, come on, boys—let's kiss the bride!"

He reached out to snatch her, but before he could claim his kiss, the girl slapped him, full in the face. All her fear had vanished now and she confronted him defiantly, unmindful of the man at her side. Flagg stepped back swiftly, his cheeks pale except for the brand where her hand had left its mark, and Standifer caught his eye.

"Kindly leave the lady alone," he suggested. And the cowboy turned on him furiously.

"You poor yap," he cried. "Who called you in on this? Annabelle is my girl and I'm going to have that kiss. We'll just see what you're going to do about it!"

He shot out a long arm and made a grab at Annabelle, and Jeff's hand whipped out of his overcoat. A heavy pistol flashed in the air and came down on Flagg's head and he fell like a pole-axed steer. Standifer looked at the crowd, his blue eyes turning steely gray, but his voice was still pitched low.

"Any one else want a kiss?" he asked. And they opened up to let him pass.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEWLYWEDS.

WITH the blushing bride on his arm and his six-shooter ready at hand, Jeff Standifer passed swiftly through the gawking crowd, which had divided once more into two groups. On the left, grim and hostile, stood men fresh from the range with their pistols hung rustler style. And on the right, grinning and sheepish, stood the cowboy musicians, their instruments still in their hands.

"Hello, Johnny!" cried Annabelle, who had suddenly regained her spirits. "I knew I'd find you here, somewhere. Say, George, will you bring my bags? We're going to 'Mother' Collingwood's hotel."

She glanced up at Standifer as, his poker face still set, he scanned the ranks of the rustlers, and his white teeth flashed back a slow smile.

"This is a new one on me," he said. "But stay with it—I'm game. Who are these boys with the drums and horns?"

"Oh, some cowboys I know," she answered airily. "They're just out for a little fun."

"Yes, they seem to be right playful," responded Jeff. "Sorry I had to hit your friend, but his head felt good and hard, so I reckon there's no real harm done."

"Well—perhaps not," she sighed. "But I'm afraid he won't like it. You see, Jack and I were engaged."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Standifer, startled out of his calm. "So that's what was biting him! But all the same, when a lady refuses a kiss——"

"Yes?" she prompted, meeting his eyes mischievously.

"Never mind," he said. "We'll discuss that later. Who is this Jack Flagg, anyhow?"

"Why, he's father's range boss. The Mill Irons outfit, you know. And——"

"Holy smoke!" burst out Jeff, suddenly looking her over again. "Are you Captain Bayless' daughter?"

"Shhh!" she whispered fiercely. "You're supposed to know all that! Don't forget—we're newlyweds!"

"Well, tell me a little more, before I get in worse!" he entreated. But the bull fiddle had set up its roar. The

horns and drums joined in, then the gong and the resin boxes; and as they started up the street a procession fell in behind, with the charivari band up in front.

"Let's hurry!" gasped Annabelle, and running hand in hand, they came once more to where a human voice could be heard.

"That's the company headquarters, down there," she explained, as they paused for breath. "But we'll stop when we get to the hotel. Mother Collingwood will take me in, and—well, you see, father married again and perhaps I wouldn't be welcome. Did you ever have a stepmother?"

"Stepfather—that's just as bad," he answered. "Is this the hotel, ahead of us?"

He pointed to a large and pretentious building, constructed of sandstone from the neighboring buttes, and Annabelle dimpled into laughter.

"That's the Bucket," she shouted into his ear. "The finest saloon in town. It's always full. They had a fight there one time and two men were killed at once."

"Quite a burg!" he observed, surveying the single street with its long row of adobes and false fronts. "But who are these gentlemen that are following so close? I suppose they're some more of your friends?"

"Well, not all," she admitted, after a hasty look behind. "That big man with the red beard is 'Hog-eye Bill' Longyear. He calls himself the 'Rustler King.'"

Jeff glanced back again and leaned closer to her ear.

"I was called out here by your father," he confided; "to put the fear into these rustlers. And I believe they've caught on to who I am."

She looked up at him, startled, then back at the mob of rustlers who were rushing up to cut them off.

"You're perfectly safe—with me," she said. "Don't forget now—you're Annabelle's husband."

"I'm sure glad to know it," he responded enigmatically, as the mob closed in around him. And he stopped short, with his back to the wall.

Once more he stood facing them, one hand in his overcoat pocket, and the tumult and shouting ceased. The rustlers drew together, looking him over with hate-filled eyes, and Bill Longyear stepped to the front. He was a big, burly man, with flaming red hair and beard, and he thrust his head out fiercely.

"I see," he observed, "you're wearing a pair of boots, in spite of your danged cady hat. Air you that ba-ad Texas Ranger that Captain Bayless sent fur?"

"Why, no," protested Annabelle, as Jeff did not answer. "This is my husband—from New York!"

"Excuse *me,* Miss Bayless," responded Longyear with mock politeness. "I happen to know about this hombre, myself. And I jest want to inform him, we're a committee of citizens to tell him he's not wanted in this town. Dropping down off the train like a regular city tough and belting Jack Flagg over the head! By grab, boys, we ought to lynch him!"

"Well, why don't you do it?" suggested Standifer ironically, as a murmur went through the crowd.

"Aw—you and your big six-shooter and your little dicer hat!" blustered Longyear, drawing closer. "You must think, by Joe, we're skeered of you!"

"Oh, no," answered Jeff, as Annabelle clutched his arm. "But don't you ever think, Mr. Longyear, that I'm afraid of you. Because right there you'd be making a mistake."

"Oh, I would, hey?" jeered Longyear. "Well, I'd like to ask one question. What fur, then, did you wear that hard hat?"

"I wore it," retorted Standifer, "be-

cause it matches the color of my hair and makes fools like you ask questions. But if you don't like my style, you know exactly what you can do. Just knock that hat off and see where you light. Or any other gentleman," he added.

He looked them over scornfully, his lips curling in a truculent smile, and Annabelle shrank away. But no one stepped out to smash the cady hat, and Standifer turned his attentions to Longyear.

"You were asking," he continued, "if I was that Texas Ranger that was due here on No. 9. Well, I'm the man, all right, and if any of you don't like it you can——"

"Oh, please don't talk like that!" broke in Annabelle anxiously. "Do you want to start a fight?"

"Never mind, now," he said. "I can do my own talking. These men have followed me, and if they're looking for trouble, I'll certainly do my best to accommodate them. I'm a free-born American citizen from the sovereign State of Texas, and I'll wear any hat I please."

He jammed the derby on tighter and cocked his head at the crowd, but as he was turning away triumphantly the doors of the Bucket bulged outward and a big, rawboned cowboy lurched forth. He was drunk, but not too drunk to take in the situation—the gang of menacing rustlers and the one man standing facing them, like a wolf before a pack of hounds. For a moment with drunken gravity he regarded Jeff Standifer, and then with a loud whoop he surged over toward him, one hand raised high as if he were going to strike him a blow.

"Hello, 'Good Eye,' you danged old cow thief!" he yelped. And with a smashing blow he knocked the hat down over Standifer's ears, while the crowd as one man ducked. But the expected bullets did not come; and when they looked up Jeff was wrenching the hat from his ears, while a broad grin overspread his countenance.

"W'y, hel-lo, Rover!" he hailed. "I thought you were dead. Well, well, I'm sure glad to see you!" And he shot out a welcoming hand.

"Dead—nothing!" scoffed Rover, grabbing him into a bear hug. "That bullet only creased me—made a nice part for my hair. Right there is where the old sheriff hit me." He backed off to show a white line through his bristling black hair, and then he looked at Jeff again. "But what the deuce," he demanded, "are you doing with that thing on? Here, throw away that dicer and put on a man's hat!" He slammed his broad sombrero down on Jeff's rumpled hair, and stood off to regard him admiringly.

"That's more like it!" he observed, casting the derby aside. "And, boys," he went on, turning his grin on the crowd, "I want to introduce to you my old side-kick from New Mexico, the outstealingest danged cow thief in the world. This is Good Eye, boys, from the Seven Rivers country, where the kids cut their teeth on a running iron. He can spot a slick-eared calf farther than you yaps can see its dust. That's where he got his name, boys—Good Eye!"

He ended up with a resounding slap which made Standifer's head snap back, and threw out his chest dramatically.

"Hah—Good Eye!" he mocked. "'The Maverick King.'" Twirling his twine, he crouched behind a blade of grass, shouting: "Whoopee-lah! *Orehanos!*"

He went drunkenly through motions of roping a calf as he let out the rustler war cry, and Standifer shoved him rudely aside.

"That's plenty now, Rover," he grinned. "I've been sent for, you might say, to discourage that kind of doings.

And if you keep on talking, these gentlemen might get the idea——"

"What?" yelled Rover. "Are you that cattle detective that the 'Old Man' sent back to Texas for? Well, dang my heart, if that ain't the holy limit! Come on, this calls for the drinks!"

"Just a minute," broke in Standifer, as Rover laid hold of him. "I want to introduce you to the lady. Annabelle," he went on, "this is an old, old friend of mine. And Rover, shake hands with my wife."

"Your—wife!" quavered Rover. "My gosh, are you married, too? Well, Jeff, you're sure getting respectable. Mrs. Standifer, ma'am, I want to congratulate you on getting a good husband like Jeff. He's a man you can depend on. He's never been known to weaken, and he's never hollered for help. That's his motto: 'Never holler for help.'"

"He never has—since I've known him," responded Annabelle demurely. "But don't you get my husband drunk, now!"

"No, ma'am," promised Rover, bowing low and crossing his heart. "Jest one drink, for old-time's sake. I'll bring him back as good as new."

"We'd better take her down to the hotel first," suggested Jeff. "I want to have a talk with you, Rover."

"Sure! Sure!" agreed Rover, brushing the staring rustlers aside as he escorted them to the door of the hotel; and the crowd looked on in wonder. Not in many a moon had things happened so thick and fast—and still there was more to come.

The Hotel Bitterwater stood next to the Bucket—with another saloon on the other side—a two-storied stone building with a broad gallery above and below, in the old-fashioned Southern style. But that it was strictly respectable was evident at a glance when Mother Collingwood came to greet them. She was a large and comfortable soul, with gray hair and a beaming smile, and when Annabelle ran to meet her she kissed her.

"Why, Annabelle!" she cried. "Is it true, what they say—that you're come back to Bitterwater, married?"

"I guess it is," admitted Annabelle, after returning the hearty kiss. "This is my husband, Mr.—er, Standifer. Can you give me a room for the night?"

She blushed rosy red as she took Jeff's arm and presented him to the keen-eyed hostess, and he concealed his embarrassment with a bow.

"Why, yes, child," responded Mrs. Collingwood, after a brief glance at Standifer, and another and longer look at Rover, "you know you're always welcome. But I naturally thought, Annabelle, you'd go up to your father's, and tell——"

"Oh, you know why I don't!" exclaimed Annabelle impulsively. "I don't believe I'd be welcome. And your upstairs rooms are so homelike——"

"I'll give you my best one, with the French doors on the gallery——"

"That will be just fine," dimpled Annabelle. "And now, Jeff, will you please register?"

"Oh—sure!" responded Standifer. And, stepping quickly to the front he wrote without a tremor:

"Jeff Standifer and wife, New York."

"What? From New York?" repeated Mother Collingwood. And she turned to eye Jeff suspiciously.

"Yes, ma'am, New York," spoke up Rover with drunken confidence. "I know that's where he's from, because he had on one of them hard hats that they wear to protect their haids from the icicles. That's my hat he's got on now—I knowed him, back in New Mexico."

"Oh, I see," murmured Mrs. Collingwood; and Jeff broke the awkward silence by turning abruptly to Annabelle.

"I'm going to be busy," he said, "with some business for your father that may take me out of town. Will you be all right here with Mrs. Collingwood?"

"Why, bless her heart, yes!" cried Mother Collingwood. "I'll take the best of care of her, Mr. Standifer. But don't you go to drinking!" she charged, and gazed at Rover reproachfully.

"No, no!" laughed Jeff. "Just one glass with my old friend, here. But—er—Annabelle!" he went on, beckoning her to one side.

"Yes—Jeff," she responded meekly.

"How are you fixed for money?" he asked, pulling out his roll.

"Oh, I've got plenty," she protested; but he peeled off three large bills and handed them over negligently.

"Better take a little more," he observed. "In case I don't show up."

"Oh, thank you—Jeff," she murmured; and as she met his eyes she blushed again, rosy red. Then, chatting gayly with Mother Collingwood, she went up the winding stairs and Standifer hurried out with Rover. He felt the need of that drink.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN.

THERE was a wild look in Standifer's eyes as he butted into the Bucket; and several rustlers at the bar, who had been denouncing him as a coward, stood frozen in their tracks. But the ranger ignored them and signaled the barkeeper.

"Gimme a tall one!" he said. And Rover smiled.

"That's the talk!" he applauded. "Give me a tall one, too."

But after the drink he plucked Jeff by the sleeve and beckoned him to a cardroom in the rear.

"Now, what the deuce," he demanded, "is all this about? And where did you meet up with Annabelle? She just came back from New York."

"I've been in New York, myself," defended Standifer. "Where do you reckon I got that hard hat?"

"Well, not in these parts," admitted Rover, sinking down and pushing the button for the drinks. "Do you figger that helped you to win her?"

"Didn't need no help!" answered Jeff. "And you don't need a drink, either. Keep sober—I want to talk to you."

"Because if you do," went on Rover, "I'm going to git me one. That's the finest gal in all this country. How'd you come to marry her, Jeff?"

"Say, you keep on asking questions and you'll know more than I do about this. So don't get so dadburned personal. What the dickens are you doing, out in this part of Arizona? You don't mean to say you're on the dodge!"

"Yes, and don't you get too personal!" warned Rover jovially. "I'm 'Ralph the Rover'—named after a dog—and I'm roving. Understand?

"'Then Ralph the Rover tore his hair
And cursed himself in his despair.
But the waves rolled in on every side,
And the good ship sank beneath the tide.'

"I found that one time in a book of poetry—it's something about a pirate ship. Come on—let's have a drink!"

"One's all I need," responded Jeff shortly. "What I'm shy on is information, so taper off and tell me what you know."

"Yours truly," bowed Rover, after tossing off his whisky. "And Jeff, old-timer, if you need any assistance, jest call on me. Understand? I'll stay with you, fanning or fogging, until time ends. I never go back on a friend."

"I'm counting on you," answered Standifer. "You're the only friend I've got in the country, and I'm sure glad I ran across you. Now, who's this Jack Flagg, Rover?"

"Why, he's the lucky guy that was due to marry Annabelle. He's Captain

Bayless' right-hand man, and range boss for the Mill Irons. Didn't Annabelle tell you about him?"

"Not a word," stated Jeff, "until we stepped off the train and he tried to kiss the bride. I hit him over the head with my six-shooter."

"Well, say, you're getting bravo!" burst out Rover admiringly. "And I could see that Annabelle was pleased. Don't you remember what she said, when I mentioned that you'd never hollered for help? She knows now that she's married a real man!"

"Reckon so?" inquired Jeff. "But say, tell me this, then. Where do I get off with Captain Bayless? What's he going to say when I report at his office that I've just busted his range boss over the head?"

"You'd better not report it," advised Rover. "Because he thinks the world and all of Jack. Been his wagon boss for years—and when he quit, last spring, the whole outfit went to pieces. Drunk, tough, and disorderly, and wouldn't work for old John Dobbins. So the captain has jest hired back Jack."

"Well, I'm dished, then," sighed Jeff. "Unless," he added hopelessly, "I can make some grand-stand play and ketch one or two of these cow thieves."

"You want a cow thief?" barked Rover. "Want to ketch one, red-handed, before the old man hears from Jack? I can lead you right to the spot —I cut a blood sign, coming to town!"

"You do it," offered Standifer, jumping up, "and I'll make you my side-kick on this job. I've got to have a pardner, and you're the very man I want, if you'll lay off of this sheep-herder whisky."

"All right," agreed Rover. "Only I've got to have my dram or my mind don't seem to sagaciate. Let's go up to the company house and see how Captain Bayless is taking it. If he's ca'm, he hasn't heard yet."

They slipped out the back way and passed up an alley, but as they came out on the street Jeff stopped.

"We'll have to get deputized first," he said. "Do you happen to know the sheriff?"

"Heck, yes," laughed Rover. "He just turned me out of jail last week. Best-hearted old sheriff you ever saw—can't bear to keep us boys locked up. Him and the J. P., they turn everybody loose."

"Well, that's fine," grumbled Standifer. "For getting votes, anyway. Reckon he'll turn all my rustlers loose, too?"

"You ain't caught any, yet," observed Rover with a grin. "There's the headquarters building, right ahead."

He pointed to a huge, two-story building that stood at the end of the street, and reluctantly Jeff walked down toward it. It too was made of sandstone, quarried out of the flat-topped buttes, and across the wide sidewalk, like an invitation to enter, there stretched before them a broad stream of light.

"That's his office," whispered Rover mysteriously, as they halted outside the door. "The old cap'n is waiting—and he's shore on the prod," he added. "I'll bet you he's heard about Jack!"

He pointed in through the broad window and, pacing to and fro, Jeff caught the first glimpse of his employer. He was a stern-looking old man with a long mustache and a fierce goatee, and he stood up very straight, like a soldier. In his youth, as Standifer knew, he had been a captain of Texas Rangers, when the Comanches were raiding the settlements. But now his hair and beard were snow-white, and his head was bowed in thought.

"I'll take a chance," decided Jeff. "All he can do is fire me. So you go down to the store and buy me a new hat. I'll meet you here in half an hour."

"Half a minute," corrected Rover,

"if he knows you busted Jack. I don't care if you did marry Annabelle."

"Say, shut up about that," warned Standifer. "And get out of here, quick. He's coming!"

"Good evening," he greeted, as the wide portal swung open, and Captain Bayless regarded him suspiciously.

"Good evening, sir," he answered, "and what is your business here? Didn't I hear another voice?"

He gazed into the darkness behind him, and Standifer came forward.

"I'm that Texas Ranger," he said, "that you wrote Captain Ross for." And the old man regarded him sharply.

"Come in," he said at last; and when the door was closed he swung the heavy shutters across the window. "Now, what's this I hear, about a fight at the station? Are you the man that got off that train?"

"Yes, sir," replied Standifer, and Bayless glared at him angrily.

"I wired you," he said, "that the rustlers were gathering to run you out of town. Why didn't you go through, as I suggested, and leave the train at Duncan?"

"That isn't the way I work," responded Jeff. "I've come here to get my orders."

"Well, your orders," bellowed the captain, "are to break up this thieving if you have to kill every rustler in the country. The company is losing a thousand calves a year, to say nothing of the steers that are stolen. It has come to such a pass that every settler for a hundred miles thinks the Mill Irons ought to keep him in beef."

"That's the way it generally is," observed Jeff, philosophically, "where there's one big company in the country. How's the sheriff—can you get him to deputize me?"

"Oh, yes, he'll do anything," answered Bayless savagely. "He's all things to all people—a great vote-getter and all that—but, damn it, he never leaves town! You'll always find Smith Crowder down there on the saloon corner, or over playing pitch with his prisoners. They all like him, the old rascal, and I like him myself. But what about my company and my obligation to the stockholders, who haven't received a dollar in years? I told Smith Crowder plainly I was out of patience with his tomfoolery, and then I wrote John Ross for you. Sit down—have a drink! I forget your name."

"Jeff Standifer," replied Jeff; and as Bayless went for the liquor he heaved a great sigh and sat down. The captain had not heard about Jack Flagg being clubbed, or he certainly would have mentioned it. Nor had he received the news of Annabelle's return, with Jeff tagging along as her husband. Otherwise, there would have been some remarks, for the boss was not a man to mince words. But now he had his mind on the rustlers.

"There are three classes of people who are getting our cattle," began Bayless as he tossed off his drink. "The Mormons, back in the mountains and down along the river. My range boss is always having trouble with them. Then the Mexicans, over east and along the New Mexico line, are getting a world of beef. But my big trouble"—and he frowned—"is with this gang of brazen rustlers who met you at the train to-night. I'll admit at the start that in any new country there's bound to be a certain amount of stealing. But when rustlers get so bold that they try to run the country and dictate how I shall run my business, then it's time for the company to take the law into its own hands and fight fire with fire. I want you, Mr. Standifer, to put the fear into their black hearts—and I'll stand by you, no matter who you kill."

He paused and nodded grimly, but Standifer only stirred in his chair.

"Well, as to killing," he said, at last,

"that isn't the way I work. The theft of a few calves, or the beefing of a steer, would hardly justify that. I try to work within the law, but if a man resists arrest——"

"Ah, yes, yes!" beamed the captain, pouring out another drink. "I quite understand you, Mr. Standifer. Just use your own judgment and you can always depend on me to come to your defense."

"Well—thanks," nodded Jeff. "I may have to call on you. But, ordinarily, I don't have any trouble. I try to work entirely through arrests and convictions. Can you depend on your district attorney?"

"As far," observed Bayless, "as any elective officer can be depended upon to prosecute his constituents. But the quick and easy way, as we found out back in Texas when the country was overrun with outlaws——"

"Nope," vetoed Standifer. "I'm no killer, Captain Bayless. I believe in respecting the law, and expecting others to do the same. That's the way to stamp out rustling."

"Oh, it is, eh?" blared the captain, throwing back his mane of hair and glaring at Jeff ferociously. "Well, let's come to an understanding, young man. Are you working for me, or am I working for you? That's what I want to know!"

"Well, neither one," responded Jeff. "I haven't taken the job yet. But if I do, Captain Bayless——"

"You'll tell me how to run things!" ended Bayless.

"No, by grab!" decided Standifer, rising up. "You can get another man to do your killing."

"Oh, no! Just a moment!" protested the captain. "Now, don't misunderstand me. You're a brave man, Mr. Standifer, or you'd have gone on to Duncan, instead of facing the crowd at the station. My old servant came running back and reported you'd had a fight; but he was so taken aback to see my daughter step down off the train that he couldn't give any details. It seems," he went on, falling to pacing the floor again, "that Annabelle is married."

"So I hear," responded Standifer bluffly.

"I've been expecting her," said Bayless, glancing uneasily toward the door. "But for some reason she hasn't come. I left the shutters open, to let the light pour out and indicate that she and her husband were welcome. But she must ask my forgiveness, and the forgiveness of her mother. There's some one out there, now!"

He hurried to the door and threw it open expectantly; but there in the bright light stood Ralph the Rover, his eyes squinted to a drunken leer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHIVAREE.

THERE was murder in the old captain's eyes as he glared into the face of Rover; and yet, before he spoke, he glanced behind him, out into the wind-swept night. But his daughter was not there, and his rage burst forth like a torrent.

"What do you mean, you drunken loon?" he roared. "Begone! Get away from my door! No, I don't want to talk with you! Go!"

"Go, he says," observed Rover, winking solemnly at his friend behind; and Standifer saw a way out.

"Wait, Rover," he called, "and I'll go along with you." But the captain barred the door.

"Is this man," he demanded, "a friend of yours?"

"He sure is," responded Jeff, "and a darned good friend. We'll both of us go—right now."

He started to slip out the doorway, but Captain Bayless stopped him, and suddenly his anger was forgotten.

"Well, I must say," he began,

"you've got a strange taste in friends. This man was discharged by my range boss last week—something to do with stealing a calf—but, of course, it's all right with me. What I wanted to say, before you go, was: You go ahead on that job and handle it to suit yourself. All I want, Mr. Standifer, is results."

He stepped aside to let Jeff pass, and his face took on a placating smile.

"You must excuse me," he murmured, "I'm not quite myself, to-night. I was expecting to find—Annabelle."

"Oh, she's gone to the hotel," spoke up Rover, unabashed. "And another thing, captain. I wasn't fired—I quit. I've got too much brains to range-brand for the company for forty dollars a month. When I start to stealing, I'll steal for myself. Come on, Jeff, here's your hat."

He held up a brand-new, cream-colored Stetson, the best that money could buy, and Standifer slipped out the door.

"I don't know what you refer to," shouted Bayless over his shoulder, but Rover cut him short.

"I refer," he bawled back, "to Mr. Jack Flagg, and the calf he wanted me to steal. But I showed him, by grab, here's one cowboy he cain't intimidate! He's nothing but a widow-robbing crook."

Rover threw out his chest and surveyed the captain arrogantly as he and Standifer traded hats, but Bayless waved him angrily away.

"Mr. Flagg informs me," he retorted, "that you are the crook. And between your word and his, I'll take Jack's."

"Help yourself!" returned Rover. "But what about this job, Jeff? Are we going out to ketch them rustlers?"

"What's that—what's that?" demanded the captain breathlessly. And Jeff turned back to explain.

"Well, by the gods!" moaned Bayless. "Must I take water again? Is this the man that informed you? Never mind my hasty words then. If they're butchering my steers you go ahead, Mr. Standifer, and arrest them."

"Well, what about Rover?" inquired Jeff, after a pause. "Do you reckon the sheriff will deputize him?"

"He'll have to do it," threatened the captain, "or I'll cut off his tobacco money. I've been keeping him in cigars for years. But I don't give a darn who it is that arrests these cow thieves as long as they're thrown into jail. It's been fourteen years by actual count since a rustler has been convicted in this county; but if that is your system, go ahead and play it out. And if the rascals resist arrest——"

"We'll kill 'em," croaked Rover. And once more Bayless' smile came back.

"I'll attend to this, right now," he announced, slamming the door; and as they stumbled across the tracks to where the jail and courthouse stood, Rover nudged Jeff in the ribs and laughed slyly.

The sheriff's office and jail stood just behind the courthouse, connected by a "bridge of sighs" where the prisoners were led back and forth, and a strip of cement sidewalk below. A dim light within threw barred shadows across the windows, but as they tramped in the door they found the sheriff and three prisoners engaged in a friendly game of pitch.

"Well, back to your cells, boys," he ordered, rising, and Captain Bayless surveyed him scornfully.

"Smith," he said, "you haven't got the first idea of making this jail a place of punishment. Have a smoke," and he handed over a cigar.

The sheriff took it doubtfully, his keen eyes on Ralph the Rover, who was standing defiantly in the rear.

"You, Rover," he challenged, stepping toward him, "what the deuce are you doing heah? I thought I told you to git out of town?"

"Important business," explained Rover, "made it necessary to return." And he jerked his head toward Bayless.

"Mr. Sheriff," began the captain, "I'll make you acquainted with Jeff Standifer, of the Texas Rangers. He's the man that Captain Ross sent out from San Antonio to help put a stop to this rustling."

"Delighted to know you, suh!" exclaimed the sheriff pompously, as he extended a large, fat hand. "I've often heard Captain Bayless boast about the Texas Rangers, but you're the first one I ever saw."

He was a big man, rotund and smiling, with his trigger finger gone and a limp in one leg, which was short. But there was something about his smile and his round, florid cheeks which made him look like an overgrown boy. Jeff shook hands, but he did not like him.

"Now, Smith," went on Captain Bayless. "I want everything to be regular. So please give Mr. Standifer a commission as deputy sheriff, and a star that he can wear around town. That will show he is authorized to make arrests."

For a moment, the keen gray eyes of the sheriff squinted down as he glanced from man to man. Then he jerked open a drawer and brought out a star, which he pinned on Standifer's coat.

"I'll just deputize you, right now," he said, "and we'll talk about commissions later."

"All right," spoke up Rover, "you can give me one, too, sheriff. We're going out to make an arrest."

"The heck you are!" bayed the sheriff. But when Bayless explained to him he dug up a star reluctantly.

"That's all right, captain," he protested, "but I've got my future to consider. And if it gits around the county that I've deputized this jailbird, I'm liable to hear from the voters. In jail one week and a deputy sheriff the next don't look very regular, nohow. But if you'll vouch for him, Captain Bayless, and stand by if there's any trouble you——"

"Give him the star," directed Bayless, "and I'll stand right behind you, no matter if all heck breaks loose. It has got to a point where I've got to stop this stealing or go out of business into bankruptcy."

"All right," grumbled Crowder, as he pinned on the badge. "But remember now, Rover, the first time you git drunk you're——"

"Then down comes my meat house," jested Rover.

"You're fired," ended the sheriff, "and you'll serve out that sentence. Six months in the county jail."

"I'll remember," promised Rover; but as he passed out the door he polished up his badge with his sleeve.

"Put that under your coat," ordered Jeff severely, "and don't let me ketch you flashing it. Do you reckon the Texas Rangers go swelling around like that? Keep it hid! Well, good night, captain!"

He shook hands perfunctorily with the general manager of the Mill Irons and hired a horse at the O. K. Corral. But as he was saddling up, to get out of town, Rover stepped over and whispered in his ear.

"You ride down that street," he warned, "and these rustlers will follow you, savvy? Stick around a while until they git good and drunk—unless you want to take on the whole crew."

"Well, all right," spoke up Jeff. "We'll wait until to-morrow." And as he went out the gate he caught the roustabout grinning.

"Back to the Bucket," gloated Rover, "and we'll join hands in a regular bender. These rustlers have got spies, and that hostler is one of them; but getting drunk will throw them off their guard."

"If I wanted to get drunk," observed Jeff sarcastically, "I'd give five dollars

for your start, right now. But maybe we'd better hide out. There's a lot of toughs in town, if I'm any judge, and these rustlers are sure on the prod."

"Out for trouble," agreed Rover, as they dodged up the alley. "But they haven't forgotten Jack Flagg. They know from what you gave him that you're not a man to be monkeyed with. And they know me, too—the scoundrels! It was only last week I took a crack at Jack, myself—that's how come they gave me six months."

"Oho!" laughed Standifer. "So that's what they were sore about!"

"Yes, and that ain't all," returned Rover, rolling his eyes. "I know too much. Understand? I've got the goods on a lot of them. But they cain't touch me now—I'm a deputy sheriff!" And he slapped the star under his coat.

"Yes, sir," he went on, as they slipped into the cardroom and ordered a bottle brought in. "I'm a bad man from Bitter Crick, once I get my dander up; and this has made me hot as a fox. I'm going to take you, Jeff, to where a fresh beef has just been killed—there's red marks all over the ground. And leading off up the canyon is the tracks of their wagon wheels, where they've gone on to make up a load. That's the way these rustlers work it—they kill and butcher a whole wagonload. And if you run up on 'em, they shoot."

His deep-set eyes gleamed fiercely as he spoke, and he slapped his holstered six-shooter.

"But I'll show 'em," he boasted, "they cain't intimidate me! I'm a fighter! You know it—don't you?"

"I sure do," nodded Jeff. "What've you been doing since I saw you last, that time when the sheriff shot you? I thought, for a certainty, you were dead."

"Dead, heck!" laughed Rover. "I jest let 'em think so, so the suckers would leave me alone. Been out here ever since, riding the range, and so forth, and I know this whole country like a book. Why, Jeff, I can take you into some of the dangest places, where an officer never would go. And when it comes to rustling, I know the business from A to Z. Been in it, in fact, myself."

"I thought you might've," nodded Standifer, "but you don't need to tell me about it. And you don't need to tell on your friends. If I can't find 'em, they're welcome, that's all. I've had quite a little experience, back in Texas."

"Yes, but what's this you were telling me," spoke up Rover with awakened interest, "about being back in New York? By grab, when I saw you with that cady hat on——"

"Oh, that was just a bluff," laughed Jeff.

"What? Ain't you never been back there at all? Then what's all this about Annabelle?"

"I mean about the hat," hedged Standifer. "I just wore it to get into town."

"Yes, but listen," persisted Rover. "If you never went to New York——"

"Now, say, you listen," broke in Jeff, "and don't be so danged curious about something that's none of your business. I'm not prying into your past, and don't you pry into mine. Is that agreeable? Then have a drink."

He poured out two glasses, and as Rover tossed off his whisky he fell into a mellow philosophizing. He harked back to their early life, on the plains along the Pecos and catching cattle in the brakes of the Guadalupes, but in the midst of a rambling story he was brought to a halt by a noise like the roar of a bull.

"What's that?" he demanded, opening his mouth to listen. "By grab, it's the bull fiddle! Them rascals have come back. Git for home, boy—this is your shivaree!"

Standifer listened, aghast, and from

the street outside he could hear the charivari band tuning up. First the triangle, then the cow horns, then the trumpets and drum—and last of all the great bull fiddle with its huge resined, rawhide ropes, stretched taut across a box.

"My gosh!" he exclaimed. "I've got to get out of this!" But Rover cut him off at the door.

"None of that, now!" he warned. "Don't you skip out on Annabelle. Don't you leave her to face this alone. They'll keep it up all night, unless you come out and make a speech, and invite them all in for the drinks."

"You buy 'em the drinks," implored Standifer desperately, slipping a couple of big bills into his hand. "But so help me, Rover, this is asking too much! And some of those rustlers are liable to shoot me."

"Not with Annabelle there," answered Rover. "The boys would skin 'em alive. But I'll tell you right now, you've married the finest gal in all this country, and you've got to show a proper respect."

He took Standifer by one arm with such a compelling grip that resistance for the moment was useless. Jeff followed along reluctantly, out the door and up the alley, which Rover seemed to know like a cat; until at last, entering a back door, they found themselves in the Hotel Bitterwater, with Mother Collingwood running about like mad.

"Oh, Mr. Standifer," she implored, "please go up to the gallery before those drunken fools start to shooting. Because the last time they did this they broke six of my big windows and shot holes in my new tin roof."

"Up he goes!" announced Rover, giving Jeff a final shove, and before he knew it he was pushed out on the upper gallery, full in the face of the yelling crowd. The bass drum boomed, resin boxes and the bull fiddle sent up a welcoming roar; but as Rover stepped forward and held up his hand the expectant cowboys fell silent.

"Gents and friends," began Rover, clearing his throat importantly as he took a fresh grip on Jeff, "it gives me great pleasure to introduce the bridegroom, who will speak a few words to you all."

Standifer glanced about helplessly, seeking some means of escape from the misguided officiousness of his friend. But Rover was inexorable, and on the brink of the abyss, he took the final step. If he could have escaped out of town before the charivari began, his brief pose as Annabelle's protector would be overlooked. But to appear outside her room, to make a speech as her husband—that was something that could never be condoned. He struck Rover fiercely away, and when he addressed the crowd it was as Standifer, the cattle detective.

"I thank you, gentlemen," he began, "for the honor you have bestowed on me, but I'm afraid I don't deserve it. Most assuredly a man in my line of work can't expect to be real popular, so——"

"Bring out Annabelle!" shouted a voice, and as if at a signal an inferno of noise broke loose. Jeff stepped back dizzily, his ordeal quickly over; but as he turned to beat a retreat he found Annabelle beside him, very charming in a smart negligée. For a moment their eyes met, and at the appeal in her glance he forgot his craven intent. Bowing low, he offered his arm and led her out on the gallery, where her appearance started a rousing cheer. Then as she gazed down at them, smiling, the macabre figures in the torchlight became still and attentive to her words.

"Thank you, boys," she said, "for this royal welcome home, even though it is a little noisy. I'm glad to be back in the old town again, and to see so many of my friends. But my husband

is kind of bashful on an occasion like this, so you'll all excuse him, I know."

She bowed and waved her hand, and as they retired out of the glare Ralph the Rover leaped to the front.

"And now, gentlemen," he shouted in his big, rousing voice, "as a friend of the bride and groom, whom we all delight to honor, let me announce that the drinks are on me. So I ask you, one and all, to join me at the Bucket, where we will drink to their long life and happiness!"

He waved his hat and disappeared, leaping down the long stairs with the agility of a monkey, and from the darkness outside the drums and bull fiddle gave a salute, before they were silenced in the rush for the bar.

Upstairs on the broad gallery, where but a minute before their ears had been assaulted by noise, Jeff and Annabelle stood alone—half stunned by the uproar, hardly knowing yet what they had done. They had acted upon impulse, in a desperate endeavor to cover up their first escapade. But now they were committed—to what?

For a moment they stood staring, and Jeff mopped his brow as he faced the startled bride. Then he smiled and bowed gallantly, turning swiftly toward the stairs.

"Good night," he said. "I won't be coming back." And he hurried out into the dark.

CHAPTER V.

GOOD EYE—THE TEXAS RANGER.

THERE were drinks, and more drinks, in the Bucket, and drunken men reeling down the street; but the man to whose health they drank—to his long life and happiness—was hiding in the alley behind. Things had happened too thick and fast for even Jeff Standifer, who prided himself on his nerve. He had been seized upon by circumstances and made the whim of hostile forces, until now he was hopelessly involved. In one night, in one hour, he had become so entangled that his only escape lay in flight. But he had put his hand to the plow.

He had come on from San Antonio as a representative of the Rangers, whose pride it was never to turn back; and if he took the train East without striking a blow he would cast dishonor on the force. Yet if he stayed, what explanations there were to be made! Was he married, or was he not? And had he a right to strike Jack Flagg over the head and leave him disregarded? There would be the deuce to pay if the range boss learned the truth—and with the captain, to boot—but Standifer had set out to run down Rover's rustlers, and he hid in the alley and waited.

Men stumbled in and out of the Bucket or glided silently by. There was more on in the town than mere shouting and drinking, for the rustlers were still on his trail, but Jeff lurked in the shadows until Rover came out, muttering gloomily as he headed up the alley. They were alone, and Standifer followed boldly along behind him until, cursing, Rover whirled and drew his gun.

"Never mind, now, you danged drunken lout," spoke up Jeff. "Have you forgotten about those rustlers?"

"Why, dang my heart," exclaimed the crestfallen Rover, "have you been waiting out here all night? I thought you was married, Jeff!"

"Let me do the thinking," grumbled Standifer, "and let's get out of town. I'll carry that whisky for you, too."

He snatched a quart bottle out of Rover's overcoat pocket and providently stowed it in his own. Then, down the echoing street, along the sidewalks of heavy planks, they made their way to the O. K. Corral; until at last, dim and muffled, they rode out of town and crossed the frozen river at the ford. The night was bitter cold, but the wind had gone down, and the swoop of the

sand storm had ceased. Rover fell into a trail and headed south across the flats without a single word, and they settled in their saddles to endure.

Day dawned, a bleak gray, and the west wind came up again, whipping the sand up in gusts from the sand washes, and as Jeff looked out over the bare and deserted country he shifted in his saddle and muttered. What malign fate had laid hold of him, after coming so far, and where would his misadventures end? Must he drift on endlessly behind his drunken guide until they starved or froze in the snow?

Rover had huddled down inside his worn overcoat, as uncommunicative as the sullen Comanches with whom his boyhood had been spent. The elation of drink had subsided now and he was backtracking his own trail, where he had come down out of the hills. He was sober, but morose, and his flights of drunken oratory had been succeeded by a stoical calm. But he was awake and somberly vigilant, and as he rode his eyes searched the trail.

They toiled up a long rise to the summit of a ridge, sparsely covered with sagebrush and cedars, and before he showed himself Rover peered over the top and scanned the wide canyon below. They were moving up into the mountains, whose high peaks, covered with snow, gleamed like crystal in the clear, morning air. There were cedar brakes ahead, and tall pines in the distance, but the canyon was treeless and bare. Long and carefully Rover looked, then he spurred his lagging horse and led the way to the creek below.

Standifer saw a wide wagon track, leading off up the gulch, and, just above the crossing, a wallowed place in the snow, which was darkened by a pool of red.

"There it is," said Rover, jerking his thumb toward the spot, and Jeff reined over to look. Like reading an open book, he saw where three men, all wearing boots, had roped and butchered a big steer. Then, leaving the offal for the coyotes to dispose of, they had loaded the carcass and moved on.

Circling wide to keep from tramping out the tracks, Standifer scouted for some sign of the hide and ears, with their telltale marks of ownership. Then he stepped down and dug around beneath the ashes of their fire, but the rustlers had left nothing there.

"Must've taken the hide with 'em," observed Jeff at last. And Rover squinted at him dourly.

"I'll bet you the drinks from that bottle of mine," he said, "I can find the brand, right here."

"All right," agreed Standifer, after another look around; and Rover dropped off his horse.

"A Texas Ranger, hey?" he grumbled. "With lots and lots of experience! Look at that rock, you big lunkhead! Cain't you see it's been moved? Huh, huh—and he calls himself Good Eye!"

He strode down to the creek bed and laid hold of a huge, flat boulder, which he heaved up with a scornful grunt.

"Now dig there," he directed, "while I take my drink. I'm something of a rustler, myself."

"So it seems," returned Jeff, as up from the half frozen sand, he unearthed a patch of hide and two ears. "So that's the company's earmark—sharp the right and half crop the left! And this is the Mill Irons brand!"

He spread out the strip of hide and surveyed it thoughtfully. "We call that the Equal O, back in Texas. It wouldn't be a hard iron to burn."

"You said it," grunted Rover enigmatically. "Or hair burn, either, for that matter."

Standifer glanced up quickly, but Rover's face was set like iron, though his eyes gave off a peculiar glint.

"I'll remember that," said Jeff, and

knowing Rover's vengeful nature, he surmised that the latter was hitting at Jack Flagg. In hair branding, where part of the brand is seared into the flesh and the rest only burned into the hair, it is not until the calf sheds that the rustler can run his own brand. But hair branding on a large scale can never be carried on without the knowledge and complicity of the range boss.

"I—see," nodded Standifer, after pondering the information. "Well, have another one on me, Rover, while I put these ears in my saddlebag. Now what's your idea on ketching these men?"

"I don't care if I do," responded Ralph the Rover amiably, giving the bottle another long pull. "Well, since you ask me, Good Eye—and since I've got a sneaking idee who this is—my advice is: Don't ride up on him while he's at work. He's kinder quick on the trigger and something like a grizzly bear, if you ever met one that had jest killed a cow. But after he's loaded his wagon and is riding home, half froze, he might possibly listen to reason. Along toward evening, some time. I believe you mentioned that you wanted to arrest him."

He drew his lip up sarcastically, but Standifer nodded.

"That's my system," he said. "And just to show you it can be done, I'll pinch this man myself. So let's ride off the trail and get a little sleep. I don't suppose you've got anything to eat?"

"Not a bean," answered Rover. "But this whisky will do us—and come night we may get some of that beef."

He grinned again, sardonically, but Jeff let it pass for, after all, his partner might be right. He knew the country and the people—even the man who had killed this steer—and to eat they might have to fight. Up a narrow side canyon, where their horses could paw down to grass, they lit a fire and dried out their saddle blankets. Then, muffled up in their greatcoats, they slept like the dead until the warmth of the brief day had passed.

Jeff was dreaming of hiding cravenly in the Bucket alley while bearded rustlers sought his life, and while he crouched there, starved and freezing, a ruthless hand laid hold of him and dragged him away to the hotel. He woke up, fighting desperately, to find Rover leaning over him and one arm in a viselike grip.

"None of that, now!" warned Rover. "This don't call for no killing. You know that all I want is that bottle of whisky."

He rolled Standifer over and fished out the bottle which the latter had hidden in the folds of his overcoat, and with a sigh Jeff rose to his feet. The dream, at least, was over; and instead of facing Annabelle he had only to arrest three rustlers. He, too, took a drink, to start the blood in his veins, and in silence they took the trail.

Rover rode in the lead, his eyes scanning the ridges as they worked back into the hills, but the sun was sinking low before they sighted an abandoned camp, where the rustlers had killed another beef. Bits of meat lay by the fire, where they had cooked a hasty meal, and they snatched them up as they passed. The coals were still warm—and if they were to catch up with the loaded wagon there was no time to stop and eat.

Standifer spurred on ahead, like a hound on a fresh trail, while Rover, dawdling behind, ate wolfishly of the fragments and grinned at his partner's haste. Dusk had fallen in the woods and the wagon track had lost itself as it fell into a well-used road, when through the trees ahead a sudden flame leaped up, and the officers came to a halt.

"They're lighting a fire," said Rover,

"to warm up their hands. We're just in time—it's only three miles to Moab."

"You stay behind," ordered Jeff, "and we'll ride in on them, slow. And when we come in sight of the fire you ask for a drink, and I'll give it to you—maybe. But no shooting, now—this don't call for a killing. I'll attend to all three of them myself."

"Go to it!" agreed Rover. "But don't forget about that drink. I believe I could stand one, right now."

"Nope—you've got to make a talk for it," answered Standifer. And they rode noisily off down the road.

A fire flared up before them, revealing a canvas-covered wagon beside which stood three men, on their guard. Each held a Winchester, thrust out ready to shoot, but Jeff did not slacken his pace.

"Gimme a drink!" sang out Rover, beginning their play acting, and as Standifer handed over the bottle he could see the three rustlers lower their guns.

"Now go easy on it," he warned, "and we'll give them a drink. And leave 'em to me," he muttered.

"Who's doing this?" demanded Rover, jerking away the bottle. "I bought that whisky myself."

"Well, keep it, then," responded Standifer, spurring his horse toward the fire. And he glanced up at the rustlers from under his hat. Two stood back in the shadows, their guns held irresolutely, but the tall man who was their leader stepped forth into the firelight with his rifle ready to shoot, and still the ranger kept on.

"By grab," he said, "that fire sure looks good!" And, dismounting awkwardly, he pulled his horse's head around and stepped to the ground behind him. Then swiftly from its holster he whipped out his pistol and tucked it up the left sleeve of his overcoat.

"It's terrible cold," he complained, stumbling stiffly toward the fire; and the rustlers watched him, fascinated. Who it was, they did not know, but he came on, his hands together, using his wolfskin sleeves for a muff, while his companion stopped to empty the bottle.

"Goshamighty," grumbled Standifer, feigning an ague of shaking as he hurried toward the warmth of the fire, "it's cold—ain't it?"

He jerked the pistol out of his sleeve as he reached out his hands and rammed it into the tall leader's stomach, and suddenly his voice was hard.

"Drop that gun!" he commanded. "You're under arrest." But the rustler was too startled to resist. His hands went up instinctively, and the two men behind him stood frozen in their tracks.

"I'll jest collect their hardware," spoke up Rover genially, as he dropped nimbly down from his horse. "Fine weather for rustling, boys. Nice and cold—the meat will keep. Well, if it ain't Ike Cutbrush—from Moab!"

He stepped back in affected surprise, and the tall rustler, swallowing his Adam's apple, suddenly burst into a fit of cursing.

"You company spy!" he hissed. "I'll kill you fer this." But Rover only laughed.

"Have to ketch me first," he said. "And maybe break out of jail, to boot. This is Good Eye, the Texas Ranger."

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Common Or Garden Sense

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Fortune Grabbers," etc.

ABOUT once a year the sheriff told his office force he was going fishing. Then he would throw a few things into a pack and strike off for the headwaters of the Skookum-Chuck River, which in the Chinook language meant "strong waters." The waters were plenty strong, but in the fall of the year when the river had fallen a man could work his way through the canyons, with an occasional ducking, and snake out the limit of trout in a few hours. To reach the spot, the sheriff left the logging train at Kamley and hiked twenty-five miles over a none too well-marked trail. There were several saw mills at Kamley, and these mills were fed by logging lines that were extended deeper into the forest each year. Beyond the ends of steel were the scattered homes of mountaineers who would sell their timber claims to the logging companies if they lived long enough. The mountaineers as a class were regarded as all right if left alone. Most people heeded this advice.

But the sheriff's hike over the long trail from Kamley to the Skookum-Chuck was in no sense a fishing trip. He was merely checking up to ascertain whether "Hank" Christy had killed "Toss" Pardee or Toss had killed Hank during the year. It would be a fine thing, the sheriff often thought, if they killed each other, then the county would be saved the expense of a trial.

Many years before they had entered the country, packed in, staked adjoining claims, and erected a cabin on the line. The cabin was large enough to satisfy government regulations. Seeing only each other, month after month, year after year, had gradually produced a first-class case of cabin fever in the men. The failure of the railroad to build direct to their holdings had aggravated the matter. They realized

that the logging company was trying to tire them out and pick up their claims for a song. They determined to stick.

Toss Pardee, the deeper of the two, contended that men shut up as they were must have an outlet, an interest. Hank, in turn, contended he was wrong and that no man needed an outside interest. Hanging onto a timber claim was interest enough for him.

"That jest goes to show you're a chump," Toss growled. His nerves were on edge, anyway. He was tired of seeing Hank's bearded face, the vacant expression in the eyes. He detested watching Hank's Adam's apple race up and down his throat as he talked, and he yearned for the time when the other's beard would be long enough to conceal the entire neck. "If you had a lick of sense," he added, "you'd know some kind of an outlet is necessary, and you'd find it."

"I've got as much sense as you'll ever have," Hank had roared. "And if you want an outlet, why not take a punch at my jaw?"

"It ain't a bad idear," Toss had returned. The next instant, he swung.

No one saw the fight. Nor did any one see the duel that followed. It ended with the interior of the cabin a complete wreck, and both men unconscious on the floor. Unfortunately, each regarded it as a draw. Had there been a winner or vanquished, the air would have been cleared and friendly relations been resumed for a time.

Each bathed his own wounds and settled back to let Nature heal them. The custom of the country was preserved. Each did his fair share of the work. Gradually one of them took over the cooking, and the other kept the cabin clean. They cut wood together and ate at the same table, but never spoke. When one journeyed to town, which was infrequently, he always brought back mail for the other.

By the strange methods of communication remote places possess, it became well known that the pair had cabin fever, yet neither had ever mentioned a word of it to strangers. The tension increased, and Toss Pardee, the milder of the two ordinarily, contemplated murdering his partner, with evident satisfaction. Ordinarily law-abiding, he looked with horror on murder, but Hank was not a man, he was merely a tormenting pest that should be done away with. Toss guessed that Hank held similar views of him and grew suspicious. That was a dangerous winter, but with the coming of spring Toss had determined to have some outlet, and he walked twenty-five miles for the purpose of spending most of his money for bulbs. He bought a book on raising bulbs and roses and added a few rose sets to his load.

"Dead right," he muttered; "a man has to have an outlet, some other interest, or he'll bust. And when he's cooped up with a buzzard like Hank Christy, it's worse than worse. Maybe when the flowers get to bloomin' around the cabin he'll sorta get interested and soften. But!" And this word came out explosively. "He's got to make the first advance. I hope he does. We're the only two in the country, and it ain't right we shouldn't speak. We're both gettin' so we talk to ourselves a lot. Dog-gone it, if there was only some common thing to interest us!"

Hank said nothing when his partner returned, but he displayed undue curiosity when the little bags of bulbs were unloaded and the wrappings taken from the rose sets. Then he saw the book on how to plant flowers. He left the cabin, climbed to the ridge, and swore. He started in with modest cuss words and finished with deep, throaty oaths. He stalked back and forth, a wild-looking creature in ragged "tin pants," stagged and shredded at the bottoms, cinched about his waist with a piece of rope, and held together by nails instead

of buttons. His faded mackinaw was the one bit of color against the green of the timber.

"Toss Pardee's lost his last shred of manhood," he stormed; "putterin' around with flowers like an old woman; talking about outlets to human emotions, and what not! He's wrong. He always was wrong, and he'll always be wrong. Next thing he'll be takin' up knittin', and after that it's only a step to a sunbonnet. But I'll live to see the time when weeds will grow in that garden and choke it out. I'm goin' to live that long if I have to hang on a thousand years!"

Five years passed and the rows of bulbs on the south slope increased. Long before plants flowered in the timber, bulbs were sending forth splashes of color on the drab landscape. The warmth of the sunny slope and Toss Pardee's tender care were responsible. He worked hard, clearing land on his side of the line; but he never neglected his share of the work in and about the cabin. He felt content, the silence of his partner had ceased to annoy him, and he was no longer impatient over the delay of the railroad. Once, Hank Christy heard him tell a passing fisherman he was creating new types. The rawboned mountaineer had noticed his cabin mate fussing about with brushes, and dusting pollen on the different flowers.

"Worse'n a danged bee," he had growled. "Gettin' a buzz, too, but he ain't got a sting—the danged old woman!"

Toss shaved every other day and cut his own hair once a month. His neatness was a considerable contrast to Hank's, who with his dark, scraggly beard and wild eyes always looked as if he should be sent to the cleaners. His hatband, shredded by time, was deeply stained, the brim was torn and sagged over the eyes. Usually, a cob pipe with deeply burned bowl, drooped from a corner of his mouth. He washed his hands and face three times a day, but he never managed to look clean.

Often, Toss would look up from his work, half smile, and walk to the property line. All Hank had to do was to meet him, but he never did, and Toss never spoke. Hank would then vanish in the timber, swearing. His powerful hands worked spasmodically.

"Some day I'll tear him apart," he vowed. "Some day he'll go too far with his woman smile and his pretty flowers. An' him what calls himself a man and is built like one!"

Toss could easily pass for a man even in a group of big timber-loggers, and his powerful arms and hands could make an undercut with the best of them. The sheriff noticed the change and decided that when the killing took place, as it eventually would, the man he must arrest would be Hank Christy. Toss had found contentment.

The change in the situation came unexpectedly for both men. Toss was crossing a ravine he had crossed hundreds of times. It was nearly a hundred feet deep, contained a tangle of stumps, young firs, down timber, and brush. It was spanned by a log the two men had expertly dropped across the first winter. It saved a struggle through the bottom of the ravine, and a climb. Toss, packing in a load of grub, bulbs, and some new blankets, was halfway across when a bit of bark, eaten deep by their boot calks, broke free. His foot slipped, held, and for a moment he balanced while his hands clutched at space. He never lost his calm. Seeing that he was doomed to drop, he kicked out and shot toward a treetop. His hands clutched again and again; limbs were torn off, and the tree all but cracked from the impact, but he broke his fall. His left foot struck a log, something snapped, red lights danced before his eyes, then there was darkness. When he regained conscious-

ness, his body was lying in a horribly twisted position; his feet wedged in some brush; a sharp point of his broken leg protruded from his tin pants, and his shoulders were held by the weight of the pack.

Hank Christy was slowly working down through the brush. He cleared his way with a sharp, double-bitted ax, but there was no sympathy in his face. Nor was there resentment or elation. He was obeying the unwritten law of the country. He cut the pack free, lifted Toss to an easier position, then worked both feet loose. Without appreciable effort, he lifted the injured man in his arms, carried him from the ravine to the cabin, then pulled the leg into place. Toss fainted a couple of times; but Hank did not notice it, or at least he did not comment. His lips were sealed. This job done, he gave Toss something to eat, threw a blanket over the bunk, pulled on his mackinaw, and struck off.

Seven hours later Hank returned. In one hand he carried a tomato can in which burned a candle—the "bug" of the woodsman. The other hand led a mule he had borrowed from a mountaineer ten miles away. He held up Toss' mackinaw, and the latter slipped his arms into the sleeves and buttoned it up about his neck. A full moon was shining and something of a chill was in the air. He would feel it, as his resistance was low from the constant pain.

Hank carried him out to the saddle, taking care not to injure the broken leg. He made certain everything was ready, then led the mule toward the Kamley trail. The big mountaineer knew what the injured man was thinking. He could tell by the way in which Toss looked at the rows of bulbs standing like ghostly soldiers in the moonlight. They were done for. The weeds would crowd them out, and probably his years of experimenting would be lost. And last year the flowers had given promise of unusual types; if he could just hold the progress he had made until each type became permanent!

Hank knew that invisible strings bound Toss' heart to the growing things and made life up there bearable. It enabled him to laugh at the logging company which was trying to wear out his determination and get the timber for a song. Hank could guess that the mental pain in his partner's mind was as excruciating as the physical pain from his leg. He smiled in the silvery shafts of light slanting between the trees. His chance had come. He would sit back and watch, day by day, the growth of the weeds until each colorful bloom was lost in the tangle of sword ferns and what not. Once he looked back at Toss, and his teeth flashed white against his black beard. The injured man was suffering deeply; his hands clutched the pommel of the saddle, one on the other. His chin rested on his breast, but no word escaped his lips.

On and on, hour after hour, they moved in silence. The stillness was occasionally broken by the soft, musical note of falling water. It would come faintly at first, then grow louder as they drew near. Presently they would come upon it, molten silver in the moonlight, leaping a mad, downward course, to vanish in the somber timber below. In the distance the Skookum-Chuck roared. The mule's hoofs splashed as they waded through the stream and sometimes slipped on the mossy stones.

At dawn they emerged from the forest. A logging camp lay below, cables strung from gin poles, lead blocks, and bunk-house roofs alike, dripping with dew. A bull cook was building a fire and fussing about; a fireman was lighting a pipe preparatory to getting up steam in a yarder.

Both mountaineers glanced at the scene. Toss' face was deadly white; Hank's bearded face was without emotion. Each thought it would be a long time before the high lead blocks would be running for their timber, but they would hold on. There was nothing else to do for men past fifty.

The mule left the camp behind, plodded over a twisted trail through a logged-off area, and came to a stop before the Kamley hospital. Hank knocked on the door and when an attendant appeared with a wheel chair he lifted Toss from the mule's back and placed him in the chair. Neither one of them spoke.

Hank threw a long leg over the mule's back and moved on to town without looking behind. Now that he was out of the timber, he might as well make the most of it. He turned the mule loose, knowing it would find its way home, then caught a logging train for Seattle. It was two months before he returned. Two eventful months, during which he worked three weeks to earn a stake to continue the "time" he was having.

Newly outfitted from boots to hat, he passed the Kamley hospital without inquiring about Toss' condition. The timber closed about the mountaineer and the pack creaking under its burden of grub.

As he neared the claims, Hank's pace quickened. Frequently he laughed, and his dark eyes gleamed brightly.

"Danged old woman down there in the hospital, helpless and frettin' about the flowers! He knows what they'll look like. He's been battlin' them weeds for years now. All night long, a-settin' on thet mule, sufferin' more for thinking what'd happen to the things he created than from his busted leg. Haw! Haw! Haaaw! The outlet for the emotions he was always talking about, too! Huh. He's got an outlet now."

Hank crossed the ravine on the big log and could look over the south slope. Higher ground always kept the land moist. There was no need of irrigation. He slapped his leg gleefully. The weeds had got the upper hand. Only here and there could he see a splash of color. For the first time in years the timber about the cabin heard his whistle. He cleaned up the cabin, placed the grub in tin cans so the pack rats couldn't get it, then prepared a meal. Frequently he stopped and looked out of the window. Always he would exclaim in satisfaction.

For nearly a week this continued, then Hank grew irritable. Scowling at the weeds, he decided, was not sufficient satisfaction.

"Might as well get it over with," he growled.

He glanced apprehensively at the trail above. Sometimes, passing fishermen looked down on the beautiful beds and drank in the colorful spectacle so few saw. Some one might be up there now. Seeing no movement, he headed for the bulbs and stepped on Toss' property for the first time in many years.

While they had been setting Toss' leg properly at the hospital, he was unconscious, but from his muttering lips fell many words about bulbs. The doctor thought it queer that a big logger would rave about flowers. Mostly they cursed and shouted as if working in the woods. And when Toss was well on the road to recovery he told the nurse all about creating new types by mixing pollens and so forth.

"I've got some pretty rare stuff up there," he would conclude, "if I can just hang onto it. But the weeds will give everything a setback. That crazy pardner of mine may even pull everything up by the roots. Well, if he does —I'll kill him. That's just what I'll do!"

He told the doctor the same thing, as well as the other patients when they would listen. Two weeks before it was safe to throw away his crutches, Toss announced he was leaving.

"I've got one good leg, and I can sort of favor the other. It's pretty late now, but I might be able to save some of the stuff. I'll make a lot of money out of it, too, if I can just hold them new types. But money ain't so important as contentment. That's mostly what I got from my bulbs and roses. Now, if that crazy Hank would only find some outlet—— But he never will. He's too danged bullheaded. Just because I suggested it was enough for him. He decided it was all wrong. If he'd have thought of it, it would have been a great thing."

Toss hired a horse and made an early start one morning. It was sure great to get into the woods again. He was in a hurry to see the damage to his garden; yet, dreading the sight, he lingered by the different waterfalls along the trail and he stopped at each spring for a drink. Somehow, the water from a fern-bordered spring is sweeter than that coming from a glass. Usually, there was an empty tin can stuck on a twig to drink from. If not, a man got down on his stomach and drank. He could see his reflection in the water as well as a fringe of trees and the blue sky.

Toss stopped a hundred yards from the ranch and summoned his courage for the worst. Weeds would be everywhere, or else in his rage Hank would have uprooted or lopped the tops off of everything. Hank would be in the cabin, looming dark and bearded. The cabin would be clean, everything in order. Hank was good that way, and clean, too, though he never looked clean on account of his beard. He would see Toss coming and prepare for him, and he would act as though his partner had never been injured, nor away. He would act as though Toss was not in existence.

Pardee sighed dejectedly, set his jaw in grim lines, scowled, and urged the horse into the open. On the brink of the switchback leading from the main trail to the clearing, he paused. A tremendous emotion filled his breast, then two big tears slowly slid down his cheeks.

"What a sight! Beautiful! And Hank done it. Good old Hank has weeded that garden!"

The entire south hill was a blaze of color. Reds, blues, pinks of the most delicate shades, and mixed colors blending from one to the other.

"And there's my new types, too; you can't tell but what they're just as strong as the old types. I'll get a good price for that stuff. Good old Hank, I knew underneath it all he had a tender streak, and he's more of a man for it! Flowers and bulbs was my outlet from cabin fever, and now it's his."

He rode down to the cabin and dismounted. With the aid of one crutch to ease the weight on the injured leg, he put the animal up. Then he entered the cabin. Hank Christy was at his end. He did not look up, but busied himself with the evening meal. He liked to have it out of the way and dishes washed before dark.

For a moment there was a deep silence, then Toss extended his hand.

"Thanks, Hank, for all you've done for me."

"Don't mention it," Hank growled; "I ain't done nothin' to speak of, that is, for you. Packed you out, but that was the custom of the country; sort of timber code. But now we're talkin', I'll admit you're right on one thing. A man has t' have an outlet."

"The flowers," Toss said quickly.

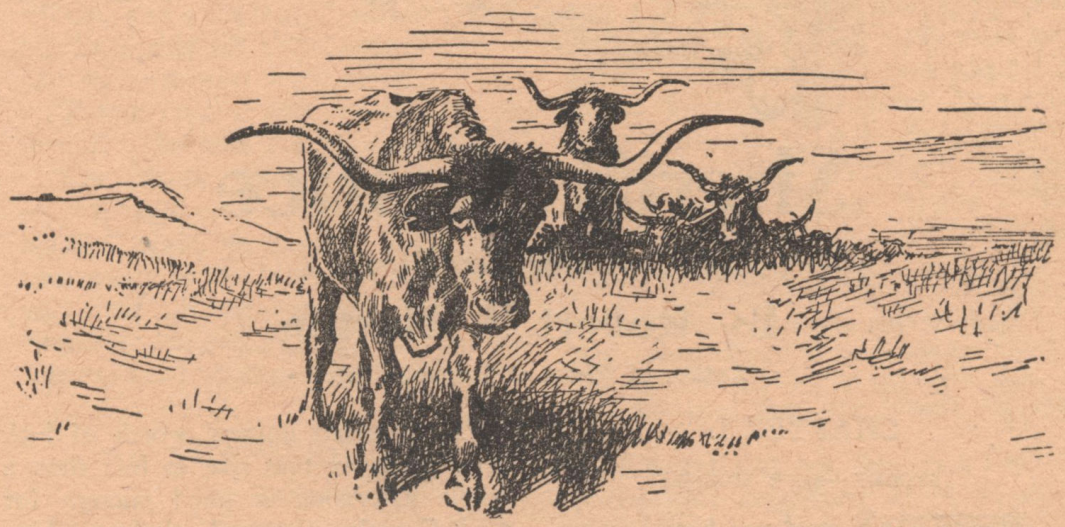
"Yeah," Hank agreed, his face twisted in disgust. "For five years I've been cussin' them, and not realizin' they was an outlet for my pent-up emo-

tions. Then I came back and was tickled to death to find 'em hidden in the weeds. It weren't long until my disposition got bad, I had a sort of ingrowin' feelin', and I hated the world for the first time in five years."

This was a statement that startled Toss Pardee, but he made no comment.

"Yeah," Hank continued. "So I finally figgered out it was the lack of flowers to cuss, and I went out and commenced to weed. Gosh, how they bloomed, and I've been cussin' the goldanged, senseless things ever since! It sorta looks like we could hang on until the railroad gets here."

Read "DESERT'S SECRET," by VINCENT H. HUNTER, in Next Week's Issue.



CULTIVATING THE LONGHORN

THE wild though unwoolly longhorn has responded so well to what may be called "treatment," or in other words, modern conditions, that the government has decided to take him under its special protection. Mr. Barnes of the United States department of agriculture has obtained a congressional appropriation to establish in Wichita National Park a longhorn herd for the purpose of experimentation. Under this intensive training on the part of the government the longhorn has shown an appreciable improvement. Like men, under proper conditions, with plenty of nourishing food, and an ample supply of water, the cattle have taken on weight, and have become sleek and prosperous in appearance. They in no way resemble the wild, rakish-looking creatures who roamed the plains in search of scant forage. However, the longhorn is not likely ever to relinquish his most conspicuous characteristic; his wide-sweeping horns still remain to him and are as essential a part of the animal as the long drooping mustaches were of the men who rode with them and wrote their names in undying glory on the pages of Western history.

Sheriff Justice

(A Ben Gormley Story)

By Robert J. Horton

Author of "Guns of Jeopardy," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"STOLEN—ONE HORSE."

TEN stacks of bluebirds, an' twenty in a stack. That's two hundred of the right color for the size of this game—which means I'm a sweet thousand to the good." The speaker, Ralph Bennett Gormley, chief investigator for the Teton Cattlemen's Association, looked up from the stacks of blue poker checks on the table before him and regarded the dealer amicably.

"Better stick while your luck's running," a player suggested.

"Yeah! You might win the place," sneered a red-faced man of rough appearance. He had taken a dislike to Gormley the moment the latter had entered the game early in the afternoon.

"A thousand dollars' worth of luck in a game of this size in less than a whole afternoon is good enough for me," Gormley observed calmly, pushing his stacks of checks across to the dealer to be cashed. "There's such a thing as a man pushing his luck too far."

"Or having it get sore at him for quittin' an' never come back again," jeered the big man with a crooked smile. When he smiled there was just a suggestion of a partial harelip on the left side of his mouth. He wore a stubby mustache, and it never showed unless he smiled.

"Eight fifty, nine, nine fifty, a thousand," Gormley counted, thumbing the bills the dealer had given him in exchange for the checks. "Correct!" He folded the bills and placed them in his inside coat pocket. Then he pushed his chair back a little, leaned on his elbows,

and looked steadily at the big man who had been baiting him.

"Stranger, you've been nagging me all afternoon," he said in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice. Nevertheless, the player who was shuffling the cards preparatory to the next deal, stopped.

"Maybe that's part of my game," scowled the man.

"An' just what kind of a game are you playing?" Gormley asked.

"You ought to know," the other flared; "you won plenty of my money."

"If you didn't have it to spare, you had no business sitting in," returned Gormley sharply.

The big man brought a fist down on the table with terrific force, his eyes narrowing. "I've got some more to spare—if you think you can get it!"

Gormley leaned back in his chair. "I'm glad you could spare it," he said, as if in relief. "But there's one thing you ought to know, because we might get mixed up in a game again." His tone hardened. "When I play cards, I can play my hands without any suggestions from any one else around the table. If we should ever play again—you keep your mouth shut!"

He kicked his chair back and leaped aside as the big man flung himself across the table at him. The table gave and crashed to the floor in splinters, with the man sprawling on top of the wreck. In a trice, Gormley had grabbed a table leg and rapped the man smartly, while the crowd laughed.

The man scrambled out of the mess and got to his feet, cursing vilely. His face was purple, his eyeballs of angry fire. Then he went for his gun like lightning—only to find himself looking into the business end of Gormley's.

"I've got your number, stranger," said Gormley sternly. "Now, there are two doors to this place; one in front, an' one in the rear. I don't care which one you pick, but get out pronto!"

The man hesitated, his hand trembling on the butt of his gun. He had not had a chance to draw. A hatred that came from his innermost soul shone black as night in his eyes."

"Get started!" Gormley commanded in a ringing voice.

The other turned toward the rear. "You've got the edge this time, but——" He strode the length of the resort to the rear door, looked back over his shoulder, to see Gormley's gun leveled at him, and went out.

A sigh went through the place as men breathed again. But no one spoke.

Gormley sheathed his weapon. "In a warm fall like this, the snakes stay out late," he drawled. Then he left by the front way.

Fred Holmes, secretary of the Teton Cattlemen's Association, was seated in his swivel chair, with his feet on his desk, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, idly looking over some letters that had come by the four-o'clock stage. One he tossed aside with a laugh. He was halfway through the next one when Gormley entered.

"'Lo, Fred," drawled Gormley. "Why don't you get a cushion for your heels? Isn't the top of that desk hard?"

"Hello, sleuth," grinned Holmes. He knew it always irritated Gormley to be called a sleuth. "Any clews to-day?"

"No, just won a thousand in the game over at Mack's," replied Gormley, simulating a yawn. "I can't win anything any more."

"A thousand's plenty for any game in Mack's," Holmes observed. "You must have roped in a live one."

"A semilive one," Gormley corrected. "Hard-looking stranger. Plenty of jack. He kept ragging me all through the game, an' I let him get away with it, because I knew if I stopped him it would break up the play. When I cashed in, I called him."

"Yes?" Holmes took his feet from the table and leaned forward with the

sparkle of interest in his eyes. "What's the answer?"

"I had to shoo him out of the place," Gormley replied casually. "Broke a table tryin' to get at me an' then wiggled a finger at his gun. He said something about me having the edge this time, as he left. He said the rest with his eyes, which are black an' bad."

"What kind of a looking fellow?" asked Holmes.

"Big, red-faced, scrubby, reddish mustache. Has a queer sort of mark on his upper lip on the left side which shows when he tries to smile. I don't like his looks nor his ways. But that breed is common."

"Must have been something unusual about him, Ben, for you don't ordinarily bother folks. You let 'em get away with everything but murder, an' your gun's the last thing you think about. I'll bet this hombre is bad."

"I don't care how bad he is," drawled Gormley; "but I would like to know where he came from." He shrugged, then: "Anything in the mail to-day, Fred?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Holmes with a laugh. He picked up the letter he had tossed aside with a chuckle and handed it to Gormley.

Gormley rolled and lighted a cigarette and then slowly read the letter, Holmes watching him with a grin while he did so.

When he had finished, Gormley looked up with a question in his eyes.

Holmes laughed heartily. "Isn't that rich, Ben? I don't know where you keep your sense of humor, but to me it's a knock-out!"

"Well, your sense of humor is a puzzle to me," Gormley retorted. "I don't see anything funny in this letter. The spelling's bad, an' the grammar isn't much. But who're we to catch a man up on those things?"

"I don't mean those things," Holmes protested. "But look what it's about. The man's lost a horse—one horse! And he writes to the association about it!"

"Isn't he a member of the association?" Gormley inquired coldly.

"Darned if I know, but——"

"Say, Fred, as secretary of this outfit don't you think it's up to you to know, or at least find out, if this fellow Dunn, as he signs himself, is a member of the association? He may be some big cattleman out there at Riverdale."

"Don't worry," Holmes said scornfully; "I know all the big ones. That's part of my business—one of the ways I hold my job. But just out of pure curiosity, I'm going to look this fellow up."

"That's sensible," was Gormley's comment, as Holmes went over to a filing case.

"Yes, here he is," grinned Holmes, holding up a card. "Andrew Dunn, Riverdale. Comment: D D D. That's the lowest rating we have. An' under the heading remarks there is a blank space. You bet, if he amounted to anything, there'd be at least a tip about him there. Don't forget this office is thorough, and if I didn't know my onions I wouldn't have held down this job for the last ten years." He, thereupon, replaced the card with a flourish of dignity.

"Oh, I'm not saying a word about you, Fred," said Gormley, looking again at the letter. "But I still fall short a few furlongs of seeing where there's anything funny about this letter. Here's a full-fledged member of the association, who has paid his dues an' never got anything for 'em, except his name on a card who's had a horse stolen. Why shouldn't he write in about it?"

"But one horse," Holmes protested; "and goodness knows what kind of a horse it was. Does he think we're going to send a high-priced investigator fifty miles into that God-forsaken southeast corner of the range to try and

find out who stole one horse? It might have strayed, at that."

"Thanks for the compliment," Gormley drawled. "After all, we don't know what kind of a horse it was. An' it might be the only horse this member had. If it was, then he's worth more attention than a big member who's got twenty thousand head of stock an' loses five hundred, say."

Holmes was staring at him queerly. "Are you crazy, Ben? Why, he doesn't even ask us to send a man—as if we would! There's no sense in him belonging to the association, anyway. Can't have more'n a few head of stock if he——"

"He doesn't say it was his only horse," Gormley pointed out. "The only reason we have for thinking so is because he says, 'Somebody stole my horse.' Sounds like it was the only one, but——"

"You can't get away from those three D's," Holmes snapped. "An' you can't get away from those blank spaces. Don't be so senseless, Ben."

Gormley slowly rolled and lighted another cigarette, while Holmes busied himself putting away books and papers and tidying his desk preparatory to closing the office at six o'clock.

"Fred," said Gormley in sudden decision, "I'm going out there!"

Holmes' face froze. "Yes, you're crazy," he decided. "The man who got 'The Well-wisher,' saved thousands of head of stock and a bank in the bargain; who went into the canyon of Kingdom Come alone and cleaned out another band of terrors; who saved the Williams stock, and dropped 'Bull' Mead over in Turbyville—going out on a one-horse job!" He laughed scornfully.

Gormley regarded him thoughtfully. "I've always heard, Fred," he said slowly, "that a man who laughs easily isn't, as a rule, any too well supplied with brains."

Holmes flushed to the roots of his hair at this quiet remark from the cool man before him, who had the most formidable reputation in his line in the State—and who also was respected far beyond the confines of the Teton range for sheer ability and common sense.

"But—it seems foolish, Ben," he stammered. "Fifty miles to ride into a country that's a blank——"

"What makes you think it's a blank?" Gormley put in coldly.

"Oh, it's no use," said Holmes, throwing up his hands. "But suppose some big job is pulled off and a powerful member sends for you—what then?"

"Tell 'em where I am," said Gormley, rising. "My contract reads to the effect that I'm under obligations to do my best to recover any stock stolen from members, and to apprehend the thieves. All right. Here's a member who's lost stock. I'm going to live up to my contract. An' at any time that I don't suit this outfit, I'm ready to tear up the contract an' say 'good-by.'"

"Oh, don't talk like that," Holmes put in hurriedly. "Go ahead, if you want to. But it doesn't look to me like you'll get much from a one-horse start."

"I'll just take this letter with me," said Gormley, as he moved to the door. There he paused. "If you have the chance, tell that hard-eating, hard-smoking, anything but hard-working Sheriff Reynolds to keep his good eye on the red-faced hombre I shooed out of Mack's. So long."

Gormley went out into the glory of the October sunset with a busy brain, and a pleasant look on his face.

CHAPTER II.

SECOND MEETING.

DOWN the street sauntered Gormley, his gaze alert, his brain whirling in a maze of thoughts. It might be that Holmes was right. Perhaps he was going on a wild-goose chase. If the horse

had been stolen, the thief was scores of miles away by now, most likely. A lone trail of this kind would be almost impossible to follow, and in justice to the association he couldn't very well chase a horse thief for weeks, when anything could be happening on the main range. If the horse had merely strayed, it might have been recovered by its owner by now. What he had said to Holmes sounded very fine, but it didn't seem soaked in reason. He had to confess to himself that he was playing a hunch. But he didn't get paid to play hunches of this particular kind. On the other hand, why should Dunn write such a letter? Why report the matter to the association at all, if he did not expect some action to be taken? The man couldn't be altogether dumb. No! Gormley felt he was right. His hunch was worth playing because there must be something behind this thing. If there wasn't, he would only be gone three days. It was the dull season, anyway; the beeves had been shipped; it was a poor and improbable time for rustling, and there was little prime beef on the range. He would play his hunch, and if there was nothing to it, give Holmes his laugh and go back to the green tables.

He quickened his pace until he reached a small, unsavory resort at the lower end of town called The Tinhorn. Inside he peered about in the semigloom until he spied a figure sitting at a table, his head on his arms.

He went over and shook the man awake. "What's the matter, Tommy? Haven't you got any better manners than to snore in a public place?"

The man raised his gray head and peered up at Gormley out of watery blue eyes with red rims. "'Lo, Ben. What you want me for?"

"Want to take you up the street an' buy you a good drink or two, an' a hot meal, an' ask you some questions. Come on."

"I haven't done nothing, Ben," complained the old derelict. "I'm expecting to get a job——"

"Come along," said Gormley cheerfully. "You know, I never meddle with town affairs, an' I'm sure no one has anything on you. I want some information, an' you should be able to give it to me, if any one can. You'll get paid for it. Of course, if you don't want to come——"

Tommy Green scrambled to his feet unsteadily. Gormley helped him the first few steps until he gained his walking legs, and out they went. They stopped at the first good resort.

"Name it," said Gormley, indicating the bartender. Tommy named it and the servitor set out a bottle of what looked like good red "likker." It must have been, because Tommy took four drinks, smacked his lips, braced his shoulders, and—helped himself to two more.

"That's enough for now," said Gormley, paying the score. "We'll go across the street to Nick's an' put on the feed bag."

"Suits me," said Tommy in a stronger voice than he had used before. "I can think of lots of good things to eat right now."

"You can order all of 'em, if you want to," said Gormley, leading the way out. "This is your day, Tommy, an' you might better eat it up than drink it down."

When they were seated at a table in the rear of Nick's café and had ordered their meals, Gormley came to the point of his business at once. He wanted to talk to Tommy while the latter was bright; before the effects of the liquor could wear off. For, properly approached, Tommy was no fool. He was an old-timer and knew the country like a book.

"Tommy, how far is it to Riverdale?"

"Used to be fifty-four miles," replied Tommy. "Dunno what it is now."

"What's the shortest trail that's easy on a horse?"

Tommy pursed his lips. "They may have changed things a bit out there—let's see." He eyed Gormley speculatively. "You goin' out there?"

"The bargain is that I ask the questions, an' you answer 'em," frowned Gormley.

"Well, if you're goin' yourself——" Tommy thought some more. "Take the Florence road for twenty-two miles—— You want to go to Riverdale itself? Yes? Well, take that road for twenty-two miles till you get to the Slocum ranch. You can tell it for miles away by the big windmill they've got. There's a creek running down there. Comes from the north and turns southeast just beyond the ranch house. It's probably fenced now, but you get on the south side of that creek an' foller it."

"All the way?" asked Gormley.

"I'm comin' to that," said Tommy with some dignity. "No, not all the way. You foller it along on the south side for about ten mile. It'll be willows an' alders all the way, but when the cottonwoods begin—there's where you cross the creek. You can't miss the ford, but this time of the year there'll only be a chaser of water in the creek at best. Cross anywhere when you get to the cottonwoods, understand? 'Bout ten miles."

The waitress came with the food at this point. When Tommy had finished eating, Gormley resumed his questioning.

"An' after I cross the creek? Then what?"

"You'll see a butte about twelve miles away. You'll just see the top of it, like a spire. That's Surprise Butte—due east. When you get on the other side of the butte you'll find another creek—a little one. It runs southeast clear to the river. Foller it an' just where it joins the river you'll find Riverdale. All clear?"

"I could find it in the dark, Tommy, even though I've never been down that way before. What kind of a town is this Riverdale?"

"Well, there's a long bar on one side, an' poker tables——"

"What're you talking about?" interrupted Gormley.

"Well, Riverdale is just a gambling resort, you might say, with a hotel an' a general store on the side. A few houses or shacks are there. That's all. It ain't a town, it's a name."

Gormley nodded. "Tough place, I suppose," he ventured.

"Don't make 'em any tougher. Nobody that's civilized goes there. If it's tough characters you're looking for, that's the place to find 'em."

Gormley's brow wrinkled. "Tommy, you must promise you won't say anything about this talk to anybody, understand?"

"You've trusted me before an' I've been on the square, haven't I?" said the old man in a complaining voice.

"An' I'm going to trust you again," said Gormley. "Tommy, do you know a man down in that section named Dunn?"

Tommy thought a long time, drumming his fingers on the table. Finally he shook his head. "No," he said positively. "No, I don't."

"All right," said Gormley. "Here's a ten-spot to keep quiet on."

"Listen, Ben," said the old man, leaning across the table. "I want to ask you a couple of questions for your own good."

"Go ahead, Tommy, shoot," said Gormley, impressed by the other's manner. When his mind was anywhere near normal, Tommy was a pretty wise old bird; and Gormley was sensible enough to appreciate the wisdom of the old-timers.

"That feller you ran up against in Mack's place this afternoon—I didn't see it, but I heard about it—his name is

Horan. That's what I heard. Now I've seen him; an' you know, Ben, I've been crossing and crisscrossing these prairies for quite a spell. I was here long before anybody in these parts ever saw a patch of plowed ground." He nodded convincingly, tapping the table with his fingers as was his custom when in deadly earnest.

"Now, Ben," he resumed, "that feller's bad—he's all bad. I know the breed an' I had his pedigree the minute I looked into his eyes. Watch him! He isn't goin' to take what you gave him to-day without tryin' to play back. You can lay your last check on that."

"Thanks, Tommy," said Gormley easily. "I had the same opinion of him that you have, an' I watching out for him in all directions."

"Well, don't forget to keep a sharp lookout behind," Tommy warned. "Now, Ben, tell me straight—are you goin' out in that Riverdale country?"

"I was thinking of it," Gormley confessed.

"Well, watch out there, too. You know, Ben, everybody in this country isn't your friend. The Well-wisher had friends, an' so did Mead, an' the others—don't forget that. There isn't any reason for a town at Riverdale. There are no ranches near, an' it's just nowhere, that's what it is. So why is that hot place there? Eh? Because it's a safe hangout for bad men who're wanted, that's why. An' if anybody out there should know you, your life wouldn't be worth a white chip!"

"Thanks, Tommy," said Gormley thoughtfully. "I had some such idea. All the more reason for you keeping a tight lip, Tommy. Is there anybody out there I could ask a favor of in a pinch?"

Tommy thought again. "There used to be an old fellow there named Gorham who was a shoemaker. I think he took dope, but I'm not sure. He was mighty handy at fixing boots an' saddles—anything in leather. But that was quite a spell ago. He's probably dead now. If he isn't, mention Tom Green an' he'd jump a fence for you."

Gormley rose. "I've got to be going. Don't spend that ten all in one place, Tommy. I'll leave a note for Holmes, an' when you get sobered up you can get another ten from him. But you'll have to be in tolerable good shape to get it."

They went out, Tommy shuffling across the street, and Gormley walking to the livery. The sunset was dying and the soft twilight closing in. Gormley was frowning. Tommy Green's words had made an impression. Perhaps there was more to this "one-horse" business than he suspected. Some one who knew his nature well might have sent that missive. He might be riding into a trap! With this thought, Gormley's eyes shone with the old, reckless light of adventure and battle. Flaming guns and galloping horses—the pungent smell of pistol smoke. Gormley strode into the livery barn, almost swaggering.

" 'Lo, Pete," he greeted the barn man. "How's my horse?"

"That's a question," snorted Pete. "Your horse is all right, an' you know it. So just what did you come in here for?"

Gormley chuckled and slipped a gold piece into the barn man's hand. "Pete, you old fraud, I'm your best customer. Has a big, red-faced——"

"You talkin' about the hombre you chucked out of Mack's to-day?" Pete interrupted.

"Well—yes," said Gormley.

"I suppose you want to know if he has a horse here, an' after finding out he has, you'll want to look at the brand. That it?"

"Looks like this good weather was going to last," Gormley drawled.

"Come on." Pete led the way to the last stall on the left. There Gormley saw a magnificent gray—a powerful horse, but one that undoubtedly was

possessed of great speed. For some moments he stood regarding the animal with admiration. He stepped in for a look at the brand and came out with a puzzled expression on his face.

"That's a queer brand," he told Pete. "Triangle with a circle inside. Triangle Circle. Ever hear of that brand, Pete?"

The barn man shook his head. "Not from this range—nor anywhere close, I reckon. I get most of 'em within a hundred miles of here—yes, an' more'n a hundred. But this is a new one to me."

"Must have come a distance," observed Gormley, stepping aside to survey the animal the better.

"Nice hoss, eh, men?" boomed a voice behind them.

Gormley whirled. He recognized the voice at once. As he expected, he found himself facing his opponent of the afternoon—the man Tommy Green had said was named Horan.

"I'm always ready to admire a good horse," he said, "an' you've got a pretty one."

Horan's eyes regarded him steadily. They were beady black, and there was a different expression in them than there had been when last their gazes had locked.

"You've got a tolerably fair mount yourself," said Horan. "But—don't do any stopping if you see that gray comin' after you, Mr. Gormley."

"Threats are nothing new to me," said Gormley. It was only to be expected that the man would learn his name. He might have known it before he sat in the game that afternoon. "But yours doesn't sound like a threat to me. It sounds like boasting."

"Wrong both times," said Horan in a sinister tone. "It ain't a threat, an' it ain't boasting. I don't have to do neither. It's advice—just about as good a slice of advice as ever tickled your ears. Chew on it!"

With this remark, he turned on his heel and left the barn.

"I'll want my horse an' pack a little after dark," Gormley told the barn man. "See there's some grub in the pack." With that he, too, left the livery.

CHAPTER III.

ANDREW DUNN.

HAVING penned a note to Holmes, which he slipped under the office door, Gormley went to the hotel for supper. Every one who lived in the county seat of Raysville, or near by, knew him—and to all appearances liked him. This included the waitresses in the hotel dining room. On this occasion he drew Gertrude Evans.

"What have you got to-night, Gertie?" he asked genially.

"In addition to the day's tips, amounting to thirty cents, I have my charms," said the girl.

"Just for luck, I'll add fifty cents to the tips, admire the charms, an' take a steak with the trimmings," laughed Gormley.

"An' I've got a warning for you," said the waitress in an undertone. "There's a guy over in the corner behind you near the door—don't look—who's been in here eying you every meal you've had the last day or two. Steak? Leave it to me." The last words were loudly spoken.

"I'll just double that tip," smiled Gormley.

It was not until he had finished his meal that he had an opportunity to get a look at the man the girl had mentioned. This man was small and very dark—dark enough to be partly Indian or Mexican. One eye, the right, had a distinct slant. Gormley felt he would know him again at sight.

He left the dollar for his waitress friend and strolled down to the resort where he had first found Tommy Green. Tommy was there, but was in

good order, meaning that he was fairly sober. Gormley immediately called him aside.

"Go up to the livery, get my horse, an' ride down behind this place," Gormley instructed. "Wait till I scribble a note to Pete on the back of this envelope." In a few moments Tommy was on his way.

Gormley went out into the street. Night had fallen long since, but the street near by was lighted by the yellow beams which shone from the windows of the resort. Gormley stood looking up and down the street and at the stars, as if noting the weather. He rolled and lighted a cigarette, tossed the match away, and looked keenly at a small figure strolling on the other side of the street. He was certain it was the man who had been watching him in the hotel dining room. Why was he being trailed? Since this man had been following him before he had met Horan, it could hardly have any connection with the affair of that afternoon. He started up the street, turned as if he had changed his mind, hesitated, and then reëntered the resort.

It wasn't long before Tommy came in and nodded to him.

"Tom, step outside an' keep an eye on a short, slim hombre that's parading on the other side," Gormley said. "Take somebody with you an' talk out there, so he won't be suspicious. If he starts this way before I can get away clean, come back an' tell me. Hurry now."

Tommy went out the front as Gormley left through the rear door. His horse was standing with reins dangling near the door. He untied the mackinaw from the rear of the saddle and donned it. It would be cold, riding in the open. Then he mounted and slowly made his way in the shadows behind the buildings to the lower end of the street. Here he swung off to the left and pushed through the trees that surrounded the town. Emerging from them, he rode to the north for some distance—far enough so that he could not be seen from town. Then he put his horse into a lope and cut southeast straight to the Florence Road. No one was in sight behind him. The moon was not up yet. He proceeded at the same lope—a pace which his horse could maintain for hours—along this road.

Already Gormley felt a glow of satisfaction. His hunch had been warranted, he felt sure. For he could not shake off the conviction that the strange happenings in town had some connection with the one-horse letter, as he now thought of it. There were friends of the men he had been forced to dispose of in the course of performing his duties who might be trailing him for purposes of avenging their leaders. As he covered the miles under the stars, this conviction became stronger. Also the prospect of running into a nest of rustlers and wanted outlaws loomed. But Gormley was accustomed to being sent on dangerous missions. So why not set out on one of his own accord? Anyway, he had got safely on his way unobserved. Pursuit could not start until his absence from town could be firmly established. He doubted if that would be the case this night.

When he reached the Slocum ranch there still were lights in the windows of the house. Here was a fence, and it would be necessary for him to pass through a gate in order to reach the south bank of the stream he was to follow for some ten miles until he came to the cottonwoods. He decided on the main gate, where there was a road leading to the barn. A sudden thought struck him. Tommy Green had described the shortest way. Now, Slocum would naturally want to know who was passing through his gate and riding across his range. Already the dogs were barking. A questionable character would hardly care to take this route. Thus, Gormley suddenly realized that

he was virtually taking a cut-off. Wise Tommy Green!

Lantern light showed in the courtyard and he rode boldly toward the ranch house. Slocum, of course, was a member of the association, as was every rancher on the Teton range. A man with a lantern met him.

"Anybody up in the house?" asked Gormley. "Or, I should say, is the 'Old Man' up?"

"Reckon so," came the drawling reply of a puncher. "Just go aroun' the front. I'll take your hoss."

"Thanks. Will you give him some water in a few minutes? I won't be here long." He walked around to the front and the door opened as he was mounting the steps to the porch. There was a tall man in the doorway. Gormley was not acquainted with all the members of the association, but that made little difference.

"Mr. Slocum?" he asked.

"That's me," came the answer.

"I'm Ben Gormley, investigator for the organization," Gormley explained.

"Come right in," Slocum invited heartily. "I've heard plenty about you. Is your horse being taken care of? Good. Norah, get a lunch and hot coffee ready; we've got a visitor."

"Don't bother," said Gormley hastily. "I'm riding on." He looked about the large living room with its fine furnishings and its huge fireplace.

"Well, have some coffee, anyway," Slocum insisted. "Sit down, Gormley. I'm mighty glad to meet our, you might say, protector."

Gormley laughed and sat down in a big chair before the fireplace. "There's a question or two I'd like to ask you, Mr. Slocum."

"Shoot, an' I'll do the best I can," said the rancher heartily. He was tall, blond, with sandy mustaches.

"Does everybody riding to an' from Riverdale come through your place?" asked Gormley.

"I'll say they don't," was the spirited reply. "I haven't any use for anybody going or coming from that place, an' they know it. I've got my trespassing signs up, an' they know enough to keep off."

"Do you know a man—he belongs to the association, by the way—named Andrew Dunn, who lives over there?"

"I know of him—yes. Are you going over there? You don't have to answer that question, of course."

"Yes, I'm going over there, but I want it kept quiet. Fact is, I'm going over to see this man Dunn, an' I'd very much like to know just where to find him."

"Well, let's see," Slocum pondered. "Some of my men go over there for a time now an' then, an' they usually stop at this Dunn's place. He's got a pretty daughter, I understand, an' that's why they always stop. Now you just wait a minute an' I'll find out for sure."

The rancher rose quickly and went out. While he was gone, the housekeeper brought in some hot coffee and sandwiches and put them on a small table by Gormley's chair.

"They look so good I reckon I'll have to eat 'em," smiled Gormley.

When he was finishing his lunch, Slocum returned. "I've got the information you require," he said. "Got it from my range boss, the danged cuss! Goes over to Riverdale to get potted now an' then an' thinks I don't know it. Now listen. You'll cross the creek by the cottonwoods an' take the Surprise Butte Trail, I suppose?"

"Yes. Tommy Green gave me the directions."

"Haven't seen Tommy in a long time," mused Slocum. "But to get back. When you come to the bridge, just before you go into Riverdale, don't cross it, but turn off to the right. You'll find a bend in the river there and in this bend is Dunn's place. You can't miss it, according to my range boss."

"Thanks, Mr. Slocum," said Gormley, rising. "I'll have to be riding on."

"I'll tell you again that I'm sure glad to have met you," said the stockman. "An' if you should need any help over there, my outfit's at your disposal. Just come or get the word to me, an' I'll send every rider left on the place. Chances are that some of the men I let go for the winter are over there now. There's one tall fellow, Sam Brodie—has the reddest head of hair you ever saw—who's almost bound to be there, he's so stuck on the Dunn girl. He's all right, an' you can trust him. He's a mighty good ranch hand, too—too good for just punching cows. I don't know what your business is over there, but I know you'll finish it."

He went out with Gormley, saw that his horse was all right, and called a cheery good-by.

"Well, I'm playing in luck, more or less so far," said Gormley aloud, as he galloped along the south side of the creek. He could see Slocum cattle off to his right, and by the size of the herds he passed on the ride to the cottonwoods, he realized that Slocum was a really big rancher. Good man to know, he thought.

The information that some of the Slocum outfit were in Riverdale was particularly welcome. He might need assistance. He remembered what Slocum had said about the tall, red-headed Sam Brodie. If he was in love with Dunn's daughter, he could be depended upon to help in any emergency that might come up affecting Dunn. Gormley now felt that Dunn's letter had been sincere. It was certain, on the face of it, that he didn't have a very large place. It probably was pretty much as Holmes had put it. Dunn had lost a horse. Well, it would be a hard job to find a stolen horse—— But would it? The horse was probably right in Riverdale. From what Gormley had heard, the class of people who visited the place would think nothing of stealing a horse in an emergency, even for a short trip.

Gormley reached the cottonwoods in the early morning hours. There he crossed the creek and rode toward the butte which was due east. The moon was just rising and Gormley had no difficulty as to direction. Soon he caught sight of the butte's spire, rising from the plain into the moonlight. He was making good time; but then he had a good horse. Gormley rode a thoroughbred, an animal possessed of remarkable powers of endurance and speed. Both were primary requisites in Gormley's trade. When he reached the butte he found the little stream on the other side just as Tommy Green had outlined. He started along the stream, as directed. Dawn is late in October, and when the first pale glimmer showed in the east, Gormley could see the gaunt trees and underbrush along the river in the south. He was nearing his goal. He leaned forward, and, as if by instinct, the animal knew they were approaching their destination, and increased its pace.

The sun was up when Gormley reached the bridge. He turned off into the big bend to the right. He saw a few cattle, perhaps a hundred head, grazing. He rode at a swift gallop now, and it was not long before he saw the small buildings of what must be the Dunn ranch.

As he neared them, he saw a small house, a small barn, another small building—probably a blacksmith shop or the like—some haystacks and corrals. Not very pretentious, but in good repair. He also saw horses! So the stolen horse was not the only one Dunn owned.

A man came from the barn as Gormley rode up. He was a middle-aged man and walked with a pronounced limp in his right leg. His hair and mustache were graying; his face was lean. It was plain he was not strong. He looked up at Gormley out of faded blue eyes and

Gormley thought the man seemed afraid —naturally timid, perhaps.

"Is your name Dunn?" Gormley asked courteously.

"Yes—yes, I'm Andrew Dunn," replied the man in a high, thin voice.

Gormley dismounted at once. "I'm from the head office of the Cattlemen's Association," he announced. "You wrote in reporting that one of your horses had been stolen."

"Why, yes," said Dunn, his face lighting. Then it clouded suddenly. "It was Samson, my big, black stallion—pure bred an' one of the finest hosses that ever nibbled grass. Your—your name——"

Gormley made it a practice never to reveal his name—his full name. There were too many who knew him by his last name so he used the first two.

"My name is Ralph Bennett," he said, extending his hand.

"Bring your hoss into the barn," said Dunn, who appeared flustered. "I never thought they would send anybody way out here just to see about one stolen hoss. Daisy said I was a fool to think they would, an' Daisy's usually right. But I wrote on a chance, anyway."

"You made a mistake in not stating that the horse was a valuable stallion," Gormley explained, unsaddling.

Dunn peered at him. "Well, maybe I did. Yes, Samson was a valuable stallion. Coal black. You ought to see him arch his neck. The place seems empty since he left. I'll take care of your hoss. Just tie him in here an' we'll go in to breakfast. That is, you can have breakfast. I've had mine. While you're gettin' your victuals, I'll look after your hoss. You've got a fine hoss, mister. Are you the president?"

"No," smiled Gormley. The man wasn't as bright as he might be at that. "I'm what they call an investigator. I go out when any of the members report a theft of stock, or other trouble on their range."

"I see, I see," said Dunn, opening the front door of the house.

They entered a small but neatly furnished living room. "Daisy!" called Dunn. "Come here, Daisy. We've got company. Who do you think he is?"

A girl appeared in the doorway leading to the dining room. Gormley caught his breath. Here was beauty—beauty of face, and hair, and form—and manner. A perfect brunette. No wonder Slocum's punchers stopped there on their visits to Riverdale.

"This is Mister—Mister——"

"Ralph Bennett," Gormley supplied.

"Mister Ralph Bennett of the association, come clear from Raysville to find Samson!"

"If I can," smiled Bennett, bowing.

The girl was looking at him steadily, as if determining whether she liked his looks or not. "I'll have your breakfast ready in a jiffy," she said suddenly in a voice that fell agreeably on the ear. She turned back into the other room.

Gormley smiled pleasantly at Andrew Dunn. He was glad he had played his hunch!

CHAPTER IV.

RECOGNIZED?

AS he ate his breakfast, Gormley's gaze rested on the dazzling girl every time she entered the dining room. No wonder this red-headed Sam Brodie had lost his heart to her. She was young, beautiful, healthy, full of life—and she had personality and an intangible charm; not what might be termed a "drawing-room" charm, but—Gormley was at a loss to explain it.

Andrew Dunn sat across from him as he ate, having come back from attending to Gormley's horse.

"That's a fine animal you have," he said. "You see, Mister Bennett, I'm not what you'd call a cowman. I want to breed fine horses. That's why I saved and skimped, and counted the pennies—oh, Daisy helped, you know."

He paused as he saw Gormley look up in surprise.

Then he leaned forward and spoke in an undertone.

"Daisy works, you know," he confided. "She works in the Oasis. That's the big place in Riverdale. That's about all there is to Riverdale, for that matter. Just the Oasis, an' a hotel, store, livery, an' blacksmith shop. It's the Oasis that draws 'em; draws 'em from everywhere, an' most of 'em is bad. She goes over there an' sings a song or two, an' dances a bit, an' does pretty fair. Oh, Daisy is a good girl, don't forget that! But—but——" He paused, frowning.

"Yes—but what?" Gormley eagerly prompted.

"I don't like the man she works for. That's Gale Parker. He owns the Oasis, although there must be more in with him. It's said that there are two or three others. They say"—Dunn looked about the room—"they say Sorrento is in with him; that he set him up in business. But nobody dares mention it aloud." Dunn nodded.

"Why not?" Gormley demanded. His self-imposed assignment was becoming more interesting and complicated every minute. "Who is this Sorrento?"

Dunn raised his hands. "I don't know, an' I'm not tryin' to find out. He comes once in a while with some men from way out East somewhere. That's what they say. I don't believe they know where he comes from. He's a terribly bad man, as bad as they make 'em. Daisy, she's seen him twice. She says his eyes make her shiver. He ain't a big man, dresses common, but wears some big diamonds. That's all I know, except that he's killed two or three men in the Oasis. But they say the men got fresh an' had it comin' to them." Dunn bobbed his head in emphasis.

Gormley was striving to place such a man—undoubtedly an outlaw—from this meager description, but he couldn't. Well, he wouldn't know of him if he came from very far East, for Gormley knew nothing of that country.

"How much did you pay for this stallion?" he asked, changing the subject.

"A thousand dollars," whined Dunn. "But he was worth more than that when he was stolen. I was breeding horses. That's what I want to do. I saved an' sold cattle—my stock isn't any too good, except for the horses—and Daisy helped. An' now Samson's gone. He was running with the mares, an' I don't see how they ever got a rope on him. I could handle him, but he'd stamp anybody else into the ground. It took more'n one of 'em, that's sure."

"No tracks or anything?" Gormley inquired.

"Nothing I could see. I don't even know where it happened."

"When does your daughter go in to —to town?" asked Gormley.

"Oh, she rides in about dark," said Dunn. "You want to go in with her?"

Gormley shook his head. "No, but before she goes, I'd like to ask her a few questions, if she doesn't mind. An', meanwhile, Mr. Dunn, I'll just crawl up in the hay an' snatch a few winks. Maybe I won't get a chance to sleep again right away soon. I've got to go into Riverdale, but I don't want to go in daylight. I'll go to-night."

"I reckon we can fix you up in the house," said Dunn.

"No. Don't want to be in the house. I have my reasons, an' if any one comes along that you don't know, get the word to me if you can. By the way, Dunn, it's best not to say anything about my being here."

"I see—I see," said Dunn eagerly. It was as if the man enjoyed being the possessor of a secret. "I know, I know. Don't worry."

"That was a very fine breakfast," said Gormley to Daisy Dunn when she came into the living room as he was leaving. "I had a long ride last night an' it hit the spot."

The girl flushed slightly, but made no comment.

"I was telling your father, I would like to ask you a question or two before —after I've had a bit of sleep. That is, if you don't mind."

"I'll try to answer 'em," she said, looking after her father, who had gone out. "I hope you can find Samson. He really was a splendid horse an' dad's been heartbroken since they stole him. You'd hardly think he was the same man. His whole heart, it seemed like, was sort of wrapped up in that stallion. If you could find him——" She looked at him doubtfully.

"That's my business, Miss Daisy," he said seriously, "finding stock that is stolen from members of the association. And it is just as important to find out who did the stealing, an' get them, too."

Gormley went out with Dunn to the barn. "You better just turn my horse out with yours," he told the rancher. "I can get him easy enough; or you can for that matter. An' I'll crawl up into the hay for forty winks."

When Gormley came down, after having had a refreshing sleep, the sun was sinking in a blaze of crimson glory behind the western hills. He made for the wash bench, and as he was finishing his ablutions with a smart rubbing with the towel, Dunn came up.

"I caught your horse an' brought him in, not knowin' just when you'd want to use him an' aimin' to have him handy," grinned Dunn.

"Anybody been here?" Gormley asked.

Dunn shook his head. "Nope." Then, recollecting, he added: "That is, nobody but young Sam Brodie. He's from the Bar S outfit an' drops aroun' now an' then to see Daisy. She draws the young fellers like sugar draws flies. But he ain't such a bad sort."

"The Bar S, I take it, is the Slocum outfit?" said Gormley.

"That's it, an' a big outfit, too. Old Slocum's gota lot of cattle. More'n enough. But me, I never cared much about cattle. I run to hosses. It's hosses I want to breed, an' now, with Samson gone——" A look of intense worry and pain came into his eyes.

"Cheer up," said Gormley. "Maybe we can get the stallion back."

"Do you think there's a chance?" asked Dunn eagerly.

"I think there's a little better than a fifty-fifty chance," said Gormley, "although I don't know just why I say that."

Dunn rubbed his hands, a pleased expression on his face. "Mr. Bennett says there's a chance to get Samson back, Daisy," he cried excitedly as they entered the house. "Says he thinks there's better'n a fifty-fifty chance. Well, the association's got some smart men workin' for 'em."

The girl looked at Gormley, as much as to say: "Are you just kidding him along?" But Gormley merely smiled and they went in to supper. Daisy was really the head of the table.

"Your father was telling me you worked in—in town," Gormley ventured.

"In the Oasis, you mean," she corrected. "That's the town, anyway. Yes, I work there. I have to help out."

"Do you know if there are many Bar S men in?" he asked.

Daisy colored slightly, but as she saw he was merely putting the question casually and had no reference to any particular man, she answered:

"I guess about a dozen or so are in for the winter. They go back to the Bar S when the horse round-up starts in the spring."

"What kind of a fellow is this Gale Parker?"

She looked at Gormley quickly, with flashing eyes, but he was looking at his plate as he asked the question.

"He's—well, he's the kind of a man who would run that kind of a place,"

she replied. "But he knows better than to bother me. I——" She paused, then: "He seems to try to regulate the place well enough, but—I hate him!"

Gormley looked up quickly. "Is it because you have to work for him?" he asked.

"Partly, an'—I don't like to see him standing at the bar staring at me. Sometimes I feel like pulling the small gun I carry an' lettin' him have it!" The girl's tone was heartfelt. Gormley thought he understood.

"Does he own that place alone, Miss Daisy?' he asked.

"I don't know. He pays me, aside from what extra money the customers donate. I only sing and do a dance or two." She looked at him wide-eyed. "That's my trick," she said meaningly. "Just to entertain a little."

Gormley nodded gravely. "I understand, Miss Daisy. An' now—who's this Sorrento person?"

The question did not startle her. "You've heard about him," she observed. "Dad told you probably. Well, I suppose a man in your business has to know everything." She considered for a space. "I don't know much about him. He doesn't come often. When he does come, though, the place hums. His men spend money like water, throw it around. They have some terrible fights. But Sorrento sort of stands off an' takes it all in. Very quiet. Wears a lot of diamonds, an' they're real diamonds, too. An' when he speaks to his men they listen; an' they do as he says, pronto. Whoever or whatever he is, he's somebody."

Gormley was thoughtful. He felt that he should get in touch with some of the Bar S men, yet he had no note from Slocum—an oversight, that—and, as ever, he was loath to disclose his identity. He wondered if he could trust Sam Brodie. If the red-headed youth was in love with Daisy Dunn, as it appeared, he would be willing to do anything for her. Still, he hesitated. He was in hostile territory—in lawless territory—peopled by denizens who were outside the law, while he, Gormley, represented the long arm of authority.

"Miss Daisy," he said finally, "you want me to find the stallion, do you not?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the girl. "I'll be so happy if you do, an' it'll make a different man of dad, here."

"Then you must help me," said Gormley sternly. "No one must know who I am or what I represent—as yet. Later I may have to have some help. But at present only us three here at this table know why I am here. You will remember what I've just said, won't you, Miss Daisy?"

"Why, of course! I'm not as dumb as I look."

"You don't look dumb," said Gormley gallantly. "It's a real pleasure to look at you. No, don't glance at me that way. I'm an engaged man. Ever hear of Martha Turby, up north of here quite a ways? No? Well, she's a fine girl, an' she's the girl I'm going to marry as son as my contract with the association is up. She says I've got to quit this game then an' settle down, whatever that means. An' that's also a reason why I'm trying to be a little more careful of late an' not take so many chances." He smiled, and he saw by the girl's shining eyes that he had won her fullest confidence.

"The secretary didn't seem to care much whether I came over here or not. I came, you might say, on my own hook. But now that I'm here, it looks as if I had work to do. But if I have to get in touch with some of the Bar S men, assuming they are not like most of the people who come here, I hope I'll be able to do so through you."

"You sure will," the girl promised. "You said you had some questions you wanted to ask me before I went to town."

"I've asked them all," smiled Gormley, "an' you've answered 'em. There's just one more. Where'll I put up my horse to-night when I ride in?"

"The livery's right behind the hotel, the first building you come to as you ride in from this side. The second building, the biggest, is the Oasis. Then's the store. You can't get lost in Riverdale." She laughed delightedly, and Gormley joined her. Even Andrew Dunn smiled for the first time in days.

Daisy left as soon as she had done the supper dishes. Gormley noted that she rode a trim horse. He had noted, too, that Dunn's horses all seemed of very good stock. Somehow he felt a personal interest in recovering the stallion, and he had a vague feeling which he could not shake off that the valuable horse had actually been stolen to draw him into that lawless corner of the range. At this thought his eyes narrowed and his jaw clamped. Who? Could this Sorrento have something to do with it? Try as he would, Gormley could place no such man. But the fact that he came to this nefarious resort with a band of wild spenders stamped him indubitably as an outlaw.

An hour after dark, Gormley rode away from the Dunn place. It was clear and cool—a perfect Indian summer night. He was wary, however, and approached the bridge cautiously. When he reached it, he drove in his spurs and dashed for the town. He didn't slow up until he saw the lights of the first building. It was the hotel and was on his left.

He found a road leading behind it, and as he passed into the livery, under the swinging light, a man came out—a dark-faced man, whose eyes seemed to light with sudden fire as he glanced up at Gormley. Gormley was startled. That glance had seemed to be a flash of recognition!

The liveryman came hurrying with a lantern as he dismounted.

CHAPTER V.

A MESSAGE.

AS Gormley dismounted, he saw the liveryman look quickly at the left shoulder of his horse. Then his gaze roved to the hip. Finally he looked at Gormley out of cold, fishy eyes, noting, of course, that the new arrival was a stranger. The liveryman would be most likely to know every one who came to the place.

"No brands on this horse, mister," said Gormley easily; "they're too easy to read. Savvy?" He pressed a gold piece into the man's palm, and the latter managed a smile. "Take good care of him, for he's a good horse. Where you going to put him?"

"Fifth stall on the left," said the man quickly. It was not unusual for his patrons to wish to know where their horses would be in case they needed them suddenly. "I'll look after him. Don't mind lookin' after a good hoss any day. You're a stranger?"

"That's me," said Gormley cheerily. "Any rule against comin' to this place?"

"Not if you've got money," the other grinned. "Gale gets irritable when strangers land short, though. If you want to eat there's a good restaurant in the hotel."

"Thanks," said Gormley dryly. "So long." He was not disposed to tell the man he had already eaten lest he should want to know where he stopped on the way. "Less they know the better for me," he said to himself as he left the barn.

An experienced trailer can sense a hostile town as soon as he rides into it; just as a hobo knows instantly when he is on unfriendly ground. Gormley knew his surroundings were hostile. If for no other reason, the mere fact that he was a stranger was against him. If he was to get anything done here, he would have to meet up with Sam Brodie sooner or later and get him to alibi him.

For Gormley was well acquainted with these dangerous, out-of-the-way towns which were rendezvous for questionable characters for miles around, even from across the line. To avoid any suspicion he entered the hotel and ate a light repast, drinking much strong, black coffee. Then he asked for a room, and got one at the rear on the second floor. He now was prepared to invade the Oasis, where he would be scrutinized by scores of curious eyes.

He walked to the big building next door, and when he had entered, he paused in astonishment. It was the most elaborate place of the kind he ever had seen. The bar was a massive, ornate affair, with a full-length mirror behind, and scores of glasses pyramided under it, glowing with iridescence. Glass chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling. The tables and chairs were good; the roulette wheels were elaborate, and the floor was very highly polished.

It was an enormous room, with a dance floor at the rear and a balcony above. Gormley quickly estimated that thousands of dollars had been spent here. And it was crowded! One would naturally be led to wonder where the all the patrons came from. He advanced to the bar and without delay the man in the white jacket and apron set out a bottle of what proved to be excellent whisky. The drinks cost a dollar. Nothing cheap about this place, that was sure.

Gormley had hardly finished his drink when a dapper-looking man, in a checkered suit with a fancy vest and a red tie, came up to him, looking at him out of cold, gray eyes.

"I always buy a drink for every stranger," he said in rather a pleasant voice. "I guess you come under that heading, eh?"

Gormley was instantly on his guard. "Reckon so," he said, reverting to the Texas drawl which was his natural heritage. "Guess you must buy a lot of drinks."

"I'm Gale Parker," said the other, signaling to the bartender. "I run this place."

"Yeah?" Gormley appeared surprised. "Then I take it you've got a right to buy drinks for strangers. My name's Bennett. When we've had your drink, I'll blow back. Don't usually meet the boss first time up."

Parker barely covered the bottom of his glass with the liquor. Gormley took a moderate potion. "Here's luck," said Parker. "I'll need it," grinned Gormley. When they had downed their libations he signaled again to the bartender.

The dose was repeated, and Gormley drew out a thick roll of bills and peeled off a hundred-dollar note.

"By the looks of that, your luck hasn't been running so bad," smiled Parker, indicating Gormley's roll.

"But I'll need a lot of luck to keep it," Gormley retorted. "I aim to gamble."

Parker's smile now was positively benevolent. "Plenty of opportunity here," he said, "an' every game is on the square. That's one thing—no man can say he was ever cheated in my place—by the house I mean."

"That's more'n a lot of 'em I've been up against lately can say," returned Gormley with a wry smile. "But I ain't complainin'. I take things as they come an' let it go at that."

"Listen, my friend," said Parker seriously, "if anybody tries to put anything over on you around here, you let me know, understand? I stand behind my customers. I'm not asking you where you're from or where you're going; but I'm telling you, you'll get a square deal here." With this he squeezed Gormley's arm and was gone, walking briskly to his station at the lower end of the bar.

Gormley was smiling inwardly. What kind of a play was this? He had sensed

Parker looking him over carefully. Was this his way of meeting and forming an opinion of strangers—of strangers he might possibly suspect of being more than they appeared to be? Or did he know who Gormley was, and had he taken this means of getting close to him? Gormley didn't think for a minute that he would be molested, in any event as long as he had money. He now surveyed the crowd in the room.

Sauntering down between the poker tables toward the wheels and dice games, Gormley's eyes roved over the throng. He wondered if he had mixed with spectators at the tables would Parker have singled him out just the same? It seemed improbable. No, the Oasis proprietor had accosted him for a definite reason.

Gormley's practiced eye detected cowpunchers among the crowd, but they were in the minority. And very few of them were playing. Suddenly above the noise came the sweet notes of a woman's voice. Instantly the clamor died down. Daisy Dunn was singing. Gormley could see her in the center of the dance floor in the rear of the big room, dressed in red, which was extremely becoming to her. His gaze swept the double line of men at the edge of the dance floor. In this way he picked out the tall, straight form of Sam Brodie. There was no mistaking him, for the men had taken off their wide-brimmed Stetsons so that those behind might see; and there was that flaming head of dark-red hair. Somehow, Gormley had a feeling that Brodie would have taken off his hat anyway, out of courtesy to the girl who was singing rather than to oblige those standing behind his tall figure. Gormley edged closer and studied his profile. He liked it. Once, Brodie turned so that Gormley could see his eyes. The latter liked those, too. A clean-cut, upstanding youth, Gormley concluded—and wondered that Slocum had let him go for the winter, since he thought so well of him. He did not know, of course, that "Red" Brodie, as he was known to the punchers, had asked for his release.

Gormley succeeded in getting into the second line near the dance floor. He even caught Daisy Dunn's eye, and she looked at him time and again as she sang. Gormley saw something else that gave him pause. This was Parker, leaning back on his elbows against the bar, his eyes glued to the singer's face. Gormley frowned. He did not like the look in those eyes, and he suspected why Daisy Dunn had said that she hated the man.

A roar of applause that shook the building signaled the end of the song. Daisy sang an encore and then ran lightly up the stairs of the balcony, where she blew a kiss to her audience and vanished behind some blue-velvet curtains.

Gormley turned about and began to play roulette. He was playing with his back to the dance floor, which had been invaded by numerous dancing girls with rouged lips and cheeks. He kept his eyes partly on the figures of the layout and partly on the crowd in the room before him. He managed to keep an eye also on Gale Parker and finally saw the proprietor go into his private office.

Gormley's luck was negligible. He played better than moderate stakes, but the game seesawed back and forth so that he remained about even. Suddenly he felt a light touch on the arm. Looking around, he saw Red Brodie, who signaled him aside with his eyes. Gormley cashed in his checks and followed Brodie into a small areaway which led to the balcony stairs.

"I don't know who you are," said Brodie coldly, looking steadfastly at him, "but Miss Dunn wants to see you."

"If it was any of your business, I could say I'm a friend of the family," said Gormley curtly. "Where is she?"

Brodie's eyes flashed suspiciously.

"Third door up on the balcony," he snapped, pointing.

Gormley immediately mounted the short flight of stairs and rapped lightly on the third door. It was opened in a moment and Daisy invited him in.

It was a luxurious room—for the cow country. Soft rugs, a divan, deep easy-chairs, bookcase well filled, pictures, a phonograph, table with shaded lamp, and—Gormley could hardly believe his eyes—a sewing machine! There was a sewing table, too, and much evidence of the use of both. Here, then, was where Daisy Dunn spent her time when not singing her songs or executing her dances.

"Mr. Bennett," she said soberly, "there's a man here from the Bar S ranch. He wants to see you on important business. Mr. Slocum sent him to our place, knowing you were on your way there, an' dad told him he could get in touch with you through me. I sent for Sam an' pointed you out, but I didn't tell him who you were, of course."

"That's right," said Gormley. "I told him I was an old friend of the family, or something like that. Where is this man from Slocum's?"

"He's over at the hotel in room 26 upstairs. Said that would be the best place to see you—where no one could look on. I've known him a long time. He'll tell you who he is."

"Then I'll be drifting over there," said Gormley. "If anybody wants to know how come we're acquainted, just say I'm a relative of your dad's from the South, or something like that. You sang very nicely, Miss Dunn. I enjoyed it."

The girl waved a hand in an aimless gesture. "I do the best I can," she said simply. She looked a bit tired.

Some little time later Gormley knocked on the door of No. 26 at the hotel. The door was opened immediately by a tall, dark-eyed man who bore the distinct earmarks of a cowman.

"Come in," he invited. When the door was closed the cowman said: "You're the man from the association? I only caught a glimpse of you in the courtyard at the ranch last night. The Old Man sent me to see you."

Gormley, always wary, stared at him coldly. "What ranch?" he demanded in a hard voice.

"The Bar S. You stopped to see Slocum," came the even reply. Then, in a low voice: "You're Gormley. I'm Hester, range boss for Slocum. He came out to me to find out where Dunn's place was, an' I gave him the information. Something came up when Robbins, our foreman, came in off the south range this morning. I've been laid up with a bad leg an' couldn't be out with the cattle. Slocum sent me to find you an' give you this."

He reached inside his shirt, brought out an envelope, and handed it to Gormley.

"We might as well sit down," suggested Gormley. He tore open the envelope, took out a sheet of paper and read:

To G.: My foreman, Robbins, came in at daybreak with the information that two hundred head of Herefords are missing on my lower range. Looked high and low for them, but could not find a trace. It is impossible for them to stray down there. We both think they have been stolen and, since you are in the locality, thought you ought to know. Would have to report it to headquarters, anyway. Am sending my range boss, Hester, to you with this note. The Dunn girl or Brodie will identify him. He will take any orders. WILL SLOCUM.

Gormley read the note twice, then he suddenly looked up at Hester. "Do you know anything about what this says?" he asked sharply.

"I expect the Old Man is sayin' that Robbins reports we're a couple hundred head short on the lower range," drawled Hester. "Never would have happened

if I'd been on the job. No sense in leaving them cattle loose down there, anyway." He scowled.

"How long has it been since you lost any cattle?"

"Well, brother, it's been a long, long time. So long that I can't just remember what year it was, an' I've been with the Bar S for twelve years myself. Robbins only tops me by about five years."

"Dunn tell you anything?" Gormley queried

"Told me they'd stole his black stallion," was the reply.

Gormley nodded. He wasn't on any wild-goose chase, after all. "Seems funny to me," he said, knitting his brows, "that these two thefts should come so close together, as to time. Still there's——"

"Nothing funny about it," Hester broke in. "Some of these rats that hang aroun' this place got right hard up, that's all. One of 'em was a little smarter than the others an' organized the raid. I'll bet the cattle, yes, an' the stallion, too, were sold right here in Riverdale!"

"Might be," Gormley speculated. "You've been here more'n once, haven't you?"

"Sure—to my bad luck. This onery place owes me plenty."

"Tell me, Hester," said Gormley, leaning forward, "is this Gale Parker who runs the Oasis in the habit of greeting every stranger who wanders into his place with a drink?"

Hester stared at him. Then he laughed harshly. "Is he——" He laughed again. "You mean in the habit of buying him a drink?"

Gormly nodded. "That's what I mean."

"Well, I'll say not!" Hester exploded scornfully. "Whenever he buys a drink, it's for business purposes."

"He came over to me first time I went to the bar an' bought me one," said Gormley. "Said it was his custom to greet strangers that way. Acted right friendly, too—especially after he saw me flash a roll."

"That was it," grinned Hester. "He picked you for a live one. He's clever that way. Wanted to get a line on you, that's all."

"You don't suppose he might have had any other reason, some kind of a hunch, say?" asked Gormley pointedly.

"As to who you are? I—I don't see how." Hester became thoughtful. "This wouldn't be a healthy place for you if they got wise to you. I suppose you know that."

"I have to take chances," said Gormley with a shrug. "Slocum says you'll take any orders."

"Those were his instructions," Hester nodded.

"Very well. I'd like you to take back to the ranch a communication to my headquarters. Tell Slocum to send a man into Raysville with it. I'll go to my room down the hall—last one on the left—an' write it. Meanwhile, go down an' take a look around an' see if you can pick up a Bar S man you can absolutely trust, drunk or sober, to keep his mouth shut. Bring him up to No. 26 an' I'll meet you there. But be careful about the man you pick."

"I guess I can find one," grunted Hester.

Gormley left the room and walked down the long hall to his own quarters.

CHAPTER VI.

GUN TALK.

BUT Gormley wrote two letters. One was to Holmes, reporting developments, and asking that Tommy Green be equipped with a good horse and dispatched to Riverdale at once. He gave no explanation of the request, knowing that Holmes would follow his instructions to the letter. Tommy should be in Riverdale within thirty-six hours. The other letter was to Martha Turby,

and Gormley spent considerable time over this missive to his sweetheart. He put both letters into envelopes and inclosed them in a single large one addressed to Holmes.

Hester responded to his knock on the door of room 26, and when Gormley entered he saw a tall, grizzled cowman of the old school, stroking his drooping mustaches and peering at him from under shaggy brows.

"This is Mert Lowell," said Hester simply. "He's an old-timer on the Bar S, an' you can rely on him."

"All right," said Gormley. "How do you do, Lowell?" He then held out a hand.

"Howdy," said Lowell, taking the hand extended to him and looking at Gormley with frank curiosity. "It's been quite a spell since I met a regular man hunter."

For some reason this disconcerted Gormley. But he could see that Lowell was sharp and far from being a fool. "Right now I'm not looking for any man in particular," he said rather lamely. "But I want to know where to turn in case I need assistance, an' maybe some advice. I reckon you've had plenty of experience."

"I've had that an' more," boasted Lowell. "What you callin' yourself aroun' here?"

"Bennett," snapped Gormley. "That's one of my names an' I guess it'll do. You've seen me around?"

"I saw you an' Parker at the bar an' thought you was acquainted," was the reply. "Can't say as you're attracting any special attention."

"I hope you're right," muttered Gormley. Then to Hester: "Here's the envelope to be sent to town. I don't suppose you'll be starting back till morning, but tell Slocum I wish it could get in there by to-morrow night."

"I'll do that," Hester promised. "I'll be startin' back just before daylight. It'll get to Raysville on time, all right."

Gormley turned to Lowell. "Where can I find you in a pinch?" he asked.

"There's only one place in town," drawled the old puncher. "If I ain't in the Oasis, I'll be in the little shack this side of the livery—the only one there. There's a couple of us who hole up there in the winter."

"Good! Let's drift down to the Oasis an' see what's doing."

They left Hester in his room. The range boss had sworn he would not go down to the resort because he had his season's wages salted away and didn't propose to lose the money at the tables.

"Have you got any idea who might have raided the Bar S stock?" asked Gormley, when they were out in the cool darkness of the night.

"Didn't know a thing about it till Hester told me to-night," Lowell answered. "He'd tell me, of course, because I'm the oldest hand on the Bar S.—that is, I've been with the outfit the longest. No, there's plenty of rustlers here all right, but they mostly work east, an' way south. They've always steered clear of anything close in because Parker don't want any more attention called to his place than he can help. I ain't seen any of that crowd, such as I know of them, bunching up like they was cookin' up a deal, either. You've got me."

"Lowell, what do you know about this Sorrento?" asked Gormley.

They had stopped in the space between the hotel and the Oasis. For some little time there was silence.

"There's only one thing I can say for certain an' that's that he's shore bad medicine," said Lowell then, lowering his voice. "It ain't exactly healthy to inquire too much into his affairs, if a-tall. I've always believed in leaving well enough alone, an' I've left him alone, you bet."

"No one seems to want to say much about him," said Gormley impatiently. "It——" He broke off his speech sud-

denly, as excited voices came down to them from a window above.

"I tell you, Daisy, there's no sense in waiting! Why, we'll be here all winter just like we are now!"

"Stop it, Sam! Don't be foolish. You shouldn't be in here, either, an' you know it. It's liable to make talk."

Gormley looked up. The words came from a window of the Oasis. He realized immediately that the voices were those of Red Brodie and Daisy Dunn. They were in Daisy's room.

"But they're talking about us now, Daisy," said Brodie. "It'll make all the more talk if we keep on goin' like this an' don't get——"

"Don't say it!" cried the girl. "Sam, I like you a lot—a whole, big lot, understand; but you lose your head, just like you're doing now. An'——"

"But I've got plenty of money," the youth pleaded. "I've saved my wages, an' I've fooled aroun' with a little gambling an' made money at that. I've got all we need. I can even buy your dad another stallion!"

"That's the most foolish thing you've said yet," said Daisy with a hint of scorn in her voice. "As if he'd let you do that—even if we were married. You must go now."

"But, Daisy, just let me say one thing more." The boy's tone softened and died away so that the words did not carry through the partly opened window.

"I guess we better be goin' in," said Lowell. "I never liked to listen in on lovers' quarrels or a man an' wife squabblin'. That youngster may have the right idea, but he's going at it in the wrong way. I can tell that, even if I am a bachelor."

Gormley did not laugh nor smile. He was surprised to learn that matters had progressed so far between Daisy and the red-headed puncher. And he could not overlook the fact that Brodie had offered to buy Daisy's father a stallion.

"Is this young Brodie a good gambler?" he asked Lowell.

"Has to depend on luck," returned the other shortly. "He's made some winnings."

They entered the resort in time for Gormley to see Red Brodie near the dance floor. Gormley slowly made his way to the roulette table nearest the floor, watching the youth. Brodie was frowning and biting his lip. There were dancing lights in his eyes, unnaturally bright. He went to the bar and imbibed a stiff drink.

Daisy came tripping down the stairs to sing. She was perceptibly agitated. Her first number was rather ragged, although it brought the usual tremendous volume of applause. Again, Gormley saw Parker watching her. He saw more this time. He saw the Oasis proprietor move over to young Brodie's side and speak to him. The youth flung up his head angrily, but Parker only motioned to the man behind the bar. They drank together, with Daisy watching them.

Gormley saw more in this drama being enacted before his eyes than any one would have suspected. Parker was speaking to the youth now. Gormley could see through the medium of the mirror behind the bar that Parker was speaking slowly, and evidently in a voice for Red Brodie's ears alone. And Brodie was listening, toying with his glass between his hands, a frown on his face.

Daisy Dunn finished her second song and fled from the floor, refusing an encore.

Lovers' quarrel? Gormley smiled grimly and turned to the spinning wheel. His hand, filled with bank notes, froze just as he was about to exchange the notes for checks with which to play. He was looking past the table, over the heads of the players at the tables. Coming from the direction of the front entrance was the man he had ousted from

Mack's place in Raysville—— It was Horan!

He thrust the bills back into his pocket and moved away from the table, with a signal to Lowell, who stood near by. Although Lowell did not know what was up, he sidled toward Gormley. The latter knew Horan had seen him; he could tell by the set of the man's jaw. Yet, Horan did not look at him. He just barely moved forward between the crowded tables.

Gormley stepped to the bar. The orchestra was playing loudly and the room was filled with the sound of voices, laughter, the clicking of chips, and the clinking of glasses. Lowell was somewhere behind him, and now beside him. Gormley gave the signal and the bartender served them. Gormley let his glass remain on the bar, and Lowell followed his example.

Never in his career had Gormley been placed in the situation in which he now found himself. Horan had been humiliated in Raysville. True, he had merited the treatment he had received, but that would not be taken into account by him. His was the breed which never forgets. Gormley remembered the look in the burly man's eyes when they had locked gazes in the barn. Triangle O! The peculiar brand seemed to stand out before Gormley's eyes as he watched the stealthy approach of Horan in the mirror. His thoughts went wild. Triangle O; Martha Turby, his betrothed; Holmes, Dunn. Was he going crazy? He almost felt dizzy, did feel a bit dizzy, in fact. This man who was creeping up on him knew the secret of his identity. He would shout it in the room. But he couldn't be allowed to do that! It would not only spoil Gormley's plans, but would more than likely result in his death. There were friends, acquaintances here of men whom Gormley had hunted down—and beaten to the draw! There was only one way out. Gormley's face went white. It looked as if for the first time in his life he would have to deliberately shoot a man down!

Horan must have found out in some way where he, Gormley, was going. It was even possible he had been followed. That fellow who had come out of the barn when he had ridden in; who had looked up at him with that queer flash in his eyes—— Gormley had it now. It was the man who had been watching him in Raysville. But how had he got to Riverdale so soon? Gormley smiled at his own ignorance. Hadn't he stopped at Slocum's, and hadn't he spent the day sleeping at the Dunn place?

Horan was only a few feet away now. Gormley turned to Lowell, his face gray, his lips white. He raised his glass. He saw the lunge in the mirror as Horan reached for him, whirled just in time for the big man to catch hold of his right foream. The glass and its contents were dashed to the floor.

Horan's eyes were burning balls of red. "We're on neutral ground now, Mister——"

"Don't say it!" Gormley's words dripped ice and cut like a lash. "Have it any way you want it, but if you mention my name, I'll shoot you in your tracks!" The last words were hissed for Horan's ears alone.

The big man stepped back a pace. Those about them moved away. But the trouble was not yet noticeable through the room.

"Ah-ha!" sneered Horan. "You want to bargain, eh? You want to make a deal now you're away from your friends!"

"The only way I'll bargain with you is with hot lead!" shot Gormley between his teeth. It had to come. There was no way out of it. Maybe Horan would take the initiative if he, Gormley, did not. But one way or the other, it had to come. "Too much at stake," Gormley was whispering to himself. "Too much at stake."

Horan placed his hands on his hips. Others were taking notice now. This business was not just an argument, a common fight of the sort that occurred regularly in the resort. Gale Parker was pushing his way through the crowd, his face dark, his eyes snapping. This looked like shooting, and he did not fancy gun play in his place.

"What makes you so white aroun' the gills?" roared Horan. "You act like you was scared, you——" As the insult came from his lips a hush fell over the place.

"Stop it!" shouted Parker, struggling through those closest to the principals.

"Go for your gun, you yellow coward!" cried Gormley, his face like chalk. "Go for it, or I'll take it away from you an' knock your teeth out with it!"

His right hand shot out and the palm smashed across Horan's mouth.

A flaming instant when men dropped to the floor for safety and then the world went red, with the room rocking to the roar of guns. Horan went backward, his right hand losing the gun, as three bullets crashed into his chest. For a moment he stood upright like a statue, then his knees gave way, and he plunged forward on his face.

Lowell grasped Gormley by the arm and pulled him away through an aisle that opened in the crowd like magic. Parker was cursing. A girl screamed. Lowell literally dragged Gormley, still clutching his gun, through a rear door into the coolness of the night.

"Too much at stake," muttered Gormley incoherently, as Lowell pushed him on toward the shack by the livery barn.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTERMATH.

TURNING a key in the lock of the door of the shack, Lowell opened the door and pushed Gormley in, following close behind him. He struck a match and lighted the lamp on the small deal table. Then he stared at Gormley, who had sat down on one of the two bunks in the room. It all had happened so unexpectedly and so swiftly that Lowell was not quite sure of what he had seen with his own eyes.

Gormley's gun still dangled from his hand as he looked up at the tall cowman.

"There was too much at stake," he said grimly. "I couldn't risk having that rat shout my name out in that kind of a crowd. I had to do it." He frowned and bit his lip. "I had to do it," he repeated, as if he were trying to convince himself. Then he spoke slowly. "Lowell, it was downright murder! It was the first time in my life that I deliberately made a man draw. An' I knew—he didn't—have—a—chance!" Gormley's face went white again.

"But why—where——" Lowell was at a loss as to how to put the question that was uppermost in his mind.

Gormley made the query unnecessary.

"Listen, Lowell," he said grimly, putting up his gun. "This fellow Horan—I didn't know his name until later—was in a card game with me the afternoon before I left Raysville. He was nagging an' slurring me all through the game, an' when I cashed in a thousand to the good, he made some pretty mean remarks. I called him an' chased him out of the place. I didn't give him a chance to draw with me. Later we met again in the livery. He gave me to understand what would happen next time we met. He called me by name. Whether he followed me here, or just happened along, I don't know. But he made for me to-night the moment he spied me. An' when he caught me at the bar, he called me. I—I had to finish him off. I can't tell you everything, but there was too much at stake."

Gormley stared straight ahead, his lips pressed into a fine, white line. He

was thinking of Martha Turby and his promise to take no chances. Better that he quit now. The association certainly would let him off, so far as his contract was concerned. It stood to reason. But in his heart was a great fear—was he getting soft and losing his hold on himself?

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it," said Lowell. "If that's the way it was, this Horan would have made you go for your gun sooner or later. He made a powerful smart draw as it was. There wouldn't be many who could stand up against him. He met a better man, that's all."

A grateful look came into Gormley's eyes. "That's right kind of you, Lowell, to say that. It makes me feel better. I hope you're right. I hope that's what he meant to do. I believe it was, but somehow——"

"But, nothing!" exclaimed Lowell. "I saw it in his eyes. Just you forget it. I'm goin' to make us some strong black coffee."

He busied himself making a fire in the stove and putting on the coffeepot. Gormley watched him curiously. His thoughts were far from that stove, and Lowell, and even Riverdale, although they repeatedly reverted to Red Brodie. There was something about the way the youth acted which he didn't like. And, somehow, his fraternizing with Parker seemed incongruous. Daisy Dunn hated Parker. Gormley had noticed that she never once looked toward him, although she had looked several times when he and Brodie had been together at the bar. As for Parker—Gormley had seen the look in the man's eyes as he regarded her, and it had told him many things.

His thoughts raced hither and yon, stumbling over each other, as he sat there on the bunk. He took out his gun, removed the empty shells, slipped in three fresh cartridges. Then the coffee was ready. Lowell put the two steaming cups on the table and the delicious aroma filled the room. They sat down at the table, and with their first sip of the hot, stimulating beverage there came an imperative rapping on the door. As Lowell went to it, Gormley moved his chair quickly so that he sat with his back to the wall, the door on his left.

"Did you bring that fellow over here?" asked a sharp voice.

"What fellow you talkin' about?" returned Lowell to the man outside the door.

"You know who I mean—— There! I see him. I want to talk to him a minute."

"Come in, Parker," Gormley invited. "You're just in time for a cup of coffee."

"It's more than coffee I want," Parker snapped out, as he entered.

"Well, I don't know what my friend has to eat," drawled Gormley, "but I guess he can scrape up something." Lowell had taken his seat.

"Cut the comedy!" Parker's eyes were snapping fire. "I want to know a thing or two—here an' now!"

"Just a minute," said Gormley evenly, his eyes narrowing as he looked straight at the Oasis proprietor. "Suppose you just take it a little easy, an' don't bark at me like that. I've been annoyed enough for one night. Sit down." He pointed to a third chair. "Sit down," he suggested in a louder voice.

Parker drew the chair to the end of the table nearest the door and sat down. He looked at Gormley narrowly and not without curiosity. "What was the idea in that gun play in my place a while ago?" he demanded.

Gormley turned toward him and tapped the table with his spoon for emphasis.

"The idea was this. That fellow came in there to get me. He made the first move, an' the first talk. I knew the minute he opened his mouth that the

argument was going to be settled with guns instead of words. No man can call me the name he did an' get away with it. If he hadn't drawn, I would have spanked him with his own six-shooter, an' he knew it! He chose to take his medicine standing up."

Parker's face was alight with emotion.

"But why fight it out in my place?" he said angrily. "I have enough troubles without it getting around that there's been another shooting in the Oasis. You just got in to-night, an' before you've been here—well, in no time a-tall, along comes this other one an' you're shooting it out in front of my bar! Who was he? An' just who are you, while we're at it? I'm entitled to know. This Bar S man is all right, an' must be a friend of yours by the way it looks. You needn't be scared to talk right out."

"I told you my name is Bennett," said Gormley coldly, sipping his coffee. "I could tell you it's Smith or Brown an' you'd know just as much. I don't know for sure what the deceased was named."

Parker leaned forward and lowered his voice. "You tried to give me the impression to-night that you were an ordinary gambler. You're not! No ordinary gambler that ever thumbed a card could draw an' shoot like you did to-night. You're dangerous! I like to know something about the dangerous men who come into my territory, an' I've never broken a confidence yet." He nodded meaningly.

"When I came here," said Gormley slowly, "the last thing I wanted to do was to attract attention." This was the truth, and he paused to let it sink in. Parker could think what he wished. It was certain that he was not aware of Gormley's identity.

"I can see that you're entitled to a certain amount of information," he continued. "I only met the man I had trouble with to-night once before. That was in a small town some distance from here. We played in a game an' he ragged me from start to finish. He was mean about it. When I quit the game, I called him. I didn't give him a chance to draw; I let him go. He promised to call the turn next time we met. Whether he followed me here, or just happened along, I've no way of knowing. But he showed up to-night an' started his operations in less than five minutes from the time he came in the door. You know the rest."

Parker had listened intently. Suspicion simmered in his eyes, but Gormley's quiet explanation had carried the ring of truth and sincerity. "Sounds like it might be so," he muttered.

"It is so!" said Gormley sharply. "I didn't have to tell you a thing, much less go to the trouble of making up a fairy tale."

"You're too smart for a common cow-puncher," Parker observed; "an' you handle words too well for an ordinary gambler. An' there's one sure bet—you're a gunman, if I ever saw one, an' I've run across a few in my day. Maybe"—his eyes flashed—"you're the law!"

Gormley kicked back his chair and leaped to his feet, towering over the other. "An' if I am the law—what then?"

"I'm ready to talk business with you," said Parker calmly, taking out a cigar.

Gormley sat down with a laugh.

"I've had sheriffs here before," said Parker, biting off the end of his cigar and striking a match. "I've always got along with them." He lighted his weed with a steady hand.

"Well, I'm not a sheriff," grinned Gormley. "I'm not even a deputy. So we can't talk business on that score. In my cattle days I did a heap of reading. But I didn't know I talked different from anybody else. I've told you the truth, Parker, an' you're welcome to pass it on to anybody that's curious

enough to ask. Do you think it would be safe for me to take a hand in a game till morning?"

"Humph!" It was plain Parker was not satisfied. "Maybe you'll loosen up some more about yourself when you've made sure I'm on the square. I've been able to do more'n one man a friendly turn." He looked at Lowell. "Is Bennett with the Bar S?" he asked.

"He's doin' the talkin'," replied Lowell, filling the cups.

"Might be at that," Parker observed. "Slocum's got a lot of men I've never seen." He rose impatiently. "Go ahead an' play," he said to Gormley, "but tie the flap of your holster down, if it's got a flap—which it hasn't. I'll say it was an old grudge an' the other one followed you here." He paused with his hand on the doorknob. "What they don't know won't hurt 'em, but what I don't know might hurt you. Think that over, Bennett."

"He hasn't any idea who you are," said Lowell in an undertone after Parker had gone.

"Either that, or he's one fine little actor," Gormley responded. Then in a louder voice, in case Parker should be eavesdropping: "Let's finish this coffee an' play a few cards. I've got money that craves action."

When they were outside again, Gormley asked another question.

"Lowell, have you noticed a slender, dark-faced man around recently; say, in the last day, or since I've been here? He gave me a look as I rode into the barn which made me think he recognized me. I didn't get a good enough look at him, but if he's the man I think was watching me in Raysville, his right eye has a slant to it."

"Can't remember noticing any such person," said Lowell. "Nope."

"How many men could we get together here if we had to have 'em?" asked Gormley.

"Not more'n ten," Lowell answered.

"Slocum said I could have every man on the Bar S if I needed 'em," said Gormley thoughtfully. "An' I've got a hunch I'm going to need 'em. Lowell, do you know of a Triangle O brand—a triangle with the O inside?"

"Can't say as I do," replied the cowman. "But I know there's no such brand on this range."

To Gormley's surprise, he attracted practically no attention whatsoever when he entered the Oasis for the third time. Parker must have spread the word well, or else those in the place thought it best to keep their eyes off him. He knew he had achieved a reputation in a minute's time. Perhaps with the gun play he "belonged."

He sat in a game until dawn and quit several hundred dollars a winner. He had a bite at the lunch counter and went to the hotel and to bed.

It was a little after noon when he rose, dressed, and went down to eat. He surveyed those in the dining room carefully, and after the meal went to the barn to see that his horse was all right. There was no one there, except the barn man. After a word or two about his horse, he went to the Oasis. It was too early for much of a crowd, and Gormley frowned as he looked over those who were there. He moved about in the afternoon but caught no glimpse of the dark-faced man he was seeking. He did not consider it wise to ask the barn man if this man had left town, but he suspected that such was the case. There was a chance that this spy was carrying a message somewhere.

Late in the afternoon, Gormley saddled his horse and rode off eastward. There was a wide trail leading in that direction from the little town. Gormley followed this trail for some two miles until he came to some rolling hills that were really merely swells in the surface of the far-reaching plain. No one was in sight. He turned off the main trail between two high swells and

rode south for some distance. Then he cut straight for the river. It was not long before he found a ford. As it was October the water was very low. He crossed the river, and when he emerged from the timber on the opposite bank, he could see the lower range of the Bar S off to the right.

Gormley sat his horse and studied the lay of the land. He saw at once that the only logical course for rustlers to take with stolen cattle would be eastward along the river. Looking in that direction he could see a tangle of small growth, swells mounting into ridges, topped by scattered firs and gnarled pines, a few low buttes—the beginning of a bad-lands district. But the Bar S foreman certainly must have searched this territory. And yet, with that hostile bunch in Riverdale so close, Gormley began to have his doubts. The foreman had not had more than two or three men with him on his inspection trip, probably. He might have hurried back to the ranch to report without any pretense of a thorough search. He certainly would not try to corral a bunch of rustlers without an adequate force at his back.

Dusk was falling and Gormley turned back to the ford. Before he could reach it, he heard water splashing. In a flash he doubled back, raced several rods along the bank, and plunged into the timber. There was a growth of aspens here and buck brush on which the leaves still clung.

He was hardly out of sight when a rider galloped eastward at a stiff pace. Gormley flung himself from his horse and scrambled to the edge of the plain. He recognized the tall form in the saddle with a click of his teeth. It was Sam (Red) Brodie.

Gormley thoughtfully rolled a cigarette as he watched the youth out of sight. "I reckon this is a case that could be solved in an armchair—if my hunches would only come true," he muttered. He hurriedly went back for his horse.

Tommy Green should arrive by morning, if Slocum had acted.

He cantered up to the livery as a bunch of men were leaving. It now was dark, but he saw by the lantern light in the entrance that these men were dusty, travel-stained, with grimy faces. None had shaved for days. They were a rough-looking lot and loud of mouth. Gormley counted eleven of them. He thrilled with a sudden conjecture and then dismounted.

The liveryman was leading a big gray gelding into a stall close by and Gormley caught sight of the brand on the animal. His hands froze to the cinch strap he was loosening. The brand was a triangle with an O in the center!

Gormley drew a long breath. Then a voice spoke beside him.

"Been out for a ride?"

Gormley looked about and into the cold, hard eyes of Parker.

"I always ride an hour or so at sundown when I'm loafing," he replied. "Keeps my horse in trim, an' sort of wakes me up for the night's activities."

"Not a bad idea," said Parker amicably. "An' you've got a mighty good horse to keep in trim. See anybody on the road?"

Gormley sensed a trap at once. "Saw a bunch coming in an' kept out of their way," he hazarded.

Parker nodded. "Good plan," he commented. "The town's full of live ones to-night, if you're looking for high play.' With that he moved away, leaving Gormley to ponder over the sarcasm that had dripped from his words.

Gormley put up his horse, and when he had finished walked out of the barn and straight to Lowell's shack. Yellow lamplight shone from the windows. Lowell opened the door when he rapped.

"Bunch just rode in," said Gormley when he was inside. He looked questioningly at the older man.

"So I noticed," drawled Lowell, turning back to the stove.

"Know who they are?" asked Gormley quietly.

"They're as tough as they make 'em," was the reply. Then, after a long pause, Lowell looked around at Gormley with a queer light in his eyes. "Sorrento is here," he said softly.

His eyes widened as a smile broke out on Gormley's face. He stood staring vacantly at the frying pan he held in his hands as Gormley went out—whistling!

CHAPTER VIII.

SORRENTO.

FOR supper, Gormley went to the hotel, but he saw none of the new arrivals. They were doubtless patronizing the lunch counter in the Oasis. But Sorrento—it seemed as though he would come to the hotel. And then Gormley remembered he had heard that Parker had a large cabin. As a distinguished visitor, Sorrento would most likely be Parker's guest. This seemed very probable.

Gormley's thoughts reverted to the brand on the big gray horse, the Triangle O. This was similar to the brand on Horan's horse. Was it possible that Horan was connected with Sorrento and his band? And, if so, did it not follow that he might have been sent to Raysville to secure information about the association's investigator—perhaps to do him bodily harm? The conviction in Gormley's mind that there had been a scheme to draw him to this isolated corner of the range was now firm.

Bit by bit his hunches began to piece together. Although he did not realize that such was the case, Gormley was working by a process of deduction. And what would happen when Sorrento learned of the killing of Horan? If the latter had been sent to Raysville, and Parker told his guest what Gormley had related to him—as he certainly would do—Sorrento would realize that it was probably the truth. But Sorrento would also be aware of Gormley's identity.

Gormley's mind was made up on the instant. He finished his supper hurriedly and hastened to Lowell's shack. He found him there and another man whom Lowell introduced as belonging to the Bar S outfit. The two of them planned to winter in Riverdale, Lowell explained.

"Lowell," said Gormley earnestly, "will the Bar S men who're here stick to me if anything comes up?"

"I reckon they'll do all they can," replied Lowell with a glance at his companion, who nodded. "Of course, it's this way," Lowell went on uneasily. "There are not many of us, an' if it came to a show-down in a gun play we wouldn't have a chance. Whatever we do, we have to do sort of on the sly."

"I can see that," nodded Gormley. "I have reason to believe there's likely to be trouble, now that Sorrento is here. This is more of a hunch than anything else. But I want the word passed to the crowd."

"We'll tend to that," Lowell promised.

"What's more, I want to send word to Slocum that I need the help he promised me. He said I could have every available man on the ranch in an emergency. I wish you would send a messenger to him asking for those men at once, or rather, by morning day after to-morrow. The messenger can make the ranch to-night easy enough. The men can ride to the Dunn place to-morrow night. They'll have to keep out of sight over there, an' I'll see them soon after they arrive. You follow me?"

"All the way," nodded the old cowhand.

"I've also sent some instructions to the office in Raysville. Now, there's this much to it, Lowell: I'm working for the association of which Slocum is

a member, an' a member of standing, I take it. He has lost a bunch of cattle, an' another member out here has lost stock. My job is to recover that stock an' to round up the men who ran it off, if possible. There can't be any halfway measures on the part of the Bar S outfit. They are either with me, or they must lay off entirely. I mean the men who're not actually working. Those held to the ranch must obey orders. If the boys here in town want to help me, if they get the chance, they'll also be helping the Bar S and the association. But it's up to them. There's just one thing: I don't want anything said to young Sam Brodie at this time. Please remember that. I have my reasons for not wanting him mixed up in it."

Lowell was looking at his partner significantly. "You're the boss," he said finally to Gormley. "I guess Ryan, here, will take your message to the ranch."

"Sure, I'll go," said Ryan. "I'll start as soon as I've had my supper. Maybe you better write a note, don't you think?"

Gormley wrote the note to Slocum on paper which Lowell furnished. Then he told Lowell of his meeting with Parker at the livery and of the concidence of the Triangle O brands. He did not tell him that in sending for a force of men, he was making what at that time looked like a premature move. It was not Gormley's habit to make premature moves. It was not his habit to permit a hunch to lead him to such drastic action so early in the game. But in this instance the hunch and his deductions were so overpowering that he felt he must strike without delay. Then, too, he was in the most hostile territory he had invaded since his beginning of service with the association. According to the contract given him by the association, he could call upon any member of the organization for assistance, even to the extent of the full complement of any member's employees who could be spared. This he was doing for the first time, doing on his own responsibility before he was absolutely certain of the use he would make of the men so drafted! On the other hand, this was the first assignment—self-imposed, at that—where his problem had seemed to solve itself without strenuous work. At least, so he thought.

It was ten o'clock when Gormley finally entered the Oasis. He went to the bar for a drink. He was not a drinking man, but in this case it was a matter of necessity. He had a rôle to play. Furthermore, it would attract more attention for him to stay away from the bar than for him to indulge moderately. This night he was due for two surprises which were to have a direct bearing on his mission in the locality.

Standing at the upper end of the long bar he surveyed the line of faces reflected in the polished mirror. There were none he knew. He strolled among the tables to his favorite wheel near the dance floor, without recognizing any one. Parker was not at his customary place at the lower end of the bar, and his office door was closed. Gormley surmised he was closeted in his office, possibly with Sorrento. Gormley was thrilling alternately with the prospect of getting his first sight of Sorrento and with noting the actions of his men. If his men were in the place they were certainly behaving with decorum, and they had been shaved, for, with the exception of one or two old-timers, no one in the place wore more than a day or two growth of beard.

Gormley was standing by his favorite table, preparing to play, when he received his first surprise. Some one touched him on the arm, and when he turned he found Red Brodie.

"Could I speak to you a few minutes, Mr. Bennett?" asked the youth in a respectful tone.

"Why—I expect so." Gormley was somewhat taken aback.

"On the other side of the dance floor, around from the bar, is a space leading to the rooms at the back," said Brodie in a low tone. "I'll go aroun' to one of the rooms, leave the door open, an' wait for you. This—this is a personal matter, Mr. Bennett, an' I hope you won't think I'm buttin' in or anything." He was evidently sincere.

"Go ahead," said Gormley shortly. "I'll be around."

When Brodie had gone, Gormley puzzled his brains for a minute or two, wondering if this could be any kind of a trap. He finally decided that the youth really wanted to see him on business of his own. Five minutes later Gormley strolled casually around to the rooms in the rear. There was a partition behind the dance floor and a hallway with all the rooms on one side. These, as Gormley suspected, were the rooms where high play was the rule. He paused by an open door and Brodie rose quickly from a chair.

When they were seated, with the door closed, Gormley looked closely at the young man and was pleased with his appearance. He noted, too, that Brodie was dressed with more than usual care this night. He must have returned from his ride down the river soon after Gormley came back. Gormley's speculations were interrupted by the other at this point.

"Mr. Bennett," said Brodie in a hesitating voice, "I don't know what you'll think of this, but I had to talk to some one an'—well, Daisy—Miss Dunn, I mean—said you were a friend of the family, an' that's how I came to make up my mind to speak to you."

It was plain the youth was finding it no easy task to tell what was on his mind. And Gormley's keen, searching gaze might have been disconcerting. Gormley thought of this and turned his attention to rolling a cigarette.

"Your name's Brodie, isn't it?" he asked casually.

"Yes. Sam Brodie. You know——" Brodie suddenly rose to his feet and walked back and forth across the little room twice. Then he paused before Gormley. "I want to marry Daisy Dunn," he said slowly.

Gormley looked at the end of his cigarette, applied a light, puffed, and smiled: "That's a queer thing to tell me," he said. "But I can't say as I blame you any."

Brodie dropped into his chair. Somehow Gormley's tone seemed to have given him confidence. "Of course, you don't know me, except what you might have heard. I've a pretty good job with the Bar S, and the Old Man will recommend me. When I saw—well, after what happened last night, I knew you was a man who—got aroun' a lot an'—you can sure handle a gun, Mr. Bennett!" His admiration got the better of him momentarily.

"Has that got anything to do with it?" Gormley inquired with a lift of his brows.

"Not exactly. But right then an' there I decided to speak to you, although I can't say why."

"What does Daisy think of your wanting to marry her?" asked Gormley. "Have you told her?"

"More'n once," said Brodie with a worried frown. "I'm goin' to tell you something nobody else knows, an' I hope you'll keep it to yourself." He paused, studied Gormley's face a few moments, and then went on: "She has promised to marry me but keeps putting it off. I—I want to get married this fall or by Thanksgiving, say; but I can't get Daisy to set a date. Listen, Mr. Bennett, I want to get her out of this place!" He finished fiercely, striking the table with an open palm.

Gormley nodded. "I see," he said sympathetically. "Could you support a wife?"

"You bet I can support her!" exclaimed Brodie. "An' I can buy her dad another stallion, an' help him build up his ranch. You heard about him losin' his stallion, of course. Well, I'll get him another. We could live right there on the ranch an' make something of it. I want to get her out of here an' clear away from that—Parker!" He lowered his voice as he spoke the name of the Oasis proprietor.

Gormley considered. "Of course, it's none of my business, Sam," he said engagingly, "an' you needn't tell me unless you see fit. But just how much cash could you raise?"

Brodie hesitated, but Gormley's look reassured him. "I can get together a little over five thousand dollars," he replied.

Gormley pursed his lips. "If you'll excuse my saying so, that's a lot of money for a cow-puncher—providing you are a cow-puncher," he said.

"I've saved my money," said Brodie with a frown. "An' I've been lucky at gamblin', an' I've saved that. I've got enough to give us a good start."

It was with some difficulty that Gormley kept back the question that was on his tongue. He looked away and his lips tightened. "Yes," he drawled finally, "that's enough to start on. Have you told all this to Daisy?"

"Sure. An' still she holds back. I'll tell you, Mr. Bennett, I—I'm dead in love with that girl. I want her! An' I'm goin' to have her!" He rose and fell to pacing the room again.

"Faint heart never won fair lady, they say," Gormley quoted. "But I don't see yet where I come in on this affair."

"You could talk to her!" said Brodie eagerly. "She has a great deal of respect for you. I can tell by the way she speaks of you. An' you being a friend an' all that—your words would count. You can tell her I spoke to you—anything—just so you find some excuse to put in a good word. Anyway, you could say something to her father."

"I hadn't thought of that angle," said Gormley. "Have you spoken to him yet?"

"She won't let me," the youth complained. "I've wanted to speak to him more'n once, but she don't want me to, an' I'm afraid if I speak to him anyway, she'll get sore at me."

"Tell you what you do," said Gormley with seeming inspiration. "You wait a few days. Don't say anything to any one, an' I'll see what I can do. Remember now, I'm not promising anything—nothing at all. Bear that in mind. Just keep your hat on for a spell an' see what turns up."

Brodie leaned toward Gormley and held out his hand. "If you can do something for me, you'll have the kind of a friend in me who'll go to blazes for you, an' then some," he said earnestly.

"I'm not promising, remember," Gormley warned.

"I haven't asked for a promise," said Brodie stoutly. "For one thing, it's that Parker. He's a fiend. He'd do anything he could to keep Daisy here in this place. I have to stand for his admiring her—but you more'n likely understand all that. I'm nothing where he's concerned."

Once again Gormley was strongly tempted to question him but refrained. He rose to go. Brodie held up a hand and then touched his lips significantly.

"That fellow you had trouble with last night," he said in an undertone. "I think I've seen him here once before. Comes from somewhere out East, I believe. But you must know more about him than I do. But he may have friends hereabouts, Mr. Bennett. You better be careful an'—don't turn your back to the dark!"

With this he walked to the door, opened it, and looked out. He motioned to Gormley to leave, and the latter went back to his favorite station at the rou-

lette table nearest the dancing floor, where he had a good view of the whole room and the front entrance.

He noted almost at once that a change had come over the place during his absence. There was a commotion at the bar, where patrons were lined three deep, with a dozen men or so in the center.

"Give a drink to everybody who can get close enough!" roared a voice hoarsely.

A rough gale of laughter swept up and down the bar as men crowded forward, reaching over each other's shoulders, struggling to take advantage of the offer. The group in the center laughed the loudest, pounded each other on the back, and reached for the bottles in front of them, of which there were several. Gormley caught the glint of gold on the bar.

"Keep dishing 'em out till it's all gone, barkeep," said one of the men loudly, spreading the gold pieces with a sweep of the hand.

"An' don't forget to get yours," shouted another, as the laughter started again. "We don't play your joint too often."

Three men in white coats were busy filling glasses held at all angles. It was plain by the grins on their faces that here was ready money and plenty of it. There were "live ones" in town, and it behooved them to work fast.

Parker was standing at the extreme lower end of the bar, a cold smile on his face. The door of his private office was open and Gormley could see a chair and a corner of a big safe. While watching the drama at the bar he had forgotten the wheel, but now he heard: "No. 13 repeats!" He always kept a sizable bet on what was supposed to be an unlucky number, and he looked down to see several stacks of yellow checks being shoved against the stacks he had won on the first unnoticed roll. He drew in his winnings, made his customary three bets, and lifted his eyes toward the door, just as it swung open and a man entered.

Gormley's heart leaped as he saw the diminutive figure and caught the spray of iridescence from a huge diamond in the newcomer's shirt front and from others on his fingers. No need for him to be told—here was Sorrento!

The man would have attracted attention anywhere, in any company. He was immaculately dressed in a double-breasted blue suit, white shirt and collar, with a blue bow tie. His hat was black and of the same shape but not quite so large as the regular stockman's model. His trousers fitted down over snug riding boots that were polished until they almost sparkled. He had an air of sang-froid, a carriage that was perfect. As he passed the tables, players suspended play to turn and look after him. There was a thin and not unpleasant smile upon his lips. He was dark, with regular features, and his eyes danced as he looked swiftly over the crowd.

Parker had stepped out from the bar, his face lighted. The man saw him and nodded slightly. The tumult at the bar had died down with his entrance. An intangible element that was almost electrical seemed in the air. The crowd broke away as the newcomer reached the center of the bar where the live ones were holding forth. He stepped in and spoke to the tallest man in the group, passing him what appeared to be a roll of bills.

"Sorrento the Great is buying!" boomed the tall man.

Sorrento continued on his way, smiling. His restless gaze met Gormley's for a second and roved on. There had been no smile in those eyes. When he reached Parker the two of them stood at the end of the bar, with a respectful white-coat waiting on their order. Sorrento merely nodded, and the whitecoat put out a decanter which must have con-

tained a special blend. The two drank, and lighted their perfectos. Then they talked.

Gormley could not keep his mind on the roulette numbers, could not keep his eye on the spinning wheel. He glanced continually at that slim, well-clad figure at Parker's side. The uproar had started again, but neither of the men paid any attention to it. Sorrento glanced occasionally toward his men in the center of the bar, but that was all. The decanter reposed before him undisturbed.

Sorrento appeared handsome, dashing, romantic. "Sorrento the Great," thought Gormley. An Italian, undoubtedly. He could easily have passed for a count, or even a prince. Somehow, his display of diamonds did not convey an impression of vulgarity; nor did he look or act like a gambler or a flashy sport. He represented the very aristocracy of banditry, and was of that cool, collected type which, of course, is the most dangerous.

A few minutes later, as Gormley again glanced toward the pair, he found Parker looking at him. Parker signaled to him to join them. Gormley frowned, and Parker signaled again. There could be no mistake this time.

Gormley began counting his checks to cash them in.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL IN THE GAME.

THEN Gormley sauntered across the room and brought up before Parker. Sorrento stood against the bar, leaning on his elbows, clasping and unclasping his thin, tapering hands. Even as Gormley glanced at them, which he could not avoid doing, he saw that the man's finger nails were meticulously cared for, even to polishing. Sorrento was staring straight ahead.

"How they running to-night, Bennett?" asked Parker cordially.

"They are favoring 13, 7, an' the single 0," replied Gormley. "I've been cashing in on repeats."

"That game's too mechanical for you," said Parker. "You want the human element. I've seen you play stud, an' you're a graduate."

"It cost me plenty to take the course," Gormley observed dryly.

Sorrento turned at this and looked at him. At close quarters the man's look was hypnotic. A wreath of green fire seemed to surround the black pupils of his eyes.

"Meet—Sorrento," said Parker with a careless gesture of his right hand.

"How do you do?" said Gormley casually.

For answer, Sorrento beckoned to the white-coat and pointed to the decanter. "Have a drink of something that's too good for these dogs," he said to Gormley, with a flicker of his slender fingers toward the crowd at the bar.

"An' one will be the limit," said Gormley. The superb poise of the man irritated him.

Sorrento's eyes sparkled like his diamonds. "You are wise—in more ways than one," he said in a soft, musical voice that fell agreeably on the ear. "A man cannot play two games at once. He must gamble or drink; if he does both at the same time, both will beat him; if he plays one at a time, then but one can beat him. You like to gamble, Mr.—ah—Bennett." He said this in a matter-of-fact voice, as if he took it for granted.

"Occasionally," said Gormley.

Sorrento raised his glass and looked at the amber-colored liquor. Then he spoke with just a hint of an accent foreign to the English tongue, which embellished his words with a rare sweetness:

"We look up now and see the sky;
We know not when or how we die—
We look up then and grass roots see;
Here's to the grave with our spirits free!"

Gormley was the last to drink, so struck was he by this strange toast. Yet it did not seem so strange, coming from the man before him. It had a double meaning, of course; but Gormley was not sure what it was. Something Sorrento had read somewhere, probably. Showing off! The man was a killer, and Gormley knew it. Those eyes and lips could change in a twinkling and spell death.

"Queer toast," Gormley remarked, putting down his glass.

"I hear you killed a man last night," said Sorrento in such a casual voice that it startled Gormley.

"Might better call it suicide," said Gormley shortly.

Sorrento nodded. "I understand you're passable with a gun."

"He wished it on himself," said Gormley, inwardly furious at the thought that he was on the defensive. "Couldn't let well enough alone."

"Just about it," said Sorrento, nodding to Parker. "Ed wasn't very smart. Always biting off too big a chew." He turned to Gormley. "He was one of my men. Worked on my ranch out east, the Triangle O."

Gormley could think of no reply. He stared at the other as the structure of his previous reasoning came tumbling down upon his head. Sorrento, a reputable rancher? Then he, Gormley, did not know men. His experience could be erased like a pencil mark on paper.

"We're going to play some stud," said Sorrento. "Maybe you'd like to take a hand where you can get action for your money?"

Nothing further about Horan? No question as to the cause of the trouble! No details requested! Perhaps Sorrento was saving his questions until later. Gormley decided to play.

"I'm ready to study a few cards," he drawled.

"Good!" exclaimed Sorrento, almost boyishly. "You'll play, Parker; that's three. Get Bullard. He's drinking light. The other three are up to you, but don't let that kid Brodie in. We're not playing for wages."

A quarter of an hour later they were seated about a table in one of the back rooms. Sorrento was smoking a long, thin cigar, and riffling the cards between his slender fingers. Besides Parker and Gormley, there were four others; Bullard, the tall man who had officiated at the bar, and three men whose faces and manners proclaimed them professional gamblers.

"We look up now and see the sky—and that's the limit!" Sorrento's white teeth flashed in a smile as he dealt the first hand.

Gormley was soon aware that there was no ulterior motive behind the game; at least none that he could fathom—none that showed by a look or spoken word on the surface. These men liked to gamble. The stakes were high. As Sorrento had said, they were not playing for wages. Moreover, the game was square. This was doubtless due to the fact that all present were acquainted with the various tricks of the deal.

Gormley won steadily, yet the total of his winnings was not large. There was no conversation. Bullard drank copiously from a pitcher of ice water at a side table which was refilled from time to time by one of the white-coats. Sorrento unbuttoned his coat and as fast as he smoked one cigar, took out another from a vest pocket. There was more than thirty thousand dollars' worth of checks on the table. Parker and two others had had to buy in a second time.

Gormley noted the change of expression on Sorrento's face. His features no longer were in repose. The lips were tensed; the eyes were cold, hard, and a burning black. He shifted nervously in his chair, but his hands were steady as steel.

Three aces beaten by a flush to Sor-

rento on the last card drawn took more than half of Gormley's checks. He rolled a cigarette, and a smile quivered and struggled to break forth on his opponent's lips. Bullard was grumbling as he lost.

"Shut up!" snarled Sorrento finally.

Bullard got up and walked around his chair to change his luck.

The tone of Sorrento's command set Gormley thinking. He grew careless in this short space of preoccupation, tried to draw out on Parker's two kings in sight, and lost half of his remaining checks.

With a scowl, his right hand went down behind him.

There was a lightning flash of Sorrento's hand and Gormley was looking into the black bore of a gun. Sorrento's coat was quivering on the left side as the shoulder holster settled into place. The eyes above the gun were sparkling green.

"Men who play cards with me keep their hands on the table!"

Gormley brought up his hand empty. His eyes had narrowed. "I expect you want men who play cards with you to play with money on the table," he said slowly.

"Then stand up and get it," said Sorrento.

Gormley hesitated. Was this an attempt to draw him into a gun play? He looked at the cold features of Sorrento, and the anger swelled within him. His eyes flashed. The others about the table were watching breathlessly.

"I don't stand up an' take out my money at the point of a gun," said Gormley steadily. "I came in here to play this game with cards."

"You're getting cards," Sorrento snapped. "But I'm taking no chances with you. I guess you're forgetting something. You made sure of one of my men last night an' put three bullets where one would have done the work."

His eyes glittered and the thin lips twitched. Then suddenly he put up his gun. "Get out your roll," he said. "I've changed my mind."

Gormley let a deal pass before he drew out a thousand dollars and bought more chips. Again the game began its monotonous rounds. Gormley played carefully and skillfully, with an alert eye on Sorrento and Bullard. There had been something behind Sorrento's outburst. And he had spoken the truth when he had said he had changed his mind. Gormley now was convinced that he had killed one of the band in Horan. Sorrento might have a ranch, at that. There were Triangle O brands in the livery; that was sure. Gradually, as the game wore on, the conviction grew upon Gormley that his real identity was known. At the first opportunity one of the band would do for him. He had no doubt as to which one would try it. But what kind of a game was Sorrento playing? And had the word been carried to him by the man who had been watching Gormley in Raysville?

The first light of dawn was graying the window when Sorrento tore up the cards in his hand and flung them on the table.

"It's time to quit," he said savagely. "I won't try to ride my luck in the daytime. We'll finish this to-night." He called loudly for the bartender and ordered whisky.

Gormley cashed in even with the game for his night's work. It was, as he reflected afterward, the queerest game in which he ever had played. Sorrento's eyes no longer flashed. They seemed to change color with his moods. They now appeared a slate gray. When they were served, he took two drinks.

A commotion was heard in the big room in front. Bullard rose and hurried out. Parker followed him. Sorrento calmly helped himself to another drink. Then he, too, went out front, followed by the three professionals.

When Gormley reached a spot where he could view the room, he saw a dozen men fighting fiercely before the bar. Bullard was tearing them apart. A closer inspection showed that Sorrento's men were fighting among themselves, with one or two outsiders involved. Sorrento lounged against the back bar by Parker's office. The Oasis proprietor was dancing about the combatants, shouting.

Gormley turned toward the rear door as a figure staggered out of the fray with crimson streaming. It was Red Brodie. Gormley caught him as he came staggering toward him and led him firmly by the arm out into the cool air of dawn.

"Double crossed!" gulped Brodie. He went limp in Gormley's arms. Gormley literally dragged the tall youth to Lowell's shack and pounded on the door. Lowell opened it shortly.

"Got mixed up in a fight with Sorrento's crowd an' passed out," Gormley explained as they got Brodie inside.

"We'll put him on Ryan's bunk an' I'll tend to him," said Lowell.

"Let's see how bad he's hurt," said Gormley. He held the lamp while Lowell wiped the stains from the youth's face and made a swift examination.

"They handed him a nose bleed, that's all," said Lowell when he had finished. "He's dead drunk!"

GORMLEY found Tommy Green waiting for him in the deserted lobby of the hotel. The sight of the old cattleman cheered him mightily. Tommy's face, too, lighted up.

"I snatched a good hour's sleep here," he grinned. "An' I had a couple of hours up at Slocum's place. I can still ride a hoss, Ben—an' unsaddled him at the end of the trail."

"Wait till I go out to the kitchen," said Gormley. "They're up out there, an' I reckon the two of us can stand some breakfast. I just quit as hard a game as I ever played in an' it's got on my nerves."

He was back in a short space, beckoning to Tommy. "C'mon, old-timer, we're going to eat." He led the way to the dining room and in a few minutes breakfast was on the table ready for him.

As they ate, Gormley went over in detail what he had seen and heard, and what had happened since his arrival in Riverdale. Tommy did not interrupt him, nor speak at all until he had finished.

"Sorrento?" he said, as Gormley stopped his recital. "Ben, that's nobody but Machito—I think that's the way his name goes. The description fits him to a T. He's not so young as you might think, an' he's bad—bad, understand. Used to operate clear into the Dakotas. Maybe he has got a ranch east of here. He might have bought the old Bluebird ranch, as they called it, about forty or so miles from here. Made a deal with the sheriffs to lay off their territory, an' there he is, snug an' safe. The description fits him like a glove, an' I'd be willing to bet my hoss—if I had one—that this Sorrento is that same person. Rustler, bank and stage robber, general all-around bandit who packs a wicked gun."

He paused. "I've never heard of him workin' our range," he continued. "But those cattle of Slocum's might have looked awful soft to him. Somebody probably tipped him off that here was an easy chance. That Triangle O brand will cover up a lot, Ben. An' I can see here an' now that they're figurin' on takin' you, an' takin' you right, in the game to-night."

"But I'm not going to show up to-night," smiled Gormley.

"That'll start 'em lookin' for you, I reckon," said Tommy.

"An' that's what I want," beamed Gormley. "I want to stir 'em up.

Tommy, you know the country east pretty well?"

"Did know it," grunted Tommy. "An' I don't forget easy."

Gormley leaned forward, his eyes sparkling. "Tommy, you're appointed my deputy here an' now—on pay. You can mosey around here at will without being suspected of anything. You get some sleep after breakfast, an' then ride out east on the south side of the river to the breaks. Find out where they've got those two hundred head of Slocum's if you can. You can bet they didn't drive that bunch straight on east. They've got 'em cached. An' they're in here now to take 'em back. An' you can bet that stallion of Dunn's is with the cattle. I'm taking a chance on you because, for some reason, I believe you're smart enough to ferret out the cache. You're a long way from being a has-been, Tommy, an' if I didn't think so I wouldn't have gone to you for information an' advice on occasion. I believe young Brodie was out to that cache yesterday."

"Who it was told you I knew this neck of the woods like a book, I don't know," smiled Tommy. "I hid some cattle out here once, an'—I'll see what I can do."

"An' I'll 'tend to things on this end," said Gormley with satisfaction. "You know, so far as I'm concerned, there's something besides cattle mixed up in this."

"I think Holmes is sending some men down here," said Tommy, as they rose from the table. "But you'll know about that. I'll get me a bed an' snatch a few winks."

"That's it," nodded Gormley. "I'm going to take a nap, too. I'll be shy of sleep from now on for a while."

Tommy Green made sure that Gormley went upstairs. Then, with an amazingly sprightly step, he hurried to the livery. A quarter of an hour later he rode out of town, straight east.

CHAPTER X.

MOVES IN THE NIGHT.

WHEN Gormley woke, he sat up with a start. The sun was slanting through the window at an angle which meant it was late afternoon. He had not intended to sleep so long, and he rose and dressed hurriedly. A glance at his watch showed the time to be half past four.

He hastened downstairs and went directly to Lowell's shack. He intended to have a talk with Red Brodie and learn, if possible, why the youth had declared he had been double crossed before he had gone completely out in the early morning. He must have been consorting with Sorrento's men all night.

Lowell was just leaving the shack when he arrived. "I made some coffee about one o'clock, but I couldn't wake him up," said Lowell in reply to Gormley's questions. "I went out an' when I came back a little over an hour ago he was missing. His horse is gone, too."

They walked to the Oasis where Gormley ordered coffee and something to eat at the lunch counter. While he was eating, Parker came up smiling and sat down on a stool beside him.

"You know, Bennett, I forgot to tell you last night before we sat in the game that Sorrento is funny when he's playing cards," said Parker. "That play of his when you started to get out your money was merely a case of nerves. Sorrento is always like that when he's gambling. He's all nerves. I doubt if he even remembers it, hardly, to-day."

"Yeah?" said Gormley.

"Yes, that's right," said Parker amicably. "An' at that particular time, if you'll remember, he was playing in poor luck. That always gets his goat. He's liable to turn on anybody when his nerves are on edge that way. There'll be a chance to win some money to-night."

"There was a chance last night, wasn't there?" countered Gormley. "Somebody must have won something. Bullard, for one, dropped a chunk. I just managed to quit even, an' you didn't carry anything away."

"No, but there was something wrong with the game last night. It was dull. I don't think any of us felt any too brisk. Be around about ten to-night an' we'll see if we can't put some life in the cards."

Gormley smiled at Parker's back as the latter moved away. He had recited the speech Sorrento had told him to recite. Gormley had no doubt but that the game projected for that night was planned for his benefit.

There were several of Sorrento's men at the bar and others were playing at the tables. There was no sign of Red Brodie. Gormley wondered if Tommy Green would encounter him east along the river. The Bar S men would arrive at Dunn's place this night, and Gormley proposed to meet them. When Sorrento and the others found him missing, the ball would start rolling. Gormley depended on this.

He left the Oasis and went to the barn. Under pretex of looking his horse over, he had an opportunity to inspect the brands of several other horses. He saw four wearing the Triangle O iron and did not bother to look at any more.

"Say, what's this Triangle O outfit?" he asked the liveryman, with an innocent expression.

The man had not forgotten the ten-dollar gold piece Gormley had given him.

"That's an outfit east of here," he replied. "Reckon you don't know this range."

"Maybe not," said Gormley; "but I know an odd iron when I see it." He went out satisfied that Sorrento was keeping his operations well under cover, using the ranch as a blind. At that, Tommy Green might be right. Sorrento might have made a deal with the authorities not to work in a particular territory and thereby have received immunity in a certain county or counties. It had been done in some cases, as Gormley well knew. But that would not prevent him from turning a trick on the Teton range. And Tommy had hinted that some one might have supplied the information as to the unguarded stock. Gormley's brows contracted at this thought. He considered riding over to the Dunn place and rejected the idea at once. Instead, he sat in at a stud game until supper time and then went to the hotel.

When Daisy Dunn rode in from the ranch, Gormley was waiting for her. He met her as she was leaving the livery after turning her horse over to the barn man. As she had left long before the trouble occurred in the Oasis she could know nothing of Red Brodie's plight of that morning.

"Miss Dunn, I'd like to come up an' talk to you a few minutes before you start work," he told her.

"Why, surely, Mr. Bennett. Come up," she invited.

Half an hour later he was in her room on the balcony of the resort. She was dressed in red this night and Gormley marveled at her beauty. Small wonder that Parker wanted to keep her as an entertainer as long as he could.

"Was Sam down to the ranch to-day?" he asked casually.

"Why, no. He didn't come to-day. Isn't he here?" The girl looked at him with worried eyes.

Gormley shook his head and sat down, motioning her to a chair. "Listen, Miss Dunn," he said in a low, earnest voice, "I want to ask you a question or two, but I can't explain why. They're personal questions. I have a reason for wishing to ask them, of course, an' I hope you'll answer them. You won't think that I'm—well, you

won't think I'm meddling with your affairs, will you?"

"Why—I suppose not," replied the bewildered girl. "What do you want to ask me, Mr. Bennett?"

He leaned forward with his hands on his knees. "Do you like Sam Brodie pretty much?" he asked.

A glorious wave of color came into her cheeks. She looked up at him suddenly. "Yes, I do," she replied defiantly.

"I suppose you know he is head over heels in love with you," Gormley observed.

Daisy looked down and didn't answer.

"Do you—love him? I have to ask you this, Miss Dunn. Any answer you make will be kept in confidence by me. I wouldn't tell a soul on a bet. This is really business with me."

"I don't see how it can be business," she said slowly. "But I—I suppose I care for Sam."

"He wants to marry you, doesn't he?" Gormley persisted.

"Yes," Daisy answered softly. "But—Sam seems to have changed somehow lately. He—he's running more an' more with a bad crowd. I don't know what to make of it."

"Maybe he feels discouraged," Gormley suggested. "How long have you been going together, Miss Dunn?"

"About two years. Tell me, Mr. Bennett, is Sam in trouble?"

"Not that I know of," Gormley assured her. "I only know that he's madly in love with you an' is all upset because you won't marry him—soon, I mean."

"But I can't," the girl protested. "I have to make what money I can to help father. I couldn't be married an' keep my place here."

"But hasn't Sam got money enough to start married life on?"

"So he says, but——" There were tears in her eyes as she paused. "He seems so different lately. I—don't know—what to make—of him."

"He's a healthy, upstanding, clean-cut young fellow, Miss Dunn, an' he's in love. He wants to marry you, an' because he can't, he's maybe running a little wild because he isn't just sure of himself. Trying to ease what's on his mind all the time. You mustn't blame him too much. If you care a lot for him—— Well, that's about what I wanted to know. I'm going to try to put him back on the right track. Oh, he isn't bad; but some of these people may have a bad influence on him."

"It's that Parker!" exclaimed Daisy, clenching her palms. "He'd do anything to help Sam hurt himself. When I see him talking to Sam, I feel as if I could—shoot him!"

"That wouldn't do any good," smiled Gormley. "You mustn't get any such idea as that in your head. I can see you're worried about Sam. You just leave him to me. Maybe I'm butting in, but if I am, I'm butting in for a good cause. Is there anybody at the ranch besides your father?"

"No. Why did you ask that, Mr. Bennett?"

"Because I'm going over there after a while. Meanwhile, if Sam shows up, you think of some way to keep him here to-night. Don't ask me why—just do as I say. You can trust me."

She looked at him steadily. "I believe I can, Mr. Bennett."

"That's the girl," he said cheerfully, as he rose to go. "An' don't tell Sam I was talking with you to-night. Oh, he can know later on, but right now I'd rather he didn't know. You understand?"

"As long as he's not in trouble, everything's all right," she answered. "I don't know as I understand, but I'm taking you at your word."

Tommy Green was just emerging from the livery as Gormley approached a few minutes after his conversation with Daisy Dunn. He grasped Gormley excitedly by the arm. "I've located

'em!" he said in a tremendous whisper. "They're right where I expected—in Spire Rock basin."

"Come on over to Lowell's shack," said Gormley hurriedly, "an' keep quiet." He led the old cowman to the shack, where Lowell happened to be.

"I want to talk with this old codger a few minutes," Gormley told Lowell, after the two cowmen had exchanged greetings. "He's just back from an errand, an' I found out he left this morning without any sleep. Fix him up something to eat an' give him a shot or two of something stronger than water, an' see that he sleeps till two in the morning. Then bring him over to the Dunn place without everybody in town knowing about it."

"That's an order," drawled Lowell. "You heard what he said, Tommy." He brought forth a bottle of "white lightning," as it was known in this section.

"How far is this place?" Gormley asked Tommy.

"Only about nine miles," replied Tommy. "It's the Spire Rock basin in the bad lands east of here. Hard to get into, but—they drove the cattle in single file an' they're all there; every steer wearin' the Bar S brand!"

"I had a hunch you'd know where to look for 'em," said Gormley. "But I was prepared to ride right on to this ranch of Sorrento's. I expect to be organized for a raid proper. Did Holmes give you any message for me?"

"Only said he'd attend to that other matter, an' I gathered he was sending some men out from town," Tommy replied. "Didn't I tell you?"

"You said something of the kind," said Gormley. "Now you get something to eat an' tear off some sleep. You'll have to be our guide down there. If I don't miss my guess, Sorrento an' his men will be sloping down there at daybreak. Did you see Dunn's stallion?"

Tommy shook his head. "I didn't have a lot of time to look aroun', an' I was on a shoulder of Spire Rock above the basin at that. Might have been behind a clump of trees. There's some firs in there. An' three or four tumble-down cabins. I had to dodge a rider comin' back, too."

"Who was it?" Gormley asked.

"Didn't get a look at him," Tommy answered. "I had to make for cover."

"That's fair enough," said Gormley grimly. "I've got to be going. You come along to the Dunn place about half past two or so." He turned to Lowell. "You'd better stay here, Lowell, an' keep an' eye out. If Sorrento's bunch start anywhere, bring the word as fast as you can to Dunn's. You can come back here an' wake Tommy up an' then get on the job again. I've got a hunch there's going to be money in it for every one who helps in this."

Lowell nodded and resumed his activities at the stove. Tommy took a stiff drink and drew off his boots. Gormley was thinking hard.

"There's one other thing, Lowell," he said finally. "If you know of any of the Bar S crowd who might want to get in on this thing, send 'em along with Tommy. But you've got to use mighty fine judgment."

When Gormley arrived at the Dunn place, he found a man in the house with Dunn. It proved to be Robbins, foreman of the Bar S.

"I'm along a little in advance of the outfit," Robbins told Gormley, "but the boys'll be drifting in pretty quick now. They'll be in the Little Breaks below here. I'll have around twenty men, counting some punchers who were visiting us." He winked at this mention of line riders dropping in for a few days' accommodation before moving on to another ranch.

Gormley explained what he had learned and what he intended to do, and Robbins fell in enthusiastically with his plans.

"I didn't make any extensive search

out east," the Bar S foreman explained, "because when I discovered the loss of the cattle I didn't have but a couple of men down there. When I rode in and reported it, the Old Man told me about you an' said to wait for orders. Well, we've got 'em an' the bunch is r'aring to go!"

Gormley remained in the house, and shortly after midnight Robbins reported that his men were all at hand. Gormley gave careful instructions to Dunn and rode away with Robbins to join the Bar S outfit. In an hour six men arrived from the ranch. They had been sent by Holmes from Raysville and included two deputies from Sheriff Reynolds' office. Gormley decided to carry out his original plan and raid Sorrento's ranch, even though the bunch in town might be trapped in Spire Rock basin.

Tommy Green arrived on schedule, accompanied by five Bar S men from town. He brought word from Lowell that Sorrento was sitting in a game at the Oasis at midnight, but that his men had cut their drinks to a minimum, presumably at Sorrento's order. The report gave Gormley considerable satisfaction.

Within fifteen minutes of Green's appearance on the scene, the cavalcade of riders crossed a ford of the river above the bridge and began the circling ride around the town and eastward along the south bank.

Two hours before, a rider mounted on a horse bearing the Triangle O brand had galloped out of Riverdale and raced eastward.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RAID.

AN hour after midnight, Sorrento, who had been playing in bad humor, and rather carelessly, tore up his cards and rose from his chair. "I guess we'll not see this Bennett to-night," he said, with a sharp glance at Parker, and another at a chair at the table which had been vacant since the game had started at ten o'clock.

He lighted one of his long, thin cigars. "I'm sitting out for a spell," he said, with an imperceptible nod to Bullard. He pocketed the money Parker pushed across to him for his chips, helped himself to a drink from the side table, and left the room.

"I reckon that means me, too," said Bullard. "I don't hanker to play five-handed." He cashed his chips and followed his chief.

"Looks like our game is busted," remarked Parker, looking questioningly at the remaining players.

"I'm ready to quit, anyway," said one, and the others nodded.

Outside in the big room Sorrento had paused at the bar, where Bullard joined him. They drank together, with Sorrento speaking in a low tone. Bullard went out and the others of the band followed quietly in pairs.

Daisy Dunn came out as Parker joined Sorrento. The latter's glowing black eyes were fixed on the girl. As she began to sing, Parker turned quickly. There was something hypnotic in Sorrento's gaze, for Daisy looked in his direction time and time again. But not once did her eyes rest on Parker.

"She doesn't pay much attention to her boss," Sorrento commented in a soft voice.

"She isn't supposed to," said Parker in a sour tone. "She's here to entertain the customers."

Sorrento laughed softly in his throat. "The girl's had your goat ever since she's been here," he jeered. "If I admired a woman so much, I'd steal her!"

"Easy enough to say," said Parker wryly.

"I'll steal her for you, if you say so," grinned Sorrento.

Parker's face paled and he shook his

head. "You leave her alone," he said coldly, his eyes narrowing.

Sorrento laughed. "I don't want her. I've enough trouble on my hands. But you—you fancy only one, and you haven't even got her!" Daisy heard him laugh and looked at him with frightened eyes. She finished her song and went to her room, ignoring the enthusiastic applause which ordinarly would call for an encore.

As she closed the door, she leaned against it, with her head on her arms. "I hate it," she sobbed aloud. "Oh, I hate it!"

At the bar Sorrento was chiding Parker. "She's working for you, isn't she? Well, then, that gives you some rights, doesn't it? Listen!" His words came in a hiss. "That tall, red-headed Brodie —he's her man, isn't he?"

"He's stuck on her, that's all," growled Parker.

"Oh—yes?" Sorrento leaned toward him. "If he was out of the way—then what?" he said with a burning look.

"No, no," said Parker quickly. "Not that. She'd know in a minute that I had something to do with it. There's a better way. Let him cut his own throat. She's getting doubtful about him already. An' yesterday morning he got dead drunk. He'll queer himself—with a little help."

Sorrento shrugged. "Bah! Your spine is getting soft!" He filled his glass, tossed off the liquor, and left the place without further talk.

A few minutes later, Lowell, who was making a cup of coffee in his shack, opened the door in response to a knock. Two men hurtled toward him, and in another moment he was on the floor, knocked senseless by a blow on the jaw. The two men bound his wrists behind him, gagged him, and trussed him up on a bunk, tying him there. Then they put out the light and left the shack.

Within half an hour Sorrento and his men had ridden quietly away.

Gormley rode with Tommy Green at the head of his men. Once on the plain south of the river they let out their horses and rode at a stiff lope. The moon was slanting in the west and the reaches of prairie were alive with shadows. In less than an hour they covered the nine miles, and Tommy pointed to an arrow of black shadow showing spearlike against the stars.

"That's the spire," he told Gormley.

They drew closer to the line of gaunt trees at the edge of the breaks, and finally Tommy slowed the pace to a walk. The trees were thick here and there was much underbrush. The dark shadow of the bad lands stretched ahead of them unending, until it blended with the black rim of the horizon. The spire loomed close, a great mass of rock, its tip silvered by the moonlight.

"Single file," Tommy said in a voice just loud enough to reach Gormley's ears. "We'll go in here."

He turned into the breaks between two tall cottonwoods which stood like ghostly portals on either side of what proved to be a hard ribbon of trail. It led around a ledge of rock and then over a high ridge. Next it dropped into a deep, dark ravine on the sides of which were patches of scrub pine and fir. When it climbed again, it climbed higher than before and on the crest of the ridge Gormley saw a great bowl below a steep slope that was strewn with ugly boulders. The trail led precariously down this slope; a steep, narrow, rocky path, where a stumble or slip by a horse would spell disaster. The noise they made worried Gormley. Surely, if any one were in the bowl, they would be heard. But the bowl proved to be empty, resembling an upturned shell. They crossed it and climbed another slope which was timbered with fir. From the rocky spine of this slope Gormley could see a large open space, with clumps of trees, dark spots which signified cattle bedded down, and the

broad, silver ribbon of the river at its farther side. Suddenly he stiffened in the saddle as another vista opened through the trees and he saw a yellow eye of lamplight apparently shining through a window. There was no opportunity to question Tommy Green, for the cowman was well in the lead, pushing his horse as fast as possible through the slender aisle in the growth of evergreen. When they gained level ground at last he stopped behind a clump of trees.

"We're in the basin," the cowman told Gormley. "The cattle are dead ahead, an' the cabins beyond. The main trail comes in from down the river below the cabins. We came by the old game trail. I suppose you saw the light from one of the cabins."

"Yes, yes," said Gormley. "Robbins, take a dozen men an' go around by the river as close as you can get to the main trail an' the cabins. Pearl, you stay here with the other men from the sheriff's office an' watch this trail. Come on over if anything serious starts. I'll take the rest of the men an' go around above here an' try to get behind the cabins an' surprise whoever is over there. If that bunch romps in from Riverdale, let 'em have it; but if Sorrento is along, try to get him without hurting him too much."

The men quickly separated into the three appointed factions and began to follow out the orders. Gormley led his contingent around the upper curve of the basin. There were plenty of fir trees to screen the movements of the horsemen, although a survey had shown that none of the rustlers was riding herd on the stolen cattle. When Gormley reached a point above the cabins he ordered his men to dismount, leave their horses tied in a clump of trees, and proceed afoot.

The light still shone from one of the cabin windows as they crept forward in the shadows. When they had reached a point behind the cabins and had spread out, Gormley stole toward the light. He edged along the wall until he reached the lighted window. Removing his hat, he peered cautiously into the cabin, and drew back with a swift intaking of breath. Red Brodie was inside, playing cards with two other men.

Gormley was not surprised to find Brodie in the basin. He had suspected the youth of implication in the cattle theft and association with Sorrento's crowd; it was this sudden and positive confirmation of his suspicions that startled him. The next problem was a hard one. To carry out his plan it would be necessary to separate the youth from his companions. This problem was solved even as Gormley was considering it.

From the river side of the basin two shots rang out, and then another. Gormley heard a shouted exclamation inside. He leaped to the front of the cabin as some of his men came running from the shadows. The cabin door was jerked open and two burly forms shot out and dashed down past the other shacks. As Brodie came out, Gormley's right crashed against his jaw. Gormley caught him as he was going down and dragged him bodily to the cabin which was last in the line at the upper end. He opened the door as Brodie came to and struggled.

"Stop it!" Gormley commanded, holding the youth firmly with both arms. "This is Bennett. Get in here!" He thrust Brodie into the cabin, jerking the youth's gun from his holster as he did so. The Bar S men were running toward the river in pursuit of the two rustlers. Guns were popping and red flashes streaked the darkness of the hour before the dawn.

Gormley saw the tall figure of Brodie by a table in the center of the room. A dim light filtered in through two windows, one on either side of the cabin.

Gormley stepped close to his captive.

"Listen!" he said sharply. "You've got to talk faster than you ever talked in your life! I've got thirty men out there, an' it's curtains for this crowd. I'm tryin' to keep you out of it. Get that in your fool head. There are men here from the sheriff's office an' the Bar S, an' if they see you here, you're in for it."

"Who're you?" Brodie demanded sullenly.

Gormley fumed. I'm investigator for the Cattlemen's Association!" he cried, rapping the table top with the heavy barrel of his gun. "You chump, I'm the law!"

"Well, what do you want of me?" asked Brodie coolly.

"I want you to promise to stay here out of sight until I——"

There was a thunder of hoofs outside and guns roared in the morning air amid shouts and yells. Gormley leaped to the door. He was out of the cabin in a twinkling, pulling the door shut behind him. A bullet cut through his hat. He caught the flash of fire from a form leaning low from a horse, and his own weapon flamed from his hip. The form tumbled from the saddle and the horse plunged on.

Men afoot were running about him. Firing came from the other side of the basin, where the sheriff's men were stationed, and from the riverside. The rustlers were surrounded! The first gray light of dawn spread a ghostly haze over the scene.

The horsemen now were in the center of the basin. The cattle were milling. In a minute it would be possible to tell friend from foe in the mêlée. Gormley, who had run some little distance from the cabin, suddenly remembered and whirled, just in time to see Brodie in the half light before the door. A horseman was bearing down upon him from the upper side of the basin, and Gormley instantly recognized the figure of Bullard in the saddle. There could be no doubt as to Bullard's intention. He meant to finish Brodie and thus seal his mouth.

Gormley ran toward Brodie, shouting and waving him back. He had taken the youth's gun and Brodie was unarmed. Gormley fired a single shot at Bullard on the horse. The animal went to its knees, throwing the outlaw over its head. Gormley had hit the horse. But Bullard had scrambled to his feet before Gormley could come up. He shot point-blank at Brodie.

"There's your medicine, you double crosser!" he shouted, and turned on Gormley.

The guns spoke almost as one, and Bullard stood stock-still with a silly smile on his face. Then he crumpled.

Gormley looked past the motionless form on the ground and saw Brodie standing unhurt. Bullard, shaking with the intensity of his rage, had missed! Gormley drove the youth, startled, pale-faced, bewildered, it seemed, back into the cabin. There Brodie's gun lay on the floor where Gormley had tossed it. The first light of day was streaming in the windows.

"I suppose you see now what you could have expected sooner or later from this outfit," said Gormley, handing the youth his gun. "Do you think they cared anything about you? Come clean, Brodie. How'd you get mixed up in this?"

"It was the money," said the youth slowly. "You know, I guess, why—I wanted the money." He looked straight into Gormley's eyes.

"An' what a way to get it," said Gormley impatiently. "They gave you some money?"

"A thousand," replied Brodie.

"But you told me you could raise five thousand!" Gormley exclaimed.

"I wasn't sure of that. But they told me I would get that much out of it, all told."

"Who got you into this?" Gormley

demanded. "Talk straight, Brodie. You came to me an' asked me to help you in your affair with Daisy Dunn, an' maybe I'm a fool, but I'm tryin' to do that little thing. Who got you into this?"

There was a long pause. "Parker," said Brodie finally in a low voice.

"Sure. Making out he was your friend, I suppose. Easy money. Where's the stallion, Brodie?"

The youth's eyes flashed. "I don't know!" he exclaimed. "They—he—promised the stallion would be returned. I showed 'em how to get away with the cattle, easy enough; but I haven't heard anything more about the stallion."

"Who do you mean when you say 'he' promised?" asked Gormley.

"Sorrento. He's behind everything. Look here, Bennett, I was crazy. I'm not whining, an' I'm ready to take my medicine. But I—why, I couldn't think straight! I can't think straight even now."

Gormley swore. At that moment the door was kicked open. Gormley whirled, to see Robbins, Bar S foreman, and some others with their guns in their hands. Robbins lowered his weapon with a look of surprise. All stared at Brodie.

Gormley smiled pleasantly. "We've had competition, Robbins," he said cheerfully. "Brodie, here, has been on the trail of this bunch, tryin' to locate Dunn's stallion. He just did for Bullard. Beat him to it when Bullard showed he was wise to him."

Brodie took his cue and proceeded to roll a cigarette.

"We've got 'em corralled," said Robbins, "an' was looking in the cabins for hide-outs, but——" He stopped short and frowned at Gormley, shaking his head.

"Sorrento?" said Gormley softly.

"Not with the bunch," said Robbins.

Gormley looked at Brodie. "You'll probably find him in town," said Brodie. "He has a habit of lettin' Bullard do the dirty work."

"You take charge here," said Gormley to Robbins. "Brodie an' me are going to town!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIDE LINE.

MOUNTED on his own horse, Brodie led the way out of the basin. They took the same trail by which Gormley had entered the rendezvous under the guidance of Tommy Green. "It's a short cut," Brodie had explained, "an' your horse can stand it." Brodie himself had an excellent mount, as Gormley speedily found out when they gained the plain on the south side of the river.

They had proceeded about two miles when they caught sight of a horseman ahead of them. Brodie pointed and drove in his spurs. They raced like the wind after the rider ahead. It was soon apparent that they were far better mounted than this fugitive—if fugitive it was. They gained so rapidly that the rider had no opportunity to turn into the wilderness of breaks and hide where there was no trail.

Finally, the rider, seeing that flight was hopeless, reined in his mount. When they came up to him, Gormley grunted with satisfaction. It was the man with the slanted right eye who had been watching him in Raysville, and who had undoubtedly carried a message to Sorrento. He had evaded the cordon thrown about the outlaws in the basin and was carrying the news of what had happened to Sorrento in Riverdale.

"Take his gun," Gormley instructed Brodie curtly, keeping the man covered.

When Brodie had complied with the order, Gormley gave another. "Take him to the Dunn place, an' keep him there. An', listen, Sam, you wait for me."

Brodie edged in close. "If you're goin' after Sorrento," he said in a low voice, "watch out for his left hand. That's his gun hand."

Gormley swept on ahead, pushing his horse to the utmost, although respecting the distance, and easing his pace to rest his mount as he saw necessary. It was not yet noon when he arrived in Riverdale. He rode to the livery and put up his horse. His first visit was to Lowell's shack, and there he released the old cowman and heard his jumbled story.

He went on to the Oasis.

As he had half expected, both Sorrento and Parker were at the lower end of the bar. But Parker might as well have been absent, so far as the next development was concerned.

Sorrento's expression changed the moment he glimpsed Gormley. It was a new face he presented as he edged up the bar. "Watch out for his left hand!" were the words ringing in Gormley's brain. It was the tip passed on by Brodie. It was all too plain that with evidence of his return, Sorrento knew that things had gone against him in the basin.

"You did not come to play last night," said Sorrento softly, looking into Gormley's eyes. His own were narrowed and the pupils mere pin-points of flaming greenish-black.

"You're under arrest!" said Gormley suddenly. "You've known who I am since you came here. Put up your hands!"

Both of Sorrento's hands moved; the right inside his coat—as was plain to see—and the left darted like lightning below. Gormley's gun spit fire from his hip, and Sorrento leaned back against the bar. Gormley could hear Parker shouting in a high-pitched voice as Sorrento went down. He leaped toward the Oasis proprietor.

"Into your office!" he commanded, and thrust Parker backward through the open door of his sanctuary. There Parker dropped exhausted into a chair, white-faced, stammering meaningless words.

"Listen, Parker, I'm going to let you off," said Gormley evenly. "I'll give you twenty-four hours to settle up your affairs an' get out. You know who I am, an' you know what's happened, or you should be able to guess. The bunch, or what's left of them, are corralled in the basin. Sorrento and Bullard are gone. You're alone, an' you can thank your lucky stars you've got a whole hide. Where is Andrew Dunn's stallion?"

Parker was cringing—blinking and trembling. "On Sorrento's ranch east of here," he managed to get out.

"You had it stolen to keep the girl working here so her father might eventually buy another?" demanded Gormley. "Answer me, Parker!"

But Parker could not speak. He merely nodded his head, horror and fright shining in his eyes.

"An' you got young Brodie mixed up in this thing, thinking he'd queer himself an' you'd maybe have a chance with the girl!" Gormley exclaimed in contempt.

Parker did not look at him, nor did he answer.

"Board this place up—sell it—do as you like," said Gormley sternly; "but to-morrow night at sundown you be gone!"

Three days later Gormley and Holmes sat in the office of the association in Raysville. The late afternoon sun was tracing a pattern on the carpet. Both were smoking cigars.

"I suppose you know," Holmes was saying, "that there are a number of rewards on this Sorrento's head?"

"There should be," said Gormley calmly.

"An' I suppose you know that Slocum has refused to allow his men to take

more than a hundred apiece," Holmes continued.

"We can make it more on our own hook for the men who were wounded, an' the relatives, or wife, of the man who was killed," said Gormley.

"An' the rest?" queried Holmes.

"Half to Sam Brodie. Daisy Dunn and he are going to get married Christmas. He's going to help Andrew Dunn on his ranch an' will have good use for the money. We'll give Tommy Green enough to keep him through his last years, an' a chunk goes to Lowell of the Bar S."

"How about yourself?" asked Holmes quizzically.

"I'm satisfied," smiled Gormley. "I did pretty well from a one-horse start, as you said the day I left." He took his cigar from his mouth and leaned on Holmes' desk. "Holmes," he said quietly but earnestly, "do you believe in hunches?"

Holmes stiffened. "Here in the office we have to be more practical," he said.

"Of course," said Gormley, nodding. "We'll give the rest—if there's any of the reward money left, I mean—to the sheriff's men. It's one of the things they work for. As for me—I'll take a week off for a visit to Tumble Creek."

"You don't even have to ask for it," snorted Holmes. "Listen, Gormley, sometimes I think that your dangerous work for the association is just a side line. I suppose you'll want more time off to see this young Brodie and Daisy Dunn married."

For answer, Gormley merely smiled and resumed his cigar.

Coming Next Week—"LION'S CLOTHES," by EARL McCAIN.

REFORESTATION IN COLORADO AND WYOMING

IN the national forests in Colorado and Wyoming, one and one quarter million new trees have been planted this spring.

Seventy-five men planted three quarters of a million trees on Mount Herman burn, which is fourteen miles west of Monument, Colorado. These trees were three years old and averaged from four to six inches in height. They were planted seven hundred to an acre. This section of ten thousand acres was burned by a forest fire in 1880. In 1924, reforestation was started on the burn, and since then six thousand three hundred and seventy-nine acres have been planted.

Buffalo Park burn, four miles above Antero Reservoir, in South Park, was also planted with approximately one hundred and twenty-five thousand seedings. Fifteen men under C. R. Towne, a ranger of Fairplay, Colorado, were employed for this task. The cost of this work was ten thousand dollars.

Twenty thousand Douglas fir seedlings, and sixty-two thousand Englemann spruce seedlings were planted on the Marshal Pass project and Poncha Crest. Twenty-five thousand Englemann spruce were planted in the Rio Grande Forest. Trees were also set out along the railroad track of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad to serve as a snowbreak in winter.

In Wyoming, on the Pole Mountain division of Medicine Bow Forest, the service set out fifteen thousand Douglas fir and Western yellow pine.

All the trees for this year's planting were raised at the nursery of the forest service near Monument, Colorado.

Keep Faith With Your Dog

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Dog Heroes," etc.

TO win a dog, win his confidence—and then never, so long as you live, to betray that confidence.

This, in a sentence, is the creed on which A. T. "Ace" Sanderlin, trainer of Arnold von Minkelreid—perhaps the most distinguished dog in the United States, if not in the world—has built his miraculous success with the only dog who has ever won the Abraham Lincoln medal "For distinguished service to humanity." Arnold, a magnificent, clean-limbed Dobermann Pinscher, has found the bodies of twenty-two lost persons, and has effected four rescues. "Hope of the Lost," he has been called by newspaper feature-writers, and the uncanny skill which he displays in his work is directly traceable to the creed which his trainer has strictly followed from the beginning.

That it is a sound creed is proved by the fact that Dawn, a great German shepherd, kennel-mate of Arnold, is already promising to equal Arnold's achievements, if not to excel them. Dawn has been trained in the same school as his illustrious predecessor. To them, Sanderlin is a man-god. They are eager to serve him, to trust him, because they know that he will not betray that trust.

Yet, skillful trainer though Sanderlin is, he asserts most emphatically that there is no mystery about it; and that the seeming miracles he performs with his dogs can be taught almost any dog by a person of patience, intelligence, and determination to win the dog's confidence and keep it. If the many thousands of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE readers who own dogs, or love them, can be set thinking along these lines, then the object of these articles will be achieved. Failure to make a dog into a marvelous companion who is ever eager to serve you, to guard you from danger, to obey your every wish as he understands it, cannot be charged to the dog, according to Sanderlin's reasoning. Except in rare cases of utter brainlessness among dogs, failure to achieve the desired end must be traced

directly to the trainer. A dog's mind is a noble thing which can be molded by the human being in whom he places all the faith and confidence of a noble nature. It is not his fault if the human being fails.

No finer illustration of this can be offered than in a visit to the Sanderlin home almost any evening. Arnold, the great one, the tried and trustworthy veteran of many campaigns in search of the lost, is enjoying a privilege which he appreciates as rightfully his. Until the bedtime hour, when he must go to the kennels, he occupies his favorite corner by the piano. To sit on the piano stool, and thump his paws back and forth across the keys in an imitation of playing the instrument, is one of his accomplishments, by the way.

Out in the kitchen, in his favorite corner until the kennel hour arrives, is Dawn, the German shepherd, lost in his dreams of carrying a rope across a boiling mountain-stream, and holding it snubbed around a tree, while his master crosses in safety.

Sanderlin holds up his hand for silence. Then he whispers, so softly that not all in the room can hear what he is saying:

"Arnold!"

Instantly the great Dobermann Pinscher is snatched from his slumber. Like an uncoiling spring, he snaps to his feet, then sits alertly watching the face of his master.

Sanderlin whispers, "Dawn!"

From the open kitchen door moves a tawny-gold shape, silently, except for the clicking of his nails on the floor. He comes close, then likewise sits expectantly, eyes on the master, long ears pricked forward to catch the slightest sound. No human being in the kitchen could have heard that subdued whisper, yet it came clear to the marvelous tympanums of Dawn, and shattered his dream. And, like a good soldier, to whom to hear a command is to obey it, he is there, waiting.

In the eyes of both dogs—the glowing, soft eyes of Dawn, and the calm and steadfast ones of the Dobermann Pinscher—there is unswerving allegiance to the human being who is their man-god. His slightest wish is to be theirs. There will be no questioning when he commands, even though the command should send them to death.

A word from him, and both dogs would launch themselves silently toward any visitor in the room. Yet, at another word, both dogs would guard to the death that same visitor. Gentle though they are, friends of Man, they may be turned into insatiate demons if the master commands.

So they sit there, and wait for the word. They want to know what that word will be. That, and that only, is their immediate interest in life.

But it seems that the man-god does not wish them to do heroic deeds, nor even perform the long list of tricks which they enjoy doing. He has merely summoned them to see if they are there, and ready. Another whisper, and Dawn goes back to his dreams in the kitchen, while the somber-coated Arnold sinks blissfully into slumber again in his favorite corner.

That, briefly, is control; probably as near perfect control as it is possible for any one to obtain with dogs. And it all springs from the root idea of faith, and trust that is not betrayed.

A psychology of dogs which Sanderlin has worked out enters largely into their training.

"I never ask a dog to obey me the first time I meet him, so long as his four feet are on the ground," says Sanderlin.

That statement is worth reflecting upon. It is perfectly plain that so long as a dog has his four feet on the ground, he is in a position to run, to

fight, to rebel in any fashion he may choose; for he is at his best, so to speak, and dependent upon nobody but himself. Therefore, why should he attempt to understand what this strange human being is saying to him?

The thing to do is to make him feel dependent upon the trainer; and that is the first step in what is called "yard-breaking," than which nothing is more important, as it builds the foundation for all the tricks and other accomplishments which the dog is to learn. Unless the dog is thoroughly "yard-broken," it is a difficult problem indeed to teach him, and it is next to impossible to gain over him that matchless control which Sanderlin, for example, exercises over his own dogs.

Important though yard-breaking is, it is relatively a simple thing to accomplish. All one needs is a small dry-goods box—and patience. The box is placed on its side on the ground. Thereafter, that dry-goods box, and any other box, platform, or chair, is to be known to your dog as "high place." For, when he is on the box, *his feet are off the ground!* He instantly feels dependent upon his trainer.

Watch Sanderlin for a moment, as he puts a trained dog through its accustomed paces.

The dog has been freed in the big training yard, and is running at will. Sanderlin, a middle-sized man with a kindly face and ever-ready smile, whose gray eyes, however, become brittle-hard when he sees a dog ill-treated, watches. Suddenly, in a soft voice only loud enough for the dog to hear, he calls the animal's name.

Instantly, the dog is at attention. "High *place!*" says Sanderlin, stressing the latter word. Like a shot, the dog heads for the box, leaps upon it, turns, and sits there, watching the trainer expectantly.

"Come!" commands Sanderlin.

The dog's forefeet drop to the ground, but before the hind feet can drop, the trainer's whisper cuts in:

"Whoa!"

The dog "freezes" in that position, half off and half on the box.

"Come," says the trainer again.

The hind feet drop to the ground, as the dog obeys, but again comes the command. "Whoa!" And, statuesquely, the dog stops again.

"Down—*close!*" says the trainer.

The dog flattens himself on the ground, head between his paws.

"Up!" says the trainer, and the dog rises. "Sit!" and the dog squats obediently. "Lift one paw!" and this is done. "Lift both paws!"

The dog is now sitting up.

"Stand!" Sanderlin commands, and the dog rises on hind feet. Then follow literally scores of commands, each of which the dog carries out perfectly. The performance is amazing.

But an untrained dog is brought in. Sanderlin takes a few minutes to make friends with the newcomer, to encourage him, and quiet his feeling of bewilderment. Then he leads the dog to the box, and says "High place!"

The dog, of course, does not understand. He may jump up on the box, or he may have to be lifted up there. But eventually, and within a surprisingly short time, he learns that "high place" means he must get upon that box. He will learn, too, that when things go wrong, when he becomes confused in the commands, if he hurries to the box and climbs upon it, all is forgiven and forgotten, and he can start all over again.

"The important lesson in this," Sanderlin points out, "is that you are gaining control of your dog." And it has been accomplished in a psychological manner. First, the trainer has made it clear to the dog that they are to be friends, that the trainer can be trusted, and that he will not betray that trust. Then, by getting the dog's feet off the

ground, he has made the animal feel more or less helpless, dependent upon him.

The matter of teaching a dog to "lead," or to "heel," at command, requires about five minutes. A leash is put on the dog, and as he tries to get ahead of the trainer, he is firmly pushed back, while at the same time he hears the command, "Heel!" Unless he is of an unusually low order of intelligence, he will quickly understand that his place is at his master's heels.

Yard-breaking, as Sanderlin does it, requires from three days to a month, showing the wide variance in the rapidity with which a dog learns its lessons. But once learned, it is never forgotten. For a dog who is to be a pal and companion, it gives one control that is extremely desirable at times. Such control results in making a field dog, such as a setter or pointer, utterly stanch under the most exciting circumstance.

Once the dog is yard-broken, there comes the next great step of making him a life-saver, such as Sanderlin's dogs, Dawn, and Arnold von Minkelreid. His yard-breaking also includes retrieving a stick, an old cap, or any other object which the dog can carry. After control is gained, retrieving can be taught a dog within a few minutes. Now, all the useful knowledge he has acquired is to be applied to the noblest purpose of all, that of serving humanity. Again we watch Sanderlin at work with a dog whom he has just yard-broken.

One of Sanderlin's small daughters, who loves dogs even as her father does, is the principal assistant. The children have become the playmates of the dog being trained, and the dog loves them in turn. He is eager to romp with them. At a command, the dog sits by Sanderlin. Then the little girl runs and pretends she is hiding behind a bush fifty yards away. The dog, all eagerness, sees every movement she makes. He knows where she is.

"Find!" says Sanderlin, and the dog is off like a shot, straight to the girl's side.

This is repeated. Bit by bit, the distance is lengthened. Then comes the time when the dog must use his nose and not his eyes.

The dog is blindfolded, while the girl actually hides. Sanderlin, of course, can see her; but she has gone in one direction where the dog last saw her, and has then turned abruptly at right angles.

"Find!" commands the trainer, lifting the blindfold.

Whining eagerly, the dog peers around for sight of his playmate. But he cannot see her. He must depend upon his nose. Swiftly he sets off, tracking her.

He overruns where she has turned aside, and comes back. Then, off at right angles, until he finds her. He is delighted with his accomplishment. Time after time this game is repeated, until the dog understands that he must always depend upon his nose, not his eyes, in finding the person for whom he is searching. Then comes another step in his education.

This time the girl carries an old cap. Before she leaves this time, she has allowed the dog to smell the cap, even to mouth it, so that it will be fixed in his memory. Now she runs and hides, and this time throws herself on the ground, as though she has fallen from exhaustion. As the dog hurries up to her, having followed her track by means of his nose, she lies quietly, but moves the cap back and forth gently.

The command of "Find!" is still ringing in the dog's ears. He remembers this cap, having smelled it before. Perhaps his trainer wants it. He seizes the cap, and comes back to the trainer, for the latter has seen the dog pick up the cap, and now orders him to return. Thus, the dog has taken the elementary steps in finding a lost person, and fetch-

ing to the trainer the cap or hat as proof that the discovery has been made.

Because the dog is beginning to understand this game, and because he is under perfect control and understands retrieving, it is also a comparatively simple matter to get him to seize the little girl's dress, or her coat, and lead her back to the trainer, as he would do when actually finding a person that is lost.

Once these lessons are learned, the dog is taught that the same game is to be played with strangers. He is to find them, fetch them to the trainer, or, if they are lying down, to fetch their cap or hat, and then lead the trainer back to the spot.

Further along in the education of the dog, he is taught to take any object the trainer hands him, and go in a different direction. He has also been taught to turn right or left, at a given command. Let us assume for a moment that the dog under instruction is the great German shepherd, Dawn, and that he is to perform the seemingly incredible feat of carrying a line across a river and taking a half-hitch around a tree on the opposite side.

Between Sanderlin and the opposite bank of the river is a hundred and fifty feet of swirling current, too swift to be waded without help of some kind. Sanderlin has a light yet strong rope, and as he holds out one end of it to Dawn, the dog's powerful jaws clamp together upon it.

"Go!" commands the trainer, pointing across the river. Unhesitatingly, the dog plunges in, quartering the current as it hurries him downstream. But he is a strong swimmer, and soon his feet touch bottom on the opposite side, and he drags himself clear. Still holding the rope, he turns expectantly toward his trainer.

Sanderlin points to the right. Dawn understands that he is to go upstream, and this he does. When he reaches a point opposite Sanderlin, the trainer yells "Whoa!"

Close to the river bank is a stout tree. Sanderlin now signals the dog to go ahead, and Dawn obeys, still carrying the rope. But the instant he has passed the tree, the dog stops at a command. Then comes the signal to turn to the right. The rope is now half around the tree. The trainer signals left, and a full turn has been made. Then comes the command, "Down—close!" relic of yard-breaking days, and the dog flattens on the ground. But, at another signal to the right, he crawls under the taut line and, behold! the miraculous feat of a dog's actually tying a sailor's half hitch has been accomplished!

Sanderlin now secures his own end of the rope with a peculiar knot, known to all sailors; when the line is kept taut, this knot will hold fast, but when the line is loosened, it will come free. With Dawn holding the other end of the rope taut, Sanderlin now crosses the stream in safety, by means of the improvised life line. Once across, he shakes the rope vigorously, slackening the knot which he had secured, and the line comes free and may be dragged across. Thus, he can now go on into the hills, still carrying his rope.

Seemingly incredible though the feat sounds, it is vouched for by Seattle newspapers whose representatives have witnessed it, and it has likewise been filmed by news-reel photographers. Sanderlin, however, does not think it so remarkable. He points out that the foundation for it was laid in yard-breaking—the gaining of perfect control whereby all tricks a dog may do are possible if the trainer has patience. "Almost any dog can be taught to do it," he asserts.

Sanderlin's theory of gaining a dog's confidence and then jealously guarding that confidence has been stated. Here are other tenets of his creed:

No dog is a "cur" in the accepted sense of the word; a registered pedigree is not necessary to make him a fine animal. Every dog posseses loyalty, faithfulness, and courage. The thing that he must be taught is obedience, just as a child is taught obedience.

No dog is an outlaw by nature. If he has no place in society, he must gain a living as best he can. His one great boon is to find a master or mistress on whom he may bestow his entire affection.

Punishment is sometimes necessary, just as it is sometimes necessary to spank a child. But there is a right and a wrong way to do it. It is never necessary to be brutal, or to make the punishment more severe than is needed for the correction. The dog does not need that sort of treatment any more than a child does.

While he must know that you are master, temper your firmness with kindness, and the dog will respect you for it. Keep in mind that a dog remembers just as humans do.

And here is a special message addressed by Mr. Sanderlin to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE readers who live on the great sheep ranches of the West:

Don't kill a sheep-killing dog!

A dog may turn sheep-killer for a variety of reasons, none of which is important; the big thing is that he is guilty. Usually it is an otherwise valuable and well-liked dog who turns criminal.

Executing him is merely vengeance, and does not serve as a lesson to other sheep-killing dogs. The guilty one may be easily taught to love sheep and guard them, and Mr. Sanderlin asks especially, when such a death sentence has been passed, that the dog be given to him rather than be killed. It is my privilege to know that he has several times saved dogs from such a death, and turned them into wonderful guardians of their flocks. Even as I write, the newspapers have carried stories and pictures of a magnificent German shepherd, or so-called police dog, sentenced to death in California for sheep-killing. Sanderlin's plea, extended through a local newspaper, has already won a reprieve for the dog; and it is the trainer's hope that the execution may be stayed indefinitely and an opportunity be given him to teach the dog to atone for his crimes.

It is a curious fact that when Sanderlin receives one of these sheep-killing dogs, he invariably gives it to some sheep-raiser, after the dog has been taught the error of his ways. These sheep-raisers are grateful to him for giving them a valuable guardian for their flocks, even though that guardian has a dark and sinister past. Present performances are what count, and there is far less likelihood of a reformed sheep-killer reverting to his old ways than of the average criminal who seeks to "go straight" finding the way too straight and narrow.

It is an odd coincidence that, as I finish this article, there is an item in the evening paper which relates to Ace Sanderlin and his great dogs, Arnold von Minkelreid and Dawn. A black headline tells of a prominent Seattle business man who has vanished, after a series of financial reverses. He was last seen wandering along the wooded shores of Lake Washington, possibly with suicidal thoughts in his mind. And near the beginning of the item is this paragraph:

> At the request of relatives of the missing man, A. T. "Ace" Sanderlin, the noted trainer, and his dogs, Arnold von Minkelreid and Dawn, have taken up the search. They set out late to-day.

So, to-night, only a few miles from where I sit in a warm, well-lighted room, Ace Sanderlin and his dogs are moving through the woods, their way

indicated only by the flickering rays of a flash light. They are trying to find that lost man, in the hope that a last plea of his friends may turn him from his dread intent. Through thick brush, dank with heavy dew, skirting the shores of a lake whose waters lie black and cold, go Sanderlin and his dogs, willingly, uncomplainingly, serving humanity without pay—yet always serving. If they find him, their reward will not be the plaudits of the newspapers, but the satisfaction of a job well done. For the dogs it will be a pat on the head from their man-god, which will mean more to them than all the treasures that may be stored up in their canine heaven. For Sanderlin, as it has been many times before, it will be the realization that life can never be empty and purposeless for a man who keeps faith with his dogs.

THE MISSION SAN GUADALUPE

THE mission San Guadalupe in Juarez is the second oldest building in Mexico. Erected in 1534, it has stood for nearly four hundred years as a sacred memorial to the Father Ortez who opened it publicly in 1540. The building itself is constructed of brick made from adobe and baked in the sun after the fashion of all the Mexican dwellings.

The woodwork is all of mahogany. This is not unusual, because there are vast mahogany forests in South America; but the carving of this woodwork is phenomenal. The natives of Mexico hewed every bit of the hard wood in this magnificent piece of architecture. It is even more remarkable when one considers the crude implements that were employed. Stone hatchets were common. Pieces of hard flint took the place of our chisels, and wooden pegs were substituted for the nails and spikes of present-day carpentry. Pieces of bamboo, laid diagonally across the huge forty-foot beams which surmount the walls, form the ceiling. The walls, which are five feet thick, have not been injured by the centuries and still maintain undamaged their austere simplicity.

As the woodwork of the ceiling and walls is hand-hewn, so are the altar and sacred figures—every one with its characteristic form and expression. At this altar, thousands of people come each year to ask forgiveness for their sins and to pray for their families or themselves. Countless pilgrims from the depths of the Mexican deserts and jungles have come to pay homage at this shrine in the heart of the desert.

The mission is situated in the middle of Juarez, and one has the feeling that it is the rose among thorns of an ancient city that has been drained to the dregs of honor and beauty. In this same city thousands of rebels have recently left their crimsoned footprints, and for years the history of the whole country has been one of discord.

The people that worship at this little "shrine in the desert," however, do not want war. What they want is peace that they may carry on their tasks and their daily worship just as their forefathers have for innumerable æons before them. Mexico is a country of implicit faith in a Divine Providence, and this faith no revolution can destroy.

The Stingaree

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JIMMY GREEN, boy king of Fort Anxious, and the fascinating tramp, "Alabama Joe," become friends. The husky, Mishe Mukwa, also succumbs to the stranger, who buys him with funds received for juggling. Stanley Parker, local hero, has been adopted by "Old Man" Tyndal for his heroism in killing Bob Dillman, found robbing Tyndal's safe. Parker is engaged to Paula Carson, daughter of the grocer, who gives Joe a job. Joe tells Jimmy that he is "The Stingaree"; that he suspects Parker of double crossing Dillman—secretly his accomplice; and that he—Joe—has come to avenge Dillman, his pal. Joe publicly taxes Parker with his crime, knocks him unconscious, and returns for the dance Paula has promised him; while Jimmy goes for the Cree, Awaskees, to guide Joe to safety. Paula promises to marry Joe. Joe, ambushed by the Lafitte brothers, Parker men, hastens to Parker's house, but is forestalled by Jimmy, who is received there in the library.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLD TYNDAL TALKS.

THAT library Jimmy never was to forget. The house was very new. Workers every day were toiling in parts of it. But the library was finished, so far as hands could finish it. Still there was a reek of new wood from the shelves, and the smell of new cement. The books that filled the shelves were mostly in sets, twenty and thirty in a group all of one binding. Jimmy wondered how any one in the world could afford the time to read so many thousands and tens of thousands of pages. Rumor said that young Mr. Parker, for one, could not. But he maintained a good show.

To dress up his part of "gentleman," he was now wearing a smoking jacket and soft, loose slippers. But he wore

a scowl, and Jimmy could not take his eyes from a reddish patch which was swollen out on the side of his jaw. There the fist of hard-hitting "Alabama Joe" had landed. It seemed to Jimmy that that blow had knocked Parker down from far more than his actual height. He had fallen from position and fortune. He had been knocked from his pride of place. He was down, and Jimmy wondered if the man ever could get up again.

There was a fire burning in the biggest fireplace that Jimmy Green ever had looked at, and big Stanley Parker stood in front of this, spreading his legs widely, frowning with serious thought down at the boy, and tamping a load of tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. Then he lighted a match.

"Mr. Parker," said the boy, "I dunno—you'll think me crazy. But you better beat it! He's comin' for you!"

The lighted match went out between the fingers of Parker.

"Coming? Who's coming, boy?" he asked.

"You know mighty well!" exclaimed Jimmy Green. "Alabama Joe is coming! 'The Stingaree'!"

The other turned pale. But he lighted another match.

"Let him come," said he.

He placed the flame over the bowl of the pipe and drew deeply on it. A cloud of smoke burst out and obscured his face. He waved a passage through it, and looked out at the boy.

"I expect him, and I've set the trap, Jimmy," said he.

Jimmy's jaw fell.

Mr. Parker, still regarding him, smiled with pitying contempt.

"You've done a good thing for Fort Anxious, Jimmy, bringing in loafers, thieves, murderers like the Stingaree. But to-night you'll have a chance to stand in on the finish of him."

Jimmy moistened his white lips.

He began to feel that he had played the part of a fool in every way, in leaving the side of the tramp and coming to warn this intended victim—a victim already armed and defended by two Mounted Police!

"One of the Northwest Mounted is enough to handle any criminal," pointed out Parker. "There are two in the next room. A strange freak of fortune made six of those fellows converge on Fort Anxious at the same time. And the whole lot of them are hunting for the Stingaree. He's a clever fellow, a famous crook. But no crook stands a chance against an intelligent and well-armed honest man. However, Jimmy, I'd like to know what brought you here? To warn me?"

Jimmy could not answer. He was trying to visualize that trap, and the chances of Alabama Joe.

"You're sure he can't break in?" he asked breathlessly.

"Well, Jimmy, you can see for yourself," said Parker. "That big window opens onto a drop of more than fifty feet—the little canyon wall of the creek, Jimmy. Listen, and you'll be able to hear the noise of the water."

It was quite distinct. It sounded like very faint and far thunder. One could hardly notice it, until attention had been called that way. Or it might have been the noise of a rising wind, booming among rock walls.

"There's two doors," said Jimmy.

"One opens into the hall, where that old fellow stands that let you in. I'd trust that hawk even with a Stingaree in its claws. That opposite door runs into another hall which has no window and goes down to a garden door, very heavy, locked, and chained. Now, then, Jimmy Green, what are the chances of Mr. Joe Stingaree getting into my house?"

A quick tap came at the door of the library, which was instantly opened by the servant.

"Mr. Tyndal's comin'!" said he.

And the old man stepped into the room the instant after.

He did not seem to see Jimmy. His keen old eyes, under their drooping and puckering lids, were fixed on his newly appointed heir alone.

He never had been famous for courtesy or a light touch. Men said that he cared not a whit even for young Parker; it was simply his desire to leave his money in efficient hands that had made him select that burly young man. Now he went straight to the point without any greeting:

"Stanley, what's the meanin' of this chatter that's goin' round the town?"

At the opening of the door, Parker had stepped to the desk and caught up a heavy, new revolver which was lying in an open drawer. This he dropped hastily as old Tyndal entered.

The shock of the old fellow's appearance at that moment and the greater shock of that sudden question fairly staggered Stanley Parker. He was only able to say:

"What talk, sir?"

Old Tyndal started to speak, but only bared his teeth. He was watching the altered face and the green-gray color of the other.

"What talk, sir?" he quoted with a sneer. "What talk, sir? Why, dang it all, talk that you met up with that new loafer, that tramp, that no-good jugglin' skunk that's come to Fort Anxious; and that he was insulted by you in the dance hall; and that he took you outside to fight; and that he knocked you flat; and that you got up and crawled home without hittin' back! That's a part of the talk! I wanta know the meanin'!"

He had talked long enough for Parker's wits to begin to work again.

"If a snake crossed your path, would you tackle it with your bare hands, sir?" said he.

"A man ain't a snake!" said old Tyndal.

"There's some one else here," said Parker uneasily. He motioned toward Jimmy. "And that fellow, Alabama Joe, is really the Stingaree! Bob Dillman's partner!"

"What do I care who's here?" thundered Tyndal. "I wish that the whole town was here to listen to your excuses! You stood up to Dillman, you said. Are you afraid of the Stingaree?"

The jaw of Stanley Parker sagged. He had the look of a man who has been struck violently, and who is stunned to the verge of falling to the ground.

"I'm gunna give you time," said Tyndal. "I'm gunna give you till the mornin' to make up a lie—or to kill that Stingaree like an honest fightin' man. And if there ain't something done, I'm gunna pick you as bare as a bird for boilin', and turn you loose! Mind what I say to you!"

He turned on his heel, with no more farewell than there had been greeting from him in the beginning. His stride, wonderfully quick and light for a man of his age, went down the hall, and the door slammed behind him.

Stanley Parker rubbed both hands upward over his face.

Then he pointed at the boy.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked harshly. "Get out of the house, you and your warnings. Get out, and stay out, or I'll——"

He had gone savage. It was as though he would have struck down even the youngster to take out his surplus of malice against the Stingaree.

Jimmy did not wait to be invited twice.

He merely said: "You keep your eyes open, Parker. It ain't what happens to you that I reckon on or care about. I don't want the Stingaree to get his hands dirty with the handlin' of you. That's all!"

He started for the door, and swung back to fire a parting shot, when a

light, hissing sound took his ear. It was like a breath, sharply drawn. A paper which lay on the floor rattled harshly. And Jimmy was turned to stone.

From the door which led toward the garden that sound had come.

Parker, overwrought with the last blow which had fallen on him, seeing only his own ruin before him, had remained oblivious of the noise, but Jimmy gasped at him:

"Don't you hear it, Parker?"

The latter stared at him as though only partly comprehending.

"The garden door—it's open—and he's here!" said Jimmy.

And to reënforce his words, there was a faint hiss of the draft again beneath the inner door.

Parker could understand that.

If he had been pale before, he was stone-white now. He said not a word, but went for the door with his hands stretched out before him, like a man fumbling through the dark, and the terror on his face was a thing that Jimmy would remember thereafter. It would waken him in the night.

Through the door into the outer hall went Parker, unable to speak.

That door closed again, and Jimmy wanted with all his soul to follow, but could not.

Just opposite him the knob of the other door was turning slowly, so slowly that he would not have been able to guess at the motion, if he had not noticed the slight shifting of the high light on the brass.

And then the door sagged open. In the dark rectangle stood Mishe Mukwa, grinning evilly, and only dimly, behind him, appeared the shadowy bulk of the tramp.

The latter came in without sound, running half crouched, with the gun ready in his hand and murder indeed in his face.

He saw the emptiness of the room, then, except for Jimmy's frozen face at the opposite door, and he got to the boy in one bound.

"You back-stabbing little cur!" said the Stingaree, and reached at the throat of the youngster.

He checked himself at the last moment.

Out of the next room a choked voice was stammering something. It rose to a sudden scream.

"He is! He is! I tell you, he's likely in the library now! Go after him, if you're worth your salt!"

Chairs scraped noisily back. But still the tramp hesitated, and in his face a grim and desperate question worked for an instant.

"No," he said, half aloud. "Only Parker!"

He grabbed Jimmy by the shoulder.

"Get out of here with me. You've been a traitor once. I'll not give you a second chance!"

CHAPTER XXX.

JIMMY SHOWS THE WAY.

THEY were through the doorway into the hall which pointed toward the garden almost at once, and Stingaree waited to lock it behind him. Then he went on. The other door stood open, with a fresh, damp breeze blowing through it; and as they reached this, they heard the charge of the two Mounted Police into the library which they had just left. The two reached the inner door. The knob rattled, and then the hinges groaned as they threw their weight against it.

The Stingaree was locking the outer door behind him, now, and throwing the key aside into the garden.

"Which way, Jimmy?" he asked cheerfully.

One would have thought that nothing of moment had happened, and that there was no trouble or shadow in the mind of the man from the South.

"I'm a traitor," said Jimmy sullenly. "You better pick out your own way!"

"Traitor to me, but straight as a string with Paula Carson, and she's an older friend. Which way, Jimmy, before they come out and swallow us alive?"

He dropped his hand on the big head of Mishe Mukwa as he spoke. There was a crash inside the house. The police had burst open the inner door, and their footfalls rushed down the hallway.

"Are you going to take the canoe?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes."

"Then we'll go down the creek bottom. That comes out close to where Awaskees will be waiting."

"That's rough going—that canyon, Jim!"

"Go out the other way, then," said Jimmy. "Go out and run straight into Charlie Dyce!"

They had gone a little distance into the thick tangle of the garden, as they talked, and now Mishe Mukwa crouched suddenly flat against the ground. Jimmy needed no further hint. He flattened himself on the soil, likewise, and jerked at the hand of Alabama Joe to bring him down, in the same fashion.

The drop of the boy had been instant. That of the Stingaree was much slower, and he muttered: "What's up?"

"I dunno," said Jimmy. "I dunno what to make of it. Shut up! Lie still and listen!"

For ten seconds they listened. The uproar at the locked front door ceased. Then, as they heard the distant, running footfalls and their odd echoes inside the house, a voice spoke close beside them:

"I saw something out here just now, Charlie."

"Talk soft. You can't tell. He may be near—the sneaking cur!"

Charlie Dyce was there. Dimly, Jimmy could see him rising out of the bushes.

"I saw something," repeated the other voice.

A door of the house slammed noisily.

A voice broke out into the open, shouting: "Dyce, Dyce!"

"Don't answer!" cautioned Dyce quietly. "Where did you see it?"

"There——"

Two shadows came toward the spot where the boy, man, and dog were crouching.

The youngster did not wait. He merely whispered to Alabama Joe: "We gotta run for it. Foller me!'

Then he was up and running.

A voice barked behind them like an angry dog.

"Who's there? Halt!"

Instantly afterward a gun cracked, and Jimmy heard the snapping of the bullet through the twigs near him. Good shooting for such dimness as this night!

He ran like a dodging teal, winging down the wind, dodging every other step. Behind him came Alabama Joe, making wonderful speed, but held back by the swinging branches under which the boy ducked, but through which the big man had to beat his way.

Half a dozen bullets in rapidly chattering succession were fired after them, and then the chase was launched. One of those bullets, Jimmy could have sworn, had parted his hair for him. But he was untouched, and he heard the grunting of Alabama close behind—grunts of effort, not of pain.

It was a wild tangle, that undeveloped garden in the midst of the woods. But Jimmy knew it, as he knew every inch of Fort Anxious. He had explored this place with utmost care, as he had explored all the stamping grounds of the rival boy bands.

So he knew that ahead of him and a little to the left there was a steep and narrow path which angled down the

precipitous bank of the creek's canyon wall. It was not an easy descent even in broad daylight. It was going to be a dangerous matter in the dark of the night. But still he did not hesitate. There was no other way for him to get the big man out of the danger.

For, well behind them, he heard the sound of the pursuit. There was hardly an Indian who was a better woodsman than Charlie Dyce. Certainly he had, as the saying was, eyes in his feet, and would soon overtake the Southlander in such going as this. Then it would be death for one of the two.

So the boy dropped back beside the tramp.

"Hard path—drops down creek wall —foller me close!" he gasped, and the next instant, leaping ahead, he had found the precarious descent and was plunging down it.

It was even steeper than he had remembered. And in the darkness he felt himself tripping and lurching forward with great steps, which he had to arrest by tearing at the bushes in going past.

Then he saw the pale glimmer of the water beneath him.

The wolf dog had run out in the lead when Jimmy heard the grunting voice of Alabama Joe exclaiming behind him:

"Look out!"

He had stumbled with a crash through a bush that stood in the path, and now Alabama Joe leaped forward with all his might.

The great dark body shot past the boy. It was that leap for the water, or else a floundering fall which, down that slope, was sure to cost broken bones.

Down went the big man. He hit the water with a noise like a great boulder, and the upward-flying spray struck cold on the face of the boy.

He reached the edge of the pool, and there stood the Stingaree, soaked, dark with wet, dripping into the face of the water and making no move whatsoever to leave it.

"Are you hurt, Joe?" breathed the boy.

There was no answer.

Hurried, eager voices spoke above them.

"They went down into the canyon. Which is the way?"

"I dunno. Show a light. It's in here, somewhere."

"Look out! I almost went then!"

Those voices above were appallingly close, but more dreadful to Jimmy was the sight of the big man standing motionless, his head and shoulders bent.

The boy caught him by the arm and tugged on him. The whole body gave loosely. And he knew that the Stingaree had been badly hurt in the fall. Incapacitated definitely, perhaps, or at least stunned.

Yet, Jimmy did not entirely despair. He set his teeth, and pulling one big, limp arm over his shoulder, he strained to urge Alabama Joe out of the water.

He obeyed, loosely, swaying and staggering, and his long breaths sounded at the very ear of the boy.

"Steady! Steady!" Jimmy found himself whispering to the tramp. "We're gunna pull through, Alabama! Pull yourself together. Fight, Joe, fight!"

"Fight!" said the other in a faint whisper. "Fight, Stingaree! You're down!"

They were clear of the water. But the bank on which they walked was precarious going, every moment threatening to drop them both into the rocky bed of the stream again.

They left the pool. They reached the rapids, where the water sang and babbled like children laughing foolishly for no cause whatever except the sheer joy of dancing in the open air.

And then Jimmy Green felt the arm that hung over his neck and shoulder begin to stiffen and harden a little.

Life was coming back into the great muscles, and then the weight which had been oppressing him was lightened.

"Where am I?" he heard the big man muttering.

As if to answer him, the voice of Charlie Dyce yelled loudly from the bank above him, and behind:

"Scatter up and down the creek. I'm going down."

"Don't go, Charlie! He's down there waiting for you. We'll bag him in the daylight. He can't go far. He's smashed up. I heard the fall. Like a stone!"

"I'm going down," said Charlie Dyce. "Will you come along, Jack?"

"To the end, if you say so, Charlie—but it's a fool play, I tell you!"

"Dyce, Dyce!" said the voice of big Alabama Joe, now strong again. "If we meet, he and I——"

He let that sentence go unended. But he pulled back and halted.

Jimmy wrenched at Joe's arm.

"Are you crazy, Joe?" he pleaded. "D'you want to kill him for absolutely nothing?"

"I never crossed him. He's after me for sport. He's hunting me like a rabbit!"

"Joe, come along. He's only doing his duty. Paula—what'd she think? What'd she do if you dropped Charlie Dyce? He's the whitest in the world—Joe, come on with me!"

"The kid's right," said Alabama Joe through his teeth. "Come on, then. But where?"

"Straight down the creek. Walk soft. Keep close to me. Watch where my feet fall. Don't make a sound."

He went on, picking his way with care. Above them, on the high bank, he could hear the searchers moving, and behind, there was the noise of Charlie Dyce and his friend, lurching down the wall of the little ravine.

They cursed with excitement and fear, and Jimmy could hear them plunging along through the brush, as they gained the waterside.

Just above them, now, he could see the black wall of Parker's house, rising like a lofty fortress. And Jimmy went on more rapidly. Would they be cut off before they gained the edge of the lake?

The going grew much better in the lower ravine. He could run. Grass was underfoot, and the big man followed behind him, running softly and easily.

Then they came out to the point where the canyon walls fanned wide apart, and before them lay the waters of the lake like tarnished silver, with a dim silhouette of a canoe upon it, and a still dimmer shadow of the craft floating alongside. It was Awaskees, at last!

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE LAKE.

BY the time they came to the water's edge, the canoe was there, driven powerfully forward by the strokes of that master canoe man, Awaskees. He was more clearly seen each moment, for a pale fire seemed to be rising among the trees to the east of the lake, and Jimmy Green knew that the moon was about to rise. There was a small mound in the center of the canoe, which was a larger boat than the boy had expected to see, and as Awaskees held the craft just off the shore, steadying it with the canoe as if he were feeling for something in the water, he said quietly, in the Cree tongue:

"This man cannot paddle. Take the bow, brother. There is a light paddle there for you. We shall need speed. There are other boats on the water tonight."

"I'm staying in Fort Anxious," said Jimmy.

"You can return," said the Cree, "after we are into the mouth of the river and heading south."

Jimmy asked no more questions. He was already in the bow of the boat, and looking back impatiently, he saw that Alabama Joe was not with them. He was actually wasting the priceless seconds by kneeling on the narrow beach, his arms around the neck of the great wolf dog.

"Can I take Mishe also?" asked Alabama Joe.

Jimmy gasped with amazement.

It seemed to him that at any moment the enemy might break out from the woods along the shore. Tall and dark the poplars stood down near the water, but already the increasing moonlight was beginning to give a ghostly luster to their leaves; and the white, slender images of the birches lay out on the placid surface. Out of those trees, sharpshooting men of the law might break, and in an instant the boatmen would be riddled; and yet the tramp still lingered on the shore!

"Joe, Joe!" gasped the boy. "They'll be coming! They're coming now!"

He did not need to speak twice, for back among the trees there was the distinct popping of a twig as though under the weight of a heavy foot.

Alabama Joe, at this, stood up and stepped into the water. Even then he paused to look back where Mishe Mukwa stood motionless upon the shore.

Then the tramp stepped into the canoe. That entering of the boat, alone, was enough to show that he was even less waterman than forester! He almost capsized the slender craft, and then looked around him for a paddle.

"Sit down—lie down!" commanded Awaskees.

And he began to give short, powerful strokes with his paddle to get the boat under way, though never lifting the paddle blade out of the water.

Jimmy, in the bow, was working away with a will and with a similar technique. Awaskees for many years had been training him in this fine art, and though he never could have the Indian's shadowy step upon the trail, or his matchless ear and eye in the woods, yet in the handicraft of swaying a paddle and working it noiselessly in the water, he was almost the peer of the Cree. But the bow was lifted a little by the weight of the two men, the tramp being a little too far aft, and that gave the boy rather too long a reach.

However, he began to swing the paddle with a strong, rapid stroke, and as Awaskees fell smoothly into the same rhythm, the canoe gathered speed like a horse leaving the mark. There was not a sound from the paddles, but the little waves of the lake splashed softly against the bow and went down the sides with a whispering ripple.

Except for the stillness of the water, the lake here was like a river—a winding, narrow body which twisted here and there among the trees. In a moment they were around the first bend, and an instant later they heard the voices of the pursuit breaking out from the trees behind them.

Jimmy looked back. There was no one in sight and the men of the law were well fenced away by the projecting bank. But Awaskees nodded his head toward the wake they left behind them. The boy understood. The sight of that would be as handwriting for such a waterman as Charlie Dyce to read.

Awaskees had forbidden the efforts of the tramp to take the third paddle in the boat, but now he gave the word. Silence was not needed so much as speed! And instantly Jimmy heard the splash of a clumsy paddle blade and felt the canoe jerked by the powerful thrust of the novice.

He gave directions over his shoulder, not turning.

"Keep your lower hand like an oarlock, Joe. Don't move it more than

you have to. Put your weight on the upper hand. Swing your body with your stroke. Swing, swing, swing! Easily does it—easily does it!"

He talked in rhythm with his own strokes, and felt the clumsy new hand behind him smoothing his strokes in accordance. There were brains in the big man. Above all, there was the most exquisitely sensitive accord of nerve and muscle. In three weeks he could become more of a woodsman and paddler than the inept in three years. They were making famous headway, the Indian at the stern applying his strokes so nicely that there was never a waver of the bow from the straight line of their course, in spite of the unbalanced weight of two paddles against one, which is the curse of a three-man crew.

Suddenly, Alabama Joe stopped paddling.

"Stop the canoe!" he commanded.

Jimmy looked back, dismayed.

And there, in the water far behind them, already silvering with the first pale light of the moon as the latter burned upward through the eastern trees, he saw a small, dark object, with a wake spreading softly out to either side.

"It's Mishe Mukwa," said Alabama Joe. "I guessed that he'd follow. It's Mishe, and now I've got to take him along."

"If we stop," said the Indian, "they have a chance to get to the foot of the lake before us, and that will turn us back. Two fast miles, now, will save us a hundred easy ones later on!"

"Let the miles be hanged!" declared Joe. "I've got to have him. Shall I go on and let him drown?"

"D'you hear, Joe?" pleaded the boy. "If they cut us off at the mouth of the river, where it leaves the lake, you won't have a chance to get away. They'll turn you back into the woods, and in the woods, you're a goner!"

"I take my chance!" answered the other grimly. "The dog has to come. I knew it, back there on the beach!"

"It may be wise," said the Indian quietly. "One has to die. The dog, perhaps?"

And turning in the canoe, he began to paddle back toward the swimming dog.

"One has to die? One has to die?" muttered Alabama Joe. "What does that mean, Jimmy?"

"That's his lingo, and he'll stick to it," said the boy. "He made medicine, before he would come on this trip, and the medicine said that if he went along, somebody would have to die."

"Rot!" grunted the Southerner.

"It's what he thinks. It took a hard pull to get him started on this job, Joe!"

"Aye," said the big fellow. "I can guess that. But he's strong as a trap, once he's laid hold on a bit of work. I'll trust that man, Jimmy!"

This conversation they exchanged in soft whispers as the canoe slid back to the wolf dog which, as they came nearer, began to swim higher in the water, raising its head expectantly.

The Cree gave the signal for stopping headway. Jimmy backed water, and saw Awaskees, with miraculous skill and strength, take that ponderous new burden over the heel of the canoe—a hundred and sixty pounds of husky, loaded with another twenty pounds of wetness in his fur. But there stood big Mishe in the center of the boat trying to lick the face of his master, and with the first shake of his body showering them all with a high-flung spray.

"Get him low!" ordered Awaskees.

And at a word from Joe, the big dog sank flat, and now they started again down the lake. But Jimmy knew that with the very first stroke he could feel the leaden difference which the new weight made. They not only had lost precious time, but, furthermore, they

had taken on board a heavy extra burden. He began to despair.

"Joe, Joe!" he said over his shoulder. "We're going to lose—on account of a dog!"

"A dog's not a dog when he's willing to die for you," answered Alabama, breathing the words out hard as he drove his immense power against the paddle.

And Jimmy, despairing though he was, could not help feeling that he had heard a great truth, which was worth remembering. A dog was not a dog when it was willing to die for a man. There had been, earlier in his life, a certain little puny, feeble, worthless brindle mongrel which was devoted to him with a deathless love. And that dog he now remembered. It had been more than a dog, certainly, for on his behalf it had stood up to a savage, half-breed husky and allowed its life to be ripped from its body in half a minute of fighting.

Jimmy thought of this.

He felt that he was a better man than the tramp, in the eyes of the law, at least. But plainly there were qualities of which the law took no heed, and this insight of Alabama Joe's was worth more than gold, if other men could only know it!

Now, following the still water along the shore which, though giving them a winding course, was worth while on account of the escape from the wind riffles on the open way, they drove along with a speed which actually increased, instead of diminishing. The answer was that they were becoming attuned to one another, and their new man was picking up some of the essential elements of the craft.

He made one unpleasant suggestion.

"There's a rifle here in the bottom of the canoe, Jimmy. But after this kind of work, my hands'll be shaking so that I can't hit the side of a barn."

And Jimmy snapped: "I'd rather have you miss, if you're shooting at a man!"

Awaskees, far in the stern, heard, and commented softly: "No man will miss, if he wants enough to hit the mark."

"True," said the tramp, with an oath. "Nobody misses if he's keen enough to shoot straight!"

"How far to the mouth of the river?" he asked again, a little later.

"Another mile."

"Faster!" called Awaskees from the stern.

"We can't go faster," answered Jimmy.

"We have to," said the Cree quietly, "or else we die on this lake. Look behind!"

Jimmy jerked his head around, and he saw behind them, printed black and bold against the silver, moonlit water, a long canoe, driven forward by the powerful swaying of four paddlers and flying straight down their wake.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CLEAR AWAY.

THEY thought that they were working at full power before. But this was a spur in the side that made them strain harder, and the trees on the bank began to brush past them at an increasing speed, except when Alabama Joe, now and then, caught his paddle clumsily in the water, slowing them, and making a splash like a big lake trout rising and falling.

But he was learning, studying the proper movements in even this time of desperate need.

Jimmy called over his shoulder in a last hope:

"Are they Indians or voyageurs, Awaskees?"

"White men," answered the Cree quietly.

He could tell by the paddle work in the other craft, even at that distance.

And Jimmy gave up hope. Such a heavily manned craft was not apt to be out on the water at that speed and at that hour except for some such purpose as the overtaking of fugitives.

He himself was driving himself against the paddle handle until the blood rushed up into his head, and his ears hummed with the effort. His shoulders were growing numb. He could not make more than thirty strokes on a side before changing. Then twenty-five. Then twenty, and he had to flash the paddle across. Behind him, he could hear the harsh, stertorous breathing of Alabama Joe as that giant gave all the power of his body to the work at hand.

But in spite of their labor, when Jimmy flung a frightened glance over his shoulder again, he saw that the pursuit was gaining on them perceptibly. And yet Awaskees had never lost the wonderful pendular swing of his paddling stroke. No one, to watch him, could have guessed that he was straining the very strings of his heart. But Jimmy alone knew the secret sign. It was a thoughtful little canting of the head to one side, as though Awaskees were contemplating some distant, abstruse problem. But the instant that his head inclined from the erect, Jimmy well knew, by long experience, that the Cree was half dead from exhaustion.

"Do we take to the bank, Awaskees?" he gasped.

The Indian did not answer, and Jimmy did not repeat his question; for he knew, now, that the Cree was not willing to waste even the breath needed for a single syllable.

All three of them were desperately tired. But yet they worked with such nerve that the canoe seemed to shoot along as rapidly as ever. They could not match four skillful paddles, however, with only two and a half—and despite his enormous power, the big man was only as half a paddle in the canoe. More men can lift their weight than can paddle it, and with both Alabama Joe and the dog in the canoe, the hands of Awaskees and the boy were filled with lead.

"It's no go. They're catching us!" said Alabama suddenly.

At that moment, the bank turned off to the right; but the Cree, instead of following the embankment, actually swung out into the open water, though the wind presently struck them, and the sharp-faced little riffles whacked rapidly against the thin sides of the boat.

Jimmy thought that the Indian had gone mad.

He threw a wild glance backward, and as they forged ahead, he saw the pursuers triumphantly cut in between them and the shore.

They were isolated on the broad breast of the lake, which had widened greatly. They could not cut back to the shore, now, and their only hope of escape would be to drive on for the mouth of the river, toward which the Cree had pointed the bow.

Half groaning, Jimmy still stuck manfully to his paddle. Defeat would be death, perhaps, for Alabama Joe. For him—well, he knew that it meant little to him. But his heart was with the big man who now labored so honestly and clumsily in the center of the canoe.

He looked back again. He shook his head to clear his eyes, and looked once more. To his utter amazement, the pursuers had lost ground, decidedly!

He could not understand, but staring at them, while he still swung manfully at the paddle, he strove to detect some faltering of their rhythm. He could make out none. Every instant they were lagging, and yet it seemed as though all the four nodded with the same swift and perfect rhythm which he had noticed in the beginning of the race. Charlie Dyce, he would dare

swear, was one of that crew, and even if the others were not all Mounted Police, they were probably picked men.

One silhouette, even in the distance, the boy thought that he recognized—No. 2 man, extraordinarily thick across the shoulders, bareheaded, swaying his head sharply down at the conclusion of each mighty stroke.

It was a mannerism which he recognized, he thought, and he suddenly could have sworn that that man was big Stanley Parker.

But what explained the mystery of the defeat of such strong and practiced paddlers as those who pursued?

He could not understand. The more he shook his head over it, the more mysterious it became, for they had both wind and wave against them. The unseen hand of the gods was pulling them forward, it appeared.

Suddenly the solution came to him.

It was the current, of course. What else could it be?

No white man ever had understood the changing currents of that lake, depending as they did upon the wind, the height of the water, and twenty other conditions. And certainly for his own part he never had been aware of a current setting off that point for the mouth of the river.

Behind him, he heard the gasping, broken voice of Awaskees.

"Steady, brother, steady! They are beaten!"

Jimmy, looking far back, saw that two of the pursuers actually had stopped paddling and sat humped far over in their places, exhausted by that desperately long sprint. Only the steersman and No. 2 kept on their work, though with a leisurely stroke which told that they were resigned to defeat. And with this new and more leisurely examination, Jimmy was certain that No. 2 actually was Stanley Parker.

He was paddling more easily, now, hardly more than half as many strokes to the minute. It seemed as though they were resting on the paddles. The blood began to clear out of his head. The dreadful aching numbness was carried from his arms and shoulders, and the pain departed from the back of his neck. Breathing was no longer a gasping effort—he was not biting at the air like a dog at raw meat. But in another moment, they would be enjoying the smooth thrust and glide of the light canoe through the waters of the lake.

"I think that that's Stanley Parker in the canoe behind us, Joe," said he.

He could feel the jerk with which Alabama Joe turned his head to stare.

"It is!" said the Stingaree. "The second man?"

"Aye," said Jimmy. "How'd you guess that?"

"I've got the look of him drawn in my heart!" said the other. "I've got it there for the sake of Bob Dillman."

Then he added, after a moment: "I'll tell you something. I think that Fate wouldn't take me away from him without giving me a second chance at him!"

"What does Fate owe you?" asked Jimmy, with the matchless rudeness of a boy.

"A square deal," said the tramp, still breathing hard, and having to shift his paddle from time to time, yet gradually relaxing. "A square deal is all. I don't expect help when I'm robbing a bank, Jimmy," he went on, chuckling. "That's my own business. But you don't write a man off the list because he's weak in one thing. Many a good boxer is no good with a gun, Jimmy. And suppose I balance up my account and say: 'Well, I've robbed some banks, stuck up stakes, punched heads, broken noses, and done a good many other things. But on the other hand, I've never done murder, Jimmy. I've had murder held out to me on a silver tray. I've had it dressed up with fine sauces and offered to me. I've been tempted, and had it whispered into my ear in the

middle of the night. Easy murder, rich murder, profitable murder. But there's no score against me there, Jim!"

"Everybody go to heaven," asked Jimmy, "that doesn't do a murder?"

And he laughed, his voice shrill with relief as the chase ended, and because he could now feel the current, like a hand, taking the boat.

"Not everybody," said the yegg quietly. Then he laughed a little in turn. "I don't ask for heaven, but only for a square deal. What's murder to most? Scares them frosty to even think of. But it's been in my line and in my way. Well, that's on record, Jimmy, my boy, and don't you forget it!"

He laughed again, and Jimmy nodded to himself. He had never marked anything like naïveté in this man before. He had thought him above or beyond such a thing, but now it stood plainly to be seen, and Jimmy was openly amazed.

They went on, now, without further speech. There was nothing to worry them until they reached the bottom of the lake. Then they would find out whether or not a message had been rushed overland to head them off. But Jimmy felt little fear of this, for they had made excellent time, except for the delay to pick up Mishe Mukwa. For his own part, he now was glad of that episode. It had showed him that the tramp was willing to risk his life for the sake of a dumb beast. Who else did he know, capable of the same effort?

No one! Not even Awaskees, manifold as his virtues were. Not even, let it be admitted, gentle, brave, and kindly Paula Carson herself. There was a certain cold logic which possessed most humans at such a time, and this logic the tramp was without.

He moved, it appeared, according to a certain closed code. He might die, but far rather die than violate the code.

While the boy was thinking of this, half dreamily, and enjoying the blinding brightness of the moon path on the water, he heard Awaskees give the Cree soft call for caution.

Before them lay the dark mouth of the river, and he could hear the dimly musical chattering of the rapids beyond. Once in their grip, it would take a galloping horse to keep pace with them along the rough shore!

But, in the meantime, they had to pass that river's mouth, which to Jimmy began to gape like a cannon at them.

He strained his eyes at the steep shadows along the banks, where a boat might be lurking.

"Left! Left!" called the Cree suddenly. "For your life, brother!"

Frantically, Jimmy shifted his paddle to the right of the bow, and tugged with all his might.

Inshore he saw only one thing, but that one thing was enough. It was the flash of the moon on a wet paddle blade under the shadows of the trees!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TRUE-BLUE JIMMY.

THEY had come to the lion. They almost had rowed into his mouth. And Jimmy heard, distinctly, the challenge in the name of the law, and the invitation to surrender. This was followed by a veritable volley, which broke the paddle in his grip and lanced the palm of his hand with a great splinter.

He looked down helplessly at the injured palm. Crimson was spurting there. But the main thing was that he was now useless in the boat, a mere dead weight for them to carry along.

He turned and called the information to the other two. They did not so much as answer, but bent on at their labor. The Indian's head was erect again. He had stripped off his shirt, and the moonshine glittered on his muscular torso as he swayed at the paddle. But Alabama Joe's face was a

terrific study, his lips being grinned back from his teeth, and his eyes narrowed to points.

But they had to pull across the strong current, which distinctly tilted the canoe, and in addition to this, the ragged paddling of the novice made it doubly hard for the Indian to keep the craft into its true straight line.

They had not a chance, Jimmy decided.

Certainly, Dyce had been able to send out word in plenty of time, for here was a six-paddle canoe, with an extra rifleman in the prow to shout commands. Those six paddles were now straining in the water, and the long boat leaped away under the impetus. Firing had stopped. There was no need for that when with a few strokes they were sure to run down the pursued and take them captive, or else slaughter them out of hand, whichever might be necessary.

So Jimmy saw, as he looked back, and he wondered at the gravity with which his two grown-up companions continued to labor. They were lost. It seemed more graceful, and far more dignified, to simply surrender at once.

They could hear distinctly the low-pitched whoop of the stroke paddle to give time to the rest, and the grunt of the others as they thrust their weight on the paddle handles. They could see the sweep of the dark hands, the lunging of the head, and the silver-bright flashing of the naked paddle blades, reaching forward. Why struggle against such odds?

As he thought this, Jimmy saw the big canoe suddenly leap half its length from the water and land with a loud splash on the surface, beyond the submerged spit of bough over which they had ridden.

Two or three of the men were thrown from their place. Distinctly, Jimmy saw at least a pair of rifles fall into the water of the lake, and those who remained in the boat were in great confusion, some bailing, others drawing in their ducked companions over the sides of the canoe.

Only the man in the bows retained his presence of mind—and his malice. He raised his rifle and opened a rapid fire upon the fugitives. But not a shot came near them. Only chance could make one of those bullets hit the mark when the rifleman kneeled in the prow of that canoe, which reeled and rocked with the movements of the rest of the crew.

"Shall we turn back and rush for the river mouth?" asked Jimmy.

"Too late!" said the Cree.

And he was right, for along the southern shore, coming suddenly out of the moon mist toward the river mouth, Jimmy could see their first pursuers, who seemed to have been spurred on—by the noise of the firing, perhaps—and were now lifting their craft through the water at a good clip.

To Jimmy Green it seemed that the end had merely been postponed, not definitely avoided. For who could tell a possible escape for them now?

To row back up the lake was simply to run into a hundred hands at Fort Anxious. And the passage to the south down the river was definitely blocked.

No word came from Awaskees, neither did he slacken his pace in paddling; but now he turned the canoe under the leaning shadows at the edge of the water, and presently sent the bow into the soft sand.

"Out, out!" said he. "Here we make portage!"

Jimmy had tied a rag around his hurt hand. He jumped into the water and helped as best he could while they ran the canoe on shore.

"What can I do?" he asked. "Portage to what, Awaskees?"

"Across to the first water that runs north!" said the Cree.

Jimmy gasped. Across the rough wilderness to carry a canoe, with the

enemy hurrying behind them, seemed utter madness to him; but he dared not doubt the wisdom of the redman.

"Get a pack on Mishe Mukwa!" snapped Awaskees in guttural Cree. "Then follow!"

He turned the canoe as he spoke, and showed the tramp how to handle the rear end of it.

Jimmy, in the meantime, was frantically busy. The bundle in the bottom of the canoe had been arranged for a pack, but it was a man's pack, not with a saddle for a dog. However, he knew every possible way of rigging a weight on a dog's back, and he worked with fingers that stumbled with haste. His wounded hand was burning hot and swelling already, but he made the fingers help.

And, outside the low-hanging branches, he saw the sliding outline of the canoe and its four paddlers.

"In here!" said the voice of Charlie Dyce. "They went in here!"

"Not here! Not here!" answered Stanley Parker frantically. "I tell you, I marked the place where they went ashore by that group of white birches. Go ahead!"

The paddles dipped and the craft shot on, while Jimmy, his knees weak, stood up and let Mishe Mukwa jump ahead on the trail of his master.

The dog carried the pack lightly, and Jimmy hurried up to give his strength to the carrying of the canoe.

No one but the Cree, he was sure, could find a way through that thicket; and even the wise brain of Awaskees was troubled now and again by the roughness of the ground and by the density of the growth.

They had an eight-mile trek, winding to and fro among the trees. They spent five hours of exhausting labor to cover that distance up hill and down, until, at last, they came out of the forest gloom and saw at their feet the bright promise of a little runlet of water.

It was not by any means big enough to float a canoe, even. But they had at least a way cleared of bush by the work of the meager water, and presently another runlet joined it.

Gasping, reeling, they went on, the water sometimes up to their ankles, sometimes to their knees. Rocks cropped up. It was a miserable, stumbling progress; but better than forcing through the trees, and, above all, the clouds of hungry mosquitoes had now been sent to bed by the increasing chill of the night. The lightness of the canoe alone had made their march possible. It was of Awaskees' own manufacture, and, therefore, it was perfection of best yellow-birch bark, free from the slightest wrinkle, and rich with the resin which turns the edge of the water. It was ribbed with thin strips of white cedar, powerful as whalebone, and slatted down its length with the same material. Not an ounce of extra weight was in it, and not a shade less strength than was needed for white water.

Another and another tributary flowed into the mother stream. Still, there were too many rocks to permit them to embark in the craft again; but they now found a fairly open bank on which they marched, wearily, but still forcing themselves to good speed.

No one spoke about the enemy, but Jimmy turned the possibilities in his mind. Even in this bright moonlight, they probably could trust the dimness of the forest to cover their trail. But it might well be that Charlie Dyce had guessed at their plan and had cut in ahead of them to watch the watercourses. There were several of these running through this wooded section. It only depended on his ability to select the right one.

The water now was very broken, but the rocks that projected through it like sharks' teeth were fewer, and the Cree halted. They launched the canoe, settled the pack in it, and the two men

stepped aboard, with Mishe Mukwa in the center of the craft.

"You?" asked the Cree.

"I got a bad hand. I won't be much good on a paddle," said the boy. "But I hate to quit you, Awaskees—and you, Joe!"

"Go back!" said Alabama Joe. "You've done more than ten men for me, Jimmy, and I'll never forget. You're not seeing me for the last time, I can tell you! Jimmy, here's a hand, and Heaven bless you, son!"

But Awaskees said not a word.

"Shall I go back?" asked Jimmy of the Indian.

"Go back and grow to be a man," said the Cree coldly.

Jimmy asked no more. He stepped into the canoe.

"No, no, Jim!" protested the white man in the bow.

But the Cree said not a word, and Jimmy accepted his fate. He had started, as it were, on a war trail, and it was better to die than to turn back.

Now the paddles dipped.

"I've gotta stay," the boy explained to Alabama Joe. "Go on! I'll manage to lift my weight, somehow!"

"True-blue Jimmy!" said the yegg. "We surely carry luck when we carry you!"

And he buried the blade of his paddle in the water, and made the handle bend sharply with the enormous pressure which he exerted.

They shot down the stream. The current took them. It was constant hard paddling, now, not so much to increase the headway as to keep the boat straight on its course, or swing it around a bend with, perhaps, the current lunging straight at the farther bank. The moon stood in the zenith. The water roared in their ears. The black of the forest extended like a night on either side, except where the poplars winked and flashed, as though with a silver gilding, and the thin, straight trunks of the birches rose through the shadows.

Steadily the stream increased in size, and now it lost some of the fury of its impetus.

The tramp, laboring in the bow, had picked up some understanding of his duties in white water, and, therefore, the canoe went handily on her way. For a good hour or so they swung along, now with only the laziest paddle strokes, when, turning the sweep of a big bend, Jimmy saw the blink of the moon on a straight rifle barrel on the farther shore.

He looked again, holding his breath, and then he could count in the shadows four dim figures of men, each with a rifle in his hands. He himself instinctively gripped the weapon in the bottom of the canoe, and felt the watchful Cree nose the craft closer under the overhanging shadows of the trees.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

INDIAN AID.

WITH such keen-eyed danger opposite them, it seemed to Jimmy that they were rushing along at a terrific rate, and that the men of the law must surely see them and their dashing bow wave. But momently the pace slackened, and now under the dark of the trees they barely crawled. Unwarned by the Cree, the boy knew enough to jab Alabama Joe in the back and signal to him to remain silent. Both he and the tramp sank into the bottom of the canoe, and Jimmy pulled down the big dog with him. Nothing now showed above the rim of the canoe except the erect body of Awaskees himself as with silent paddle he let the boat drift.

Out, out, out along the point they edged, and the successive trees dipped their branches with a whisper toward the face of the boy, as he lay there on his back frightened, staring upward.

He waited each instant for the sound of the guns, enormously loud in the wilderness, but the sound delayed.

Then he felt that the canoe had turned the corner. Yes, it was turning to the right now, and traveling each instant farther away from danger.

Thanksgivings were forming on his lips, and instinctively deep in his throat, when the moon blazed suddenly full down upon him. They had come to a section where not a vestige of a tree lined the banks. It was a freak of the soil which would not support a shrub, even, at this spot, and they lay naked under the eyes of their enemies.

"Who goes there? Halt!" shouted Charlie Dyce like a sentinel.

They hardly waited for answer, but a rifle bullet came with such a good aim that it went *clip-clip* through the sides of the canoe just over the breast of Jimmy, and he felt a chip flicker into his face. There was no purpose in remaining prostrate now.

Alabama Joe, without an instant's delay, with the courage of a very brave man, instantly was up on his knees, again, and bending the paddle with his furious, noisy strokes, which set the head of the canoe bobbing like a high wind.

Jimmy, propping himself up on one elbow—there was no purpose in showing all his body—saw that two of the four had dropped to their knees, and a fourth one—that looked like Stanley Parker—was lying flat, hugging the rifle butt into his shoulder.

Four good riflemen, with a bright moon to show them a target, and the Cree—apparently gone mad—shouting: "Left! Left!"

Straight out into the open current?

Yes, and across it, the light craft dodging like a deer, and then shooting forward with wonderful speed as the current yanked it by the nose.

Nothing baffles the best of marksmen more than a change of pace, unless it be treacherous moonlight itself. Even the frantic paddling of the tramp, jerking them from side to side, was now of value, since it kept them dodging.

But what a rain of lead! Several times bullets went through the canoe. A double jet of water spurted furiously right on Jimmy's body, and he began to bail with all his might.

Then there was a cessation of paddling. He looked back. A jutting point of rocks loomed between them and the riflemen, whose fire ceased at the same instant.

They would run to take up a new position, beyond a doubt, but in the meantime an eight-knot current was sweeping the canoe forward, along a rapidly winding course, and it would be strange if the best speed of those four over broken ground could get them within range of their target again.

A few paddle strokes, now and then, kept the boat flying, and only once was there a solitary shot.

"Are you hurt, Awaskees?" shouted the tramp, turning in the bow.

"Not hurt," said the Cree.

"Jimmy, boy?"

"No," said Jimmy.

"You're our luck!" cried Alabama Joe happily. "I know that we had our luck aboard, and they'll never put a hand on us!"

He began to sing a song on this theme, still laughing, and still swaying the paddle with an infrequent but powerful stroke. They went at the rate of a smoothly trotting horse. The trees sped by in a blending mass on either side. And so the moon sank, and the dimness of the night settled around them.

In that dark, high walls rose on either hand.

"Keep a sharp lookout, Joe!" called the boy, straining his own eyes ahead.

But no eye could have seen what gripped them. It was "black" water—that is, one of those sudden and furi-

ous slides when the current slopes noiselessly and with terrific speed over a smooth drop of stones. So it did now. The pull of the current caught them with a wrench that pulled their head to the right, and they were flung forward like a stone from a strong hand. The wind cut at them in a gale. Twice they staggered, gunwale deep, shipping water. Then they ground their length against a stone, but the stone was smooth and did not tear the delicate birch bark. As for the water they had shipped, as they straightened out again in the quieter water beyond, Jimmy was busy bailing this.

Two streams joined them, here. A slower current rolled beyond with the unmistakable surface of deep water; and the Indian kept them fairly in the center of the stream. So the dawn came over them, pink and still; and now and then a fish splashed; or something dropped in the woods; and the great Northern wilderness gathered them deeper and deeper in its arms. Fort Anxious was one long day's journey behind, but it seemed to Jimmy a lifetime away.

Sometimes he looked back with troubled wonder at the Cree, unable to explain how he had come to leave the Fort, and the wife and the child who lived there, dependent upon him. It seemed totally unreasonable. Nothing had been said to him about pay. He could be sure of nothing but great danger.

Still, he drove the canoe onward with steady strokes of the paddle. The tramp, in the meantime, kept to his share of the work, but there was a twisting lurch about his strokes that showed utter exhaustion.

When the Cree stopped the canoe under the shelter of overhanging boughs and announced that they would halt here, Joe dropped on his back upon the bank and threw out his arms, unable to move, groaning deeply and unashamed with every breath.

The big dog, Mishe Mukwa, stood over him and licked the palms of his hands.

They were a dreadful sight.

Soft as the hands of a woman, almost, the first few moments of this unaccustomed work must have blistered them. Then the blisters broke, and the skin gradually wore off the blistered places, leaving raw flesh, which in turn would be worn away by the relentless labor of the Stingaree.

The Cree pointed down at those crimson, swollen hands.

"On one leg," said he, "we only hop and crawl."

He meant that his own paddle was the only one which would be able to work the canoe forward the next day, and Jimmy agreed in silence. For his injured hand was already quite badly swollen.

They worked, first drawing up the canoe, and then, with a growing sense of disaster before him, Jimmy helped to gather materials for a fire. The teapot was brought out. From the rotten, very old wood which Jimmy had found arose hardly a trace of smoke, and this was dissipated among the trees before it rose against the sky. There was little chance that such a smoke might betray them to their enemies. And in the meantime the water boiled, the tea was made.

Strong, hot tea, bitter and black, such as the Northern travelers drink. Whisky is scorned for this, by all of those who know the rigors of a day's labor through the woods. They drank it, the hands of Alabama Joe shaking violently, though he gripped the tin cup with both. Still he drank, and drank, and then lay down on the bank again and slept instantly, while the other two ate.

"We'd better make him eat," suggested Jimmy.

"The belly will take care of itself," said the Cree.

He leaned over the sleeper and cried out softly, like a delighted child:

"Hai, Jimmy, see! What a chest! What shoulders! What a pair of arms! No wonder that he struck down Stanley Parker as a grizzly strikes down a deer! There is hard strength in the body of Parker. It is hard as oak. But soft strength is better and stronger still. Hai! See his hands! They are worn almost to the bone, but he will feel better when he wakes."

From the very shrubs that grew here, along the bank, he picked some of the smallest budding leaves, stripped off the bark of the same bush, and with the inner part of this and with the buds, he made a stew in the last water which had been heated. This he steeped for some time, and with it made a good thick poultice on each hand of the sufferer.

The latter did not waken! It was wonderful that he could sleep when those tormented hands of his were being touched.

"But if a stranger spoke a hundred steps away, he would leap to his feet," said the Cree. "This, brother, is a man!"

With all his heart, Jimmy agreed.

And it was a wonderful thing to hear the faint groans of Alabama Joe as he drew each breath decrease and then diminish to utter silence. Both hands were bandaged. And then Awaskees turned to the boy.

It was a different dressing which he prepared for him, but its touch was as magic, apparently, as that which had drawn the torment from the wounds of Alabama Joe. For the pain gradually left him. He sat cross-legged on the bank, and ordered the Indian to sleep, while he kept watch.

"Yes," said the Cree good-humoredly, "for we must keep our one foot strong, or else we cannot even hop along!"

"Tell me, Awaskees," asked the boy suddenly, "why you were willing to come on this trip, and what will become of your wife?"

"Why should a wife," said the Cree, "stand between a man and his fate?"

"But suppose she goes hungry?"

"It is not winter," answered Awaskees. "Like me, she has two hands to hold a fish spear. Like me she has two hands to hold a rifle. I have a child. It is her child also. I did not marry a flabby thing, such as that which the white man is sure to love, that would starve unless the acorns were husked for her, and the shells of the nuts cracked, and the berries picked from the bushes. My wife is a woman, Jimmy. Besides," he added, taking his last pull on his pipe, "if I live, he will make me rich."

And he pointed toward the sleeping form of Alabama Joe.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BIG FISH AND LITTLE.

BY the edge of the stream sat Jimmy. He had in his well hand the base of a narrow pole which rested at the balance over one knee and extended out over the water, into which there dropped from the end of it a line that seemed to break off at a sharp angle as it reached the surface. There was not much chance of a fish, the boy felt, but it would be foolish to waste the hours of his watch. His bare feet, tough in the sole as moccasins, rested on the icy rocks which framed the shore. And a cold air bathed him, the damp, chill morning air of the woods, thoroughly cooled all through the night by the winds which blew off the rivers, and they in turn yet carrying the low temperature of melting snows.

Their camping place was on the margin of a bend, so that he could look both up and down the stream to a considerable distance, and in case another craft came in sight, he would be able to mark it well before it came close

enough to see him through the showering branches which concealed his place on the bank. The canoe was high and dry, and covered over with branches. Not even a beaver, swimming down that stream, would have been able to distinguish the camouflage from real brush. So well did Awaskees understand his art!

Jimmy had seen this work before, and had admired it; but never before had he been with a man whose life, perhaps, depended upon good hiding, and he took careful note of everything. He felt, indeed, that he was living upon a different plane, and that six months of such life would teach him the woods as he never had known them before. All was new and all was delightful to him. And all of his delight was poignantly seasoned and spiced with the sense of danger.

The stillness of the forest, and the soft, speaking sounds from the running water meant something new to him, also. There were constant whispers passing to and fro among the trees; and now and then these sounds crept up stealthily behind him, exactly like the murmurs of men who were stalking their position and who were exchanging opinions on the way. Often, too, some bubbling noise of the water was exactly like a voice, breaking from the surface; and these things would startle him and make him stiffen, with his hair fairly rising.

He had been sleepy when he first sat down here. He had been wondering how he could pass the time without making noise, and yet to be sure of keeping strict observance of all that came near him.

Every ten seconds, he looked up and down at the neighboring bends. They remained blank, though sometimes the force of the current, changing course a little, would appear to him like the shadow of an approaching boat, and he grew tense to observe it. Nothing came, as yet, and sleepiness was far from his eyes.

He began to think over all that had chanced to him. He began to turn the Southerner in his mind—or was he a Southerner indeed? He felt, in a way, that Alabama Joe was a force like a great wind, picking up and displacing other human lives like dead leaves, whirling them lightly before him, drifting them in heaps into new positions. He had come to Fort Anxious, and in so short a time he had transformed the business of the grocer; he had won the love of Carson's daughter; he had crushed the great reputation of the most important man in the Fort. He had beaten and disgraced the formidable brothers, those man-slaying Lafittes; one of them was wounded and helpless in the hands of the law; the other had shown a yellow streak which his fellows never would forget. And, besides this, he had opened the eyes of old Tyndal, and he had drawn upon his trail the vengeance of the law in the strong person of Charlie Dyce, and in the hatred of Parker. As his companions he had taken the finest Indian that ever shot moose in those woods, and a poor waif, who, nevertheless, was the king of his kind in Fort Anxious.

All of these things he had done, besides smaller matters which the boy did not pretend to weigh, such as the effect he might have had upon the life of pretty Marie Dugommier. She had been looked down upon, on account of her mother. Would she not be looked up to more and considered a prize worth consideration by the other young men of the village, since the famous Singaree had noticed her and taken her to a dance?

Then the boy wondered profoundly whether he could call this criminal actually a bad man, or a good one. He could not tell. There had been moments when he himself had been in mortal fear of the hands of the Stinga-

ree. At other moments, he felt himself close as a blood brother to the man. No, he could not make a moral pronouncement and say good or bad about a thing which appeared to be, above all, a sheer force.

By the strong light which the Stingaree cast upon all those who were near him, the Cree was newly seen, likewise. He had always seemed to Jimmy about perfect, except for the color of his skin —if that were a real disadvantage! But now there were other things to say about Awaskees. He had proved himself braver and more ready of wit than ever. But he also had established himself as a distinctly practical mind. He came on this trip, he had said, out of love for Jimmy Green; and yet out of his own lips he was convicted of having the highest hopes of practical benefits to be showered upon him at a later date by the criminal, as a reward for deliverance. Was that noble? No, it was not.

Yet it was forgivable, Jimmy felt. For the Indian had sensed in the tramp a power which would be able to endow friends richly. Highly forgivable, then, was the attitude of Awaskees, the moose hunter.

What of Charlie Dyce—noble Charlie, young Charlie, Charlie the rising man and youthful hero of Fort Anxious, about whom every one spoke a good word?

No, not altogether perfect was even Charlie Dyce, for he worked partly for the fun of the game, and partly for a better salary; and partly for fame, which in reality was a god with clay feet.

As for Jimmy himself?

He looked deeply inward, and sighed.

Truly he wished to serve and save the big man from the South. But also he had come because of the relish of the adventure; and the strangeness of the undertaking; and the joy of pitting himself with one party of strong men against another party, almost equally keen, far greater in numbers. In a sense, he wanted to be a brave and faithful friend. And in another sense, he wanted to "show off" before the eyes of the mysterious Stingaree.

More mysterious, to be sure, the more Jimmy knew about him.

So Jimmy, sighing over these problems, reached a conclusion which older and wiser philosophers had reached before him—that there is nothing human that is also pure. Only in heaven can absolute love, faith, and service be found.

And he shook his head sagely and sadly. And he felt that he had grown much older since the sun last set, and that he would grow older still before the next sunrise.

Something stirred. He looked behind him and saw the great head and the eyes of Mishe Mukwa, always green with suspicion.

He, too, was a problem, for he had come to the service of Alabama Joe partly from love, but partly from fear; and fear, surely, had in the first place controlled him.

Indeed, the longer Jimmy thought over these problems, the more convinced he became that only one thing was worth his attention, and that was the power of Alabama Joe.

In what that power consisted he could not pretend to say. It was, doubtless, made of many parts. This was a juggler, a safe-cracker, a most eminent liar, a thief, a house-breaker, a highway robber, a smooth-spoken deceiver, a male flirt, and gunman. But he was something beyond all this. All these things added together did not quite explain the attraction which drew men, and women, and animals to him.

Something flashed at the upper bend.

Jimmy, seeing it, beached his fishing rod instantly, and then saw a canoe with four paddlers working in it.

His heart sank.

He drew back on the bank and flattened himself among the brush, yet he would not waken his companions until he was sure that the other craft contained the men who were hunting them.

On came the canoe with wonderful speed, for the current was taking them, and the paddles were strongly helping. It drew nearer. He could swear that there was no pair of shoulders in it equal to those of big Stanley Parker, and nowhere did he see a silhouette similar to the familiar contour of the Mounted Policeman, young Charlie Dyce.

No, it turned out to be a ragged set of voyageurs, with a heap of packs in the center of a big canoe as delicate, as decorated, as exquisite as the paddlers were beggarly.

They went by, and turning the bend, all at once they struck up a paddling song, and the strange, broken rhythm floated behind them, and wavered through the air, and enchanted the forest, and the ear of Jimmy Green.

They disappeared around the bend, and he found himself nodding and smiling.

They were not enemies! Enemies to nothing except themselves, when whisky was cheap—or plain alcohol, for that matter.

He sighed and smiled again. Not enemies? he repeated in his thought. Enemies, of course. For all men were hostile, since if they were not actually upon the trail of the fugitives, they could give warning to others who were, and every craft that floated upon those waters was a potential cruiser coming against them. All the arms of the law could man them. All the money of the law could hire paddlers and riflemen.

It was a new thought, and Jimmy winced as it came into his mind.

Slowly he pushed the fishing rod out again, and the bait dropped with a careless flop into the water.

Well, no matter for that, since nothing was biting in these shallows and could not be expected to bite. The bait was dead, moreover, and Jimmy knew that he was going through a mere form of fishing, rather than attempting to practice the actual art.

He had barely reached this sneering conclusion when the rod was almost snatched from his hands!

He managed to keep some sort of grip with one hand, being jerked to his feet with the rush of the weight on the other end of the line.

But then he had both hands on it and braced himself as the fish changed and bolted up the stream.

He drew in what play he could of the rod, to meet the shock as the big fellow came to the end of its run.

And he barely was able to withstand the pressure, his sore hand aching to the shoulder as he gripped the rod hard. This, with the whole weight of the current boiling down in his behalf!

The fish was turning. And Jimmy, filled with a sudden inspiration, ran inshore and jerked hard. Luck was with him. The fish jumped. Its head was so big that the sight of the great lake trout frightened him, but that leap threw it off balance, and the next moment it was wriggling on the bank and biting the empty air.

And yet Jimmy had little joy of his prize. He knew it was not landed or hooked by his skill. A ghostly feeling came to him that the evil spirits or good who watched over Alabama Joe had sent this prize to their servant!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MAN AMONG MEN.

IT is more than odd that this famous hunt of the Indian, the boy, and the criminal should be called by none of their names. Even Mishe Mukwa might well have been honored. Or failing

that, the trail might have been ascribed to Charlie Dyce, whose work was such an honor, even to the Northwest Mounted. However, the affair is now known from the Pacific to the Atlantic as the "Parker Trail." No one can tell why, unless because of a magazine article, written by an outlander, which appeared at about that time, and told of the first events of the man hunt before it was even completed. The writer called the chase "The Parker Trail," and by this name it is now known everywhere, even in Fort Anxious, which knows that Parker certainly does not deserve the chief credit.

Every detail of it cannot be told, but a few of the most important and striking facts must be catalogued.

For instance: They made a five-hour halt at that first stopping place, when the Indian rose without a yawn and without a word, and sat down to eat a great slab of the fish which the boy had roasted over a small, smokeless fire. Between them, they barely managed to rouse Alabama Joe, but once the smell of food reached him, he seemed quite recovered. He sat down cross-legged, and the three of them feasted. There was enough for them all, and finally to satisfy the huge hunger of Mishe.

Having eaten and covered the trace of the fire, they put out into the stream, and paddled easily down the current.

Not a word was spoken. Alabama Joe, taking his place in the middle of the craft with his head on an edge of the pack in lieu of a pillow, instantly fell asleep again, with his poulticed hands laid across his breast. Jimmy took his place in the bow, for his own wound had recovered wonderfully. Holding the paddle in his sound right hand, he could push on the very tip of the hilt with the heel of the injured member, and so he managed to give real help to Awaskees.

It was not vigorous paddling, but it was enough to keep them spinning along at a good gait, with the current helping mightily. That same current, unluckily, was helping their pursuers, and Jimmy was not surprised when, about noon in the day, he heard a low word from the Indian, and looked back to find that a four-paddle canoe was coming swiftly after them.

Charlie Dyce had taken his men to an outlying trapper's hut, where they were able to buy a boat, and in this—a dugout, but a trimly made one—they had set off down the stream. The strokes of four paddles were more than twice as effective as the work of a man and a half, which was about the useful strength of Awaskees and his crippled crew. So, at noon in the day, Jimmy looked back and saw them coming.

Speed would not help them now. Instinctively he looked toward the shore, though Alabama Joe might prove even more of a helpless leviathan in the woods than he had been so far on the river. But, since they had to take to the land, it seemed far better to do so at once and gain as much of a lead as possible before allowing their pursuers to close up the gap between the two canoes.

Yet, though he looked back repeatedly, there was no sign from Awaskees, who kept on paddling.

They rounded a long curve, and as the trees shut out the view of the rearward boat, a new thought came to Jimmy, and instantly he had dropped his paddle and was stripping off his clothes.

It was no great task. There were not many of them, and a mere wriggle was sufficient to shed most of them, once a fastening or two had been loosed.

Then, in spite of his haste, he could not help trying the water with his hand, boy fashion, and shuddering as the ice of it ran up into his blood. That hesitation was only for an instant, and then he stood up and leaped from the center of the canoe into the air so expertly

that the light craft only staggered a little from the thrust of his feet.

So Jimmy Green flashed through the sunlight in a bright arc, and disappeared into the face of the river with not much more noise than a fish of the same size would have made in slipping home. A tuft of leaves was floating down the current. As he rose, he caught this small branch; and giving one glance toward the rapidly retreating back of Awaskees, he covered his face with the leaves and lay close to the surface, swimming just hard enough to keep his head pointed upstream.

He was naked. But he had brought with him the tool which he wanted, and that was his long-bladed hunting knife, with an edge of which even Awaskees had approved.

He carried it in his teeth, gripped by the blade, and the taste of the steel was like the taste of this adventure, as he saw the canoe of Dyce come spinning around the curve.

There was in it as formidable an array of faces as one could have picked out of the populace of Fort Anxious. For he saw there Dyce in the bow; and big Stanley Parker's weight stowed at the stern, where the greatest burden should be. And in between these two appeared Louis Duprés, a half-breed with the cunning of an Indian and the rash valor of a white desperado; and behind Duprés appeared the broad, brutal face of "Butch" Graham, whose ugliness was so great that the boys badgered him in the streets of Fort Anxious, and whose savagery was so intense that he would chase the youngsters. He had caught eight-year-old Sammy Webster in this manner, and thrown him off the edge of the bluff below the Sampson house. The depth of the pool of water at its base kept Sammy's neck intact, and prevented Butch from being lynched. However, that was his character; and Jimmy Green, as he stared out through the leaves, wondered again and again that Charlie Dyce had selected such traveling mates.

Certainly, sterling goodness had not been what he was after! But, after all, the end was the thing for him, and not the means toward it. He could not have found in the Northwest three more powerful canoe men, or much better woodsmen, either. These fellows all would march until they starved on their feet; Butch and Louis because they had the instincts of hunting dogs, and Stanley Parker because he was controlled and consumed by hunger for revenge. It seemed to the boy that he could read this emotion in the face of Parker, even at a distance; and he grew colder than even the temperature of the water. Charlie Dyce, he knew, was the fairest man in the world; but Jimmy would rather have trusted his life to a puma than to any of the other three!

As he measured the distance and watched the canoe come closer, with a wonderful unison and rhythm of paddle strokes, Jimmy could not help admiring this beautiful machine. He admired it, and then dived.

He thought at first that he had waited too long, and that the canoe had passed on above him, hurled along by the current, and by the four pairs of arms; but when he looked up through the water toward the blue dazzle of the sky, suddenly the nose of the canoe appeared, with its bow wave curling and flashing like liquid diamond. Toward the belly of the shadow Jimmy rose, striking out with his hands until he was very close. He feared, even now, that it might escape from him, but he was overanxious.

He reached it a third of the way from the stern, and ripping across and downward, he opened a great, ragged hole through which he could guess how the water was bursting upward. He stabbed again. The point of the knife

struck wood, but he wrenched it out and had time for a third blow, which laid open the end of the canoe and let the flood in there also.

He rose to the surface.

"Rocks, rocks!" he heard Butch Graham yelling in his thick, horrible voice. "You dang chump, Parker, you! Rocks you put us on——"

Jimmy took a deep breath and dived again, triumphant, for he had seen the canoe rapidly sinking.

The stream whirled him along with a strong hand; and as he rose to the surface again, safely in the distance, he saw the four struggling with bending paddles toward the nearest shore, but with the water gunwale high.

It now went in over the lip of the canoe's side. In another moment, he heard the enormous voice of Butch thundering curses.

The canoe was down!

He had hoped that it would sink in such deep water that it could not be reclaimed. As it was, the voyage of the four must be delayed for hours while they repaired the damage which he had done, and Jimmy Green swam on, laughing with pleasure, and shuddering with cold.

Then, as he came to the bend, he heard a loud shouting. A rifle clanged. A bullet cut the surface an inch from his nose and doused his face with stinging spray.

When he looked back, he saw that madman, Butch Graham, struggling to get his rifle free for a second shot, while Charlie Dyce, of course, was preventing him.

Then the current snaked Jimmy around an arm of projecting rocks, and he was out of view.

There was no canoe before him.

He took to the shore and ran down it, going hard to get his blood warm again, and as he ran, lightly, strongly, it seemed to Jimmy that the world was a better place than ever it had been before.

For this was a marvel of which Fort Anxious well could talk.

Yes, and it did so, telling how one boy met four strong men, all armed to the teeth, and stopped them, and sank their boat, and caused them the loss of a good bit of the best powder, and of two excellent repeating rifles which, together with all the weapons, had gone to the bottom of the stream. The rest were reclaimed, but now the party had two long-distance weapons alone.

Jimmy could not know this, but he had done enough to delight himself even without that knowledge; and when he came in view of the canoe, he bounded like a deer, he whooped like a young hunting wolf.

So much so, indeed, that Mishe Mukwa stood up and smiled to show all his teeth.

The Indian, however, pointed ahead to a spot where some shelving rocks ran out into good deep water. There the boy ran, and there Awaskees paused to let him spring aboard. Not an easy thing to jump into a canoe without upsetting it, without so much as seriously rocking it. But Jimmy managed that feat. Long, long hours of practice and of broken shins had taught him the mystery.

He went again into the bow and there he kneeled, swinging the paddle rhythmically, his heart light, his very soul uplifted in the expectation of praise.

Not a word of it came to him. Instead, he found himself working away with less and less joy, gloomily, his head falling. Not a syllable of commendation did they speak, and yet he bitterly told himself that they would already be in the hands of the law, if it had not been for his exploit.

All day they went on, with the tramp sleeping like one possessed in the bottom of the canoe. All day they slid on northward, and when dusk came, they paused again for a brief meal of fish, which had been caught by trolling on

the way. But before they stopped, Awaskees said:

"Brother!"

"Aye!" said Jimmy shortly.

"Is it time to rest and eat?"

Jimmy could not speak. He could only nod. For he saw that though no praise had come to him, by this feat today he had made himself a man, and equal to either of the others. Even Awaskees would condescend to ask his advice.

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

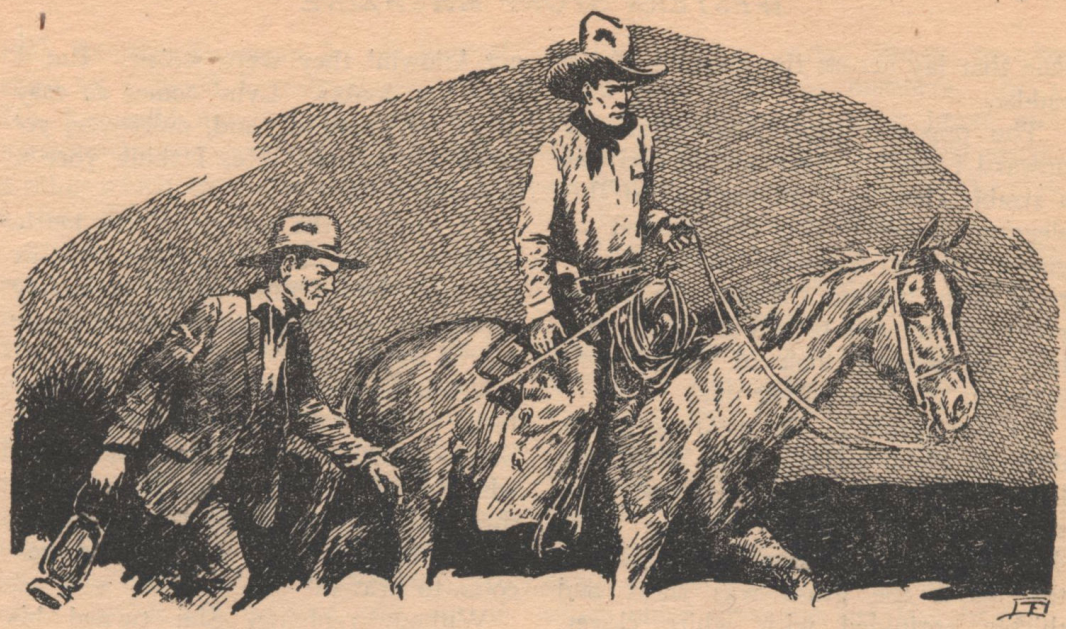
SOME BIRDS THAT MAY GO WEST

THE day of the immigrant is not yet over, and it is rather interesting to learn that some future immigrants may be winged ones. Sportsmen and hunters are finding that the supply of game birds is being seriously depleted with the human occupation of the land. In a quest for material with which to replenish the winged game supply some careful researches have been made. To these the bureau of biological survey has contributed. It is, of course, essential that the imported birds should be placed in a similar environment to that which they have left, and the various game birds of Europe and Asia have been investigated for possible importation with this in view. The pheasant seems to be the most adaptable, and some interesting suggestions have been made. For example, the precipices of California, Oregon, and Washington, which appear to lack a bird of sporting class, may most appreciate the cheer pheasant. Its name alone ought to insure this bird a welcome. The sand grouse might flourish in the deserts of the Southwest; and still another type, Elliot's pheasant, might take kindly, it is thought, to the mountains of western Texas and southern Arizona. If this desirable immigration takes place, the imported game may find themselves true birds of freedom.

WESTERN RECORDS FETCH HIGH PRICES

GREAT interest has been shown by collectors in early records of the West which have recently come upon the market. Included in a sale of colored views, lithographs, oil paintings, maps, and similar articles, relating to pioneer days of the Far West, was a document which should have especial significance for San Franciscans. This was the original manuscript town journal and official account book of San Francisco, in the handwriting of the city's first treasurer, William A. Leidesdorff. It is described in the catalogue as the first financial record of San Francisco by an elected treasurer, and contains more than two hundred entries of payments of settlers of the city for the first city survey, street construction, and similar municipal activities. The entries run from October 7, 1847, to May 2, 1848, and end with the death of the treasurer—curiously enough, a few days before the gold rush began. There is a characteristic picturesqueness in most of the records of the early history of the Western days. The price paid for this unique manuscript, which like all things of the kind is sure to be increasingly valuable, was $750.

Two pictorial items of historic significance were the original impression of one of the rare lithographs of San Francisco in 1846-7, then Yerba Buena, before the discovery of gold; and the first etching of San Francisco, which was made in 1855.



Vanishing Brands

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Branded Gold," etc.

TO the west of the shallow ford the declining sun, resembling a huge red ball of fire, seemed to balance precariously atop the distant rim rock. Within a half hour it would be dark, so quickly does night follow day in the Rio Grande country.

A quarter of a mile away, following a narrow, sun-baked trail that wound through the mesquite and chaparral, a dun-colored dust cloud rolled onward toward the river like a rapidly moving wraith. Presently the cloud resolved itself into a compact little herd of paint horses driven by two riders, one a trifle in advance of the other.

The leading rider was a man of medium height, ferret-eyed, with a thin, acquisitive mouth, and a nose which hooked sharply downward, lending to his features the predatory look of a hawk. Just now his expression was hangdog and his close-set eyes were full of meanness. His name was Sim Black.

The horseman bringing up the rear was a tall young fellow, lean, sunburned, and saddle-hardened, with a profile as clean cut as a cameo, wavy black hair, and fine dark eyes. He owned a horse ranch on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, and most of his acquaintances knew him simply by the name of Nueces.

When at last the horse herd reached the ford and stopped to drink, a third rider clattered down the opposite bank and splashed across the river. He was a Mexican, old, and small, and shriveled, who nevertheless, rode his horse with the grace of a bird on a swaying limb.

"You have the *cabollos,* señor?" he cried joyously to the tail rider.

"Aye, Pedro, every last head," replied Nueces. "Get behind yo' men, and let's shove 'em on across." He pointed forward with a short-barreled

rifle that lay across the pommel of his saddle.

The opposite bank shelved steeply upward from the river and on top was a sizable clearing. At one end of this clearing stood a pen constructed of gnarly, twisted mesquite-trunks set upright in the ground. Bleached white by years of exposure to sun and rain, they had the ghostly look of dead men's bones in the fast-falling dusk.

In the center of the clearing was a decrepit adobe building, half shed, half house, with sashless windows, and chimney that leaned sidewise at a drunken angle. Immediately around the house the grass was short and thickly sprinkled with white clover. Elsewhere, the opening was covered with a rank growth of weeds, patch after patch of shiny, broad-leaved plants hip-high to a man.

Both this weed, *hierba de leche,* the Mexicans dubbed it, and the white clover were foreign to this particular section. It was commonly supposed—and for that matter the supposition was entirely correct—that both the weed and the clover seed had in bygone years fallen from bales of hay carried for fodder by parties camping there.

When the horse herd had climbed the bank into the clearing they broke for the pen of their own accord. Nueces, bringing up the rear, stopped where Sim Black and Pedro waited by the ramshackle gate. He lifted the short-barreled rifle from across his saddle, and working the lever rapidly, ejected the shells. Then urging his horse forward, he thrust the gun into an empty saddle holster beneath Sim's right leg.

"There's yore gun," he snapped. "Now, let me put a flea in yore ear. Just because that crooked sheriff on the other side is willin' to wink at any hosses rustled from old Mexico, don't assume it's open season on my stock. Co'se, like yo' claim, yo' may have bought these hosses from some one else not knowin' they were stolen. But I have my doubts. Lyin' comes as easy to yo' as breathin', and, moreover, yo' know my brand. Me, I think yore a downright thief."

"A case of the pot callin' the kettle black, eh?" sneered Sim, who with his rifle again beneath his leg and his safety apparently assured, had regained some degree of courage.

A dull flush stained the tan of Nueces' face. "I've taken a heap from yo', Sim," he said, keeping his voice even with an effort, "but from this on, I'm through. Next time we tangle I don't aim to be so gentle. Now, yo're welcome to beat it."

Without replying, Sim turned his horse and rode down the steep bank. By this time the red ball of sun had vanished and murky twilight was at hand. When the splashing footsteps had cleared the ford and the dim image of the horseman was swallowed up by the brush of the opposite shore, Nueces dismounted, with the intention of assisting old Pedro, who was having trouble in closing the corral gate.

He had taken barely two steps before a shot rang out from the opposite bank. Spun half around by the shock of a heavy leaden slug, Nueces clutched at his left shoulder, swaying dizzily as he fought a sudden nausea. Then, before Pedro could come to his assistance, he toppled and plunged to the ground.

Possibly ten minutes later, Nueces, holding to the horn of his saddle, stood berating himself, while Pedro crudely bound his shoulder with strips torn from his shirt.

"Likely the rat carried extra ca'tridges in his saddle pockets," he was saying. "I was a plumb fool not to look. He sure is a rotten shot though. Had me sky lined at less than fifty yards. I'm lucky to be alive."

"Luck is to be preferred to riches," commented Pedro soberly. "What now, señor?"

"Help me on my hoss," directed Nueces. "I'll have to go to town and have this shoulder looked at. Meantime, yo' best start those hosses toward the ranch, even if it is dark. If we leave 'em here, no tellin' but what Sim may get some one to help and make another stab at rustlin' 'em. I wouldn't put it past him."

"But is the señor able to make the trip to town alone?" objected Pedro.

"I got to," said Nueces grimly.

"And he knows where to go?" inquired Pedro anxiously. "If not, there is an apothecary in Casa Grande named Don Juan Alverez who is more skillful than many doctors."

"I know Don Juan," said Nueces briefly. "Give me a leg up, Pedro."

It was seven miles by way of the winding river trail from the pen to the Mexican town of Casa Grande. When he started, Nueces' shoulder felt numb and dead. But soon it began to throb dully. As the miles dropped behind, each jarring impact of his horse's hoofs against the hard-packed trail brought exquisite torture.

And with each pulsing throb a mounting sense of bitterness toward Sim Black possessed Nueces. He had been too lenient simply because they both hailed from the same section, he told himself. Long since he should have stilled Sim's ever-wagging tongue. Or, at least, he should have shot him like a rat after locating his stolen horses in Sim's corral, instead of disarming him and eventually letting him go free. Slumped in his saddle, half delirious from pain, muttering and arguing pro and con, Nueces, nevertheless, rode steadily forward until the lights of Casa Grande hove in sight.

A little later Don Alverez, in response to a feeble hail, ran out of his house just in time to catch Nueces' swaying figure.

"Hasten, señora!" the apothecary shouted to his wife, as he eased the horseman to the ground. "Quickly! Prepare a bed in the guest chamber! It is the Señor Nueces, and he is wounded!"

Possibly an hour had elapsed when, stepping back from the bed, he surveyed with professional satisfaction his patient's freshly washed and bandaged shoulder.

"You were indeed lucky, amigo," he observed nodding. "An inch lower, and who knows? As it is, a month will see you well again."

Time proved that Don Alverez had estimated exactly. For it was a month to a day when one afternoon Nueces, taking his first walk of any consequence, came into the plaza and let his gaze rove about in search of old Pedro, whom he had sent word to meet him there.

Pedro was nowhere in evidence, but two horses wearing Nueces' own Circle Dash brand stood tied to a hitch rail in front of a gambling house across the square. Evidently there was a game in progress, and his henchman, unable to resist its lure, had gone inside, reflected Nueces.

He consulted his watch, undecided whether to summon Pedro or to defer until evening a certain trip the details of which he had carefully planned during the long hours of his convalescence. Good judgment told him this latter course would be wisest. After sundown he would be much more likely to find Sim Black at home. He stood fighting back his impatience, when some one touched him lightly on the arm.

"Is your name Nueces?" a feminine voice asked.

He turned, to face a slim young girl wearing riding breeches and a tan silk shirt. A few rebellious curls had escaped from beneath her small Stetson, and a pair of silver-mounted spurs gleamed against the background of her tiny boots. Her features were attractively irregular, with the hint of a dimple showing in one cheek. A healthy

tan, while it served partially to conceal, failed wholly to hide the peach-blow coloring of her skin. She had a firm little chin, and gray eyes which, just now, were filled with a troubled light.

"Yes'm," said Nueces, whipping off his hat. "Was there something yo' wished of me?"

The girl nodded. "Is there a place not quite so public where we might hold a few minutes' conversation?" she inquired.

Across the plaza was a restaurant with an adjoining patio whose blank wall had been pierced by a wide-arched doorway. The patio was filled with chairs and tables. Nueces inclined his head in that direction.

"We might step over yonder and order a cup of coffee," he suggested.

Together they crossed the square. When they gained the archway to the patio, Nueces paused.

"The's a man a few doors down who's expectin' me," he explained briefly. "I'd like to leave word with him where I am at. So if yo'll find a seat, I'll be right back."

A moment later, he entered the gambling hall. It was a typical native dive, sordid and uninviting, with a plain pine bar running the length of the room and a monte table prominent in the foreground. Clustered around this layout, like flies swarming about a lump of sugar, were a score or more of eager, hot-eyed players.

They were dark, bow-legged, little peons to whom gambling was the breath of life. Each man owned but one thing that he would not consent to risk on the turn of a card. This was his horse; in most instances, a paint. To his *cabollo* he would cling with grim persistency through thick and thin, sunshine or adversity. The sole way one could be parted from his mount was by death, or by offering him a sum so far in excess of the animal's actual value that he could replace it with another far more desirable. Nueces knew this class and their peculiarities like a book; in fact, he was personally acquainted with many of those grouped about the table.

"Look at those hombres, will yo'? he muttered in disgust, as his eyes roved in search of Pedro. "Gamblin' like a lot of millionaires. They must have struck a wad of easy money somewhere."

But all thought of what he had seen had left his mind when, shortly afterward, he rejoined the girl.

"I expect it's time I introduced myself," she began, as soon as he was seated. "My name is Nan Sommers, and I am starting a dude ranch on the south fork of the Llano, about a hundred miles north. Perhaps from that you can guess what brought me down here?"

"No'm," said Nueces briefly, wondering what this was leading up to.

"Well," continued Nan, "I will need a string of riding horses, and I decided on paints. Some one told me you bred paint horses exclusively, so I came here with the intention of looking you up. With me I brought a draft for several thousand dollars, which upon my arrival, I deposited in a bank on the American side. During my conversation with the banker I mentioned my errand, and he advised me strongly against buying any horses of you."

Nueces stiffened slightly at this frank statement. "Would yo' mind tellin' me," he interrupted, "just what reason that banker offered?"

"He said," explained Nan, her color deepening, "that you were a reputed rustler; that you lived across the border because several years ago you were caught stealing stock from your father and were forced to leave the country."

A baleful light darkened Nueces' face as he connected this with Sim Black's wagging tongue. But he made no denial.

"So naturally," Nan went on, "I inquired of the banker if he could recommend some other breeder. He said he couldn't; but he must have broadcast my errand, for a little later a man named Black hunted me up and told me he had a bunch of paint horses for sale. He explained, however, that they were in Mexico, and that it would take him several days to gather them."

"Could yo' tell me exactly how long ago that was?" interrupted Nueces quickly.

"A month and three days," Nan replied, after a moment's thought.

A sudden excitement caused Nueces' heart to pound. He had spent innumerable hours since that night the slug found his shoulder speculating just what lay behind Sim Black's attempt to rustle his Circle Dash horses. Knowing the man of old, he had seriously doubted if Sim had the nerve to keep the stock for his own use. So this was the answer!

"I was to inspect the horses one morning," continued Nan, when Nueces made no comment. "But late the night before, Mr. Black came to the hotel where I was stopping and explained that as yet he had been unable to get the horses together. However, he said he was doing his best, and that if I wished to return home he would let me know as soon as they were gathered. A few days ago I had a letter telling me they were ready for inspection. So I came back again yesterday morning."

Ever since Sim Black's name was mentioned Nueces had been trying to fathom this girl's reason for seeking him out. Now he thought he knew.

"In case yo' wish to hire me to pass judgment on Sim Black's hosses, I'm afraid I can't oblige," he interjected. "The's a little unfinished business between us two that might prevent me renderin' unbiased judgment."

If Nueces' vague explanation aroused Nan's curiosity, she did not show it. "That's not why I came to you," she contradicted hastily. "The horses were just what I wanted, twenty-five nicely marked paints, all gentle. Mr. Black had them in a pen beside an abandoned house about seven miles up river from here. I bought them on the spot for a hundred dollars each. They were a great bargain."

Had not Nueces been absolutely certain that his own horses were beyond striking distance of Sim Black, he might have been troubled. Now, however, he was only puzzled.

"Then why——" he began.

"This was yesterday afternoon," Nan went on. "I paid for the lot as soon as we got back to town and took a bill of sale specifying twenty-five horses each branded with a Lazy B on the left shoulder. Mr. Black had explained that in order to bring them across the river lawfully, I must have them inspected and furnish proof of ownership. So I hunted up the inspector, explained that I wished to cross twenty-five Lazy B horses, and presented the bill of sale as evidence of title. The inspector was busy and said he could not make the trip before the second day, which is to-morrow. That meant another thirty-six hours in the pens for the horses. I hated to think of their going as long as that without feed, so this morning I hired a conveyance and carted out several bales of hay. When I opened the corral gate I could scarcely believe my eyes."

"Were the hosses missing?" interrupted Nueces, voicing a conclusion that had been forming in his mind.

"No," returned Nan unsteadily, "the horses were still there. But the Lazy B brand was gone from each animal's shoulder."

Nueces started as if he had been shot. Then, sinking slowly back in his chair, he stared out through the arched doorway into the plaza. But he was utterly oblivious to what was taking place out

there. Although she had no means of knowing it, Nan's unexpected statement had whipped his thoughts back a full five years.

So Sim Black was making use of the knowledge that had resulted in his own banishment, Nueces was reflecting. Clever of him! Sim must have used his eyes as well as his rifle that night in the clearing. But where did he get the horses to use his knowledge on? Nueces pondered, and as the silence grew oppressive, Nan stirred uneasily.

"That's why I hunted you up," she at length broke out in a discouraged tone. "I thought possibly you might advise me what to do. Sim Black laughed when I went to him. He said that some one had undoubtedly stolen the horses he sold me and substituted these others. Of course, I knew better, for I recognized most of them by their flesh marks. The banker to whom I next appealed appeared disinterested, and when I requested the sheriff's assistance he said the matter was without his jurisdiction. So, as a last resort, I have come to you."

"Did these hosses wear other brands besides the Lazy B, ma'am?" asked Nueces, rousing from his abstraction.

"Every one," unhesitatingly replied Nan. "Before I bought, Sim Black explained that he had picked them up here and there and had never bothered to blot out the original owners' brands."

"Suppose you draw one of these brands as near as yo' remember," Nueces suggested.

"I'll try," agreed Nan. With one finger she began tracing a pattern on the table top, while Nueces watched closely. Even before she finished, his eyes lighted with sudden comprehension.

"That's Miguel Ortiga's brand," he exclaimed. "He's in town right now gamblin' at monte. If yo'll wait here while I go see him, I reckon I can tell yo' just how yo' stand."

Thirty minutes passed before Nueces returned. His face wore a sympathetic look.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said after seating himself, "but yo've been swindled. Those paints you bought actually belong to a bunch of hombres who at present are gamblin' away some easy money down the street. It seems Sim Black gave each one of them fifty dollars for a three-day option on his hoss. Meantime, the hosses were to remain in the pen where yo' saw them. In case Sim decided to exercise his option, he was to pay each owner two hundred dollars additional. It sounds like a crazy deal, in the face of his sellin' the hosses to yo' for a hundred dollars a head. But Sim wasn't runnin' any risks, at that. He knew that before the inspector got around to look at the brands every last Lazy B would have faded. And, of course, the inspector wouldn't pass a single head whose brand didn't tally with the one specified in the bill of sale. There was always the chance yo' would run 'em across regardless. But in that case yo'd be in hot water with the inspector on the other side and the rightful owners over here. In any event, Sim would be settin' Jerry with what yo' paid him for the hosses, minus the option money, and maybe a split with the banker and sheriff. A nice, easy graft if yo' ask me!"

Nan's eyes filled. "Then I have lost both the money and the horses?"

"I'm afraid so, ma'am."

Lapsing into silence, Nan studied Nueces' face across the table. What she read there convinced her that he was holding something back. A sudden flash of intuition told her what this was, and her jaw set in a determined line.

"You also know the secret of that disappearing brand," she accused. "If you'll promise to come across the river and explain to the court just how the brand was applied and what made it van-

ish, I'll sue Sim Black on the American side for the money I paid him. Any jury in the world would bring in a verdict in my favor on the strength of your testimony."

Once again Nueces stared out of the arched doorway with unseeing gaze. His shoulder, under the stimulus of an excitement he felt but did not show, throbbed painfully.

"I'm goin' to tell yo' something, ma'am, that perhaps will help yo' understand why I can't do that," he said at length, his gaze shifting back to Nan's face. "Five years ago, before I came of age that was, I accidentally discovered how to put a brand on a hoss that would look like it had been there always but would soon disappear. In a spirit of mischief I roped a dozen range mares belonging to my father and worked over his Half Circle brand into my own Circle Dash. Then, for a joke, I left the mares where he would find them. My father is a quick-tempered man. He immediately decided that I had altered the brands the previous fall intending to sell the mares as my own at the first opportunity. He flew into a rage, called me a rustler, and cutting short my explanation, ordered me to leave home. So I came down here. Sim Black worked for my father at the time and he knew how I had changed over the brand. Shortly afterward he followed me to the border, and because I refused to be blackmailed, he spread the story of why I left. That's how I came by the name of a hoss thief."

Nan nodded mutely, her face showing the sympathy she felt.

"So yo' see, ma'am," continued Nueces, "how dangerous it would be for this secret to be told in open court. Hoss stealin' is bad enough now along the river. With that knowledge in the wrong hands, it might get out of bounds."

Against her will, Nan was forced to admit there was a certain amount of logic in this argument. Then, after a moment's thought, she put her finger on its one weak point.

"But as long as Sim Black knows the secret, what's to prevent him passing the word along?" she cried.

"He's waited too long now, ma'am," Nueces answered grimly. "In the mornin', Sim Black will be dead."

"You—you intend to kill him?" Nan cried, her eyes widening.

"Aye," confirmed Nueces. "Lately, this country has grown too small for both of us."

Nan did not argue or protest. She was a Texan born and bred, and the cold finality of Nueces' tone told her that the enmity between these two was past any settling except by deadly combat.

She rose and held out her hand. "Good-by, and thank you for what you have told me," she said. "I hope that you won't be hurt."

"That's a chance I take, ma'am," replied Nueces gravely.

At dusk, Nueces, followed by Pedro, mounted his horse and took the side street leading to the international bridge. It was full dark by the time he arrived at the American town opposite. He did not pause there but continued straight on out the main street, looking neither to the right nor left, a grim, purposeful figure beneath the flickering of the arc lights.

Three miles from town he stopped, where a hundred yards to his right, the jagged outlines of a group of adobe buildings bulked against the starlit sky line. Here he dismounted and handing the reins of his horse to Pedro, he made ready for what lay before him.

His preparations, were simple. He removed his hat in order to lessen his height, shoved his pistol between his waistband and his trousers; then taking a lane that led to the distant house, he stole softly forward.

Nueces' objective was the kitchen, where he felt positive at this hour he would find Sim Black at supper. Presently he came to a gate that led into a walled patio connecting the house with a group of outbuildings behind. Opening the gate, he stepped cautiously into the patio and glanced toward the kitchen. Against the yellow glow of a curtained window a man's head and shoulders etched a black outline upon the shade. There was no mistaking the hawklike profile, and Nueces moved silently in that direction.

He had progressed perhaps ten feet when he heard a sound in one of the outbuildings, and a sudden ray of light showing through a crack caused him to freeze in his tracks. Almost at once a shed door opened and a Mexican emerged onto the patio.

While mapping out the campaign he was now following, Nueces had discounted the possibility of Sim Black's having company at the ranch. Sim was unmarried, far too stingy to keep help except when utter necessity drove him to it, and this chanced to be the quiet season. So Nueces confidently expected to beard Sim alone in his own house where, face to face, an even break and no favors asked, they would have it out man to man. But the presence of this other person put a different front on the situation.

The Mexican walked to the center of the patio, where there was an old well, its mouth curbed by a waist-high wall of stone. In one hand he carried a brightly burning lantern with a tin reflector. In the other dangled a bucket. He set the lantern on the well curb in such a manner that the full power of its reflected radiance bathed Nueces with light from head to foot. Trusting that the Mexican, concerned with filling the bucket, would not look in his direction, Nueces took the only chance left to him and remained immobile.

But, unexpectedly, the man glanced up. Nueces could read the expression on his face as it changed from surprised alarm to downright terror. Then he shot like a rabbit behind the stone well-curbing, at the same time raising the alarm.

"Beware! Señor Black, beware!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "It is the *bandido,* Nueces!"

The fat was in the fire with a vengeance! In turn, Nueces ran for the safety of the encompassing gloom. As he left the light, two red jets of flame spurted from the side of the well curb, and he heard two bullets like angry wasps buzz past his head.

Once clear of the light, Nueces whirled, and aided by a reflected ray from the lantern, he could dimly perceive a hand and arm backed by a peering face around the side of the well curbing. He shot twice, heard the Mexican's pistol clatter across the patio, and the man, howling wolfishly for mercy, scramble over the wall and make off.

Meantime, there had come no sound from within the house. The hawklike profile had disappeared from the window curtain, and that was all. Nueces advanced warily. All chance of an even break was now gone. Sim Black had all the advantage. But Nueces' determination never wavered. He had brought on this climax, and he meant to see it through.

Momentarily, he expected a spurt of red to flame from one of the darkened windows, the forerunner of a fusillade that would sweep every nook and corner of the patio. His only hope was that he perchance might get in a lucky shot before his own end came. Then, as he stopped to listen, he heard the front door slam and the sound of footsteps running along the wall outside the patio, headed in the direction of the barn.

A sudden wave of disappointment displaced the grim, cold rage that had

possessed Nueces since the night Sim Black's slug had found his shoulder. The man was an even greater coward than he had supposed! "Rat" was too complimentary a name for him, for even a rat will fight when cornered.

"I reckon," Nueces muttered, disappointment dulling his voice, "he's got away fo' good this time."

With all need for caution past, he now crossed boldly to the well curbing, and picking up the lantern, let himself out of the door through which he had entered.

Then as he started down the lane his ears caught the drum of hoofs leaving the barn and angling across the prairie. Nueces laughed with the harsh bitterness of one whose well-laid plans have met defeat, and in a sudden burst of anger he raised his gun and emptied the four remaining shots at random in the direction of the hoofbeats. Before the sound of the reports had ceased echoing flatly from the buildings at his back, he heard the crash of a horse falling.

A moment later he stood wondering at the strangeness of fate. For not one of his shots had gone home. Instead, Sim's horse, speeding blindly in the darkness, had run afoul of a tangle of rusty wire marking an old fence line and fallen. Virtually uninjured, the pony had regained its feet and made off, leaving Sim Black, dazed and shaken on the ground.

"Get up!" Nueces ordered harshly.

Sim Black never moved.

"Get up and draw yore gun!" once more commanded Nueces. "I reckon the's light enough to shoot by!"

If ever there had been a spark of courage or manhood in Sim Black, it deserted him now; for, if anything, he cowered lower, babbling, begging, pleading that his life be spared.

Nueces eyed the groveling man with a disgust that amounted to revulsion. It was out of the question to kill so arrant a coward. He was no murderer. Nevertheless, the man must be punished, and at the same time shorn of the power of doing further harm. For an appreciable space Nueces considered ways and means. Presently he laughed aloud for the second time and menaced Sim Black with his pistol.

"It's up to yo'," he snapped. "If yo' want to live, get up and walk. Otherwise, I'll kill yo' where yo' lie!"

Shortly afterward, driving Sim before him, Nueces gained the road at the spot where Pedro was waiting with his horse. He broke in on the Mexican's voluble exclamations of pleasure with a few brief directions.

"Beat it for town at once, Pedro," he ordered. "At the hotel yo'll find a young lady named Nan Sommers. Tell her that I said to be at the pen in the mornin' with the inspector and she'll find Sim Black waiting to deliver those twenty-five paint horses. Sure yo' got it straight now?"

"*Si, señor,*" replied Pedro.

"All right, then. Get a hustle on! And afterward come to the pens yourself. Later on there'll be work fo' yo'."

When Pedro had thundered away down the road, Nueces knotted one end of his rope to Sim's left wrist, tying the other to his saddle horn. Next he blew out the lantern and placed it in Sim's free hand.

"Be careful of it now," he warned, "else yo'll have to work in the dark, which won't be so pleasant considerin' what's ahead of yo'. Now march right along!"

When early the next morning Nan with the inspector arrived at the up-river pen, both Nueces and Sim Black were waiting. Sim Black was dirty and disheveled, and his hands were stained a deep, dark brown. Nueces' face was drawn, his fine dark eyes were shadowed with pain, and his hand kept seeking his wounded shoulder as if to still its throbbing.

As he opened the corral gate and motioned the inspector inside, Nan's eyes lighted. Prominent on the shoulder of each horse was Lazy B in conformity with the bill of sale.

The inspector checked the brands, examined each animal for any visible disease, then presently wrote out a permit and handed it to Nan.

This formality over, Nueces beckoned Nan to join him.

"Pedro will cross the hosses and drive 'em about ten miles up country to a place called Fargo," he explained. "Yo' best arrange to meet him there and stick yore brand on the bunch at once. After that, yo'll be in the clear sure enough."

Nan nodded, her eyes wide with happiness. "I understand," she said, "and I can't commence to thank you." She turned as if to leave, and then swung back. "It's merely curiosity on my part, but would you tell me the secret of this disappearing brand?" she asked.

A hint of a smile crossed Nueces' face, and he waved first toward the patches of rankly growing weeds in the foreground, then at a pile of stripped stalks that lay within the corral.

"*Hierba de leche,* otherwise known as milkweed," he stated briefly. "Yo' paint a hoss with the juice, and it raises a temporary welt that looks exactly like an old haired-out brand. But it'll soon disappear, as yo've found out. Anything else?"

"Only this," said Nan, thrusting forward her determined little chin. "I'm going to get in communication with your father and explain what you just told me. He's bound to forgive you when he knows just how you changed over his brand."

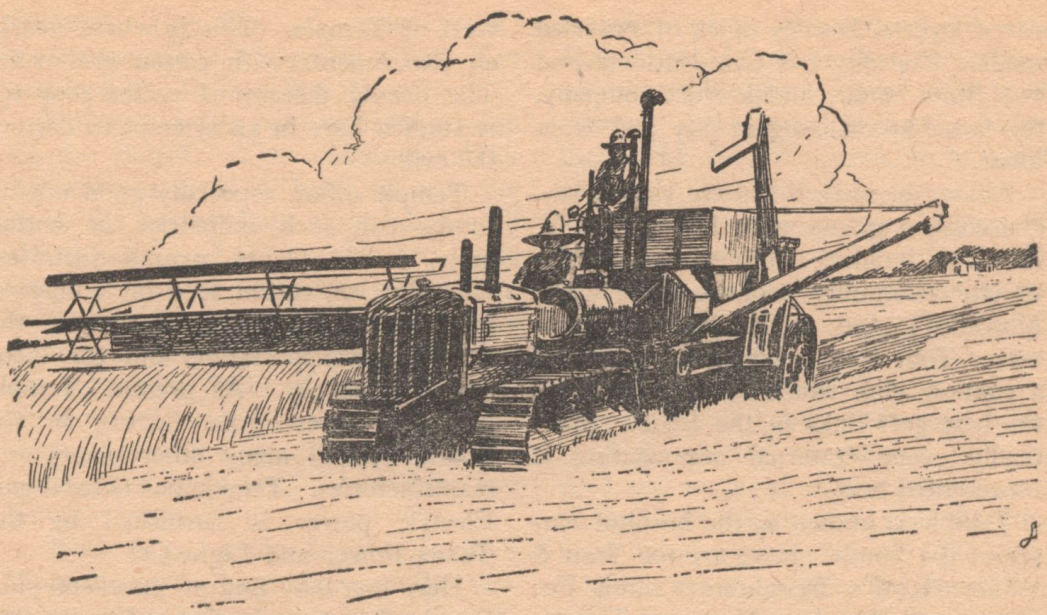
The smile that quivered about Nueces' lips expanded into a broad grin. "I wish yo' would, ma'am," he chuckled. "And yo' might also add that after Sim Black has paid off those hombres whose hosses yo' bought, he's comin' back here and under my supervision he'll grub out every last one of these milkweeds, root and branch. Then to play safe, in case I change my mind about killin' him, he's decided to leave the country. Don't forget the last part of it, please. Dad'll be interested to know there's one less hoss thief along the river. Fo' as it happens, we made up long ago and are partners in this ranch I'm runnin'."

HUNGRY TUNA

FISHERMEN of the good ship *Navigator,* who recently set out from San Diego, California, in search for tuna fish with one hundred and fifty thousand sardines for bait, were forced to throw their bait away. This seeming folly was due to the fact that the giant tuna encountered off the coast of the Cocos Island in the Pacific, two thousand four hundred miles south of San Diego, were so hungry that they bit at bare hooks, pieces of cloth, or tin cans.

This fishing ground had never been visited by fishing boats before and the fish were caught faster than they could be put in refrigeration.

The men were forced to work on three-hour shifts as the heat was so intense that they collapsed if they worked on longer stretches. At the start, twelve men working in three-pole teams busied themselves with catching the fish, while two of them took care of the captives, but the catch was so great that within a half hour they were forced to take one crew of catchers off to help those who were putting the tuna away.



Pioneer Towns of the West

(Temple, Texas)

By Duane Clark

THE first lots were offered for public sale at Temple, June 29, 1881. That opening day, over a hundred thousand dollars' worth were sold, and the judgment of the men who bought them was not in vain, for Temple has made a steady and consistent growth.

Temple was named in honor of Major B. M. Temple, chief engineer of the G. C. & S. F. railway, who surveyed this road from Galveston to Fort Worth. From a population in 1900 of seven thousand, Temple now has risen to eighteen thousand.

All around Temple the country consists of both level and rolling land. There are many cultivated farms. Cotton and grain are raised, while much of the land is used for stock raising. Temple is considered one of the most healthful cities in the Middle West. It has an altitude of seven hundred and fifty feet, and an average rainfall of thirty-five inches.

Temple is situated on the two greatest southwestern trunk-line railroads, the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe, and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas. There are about twenty-seven passenger trains daily. Fast and direct transportation to California is available, with other direct connections to Galveston, New Orleans, San Antonio, St. Louis, and the Gulf coast to the Pacific coast. There is also a direct connection from the lumber mills of East Texas and Louisiana.

Temple has one of the best financial standings of the cities of the South. It has a municipally owned and operated water supply and disposal plant valued at seven hundred thousand dollars. The filtration plant and pumping plant are capable of delivering four million gallons of water to the citizens every twenty-four hours.

All fire apparatus is modern and motorized. There are eighteen miles of

paved streets, besides miles of graveled roads. The city has two National and two State banks, and a trust company, the latter specializing in city and farm loans.

Among civic facilities are twenty-two churches, a government building, a Y. M. C. A. building equipped with an up-to-date swimming pool, an Elks Club, Masonic Lodge, a Chamber of Commerce, four weekly luncheon clubs, and a country club which boasts of one of the best golf links in the State. Practically every fraternal organization is represented here.

Temple is known as the hospital center of the South. Here are the Scott & White; King's Daughters; Santa Fe; Woodson's Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat; and the Colored Hospital. Also, there is the Dowling Veterinarian Hospital.

Besides its daily and weekly newspapers, Temple has a number of wholesale grocery houses, job printing and stationery houses, drug stores, vehicle houses, wholesale and retail sheet music shops, hardware, agricultural implement houses, wholesale coffee roasters, wholesale and retail grain dealers, bakeries, ice-cream factories, fruit and produce houses, wholesale meat houses, seed stores, lumber yards, et cetera.

Bell County, of which Temple is the center, is agriculturally important. Besides cotton, the grains raised are corn, oats, wheat, sorghum, millet, milo maize, kaffir, feterita, sudan grass, barley, rye, alfalfa, and prairie hay. Practically every kind of garden truck is grown.

Several of the finest dairy herds in the South are located in Bell County. Some fine Poland China and Duroc hogs and poultry thrive here. Purebred sheep are being placed on nearly all the farms. The State Agricultural Experiment Sub-station No. 5 is located just west of Temple. This is where nearly all experiments with cotton are made. The deadly disease of cotton-root rot is studied here in an attempt to correct the evil.

Temple offers especially good opportunity for such industries as cotton mills, textile plants, overall factories, oil refineries, cotton seed oil refineries, brick plants, et cetera, because of the excellent transportation and the labor and fuel supply. At present, Temple has the largest gum factory in the South, besides many other plants and manufactories. Temple has natural gas. Electric power is furnished by the Texas Power and Light Co.

Here one may find an excellent public-school system, having cafeterias, auditoriums, gymnasiums, and an athletic park. The system consists of a high-school building; seven two-story ward schools; a ten-room, brick, colored school, and a separate Mexican school. There are two commercial schools and a music conservatory. Also, there has been organized a Municipal Junior College, where two full years of university instruction may be had. It opened in September, 1926, and the first year received the highest commendation from the State Department of Education and the Association of Texas Colleges, the two agencies which prescribe the standards for the institutions of higher learning in Texas.

The women of Temple are members of a number of clubs, among them being: Woman's Parliament; Study Club; Domestic Club; Betty Martin Chapter, D. A. R.; The Housekeepers' Club; and the Nurses' Association.

In addition to being an ideal location for an industry, Temple is proud of its homes and home life. Temple is "A city built by home people."

A Bear-trapped Wolf

By Austin Hall

Author of "A Running Fool," etc.

PERHAPS it was premonition; or, it might have been the sudden transition from the sunny slope to the shady side of the mountain. Whatever it was, Tom Haskell sensed it immediately. One minute he had been climbing up the rugged side of Sawtooth Ridge; the next, he was on the other, where he could look down at the basin, deep and cool, cloaked in the somberness of the dying day. The feeling came like a wave, a tensed restlessness which he could not define.

Something was wrong.

Six years before, Tom Haskell had lingered in this very country, had noted its contour, the plentiful signs of fur, and its isolation. Just the place for a winter's trapping, he had decided. Also, he had discovered an abandoned cabin with a stove, dilapidated tables, and rickety camp tools. At that time he had been busy farther North; but he had never forgotten the place. Neither had he heeded the rumors current about the Topknots—of their ruggedness, and of the unknown terror that ruled them. Once he had overheard a remark in a saloon. A pair of old line trappers were leaning against the bar rail.

"Ah, m'sieu!" a half-breed was saying. "Not for ten tousand dollar would Pierre go dere. Hey? Zee Topknots? Zee home of zee 'Black Wolf'! Does not Pierre know? 'Poleon Gareaux he go so." The breed had drawn his finger across his throat. "And Jules Labeau. *Mon Dieu!*"

Tom Haskell had not been interested at the time; but now it was all coming back. Why hadn't he questioned the man? And what was the reason now for his sudden recollection? Certainly there was nothing in the landscape to arouse suspicion; the woods were gleaming with colors, the streaks of early autumn; the streams rippled, and the birds chirruped in the treetops. It was the same place he had left six years before—the hills undulating from the central ridges, the green billow of

the spreading forest, and the same sky. Once he had fallen in love with it, but now——

Tom Haskell tapped his burro and began the descent of the ridge; but, in spite of his effort, he could not get away from the feeling. He was certain that some one had watched him pass over the summit, and that he was still being kept under surveillance. The way led down a hogback, along the sides of a ridge, and across a ravine. Just as he was crossing a wooded brook, he noticed something in a pocket gully, half hidden under a decaying log. He stopped and climbed up; and what he discovered did not tend to allay his strange foreboding—the scattered skeleton of an animal, with the leg bone still in the trap. Undoubtedly, a lynx. The trap itself was rusty and stiff; but still good for use. Haskell pried it open and tossed it upon his pack. But what of the trapper?

Once again Tom hurried along, cutting to the crest of the ridge, and finally reaching the old log cabin. It was just nightfall, the stars were beginning to come out, and the moon was lifting a silver slice over an eastern summit. The door of the cabin was off its hinges; a litter of leaves covered the floor. That was all as he expected; but as he entered, he drew in a deep breath. Dishes were in the cupboard, pots and pans, blankets on the bed! Exactly as some one had left them. Also, there was a litter of sticks and trash in one corner, stuffed with shining objects gathered from the room and several hunks of rags. A pack rat's nest! Tom lighted a match and was rewarded by seeing a pair of bright eyes; then an object scooted across the floor. A full-grown pack rat.

"Huh," Tom mumbled. "Well, rat, I'm kinda glad you're here, at that. You're something alive, anyway. And you show me that I ain't a-trespassing on nobody's property. But I wonder what become of the fellow who owned the blankets?"

In ten minutes he had cleared the rubbish from the room and routed the inhabitants. After that, he cleaned the stove and built a fire. Soon he had supper, and then he began installing his own property. But he could not rid himself of that queer apprehension. He began rummaging around, and, finally picked up a scrap of paper in a corner. The writing on it was indistinct and obscure, but he made it out:

Sig Nelson

Just that; no date, nothing more. It might have been a scrap of a letter, or almost anything; but Tom felt sure that it was the name of his predecessor. A Swede! And a Swede was not the man to be frightened away by anything trivial. Tom Haskell fixed the bed and rolled up in his own blankets. The last thing he remembered was the word Sig. It kept returning "Sig, Sig." Finally, as he was dropping into the borderland of slumber, the thing worked itself out. Sig was short for Sigurd. And there was never a man by the name of Sigurd who knew what it was to quit. Yes, something strange had happened here.

However, morning air is a splendid tonic. When Tom awoke, the sun was almost up; the air tingling with an early frost. Over the cabin roof a big chestnut was dropping its bursting burs; while down by the brook a number of squirrels were holding a harvest consultation. Haskell was glad he had come early in the season; it would give him an opportunity to look over the country and select the most suitable places for his traps. After a breakfast of bacon and coffee, he shouldered his gun, striking south along a trail that led from the cabin. All that morning he strolled about the hills, hunting out sign, and weighing the advantages of different locations. The signs of "var-

mint" were plentiful—lynx, coon, fox, and fisher. Creeks flowed between the ridges—everything was as he would wish it. Finally, after a long detour, he headed back toward the cabin, striking an easy trail which he would use later in the season. Suddenly he stopped.

Another skeleton—and another abandoned trap!

This time the animal was of a smaller species—caught in a smaller trap. But the effect was the same on Tom Haskell. The sinister feeling came back. Tragedy! He was working on hoodooed territory. With a laugh, he shrugged it off and appropriated the trap. After all, what was one man's misfortune could be another man's luck. He climbed the ridge and headed toward camp. Then, just as he was trudging along the trail again, something brought him up with a jerk.

Another skeleton!

Half across the path the thing lay—the grimmest object he had ever beheld. The bones of a man! The clothes torn and ripped to pieces; the shoes still on the feet. Trapped! The left foot caught in the jaws of a huge bear trap, the end chains fastened to saplings on either side.

Murder or plumb carelessness!

Tom Haskell did not know which; but it accounted for the animals that had been left to die, and the sudden disappearance of Sig Nelson. The facts were evident; no trapper can extract himself from a bear trap without the aid of clamps. The sight brought a shudder to the lonely Haskell. Just a slip, and the man had been made a prisoner. But he was a trapper, and he must have carried his tools. And what agony he must have gone through! The saplings on either side were worn deep where the poor chap had worked the chains; but they had been chosen well; both out of reach. That set Tom to thinking.

Certainly, the man should have had a knife and a gun. No trapper is ever without them. But Tom could find nothing. The clothes were rotten and ripped; the bones prostrate; but at length he located something in the good shoe, under the heel. As he drew the shoe off, a soiled notebook fell out. Here, undoubtedly, was the man's last will and testament. It had been wet by the rains of the season, and the leaves were welded together; but on the outside page he discovered what he was looking for—a note scrawled in pencil.

I am Sigurd Nelson, trapper. Black Wolf did it. Look out for Black Wolf.

SIG NELSON.

That was all; but it was enough. The man had been murdered—undoubtedly, for his furs. Whoever the Black Wolf was, or wherever he had come from, he was possessed of diabolical ingenuity. What could be more perfect than to have a trapper enscared by his own trap! It would look like a blunder. An accident! In case of discovery, the Wolf's case would be perfect. But who would even think of the murderer?

Tom Haskell had picked the answer out of the shoe. Leave it to a trapper; the dying man had placed his letter where it would endure through the seasons. And now Tom Haskell could return his discovery to the sheriff; after that, the officers could hunt out the Wolf. However, Tom Haskell had a great deal of work ahead of him, and he disliked that trip down to the county seat. As it turned out, that part was to be taken off his hands.

When he returned to his cabin, he was surprised to see a column of smoke curling from the chimney; a smell of fried bacon filled the air. Company! For a moment Tom was cautious and undecided. The newcomer might be the mysterious Wolf; but almost instantly his fears were allayed by a

husky-looking individual's stepping to the doorway. A man with a star! Either a deputy or the sheriff himself. Here was a stroke of luck that the trapper had not anticipated! The officer greeted him with a smile.

"Found your stuff inside, and thought I'd make myself at home," he explained. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Tim Graham, you know. I followed you up the Sawtooth Ridge yesterday. That is, I got almost to the summit. You came into the Topknots from the other side, didn't you? Well, it's a lucky thing I picked up your trail. Come on in. Supper's about ready. Guess you must be hungry."

Tom found himself gazing at a heavy, squat man, a veritable Hercules in his way, with blue eyes rather closely set, and reddish hair. A livid scar under one ear was his distinguishing mark, that, and long arms and a pair of hands that were about the largest the trapper had ever seen. But the man was an officer and that was sufficient. In a few minutes Tom had related all that he had learned. The other listened attentively; his eyes grim. In an instant, he had become an officer all over.

"Humph!" he muttered shrewdly. "Another, eh? Well, as I remarked in the beginning, it's a mighty lucky thing I picked up your trail. The Black Wolf! We'll have to look into this. There's a reward for that fellow that runs into four figures; but this is the first time we've ever got a real case against him. He's been working here for years; but no one has ever seen him or knows what he looks like. Black Wolf. That's just a name they call him because of his ways—him always working in the dark. Wait till the sheriff hears the news. What did you do?"

"Nothing," answered Tom Haskell truthfully. "I—I wasn't exactly decided."

The visitor lit a cigarette; his shrewd eyes on the trapper.

"Well, don't do any more," he cautioned. "To-morrow I'll go down and take a look for myself. After that, I'll report to the boss and he'll bring up the coroner. That's the law, you see. We want everything just as it was found, so we can follow up all the clews and get at the facts. Some one has got to pick up this Wolf mighty pronto. I suppose you'll be moving out now, eh?"

But he did not know Tom Haskell; the trapper merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should I?" he asked. "You certainly don't think I'd be fool enough to be caught in one of my own traps, do you? As for this Black Wolf, I'll admit I don't like him; but there are lots of other things I don't like. Besides, I'm a trapper and have to accept all kinds of chances. It's in the game. You play it alone, and if you lose, all right and good, that's just your hard luck. The main thing is furs. This is a mighty good country, and I'm goin' to stick. Mebbe I'll get the Black Wolf himself. Who knows? From what you say about him, I gather he'd be worth a pair of silver foxes. That's an inducement all by itself."

Tom Haskell rather liked Deputy Graham. The man had an insinuating manner; and he knew the country. Sitting there by the firelight, the visitor related many a tale about the Topknots, many of which seemed to center about the mysterious Wolf. Early next day the officer went down to look over the body, and after that, he accompanied Tom about the ridges to assist him in picking out his trap sets. Late in the afternoon he headed for the Sawtooth and the county seat. His last words to Tom Haskell were a warning:

"Keep your eyes open, fellow, and be careful. But I really don't think you have anything to fear until the trapping season. That bird is after furs.

Money! Just like any other crook! In the meantime, I'll get the chief. You can look for us in a few days.

However, a few days brought no sign of the sheriff. Tom continued about his work as usual. The cabin soon became the neatest kind of an abode; all the trappings of the season were gone over. When the first snow came along, he proposed to be ready. Traps were oiled, and the impedimenta for drying the pelts built ahead of time. But still there was no sheriff. Tom began wondering. Perhaps the Black Wolf had headed the deputy off. And if he had he——

When he got so far in his reflections, Tom Haskell always changed the subject. But it kept coming back. Try as he would, he could not banish the element of treachery from his mind. At night he would wake up thinking—wondering. Each sound, however trivial, was enough to startle him. But still he swore to himself that he was not afraid.

The nights grew longer; and then at length a heavy rain set in, drifting in sheets and finally turning to snow. One morning he woke to discover a white landscape, with the storm growing thicker every minute. The blizzard kept up for several days, and then to Tom's delight capped off with zero weather. Henceforth, he was busy with his trap line. In less than two weeks his catch was coming along strong—the finest he had ever seen. Prime hides, some of them of rare variety. Best of all, along about the fourth week, he caught a big silver fox. The Topknots were turning out to be all that he had expected and a great deal more. If it kept on, Tom told himself, he would go out with a real young fortune.

However, he did not forget the Black Wolf. And he kept wondering about the deputy. What could have happened to him? Then, there was always that weird feeling of uncertainty—the sensation of being watched. But still Haskell could find no sign, no track, no positive indication of any man in the country other than himself. Nevertheless, he did not propose to be caught napping. The more the furs piled up, the greater would be the danger. So he took care of that. As fast as the pelts were cured, he carried them to a cache and hid them away where only a wizard could have found them.

Deep winter came with its silence, long nights, and cold, white days. Tom Haskell worked on, never stopping. And still no signs of the officers; until at length he became sure that there had been treachery somewhere. He began thinking about going to the sheriff himself. But about that time the game began running better than ever, and he delayed his departure. Then, without a particle of warning, the great thaw broke over the mountains. A warm rain fell, and the snow disappeared; after that came a spell of hot weather, a veritable summer week, putting an end to the trapping season. The first poor hide was soon to show. One night Tom sat by his fire, smoking; it would be his last. Next morning he started out to pull up his line.

Just before daylight he set out, hitting along the trail that led to the north, whence he would circle and swing back with his empty traps. Next day he proposed to pick up his furs and head for the settlements. The season had been prosperous beyond all expectations; Tom Haskell was happy. The trail was still dark; it was just before dawn, and he had no light. Besides, a wind had been blowing the night before, scattering débris over the path. The two facts together might have been the cause of what happened. As Tom was passing between two logs, he heard a sudden sound, and it seemed in the flash of that second that the earth itself had suddenly leaped up to bite off his foot. A Titanic monster that came out of no-

where, caught him, tripping him to the ground. But before he fell on his face, he realized what had happened.

A bear trap!

The Black Wolf again! Playing the same old game—in the same old way, and he had been fooled. Tom instinctively reached for his gun; but before he could touch it, something struck him from behind; blackness descended. After that he knew nothing.

When he regained consciousness, he turned over, twisted himself about, and looked up. It was now broad daylight; the sun was warm. A squirrel was rummaging about a sugar pine and gazing down to see what it was all about. In fact, Tom was not quite certain himself. His mind was muddled and thick; his head throbbed with pain. His foot was numb and swollen from broken circulation. And—oh, yes! There was the trap! Things began clearing. The Black Wolf had struck him over the head with a blackjack. A crook's own weapon! Anyway, it had put him out. His left leg was in the trap; it was a wonder it hadn't been broken. Sticks and twigs caught in the jaws had stopped its force; and in that much he was lucky. Instantly he began taking note of his predicament—and of his chances.

The trap had been set nicely, midway between two logs—one of them a pitch pine—that lay on either side of the trail. But from where he was, he could reach neither. Nor could he open the trap. The springs on either side were of mighty stiffness; there was no hope except to jack them down with his clamps. Then for the first time, he really understood the extent of the Wolf's cunning. He ran his hands through his pockets and glared about him. He had been picked clean; his revolver was gone, his sack, every vestige of a tool, not a thing left. Just a few stray matches overlooked in his jumper pocket; that was all.

It was the same thing that must have happened to Sigurd Nelson. Only, he had starved to death; which was something that Tom Haskell did not propose to do.

"Of all the durn fools!" he muttered. "And now I'm getting just what I deserve. And me a trapper? Huh! I was wise to his game, and then fell right into it. I ought to be shot. Me starting out in the dark. If I'd 'a' waited for daylight, it wouldn't have happened. Still, I've got to get free. Let's see now. There isn't a chance in the world of my working myself loose from that trap. Wow, my leg!"

The foot in the trap had swollen; a pain shot up the limb; but the bone was intact. Try as he would, Tom could not budge the trap from its setting; his best efforts merely lifted it up. After a bit, he sat still again.

"Huh!" he muttered. "Well, that's not going to help me a bit. Poor old Nelson! How he must have suffered! Isn't there something I can do? It's sure tough to lose out like this. But, anyway, when the Wolf goes after the furs, he won't find them. Hello! Listen."

From the direction of the cabin came the sound of some one pounding; boards ripping. Tom Haskell smiled grimly.

"Ain't so good, old fellow, is it? If you locate them furs, you're a dandy. But mebbe you'll be back to torture the secret out of my hide. And I kinda wish you would, so I could get a glimpse of what you look like. In the meantime, I guess I better lie still."

The sounds continued for an hour; and once there was rustle of footsteps down the trail. But no one appeared. After that, all was still again. Tom's foot had swollen to an enormous size; his left leg was entirely useless. Time and again, he went through his pockets—to find only the matches. But at length an idea flashed on him.

Why not?

The log to his left was of pitch pine. If he could set it afire, he could loosen the trap chain. No sooner thought of than done. By painful gymnastics, he succeeded in catching hold of a dead limb and pulling it toward him. That done, he began using it as a sweep, pushing the leaves about him in a heap, and spreading them in a windrow toward the log. With one swing, he touched something just out of his reach —a piece of bright metal. He wondered what it could be.

However, just at that moment he was more interested in the dry leaves. Soon he had gathered a respectable pile of them; and what was still better, he found several pitch splinters that had been broken from the log. Next, he scratched a match, holding it down and nursing the tiny flame against the leaves. Slowly it caught, and began smoldering along the windrow. Tom helped it by blowing. Straight for the log it went, where it caught among the débris and appeared to go out. But a streak of flame began licking along the side. The trapper watched it hopefully. wondering whether the log was too wet, but in the end the blaze began to circle around the pitch, and before he knew it, it had taken a firm hold.

Ten minutes after that, Tom Haskell was having the time of his life; the log became a furnace directly in front of his face, ripping, snapping, popping, throwing off the heat of an inferno. But there was no way out; it was his only chance. When he was not fighting firebrands from his clothes, he was rubbing his hands and face with the soft, wet dirt from under the trap. And all the while he kept testing the chain, pulling, pulling, hoping it would loosen. And at last it did.

With one end of the trap free, he was able to pull away from the fire and give his attention to the other log. At the end of a half hour, the other chain was loose. He was able to hobble away. But just as he turned, he thought of the shining metal, crawled over to examine it, and shoved it in his pocket. After that he dragged himself on his hands and knees toward the cabin, pulling the heavy trap with his left leg. Altogether, it was the most painful trip he had ever made. But after what seemed an eternity he finished it. Sure enough, everything was as he expected to find it; the floors ripped, the mattress torn apart, the whole place littered.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Well, he didn't get anything. I saw to that. Looks like it'll be my turn now. And I fooled him with the trap. Now to get the durn thing off."

Here again he was fortunate; he was able to devise a clamp for one of the heavy springs; then, by means of a cord, he tied down the steel, while he worked at the other side. In half an hour he was a free man.

However, in more ways than one, Tom was still a prisoner. He could scarcely move; and it would be days before he would be able to use his leg. Likewise, he had much to do. But first of all, he slipped over to the wall and unearthed a hidden gun. With that in his possession he felt more secure; next he hunted up some food, and rested after he had eaten. Toward night he began crawling back to the log, where for an hour he was very busy. Finally, he returned to the cabin and climbed into bed. In spite of his pain, he fell asleep.

Tom Haskell awoke in great pain to find the sun was shining through the window. His leg was so swollen he could scarcely move it. The flesh was purple. He would have to see a doctor.

A doctor? There was far more chance of his seeing the Black Wolf. The fellow was pretty certain to come back; no doubt, the crook would en-

deavor to extract the secret of the furs from Tom. But when he thought of that, Haskell smiled grimly and touched the .45 by his side. The Black Wolf would be in for a little surprise. Tom began thinking about the sheriff and the visit he had received from the deputy when he first came to the mountains. Yes, and the deputy had started to bring the sheriff. Once again, the trapper smiled. He was thinking—of the Black Wolf!

He was still musing when a footstep sounded on the trail above the cabin. No doubt, the Wolf himself! But this time Haskell was prepared; the touch of the .45 was a mighty pleasant feeling. Closer and closer came the sounds. Some one was talking. Tom's tongue was glued to the roof of his mouth. A shadow flitted past the doorstep; two men entered. The first man, a big fellow, wore a sheriff's star. Tom knew him in an instant. The second man, Deputy Graham, had his coat buttoned. Tom Haskell lay perfectly still.

"Well," he said, looking past the big man toward the deputy. "You was a mighty long time getting the chief, hey, Graham? I've been looking for you all winter. Oh, I know how it is. Something must have happened, I suppose. Sure did—to me, at least. Just take a good look at that leg. How about it?"

The tones were biting, sarcastic. As Tom threw back the blankets, the deputy reddened. He appeared ill at ease; he could scarcely meet the other man's gaze.

"What the dickens!" he blurted out. "Did he get you too, old fellow? Honest, Haskell, please let me explain. But tell me first, how did this happen?"

There was not much to tell; but what there was, Tom told freely. When he was through, he pointed at the bear trap.

"And that's his implement of warfare," he announced grimly. "I had a heck of a time getting loose. But I made it. Gosh, I'm mighty glad you're here!"

But just then he noticed that Graham was by the door; the deputy had been gradually slipping back; all at once he disappeared. The sheriff had started asking questions on his own hook. Tom noticed his big gray eyes, kindly and honest. The old man drew out a cigar, passed one over to Haskell, and went on talking. The trapper was listening, but not to the sheriff. Suddenly, his keen ears caught a sound. At the same instant, his hand slipped from the covers, holding the big .45. He had the sheriff covered.

"All right, chief," he snapped. "Stick 'em up high and keep 'em there! Now then! Walk over here and turn your back. Oh, I mean it! Every word. Too many wolves in these mountains. Black ones too. I ain't taking any more chances. Understand? Once stung, always wise. There, now, I've got your guns. What do you think of my little game, eh?"

He laughed and tossed the confiscated weapons upon the back of the bed. The sheriff was the most puzzled man he had ever seen. Tom Haskell was almost sorry for him.

"Oh," he said softly, "you look all right to me, chief. You're a regular old-fashioned sheriff—honest, clean-cut, and fearless. But, as I say, I ain't taking no chances. What will you give me for the Black Wolf. Hey?"

Tom Haskell stopped to let the words sink in; it was plain to be seen that the old sheriff was puzzled. His keen gray eyes gave an appraising glance about the room, coming back at last to the wounded trapper.

"Hey," he exclaimed sharply. "The Black Wolf? Just what do you mean? I would give a good deal, of course. But what's the idea of this foolery? You don't think——"

But Tom Haskell interrupted.

"Yes," he said. "I do a whole lot of thinking; in fact, I've been thinking ever since yesterday. Let me ask you where you ran across your deputy? Or did he come with you from the county seat?"

This time it was the sheriff who was thinking; his eyes had narrowed.

"Jim Graham?" he exclaimed. "You —you don't mean——"

"I asked you where you met him?"

"Why—why——" stammered the officer. "On the other side of the Sawtooth. He'd been out hunting for the Black Wolf. What are you grinning at?"

"A lot," answered Tom Haskell. "In fact, it's almost funny. Did he want to come back?"

"Why, er—yes! He was heading this way when I found him. In fact, he wanted to come alone. But I wouldn't let him. Kept him with me. But, say, man, what the dickens are you driving at?"

And then Tom Haskell sprang his trump card.

"Just this," he announced. "The Black Wolf is none other than your trusted deputy, Jim Graham. Oh! Don't jump out of your chair. I happen to know all about it. Also, I have the evidence. If you'll just step down that trail, you'll find that I'm telling you the truth. Listen!"

He stopped.

"Do you hear the curses! Well, that's the Black Wolf down there in a bear trap. Hey! And he's looking at a little piece of metal that he dropped when he slugged me over the head. His own star! You'll know it, because it's got a dent on one of the points. I picked it up when I was building that fire. And I used it as a bait when I reset the bear trap—exactly where I had been caught. Yep, sheriff, I'm a pretty good hand at setting those things myself. I knew he'd come back after his star; but I didn't figger on you. This trap here on the bed. Well, I just used that as a decoy; to keep him from suspecting the one in the trail. This is the one he used on Sig Nelson. I let him look at it, just to fool him."

There was no doubt of the sheriff's wonder.

"The dickens!" he exclaimed. "Man, man, go on! The Black Wolf! Jim Graham!"

"None other," announced Tom Haskell. "He's down there taking some of his own medicine. Caught in his own trap. And he brought along the sheriff himself to look over the evidence. Oh, it's a pretty little picture. And am I lucky? Well, that will make two more silver foxes—without even skinning him. And I'm thinking I can use the reward. Well, don't let me keep you. Go down and take a peep for yourself. Then come back and help me with my leg. I know your face; and I can see you're honest and safe. Take your guns, bless you!"

But the sheriff was on his way The Black Wolf was caught. Tom Haskell was satisfied.

FOOD FOR SILVER FOXES

A NEW form of food is to enliven the existence of the silver foxes on the Hawkeye-Itasca silver fox ranch near Vinton, Iowa. They are in fact to dine during the coming year on jack rabbits from North Dakota.

The meat of jack rabbits is said to be unusually fine for the foxes who are evidently in luck. Recently a carload of six thousand of the big rabbits was received from Bismarck, North Dakota. The shipment, which weighed twenty-four thousand pounds, was put in cold storage.

The Humanness of the Indian

(Were The Indians Lazy?)

By Kathleen Ludwick

IN an article by Doctor M. R. Harrington, a distinguished and most interesting writer, entitled "On the Trail of the First Pueblos," appeared this vivid paragraph:

Bit by bit, the life story of a vanished people takes form—a story not without its human interest and its pathos. Such things as the imprint of a woman's hand on the plastering of a ruined wall; the bones of a pet puppy in the grave of a baby; the last rich gift of treasured beads lavished on the dead body of a beloved child—all make us realize that they, too, lived and worked, loved and lost, very much as we do to-day.

The same might be said of the Indians who inhabited the West at the time of the white invasion. They differed little in their humanness from ourselves. They loved and laughed and mourned very much as we do, although they manifested their emotions differently.

It is plainly to be seen from the article referred to above and from other writings of this noted archæologist that his attitude toward the modern Indians who have labored intelligently, cheerfully, and willingly for him in his work of excavating the ancient caves and lost cities of Nevada and other Western States, is not only just but sympathetic, and that for many members of this much maligned race he cherishes real respect and admiration. I think it is the same with the broad-minded and tolerant people everywhere who have known the Indians best and who regard them, not as beings but little higher than animals, but as younger brothers, so to say; much as the seniors in high schools might regard the eight-graders of the grammar schools.

Were we to select a small percentage from certain classes of white Americans, whose total numbers would correspond to those of the Indians in the

United States a few generations since, it is quite probable that we should have a mass of people whose behavior would be very much like that of the Indians under similar conditions. It is problematical whether the white savages would measure up to the red men as far as industry goes, until they fully realized die!" to use an expression common in the West since the days of '49. Probthis coast since the days of '49. Probably among them would arise characters like Chief Joseph of the Nez Percés—whose military strategy would compare favorably with that of a Napoleon—or a Winnemucca, chief of the Piutes, patriot and statesman, who towered above their people as Washington and Lincoln towered above their fellows.

The battle of the ethnologists and archæologists rages around the origin of the Indian. It would not be surprising if they finally agreed that, just as the American nation to-day is composed of members of many and diverse races brought together here for some inscrutable purpose of Omniscience, the various Indian tribes are the descendants of peoples indigeous to the soil like Europeans and Asiatics, and also of immigrants from various and distant regions of the earth. No doubt, some of them came from Asia, probably from China and Japan, sailing along the coast of Siberia and Alaska, or, blown out of their course, straight across the Pacific from island to island now sunk beneath the surface of the Pacific, as the Hawaiian Islands may be in course of time; perhaps they are descendants of colonists from the legendary Atlantis, a theory which now seems to be regarded with more respect than formerly. To me, at least, the idea that all the American Indians are descendants of immigrants from some particular country is absurd.

It is quite common in some places to hear the phrase, "The lazy Indians," but fair-minded people who know them best respect them for their industry, realizing the great handicap under which all their undertakings were conducted. The amount of labor required for a mere existence was prodigious.

They were compelled to kill the game which formed their staple article of diet, to erect their homes, to produce their clothing, to procure their fuel, without any metal tools or implements whatever, before the coming of the whites. An appalling task to confront even the white man, with his boasted superiority.

Before the Northern Indians could erect their simple shelters, the women must weave the mats for covering from rushes and other materials, gathered miles away, perhaps; the hunters must bring home the game from whose pelts would be fashioned the heavier coverings for the *campoodie,* and the women must tan the skins. In the event that the lodge was a more permanent structure and built of poles, the trees and branches must be *burned* through instead of being sawed or chopped with axes.

Even modern hunters, with the latest in firearms, find hunting an arduous and exhausting pastime. With the Indians, equipped with only the most primitive weapons, it was the hardest kind of toil, including the bringing home of the game on their shoulders. With them it was a matter of routine, almost daily work, except when snow or tempests rendered it impossible. To provide a family of five or six with meat from the chase of small animals such as deer and antelope, rabbits and fowls, and set aside a reserve for winter, was "some job." Safety from famine required forethought and economy—and some of the Indian women were good managers, comparing favorably in that respect with their white civilized sisters.

The women gathered cereals, herbs for medicine, dug roots for food, and preserved everything possible for win-

ter. They skinned and cleaned the game and fish, smoked it, and preserved it in other ways. They walked long miles for fruit, gathered it, and carried it home, often bearing their papooses on their backs as well. They stored their food in containers which they themselves must fashion, first trudging miles perhaps to secure the material. All game bladders were carefully preserved for containers, chiefly for fats. They wove the huge conical baskets in which they carried home their cereals and fruit; small willow baskets; large, shallow, tightly woven baskets hardly more than mats, used for shakers when they winnowed the hulls from the grain; and countless other baskets of varying shapes and sizes. They could not run down to the store for a paper of needles. They had to make their needles from small leg bones of animals. The sinews of all animals were saved for making thread.

The Indian women manufactured their own culinary utensils, weaving their cooking baskets so closely that they would hold water once they had been well soaked. They wove water bottles and covered them with pitch. They made mortars, large and small. Of course, these did not require frequent renewal, but even mortars will wear out in time. They made spoons from the breastbones of swans and other fowls.

With stone and flint knives they scraped, and cleaned, and tanned the pelts from which nearly all their clothing was made, and the skins for covering their *campoodies* in cold weather. The Indians of southern Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico grew cotton and raised sheep for the wool to weave the cloth for their blankets and garments. The Northern and Western Indians knew little of the art of weaving, although they used the fibres of aspen and cottonwood bark, milkweed, and other plants, for weaving hats, coarse cloth for skirts, bags, and cordage. They made robes from the skins of beaver, mink, fox, and other animals. They cut strips from rabbit skins, twisted them together, and made them into blankets and robes, sewing them with bone needles and using sinew for thread. Not a process in the production of food and clothing but entailed wearisome or arduous labor and infinite patience. Much of their product was durable. I have seen cooking baskets a hundred years old. The moccasins and leggings, wore out quickest.

When the women had nothing else to do (?) they fashioned quivers, and belts, and war bonnets for their lords and masters, embroidering them with beads and gayly dyed porcupine quills, claws of the bear, the teeth of the elk.

Much of the prejudice against the Indians arose from the fact that the majority of the intruders into their country lacked sympathy and insight. They failed, from ignorance and otherwise, to give due weight to that much-debated factor of mutation. Also, their viewpoint was colored by cupidity and animosity.

The Indians were confronted with some of the gravest problems that any race has ever been compelled to solve—readjustment within a frightfully inadequate space of time to absolutely new and different conditions from those before obtaining in their lives and those of their ancestors for long ages. Within the space of a few decades they were compelled to adjust themselves to a changed environment, to seek new sources of food and clothing with strange equipment that must have appeared appallingly complicated to their simple minds. The elder Indians were dazed and bewildered by the immensity of the problem. Few of them solved it. They went apathetically through the rest of their lives, victims of the worst type of nostalgia—homesickness for the old conditions, unable to adapt themselves to the new. Their conquerors

treated them in the main as a despised and subject race, with insult and hatred and ridiculing their efforts toward adjustment in this bewildering situation, instead of patiently endeavoring to aid them.

For some fifteen years, off and on, Captain Jim, a subchief of the Piutes in northern California, with his wife, Minnie, a niece of Chief Winnemucca, occupied a *campoodie* on our place, the distance of two city blocks from our house. He was probably a grown man when he first saw an ax and shovel; and yet, fifteen years after the first whites settled in our valley, this Indian chieftain, not deeming honest toil beneath his dignity, dug not only a cellar but a well for us; he dug postholes and built fences; cut down juniper trees and "snaked" them down the steep mountainside above our house, using a horse for the purpose. Often we would hear the sound of crashing trees and catch glimpses of a lithe, brown body, naked except for breechclout and moccasins, vigorously swinging an ax. In the section of our own garden that my father allotted for his use, Captain Jim raised as good crops of melons, potatoes, corn, squashes, and other vegetables, as our own. And he had never seen a hoe or plow or garden until he was grown.

When I hear people talk about "the lazy, shiftless, worthless Indians" I think of Jim, the Piute chieftain, and his handsome, industrious, and kindly wife, Minnie, a Piute princess, in true dignity and nobility of character the equal of any white woman I have ever known.

KING OF THE FOREST

TEN years ago the lion was a true "King of the Forest," in the State of Colorado. Here he lived in the rough, isolated, mountainous sections, venturing out only at night to prey upon unsuspecting sheep, cattle, and deer. Being a crafty night prowler he was seldom seen, but the results of his raids were keenly felt.

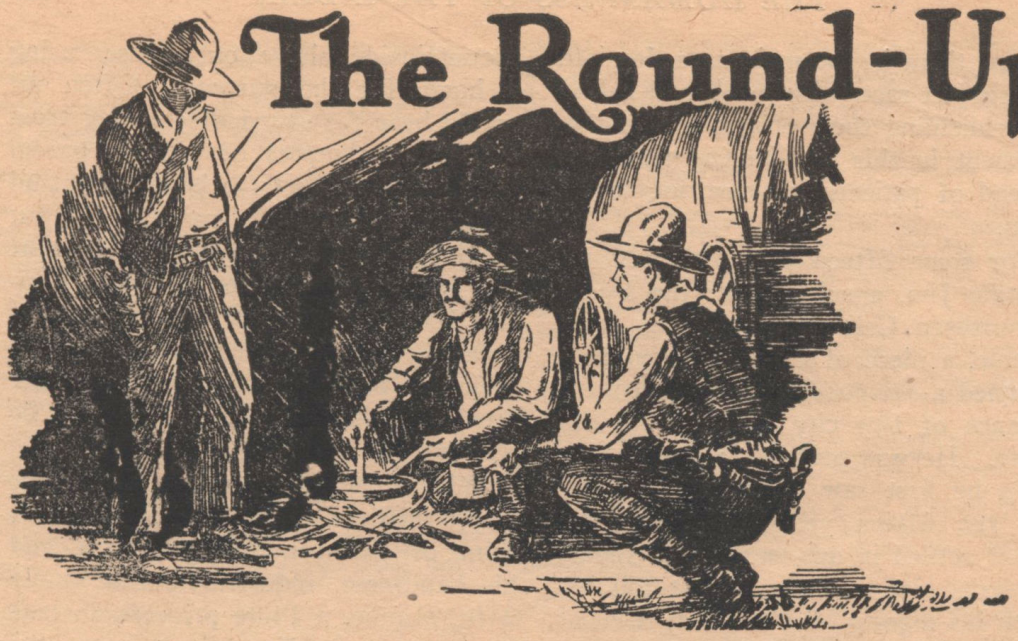
The United States Biological Survey estimates that one lion kills two thousand dollars' worth of live stock in a year, and those who know lions say that a lion kills two deer a week. From these estimates it is easy to calculate how great a menace this beast is.

As soon as a bounty was offered for lion skulls, lion hunting became popular, and since then farmers and stockmen have been saved thousands of dollars.

Before this bounty was offered the deer in Colorado were disappearing so rapidly that it was feared they would soon be extinct, but the killing of seven hundred lions in the past ten years has prevented this calamity and to-day Colorado boasts of at least forty thousand head of deer.

Lion hunting is no easy job, for these bloodthirsty animals hide in the roughest and most impassable sections and it takes courage and good dogs to run them down. They never fight except when cornered, and then they are a dangerous foe to either man or dog. Liberal bounties and the sale of skins, which are worth from forty to fifty dollars, make lion hunting a profitable as well as a thrilling occupation.

The Round-Up



AD Orable" has just loped into camp, and he ups and he says, says he:

"AUTHORS, BOSS, AND FOLKS: I've been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a good many years, and the best story I ever read was 'Stormy Dorn.' We want more stories by Cherry Wilson, Walt Coburn, Humphreys, and Krebs.

"I like Coburn's stories because, when he writes about Swedish characters, it takes me back to the days when I lived in Wisconsin and Minnesota and would sit by a nice, warm fire and hear them tell of their crops and so on. Coburn sure knows Swedes; he writes about them just as they are in real life. In Minnesota and Wisconsin the Swedes are all big, strapping fellows, with very light or medium complexions.

"I hope Cherry Wilson and Humphreys write some more of their wonderful masterpieces. I like their stories. I think Cherry Wilson is the best writer, man or woman, that ever wrote for any magazine—and I've read aplenty.

"Well, everybody, I guess I'll ring off and give you all a chance. Giddap, Pinto, and let's go."

Comin' from the good old State of North Carolina, T. F. Seehorn, of Lenoir, declares:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: Have been a constant reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for several years, and it would be hard for me to choose a favorite among several of the writers, such as Robert Ormond Case, Max Brand, Cherry Wilson, and others.

"We all love Cherry Wilson. I hope Robert Ormond Case will never let Windy and Lonesome die. Will always hold it against Max Brand for letting Dan Berry get killed. Dan, Satan, and Black Bart were in a class by themselves. I have no criticism of any of the story writers. They are all interesting."

A fine old-timer, J. W. Scott, Box 816, Henryetta, Oklahoma, is now introduced by us, and introduced with pride at having him with us this evenin':

"BOSS AND FOLKS: In the April 5th issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE I saw a story of the Western city of Boulder, Colorado. There is quite a bit of truth in the article, but not all.

I crossed the plains in the year 1859. Of course, I was young at that time—only five—but in those shining times impressions were made that have stayed with me until this day.

"Now, my father crossed to Boulder City in the year 1857 to prospect for gold; he found it and returned to Kingston, Missouri, for the family, to take us West. Also, he thought all that was lacking was a quartz mill, so he bought one and took it through. We had twenty-six wagons, six yoke of cattle being hitched to each wagon. My father's was the first quartz mill in operation in the Boulder district.

"I saw some familiar names referred to in your story. Especially that of Daniel Pound. The son I never knew; perhaps he was born later. Also, T. J. Grahame. Perhaps all the others were there. I remember Mr. Pound for the reason that he ran a general store and the post office which was located in this store.

"We fought Indians and were attacked several times on our way West. I am an old man to-day, and there are only a few of us old-timers left, but the events of those days were so impressed on my mind that I never will forget."

The ladies are sure with us in force to-night, and mighty glad we are to see 'em. Yes, indeed, we like the ladies; sure do; always have and always will. No, there ain't no woman hater about us. And so, Mrs. W. B. Edman, of Stratford, California, what is it you'd like to say to us?

"Boss and Folks: May I compliment you on the story 'Raised on Trouble,' by George Cory Franklin, in a recent issue of the Western Story Magazine?

"I was raised in Monte—the rest of the name is Vista. I was married in Del Norte, seventeen years ago. I've picnicked many times on the old Rio Grande, close to Seven Mile Plaza.

"Let me say, Mr. Franklin's description of the locale was accurate, but it's too bad he didn't describe some of the marvelous scenery in and around the dear old San Luis Valley. It is indeed a garden spot. I don't know Mr. Franklin, but I'm for him."

And if here isn't another lady! Sure must be ladies' night, and no mistake. It's now Mrs. Steuart Wilson, who comes all the way from Nazareth, Pennsylvania, to be with us to-night:

"Boss of the Round-up: I was very successful in finding my lost relatives, for whom I advertised in Western Story Magazine. Though I received many letters, the one from the persons I advertised for came first."

Yes, Folks, we're findin' them all the time. So if there be any of you who have lost some strays, jest name their brand, and we'll get right out on the trail and run 'em down for yer.

There is no animal which is beneath our notice and attention. Lee Palmatier, Hillside Apiary, Walton, New York, will now draw our attention to an animal—insect, more properly speaking—which has advertised its own presence in a most painful manner on several well-remembered occasions:

"Boss and Folks: I have read your Western Story Magazine for the past nine years and like it very much.

"I have also handled honeybees almost every year for the past forty years, and have studied them some. I think if you will put a piece of cloth or paper the color of a dandelion blossom in a field of blossoms, you will see the bees strike the decoy as often as they do the real blossoms. If so, that will spoil your theory of the honeybee

being color blind, as per the item 'Bees Don't See Red, Or Any Other Color,' on page one hundred and twenty-three of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE of March 1, 1930.

"I wish to emphasize this point; I may be wrong, but I have tried this out to my satisfaction, both with Golden Nation and Carmolion."

And this, that Ernest Hall, 621 St. Louis, Ferndale, Detroit, Michigan, is going to say, will surely please the authors:

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: I have been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for three years. It is fine. I like Max Brand, Robert Ormond Case, Cherry Wilson, and the stories about McQuirk and D. Long, Silvertip the Bear, and Shorty McKay. 'Empty Saddles,' 'The Yukon Drive,' 'Happy Valley,' and the Geraldi series were fine. But every story I have read in our magazine has been a good one; I read each issue from cover to cover. This is my first attempt at talking in Round-up; I hope I have not taken too long.

"Yours for WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE."

Kind words, these, from Ivan Francis, Hawarden, Iowa:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I'm just an Iowa farm boy, fourteen years old, who'd like to tell you how much I admire WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. I've read it for five years, and I believe it's the best magazine ever published.

"'April Rides,' 'The Yukon Drive,' and a few other continued stories are leaders. Bob Case, John Fredericks, Ray Humphreys, and Roland Krebs can't be beat.

"Well, I'll be riding on now. Thank you.

"Much success to our magazine."

But we must not forget to sing. Then, let's go with:

THE U-S-U RANGE.

O come, cowboys, and listen to my song;
I'm in hopes I'll please you and not keep you long;
I'll sing you of things you may think strange
About west Texas and the U-S-U range.

You may go to Stamford and there see a man
Who wears a white shirt and is asking for hands;
You may ask him for work and he'll answer you short,
He will hurry you up, for he wants you to start.
He will put you in a wagon and be off in the rain;
You will go up on Tongue River on the U-S-U range.

You will drive up to the ranch and there you will stop.
It's a little sod house with dirt all on top.
You will ask what it is, and they will tell you out plain
That it's the ranch house on the U-S-U range.

You will go in the house and he will begin to explain;
You will see some blankets rolled up on the floor;
You may ask what it is, and they will tell you out plain
That it is the bedding on the U-S-U range.

You are up in the morning at the daybreak
To eat cold beef and U-S-U steak,
And out to work, no matter if it's rain—
And that is the life on the U-S-U range.

You work hard all day and come in at night,
And turn your horse loose, for they say it's all right,
And set down to supper and begin to complain
Of the chuck that you eat on the U-S-U range.

The grub that you get is beans and cold rice
And U-S-U steak cooked up very nice;
And if you don't like that you needn't complain,
For that's what you get on the U-S-U range.

Now, kind friends, I must leave you; I no longer can remain;
I hope I have pleased you and given you no pain.
But when I am gone, don't think me strange,
For I have been a cow-puncher on the U-S-U range.

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.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

THE Wind River range of western Wyoming sweeps southward to meet the old South Pass. In the South Pass country, the Sweetwater stomping grounds of the old-timers and the gold-rush miners, are the stampede diggings of the earliest strike west of the Mississippi.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Wonder if you-all know that it was here, in the Sweetwater diggings, that the first discovery of gold was made west of the Mississippi in 1842. Many millions were taken out between 1865 and 1875. Maybe you-all would like to know something about the gold-rush days in this old Sweetwater country. But maybe you would also be interested in the present activities and the immediate future of these old gold-rush diggings.

My pards and myself have very large gold-placer holdings out here in the South Pass mining district, and we could let a few hombres in on these diggings if we can get in touch with some square-shooting hombres who are willing to come out here with a small grubstake and work hard. In fact, there is plenty of work here in these holdings for ten or fifteen hombres if they can furnish a grubstake and are willing to do some back-breaking work in the recovery of the gold. Now, folks, who will be the hombres to take hold of this lifetime job? This is an opportunity that rarely comes to a hombre, and only you folks who can shoot along a few references as to your being a square-shooter need horn in on these here diggings. In return, you-all will get a square deal by myself and my pards. The Rockies have been my home for the last thirty-five years, and I've put in a lot of time as a mining engineer.

OLD MINER, OF THE GOLD-PLACER DIGGINGS.
Care of The Tree.

Bronc rider.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Here comes a hombre who is one of the bronc riders of this little old wild West. I have been breaking range horses for the better part of twenty years, and am quite well known in a few small sections of our great Northwest. Have been breaking horses in the Northwest for several years. Started in Canada and worked down through Montana and finally drifted from the Northwest to Nevada and Utah.

I compete in small rodeos in the fall, although I do not have bucking saddle horses. I got myself entered in my first bulldogging contest a couple of years ago, and although I had never attempted bulldogging before, I won second prize against fast men. However, these hombres happened to have a streak of tough luck, which enabled me to make a good showing. On my fourth steer—which happened to be a cow instead of a steer, owing to a shortage of dogging stock—I made a

time of five and four-fifths seconds. This was in a rodeo at Caliente in southeastern Nevada. I also won second in the bronc finals in Caliente last year. Have ridden in Cedar City, Utah, taking second in the bronc finals, and have been bucked off at Caliente and bucked off at Cedar City, too. So you see it isn't all pie-eating in these bronc contests. Too often we bite the dust. I remember the time I started at Beaver City with a twisted knee. Couldn't mount without help. I came out with a few things besides the twisted knee —a sprained ankle, sprained wrist, cracked collar bone, and a torn ligament in my neck, but I won third bronc money in the finals, and it was won by myself, no substitutes!

Like all bronc riders, I have some theories on horse training. You hombres notice I say horse "training" and not horse "breaking." I don't fight broncs. I gentle them. And that reminds me of another time when I rode in a wild-horse race. My saddle ran over the horse's shoulders, throwing me and doing considerable damage to myself personally. But my helper caught the stallion and I won second money.

Well, folks, maybe you-all aren't interested in my yarns, but I'll be glad to hear yours.

AL B.

Care of The Tree.

Cowboy-lumberjack.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Well, folks, here is a line from an ex-cowboy and lumberjack who wants to get four or five square-shooting pards together to go into cattle raising. This is my plan, folks. First we'll get hold of a good piece of rangeland. One of the hombres will stay on the home ranch, while the other four get out and round up a little grubstake for a bunch of dogies. And in a short time we will all be needed on the ranch to look after the stock. Now, what say you, pards?

BENICIA HOMBRE.

Care of The Tree.

Bitterroot Mountains.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm just another lobo, having rambled across the continent and loped up to the head of the Bitterroot Valley—up in the Bitterroot Mountains. I've tried my hand at logging, road mending, jockeying, and working with threshing crews. I'm here now working on the Three Circle Ranch, up at the head of the valley in the mountains.

Our bunk house is of lodgepole peeled—twenty by thirty feet, with a fireplace in the center of the room, facing east, and a cook range backed up to it, facing west. There is some stir in the bunk house when mail comes in, folks. The stage brings the mail up from Darby on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and takes it down on Tuesdays and Fridays. The road up the Valley to Alta is four miles from here. It follows the west fork of the Bitterroot River. The west fork is just a half miles from the ranch house, and during the winter months all hands haul ice for the west fork.

Dogies? Yes, we have a few, and about thirty head of horses on the range. TOD.

Care of The Tree.

Gold-rush miners made the Sweetwater country, in the old South Pass mining district, their stomping ground in the early '40s. Now the young old-timers are working gold placer holdings in the old gold-rush district. Wear your friend-maker badges, folks, and get in touch with these hombres of the gold diggings of Wyoming.

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.

Box B.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are twin sisters, hailing from northeastern Texas. Just above Dallas is the old Box B Ranch. We have ten riding horses in the Box B corral, although only two of them are favorite mounts. Yes, we are cowgirls, and for three years we have won the championship for being the best all-round cowgirls. We are seventeen.

Who wants to hear about Texas and the old Box B?

RUTH AND RUBY CANTRELL.

Route 2, Box B Ranch, Frisco, Texas.

Big Horn country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is the land of the Crow Indians—the Big Horn country of southeastern Montana. It is the land of the sagebrush as well as the land of the Indians, and sometimes one grows a bit lonely among the sagebrush and the redskins. However, I

am very fond of Indian lore, art, and history, and would like to meet some of the folks of the old Holla who are interested in the Indians. MISS B. H., OF MONTANA.

Care of The Tree.

Snohomish.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I first learned to ride on a wild little Texas pony, down in the open rangeland that is now the rice country of Arkansas. That Arkansas country was the prettiest I ever saw—level as a floor, open grass lands interspersed with strips of timber. And that was the life, folks! A good lively broncho and a fine open country all around you. I rode from the age of four until I reached the age of sixteen, when father thought he should take me to the city and make a fine lady of me. Well, from the health standpoint that wasn't so good, so some years later I was transplanted to Montana. And since I left the Arkansas country I have seen the Ozarks in Missouri, the Gallatin Valley of Montana, and other stock-rasing sections of Montana, including the country around Missoula. And I want to say that there are real people in that Missoula country! Now I've been on the Pacific coast for the past five years, and I can tell something of the State of Washington.

I live all by myself, folks, on a little five-acre tract about twenty-five miles from the city of Seattle. Any one who is a home builder can very easily own their own home in this part of the country. In many places one can find cedar from which to split out "shakes." I split the shakes for my own barn and woodshed.

Well, I hope I shall have some mail coming my way pronto. And I will give any information I can about this country.

FAY WEDEMAN.

Route 3, Snohomish, Washington.

Oklahoman.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My pard and I intend to trek to Colorado, Arizona, or New Mexico this summer, and we would like to have some folks inform us regarding a location in the foothills of the mountain country. We do not care how far from town or the railroad the location is, and we are "all set" with a small grubstake. We will build our own cabin and intend to spend a good part of the time hunting and fishing. We would like a location where there would be fishing within striking distance, if possible. Although we will consider Arizona, we really prefer Colorado or New Mexico. How are the locations around Carlsbad, New Mexico, folks?

I have lived in Oklahoma all my life, folks, and will be only too glad to give any information I can regarding the Sooner State.

RAY R. M.

Care of The Tree.

"Won't some of the girls of the Gang who live on ranches—either horse or cattle ranches—write to me? I especially want to hear from all parts of Arizona, and Yavapai, Mojave, Graham, Cochise, and Gila Counties most of all." Address this young Gangster as Miss Texas Bobby, in care of The Tree.

"I am interested in what you Western Gangsters have to say about the different parts of the West and Northwest. I will exchange snaps, so come on, folks, and let's hear from all of you pronto." This hombre is Wilson Travers, Campbellton, New Brunswick, Canada.

A young British soldier, now serving in India, would welcome and answer as many letters as he receives from any pen friends who care to write. This hombre is Frank Usher, Fourteenth Medium Battery, R. A., The Fort, Delhi, India.

"I am a boy, thirteen years old. I live in Pine Bluff, an Arkansas city. I want some Pen Pals from the Northern woods or from the land of the rope and the branding iron. Come on and give me lots of information about the great West, pards." This junior member is James R. Goldman, Route 1, Box 517, Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

"I am twenty years old, born and raised in New York City, but am thinking of going out West, and would like to get in touch with some of the lonely cow pokes out there," says Howard Kirchner. Address this Gangster at 122 Nellis Street, St. Albans, Long Island, New York.

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.

FIRST place this week goes to Mark G., of San Francisco, California, who is making some inquiries about a subject in which, from time to time, a number of hombres have evinced an interest. "My questions may be somewhat out of your line, Mr. North," writes this Westerner, "but if you can give me some space in your department, I'll surely be grateful. I'm interested in the sheep-raising business in Australia, and want to know something about the opportunities for beginners in that country. Is there much good land available? Of course, I realize that these general questions make a big order, and so I'll say that I'd especially like any information you may have about the State of New South Wales."

We are grateful to Mark for that last sentence, because a letter filled with general questions about a country as large as Australia is, as he says, "a big order." As Mark probably knows, Australia leads the world in wool production, both in regard to quantity and quality. Although this rich, young country offers many opportunities to the newcomer, the day has passed when large areas of land could be obtained practically for the asking. Land to-day is either in freehold possession or under rental on fairly long leases, and as wool has increased in value, the rise in land values has kept pace with it. Nevertheless, splendid chances for the acquisition of land by newcomers present themselves from time to time, as large holders are forced to reduce the size of their holdings, or as grazing leases expire.

There seems to be a certain magic about sheep raising, which we can well understand, for, in addition to being profitable, it is one of the freest of all outdoor occupations. And although Australia is a relatively new territory, it offers the beginner all the advantages of an old, well-stocked country. In the early years the rancher had to bring every animal across the ocean in small sailing vessels at considerable inconvenience and expense. Now, the beginner has at hand splendid flocks and

herds, and all breeds of useful horses as well. Good breeding stock may be purchased at prices far below those in other countries.

Now to talk of New South Wales. North from Victoria, on the Murray River, into the southern pastoral districts, Mark will discover a great extent of sheep country reaching away west and east into the mountains, which stand back from the coast. Throughout this wonderful stretch of pasturage, there are great productive grazing properties, which carry from one sheep to an acre to three sheep to two acres. The newcomer, in his search for land, will find large estates varying in value from twenty to thirty-five dollars per acre.

If the new settler is in a position to buy land and stock, the opportunities for making good are said by old-timers to be splendid. Mark may also be interested to know that there are chances of securing land on lease from the government, and also of acquiring a partly improved portion of a large run which is being put up by the owners or subdivided after resumption by the State. As might be expected, sheep lands in New South Wales vary greatly with their location, from the ranges of three thousand acres in the east to the vast leaseholds in the western division of the State, which carry a sheep to every twenty to thirty acres.

It is not unusual for a man to have holdings in both the eastern and western portions of the State, living on the better-improved ranch in the east and paying visits of inspection to their outfits in the west.

Another important pastoral section of New South Wales is that known as the Upper Hunter country and the New England tableland. The Upper Hunter country is of a rolling nature, with well-clothed hills sloping down to very rich valleys. From this district and from the same class of pasture still further north, comes a large proportion of the beef supply of Sydney, a city of a million inhabitants. Throughout this section there are large properties on which both sheep and cattle are bred, raised, and fattened. Mark would find it possible to secure good pastoral land in this part of New South Wales, but the price is high, especially where the place is improved and ready to work. In this section there are a number of thoroughbred studs, and some of the most productive runs have been secured by wealthy men who use them mostly for breeding high-class yearlings for racing purposes.

The country in the northwest of New South Wales is of a quite different character. It stretches away from the coastal ranges in great level plains, extending for hundreds of miles toward Central Australia. Most of the vast extent of pasture land out there is in the artesian belt, and is watered from bores. The water is mineralized, and contains various salts, but is palatable to stock and is generally regarded as being a tonic which tends to keep animals in good condition. In this northwest country, cattle stations are carried on in much the same fashion as in the early days. Cattle camps are still worked, but there are more yard operations and, as might be expected, more fencing than in the years when the same class of country was practically one vast, open run.

And now we must simply restrain our enthusiasm, although there is much more we could say about the pastoral industry in Australia. We are sending Mark an address from which additional information may be secured, and if any of the rest of you hombres are interested, you may have it upon request.

It's quite a hop from Australia to New Mexico, but our next searcher after information is flinging some queries our way about a certain section of the Sunshine State. "Have you any facts about Luna County down in

New Mexico, Mr. North?" asks S. I. P., of Jacksonville, Florida. "If so, I'd like to know just where this county is located? Is it cattle or agricultural country? What is grown? Is there any homestead land down there? Is it a healthy climate? What are the largest towns? Well, as you can see, I'm out for all the information you can hand me."

Well, we are glad to accommodate S. I. P. to the best of our ability. Luna County is situated on the southern border of the State, and prior to 1910 was regarded as a cattle country only. Since then, however, the underflow water has been developed and a pumping system for irrigation maintained, which has advanced the agricultural interests very materially. We have been informed that in no part of New Mexico has the pumping system been brought to such a successful issue as has been achieved in the Mimbres Valley in Luna County. The water supply seems plentiful and is of an extraordinary purity. Health conditions are good.

The soil of Luna County is fertile, and El Paso, Texas, provides an excellent market for the farmer's products. Peaches, pears, prunes, and plums are grown to perfection in this locality. This county possesses a cannery where large quantities of tomatoes are packed and shipped. In the mountains surrounding the valley minerals have been discovered, and that section promises to become a well-defined mining country.

For information about homestead land in Luna County, S. I. P. should make inquiries of the United States Land Office at Las Cruces.

Deming, which is the principal town, is an attractive place, with pretty homes, excellent schools, many modern conveniences, and a hospitable Western atmosphere.

While we're talking about places in New Mexico we must answer the letter of Pete F., of Asheville, North Carolina. "What can you tell me about the Indian pueblo of Acoma down in New Mexico, Mr. North?" asks this citizen of the Tar Heel State. "I expect to motor down that way some time soon and as I've always been interested in these Indian pueblos I surely want to take this one in. Is it near Gallup?"

Acoma has a population of nine hundred and fifty-five and is located about eighty-eight miles east of Gallup. This pueblo, which is built upon the top of a giant rock rising almost perpendicularly four hundred feet from the plain below, is called the "City of the Sky." The summit contains one hundred acres and is devoid of earth, all building material having been carried from the plain below on the backs of the builders. As their only means of ascent was hand and foot holes pecked in rock, one misstep meant destruction.

Notwithstanding the danger and difficulty of conveying building materials to the stronghold, this pueblo has a massive church one hundred and fifty feet long and forty feet high, with roof timbers forty feet long and more than a foot square. There is also a graveyard two hundred feet across, all the dirt having been carried up the steep ascent. To-day there is a roadway cut in the rock, making ascent easy, and although the Indians were unfriendly to the early Spanish explorers they welcome present-day visitors.

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 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.

Address all communications to Missing Department, WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

LONESOME L.—Remember Cleone Renard? Please write to C. W. Abbott, 890 Eddy Street, San Francisco, California.

BANNON, CHARLES.—Five feet six inches tall, dark complexion, and weighed about one hundred and forty-five pounds. Was an oiler on the "Isaac T. Mann." Information appreciated by his New London Pal, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, ROSE.—I am very lonesome. Please write to Eunice Harper, Route 1, Swearingen, Texas.

RAND, ALBERT.—We were on the S. S. "Mystic" from January to April, 1928. Left the ship at New York City. I last heard from him in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by Frank Tucker, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, COY.—Left West Virginia, in August, 1928. Please write to an old pal, Joe E., care of this magazine.

GEARY, ELLEN T.—The aunt of W. J. Brady, who was killed in an automobile accident, driving from Melbourne, Florida. Believed to be in Kentucky, or in Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by Mrs. Vida Maddox, 75 West Mallory Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee.

TURNER, MRS. MAE, nee **BAKER.**—Lived in Wardell, Missouri. Remember your friend in Melbourne, Florida? Please write to Mrs. Vida Maddox, 75 West Mallory Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee.

BOONE, BRADY.—Last heard from in Mema, Arkansas. May be in California. Information appreciated by his cousin, Mrs. Vida Maddox, 75 West Mallory Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee.

GASSETTE, MRS. ALPHA.—Formerly of Monette, Arkansas. Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by Mrs. Vida Maddox, 75 West Mallory Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee.

FONTZ, MRS. EDNA.—Last heard from in Claremore, Oklahoma, in 1928. Please write to an old friend, Lucy, care of this magazine.

OAKFORD, MRS. CAROLINE.—Last heard from in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in 1927. Please write to an old friend, Lucy, care of this magazine.

BOSTIAN, MRS. IDA, nee **SKIPPER.**—Last heard from in Morrilton, Arkansas. Please write to your cousin, Lucy, care of this magazine.

WHITFIELD, CLAIRE.—Please write to your brother, Jack, care of this magazine.

LONG, BART G.—A civil engineer. Worked for Ward, Hockins & Young Co., at Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Last heard from in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1927. Information appreciated by Boazo, care of this magazine.

RYAN, W. H.—Last heard from in Picher, Oklahoma, in 1920. Have important news for him. Information appreciated by Charley Scearcy, Columbus, Kansas.

MOORE, TEDDY.—Tall, slim, light hair and blue eyes. Has his name tattooed on one arm. Left home three years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Ben Moore, 921 North Washington Street, Mexico, Missouri.

MAY, CHARLES F.—Was on the U. S. S. "Arkansas" in 1925. Lived at Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, for some time. Later moved to Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by J. Donnelly, U. S. S. "Ellis," care of Postmaster, New York City.

CAMPBELL, CLARENCE.—Last heard from in Noxie, Oklahoma, three years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. S. O. Campbell, R. R. 3, Box 235, Texarkana, Texas.

PERRY, EDNA FLORENCE.—Twenty-one years old. Last heard from in Coffeeville, Kansas, in 1927. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Lucille Howell, Route 1, Box 4, Nyssa, Oregon

DUNBAR.—Would like to hear from relatives of Frederick Oscar Dunbar, particularly a brother, Herbert. Please write to June McGinnis, 11711 South Main Street, Los Angeles, California.

PER.—Remember March 25th? So lonesome. Please write to M. M., 1429 Oak Street, Keosauqua, Iowa.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from members of the Second Division, First Battalion, who served at Fort Worth Texas, in the fall of 1918. Address Clay E, Raney, Box 253, Wisner, Louisiana.

HOBBS, JOHN H.—Thirty years old. Six feet tall, blue eyes and light hair. Last known address was, in December, 1928, 218 Occidental Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

B. B. M., LOUISE.—The children and I want you to come home. We have moved. Tom is in Wichita. Please write to your mother, Mrs. C. J. Clarkson, care of this magazine.

CULLINANE, MICHAEL.—Born in County Kerry, Ireland, about sixty-five years ago. Lived in Jersey City, New Jersey, for several years. Left there in 1907. Information appreciated by his son, Tim, care of this magazine.

GIDDY, MRS. JOHN, nee **SUTHERLAND.**—Left Scotland for Canada, sixteen years ago. Last heard from in Toronto, Ontario. Information appreciated by her younger sister, Greta, now Mrs. James Forsyth, Thornburn, Pictou County, Nova Scotia, Canada.

GRIFFIN, DAN A.—Last seen in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1914. Important. Please write to Mary Donaghue, Box 827, Portland, Oregon.

WARBURTON, JOHN, ALICE, and **JAMES.**—Last heard from in Bolden, England. Information appreciated by W. E. Warburton, Box 671, Pocahontas, Virginia.

MATHEWS, LUTHER.—Last heard from in Aberdeen, South Dakota, in 1918. Information appreciated by Siss, care of this magazine.

PATHYSON, MRS. BELLE, and son, **JOHN.**—Information appreciated by Mrs. Matt Hogan, Salem, Missouri.

MOORE, ORVAL A.—We are still friends. Please write to Dorothy Keller, 222 South Genesee Street, Waukegan, Illinois.

PAL.—Saw your ad, but did not know if message was for me. Send another and put your initials. Address Buddy of Bridge Days, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—When I was a few hours old, I was taken from my mother by Doctor C. Reed, of Trenton, New Jersey, to the home of Mrs. D. Steepy, in Trenton. I would like to find my parents. Am now twenty-five years old. Please write to Mrs. Myrtle Sliter, R. D. 1, Polk, Pennsylvania.

CLUTE, VELMA BEATRICE.—Was born July 3, 1912, and left with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, of Hornell, New York, when she was five months old. Information appreciated by her broken-hearted mother, Mrs. E. I. Irish, care of Mrs. D Ingraham, 31 Caledonia Street, N. E., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FLOOD, JERRY A.—I am worried about you. Please write to Betty, care of this magazine.

BACHMAN, JOHN.—Born in Pennsylvania. Was in Wausaw, Wisconsin, about ten years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, Fred Bachman, 417 Washington Street, Wausaw, Wisconsin.

HUGHES, FRED.—I'm all for you in spite of what happened. Need any help? Please write to B. F. W., care of this magazine.

WILSON, RUBY.—Seventeen years old. Five feet three inches tall. Last heard from in Rush Springs, Oklahoma, in 1927. Please write to an old friend, C. G. Asberry, care of Mrs. M. A. Kennedy, 506 Summit Avenue, Lawton, Oklahoma.

SUGAR.—I still love you and want you. Please write to Frankie, 1492 Boxwood Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

HARRISON, EARL.—Last seen about ten years ago. Your sisters and brothers would like to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. Evelyn Amerine Eastman, 855 West Eighth Street, Des Moines, Iowa.

C. R. C.—Mamma is dead and John needs your help. B. married H. Please come home or write to D. M. C., Greenview, Illinois.

DeMARS, AGNES.—When she was eleven, in 1926, she lived in West Houghton, Michigan. I left Houghton and went to Westwood, California. Lost her address. Information appreciated by Olive, care of this magazine.

WRIGHT.—Would like to hear from people having that name. Address Ruth Wright, 617 South Eighteenth Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

EIDE, PEARL.—Born September 11, 1900, at St. Paul, Minnesota. Five feet two inches tall, blue-gray eyes, dark hair, medium complexion, and weighs about one hundred pounds. Last seen in Minneapolis, Minnesota, December 1, 1928. Information appreciated by her husband, James Eide, 1901 First Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

STENGEL, CARL ANTONE.—Thirty years old. Five feet six inches tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. Speaks German. Was overseas as an interpreter for the United States forces during the World War. Worked in hotel in L., Washington, in January, 1928. May be in California. Son, born October 6, 1928, was adopted by friends. Please write to L. C. M., care of this magazine.

EXIE.—Remember Maggie and Tony? Still love you, and have tried for years to find you. We are in California now. Please write to Earl, care of this magazine.

FORREST, LOUIS H.—Twenty-seven years old. The foster son of Charles K. and Gertrude Forrest. Was taken from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in 1906, to California. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. C. Lefley, 742 Montana Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

FORLENZA, NICHOLAS A.—Twenty-one years old. Five feet five inches tall, black hair and brown eyes. Left home October 18, 1929. Last heard from November 4, 1929, at Atlantic City, New Jersey. Information appreciated by Elmo Forlenza, 43 Van Duzer Street, Tompkinsville, Staten Island, New York.

AUBREY, ERNEST.—Twenty-seven years old. Blond, blue eyes. Last seen in Hunter, Missouri, in 1916. Information appreciated by an old schoolmate, Florence Newland, Box 1313, Lamar, Missouri.

MARTIN, WILLIAM V.—Formerly of New York City. Information appreciated by Norman J. Reagan, 307 Breckenridge Avenue, Buffalo, New York.

DOWELL, MRS. V.—Last seen in South Bend, Indiana, in July, 1929. Please write to N. W. Kriedman, 2783 West Twelfth Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

GORDINIER, EMERY.—Please write to Mother, 8714 Baring Cross, Los Angeles, California.

JOHNSTON, DONALD A.—Twenty-one years old. Six feet tall, light-brown hair, blue eyes, weighs about one hundred and eighty-five pounds, and has a mole on his cheek. Left Gary, Indiana, in September, 1928. Last heard from in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in July, 1929. Father is seriously ill. Please come home or write immediately to B. C. Johnston, care of this magazine.

CASEY, MRS. RUTH HALL.—Last heard from in New York City, about five years ago. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Harry Hall, 318 Washington Avenue, Newport, Kentucky.

PEAK, MRS. MARGARET.—Last heard from in Long Island, New York, about three years ago. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Harry Hall, 318 Washington Avenue, Newport, Kentucky.

GREGORY, ROSE, nee **HENNESSEY.**—Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. Please write to your old friend, Irene Leach, 1402 East Sixty-first Place, Chicago, Illinois.

CROSBY, MRS. HELEN.—Lived in Massachusetts, three years ago. Please write to George, care of this magazine.

COTE, NAPOLEON, and niece, **LILLIAN.**—Formerly of Lebanon, New Hampshire. Lillian is believed to be in Newport, Rhode Island, and her uncle may be living in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Have news of Eva Mary Rice. Please write to Mrs. Nellie Newell, 84 East Canton Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

NOTICE.—My mother, Rose Trudell, married a man named Hammond. I was born August 25, 1906, and was adopted by people named Crowell. Would like to hear from my mother. Please write to Mrs. Helen Corrigan, care of W. G. Shattuck, South Burlington, Vermont.

TUTEN, HOWARD U.—Please come home or write to mother, Box 244, City Point, Florida.

HANNAN, MAMIE.—Born in Chicago, Illinois, May 10, 1870. The daughter of John and Mary Hannan. Educated in a Catholic seminary. Had three sisters and three brothers. Lived in Chicago until 1905. Five feet two inches tall, had dark-brown hair and brown eyes. Information appreciated by her sister, Margaret L., care of this magazine.

LOVELL, ISABEL.—Daughter of James and Isabel Woodcock Lovell. Born in Morrison, Illinois, in 1882. Her mother died, and she was taken by her father to Fredericktown, Ohio, in 1885. Had a half-sister, Margaret, and a half-brother. Information appreciated by her cousin, Mrs. Hal Lane, 644 Seventh Avenue South, Clinton, Iowa.

VAN ZEE, SILAS.—Last heard from in Kamas, Utah, in August, 1929. Information appreciated by Spud and Al, care of this magazine.

McHORTER or **PUSSEL, ORIN.**—Thirty-five years old. Black hair and blue eyes. Married Esther "Billie" Frances in November, 1920, at Duluth, Minnesota. His sister and mother lived in Comstock, Wisconsin, until 1923. He was heard from in Duluth, Minnesota, in January, 1923, and later, in 1925, from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Information appreciated by Orline, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Wanetta, the daughter of Wetha Shaw Miller, was born in November, 1908. In 1910 she was placed in an orphanage, and was adopted by a family in Lincoln, Nebraska. She is my only cousin, and I would like to get in touch with her. Information appreciated by Kenneth, care of this magazine.

MARTIN, DAVE or **DICK.**—Was in Indianapolis, Indiana, about twenty years ago. Information appreciated by William M. Martin, Barnes Street, Providence, Kentucky.

NOTICE.—About three years ago, a lady advertised in this department. She said she was born on Ellis Island, New York, about 1870 of foreign parents. Would like to get in touch with her. Please write to John Berg, 264 Ellenwood Street, Osage City, Kansas.

TEDDY FROM COLORADO.—Last letter received in 1924. Can't believe that you have forgotten me. I often think of the old days at Coney Island. I still care a lot. Please write to Maryon, care of this magazine.

LaDORISA, JACQUELINE.—A chorus girl, formerly with the "Step Lively Girls." Information appreciated by G. E. P., care of this magazine.

DURHAM, MAE.—Last heard from in New Orleans, Louisiana. Please write to Toots, care of this magazine.

GILBERT, WILSON.—Please write to an old friend, Toots, care of this magazine.

NICHOLSKY, NICK.—Believed to be in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Last heard from in 1923. Information appreciated by his nephew, L. N., care of this magazine.

OSOFFEET, ABRAHAM.—Believed to be in Regina, Saskatchewan, or in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Have good news for you. Please write to L. N., care of this magazine.

COMBS, GARRETT DANIEL.—I can help you. Please write to sister, 1906 Sherman Avenue, Middletown, Ohio.

CROW, MARGARET.—Was adopted from the Boys and Girls Aid Home, in Portland, Oregon. Is about fourteen years old now. Please write to your brother, Lester L. Crowe, Sumner, Oregon.

WHITBURN.—My father, John Whitburn, was born of English parents, on the Island of Aldrie, in 1848. He came to America in 1873. Had five brothers and one sister. Would like to hear from them or their descendants. Please write to Mrs. Emily Whitburn Sanders, Route 1, Crane Hill, Alabama.

HUNTER, HAPPY or **DOLORES.**—Last heard from in Wilmot, South Dakota. Please write to an old neighbor, G., care of this magazine.

KHAN, or **GRANT, SAMUEL ANDREW MICHAEL MOORE.**—Sixteen years old. Light hair, blue eyes, five feet four inches tall, had a red birthmark on arm between wrist and elbow. Left home, in Fresno, California, in September, 1928. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Katherine Khan, Box 940, Visalia, California.

The consular office of a foreign government, situated in New York, is trying to get in touch with the following people for various reasons: CAMPBELL, GEORGE.—A British subject; last known address was 279 West One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Street, New York City. **LITTLE, WILLIAM ALLEN.**—A native of Newcastle-on-Tyne, England; last address, care of Mrs. P. MacConvill, Elmont, Hempstead Turnpike, Long Island, New York. **GORDON, ROBERT.**—Native of Malta; employed on merchant ships; late of 23 Ludlow Street, New York City. **DUNN, MRS. LYDIA CHRISTIANTINE,** nee **OUCKAMA.**—Last address, 63 West One Hundred and Fifteenth Street. **MOLYNEUX, ROBERT.**—Forty-one years old; late of Liverpool, England; a marine fireman; believed to be in Brooklyn, New York. **DAVIES, JOHN.**—Native of England; lived in Montreal, Canada, thirty-six years ago. **AQUILINA, JACK.**—Native of Tunis; recently of 245 Broome Street, New York City.

Information concerning the present address of any of the above should be addressed to Box 2, Station P. New York City.

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