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Western Story Magazine

JULY 19, 1930

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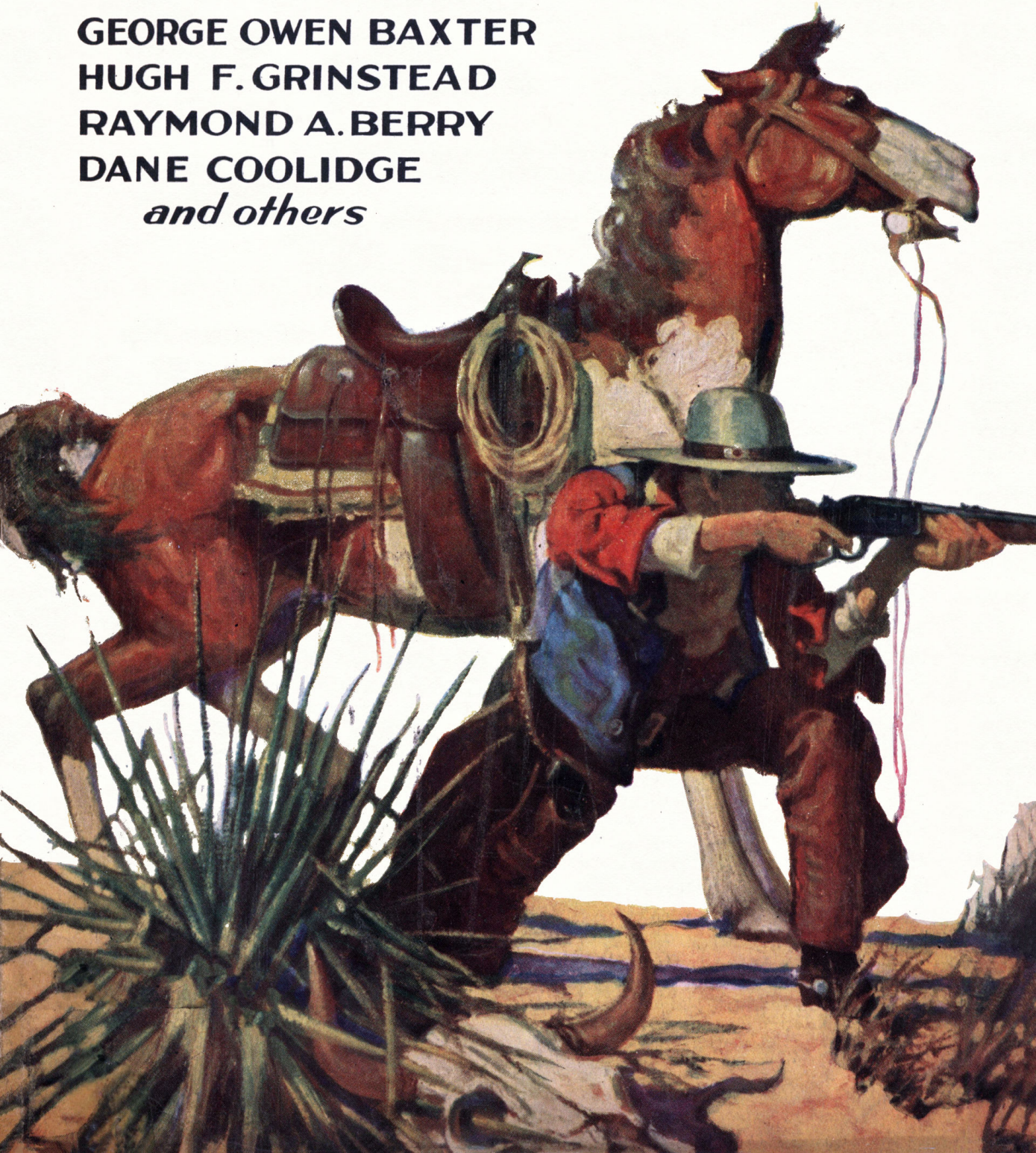

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"Job-Way" Training is the short cut to Auto Success. No need to quit your present job—no need to leave home—just use your spare time to prepare for a brilliant future—a real job paying up to $100 a week. All you need is common schooling. I don't care if you never touched an auto before, I can train you at home. You should be able to make extra money quick—a few weeks after starting. Men from all walks of life who worked long, hard hours for low pay are becoming garage owners, foremen and superintendents. If you like autos—if you're between 15 and 55—get the facts now. "Job-Way" Training covers everything about autos—Mechanical and Electrical Work, Starting, Lighting, Ignition, Welding, Vulcanizing, etc.—Everything you need to get in line for a big money job as an Electrical and Mechanical Auto Expert.

It's the trained man who gets the good jobs and "Job-Way" Training is COMPLETE, yet so simple, so easy that you get it quick.

Send COUPON *for* FREE Auto Book

Get my FREE Auto Book. Learn how "Job-Way" Training has brought success to hundreds. See what it can do for you. Find out how my Employment Department helps you get a good job—about the three big outfits you get. Read my money back agreement, my aviation course offer and many other features.

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There are lots of "Jims" in the world—in stores, factories, offices, everywhere. Are *you* one of them? Wake up! Every time you see an I. C. S. coupon your chance is staring you in the face. Don't turn it down.

Right now more than 180,000 men are preparing themselves for bigger jobs and better pay through I. C. S. courses.

You can join them and get in line for promotion. Mark and mail the coupon, and find out how.

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Vol. XCVII Contents for July 19, 1930 No. 1

ONE NOVEL

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MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

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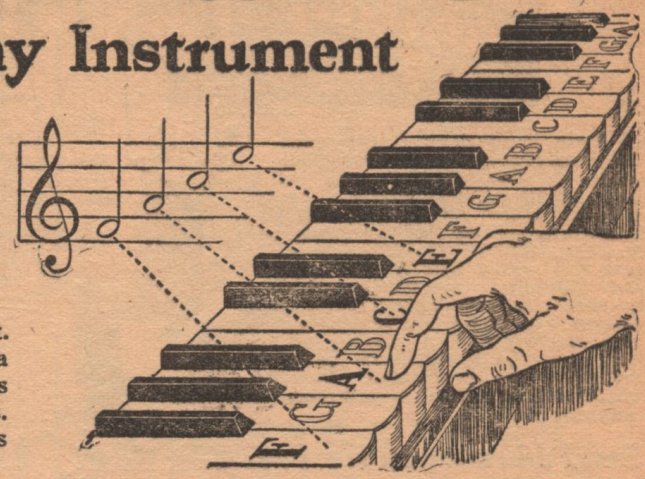

Quickest because natural and pleasant. Grateful students say they learn in a fraction of the time old, dull methods required. You play direct from notes. And the cost averages only a few cents a day!

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

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The whole interesting story about the U. S. School course cannot be told on this page. So a booklet has been printed—"Music Lessons in Your Own Home." You can have a copy absolutely free by mailing the coupon below. In the booklet you will find an offer that makes the U. S. course available to you at a very low price. With it will be sent a Free Demonstration Lesson which shows better than words how delightfully quick and easy this wonderful Method is. The booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*. If you are really anxious to become a good player on your favorite instrument, mail the coupon now—today. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3597 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

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Rupture is not a tear, but is due to a muscular weakness in the abdominal wall. Trusses merely brace these muscles but do not strengthen them—on the contrary, the gouging of the ordinary truss pad often increases this weakness as it tends to shut off circulation of the blood.

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Stop wasting your time and money on old-fashioned devices. Learn how to close the hernial opening as nature intended, **so the rupture can't come down.** Send no money; just mail the Free Test coupon below. For your own good—write today—tomorrow may be too late.

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We supply you with equipment and plans for making and selling a delicious new **greaseless** doughnut that is cooked in a remarkable electrical device. Easy to digest and more toothsome than old-style doughnuts ever were. This delicious new dainty—Brown Bobby—costs less to make and sells four times as fast. No wonder so many people without one bit of experience are literally cleaning up fortunes with this new moneymaker.

You can open a shop; rent cheap floor space in a grocery, delicatessen, lunch counter, drug store, etc. Or start at home—and make good profits your very first week!

$3,000 in 3 Months

"I made $3,000 in 3 months from my greaseless doughnut business."
Thos. Minch, Fla.

Men and women start in this business daily. You cannot afford to delay. Details will gladly be sent without obligation of any sort. Such an amazing moneymaker may never be offered you again. Write at once for full plans and details.

Food Display Machine Corporation
Dept. 337, 500-510 No. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

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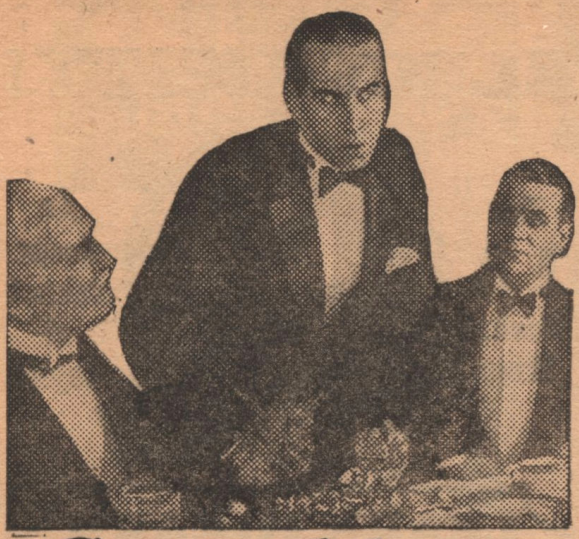

Speechless ...When A Few Words Would Have Made Me

[But Now I Can Face the Largest Audience Without A Trace of Stage Fright!]

THE annual banquet of our Association—the biggest men in the industry present—and without warning, the Chairman called on me to speak—and my mind went blank! I half rose, bowed awkwardly and mumbled, "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me today," and dropped back in my chair.

Speechless—when a few words would have made me! If I could have made a simple little speech—giving my opinion of trade conditions in a concise, witty, interesting way, I know I would have been made for life! And then a week later like magic I discovered how to overcome my stage fright. With the aid of a splendid new home study method I rapidly developed the ability to face giant audiences—without a trace of stage fright.

* * * * * * * * *

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Send For This Amazing FREE Booklet

This new method of training is fully described in a very interesting booklet, **How to Work Wonders With Words.** In it you are told how this new easy method will enable you to conquer stage fright, self-consciousness, timidity, bashfulness and fear. Thousands have sent for this booklet and are unstinting in their praise of it. You are told how you can bring out and develop your priceless "hidden knack"—the natural gift within you. You can obtain your copy absolutely free by sending the coupon.

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Send me FREE and without obligation my copy of your inspiring booklet, **How to Work Wonders With Words**, and full information regarding your Course in Effective Speaking.

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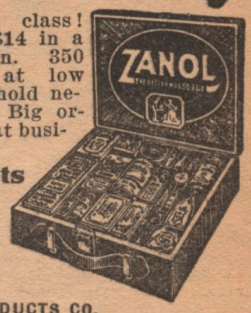
Get into the big money class! Amazing chance to make $14 in a day. Wonderful new plan. 350 High Quality Products at low prices. Every one a household necessity. All fast sellers. Big orders in every home. Repeat business. Steady income.



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We show you new way to build permanent business. Big profits from the start. Spare or full time. No capital or experience required. Ford Tudor Sedan free to producers as extra reward. Write now.

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The Best Magazine of the Screen

Price, 25 cents per copy

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS

Free to Men Past 40

What is prostate gland disorder? Why does it come to two-thirds of all men past middle age? Why does it cause loss of health, sciatica, aching feet, back and legs? Amazing book, written by well known American scientist, answers these questions and tells how 100,000 men have found relief without drugs, surgery, lessons. Simply send name and address for copy, no obligation. Address

THE ELECTRO THERMAL CO.,
7631 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio

Life Worth Living Since Asthma Left

Thought Her End Had Come, But Has No Sign of Trouble Now.

Sufferers from asthma and bronchial cough should read this message from Miss Jane Cunningham, 531 Charleston Ave., Port Arthur, Tex. She says:

"I had asthma for 7 years. I tried serums and about everything else, but finally the attacks became so severe I thought my time had come. In November, 1927, as a last resort, I tried Nacor, and after that, I never had a bad attack. After taking two bottles, my asthma disappeared and has not returned."

Hundreds of people who suffered for years from asthma and bronchial coughs, state that their trouble left and has not returned. Their letters and a booklet of vital information will be sent free by Nacor Medicine Co., 773 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind. Write for this free information, and find out how thousands have found lasting relief.

Just Say 20 Words To Ladies

And I Pay You Cash For It

Here's an utterly new, easy way for honest men and women to make money in full or spare time and also the strangest offer we have ever made. No need to sell a thing. Just introduce Van to 10 ladies and say 20 magic words and this million-dollar company will pay you cash. This is the revolutionary new plan of C. W. Van De Mark, the famous sales genius who has already put more than 25,000 men and women on the road to prosperity. "Conservative" business leaders called Van "crazy" for making this radical cash pay agreement. They said it would ruin "conservative" traditions. Cooler heads called it a master stroke that would boost prosperity—for Van will now actually pay you a cash penalty if you don't make at least $15 the very first day.

No Need To Sell Anything

TO GET YOUR CASH PAY

Now Van himself reveals the sensational truth! Countless housewives learned that they can make big savings on our amazing bargain offers. So in almost no time the sale of our products has expanded almost to the "bursting" point. Now we must hurry and employ 1100 more local men and women to take care of regular customers in each town. Big money for our representatives means nothing to us from now on! To save time I now offer every honest man and woman steady work and will pay cash for just a few hours of their time.

I Pay You a Cash Penalty

If You Don't Make Big Money From the First Day

I will not only pay you an actual cash penalty if your first 10 calls do not give you a big profit—but I allow you to make a big profit on every order my customers give you. So what is to stop you from making as high as $35 in a day like some of my other "partners"? I don't let you risk one penny. To show you that I do things in a big way, I will send you $13.00 worth of my products (retail value) to start you. Don't send a cent for this daring offer — just rush application opposite. I'll tell you a priceless secret that will get others to make money for you. If you are a married woman you can surely devote a few spare hours a day. My plan is a funny one. Some of my woman "partners" have made more money in a single day than their husbands make.

I Send You $13 Worth of Goods
(Retail Value)
Without Risk to You To Start You
Just Send Coupon

Get Van's Cash Agreement

Just tell me how much you want.

$15 in a Day Full Time?
$3 in an Hour Spare Time?

and I will send my Written Agreement, legal and binding upon me. The more time you devote to this business the more money you get.—Van.

$25,000.00 Bond Backs Our Guarantee

Rush Pay Application

Send no money—just application. I need 1100 more "partners" quick to start on my daring new Cash Pay plan. This announcement will probably "upset" the nation. Untold thousands will apply. If you delay, it may be too late. Right now mail the Application below for my daring Cash Pay plan and offer of $13.00 worth of goods. Curtis W. Van De Mark, President, The Health-O Quality Products Co., Dept. 1094-G. G., Health-O Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Curtis W. Van De Mark, President
The Health-O Quality Products Co.
Dept. 1094-G. G., Health-O Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Van: I apply for opening as "partner" to start on your cash pay agreement. Send offer of $13.00 worth of products (retail value) and guarantee. **This is not an order—send nothing C.O.D.** I risk nothing.

I want $.....per hour.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

WIN $2320.00

Just to advertise, we will give away at least $8,000.00 worth of free prizes including TEN BRAND NEW AUTOMOBILES and thousands in cash. YOU can win BOTH a Buick 4-Door Sedan and $1,000.00 cash extra or $2,320.00 all cash.

CAN YOU PUT A LUCKY STAR AROUND THIS FREE BAG OF GOLD?

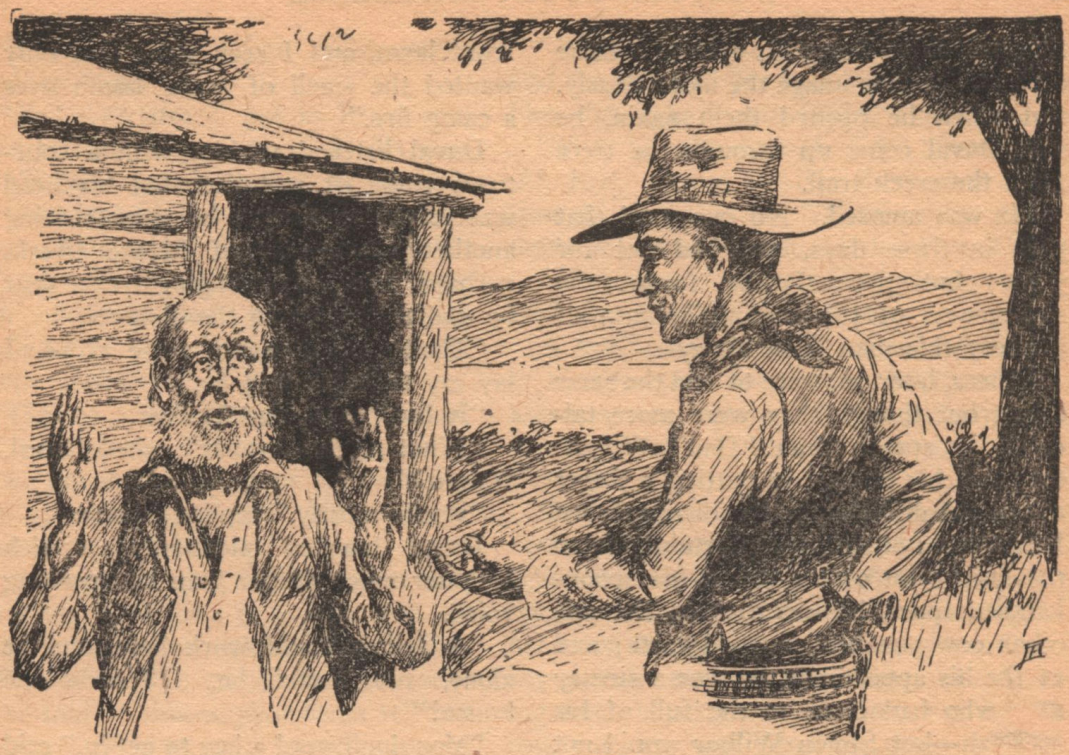
By drawing six straight lines with four dots on each line, a perfect six-pointed star can be made from this puzzle. If you can work it, I'll tell you how to win a Buick 4-Door Sedan and

GET $1,000.00 EXTRA CASH

just for being quick!

And, positively everyone taking complete advantage of this opportunity will be rewarded. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. Send your answer now. Win the $2,320.00 or a Buick Sedan and $1,000.00 cash Extra for promptness.

L. Shulman, Dep't. 17, 37 W. Van Buren St., Chicago, Ill.



Daring Duval

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "Happy Jack," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CHICKENS AND HAWKS.

IN the spring of the year Duval came to Moose Creek. Between the tall, dark pines the underwoods were beginning to bloom with yellow green, as bright, well-nigh, as sunshine, and far away the dim avenues were streaked with color as though the sunlight had fallen through. Wings were beginning to whir from the southward; every dawn was filled with musical chattering. In the marshes, too, the frogs were singing. On the hills, in the valleys, the cattle sleeked over the harsh winter which had hollowed their sides. Cows bawled down the wind for their calves; the young bulls challenged the old masters with great bellowings; and in Moose Creek itself the screen doors were banging all day long as the children ran in and out from play. This was the season when Duval came down from the mountains.

It was old Simon Wilbur who saw him first.

Simon had gone hunting and his way had taken him up the weather-dimmed trail past his old place. He sat on the chopping block before the woodshed and took off his hat to the small breeze that managed to find its way through the forest. Deeper in, the wind was always still, but this was close enough to the open to allow even the mildest stir of air to enter, carrying the moist richness of the spring with it. The raw scent of young grass was in it, and the delicate fragrances of the wild flowers.

Simon Wilbur closed his eyes to breathe deep and see the image the more clearly, and when he opened them again, he saw Duval come up through the trees from the creek trail.

He was amazed. No one used that path in these days, and had not for years; but presently he forgot the strangeness of the coming because of the way this man filled his eye.

Others, later on, were to feel the same thing, but though they were more talented in speech than "Dad" Wilbur, they had his trouble in putting a finger on salient differences that distinguished Duval from other men. Certainly, from the limp brim of his hat to his spoon-handled spurs, he was dressed like any other cow-puncher of good taste; and as for his appearance, he was a sinewy man who had come to the full of his strength—but Simon Wilbur would not have bet on his age within five years. In fact, there was nothing unusual about him, yet as Wilbur afterward expressed it, he felt at once that the stranger had "been around the corner and seen the other side."

When he saw Wilbur, Duval halted his horse, a good bay gelding that was perhaps a little too long in the rein to make an ideal cow pony.

"Hello," said Duval. "Now, this place I call something like——"

"Like what?" said Simon Wilbur, who really committed himself in the most casual conversation.

Duval looked at the stout little cabin, the wood and horse sheds behind it, the two great trees which guarded the path to the water's edge, and the meadows that descended the hillside, still dotted with a few big stumps. The second-growth saplings were coming up now in clusters, but still the fields were fairly clear.

"Like home," said Duval.

"Home," said Simon Wilbur, "is what you're used to. I seen some that needed three stories and an iron deer on the front lawn, and I seen some that only wanted the smell of fryin' bacon over a camp fire."

Duval listened to him with a courteous smile of attention, but his head was raised as though he were hearing another voice—that of Moose Creek, perhaps, which was singing treble near by and deep bass in the distance.

"That ground would raise crops, I lay my money," said he.

"It has," said Dad Wilbur.

"What sort of crops?" asked Duval. "Grain?"

"Rocks mostly," replied Simon.

Duval laughed pleasantly, a rich laughter much deeper than his speaking voice.

"A fellow could work here, and be alone, too," said he. "How's the house?"

"You don't need a key to get in," said Wilbur.

Duval dismounted with a clinking of spurs, and after throwing his reins, went at once through the cabin. He looked out once from the attic window.

"This 'u'd be tolerable warm in winter, partner," he called.

"Oh, it's warm enough," said Wilbur. "In summer, too!"

A little later, Duval came out again. This time he walked down to the creek and leaned there for a long moment against one of the great trees. The old path was quite grassed over now, except in the center, where many feet had worn through the surface soil to the gravel. Wilbur regarded the place with a half-happy and half-melancholy interest. It was as though he looked upon a picture of his young manhood out of the shadow of his age.

Then Duval turned on his heel.

"Who owns this outfit?" he asked.

"Why, stranger?"

"I'm fixed to buy, if it ain't the price of a summer resort or a dude ranch. What would Mr. Real-estate Dealer say if I went and whispered in his ear?"

Simon Wilbur grew cautious.

"There's a house here," said he.

"Kind of moldy, though," suggested Duval.

"There's some bang-up sheds, too, that cost a lot of makin'."

"They was made crooked, though," said Duval.

"And there's a hundred acres of land down there——"

"Fit to raise rocks mostly," suggested the stranger.

Wilbur grinned in sympathy.

"I own this layout," he said. "Twenty dollars an acre ain't too much, and I'd throw in everything else for another thousand, and never bear you no hard feelin's whatsoever because of your bargain."

"That's three thousand," observed Duval.

"You been to a right good school," said Wilbur.

"Sure I been to a good school," said Duval. "And after addition they taught us subtraction."

"What you gunna subtract?"

"Rocks," said Duval, "among other things. I'll pay you fifteen dollars an acre and take the buildings throwed in. That adds up to fifteen hundred. Do you like it?"

Wilbur raised his hands and his eyes to heaven, and sat as a picture.

"My name's Duval," said the other. "Do we shake on it?"

"Fifteen hundred!" said Wilbur. "Young feller, I like you. I like your cut, and I even like your sassy way, but I'd hate to pay that much for a laugh. If I went home and faced ma after makin' a deal like this——"

"She'd say she never knew you were a great business man before. Look here. This land ain't been on the market because you didn't know there was a market. If I wasn't a dog-gone good man on a trail, I never would've tracked it down and got a chance to offer on it. Fifteen hundred dollars, and I leave it to you to fix the deed and the rest, or whatever you do when you buy land. Here," he continued, "is the coin in your hand!"

He took out a wallet from which he shuffled a number of notes and displayed them to Wilbur.

"Two fives and four of a kind," said Duval, "is one better than a full house, and would get you shot in parts of the country that I been in. Make your choice, mister. Will you play this hand? There ain't a second deal."

"I'll play this hand," said Wilbur, and took the proffered money.

He thumbed each note; he tested each slip of paper by making it crumple and snap out under the jerk of his hands.

"If you live near here and got a buckboard that I could borrow," said Duval, "I'd like to get down to town and buy some fixin's to go along with this roost."

Wilbur was glad to go. In the first place, he was convinced that the stranger would change his mind before he could get the money safely hidden away; in the second place, he was burning with desire to bring the tidings to his wife. Therefore, he streaked down through the woods as fast as his long, old legs would carry him. Only when he came to his new home, did he check his speed a little, and arriving at the back door, he spent a long time scraping his boots on the iron that was fixed there for that purpose.

"Is that you, Si?", called his wife. "If you ain't brought back some meat fit for lunch, you can get yourself downtown and fetch up some chops."

"I ain't got no meat," said Wilbur, "but I don't reckon that I'll be goin' downtown."

He heard a stifled exclamation. Martha Wilbur rushed from the kitchen and stood at the top of the steps like a hawk about to pounce. She was years younger than her husband, but the

washboard and many years of labor had humped her back and set her mouth.

"You won't go?" said she, controlling her voice.

"I reckon I don't feel like goin'," said Wilbur.

"You don't feel like goin'!" said Martha Wilbur, and tried to catch her breath to express herself in better words.

"No," said Simon. "I'm gunna drive the buckboard up to the old place."

"Are you gone crazy?" said she.

"No," said he, "I just give the place away, and now I'm gunna loan the young gent the buckboard."

The wife came rapidly down the steps and taking him by the shoulders, looked earnestly into his face.

"You wo'thless old skinflint!" she exclaimed. "What've you been up to?"

"Givin' away the old place," he insisted, "and I got this in exchange for it."

Slowly, one by one, he took the notes from his pocket and spread them before her eyes.

"Bless my soul!" whispered Martha Wilbur. "Has somethin' worth while growed out of that place? You give him a promise to sell, wrote out, or something?"

"He didn't ask for nothin'," said he. "Maybe——"

He waited, evil hope in his face, but unwilling to say the thing that was in his mind.

She, however, shook her head with instant decision.

"Them that don't ask for bills of sale are them that don't need 'em," she decided. "Him that paid you that money once won't never pay it twice, Simon; and if you lied to him about the ground, you better be movin' to a new county over the hills!"

"I didn't lie," said Simon.

"Simon," she exclaimed, "I've lived with you nigh onto forty years!"

He seemed to accept the implication of this without resistance, but he added thoughtfully:

"I didn't lie, because I couldn't. You'll know what I mean when you see him. Chickens don't lie to hawks, ma'am. No more could I lie to him!"

CHAPTER II.

"CHARLIE NASH IS LOOSE!"

LATER in that same morning, Duval appeared in the town of Moose Creek itself, driving Wilbur's roan mare and sorrel gelding to the Wilbur buckboard, through the poplar grove at the head of the village; past the broken-down mill where old Lawrence was murdered for the sake of his pocketknife; past the Gilling blacksmith shop with its brand-new sign; past the Collum house, whose back porch overhung nothingness after the floods of the summer before when the river had torn away its bank, and so he came down the single street, winding as Moose Creek wound, until he reached Lane's grocery store.

At the hitching rack he tethered his team and went into the neatest mercantile interior that ever had graced Moose Creek. Linoleum was under his feet, its flowered pattern somewhat dim from vigorous scrubbing; all newly white-enameled, the walls, the ceiling, and the shelves were shining; every jar of preserves stood in a strictly drilled line upon snowy oilcloth; the bins behind the counter for sugar, rice, beans, and flour carried not only their appropriate labels, but, like the walls, were freshly coated with the same glistening paint. All was white as snow, in fact; and against that background the labels of the canned fruits and vegetables, the translucent glasses of jellies made a little paradise of color.

A tall cow-puncher leaned at a counter toward the rear of the store, but he was the only human being Duval saw at first. For the girl who stood oppo-

site was in white also and lost against her background. She was stiffly done up in a long apron tied about her waist with a gigantic bow; she had great white cuffs, and a broad collar of starched linen; in short, she was so extremely speckless and stood so stiff that Duval could have been excused for thinking her no more than a model and imitation of a pretty girl, such as might be displayed with a face of pink and white in the window of a shop in a small town —"Fashions for the kitchen!"

Now, however, she raised her eyes to the tall cowboy. Duval, even from the distance, could note two things—that she was saying "no," and that her eyes were blue. No washed-out color, sometimes gray or green, according as the light struck them; but blue of the sea, or of lapis lazuli, blue that could lighten or darken but never could change.

Those eyes had opened so wide that she seemed to be listening, rather than speaking; but the man who heard her voice snapped his fingers impatiently. The sombrero he was wearing he pushed far back on his head, which was covered with closely curling black hair.

"I've run uphill for six months, Marian, and I ain't gunna run no more," said he. "There's some that like huntin' for the sake of the walk and the fresh air, but I like the game that I kill. If you say 'no' now, it's final and for good. Y'understand that? Wait a minute. I——"

"Charlie, there's another customer ——" she began.

"Dang the other customer!" said Charlie.

She stood with downward look, enduring, while Charlie leaned closer across the counter, making man's age-old mistake of logical argument where logic and argument never are wanted.

"Wait a minute and think. I've worked like fury for six months. I've piled up a roll. The old man'll back me. I've got a place laid out——"

His excited voice sank out of hearing, not from caution or embarrassment, but with a profound emotion.

He ended, and Duval, watching, waited to see compassion, pity, gentleness in the face of the girl, but he waited in vain. For again she looked up with the unmoved face of a doll, the big blue eyes opened: "No," said she. And something else which Duval could not translate from the movement of her lips; perhaps some trite expression of regret, an avowal of friendship, but no more.

The youngster who leaned on the counter did not wait for the end, neither did he say good-by; but yanking his hat deep over his eyes, he turned on his heel and strode rapidly down the aisle toward Duval and the door. His black eyes glittered as they came, shining at Duval with a promise of trouble if there appeared in the stranger the slightest glimmer of a smile, or even the faintest suggestion of interest, of curiosity, of scorn.

But Duval already was reading the labels on the shelf.

He did not look down from his occupation until he heard her voice before him, asking what he would have. It was a small voice, high and sweet, like the voice of a child; and when he looked at her he saw that her hands were like the hands of a child, also—softly dimpled across the knuckles. Yet when he glanced at her again he would have been surprised by so much as a smile, so doll-like was she. In this fashion, exactly, would a child of five have conceived the ideal woman.

Duval sat down on the high chair in front of the counter, and took out a list.

"Here you are," said he. "I'm openin' up the old Wilbur place, and it's a bare cupboard up yonder. I want it lined, and if I've forgotten anything, you fill it in, will you?"

She considered this appeal and the

list at the same time, tapping the eraser end of a pencil against her chin.

It was a very complete list, she thought. She hoped that he would like the sort of bacons and hams that she carried. Did he care to see a sample of the flour? He did not!

"But you'll have to make a selection of jellies and preserves," said she. "Mrs. Morris makes this apple and quince; you see how clear it is, like amber, almost! But some people prefer Miss Lydia Stanley's apple jelly. Then there is——"

"Listen," said Duval. "I like jelly a little or a lot according to the number of notches that my belt is out or in. You select me a couple of dozen, and throw in some preserves—you be the judge. A man has to eat——"

From the corner of his eye he looked through the broad, front window of the store and saw young Charlie knock open the swinging door of Pete's Place, the saloon across the street. Like one sternly bent on an important march went Charlie, reaching for his wallet as he moved. And Duval, looking back at the girl, caught the movement of her eyes by which he knew that she also had seen.

But not a shadow appeared in her face, not a tone of her voice altered. He determined to force the point.

"Listen!" said he. "It looks to me like your partner, Charlie, is gunna collect some trouble, the way he sashayed through that door across the street. I hope he's insured against broken glass, ma'am!"

She looked at him without the slightest emotion.

"A Nash is hard to break," said she. "Charlie is a Nash. I'll pick out the jellies and preserves, then. One glass of each kind until you've approved of them. Is there anything else? Or shall I start to fill the list?"

"A gent can't live on beef forever," said Duval, considering. "Lemme see. Between shifts some anchovies ain't so bad. Got any?"

"I can get anything you want—in a few days," said she, and looked up anxiously. Anxiously—for her business!

"All right," nodded Duval. "Vermont maple sirup will be the thing for hot cakes, and sardines with crackers would make any man a meal. A couple of hams, too, eh? Lemme think!"

Duval raised his lean, pale face and looked through the window at the sky. Happy thoughts could be traced in his eyes.

"Tarragon vinegar. Is that in your stock, ma'am?"

"I'll order that, too."

She was writing rapidly on a pad.

"And what about oil for salad. Real olive oil. Italian olive oil, please——"

He was conscious that she had stopped writing and was looking up from her pad at him with ever so slight a puckering of her eyes.

"And English mustard?" she asked. "And a few cloves of garlic?"

He met her eyes fully, and at once they opened wide, guileless as the glance of a child. But Duval had heard enough to make him rise at once from the chair and curse the moment he had entered that store.

"Yes," said he. "If you'll fill out that order, I'll drop in for it later on."

"Certainly," said she. "In twenty minutes, Mr.——"

"Duval," said he.

"Yes, Mr. Duval. As you go out, do notice our new line of brooms and mops. Brown & Hardy's line, and the very best. Anything in which I can serve you—— In twenty minutes, Mr. Duval——"

She opened the door for him and smiled him out, a small, mechanical trade smile. And Duval found himself on the sidewalk. He turned up the street with long, slow steps, as one whose mind is profoundly occupied. He was heedless of the next two stores, but

he turned in at the hardware shop; and again he sought the blacksmith's, where in the rear yard he wandered among rusty secondhand plows, "better than new, because you can see what's the matter with 'em!"

When he came onto the street again, the mind of Duval was more composed; the blacksmith followed him to the big sliding doors of the shop, for Duval's order had been comprehensive, from old pitchforks to be remounted on new handles, to plows and harrows, hammers, spikes, plowshares, and a score of odds and ends. The junk yard had been turned into a gold mine on a modest scale.

"You're here to stay?" suggested the blacksmith.

"Unless they drive me out," said Duval, with the faintest of smiles, and sauntered easily down the street.

He was himself again, but he had arrived at one ardent conclusion. After this day he would never again enter the grocery store and submit to the examination of the big, childish eyes of the girl in white.

This determination completed his gathering peace of mind, and a lighted cigarette made him the old master of himself. He could look out now at the village and smile contentedly at the dark heads of the trees that rose behind it, along the bank of the creek, and at the first touches of green that were appearing in the front gardens.

So he went down to reclaim his groceries at the store; found them gathered near the door; paid the bill; bore them out to the waiting buckboard, and all without once meeting that blue, young eye of the girl.

He had heaped his purchases into the tail of the wagon when the explosion occurred in Pete's Place across the street.

It was like an explosion in more ways than one. It was a series of reports accompanied by wild howls, crashings of glass, splinterings of wood, and then through the battered door of the saloon poured half a dozen men, with the bartender last of all, his long, white apron blown up by the wind of his running and streaming across his shoulder.

And as the bartender ran he was yelling: "Help! Help! Help! Get the sheriff! Help! Charlie Nash is loose ag'in!"

CHAPTER III.

A FREE PULLER.

IT was apparently a well-known name in Moose Creek. An echo of it ran up the street and down: "Charlie Nash!"

Doors slammed, feet rattled down steps, a crowd was rapidly pooled in a broad semicircle around the front of the saloon. No one occupied the center of the street, but the fringes were well filled. Men, women, children came out to listen to the blind show. For inside the saloon, glass still occasionally crashed, a revolver exploded, and some yet-unbroken piece of furniture smashed.

"Poor Pete!" said a man near Duval. "He'll be ruined!"

"Where is he now?" asked Duval.

The answer came at once, for a bottle flew through the gaping, broken windowpanes in front of the saloon and was dashed to pieces in the road.

"He's busted into the cellar!" yelled the voice of Pete. "Ain't anybody gunna stop him? My gosh, I'm a ruined man! Ain't there any law? Ain't there any sheriff in this here county?"

"He ought to be stopped," remarked Duval to his neighbor.

"Sure he ought to," said the other dryly. "Ideas is cheap, but they's a premium on bullet-proof men in this here town."

"He's most likely drunk," said Duval, "and couldn't shoot straight."

"That ain't the Nash way," said the

other. "The more redeye, the more they hit the bull's-eye."

"Do they?" said Duval, and straightway turned and looked through the window of the grocery store.

He saw the girl within, not with hands clasped, in terror and in horror, but mounted on a sliding ladder, stowing new jars in the dapper rows upon the shelves!

Duval smiled, but not with pleasure. He glanced around him at the gaping, uncertain faces of the crowd, then walked around its outskirts and straight up to the swinging door. Here he hesitated to pull his hat on more firmly.

"He's going in!" gasped some one, and a murmur repeated the phrase. "Follow him up! Come on, Buck, you and me!"

But no one stirred, and though Duval did not glance behind, he seemed to know that there was no help for him; so he pushed the door open, and stepped inside!

Those who waited in the street heard what they had expected—a rapid tattoo of gunshots; after that, a thudding and crashing—then silence.

"He's dead, the poor chap!" said the blacksmith. "And I've lost the biggest bill that was ever ordered out of my shop. The poor sucker's been drilled in about twenty places."

"I told him," said another. "But he knew too much. Here's the sheriff! Hey, here comes the sheriff!"

The sheriff came on a running horse. He looked an impossible figure, with long sun-faded hair blown back over his shoulders, and the brim of his felt hat furled by the wind of the gallop. But the moment he dismounted, throwing his reins at the same instant, he was revealed as a little bandy-legged man.

He went forward at a waddling run, firing questions as he proceeded.

The blacksmith became the spokesman.

"Charlie Nash gets on a rampage, shoots up Pete's Place, smashes things a good bit, I guess. Along comes a stranger by name of Duval and walks in on him. I reckon you'll find Duval a dead man inside and Charlie gone off the back way, or else dead drunk."

The sheriff ran straight on toward the door of the saloon, but as he came closer the impetus of his resolution or of his sheer motion wasted away, so that he was walking only slowly when he came to his goal. There, however, he did not stop, but, drawing a revolver from the holster on his thigh, he threw the swinging door wide, and crouched to receive a shock.

What he saw, made him straighten and run on into the place.

"I told you," said the blacksmith. "This Duval is laid out cold and the sheriff can start a long trail after poor Charlie Nash; bad blood is sure to come to the top, in the long run, and Charlie's full of it!"

The sheriff appeared suddenly at the door, again, with an odd expression of bewilderment and disbelief.

"Who's this Duval?" he asked. "Who is Duval?"

At this invitation, the entire crowd swayed in closer.

"A gent you won't forget once you've seen him," said the blacksmith. "The right kind of a lookin' man, sheriff. Ain't he on the floor, in there?"

The sheriff stepped back.

"Come in and look!" said he.

They poured in willingly. The entire street was emptied into Pete's Place, where they found plenty to look at in the shape of shattered mirrors, smashed chairs and tables, bullet furrows in the ceiling and along the floor, but not a sign of the dead body of Duval.

They spread eagerly; to the cellar they extended their search, shouting advice, opening every door, staring under beds, but still they found nothing; and gradually they flooded back into the

main room of the saloon, where Pete now stood again considering a little heap of seven hundred-dollar bills, together with a brief note, which said:

Sorry, Pete. If this ain't enough, let me know what else you want. CHARLIE.

The sheriff read this note and looked at the money also. His bewilderment seemed to grow.

"I know Charlie and what Charlie can do!" said he. "I've seen enough examples of that. Didn't he gut this place and the seven men inside of it? But Charlie's gone! What did you hear when Duval came in?"

"Heard guns, then a crashing. Then nothin' at all."

The sheriff closed his eyes and furrowed his brow with most intense thought.

"Duval comes in through the door; Charlie lets go at him. Duval dodges in close and takes the gun away from him——"

"Takes a gun away from Charlie Nash?" echoed Pete, aghast.

"Shut up!" said the sheriff. "I know it ain't possible. But I'm sayin' what must've happened! Takes the gun away from Charlie, and lays Charlie out cold on the floor. Then jerks him up to his feet, half sober. Shows him what he's done. Gets the money out of him. Writes the note for him—you see the writing ain't the same as the signature, don't you? Then shoves him out through the back door and gets him away!"

He paused and opened his eyes, looking around him dizzily.

"Where's Duval's hoss?"

"He come in with Dad Wilbur's buckboard."

So the sheriff went to the door, saying: "That'll be gone, by this time, and nobody'll know where it went!"

He was right, for when he cast the door open and stepped into the street, the buckboard had vanished. He went across to the grocery store and touched the brim of his hat to Marian Lane.

"You didn't see this stranger start, Marian?" he asked.

"I was busy in the store when he drove off," she said.

"When he drove off? Then you did see him?"

The long lashes which made a violet shadow on her cheek now rose slowly up and she looked at the sheriff gravely.

"I've an idea," said she, "that it wouldn't pay one to know too much about Mr. Duval!"

"Humph!" he grunted. "Marian, if that gent's come to stay, I want to get some information, and I know that you can get what you want out of a man. You start him talkin' the next time he comes in and I'll give you something to remember me by."

"Of course," said she, "I'll try to remember if I hear him talk, but I'm pretty sure that I'll never have a chance to talk with him again."

"Hey?" he barked at her. "Now whatcha mean by that, Marian?"

"Well," she answered thoughtfully, "the fact is that I don't think he likes women very well."

"Is he as young as that?" grunted the sheriff, frowning.

"No, he's as old as that," she corrected. "What's happened to Charlie?"

"Been pulled out of the fire, thank goodness, by this Duval, from what I can make of it. But he ain't out of trouble yet. I'm gunna make this a lesson for him. It's jail for young Charlie for the disturbin' of the peace. Thirty days would do him a mighty lot of good!"

He watched the look of the girl wander askance toward a corner of the ceiling.

"You—Marian Lane!" he said sternly.

"Yes, Uncle Nat," said she.

"Will you wipe that baby look off of your face," he demanded, "and tell me

out and out what you had to do with this here affair?"

"I? What could I have to do with it?"

"You, you!" he insisted. "What did you have to do with it?"

"I only know that Charlie was in here just before."

"What was Charlie tryin' to buy? You?"

She nodded, and the sheriff grunted with indignation.

"Takes his busted heart over to the saloon and smashes the furniture, eh? But I don't hardly blame him. If I was ten year younger, I suppose that you'd make me raise heck, too! Maybe thirty days is too long. Maybe a week would do, or just a talk from the judge." He concluded solemnly: "Honey, what a terrible lot you got to answer for!"

"Dear Uncle Nat!" said she. "What have I to answer for?"

"Who sent Sam Barker downhill to drink?" he demanded. "Who made Josh Newman start for Australia? Why did little Carl Justin leave town? Both of the Wayne boys left the next month. And old Perry Booth got into such a way that he divorced his wife——"

"Do you blame all of that on me?" she asked.

"I do," said the sheriff. "I would rather have you out of town than Pete's saloon. And I mean what I say!"

He strode with his odd waddle to the door, but there lingered and finally turned back toward her again.

She stood with her hands clasped and her head hanging.

"You little wo'thless puss!" said the sheriff. "You knew that I'd turn around, and you wanted me to see a picture, didn't you? Anyway, honey, you ain't quite as bad as what I make out, maybe! Come over pretty pronto and pick yourself out a puppy. The brown has a new litter."

He hurried out into the street, swung into the saddle, and was stopped by Pete, who ran hastily out to him.

"If you give Charlie a runnin' for this job," said Pete, "he'll sure murder me. Leave him be, won't you?"

"I never lay no whip on a free puller," grinned the sheriff. "Don't you worry too much about what I'll do to Charlie, but think a mite about what he's likely to do to me. Howsomever, I can't lay down and let such things as this happen in the town, can I? Get up, Buck!"

He spoke to the horse, touched it with the spur, and instantly was at full speed out of the town and up the hill that led toward the old house of Simon Wilbur.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHERIFF MAKES A CALL.

UP through the spring rode Sheriff Nat Adare, following the dim old trail by the bank of the creek, and as he went, he took note of all that lay around him, but not with the eye of a beauty-lover, rather that of a hunter.

So he came to the lower meadows of the old Simon Wilbur place, and riding across these, he came to the front door of the cabin. A fragrance of cooking meat blew out to him, and the sheriff found himself a very hungry man. He dismounted, tethered the horse, and knocked at the door.

It was opened to him at once by the stranger.

He never had seen the man before, never had heard the pale face described, and yet he knew with a perfect surety that this was Duval. Some one had said that, once seen, he never could be forgotten, or words to that effect, and the sheriff knew that it was true.

"You're Duval?" he said at once.

"And you're Sheriff Adare?"

"D'you know me, young feller?"

"As well, I reckon, as you know me, sheriff. Will you come in?"

"I figgered on doin' that," nodded the sheriff.

"Bring your hat along with you," said Duval, failing to move from the doorway, "but we got a rule here that visitors hang their guns outside."

He pointed to half a dozen new, large nails which had been driven recently into the logs beside the door, and the sheriff considered them for a moment as though he were reading a page of print.

"Most generally," he observed, "I aim to carry my guns with me. It's kind of a rule in my business."

"Why," said Duval, "likely it is; but it never does a gun no harm to get a lot of fresh air."

Nat Adare hesitated an instant longer, then obediently unbuckled his gun belt and hung it on the first nail.

"Come in," said his host genially. "You're in time to have chow with me, sheriff."

"Thanks," said the sheriff. "I don't mind if I do. Am I smellin' venison or dreamin' by day?"

"This here?" said Duval innocently. "Why no! This here is something that I bought at the butcher's."

"Humph," said the sheriff, and stepped through the door.

He saw that the place suddenly had become habitable. Two or three old, broken chairs had been revamped. The little table no longer staggered on three legs, and in the corner of the room the old stove which the Wilburs had abandoned as past all use had been made to support a roaring fire.

"Why, partner," said the sheriff, "you must have somebody already with you."

He pointed at the two places which were set on the table.

"It's an old rule in my family," said Duval, "never to sit down without layin' an extra plate. It's more sort of companionable, sheriff!"

"The same gent in your family fixed that rule that made the one about guns and fresh air, I s'pose?"

"The same one. Dad was a great hand for rules, and mostly I find 'em come in handy. Gimme your hat. That's the best chair over yonder. I'll fix you a basin of hot water if you'll wash your hands. And can I put up your hoss and give him a feed of oats?"

"Thanks," said the sheriff, sniffing again the fragrance of the cookery, and scanning the simmering coffeepot, the frying pan from which the rankness of cooking onions steamed forth, and other bubbling pots which made music, all in varying keys. "Thanks, Duval, but I don't take off my hat in no man's house until I've had a chance to speak my business. I don't eat salt and meat unless——"

He paused and looked straight at his host.

"Duval, what happened down there in the saloon?"

"Saloon?" said Duval in polite inquiry.

"What did you do to young Nash in Pete's Place?"

"Ah, yes," said Duval, recalling himself. "When I sashayed in there, I expected to have a handful of trouble, but the fact is there wasn't any at all!"

"Humph!" said the sheriff. "Duval, was Nash there?"

"Perhaps he was," said Duval. "I dunno, exactly. I was sort of flustered and nervy just then."

"Guns went bangin' after you entered," observed Adare.

"Yes, they did," said Duval. "The fact is that I wanted Charlie Nash to know that I was comin' along, and if he had any idea of gettin' out by the back door, that would be a good signal for him."

"Who wrote the note that Charlie left behind him?" demanded the sheriff.

"That's a thing that I dunno as I could say," replied the host. "Set down, sheriff. I dunno that any man gets very far by just standin' around!"

The point of this remark made Adare grin broadly.

"There ain't anybody else in this house, I s'pose?" said he.

"It was a rule of my old man," said Duval, "never to lock no doors and windows. Locked doors keep the air out and the smoke in, he used to say. Maybe you've heard that sayin', sheriff?"

"I dunno that I have. Your old man must have been a rare one, eh?"

"The finest in the world," said Duval. "Hosses was his main hold, but he wasn't so bad with them, neither. He was full of ideas, but mostly he said that them that wanted to get along in the world had better keep their own floor swept and not mind about the neighbors'."

The sheriff winced a little, but then broke out into frank laughter.

"Son," said he, "I like the way that you go about things. Who are you, Duval?"

"Me? Why, just an ordinary cowhand, sheriff. Got a little stake and come along through the hills lookin' for a place to set up farmin'."

"Bein' off the main high road don't depress you none, I guess," said Adare.

"The old man always said," was the answer, "that a mite of solitude done a lot for a man's nerves."

"You don't look nervous, Duval!"

"Don't I? I'm mighty glad of that. But I've been reckoned a tolerable nervous man, Adare. Off here by myself is the way that I like to live. The sound of the water, Adare, is a mighty soothin' sound. Bein' off the road don't bother me none. The old man used to say that fast travel wasn't no good, except to them that had some place to go."

The sheriff smiled again.

"Duval," he said, "where've you been?"

"Me? Up at the T Bar talkin' to the cows, walkin' in the mud, and goin' to get it at about four thirty in the mornin's."

"What made you quit? Or was you fired?"

"I quit, because God don't make a long enough day to suit the boss of the T Bar, and he has to piece out with lantern light."

"I seen them kind of bosses," agreed the sheriff with enthusiasm. "Dog-gone their ornery hides! No other reason for quittin'?"

"Between you and me, speakin' personal," said Duval seriously, "they got some pretty tough hombres up there on the T Bar, and a peaceful gent like me is always nervous around a place like that. The old man used to say that you don't need to light no fuse to set off a mean hombre!"

The sheriff threw his hat in the corner and suddenly sat down.

"Call in Charlie Nash!" said he. "Call in Charlie and be danged, you lyin', four-flushin', two-legged maverick!"

The host accepted these strong names with a smile of perfect complacence.

"It's all right, Charlie!" said he.

And the rear door of the shack opening, Charlie Nash appeared with a washbasin in his hands.

"Why, hullo, Nat!" said he. "When I get some hot water into this basin it'll be about right for you to rub some of the harness blackin' off of your hands. How are you, old-timer?"

The sheriff looked without malice on the youth. A handsome lad was Charlie Nash and looked the part for which he was given credit around the town of Moose Creek, and over all the broad county thereabouts. For it was said that Charlie Nash could drink more, fight harder, and lift a bigger weight than any man on the range. Supple, thick-chested, straight-eyed, he was one to have raced for a prize, or fought for it.

He was marred in one place, however, for the keen eye of the sheriff found a slightly purple swelling just to the side of the square point of Charlie's jaw. It was, in fact, exactly on the

place which prize fighters call the "button," because even a tap there is apt to bring darkness.

Charlie Nash, unabashed, noted the direction of the sheriff's glance, and nodded as he put down the basin.

"Sure," said he. "That's the place where he turned out the lights. Step up, Nat. There's the soap, and here's a towel."

The sheriff rose, and while he bent over the basin and liberally soaped his hands, his face until the bristling eyebrows were a fluff of snow, his neck until the suds filled the seams that checked it, he talked explosively between rubs.

"Now, boys," said he, "I'm in your hands. You've been and made a fool of yourself, Charlie. And maybe I'm makin' a fool of myself up here."

Here the host broke in quietly: "I reckon that you're wrong about that, sheriff."

"Why, it's kind of likely that I am," replied Nat Adare. "The way that I figger it, you're sorry for that fracas, Charlie. Besides, I know what started it."

He turned from the basin, dripping water on the floor and glaring at Charlie.

Charlie merely grinned.

"You can talk right out," said Charlie. "He knows what started it, too!"

"Dang!" said the sheriff. "I've got soap in my eyes."

And he raised double handfuls of water to his face and blew noisily into them. At last he turned, the water leaking from his face over his shirt front.

"I reckon, Charlie," said he, "that you'll go back with me, and while I sit on my hoss with my guns buckled on, lookin' plumb wild, you'll make a speech to the boys and tell 'em how sorry you are that you been a jackass, but the sheriff is gunna give you another chance after you've paid for the harm you done to Pete. And then you'll buy a drink all around!"

"Make a talk like that——" began Charlie Nash in great excitement. "I'd rather——"

"Sure you'd rather," said the host gently. "The old man used to say that the first speech was the first step up the ladder in politics, and it never made any difference what the speech was about!"

CHAPTER V.

TOMATOES—OR DUVAL.

IN this history of Duval it would be of interest to maintain a daily chronicle, except that that would take too long. But, as all the people of Moose Creek maintain to this day, it was impossible to conceive of Duval without conceiving at the same time of his background. For, as they say, it was impossible to make a picture of the man by merely repeating his words and speaking of his deeds. Something was left over, some superior strength which, for a great while, seemed too big a thing ever to find labor that would seriously tax it. That labor was eventually found —but the story of that comes later.

Sooner or later all the chief men of Moose Creek went up to call on Duval; the more daring spirits among the boys used to venture there also, and they found him plowing with a team made up of his saddle horse and an old brown mule he had bought from Wilbur; or else he was installing the secondhand furniture he bought out of the vacated Gresham house; or he was repairing the roof; or sometimes they found him gathering greens for a salad; or sowing flower seeds in small, femininely neat beds around the borders of his house. Of the evenings it was known that he kept Monday for laundry work, and for the repairing of his clothes; but the other nights of the week he was glad to have visitors. They would come and find him beside a circular, burned lamp

with a green shade, reading, and whoever arrived, was certain of a welcome. Yes, day or night Duval was a cordial host. He never was at any labor so important that he would not pause from it and invite the guests to sit on his veranda, if the day were fine, and drink some of Pete's best beer, which was constantly kept cooling in the icy water of the creek; this, with sausage sliced delicately thin, or cheese of a quality unheard of before in Moose Creek, made repast to be talked of long afterward.

Sometimes late callers in the afternoon were asked to stay on for supper, which Duval prepared like a chef. He could make a man at home in one moment; his pale face was so full of courteous attention, and his gray eyes dwelt so carefully on every word, that each man felt he had been selected from many and placed high in the consideration of the new resident. There were two extra beds also, which frequently were filled; and it might be said that no man in Moose Creek lived with less real privacy than Duval.

It became known that he was a thoroughly good fellow. He would go down to Pete's Place and drink his beer or his redeye, up to a certain point, with any man; and if the other fellow's pocket were emptied, Duval never permitted a scarcity of drink for all that. Punchers who came in from the range and spent their month's savings in one grand party could be sure of a little present from Duval to pay for their lodging and buy their morning's drink that gave the world another color; and within ten days it would have been safe to say that he had become the most popular man in the district.

Yet no one knew much about him. He talked freely of his garden, his farm, his work, his house; but he never chatted of his past, beyond his days on the T Bar Ranch, where the boss thought Providence had not furnished our earthly laborers with enough hours of daylight for their work. Beyond that, his life did not appear to be of sufficient interest to keep his attention. He preferred to listen, at any rate, and of course that is the greatest of all talents in the world. No matter how bent a visitor might be on extracting from Duval the story of his life, before long he found himself put off onto the tale of his own experiences, and who can resist the listener who seems to understand?

No one, however, could persist with the questioning of Duval past a certain point. It was not that his exploit in the saloon with Charlie Nash had given him a formidable reputation, for he was always the soul of good nature and gentleness; but behind the good nature there appeared that quality of secret strength which Moose Creek saw and appreciated, but could not define.

His peculiarities of behavior were few, but they were pointed. He kept close to his work, rarely going out, except to Pete's Place for an hour of an evening, now and then. He no longer came down to do shopping, but old Wilbur was feed to stop by every day on his way to the stores. Whatever Duval needed was written down on a list, and this the old man carried from store to store, and brought back the needed articles in the evening. Neither did Duval ever go to the post office, for no mail ever arrived for him, a fact upon which the post mistress commented at some length! Women, too, it was known that he despised. He could be lured out to visit a bachelor's house if only men were there. He would take a hand in poker and hold it until cock crow also. He would play the piano for the boys, and sing them songs in a deep baritone which, like his laughter, was more profound than one would have expected from his speaking voice. But if there were women included, he was gone at once. No female footfall passed inside

the gate of Duval's place, and no girl's voice sounded within the door of his house.

However, men do not object to a companion whose interest is not in the other sex. The peculiarities of Duval were to his honor. They increased his dignity and fortified his position in the community.

It was not from Duval that they learned the first bit about his unknown past; it was from chance.

In that chance, as in the first instance when he arrived in Moose Creek, there appeared Marian Lane, and Charlie Nash, and Pete's Place. There also appeared a stranger.

The latter had come into the Lane store. Most strangers who passed casually through the town generally did enter that store, because of the freshness of the window, and the gleaming "city" brightness of the interior, the colorful rows of cans and glass jars, and, most of all, the flowerlike face of Marian Lane in her fluffy dress of crisp petals, as it were. Men at a gallop of thirty miles an hour, as they passed that store for the first time, seemed able to look back into the remote shadows of the room and find the beauty of the storekeeper. They could not help reining up, then, and turning back, to enter, buy, stare, and buy some more. To attempt a little conversation, too, that generally froze as they faced the smile that strove to encourage them, but did not seem to understand.

Now, on this evening, the stranger came into the store and, like Duval on the first occasion, he found the girl talking with tall Charlie Nash. His fine fury, of course, had died long ago, and he had come humbly back with apologies and regained as much of a place with her as he ever had attained.

"Dear Charlie," she said to him this evening, "why do you waste so much time on me?"

"Because some day," said Charlie Nash, "you're gunna light up, and I want to be on hand to see the fire! Ain't that a good reason?"

This he said as the door opened, and the stranger came in. It was a very dark evening, the sky being covered with low clouds that shut away the last light of the sun and made a lamp necessary in the store.

The lamp hung by three chains from the ceiling, and Marian Lane, squinting a little beneath it, watched the tall stranger come in, with his shadow stretching like a flat, awkward giant behind him.

"Gimme some canned tomatoes," said he, "and make it pronto. I'm rushed."

"Oh, yes," said Marian Lane. "For mulligan?"

And she looked over her shoulder at him with that bright, childish smile which no man could understand, and which no man could resist. He watched with new interest as her small hands took down the can he required; he watched the faint pucker of her smile as she looked from the smallness of the can to the bigness of the purchaser.

"Yes," he said. "Mulligan. The dang hotel is filled up! There ain't any other place in the town where a white man can stay. But it ain't the first time that I've made home in a 'jungle.'"

Charlie Nash stood up from his counter chair and regarded the new man carefully. One does not use rough language in the presence of a girl in the West; certainly not of a stranger.

But this fellow was one who apparently made his own rules of conduct, wherever he went. His skin looked like brown leather, a little red-tinted over the bridge of the nose and across the cheek bones. He had a lipless mouth with a hook at one side of it, and eyes so filled with evil that they were unashamed of showing it.

With these eyes he stared at Marian Lane, and she smiled dauntlessly back at him. It was for this cause that

Charlie Nash often accused her of preferring the obivously bad ones to the best lads of the range.

"Well, I'll tell you," said she. "We have a very hospitable fellow who lives just out of town. He might take you in."

"I don't go battering doors for a bed," said the other ungratefully. "A hoss blanket, and a swiped chicken, and a can of tomatoes will make me a supper anywhere, and a bed after it."

"Oh, but you wouldn't have to beg!" said she. "Mr. Duval——"

The other reached a gloved hand across the counter with no hurry, but with inescapable speed. It settled on her arm and held her as though he feared that she would escape.

Charlie Nash doubled his fist and came cautiously nearer. He was famous for the strength of his punch, and he rarely had wanted more to use it than on this occasion. But down the right thigh of this traveler there was buckled a long holster out of the top of which blossomed the handle of a full-grown Colt .45. And Charlie was not carrying a gun. It was an act of penance to which Duval had persuaded him after the almost fatal incident in Pete's Place.

So Charlie hesitated.

"Duval?" the fellow was saying. "You mean Duval?"

"Do you know him?" said Marian.

"Know him? Him with the pale face and the gray eyes?"

"Ah, that's the man!" she admitted. "You do know him?"

"Do I know him?" he said, releasing her arm—almost flinging it from him. "I know he's lower than a hound. I know he's a sneak and a yaller skunk. I know enough to tell you about him. Where's his house? Know him? Ain't I been lookin' and prayin' for months that I'd meet up with him again? Where's his house, I ask you?"

"Stranger," said Nash. "That there is a friend of mine. I don't allow no——"

He almost ran his nose into the end of a leveled gun. It came so suddenly that Charlie hardly had time to realize the seriousness of his position; but rolling his eyes in amazement, he saw Marian Lane exhibiting neither fear nor horror, but merely watching with a rather critical curiosity.

That was for Charlie Nash almost as great a shock as the gun in his face.

"Fill your hand and then talk to me about your friends!" snarled the big man.

"I ain't heeled," declared Charlie, "or you wouldn't have caught me cold."

"You lie," said the tall man. "You're a sneak and a liar like your friend Duval, that murders and then sneaks away out of the trouble that he's got comin' to him! I know you, boy!"

"Yonder," said Charlie with quiet fierceness, as though he could keep his words from reaching the ear of the girl on the other side of the counter, "is the only good saloon in Moose Creek. It's Pete's Place. You go in there and tell Pete that I sent you. He'll feed you the best in the place."

"And you?" asked the other, gradually lowering the gun, and finally dropping it into a holster.

"I'll pay the bill," said Charlie Nash, "after I've gone home for my gun and come back and laid you out. I'll pay for your drinks, and they'll be the last that you'll lap up around here, old son!"

The other patted the butt of his Colt and nodded with an ugly smile that was almost approval.

"I like to hear 'em talk up," said he. "How long will you be gone?"

"Twenty minutes—a half hour—not more!"

"I'll wait for you," said the tall man. "I'll have you first, and your friend afterward. Ma'am, I've changed my mind about havin' tomatoes!"

He left the can on the counter, un-

paid for, and strode through the doorway to the street. They could see his profile as he crossed toward the saloon, and he was smiling broadly, like one who has newly heard an amusing story, but will keep the mirth of it entirely to himself.

"You'd better hurry, Charlie, if you want to get home and back in twenty minutes," said Marian Lane.

He started from his dream and glared at her.

"What's in you, Marian?" he demanded of her. "What's wrong with Duval that you mention his name to every gent that comes this way? What's he done that you should have it in for him? Confound me, if you ain't the bottom of all the trouble that I have in this town!"

CHAPTER VI.

FOND OF READING.

WHEN Charlie Nash had left, running through the door like a man pursued, the girl waited for another moment, then acted swiftly. She locked the front door of the shop, pulled down the lamp on its chains until she could extinguish it, and then ran back through the aisle of the store, swerving this way and that in the darkness to avoid every obstacle.

She opened a rear door that led to her own room above, and, fleeing up the stairs, she was plucking off white apron and white dress as she went.

Now the door slammed behind her in her own room. She stood in the darkness panting, fumbling for a match, and around her the rising evening breeze was whispering at the window curtains, and stirring the pale sweetness of lavender.

The match broke in her excited fingers, but the next one spurted flames; the flame ran across the wick of the lamp, whose chimney she had tilted to the side; at first it squatted, then rose in an increasing wave of brightness as the wick was warmed.

By that light she dressed, stepping into khaki skirt, thrusting her arms into a blouse, jamming a hat on her head. The slippers were kicked from her feet and short boots dragged on, while she exclaimed impatiently at this delay.

Then down the stairs she went, swinging herself through the doorway at the bottom by one hand, like a fugitive boy with a father's wrath behind him—so raced outdoors.

Behind her store was a small corral, where one little-used pinto grew fat and sleepy, day by day; but now that his mistress came in dire need of him, he frisked at once to life, and scurried from corner to corner in the corral, throwing up his heels, and grunting with content at this pleasant excitement.

She paused to consider darkly, then hurried to the shed and brought out a blacksnake. The first sound of its snapper was enough for the refractory pinto. He stood still, with head stiff and high, ears flattened. So he was dragged in by the mane, saddled, bridled, and she was in the saddle.

She did not go up the main street of the town. It was her purpose to remain unseen, in all that followed, if she could manage it—unseen except by one pair of eyes; so she took the way she knew across the back lots, dodging here and there behind the back fences, stooping to keep from being knocked from her place by the low boughs.

In this way she came out upon the high road that climbed the hill; but even this she did not follow, preferring to plunge straight across it and take the dim trail by the bank of the creek. This was daring riding. Even by day it was a broken and difficult way, but she gave the mustang the whip and trusted to his brute intelligence, his more than humanly keen eye.

Rounding the second bend, he slipped heavily, and staggering on the verge of

the bank, so that for a dizzy moment she saw the water beneath her, and felt that the roar of it was leaping up at her ear. Yet he recovered. As a jockey rides, crouched far forward, hands far out on the reins, so she rode, swayed to the side of the high horn of the saddle. Branches shot over her head. The broken ends of limbs torn off by wind or lightning reached at her with jagged points, but through the tangle of danger she rushed the pinto without flinching until she saw the meadows stretch at her side, and headed straight across them for the lighted door of the house.

When they reached plowed ground, it checked the pony so suddenly that she was nearly flung from the saddle, but she recovered in time to check him just beneath the house.

There she dismounted and threw the reins; there for a moment she waited, breathing deep, replacing her hat in its proper position, relaxing from the strain of the gallop. Then she went to the door of Duval.

The evening was warm. A shower in the afternoon had purified the air without chilling it, and, therefore, the door was open, so that she could look in on Duval beside his green-shaded light. She had heard other men describe the details of his household appointments so carefully that she knew them now as though her eye already had rested on them. It was like a twice-told tale, one telling of which had come to her in a dream.

She saw the stove, the top of it carefully scrubbed clean of soot and grease stains—that famous stove on the naked, glowing iron of which Duval cooked his famous steaks. She saw the wood for the next fire stacked neatly at one side, the kindling in a tidy pile near it; the table on which those celebrated feasts were spread divided the room in two, as it were. That nearest the door was kitchen and dining room. Beyond stretched the circular rag rug, rich with red and blue. A shelf of books filled a corner—why had not one told her of their titles? Three or four big, comfortable chairs; a little round table with a lamp on it—the green-shaded lamp—and the pale face of Duval lost in shadow, the light falling only on his open book, and the lean hands which held it.

She saw this in that instant she paused at the door, and knew that Duval had become aware of her before he lowered the book and looked up.

Now that the book was down, he came to her hurriedly.

"You ain't come sashaying all the way up here through the night, have you?" asked Duval. "Not on account of that Tarragon vinegar? That could-'ve waited, even if Dad Wilbur did ask for it again to-day."

"Why," said she, "it wasn't the Tarragon." She drawled the words carefully. "It was a bit of news that I thought you ought to hear. News about a friend of yours."

"What friend?" asked Duval.

"Charlie Nash. A stranger came into the store this evening and happened to hear your name——"

"From you?" asked Duval mildly. But she felt the keen, gray eyes fixed on her steadily.

"I don't remember—Charlie, I think. It seemed to throw the man into a rage—a big, lean, ugly man, with a leathery face, and a crooked, thin mouth. He wanted to know where you live, and he said such terrible things about you that Charlie——"

"Tackled him?"

"Ran straight into a gun."

"And Charlie's bare-handed!" said Duval. "Bare-handed, on account of my advice——"

"The stranger is waiting for him in Pete's Place," she ended. "He'll be down there in five minutes, or so, I expect. Charlie will, I mean!"

Duval reached a hat from a peg on the wall.

"You rode up?" he asked in his gentle way.

"Yes," she said.

"I reckon you won't mind walkin' back, then," said Duval. "I'm kind of pressed for time."

He was through the door as he spoke; she, following a step or two, was in time to see him spring on the back of pinto like a mountain lion at the kill, heard the grunt of the pony as strong knees crushed its sides, then the scuffing of hoofs that struggled for a footing in the loose earth, and horse and rider vanished in the gloom.

She started a step or so after him, but reconsidering, she went hurriedly back into the house.

She was frightened now, it seemed. She looked askance at the steep flight of stairs that led up to the attic rooms, as though they were letting down invisible dangers upon her. The door behind her and the door before, were open throats of terrible possibilities, so that she went on tiptoe, hands clenched at her sides, but still resolutely persisting until she stood before the books.

They were battered volumes. A worn set in blue-buckram bindings were labeled with the title "Hakluyt's Voyages"; she saw a "Tom Jones" in two fat volumes; there was a narrow Marlowe beside it, then a book on woodland flowers; one on the game fishes of the Catalina Islands; Boccaccio wickedly set in a dark corner——

She had seen enough titles, and hurrying toward the door, she only paused to glance at the thick volume he had been reading as she entered. It was the most self-revealing, the most wise of essayists, Montaigne.

"Cow-puncher?" she said in a whisper.

Then, as though fear overcame her, she ran to the door, but paused there and looked back with a frown at all the room, as one striving to fit together the bits of a most difficult puzzle.

"Cow-puncher my foot!" said she. "But what is Duval?"

She carried that question unanswered into the open night, then remembered the thing that might be happening even this moment in the village of Moose Creek.

That thought started her running, light as a boy, with a swiftly springing step, straight down through the perils of the dark creek trail.

She knew what she would do, if only she could reach the place in time. As she ran, she listened for the half-stifled report of a revolver, heard none, and raced on still faster. Once she stumbled over a projecting root and tumbled head over heels, but this did not deter her. On she went like a whirlwind, dodging the black trunks as they leaped up under her face, and so ran on behind the rear fences of the village on the creek side until she came opposite the back of Pete's Place. There she turned in.

CHAPTER VII.

CAST OUT!

SHE knew every feature of the place out of the exploits of her childhood, which had ended not so many years before. In those days, whatever a boy would dare to do, she would do also. She even could lead the way into perilous adventures in the times when she wore overalls, a flipping pigtail—stuffed inside her jacket most of the time, and knees as often bruised and gashed as those of any headlong boy in Moose Creek. And, still, at times, she yearned for the years when she had worn her freckles with never a care in the world. Then came womanhood, and with a nun's cold finger touched her eyelids and her lips.

The old practice was gone, but still she knew how to climb up the brick wall that helped to keep the river at

bay from the rear marshes of Pete's back yard. The top of it was not four inches wide, and there was a long fall to the water beneath, yet she stood upright, and walked easily along it, her arms stretched out on either side to give her balance.

She reached the rear wall of the house. On that roof she once had hidden in an important crisis of a game of hide and seek, to the despair of every boy in the village. Now she worked her way deftly across it, lowered herself to the low top of the kitchen, and from this dropped again to the ground.

She was inside the back yard of Pete's Place, without the use of a key for entering that sanctuary.

And straight before her was an open window that allowed fresh air to blow in among the billows of smoke that filled the barroom.

The big stranger was nearest to her. She could have reached through the window and touched his shoulder. Beyond him stood half a dozen others with tall beer glasses before them, or little "whiskies," no taller than three of her slender fingers. These who stood farthest from her were dimly seen through the haze of smoke from swiftly burning cigarettes. But of one thing she made sure at once, if for no other reason than that the cynosure of all eyes was this newcomer—Duval was not there!

She rubbed her eyes like a child wakening from sleep, and looked again, searchingly, into every corner.

It was true. Duval had not come!

Hurriedly she strove to reconstruct or to adapt her conception of the man; but no matter what shadows she could admit into the picture, she could not think of him as one tainted by cowardice. Yet, when she looked again at the stranger, she was not so sure, for he seemed to Marian Lane the most formidable she had ever seen.

He stood now in an attitude of reflection at the bar, which Pete polished solicitously before him.

"I seen you before, stranger, I reckon?" suggested Pete.

"No," said the other, "you never did, or you'd know me. I'm Larry Jude."

The girl, in the outer night, saw heads jerked back a little, as though the name had struck them with a physical impact; she herself thought she had heard it in the casual talk of men, or in the newspapers; she could not be sure, except that it was connected with brutal violence.

"There's one around here that's called a man," said Jude. "Duval!"

Pete stood stiffly at attention.

"You know his house?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," said Pete.

"Man!" repeated Jude. "Boy-killer, I'd say!"

It was a fierce hour of trial for Pete. He grew pale, but he did not give back from his duty to a friend.

"He's pretty high considered around here," said he. "He—he's a friend of mine, in fact."

"A friend of yours?" said Jude. "A friend of yours?"

His great shoulders swayed a little forward over the bar, but Pete stood his ground, very white of face now. Jude, however, suddenly laughed.

"A boy-killer, is what I said. A boy-killer! D'you hear me? D'you all hear me when I talk?"

He threw up his head, and every man at the bar started. Yet they kept their attention, in pretense, fixed upon their drinks, so that it was obvious that they did not wish to have the newcomer's eyes specially focused upon them.

The girl at the window, no matter what her excitement, scanned those faces critically and knew that she would remember them as men who had failed; for not one of these, she was sure, but had accepted the hospitality of Duval either in his house or at this bar, or

had listened to his singing and praised it, or won from him deeply at cards, or "borrowed" a stake to take them home.

She was hardly amazed when she saw them turn their heads from Jude toward the other end of the bar, for certainly they would have chosen to find another object of interest in that direction.

In fact, she did actually discern a new form just against the farther window. She could not see the face, but she made out the leisurely posture of the figure, one elbow on the bar and the hands loosely interlocked. Then, as by a single phrase one recognizes a piece of music, so she recognized Duval!

How he had come, she could not tell. There had been no noticeable swinging open of the door, but like a ghost he had melted into this room and materialized at the bar facing Jude.

She glanced back at that lofty man, and saw that from the moment of throwing up his head he had not stirred, except his right hand, which gripped the handle of his Colt. Powerfully, it gripped it, the skin whitening over the knuckles; but except for that sign, he looked rather like a soldier, frozen in the attitude of attention.

So were they all, for that matter, from Pete to the least of the drinkers at his bar—one with glass arrested halfway to his lips; one with a match flaming in his finger tips, but never approaching the cigarette for which it was intended; all of them men of stone, except that careless figure at the farther end of the bar.

He who held the match had his fingers singed, and started as he dropped the red ember; at that movement the gun of Jude leaped almost from its holster—then slowly sank back again into the leather, and all the line at the bar slipped away softly, as though they would not attract attention, and flattened themselves against the wall.

Their heads never had turned; at big Jude they cast not a single look, but kept their attention riveted upon Duval. Marian herself could hardly draw her eyes away until, as a rift opened in the smoke, she saw that he was smiling.

At this, with a gasp, she glanced back at Jude to see how he was taking it. First she noted that the hand which grasped the Colt was trembling; and then she discovered that his coat across the shoulders was growing slack and tense in turns as he drew in great breaths. His head, indeed, moved a little with the greatness of his breathing. And all at once she forgot the brutality of this man, the savagery grained in his soul and sneering on his lips, as she would have forgotten the ferocity of a tiger, if she had seen it struggling against a torture. So Jude was struggling. He was able and willing enough to risk his life in quick action, she could have wagered; but this slow torment, this mysterious strain of nerves and will against an intangible force was breaking him.

He shuddered suddenly from head to foot. She could see his jaw sag and his tongue moisten his lips.

At that moment, Duval spoke; the sound of his voice made the gun leap again in the holster of Jude, but for the second time he failed to draw it clear; there was a different reason now, she could guess.

"And here's another Jude!" Duval had said.

He walked slowly down the barroom, with his hands resting lightly on his hips —far, far from any weapon. Indeed, if he were armed, there was no sign of it. She noted now, as she wondered at the inhuman courage of this man, how he was dressed. Details of his appearance had not entered her eye when she saw him in his house, but now she was aware of common, blue overalls cinched about the hips with a tanned belt of common hide, and of a flannel shirt that once had been blue, but was faded almost gray from the washtub. It was

open at the throat, and the sleeves were rolled up to the elbows for comfort and coolness in part, no doubt, but in part, one would guess, because the sleeves had shrunk. He could have stood as the commonest plowboy on the range, had it not been for that indefinable thing which still she could not even name, but it was Duval.

As he came, the enchanted eyes of the watchers followed him; big Jude shrank back perceptibly until his shoulders were pressed against the window and obscured her vision.

She could only hear the voice of Duval speaking terrible things in the most casual tone!

"If I'd had an idea there was more like the kid," said Duval, "I wouldn't have knocked him over to stop him; I would have killed him, partner. But I figgered that he was the only one of his kind and that maybe the world wouldn't want to lose him. He'd go behind bars to be looked at, five cents a look. But now that I have a slant at you, I know it's a tribe, like the snake tribe, all poison and no use, except they eat rats, and toads, and such."

The voice grew very near. With horror in her heart, and unspeakable shame, Marian saw the big shoulders of Jude strain still farther back.

"But you've come huntin' in the wrong place, Jude. Here in Moose Creek we don't keep rats and toads even to feed the Judes with. You'd starve here, partner. So leave your teeth behind you and—get out!"

Jude did not stir.

The girl, one hand pressed against her face, wondered how a brother of hers could have endured such a crisis, and if he would have acquitted himself better than this monster, Jude. But from her very heart rose a great revolt against the strength of the conqueror.

"D'you hear?" said Duval. "Drop your gun belt and move!"

There was a heavy clatter on the floor.

Then she could see Jude stumbling toward the distant door, with the back of one hand raised across his eyes as though he wished to cover his shamed face from the sight of men.

He who stood at the very end of the line that was watching by the wall stepped out in the path of that retreat.

"A sneak!" he shouted. "A yaller sneak!" and he struck the big man across the face.

There was no answering blow from Jude, the tyrant. Instead, he shrank cowering to one side, and then ran—fairly ran! In his blindness, he struck the door jamb, staggered, and then pitched forward into the street, with both his arms cast out before him as though the darkness were more precious than all the treasures of the world.

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

A NEW KIND OF BULLET

THOSE lesser minds who feel some resentment against the great Shakespeare for his perfect comments on almost every subject, will hail with delight the occasion to remark that the poet didn't know *all* that he was talking about when he said, "How far that little candle throws its beams!" For we have it on no less an authority than the *Army and Navy Journal* that a captain of infantry of the department of experiment at Fort Benning, firing from a twelve-gauge shotgun, with an ordinary tallow candle completely penetrated a one-inch pine board at close range. The prestige of the candle, which has been waning under the spread of the various forms of more powerful light, will now wax apace. And at last we will know what to do with half-burned candles!

Thanks, Kid!

By George Cory Franklin

Author of "Dead Matches," etc.

I DISREMEMBER ever seein' a worse spring than that one was. We'd had a hard winter and the stock of the J B Connected was poor. Then just when we're makin' our second drive toward our summer range at the head of the Rio Grande in May and the grass is gettin' started, along comes a late blizzard that puts a crimp in every rider except "Halfy." Seems like nuthin' ever gets the grin off that cowboy's face. Everybody but him was grouchy that mornin' when we took our stiff, cranky ropes and stumbled around over rocks and slippery ground tryin' to catch our horses.

"Dad" Trumble made a pass at a pony. His rope was stiff as a wire cable and the honda didn't run up like it should, although the loop fell true. Before Dad could take up the slack, a heavy bronc that we called Diamond had stuck his head in beside the neck of the pony Dad wanted, and run against the rope. Just one of them little things that don't look like nuthin' at all, and yet that often breeds trouble. Dad's an old-time cowboy, one of the best judges of cattle in the whole upper Rio Grande basin. That's why Jim Brown keeps him on the pay roll, but Dad's old fingers is stiff and his legs don't work as supple as they did twenty years ago, and when the double jerk come on that rope he'd 'a' been jerked clear under the whole bunch of millin' hoofs but for Halfy, who drops his own loop around Diamond's front feet and spills him.

Ropin' saddle stock by the front feet is poor business any time, and Jim Brown calls Halfy good and hard for doin' it. Not that Jim is unreasonable, either, but he didn't see what had made

the boy do such an unheard-of trick. Before I could tell him, he tore into Halfy like a proddy steer.

"What's comin' off here?" Jim snorts. "One more break like that and I'll hit you with a pay check!"

"Now, wouldn't that be a horrible thing to do to me on a nice, warm mornin' like this," kids Halfy, "when it's so nice and beautiful and the birds are singin'——"

Dick Colton laughs a mean, raspin' sound that hasn't got any fun in it. "Don't be hard on the kid, boss," he sneers. "He was doin' it to save that pore old relic from gettin' his bones broke."

I saw Dad's face color, but he didn't answer back or explain a thing.

"Aw, shut up and let's get goin'," says Jim. "But cut out the grand-stand stuff."

Halfy ain't payin' much attention to Jim, and less than none to Colton. He's busy gettin' Dad's rope straightened out and pullin' the old man's pony out into the open. Dad don't say nuthin' except "Thanks, kid!" and Halfy nodded and made a grab for his hat that had just been caught by a particularly twisty gust of wind and was about to sail away over the chuck wagon. Brooks, the cook, batted on the dish pan with a knife handle and we all grabbed our eatin' tools and, bein' as we're mostly young, we're all ahead of Dad, which is goin' to leave him less time to eat after he gets his plate loaded.

Halfy ordinarily is in no hurry to rush to a place at the grub pile, but this mornin' he was the first one there, and when he turned away I saw he was carryin' two well-stocked plates and an extry cup of coffee. He set one of 'em in a sheltered place where the wind wasn't whippin' the smoke from the camp fire quite so fierce, and motioned to Dad. "Come on, old-timer," says Halfy, "a cup of Java will make your insides happy, and there'll be another day when the sun will shine and your bones won't creak."

"Thanks, kid!" says Dad.

I'd 'a' liked to 'a' picked a easy ride for Dad that day, but bein' foreman of the J B don't give a man much leeway for sympathize, and I've got to clean them foothills as we go of whatever strays have been lost by the first drive we'd made in April. Our practice is to take the young steers that's been left over from the beef round-up the year before, and any strong cows that's fit to drive, up early to the summer range; then along in May when everything is nice, we drive up the yearlings and cows that have young calves. Usually this is the trip that the cowboys like best of all the year's work. The days are warm, matin' birds are singing along the streams, the meadows are green with the first grass, and the herd drifts along, glad to get back to the places they know. The cowboys gossip with the riders from other herds, meet old friends of the years gone by, and altogether have a glorious month. But this spring it seems like everything had gone wrong. We'd lost quite a few steers on the early drive, owing to a little stampede that had happened at this very same camp, and that no one had ever been exactly able to account for.

Steers that have wintered under fence ain't crazy to run, and bein' poor makes 'em even less dangerous than ordinary. The night of the stampede Lisle Crosby and Dick Colton had been on guard, and they'd surprised us by firin' a shot, then after a little wait—one, two, three, which is the alarm signal all over the Western range. We'd forked our night horses as quick as we could and rode to the herd. Lisle and Dick had turned the cattle and we soon had 'em quiet, but we tallied out twenty head short, and though we held up the drive for half a day, we couldn't find those missin' steers. With the market higher

than a cat's back, twenty dogies are worth a wad of money, and that's why we're draggin' every little rincon on this next drive.

We had moved the herd off the bed ground that mornin' after Dad had made the awkward throw, and I was so busy seein' that everybody was placed right to hold them cows on the trail and keep movin' that I didn't notice that Dad ain't workin' on the drag until Jim Brown asked me where the old man was. Then I began to look around and ask questions. Nobody had seen him.

Halfy is clear at the point workin' opposite Lisle Crosby, and is one of the last men I inquired of about Dad. Halfy hadn't seen him, nor had Lisle, but I noticed Lisle ride back a few minutes later and stop to talk to Colton, the man who had been with him the night we lost the steers.

The weather was gettin' no better fast. The wind howled around the high peaks like it was gettin' a mad up, and then shrieked as it tore down through the forests to sweep over the sand hills and chill the humped-up cattle to the bone. Little calves was runnin' around bawlin' till it made your heart ache to hear 'em, and it was just one continual fight to keep 'em movin' at all.

In spite of all we was havin' to do, I kept worryin' about Dad. Maybe a horse had slipped and fell with him, pinnin' him underneath. Maybe he'd got bucked off and wasn't able to get his horse again. I rode back to the point, rememberin' how nice Halfy had been to Dad that mornin', intending to send him back to look for the old man. I was surprised to find him workin' alone.

"Where's Lisle?" I asked Halfy.

"I dunno, 'Baldy,'" he answered. "Him and Dick rode off right away after you was up here before. I thought you must have needed 'em and sent 'em to the drag."

I called to Jim Brown to take charge of the drive and motioned to Halfy to come with me. We rode back along the herd, Halfy on one side and me on the other, checkin' up to be sure that Lisle or Colton wasn't somewhere along the column. We met at the calf wagon, and the second I saw Halfy's face I knew that he'd sized things up the same way I had. He looked at me, and for the first time I saw that boy's face bad. His eyes was narrowed; his lips was a hard, straight line.

"So, those steers were pocketed some place a purpose," he said.

"Looks like it," I answered.

"Baldy," he says, "old Dad has figured this thing out, and for some reason he didn't want to tell you. Maybe he wanted to be sure before he accused anybody. He's gone to find out, and Lisle and Dick have gone to stop him. Maybe Colton suspected that Dad had their play figured out, that's why he was so ready to sneer at Dad this mornin' when he had that accident."

"Come on, Halfy," I says, and we rode back along the trail watchin' for tracks. When we came to the place where we'd camped the night before we found Dad's tracks all right. He hadn't gone but a little piece with the cattle and then he'd turned back across the river and headed for some piñon-covered hills to the southeast.

Halfy rode ahead at a long trot, leanin' over his horse's neck. After a while he pointed to where two horses had come in from the north and gone on followin' Dad's tracks. Right off, Halfy reins his horse to a stop.

"Baldy," he says, "maybe we'll be too late if we follow around these tracks. It's clear that Dad is headin' for that little basin on the Myers Creek side. I'm goin' straight across to help him. Any man that'll do what Dad is doin' is entitled to the best I've got. Suppose you follow these tracks so's we'll be sure not to pass Dick and Lisle, and I'll make a quick ride to help Dad."

I nodded to him to go ahead and I rode on, while Halfy cut across the foothills, ridin' like he was out to turn a bunch of wild horses. It's a cinch now that Lisle and Dick will show fight if we catch 'em. They've gone too far with this stealin' game to be able to explain how it was that them steers disappeared when they was night herdin', and they wasn't able to find 'em next mornin', but they was able to ride straight to 'em now. I rode along on the trail made by the three horses, and even though I knew there was trouble just around the corner, I noticed that the weather was changin', which shows how much an outdoors man takes it into his plans all the time.

At the top of the next raise I found that the direction of the wind had changed. It had stopped roarin' on the high mountains, and there was a mild, soft feelin' beginnin' to come into it. "If we was to have a chinook," I thought, "the flat places would be a lake in an hour or two, and I wouldn't be able to follow these tracks in the snow."

I didn't have much time, though, to speculate on the weather, because right then I got a surprise. There's three horsemen comin' down a valley some distance away, and a glance tells me that it's Dad ridin' in the lead on Button, the pony he'd had trouble catchin' that mornin', and behind him are the two cowboys I'd suspected of stealin' steers.

Bein' foreman of the outfit, I didn't want the boys, any of 'em, to know that I'd been trailin' 'em, so I reined my horse into the timber right quick and kept back into the piñons out of sight, but where I could watch the trail.

Dad was ridin' stiff and awkward, and when they got up near enough for me to see him good I pretty near fell off my horse with surprise. Dad's holster is empty, and his hands are tied behind his back. Looks like I'd got to change my figurin' a heap. I just sat there and thought, too numb with astonishment to speak. Was Dad a cow thief, and had Lisle and Dick, who was on guard that night of the stampede, suspected that some of our men was to blame, and watched to see if any of 'em left the outfit when we was near the same place? When I'd rode up along the herd askin' about Dad, had they decided that Dad had them dogies hid some place in the piñons and trailed him?

Sure enough, that's just the story that Colton was tellin' Jim Brown when I rode around and came back to the herd. The sun had come out bright and the wind was blowin' soft and mild, already the water from the melting snow was beginning to gurgle underneath. I was dimly conscious of the birds chirpin' hopefullike, but my heart felt like it was made of lead as I listened to Colton's talk.

Jim Brown's face showed that he was sufferin' too. He turned to Dad. "Tell me the truth about this, Dad," and there was a note in his voice that was nearer to pleadin' than any man had ever heard in Jim's tones before.

But Dad wouldn't say a word. He just sat there on a wagon tongue with his hands still tied and his lips set in a straight line.

"Where's the steers you say Dad was drivin' south when you caught him?" Jim asked Lisle and Colton.

"They scattered and we couldn't get 'em," Lisle explains. "One of us had to stay with this here cow thief, and one man couldn't handle them cattle alone."

"Besides," broke in Dick, actin' sort of hurtlike, "we thought you'd be better pleased to have the man that was stealin' 'em brung in than to have the steers. It won't be any trouble to round 'em up, now that we know where they are."

"I've a notion that them steers will be back afore long," I busts in. "Halfy is out there on Diamond, and if he can't

handle 'em on that horse, they've sure got awful fat and wild since they've been gone."

Dick and Lisle looked at each other quick, and I saw Colton wink at his partner.

"So, they had it all framed up, did they?" he asks.

"What are you drivin' at now?" I snorts.

"Snap out of it, Baldy," says Lisle, "you couldn't see a hole in a ladder. Just think a minute—that play this mornin'. Dad, here, ropes two horses instead of one, and the extry bronc is Diamond, the best and stoutest horse in the whole J B remuda. Anybody can see by the way Halfy treats this old relic that he's standin' in with him. Halfy just slips his bridle onto Diamond apparently because he had him caught. It was all a put-up job. They knew that they'd be followed, and the play has worked out just like they figured it would. Halfy thinks that you fellers won't be hard on a old man like Dad, and ridin' a top horse like Diamond he can fog them dogies across the divide onto the Saguache easy. He'll sell 'em to some of them buyers over there that don't ask questions, and then lay around and wait until Dad gets out of jail."

I was watchin' Dad when Colton spills this information, and for the first time the old man looks scared and guilty. He opened his mouth like he was goin' to talk, and then a hopeless expression comes into his eyes, and he sorta slumped down and didn't say a word. It's evident to me that Dad is worried about Halfy more'n about himself.

Jim Brown is as good a cowman as ever forked a bronc, and he's human, too. If he thinks anybody is gettin' the worst of it, he'll stick up for 'em. I was surprised at how completely he'd seemed to fall for Colton's story.

"Ride up along the line, Baldy," he tells me, "and have the boys throw the cattle off the trail, then all of you come back here. Believe me, nobody's goin' to say that we didn't give Dad a fair trail!"

I did like he said, and in a little while the whole J B remuda is in camp unsaddlin' their horses. Brooks has got a fire started and is rustlin' us some chuck. I saw him go toward the other wagon carryin' a plate and a big butcher knife in his hand like he's after meat for dinner. Dad ain't sittin' on the wagon tongue any more. He's layin' on a pile of blankets with his face toward us, and Brooks walks right past him, stoppin' for a second to say something to the old cowboy.

The riders ain't jokin' any more, nor talkin' much. They all like Dad, and it's just cast a cloud over us to see him tied up like a criminal. Lisle and Dick sort of herd off by theirselves, waitin' for the trial to begin. Brown steps around to one end and leans against the off hind wheel of the chuck wagon. I noticed that as he did it he slouched his gun so that it was within easy reach of his right hand that was hooked in his belt just above it, and he was lookin' toward where Dad was layin'. Sudden he turns like he'd just seen something over in the piñons toward where the steers had been lost, and everybody raises up to see what Jim is interested in.

It was enough to interest anybody, too: a riderless horse trottin' across the ridge. Lisle and Dick walked a few steps toward the horse, and stood talkin' in low tones. When I looked back, Dad was gone. I started to holler, but caught a look from Jim Brown and a shake of his head that said plain as could be "Keep quiet, you fool!"

Right off I remembered how Brooks had walked past the pile of blankets where Dad had been layin', and I began to smell a rat. Jim has fixed it so that Brooks could cut them strings and turn

Dad loose. The whole play had been made to order for Dad to escape. All our horses been turned loose, and if Brooks had been able to hide a pony where Dad can get it, the old man is goin' to have a good, long head-start before we can catch 'em up and saddle.

Lisle is the first one of the riders to discover that Dad has disappeared, and he sure is crazy mad over it. Him and Colton rush down afoot through the slush to chase in the saddle stock. The horses had other ideas about bein' corralled, and it was easy to see that none of the other riders was very anxious to help corral 'em. Instead of our bein' in the saddles in ten minutes like we should have been, it was a good half hour before we was ready to go and look for Dad; and by that time the water runnin' from the hills had spread over the low ground like a shallow lake. There wasn't a track showed anywhere. Lisle and Dick chased up and down the flat tryin' to find some sign, but the rest of us was plumb willin' to admit that Dad had got away.

"Bein' as our ponies are all saddled," says Jim, "we'll take a look at that place where you caught Dad with my cattle."

Anybody can see that this proposition don't make any hit with Colton or his partner, but Jim has played it so slick that they have to go. I've been more or less asleep up till now, but any man would have to be as dumb as a sheep-herder's burro not to catch onto Brown's scheme, and I got the idea that a good place for me was to be close enough to Dick and Lisle so that I could overhear anything they might say, or to see any kind of a signal passin' between 'em.

We crossed the river and found the horse that we'd seen in the piñons. He's a poor rawboned critter with a Mexican brand, and the saddle which is still on him is an old worn-out, double-rigged affair such as the poorer class of peons around Santa Fe use. We rode on, following about the direction that Halfy and I had gone that mornin'. There ain't a track shows by this time, and a dozen men might have gone that way and left no trail. The farther we went without seein' anybody, the more relieved Colton appears to be, and the more it looks like his explanation of the affair was right. It's a cinch that if Halfy had found the cattle where Colton says they left 'em, he'd surely ought to be comin' along with 'em before this.

I looked at Jim Brown. His face shows that he's puzzled and is thinkin' that maybe he'd made a mistake after all in placin' so much confidence in Dad and Halfy. Maybe Colton was right and them two had been the guilty ones. Then as we came up over a low divide we heard pistol shots in the timber beyond, and our boys all spurred their horses toward the sound of the shooting, that is, all but Lisle and Dick Colton. They appeared to lose a heap of their anxiety to cross that divide, and hung back, gradually droppin' behind the rest.

Anxious as I was to see what was goin' on in the timber, I eased my horse back and stayed behind those two. They looked back at me two or three times like they was wonderin' how suspicious I was of 'em. Then as we come to a gulch, Lisle wheeled his horse up it and Dick turned down. All our men had gone on into the timber beyond, and I was left alone in between the two men who I was sure was the criminals, yet I had no call to throw a gun on either of 'em just because they didn't keep up with the other men. I couldn't follow 'em both at once, either, and I was up a stump, havin' to sit there as helpless as a hog-tied yearlin' and see the men that I was convinced had caused all this ruckus git away.

But I wasn't the only rider in the upper basin to get a surprise that day;

because while Lisle and Colton was spurrin' their horses in opposite directions and they was turned around in their saddles lookin' back to see what I was goin' to do, they didn't see what I saw, and that was Halfy on Diamond ridin' down the draw, swingin' an open loop in front of Lisle, while Dad was ridin' up to meet Colton, and Dad was takin' no chances on his old muscles bein' stiff and slow this time, for he was holdin' a six-gun low down where he could hardly miss gettin' Dick unless he stopped.

Halfy made a pass with his loop and tied, jerkin' Lisle out of his saddle to sit down with a grunt in the soft mud and water, and a second later old Dad's high-pitched voice ordered Dick to stop.

"What's happened, Halfy?" I asked.

"Quite a lot," he answered. "First, I caught up with a bunch of greasers movin' our steers. I knocked one of 'em out of his saddle, and he's layin' over here unconscious yet. Then I had a runnin' fight with the others and have just drove 'em off, but the steers scattered on me. I was sure glad to see our riders comin' to gather 'em up."

Yep, Colton and Lisle had pulled the play all right, and had arranged to deliver the cattle to some Mexicans who was goin' to trail 'em south. Dad had been suspicious of 'em all the time—ever since the night of the fake stampede—and that mornin' he'd quit the trail herd without sayin' anything and was huntin' for the bunch when Colton and his partner found him and decided to frame the old man, which maybe they might have succeeded in doin' if it hadn't been for Jim Brown's confidence in Dad and Halfy.

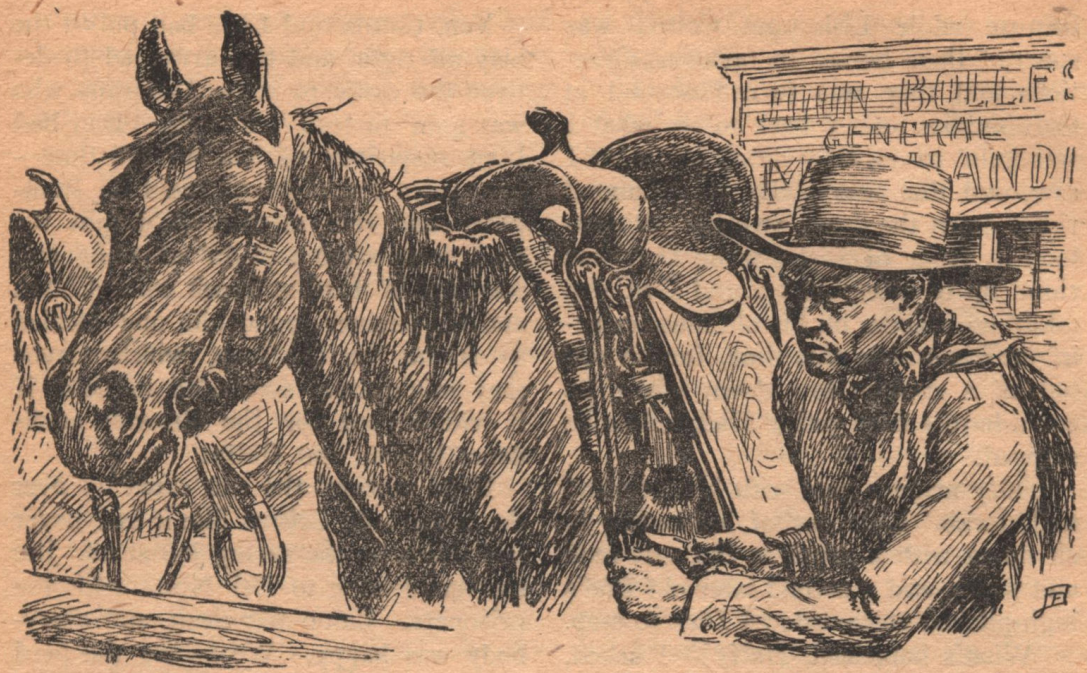
Next mornin' the sun came up over the Sangre de Cristos like it had never laid down on the spring job at all. Jim had gone back to Del Norte with the prisoners. Camp felt clean, and everybody was happy. We swung the herd out onto the trail. The cattle wanted to get back onto the summer range, and they struck out like they couldn't wait to see them green hills ahead. The little calves walked along beside their mothers, full-bellied and contented. Halfy tossed Dad a package of tobacco as he rode away toward the point.

"Thanks, kid!" said Dad.

A COUGAR FIGHT

TOGETHER with his crew, Captain W. Urquhart, who was in command of a tug anchored in Loughbrough Inlet, near Vancouver, British Columbia, recently had a narrow escape from death. Captain Urquhart had just stepped to shore from a work boat when a hunger-crazed cougar, who had been watching him from a cliff fifteen feet above, sprang and landed in the boat, upsetting it. The animal fell into the water as the boat turned over and, enraged, made for the tug, which was twenty-five feet away. The crew, who had been looking on, grabbed long poles and managed to keep the big cat from climbing into the boat, and finally were able to force it under water until it drowned.

The cougar was then taken from the water and skinned. A forty-dollar bounty was collected, and the skin was sold for twenty dollars. The crew then divided the proceeds, and declared that they had had a profitable as well as an exciting day.



The Leather Map

By Raymond A. Berry

Author of "Knights in Chaps," etc.

CHAPTER I.

REMEMBER THE ADDRESS.

FARTHEST outpost of civilization on the edge of the Colorado River bad lands, Houserock sweltered, with her scattered stores and dwellings wrapped in a gray mantle of dust and haze. It was August, and the cottonwood and snake trees along the streets seemed to droop their shoulders of leaf and bough beneath the weight of merciless heat beating down from a fever-red sun. To the west, distorted figures of mirage did a weird, slow sword dance among the jagged, daggerlike spires of the vermilion cliffs.

On the south, monstrous thunderheads were piling up, blue black at their bloated bases, creamy white on their sunlit summits. Red shuttles of electricity passed between these clouds, and low growls of thunder came from the dark canyons beneath.

In the adobe courthouse at the center of the village was congregated a group of the district's most prominent citizens. They were all in shirt sleeves, and every one of them was tremendously interested. Oratory was the order of the day, and it was this that held the breathless attention of the young man in the adjoining room.

"I'm tellin' you, men," Ockletree, the sheepman, who held the floor at that particular moment, was proclaiming: "This Kempter feller is plain no good. Kempter of Forlorn some call him. Others, just plain, 'Shiftless' Kempter. Spends two-thirds of his time prowlin' round down in the Forlorn country. Doin' what? We ought to take him out

of the sheriff's keepin' an' make an example of him."

"Well, Ockletree," put in Ross, who could be identified as sheriff by his star, "you'll have to admit that he couldn't get into mischief down there. There ain't nothin' to get into mischief with."

Ockletree, a tall, florid-faced man with close-cropped mustache which bristled like an awning over a savage mouth, sniffed:

"There's a lot nobody knows about that country down there. Besides, how do we know how much of his time has been spent down there? Maybe it's a blind for skullduggery all the time. Anyhow, we've got the goods on him this trip. Old Ben here was beat almost to death—left to die, in fact. Ben will describe the party for you—describe him so that anybody can tell it's Kempter. Are we goin' to stand for it? We are not. Sheriff, you questioned this feller Kempter about his business at the time and what did he tell you?"

"Told me he hadn't got in from the Forlorn when this happened," answered Sheriff Ross thoughtfully, "and, from the looks of him, he might just as well have come off a griddle—an' that's what the Forlorn country is these days."

Ockletree's answering laugh rang sneeringly through the room. "Some alibi—some alibi! He hadn't got in from the Forlorn? What's he doing down in the Forlorn?" the sheepman shouted. "And can he prove that he was there? He beat up old Ben here, didn't he, Ben?"

The old, goatish-looking man felt his bruised body and muttered: "Yep, some one did sure enough, but I ain't sure——"

"But you said it looked just like him, didn't you?" shouted Ockletree.

Old Ben winced as though he had been hit.

"Yep, he sure enough did," he bleated; "but his face was partly covered."

"Right down to his make of boots and the color of his hair he looked like him, didn't he?" interrupted Ockletree.

"Yep, he sure enough did," affirmed old Ben, staring at the sheepman as though hypnotized. "There ain't no doubt in the world but that he done it."

"How about it, men? Do you agree with Ben?" asked Ockletree.

A vociferous approval of the speaker's statements followed. Apparently about seven eighths of the gathering were prejudiced against Kempter of Forlorn.

The man in the small room was perfectly cognizant of this attitude, for he squirmed industriously to finish untying himself. He succeeded in freeing his arms in another minute, and bending quickly, extricated his legs. Standing erect, he strode to the window of his cell, for that was what the room was, and looked out.

Several good-looking horses stood at the hitching posts. One of them, an especially fine-looking sorrel, had an S O on its flank. The brand placed it as Ockletree's, and next to it were a pair of pack horses with well-filled packs upon their backs. These horses also had the Ockletree brand, and the young man in the cell looked at them with keenest interest. Back in the main room of the courthouse, oratory was still rampant. The citizens were now intent upon the kind and measure of justice to be meted out to the undesirable gentleman from the Forlorn country.

Kempter smiled broadly, and striding across the room he grabbed up an old table standing in the corner, and with a quick flip turned it over. Then, while the declaiming in the courtroom was at its height, he placed his foot against one leg of the table and pushed, holding the table flat as he did so. The results were gratifying from two standpoints. The leg pried off easily and without much sound. In comparison with the

din in the other room, the job was noiseless.

Picking up his table leg, Kempter strode to the window, and inserting it between the bars, he began the work of wrecking them. There was little danger of being disturbed at this task, for the window he chose faced the blank end of a large barn. Houserock was more than democratic in allowing its citizens to erect hay barns, pig pens, corrals, and what not within its limits. The opening made, Kempter crawled through the aperture and stretched luxuriously in the sunlight. In this seemingly bold maneuver there was not any great element of risk, for the young man from the Forlorn country knew that every citizen of Houserock not at the courthouse was asleep. It would not be sensible for any one to be otherwise.

In addition to this fact not many of the people knew him well. Out there in the sunlight he would pass for any one but himself, unless the observer came close and knew him. The windows were too high for those within to notice him.

Grinning appreciatively at the continued din, Kempter opened his pocketknife and moved from horse to horse, stopping at each one long enough to nearly cut through the cinches. When he had finished this, the excitement still ran high inside. Apparently the town was planning to make a gala affair of his chastisement.

"When you're ridin' Luck, you want to stay in the saddle," he mused, and widened his activities by untying some of the horses at the front of the courthouse and replacing them with the two pack animals and the saddle horse belonging to Ockletree—the only three horses whose cinches remained intact. They would be much handier to take here at the door.

As he finished with this task he heard a little gasp and, turning around, found a slim, almost frail-looking, youth surveying him from beneath the brim of a slouch hat. Kempter felt his first twinge of uneasiness at the sight. If the boy yelled, he could jump into the saddle and run. But that was not the way he had planned the affair, and he was a stickler for having things work according to plan.

"Hello, buddy," he greeted the newcomer casually.

"Howdy, mister," came the answer in a small, grave voice, while Kempter could feel a pair of keen, intelligent eyes probing him from beneath the drooping hat brim. Suddenly, Kempter was consumed with a desire to see the face and determined how much of suspicion it contained. He took a step forward and the youth immediately darted back two.

"That's no way to do when a fellow tries to be friendly," Kempter said reprovingly. "Shove your hat back so I can see your face."

"I won't," came the positive answer. "The sunlight hurts my eyes, and besides, perhaps I don't want to be friendly."

"How long have you been around here?" demanded Kempter.

"Quite a while."

Perplexity puckered the corners of Kempter's eyes, while a wry smile twisted his humorous mouth. "You—you saw me inspecting the horses, then?"

"Yes."

"And—and you didn't happen to see me come out of the front door, did you?"

"No, but I saw you come through the back window. You're strong, aren't you?"

"I'm more startled, skundered, and perplexed than anything else. Where were you, kid?"

"Sitting on the shady side of the courthouse listening to the talking. Then I heard what was going on at the back and went around to see. I kept behind a cottonwood, though."

"You oughtn't to listen to men talking the way those were," Kempter reproved again. "It's apt to have a hardening effect on your young sensibilities. But why didn't you yell and give the alarm?"

The youth continued to appraise him disconcertingly from the shelter of his broad-brimmed hat. Moreover, he always stood in the shade, which made the shadows deeper.

"Perhaps I shall yet," he stated defiantly.

"You'd better not," warned Kempter.

"Why?"

"You'd be spanked for not howling sooner."

"Maybe," said the youth doubtfully. "What's your given name?"

"Chad. I supposed every one around here knew it by now since I got notorious."

"Chad," repeated the youth in a musical tone, "that's a nice name. Take off your hat and let me see your hair."

Amazed, Kempter complied. There was really no need for haste. The argument within still raged.

"Oh," exclaimed the boy in an ecstatic voice, "it's brown and curly."

"You're one queer kid," responded Kempter. "Why aren't you looking to see if I've got guns and how many notches there are in them? That would be a more normal way for a kid to act."

"Why, you're not armed, are you?" exclaimed the boy.

"No, I'm not," frowned Kempter, "and I'm worried about you worse than you could possibly be about me. A kid that talks like you do is growing up unnatural. If you don't get over that sissified way of speakin', you'll get spindle-legged, weak-eyed, and bald-headed young."

"Smarty!" came the answer. "You're cheeky, breaking jail and then starting in to reform me."

"Talk grown up, don't you?" observed Kempter. "You're one of these kids that's kept off in the bushes most of the time with just old folks around, I'm afraid. Make them take you to town oftener and get in with some tough kids that will maybe black your eyes and teach you to say 'ain't' and talk like a man."

"Oh——" gasped the youth.

"You shouldn't gasp," reproved Kempter scowling. "Now, scoot over behind that tree and watch me get some guns. If you keep still, you'll have lots of fun. If you make a noise——" Kempter's scowl became more fierce than one would have thought possible—"well, if you make a noise it will be just too bad. And don't try to cross the street. I've got eyes in the back of my head. I could see you even if I was inside and I'd get you before you got anywhere."

"I won't run, and I won't tell."

Something in the boy's tone brought Kempter up short, after taking a step toward the door.

"Were you laughing?" he asked severely.

"No, but I won't tell. Go on!" hurried the youth. "You ought to get on one of those horses."

"I will in just a second," promised Kempter, and ran up the stairs.

At the top he knocked. Old Bill Gegus, self-appointed bailiff of the Houserock court, would surely be at the door with his heavy six-guns strapped about his waist. At the second knock, the door opened a crack. Kempter wanted more than cracks, however, and stepped discreetly behind it. The door opened farther and half of Gegus' burly form appeared. On that half was one of his six-guns. Kempter's hand flew out like a flash of light and Gegus' mouth sagged open as the muzzle of his own weapon poked at his stomach a fractional second later. The smile in Kempter's eyes was grim as he grasped Gegus' whiskers with his other hand and pulled him none too gently through

the door, which he closed behind him with his foot.

Immediately, the Houserock bailiff lost his second weapon—lost it long before the dumb astonishment had faded from his face.

"Now, you old walrus," whispered Kempter fiercely, "you can escort me into this august assembly, only it won't be just like you've dreamed of doing it. I'll walk behind you and use that double-duty stomach of yours as a lead screen in case any of the citizens get excited and start shooting!"

From within came the sheriff's voice in a grieved singsong. "Well, men, if you're all against me, I reckon I can't hold out alone against all the citizens of this county—though I warn you it's against the law."

"That's the talk," shouted Ockletree, "I knew you'd come to it. Boys, we'll have that young rooster out of his coop and a good coat of tar and feathers on for a starter. Go get him, some of you!"

"I'm already here, Ockletree," came the crisp answer from behind, and the mob turned to face a pair of unwavering gun barrels backed by Chad Kempter's bleak blue eyes.

A hush fell over the assembly.

"Gentlemen," began Kempter, "I guess it's about my turn to orate. Keep your hands away from your hips while I'm doing it! Did any one ask what was taken from this old Ben that bleats when Ockletree cracks the whip. What was I supposed to have taken?"

"He never took anything," exclaimed Ockletree furiously, "because we came along and scared him away before he had a chance."

"Something was too took!" trebled old Ben, but his voice went unheard.

"Shut up," Kempter snapped at Ockletree, "or if you've got to talk, talk low! The fact of the matter is that you—all of you—know down in your hearts that old Ben didn't have anything that I wanted. He's poor, downright poor, and no one accused him of having a sock of gold hid, like we hear about so frequent. Moreover, you know that I'm not the sort of man that's craving a lot of cash for spending. What would be my incentive? You've been accusing me of other things, too, and getting two or three people in each case to swear they had seen me or had evidence that I was there when actually I was in the desert. Now, the only man in this room that dislikes me well enough to go to all this trouble is Sam Ockletree. Just what is Sam's reason for hating me so much I'm not sure, except perhaps it's because he knows I think he's a four-flusher, and I've never hesitated to tell him to keep his nose out of my business. Ockletree always has had a lot of curiosity about my wandering around down in the Forlorn country, but he hasn't got any satisfaction out of it except the one of hanging the moniker of 'Shiftless' Kempter on to me.

"But now he's let his hate run away with his brains enough to try getting me out of the country by the split-rail method—or worse. He ought to be smart enough to know I wouldn't stand for that. If the sheriff feels that it's up to him to put me in the calaboose for a time just by way of showing his authority, why, I'm not the one to object; but when he goes to wearin' a hypocrite's long face and sidin' with Ockletree on anything as radical as this, I feel compelled to stand up for my rights."

Sheriff Ross swelled with outraged dignity. "I was tryin' to protect you, Kempter, but you can see how it is—your black record has turned the whole county against you."

"My black record consists in mindin' my own business, not snoopin' into other people's affairs, and expectin' other people to do the same," flashed Kempter; "and this is what I get!"

"You're not altogether right on that," cut in the sheriff again. "A lot of people who are good, respectable people have identified you as bein' mixed up in a lot of mischief around these parts. How do you account for that?"

"Only," retorted Kempter bitterly, "by sayin' that the whole town is under the thumb of Sam Ockletree, here, an' they lie when he says to—the sheriff included."

As he made the statement, Kempter realized that he did not altogether believe it himself—the part about lying, at least; but he went on defiantly:

"So long as you people have given me the name, I'll take the game. I'm leaving for the Forlorn country now, and I'm riding astride Sam Ockletree's favorite horse. I'm also taking along two of his pack animals with provisions which I intend to use. This, Ockletree, will give you and Ross all the excuse in the world for looking me up, and I'll be home to receive callers any time after Thursday. Just remember the address —Shiftless Kempter of Forlorn."

CHAPTER II.

HALF A MAP.

STEPPING quickly out of the room, Kempter slammed the door shut and locked it with the key he had taken from Gegus. Running down the steps, he flung himself on Ockletree's sorrel; and turning loose the two pack animals, he hazed them down the street at a wild gallop. Before they had run a block, the two pack animals were thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the occasion and ran with a fleetness that was truly surprising. Best of all, Kempter knew that for the first two miles or better he would have no trouble in keeping them headed right, as for that distance the route he wished to take them over was the one used by Ockletree's men.

With the advantage thus given him, Kempter twisted in his saddle to see what was taking place behind. By the time he had gone two blocks men were bolting from the doors and windows of the courthouse. It was a frantically excited crowd, and wildest among them would be Ockletree and Ross.

Shots were fired at the fugitive by such of the men as were without mounts, but these went far wild, and Kempter watched with keen interest while the others ran for their horses. Some of the girths broke spilling their owners upon the ground before they had ever touched the saddle seat. Others, with a trifle more of the leather hanging, held till the horses had taken a couple of leaps; then, by ones and twos the riders left their horses, tumbling to the road in ignominious heaps.

At the sight, Kempter stood up in his saddle and let out a defiant whoop. Then, just before he reached the turn in the street, he saw the slim, denim-clad figure of a boy watching from beside the trunk of a giant cottonwood. The youth was standing on his tiptoes, waving something white, and Kempter whirled his hat in answer.

Luck was with him, and ten minutes later he was hazing the pack horses into a wilderness of squaw brush, wild hawthorn, and cedar which choked the entrance to a dry canyon. The trail to Ockletree's ranch lay behind now. Ahead was the wilderness. That and the canyon-bounded, heat-blasted barrenness of the Forlorn land. As he rode, Kempter felt a queer mingling of exultation that he had defied the people who had prepared to humiliate and torture him, and wonder that he had done so madly impulsive a thing.

He had dared them to invade his sanctuary, and now that the invitation had been given, he was prepared to make the trip a highly educational one for those who chose to take it.

Kempter of Forlorn! He had won that title by years of roaming in this practically unexplored, canyon-crossed,

mesa-studded wilderness. Much that he had learned of the region was unknown to any other living man—yet there were still things down here to be solved—one thing in particular that made his blood sing with the same wild music of adventure that had sent the mail-clad Spanish explorers clambering over unnamed mountains and wading through chartless jungles in centuries past. Involuntarily, he reached into his inner vest pocket to see if the precious piece of leather was still there. It was, and with relief Kempter thought of the events of the past day.

Strange about that boy! One would naturally have expected him to give the alarm unless he was really frightened by Kempter's threat. Somehow, Chad doubted that. He had not seemed particularly afraid. He hoped that some day he would meet the boy again and have a chance to show his gratitude.

As he speculated, the going grew still rougher until he was compelled to go ahead and lead the way for the pack animals. He was delighted to find that they were trained and willing to follow. The clouds to the southward mounted higher until the sky was overcast. Soon, great drops spattered upon the rocks and made music among the leaves. For the first time, Kempter looked to see if there was a slicker tied behind the saddle. There was one, and donning it he rode on through the lightning-ruptured murk, thankful for the increasing violence of the storm.

All the remainder of that day and far into the night he traveled, marking his course by the lightning flashes that accompanied each successive squall. Then, when the storm settled into a steady, pitch-black downpour, he stopped in a little clump of cedar along the side of a narrow canyon and waited for daybreak. Light came without any slackening of the deluge, and he was forced several times during the day to rechart his course to avoid stream beds made impassable by the sudden advent of flood water.

That afternoon, tired and water-soaked, he crossed a naked rock plateau littered with fallen spires of rock gnawed from their pedestals by the sharp teeth of erosion. Dropping from this barren plain, he made his way through the drenching twilight to a tiny cave above a sage and cedar-covered flat. Getting stiffly from his horse, he made his way to the cave mouth, the slicker rattling about his legs as he walked. Close to the mouth he paused and peered within, flashing his electric torch about the dark interior. It was one of the hidden spots that went to constitute his home in the Forlorn country; yet, coming to it after a prolonged absence, he felt the same trepidation that a wild animal does about entering its burrow. Danger might be within.

Satisfied that the place was empty, Kempter strode inside and looked about. Nothing, so far as he could see, had been touched. Accordingly, he kindled a fire in a natural fireplace where the smoke sucked up through a crevice in the rocks. With the fire going, he went outside again, and taking the packs from the horses, he carried the dunnage inside and put the animals on picket ropes. With dawn he intended to be away on the business that had held him all these past years. Before then there was much to be done, packs to be sorted, and a route laid that would defy men who might follow him.

It was not until he started to rummage in the rude cupboard built into the wall of the cave that he realized that his hiding place had been entered during his absence. Every article that the place contained had been examined. The tea and coffee had been poured from their respective containers. Match boxes had been opened, and even the salt and sugar had been emptied from their sacks. But, most remarkable of all, each and every commodity had been

gathered up and put back again into its container with most fastidious care. From the cupboard, Kempter turned his attention to his cooking utensils, and found that they had been used. Some one had cooked a meal during his absence. Yet it had been some time back, for the ashes had long been cold when he built the fire.

Frowning, he stepped outside. Could there still be some one lurking about? Out in the darkness, however, there was no sound save the steady *swish-swish* of the rain and the soughing of the wind. With an impatient shrug Kempter reentered the cave. Any one who had been here when the storm started would be in the cave when he arrived; or, if they had been frightened away by his approach, they would have left tracks in the saturated soil about the entrance.

Dismissing the matter from his mind for the time, he went about the preparation of supper. One had to eat even if callers had been there who had forgotten to leave their cards. And, after all, this spot was but one—the most poorly concealed by far—of his several retreats. If strangers had found his cabin in the giant yellow pines, that would be something over which to feel agitation. As to what the stranger, or strangers, sought, he could only guess. Certainly it was not food or they would have taken more. It could be money, or information concerning his identity. Last of all, it might be that they were seeking the piece of leather reposing in Kempter's pocket. Of all things that they might be searching for, he least desired that it should be this last, nor did he well see how any one could know of its existence. And yet, the other half of the leather map was missing. It was barely possible that some one had gained possession of this other part and was hunting his half, determined to get it by fair means or foul. Kempter, on the other hand, had determined to unravel the riddle alone, unaided except for the incomplete drawing already in his possession.

Supper finished, he went outside again and prowled about the flats. The horses were eating quietly, and the sixth sense which his long stay in the wilderness had developed failed to warn him of any imminent danger. Going inside once more, he began the work of making the smaller and more compact packs that he could take with him on his present expedition. So far as this particular cave was concerned, he expected never to return to it again.

When the packing had been completed, Kempter sat down at the rough table, and placing a candle in front of him, mulled the leather from his pocket and removed its protecting wrapper of oilcloth. Then he spread it out in front of him. The drawing upon the leather had been done with some sort of wild berry juice, Kempter had decided, for he doubted if any one who had to use leather for this work would have possessed ink. At any rate, the lines of the drawing still showed, as did the words of the broken sentences beneath, which read as follows:

of the place
Morgan found while
here in 52. It
to any one who
John and me know
drinks got a wallop
at's below it makes it
Trouble is you can't
to do much work.
about the place,
all right
almost to
it fall back.
now but hope to come
another crack at it.
case we don't, but
the ones to finish

P. S.: We had a quarrel—danged near fought. I told John we'd each go our own way. I cut the map in two. He can eat his half if he wants to.

Above this writing was the outline of a heavily timbered plateau with a perpendicular cliff rising on the south end toward still greater heights. On a talus slope at the foot of this cliff were straight lines with heavy dots at frequent intervals. Below these lines at the foot of the slope and at a spot where the shoulder of cliff projected was a flat spot with a circle at the center. By the side of this circle was the facetious statement:

Drinks and gold.

Above the straight rows and apparently under the edge of the cliff was the rude outline of dwellings, probably cliff houses, Kempter had long before decided.

Thoughtfully he stuck the leather back into his pocket. All that he had to go on in locating this spot was the place in which he found the body of Bill Ryder—that and the mirage picture which had visited him several summers before on a sultry July day. In that picture he had seen cliff houses staring from the entrance of a huge cave at the base of a large cliff, while in front of the cliff was a mass of green timber. But whether on a mesa or not, he could not say. All that he knew for certain was that he had never seen the spot depicted in the mirage. Yet the timber beneath the cliff and the houses looking out were all in perfect agreement with the map. If he only had the other half that depicted the trail up to the mesa!

Getting to his feet, he gathered up a piece of paper he had taken from some bacon and tossed it onto the fire. As it blazed upward, illuminating the soot-blackened rocks around, Kempter found himself staring at an imprint of a small hand upon the sooty rock. It was slender as well as small, and the thought flashed through Kempter's mind that it might easily belong to the boy with whom he had talked in Houserock. Of course, the idea was silly. It was silly to think of any one youngster down in this country, for that matter. And so, dismissing the matter temporarily from his mind, he rolled up in his blanket and went to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

TURN ABOUT.

FOR a space of two weeks thereafter Kempter cruised alone through the broken labyrinths of his domain, searching unceasingly for some clew that might lead him to the spot for which he sought. All the time, however, he kept on the alert for any sign of men upon his trail. There was none, and he smiled with satisfaction, thinking how his wilderness had swallowed and bewildered the men whom he did not doubt had followed.

Five days after leaving that first cave, he visited a second retreat of his—a makeshift cabin located in a clump of cedar. To his amazement he found that it had been occupied—and not only occupied, but recently. Food had been cooked from the scanty store which the place contained. And his blankets had been slept in. Everything about the place had been left scrupulously neat—in better order, in fact, than Kempter had ever left it. Dishes washed, bedding folded, and the cobwebs wiped from the cracked mirror on the wall. There had even been an attempt to sweep the place with a handmade broom of sage. He could see where the dirt had been gathered upon a thin piece of board that had come from an old packing case.

Going outside, he found where it had been thrown well away from the door, and by the spot was the imprint of a shoe. With a start he noted that it was a small shoe—one that could easily match the imprint of the hand back in the cave. After that he searched the place feverishly but found no indication

that any one but the wearer of the small boyish shoe had been there.

Twice more in the next few days he found evidences that retreats of his had been visited by this same mysterious personage; and mixed with his alarm at finding the places had been discovered, was an eagerness to see what bit of hominess had been imparted by the unknown occupant; yet it was maddening not to be able to see the person who made such free use of his belongings.

On the twelfth day following his return to the Forlorn country, he picked up a bunch of riders through his field glasses. It was Sheriff Ross leading a posse. Filled with bitter enjoyment, he watched their progress from the top of a high butte. Certainly they were a long way from taking him. In an air line he was not over two miles from them. As they would be compelled to travel, it was nearer thirty.

Moreover, they were following no trail. It was all blind guesswork for the sheriff—the kind of guesswork that wears out horses, frays the nerves of men, and leaves them with nothing but empty hands in the end. From his vast knowledge of the country, Kempter could tell right close to where they would be camped for the night.

Content with the knowledge thus acquired, he went to where Ockletree's saddle horse and the two pack animals were tied among some cedars. Mounting the sorrel he started down into a gorge running in the opposite direction to the one the posse was following.

Clouds were beginning to scrape the higher pinnacles and Kempter was anticipating the coming of the first fall storm. It would be cold as well as wet by morning, and he decided to be shielded from the weather in the cabin where no one—not even his mysterious housekeeper—had ever entered.

Riding down the canyon, he became conscious of wood smoke sucking up the gorge toward him. Somewhere below, men were camped. His knowledge of the region told him he was coming to flats crowded with cedar, giant sage, and wild hawthorn. There would be plenty of cover to conceal all his movements, and accordingly he decided to move closer and investigate. The Forlorn country showed signs of becoming crowded.

It was nearing noon and, as he advanced, an odor of boiling coffee told him that he was getting perilously close to his fellow men again. Had that not been enough, there was a sharp cry of pain to further direct his movements. It was a wild, stark cry, laden with a bitterness and hopelessness that stirred Kempter to the very depths of his being —especially since it was not a sound issuing from the toughened lips of an adult inured by years to a measure of suffering, but one that seemed boyish and appealing—appealing for help that the suppliant knew might never come to him.

Flinging himself from the horse, Kempter moved in the direction of the sounds with all the speed that even a measure of caution would permit. Soon he was rewarded by a view of a fire dancing like some yellow-suited gnome in a tiny clearing among the sage. To the left of the fire was a dead cedar, and tied to it by his thumbs, so that his toes just touched the ground, was a diminutive, denim-clad figure. Kempter could not see the face of the unfortunate, as he was behind, yet instantly he felt that the figure's size compared exactly with the imprints left by his unseen visitor of recent days.

Grouped around the tortured one were three tall, bearded men, and one smooth-faced individual, who, Kempter instantly recognized with a feeling of dislike, was his own double. One of the whiskered trio held a heavy quirt in his hand.

"Billy," he said, looking at the shrinking form before him, "I've tried to be a

good father to you since your mother died. I——"

"You haven't been!" came the clear, pain-shot accents of the tied one. "You're a brute and I hate you. Besides, you're not my father!"

"That's neither here nor there, Billy," responded the bearded man. "You've got unmanageable, and I'm goin' to break your spirit unless you come to yourself an' tell me all you've been doin' the past ten days. Hurry up, now, an' tell me what you've been doin'."

"Nothing that's any of your business," the prisoner sobbed angrily.

The whip-wielder's brows contracted into a scowl of primitive ferocity, while his lower jaw protruded threateningly.

"When any one runs off like you did and lives for ten days—an' comes through it in as good shape as you did, it comes pretty nigh bein' our business, don't it, Nick?"

The remark was addressed to the smooth-faced man, who nodded.

"Yep, Billy, we've got a right to know where you've been. Some one's fed you, an' we've got to know who an' where."

"You haven't got to know anything about what I did," moaned the captive; "if I can live without help from any of you, that's my business. I don't want any food, water, or anything else of yours. Turn me loose and I'll shift for myself."

The quartet laughed and the smooth-faced man said with ugly softness:

"That's just the point. You haven't shifted for yourself. Some one's doin' the shiftin' for you, and we suspicion he's the gent we're after. Ockletree pays your dad good wages, an' you can see your dad can't afford to have you double-crossin' him."

"He's not my dad," came the angry retort, "and I won't tell anything. You don't da——"

"But you've got to tell. You know something we don't. No kid with bare hands ever lived out here ten days without help an' come through as comfortable lookin' as you have," answered Nick. "Hurry up an' tell us!"

"I'll not," moaned the other.

"No use," said the man with the whip. "Some folks have just got to have sense licked into 'em. I'll——"

He lifted the whip high as he spoke, but the crack of a revolver clipped off both his speech and the whip at the same instant. With only the stub clutched in his fingers, the man whirled at the same instant as his three companions—and all found themselves staring into the muzzles of Kempter's guns.

"Stick 'em high!" snapped the latter, and four sets of hands shot skyward.

Without saying another word, Kempter circled toward the youth who was held by his thumbs. At the youngster's side he paused.

"You men, turn your backs to me," he ordered; "but remember to hold your flippers high!"

Like figures from a ballet the four obeyed.

"Keep your faces straight ahead," clipped Kempter. "If one of you turns, I'll blow his brains out."

There was no doubt that the men were impressed, for they stood as rigid as ramrods. Softly one of Kempter's guns slid back into its holster, while the other continued to cover the four. His free hand reached down and pulled his hunting knife from its sheath. After that he moved around so he could see the thongs holding the boy and watch the men at the same time. Two slashes of the sharp blade and the boy was free. So far, Kempter had been too busy to look at the youngster's face. Now, as the boy staggered back, he realized it was the one who had questioned him in Houserock.

"Kid," he said, "are you as game as you was that other time?"

"You bet I am," came the quick response. "I'm ready for anything."

"Then step over and relieve those four horned toads of their guns."

Quickly the boy stooped down, and picking up his hat, thrust it over his thick, short-cropped hair, then moved with swift grace to obey Kempter's order. At the finish, he turned and looked at his benefactor.

"Break them open and throw the shells into the brush—as far as you can," the latter ordered.

With slender, expert fingers the youth executed the order.

"Now," said Kempter, speaking low to suppress the terrible anger that burned within him, "I want the man who was so keen on doing the whipping to step up to this limb where the kid was tied. Step lively!"

The broken whip fell from the man's fingers, then with a stiff, unnatural gait he moved to the indicated spot.

"Right below the limb. There! Now reach!" ordered Kempter. "Reach until you feel your muscles crackle! Good!" he exclaimed then. As he spoke, his steely glance flitted swiftly to the smooth-faced replica of himself. "Get over there, you cur," he commanded, "and tie up this believer in corporal punishment! Tie him by the thumbs like he tied the kid!"

The man who had been addressed as Nick shot forward to obey.

"Use the same thongs that were on the kid," Kempter continued, "and tie him high and tight. Go on! Higher, higher! Make him come up on his toes!"

A half snarl, half groan escaped the man who was being tied.

"Quit!" he roared, his eyes blazing with maniacal fire. "If you pull on that thumb any more, I'll kill you when I get loose."

"And if you don't, I will before he does," came Kempter's voice with a crackle to it like that of new ice. "There, that will do!"

Swinging on the tips of his toes, the burly man spun around till he faced Kempter. He poured a torrent of abuse at his captor, while perspiration ran down his face. When he looked at the man called Nick, his glance contained such utter ferocity that the latter shrank back.

"I had to do it, Critchlow," he muttered.

"Yes, and that's not all you have to do," stated Kempter. "Go over there and pick up that rope!"

Nick obeyed.

"Double it!"

Again the command was carried out.

"Good," approved Kempter. "Now, step up and use it on your friend Critchlow. Put some weight behind it!"

His face ashy, the fellow complied.

"Harder," urged Kempter. "If you can't do better than that, I'll let Critchlow work on you!"

Instantly the blows increased in violence, while the man being punished writhed and howled.

"Some people have to have sense beaten into them," Kempter explained dryly, "but you can stop now, and we'll see if we've accomplished anything. Now, Critchlow, I'm going to ask you some questions. If I get fair answers, I'll not have you licked any more. It all depends on you how much more of this you get. Just remember that it doesn't make a snap's worth of difference to me whether you want to talk or not. It's your thumbs that are swelling. Not mine."

"Hurry!" panted Critchlow. "Can't you see I'm about crazy?"

"First," said Kempter slowly, "I want to know what your business is down here. Tell the truth, man, if you're in a hurry to get loose."

Critchlow's lips worked. "I—we—I mean, we all are workin' for Ockletree."

"Good," nodded Kempter, "you answered that one honestly. What are you doing for Ockletree?"

"You know blamed well what we was tryin' to do," roared the tied man. "We was tryin' to get you."

Kempter smiled. "I suspected something of the sort. What did you expect to do with me? No, wait! That's too hard a question. I can't expect you to say you intended to murder me in cold blood. Tell me what it was that Ockletree had against me."

"Let me loose," moaned Critchlow, "I'm bein' pulled apart. He was afraid you'd find somethin' down here. I don't know what."

"And did he tell you to make the boy here search that cave of mine?"

"I never made Billy search the cave."

"He lies. He did," cried the boy. "He was afraid to go in himself and sent me, while he waited outside. But that was before I knew just how awful he was. Mother died down here alone while he was up in Houserock carousing. I wanted to stay with her and he wouldn't let me. He's only a stepfather."

"And what were you to look for, Billy?"

"A soft piece of leather with writing on it."

"Yes, yes, that's right," howled Critchlow. "For mercy's sake, let me loose!"

"What do you know about mercy?" demanded Kempter, in a voice so terrible that all the five persons about him shrank away. "You come down here to hunt down and kill for pay a man against whom you had nothing personal. You leave a lonely woman to die in the wilderness alone while you seek your own pleasure. You abuse a poor heartsick kid till he runs away from you for very loathing, and then, when you finally find him, you torture him for going!"

Critchlow was trembling like a leaf, and the other men of the quartet were ashen-faced as though they felt themselves standing on the brink of oblivion. For the moment all calmness was gone from Kempter. He was a raging volcano of fiery feelings that might at any instant send death belching from his six-guns.

Thus he stood for a space, struggling to master his emotions, and when his face did calm, those present breathed easier—for the men had felt the icy breath of death close at their sides.

"One more question, Critchlow. Did Ockletree hire your friend Nick, here, to masquerade as me in all these lawless affairs, including the beating up of old Ben?"

"Yes."

"Do you think Sheriff Ross knows Nick, and what he's up to?"

"I don't know."

"All right, Nick. That will do. Cut your playmate down."

Loosened, Critchlow stood sucking his swollen thumbs and glaring at his companions.

"Critchlow," said Kempter, "when your fingers get nimble again, I want you to tie up the two that have had no part in these proceedings. Tie 'em tight, back to back. Tie 'em good and tight! If you don't, I'll swing you from that limb again."

"I'll fix 'em," muttered Critchlow, and with Kempter's eyes watching every move, he bound their wrists and arms till the hemp bit into their flesh and made them cringe.

"You did a good job," approved Kempter. "Now, do a better one for Nick. Wait! We'll walk over to his horse and you can lash him into the saddle. Tie him so that he'll sit there as long as the horse's hair stays on. I'm taking Nick for a ride."

In another five minutes Kempter's duplicate sat stiff and helpless in the saddle—arms trussed behind and legs tied by a rope running beneath the horse's belly.

"He'll do," stated Kempter, and glanced uncertainly at the boy. "Kid,"

he asked, "do you want to go along with me, or to stay here?"

The small, wistful face paled beneath the felt hat. "I'd rather be dead than stay here," came the low, determined answer.

Kempter frowned. "This is a wild, rough country. No place for you to be under the best of circumstances, and I'm a hunted man. Still, if you say go, why, go it is. At that, you're probably safer with me than left here with these brutes."

"I want to go."

"All right. That settles it. Pick out the horse you want and we'll be leaving."

Billy stepped to a white-stockinged black and vaulted lightly into the saddle.

"Critchlow," said Kempter, "you can lead your friend Nick's horse. I'll walk beside you and tell you where to go."

"What are you goin' to do with me?" croaked Nick.

"You've got nothing to do but guess, so amuse yourself," retorted Kempter. "What I should do is to fold you up in a wooden envelope and ship you back to Hades."

A little later the four came to where Kempter had left his pack animals and saddle horse. Mounting, he took the reins to Nick's horse from Critchlow and pointed west.

"Get going, Critchlow. Travel at a dog trot. I'm in a hurry all of a sudden."

"I ain't no good at walkin'," protested the man on the ground. "My ankles is weak an' my breath's short. I can——"

"And I know your heart's bad," cut in Kempter, "but a man never knows what he can do till he comes to an emergency. You're going to rise to this one or fall down permanent. Get going!"

And so they set off, winding in and out among the clumps of cedar and greasewood, with Critchlow lumbering ahead like a huge, ungainly bear. As he jogged along, his breath wheezed louder and louder until at last it came in choking gasps and his legs weaved drunkenly beneath him. Kempter knew that the fellow was almost exhausted and he was not surprised when Critchlow went down in a heap, the matted hair on his forehead trailing in the dust.

Turning a strained face upward, the man looked at Kempter with tortured eyes.

"Shoot, if ye want to," he panted, "but I'm done."

Kempter smiled. "I'm satisfied, Critchlow. Your efforts have been convincing. You are at liberty now to walk back and untie the other two men whenever you are able. Nick, Billy, and I will just ride on. But remember one thing—if you trail me again, you may not get off so easily."

With that, Kempter urged his horse ahead and the little cavalcade passed the haggard figure panting on the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

AN AMBITIOUS PROGRAM.

FOR a space Kempter rode, oblivious to everything but his own thoughts. And, as he rode, the clouds, together with the approach of night, cast a deep, somber gloom over the broken landscape.

At last he became conscious of the boy's small form riding at his side. As usual, the soft felt hat was low over his forehead, and he stared straight ahead, probably not wanting any one to read the lonesomeness in his eyes, thought Kempter, and threw aside his own problems to try to cheer this small waif of Fate.

"You're a right good housekeeper, Billy," he remarked lightly. "I surely appreciate the way you left things at my different camps when you visited them."

"Yes," came the reply, "I tried to leave things clean. It was the least I could do after stealing things from you."

"No one calls getting a little food stealing in this part of the world, Billy," the man answered gently. "Besides, you more than paid for it in cleaning things up the way you did. You must have been awfully lonesome, Billy, staying by yourself that way. Why didn't you let me find you? Or didn't you know how to?"

"Yes, I knew how. I saw you once or twice from the brush close to your camps."

"And yet you never came out and spoke to me," marveled Kempter. "What kind of a fellow do you think I am anyhow, Billy? Do you think I'd be anything but nice to you after the kind of break you gave me back at Houserock?"

Billy seemed to shrink and get smaller in his saddle. "I—I—I didn't know," he answered in that small, clear voice.

"Well, you ought to know," Kempter reproved gently. "You're shivering right now. It's getting cold. I'll give you my coat."

"Oh, no," protested the youth, "you'll need it yourself."

"No, I'll not," laughed Kempter, "I'm old and tough. Besides, my wrath will keep me warm. There, slip into it."

Billy obeyed, still looking anywhere but at Kempter, who when the job was finished gave him a friendly pat. "No use feelin' blue, old-timer. Everything will work out fine."

"Maybe," came the doubting answer. "What are you intending to do with me?"

"Well, Billy," said Kempter with forced lightness, "that's a question. I'd like to ride with you back to civilization and see you get settled fine, but right now I can't. There's things stopping me, so I guess I'll have to figure on turning you over to some one else to do it. There's an officer of the law over here a few miles. I can likely trust him to take you out."

"Who is it?"

"Sheriff Ross and some of his cohorts."

Silence followed.

"But he's looking for you," the youth stated in a hushed voice. "It's dangerous for you to go there. I don't want you to. I won't let you," he ended almost fiercely.

"Gosh, Billy, you're spunky when you get started. What if the sheriff is looking for me? That doesn't mean he'll get me, does it? I got away at Houserock, and I'm a lot more at home down here."

"I don't want to go with the sheriff," Billy stated with wonderful positiveness. "I want to stay with you, Mr. Kempter."

"Chad's my name, Billy. Call me Chad. And I'm mighty sorry, partner, but it isn't possible for you to stay with me. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to leave anything as despicable and low-down as Nick, here, with Ross, unless there was something mighty fine left at the same time to take the horrid taste out of his mouth."

"I don't want to go with them," Billy reiterated, "I'd rather stay with you."

"And I'd like mighty well to have you, but it's not the thing, so forget it, partner. I'm a hunted man—one of the kind that sometimes has to sleep on naked rocks, go without meals or water quite frequently, and have sporting gentlemen try out all sorts of high-powered artillery on him."

"Oh," gasped the boy, "that's horrible! But I want to stay with you just the same."

"But, good gravy, son, you can't! Still, you don't need to get excited about what I said. It won't be that bad. I was just drawing a black picture so you'd be glad to leave me. Got any relatives around the country?"

Billy shook his head. "No one," came the muffled answer.

"How about some friends you could go to?"

"I was never allowed in town long enough to have any. Just in and out the same day, mostly—and that not very often."

"You'll need money and a friend when you get to Houserock," said Kempter. Reaching into his pocket, he produced a small roll of greenbacks. "Here, Billy, stuff this away in your levis where no one will guess you have it. Then, when you get to Houserock, ask for Bill Green. Tell him I sent you to him. Tell him the whole story and he'll see that you get started out all right."

"I—I don't want the money."

"But you're going to take it, Billy," said Kempter sternly; "you've got to take it. Here."

Under the pressure of Kempter's insistence, a small hand reached out and took the money and silently slipped it into a pocket.

"I don't know how to thank you," the boy said.

"There's nothing to thank me for," Kempter stated definitely. "And remember one thing, Billy. That's good clean cash—earned by honest labor. Nothing that anybody need be ashamed of taking."

After this, they rode in silence till the night was all about them, filled with the mysterious voices of the wind whispering and wailing about trees and crags. With the darkness came storm, only this time it was a soft, steady drizzle that had a penetrating chill to it.

"How can you find those people in the dark?" Billy asked at last.

"I'll find them right enough," assured Kempter. "I know this particular part of the Forlorn country in the same way that a cat knows all the roofs and alleys in his own block."

"How long do you think it will be?"

"Pretty soon, now. I think I hear voices. In fact, I know I do. Time to stop Nick's mouth with a handkerchief. He might break into speech at the wrong time."

Kempter's duplicate was too far gone from riding in his bound condition to resist anything. Passively he allowed the cloth to be thrust between his jaws and into place. The gagging done, the trio moved forward again until they could see where the flames of a crackling camp fire drove back the heaped-up shadows from a little space. A tent had been erected close to the fire so that the heat beat in at the open tent flaps.

In this aperture were several figures. Just beyond this tent was a second smaller one almost hidden by the larger shelter. A low fire was also burning by this second tent.

Kempter turned to Billy. "I'm getting off now and going over to make arrangements for your welcome," he stated in a whisper. "Stay here with Nick till I come back."

Almost instantly, the shadows swallowed him. Worming his way in and out through clumps of dripping brush, he found himself at a point but a few yards from this second tent. As with the other, the flaps were back, allowing the warmth of the blaze to enter the tent. In this opening sat two smokers, and when one of them pushed a piece of dry sage from a pile within the tent onto the blaze, Kempter saw that they were Ockletree and Sheriff Ross.

They were conversing in tones so low that Kempter could not hear, and, accordingly, he moved around until he was behind the tent. The canvas side walls were staked to the ground with iron pins and Kempter was compelled to remove two of these before he could gently lift the wall and worm his way under it. He was halfway through when another limb of sage struck the blaze, sending the light spurting into the room. At that instant Sam Ockletree

chose to look back, and Kempter flattened himself out upon the ground. Only the pile of sage kept him from being discovered at that instant.

"What you always cranin' your neck about for, Sam?" asked the sheriff.

Ockletree laughed harshly. "I feel uneasy down here, Jake. I know this campin' out is pretty much the same thing as I've done all my life, but this trip's kind of different. You know, Jake, big game hunters sometimes get to feelin' mighty uneasy when they're out after a man-eatin' tiger. You know sometimes them tigers come right down to the camp an' take one of the hunters apart. This storm, the part o' the world we're in, an' the man we're after, all combined got me to wonderin'. Kempter is smart, Jake, an' he's no coward. Mebbe it would be well for us to have a guard out."

Ross' amused laugh answered this statement. "Kempter is smart, Sam, and that's just the reason he'll not show up here to-night. He's not fool enough to risk pesterin' round this crowd on his lonesome. This is really a tough posse, if I do say it."

"They need to be. We're out after a hard man to catch."

"But one we've got to get, Sam; or you'll not be sleepin' easy till we do."

"He'll be hatin' me, Jake—and there's not much to keep a man who hates you from reachin' you in this part of the world."

Ross nodded. "I know. He can pick you off with a rifle that's got telescopic sights, an' be so far away that the report never reaches your ears; or he can come at night like a sheep-killin' grizzly an' slaughter you in your bed. Your comin' out so strong against him at the courthouse may have been a bad thing, Sam."

"I know it," agreed Ockletree, "but I had no idea that he would escape me. Jake, we've got to get him!"

"You've got to get him—not me," corrected the sheriff. "A man has to have a strong incentive to keep up a hunt for long in this country."

"Isn't his breakin' jail on you enough?" growled Ockletree. "Do you want to be the laughingstock of the whole country when you get back to Houserock?"

"Kempter made fools of so many of us that day that I'd not be much noticed in the jam. Moreover," Ross added, "I'm thinkin' I can let it circulate that I let him escape to prevent a lynchin'."

"Ross, what is it you want?" snarled Ockletree. "I'm ready to lay my cards all on the table if you'll do the same. If it's money you want to keep up this search, tell me how much it'll take to stop the itchin' in your fingers."

"Maybe it's not money I'm after," answered the sheriff slyly. "There's other things of value besides currency. Probably it would be a fine thing for you to tell me what you're after down in this country. What has Kempter got that makes you so determined to do away with him? It must be something of great value to induce a man of your kind to risk the animosity of a fellow like Kempter. People have called him lazy—never to his face, though, and always he has been considered a good man to leave alone. Yet you've socked your tomahawk in the war post an' gone out after his scalp. How come?"

Kempter, now lying breathless behind the sage, could hear every syllable of their speech—even see the writhing of Ockletree's muscles as the sheriff pursued his pumping tactics.

"It's a map—a piece of one," Ockletree blurted out at last. "I'm sure he's got it, and I want it. A half of a map is of no use to any one, but the whole would be worth a fortune."

The sheriff laughed sneeringly. "Another of these maps of lost mines, eh, and you've been crack-brained enough to fall for that sort of stuff? If you've as little wits as that, I reckon there'll be

no great harm done if Kempter does get you."

"But this is different. The map is of a genuine spot. The fellow I got my part from told me that much. He got it firsthand from one of the partners who made the original discovery. The dotin' old loon carried it around with him for forty years an' never made any effort to find the place. Wouldn't even ask any one if they had heard of the other piece for fear the one he had would be stolen."

"He was justified, wasn't he?" asked Ross dryly. "Ain't I to understand that you've got the half he had? If it was as valuable as you say it was, it must have been stolen. I've been wonderin', Sam, about that beatin' up old Ben got. You didn't get this map you're talkin' about then, did you?"

"You're shrewd," admitted Ockletree. "Yes, I got it then. One time, about a year before, the old chap told me he had this map and showed it to me when he was drunk. There's only one thing you can get drunk on—that's good strong pear wine. I carried a quart of it clean down from the north end of the State to do the trick. Man, how it loosened up his tongue! He talked like a sewin'-machine agent after he had a pint or so under his belt. He got this piece of map from a man named John Morgan, who was just ready to cash in from a case o' blood poisonin'. Old Ben made this Morgan's last hours as easy as he could, an' the fellow turned the map over to him with directions that he give it, or send it, to some relatives somewhere or another. But old Ben had different ideas than that. He hung onto the map—took it out nights an' gloated over it when he might have been huntin' for the place where all this gold was located. Not a vein, I mean, but pure gold that had been made into images of one kind and another and ornaments—hundreds of pounds of it, just waitin' for some one to pack it off."

"Why didn't these two that first discovered it do the packin'?" demanded Ross.

"Couldn't, this Morgan told old Ben. The Indians got after them and they was lucky to escape for their lives."

"Have you got this piece of map with you?"

Ockletree reached into his pocket and fished out a piece of leather and handed it to the sheriff, who smoothed it over his knee.

"The directions look definite enough," he said after a minute, "but they don't go far enough. Why didn't they finish this drawing?"

"I told you it was only a piece," said Ockletree. "The rest is in Kempter's possession."

"How do you know it is?"

"Why else would he be spendin' all his time chasin' round down here? There ain't any other reason. An' besides, he give it away here about a year back."

"How?"

"While he was in the hospital after getting thrown off his horse, one of the nurses that took care of him was a cousin of mine. Kempter wasn't satisfied a minute till they dug through his clothes an' got out a package. He kept that package under his pillow all the time. My cousin got so curious about it that when she give him a hypo one night to put him to sleep, she opened the bundle an' found it held the piece of leather that matches this. Of course, she didn't know anything about this one, an' the whole business was Greek to her, but it clinches his havin' it."

"Yes," meditated Ross, "an' it makes me feel a lot more certain there's something down here. Kempter is long-headed, with all his peculiarities. I'm bettin' he's got more evidence about this business than you have, Sam. Well, here's my idea. I'll go in with you an' help dispose of Kempter for half the treasure if there is one, or for ten thou-

sand in cash if there isn't. What you say?"

"All I can say is that I'll do it," retorted Ockletree. "Haven't you got a half nelson, head lock, flyin' mare, and several other holds on me?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if I had, Sam. Well, now that we understand each other, I want to tell you what a prime chump you'd make of yourself by killin' Kempter till you had his part of the map. You've got a murder squad down here somewhere, haven't you?"

"Yes, an' I wish they'd kill the feller even if the knowledge of the map did go with him. But it wouldn't. He'd have it on him."

"Maybe and maybe not. The thing for us to do is to bag this wolf of the Forlorn alive. Then, if the map isn't on him, we can offer him his freedom in exchange for it. After the map's in our hands, I'll turn him over to you and——"

"That's an ambitious program!"

The statement came from Kempter, and the tones of his voice stabbed into the sensibilities of the plotters like knives.

"Make a sound," continued Kempter, "and your hearts stop beating!"

CHAPTER V.

A DILEMMA.

ABSOLUTE silence followed this statement—a silence in which the faint crackle of the fire and the pattering of the rain on the tent top seemed amplified to amazing proportions.

Kempter, with a cocked revolver in either hand, had risen from behind the sage and stood looking down at the cowering pair with a face as hard as granite.

"A fine officer you're proving yourself to-night, Ross," said Kempter, after a silence that fairly screamed. "I came here expecting to prove my own honesty to an honest man; and when I get here, I find the man I had depended on is a worse crook than the others."

And still there was no statement from the two men by the fire—in fact, there was nothing that they could say. Kempter leaned forward till the muzzles of his guns almost touched the pair.

"Unbuckle your gun belts," he ordered, "and if either of you touches a gun, I shoot!"

With trembling fingers, the two obeyed.

"Stand up!"

Still shaking with nervous dread, the pair rose as nearly upright as the walls of the tent would permit. With his guns still in command of the pair, Kempter kicked the gun belts that had slid from their waists into a corner.

"Walk to the back of the tent," he directed, "and face the canvas!"

When they had complied, he said: "Ross, you get a pocketknife and cut the end out of the tent—the whole thing—so we can walk out in a bunch and keep an eye on one another."

A ripping of fabric followed, and soon the wet, chill air rushed in through the gap made by Ross' knife.

"Before we get where there isn't a bit of light, I want that map, Ockletree," said Kempter. "I saw Ross hand it back to you, and considering all you've got me into the last few weeks, I know any honest man would say I had it coming."

A moment later the leather was in Kempter's possession.

"That makes us ready to travel," he observed, "and don't try to pull away from the muzzle of either of these guns, for if you do I'll span the gap with a bullet. When I jab one of you in the back hard with a gun, it means for that fellow to turn to the right or left, depending on which one I shove against."

"Where we goin'?" whispered the sheriff.

"I'm taking you out to turn a man and a boy over to you," answered

Kempter. "The man's the one who played my part in all the little nastinesses that have been wished off on me the past months. He's a skunk and ought to make a real addition to your bunch. The other one—the boy—is a prince, and I guess even you, Ross, will see that a kid gets a fair deal. Take him out to civilization and treat him right. If you don't, some time I'm going to be around to see why you didn't. Now, let's move!"

A few minutes later the trio were back where Kempter had left his horses. There was barely enough light from the posse's camp fires at this point to make out the outline of the different animals. The horses were still there, Kempter's mount as well as the animal on which the gagged and bound Nick sat like a ramrod. But of Billy and his horse, there was no sign.

Kempter experienced a deep regret, coupled with worry. What had become of the kid? Had he decided that he would rather shift for himself again than to be turned over to the posse? And, if so, why?

"Where is the boy you was talkin' about?" asked Ross in the undertone which he deemed essential to keep from being annihilated.

"Gone," said Kempter, "and I can hardly stay to look him up. I doubt if you'll run on to him; but, if you do, treat him well. Ockletree must know of him. He was with his bunch of killers."

"I don't know anything about any boy," growled the sheepman, "but I do know most certainly that that's my horse you're ridin' an' my pack animals you're usin'."

"Yes," said Kempter, "they're good animals. I think I'll use them a while longer."

"You'll wish you hadn't, you——"

"Shut up, Sam," said Ross in a savage undertone. "First thing you'll be liftin' your voice, an' when you do, you an' me'll start sailin' toward the pearly gates."

Kempter moved over to his horse, then slipping one gun into its holster, he swung into the saddle.

"That was a neat piece of horsemanship," commented Ross. "Your eyes nor your gun neither of them ever left me."

"I can handle a horse somewhat," answered Kempter soberly, "but understanding this country is my long suit. I'm leaving you now, but don't make the mistake of trying to burst your lungs yelling too soon. I have real good luck shooting by sound."

"Next time we meet things will be different," predicted Ross with nasty pleasantness.

"I reckon they will," replied Kempter, "but maybe not just the way you're hoping."

With that he whistled softly to the pack horses, and, turning, led the way into the night. As he rode, he listened for excitement, but there was none. An ironic smile curved his lips at the continued stillness. Ross and Ockletree were not eager to announce the way they had been surprised; besides, they might well consider the futility of pursuit through the night and the storm.

Kempter rode in silence for a space, busy with thoughts of Ockletree, the ruthless; Ross, the knave; and, most of all, of Billy, the paradox. Queer kid! Afraid of being alone in this wilderness, as any normal kid would be, yet deliberately hiking out alone in the night and the storm rather than be turned over to Ross.

Kempter found himself wondering if he had done the right thing in insisting that Billy should go with the posse. Yet what else was there to do? And he had run a great risk to give the boy the opportunity that he had refused. Queer how shy the boy was. Queerer yet how grown-up and unusual was his manner of speech. It had a gentleness to it

hard to associate with a boy. Yet he had spirit, too—a stronger spirit than most men.

As Kempter dwelt upon the pleasant peculiarities of his late companion, he found himself sighing. Just then the back pack horse began to snort and act peculiarly. Apparently he was frightened by something, and pressing the button of his electric torch, Kempter turned back to see what was the nature of the trouble.

And, as he looked, he felt his scalp tingle, for the tarp covering the animal's pack suddenly lunged upward for nearly a foot, while two ghostlike, canvas-covered wings shot out, one on either side.

Bewildered beyond speech, Kempter rode his snorting horse forward and, grabbing hold of the tarp, pulled it back. There, with one slim arm flung up to shield his face from the light, was Billy!

With a strange feeling of wonder, Kempter felt his heart leap with joy at the sight. Reason might tell him that the boy should not be here, but his heart was unashamedly glad at the miscarriage of his plans. Still, he must assume a measure of dignified displeasure to live up to the old tradition of adults who have had their authority defied by youth.

"Billy," he demanded sternly, "what are you doing here?"

For once there was no hat shielding the small, oval face. Kempter, looking at the graceful sweep of the thick, dark eyebrows, the delicate pink in the petal-like softness of Billy's cheeks, found himself marveling anew. Then, when two pearllike tears twinkled mistily in the long, sweeping lashes, and the red bow of the small lips quivered, he felt a new, tempestuous emotion sweeping through him.

"Don't cry, Billy," he found himself saying anxiously, "I didn't mean to be so rough."

Two small hands rose and covered the tear-streaked face and Billy's shoulders shook convulsively.

"I couldn't stay with that man," the diminutive figure said, sobbing. "Sheriff Ross knows me by sight—and—and he tries to kiss me!"

"Billy!" ejaculated Kempter, consternation and understanding leaping into his mind. "Good gosh! And I thought you were a boy!"

A little smile mingled with the tears as Billy lifted her face and looked straight into Kempter's eyes. Then a shudder ran over her. At this Kempter's arms reached out and curved protectingly about the slight, shivering form.

"You poor kid! I ought to have understood sooner. A girl like you out here in this wilderness—and under these circumstances!"

And looking up into the stormy night, Kempter of Forlorn prayed to the God of his fathers for strength and wisdom to guide himself and this girl through the dilemma in which they were placed.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CABIN.

"WHAT are you going to do?" asked Billy, after she had gained a measure of composure.

"I don't know," said Kempter slowly. "No man could know what to do offhand in this case. We'll spend to-night in my cabin. Perhaps by to-morrow I can think things out. Get into my saddle, Billy. I'll walk the rest of the way."

"I don't like that," demurred the girl.

"I need to, anyhow," answered Kempter, a shade impatiently. "The trail through here is hard to follow."

Two hours later Kempter led the way through a narrow slit between smooth, wet walls of rock. After the horses had passed, he dropped a maple pole into the crotches of two cedars, one on either side of the natural gateway, thus

making it proof against the straying of the stock. Getting in the lead again he strode swiftly forward through a damp meadow, with giant pines standing all around its edge. They were yellow pines, some of them six or seven feet in diameter, the great bark scales glistening like polished shields in the light of the electric torch that he held firmly in his hand.

Without hesitation, Kempter moved toward a group of three tremendous trees standing close to the far end of the crag-surrounded flat. Two of the trees in this group were in their prime, while the third had dead snags sticking out among the green foliage of its healthiest limbs.

Beneath the tree showing the dead branches, and with one end built squarely against it, was a small cabin with a wonderfully inviting air about its sturdy construction. Kempter strode up to the door, and removing the bar, flung it open. After that he explored its interior with the yellow pencil of his flash light before entering himself.

Satisfied, he stepped across the threshold, and walking over to a shelf, procured candles, two of which he lit, and set in their wooden holders, one on each end of a small table made of poles. Going out again, he lifted the tired Billy from the horse and steadied her for a second while the numbness left her limbs. After that he guided her over the irregularities of the rough rock path and into the shelter of the pine-log walls.

Quickly, Billy's eyes took in the simple, masculine atmosphere of the place. Blankets, guns, and provisions—it held an abundance of them all. There was also a three-legged stool, a bench for the water bucket and a tiny stove. Over to the far end, with a huge bear skin hanging behind it, was a narrow bunk whose bottom was made of interlacing leather thongs. At the end of this bunk was a shelf containing a row of well-worn books.

"Sorry," said Kempter, as he watched his companion's swift survey, "I should have had more conveniences; but, to tell the truth, I never expected a visitor. This was built strictly as a one-man house."

"I think it's splendid," admired Billy. "Lots more homelike than those other places of yours."

"They were only night shelters, you might say," explained Kempter, "while this is the best attempt at an abiding place I am able to make down here."

Billy pointed toward the window. "Aren't you afraid your light will be seen?"

Kempter shook his head. "No one can see the light till they enter this cove, and, of course, when they found the cove and my horses, they would investigate anyway. But it would be a queer thing if it were discovered. Even in the dark you must have realized that we threaded our way through innumerable intersections of gorge."

As he spoke, Kempter was busy poking among the cans in the little cupboard. "We'll have a good supper," he said casually; "then, when that is over, I'll fix the bunk for you. I prefer sleeping in the open myself."

"Even in a storm?" asked Billy.

"A storm doesn't amount to anything under these big pines," he assured her. "There's needles piled around the base of these three trees that haven't been wet with rain in a hundred years. Perhaps I shall take my bedding roll and tarp down to the gap so as to guard against any possible surprise."

Billy, slim in the candlelight as a yellow willow, looked at Kempter with a contented face; then, stepping up beside him, she looked into the tiny cupboard.

"Let me fix supper," she begged. "I love to do it, and it is the one thing I can help about."

As she fried the bacon, she turned to her companion.

"What are you going to do now that you have all the map, Chad? Hunt up the treasure?"

Kempter started. "How did you know that I had the rest of the map?" he demanded.

Billy's eyes dropped: "I—I saw you take it from Ross!"

"You didn't stay with the horses, then, like I said?"

"No," said Billy faintly, "I—you—that is—I was afraid something might happen and, if it did, I wanted to be able to help you."

"But you didn't have a gun."

"No, but I had one of the iron pegs from the tent, and I'd have used it if I had needed to," said the girl fiercely.

Kempter threw back his head and laughed—laughed until the rattling of a cow bell on the cabin wall froze the sound at his lips. In one big bound, followed by a sweep of his arm, he dashed out both the candles and the two were alone in the palpitating darkness.

"Chad!" came a small, frightened whisper. "What was it, Chad?" Kempter felt one of Billy's hands groping toward him.

"I'm afraid," said Kempter soberly, "that our retreat is being entered. I had a wire strung across the gap, breast high. It runs along the trees and hooks to the bell that was just rung. It gives one time to do just what we're doing—blow out the light, if it is night, and prepare for a siege. I'm going to get a bucket of water now."

Groping his way over to the bench, Kempter picked up the bucket, made his way outside, and went around the cabin to where a tiny spring made faint music above the pattering of the rain. Throwing out the water already in the bucket, he scooped up a brimming pailful from a small, moss-rimmed pool and returned to the cabin. Close to the door he paused and stared into the blackness toward the gap. There was no speck of light, neither was there any sound to indicate the nature of the intrusion. Thoughtfully, Kempter entered the building and closed and barred the door behind him.

"Is it you, Chad?" asked Billy, in a small, hushed voice.

"It's me, Billy," Kempter reassured her.

The girl laughed shakily. "Isn't it strange what a lot of difference a little light makes, Chad? This doesn't seem like the same place any more. It feels now as if almost any horrible thing could creep out of the shadows."

"We're all right, Billy, and we'll have a light," whispered Kempter. "There's only two or three places where light can shine through, and I'll hang skins over them. After that's done and something's thrown in front of the door, we're all right on the light score. Then we'd better eat while things taste good."

"It may be our best chance," Billy agreed doubtfully, adding, as the light flashed on again: "What do you think it was?"

"I don't know," evaded Kempter. "It could be nothing more than a limb's falling across the wire. I'd go see, but to do that, I need a light, and if there is any one outside, it would betray my whereabouts."

"You don't think for a minute it was a limb," Billy stated definitely, "and either do I. The bell rang too long—just like it was being jerked, then jerked again hard."

"It did," acknowledged Kempter. "Oh, well, for that matter, it could have been a deer with a cougar after it—struck the wire on the bound, you know."

There was rank disdain in the tilt of Billy's nose as she looked at him. "Don't you think I know more about the habits of animals down here than that?" she asked. "All the deer are higher up

than this now, and so are the cougars. And if there was a deer and a cougar, the cougar wouldn't be chasing the deer. All the cougars I've known anything about are too lazy or too smart to run foot races for their meals. They spring from a rock or a tree."

"Likely you're right," agreed Kempter, thoroughly chagrined. "Let's just leave it that we don't know what's out there. Probably we'll be informed in a few minutes."

"If it's Critchlow, we won't," Billy retorted. "He's part savage, but he's smart. It would be like him to prowl around till morning, partly because of being afraid to attack in the night and partly because he'd know the suspense would wear on our nerves."

Kempter looked at his companion. "How old are you, anyhow, Billy?" he demanded. "Somehow, you seem to change every few minutes. One time you're nothing but a kid—the next you talk like a woman."

Billy's long lashes swept down, concealing her eyes. "I guess maybe I'm both," she said, "old in knowing trouble, and young in experience where fun is concerned. But I hope it isn't Critchlow."

"It couldn't very well be," said Kempter. "Remember, we left him exhausted."

"But he could have rested several hours and still got to this point with the other two men as soon as we have," replied Billy. "We're not so many miles from where you took me away from them, are we?"

"No, we're not," said Kempter; "but how in the world do you keep track of such things?"

"I don't know," answered the girl. "It just comes nat——"

Jangle! Jangle! Jangle!

Again the room was filled with the strident ringing and the two occupants turned startled faces toward the swaying bell. Then Kempter stepped upon the stool and tore it loose from the wire that moved it.

"I ought to have done that sooner!" he exclaimed, as he looked at his small companion.

Billy's face was chalk white. "It is Critchlow," she whispered. "No one else in the world would think of torturing us this way."

"It's more like the carrying on of a crazy person. No one in their right senses would want to keep warning us this way. And still I don't see how it was that they followed us here to-night. Well, all we can do is to wait for them to make the next move—or for daylight to come. You might just as well rest while I keep guard."

The remainder of that night dragged interminably. Billy lay down on the bunk and pulled some blankets over her; but every time Kempter looked toward her, she was awake, scrutinizing him with wide, troubled eyes. At last he blew out the lights and, pulling the screen from in front of the tiny window, stood by it, peering into the wet gloom of the falling rain.

When daylight at last impregnated the black with gray, and the dim outlines of trees and cliffs crept phantom-like out of the murk, Kempter looked eagerly for a sign of their nocturnal visitors. Soon he could see the horses browsing on the drenched grass. All were feeding quietly and gave no sign of having been disturbed. As he watched, the clouds began to break and, through the rifts, a stronger light poured into the cove. Now, Kempter could see practically all over the glen, and a growing conviction welled in him that there were no other human beings besides themselves within it. Yet he hesitated a little longer, for the clamor of the cow bell still rang warningly in his brain.

It might be that Billy was right and that Critchlow was here, waiting perhaps with his companions just around

the angle of the cabin for him to venture out and be shot or captured. Another thing that held Kempter back was the fact that Billy was asleep, and he hated to disturb her. Soon enough at best she would awaken to the grim realities of their desperate situation.

So it was that Kempter delayed his reconnoitering expedition for almost another hour and, while he waited, the sun came out and began to toast the rain-steeped needles. A breeze blew into the vale and brought to his nostrils the odor of wet sage, red willow, and mint. Turning his head, Kempter glanced at the face of Billy, composed and sweet as she lay sleeping. A mountain wren gave voice to a fragment of song, and Kempter felt himself surrounded with so many evidences of the wonder of existence that life became doubly sweet. He must somehow not only get this girl out of her strange predicament, but also win his own way back to security and the respect of his fellow men.

At last, he could delay no longer and, touching the girl's shoulder, he gently woke her up.

"I'm going outside, Billy," he explained, in answer to her first sleepy bewilderment. "Shut the door after me, and don't open it till I return."

Startled remembrance of all that was past leaped into the lovely violet eyes.

"But what if Critchlow is out there waiting for you?" she exclaimed, one of her hands grasping at his sleeve to detain him.

Kempter smiled. "I don't think there is any one out there, Billy."

"But the bell?"

"Something else must have happened to it. That's one of the things I wanted to find out about. I'll be careful."

Outside the cabin, Kempter edged cautiously to a corner and looked around, then instantly his air of caution vanished. A coyote was standing back of the building, two half-grown pups at her side. At sight of him they whirled and vanished instantly. If there had been any one else near the cabin, the animals would not have been there for him to see. The only way by which they could have entered the cove was by way of the gap, so it seemed proved conclusively that there were no men at it.

Hurrying toward the narrows, Kempter found the pole gate still in place, while, just beyond it, was a churned spot where a horse had stood for, apparently, a long time. Mystified, Kempter crowded under the gate and found that the wire he had stretched across the gap was broken, and a piece of it gone. Moving on down the passage, Kempter paused. At the narrows he saw the horse that Billy had been riding the night before. He was standing at an intersection of the three canyons and seemed to be tangled up in something. That something, without a doubt, was a piece of Kempter's wire.

Relieved, he started toward the animal, then halted abruptly, while a groan escaped his lips.

CHAPTER VII.

UP A TREE.

THERE were voices below. Some one was approaching and they would find the horse!

An instant later, eight men came in sight, and at their head was Ockletree and Sheriff Ross. Sick at heart, Kempter turned, and keeping out of sight hurried back toward the cabin. If he had only gone out earlier! Then he could have moved the horse back and perhaps escaped discovery. Not one man in a thousand would think of turning into the gutter leading to his hiding place. Kempter himself had passed it a dozen times before discovering it. But now these men, with the horse for a clew, would undoubtedly ferret it out.

Below, he could hear shouts of

triumph. In the eager voices of his enemies it seemed to Kempter there was the same hunger that sounds in the baying of a hound pack when the scent grows warm and the kill lies just ahead of them.

Billy met him at the cabin door with concern in her face.

"What is it, Chad?" she asked.

"They're coming, Billy." But, not for all the world would he have told her that it was the horse which she had turned loose that had been their undoing.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

"I guess it's not our move. We'll wait and see what Ross and Ockletree have to say."

There was not long to wait, for almost instantly the eight riders broke into view and rode swiftly toward the cabin.

When they were within fifty yards of the building, Kempter shoved a rifle through the window.

"You're close enough, boys!" he shouted. "If one or two of you want to move in closer to parley, all right. But the rest stay back!"

At his command, the posse halted, while Ross and Ockletree flung themselves from their saddles and strode toward the door.

"That will do," Kempter ordered, when the pair were within thirty feet of the window. "We can talk fine from here."

The two halted and Kempter could see the savage satisfaction on their faces.

"Well, Kempter," called Ross, "it looks like we'd come to the end of the trail pretty fast. Tell me, do you feel as bold and wicked as you did last night?"

Before Kempter could frame an answer, Ockletree broke into the conversation.

"Guess you won't mind if I take back the horses you stole, will you? Reckon now that you understand that I take real good care of my stuff."

Kempter faked a yawn of indifference. "I'm done with 'em, Ockletree. Kind of glad to have you come along and save me the trouble of tending them any longer. Anything else you'd like?"

"Nothing at all," Ross put in, "except you and the girl."

Kempter laughed. "You're easy satisfied. Wouldn't you like the treasure that map told about as well?"

Instantly, a covetous gleam crept into Ross' and Ockletree's eyes. "Have you found it?" they asked in a breath.

"Do you think I'd tell you if I had?" laughed Kempter.

Ross looked silly. "Of course, you ain't found it," he exclaimed. "You never had a chance. It's just last night you stole the other half from us."

"But just supposing I haven't; I've got directions for looking it up."

"In a few minutes you won't have," said Ockletree.

"Listen," exclaimed Kempter, "if you men are ever lucky enough to capture me, you don't suppose I'll have the map ready to turn over to you, do you?"

"You'll be glad to turn it over," stated the sheriff.

"Don't you think it. I'll burn it before ever you get inside this cabin."

"What are you driving at?" demanded Ross.

"I was wondering if you'd be willing to take the map instead of me and the girl."

"I would," said Ockletree quickly.

"I wouldn't," said Ross. "And more'n that, you wouldn't unless you're a fool, Sam. What's to hinder them from havin' copied it? Or again, mebbe Kempter knows from the lay of the country that the map isn't correct now that he's got the whole thing in his possession. Nope, the only thing we can do is to ask Kempter, here, to give him-

self up without any strings connected to the business."

"And be murdered in cold blood on the way in. The men who framed me and the officers after me being the same people, I'll have to say no, thanks. I'll stay here."

"Suit yourself," retorted Ross, "but I'd think you'd at least want to let the girl go. You don't want her shot, do you?"

"I'll leave the decision to Billy," Kempter stated dryly, "but I hardly think she'll decide that being with you is any improvement over her present condition."

"I'm not going outside," said Billy in a clear, firm voice.

"There's your answer," said Kempter. "Guess that finishes the parley."

"Have it your own way," replied Ross, "but you won't feel so frisky when this cabin is bein' torn down around your ears an' there's rifle slugs eatin' into every log."

"The place is well built," said Kempter, "and if it ever gets in the condition you mention, there won't be near as many of you to see how it looks."

"The trumps are all in our hands," smiled Ross. "We've got our choice of battering your door in and takin' you by force or lettin' you choke to death. People don't live long in this climate without water, an' I noticed the spring was outside."

"We've got a water pail," replied the fugitive, "and it's full."

"It won't last long," said Ross, "and we're in no particular hurry."

"Maybe you're not," rasped Ockletree, "but I am. I've got other things to do than spend the summer down here. I'm in favor of takin' Kempter up on the map deal."

Ross stared at the sheepman a long time before answering, and Kempter, watching them, felt that some sort of telepathic communication was going on between them.

"All right, Sam," the sheriff said finally, "if you're set on it, we'll do as you wish. Hand over the map an' we'll leave you alone."

Kempter smiled. "I'm not that simple, Ross. I'll give you the map, but it won't be till both Billy and I are safely back to civilization in a town that you don't control. You move out and give us a chance to leave unmolested, and, inside of a week, I'll see that the map's delivered to you in Houserock. More than that, I believe it's authentic."

It was Ross' turn to look amused. "You don't want much, Kempter. Some places you might make a pair of deuces win over four aces, but not with me. I'm goin' to have you, dead or alive, and if the girl gets hurt in the process, why, that's your fault. Come on, Sam."

There was an angry flush on Ockletree's face as he turned to follow the sheriff. After they had gone a short distance the sheepman's strident voice drifted back to Kempter.

"You acted a fool about that business, Ross. You ought to have took him up. We could have got the map an' them, too, that way. Wouldn't have been no trouble to have picked 'em up on the way out."

Watching, Kempter saw the two men join the rest of the party, after which Ockletree mounted his horse and, catching the saddle horse and pack animals which Kempter had used, rode away with the man, Nick. Billy had found herself a place beside Kempter at the window, and together they watched the separation.

"What does it mean?" asked Kempter. "Looks like they're through playing together."

Billy frowned. "I believe they have quarreled," she said judiciously. "Didn't you see how Ockletree was waving his arms just before he and Ross separated? I think from what Nick and Critchlow have said of Ockle-

tree that he's a sort of coward. Perhaps he's afraid that he'd be shot capturing this place. Probably feels like you'd try to get him even if you didn't any of the others—after the way he's treated you."

"At that, I'm not so sure he's wrong," mused Kempter. "Still, I don't believe he's leaving this part of the world. Ockletree's been hit by this treasure bug too hard. Likely he thinks he'll get Critchlow and the others and maybe find the treasure while Ross is settling with us. I almost believe that's the answer. He's seen some place here the last day or so that looks as if it might be the region described in his half of the map. I've no doubt he's got every line of it in his head. Now, so long as Ross wouldn't bargain with us, he's decided to go it alone. More than likely if he'd stayed with the sheriff, Ross would have wanted half what they found—if they got anything. Then, again, he may only be intending to bring the others up here and all join in together against us."

"I hope it's not that," said the girl. "There're too many out there now."

"So many, in fact, that three or four more wouldn't make any great difference," said Kempter. "I almost hope they are coming back here."

"Why?"

"Because that way we'll have only one bunch to keep away from instead of two—if we succeed in escaping. Also, I hate the idea of Ockletree's getting the treasure, maybe, that the map tells about. You see," he added with a smile, "I'm not downhearted enough yet to lose interest in it."

"It looks as though the others were leaving, too," exclaimed Billy a moment later. "See, they're going toward the gap!"

"That's probably to tie their horses where there won't be any danger of their getting shot," answered Kempter. "I suppose I ought to open up on them, but I hate to be the one to start this thing."

Five minutes later the group of men who had last left reappeared, all on foot, and each carrying a rifle. As soon as they had entered the glen, they deployed to either side, four on the right and two on the left, seeking the shelter of the trees. For fifteen minutes after this neither the girl nor Kempter caught a glimpse of them. Their advance, if they were advancing, was being conducted with a stealth worthy of Indians.

The pines, however, played out at a point not less than seventy-five yards from the cabin, and between them and the building was an open space where it would be impossible to advance without being seen. Kempter, with eyes glued on this line, was at last rewarded by seeing the trembling of a bunch of elderberry. Then, before he could see any one, a shot rang out and a lead slug tore splinters from the log above the window. It seemed the signal for attack, for, after that first shot, bullets hummed from both sides of the glen. Both the small windows were shot through time and again, and Kempter saw that it would be impossible to use them in warding off an attack.

"Keep low down back in the corner," he advised Billy. "That's right. On this side. Things are going to be considerably warm in here, but we're not whipped yet."

As he talked, Kempter was digging the mud chinking from between two logs close to the floor. He finished the job just in time to see a man leave the pines and run for a short distance, then throw himself down behind a clump of sage. In an instant, he divined that this was to be the manner in which the attack was to be conducted. The four men had been sent to the right because this was the only way in which any shelter at all could be had in approaching the cabin.

Doubtless, the two men on the left

would never attempt to leave the trees at all—neither, perhaps, would one of those on the right. At least half of the force would be used to hold Kempter away from the windows. The sudden savageness of the attack seemed to indicate a determination on Ross' part to get the business over immediately. All this ran through Kempter's mind in a flash as he hurried with the work of enlarging his opening.

Just as it was big enough to use as a porthole, another man dashed from the trees on the right and scuttled like a frightened cottontail for the shelter of one of the bunches of sage. This time, however, Kempter was ready, and as he caught the man's body over the sights of his weapon, he squeezed the trigger. The runner stopped short, swayed, then pitched headlong to the ground and lay still, one arm crumpled unnaturally beneath him.

Instantly, Kempter was blinded by bits of bark as a bullet ripped through the opening he had made. It was but the first of many. Ross' gunmen were showing altogether too much proficiency.

Wondering as to his next best move, Kempter looked about and saw Billy digging desperately at the chinking with a large knife. Already she had another porthole ready for use and was waving him to come to it.

Stepping carefully over the hole he had just made, Kempter reached this last opening. Putting his eye to the aperture, he was in time to see a pair of legs vanishing into a heavy stand of mullin plants almost up to the house. The man's foot, however, still showed, and aiming carefully, Kempter put a bullet in it. The howl of pain that followed told more plainly than words that one more of Ross' men was going to have something besides fighting to take his attention.

As he drew away from the hole to keep from being hit by the bullets that instantly began pouring through it, he found Billy at his side.

"I don't believe any more of them have left the trees yet," she said.

"Probably they won't then," he retorted. "There hasn't been anything lately to encourage them."

"But what will we do when they start again? We can't keep digging holes in here for long or we'll sure be hit."

"Listen!"

Both stood still, almost without breathing, and to their ears came the sound of ax blows.

"What are they doing?" Billy asked, her pupils dilated with excitement.

"Starting to cut down a tree. That means they've had enough cross-country dashes and are going to try something else. They figure on felling that tree so they can use it for a breastwork while they're creeping closer. Ross is certainly in earnest about this business."

"What can we do?"

"We can use the time they spend in cutting that tree to get out of here," said Kempter. "It's a big one, and they'll be busy for a long time."

"How do you know it's big?" asked the girl.

"Because a little one wouldn't reach out far enough," laughed Kempter. "They've got to have a whopper. I'll bet it's one of the tallest ones—just behind the chokecherry bushes. They'll be an hour or two felling it, maybe, and during that time they'll call off the shooting. It's the break we've been needing, Billy."

"I don't see what good it can do us," the girl demurred. "There's nowhere we can go."

"Are you sure of that?" smiled Kempter. "Watch a minute and I'll show you something."

Stepping to the end of the cabin nearest them, he reached up and pulled aside a skin, revealing a small, hinged door of slabs. Behind this aperture yawned a dark opening. Billy stared.

"But how can that be possible? The cabin is standing in the open—nowhere near the cliff."

"I know," replied Kempter, "but there's a big tree against the end of it and the tree is hollow. There's a good-sized hole in it up about sixty feet. That hole comes out just above a large limb, nearly a foot in diameter. We've got to play squirrel and climb up this hole, Billy."

"But we can't," protested the girl. "We'll slip back down."

Kempter laughed. "I've fixed that, Billy. There's some big spikes driven on the inside. I did that over a year ago. We can walk right up it."

"But why, if you knew you had this way of escape, didn't you use it sooner?"

"Because it's a hard trail. I've been spending most of my time in past years swinging around on ledges, and I can negotiate it lots easier than you possibly could. It's nothing but an emergency exit, you know, and when we do get out above we'll have a hard climb ahead of us—and no provisions. Two canteens of water and a small bundle of food is all that we can hope to take."

"They're not chopping any more!" exclaimed the girl. "Oh, Chad, do you think they're going to rush us?"

Kempter's face grew grave. "I don't know, Billy. It don't seem like they would after the dose they've just got. I'll take a look."

As he applied his eye to one of the cracks, a tremendous jar shook the cabin. Geysers of earth and stone shot up from behind the chokecherries, and the tallest of the yellow pines seemed to spring from the ground, its every branch and needle trembling convulsively.

Fascinated, Kempter watched while the tree leaned toward the cabin, hung —almost as though poised—for a second, then came thundering down, with the air whistling and screaming through its boughs. When it struck the earth the ground shook beneath the mighty impact and the air was filled with flying splinters from broken limbs. Dynamite! The attackers had decided that the ax was too hard.

Kempter shook himself loose from the hypnotic effect of the spectacle. Hurriedly he grabbed up the two canteens from a nail on the wall, then handed one to Billy. Next he passed her a small sack containing bacon, flour, and a few other camping necessities. As he worked, he watched through a crack beside the door for signs of Ross' men. He did not have long to wait before he glimpsed a hat bobbing along behind the fallen tree. Then another. They were not traveling fast. Evidently the tangled limbs were proving an obstacle. Whipping out a revolver, Kempter aimed at one of the heads and fired. The felt hat leaped into the air, and the heads instantly disappeared.

Kempter smiled grimly. This would hold them back for perhaps a moment longer. Snatching up two coats, he donned one and ordered Billy to slip into the other.

From outside came shouts and a sound of running feet—then the crash of an ax against the door.

"Hurry and get up that hole!" Kempter whispered to the girl. "Climb as fast as you can, and when you get to the top, wait for me before you step out onto that limb. Understand?"

Billy nodded. "But you—aren't you coming?"

"In a second. Hurry!" he urged fiercely.

Then, as Billy disappeared with coat and bundle, Kempter turned back and fired several shots through the door.

"Go on! You're out of line. He can't touch you!" shouted Ross. "Keep at it and we'll have him in another minute."

And still Kempter tarried, intent on getting the articles that would be abso-

lutely essential to their escape. One of these articles was a coil of rawhide rope, then several boxes of shells were stuffed into his pockets, and finally he grabbed up a rifle from its pegs. This done, he ran back to the opening in the cabin wall and crawled through, pulling the hinged pieces of log shut after him.

As the opening closed, he heard the rattle of a plank knocked from the door. Then feet thumped on the cabin floor and the place was filled with a confusion of voices. Above the general uproar sounded the sheriff's cry of thwarted fury.

"Where in Hades are they?" the officer was shouting. "They've got to be here. Look at the floor! See if there's a trapdoor there anywhere!"

Kempter heard no more, for the walls of the great tree killed all the sounds as he climbed upward. He was about halfway up when a block of light below showed that the door into the tree had been discovered.

Now he could hear voices again.

"Might have known the rat would have some hole," snarled Ross. "All right, we'll smoke 'em out. Don't shove your heads in there, you men—unless you want 'em blowed off. Get some fine kindling and that can of grease. We'll have a smudge that would make a stone image shed tears."

It seemed to Kempter that almost instantly flame spurted into the bottom of the tree—flame followed almost instantly by a puff of choking smoke, swept upward by the air current sucking through the tree.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COUGAR CRIES.

HOLDING his breath, Kempter climbed the last part of the way with his head swirling. Then, at last, he was beside Billy at the upper opening, filling his lungs with fresh air.

Directly beneath them a long, horizontal limb ran out for thirty feet, toward the cliff, ending in a blunt, six-inch stub some six feet from the bluff face. Almost on a level with the limb was a ledge some two feet wide. That ledge was their only chance for salvation. Below them was sufficient foliage to partially screen them from the eyes of those upon the ground, but it would be only a matter of minutes at most until Ross' men would discover the smoke pouring out and watch that point too closely for them to hope to go across unseen.

Quickly, Kempter wormed through the opening and stood upon the limb. "Wait here, just a second, Billy," he directed, and walked out twenty feet or more to where a smaller branch shot upward from the large one. To this smaller limb he tied one end of his rope, then he ran on out to the end of the gently swaying branch and jumped.

His feet struck fairly upon the ledge and the fingers of his free hand found a point of rock by which he could balance himself. Using this same piece of rock as an anchorage, Kempter snubbed the free end of his rope about it and beckoned Billy to follow him.

Fearful, but unhesitating, Billy walked out to the very end of the limb, using the rope Kempter had stretched to balance herself.

"Catch hold of the rope way out," he ordered in a low voice. "Now, lean toward me. Hurry! Don't mind if you do lose your balance. That's it. I've got you."

Kempter's fingers had closed about her wrist like steel bands and whisked her across the gulf. As she stood trembling on the shelf beside him, shouts came from below and bullets began glancing off the ledge about them.

"There's not much danger," Kempter reassured her. "They're shooting blind. They don't see us. But we'll move on farther."

Reaching out, he cut the rope in such a way as to save as much as possible; after which he turned and led the girl higher up the slope and around a jutting spur of rock into a narrow gutter which led upward.

"Will they follow?" asked Billy excitedly.

"I doubt it. It's a hard jump to make without a rope or anything to help. And I don't think Ross' men will try to come up this gutter. More likely they'll try to go round some other way and head us off."

Shortly after this the climb became almost perpendicular, with but the most indifferent of foot and handholds. At first, Kempter was uneasy every second for fear Billy would slip. Soon, however, he realized that she was almost as good on the climb as he was, and he devoted his entire energy to picking out the best and quickest route around the side of the cliff. He had never been on top of this particular mesa—in fact, he had not believed it possible to get there, although he had never tried with any seriousness to reach it. The reason for his indifference had been that he had studied its top from another mesa of the same height and it had appeared treeless. Moreover, there was no cliff above it beneath which could be that old cliff dwelling of the map and his mirage.

Now, however, Kempter saw something ahead which filled him with misgivings. His old, angling trail around the mountain was no longer available. High water from one of the last storms had produced a rock landslide in one of the nearly vertical gutters. This slide had completely sheered away the shelf of rock which he had hoped would bring them into the comparative safety of a steep draw leading down into another canyon.

When he stopped, Billy instantly divined the trouble.

"We'll have to go up, instead of sideways, won't we?" she asked.

"Up or down one," he answered. "But we don't dare go down and we can't go up. Makes a nice little problem, doesn't it?"

"And we can't stay here forever," said the girl. "Still, as long as people have been above here before, I don't see why we can't get up. You can go anywhere any one else can, Chad."

"What do you mean about other folks?" quizzed Kempter. "I didn't know any one had been up here at all, even this far, excepting myself."

"But some one has," declared the girl, "I know it. Look what I picked up, wedged into a crack of the rocks, a few minutes ago."

In her hand was a fragment of red and black pottery.

Kempter whistled. "By George, it looks like you're right, Billy! That piece of stuff never blew up-hill. But how in the name of time did it get here?"

"I don't know," the girl answered, "but perhaps this is the place your map told about. Why don't you get it out to see?"

"There's nothing here to see," objected Kempter, "and, besides, this couldn't be the place. There's no bluff up there for those cliff houses to be at the foot of, and there's no forest."

"Well, anyhow, let's look at the map," urged his companion. "You haven't yet, you know, since you got the other piece. I'd like to see what the thing looks like altogether."

Kempter glanced at the blank spot in the trail ahead and smiled. "Reckon you're right, Billy. We've got as much time right now as we ever will have. There's no place to go."

Sitting down beside a flat stone, he spread the two pieces of leather out and fitted them close together. No sooner had he done so than the rest of Bill Ryder's letter lay plain before them. Kempter read the completed message aloud.

"Here is the map of the place
me and John Morgan found while
trapping down here in 52. It
will look fishy to any one who
sees it, but John and me know
it's there. The drinks got a wallop
and knowin' what's below it makes it
all the better. Trouble is you can't
stay long enough to do much work.
Something queer about the place,
but the gold's all right.
We got an idol almost to
the top and had it fall back.
We're leaving now but hope to come
back and have another crack at it.
Here it is in case we don't, but
we want to be the ones to finish
it ourselves."

As he ended, Billy gave a little exclamation of wonder and pointed at a spot in the middle of the left-hand half.

"Look, Chad! That's the very place where your cabin sits. See! The cove, spring, and those three big trees are all outlined. Why, Chad, you've been living right on the trail, and didn't know it!"

Kempter stared. "It does look like the place," he admitted, "but it can't be. As I told you before, that mesa up above doesn't answer the description."

"But there've been Indians up there," Billy insisted excitedly. "The piece of pottery proves that. I wonder if they crawled up that hollow tree just like we did!"

Kempter shook his head laughingly. "Hardly. The hole in the tree barely showed when I came here. I'm the discoverer of that means of getting up. Let's study this thing a little harder."

"What does that black spot mean?" asked Billy. "See, the trail disappears at it for a teeny ways and then comes out at another one. Is—is that a cave of some kind?"

"It might be," mused Kempter. "There was a sort of hole back of the cabin. Stuff from the roof had fallen in and filled it up. I never bothered with it."

"Of course not," said Billy. "You never had this half of the map. If you had, you would have reached the treasure years ago."

Curled up with her high-topped shoes underneath her, the girl looked more like an eager-eyed boy than ever, as, with hat pushed to one side of her head, she pored over the map.

"Chad," she cried, "that cave was only meant to have gone a short distance. They were in the open again by the time they reached here."

"I wonder what those zigzag lines are meant to represent," mused Kempter. Suddenly he whistled. "By George, I believe I've got it! Those are steps. We've got to look all along here for a place where there's some stone steps leading up that hill."

As he spoke he looked at Billy's bewildered face and laughed. "I don't mean steps like a flight going up to a city or county building or a big church," he explained. "These will be some small niches in the rock, just big enough for a person to cling to. Can you see anything like that?"

"No, and it will be difficult to find them, won't it, Chad? Little niches like that would be awfully hard to see on the side of a big mountain like this. Maybe there isn't any use in looking for them."

"No use talking like that," said Kempter, resting his chin in his hands. "The way we've got to figure is that we're going to find those steps. Let's see. The way this thing's marked it looks as though the trail might run up one of those rock gullies. Where did you pick up that piece of pottery?"

Billy's brows contracted. "Back about a hundred yards. But that's not the place."

"It ought to be," argued Kempter. "The logical place for broken pieces of pottery would be along their trail, if anywhere."

"Yes, but that little gutter where I found it had funny little plants growing

all the way up it. There're no steps there."

"Show it to me."

Hurriedly they retraced their steps, halting at last before a long, almost perpendicular gutter.

"See," said Billy, "it has got vines growing in it."

"It has," answered Kempter solemnly, "and I'll bet that there's steps under the vines. The only way they could have got started in such a place was by having good deep niches in which to root."

Reaching a hand into the green foliage, he ran it exploringly about. "There you are!" he ejaculated triumphantly, pulling the vines back so that Billy could see the first of a series of six-inch deep, foot-wide steps.

"I've seen lots of niches made near cliff dwellings," observed Billy, "but never any like these. They were all shallower and not nearly so long that I saw."

"I don't believe these were made by the Indians," replied Kempter. "They look to me as if steel tools had been used on them—something the native Americans didn't have."

"Then you think it was the two trappers who made them?"

Kempter shook his head. "Not in the first place. They'd have mentioned it if they had. Also, it would have taken the two of them a year to have done it, and no trappers would spend that much time at this kind of work. You know, Billy, I'm beginning to think there's a right good mystery connected with this place, even if it isn't the one where the gold is located."

"And the drinks," mused Billy. "Isn't it queer they mentioned the drinks?"

"Water tastes mighty good down in this part of the country. Hurry now and let's go on up. Some of Ross' bunch might accidentally take it into their heads to follow us, you know."

Kempter led the way and fifteen minutes later they were at the top of the steps and out upon another ledge which led rapidly upward. Upon the rocks along their path were drawings, mostly in red, depicting hunting scenes, ceremonials and wars. They were angular sketches, crudely done, yet endowed with a sort of savage vitality. In addition to the drawings, they came to piles of boulders, heaped up at some past time for purposes of defense. Some of these heaps of stone were placed upon rock platforms in such a way that the use of a wooden lever could send tons of them hurtling down the slope at once.

Again they clambered through narrow openings in rock walls built across the ledge. These walls had at one time served as defenses, for behind them were numberless arrow-heads, broken spears and bows. At each new evidence of something big above, Kempter and the girl hurried faster, and, at last, came out upon a smooth plain of naked stone. A cool wind blew across it and made them shiver.

The air up here seemed to have an electric quality. One could almost imagine that it sparkled, and breathing it seemed like filling one's lungs with the elixir of adventure. Clouds on the west horizon seemed lighter and more ethereal than when viewed from the gorges. In fact, but few of the conditions of ordinary existence appeared to hold good upon this wild mountain.

As he looked about, an exclamation of surprise escaped Kempter's lips.

"This place is bigger than I supposed," he told Billy. "It looks fully five miles across and nearly as wide. I studied it through field glasses from points that must have been ten miles away, but somehow I never got the right impression of its size. But what did people ever want to come here for? There're no trees—no water. None of the things that would make a place like

this livable. All I can see is that some time or other a bunch of hard-pressed Indians fled here to stand off the attack of some stronger tribe that threatened to annihilate them."

"If that's the case, how about the map? It's been all right so far."

"The map," said Kempter, "is a fake, I'm beginning to think. Bill and his partner were a pair of jokers. They were up here all right, but they faked this forest, cliff dwelling, and gold stunt, just to give some other poor chaps a climb."

"I don't believe it," said Billy, "but I'm too tired now to argue." And with that she sat wearily down.

Kempter glanced at the sun, well over in the western sky. "No wonder you're worn out," he exclaimed, "you're entitled to be! It's past four o'clock, and you've done all this climbing without a thing to eat. We'll break open our supplies and have a banquet. Wish I could give you something hot, but there's not a scrap of anything to make a fire with and I wouldn't dare to use anything if I had it."

"What's the funny brown thing over to the north?" Billy asked after she had eaten.

Kempter got to his feet and went toward the object indicated. As he drew closer, he stopped and stared in surprise, for the thing at which he looked was the stock of an ancient, silver-studded blunderbuss with a piece of the old rest supporting its barrel still lying close beside it. Filled with wonder, Kempter returned and showed the articles to Billy.

"I'm not surprised at anything," the girl murmured drowsily. "I'll bet we'll find stranger things than that up here, Chad, but right now I've got to sleep."

Kempter watched until her regular breathing told that she slept, then he spread his coat down over her and walked briskly back and forth across the smooth, erosion-planed rock.

The sun set, smoldering red, in a sea of haze. The distant peaks turned from a bleak buff to twilight tapers, glowing with the day's last light above lakes of indigo shadows, before he stooped to awaken her. Bald as this mesa appeared to be, there might be some place that offered more shelter than the spot where they found themselves.

At his call, Billy opened her eyes, stretched, then sat upright with a smile upon her lips.

"How are you feeling?" asked her companion.

"Wonderful," came the quick reply. "Chad, I feel just as if we were in some sort of fairyland up here."

"And you're not worried about anything?" he asked curiously.

"Not any more," she said simply. "I just feel that everything is going to come out all right. When I was little I used to have lots of fairy tales to read. Chad, this is just like a fairy tale. I wouldn't be surprised even if we find an ogre's castle up here. But what if we do? Everything always turns out right in fairy tales. And, you know, I've had a rather hard ten days trying to keep away from Critchlow. I could hardly sleep at all nights for thinking what he would do if he got me. That is partly what makes me so tired."

After that the two walked in silence for a time, with fitful gusts of wind dashing cold against their faces or rasping around tiny points of stone like the running feet of phantoms. One by one the stars leaped out against the black bowl of night, while elfin whisperings seemed to fill the air. Over in the east a silver glory grew in splendor as the moon swung upward until the nearer crags on the neighboring mesa were etched in palpitating frost.

Soon the flood of light was all about the two, filling them with a sort of heady exhilaration, blended of mystery, romance, and their aloofness from the rest of the world. Nothing seemed

real. Even their own danger dwindled to relative unimportance as the rare wine of adventure coursed through their veins.

It was the scream of a cougar which brought them out of the trance in which they moved. The cry was loud and seemed to come almost from beneath their feet. Startled, they looked at one another; then, as the cry was repeated, they stared ahead to where a gash was appearing in the plain.

CHAPTER IX.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PAST.

FILLED with excitement, they joined hands and ran toward it, eager for a glimpse of what was ahead.

The spectacle came sooner than they expected for, before they had gone any distance, they were brought up short by the opening of a great chasm at their very feet. As nearly as they could tell, they were standing on its very rim. It was perhaps five hundred feet in depth and well over a mile in width. Moreover, this depression was heavily timbered on the side closest to them and seemed to run almost entirely across the mesa.

"Notched," marveled Kempter, "and I never dreamed it! From the places where I looked on the other mesa, this notch never showed."

"Look, Chad," called Billy. "See over against the cliff on the far side!"

Kempter followed her pointing finger and beheld the white, indistinct outlines of buildings crouched at the head of a long, talus slope running down from the bluff. But stranger yet were the long, dark rows of something undefinable running with geometrical regularity along the slope to the left of these buildings.

"What is it?" asked the girl.

"If you mean those rows, I don't know," replied Kempter, "but this is surely the place those two trappers had in mind. Look! You can count two or three little lakes dotted here and there among the trees. I'll bet this is an animal's paradise. Listen, and you can hear the big game thrashing around in the brush."

Standing with bated breath they heard the snap of limbs, the barking of a fox, and farther repetitions of the cougar's cry. One of the lakes was almost directly beneath them, and, while they stood there, a doe and her fawn stepped out into the silver opening and stood with their wild grace silhouetted in black against the silver sheet of water.

"We've got to get down there," announced Kempter, "but how?"

"Look at the map again," urged Billy. "Wasn't there something about a signal fire on it?"

"Seems to me there was," muttered Kempter, "and if there was, it would be up on top, I suppose. Here's the map."

Spreading the leather out again, they examined it by the light of Kempter's electric torch.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Billy as one of her small fingers came to rest upon the spot. "See, it says 'Place of signal fire' right on the edge of this gorge. Only, it looks farther to the west, and the trail starts down a little beyond it."

"We'll go that way and see," said Kempter.

A half hour of skirting the canyon brink brought them to a spot where there was a jumbling of good-sized boulders strewn upon the bed rock. Toward the center of this area they found where stones had been built up into a crude circle some five feet high. Climbing up on the edge of this wall, Kempter flashed his light inside. It was partially filled with ashes. At its edge lay several partly burned sections of log, protected from decay by their coating of charcoal.

"This is the place, Billy," he announced; "there's been fires here in the

past, plenty of them. I can imagine a blaze going here night and day for a century, with poor wretches from that cliff house down below carrying the wood for it up on their backs."

"Why did they have it?"

"Ask me something easier. Maybe it was for worship, maybe for signaling to guards stationed at the edge of the mesa. Who knows? Anyhow, it's here and the road down can't be far away."

Another few minutes' search brought them to a pair of large stones standing upright on the very edge of the precipice. Between these a narrow trail crept down a steeply angling shelf of rock and disappeared into the depths. Without hesitation, Kempter and the girl started down this path.

Soon there was the smell of pine in their nostrils, while the music of rustling leaves reached them but little later. At a bush along the path Kempter halted, and the flash light revealed that it was full of purple berries, sweet-smelling and ripe.

"Service berries," said Kempter. "Let's eat a few."

After this they moved on down into the timber, where their path was arched with green until it resembled a tunnel. Leaves and needles heaped high on the floor of this path made it seem that they were walking on a deep-piled carpet. From the pines came the drowsy *whit-whit* of pine hens disturbed in their slumber by the passage of light. Rabbits repeatedly ran across their path, blinking in the glow till Kempter was almost upon them. Two he killed with rocks. They would make a delicious breakfast, and he could procure them without announcing his presence to any possible listeners by the use of a gun.

Repeatedly he heard large animals lumbering through the brush close at hand. A big grizzly stepped into the light and raised himself on his hind legs as though to dispute their passage; but when the light of the torch struck him in the face, he gave a disbelieving *woof,* and dropping to all fours lumbered into the forest. Twice, cats appeared in the path and stood with backs arched at their approach. Then, when close, the animals emitted hissing squalls, and springing into the air, disappeared wraithlike into the shades.

On straight south through the woods they moved until bare rock barred the advance of the conifers and they were in the open, with the moon-bathed southern cliff in plain view. Nor had they strayed from the ancient path, for full ahead, with small windows staring blankly like the eye sockets in a row of skulls, were the cliff houses beneath the bluff. Also, they could see plainly those regular rows along the talus slope, only now they were close enough to perceive that it was a growth of some kind.

As they moved up the slope toward them, they felt the warmth of the past day beneath their feet. Kempter paused and sniffed. There was sweet, heavy fragrance in the air—almost like a drug it was so strong.

"Billy," said Kempter, "we ought to know what that smell is."

"Why—why, it's grapes!" breathed the girl. "Grapes getting ripe and falling on the ground where the sun has been cooking out their juice. Think of it! Grapes in a place like this!"

Pushing forward, they made their way to the vines and found themselves lost in awe as they contemplated their stupendous proportions. Some of them were bigger than a man's waist at their butts and supported a pile of foliage and fruit almost like a small haystack.

Everywhere that Kempter turned his light the rocks about the plants were stained with juice, while, from the vines, hung tons of purple fruit.

"Some one with a head planted this patch," said Kempter. "Look, Billy, how flat rocks have been laid between

all the plants to keep down other vegetation. Beats hoeing and weeding, doesn't it? And they did a job that's lasted fairly well for perhaps hundreds of years."

"It must have taken a long time for plants like this to grow," said Billy. "Makes one feel as though the place is still inhabited, doesn't it, Chad?"

"It does," answered Kempter. "Suppose we go over to the cliff dwellings and look about. Perhaps there are accommodations over there for travelers. Who knows?"

Leaving the grapes, they wandered through the moonlight toward the buildings. Most of them, as they drew closer, proved to be in a partial state of disintegration; but, over to one side of the others and with a stairway of stone slabs leading up to it, was a rock house in a perfect state of preservation. Even the roof of this building was intact, and the two explorers climbed the steps leading up to it filled with an ever-increasing wonder.

There was a huge, nail-studded slab door to bar their entry—a door with massive hinges of hand-wrought iron. It had been locked at some time past by a tremendous padlock which now dangled from a rusty chain. The present means of keeping the door shut was a heavy-bladed dagger that had been driven into the joint between two rocks. The chain had been wrapped around this dagger hilt.

"Looks like maybe our friends, the trappers, had been the last callers," said Kempter. "But what are hinges, chains, and nails doing in a place like this?"

A sort of excited shiver shook the girl and there was a tremulous note to her laughter as she asked: "Shall we knock, Chad?"

"I guess we can go in without it," he answered.

Undoing the rattling chain, he pushed upon the heavy door. A shrill squawk of age-rusted hinges followed, then the door swung open and a gust of cold, dank air rushed out.

Neither Kempter nor his companion were prepared for what the beam of the electric torch revealed. They had stepped into an old world—the world of Coronado, De Soto, and the other Spanish explorers. Rugs, moth-eaten and dim, were upon the floor. Ruffled shirts and velvet doublets hung from pegs beside pieces of tarnished armor. Cumbersome matchlock guns rested upon pegs above the fireplace, where a black iron kettle still swung above dead ashes. Three or four pieces of silver service sat upon a mantelshelf beside an hourglass. Upon a crude writing desk were piled some heavy, brass-bound books, with several rolls of yellow parchment lying beside them. Kempter glanced at the rolls and saw that one of them contained writing, evidently done with the quill pen lying above them.

"It's Spanish, of course," he said, "and I can't read it."

"Let me!" exclaimed Billy. "I learned it from a Spanish woman that used to stay with my mother a lot. I can read it quite well, only that this is so old and a little different."

Kempter handed her the sheet and held the light so that she could see. After some minutes of study she read slowly:

"Having grown weary of our protracted exile from the land of our nativity, I, Don José Cerova, and my friend and partner in this most profitable business, Ferdinand Gomez, have decided to abandon our holdings and leave for Spain, taking with us sufficient wealth to make us influential all the remainder of our lives.

"Being well content with the treasure we are carrying away, and feeling that we shall never return to this lonely land, we willingly bequeath the remainder of the gold and the business that goes with it to the next adventurer of our race who comes here. The natives of this region have acquired a strong appetite for wine and a keen appreciation of its quality. Make your wine carefully after the rule that we have set down and the heath-

ens of these barrens will gladly barter anything they possess for it. Rule them, as we have, with an iron hand, and make them understand that ye are gods. Let none of the natives employed in your service drink except sparingly. This is a caution ye who would next trade wine for gold cannot afford to overlook, for disregarding it will bring danger. Keep your armor ready, your swords sharp, and if there be any danger of running out of powder, leave at once.

"Signed,

"DON JOSE CEROVA AND FERDINAND GOMEZ.

On the twelfth day of March, sixteen hundred and seventy-eight.

"We pray the saints may guard us on our trip out."

As Billy finished, Kempter whistled.

"Grapes for gold! What an enterprising bunch those old Spaniards were, Billy! I tell you they were real business men. Doesn't it say where the gold is cached?"

"No, it doesn't."

After she had spoken, the girl thoughtfully turned the roll over. Both she and Kempter gave a start as they saw that it contained writing in crude English.

"It's Bill Ryder again!" exclaimed Kempter.

Avidly, they read:

"John, when ye get back here be mighty careful how ye act. The savages is plumb hostile. I've explored all along the east end of the valley and there's no going down that way. The redskins is on the look out. I saw where Cerova and Gomez got butchered along with the rest of their bunch. Guess the redskins took the gold. Anyhow, there wasn't none by them. If ye go out to prospect the south rim before I get in from the west leave word when ye're coming back. Also I'd like ye to leave that spare powder horn of yours. Mine leaks."

For some time after he finished reading the message, Kempter was silent. He was busy trying to visualize those long-gone days of excitement. One thing he well knew—Bill Ryder and his partner had got out of this particular scrape and had lived to quarrel.

"I'd like to have known this Bill Ryder and John Morgan," he said aloud at last. "They must have been real men."

Billy failed to answer and Kempter turned to find her eyes almost shut.

"Billy!" he exclaimed. "You're going to sleep again! You must be almost done out."

The girl nodded drowsily. "I think I am, Chad. I'm still tired, and Spaniards, or gold, or anything doesn't seem to stop me when I get this way. I'm going to curl up on José Cerova's bed and sleep—sleep for hours and hours."

After Billy had gone to sleep with his coat thrown over her, Kempter stepped out into the moonlight. He had been in the open but a moment when a shot reached his ears. It seemed to come from a point perhaps two miles from the east.

Instantly it flashed through his mind that this would be from Ockletree's party. The reason that the sheepman had left so promptly the past morning was that he had recognized the spot where Kempter had his cabin as the one described in his part of the map. Doubtless he or his men had found out about another path which they thought would lead up to the plateau. Evidently their belief had been justified, for certainly the report he had just heard was within the gorge where Kempter now stood.

He was not particularly surprised that another man had found a way up on to the mesa where he himself could not. This was far too big and rough a country for any one man to discover all the points about it. Besides, Kempter had not tried particularly hard, believing that it was not the place for which he sought.

So now, just as he and Billy had reached the goal, the sheepman was at hand, ready to wrest from them the fruits of victory—perhaps even their lives.

The first point to be considered was

how to keep Billy from falling into the hands of Ockletree and his henchman, Critchlow. The best thing to do would be for them to start back the way they had come, as soon as the girl was rested enough to travel again.

As he mulled over this matter in his mind, Kempter's glance roved toward the rim of rock which they had skirted when trying to find the path down. To his amazed chagrin, there was a light shining on that rim—shining at the spot where the old signal fires had burned in the long-dead past. That could mean but one thing. Ross had finally dared to follow and was camped there, waiting for a new day to move forward.

So both possible avenues of escape were blocked! To attempt to pass so close to that fire on so brilliantly lighted a night would be folly. If there were any chance for leaving at all, it would be by getting past Ockletree's band. Instantly, Kempter decided to move in that direction and reconnoiter. There would be ample time for him to come back and get Billy—provided there was a road open for their escape.

CHAPTER X.

TWO LETTERS.

HALF an hour later, Kempter was approaching the sheepman's camp. It was situated close to the east end of the false valley and at a point where the gorge narrowed to not more than ten rods in width. There was deep grass in the bottom of the narrows—for this was no stream bed. On the contrary, the ground was rising somewhat. Not a tree grew on either side of the meadow, and the moon made it almost as light as day.

On the side of this meadow next to him, Kempter could see the winking coals of a camp fire, while about it were lying the cocoonlike forms of the blanket-rolled sleepers. To pass this group without a fight would be impossible, and a fight with the odds five to one would be suicide.

Thinking thus, Kempter squatted down in the shadow of a box-elder bush and concentrated his mind upon the problem confronting him. In the morning, if nothing were done, Ockletree and Ross would both move their forces into the basin. In time they would get in contact with one another. Also, in time, they would discover the grapevines, the Spanish house, and even himself and Billy. After that—no matter what their private grudge at one another—they would join forces to cope with him. The outlook seemed very black.

Had it not been for Billy, he might have been tempted to try shooting his way out, but that could not be. At last, he rose, and retreated to a point farther back in the trees. Here he pulled a little memorandum book and a pencil from his pocket. Turning on his flash light, he printed the following upon a page:

> Ockletree, you thought you had outsmarted me when you left me this morning, but it takes a better man than you to do it. I've got Kempter, the girl, the map, and the gold all in my possession, and there's plenty of gold. What do you think of that? If you're not satisfied, come on up to where I'm camped on the rim and I'll give you a feed of lead. I'm not signing this, but you know well enough who is writing it."

This done, Kempter shut off the light and crept cautiously back toward Ockletree's camp. A cougar could scarcely have moved more silently or less obtrusively through the night than he. Soon he was close enough to hear the sound of snoring. Lifting his head, for he was lying flat, he studied the sleepers at close range. In all probability he could move up to them without the guard's suspecting, for the sleepers were in the shadow of a pine. Satisfied, he resumed his forward inching and was soon close enough to reach out and touch the nearest sleeper. Lifting him-

self on an elbow, he strained to see the fellow's features.

It was Critchlow, his face working as he dreamed. Carefully, Kempter edged around him and moved toward the next. This time luck was with him and he found himself looking into the sheepman's face, which was cool and calculating even in slumber. Ockletree's hat lay near his head, while the butt of one of his guns projected from beneath the coat he was using for a pillow.

Kempter turned his attention to the gun. Every one knew the silver-ornamented revolvers that Ockletree had carried for years. They were more characteristic of the man than even his shoes or his hat, and accordingly Kempter, with infinite patience, began the work of removing the gun from beneath the sleeper's head. It was slow work, for the least quick movement would spell disaster. Yet he kept on and at last had the satisfaction of holding it unobstructed in his own grasp.

Next, with the same forced deliberation, he took out the note and prepared to place it somewhere on the sheepman. As he paused to consider where might be the best place to put it so that it would undoubtedly be observed, Ockletree made a spasmodic movement in his sleep and kicked out, striking Kempter.

Instantly, his snoring ceased and, with a prickling of excitement, Kempter realized that the man was returning, partly at least, to consciousness. It was too late to run without being detected, and that would entail a night pursuit—the last thing that Kempter wanted. For one brief moment his mind revolved a dozen possibilities at lightning speed, then hit upon the one which seemed the only course to take.

Instead of trying to move away, he lay upon his side, in an attitude of slumber, with his face turned away from Ockletree. After that, as a final touch, he ventured a faint snore.

"Get over, Critchlow, can't you?" mumbled the sheepman a second later, his voice thick with sleep. As the sheepman spoke, one of his arms pushed his companion. In answer, Kempter emitted an unintelligible grunt and moved away. A few half-satisfied, half-grumbling, sounds escaped Ockletree, and then again his snoring sounded peacefully through the camp. Raising up again, Kempter felt about till he found the sheepman's boots, and tucked the note into one of the leather grips on the tops. Satisfied, at last, he wormed his way out of the camp with half his night's work done.

After stopping to make sure that Billy was all right, he started toward the twin rocks that guarded the upper end of the path down into the gorge. And an hour and a half after he left Ockletree he was not more than a stone's throw from Ross' camp. Again he took out his memorandum book—this time in the shelter of a big rock—and printed a second letter, which read as follows:

Ross, you're a skunk, and I'm going to tell the world you are. I've got the girl. I've got the gold, and I've got Kempter. I've made peace with Kempter, and I'm going to take them all back out with me and spread the news of what kind of a sheruf you are. Once or twice you've hinted that I was yellow. If you still think so, just try and take one of the things I menshuned away from me. I'm camped at the east end of the valley. If you do come, you want to have your irons ready to smoke. You no who this is.

Kempter looked at his completed work with satisfaction. Next was the job of getting it to Ross. It was still bright moonlight, and Kempter doubted his ability to reach the fire unseen. The chances involved were tremendous, as there was not a thing, until he reached the ring of rocks, to obscure his movements. While debating, he moved upward toward the twin rocks. When close, a small stone rattled down between them.

Instantly, Kempter froze in his tracks. A moment more and he heard a weary grunt, followed by a scratching sound. After this came the faint flare of a match and then the aroma of burning tobacco.

He waited for some time, thinking that the guard might come into view. Nothing happened, however, and Kempter decided that the man was seated, probably with his back resting against one of the stones. After that came the tediously slow job of trying to stalk the guard. Inch by inch, Kempter moved upward, testing each footing with a caution that allowed no mistakes. Every step must be safe from the noise of snapping twig or sliding stone. There could be no grate of gravel nor rasp of cloth against rock.

At the start he removed his shoes and, as he got close to the rocks, he took off his socks as well, so that he might avail himself that much more fully of the touch sense. Now he was between the rocks, with fumes from the guard's cigarette strong in his nostrils. Another five feet and he would be where he could see him.

This last short distance, however, was made doubly difficult by the number of small rocks which cluttered the incline. To move without their rolling seemed impossible.

Again, Kempter paused to consider, and while he did so, the guard cast away his cigarette and the live end lay winking on the rocks above. Kempter stared at it, and as the guard shifted his position, he reached for his own revolver. He was going to be discov—— No, the man had settled down again and had lit a second smoke. Whereupon Kempter breathed more easily and fell to studying the rocks once more.

To one side there was a shelf some two feet wide and about the same length. It occurred to Kempter that he might pile those pebbles, which threatened to reveal his presence, upon this shelf. Accordingly he set to work, and within a short time had stacked the loose fragments where there was no chance of their sliding.

Again he moved ahead. He could hear the man's breathing. Another foot. No, a half foot, or less. Softly he slipped Ockletree's gun from his pocket and, clubbing it, pulled himself upward until he was crouched at the very angle of the monolith.

Now was the moment of decision. Quickly he thrust his head around and found himself staring into the face of the guard—not a foot away. The man's hat was off and the moonlight beat full upon his features. Kempter saw his eyes protrude, then his mouth sagged, and the cigarette dropped upon his leg.

For the instant he was paralyzed by the suddenness of Kempter's appearance, yet the latter could see that he was struggling to regain control of his voice.

Kempter's gun arm swung upward and there was a flash of bright steel in the moonlight; then the guard's head sagged downward and a low moan escaped him. Satisfied as to the guard's unconsciousness, Kempter fell to work. Cutting loose the man's suspenders, he used them to tie his hands. His gun belt he used in a similar manner to strap the legs. This done, he gagged him, and afterward took the letter from his pocket and pinned it with a thorn to the guard's shirt front. Just before leaving, he dropped Ockletree's weapon upon the ground.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT.

AS Kempter approached the grape patch once more, he heard Billy's voice crying his name. Hurrying forward, he met her beside one of the great vines.

"Oh, Chad," the girl called, her voice filled with great relief, "Chad, I

dreamed that you had left me! It was terrible. I woke up, and then, when I found you gone, I couldn't control my nerves. I've imagined everything, Chad. And this vineyard! It's peopled with ghosts, I think. I've been up and down the rows looking for you, and the rustling and whispering of the vines is like the sound of voices. They laughed and gibed at me, Chad. They said that you and I would become old and be ghosts like they are. I hate those vines. Let's leave!"

Kempter laughed reassuringly. "It's getting daylight, now, Billy. Ghosts never bother in daylight. We don't want to leave till we know more about this place. Besides, I don't know where else to go just at present. See, there's some one camped on the mesa above. We can't go that way."

Billy stared toward the spot of red. "Who is it, Chad?"

"Ross."

"You've been up there, then?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Just a scouting trip," he assured her lightly. "Now, I'm going to cook you a rabbit before it gets light enough for them to see the smoke. Let's find a place by the cliff houses. I'd rather be in the open."

"I don't care where we do it, now that you are here. Chad, can't we find another place out of this? Over east, perhaps?"

"Not now," said Kempter, "Ockletree is coming up that way."

A sound of dismay escaped the girl's lips and Kempter hastened to comfort her.

"Don't let that bother you, Billy. No doubt we're better off with two bunches after us than one."

"That couldn't be possible."

"Anything's possible in a place like this. Come on. We'll get our baggage and hunt a place to cook breakfast. Maybe we'll find some wine stored around here somewhere. Looks reasonable that the Spaniards had a supply, you know, and Ryder mentions the drinks."

"I don't like the stuff," said Billy firmly, "but it would be fun to hunt it, though I don't see how they could get barrels into a place like this."

"How about using native crockery to store it in?" joked Kempter, eager to keep any conversation going that would keep his small companion from worrying. "There's an idea, Billy! I'll bet there was a lot of competition here in the old days seeing which of the natives could make the biggest jars. Come on. Let's find them. It ought to make a worth-while exhibit."

Joking, he led her out of the grapes and toward the old Spaniards' house where they gathered their scant belongings together, then hurried toward the row of deserted dwellings. Behind them there was a shallow cave and the two walked through it with the dust of bygone days deep about their ankles. Yet nothing of interest was revealed and they returned to the outside, making their way down into a little hollow with pines growing in a part of it. It was a striking place, different from anything Kempter had ever seen. The trees were large and far-spaced at the upper end, while farther down they grew smaller, finally disappearing entirely. Nor was there any other living vegetation where the trees were absent. Nothing remained in the area but rock, bare earth, and the yellow piles of decay, marking where trees had once stood.

There was plenty close at hand, however, to occupy their attention for, beneath the trees, were the round, juice-stained rocks that had been used to weight the grapes down in the old wine presses, all of which had rotted badly. Yet enough remained for Kempter and his companion to picture something of the strange bustle of that old-time

vinery. The path of rocks leading from the presses out to the vines still invited traffic, while a similar path led over a little rise of ground to a spring, beside which were the broken fragments of numerous earthen jars, used for transporting water.

In fact, all along the trails were pieces of broken pottery, speaking more eloquently than words of the feet that had passed to and fro. Of the vats there was little left but broken slabs, staves, and fragments of split and twisted willow, which in some sheltered spots had escaped the rains and so had failed to decay.

"Pieces of their old willow hoops," explained Kempter in answer to Billy's questioning. "Doubtless they had them pretty well covered with them. It would take a lot of vats this size. It looks as though the Spaniards had done a lot of export business here. Probably furnished liquid happiness to Indians over quite a tract of country."

"But I don't see where it was stored," said Billy, "and I don't understand why there are no trees down at the other end of this hollow."

"Maybe if we'd go down there we'd know the answer to both things," suggested Kempter. "Shall we go?"

Before they had taken a dozen steps their eyes were attracted to a round, stone slab lying upon the floor of the glen at a point where there was nothing but naked rock around it, except for a ring of loose, dried clay close to the stone slab. Beyond this point, only a few feet, was a cliff of white rock with a hole in it some six feet or more from the ground. Kempter took hold of the slab and lifted, but he could barely make it move.

"No use, Billy," he said, "I'm not strong enough. Run back and get a piece of wood from around the old presses. Maybe we can pry the top off with a lever."

While he waited, he sat down upon the edge of the slab to get his breath, and meditate upon the reason for the clay around its edge. He concluded that perhaps it had been used in sealing the opening to whatever chamber was below. From this he fell into a dreamy speculation upon the people who had toiled in this out-of-the-way place. Next, in a hazy sort of way, he realized that he was sleepy—more sleepy than he had ever been in his life. He had better—get up while—— No use. He was sinking into a soft void of utter nothingness.

Later, lights fizzed in his brain and voices seemed to call from a great distance. He wanted to hear what the voices said, and tried to answer. The roaring in his head increased in intensity until at last it brought him, on some sort of ghostly current, back to where there was light, and last, but more important than all else, he could see Billy's anxious face above his own.

"Wake up, Chad!" she was crying. "Please, wake up! You must! You've got to!"

There were tears on her cheeks and a broken piece of crockery in her hand, from which she poured water upon him. Slowly, Kempter regained fuller consciousness.

"What—what happened?" he asked at last.

"When I got back with the stick, you were asleep, Chad. And though I knew you were tired, somehow your sleep didn't look just right to me. I was frightened and suddenly began to hate the spot where you were. I hauled you back up here."

"Billy," he exclaimed wonderingly, "how could you!"

"I don't know," she retorted, "but I did. I guess the sound of guns frightened me. Chad, there are people fighting over beyond us a way. I guess it's Ross' and Ockletree's men. There's been screaming and cursing to turn one's hair gray. Get up, Chad! Do

get up! The sounds are coming closer!"

Dizzily, Kempter rose to his feet with Billy's help. Upright, the mist seemed to lift from his brain.

"I can't understand it," he muttered, looking back at the stone slab on which he had fallen asleep. "It seemed as if I was hypnotized, or had an anæsthetic, or something of the sort. Anyhow, I couldn't get up when I knew I should. Guess those old Spaniards put a curse on the place, Billy."

"Never mind what they did," panted the girl. "We've got to run. Hear that?"

Kempter heard. It was the crash of repeating rifles close at hand. The reports dashed against the cliff front to the south and were echoed back in staccato peals.

Billy was right. It was time to go, and Kempter, turning, ran heavily toward the cliff house, with the girl at his side. Before he had gone any distance, he felt too tired to go farther.

"I'm going to stop behind this rock," he said, pointing to a huge stone with chokecherries spraying over it. "They'll not find me here. You'd better go farther, Billy."

"I'm going to stay with you," the girl retorted fiercely.

And together they crouched down, peering through their screen of green fronds toward the point from which the firing came. As they watched, the sounds swept closer until they caught a glimpse of two disheveled figures running beneath the pines down toward the stone slab on which Kempter had slept. One of them Kempter recognized as being Ockletree, and Billy said his companion was Critchlow. Close behind them came Sheriff Ross and another man.

"Don't shoot any more!" Kempter heard Ross call to his companion. "They're out of ammunition. We'll get 'em alive!"

Below, Ockletree and Critchlow saw that they were trapped, and turned at bay like wild beasts. At the sight Ross laughed mockingly.

"Thought you could outsmart me! Well, you put up a harder scrap than I thought anybody as yellow as you ever would. But you're caught now, Sam, even if there was several good men shot in the process. Now, unless you want to go to the happy huntin' ground yourself, you'll tell me what you did with the gold, the girl, and Kempter."

Ockletree showed his teeth like a cornered cat.

"You're a great one to ask that," he sneered, "after gettin' 'em all yourself! Go on an' get your killin' over with!"

Ross stared disbelievingly at the sheepman. "You've got the nerve to say that after leavin' me that note?"

"I never left you no note," Ockletree shouted. "You left one for me, you—you——" He became incoherent with rage.

Ross seemed to lose control of his temper, for suddenly his rifle whipped upward and flame spat from the barrel. Watching, Kempter saw a bit of felt fly from Ockletree's hat brim, while Critchlow, who was standing just behind, pitched to the ground.

"Missed the goose and hit the gander," snarled Ross. "Next shot you won't be so lucky, Sam."

Ockletree went white as he saw the fury in Ross' face.

"Come on," the latter called to his companion, "we'll go down and reason with Sam some more!"

As the two hard-faced men strode toward him, Ockletree seemed to shrink. When within about twenty feet of him, Ross halted.

"Turn around, Sam, with your back to us," he ordered.

Ockletree hesitated, and a terrible laugh came from the sheriff, after which he called:

"Sam, if you don't mind, I'm goin'

to put a bullet through you an' let you lie screamin' on them rocks."

There was no doubting the decision that lay behind the statement and the sheepman turned his back to the officer.

"All right!" snapped Ross to his companion. "Get busy and tie his arms and legs!"

Ross' man worked swiftly, and in almost no time Ockletree was trussed.

"Now," directed Ross, "pick up that slab of wood and run it through his arms. That's it. Know what we're goin' to do to you, Sam? I'll tell you. We're goin' to twist on this stick till you cry for mercy unless you tell what you did with them things."

Ockletree turned a face that writhed with fear toward his captor:

"I can't tell, you cur," he squalled. "You've got 'em yourself!"

As he spoke the sheepman managed to jerk loose and run totteringly toward the white stone cliff that barred the other end. Here, with his head almost against the hole that Kempter had noticed earlier, Ockletree pitched to the ground. Ross stared at the man.

"What's happened to him?" he called to his henchman. "Think he's havin' a stroke just to cheat us? Go, see if you can get him up!"

The man went to obey then; as he bent over Ockletree, he staggered and went down like a log.

CHAPTER XII.

PERFECT FOR TWO.

STARTLED, Kempter and the girl looked at one another, then, without a word, they turned to view the drama going on below. Ross, with legs straddled and neck craned forward, was staring at the two fallen men. After a moment, he took a step forward, hesitated, and shouted the names of both men.

There was no answer, and Ross, instead of going closer, whirled and ran back up the hollow toward the remains of the old wine press.

Kempter turned to Billy.

"Stay here," he ordered in an undertone, "I've got to intercept that fellow. He's going for help."

Jumping to his feet, Kempter hurried down the hill with a drawn revolver in his hand. Bushes screened him from the sheriff until he had reached the pines. There, on the old path leading toward the grapes, he met Ross running heavily, head down.

"Halt!" Kempter commanded.

At the order, Ross glanced up and saw Kempter for the first time. Whatever else the sheriff might be, he was no coward. Surprise showed in his features, but no fear. In one instant he was erect, the next he was pitching toward the ground, pulling a revolver from his holster as he fell. Before his shoulder struck the ground, the first gush of flame leaped from the weapon, and Kempter, who had sprung sidewise, heard the lead singing at his ear. His own weapon crashed in answer and rock dust flew from one of the stones in the ancient trail. Almost instantly, two more shots came from Ross, but they went wild, and Kempter saw that the fall had destroyed the sheriff's usually fine coördination of hand and eye.

Ross seemed to sense the fact at almost the same instant, but appeared amazed at Kempter's failure to continue shooting. The chagrin in his eyes at failing to score a hit turned to gloating satisfaction.

"Your gun's jammed," he exulted, then leveled his weapon once more, this time with the utmost deliberation. Just as he was about to press the trigger, Kempter's gun spoke a second time. Ross' weapon flew from his hand, and he uttered a cry of pain.

"Got you, Ross," Kempter remarked quietly. "I could have got you sooner, for that matter, only I wanted to take

you as nearly whole as possible. You'll make a better exhibit that way. Now stop your howling. I want to ask some questions."

"What do you want to know?"

"Where you were headed on the gallop, for one thing?"

"I was goin' to see if any of my bunch was still able to travel. If there was, I was going to have them come back and give me a lift with my man and Ockletree."

"Why didn't you do it yourself?"

"I was afraid to. I can stand up to lead pretty fair, I reckon, but I ain't made right for facin' the kind of thing that's down there."

"What kind of thing's down there?"

"I don't know. But you saw it get Ockletree and that fellow that was with me, didn't you?"

"Sure, I saw them keel over. And now I'm going to watch you haul them away from there."

The sheriff's face turned several shades paler. "I won't," he stated flatly.

"Oh, yes, you will. You wouldn't like to have me shoot you the way you were planning to drill Ockletree. Right about face! There's no time to lose."

At the point of Kempter's gun, Ross marched back down the glen to a spot some thirty feet from where the two lay.

"From here you go it alone," Kempter ordered. "My advice to you is that you work fast and hold your breath while you're closest to that hole. I'd even advise standing stooped so that your head's well below the opening."

"It'll get me," said Ross shakily.

"If it does, it isn't the hardest way to die," replied Kempter stonily. "Hurry! You can rest between trips. Don't pay any attention to Critchlow. He's dead."

"So are the others," muttered Ross, as he crept forward.

Three or four minutes later the two men lay stretched at Kempter's feet. Ross was still upright, but he seemed dazed.

"How do you feel?" asked Kempter.

"Like I wanted to go to sleep," answered Ross drowsily. "I'm all in."

Kempter reached out and slapped the officer in the face. The blow seemed to revive him.

"Get back up the gully a way," ordered Kempter. "Then, when your head clears a little, we'll drag these two on up to the shade of the trees."

When at last the unconscious pair were lying side by side close to the old wine press, Billy joined Kempter.

Ross stared. "How comes it that you two are loose?" he demanded. "Did you make some sort of bargain with Sam?"

Kempter shook his head, then said to Billy:

"Get some water so that we can bring these two around and dress the sheriff's hand."

Shortly afterward Ross received crude first-aid treatment and was securely bound. The other two were still unconscious.

"Are they going to get over it?" asked Billy.

"I think so," answered Kempter.

"What was it that happened to them?"

"I don't know yet, but I'm going to find out. You watch them, Billy, while I'm gone. If they stir, or you see any one coming, call me."

"Oh, don't go, Chad! You'll be hurt."

"No danger. I've learned a lot from observation. But I'm going to take along a better pry for the stone slab."

Hurrying back to the spot, Kempter found a small boulder to use as a fulcrum for his wooden lever. This time, when he lifted the rock, it moved and slid back a few inches. Instead of following up his advantage, Kempter moved away for some distance and stood a few minutes before returning to

finish his task of shoving the stone aside.

This time the sunlight drove downward in a great yellow beam and illuminated a purple pool some ten feet below. From the surface of this pool projected a hideous, dark-stained head. At first it seemed that of a human, then, as his eyes got more accustomed to the gloom, Kempter realized that it was a carved one, an idol's, probably. And most likely the one that Bill Ryder and his friend had fished for so many years ago.

The stick, which Kempter had laid on the edge, somehow slipped and fell in. Purple spray flew upward, and to Kempter's nostrils crept the odor of old wine. This was the drink to which Ryder had referred. It would be like an old trapper to try anything!

Suddenly, Kempter realized that he was getting sleepy—that it did not seem worth while to stir. He would not move. He——

Just as he was slipping, a cry from Billy beat into his dulling consciousness. Billy wanted him, and Kempter's mind oddly responded to a call from her in a way that it would not have done for any other earthly agency. He jerked back from the edge of the pit, and rising to his feet reeled toward the pines. By the time he had reached the girl, he could think straight.

"What was it?" he asked as he saw her looking at him.

"These other men. They're coming to," she replied, "and, anyhow, I was frightened for fear you were going to fall in, Chad. You acted so strangely."

"I felt strange," Kempter laughed, "but I'm all right now. Guess it's time to tie these other two."

In another five minutes Ockletree was able to sit up and stare about. The change in affairs seemed to bewilder him.

"What's happened?" he demanded. "I don't get this. How comes it that Ross is tied and that you, Kempter, an' the girl, are here?"

"It means that you did a bum job of guardin' them, an' that they got loose," snarled Ross. "It's the thing that undid me. Just shows what a fool's luck will do."

"I never had these people, you yellow liar," marveled Ockletree. "What's the use of talkin' that way when you know, an' I know, that I didn't?"

"You two might as well quit bickering about that," interrupted Kempter. "Neither of you had us. We just slipped a fast one over and you both fell for it. I left those notes."

The men's faces were blank.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the sheriff. "That makes it seem a lot different! We've both misjudged each other."

"Well, there was no mistake about your killin' Critchlow an' threatenin' to kill me by torture, was there, Jake?" snarled Ockletree. "I'm through with you for good."

"As you are going to be tied together something like Siamese twins for the next few days while we're getting out of here, it would be better for you to try to cultivate a little affection for each other," advised Kempter.

"What you aimin' to do?" asked Ross.

"Turn you over to the authorities in another county," answered Kempter. "I know the prosecuting attorney in Rim County quite well. He'll be mighty glad to get hold of you when he knows what you've been doing."

Ross and the sheepman digested this piece of news with wry faces.

"Anyhow," said the sheriff, "I'd like to know what knocked Ockletree an' that other fellow over."

"Gas," replied Kempter, "I don't know just what kind, but something on the order of monoxide gas, I suppose, escaping through a fissure in the rocks. It's the gas that killed the vegetation and that would have killed you fellows

if you had stayed in it a little longer. It's all over down there, but it's worse on a level with the hole it comes out of."

"What's in the other hole—the one that had the lid on it?" asked Ockletree.

"Gold. Wine and gold," answered Kempter. "They're mixed in about equal proportions, I should say."

"It seems awfully queer," exclaimed Billy. "Why should they ever have poured wine in such a horrible place."

"It wasn't horrible then, according to my way of thinking," replied Kempter. "You can see there used to be vegetation down there. The decay from one or two trees is some of it still left. That shows that it can't be many hundred years since this flow of gas began. I think probably an earthquake made a fissure between two rock strata and permitted gas to come up—perhaps from way down deep. I figure that our two old Spaniard friends went out of business largely because of the earthquake and the gas. Probably they were a bit superstitious, as well as grasping, and thought that the hand of God was against them. But that didn't keep them from lugging such of the treasure as they were unable to take with them down to their wine cistern and dropping it in. That little message they left sounded mighty magnanimous, but there was a catch to it."

"Who does the gold belong to?" Billy asked next.

Kempter grinned. "It belongs to you and me, Billy. We're partners in this deal. And I'm thinking your half will make you wealthy—wealthy enough so you can go East, if you want to, and get a lot of polish. Then marry some fellow that lives in a civilized country."

"I don't want to live anywhere but in the West," answered Billy. "And you've promised to look after me."

"I will," smiled Kempter, "but it's going to be some job, Billy, pretty as you'll look in all the nice clothes you're going to have."

"Pretty clothes!" snarled Ross, looking like a trapped wild cat. "Pretty clothes! Is that all you can think of for her to do with the money she'll have? What are you goin' to use yours for? Hair tonic?"

Kempter looked beatific. "I like you, Ross, a lot better than I do, Ockletree. There's stiffening in your backbone. Just because I do feel that way, I'll tell you what I intend doing with part of mine. I'm going to use it to see that you fellows either hang or spend a good long time in jail. In fact, if it's a prison sentence you draw, I'll offer to pay your board and lodging if they'll keep you two in the same cell where you can enjoy each other for life. How does that strike you for being interested in your futures?"

Apparently, the prospect robbed them of speech, for neither Ross nor the sheepman uttered a sound.

Kempter moved a short distance away, with the girl at his side.

"Billy," he said, "don't you think this would be a nice place to fix up for a retreat when one gets tired of civilization?"

Billy flushed and turned her head away as she answered, "I think it would be perfect for two, Chad."

Golden Bacon

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Six Bits Difference," etc.

"I WONDER what's went with that slab of bacon that was hangin' on this peg by the door," Mack Barnes grumbled as he rummaged among boxes and barrels in the lean-to storeroom.

"Pack rats is a-gettin' bad," mildly suggested his old partner, "Idaho" Freeman, without looking up from the perusal of a week-old newspaper.

"Pack rats your granny!" snorted Mack. "Do you figger a critter the size of your fist could drag off ten pounds of meat, 'specially when it's hangin' by a string to a peg?"

"A coyote might."

"Yah, or a mountain lion, providin' it could squeeze through a crack no wider'n your finger," Mack retorted. "If them two idees is the best you got, I reckon you ain't a-goin' to be no help in findin' out what's made away with the bacon."

"Two hungry men eats consid'able bacon in a week's time," Idaho ventured.

"I ain't denyin' that you got a appertite like a sawmill, an' that I ain't tender-hearted when it comes to eatin', but they ain't no two men could get away with that much bacon in two days," Mack declared. "That slab was a-hangin' there night before last. More'n that, the flour is about petered out, an' the coffee in the can is a full pound short of what it had ought to be this time of the month."

Idaho blinked helplessly at this apparently unexpected revelation. He had undoubtedly given the three most plausible reasons he could think of for the rapid depletion of their foodstuffs, and none of them had proved convincing.

"It—it's kinda myster'ous," he presently mumbled in a vague manner.

"No, they ain't no myst'ry about

it," Mack declared after a minute's thoughtful silence.

"Huh?" Idaho was surprised into querying.

"I'm admittin' that such things as bacon an' flour don't take laigs an' walk off, an' they couldn't be lugged away by pack rats or coyotes," Mack went on. "They couldn't nobody sneak in an' take 'em unbeknownst to both of us whilst we was away from home, because we ain't both been away at the same time; but I'm still claimin' it ain't myster'ous."

By every rule of logic, such a statement should have drawn a ready reply from Idaho. He might have been expected to stoutly deny all knowledge of the missing articles. But no such thing happened. Except for the scrape of knife or pan as Mack cut a few slices from the last small remnant of bacon to be found, utter silence reigned for the next few minutes. It was evident that Idaho chafed at his partner's silence, as if he wanted Mack to go on and accuse him of whatever remissness or crime he might be deemed guilty of committing.

Mack betrayed no further curiosity concerning the disposition made of the missing slab of bacon. So far as appearances went, he had dismissed the matter from his mind. He had doubtless said all he had to say, and was waiting patiently for developments. It was a way he had, and it was usually productive of results.

Idaho presently lost all interest in the paper, threw it aside, and got up to move restlessly about. Whenever Mack chanced to look in his direction, he paused expectantly. The suspense was becoming irksome, but Idaho stood it until dinner was ready and the two were seated at the table. He even managed to worry through the meal, but when he fancied he detected a twinkle in the eye of his partner he could no longer contain himself.

"Well, why don't you go on an' finish what you got to say?" he demanded explosively.

"Dunno as I'm cravin' speech right now. I never did believe in a feller wearin' out his tongue without he had somethin' to say," Mack calmly returned.

"I don't mind wearing a little offn the end of mine just to let you know I wouldn't tell you a danged thing about what went with that bacon, after them remarks," Idaho growled.

"Ain't no use to get het up over it; I wouldn't go so far as to accuse you of knowin' it wasn't a pack rat or a coyote as got it."

"No, but—but——"

Idaho floundered helplessly and trailed off into unintelligible grunts. True enough, Mack had not openly accused him of knowing, and there was a remote possibility that he had not even suspected such a thing. Idaho was suddenly angry with himself for so artlessly falling into the trap of his taciturn partner. It was always like that, Mack gained the information he desired by merely keeping still. Idaho lost his temper at the thought of it.

"If I had 've took an' throwed that meat to the coyotes, it ain't no more'n I had a right to do," he declared with some heat. "I allow half this cabin an' all that's in it is mine."

"It ain't no more'n half yourn."

"I dunno but 'tis, come to think of it," Idaho retorted. "If I ain't plumb forgot, I built this cabin myself while you was off freightin' somewhere around Ore Creek. You wasn't even close around when I struck copper on the claim that keeps on makin' money without either one of us turnin' a hand."

"Yeah, but it's half mine—cabin, copper mine, an' all; you got to admit that," Mack declared.

"It wouldn't 've been if I hadn't give it to you."

"Why, you danged, misguided old runt, you never give me nothin'!" Mack exclaimed, with a frown of impatience. "I won it off you fair an' square in a poker game."

"I just took pity on you an' let you beat me; but if it was to do over, I reckon I wouldn't be so foolish."

"Let me! Why, I could beat you playin' poker with one hand tied behind me, any day you ever saw!"

"How come I turned right around an' won a half int'rest in that ranch of yourn down on the railroad, if I was such a pore player?" Idaho demanded.

"Why—I—er—I just let you, bein' kinda tender-hearted."

"If you got a notion I'm a-goin' to get sorry for you an' give it back after all this time, you got another think comin'."

"You couldn't run after me fast enough to give me back anything I've once give up," Mack growled. "You must've got up on the wrong side of the bed this mornin', tryin' to start a argument about things that's so far back they're pretty nigh forgot."

"It gets me riled to be accused of things."

"I ain't accusin' you of nothin' more'n bein' a old sore-headed."

"You been hintin' about things."

"Now looka here, Idaho; if it'll do you any good, I'll swear I see a pack rat draggin' that bacon off, or a coyote crawlin' through that crack by the winder to get at it."

"You'll be swearin' to a blamed lie."

"Yeah, I'm suspicionin' it wouldn't be the whole truth an' nothin' but the truth, an' I reckon you know it."

"I'm a-tellin' you here an' now that I'm gettin' tired of them reflections you been castin' at me," Idaho continued, with mounting irritation. "Things is comin' to a high pass when a feller has got to give a account of everything that's missin' from his own house. If I got to be pestered to death by a old he-baboon that calls hisself a man, I'd rather sleep outdoors an' cover up with leaves."

"They's plenty of room outdoors, an' you ain't tied," Mack replied. "It'll be nice an' quiet without you, an' if I get to hankerin' for comp'ny any time, I can ketch me a side-winder or a wild cat for a change. I allow they'd be some improvement over what I've been endurin' for some years."

Idaho choked back an angry retort and got up from the table. It was his turn to clear away the dishes after the noonday meal, and he went sulkily about the task, completing it in silence.

Mack, realizing that his partner would be poor company, indeed, until he recovered from his grumpy spell, got down his gun and set off for Shoestring Canyon in hopes of knocking over a sage hen for supper. He was a little puzzled, and half angry at Idaho for taking offense at so trivial a matter. He had not lived most of the last twenty years with his partner without becoming familiar with his idiosyncracies. Idaho had been restless for several days, chafing at the humdrum of an idle life, when there was no longer the necessity for working for a living.

"I figgered Idaho would bust loose pretty soon, but I didn't allow he would get so techy over a little thing," Mack muttered to himself, as he trudged toward his favorite hunting ground.

He had indifferent luck, and it was almost sundown before he succeeded in bringing down a sage hen, and started homeward. One bird would make a bountiful meal for the two of them. It was Idaho's turn to cook supper, and nobody knew better how to cook the toothsome meat of the sage hen. He would probably have a fire kindled when his partner returned from the hunt, and with coffee, biscuits, and the juicy fowl cooked to a turn, good humor would return and the day would end perfectly.

But when Mack came within sight of the cabin, he was surprised and a little piqued that he saw no smoke ascending from the chimney. It was evident that Idaho was still in a huff; either that, or he had gone upon some excursion of his own and was late returning. It was with some impatience that Mack gathered fuel and started a fire. This changed to uneasiness when the missing partner failed to show up in time for supper, and developed into alarm when bedtime came and there was still no sign of him.

Mack was never one to worry needlessly. He told himself that his partner had gone to visit some of the homesteaders and had been prevailed upon to pass the night there, although he knew that only the most urgent circumstances would keep Idaho from his own bed. Again, he might have gone for a visit to their protégée; Hilda Burton, teacher of the Badger Valley school, or to see Jerry, their adopted son.

Since he could do no good by remaining up, Mack retired early and slept poorly. He was astir betimes the next morning, looking for the slightest clew to the whereabouts of his absent partner. When he had eaten a hasty breakfast, he mounted his horse and rode off toward Hilda's homestead. He hoped to learn what he wished to know without asking a direct question. He didn't want Hilda to know yet that Idaho was out of pocket unless he happened to be there. It would but lead to his being asked embarrassing questions, in the end being compelled to disclose the particulars of their petty quarrel and how it had started. The girl was sure to side with Idaho. She would be all for the under dog, and at that moment Idaho appeared to be very much submerged.

The trip was unproductive of results. Mack got no news of his missing partner, although he approached two homesteaders with veiled inquiries after leaving Hilda's place. The girl had asked after the health of Idaho, and Mack imagined his rather vague reply had not been quite satisfactory. He hurried away before more disquieting questions should be asked.

Mack half expected to find his partner at home upon his return, but his mild hopes proved vain. Arrived at the cabin, he began a hasty but methodical search, much as a boy looks for a lost ball. He rode in circles spiraling outward until he had thoroughly covered the area adjacent to the cabin without coming upon the remotest clew. He came in at noon and slumped wearily down.

"It was low-down of me to go pesterin' Idaho about a scrap of meat," he muttered contritely. "He was right; it wasn't none of my business to be insinuatin' that he knowed what went with it."

Dejectedly, he ate whatever scraps of food he could find already cooked, and after a brief rest continued the search. He went as far as Shoestring Canyon on one side, and to Dry Fork on the other, and just at sundown he came upon a footprint in the sandy bed of a dry wash. In the brief intervals before dark, he searched and came upon others leading in the same direction. He knew of a certainty that the tracks were made by Idaho's heavy boots, and were no more than a day old.

Back at the cabin that night, Mack made a thorough investigation to determine what Idaho had taken with him. A canvas knapsack was gone from its place on a nail, and he thought a blanket was missing. He was sure about a tin cup and an old frying pan they never used. He failed to find an extra pair of pants he knew Idaho possessed, likewise shirt and socks.

"He allowed I was a old he-baboon, always pesterin' him," Mack mumbled, as he sat on the side of his bunk that night. "I'm worse, I'm a mangy, sheep-

stealin' coyote. He did let me win that time when he wanted to give me a half int'rest in his copper mine an' knowed I was too contrary-minded to take it. Yeah, just like I let him win half of my homestead to even up things, neither one of us suspicionin' he was gittin' anything worth real money."

When Mack awoke the next morning, remorse still pursued him. He rolled from between warm blankets with an exclamation of disgust at himself.

"Sleepin' on the ground, an' him with the rheumatiz, whilst I'm rolled up in a soft bed," he mumbled self-accusingly. "Allowed he'd rather sleep on the ground an' cover up with leaves than be pestered by a meddlin' old cuss like me, an' I dunno as I blame him."

With a gesture of impatience at himself for becoming sympathetic, he pulled on his boots and went about the simple household tasks. Idaho was a good partner, no doubt of that; but it was his own fault if he chose to go out and sleep on the ground when he had a good dry bunk at home. He had no real cause to get huffy. He was contrary and obstinate, that was it. Still, partners were partners, and who else but Mack would look after him?

"Contrary-minded at times, but they don't make 'em no better'n Idaho," Mack repeated to himself. "I ain't forget that time he——"

He broke off with a determined shake of the head. No use to get sentimental, but he must really find out where Idaho had gone. Never before had he taken it into his head to leave without telling where he was going.

When Mack had eaten breakfast, he got together all the available food and made a pack of it. There was no bacon, but there was enough coffee and flour to last one man several days. He would take along his gun and shoot sage hens and rabbits for meat. Unlike Idaho, he preferred riding to walking. He could go almost anywhere he chose on a horse, and travel more miles in a day than he could in two afoot.

He struck Idaho's trail where he had left it the evening before, and followed it without much difficulty for seven or eight miles, but he lost it where it crossed a rocky ridge. He sawed back and forth across the course without again picking it up. He ceased to search for signs, and held to the same general course he had taken at the beginning, which carried him down the bed of a gulch for a mile or two.

It was high noon when he came out upon a narrow flat between the hills, a place he recognized. There had been placer mines here years before, abandoned after every shovelful of gravel had been cleaned off to bed rock and washed so clean of the gold that was in it that a man could not have made Chinaman's wages working it. It was a good place for a noon camp, however. There was plenty of water, and a fair-sized park of grass where a horse might graze.

When Mack had staked his horse on the grass, he gathered fuel for a fire. It would be a sorry enough meal without meat, and he had failed to run across so much as a cottontail rabbit since leaving home. When a man travels without a pack animal, he must put up with the lightest possible equipment. An empty tomato can sufficed for a coffeepot, while bread and meat could be cooked over the coals at the end of a forked stick.

The coffee had been set to boil in the can, and Mack was casting about for a smooth, flat rock where he might mix some of the flour into stiff dough to be wrapped around a stout stick for baking, when he chanced to descry the edge of a copper pan showing above the sand and gravel, left there by some discouraged miner years before. He knew it at once for the kind of pan that prospectors and miners use when washing loose sand and gravel in search of color. It

might very well answer for a mixing pan for bread dough.

He unearthed it without difficulty and carried it to the little stream to scour it clean. There was a familiar feel to the pan, and in a reminiscent mood of the old days when he had prospected for gold, he filled it with sand and gravel, and gave the pan that peculiar whirling motion that separates the gold from the lighter material. A whimsical fancy prompted him to keep this up until he had cleaned the pan. He might have adopted a faster method, but there was something enticing in the process.

And each time he looked in the bottom of the pan for the gold he knew was not there. But the unexpected happened, for when he raked off the gravel from the third or fourth panful, he saw there at the bottom a tiny nugget, a remnant overlooked by the zealous hunters of another day. Scarcely larger than a grain of wheat it was, but gold, nevertheless.

His eyes widened in surprise, and his heart beat quickly with a once familiar, but now almost forgotten, fever. He laid the yellow particle in his hand and feasted his old eyes upon it before wrapping it in a scrap of paper and transferring it to his pocket. With eager haste, he scraped up more of the gravel and washed it in the same deft manner. It pleased him that he had not forgotten how, that he was not immune to the thrills of the gold seeker. The next panful yielded but the slightest trace, and subsequent ones only a few grains.

He presently sat up and looked guiltily around, ashamed that he had allowed himself to become absorbed in such a foolish pastime. The pan was clean now, and there was no reason why he should not go on with the preparation of his dinner. But there remained a narrow spit of sand and gravel at the water's edge; he would wash that out and quit. Almost the next panful yielded color, enough to kindle hope.

Mack forgot his belated dinner, forgot his lost partner, and what had brought him to this isolated region. He was living over a past generation. The ground he was working could never yield a living wage to the most adept; it was as if he played a game. There was more of the gravel than he thought, and an hour slipped by without his realizing the passage of time. His back ached, and he slowly straightened himself, his hand on his hip.

As he raised his head, he saw a man standing less than thirty feet from him. A man possibly little older than himself, yet gnarled and wrinkled, as one might be who has spent most of his life in the open, exposed to sun and wind. His eyes were keen and bright, and were focused upon Mack, on his knees by the water's edge. More disturbing yet was the fact that the rifle he carried was pointed in the same direction.

"Claim jumper!" he exclaimed contemptuously, his eyes snapping.

"I—I ain't, I was just a-washin' this old pan I found, so's I might mix me some bread dough in it," Mack quickly denied, uneasy at sight of the gun trained upon him.

The old man chuckled raspingly. "It's a lie, I been watchin' you. Diggin' gold on my claim, an' I reckon you know what claim jumpers get."

Mack did know the common fate of claim jumpers, and a little chill of apprehension ran down his spine. He cast about in his mind for some way to convince this ancient stranger that he had no designs whatever upon his mining claim.

"I was just passin' by, an' seein' this old pan stickin' out of the ground, I got it to mix up bread dough in," he earnestly explained. "I got to slingin' the gravel around like old times an' turned up a nugget."

"A nugget, did you say?" the old man queried, coming a step closer, but keeping the muzzle of his rifle up.

"It's just a little one, but you're plumb welcome to all the gold I found," Mack hastily continued. "I was just —er—foolin' to pass the time away," he added somewhat shamefacedly.

"I dunno, maybe you ain't lyin', but I'll wait till my pardner comes back. He's a powerful fair-minded man, an' if he says string you up for jumpin' the claim, why, up you go to the highest limb, or he may shoot you. I dunno."

Mack devoutly hoped that this absent partner of the old fellow was, indeed, a fair-minded man, and that he was amenable to reason.

"My pardner's gone for grub, but I'm lookin' for him back before night," the old man went on. "Bacon's what I'm cravin' most. Seems like I eat a heap, or somethin' goes with it. Do you happen to have some bacon in your pack?"

Mack shook his head, realizing that there had never been a time in his life when he was more in need of a little bacon. With a few slices to donate, he might succeed in convincing this zealous guardian of the placer of his good intentions.

"I allow you're lyin' for sure now," the old man said. "Fellers that's fed up like you don't go long without meat."

Mack realized that his own statement was unreasonable, but he could not go into details and explain to this suspicious stranger how he happened to be without bacon. He probably wouldn't believe that.

"You can have all the bacon you can find in my pack," Mack replied.

The old man eyed the pack warily, but made no move toward it, remaining cautiously on guard.

"Tell you what," he began after a moment. "You go ahead an' cook up what you got an' I'll eat with you. I can smell your coffee b'ilin' now. I got a cabin just around the bend, but I ain't got no grub to speak of—seems like I eat it up so fast. I was empty a long time, is how come takes a long time to get me full. I was empty as a drum when my pardner brought in that last grub. He gets the grub an' I do the work mostly."

Mack determined to try satisfying the old man's hunger on the chance of further gaining his good will. Coffee and bread make poor provender, indeed; but there was plenty of it forthcoming by making a second boiling of coffee in the can. In a further effort to allay the suspicions of the professed owner of the placer, Mack emptied his pockets and produced the little gold he had washed out—only a few grains besides the tiny nugget.

"I reckon you're all right, mister, but I wisht my pardner was here; he'd know what to do about it. Pardners is pardners, an' it wouldn't be noways right for me to let you go without askin' him, not when I ketched you in the act of washin' gold out of the gravel on my claim. Still an' all, you give it up, an' I took to you the minute I see the way you whirled that pan. I says to myself, there's a man as knows how it's done," the old man garrulously continued between mouthfuls.

"I allow I ain't forgot how," Mack agreed, pleased that he had been recognized as an old-timer.

"You ain't, for sure, an' I reckon you been lucky in your time. I believe a heap in luck. You found gold right off without tryin', more'n I've took out in a month's time down there by my cabin where I been workin'. Twenty year, off an' on, I been huntin' for the right place, an' it just took you to come along happenso like an' show me the place where I should've been diggin' all the time."

"Twenty years!" Mack exclaimed.

"Off an' on, I says," the old man explained. "They's been times when I ain't laid eyes on this place for a year an' more, off scrapin' up enough to pay

taxes an' to get me a little grubstake. But I'm bound to find it some day. The place to look for a thing is where you lost it, I says to myself, an' I allow I lost enough right here in this flat. Fifty thousand dollars if it was a nickel."

"Fifty thousand?" Mack repeated uneasily, wondering if the old man were in his right mind.

"A little rise of it, I reckon, countin' everything, but I'm bound to get it back if I keep on lookin'. I never knowed it to fail if a feller looked long enough an' right where he lost it. I mayn't ever get all of it, because I'm a-gettin' old, an' don't need much, just enough to keep me in grub an' terbacker."

"Mean you been ownin' this ground all them years?" Mack queried with suddenly aroused interest.

"That's right, mister; patented land, too. You'll find it in them deed books up to Burnt Rock if you look, how it says that three minin' claims in this gulch is the property of Buck Renfro, meanin' me. I give up good money for 'em, too, back when a hundred dollars didn't mean nothin' to me," he added reminiscently.

Mack tried in vain to recall where he had heard the name of Buck Renfro before. Memory of it eluded him, though he was sure he had heard the name, probably in connection with some story of old miners and fabulous stakes.

"I reckon you think I talk a heap," the old fellow ventured apologetically. "A feller saves up a heap of talkin' when he's been by hisself a long time, an' I ain't saw a body in three months exceptin' my pardner, an' he ain't here no great lot. Comes an' goes, he does. Stays maybe one day an' works alongside of me like he took a heap of pleasure in it, then he's off to get grub ag'in. I dunno how he gets it, an' it don't make so much diff'rence long as he divides with me an' don't growl when I don't hit the pay streak right off. He was here yest'day, but he went back to-day to get the bacon he somehow forgot to bring. I allow he'll get it, too, if there's any to be got."

There was a few minutes of silence while the last crumbs of bread were eaten and the remainder of the coffee disposed of. Mack had considered inquiring about Idaho, but since the old man had just said he had seen no strangers for the last three months, it would be useless to question him.

"It was foolish of me to think for a minute that you was a claim jumper or a sluice robber," Buck Renfro suddenly observed, evidently unable to keep silent a moment longer. "Fellers that go around doin' such ain't much for work; ain't many of 'em knows how to handle a pan like you. I'd be pleased if you'd stay an' wash out a few more panfuls. You know, I got a idee that when luck's with a feller he can't go wrong, an' it stands to reason that they's gold where you take a notion it is. If I foller up where you lay out the ground, I can't miss it.

"Tell you what," he went on after a short pause, "I'll run back to my cabin—it ain't more'n a quarter of a mile—an' get my pick an' shovel an' a pan. Then we can both work together for a little while till I get started on the right track. You'll promise not to leave whilst I'm gone, won't you?"

"I give you my word I won't," Mack sincerely replied.

"A man's word is good enough for me. I ain't often mistook in a man, an' if you ain't right here when I get back I'll be mightily surprised."

With surprising energy, the old man walked away in the direction of his cabin, while Mack took the pan he recovered from its long resting place, and began idly to wash the gravel just as he had done when he found the tiny nugget. Even had he felt inclined to

leave, he could not have done so after his new acquaintance's show of confidence. Besides, he had decided to await the coming of the man who had gone foraging for bacon. There was no knowing what sort of man he might be, but he was doubtless familiar with that region, and might know if Idaho had passed that way.

It was with some misgivings, however, that Mack so decided. This man who so mysteriously foraged for provisions might not be so tractable as the trusting old Renfro had proved to be. He might be positively suspicious at the presence of a stranger in this isolated haunt, where he chose to spend a day or so at a time at irregular intervals. Mack himself was suspicious of such queer behavior. It was likely that the man was some criminal, he thought, his partnership with the veteran miner in a forlorn hope being but a masquerade to hide his identity. It was to be hoped that he did not put in an appearance before the return of Buck Renfro from his cabin. He might easily mistake the motive for Mack's presence there by the little stream, with a pan in his hand, industriously scooping up gravel and washing it.

But scarcely ten minutes had elapsed before Mack was forced to conclude that this very disaster was close upon him. He heard distinctly the crunching of heavy boots upon the fine gravel of the stream bed, and knew that a man was coming toward him, and must pass within a few feet of him if he went on toward Buck Renfro's cabin, as seemed most likely. A tall bush intervened, so that it was not possible to see the newcomer, although he was less than twenty yards away. As Mack looked in that direction, he saw a flash of color through an opening in the undergrowth, and the next instant a man stepped into plain view and halted with an exclamation of surprise. He stared in open-mouthed wonder at Mack.

The man was short, thickset, bearded and grizzled, and he carried a light pack on his back. Of his countenance, every lineament was as familiar to Mack as if it had been his own, for this new arrival was none other than his old partner, Idaho Freeman!

The two continued to stare at each other for the space of a minute. The expression of relief and pleasure upon the countenance of Mack slowly changed to a scowl of irritation. As the mother who grows angry with her truant child the moment it is safely back at home, so was he vexed with his old partner when there was no longer any reason for worrying about him. Idaho, always being the more ready with words, was the first to speak.

"Why, is—is that you, Mack?" he uselessly queried.

"No, it ain't me, it's the King of Rooshy in disguise," Mack snapped.

"Wha-what you doin' off up here?" Idaho anxiously queried, not yet recovered from his astonishment at seeing his partner so unexpectedly.

"Ain't a feller got a right to get away from home once in a while without bein' follered around by a danged contrary old sawed-off hip'potamus?" Mack fiercely demanded.

"I see you wasn't at home when I went back, an' I allowed maybe you was out huntin' fer me."

"Huntin' fer you!" Mack snorted. "You sure got a big opinion of yourself, figgerin' a body would fool away time lookin' you up. If I'd had any idee of runnin' acrost you, I reckon I'd ha' managed to go in some other direction."

"An' come to askin' questions, I might ask you what you was doin' up in here, if I keered enough about it to waste my breath on it," Mack went on after a short pause.

"I was bringin' Buck some more grub. Have you saw him around here?"

"If you're meanin' him with the

heavy crop of vines on his face, he just stepped over to his cabin for a pick an' shovel, an' will be back in a few minutes. How come it's you that's bringin' him grub instead of his pardner he was tellin' me of?"

"Why—er—I—I'm his pardner," Idaho stammered, evidently reluctant to reveal the secret he realized he could not hope to keep much longer.

"You!" Mack exclaimed, fairly breathless from surprise.

"I felt like a hoss thief, sneakin' off up here whenever I got to hankerin' after old times, but I allowed you'd make fun of me if you knowed about it," Idaho explained. "It was low-down of me, I know, to go sneakin' out grub the way I done, an' when you missed that piece of bacon I figgered my fun was at a end. I come off up here to tell old Buck they wouldn't be no more grubstake for him, but I didn't have the heart. He was so nigh starved that I just had to go back an' get that piece of bacon I'd hung back on the peg after you got suspicious."

"You hung it back?"

"I reckon you didn't look in the lean-to any more after that, or you would 've saw it. I was riled up because you ketched me, an' re'lly I didn't have no right to go an' give away grub that was half yourn. I reckon old Buck might as well know first as last that he's got to go to the porehouse, that his old placer has petered out for good."

"Who says so?"

"Why, Mack, you ain't got a idee there's any gold here, have you?"

"I ain't sayin' whether they is or they ain't, but if you go tellin' him that his mine ain't good enough to draw him a grubstake long as he lives, you'll be tellin' a danged lie; an' more'n that, I'll tie you up somewheres an' take your terbacker away from you if you tell him any such stuff."

"But——"

"An' don't you go bringin' him any little old scrap of bacon; get him a whole side next time, so's he won't get hungry an' have to live on cottontails between times."

"Why, Mack, I really thought you didn't——"

"Yeah, you're always thinkin' some fool thing about me," Mack interrupted. "The very next time you go off havin' a lot of fun all by yourself, without tellin' me, I allow to skin you alive."

Idaho grinned, knowing for a certainty that he had been forgiven.

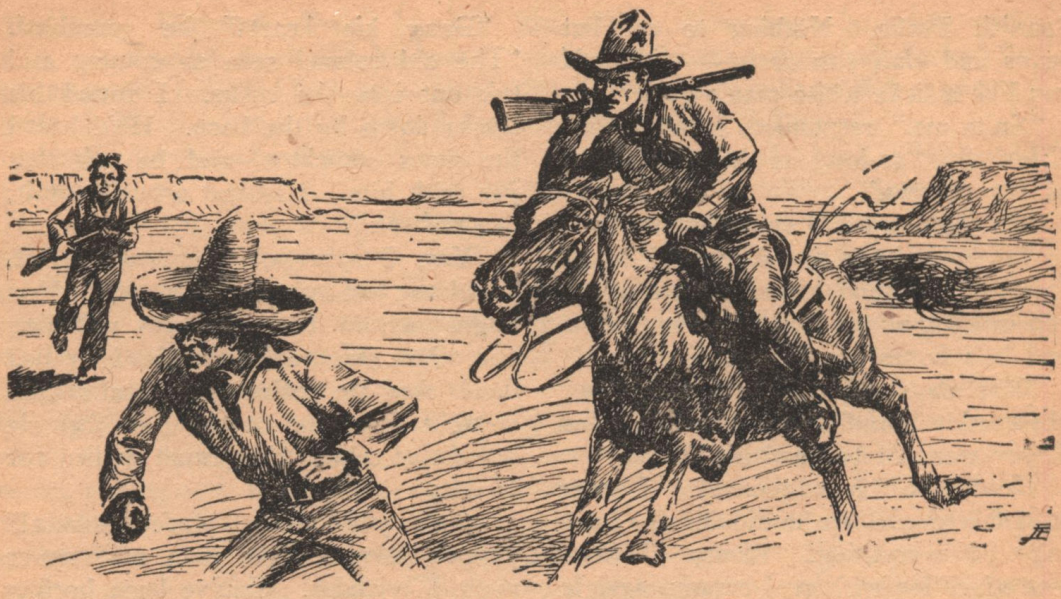
"Did you ever figger what me an' you would've been like if you hadn't 've been lucky enough to find a copper mine whilst you was lookin' for gold, or if I hadn't been smart enough to take up land right where they was goin' to make a town?" Mack abruptly asked.

"I ain't never give it no thought," Idaho admitted.

"Chances is we'd 've been just like Buck Renfro, foolishly huntin' for gold where it ain't. We wouldn't 've had no more sense than he's got, not that one of us has got any more as it is, namin' no names."

"I got about a coupla ounces of gold dust here in a poke, some I been savin' for old time's sake," Idaho announced, fairly certain now that he would not be ridiculed by his old partner. "I reckon it's a foolish notion, but I thought I'd scatter it around on the gravel so's he would wash it out an' be hoped up some."

"It ain't so foolish; I allow it's the sensiblest thing you've did in ten year," Mack declared. "Here, take an' sow it right here where I been washin' out a few panfuls of gravel. He's got a notion that I brought him good luck, an' might be he's right. Hurry up, you clumsy old rhinocery hoss, he'll be back any minute now, an' we don't want him to suspect nothin'. I aim to go down to Burnt Rock an' buy me a whole tomatter can full o' dust before I come back up here ag'in."



Maverick Makers

By Dane Coolidge

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

A QUEER trick of fate compels Jeff Standifer, Texas Ranger, arriving in Bitterwater to aid Captain Bayless, of the Mill Irons, against rustlers, to pose as husband of Annabelle Bayless, his fellow passenger. At the station he knocks down Jack Flagg, Bayless' range boss, Annabelle's fiancé. Jeff meets his old friend "Ralph the Rover," and they capture Ike Cutbrush, Mormon butcher, and his two sons, redhanded. Rustling is universal, but Bishop Lillywhite promises Jeff to order it suppressed among his people, if Gentile activities are also curtailed. Jeff promises a fair deal.

Although Bayless is reconciled to his daughter's marriage—as he supposes—Jeff's position is difficult, especially as Annabelle, in her fear of Flagg, begs him not to reveal the deception. Summoned before Bayless, Jeff and Flagg again quarrel, but decide to stick it out and let the best man win. Jeff and Ralph again take the trail, the former miserably wondering what is to become of him and Annabelle.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RUSTLER YELL.

FOR two days, sullenly and in Indian silence, "Ralph the Rover" led the hunt for rustlers. He rode south and then east through a country covered with pines, with wide glades and rugged canyons between, but it seemed as if their movements were watched. They came upon a maverick, freshly branded into the Hog-eye, the iron of "Hog-eye Bill" Longyear, but the Rustler King was nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless, they took the tip that he was watching them and circled far to the east, quitting the trails and traveling by night. It was a grim and silent business, with nothing to drink and little to eat, and in the end Rover found his tongue.

"This is Mexican country ahead," he said, waving his hand toward some rough, timbered ridges. "They call it

Spanish Peaks. Nothing to eat but beans and *chili con carne*—— How'd you like a little white man's grub?"

"Suits me," responded Standifer indifferently, "as long as they don't spot us for officers."

"Oh, this old Colonel Rhubottom is so far behind the times he don't know that Lee has surrendered. He lives up yon canyon, where that lava rim shows, and he's honest as the day is long."

"The days are awful short, now," observed Standifer cynically; but Rover was not to be denied.

"And grub!" he exclaimed. "I never seen the time when he didn't have lashings of everything. Plenty of beef, lots of coffee with real cream, straight from the cow—the finest bread and cake you ever et. The old man is from Kentucky and keeps a jug of the best. I can taste that liquor, right now."

He smacked his dry lips and reined into the trail, and Standifer decided to humor him.

"Go ahead," he said, "and if we don't get the drink we may ketch him butchering a beef. There's sure somebody in these parts doing an awful lot of hair branding, and that don't look like Mexican work."

"I'll show you some Mexican work—to-morrow," promised Rover. "There's a snaky bunch over in them peaks. But before I have a battle with a crew of greasers I want a good drink under my belt."

He led the way up a dark canyon where the overhanging rim rock cast black shadows into the valley below; but the colonel was absent from his log cabin among the pines, and the womenfolks were frightened and shy. Nothing was said at the frugal board, and supper that night was corn pones and blue, skimmed milk. Jeff doubted if they were really welcome. For breakfast they had the same—no beef and no coffee—and Rover rode away in a pet.

"Dang his heart!" he grumbled. "The old colonel seen us coming and tuk out into the rocks. I found his tracks down by the barn. He'd heard the news somehow—and he tuk that jug with him. I looked around for it, everywhere."

"Yes, I saw you," answered Jeff. "And the old lady saw you, too. You might say, in fact, she was watching you. But say, wasn't that beef we had fine! And the coffee—with real cream, straight from the cow! And that riz bread and cake! I'm plumb spoiled for Mexican cooking!"

"Aw, you think you're smart!" yapped Rover. "As if a man never made a mistake! You've been beefing and complaining about everything I do. Now you cut the wind, for a change. Jest lead me to some house where the people will make us welcome, and set out the company beef. I'm burned out on being the goat."

"All right," agreed Jeff, spurring his horse up in front. "It's a cinch I can't do any worse. You've showed me lots of country, and lots of pizen-mean settlers that made signal fires on the buttes when we left. But that isn't what we came out for. I want to ketch some cow thief to keep Ike Cutbrush company, so we'll head over into these Spanish Peaks."

He reined his horse out of the trail and crossed the country at random, shaking his rope out as he rode. When a cow and calf jumped up he took after them on the run, following their dust wherever they led, and so on, in rustler fashion, until they came out at last to the head of a broad, open valley.

"Now look out, you danged loon," warned Rover from behind, "you're crowding into Mexican country. The first thing you know you'll run against a bullet—these *paisanos* don't like company men, at all."

"Fair enough," returned Jeff. "Because I don't like Mexicans. There's

a house, away down there in that swale."

He pointed, and Rover narrowed his eyes down intently.

"There's some Mexicans," he said at last.

"Six of 'em," counted Standifer. "And I'll bet you ten dollars they've hung up a Mill Irons beef."

"Beef—nothing!" scoffed Rover. "That don't cause no excitement. Look at them hombres, huddling up."

"They've seen us," stated Jeff. But Rover snorted.

"They have not," he contradicted. "They've got a bottle of mescal, I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts."

"Well, in that case," grinned Jeff, "you ought to be game to ride down there Let's whirl in on 'em, before they can hide."

"Go to it," answered Rover, loosening his gun in its scabbard, and they charged down the long, narrow trail.

The house stood backed up against the edge of a dry wash, with a second house, half hidden, behind. And across the wash, to the east, there rose the steep bank of a mesa. Clumps of scrub oak crowned its top, but except for scattered pines, there was little to impede the view.

As they loped down out of the brush and headed straight across the flat the six Mexicans turned to watch them. Then one by one they drifted away behind the house, leaving their leader to face the two cowboys. He was afoot, and unarmed, but as they rode up closer Jeff could see he was a dangerous man. His skin was almost white, showing his Spanish blood; his deep-set eyes never wavered; and beneath the shadow of his thin, drooping mustache his thick lips drew back scornfully.

"Good morning, sir," he hailed in perfect English as Jeff reined in before him. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"We are officers," answered Standifer, "out looking for stolen beef; and I'd like to search your house."

"Very well, sir," returned the Mexican. "This is my house. You may search it. But how do I know you are deputy sheriffs, and not a couple of cow thieves, yourselves?"

"You don't," he said. "Rover, go in and search that house. The one behind is padlocked."

He sat his horse in the open, one eye on his prisoner, the other on the mesa beyond, and Rover came out with two guns.

"That's all," he reported, and the Mexican eyed him malignantly.

"Those are my guns," he stated angrily.

"I'll keep 'em for you," mocked Rover. "Now, where's the key to that house?"

He pointed to the log cabin which stood in the rear, its door fastened by a padlock and heavy chain. Smoke was curling from the chimney, showing it had lately been occupied, but the five men who had been there were gone.

"That is the home of my brother-in-law," said the Mexican. "Unless you have a warrant for him, or a search warrant, you have no right to enter his house."

Standifer looked him over appraisingly. He was surprisingly well-educated, for a Mexican—or at least regarding the right of search. And, of course, Jeff had no search warrant.

"Where is your brother-in-law?" he asked.

"He has gone down the valley, with his friends," returned the Mexican; and his eyes took on a sinister gleam. Jeff glanced down the canyon and saw the dust of their flight, and broad sombreros bobbing as they rode. Then he turned and reached into his coat.

"Here is my search warrant," he said, fetching out the official envelope which contained his deputy's commission. But the Mexican, as he had

guessed, could not read English. He eyed the stamps and seals, holding it upside down, then handed it sulkily back.

"I don't give a dang!" he shouted roughly. "You can't go inside that door."

"Take that ax, Rover," directed Jeff, "and chop the door open. I'll bet we find some beef."

He shifted in his saddle, bringing the muzzle of his pistol in line with the cursing Mexican, and waited while Rover swung the ax. The chain could not be broken, nor could the padlock be smashed, so he hacked a hole through the door jamb and finally jerked the door open.

"Fresh beef," he announced, peering cautiously in, and then he darted inside. Jeff gave over for a moment his close watch on the Mexican, and Rover came bounding out.

"It's a Mill Irons steer——" he began, and then he looked wildly around. "Hey!" he yelled. "Where the heck is that Mex?"

Standifer turned to where, only a second before, the Mexican had been sullenly eying him, but like a flash he had disappeared.

"I'll get him," he said, jumping his horse around the corner, and a hundred yards away, across the wash, he beheld the Mexican, running for the mesa.

"Halt!" ordered Standifer, jerking his rifle out of its scabbard, and Rover came running after him.

"Kill the scoundrel!" he yelped, as the Mexican kept on. "You've ordered him to halt! Now bore him!"

"Leave him to me!" answered Jeff, galloping down the low bank and out across the broad wash below. "Hey! Halt!" he called again, but the Mexican ignored him, bounding up the steep bank like a buck. Standifer rushed his horse after him, grimly determined to ride him down, equally determined not to shoot an unarmed man, but as he started up the bank his horse slipped and stumbled, falling back in a shower of stones.

Jeff dropped off and grabbed one rein, snaking his reluctant mount after him, until at last they scrambled up the rim. The level top of the mesa was covered with scrub oaks, and through them, running hard, the desperate Mexican plowed his way, paying no attention to his pursuer. Standifer shouted, then threw the spurs into his dispirited horse and hit him over the rump with his gun barrel. They gained by leaps and bounds, but just as they ran on him the Mexican plunged out of sight. He had crossed the high mesa and started down the opposite bank toward a wooded bench beyond.

In a storm of sticks and dirt Standifer whipped down after him, saying nothing but with his gun raised to strike. Something told him that the Mexican was leading him into an ambush, laid perhaps by the men who had fled. Otherwise, he would stop, to escape being shot, or double and hide in the brush. But he ran on, regardless, and as Jeff closed in on him he saw a boy with a rifle ahead. He, too, was running, toward them, and if the Mexican got the gun—— Jeff leaned over in his saddle, swinging his rifle like a saber, and struck the man over the head.

He went down in a sprawling heap, and the boy, seeing the disaster, turned back up a trail through the pines. Standifer watched him, scanning the wash below as he brought his charging horse to a halt. Then he rode back and dropped off beside the body of the Mexican, who lay as if he were dead.

The sharp edge of the rifle barrel had laid open his scalp, producing a great flow of blood, but his skull, which was hard, was not fractured. Jeff whipped out his handkerchief and bound the wound tight, meanwhile

raising the rustler yell for Rover, but as he looked up from his work he saw a Mexican riding toward him, down the trail which the boy had followed.

With a single, vengeful swoop the Mexican swung down and snatched the rifle away from the boy. Then, dropping behind a pine, he thrust out his gun and fired across the wash at Jeff. It was a challenge, and a summons to the rest of the band who were lurking back in the woods, and Standifer crouched down behind his man. Caught out in the open, he could seek no other shelter without risking the loss of his prisoner. So he laid his rifle across the prostrate body and drew a bead on the tree.

The Mexican thrust his gun around the side of the tree to shoot, but before he could aim, Jeff smashed the bark into his face and drew another bead. Again the rifle crept out, and once more Jeff's bullet threw splinters of bark into the Mexican's eyes. But as Standifer settled down to smoke him out, a big .45 slug came at right angles from down the wash and smashed against a rock at his left.

Changing his front, Standifer swung his gun to meet it, when the Mexican behind the tree opened up on him. Jeff jumped, for the first bullet had barely missed his head. He was exposed to two fires at once. And as he huddled down behind the body of his prisoner, a copper-jacketed bullet sung past. Another struck a rock with a venomous spat—and suddenly Standifer was blind.

Blood and tears intermingled, his ears rang, and his head swam. Then as he wiped away the dirt, he saw the light again, and felt a sharp stinging in his nose. A flying splinter from the copper jacket of the bullet had grazed the bridge to the bone, cutting a knife-blade gash across his forehead. He could not see his enemies, and as he flattened out to escape their bullets he felt his barricade stir. The sabered Mexican was coming back to life, and as Jeff clutched at him he struck back.

Blinded and exposed to their fire from two sides at once, Jeff reached for his pistol and thrust it up against the man's jaw.

"Tell your friends to stop shooting," he cursed. "Or I'll blow the top of your head off!"

For a moment, the Mexican resisted. Then he bawled out in Spanish and the storm of bullets ceased. Standifer clung to him, panting, wiping the blood from his eyes while he listened for Rover's shrill whoop. But his enemies were creeping closer, and the Mexican with crafty turnings was seeking to elude his grasp. With a last desperate effort, Jeff raised his head and repeated the rustler yell, and the answer came, close at hand.

"Whoopee—lah! *Orehanos!*" And the *whang* of Rover's big gun.

CHAPTER XII.

AMBUSH.

MANY times in the cedar brakes of the Guadalupes, when one or the other had tied to a steer—a wild steer that fought the rope and charged to gore his horse—Jeff and Rover had given the rustler yell. It was a yell of savage triumph in the midst of battle, and at the same time a call for help. It announced the capture of another maverick, or *orejano,* and never had they called in vain.

The flow of blinding tears had passed, and Standifer could look about him dimly, when from the summit of the mesa there came a second shot, and the Mexican behind the tree leaped aside. His body was exposed now to a shot from Jeff, and taking a chance, he whipped up his rifle. The Mexican jumped again, then as Rover opened up on him he leaped up and ran down the trail.

"Here," threatened Standifer, jabbing his prisoner with his six-shooter, "you hold still, or down comes your meat house! I've got tired of monkeying with you Mexicans."

They lay quiet, until the stillness was broken by a fusillade from down the wash, and above the rattle of the Mexicans' rifles Jeff could hear a roar that he knew. It was the bark of Rover's big .45-70, and the answers soon died away. Yet, though the battle receded, it sprang up again down the canyon, with one man fighting five. They were in a Mexican country and the odds might soon be greater, but Rover did not return. Still farther and farther away the old .45 barked its challenge, and Jeff dug a hole among the rocks. His eyesight had cleared now, though his wounded nose still ached, and he stirred up his prisoner with his gun.

"Get up," he ordered, "and bring me back my horse. And any time you want to make a break, step to it—the bridle is off."

He patted his gun barrel, and the Mexican understood. The time for taking chances had passed. He rose up, staggering weakly as he clasped his swollen head, and obediently he led back the horse.

"Now go over," directed Jeff, "and bring me that other horse." And he pointed to the Mexican's mount, which was standing in the trail by the tree.

For a moment, the sullen prisoner regarded him distrustfully, for in Old Mexico it is not uncommon to invoke the *ley fuga,* the law to kill prisoners in flight. But there was no choice but to go, and he brought back the horse, though his eyes often sought the hills. Now that the battle was over his friends would rally to save him, and it was to thwart them that Jeff caught the horses.

"All right," he said, stepping in between them, "now lead those horses back to your house."

Slowly and reluctantly, the Mexican obeyed, and walking between the horses for protection, Jeff followed him, rifle in hand. Over the top of the horses' shoulders he caught glimpses of furtive men, running swiftly to cut them off. Up the steep bank they labored, a horse on each side, and the prisoner marching ahead, but as they gained the rim the Mexican horse flew back and jerked his bridle rein away.

"Ketch that horse, and ketch him quick!" snapped Standifer, jabbing the Mexican in the ribs with his gun; and instinctively he ducked behind his mount. Then it came, the expected bullet, knocking the horn off his saddle, while another cut the ground at his feet. He swung around behind his horse, taking shelter against its withers, but he did not lose sight of his prisoner.

"Hurry up!" he ordered, and at sight of his rifle muzzle the slothful Mexican leaped into action.

"You son of a goat," warned Standifer in Spanish, "have a care or I'll send you to eternity. Now, lead those horses ahead and keep them together—and if one gets away, adios!"

The Mexican understood, better in Spanish than in English, and his newfound braggadocio disappeared. He hurried ahead across the mesa, and going down the other side, he handled his horses perfectly. Back in the shelter of the houses Standifer looked him over coldly and drew a pair of handcuffs from his pockets.

"Stand up against this post," he ordered; and the Mexican stepped up obediently. The Ranger pulled his wrists behind him and fitted the cuffs closely, leaving him shackled with his arms behind the upright. Then he led the horses inside and sat down. He had caught a bad Mexican, one not unused to deeds of violence, if his actions were any criterion, but they were a long way from the Bitterwater jail. A long way from friends and help, and with the

brush full of *paisanos* who certainly had learned to shoot.

Never before in the Ranger service had Jeff encountered a band of Mexicans so vindictive and hard to handle, so keen to take advantage, and so bold in giving battle, so determined to rescue their chief. And this man whom he had captured, he was no common rustler. There was something behind it all. Somewhere in these peaks there was a prize well worth defending—or they were wanted for other crimes. Standifer confronted him, his hand on his six-shooter, but the bloodshot, angry eyes never quailed.

"What is your name?" he demanded. "And what are you doing here?"

"Ramon Archuleta," responded the Mexican defiantly. "I live here. This is my home."

"And who are these others?" inquired Jeff.

"They are my friends," replied Archuleta. "You will never leave this valley alive."

"Think not?" mocked Standifer. "Well, I'll bet you I do—and take you along with me, to boot. But here comes my pardner, and don't talk back to him—because Rover sure hates a greaser."

He flung the name at him scornfully and stepped out the door, where Rover was riding up. He was hot and bedraggled from riding through the brush, and his hands were torn and bleeding, but there was fire in his eye and when he stepped down, rifle in hand, he scanned the valley behind.

"That's the outfightingest bunch of Mexicans I ever saw," he panted. "I'm danged near out of cartridges. Never could git a stand on one long enough to shoot his eye out—what the heck has happened to your nose?"

"Never mind," answered Jeff, "but get your horse inside here before some Mex puts a bullet through him. There's a bunch of them, up on that mesa."

"They're scairt of me," boasted Rover. "I done chased 'em all over the country. W'y, hello," he exclaimed as he stepped through the doorway, "I thought you killed this rascal!"

He stood glaring at Archuleta, who returned his scowl with interest, then turned and took down his rope.

"Don't you know," he reproached, "that this hombre is dangerous? You're making a pet out of a rattlesnake."

He snapped a loop over the Mexican's head and brought it tight with a jerk. "But if you're too tenderhearted," he went on, "I'll attend to him myself."

"Nope—leave him live," replied Standifer. "I need him in my business."

"Now, here," protested Rover, "you may have been a Ranger, but you cain't tell me nothing about Mexicans! They're the most treacherous scoundrels in the world, and the thing to do is hang him right now!"

He yanked the rope roughly and looked up at the rafters, but Jeff laid violent hands on him.

"Come out here," he said, dragging him outside the door. "I tell you, I need that man! He's made his brag we'll never leave here alive—and if you hang him we never will. We're surrounded, and these Mexicans are sure *bravo*. They certainly don't act like plain rustlers. They're hiding out for some reason, and just killed that steer for beef. And this man here is their leader."

"That's all the more reason for killing the hound!" raved Rover. "What the dickens do you want with him, anyway?"

"In the first place," answered Standifer, "he's my prisoner, and it's our duty to bring him in alive. Didn't we take an oath to support the law? You're a heck of a deputy sheriff!"

"Well, you're a dodrammed loon!"

returned Rover vindictively. "Why didn't you shoot him, like I told you to, in the first place? But no, you had to ketch him—and the next thing I knew you had got yourself into an ambush. Look at that hump on your nose, swelled up like a sore thumb! You'll get cross-eyed, looking around it."

"Never you mind about my nose," retorted Jeff. "It hasn't affected my brains. This Mex doesn't know it yet, but he's going to get us out of here. And more than that, he's going to go with me and bring in the rest of the band. I've got it all cleverly planned out."

"Well, I'm shore glad to hear it," mocked Rover, bowing low. "You Rangers git awful smart, don't you? But—er—how are you going to persuade him?"

"That's your job," said Standifer. "But don't be too rough with him. Don't fix him so he can't talk."

"I git you!" nodded Rover and stalked inside, just as a bullet struck up the dirt.

CHAPTER XIII.

ARCHULETA ASSISTS.

THERE was a smash of angry bullets against the outside of the log cabin, and threatening shouts from the mesa were heard. The Mexicans had rallied to rescue their chief—but Archuleta was handcuffed inside. Not only was he handcuffed, but he was bound fast with Rover's throw rope, tied in all the fancy knots he could devise, and as the Mexicans grew bolder at nightfall, Rover clapped another loop around his neck.

"Tell your *paisano* friends to go on away and leave me sleep," he directed. "Otherwise——" And he hauled on the rope.

The Mexicans left, and in the morning at daylight the edge of the mesa looked bare. But Standifer knew they were lying in wait for him, and he turned to his sullen prisoner.

"Archuleta," he said, "I ought to hang you, right now, because I know you'll get me killed if you can. But I'm going to give you one chance. I want those five men who were with you."

"Yes?" returned the Mexican, but as Rover moved toward him the defiant sneer left his face.

"I want them," repeated Jeff, "and I want you to take me to them, and tell them to come in and surrender. They were caught butchering a steer, and I want them for rustling. But, by gravy, if they start to shooting, I'll kill you."

"Very well, sir," replied Archuleta, his cunning eyes glinting. "But first you must untie this rope."

"I'll untie it," blustered Rover, "but I'll put it around your neck and fasten it to the horn of my saddle. So if one of your greaser friends should happen to knock me off, my horse will drag you to death. And if they don't happen to hit me—if they shoot—I'll attend to the dragging myself."

"Muy bien," shrugged the Mexican. "I am your prisoner. But take these handcuffs from my wrists. I cannot hold the reins, to ride."

"Oh, that's all right," said Rover, "I'll tend to the reins. All you've got to do is holler to your friends and tell them not to shoot."

They lifted their prisoner on to his horse, his hands still fastened behind him, and tied his feet underneath. Then, one on each side, they rode out into the open and Archuleta began to shout:

"Oyez, muchachos! No tirer! Cuidado! Be careful, boys—do not shoot!"

There was a silence, nothing moved; and as Jeff glanced at Archuleta his old, suave smile had returned.

"There is no one," he said, "so do

not be alarmed. Now I will lead you to the home of my friends."

"Now look out!" warned Rover, turning to Jeff. "He's just leading you into a trap. That danged old canyon sure looks spooky to me, and he's taking us right down into it."

"Oh, no, my friends," replied Archuleta reassuringly. "Why should I deceive you, now? When you rode in on us yesterday I thought you were cowboys, and with them we have had several fights. But now that I know you are nothing but officers I am satisfied to go to town. I will hire a good lawyer—and how can you prove who it was that killed the steer?"

"Aw, shut up!" came back Rover. "You're one of these talking Mexicans, but I've still got my rope on your neck. So mind your P's and Q's, and the first crooked move you make——"

"Then down comes your meat-house," ended Jeff.

He nodded grimly to Rover, who responded with a wink, and they rode slowly off down the canyon. They were trapped in the inclosed valley, at the mercy of the Mexicans if they chose to put up a fight, but on the day before Rover had chased them several miles—and their leader was now a prisoner. No matter where they were hid, they must see the strong rope that was fastened about his neck, and to them its significance would be plain. There had been trouble between the cowboys and the Mexicans of the mountains, and more than one horse thief had been hanged.

So they kept on, confidently; then Archuleta, no less confidently, led the way to a hidden log house. It was tucked away in a narrow canyon, out of sight from the main trail, and as they sighted it Archuleta gave a whoop. But no one answered until, as they approached the loopholed house, Standifer saw a rifle thrust out.

"Look out!" he yelled to Rover, and whipping out his six-shooter, he rammed it under the Mexican's jaw.

"You tell your friends," he barked, "to come out and surrender or I'll blow the top of your head off. And then, by grab, we'll get them!"

"And kill every one of them," added Rover.

He had dropped in behind their hostage, his pistol balanced over his shoulder ready to snap down and shoot at the first move, and Archuleta sat paralyzed between them. It had happened so quickly, this sudden flash of weapons, this swift move to snuff out his life, that his taut nerves had cracked beneath the strain.

"Do not kill me!" he pleaded. "For the love of pity, spare me, and I will order my *muchachos* out. Listen, boys," he went on in Spanish, "the gringos are going to kill me unless you come out and surrender. Do not wait, do not parley, but come out at once. Come out, and lay down your guns."

There was a stir within the house, the sound of a log being thrown away from the door. Then it opened and a Mexican stepped out. He was wounded in the arm, and Standifer recognized him as the man with whom he had had his duel.

"I surrender," he said in Spanish; and laid his rifle and pistol on the ground. Then another and another filed out, until all five had given up their guns.

"Very well," spoke up Jeff, when the last had raised his hands, "if you are peaceful, you will not be hurt. I am a deputy sheriff and I want you for killing that steer."

The Mexicans gazed at him wonderingly, as if doubting their ears, then turned and exchanged significant glances.

"They thought you were cowboys," explained Archuleta unctuously. But Standifer sensed more than that. For

at the words of their leader they only grinned. Something else was in the wind, something the officers did not know about and which the Mexicans would not tell. But with six prisoners on his hands and a long ride ahead of him Jeff had no time to investigate. While Rover took their guns and herded them down to the corral to catch up and saddle their horses, he sat watchfully beside their leader, his pistol poised to shoot, scarcely believing that his long chance had won.

Riding into their stronghold, he and Rover in one day had arrested six Mexican rustlers, and now, with all their guns wrapped tight in a tarpaulin, they were ready to take them to town. On the day before they had fought like fiends, but Archuleta had suddenly changed his front. Instead of his old, studied malevolence, he was now suavely ingratiating, and he exhorted his men to submit.

"Have no fear," he said in Spanish, "this is the detective from Texas that the great company hired to stop cattle stealing. But how can he prove that any of us killed the steer that was found in the locked-up cabin? I will hire a good lawyer and he will free us at once. Because, of course, we know nothing about the beef. We had just ridden up there when we saw the two cowboys. If I had been guilty would I have stayed there, unarmed?"

"Let him talk," muttered Standifer to Rover. "Our job is to get them back to town. You watch the men and I'll take the boss. *Andale, hombres*—let's go!"

He led off up the trail, his pistol drawn and ready, never far from Archuleta's back, while in the rear Ralph the Rover herded the band of Mexicans, who did not conceal their enmity. They were all big, glowering men, quite different from the native *paisanos* who had learned a certain fear of the cowboys. And from their high-peaked sombreros and buckskin shoes it was evident they had come from Old Mexico. Their Spanish was different from the New Mexico brand and they carried themselves swaggeringly in the saddle.

"Wait," exclaimed a squat, pock-marked *cholo* as they passed the log cabins going back, "I am hungry for some of that beef! We have not had our breakfast, and how can we ride to town when we are starving?"

"Now, look out!" spoke up Rover. "They're up to some trick. Maybe they've got some guns hid in that house!"

"Oh, no," explained Archuleta, "my boys are just hungry. Please permit us to cook some meat."

"You stay on your horses," ordered Jeff in Spanish, as he faced the insistent men. "And let me warn you, right now, that my partner hates Mexicans and would love to kill you all."

"But we must have food!" cried the *cholo* with angry vehemence. "And our *compañero* here is sick."

He pointed with his chin at the wounded Mexican, who had his arm in a sling, and Standifer whipped out his pistol.

"Ride out there," he said. "And Rover, tie his hands to the horn. Who do they think is running this show?"

The Mexican obeyed and Rover tied his hands. Then he bound his feet beneath the horse's belly.

"Now you!" he yapped. And, calling them one by one, he roped them hand and foot to their saddles. At first they protested, but at a word from their leader they silently submitted.

"All right," observed Standifer. "You stay and watch 'em, Rover, while I get a little beef. And if any one makes a break, you kill the whole bunch of 'em. I'm going to get that hide, for evidence."

"That's the talk," applauded Rover. "And I'll do it, for a nickel."

He lolled menacingly in his saddle, one eye on his prisoners, the other on the trail behind, and Standifer strode down to the cabin. The door still hung open, where Rover had broken it down, and the half-butchered beef lay on the floor. But as he turned it over, to cut out the brand, a big square of hide was gone. Some Mexican, during the night on in their absence down the canyon, had removed the marks of ownership—for the ears had been slashed away, too. Jeff glanced out the door to where the prisoners were watching him and it seemed, to his jaundiced eyes, that Archuleta was smiling. But Standifer did not hesitate. Working carefully and methodically, as if the brand was still there, he cut out a section of hide and wrapped it up in a bundle. Then, carving out a chunk of beef, he returned and tied them on his saddle.

"We'll be going on," he announced, "and stop and cook this later. I saw a man, just now, up on the mesa."

He fell in behind Archuleta, and with his pistol ready to shoot, motioned him grimly on toward the pass. The Mexican glanced at him cunningly, but at the prod of the gun he led the way up the trail. Again he looked back, but Jeff's face did not change, though his last legal evidence was gone. He had arrested the rustlers and, case or no case, he was going to take them to jail.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HUSBAND'S HONOR.

THEY topped the pass in safety and dipped down the other side, toward the plains and distant Bitterwater. But as they halted to cook some beef, Standifer saw a band of horsemen, riding rapidly in from the south.

"Them's Mexicans," announced Rover, reaching back for his rifle, and, raising his sights, he placed three bullets so close that the leaders came to a halt.

"I knowed it," he said, "they've come to take our prisoners. That's the bunch from this Mexican town, Pilon."

"They'll never get them," stated Jeff, kicking dirt over the fire and swinging up on his horse. "And the first man that tries to stop me will go home in a blanket. These Mexicans have been badly spoiled."

"Not by me," asserted Rover, taking a shot from the saddle. "I know how to handle them to perfection. And don't ride too fast—they might think we were scairt of them. I'm shore glad we're out of that brush."

They had come down out of the pines and the cedar-covered ridges to the wide, rolling prairie below, and while their pursuers, well out of range, hung close on their flank, they headed across the plains on the trot. The wounded Mexican groaned and begged them to stop, making extravagant gestures toward his arm, and Archuleta tried to protest, but Standifer drove him on until, far across the flats, they could see the silvery river, and Bitterwater.

The day was near its close, and the Mexicans, tied to the saddle, made much of their aches and pains. Jeff himself felt a weariness which he would not admit, and the cut across his forehead throbbed and stung. But, riding wild behind him, Ralph the Rover was in his glory, emptying his rifle at the scurrying Mexicans. They had increased in numbers until now over a hundred followed them toward the town, for the year before a band of cowboys had invaded Pilon and more than one native had been killed. Two Texans had met their death, and the feeling was so high that a race war might easily spring up. Yet, though they followed so menacingly, the Mexicans did not shoot and Rover gave up in disgust.

"The danged yeller coyotes!" he cursed as he fell in behind his prisoners. "One Texan could lick a thousand of them. Look at that dust, down on the flats! That's the boys, coming from

Bitterwater. But we don't need no help—do we, Jeff?"

Standifer grunted and shifted his weight in the saddle as he watched the flying cowboys approach. Some were rustlers themselves, some little men opposed to the company, some Mill Irons hands under Jack Flagg, but Rover's round of shots had brought them all, and as they whirled past they gave the high yell. They rode circles around the prisoners, looking them over with baleful glances, exchanging coarse pleasantries with Rover, then with a rush they were gone after the Mexicans of Pilon, who had dared to threaten a Texan.

Jeff rode in slowly, escorted by the cowboys, who had turned back not to miss any fun, and as he passed the hotel he spied Annabelle on the gallery, looking down with startled eyes. He saw her again as a mob surged out and stopped them, in front of the Bucket. Then as he stepped down from his horse she came running to meet him, and his heart gave a jump and stopped. He had left town without seeing her, without even a word after his days of unexplained absence, and now, unshaved and wounded, his head bound with a dingy bandage, he stood staring, for there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Jeff!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing his grimy cheek. "Are you hurt? What's the matter with your head?"

"Nothing at all, pet," he answered, as the crowd turned to watch them, and he blushed deep, under his tan. This was not the reception he had expected from Annabelle, but he tried to act his part.

"Did they shoot you?" she demanded eagerly, gazing up at his stained face. "Come in and let me take care of you."

"Just a scratch," he said, "from the jacket of a bullet. I've got to put these prisoners in jail, and then I'll be down to see you."

"Please come!" she whispered, leaning closer, and he nodded as he turned away. Many eyes were fixed upon him as if trying to read his heart, to pry into the secret between them, but he rode away soberly, leaving Rover to do the talking.

When he had come back before he had avoided this woman whom he had acknowledged before the world as his wife. He had ridden away without even a word of greeting—and yet she had welcomed him home. In spite of all the gossip which his actions must have caused, she had rushed through the crowd to kiss him. But did she love him, or was she acting a part? Whatever the answer, his duty was plain and he rode straight back to the hotel.

Annabelle was out waiting for him, looking very sweet and winsome, and his heart smote him as she held out her hands.

"Come up to my room," she said, "and let me bathe your head. I want to talk with you—Jeff."

"Yes—Annabelle," he answered, and again the blush mounted until his wind-burned cheeks were aflame.

"I'm sorry," he began, as they mounted the winding stairs, and her hand crept into his.

"Never mind," she responded. "I'm so glad you're back again! What brutal-looking ruffians they were!"

"Oh, the Mexicans!" he replied. "Yes, they put up quite a fight."

"And did they really try to kill you?"

"I'll bet you!" he exclaimed. "And if it hadn't been for Rover I might have cashed in my checks. This cut over my eyes made me blind."

She opened her door and for the first time, reluctantly, he entered Annabelle's room. Then she closed it and confronted him reproachfully.

"Yes, I know," he said. "I had no business to neglect you, and I'm awfully sorry, Annabelle. Did it make things worse, for you?"

"Yes, it did," she admitted. "And I hated you for it, Jeff. But when you didn't come back, and I heard about your quarrel with Jack—I was afraid I'd lost you, then. People said you had skipped out of town. The women all thought we had quarreled and separated, and I was so mad I let them believe it. But when I saw you, all tired and wounded, and with those terrible-looking Mexicans, I forgot all about it, Jeff. Can you forgive me for kissing you that way?"

She gazed up at him archly, and Standifer scratched his head.

"I believe I can," he said, "if you'll promise not to do it again. Certainly is mighty embarrassing to a man of my shrinking nature to receive such attentions in public. And a danged sight worse to have these people think I'd quit a nice girl like you—they believing, of course, you're my wife."

"Oh, Jeff," she murmured, stepping closer, "sometimes I almost think I am. We quarrel so, you know."

"That's right," he sighed. "But this time I was wrong, and I'm game to admit it, Annabelle. Now go ahead and take off that bandage."

He submitted his head to her tender ministrations, and as she bathed his throbbing wounds and tied a bandage around them her hands seemed more than kind.

"There," she said at last, as with a final pat she stood off to admire her handiwork, "that's the first thing I ever did for you. Now sit down and tell me about the fight."

"I would," he smiled, "only I want to hear about you. And then I'll have to go and get shaved. Have you been up to call on your stepmother?"

"No, I haven't!" she declared. "Because I know if I do she'll step in and take charge of my life."

"How do you mean?" inquired Standifer curiously.

"Well, you see," explained Annabelle, "when father married again, I couldn't get along with my stepmother. She was only a few years older than I was, and the giddiest little thing you ever saw, and yet she tried to rule me like a child. It was simply ridiculous, and father sided with her in everything, so —— Well, that's when I commenced going with Jack. Of course, I'm glad I didn't, now, but I was going to marry him, just to have my own way, for once. We had agreed to run away—I was awfully foolish, then—but would you believe it, she was listening and heard our plans, and reported me to my father!"

"I see," nodded Jeff. "Well, what then?"

"Why, father was simply furious, because he knew Jack was a drinking man—he's terrible when he's drunk. So he bundled me off to a girls' school near New York and I stayed there until I was eighteen. I was mad, at first, and I never did like it there, but when it came time to go home I knew I had never loved Jack. He was just the first man I'd ever seen and—— But you know all about that. So now here I am, shut up in this hotel with nothing to do but dawdle around, and I can't even go to see father. Because, of course, he'll ask questions—and how can I answer them? But I did send up for my horse."

She paused significantly, and Jeff glanced at her sharply.

"Did you go for a ride?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," she answered, "and, of course, Jack followed me. It wasn't my fault, Jeff."

"Well, who said it was?" he demanded. "I suppose he went along with you?"

"Why, yes," she responded innocently, "only——"

"I'm going to tell that whelp," he burst out savagely, "to leave my wife alone!"

"But I'm not your wife," protested Annabelle.

"It makes no difference—people all think you are! And I know what Jack Flagg is up to. He's trying to get back at me for hitting him over the head!"

"Why, Jeff!" she exclaimed mischievously. "I believe you're actually jealous. But Jack and I have always been friends."

"Well, why don't you marry him, then, if you think so much of him? Don't let me stand in your way!"

He was trembling with rage, and for the first time since she had known him his anger was directed at her. But Annabelle had a temper of her own.

"Because I don't want to!" she retorted. "But is that any reason why you should forbid me to even talk with him?"

"I've got a reason," he said. "A good and sufficient reason. You're supposed to be my wife. And as long as you are, I'm going to protect your honor—and my own!"

"Oh," she mocked. "Your honor!"

"Yes, mine," he repeated. "My honor as a gentleman—and as a fighting man, to boot. I can see right now that Jack Flagg will never be satisfied until he looks down the muzzle of my six-shooter. But until that time comes, you remember what I've said. I'm here to protect you—as my wife. But, of course," he went on, "if you want to tell the truth——"

"Oh, no, Jeff," she pleaded, "I couldn't! Can't you see it would ruin my life? I didn't think, when I went with Jack. But if you'll only be patient and put up with me, Jeff!"

She laid hold of his coat and drew him closer, then slipped her arms about his neck. "Please, dear!" she entreated, and as she clung to him beseechingly the anger in his eyes died away.

"I'll do anything for you, Annabelle," he said at last, putting her hands aside. "Only remember what I say. A wife is as much obliged to protect the honor of her husband——"

He stopped, for Annabelle had bowed her proud head and buried it against his breast.

"Yes, yes—I'll remember," she sobbed. "And oh, Jeff——"

She paused, gazing up at him through tear-dimmed eyes; and suddenly she kissed him eagerly. Then she turned and fled, and Standifer awoke, groping his way down the winding stairs.

CHAPTER XV.

INCOMMUNICADO.

A COLD wind, buffeting his cheek as he stepped out the door, brought Standifer back to earth. He had moved in a sort of dream since, for no reason that he knew of, Annabelle had kissed him again. Kissed him eagerly and contritely and fled from his presence like a child who has admitted a fault. It was not like Annabelle, at all.

Her father had told him—and he had learned it for himself—that she was willful and hard to control. She had ways of her own for accomplishing her purpose without seeming to oppose him in the least, but kisses and tears had not been among her wiles when she had persuaded him to pose as her husband. He had yielded then without knowing that he yielded, out of a distorted sense of chivalry. But now she had yielded, and kissed the hand that ruled her, when at last he had asserted his will. She had promised to remember his words.

It was not much that he had asked of her—no more than any husband should expect from a dutiful wife—but Annabelle was not his wife. He wondered wearily why she clung to the pretense when all the town could see it was false. Was it to escape from her stepmother—to stave off Jack Flagg when he came to remind her of her promise—or did she do it for love of him? That was a thought that called for a drink.

He felt weak and unstrung, and as he passed the Bucket he turned toward the swinging doors. But as he started to enter he was halted in his tracks by the big, booming voice of Rover. He was telling the story of their fight. Jeff drew back and peeped in through the crack of the door, curious to hear the lurid account, for Rover was never trammeled by facts. But as he ran on now in his grand, triumphant battle chant, Jeff could hear another voice, breaking in.

"Like heck you did!" it scoffed, and the crowd began to laugh, but Rover kept doggedly on.

"How many did you kill?" cried the high, derisive voice, and Jeff swung the door to look in. Rover was sitting in state on the high, mahogany bar, with a crowd of laughing cowboys gathered about, and in the midst of them, head and shoulders above the rest, rose the tall, hulking form of Jack Flagg.

"Didn't count 'em," answered Rover. "Too danged busy dodging bullets. Did you see that scar on Jeff's nose? He got grazed by a slug, and another one cut his forehead. Made him blind—he couldn't see, or he'd 've killed the last one of them. The blood ran into his eyes."

"Where does he bury his head?" inquired a deeper voice; and Jeff saw the smirking countenance of Flagg. He and his gang were heckling Rover.

"Never mind!" flared back Rover. "It's shore lucky for you he was trained in the Texas Rangers. They make it a rule to give every tough the first shot or he'd 've killed you, long ago. Yes, sir, they killed so many men the people protested—seemed like it was done in cold blood—so Captain Ross gave an order never to fire the first shot. Give the sons of goats a chance."

"Who do you mean by sons of goats?" demanded Jack Flagg truculently. And Rover stuck his chin out at him, sneering.

"Well, you're blatting the loudest!" he answered. "And don't you never think I'm skeered of you. You'd better draw in your horns or I'll knock 'em off, and put a ring in your nose."

"You're drunker than I thought you were," retorted Flagg, laughing hectoringly, and the crowd took up the shout. Jeff closed the door softly and went on up the street—Ralph the Rover could take care of himself. But this talk of Flagg's was a studied attempt to influence public opinion against him. In spite of Jeff's warning, Flagg had gone his way—riding openly with Annabelle, sneering covertly at his courage, boldly daring him to take offense. He was hunting for trouble, but Jeff could not meet him now. He had other duties to perform.

The town was full of people, for court was in session, and, milling around the jail, a crowd of curious cowboys were waiting to catch a glimpse of the prisoners. They turned to stare frankly at the new deputy sheriff who had arrested the band of Mexicans, and for the first time since his arrival Jeff was aware of a grudging approval in the eyes of the men he passed.

There was a feud of long standing between the Texas cattlemen and the earlier Mexican settlers, a feud which had accentuated their natural race antipathy to a point where a word could bring on a war. When the Mexicans had controlled the county they had punished with great severity the law-breakers from this alien race, and when at last the Americans gained control they had dealt fully as harshly with the Mexicans. And, where the early Texans had refused to submit to arrest at the hands of Mexican deputies, it had now become almost as difficult to bring in Mexican prisoners, especially from the mountains to the east.

There the Mexicans of Pilon and the neighboring sheep and cattle towns had boldly defied arrest, and Ralph the Rov-

er's tale of the battle among the peaks had stirred up the war spirit anew. Even the rustlers and their sympathizers, who had eyed Jeff askance, were moved to a certain admiration, for in making his arrests he had shown a nice discrimination which allayed the worst of their fears. He had come among them boisterously, clubbing Jack Flagg over the head the minute he stepped off the train, but he had only arrested a Mormon butcher and the six Mexicans he had just brought in. Six Mexicans so *bravo* that the crowd had rushed to see them, only to be turned back at the door.

"Mr. Standifer," hinted the sheriff, as Jeff entered the office, "there's a great deal of interest in those prisoners you brought in. And, so far, nobody in town can identify them. Don't you think it's a good plan to kinder let the boys file in and look at them in their cells?"

"No, I don't," answered Standifer. "I want them kept strictly *incommunicado*. They're a bad bunch of hombres, and if you let people come in they can demand to see their own folks. They've got something they're concealing from us, and they're crazy to pass the word out—maybe to bring in the band and stage a jail break. I don't want them to have a lawyer, or nothing."

"Well, that's their right," stated Smith Crowder as with a disgruntled limp he turned back and slumped down in his chair. "And another thing, Standifer, you ain't in Texas now. I'm the sheriff, and these people are my constituents."

He jerked his thumb toward the door, where the disappointed crowd was voicing its discontent, but Standifer only shrugged.

"Can't help it," he said. "If I'd exercised my full rights I could have killed that man Archuleta. I took this battered nose, and a big chance to boot, to bring them back and convict them. And that's just exactly what I'm going to do."

"Well—how?" demanded Crowder sulkily.

"By keeping them *incommunicado* until they spill what they know. Tell me, has the district attorney been in yet?"

"No. He's busy. There's his office."

The sheriff was angry now, and perhaps a trifle jealous of this new deputy who was stealing his laurels, for except for some town arrests Smith Crowder had done very little in upholding the majesty of the law. His short leg and corpulent body made riding a great hardship—and the rustlers, one and all, had votes.

But Eugene Sutton, the district attorney, was a different type of vote-getter. For him there was only one record that counted, and that was of criminals convicted. He was a small man but aggressive, with the tense, nervous watchfulness of a terrier, and he made the new deputy welcome.

"Just a minute," he said, "until I sign these papers. You're the very man I was looking for."

He dashed off his signature and beckoned Standifer into a private room where they could talk without being disturbed.

"Mr. Standifer," he began, "I'm glad you came back in time to be a witness against Ike Cutbrush. The grand jury has handed down an indictment against him, and I honestly believe we'll convict. I decided, as a matter of policy, not to press the case against his sons. He's a Mormon, as you know, and until you brought in these Mexicans it looked like religious persecution. But the Church of Latter Day Saints is opposed to rustling, on principle, and I've decided upon a rather bold stroke. I hope you'll approve of it, Jeff."

He leaned back, smiling, and Standifer watched him curiously. It seemed

to him the official was a little complacent.

"As you know," the latter went on, "it has been practically impossible to get a conviction in this county for rustling. But I feel confident I can convict Ike Cutbrush. I'm going to challenge every man for this jury unless he's a Mormon, in good standing. That will give the Mormon people a chance to go on record. There will be no way to dodge the issue. The evidence is conclusive. They are trying one of their own erring brethren. The verdict, I feel sure, will be 'guilty'!"

Standifer stared, a little resentfully, as Sutton crossed his legs and demanded his opinion of the move, but his poker face did not change. The idea, of course, was his own—passed on, perhaps, by Captain Bayless—but all that he wanted was a conviction.

"Why, yes," he said, after a judicious pause, "that looks like a very good plan. Have you seen these six Mexicans I brought in?"

"Well, no," admitted Sutton. "I hope you've got as good a case against them."

"No case at all," confessed Jeff. "And they don't act like rustlers, either. I'm satisfied, from watching them, that they are Old Mexico Mexicans, and I believe they're up to something. Their leader, Archuleta, although he can't read or write English, seems to know quite a little about law, and what I want to do is to keep some shyster lawyer from turning him out on bail. They've got something they're concealing—something big!"

"Well, just what evidence have you?" inquired Sutton cautiously. "I've heard that they're desperate-looking men."

"The first thing against them is this nose," grinned Standifer. "I got that in a regular gun battle. Now, men wouldn't fight and resist arrest like that unless there was something behind it. My idea is they've got some plunder hidden out in those hills, because here's the way it all happened."

He ran briefly through the story of the conflict, and Sutton nodded approvingly.

"You're right, Jeff," he said, "and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll request the judge to fix a high bail, and we'll keep the grand jury in session until the last thing before court adjourns. Because if we go before it now, with nothing but this piece of hide, we can hardly expect an indictment.

"Good enough," agreed Standifer. "And don't you tell anybody that the brand is cut out of that hide. I don't believe even the Mexicans have caught on to my bluff—that's another reason for keeping them close."

They shook hands on the bargain, for their interests were identical, and, waking or sleeping, Jeff never left the jail long enough for a messenger to slip through. Mysterious Mexicans began to drift into town and gravitate toward the county jail, but Standifer was watching, and at the end of four days, Archuleta gave over his demands. At first he had asked for lawyers, for a conference with his friends, for the privilege of communicating with his family. He had blustered and threatened; but Jeff was adamant and Rover patrolled the jail yard at night. But on the fourth day he asked humbly if he might send out his laundry, and Standifer granted his request.

Each day a comely Mexican woman had appeared at the door with food and tobacco for the prisoners, but as she stood there waiting eagerly for the bundle of laundry Jeff held up a detaining hand.

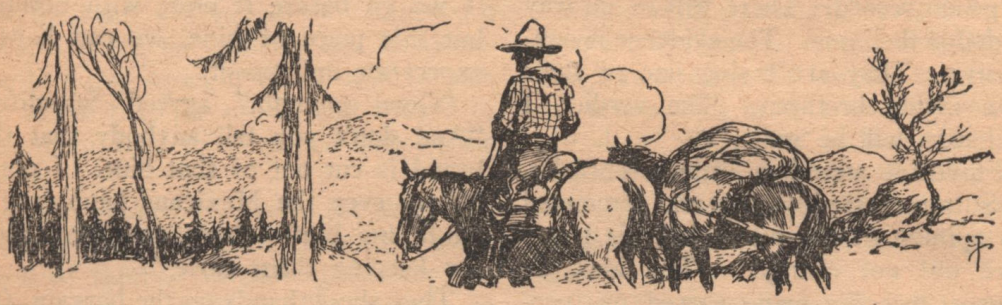
"Un momento!" he said, and spreading the clothes on his table he looked them over carefully. Against the light the shirts revealed nothing, but as he examined the seams the fold of an undershirt caught his eyes. He turned it back and under the lap he made out

three words, in Spanish: *Muevele los caballos.*

"Move the horses!" Why had he never guessed it before? The valley among the peaks was a rendezvous for horse thieves. And in the confusion of their arrest the guilty Mexicans had no chance to move their *caballada.*

"Here are your shirts," he said to the staring woman, bundling them hastily into her arms. But as she gathered them up he pulled out the telltale undershirt and hid it under his coat. That night with a posse of cowboys he headed out across the plains, riding hard for the Spanish Peaks.

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



Old Slowpoke

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Breed of the Wolf," etc.

ALTHOUGH his dogs had picked up and followed a dozen false trails since morning, Rall Hollidge's weary body tensed and he broke into a shuffling run as the bell-like baying of Ginger, the leader of the pack, announced the potential discovery of another lion. Business had been poor of late. Lion pelts brought only forty dollars apiece. At an average of one lion a week, this scarcely sufficed to feed Hollidge's dogs. It was time, he knew, to look for new hunting grounds; but Hollidge disliked to leave the Yargod Hills. The reason for this reluctance was, of course, Jane Saunders.

It was, as usual, Old Slowpoke who told Hollidge that a fresh trail actually had been struck. When on a hot trail, there was a different tone in the old dog's baying. Hollidge grinned. Old 'Poke, following some distance behind the rest of the pack, as always, was moving laboriously over the rocks toward a brush-littered coulee at the head of the valley.

Hollidge saw the lion then. Far in advance of the pack the tawny beast slipped into the entrance to a wooden draw and disappeared.

Half an hour later, the dogs had treed their quarry. As Hollidge cut across the valley toward the spot where the pack was shrilly announcing its victory, he espied Old Slowpoke, painstakingly following the lion's trail, apparently oblivious of the fact that the game had already been treed by his companions two miles away on the opposite side of the valley.

Hollidge merely grinned good-naturedly. He never became angry at any of his dogs, least of all at Old 'Poke. Although the fat, hybrid hound ate twice

as much as any other of the dogs, and as a hunter was practically useless, Hollidge thought more of him than he did of all the rest of the pack put together. There was a bond of sympathetic understanding between him and the dog. Hollidge was big, slow-moving, ponderous, and deliberation itself in thought and action. It was true of both, however, that they usually got what they set out to get. This often worked out in a somewhat ludicrous manner where the dog was concerned. More often than not, Old 'Poke would reach the end of the trail, which he so carefully and laboriously followed, long after the quarry had been brought to earth and the hunt was over.

Hollidge leisurely approached the treed lion, brought it down with a single well-placed shot and was taking the pelt when Lew Rines appeared.

Rall Hollidge did not like Rines, primarily, of course, because Rines was his rival for the hand of Jane Saunders. The two men were as different as it was possible for two men to be. Rall Hollidge was huge, loose-limbed, slow-moving mentally and physically, and inclined to carelessness in dress; Lew Rines was slim, alert, and invariably dressed in the height of local fashion. So far, the rivalry between them for the hand of Jane Saunders, heiress of the Double S Ranch, had not been definitely settled. It was well known that Rines was the favorite of Joel Saunders, Jane's father. On the other hand, it was apparent that Jane had very little use for Lew Rines. Just where Rall Hollidge stood in her regard was known only to the young lady herself.

"Well, how's the mighty hunter today?" Rines greeted, in his usual bantering manner.

Hollidge did not reply. He was looking across the valley toward the spot where Old Slowpoke, nosing his ponderous way among the boulders, was drawing near. Hollidge had promised to be at the Double S Ranch at six o'clock for supper. He would not go on without Old 'Poke. It was already nearly six. If the dog did not hurry, he would be late. Jane was always displeased when he was late. Rines followed the big man's gaze.

"Old Slowpoke," he muttered, grinning. "I can't understand, Rall, why you keep that darned fool dog. Why, he's absolutely useless to you! I'll bet he's never treed a lion since you've had him."

Rall Hollidge shrugged. "He's a good dog," he protested mildly.

Rines chuckled. "I've got a riddle for you, Rall," he said.

Hollidge displayed no interest whatsoever. Rines was forever telling riddles and jokes, most of which were beyond Hollidge's stolid comprehension.

Rines pointed toward a little hill which had extended to the top of a bald-faced ridge. "Why is that hill like a lazy dog?" he asked.

Hollidge shrugged. "Search me," he muttered disinterestedly.

"Give up?" Rines pursued.

Rall Hollidge nodded. "Sure," he said; "I give up."

"Because it's a slope up," Rines answered. He laughed at the evident lack of comprehension in Hollidge's face. "Don't strain yourself," he admonished, "it'll come to you by and by. It's got somethin' to do with Old Slowpoke. Maybe that'll help you figure it out."

Rines sat on a fallen log, lit a cigarette, and watched his companion skinning the lion. Some ten minutes later, Hollidge began to laugh.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he chortled. "Slope up. A slow pup. Pretty good at that, Lew. Ha-ha-ha!"

Lew Rines shook his head sadly and rose. "You're gettin' worse instead of better, Rall," he said. He flung his cigarette away. "Well, so long," he grinned. "I've got a date at six o'clock."

The smile left Hollidge's face when

he saw that Rines was heading toward the Double S Ranch. He was, for a moment, tempted to call his dogs and go on with Rines; but a glance into the valley showed him Old Slowpoke nearly a mile away. He would not go without Old 'Poke. That was all there was to it.

It was after seven o'clock when Rall Hollidge reached the Double S Ranch. Joel Saunders and Rines had finished supper. Jane had waited for him. He was vastly relieved to find that she was not angry. She was distressed, though. He tried, in his clumsy way, to find out what was wrong; but she merely shook her head in response to his questioning. There were red rings around her eyes, he noticed, as though she had been crying. They finished supper in silence.

It was not until he started outside to join Saunders and Rines that she gave him an indication of what the trouble might be. "Dad is going to talk to you, Rall," she whispered. "Promise me you won't get mad. Everything will turn out all right."

Hollidge nodded. "I won't get mad," he promised.

He was still wondering what she had meant, when Joel Saunders, his pale-blue eyes gleaming purposefully, stamped across the porch. Hollidge heard the screen door open and shut behind him, and Jane stood at his side.

"Hollidge," the old ranchman began, "I've got somethin' right important to say to you. Somethin' personal. Go into the house, Jane!"

But Jane Saunders did not move. Her lips were set in a thin line and her eyes were blurred with tears. She shook her head. "No," she said, "I won't go. I know what you're going to say, and——"

Joel Saunders' eyes flashed. He took a step forward then stopped.

"All right," he finally said, "listen in if you want to." He faced Rall Hollidge then. "You an' Jane are gettin' too thick to suit me," he snapped. "That's what I want to talk to you about, Hollidge. I don't aim on havin' you for a son-in-law. Is that clear?"

As usual, Rall Hollidge could find nothing to say. He merely shuffled uneasily.

"I'm gettin' along in years," the ranchman went on quickly. "The Double S is a prosperous, goin' concern. I've got quite a wad o' cash money laid by. All Jane knows is ranchin'. She likes it. I want her to keep the Double S Ranch goin'. She's gotta have a man what is a man; one who knows ranchin', an' who can keep things movin'. You ain't that man, Hollidge. As a matter o' fact, I'm gettin' plumb sick o' the sight of you an' them houn's o' yourn. I don't want you hangin' aroun' here no more."

After this bitter ultimatum, the old man turned on his heel. But Jane Saunders caught her father by an arm, and clung to him tightly. She was not crying now. "You had no right to say that, father," she protested. "You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know Rall Hollidge. You——"

Joel Saunders swung angrily about, and pushed his daughter gently but firmly away. "All right," he said, through set teeth; "if that's the way you feel about it, young lady, you can take your choice—me, or him! I won't have him and his mangy hounds hangin' aroun' this ranch. If you prefer the company of him and his dogs to me, why——"

The old man shrugged expressively and turned away. Jane caught his arm again, but this time he did not stop. She followed him into the house. Hollidge could hear them arguing. Lew Rines rose, and, grinning, sauntered toward the corral.

Rall Hollidge, more upset than he had ever been in all his easy-going existence, sat on a flat rock and watched miserably a fleecy white cloud drift be-

fore the moon. Old 'Poke came and lay between his master's feet, looked up into the man's face and whined lugubriously.

Rall Hollidge had no idea how long he sat there, staring. Suddenly, a light flared in Jane's bedroom window. Hollidge could see her moving about.

The big man came slowly to his feet again. She was going to bed. This meant that she had decided to stay with her father. He shrugged despondently, and without a backward glance, called softly to his dogs and plodded away.

Rall Hollidge and his dogs were gone when Jane Saunders appeared a few moments later. She was fully dressed and carried a suit case. Her cheeks were still wet, but she was no longer crying. She had decided. Lew Rines had just asked her, for the hundredth time, to marry him. She had told Rines and she had told her father that she intended marrying—Rall Hollidge.

She did not immediately realize that Hollidge was gone. A few moments before she had seen him from her window surrounded by his dogs. But he was gone. Was it possible that he did not want her? Had his faith in her been so slight that he had gone without even waiting to learn her answer to her father's ultimatum? Evidently, for he was gone!

A dry sob choked the girl's throat. Her shoulders dropped dejectedly. What was she to do? She would not go back to her father. And if Rall did not want her, she could not go to him. But she wanted to go to Rall! Perhaps he had not understood. With feet that dragged ever so slightly, she turned toward the hill road leading to Hollidge's cabin.

But she did not go far. At a bend in the road she slumped on a grassy bank, rested her head in hands, and cried softly. Suddenly a hoarse yell sounded from the direction of the ranch house. Then, a roaring report, muffled by the walls, struck harshly upon the moonlit stillness. Jane sprang to her feet. Had Rall come back? Were they fighting—he and her father? She broke into a mad run.

When still some distance from the house, she heard the front door slam; a dark form materialized out of the shadows, and, running swiftly, dashed across the open before the house. Even before Jane recognized the running man she saw that he carried a nickel-plated oblong box beneath his arm. The box was Joel Saunders' bank, and in it were several thousand dollars in paper money. Robbery! And her father——

The running man turned suddenly, a gun in his right hand. Jane saw the flash. Then, something struck her left shoulder. She spun about, stumbled, and fell heavily, landing with force on her head and the injured shoulder.

Half stunned by the crashing force of the six-gun slug which had torn an ugly groove through her upper arm, Jane crawled on hands and knees toward the ranch house. Not until she reached the porch did she get a hold of herself. She was still dizzy and sick. Realizing that she had already lost much blood, she attempted to bind the wound. But the injury was in an awkward spot and her efforts were futile. She dreaded to enter the house. Somehow or other, she knew just what she would find there.

As she had expected, Joel Saunders was dead. He lay sprawled sidewise, in a chair in his office. The thief's bullet had pierced his heart.

Although steeled to find exactly this, Jane was for the moment overcome by sheer horror. And Lew Rines had done this thing. Yes, she had positively recognized him. Lew Rines, who had a hundred times proposed marriage to her! Lew Rines, her father's choice! She had always suspected that Rines had been more interested in her father's money than in her. But even in her

wildest dislike of Lew Rines, she had never thought him capable of this!

Jane never knew how she got there, but some time later she found herself on the hill road leading to Rall Hollidge's cabin. Off to her right, the rasping strains of a fiddle came from the Double S bunk house. There was the sound, too, of heavy feet pounding in noisy rhythm with the music. The two shots evidently had not been heard by the men in the bunk house.

A stooped, bow-legged figure came toward her out of the darkness, a man with a long white beard. It was "Dad" Fothergill, who had been the Double S cook for a quarter of a century.

"Howdy, Jane!" the old man exclaimed.

Jane did not return the friendly greeting. In fact, she hardly looked at Fothergill.

"Father is dead," she said, in a dull voice. "Murdered! Robbed! Lew Rines did it. Tell—the boys."

She turned and went on. Dad Fothergill shouted questions. But she did not answer. She wanted Rall Hollidge. She did not want to talk to anybody else. Rall was so big, so calm, so quietly confident. He would comfort her; he would do something. Rall and his dogs would run the killer down. They would surely——

The girl's thoughts degenerated into a jumble of senseless things, half fancy, half real. She was very weak, and stumbled as she walked. She reached the Hollidge cabin at last. But there were no welcoming yelps from the dogs. The cabin was in darkness. Rall Hollidge was gone!

Like one in a dream, the distraught girl turned toward the black hills in the distance.

When Hollidge left the Double S ranch house he had confidently intended immediately leaving the Yargor Hills behind him. Those hills had long since been hunted out. With Jane lost to him, there was no longer any reason for his staying. It was not until he had left his cabin far behind him that the real hurt began to make itself felt. True to his nature, Rall Hollidge was slow to anger, slow to hate, slow to love. Once these primary emotions were aroused, however, they went deeper than with the ordinary individual. Hollidge had loved Jane with all his heart and soul. He still loved her, as a matter of fact, and always would. He bore her no ill will because she had decided to stay with her father. But, the hurt was there, nevertheless; and, as time passed, that hurt bit deeper and deeper until it seemed as though steel bands were locked about his heart, crushing out his life.

For the most of the night the miserable man tramped aimlessly on into the hills. The dogs, sensing the change in their master, circled and left him. Only Old 'Poke, faithful as always, followed close at his heels.

When the red sun peeped up over the eastern horizon, Rall Hollidge was still walking. He seemed like a man in a daze. All during the day he plodded on, without thought or purpose. He did not eat. The thought of food did not even occur to him. At night he sank exhausted upon a grassy bank and slept like one dead. Old Slowpoke lay close at his man's side. Later, the other dogs appeared, and whining querulously, circled around the still figures.

It was mid-afternoon of the next day when Sheriff Ed Putnam and his posse came upon Rall Hollidge. The big man peered dully at the familiar faces. He recognized Putnam, Lew Rines, and several others. For no reason evident to him at the moment, his bloodshot eyes returned again and again to Lew Rines. Were Rines' wrists handcuffed? It did not seem possible. But, yes, they were.

"You sure led us a merry chase, Rall," the sheriff said.

Hollidge scowled and shook his head. Chase? What did they mean? He had not been running. What was wrong? What did they want with him? The posse, he discovered, was mostly made up of Double S men. They all looked haggard and tired. And—Lew Rines—a prisoner——

Hollidge's confused mind suggested many questions; but, as usual, words refused to come.

"What's wrong," he finally asked.

"Jane Saunders—is gone," the sheriff answered. "We thought maybe you had seen her?"

Hollidge grasped this bit of startling information quickly. "Gone!" he repeated. "Where?"

Putnam shrugged. "That's what we've got to find out, and that mighty soon," the old officer answered. "She was hurt. She started out looking for you, and——"

"Who hurt her?" Hollidge interrupted quickly. His slumping shoulders had straightened; his blue eyes were alert.

Putnam pointed toward Lew Rines. "Rines killed and robbed Joel Saunders early last night; and he must have shot the girl, too. All the way to your cabin her trail was marked with blood. She fell several times, indicating that she was probably hurt bad. We lost her trail just beyond your place. We've been searching all night. Happened to think of you and your dogs. Figured you might be able to help us. We——"

But, even as the sheriff talked, Rall Hollidge had started away. Calling to the dogs, he started at a run straight down the mountainside, where the horsemen were unable to follow. As he struck into the valley, the pack came from a dozen directions and baying noisily fell in behind him. Far in the rear waddled Old 'Poke, his big feet carrying him clumsily over the ground.

By the time the sheriff and his men reached the valley, Hollidge had already followed Jane Saunders' trail far beyond the point where they had lost it that morning. Now, with his dogs gathered around him, he was pointing out the imprint of a small boot heel in the moss. One after another, the intelligent animals sniffed noisily at the mark. It was some time before the man could convince them that they should follow the owner of that boot. It was Ginger who understood first. Baying his instructions to the rest of the pack, the big cinnamon-colored hound started away in full cry.

Long after the rest of the dogs had gone, Slowpoke lumbered up. Whining softly, the dog muzzled the boot mark. He did not need to be told what to do. Before the dog started away, Hollidge knelt and threw an arm about the animal's neck. As far as the posse could hear, he did not speak. When they fell in behind the dogs, it was noticed that Hollidge kept pace with Old Slowpoke.

Superficially, the task of locating Jane Saunders appeared impossible. The spot where her trail had disappeared was a massive rock pile, twenty miles square and in spots nearly a mile high. That mighty pile of rocks contained hundreds of blind canyons, great fissures cleft out of solid stone, black and seemingly bottomless. There was practically no vegetation. It had rained the night before and the hot sun had quickly absorbed the moisture, removing at the same time most of the scent that might be left.

A dozen times during the next two hours the pack silently admitted failure. Each time, it was Old 'Poke, nosing laboriously over the rocks, who picked up the trail and once again sent the dogs away in full cry. The old hound never was at a loss for long.

Just as the summer dusk was bathing the hills in purple shadow, Old 'Poke

stopped at the entrance to a black canyon, and, turning his sad eyes up to Hollidge whined lugubriously. Rall Hollidge, breathing hard like one in the last stages of exhaustion, dropped on the ground at the dog's side.

"No, no, 'Poke," he almost sobbed; "you haven't lost it! Don't give up, 'Poke! She must be near!"

Then, as though imbued by some of the man's frantic anxiety, the dog began circling swiftly. The rest of the pack, half a mile away, were again at a loss. Hollidge, his eyes blurred with the intensity of his staring, watched Old Slowpoke. The dog was making circles fifty feet in diameter now. Suddenly he barked sharply. He had squeezed between two boulders at the bottom of the rocky slope. Hollidge plunged headlong down the almost perpendicular wall.

They found her there, wedged in that narrow cleft between the two boulders. She had apparently fallen over the wall, which accounted for Old 'Poke momentarily losing her trail.

She was unconscious when Hollidge caught her in his arms. At the sound of his voice, however, her eyes opened. She looked up into his face.

"Why didn't you wait for me, Rall?" she asked softly. Then she saw the posse. The men were talking, shouting, laughing, half mad with relief. "I fell," she went on. I don't see—how you ever—found me——"

"It was 'Poke that did it, honey," Hollidge said. "If it hadn't been for him, we maybe never would have done so."

And Old Slowpoke, as though absorbing some of the exuberant happiness of the men about him, romped about Hollidge and Jane Saunders so strenuously, that his hind feet finally went from under him and he fell in a tail-wagging heap at Hollidge's feet.

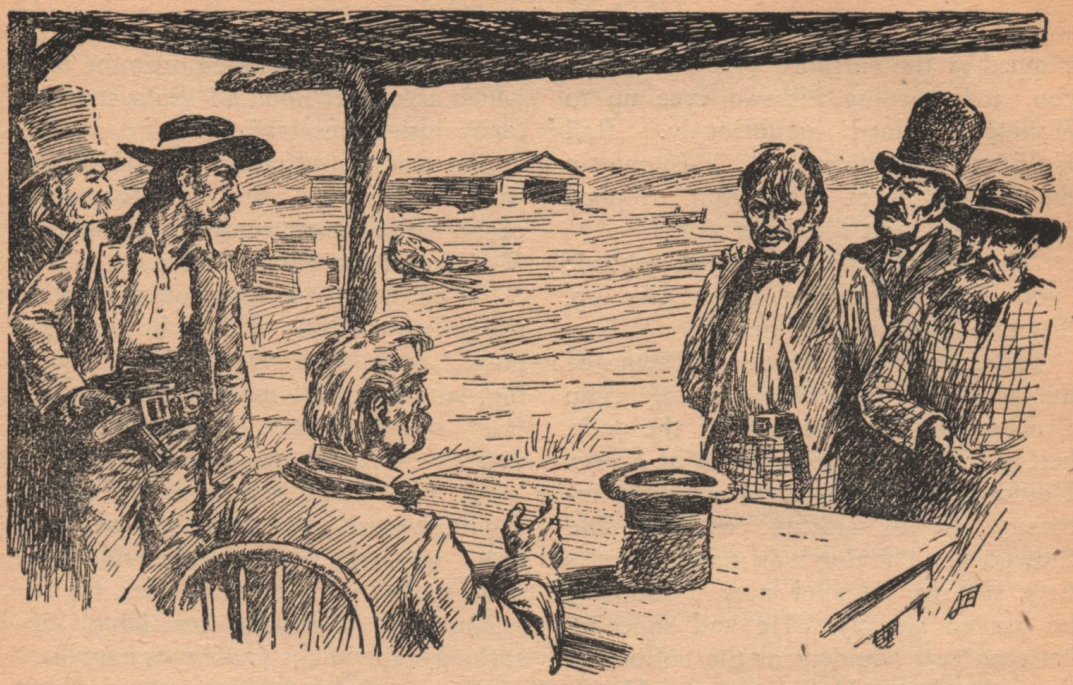
SEA OTTERS INCREASE

ACCORDING to recent reports received by the United States bureau of fisheries, sea otters of western Alaska waters are on the increase. Boatmen, trappers, and traders who are familiar with the Aleutian Islands section report that they are more numerous than ever before and seem to be steadily increasing.

E. P. Willis, a trader, and the crew of the schooner *Eunice,* claim to have counted twenty sea otter in an hour's trip. One Indian trapper said he could have easily killed one hundred on the beach of Unalga Island.

The bureau's office had three sea-otter skins sent to them by United States Commissioner Durrell Finch, of Unalaska, which were reported to have been taken from animals found dead on the beach. The men who discovered them were applying for permission to sell them. If it can be proved that the otter skins were actually taken from dead otter found on the beach, the owners will no doubt be given the desired permit. Killing otters is prohibited, and the bureau has to take great precaution to prevent fraud.

English and Russian firms will buy otter skins, but in the United States there is no market for them. The price of skins varies according to size and quality. The Juneau bureau is said to be in possession of a skin that is worth at least one thousand five hundred dollars.



Pioneer Towns of the West

(Columbia, Missouri)

By Duane Clark

THE original town of Columbia was named Smithton, and was founded by the Smithton Land Co., a group of thirty-five stockholders. It was located on the beautiful elevated plateau northwest of Columbia's present site. Smithton, named in honor of General Thomas A. Smith, who was at that time receiver of the land office at Franklin, Howard County, never numbered more than twenty inhabitants.

Up to May, 1821, by an act of the legislature, Smithton was the temporary capital of Boone County, and the first terms of the county and circuit courts were held there. A serious difficulty in obtaining water by digging wells caused the removal of the town to its present site, southeast of the original Smithton.

The court held its sessions under an arbor constructed for that purpose, as there was no suitable building at that time. A few weeks after the new site had been selected and renamed, lots were laid out and sold. The first house to be built was a log cabin, and it was erected by Thomas Duly. The first merchant was Abraham J. Williams. He built a two-story frame storeroom at a time when any kind of a two-story building was looked upon with awe.

One of the outstanding characters of Columbia during its early days was Colonel Richard Gentry, who opened the first tavern, also a log building. Colonel Gentry, who was postmaster in 1830 and served as colonel of a regiment of volunteers in the Florida war, was killed at the battle of Okeechobee in 1837. Gentry County was named in his honor.

In the second year of Columbia's existence a lively dispute arose between Colonel Gentry and Doctor William Jewell as to whether the central part of the town should be where it now is,

or at another place. Gentry won, and the same year, 1822, several houses were built there, and the nucleus was fully established. After this the town slowly but surely progressed, adding stores, houses, churches, and schools.

The first courthouse was erected in Columbia in 1824 and was called "the hull of a courthouse." It was a brick structure, built by Minor Neal, in a plain, old-style architecture, with hip roof, two stories high, and a courtroom on the ground floor, this floor being brick. The grand and petit jury rooms were on the second floor. The building was fifty feet long by forty feet wide. All the rooms were lighted by candles.

Nathaniel Patten was editor and publisher of Columbia's original newspaper. It was succeeded in 1835 by *The Patriot,* which continued for nine years, when *The Statesman* appeared, a paper which covered a period of forty-two years.

On the twenty-first of October, 1833, a semiweekly line of mail coaches was established between St. Louis and Fayette, by way of St. Charles, Fulton, and Columbia.

Bounded by forests and wild prairie, Columbia fought its way to the comforts of civilization, until now it is one of the most beautiful, cultivated, and wealthy small cities of the State. It is the business, social, and educational center of an agricultural district which is unsurpassed for its fertility, enterprise, and intelligence.

Columbia's streets are broad, shaded by great trees, many of them are paved, and all are lighted by electricity. The city's waterworks furnish an adequate supply of pure water. Nearly all the religious denominations are represented in Columbia, and have beautiful and costly houses of worship.

Because of Columbia's dominant interest in education, it is often spoken of as the "Athens of Missouri." The State University is located here as well as an agricultural college. For the education of young women there are Christian and Stephen's Colleges. There are three public school buildings for white children and one for colored children. These schools are all located in shady and attractive groves which give unique charm, very different to the usually prosaic school surroundings.

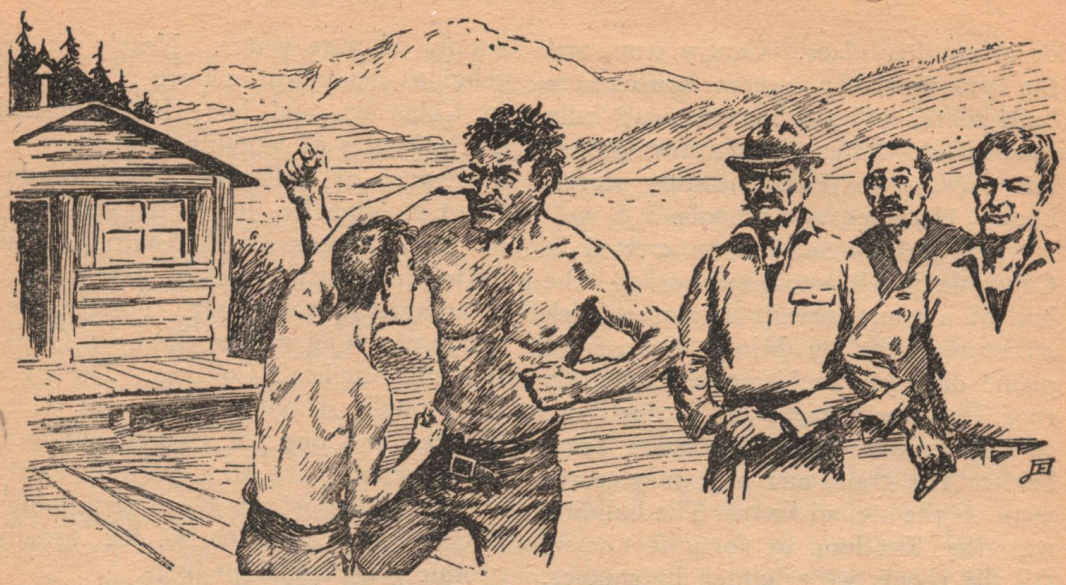
Among the newspapers published at Columbia are *The Herald, The Statesman,* the *Daily Tribune,* and the *Evening Missourian.* The latter is published by the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri. The Herald Publishing House is one of the largest and best-appointed in the State, and prints and binds the supreme court decisions of Missouri and other States.

Columbia is connected by branch railroads with two of the great systems of the West and South. They are, the Wabash, at Centralia, twenty miles north; and the Missouri, Kansas & Texas, at McBaine, nine miles south.

The State institutions in Columbia are the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri. The largest factories are the Hamilton-Brown Shoe Co., and the Columbia Ice & Storage Co. Since 1900, the population of Columbia has grown steadily until it now numbers sixteen thousand.

OLD MINE STILL GOOD

THE London Mine, three miles above Alama, Colorado, is owned by W. Kennon Jewett, of Pasadena, California. His father, who made a fortune in it years ago, willed it to him. For years this mine has been idle, as many miners believed it was worked out, but about two years ago another attempt was made to work it, and operations have since been going on, with remarkable results. During one month alone, twenty-six twenty-five-ton carloads of ore, with gold averaging five ounces to a ton, were shipped out.



Chips from the Big Sticks

(Whistlepunk)

By Howard J. Perry

THE foreman of Camp Six, Mike Dolan, cursed loudly as he ran his eyes over the contents of the letter before him.

"Good gosh-all-mighty!" he exclaimed. "If that don't beat the deuce! How in heck am I goin' to get out logs with this bunch o' roughnecks when I got to put up with interference like this."

"Shorty" Hayward, the camp timekeeper, looked up from his report sheet and cast on his chief a quizzical look.

"What's the trouble, Mike?" he asked. "What's the old man gone and done now?"

The foreman crumpled the letter in his great paw. "Jumpin' catfish, I ought to have known better'n to have told him about my troubles, when he was up here last Sunday!"

The timekeeper continued to look puzzled and Dolan went on to explain.

"When Wilson came up to look things over Sunday, I told him how much trouble we had tryin' to keep a whistlepunk on the job, an' how 'Buck' Johnson an' his gang of timber beasts ran every kid we got out o' camp. I told him I wanted a two-hundred-pound man-eater for the job, as that's the only kind who could hold it down."

Dolan paused and lit his corncob pipe.

"Well," said the timekeeper, "is he sending you one according to your specifications?"

The foreman glanced up ironically. "Yeah, he's sendin' me one all right." He took the crumpled letter and spread it out before him. "Listen to this, an' you'll know why camp foremen go nutty. Here's what Wilson says:

"DEAR MIKE: Relative to our conversation last Sunday, I'm sending you a new whistlepunk. Don't jump out of your shirt when you see him. He's only a kid and he hasn't been very well, but I think the woods will be good for him. His name is Joe Nagrom and he ought to arrive about the time this letter does."

Dolan looked up at the timekeeper with a heavy scowl on his brow. "Now, I ask you, if that ain't about the last straw?"

"What I'd do would be to fire Buck and his cronies," the latter suggested. "They raise too much rumpus around here."

"Sure," the other retorted, "that's what I'd like to do, but you're forgettin' that Buck's the best hooktender in these parts, an' most of his bunch are Number One loggers. I don't want to cut my production."

He got up and started for the door. "Nope, we've got to put up with things for a time. I suppose this new 'punk won't last long, anyways, then I'll get one that will stick."

The calks of his boots cut deep into the commissary floor as he strode out.

Buck Johnson was a powerful man, built on the style of a gorilla. He knew that he was a good logger, therefore, he was aware that he could do things that would have lost less able men their jobs. As a result, he had become the camp bully and found keen delight and needed relaxation in exercising the loggers' proclivity for badgering. But where some might have stopped at accepted practices along this line, Buck carried it to the extreme. Because of this, the lives of his victims were made exceedingly miserable.

Since whistlepunks were placed in almost the same low category as flunkies and bullcooks, they offered excellent subject material for Buck and his crowd; and so it happened that the foreman had experienced no litttle difficulty in securing a man who could weather the tormenting of the big hooktender.

Two hours after Dolan had left the commissary, the logging train whistled into camp, and a few minutes later he returned to see the new whistlepunk.

The timekeeper looked up from his work and cast his eyes toward the other end of the room in a telling wink.

Following his gaze, the foreman's eyes rested appraisingly on a slender youth sitting on a box. The boy got to his feet, removed his hat, and Dolan observed a thatch of curly red hair set above a freckled face with a distinctly pug nose.

"Your name Nagrom?" Dolan inquired in a gruff tone.

"Yes—yes, that's my name. Joe Nagrom. Mr. Wilson told me you needed a whistlepunk. He said you'd put me on."

"Yeah, he told me the same thing," Dolan replied. "An' since he owns this outfit, I guess that's all there is to it. I suppose he said it would be steady?"

"Yes, sir," the boy replied. "That is, as long as I wanted it."

"Well, that's a horse of another color," Dolan laughed. "Maybe you won't want it very long, even if you can do the work, which is simple."

"Oh, I'll want it all right," the other returned. There was a surprising note of confidence in the youngster's voice.

Dolan stared at him for a few moments, then turned to the timekeeper. "Very well, kid," he said with a shrug. "Shorty, here, will show you where you sleep, an' I'll take you out in the woods to-morrow morning." The foreman swung around and went out.

In the woods the next morning, Dolan took it upon himself to instruct the youngster in the new work. It was not difficult, except for the understanding of the signals. A long wire from the whistle cord on the donkey engine extended out into the area where the logs were being hauled in. The signals were waved to the whistlepunk, who, with the wire across his shoulder and grasped tightly in his hands, threw his weight on it to pull the whistle cord, sounding the blasts which notified the engineer what to do; as well as every one within hearing just what was going to happen.

That evening in the cook shack, Buck Johnson leaned over and whispered in

the ear of one of his companions. When that individual went out, he surreptitiously slipped the molasses jug under his shirt. Shorty Hayward, the timekeeper, saw the move and when he returned to the commissary he mentioned it to Dolan.

"Yeah, I expected they'd begin on the kid," the foreman growled. "Sometimes I feel like kickin' that whole bunch out of camp, but I'd have a heck of a time gettin' another crew that would produce as many logs a day."

"How'd the kid get along to-day?" the timekeeper asked.

"Better'n I thought," Dolan replied. "He's surprisingly strong, though he don't look it, an' he caught on to the signals right off the bat. I'd like to keep him, but I suppose he'll be pullin' out darn quick, especially if Buck plans on puttin' molasses in his bunk."

But Dolan received quite a shock the next evening when he happened to be passing by the youngster's bunk house and found him washing out his blankets. Nagrom was whistling as he scrubbed at the bedding.

"What's the matter, kid?" the foreman asked with assumed innocence. "Blankets too dirty for you?"

The boy straightened up and grinned. "Nope, they were clean enough, but sleeping on molasses isn't comfortable. I guess the fellows played a little joke on me," he continued while scrubbing briskly.

Dolan stared at him perplexed and then walked away. Back in the commissary he related to the timekeeper what he had seen. "It looks like the kid's too gentle to get mad," he laughed. "But that crowd'll get his goat. They've got a bag full of jokes that would make a saint cuss."

But to the astonishment of the foreman and the chagrin of Buck Johnson and his cronies, the bag of jokes failed to produce the reaction Dolan predicted. The whistlepunk met every situation with the same good humor. Even where some of their tricks meant physical discomfort to an extreme degree, the kid never once disclosed the faintest indication of resentment.

However, instead of ceasing their badgering when they met with such lack of response, Buck Johnson and his companions strove all the harder to break the newcomer's indifference.

Then one night as the men were finishing their supper, the explosion that every one had ceased to expect occurred. Buck Johnson, from his end of the table, had called across to the whistlepunk who sat some distance away:

"Hey, there, 'Babyface'! Pass that pie up this way."

It was a remark of little consequence compared to many the hooktender had flung at the youngster, and no attention was paid to it by most of the men. But instead of complying with the request, Nagrom got to his feet and deliberately walked up to Buck. Something in his unwavering eyes and the firm line of his jaw made the others pause in their eating.

"Listen, Buck." The boy's voice was oddly cold and even. "I've been in this outfit a month now and during that time I've swallowed more dirt from you than any man has without fighting or quitting. I should have broken your head long before this, but I made a promise, and that promise is up to-night."

He took a step closer and shook a doubled fist under the surprised hooktender's nose:

"Now, listen, you yellow bohunk. Tomorrow is Sunday and if you don't meet me at ten o'clock in front of the commissary and be prepared to take the worst lickin' a man ever got, then every man in this camp will know you're a cowardly timber beast."

He paused, and a deadly silence followed. It was as if the boy's words had suddenly petrified every man in the cook shack. They gaped open-mouthed as

though a strange apparition appeared before them.

Buck Johnson's jaw had fallen. But instantly he recovered himself and essayed a careless laugh, yet it sounded hollow. He swallowed hard a couple of times, and in a coarse voice taunted:

"You mean, you want to fight?"

"You've got good hearing. And every one else heard me, too, you rotten timber beast!" Nagrom threw the words at the hooktender as though they were stiletto-pointed missiles.

The big man's face suddenly flushed. He half rose from his seat as though he would accept the challenge right then.

"So you're lookin' for trouble, eh?" he demanded. "Well, you'll get it, you little runt. I'll meet you to-morrow morning, an' I'll break every bone in your body."

The boy never quailed under the other's heavy scowl.

"That's one contract that you'll never fill, Johnson," he said, spacing each word to give added emphasis, and then he turned and strode noisily out of the room.

That night the loggers gathered in little groups and discussed the sudden change in events. Most of them concluded that the whistlepunk had either gone crazy or had made the bluff and would leave the camp during the night.

But the next morning when they sat at breakfast, he was in his usual place, eating calmly. When he had finished he went to his bunk house, where he remained until shortly before ten o'clock. Then he emerged and walked across to the group that had gathered before the commissary. He might have been going to buy a pair of socks from the storekeeper, so unperturbed was his attitude.

Buck Johnson, who stood talking to a group of loggers, whirled as the kid came up. His face showed his surprise. Apparently, the hooktender considered the whistlepunk's appearance at the appointed time as unlikely as that of a prehistoric animal.

"Well, 'punk?" he inquired. "So you still feel like goin' to the hospital?"

"Any time you can send me, Johnson," the other replied. "How about starting in now? But you'd better take your shirt off. I don't want you to have an excuse when I'm through with you."

The colossal confidence of the boy increased the loggers' amazement. Buck laughed outright. Automatically, the men formed in a circle about the two. As they faced each other, the difference in their weights was ridiculous. Johnson was a burly man, with thick shoulders and bull neck. He would top the scales at close to two hundred. The whistlepunk was lithe and slender, but with long arms. It was doubtful if he weighed more than a hundred and fifty pounds.

The boy stood with his hands at his sides, while Buck's body asssumed the usual gorilla-like crouch, his big fists clenched. Then, like a flash, the hooktender swung at the other's head. The blow swished through the air; but the youth, with a catlike movement, ducked. At the same time he brought his own fist up with lightning swiftness. It crashed against the astounded hooktender's chin, sending him back on his heels.

With a hoarse roar of anger, he recovered and lunged forward at his opponent, his arms swinging wildly. The whistlepunk waited a brief second, then sprang lightly aside, and as the big logger's hands flailed the empty air, the boy's fist again found its mark on Johnson's face with terrific force.

An appreciative shout came from the loggers as they suddenly realized that a rare and unprecedented spectacle was being served up for their amusement. Buck Johnson was being beaten by a mere kid who knew how to box. They shouted encouragement as the two faced each other again.

Buck glared momentarily in baffled rage and apparently decided that the only way he could crush the whistlepunk was to revert to the loggers' tactics of getting a man down. With a lunge, he rushed the youngster, but Nagrom was prepared. As the big man pitched forward, the boy ripped a left and right to his face; and then, with a bound, was out of the way. This time he did not wait for the logger to recover and face him. As Buck stumbled from his overbalanced weight, Nagrom followed him, driving his fists with unbelievable precision first to his head and then to his body.

The attack was so severe that Buck covered his face momentarily with his arm, and immediately the boy centered his blows on the body. As the big man lowered his guard to protect his torso, the boy shifted his attack to the face. Coolly as though he were going about the business of chopping down a tree, the whistlepunk took advantage of the other's helplessness, timing his blows so that their full force landed where he aimed. Johnson began to waver, his eyes became glassy, and his jaw dropped open.

Now with increased vigor the youth threw his fists to the logger's jaw, and he began to sag. His knees doubled, and like a giant fir before the faller's ax, he crumbled and pitched forward, unconscious, on his face.

For a moment the boy gazed down on the stricken logger, then stepped aside just as Mike Dolan shouldered his way through the ring of still incredulous onlookers.

"Say, what the——" He stopped abruptly as his eyes fell on the prone figure in the dust. Then he looked at the whistlepunk, his face puckered. "Did—did you do that?" he asked.

The youngster nodded. "I had to, Mr. Dolan," he replied quietly. "But he isn't hurt. Just knocked out. He'll be all right in a little while."

"Good gosh!" the foreman exclaimed. "I ain't worrying about him. What I want to know, Nagrom, is how did you do it?"

"It isn't a miracle," the other replied. "And I might explain that my name isn't Nagrom. It's Morgan, which is Nagrom spelled backward. I'm Joe Morgan, the present middleweight champion of the Pacific coast. I needed a little rest and Mr. Wilson asked me if I wouldn't like to come up here. He told me what to expect and made me promise I wouldn't do anything for a month."

This incident of the champion boxer who came into the woods as a whistlepunk is just one of the many cases where that lowly place has been filled by odd personages. It is probably due to the fact that the job is one of the few in the timberlands where muscular brawn is not needed, and one which is easily learned by the inexperienced.

The whistlepunk came into being about the time the donkey engines were first introduced into the logging camps. With the advent of these steam engines, it was possible to run the cables far out into the woods and drag logs to a central point. Oftentimes, the ground was irregular and the men working with the chokers were hidden from the view of the engineer. Thus it became necessary to have signals that could not be mistaken. By running a wire from the whistle to the place where the crews were working, the signals could be sounded from there, and at the same time the other men in the woods could hear them and know just what to expect from the engineer.

Most of the time these wires were extended over long distances and kept off the ground by loops attached to trees. In order to sound the whistle, it was necessary for the whistlepunk to throw all his weight on the wire.

In later years, however, many camps have installed batteries and use elec-

tricity to pull the whistle. This modern style means that the whistlepunk is able to move about with the electric button in his hand, and the heavy pulls on the wire have been eliminated.

One of the chief causes for accidents in the camps has been the misunderstanding of signals. A new engineer comes on the job from some other logging section of the country and reads the signal wrong. The result has often caused serious injuries to the men. A strong effort is being made by the various logging associations to have a standard code. This will undoubtedly come to pass in the very near future.

But the whistlepunk remains an interesting character in the camps. There are many stories told about the unusual types of men who have held his job.

It is related that once a man of royal family was a whistlepunk in one of the Northwest outfits, and his identity did not become known until years after he had left. Then, too, many men seeking to hide themselves have become whistlepunks. This list includes criminals, prominent business men, and society folk from the big cities. Even a college professor of note once spent a whole summer as a 'punk and gathered a great amount of firsthand material on camp conditons.

But the whistlepunk is generally a youngster who prefers the life of the camps. He gets small pay; he does not associate with the men to any great extent; and he goes and comes. He is the most migratory member of the logging crews, but the operators lose no sleep over it. There is always another one at any employment agency.

A HUNGRY POLAR BEAR

ONE night when Inspector Joy and Constable Taggart of the Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, together with their Esquimo driver, were peacefully sleeping in their igloo in the Canadian arctic, they were awakened by the barking of their dogs, who were trying to scare away a hungry polar bear who was stealing food.

A midnight call from a bear in this section is no novelty, but as the barking continued, Taggart rushed to the door to get his gun. A huge drift of snow blocked his way, and the three men were imprisoned without firearms. In this section guns are always kept outside, as warm rifles freeze as soon as exposed to intense cold, and thus become useless.

As a last resort the three men began to shout, thinking that the noise might scare the visitor away, but unfortunately it had the wrong effect, as the beast became enraged, pounced on the igloo, and broke a huge hole in one side. Taggart's rifle stood near the opening made by the bear, so while the other men beat the intruder back, Taggart grabbed his weapon. With almost human intelligence the bear lunged forward and struck the gun from Taggart's hand and stood on it with both forepaws while he snarled threateningly.

Again the bear lunged for the men, but was beaten off with a snow knife and sticks. At the psychological moment, Taggart succeeded in grabbing the rifle, and when Mr. Polar Bear made a third charge, he received a bullet through his head, which brought him down.

What Counts

By Austin Hall

Author of "A Bear-trapped Wolf," etc.

DROP that poke! There now! Just step over to yonder bush and loosen your belt. When you're rid of them guns I'll tell you the rest of it."

There was no way out; Sammy Belton realized it in an instant. Between the two rocks he could see the gleam of "Mojave Tom's" eye behind the rifle sights, cold, deadly, unflinching. And yet, for an instant, the youth hesitated; it did not seem possible after all the months they had lived together, the nights under the stars and the pleasant hours in the mine shaft—— But, of course, this was what came of trusting a crook. Once a thief; always a thief. That eye behind the rocks was not to be mistaken.

"You hear what I said?"

Sammy Belton had begun to move, but he was not exactly afraid; neither was he thinking about the gold; rather, it was something deep down in his heart —a broken sensation as if the light of the earth had suddenly disappeared. It was his first great shock; his initial experience with the ingratitude of human relations. Gold! What was gold when it came to losing a pal, even though that pal had been a crook? Still hesitating, he gazed at the distant horizon where a lofty peak balanced its summit against the shimmering sky. Below the peak lay the outlines of the nearer range where a gaping gash revealed the mouth of a lonely canyon. Already he was measuring the odds, wondering whether he would ever reach the place alive.

"This is the last chance I'll give you," came the threatening voice from behind the boulder. "Drop that poke and hustle over to that bush. There now!"

Sammy Belton obeyed the command; his guns tinkled against a rock, and the

belt curled up. A surprised lizard scooted into the open and stopped to gaze at the two intruders.

"Aw, shucks!" came the younger man's pleading voice. "Tom! Have you gone crazy? After all these months together! Remember, Tom, it's really my gold. It was me that took you in when you didn't have a cent nor a bite to eat."

A mocking laugh was the only answer; the man with the rifle straightened and stepped forward, his lips sneering. He was a gaunt creature well past the middle fifties, his face grizzled with weeks of beard, his skin burnt by years upon the desert.

"Yeah," he snarled. "Well, that's your funeral; not mine. Wise guy, you was—I don't think. Suckers are born, kid; but when they've lived in a hole like this as long as I have, they know enough to take things when they see 'em. You found me in the desert, eh? Well, mebbe I let you find me on purpose. Did you ever think of that? And you say it's your gold. But who helped you dig it? What's that? Oh, you found it, you say. But you didn't put it in the ground, did you? But why argue about something that ain't neither here nor there. I've got my gun on you, and the stuff's mine. Besides, I'm a-gettin' along in years and I need it. Now I suppose you'll spill some of that sob stuff 'bout wantin' a college education and me a-robbin' you of the chance! Huh!"

As a matter of fact, the older man had proclaimed the other's intention to a dot. Eight months before, Sammy Belton had journeyed into the desert for that very purpose—to pick up knowledge of geological formations, and to work a certain claim of whose location he had been informed; hoping thereby to pick up enough money to put him through a course in mining engineering. At first, he had worked unsuccessfully, until one day the decrepit Mojave Tom had shambled into camp—forlorn, miserable, without water, and with scarcely a bite to eat.

But from that moment things had run a different course. The desert rat was possessed of an uncanny knowledge of desert mining; in less than two hours he had explained to the youth where he had run past his pay dirt, and put him back on the right track. Almost immediately they had begun to dig gold. Naturally, Sammy Belton had agreed to share the output. And for a while all had gone smoothly; the old fellow proved a worker of the untiring sort, pounding away early and late. Also, he had turned out to be the most agreeable companion Sammy had ever met—smiling, cheerful, with the kindest gray eyes ever put in a man's head. Night after night the older man had sat by the fire, listening to the youth's hopes and ambitions; until at length Sammy had come to regard him almost as a father. Certainly he had never suspected that the other was anything but what he represented himself to be. And then—— Well, there is always an awakening.

One night a paper had fluttered from the older man's pocket, and quite by accident Sammy Belton had picked it up and read the contents. It proved to be a clipping from a newspaper—an editorial. The caption was ominous.

GET MOJAVE TOM!

We are asking how much longer the sheriff of this county is going to allow a certain bandit known as "Mojave Tom" to run loose over our valued landscape. And we are asking it, because the lives of some of our most prominent citizens have lately been placed in jeopardy. In fact, three of them have already been murdered, to wit:—Mr. "Silk" Elkhorn, proprietor of the game at the Monte Carlo; Tom Diggins of the Browntail Saloon, and a certain Hugo Hillis, a mining promoter newly arrived in our city. We call these cases murder because those who witnessed the shootings, one and all, affirm the guilt of the said Mojave. It seems to us that when a bad man walks into a peaceful game, or a saloon, and

shoots the proprietors without provocation, something ought to be done about it. And from what we hear the killing of the mining promoter was even more ruthless. He was killed merely because he had chosen to execute his legal and guaranteed rights in ejecting certain squatters from his property. It looks to us about time for a new sheriff; and unless this killer and cutthroat, Mojave Tom, is caught, *muy pronto*, we're thinking we'll elect one.

When last seen, this fellow, Mojave Tom, was hitting for the desert, where he is wont to retire whenever the hand of the law is stretching in his direction. For those who have not seen this rascal, we give the following description: Tall, sunburned, slightly aquiline nose, lean features; the tip of the right ear is clipped—no doubt by a justified bullet—and the little finger of the left hand is missing. The bandit has rather a pleasant face and eyes of deceiving softness.

That was all, but it was enough. It suited the stranger to a nicety; he had even given his right name. Nothing had been mentioned as to age, but that, no doubt, was an oversight. Of far more importance were the facts that the right ear had been clipped and the little finger of the left hand was missing.

A bad man! A renegade! And a killer!

Sammy Belton could not believe it, yet the proof was there. "Eyes of deceiving softness." In print, too! For a long while the youth had remained sitting in the darkness; then he had replaced the paper upon the ground and walked away. Later, he had watched Mojave Tom snatch the clipping from the sand and shove it into his pocket.

And from that minute on, the desert rat had manifested a peculiar nervousness. He appeared to be thinking—watching always. The eyes had grown softer, more subtle; as if they were holding back a load of anxiety. No doubt, he was wondering just how much his companion knew.

All this had happened two weeks before. The time had arrived at length when Sammy Belton had decided to go out to civilization. With half of that poke as his share, he would be able to spend at least two years at college. They had abandoned camp the morning before, heading for the western range and the springs that bubbled in the lonely canyon. Nothing unusual had happened until this minute; when, in spite of the youth's precaution, the renegade had suddenly gained the upper hand. Just now he was heading for the coveted poke.

"Huh!" he gloated. "Goin' to college, eh? Mebbe you're goin' to college? But the way I gets it, bub, if you ever leave this old desert alive yuh'll be lucky. No, I ain't a-goin' to kill you. That 'ud be like pluggin' a baby. And I ain't a-shootin' up no cradles yet. I'm merely goin' to fix it so's yuh'll stay right where you are. Now then. Just stick by that bush while I do the work."

With that, he yanked out his six-gun and began his work of destruction, shooting the water sacks and tramping the precious food into the sand. When but one sack of water remained, he caught it up and shifted it to his shoulder. The poke of gold, the rifle, and the water! He had them all. Sam Belton was to be left helpless. Grimly he watched a lone buzzard swooping around overhead. High up the bird was waiting, swinging in a vast circle. Sammy knew the story. A buzzard here, and miles away, another; and so on, far across the desert. When one of them started for the ground, all of them would know the news. After that would come a vulture's convention—and bones! No wonder his speculating gaze wandered toward the canyon's gaping mouth.

"All right!" said the crook at last. "Now, you stay right where you are until I get a-goin'. I got my rifle ready and I ain't taking no chances. Savvy? It's either me or you. And I'm thinkin' it's me that's a-goin' out. I didn't do all that work in the mine for nothing.

And if I catch you moving before I reach that rise out yonder, I'll send a slug through your heart. So long, buddy. So long! It ain't my fault you've been a sucker."

Sam Belton did not move; grimly, with despairing eyes, he watched the other trudging along, loaded with the gun, and the one good water bag, and the gold. Full well he realized the terrible odds against him. He was without water; he was inexperienced. In a short time the temperature would mount to one hundred and twenty. It would mean death. And the bandit? Sam had seen enough of that wiry old body to know that it could endure almost anything. Years of bitter hardship had reduced Mojave Tom to a mere bundle of skin and bones. He required a minimum of water, and he understood every whim of the desert. He was bound to get through.

And yet—there were those pleasant days in the mine shaft and the soft nights under the stars. But this was life!

Slowly and gradually, the desert rat was drawing nearer to the rise; Sam could see him looking back now and then; finally he hesitated. Just as he arrived at the crest the bandit lifted his arm in apparent bravado, waving a mocking farewell. In an instant, Sammy Belton leaped forward, picking up what was left in the vain hope that something could be salvaged. The food was spoiled, his guns broken, and one of the water bags was empty; but as he picked it up, he spotted the other. An exclamation of joy sprang to his lips.

The second bag was still two thirds full!

A bullet hole in the upper section of the bag told the story; it had been propped against a rock and the water had run out only as far as the perforation. Sam Belton snatched it up and weighed the contents. The gold was gone, but here was something far more precious. Once again he measured the distance to the mountains. Could he make it? He might do it by circling the ridge ahead of him so as to avoid the bandit's rifle; after that, he could sneak up to the canyon. Even the buzzard seemed to understand; as the young man started out through the hot sands, the bird of ill-omen swooped a last time and then speeded ahead. Belton noted that he was following his partner.

A prophecy? Perhaps. Sammy Belton had a superstitious belief in these augurs of calamity. They could scent death from afar; he knew not how. And yet he was certain that no bird could foretell the doom of a desert rat like Mojave Tom. As he looked, he happened to reach behind his back; his hand touched something at his hip. His binoculars! In his anxiety and haste he had forgotten them. Eyes! At least he could see farther than his enemy. The thought was encouraging. He snatched them up, and saw miles and miles of desert!

It was early when he started. First, he circled the ridge and entered the open stretch to the north, hitting into the sandy waste and plugging doggedly along. To the south, he could see the other, scarcely more than a dot making his certain way toward the canyon. The older man had the shorter cut and the easier going. Likewise, he had food and plenty of water. Right now they were equal, but the man with food had the advantage. Also, there were other ridges which Sam would be compelled to negotiate, climbing and fighting to retain his own. No. There was no hope of winning the race—if he came out alive he would be lucky. Besides, he could not venture too near that rifle. Nevertheless, he might look. Through the binoculars he distinguished the other, trudging confidently with the easy swing of a man inured to the desert. The sight brought a lump into his throat.

"No," he muttered. "Had any one told me the truth, I wouldn't have believed it. And that paper—— Why didn't I believe it? I guess he was right when he called me a sucker. Oh, well!"

Sam had already come several miles and the water was partly consumed; but he knew how to economize. He drank carefully, in small swallows, to get the utmost from the liquid. After all, it was merely a question of calculation; so much water to go into his body and so much to perspire. Not a particle to be wasted. He could almost tell the mileage; by careful use he had enough water to last two thirds of the way; the remaining distance he would have to make out of sheer endurance. But just when he arrived at his estimate, he entered the stretch of a dry soda lake; the place was between two hills, glistening like ground glass, burning like flame. In an instant a hot wind was crackling against his face, blinding him with its torture. Thirst came again. And what a thirst! The place was an oven. In ten minutes he was struggling with his desire to drink. Water! Water! But he kept on, repeating to himself as he walked.

"I can only have so much—no more. I won't take a drink until I reach that rock out yonder."

But he was in the desert, and the boulder he had designated proved to be far away. On, on, he continued, until he could endure no longer. Wearily and eagerly he took the water bag and lifted it to his lips. Then——

He did just the wrong thing. The water was good; so good that he could not stop drinking. The simple truth was that he had defied the equation he had laid out for himself, and in so doing, his thirst had become the master. When he finally stopped, he had drunk too much. But it had restored his reason, given him needed strength. With jaw set and eyes focused, he headed onward. Another ridge; then a stretch of sands, and still another ridge. With those last drops of water, he managed a great distance. Finally, he thought of looking for his rival in the south. Out in the plain he could distinguish a dot, but it was not moving. Time and again he focused the glasses, but each time the spot was the same.

Something had happened!

But that did not worry Sam Belton; his own water was now gone, and the sun was still in the heavens. The canyon was looming ahead, but he knew it was miles away. If he did not reach it in the next few hours, he would be done for. On, on, he went, trudging, plodding, each step a torture to his drying body. His tongue grew thick; his lips were cracked. Soon the canyon became a blur, nearer and nearer, and yet so far away. Would he ever reach it? The mountains loomed—like a vast wall of nightmare vision—mocking his misery. Water! Water! His brain throbbed; blackness danced before his eyes. Time and again he sucked at the spout of the water bag. He stumbled along, mumbling and incoherent—with the urge of a dying man fighting subconsciously. Then came a lapse. He felt something against his cheek. He reached out his hand!

He was clutching sand!

Evidently, he had fallen on his face; how long he had been unconscious he did not know. But he must get up—keep moving. Ahead of him somewhere would be the spring—water! Again came that nightmare of desire, torturing the parched, closed throat and the thickened lips. Yet, somehow, his mind cleared; he remembered that he had to keep fighting, that he was in the prime of youth, that he had still a great deal to live for. No. He would not die. He would struggle on, on his hands and knees, inch by inch, until the end.

How long he fought, he did not know; but at length he came to a hard,

traveled surface. The air suddenly became cooler. A wind fanned his face, and with the breeze he picked up strength; he even managed to struggle to his feet, staggering along the trail. Darkness had settled; the moon was shining. Then—he sensed it—moisture just ahead! Like a thirst-crazed horse he hurried forward. There was a splash at his feet!

It was the spring! Or at least, it was a puddle. It really did not matter so long as it was wet. The taste was alkaline and brackish, but it was good. And, fortunately, it was only a few mouthfuls, a mere cupful, that had seeped into the imprint of some wandering hoof. Had it been the real spring, Belton would have drunk himself to death; as it was, he lay still until his mind began to clear. His recollection came back. Oh, yes! Now he knew it all. He had been fighting, fighting, and he had almost died. Soon he straightened up, studied the landscape and found the mother spring farther along the trail. This water was pure and cool. In half an hour he was his real self, alert, aggressive. The night was silvered by a full moon shining out of the east. It was probably about eleven o'clock. What suffering he had gone through.

After that, he lay down, merciful sleep coming to him almost instantly. When he woke it was breaking day; the sun sprinkling the eastern rim with upshot rays. Once again, Sam sought the spring, drinking deeply. Vastly refreshed, he looked around. The pool was bubbling from some overhanging rocks to which a hard-beaten trail led up. Here and there lay a number of boulders with the débris of bygone travelers scattered here and there—tin cans, scraps of canvas, even bones. Horse and burro tracks were numerous. Belton began rummaging among the débris. Suddenly he gave a shout. He could scarcely believe his eyes. But there, sure enough, cached between two boulders, was a canvas sack, with a shining object protruding from one end. In an instant he had pulled it out, revealing several cans of tomatoes, some cans of corn, and some dry beans. In no time he had pried the tins open with his knife, and was eating the best breakfast he had ever tasted.

But what of Mojave Tom?

Sammy Belton had almost forgotten him; at first, he had taken it for granted that his former partner had beaten him to the spring and passed on his way. But now he suddenly remembered—just before the blur of torture, he had gazed through the binoculars at an object on the sand. Something might have happened. So he climbed up one of the bluffs and began a search of the valley. Sure enough, the dot was still there—several miles out, apparently lifeless. Yes, he was certain that it was a man. Close by, he noticed something else, smaller still, but moving around. With an exclamation of horror, he cried out.

"A buzzard! Look! He isn't coming up close because the other must be still alive. Hey? And look over there to the southward. Here comes another. Lord!"

The buzzard flight! Already, the string of birds was winging along from the dim horizon. Soon they would gather at their grim convention. The sight was maddening. Sam Belton bit his lips. The man down there had been his partner, had worked with him, shared his bed and food. That was sufficient.

"Gosh!" he breathed. "What could have happened? And how he must be suffering! Poor chap! I had a taste of that yesterday and I know. And—and—he wasn't so bad at that. Just—he simply couldn't withstand his weakness. And he's a man, the same as I."

By this time he had reached the spring and was filling up the water sack; then he gathered the extra cans

of tomatoes. And just as he was about to leave, he discovered another bag, abandoned, but still good enough to hold water. With the two bags, he headed out for the plain.

Two hours later he had come closer to the motionless dot. The vultures were in solemn assembly now, grouped off to one side. But there was something wrong. One of them would walk close to the prostrate form, stretch out a long neck of investigation and return solemnly to his companions.

Waiting for a man to die!

Sammy Belton prayed for a gun. Certainly, Mojave Tom was far gone, or he would be protecting himself. Finally one of the birds spotted the new arrival coming across the sands. A dozen weird heads were thrust up to spy his movements. Then, first one, and then another, took to protesting flight. Belton waved his arms.

"Get out of here!" he yelled. "You curs of the air. Get!"

A few minutes later he had rushed up to the body and was looking down at Mojave Tom. The man was lying prone on his face, but his outthrust arm moved spasmodically. The rifle was close to the clutching fingers. He was still alive; not much more.

"Mojave! Oh Tom!" Sammy Belton was kneeling now. "Tom, old boy!" he cried. "Answer me. Are you hurt? What's the matter?"

Then, with an exclamation, he remembered. What a fool he was! Water, of course! Water! The man's lips were swollen, his face almost lifeless. Slowly and tenderly, Sammy Belton drew the stricken form to an upright position and lifted the water sack. Just a few precious drops on the end of the tongue. Then some to the back of the neck, bathing it. Then Sam washed the unconscious face. Again, a few drops on the end of the tongue. The lids quivered; the eyes gleamed. The mouth opened for the precious liquid. This time Tom administered a tiny drink, then he again bathed the hands and face.

"Poor old Tom!" he muttered. "He might have been bad, but he was a mighty fine pal while he lasted. Huh! What am I talking about? He's a man! Hey, Tom? Don't you know me? It's Sammy. Your pal, Sammy. I'm here to pull you through. There, now, old-timer. Sit up. Dog-gone your old hide! That's it. Easy now. In a few more minutes you'll be hopping around like a two-year-old."

The eyes were conscious now; the man lifted his hand to his face. His whole body swaying, his eyes peering up at his rescuer; Tom nodded weakly.

"Uh-uh!" he mumbled. "Goin' to kill me, I suppose. Well, it's your turn now. There's the gold. You got me dead to rights. Only please take the guns and do it merciful. That's more than I deserve. More than I give to you. I——"

He could say no more; he opened his mouth for water. Even when condemned to death, a man will crave a drink. This time he was able to absorb a considerable amount.

"Tom, Tom," cried the youth. "I'm not going to kill you. What in the world are you thinking of? Forget it. There now. Take it easy. Why should I shoot you? You're going out with me. Can't you understand? It wasn't your fault. I was——"

He was silenced by the other's wondering stare; the old man's gaze was steadfast, as if he were looking at a vision; but not a whisper came from his lips.

"What happened?" asked the youth. "You didn't fall from thirst. You had plenty of water. What——"

"It was my leg," interrupted the other. "Served me right for playing the crook! I was crossing over a rock when the durn old foot went back on me and turned clean under. And then, just to

give me good measure, I fell on the water sack and plumped out the cork. Every last drop was wasted. That was yesterday afternoon. You say you're going to take me out. But you can't. I've only got one leg. It's—you'd better get the rifle, Sam, and make a good job of it."

But Sam Belton was opening a can of corn; then he took one of tomatoes.

"There!" he exclaimed when he had finished. "Now, then, we'll get some of this stuff under our belts, and see what we see. Hey? You want to remember that I weigh two hundred pounds and I'm young and husky. If you can't walk, I'll carry you. But you're going out as my pal and pardner. Savvy? And I don't care who you are, and what you did. It's enough to know that you're a human being. After we get out, it will be your own business."

A half hour later the two men began their terrible trek across the sands, the older one leaning on the younger and hobbling on his one good leg. They went a short distance and then rested. Most of the time the young man lugged the other upon his back, fighting his way toward the canyon. All the while, the older man kept protesting that he wasn't worth it. Through the afternoon and into the sunset they toiled; but at length they arrived at the welcome spring. Sam Belton dropped his burden and began bandaging Tom's wounded foot. The water was life saving. A few minutes sufficed to build a fire. The young man was cheerful in spite of his fatigue.

"Well, Tom," he said, looking up from the tiny blaze, "we made her. Hey? Now, if we only had some coffee! Gee, old-timer, it's good to see you here. Why, why, what's the matter?"

There was a look in Mojave Tom's face which Sam Belton could not fathom; it was the same soft sympathy which had been manifest through all their days of mining. The old Tom! More than that, there was a smile on his face.

"Coffee?" he said enigmatically. "Hey? So you'd like some coffee? Huh? Mebbe you'd like a feast just to celebrate? So would I, because—well, we've both learned a lesson. And what do you say we have it? They's lots of things possible if you just know how."

Was the old man going crazy? Sam Belton was just watching him; he could not understand. Again Tom smiled.

"A fat chance!" cried the youth.

"Oh, I don't know," came the answer. "Didn't you come here and find some corn and tomatoes? How do you suppose they got here? Answer me that. Tell you what, Sam, I've got a hunch! Something tells me that if you wander up yonder ravine and look behind a red boulder, you'll find something to surprise you. How about it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Try it and see. It ain't a-goin' to hurt you just to look."

The old man smiled as Sam Belton disappeared around the curve; and that smile had grown to a grin when, a few minutes later, the youth appeared loaded down like a pack mule, with cans and provisions of all sorts. But his load was not as great as his wonder.

"Dog-gone it," he said. "Why, you old horn toad! What do you mean? Coffee, I'll say! Tom, I'm beginning to think you've played me a trick."

"What did you find?"

"Find?" Sam cried. "Why ask me that when you know just what was there? A whole grocery store piled up in a rock cave. And that inscription on the sign! Let's see if I can repeat it?

"Stranger! Take and be welcome! But remember there are others behind you. Take what you need. No more. Give your first thanks to God. And if you have any left, remember Mojave Tom, who has been lost himself and knows what it is all about.

"You! Tom, you knew it all the while. And here—here I thought you were a crook. Please tell me what it is all about. All I know is that you came and helped me with the mine; and then one night I picked up a paper. It said you were a crook. But"—the young man nodded toward the ravine—"now I know better."

Mojave Tom had picked up a stick and was stirring the fire; he looked up slowly.

"Yes," he answered. "I saw you pick up that paper right after I dropped it. Fact is, I dropped it on purpose. Did you believe what it said?"

"No, not then," said Sam. "I couldn't, until what happened out in the desert and—well, I couldn't believe it even then. But I sort of had to. Hey? Dog-gone your old hide, you look hurt! Have I said something?"

Once again the old man poked the fire; for a moment he did not speak; then he said slowly:

"No, you ain't said nothing to hurt me, Sam. Not a word. Fact is, I'm awful glad. Let me explain. You see, I'm just Mojave Tom. But I ain't no crook. Instead of that, I'm the richest man that ever lived in the desert. And I've got gold—scads of it. They ain't no man ever found as many bonanzas as me; nor had more luck. All my life I've been a-livin' in the desert, 'cause I love it, and finding more and more gold. Mebbe it's luck and mebbe it's because I know how to go after it. Howsomever, now I'm an old man and——"

"And what?" asked the wondering Sam Belton. "Go on!"

"Well," came the answer, "you see, I just lived in the desert. Didn't never think of getting married, and the first thing you know, here I was a dried-up buzzard with neither chick nor child. Just an old man all alone. And years ago I wanted a son. Now there is no chance. So if I couldn't have one of my own, I'd take some one else's. Only, I wanted him to be a real man; he'd have to be a son of the desert, and he'd have to possess certain qualities, such as—such as you showed to-day."

Once again Tom stopped; for a moment he gazed up at the heavens, thinking. Sammy Belton waited; and finally the old fellow went on.

"Yes," he said, "that's the way it was. "I didn't want to waste my time on no ingrate, nor any young whippersnapper who'd turn out a selfish brute. So I just figgered out my own way of finding out. You see—— Well, I was merely going to let the desert decide for me.

"And then, you came into the country in a mighty big hurry. Didn't stop for nothing because you was headin' for your claim. Hey? And when I heard that there was a boy out here digging gold to put him through mining school, I was sartain that you was the one. But I intended to put you through the test. That's why I had Collins of the *Star* print that paper for me. I paid him to write some sort of a story so's I'd look like a crook. And then I cut it out—just as I would from a newspaper. After that, I hunted you up in the desert—coming in like you saw me that first day. Hey? And we went to mining. And I knew right away that you had everything—only I was afraid. You see, I hated to let you find the paper because I had already grown to love you like the son I wanted. I didn't want to lose you. I guess you understand the rest."

The old man stopped; Sammy Belton nodded; he was learning a lot.

"Yes," he said at last, "I understand part of it. It was all a scheme. But surely, you didn't know that you were going to sprain your ankle? You——"

"No, of course not. That was an accident. Howsomever, I aimed on falling on the sands where you could see me, and waiting to find out what you'd do. You remember I didn't touch your

binoculars; and when I shot the water bags I hit one near the top. I knew you'd get through. And for years I'd kept this cache here at the spring. But it worked out altogether too real. In fact, if you hadn't come back, I'd 'a' been a dead one. But you did—and that's what counts. The old desert is right—it takes her to find out whether a man is a man or a fool. And when the desert decides in his favor, you can trust that man through the remainder of his natural life."

"I—I was merely doing my duty!" protested Sam Belton.

"I know that," came the answer. "But it means an almighty lot to me. It means, too, that I've discovered a full-fledged pardner for several million dollars. And you're going to have that education. Then, when you're through college, we're goin' in for some real mining. And I've got the claims for you to develop—scientific. Sammy, my boy, I'm the happiest man in the world. As soon as this leg is cured, we'll go out and make out some papers. Now, son, shake hands with an old-timer. And"—his eyes were brimming over—"let me call you son."

FOR BETTER APPLES

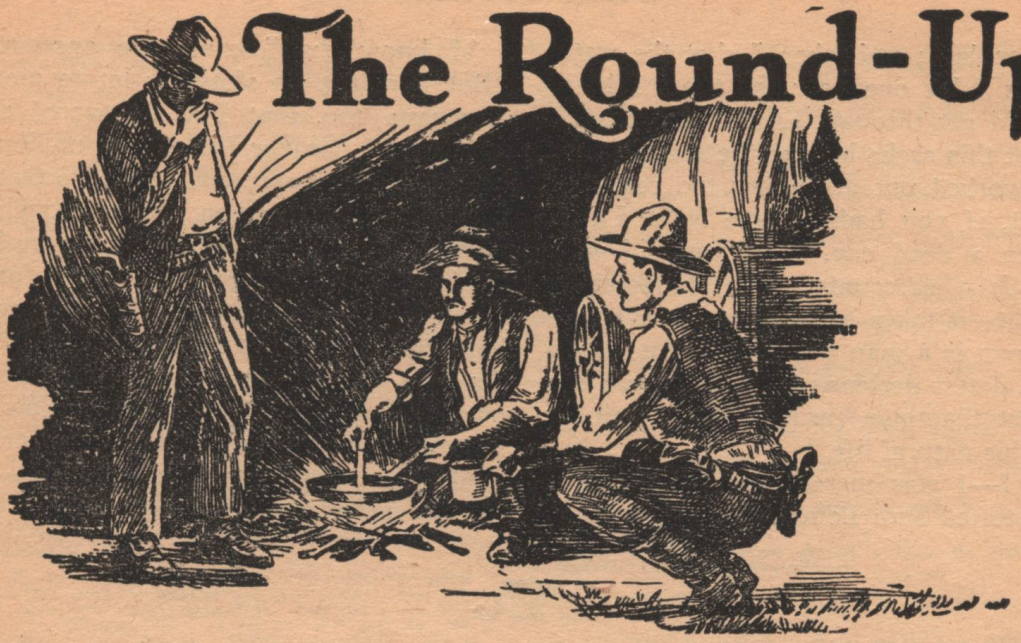
FRUIT-TREE seeds to plant in their own gardens are offered to prairie farmers in Canada by the government experimental station at Morden, Manitoba. Ambitious farmers may be encouraged to accept this offer on learning that after several years of seed planting the Canadian department of agriculture has developed varieties of apple trees suited to the climatic conditions of the prairie provinces, and there are no less than sixteen of these varieties. Evidently, standardization is not the ideal in the apple world, as it seems to be becoming elsewhere, and there will be apples to suit every taste and various climates. Some of the varieties planted, or rather produced, by the government have been pronounced good, and two grades have been classified as "very good." But the ideal apple is still to be achieved, and the experts point out that it will be several more generations before the perfect apple appears upon the scene. It behooves the ambitious farmer to go to the root of the matter and apply to the government without delay for fruit-tree seeds.

OIL IN WYOMING

A GOOD grade of black crude oil has been recently discovered about thirty miles northwest of Casper, Wyoming. The All States Oil & Gas Co., who have been drilling in this section, estimate that they can produce about three hundred barrels a day. The officials are most enthusiastic, as the oil heads started flowing when they had penetrated the sand but a few inches. Government experts believe this territory will be good for twenty-five years more as previous production has come from shallow sands.

Oil men from Denver expect that this find of the deep sands will result in great activity among those who own land in the districts where these new discoveries have been made.

The Round-Up



LET us start off with what William C. Willsay, Tulsa, Oklahoma, is pleased to call "Horse Facts." Come on then, Bill, let's have some of them:

"Jest as you say, Boss. Here goes:

"It is not well to use a whip on the horse from which you shoot; if so, when you raise the gun to fire he is sure to be unsteady, feeling a dread of the whip.

"A horse can draw about seven times as much as he can carry. An average horse equals six men at a pull.

"A healthy horse will live on water alone twenty-one days.

"He will live without eating or drinking about fifteen days.

"He will live six days if fed, but without water.

"The average length of life of the horse, in all localities and under all circumstances, is about twenty-one years. He requires about five gallons of water daily.

"The age of the horse may be determined by observing the teeth at the times when they appear, are shed, and replaced, and by noting the alterations in their form and markings. At two years, all are milch teeth, which are easily distinguished from the permanent by being smaller, whiter, and having necks. At three years, there are two permanent teeth, central incisors. At four years, there are four permanent teeth, central and lateral incisors. At five years, all are permanent teeth.

"From this time on, the age of the horse is decided by the marks on the teeth. At six years, the marks on the central incisors are worn out, and the points of the tushes are blunted.

"At seven years, the marks on the central and lateral incisors are worn out, those on the corner incisors still showing.

"At eight years, all the cavities are filled up. Beyond this age the criteria are uncertain. The markings on the teeth, except those of crib biters, are more distinct in the upper than in the lower jaw.

"When full-mouthed, the horse will have forty teeth, twenty in each jaw. The mare possesses only thirty-six.

"The strongest part of the horse and the center of action is a little in the rear of his shoulder blades, hence riding rather forward in the saddle is a

relief to the horse, while leaning back and bearing upon his loins—his weakest part—causes much fatigue."

From domestic, we'll now turn to wild animals. It's going to be bears, this time. Mark W. Sweet, Route 3, Box 91, Memphis, Tennessee, will do the growlin':

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Stir up the fire a little, and give an old-timer just a little room. I've rid quite a piece, and I'd like to sit a while.

"I've been hearin' all of the tales from the folks at the Round-up about shooting, antelopes, bad hosses and how to handle 'em, et cetera. It's about time to change the subject, don't you think?

"Let's talk about bears. I hunted and trapped 'em in the northern part of Idaho, many years ago, close up to the Canadian line, among the big mountains. One I have in mind, a big grizzly, was the first wild bear I ever saw. There were nigh eighteen inches of snow on the ground, and it was as cold as heck. Old Man Sorley was with me—an old trapper and hunter, supposed to know all about all kinds of bears. We were armed with a .22 Winchester and a .32 Colt rifle. Neither gun is large enough to hunt big game with, but we used them more to kill the game we had taken in traps. We were not out hunting bears.

"We were crossing a deep gully, over which a great fir had fallen, and were using it as a bridge, being mighty careful to brush away the snow for the next step on it, so that we would make no misstep an' fall, when, about halfway across, we noticed what appeared to be a big brush pile, down in the bottom of the gully. The snow covering it did not look just right. It was off color, so to speak—kind of a yellowish cast to it, like it was sort of het up underneath.

"We turned and made our way down to it. The old man said it was mighty funny, for he'd never heard of a bear holing up under a brush pile, yet here were all of the indications of a resting place for a bear's winter sleep.

"Of course, the wind was from the north, so, scratching away the snow on the north of the pile, and also on the south, we hunted up some pitch splinters from a pine stump and started a big smoke; she drew right under that pile o' brush.

"After our fire was going to suit us, we made our way back to the fallen tree and watched. Soon, some of the brush caught and made things mighty hot for whatever was under the pile.

"We soon heard mutterings, deep, throaty ones, and sounds as if some sore-headed man was talking to himself; then the pile sort of heaved, cracking the snow on top of the pile and making it slide off around the edges. Near the base, on the east side, up the gully, suddenly appeared the head of the biggest bear I ever saw. He was soon all out from under the pile, kind of shaky on his feet, but it didn't seem to take him long to stiffen up good and strong.

"The old man nudged me in the ribs and whispered, 'Son, fer Heaven's sake, don't shoot.' That was all a waste of breath on his part, for I wouldn't have shot at that bear if I had had a cannon.

"Now you tell one.

"Our old magazine is doing fine. Keep up the good work. I haven't missed a copy for years. I think she is doing better the older she gets. I will not praise one author, for I would not know which one to select."

Now, let's do our singin' right here and now, then there will be no chance of our missin' out on it. Then stand, sit, or lie, to raise your voices in song; you can do as you like as to this, but we do insist that you raise 'em good. Off you go, then, with:

THE BOSTON BURGLAR.

I was born in Boston City, a city you all know well,
Brought up by honest parents, the truth to you I'll tell;
Brought up by honest parents and raised most tenderly,
Till I became a roving man at the age of twenty-three.

My character was taken then, and I was sent to jail.
My friends they found it was in vain to get me out on bail.
The jury found me guilty, the clerk he wrote it down,
The judge he passed me sentence, and I was sent to Charleston town.

You ought to have seen my aged father a-pleading at the bar,
Also my dear old mother a-tearing of her hair,
Tearing of her old gray locks as the tears came rolling down,
Saying, "Son, dear son, what have you done, that you are sent to Charleston town?"

They put me aboard an eastbound train one cold December day,
And every station that we passed, I'd hear the people say:
"There goes a noted burglar, in strong chains he'll be bound,
For the doing of some crime or other he is sent to Charleston town."

There is a girl in Boston, she is a girl that I love well,
And if I ever gain my liberty, along with her I'll dwell;
And when I regain my liberty, bad company I will shun,
Night-walking, gambling, and also drinking rum.

Now, you who have your liberty, pray keep it if you can,
And don't go around the streets at night to break the laws of man;
For if you do you'll surely rue and find yourself, like me,
A-serving out my twenty-one years in the penitentiary.

Comes now a young feller from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Werner Krometke by name:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I am a student of Hattiesburg High School and have been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for four or five years and haven't missed an issue. My father and sister are also regular readers. We think that the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is the best magazine on the market and that the authors are the best to be got.

"I have just finished reading the last chapter of 'Tiger Den,' by John Frederick; I think it is a wow. My favorite authors are Max Brand, Ray Humphreys, and Walt Coburn. Why not have Max Brand create another character like The Duster or Geraldi?

"I wish you every success."

This will please Jack Gregory and Walt Coburn in particular, and all the other writers in general. Gregory is one of our oldest old-timers. Walt Coburn we brought up on a bottle, our very own selves. Yes, he sold us his first story. It's now Joe L. Mote, Watseka, Illinois, who'll do the talkin':

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Have you got room for another hungry one? I just couldn't keep still any longer; I had to tell you how much I liked Jackson Gregory's story, 'The Trail to Paradise.' Also, I have started Coburn's story, 'Wet Cattle,' and it starts like a humdinger. In fact, I like all of the stories published in the good old WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

"An Upholder of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE."

In Next Week's Issue—
"WIND FOOT," by GUTHRIE BROWN

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.

IN the Alaska country south of the Yukon is the Feather River Glacier Basin, a little valley to the north of Juneau, in the midst of the heavy-timbered mountains of the coast range.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have a homestead in the Feather River Glacier country in Alaska, about thirty-nine miles north of Juneau, and I'd like to tell you-all a few things about that man's country. Yes, to begin with, Alaska *is* a man's country. Kind, strong people live there. Of course, there are treacherous hombres who invade that country just as they find their way into any other land, but the marshals soon get these men.

Now you-all know that there are lots of glacier lands in Alaska. The Feather River Glacier country is only one of them. The glacier-country's boundaries are generally high mountain slopes, covered with heavy growths of pine and spruce. The glacier land is usually barren and covered with rocks, or if it is real old glacier land there are usually small trees starting in the valleys or basins. These basins are anywhere from one half to a mile or more in width. The Feather River Glacier land where I have my homestead is about five miles square, and has about fifteen acres of tillable land. Heavy timber on high mountains surrounds it, and there are two beautiful trout streams that pass through it. It is a wonderful place for ducks and geese, and I have shot bear from my cabin window. Deer and caribou are very plentiful, also ptarmigan and eagles. Mountain goats and sheep can be seen from my cabin at most any time. Wolves can be heard at all times in the evening in the winter.

The summers in Alaska literally put California and Oregon to shame. The nights are clear and warm, and to see the northern lights dance on the snow-covered peaks about one's cabin can hardly be described. Along the coast from the Aleutian Islands to Seattle it is usually warm and wet in the winter months, but over the coast range of mountains in the interior it gets real cold. It is beautiful to take the trail on one of these clear cold days and see the wild life dart across your path.

My native State is California, folks, but I like to think of Alaska as my real home. I am a young man and have traveled around a lot, and I'd like to exchange yarns with the nature lovers. MILTON E.

Care of The Tree.

Bronc busters and horse trainers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: The "knock-down-and-drag-out" method of bronc busting is no longer used by the best horse trainers who still call themselves "bronc busters." Breaking a horse—if one means literally what the word implies—means breaking that splendid and proud spirit that makes the horse the most beautiful and the most loved of all our

animals. And "breaking" also suggests breaking a habit. Now, if a horse has been handled right, he has no habits to be broken of. For before a horse has been handled he does not know a good habit from a bad one. And with a trainer who does not know his business, a horse, in order to avoid punishment, or to get his own way, will very often become mean. Some horses are naturally treacherous, but unless they have been handled before, they have no mean habits. They are just a little harder to handle, but with the proper methods any horse can be trained. The results of mean trainers are mean horses. And in my way of thinking there is no such thing as a mean horse naturally. Of course, if a horse has been handled wrong in the first place, kindness, and nothing else, is often a very slow process. But humane methods can be used in any and every instance. There are all kinds of methods that can be used on him, such as safe ways of throwing him, and also ways of controlling his forefeet.

Some folks contend that Mexican horses are meaner than ours. Mean horses are made so by mean handling. So it would indicate that the Mexicans as a whole are not good trainers. If bits, spurs, and quirts are used for the purpose of breaking him, is it any wonder that the horse will not respond to kindness? How quickly a horse will learn to live under the cruel conditions forced on him! Kindness would naturally be wasted after such treatment as the Spanish bit, the spurs, and the quirt!

Folks, if your idea of an excellent mount is one that you cannot ease up on, make friends with, and with which you must be constantly on your guards—then it is my opinion that you have a queer idea of what an excellent mount is. I am not a horse trainer, but I am an observer and lover of horses and have handled stock more or less all my life. My sister and I run a riding stable and are constantly changing horses. So we are in a very good position to observe the different types of horses. We see them at their best and at their worst.

VIRGINIANS.

Care of The Tree.

The pack country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I lived up in British Columbia for two years, up where we had to pack everything over an eight-mile pack trail with horses and then load it on a scow and row it for twenty miles through three lakes. I was pretty small then, but I'm here to say that I loved the life in those Canadian open spaces!

I'm nearly twenty now, and have spent most of my life in the State of Washington. I'm anxious to see the world, folks, but I have never been away from home much because somehow I never seemed to find the right buddy. What I'd like to do is to find a good pard who would like to start out with me—work a while, and then pull freight for a new camping ground. I am not afraid of the wide, open spaces, nor am I afraid of hard work. I'm also a square shooter.

BEN K.

Care of The Tree.

Alaska is the land of the glacier basins and the homestead country of the far Northwest. South of the Yukon is the Feather River Basin, in the heavy-timbered country of the coast range. Wear your friend-maker badges, folks, and meet the homesteader from the glacier-basin country north of Juneau.

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.

Kansas puncher.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young puncher from Kansas, seventeen, and mighty anxious to learn something about the life of a forest ranger. I'd like to hear from some of the forest rangers of the West, so come on, you rangers, let's see what you can tell about your forest-ranging job and the country of the great forests. And—all letters will be answered.

BEN STEINER.

Wilson, Kansas.

The pack-horse trail.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm just a-wondering if some of you folks would be interested in a saddle and pack-horse trip into the wilds of the West. I am planning such a trip, and would like to make it *muy pronto*. I have lived in the West for fifteen years and know ranch life and the life of the open real well. I have taken numerous saddle and pack-horse

trips in the Colorado Mountains, and know something about the pack-horse trail. I want to say that if a hombre is looking for grandeur in nature, Colorado sure is the place to see it, and I've seen some other worth-while places, too, including the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River and Sky-line Drive. The highest swinging bridge in the world crosses it at an elevation of over one thousand feet. But there isn't anything, folks, to beat old Colorado!

Let me hear from you people who are interested in this part of the West, and especially those of you who like horseback riding.

F. D. GREEN.

502 Pike Avenue, Canyon City, Colorado.

Prairie country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was raised on a homestead in Colorado and have helped prove up on one here, in Wyoming, so I know something about homesteading. What I am now looking for, folks, is a place that can be farmed or worked as a hay ranch. I have lived on the prairies all my life, and I'd like to find a place that I wouldn't have to clear. I believe there are some homesteads worth taking if one can only locate them, and I would like to hear from folks who can give me information about such homestead lands.

I have traveled around quite a lot in the last six years and can tell something of the Northwest. Denver is as far south as I've ever been, but I've been as far north as the Athabasca River in Alberta.

And, yes, one more thing. I would like to meet up with a good pal. I am twenty-five. Well, come on, hombres, let's blaze a trail.

VERN HENDRICKSON.

Route 3, Box 31, Douglas, Wyoming.

Top hand.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm twenty-two, and a waddy from over south San Antonio way. I'm a top hand on a small cow ranch fifteen miles out of San Antonio. I'm looking for a buddy—yes, there's a place waiting for him here, and I don't care whether he is a tenderfoot or not. You see, folks, it's this way. I have had the misfortune to get my face pretty much smashed up, and so I stay away from the crowd. Yep, I'm one of the hombres who has many a yarn to tell, for I'm a real son of the great West.

Well, folks, just you send along some letters *muy pronto*, for I get pretty lonesome here on the ranch. And, pards, let's hear from you.

WADDY FROM SAN ANTONIO WAY.

Care of The Tree.

Over Saskatchewan way.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a young fellow of nineteen, am a pretty fair rider, and was raised with the dogies, so I know a little about ranch life. At present I'm on a mixed farm in Saskatchewan, twenty miles from the boundary line. I'm getting tired of this district, though, and would like to hear from some of the cowboys and ranch hands of other sections of the Canadian country.

HENRY WILSON.

Box 96, Lampman, Saskatchewan, Canada.

"I am looking for a pal who would like to make a motor trek through the White Mountains this summer, folks." Address this young man as Douglas, of Ontario, in care of The Tree.

"North Carolina is my home stomping ground, folks. I'd like to hear from some of you hombres who live along the East coast, as I intend hitting the trail very soon. I'm twenty-six." This new member is Horace Revels, Henrietta, North Carolina.

"My home is in the little town of Gananoque, the Canadian gateway to the far-famed Thousand Islands," says Marion Marshall. Address the letters, folks, to Gananoque, Ontario, Canada.

"Here's hoping I corral a few good Pen Pals from the West, the Southwest, and Alaska. Any of you hombres who live in the mountains and timberlands write to me, and you sure will get an answer. I can tell you about the Virginia timberlands where I lived the greater part of my life." This hombre is George Smith, 5626 South Marshfield Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

"Folks, I am planning to go West or Southwest this spring, and I would like to hear from all of you who live in the West. In return, I will yarn about the Northern States, and especially about the city of Chicago," says P. V. Baker, 8527 Buffalo Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. He is twenty, folks.

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.

ONE topic which seems never to lose its popular appeal is that of Uncle Sam's Western irrigation projects. The last hombre seeking information along this line is Al F., of Dayton, Ohio. "I've been a steady reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for the last five years, Mr. North, and never miss your department. You've had a good deal to say from time to time about the government irrigation projects in the West, but I've never seen anything about the Shoshone Project, and that happens to be the one I'm interested in. I'd like to know about the location, climate, engineering features, crops, transportation facilities, and principal towns. In other words, I'd like all the facts you have."

We are mighty glad to be able to oblige Al, for we share our readers' enthusiasm for the Western irrigation projects and welcome a chance to talk about a new one. The Shoshone Project is located in the northwestern portion of Wyoming near the Yellowstone National Park. Springs are cool and the summers warm and clear. The frost-free season extends from about May 28th to September 19th.

The engineering features on this project are both numerous and interesting. Among them are the Shoshone Dam, a rubble concrete arch three hundred and twenty-eight feet high placed across the Shoshone River about eight miles above Cody, Wyoming, that makes a lake ten square miles in area and provides four hundred fifty-six thousand and six hundred acre-feet of storage; the Corbett diversion dam; the Corbett Tunnel; the Willwood diversion dam, sixty-eight feet high; a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar power plant at Shoshone Dam; and a very complete canal, and lateral system now constructed, covering seventy-one thousand acres, and an extension for seventeen thousand and six hundred acres additional.

The Shoshone River furnishes an ample water supply. Water for domestic use is obtained in some districts from shallow wells and in others from canals. The topography of the land, in gen-

eral, is suitable for irrigation without prohibitive leveling costs. The soils of the project are varied, some sections having clay soil with a subsoil of coarse gravel, while others are of the sandy loam type.

As for the leading crops, they are alfalfa, sugar beets, potatoes, and wheat. Alfalfa, which has been the main crop of the project since its beginning, has an average yield of about two tons per acre, although many fields produce double that amount. Sugar-beet production is increasing rapidly, and is probably the most profitable line of farming at the present time. Small fruits, berries, and truck do well, and are grown principally for local consumption.

Due to the climate and compact settlement of the project, which are favorable for dairying and poultry raising, many of the successful farmers make these industries the backbone of their operations. Turkeys also do exceptionally well on account of the dry climate, and they represent an important part of the farmers' program. Feeder hogs are extensively raised, and thousands of lambs are fattened on the project for market every year. The timber-covered mountains produce an abundance of summer pasture for range stock, which affords a market for surplus feed grown under irrigation.

Transportation facilities are good. The main line of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad runs through the eastern part of the Frannie division, and a spur from the main line runs through the heart of the project to Cody, Wyoming. The Park to Park Highway passes through Powell and Cody, giving a direct route to the Yellowstone National Park. The principal markets for wheat and fat live stock are Kansas City and Omaha. The local demand consumes most of the forage and dairy products.

Powell, with a population of thirteen hundred, is the principal town, and Deaver and Frannie are smaller railway stations. Billings, Montana, is the nearest city of much importance. Consolidated schools exist at Deaver and Powell, and serve nearly all the projects and some of the adjacent communities. Al will find also many fraternal and social organizations on the project. And if he is interested in outdoor recreation, he'll be glad to hear that the Yellowstone National Park is only half a day's drive from Powell.

Outdoor recreation is certainly the topic that is claiming the attention of J. O. T., of St. Paul, Minnesota, at the present time, judging from the questions he is putting to us. "Do you know anything about Prince Albert Park, up in Saskatchewan, Mr. North?" asks this citizen of the Gopher State. "I've heard some things about it that make me mighty keen to get up there. For instance, I'm bugs on canoeing and I'm told that it is possible to make an entire circuit of this park in a canoe. Is this true? What about camping and fishing? I know this park is new, but if you have any information, please pass it along."

J. O. T.'s information, so far as it goes, is correct. The Prince Albert National Park is the most recent of the Dominion's playgrounds, being only a little over two years old. It is seventy miles from the town of Prince Albert. Probably the most unique feature of this park is its canoeing opportunities, which make a strong appeal to the adventurous hombre. Starting from Waskesiu Lake, the park headquarters, J. O. T. may travel, with brief portage, literally for hundreds of miles, reaching on the west Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River, and on the east the waters flowing into Hudson Bay. In fact, as rumor has reported, the entire circuit of the park may be made by canoe, the route passing through nearly a score of lakes tied together by small streams.

We predict a grand vacation in this park for any water lover. If, when J. O. T. has circumnavigated the park, he is not yet satisfied, he can transfer his canoe and his energies to Monreal Lake, immediately east of the park. This sheet of water is about thirty-four miles in length and seven miles in width, and was for many years a waterway to the Indian hunting grounds.

One of the first concerns of the Canadian government when the park was established, was the creation of an effective fire and game protective service. Trails were cut through the wooded regions, forest telephones constructed, and modern fire-fighting equipment, including portable pumps and power boats, installed. As the park had no telephone communication with the outside world a wireless station was erected which connects with a similar station at Prince Albert.

For the convenience of visitors, an area of beautiful Waskesiu Lake, in close proximity to a fine bathing beach, was cleared and equipped with open fireplaces, kitchen shelters, and other conveniences. A site for business and residential purposes was laid out by a landscape architect, and already a good deal of building has taken place. J. O. T. may enjoy plenty of fishing, too, for pike, pickerel, and lake trout are found in abundance in the streams and lakes.

In fact, they are just about as plentiful as jack rabbits are in some sections of the West. Well, anglers don't as a rule complain about the abundance of fish, although farmers in the past have grown irritated over the presence of droves of rabbits, which every year are the source of considerable loss to young orchards, truck farms, and lettuce patches. Now, however, things are changing, as you can see for yourselves by reading the following questions and answers.

"Is it true, Mr. North, that the fur of the ordinary jack rabbit may be sold to hat manufacturers for a good profit?" asks Fred H., of Phoenix, Arizona. "I've heard that this was the case, and I am greatly interested as these pests do a great deal of damage to my crops every year. How much does the skin of an ordinary jack bring? Any information you may have on this subject will be greatly appreciated, I assure you."

According to reports which have reached our ears, farmers and hunters in seven Western States last season sold eight million bunny skins to hat manufacturers for the tidy sum of two million dollars. In view of the great droves of rabbits which are found in the desert places of Arizona, we can understand that this is good news to Fred and his fellow sufferers. It is said that the skin of an ordinary jack brings between ten and twenty cents. Hides of the huge antelope jack rabbit, found only in the Nogales and Tucson district, should net the hunter approximately forty cents apiece. That is equal to the value of Dakota "white tails," which thus far in the history of the new industry have brought top prices.

This talk about the Baby State reminds us that Charles H., of Oakland, California, is craving a little information about Graham County, Arizona, which we acknowledge is a mighty interesting part of the Southwest. Because we had some information about that section in the department not long ago, and because our space is all used up, we are telling Charles where to write for facts and pamphlets. Anybody else who wants this address may have it for the asking.

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.

HARRISON, BENJAMIN JAMES.—Please write to Mrs. Charles Gotscall, Jetmore, Kansas.

MOMAN, EDWARD WILLIAM.—Twenty-eight years old. Five feet ten inches tall, weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds, dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri, about three years ago. Information appreciated by Clarence Moman, Route 3, Weir, Kansas.

YANK.—Grace sent your letter to me. Was very glad to hear from you. I love you always. Please write to Mother, Adela, Kentucky.

C. M. K.—Please write to Mamma, care of this magazine.

McFADDEN, ELLEN.—Her mother's maiden name was Ellen Gallagher. She married John McFadden, and left Northumberland, England, about 1878. They are believed to have settled in Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by J. Gallagher, care of this magazine.

KANE, E. R. D.—The boys need you. Please come to my sister's or write to your wife, V. K., care of this magazine.

TAYLOR, HARRY L.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in May, 1929. Am all alone. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

CURREN, ALFRED.—Last heard from in Arizona, about four years ago. Please write to Levi Curren, Garrison, North Dakota.

SYKES, ERWIN JERRY.—Twenty-three years old. Blond hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Lived in Dallas, Texas, in 1926. Information appreciated by Pearl Williams, 426 Center Street, Taft, California.

GADDY, JERRY C.—Twenty-eight years old. Brown hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by Pearl Williams, 426 Center Street, Taft, California.

SHANNON, CHESTER CARLTON.—Know everything and would forgive all, if you would write. Helen, care of this magazine.

LEARY, TIMOTHY F.—Wife's name was Catherine G. Foley. They had three children. He left them in Boston, Massachusetts, about twenty years ago. Information appreciated by Daughter Esther, care of this magazine.

HOUGHTON, RALPH OLIVER.—Born in Charlevois, Michigan, about 1882. Had one brother, Ira, and a sister, Mary. A painter. Last heard from in Ajo, Arizona, in 1916. Five feet nine inches tall, brown eyes and hair. Has a scar on upper lip. Information appreciated by D. B. H., care of this magazine.

BOSS, BILLIE.—Information appreciated by G. S., care of this magazine.

HAMP, M. J., or FANNY ST. CLAIR.—Left home in Sabula, Iowa, in 1881. Was in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1884. Information appreciated by Henry B. Hamp, 1145 Thirty-ninth Street, Rock Island, Illinois.

ALLAN, KARL ROBERT.—I try not to worry. Please write to Mother and Dad, same address or care of this magazine.

ARNDT, WREITHIE.—Thirteen years old. Five feet four inches tall, weighs about one hundred pounds, dark, curly hair, blue eyes, and dark complexion. Cyril has gone, and we all want you. Please come home, or write to mother, Mrs. William F. Arndt, No. 750, McCleary, Washington.

POWNALL, KENNETH.—Please write to Mabel Arndt, McCleary, Washington.

SWEARINGEN, JAMES B.—World War veteran. Last known address was East South Temple Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah. Information appreciated by Mrs. Charles Copple, Box 343, Houston, Mississippi.

UNCLE PETE.—You have done nothing all of us are not willing to forgive. Mother loves you. Please write to Alma, care of this magazine.

WORTHY, JIM, and family.—Lived at 1226 East Broadway, Alton, Illinois, in 1927 and 1928. Mr. Worthy is about thirty-two years old, and was working at Wood River, Illinois. Had brown eyes and hair. His wife, Goldie, is about twenty-seven years old, weighs about one hundred and twenty-five pounds, and has blue eyes and brown hair. Information appreciated by Mary Bennett, Box 133, Black Water, Missouri.

GIBBONS, FRED.—John told me that he had a letter from you. I am still waiting to hear. Please write to your pal, Charles, care of this magazine.

WHITE, GEORGE.—When a boy, lived at 1 Arlington Street, Piccadilly, London, England. Last heard from in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Information appreciated by his cousin Rose, Mrs. R. Dafoe, 1331 West Yandotte Street, East Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

NOON, FRED and EVA.—Formerly lived in North Finchley, London, England. Last heard from in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1916. Information appreciated by Mrs. R. Dafoe, 1331 West Yandotte Street, East Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

WEISS, FRED.—Please come back. Write to Babe, care of Dad, 612 Southwest Twenty-fourth Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

SMITHSON, MRS. MATTIE.—Last heard from in Globe, Arizona, with her father and brother, Bud. Information appreciated by a friend, Marvella Morgan, R. D. 2, Box 65, Hamilton, Ohio.

STEWART, EUGENE P.—Last heard from in Globe, Arizona. Information appreciated by Marcella Morgan, R. D. 2, Box 65, Hamilton, Ohio.

LONGWORTH, WILLIAM H.—About fifty years old. Born in Brooklyn, New York. Is believed to have relatives in New York City. A printer. Last seen in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1907. Have valuable information for him or his relatives. Please write to A. K., care of this magazine.

WEEDMARK, HOWARD.—Has not been heard from for twelve years. Information appreciated by his son, Wallace Weedmark, 219 John Street, Rome, New York.

RAY, SILAS R.—Last heard from in Scott County, Arkansas, about thirty-two years ago. Information appreciated by his daughter, Lizzie Cook, Route 4, Box 166, Shawnee, Oklahoma.

McMILLIAN, JAMES.—Of Texas. Was selling cotton seed in Oklahoma in the spring of 1929. Have you forgotten Stillwater and your pal of Perkins? Lost your address. Please write to I. S., care of this magazine.

McCLAIN, PAT.—Mother and sister anxious. Please write to Mrs. Mary Cathey, 517 Hagan Street, Nashville, Tennessee.

NEWSOM, ROY R.—Remember J. S. of Los Angeles? Please write to Richard, care of this magazine.

REPASS, or HURT, FRED.—Have news for you. Please write to T. A. Repass, Tazewell, Virginia.

The consular office of a foreign government, situated in New York, is trying to get in touch with the following people for various reasons: OWEN-WALKER, RICHARD.—Native of Yorkshire, England; came to New York in 1923; studied medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland. **FISHLEY, CLIFFORD GEORGE.**—Native of Jamaica; thirty-seven years old; recently of 164 Putnam Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. **McGOWAN, JAMES.**—Native of Liverpool, England; recently of 594 Third Avenue, New York. **HUTCHINS, ERNEST JOHN.**—Native of Great Britain; an artist; late of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. **GRIFFITHS, EDWARD.**—Thirty-three years old; tattooed between wrist and elbow of right arm; served in the British army during the war; steward on Union Castle line; worked for the Pierce-Arrow Motor Co., in Buffalo, New York; lived at 24 Park Street, and at 56 Wardman Road, Kenmore, Buffalo, New York. **Information concerning the present address of any of the above should be addressed to Box 2, Station P, New York, New York.**

SIMMONS.—Would like to hear from relatives of Daniel or Joseph Britton Simmons, of Harrisburg and Galatia, Illinois. Please write to Mrs. H. B. Fields, 1631 Herald Street, Dallas, Texas.

PETERS, MRS. GERTRUDE DATTEN.—Thirty-two years old. Weighs about one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Has a sister in Seattle, Washington. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, in August, 1927. Information appreciated by D. G. Wilhelm, 2122 Una Street, San Diego, California.

FRANCES, JOHN and JIM.—Were with the old Texas Ranger Show in 1922. Left the show in Texas, and went to California. Believed to have later gone to Iowa. Information appreciated by Grady Flowers, Glen Rose, Texas.

WILLIAMS, N. F.—Was on the U. S. S. "Oklahoma," in 1923. Believed to have people in Gray's Harbor, Washington. Information appreciated by Mrs. Helen Gorman, 1262 East Eighty-seventh Street, Los Angeles, California.

SCOUTT, ANNA.—About twenty-six years old, five feet two inches tall. Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Last heard from in a hospital in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I shall never forget your kindness. The baby's arm is all right now. Please write to Lonely, care of this magazine.

WAGLE, MRS. ADA.—Five feet two inches tall, and has brown eyes. Left home ten years ago. Information appreciated by her son, Lowman, care of this magazine.

GRZYMKO, S. F.—Please write to J. Kamplinski, Jackson, Michigan.

H. F. D.—Twenty-four years old. Five feet five inches tall, weighs about one hundred and forty pounds, gray eyes, brown hair, and ruddy complexion. Left home, in New Jersey, in November, 1929. I am not well and am back at mother's. So lonesome. Forgive everything. Please write to Mae, care of this magazine.

MARKHAM, JEAN.—Lived on Amosland Road, Holmes, Pennsylvania, during 1910 and 1911. Information appreciated by W. J. B., care of this magazine.

SHERPY, LYAL or LEILA, and DOROTHY.—Lived at Faribault, Minnesota, about ten years ago. Please write to Clara, care of this magazine.

CONNELLY, WILLIAM, JAMES, and ELLEN.—Left Barrhead, Scotland, a number of years ago. Information appreciated by M. Ray, Box 274, Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada.

MESLER, HENRY.—Last heard from in Marietta, Ohio. Information appreciated by his daughter, Elizabeth Lindgren, 1346 East Sixty-third Street, Chicago, Illinois.

KUMP, LOUIE FRANK.—Five feet six inches tall, weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Has gray hair and light-blue eyes. When last heard from was staying at the Golden Rod Tourist Camp, in Phoenix, Arizona. Information appreciated by his daughter, Jessie L. Kump, El Paso, Texas.

NORWOOD, EVERETTE T.—Forty-two years old. Five feet eight inches tall, weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds, dark complexion, brown hair and eyes. Last heard from in Georgia. Left Eupora, Mississippi, about ten years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Fannie Lamb, 445 Wood Street, Water Valley, Mississippi.

GOULD, ERNEST L.—Forty-nine years old. Five feet eleven inches tall, weighs about two hundred and fifteen pounds. Left home in January, 1930. Information appreciated by Mrs. M. Gould, care of this magazine.

OKEN, MRS. SALLY.—Peggy has been ill. Jack knows. Wake up. Please write to S. O., care of this magazine.

SARRATT, MILFORD GEORGE.—Eighteen years old. Five feet ten inches tall, weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds, brown hair and eyes. Left home in May, 1929. Information appreciated by his father, A. G. Sarratt, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Some ladies stopped at our house, in Banks, North Dakota, late last fall. They asked about the river. Would like to hear from them. Please write to F. B., care of this magazine.

McCLELLEN, MAC.—Thirty years old. Six feet tall. Last heard from in Willows, California, in 1929. Information appreciated by Lewie Cooper, Paskenta, California.

CROWE, HARRY LAWRENCE.—Last of Birmingham, Alabama. Served in the U. S. navy and in the First U. S. Cavalry at Fort Marja, Texas. About twenty-six years old. Last address was, in 1928, 4927 Rossville Boulevard, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Please write to your old buddy, Jack Montgomery, care of Marie Yahla, 256 Twenty-fourth Avenue, San Francisco, California.

L. P. H.—Who advertised for Jerry B. We have news for you. Please send us your address.

DAVIES, JOHN P.—We are holding a letter for you at this office. Please send for it.

DeLOREY, EDWARD F.—We are holding a letter for you at this office. Please send for it. Address Anna, care of this magazine.

FRANKLIN.—Please send for letter, from J. E. C., which is being held for you at this office.

HADAWAY, J. T.—We are holding a letter for you, from Madge and Babies. Please send your address.

HONEY.—We are holding a letter from Glady's, for you. Please send your address.

JACK.—Please write for letter, being held at this office for you, from Jill.

MICHAELANGELO.—We are holding a letter for you. Please send for it. Address Angelo, care of this magazine.

MIDNIGHT BLACKIE or R. M.—Please send for letter from G. L.

MURPHY, HARRY ISOM.—We are holding a letter at this office for you. Please send your address.

J.—We are holding a letter for you at this office. Please send for it. Address Sis and Bub, care of this magazine.

MURPHY, J. J.—Please send for letter, being held at this office, signed Patricia.

McANDERSON, JACK.—We are holding a letter for you, from Paul. Please send for it.

McCANN, JOSEPH.—We are holding a letter for you, from Mildred. Please send your address.

PENMAN, ROBERT.—We are holding a letter for you, from Mother. Please send for it.

PEELER, JOHN A.—Please send for letter, from Bill, held for you at this office.

R. C. L.—We are holding a letter for you. Please send for it. Address A. F. L., care of this magazine

SISTER I. D.—We are holding letters from Sister O., for you. Please send for them.

SMITH, W. H.—Please send for letter held at this office for you.

T. E. D.—We have a letter for you, from E. Please send for it.

T. E. F.—We have a letter from Wife, for you. Please send your address.

WHITE, BOB.—We are holding a letter for you, from Chic. Please send for it.

DEFFENBAUGH, CLIFFORD TROUPE.—Have always felt that there was a mistake in the report of your accidental death. If you are living, please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

HESTER, R. F.—Forty-eight years old. Six feet tall. Dark-brown hair and eyes. In 1910 was in Fort Worth, Texas. Sometimes worked as a locomotive fireman. Last heard from in 1911, at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Please write to Jackie M., care of this magazine.

SON.—There has been no news. Trust you to keep the promise you made me in the maize field. Please write to Mamma, care of this magazine.

COLE, ALFRED H.—Fifty-six years old. A newspaper man. Last heard from in New Orleans, Louisiana, several years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Ruth Ryder, West Kennebunk, Maine.

TEEL, CLARENCE E.—Please write to your wife, Bettie, care of this magazine.

MASSEY, LOYAL N.—Formerly of Grand View, Idaho. Information appreciated by a friend of war days, Arthur, care of this magazine.

BARNABY.—Griff Barnaby married Mary Richey, my father's sister. They had three children, Mary, Will and Harland. Last heard from in Nicholas County, Kentucky, in 1866. Would like to hear from their descendants. Please Write to J. H. Richey, Box 345, Kennedy, Texas.

BARTLETT or BARNES, ROBERT A.—Last heard from in Saverne, California, in December, 1929. Information appreciated by son, Wesley H. Bartlett, Building 9, Fort Winfield Scott, San Francisco, California.

BARTLETT, MILDRED H.—Please write to Wesley H. Bartlett, Building 9, Fort Winfield Scott, San Francisco, California.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from the people who advertised some time ago for Charles E. or Charles R. Morgan. Please write to M. Rouge, 1407 Second Street, S. E., Canton, Ohio.

GRADY, JACK.—Former radio singer. Please write to H., care of this magazine.

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Only $2.00 down

BRAND NEW CORONA GENUINE *Model #3*

Lowest Price — Easiest Terms Ever Offered

HERE's your chance to own that *brand new* Genuine Model 3 Corona you've wanted — on the easiest terms ever offered — at LOWEST PRICE ever offered. Complete in every detail; back spacer, etc., *Manufacturer's Guarantee.* Recognized the world over as the finest, strongest, sturdiest portable built.

Yours for 10 DAYS FREE

Try this wonderful portable typewriter — the same machine that has satisfied 500,000 users. Experience the joy this personal writing portable typewriter can give you! Use it ten days free! See how easy it is to run and the splendidly typed letters it turns out. Ideal for the office desk, home, traveling. Small, compact, light, convenient. Don't send out letters, manuscripts, reports, bills in poor handwriting when you can have this Corona at such a low price on such easy terms. Remember these are *brand new* machines right out of the Corona factory.

Carrying Case Included

If You Act Now!

Leatheroid carrying case, oiler, instructions, free on this offer. Send no money — just the coupon. Without delay or red tape we will send you the Corona. Try it 10 days. If you decide to keep it, send us only $2 — then $3 a month until our special price of $39.90 is paid. Now is the **time to buy. Mail coupon today!**

Save Money — Use this Coupon

Smith Typewriter Sales Corp., (Corona Division)
469 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill. Dept. 197

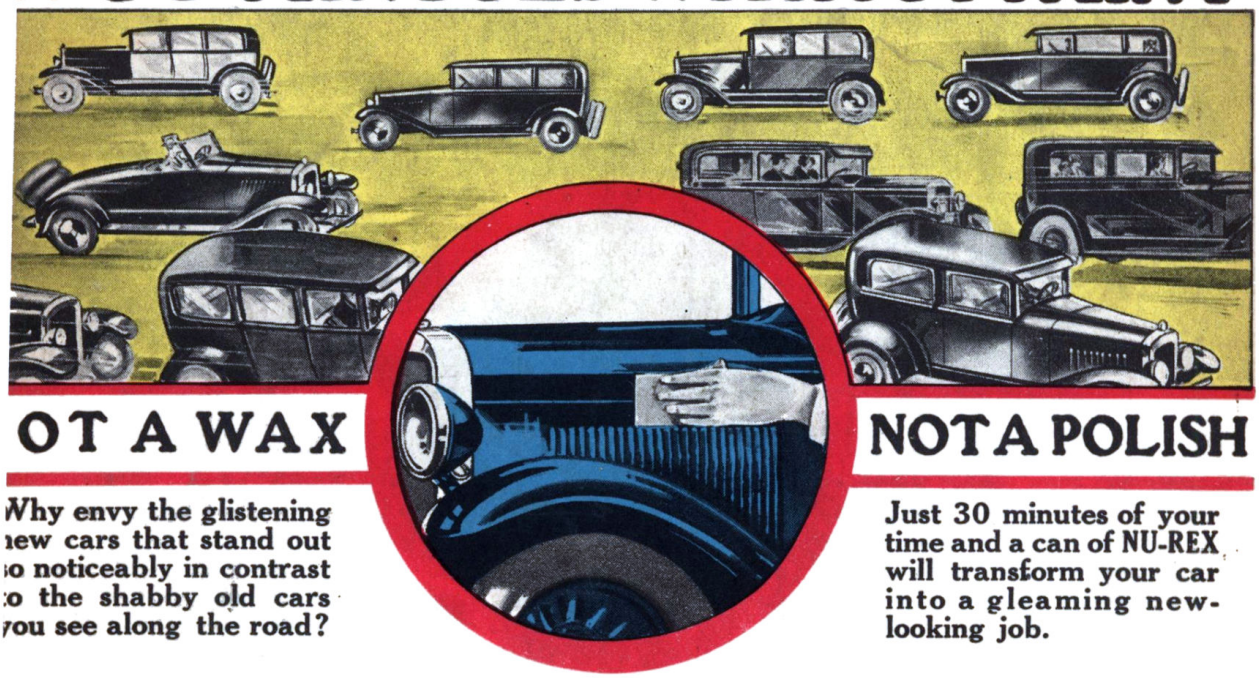
Ship me the Corona, F. O. B. Chicago. On arrival I'll deposit $2 with express agent. If I keep the machine, I'll send you $3 a month until the $37.90 balance of $39.90 price is paid; the title to remain with you until then. I am to have 10 days to try the typewriter. If I decide not to keep it, I will repack and return to express agent and get my money back. You are to give your standard guarantee.

Name _____

Address _____

Employed by _____

IAKE YOUR CAR LIKE NEW N 30 MINUTES WITHOUT PAINT



OT A WAX — NOT A POLISH

Why envy the glistening new cars that stand out so noticeably in contrast to the shabby old cars you see along the road?

Just 30 minutes of your time and a can of NU-REX will transform your car into a gleaming new-looking job.

A Sweep of the Hand—and Your Old Car GLEAMS—GLISTENS—SPARKLES

agic NU-REX Does It! Unquestionably this is one of the greatest discoveries the automobile field. Think of it—a marvelous fluid called NU-REX, almost agical in effect, does away with all polishes and waxes. No rubbing, painting, aning or waxing is required. Just a sweep of the hand and the dull, drab rface vanishes and the hidden color gleams forth with a wonderful luster.

Save Time and Expense of Painting

ithout any experience whatever you can U-REX your car and make it look as though just came from a paint shop and the beau- ul new finish will last indefinitely.

AYS BIG MONEY TO AGENTS

merely showing NU-REX you will make g money. Every car owner to whom you monstrate will buy. Sales rapidly multiply. very sale brings you enormous repeat busi- ss. In your spare time you can easily make to $5 or $10 an hour with little effort.

NU-REX PRODUCTS COMPANY

A. C, DEPT. 250, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Refinish Your Own Car FREE!

We are now appointing men in various localities to take care of the big demand. A sample supply of NU-REX is furnished free to our workers. Fill out the coupon below and send it in today.

NU-REX PRODUCTS COMPANY,
Sta. C, Dept. 250, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars regarding NU-REX and tell me how I can refinish my own car Free. This does not obligate me in any way.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

If you are interested in full or part time salesman's position check here ☐