

15

STREET & SMITH'S

MARCH 31

Western Story

Magazine

EVERY WEEK



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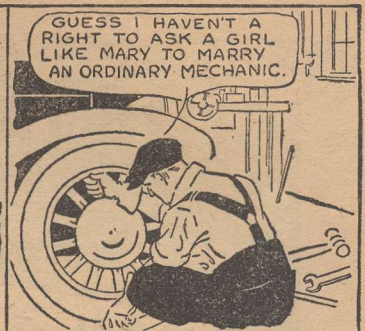
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**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 4CD
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

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29x5 00-19		5.50	1.05
30x5 00-20		5.50	1.05
28x5 25-18		3.90	1.15
29x5 25-19		3.90	1.15
30x5 25-20		3.90	1.15
31x5 25-21		3.90	1.15
28x5 50-18		3.50	1.15
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33x4 1/2	4.45	1.15
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WHY MEN GO



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(Read Free Offer)

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Now a new discovery enables people who have dandruff, falling hair, thin hair and baldness to harmlessly remove the congested, thin outer layer of scalp skin. This permits opened pores to breathe in air, sunshine and absorb a penetrating, stimulating scalp-food to activate the smothered, dormant hair roots and grow new hair. It is the most sensational discovery in the history of falling hair and baldness. It is all explained in a new treatise called "GROW HAIR," showing "anatomy of your hair" and tells what to do. This treatise is now being mailed FREE to all who write for it. Send no money, just name and address to Dermolay Lab., Desk H 381, No. 1700 Broadway, New York, N. Y., and you get it by return mail free and postpaid. If pleased, tell your friends about it.

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**EXPERIENCE OR TRAINING
UNNECESSARY**

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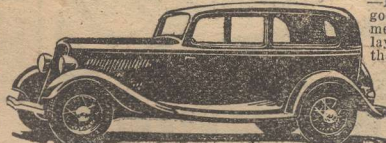
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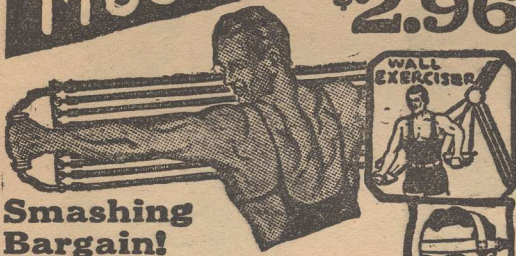
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HEIR TO THE LONELY R

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Author of "The Ramblin' Kid," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HERITAGE.

JUST before sundown the two men rode over Catback Ridge and had their first glimpse of the valley that was to be a battleground. Straddling dusty pintos and leading a couple of bony, exhausted pack horses, they bent forward with quick interest. "Sandy" Riggard, a few feet ahead of his emaciated partner, squinted down at the dilapidated town far below, studied its familiar layout for a while, then announced:

"That's it, Porcupine! Just about as ornery-lookin' as ever." His lean

young face hardened slightly. "Better let me handle this business myself!"

The thin man behind him growled: "Yo're plumb welcome to it! *I* ain't hankerin' to get mixed up with the sheriff."

"I ain't expecting trouble," Sandy Riggard assured him. "All I aim to do is take possession o' my ranch. I don't see any call for trouble in that."

"Just the same," his bony partner retorted, "I been sharin' your crazy luck long enough to know I better ride with my six-gun handy. But," he finished virtuously, "I'm goin' to leave you to your own troubles the

minute we hit town! I'm goin' to locate the nearest saloon an' pour plenty cool liquor down this throat o' mine. It needs it!"

Sandy Riggard didn't reply. He led the way mechanically down a crooked mountain trail which wound among rocks and through knee-high sage. While he surveyed the town below them, a queer smile twisted his thin lips—a smile that held the faintest hint of wistfulness.

Furnace looked unspeakably drab down there. Yet, beyond it, the valley became quite green with its buffalo grass; rolled on luxuriantly for miles, to climb at last a blurred purple mass of mountains. In the late afternoon haze the far-off Sierras loomed dark, shapeless, full of somber mystery. Peering toward them, he could see scattered brown patches, like the shadows of immense clouds, on the valley; those were grazing herds of good Texas longhorns.

Sandy drew a profound breath. Somewhere ahead lay the twenty-two thousand acres of grassland which constituted the Lonely R range; his own, if all went well.

Abruptly his sun-baked face lost its smile. Why shouldn't everything go well? He had only to present his father's letter to Sheriff Colby. After that he could at once assume the ownership of the Lonely R.

SUDDENLY "Porcupine" Quill, whose bloodshot eyes were focused on the town, rasped: "Seven hundred miles is sure a long way to travel just to find a snake hole like this! How long since your pa kicked you out o' the house, Sandy?"

"Eight years"—tightly.

"Shucks, looks to me like he did

you a good turn! Prob'ly figgered you'd be heaps happier up north."

"Listen, old-timer," Sandy said softly, "I—I want you to know I *deserved* bein' kicked off the Lonely R! Savvy? It was my own fault. My pa was absolutely right!"

"Huh?" Porcupine Quill raised startled brows. He had an extraordinarily lean figure, apparently without any flesh at all between the bones and the leathery skin. His astonished face was like a skeleton's. He gaped at Sandy and protested, "But I thought——"

"What you thought don't count. I was a danged young fool at seventeen! I gave my pa more trouble than I was worth. That's why he shooed me away from home. If—if he was alive, I'd go to him and tell him I know now he was right! But"—Sandy straightened in the saddle, his brows contracted—"it's too late! Best I can do is go home an' run the Lonely R like he'd want it run. And that's what I aim to do!"

"Mm-m-m," the lean man ominously muttered, "here's hopin' it'll be as easy as you think!"

They reached Furnace within twenty minutes. Porcupine, instantly locating the Lucky Horse Saloon, emitted a brief whoop of satisfaction. But Sandy's eyes were traveling along the other side of the drab street.

"I remember the sheriff's office used to be up yonder, next to Dougherty's Stable," he said softly. "Reckon I'll go there first, Porcupine."

Sandy left Porcupine, the pinto, and the pack horses at the saloon's hitch rack. Four other ponies were there, drawing away uneasily from the foam-flecked strangers. And a dozen men, scattered in front of stores along the street, frowned at the newcomers curiously. But the

dusty travelers granted none of them any particular attention.

CROSSING the road, Sandy Riggard found the sheriff's office still established beside the stable. He couldn't restrain a grim little smile at the sight of it; and he strode into the place heavily.

A big man sat there, reading a Waco newspaper. His legs, booted and roweled, were comfortably crossed on a corner of the desk. A stubby pipe jutted from under his shaggy brown mustache, and his long, unkempt hair appeared seriously to need not only a barber but a generous dose of soap and water. He was rugged, beefy of face, and in his early forties. On one side of his nose there was a brown mole from which sprouted a few tufts of hair, grotesquely; the mark looked like a spider on his face.

The big man swung down his legs, took the pipe from his mouth with obvious reluctance, and squinted up at Sandy in a mixture of surprise and suspicion.

"Well?" His voice was amazingly deep and not noticeably pleasant. "What you huntin', stranger?"

He lowered the newspaper as he spoke, revealing a badge on his dangling vest.

"Reckon it's you I want," said Sandy. "That is, if you're Sheriff Dan Colby."

"That's me, yeah."

"I'm Steve Riggard—John Riggard's son."

The effect of that announcement was bewildering. It was as if Sandy had suddenly drawn the six-gun at his hip. For Sheriff Colby sat upright, with a jerk, and stared. He put down the pipe; parted his lips under the shapeless mustache.

"Riggard!" he exclaimed after a

while; and then grimly: "Young Riggard, hey? The bad un!"

Sandy bristled. But he kept his voice controlled. "I came down from Utah soon as I got my dad's last letter," he said quietly. "Reckon you know about that letter. The same mail brought me another one from Doc Wainwright, telling me my father'd died a couple of hours after he wrote me. I—well, here I am, sheriff."

Colby frowned. He sniffed loudly, wrinkling his nose, and the movement made the "spider" appear to dart up and down.

"Letter?" he repeated. "What you talkin' about?"

Startled, Sandy demanded, "Don't you know what my dad wrote me?"

"How in blazes should I know such a thing?"

"Why——" But Sandy Riggard checked himself. He stood frowning, his eyes searching. Then, on sudden decision, he took a letter from his shirt pocket and offered it stiffly across the desk. "Read it," he said curtly. "It concerns you!"

The sheriff accepted the paper with a look of uncertainty. He scowled and read slowly:

DEAR STEVE:

When a man's about to die, he sees life in new colors. I'm that way now. Doc Wainwright has just told me I won't last, through the night. I've been sick for the past two months, and I've just about reached the end.

Steve, my boy, I could die happy if I knew you didn't hold a grudge against me for the way I treated you eight years ago. I guess we were both pretty hot-headed. I'm not denying I felt mad as a wild bull after you went away. I was so sore that I even went to the trouble of disinheriting you, as you probably know. I deliberately drew up a will that cut you out completely and left the Lonely R to Sam Winter, my foreman.

But as a man grows older and wiser and calmer, things like that make him

feel like the world's prize fool. I've been feeling rotten about the way I acted for the past few years. That was why I sort of kept an eye on you, even while you were off wandering over the world. I always knew just about where I could lay a hand on you, Steve.

When I took sick and realized I couldn't live much longer, I got to feeling I'd been crazy about lots of things. Particularly about writing a will which would take the Lonely R away from my only son. So a few weeks ago I wrote a new will, Steve, and I'm leaving everything I own to you. It's yours by right, and I guess this is the only way I can make up to you for what I did in the past. Sam Winter understands why I did this, and he promises he'll go on working for you if you want him.

I wrote to you a few days ago, hoping you could get here before I close my eyes. But I know now that won't be possible. So I put the new will into the hands of Sheriff Dan Colby. When you give him this letter, he'll turn the will over to you. Take the Lonely R, son, and run it like it's always been run. It belongs to you. It's all I've got to leave, and I want you to have it as a token that, in spite of everything I did, I always had a father's love for you. God bless you, son.

JOHN RIGGARD.

As he read that letter, Sheriff Dan Colby gulped occasionally. He relighted his pipe with fingers that weren't very steady. He puffed mechanically, with a liquid sound, the match flame expanding each time he ceased to suck it into the bowl. When he reached the last words, he darted a swift, narrow glance upward at the tall young wanderer on the other side of the desk. An instant he sat motionless. And then—

The match suddenly descended to touch a corner of the letter! The paper sent up a leaping, joyous streamer of flame!

"Hey there!" yelled Sandy. "What the——"

Impetuously he sprang forward,

his expression stunned, his whole being plunged into storm. He reached out wildly to grasp the burning sheet of paper—and just as wildly stopped.

For he found himself gaping into the black bore of Sheriff Dan Colby's six-shooter!

The ponderous weapon glared up from the edge of the desk, straight at Sandy's stupefied face. It was steady and menacing. And over it the sheriff fiercely grated:

"Stand back, feller, stand back!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF WAR.

SANDY RIGGARD stood speechless. He couldn't understand this incredible act. His astounded eyes swept from Colby's face down to the burning paper. It had been dropped into an enormous flowered clay bowl on the desk, a thing which served ostensibly as an ash tray. There the letter vanished in dancing flames.

"Why, you——" he blurted.

"H'ist yore hands, Riggard! Turn around!"

As he rapped out the orders, Sheriff Dan Colby rose, and the Colt rose with him. Its muzzle continued to point balefully at the center of Sandy's chest. The official's massive features were rock-hard now, the eyes ugly with the danger they held. The "spider" on his nose was still, tense.

"Turn around!"

But Sandy Riggard was too dazed and outraged at once to obey. His lean young face had gone deathly gray, the eyes blazing. A sledge hammer seemed to be banging crazily in his chest. He tore his gaze up from the consumed letter to the sheriff, and his breath finally burst from him on a hoarse oath.

"By thunder, what the devil d'you think you're doin'? That letter belonged to——"

"Shut up!" Colby snapped. "You ain't deaf! Put up yore arms an' swing around pronto. Or d'you want me to plug you for resistin' the law?"

The six-gun jerked forward two inches. And Sandy Riggard, blinking at it, realized in an access of amazed wrath that this man actually intended to squeeze the trigger unless he were obeyed. There was something utterly uncompromising about Sheriff Colby. Standing there, he seemed to gain weight and bulk and power.

Sandy swallowed prodigiously; gulped down the furious outcry that clogged his throat; crushed his dizzy incredulity. With his stare afire, he slowly turned his back to the desk and raised his arms.

There were a couple of swift steps behind him. He felt his own Colt .45 snatched out of its holster. And he was given a lusty shove toward the wall.

"All right," rasped Colby. "You can lower yore arms an' look around. I'm warnin' you, though, not to get pesty. Don't try to be smart with me!"

When Sandy whirled about, pale and seething, he found the sheriff once more settling into the chair behind the desk. The man still gripped his weapon and kept its muzzle aimed at his caller. His left hand, however, manifested remarkable skill and swiftness in "breaking" Sandy's Colt and tapping it on the desk, so that its slugs clattered out and rolled like marbles.

"What the devil's the idea of all this?" gasped Sandy Riggard. "You got no right to——"

Colby curtly interposed, "I ain't in any mood to do much explainin'.

You'll have to take things as they come."

"What'd you burn that letter for?"—hotly.

The sheriff leaned forward, and the slightest trace of a hard, mocking smile flickered under his mustache.

"That," he said, "was a sort of accident, like. Sabe? My match just kinda caught the edge o' the paper."

"Listen, sheriff!" Sandy cried in outrage. "You know danged well that——"

"Hold it!" Again the official's eyes became dangerous. "If you got to talk, Riggard, we'll talk about yore pa's will!"

"What about it?"

"It was probated a week ago," declared Dan Colby, driving every syllable across the desk like a bullet. "It gave the Lonely R outfit to Sam Winter! Winter used to be foreman o' the ranch."

"You're talkin' about my dad's first will!" Sandy harshly retorted. "I want the will he left with you—the one that made *me* heir to the ranch."

Bluntly Sheriff Colby shook his head. "Never saw such a document."

"Wha-at!"

"Nor even heard of it! Far as I know, there ain't no such will."

SANDY RIGGARD impulsively stepped forward to lean over the desk. He was colorless as he stabbed a finger toward the ashes in the bowl.

"Looka here, sheriff! That letter told me——"

"Can't help what the letter told you. *I* was never given such a paper!"

Sandy—tall, tense, his fists suddenly clenched—was breathing

heavily. A lock of straw-colored hair hung from under his Stetson and dangled over his forehead as low as a flaming eye. His whole lean figure looked ready to plunge across the desk into a fight. And, indeed, nothing would have delighted him more than to swing a fist at that mustached face. It required a violent effort to suppress the yearning.

"I get it now!" he grated thickly.

"Get what?" demanded Colby.

"You're crooked through and through! You don't want me to get hold o' the Lonely R! That's why you're denyin' my dad's last will! That's why you burned that letter just now—because it was proof that my dad *had* written a new will! Colby, if you'll take off that badge, I'll bang the daylight out o'——"

"Shut up!"

There was something terrible in the sheriff's roar as he sprang to his feet. His cheeks became mottled by purplish patches. Dramatically, with a quivering left arm, he pointed to the door, and his deep voice thundered:

"Get out o' here! Vamose an' stay out, d'you hear? Nobody's goin' to come into this office an' call the sheriff o' this county a——"

"If you deny what my father wrote——"

"Get out!"

But Sandy, his eyes flaring more furiously than ever, didn't immediately stir. And Colby hurled at him:

"I'm tryin' to be decent to you for yore pa's sake! He was my friend! But if you say another word, I'll clap you into the calaboose for contempt o' the law—an' I'll be dog-gone glad to do it!"

For a few seconds, Sandy glared at the man in seething silence;

glared down at the leveled gun. He realized, with an inner groan, that it was futile to continue this dispute. He couldn't fling himself against a sheriff as he might have attacked another man. What he needed most now, he knew, was an opportunity to think clearly; to marshal his wits against this amazing development in his life.

So he sucked in a swift breath, snatched up his unloaded six-gun from the desk, and nodded in a sharp, premonitory way, a way that was definitely menacing.

"All right, sheriff," he said grimly. "All right! I don't aim to fight the Law. But I do aim to get back my dad's Lonely R. Savvy? From what I see, you're headin' plumb into a heap o' trouble! That's all I got to say."

He turned and walked out of the office.

SANDY RIGGARD'S whole being was boiling with rage as he strode across the dusty street toward the saloon. Dusk had settled upon Furnace, a purple dusk that filled the town with uncanny beauty and stillness. But he wasn't aware of it. His brain hammered too feverishly to be concerned with external things.

He wanted before all else to yank his partner, Porcupine Quill, away from the bar and drag the man off while he was still sober, for a discussion of ways and means to confront this new and wholly unexpected situation. He wanted to get out of Furnace. So he slapped open the swinging doors of the Lucky Horse, entered the shadowy place, and—abruptly halted.

Porcupine leaned over the bar with four other men. One of them—a big, shaggy, bearlike cow-

puncher with a zigzag scar on his chin—instantly recognized Sandy. He turned, lifted a hand in hearty salute, and cried a hoarse but cheery:

"Hi, there! I'll be a dog-gone horned toad if it ain't Steve Riggard hisself! Yore partner here was just tellin' us you were back in town!"

Sandy stood still, startled; he said tightly:

"Hi, Sam."

And Sam Winter, new owner of the Lonely R, came forward with a grin that hideously distorted the scar on his chin. The mark stretched as if it were made of rubber. He extended a hand like a bear's paw, and Sandy briefly accepted it. So far he had nothing against this man. Winter pushed his sombrero far back on his disheveled red hair. Still grinning, he asked:

"What's all this I hear, kid?"

"About what?"—icily.

"You comin' back to claim the Lonely R. Yore partner's just been tellin' us——"

"You heard right," snapped Sandy tensely.

"What? Aw, sa-ay!" Sam Winter tossed his big hands carelessly, in a kind of tolerant reproach, then hooked his thumbs in his belt. He was still smiling, though now there was a peculiarly furtive undertone to the expression. "Yore dad willed the ranch to *me*, Sandy. You know that. Of course, if yo're huntin' a job, mebbe I can manage to use you on the——"

"Wait a second!" Sandy cut in sharply. His flashing eyes narrowed in a manner that should have warned Winter. His nostrils thinned and dilated again, like a thoroughbred's. "What've *you* got

to say about my dad's last will, Sam?"

"Huh?"—in perplexity.

"My father wrote me you knew all about it! He even said you'd offered to go right on working for me! How about it, Sam? You denyin' it?"

Sam Winter blinked. His grin slowly faded before an expression of bewilderment. Somehow, however, Sandy discerned a more subtle emotion behind the man's amazement. He saw slyness, a hint of crafty caution.

"What you talkin' about?" the big man softly asked. "This is the first I hear o'——"

"I get it," grimly interrupted Sandy. "You an' the sheriff are in cahoots!"

"*Huh?*"

"The two o' you got together an' worked out this scheme o' keepin' the Lonely R! All you had to do was get rid o' my dad's second will, which same he left in the hands o' Sheriff Colby! Well, listen, Sam. I didn't travel seven hundred miles to be tricked out o'——"

He stopped. He checked the angry crescendo of words because Sam Winter's huge hand suddenly seized his shirt at the chest in a powerful grip. And Sam's scarred face, coming close to his own, became brutally ugly.

"Listen, kid!" the cowman rasped in a low tone. "Are you tryin' to call me a liar?"

"A liar," corrected Sandy, "an' a crook!"

Sam Winter stared. He lost color. Then, abruptly, he whispered, "I don't take that from no man!" and drew back his left fist.

What he didn't realize, however, was the fact that Sandy Riggard was inwardly fuming; trembling.

He didn't realize that Sandy asked no better outlet for his rage just then than an excuse to drive his own fist furiously into something solid. So, while Sam pulled back his arm, things happened.

Sandy lashed out terrifically, with all his hundred and seventy pounds behind his arm. His fist crashed squarely up against the scarred chin!

There was a crack.

Sam Winter gasped. His eyes rolled upward glassily as he staggered back, arms wildly gyrating. He reeled half a dozen steps before he finally toppled backward to smash heavily on the floor!

"Hey!" one of the other men cried, outraged. "What in blazes d'you think you're——"

"Steady, gents!"

It was Porcupine Quill's deep voice that interrupted. Darting a swift glance at him, Sandy saw that his lean partner had drawn his old six-shooter and was swinging it persuasively.

"This," announced Porcupine to the world at large, "is a two-man scrap, an' I don't aim to see any body bust into it."

He caused instant silence. The stocky, dark-skinned cow-puncher who had started forward at once halted. He glared at Porcupine, at his gun, and stood still. Sandy, meanwhile, was scowling down at the hulk that was Sam Winter. He watched the man roll over, holding his jaw and groaning. Winter manifested no intention of rising immediately to renew the argument. So Sandy abruptly swung toward the door.

"Come on, Porcupine!" he drove savagely through his teeth. "Let's get out where we can breathe clean air! This town is full o' poison!"

CHAPTER III.

BULLETS!

WELL, I told you, didn't I?" moaned Porcupine as Sandy and he rode out of Furnace. "I knew you'd bust plumb into trouble! I ain't never seen any hombre could find more peskiness without even tryin'!" And then the thin man asked in despair: "What was it happened, anyhow? How'd you come off with the sheriff?"

Sandy glowered back over his shoulder. Through the deepening dusk—it was almost dark now—he could see lights in the stores of Furnace's only street. There was no sign of pursuit by Sam Winter, however; and he grunted. The man was doubtless nursing his jaw. Tersely, without the slightest elaboration, he told Porcupine what had occurred at the sheriff's office.

"Well, I'll be a tarantula's uncle!" gasped the bony man. "Of all the dirty tricks——"

"Near as I can figure it," snapped Sandy, "the sheriff probly gets his rake-off from Winter for keepin' the second will secret. Meanwhile, they got a twenty-two-thousand-acre stretch o' range an' I don't know how much beef!"

"They ain't even polecats!" raged Porcupine. "They're just plain snakes! I wish you'd smacked Winter with *both* fists! What d'you figger on doin'?"

"First off," Riggard grimly flung back, "we'll camp for the night. I remember a pretty good spot down by the river. Two-three miles south. I don't want to hang around town to-night an' mebbe get into more trouble with Colby. I—I sorta want to think things out 'fore I take a slam at a gent who represents the law!"

"We'll have to sleep one at a time,

"I'm thinkin'," snapped Porcupine. "No tellin' what Sam Winter's likely to do now to get even!"

The camp site Sandy presently chose was attractive enough—a small clearing sheltered by a semi-circle of cottonwoods, junipers, and giant boulders. A narrow stream, shimmering in moonlight, gurgled cheerily past the spot, and occasionally its surface revealed silver flashes where fish leaped.

By the time they had unsaddled the weary horses and staked them in grass, a full yellow moon was pouring its radiance upon them copiously. They said little until they were squatting on their heels beside a small fire, with beans sizzling in a pan and coffee bubbling in a pot. Then Porcupine, his bony countenance reddened by the flames, urged:

"Well? What do we do?"

"I'm just thinkin'," muttered Sandy.

"Think out loud, will you? My own head ain't got a decent idea under the scalp."

"First place," Sandy rapped out ominously, "we *know* my dad made a second will! Also we know he'd told both Colby an' Sam Winter about it. That's what he wrote. So, as long as these two hombres keep swearin' there wasn't a will, they're lyin'."

"Which same you can't prove."

"Not without my dad's letter!" Sandy savagely admitted. "That buzzard of a sheriff! If I'd had any idea he was fixin' to set fire to the thing——"

"The point is," Porcupine gently interrupted, "what can we do about it?" Lugubriously he shook his lean head. "The letter's gone. So's the will. Looks to me like we're stuck good an' proper."

WS—2B

SANDY didn't reply. Frowning into the flames as he stirred the beans, he tightened the lines of his lips. From somewhere far off in the night floated the howl of a coyote, but he scarcely heard it. He squatted there, reddishly illuminated, and tried to keep his infuriated mind clear. One thing was certain: he didn't intend to relinquish his claim to the Lonely R without a struggle!

It wasn't until ten minutes later, when they were finishing the hasty meal, that he suddenly curled his fingers into a fist, banged it down on the grass, and ejaculated:

"By thunder! Why didn't I think o' that before?"

"Huh?" The startled Porcupine looked up from his coffee cup, his eyes batting. "Of what?"

"I just remembered Old Man Larchmond!"

"Who's he?"

"Larchmond!" Sandy repeated the name spiritedly, with a new surge of excitement. He stared intently at the river, and all its moonlit scintillation seemed to be reflected in his eyes. He rushed on to explain: "Larchmond owns the Winged Bar outfit, 'bout seven miles due west o' here! He was dad's closest friend. Seems to me Larchmond must 'a' been over to see dad 'fore he—'fore he died! An' mebbe—quién sabe?—mebbe Old Man Larchmond knows about the second will!"

"Sufferin' toads!" Porcupine abruptly set down his cup. His bony face instantly brightened with hope. "Say," he exclaimed, "that's an idea! If we can get a *witness* to swear there was a second will——"

Sandy Riggard jumped to his feet. He snatched up his Stetson, slammed it down over his disheveled yellow hair, and started toward the

horses. As he strode, he tugged up his corduroys and flung back over his shoulder:

"I'm goin' to see him, Porcupine!"

"Now?"—in amazement.

"You bet! It can't be much more'n eight o'clock. I'll be there in half an hour."

His lean partner promptly scrambled off the ground.

"But listen, Sandy! To-morrer mornin'——"

"Nothin' doin'!" I'm goin' to get this thing settled pronto, to-night. You squat here with the horses. No use makin' all four of 'em work more to-day. I'll be back in a couple of hours at the most."

He was already saddling his startled and somewhat rebellious pinto, gentling the pony in soothing undertones. Porcupine, as a matter of truth, protested against this venture almost as much as did the rearing horse. But Sandy doggedly continued to shake his head.

"I can't sleep with this thing on my mind," he declared. "I've got to see Larchmond now!"

"You ought to wait for daylight," Porcupine vehemently insisted. "With this Sam Winter buzzard and the sheriff both dead set against you, there's no telling what kind o' trouble you're likely to ride into!"

"I'll be all right," Sandy Riggard retorted. "I know this country like I know the palm of my hand. Nothin' 'll happen!"

But he was wrong.

HE had been riding less than five minutes, in fact, when he sustained a new—and terrible—shock. It came while he was pushing his way through a shallow gulley, black in shadows. A few lonely cottonwoods reared themselves like specters in the dark

depths, and once Sandy had to lean sideward in the saddle to avoid having his Stetson swept off by a branch. It was this movement, he always felt, that saved his life.

For as he bent to the left, there came the sudden sharp crack of a gun!

The staccato sound burst from above and behind him. At the same time he heard the *spang* of a bullet against the branch of the cottonwood!

Sandy gasped, whirled his pinto around. In a single motion he snatched out his own Colt, reloaded now, and raised it. He looked up exactly in time to see a spurt of red flame at the top of the rise! There was another crack; a bullet clicked on his saddle horn.

"What in thunder!" Sandy gasped—and fired.

His face was suddenly taut, gray, the eyes aflame. He blazed away directly at the spot where he'd seen the red flash. And as he squeezed the trigger, he used his rowels. The startled pinto responded with a wild bound that sent it charging madly up the rise.

Strangely, no other bullets met Sandy as he dashed toward the rim of that gulley. He held his six-gun ready, and his eyes blazed as they sought a glimpse of his assailant. In his chaotic mind crashed the knowledge that either Sam Winter or Sheriff Colby must be responsible for this attack! But he had no time now to think coherently.

He reached the gulley's rim—and saw a man!

The figure was like a shadow dashing through the moonlight. Apparently he had just raced back to the cayuse he'd left under a tree. He vaulted into the saddle just as Sandy spied him. He turned—his

dark face viciously contorted—and jerked up his gun.

But he never used it again.

Sandy Riggard was already squeezing his trigger. He shot four times in hammering succession, hardly lifting his Colt from the hip. Four crashes—four streaks of red. His terrified pinto stood like a wooden horse, paralyzed, legs apart, ears laid back, neck outstretched. Sandy's lean face seemed to be made of gray rock.

And as he fired, he saw the man under the tree pitch crazily side-ward. Saw his hat drop off; his gun glitter in the moonlight as it flew away in a long arc. There was a single horrified yell, strident, insane with pain. Then the man banged on the ground. Once or twice he flung himself about, convulsively, writhing like a wounded snake. And after that agonized spasm he lay still and limp.

Pallid of countenance, Sandy Riggard rode forward and dismounted. He knelt beside the figure, rolled it over on its back. From a hideous bullet hole in the forehead blood had spilled dreadfully over the whole face. Another wound in the chest offered its own terrible sight. Sandy stared a while; finally gulped hard as he rose. There was nothing he could do now.

The man was dead.

For a full minute, Sandy Riggard gaped down, and his mind raced furiously. He recognized this cow-puncher. It was the dark-skinned waddy who had attempted to intervene when Sam Winter had fallen in the Lucky Horse Saloon. In the end Sandy muttered huskily, slowly, yet bitterly:

"So they've declared open war! Well, if they want it bad, they'll get it!"

CHAPTER IV.

TO THE WINGED BAR.

SANDY remained rigid, glowering at the man he had killed; breathing hard. His temples throbbed. Mechanically his fingers jammed a fresh supply of slugs into the hot barrel of his Colt. Of a sudden he snapped up his head to peer about through the moonlight. For there was the dangerous possibility that this bullet-slinging cow-puncher hadn't come here alone. If he had a companion—

The thought had just occurred to Sandy when he caught the dull cannonade of oncoming hoofbeats.

He started violently, swung around, raised the six-gun. Whatever alarm he felt, however, was instantly quieted when he recognized the lone horseman who came thundering over a rise. It was his bony partner, Porcupine Quill—a skeleton on horseback.

Evidently Porcupine, having heard the distant fusillade of shots, hadn't paused even to saddle his pony. He was riding bareback, as furiously as an Indian, smashing his heels again and again into his horse's belly. When he spied Sandy, he yelled hoarsely; waved an arm which brandished a gun. There was relief in his lusty roar, and amazement.

Thirty seconds later they stood together over the dead man, Porcupine gaping at him in a daze.

"Sufferin' sassafras!" he whispered, aghast. "You killed him complete!"

"Reckernize him?" Sandy snapped stiffly.

"Course I do! Wasn't I drinkin' with him an hour ago? They—they called him Banjo!" Porcupine blinked up in awe. "Just what happened, Sandy?"

"He tried to dry-gulch me!"

"Dog-gone!"

Sandy Riggard described the encounter as tersely as possible. While he spoke he continued to peer about narrowly, suspiciously, but he discovered no hint of others in the vicinity. His pinto was rubbing its nose on his shoulder, as if to seek reassurance in the contact, and he responded abstractedly by patting its neck. As soon as he finished the account, Porcupine Quill spiritedly rasped:

"This smells like Sam Winter's idea! Banjo worked for Winter, judgin' by what they was sayin' in the saloon. I'm layin' a hundred to one this was Winter's notion o' gettin' square for the crack you planted on his jaw!"

But Sandy, frowning tightly, shook his head. "I kinda think there's more to it than that," he muttered.

"Huh? How d'you mean?" Porcupine queried.

"I got a hunch Winter was tryin' to kill my claim to the Lonely R by killin' *me!*" He jammed the Colt back into its holster and added savagely: "That means we got to keep our eyes wide open from now on, Porcupine! No tellin' when Winter'll make another try at us! After this, it's war!"

Porcupine inhaled deeply, thrust out his jaw, and glared about through the darkness balefully. His six-gun was still in his grip, and he swung it up and down with eloquent significance.

"All right," he said. "Just let them tarantulas start somethin'. I'm a peaceable man, Sandy, but there's times when the song o' my six-gun sounds real sweet—an' right now I'm just hankerin' to hear its music!"

HALF an hour later Sandy Riggard and Porcupine Quill were traveling again. They rode through the moonlight slowly, in the direction of "Old Man" Larchmond's ranch. Both of them scowled; both were silent for a long time, their eyes darting about alertly for glimpses of possible dry-gulchers hidden behind rocks or clumps of brush.

It had been Sandy's idea that they break camp and proceed together. "Reckon we'll be a lot better off fightin' together," he had said grimly. "if somethin' *does* start poppin'. Ride with your fist on your gun, Porcupine!" Moreover, he had realized, the nearer they were to the Winged Bar, the less likely it would be that any one would venture an attack. So they proceeded side by side, held tense by an uncanny feeling of surrounding danger.

Behind them trailed not only the two weary pack horses but also the sorrel cayuse that had belonged to the man called "Banjo"; and Banjo's body was slung over the saddle.

Porcupine frowned back at the dangling corpse now and then, and dubiously shook his head.

"I dunno——" he muttered, hesitating.

"Dunno what?" snapped Sandy.

"About this here carcass," uneasily said Porcupine. "By rights I figger we ought to haul it into Furnace an' hand it over to the sheriff."

"We would—if we could trust the sheriff."

"All the same——"

"If I know anything about Sheriff Colby," Sandy Riggard interrupted sharply, "he'll be tickled with an excuse to fling me into the hoosegow and keep me out o' the way! Can you see me ridin' into town with a carcass that's pumped full o' my own slugs? Colby'll lock me up

first an' listen to my explanations later—an' then he'll say he don't believe me! Porcupine, I aim to stay out o' his jail. I *got* to stay out if we're goin' to fight for the Lonely R!"

"But this body——" groaned the lean man. "Gosh, Sandy, we gotta do somethin' with it!"

"We will," Sandy Riggard grimly promised. "In about ten minutes we'll cross a trail that leads straight to the Lonely R. Reckon Banjo's cayuse here knows the way home. We'll let him carry his rider back to Sam Winter!"

Though Porcupine continued to appear doubtful, they rode on without disputing the point. The floor of the valley rolled gently, its short buffalo grass almost purple in moonlight. It wasn't long before they skirted a small herd of longhorns that had strayed into a grassy basin. Sandy pointed to the brands on a few near-by calves.

"Winged Bar," he said.

"An' I notice a few R brands mixed in with 'em," Porcupine observed, scowling. "Looks like we're near home, hey?"

They were near the Lonely R, yes; Sandy Riggard, peering narrowly over this familiar country, felt a queer ache in his heart. Up to the age of seventeen he had regarded this valley as his whole world. His and his father's. Only two miles away, beyond a ridge, stood the white ranch house of the Riggards; Sam Winter's now—by right of swindle. And yet that letter had said——

"Hoppin' toads! *Listen to that!*"

THE sudden interrupting whisper burst hoarsely from Porcupine. He abruptly stopped his horse, and his bony face became taut, tense, the eyes flash-

ing. Sandy, too, halted in amazement. Together they looked toward the west.

"Hear that?" Porcupine ejaculated.

Sandy stiffened. "Guns!"

"Guns? Man, it's a regular battle! Listen!"

The sounds came faintly through the night—sharp, distant cracks. Dozens of them. They were echoed from somewhere in the south, so that they became a veritable clatter. Sandy looked at Porcupine with startled intensity, and Porcupine blinked back.

"What's the custom o' the country?" he whispered. "Do—do we take a peep at this mess? Or do we mosey on to our own business?"

Sandy Riggard jabbed a finger toward a few junipers.

"Let's tie up the pack horses and the cayuse!" he snapped. "If this valley is goin' to be our home, we better get to savvy what's goin' on hereabouts!"

Half a minute later, freed of the pack horses and the body, they were galloping in the direction of the shots. It was an uphill ride toward the moon, and the rim of the long rise blotted out all sight of what lay beyond. The shots continued, becoming steadily clearer, louder. Sometimes they ceased for a while, only to burst out in new fusillades, continue a few moments, and stop again. In the intervals of stillness the hoofs of the charging ponies sounded thunderous.

Sandy's chest echoed the heavy thuds. He bent low over the saddle horn, and the hot wind lifted the brim of his Stetson to reveal fires in his eyes. Porcupine, a few yards behind him, rode just as hard. Once he panted in grating tones:

"What'd I tell you, Sandy? I knew dog-gone well you couldn't

travel anywheres without gettin' messed up in a pile o' crazy trouble! The farther you go, the worse things are!"

Sandy didn't answer. At that instant he heard another salvo of shots. They seemed to be just beyond the crest of the up grade. He bent far forward and rasped into the pinto's ears; sent the horse straining on with every ounce of strength in its body.

Until suddenly—

As they plunged over the top of the rise, they saw a group of men some four hundred yards away.

Mounted men huddled together in the moonlight. Five of them. They appeared to be gathered about something that lay among them in the grass. Their horses fidgeted, reared nervously, and tried to shy away from the thing on the ground. There was no more shooting now. Only a deadly silence.

"Hold on!" whispered Sandy.

He and Porcupine reined in on the hill—too late, however to avoid being seen. To those five men, across four hundred yards of rolling brush, they loomed distinctly in the moonlight.

Porcupine instantly drew his six-gun. He swallowed hard as he held his horse still.

"Sandy, I—I got a hunch," he rasped, "that we bumped into some-thin' that didn't concern us! But it's goin' to concern us plenty from now on!"

"Steady!" warned Sandy. "Just sit tight till we see what's goin' on!"

"If them hombres start this a way," Porcupine declared, "I'm goin' to vamose for them rocks over yonder! I'd rather palaver with 'em from behind a wall o' stone!"

They sat still, rigidly waiting.

The five men, their faces indiscernible at so great a distance in the darkness, had gathered together

in what was evidently an excited conference. Their horses were milling wildly. One of the figures, as if to goad the others, actually started toward Sandy and Porcupine. But his companions didn't follow, and he presently rode back to them, gesticulating in anger.

After a few moments they evidently reached a decision, and it was startling.

The whole bunch of them turned and started streaming off toward the south!

They made no attempt even to approach the two men on the rim of the hill! Instead, they streaked off as furiously as their horses could gallop—*away* from Sandy and Porcupine! Away toward the black jumble of the Sierras!

"Sweatin' toads!" ejaculated Porcupine, his eyes round. "What's the idea? They *scared* of us?"

"Reckon they don't want to be seen up close!" Sandy grated. Then he snapped his eyes back from the departing men to the spot they had abandoned. "Porcupine," he whispered tensely, "they've left somebody's carcass a-layin' yonder! There's a horse without a rider, too!"

"We better go have a look-see!"

As they started forward, the thin man added: "Sandy, the more I see o' this Texas country, the less I like the goin's-on o' the place! Seems to me we rode plumb into a mad-house. We don't seem to bump into nothin' but crooks an' dry-gulchers an' gun-slingin' gangs!"

They crossed the four hundred yards at a hard gallop. Their eyes still darted intermittently to the five riders now melting into the distant darkness. But within a few moments they fastened their attention completely on the black bulk that sprawled ahead of them in the

brush. As they approached it, Sandy's throat developed a queer, nervous pulse. He scowled. He had a vague suspicion that his arrival in the valley was in some way connected with this affair, yet he couldn't explain the feeling. He had just stopped his pinto near the prostrate figure and was about to dismount when——

Half out of the saddle he checked himself.

He hung there, in one stirrup, and gaped down amazedly at the man in the brush. Gaped with a rush of incredulity that verged on horror. His lean face paled. And he gasped hoarsely:

"Holy thunder, Porcupine! *It— it's Old Man Larchmond!*"

CHAPTER V.

FIVE TO ONE.

FOR Sandy the shock was stunning. He dropped to the ground in a daze, sank to his knees beside the prostrate figure.

The rugged, gray-bearded rancher lay face-down in the dry brush. His arms were outstretched, and his sombrero had rolled fifteen feet away. There were countless blood-stains on his clothes to mark bullet wounds, but what had finally killed him was the hideous hole drilled through his throat.

Sandy Riggard and his emaciated partner, both of them gray of countenance, knelt beside the old cowman and gaped at him. Then they gaped across his corpse at each other. Sandy's heart was hammering violently. His hands were unsteady. For a while, he couldn't force a single word through his constricted throat. But at last, when his eyes were flaring savagely, he managed to drive out a thick-voiced:

"Dry-gulched! Just plain mur-

dered—by five yeller-livered scorpions!"

He glared toward the south, where the cavalcade of killers was just topping a rise. Their distant hoofbeats were muffled now; and here lay the utter flat hush of death—punctured eerily by a whine from the big bay gelding that had been Larchmond's mount. Of a sudden Sandy jumped to his feet.

"I'm goin' to foller those jaspers!" he grated. "I'm goin' to see who they are an' where they're headin'!"

"No!" barked Porcupine, rising to his gaunt height. "Don't be a idjit!"

"We can't just sit around like a couple o' buzzards!"

"An' you can't go single-handed after five killers! This is a job for the sheriff! It ain't *our* war!"

Sandy, already running toward Larchmond's horse, flung over his shoulder:

"I figger it is!"

"Huh?"

"I got an idea this old man was dry-gulched by those dirty coyotes so's he wouldn't tell what he knew about my dad's will! It's just an idea, but I'm goin' to foller it up!"

On the last words Sandy vaulted into the saddle of Larchmond's big gelding, and the horse reared, its legs pawing high. He chose this mount in preference to his own pinto because it looked fresh, and he would need speed now! Glaring down at the bewildered Porcupine, Sandy snapped:

"The Winged Bar is only three miles ahead! Ride for it, will you? Round up as many o' their waddies as you can, an' come after me! The trail ought to be plenty clear in this moonlight—an' I may need help mighty bad!"

That was all he said. He whirled the gelding around and sent it dashing off madly in the wake of the five

killers. Porcupine Quill, with some desperate idea of following, raced to his own horse. By the time he was in the saddle, however, he realized his weary pinto would never catch up with that powerful Winged Bar horse. So, grating oaths through his teeth, the lean man swung toward the Larchmond ranch and rode, with all the speed he could urge out of his mount, in quest of help.

Sandy's bay gelding proved to be possessed of incredible power. It flew over the brush-strewn plain with tremendous bounds, and it traveled even faster when it reached a long stretch of buffalo grass. That speed went to Sandy's head like warm wine. His eyes shone as he bent forward. His whole being thumped with excitement. He had no intention of fighting those five men, but he had every intention of discovering which way they went.

HE could still see them. Though fully a mile away, they were streaking along the crest of a ridge in single file. They had altered their course, swinging slightly toward the west. And Sandy profited by their turn; he dashed toward them diagonally, thus saving considerable distance.

No doubt they saw him, too; the Texas moonlight was too brilliant to permit concealment. But they lunged on—and suddenly disappeared. It was as if they'd fallen into an abyss, to be swallowed by darkness.

"There must be a dog-gone steep drop yonder!" he panted to himself. As he lunged on, he tried hard to remember the topography of the valley. After eight years, however, his recollections weren't positive. He knew only that the five men were *not* riding in the direction of the Lonely R. But that meant nothing.

Sam Winter's crowd would scarcely leave a trail that led straight back to their headquarters.

He used his rowels again, and the gelding gave him incredible speed. As he neared the spot where the riders had vanished, he lowered his hand to the butt of his gun. His face grew tauter than ever; his eyes blazed.

And then——

Sandy Riggard reached the rim of a precipitous drop to crash into hell.

He was just starting downhill when two guns roared thirty yards below him. He caught a wild glimpse of flame spewing out from a cottonwood clump. He heard an angry buzz close to his head. He gasped. Leaning back, he reined in the gelding with an abruptness that brought the horse up on its hind legs.

And again guns banged below him.

He could feel the shudder of agony that went through the gelding as lead smashed into its chest.

The horse toppled over sideward in a crazy confusion of kicking, lashing legs and writhing neck. Sandy flew wildly out of the saddle to land on his back fully ten feet away. The fall exploded the breath in his lungs. He rolled over instinctively; flung himself to his chest behind a screen of brush. It was the only promise of shelter he could reach.

Thirty yards down the slope guns crashed again—but they stopped when Sandy vanished behind the brush. It was only when he lay there, breathing hard, his own six-shooter in his grip, that he realized what had happened.

He glanced about dazedly.

The bay gelding, though still kicking spasmodically as it writhed on its side, was mortally wounded. No doubt about that. Sandy snapped

his infuriated eyes back toward the cottonwoods. He couldn't see the men the trees concealed. But farther on—perhaps a hundred yards below—he saw two riderless horses.

The fact that there were only two momentarily bewildered him. He peered far ahead into the darkness, however, and soon found the explanation. Down the valley, fully a mile away, he saw three men dashing into a herd of longhorns! They weren't riding together now. In fact, they had spread out and were heading in three different directions. And as he gaped after them, Sandy understood their whole devilish plan.

"They saw me chasin' 'em!" he told himself desperately. "So they left two coyotes behind to plug me as I came over the rise! An' the rest of 'em is spreadin' an' goin' through the herd so's to leave no clear tracks! Dog-gone their hides! Just a pack o' murderin' buzzards that's——"

A shot ended the thought.

He heard the slug tear through the brush; heard it *spang* into the ground within two feet of him, and a tiny fountain of dirt leaped up to mark the spot.

"Well," he grated thickly, as he glared at the trees, "looks like I got a man-size battle on my hands!"

CHAPTER VI.

A JOB FOR THE SHERIFF.

SANDY RIGGARD lay rigid, motionless. His stare, piercing the screen of brush, was fixed on the clump of cottonwoods thirty yards below. It was like squinting through a trellis. He remained flat on his chest, and his Colt pointed straight at the trees. There was sweat all over his body now, and a

storm raged in his head. But he didn't squeeze the trigger. Not yet.

"I can't hit them while they're behind wood!" he reasoned. "No use wastin' lead till it'll do some good!"

One thing was clear now: This fight must result in either his death or theirs. On that realization his young face became a gray rock. He waited, his heart thundering.

A crash; a jet of red fire!

It spurted from among the trees, and a bullet hummed a few feet over Sandy's head. Another struck so close to him that bits of earth sprang to his features, and a pebble stung his cheek. He winced. And yet he still fought back the impulse to blaze away.

Distinctly he could hear the excited mumble of their voices when the echoes of the shots had died. He lay tingling. Unless they killed him first, he intended to wait for a clear target. If he could put slugs into them——

Then he caught a low-voiced, throbbing phrase clearly: "Think we plugged him?"

And a throaty: "Dunno!"

"He ain't movin' none!"

"I got an idea mebbe I banged him as he dove for that brush! I sure had a clear bead on him!"

There was an interval of silence. Sandy, trembling in every nerve, felt as if he were lying on the brink of catastrophe. His muscles were constricted. His eyes were feverish. This truce, he knew, couldn't last very long.

And it didn't.

Suddenly there were two more shots. Where they struck, he didn't know. They seemed to be experimental; an invitation for him to reply. But he remained as still as a corpse.

He never knew how many minutes passed in that tense manner.

They seemed so many hours. But at last——

He saw two shadows slip out from among the cottonwoods!

The men crouched on hands and knees, and they crept uphill cautiously, inch by inch. No doubt they had finally decided to investigate the results of their shooting. They were coming steadily nearer; getting out of the shadows of the trees.

Sandy's chest banged crazily.

"If I let 'em see me, they'll plug me sure as thunder!" he thought. "It's either them or me now! So I——"

He aimed through the brush carefully. He was ordinarily a good shot, but he had never leveled a gun so cautiously as he did now. Straight at the closer of the two killers. He waited a moment longer. Waited until they were scarcely twenty yards away. His muzzle was trained on the fellow's right shoulder, for actually Sandy wanted to wound, not to kill. He wanted a prisoner—somebody who could be made to talk and to explain why Larchmond had been dry-gulched. He waited until he was sure of himself. And then——

He squeezed the trigger.

A roar, and red fire streaked through the brush. A jet of flame that drove lead straight at its target!

FROM the man below issued a sudden terrible yell. He jumped up insanely, staggering and whirling furiously downhill. His gun fell from his fingers. He stumbled on fully six strides before he plunged headlong into grass. For another few yards he rolled like a log, and finally he lay still.

Sandy, meanwhile, jerked his aim toward the second fellow. The man

was already up and running in terror—away! Running madly for the shelter of the cottonwoods! He roared something. Sandy blazed away at him, but this time his bullet went wild. He sprang to his feet, lunged down in pursuit, fired again.

"Come back an' fight, you yeller-spined coyote!" he yelled hoarsely.

But the man—tall and lean—showed no disposition to accept the challenge. Reaching the trees, he continued downhill, toward the horses. Moreover, he proved to have extraordinary speed in his long legs. He was outdistancing Sandy at every stride, and the bullets that followed him lent impetus to his desperate efforts. He didn't pause to send back any slugs. By the time he leaped into the saddle of his horse, he had put forty yards between himself and his pursuer.

Then he waited just long enough to send a final ineffectual bullet at Sandy Riggard.

It was his farewell. He whirled about and galloped off in the direction of the distant shadowy herd of cattle. He must have caught the bridle of his partner's mount, too, for both horses were bounding along side by side.

Sandy lashed out a harsh oath. He stood still, aimed, and sent a last slug after the fleeing figure. But the man was too far off now to be dropped out of his saddle.

"What a country!" Sandy rasped. "Dry-gulchers without enough nerve to face a man square! Get 'em in the open, an' they run like scared coyotes!"

He watched the departing figure in blazing disgust until it was hopelessly out of range. Then he swung around and strode toward the man he had hit. He sent one swift glance toward the bay gelding, now

lying motionless on the rim of the rise. Killed, no doubt. It had ceased writhing some time ago. Sandy gulped. He stabbed his burning gaze down at the still figure in the grass, then knelt beside it.

A short, grizzled cow-puncher with an ugly grimace of agony on his leathery countenance. Sandy thought, "Well, we got somebody who ought to have quite a story to tell, anyhow!"

But he was wrong. He discovered his mistake almost immediately. The bullet he had so carefully aimed at the fellow's shoulder had not scored a bull's-eye. Or possibly the target had been jerked upward. Whatever the reason, the slug had crashed full into the powerful chest!

And the man was dead.

PRESENTLY Sandy straightened. His lithe body was rigid. He took tobacco and papers from his pocket mechanically, and though he had no desire to smoke, he began to roll a cigarette with stiff fingers—an act intended only to steady his nerves. He frowned at the dead man. And his mind was seething with a hundred queer thoughts when, of a sudden, he heard the rumble of oncoming hoofbeats.

With a start Sandy jerked up his head; dropped the cigarette. Instinctively he snatched the Colt from his holster and ran up to the crest of the hill, where the gelding lay dead. There he crouched low, behind the brush that had concealed him a few minutes ago, and peered through the darkness with flashing eyes. He knew that if reënforcements were coming for the man he had shot, he himself would be in desperate trouble. There was no way of escaping from a battle now, without a horse.

Then he saw them.

At least a dozen riders were wildly charging toward him through the moonlight. His jaws hardened as he crouched, watching them, and he began to take slugs from his cartridge belt and jam them into the barrel of the Colt. It wasn't until the crowd had approached within two hundred yards that Sandy at last discovered he had no immediate cause for alarm. He recognized one of the oncoming men—the one who was waving his arm and hoarsely yelling. It was Porcupine Quill—Porcupine and the waddies he had recruited on the Winged Bar.

Sandy sprang out of the brush like a rising specter, and a grim little smile flickered about his mouth. As he holstered the six-gun, he lifted one arm in salute.

"Well," he decided, "this changes the look o' things for the better, anyhow."

Two minutes later he was the center of an uproarious and infuriated mob. The fact that their boss had been killed had thrown them all into the blackest and most dangerous of moods. Yet the most vehement of them all, however, was Porcupine Quill. He stood momentarily stunned by the sight of the body near the cottonwoods and the carcass of the bay gelding.

"Sufferin' sassafras!" he gasped. "Sure looks like you've been havin' plenty excitement!"

"A hot bullet party," Sandy dryly acknowledged, and found himself forced to give a detailed account of all that had occurred. The men listened tensely, then strode downhill in a group, leading their horses, toward the corpse at the cottonwoods. Of this whole crowd Sandy remembered only one as a relic of the old days. This was the Winged Bar's top hand, Jud Craven. Jud

was a lean, hard-muscled, frowning man in his forties, with skin as tough as saddle leather. When he recognized the dead figure near the trees, he halted abruptly with a deep-throated ejaculation. His brows contracted in a V.

"By juniper!" he rasped. "It's little Lefty Hobart o' the Lonely R!"

"Which means," somebody else cried hotly, "that whole crowd o' varmints most likely was Sam Winter's men!"

The outcry was like a signal. Instantly the storm of voices crashed with renewed fury. Some of the men started to swing into their saddles.

"We oughta head for the Lonely R," one of them shouted, "an' show that pack o' buzzards they can't——"

JUD CRAVEN, however, seized command of the situation with an almost Jovian bellow. Both his arms rose high. His roar brought quick, attentive silence; when the stillness was almost deadly, he lowered his arms slowly and announced in a more controlled tone:

"None o' that, gents! We don't take the law into our hands 'fore we give the sheriff a whack at his job!"

"But Jud——" somebody protested.

"I know how you all feel!" he flung out. "I feel like bangin' away at the Lonely R myself! But we gotta go by the law. That's the way the Old Man would 'a' wanted it done. We got to get the sheriff. Besides"—a new, ominous note crept into Jud Craven's voice—"there's only twelve of us here, an' only six more back there with Miss Anne an' the Old Man's body. The Lonely R runs close to forty men these days. We'd be wiped out pronto if we tried anything."

This final argument, though it evoked a chorus of enraged growls, nevertheless swayed the men. For the time it quelled the spirit of lynch law which had begun to flare in them. They certainly couldn't fling themselves at the forty gun-toting cow-punchers of the Lonely R—especially when they were still acting on a suspicion, not on proved facts.

"What we'll do," Jud Craven directed emphatically, "is leave a couple o' you here to watch this body so's the sheriff can see it as it lays. The rest of us better get back to Miss Anne an' the Old Man. When Sheriff Colby comes out, we can mebbe sort o' ride along with him."

Craven's counsel prevailed. Within a few moments the crowd was back in the saddle—Sandy Rig-gard now riding "double" with a small cowpoke on a huge spotted mare. As they moved through moonlight, he found himself flanked by Porcupine on the left and Jud Craven on the right. He scowled straight ahead, however, and asked in a low, tight voice:

"Figger Sheriff Colby can be trusted to handle a case that concerns Sam Winter? I'm sorta suspectin' them two is in cahoots about some things."

"The sheriff's got to do his duty!" Craven bluntly declared.

"But——"

"If he don't, he's likely to run into a plumb mad bunch o' citizens hereabouts! Old Man Larchmond was just about the—the best-liked cattleman in these parts. That is, by everybody exceptin' this Sam Winter coyote!"

Sandy, mounted behind the small man, rode in grim silence for a time, then a queer little grunt escaped him. He narrowed his eyes and muttered:

"It sure makes me feel low to

realize my dad's outfit is gettin' a bad reputation."

"'Twasn't yore pa's fault," Jud Craven snapped. "He was a great cowman. But since Sam Winter's got hold o' the ranch, he's fired just about all the old good hombres an' he's hired a bunch o' rattlers that he yanked out o' the mountains! Right now the outfit's full o' polecats. It's the black spot o' this whole county!"

Sandy Riggard, pale and oddly gaunt, drew a deep breath. He cast an oblique, determined glance at his lean partner and whispered:

"It'll change plenty when I get it back!"

Porcupine Quill snarled, "If you get it back."

"I will!" said Sandy. "So help me, *I will!*"

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAW.

IT was a somber cavalcade that loped toward the spot where Old Man Larchmond lay dead. Sandy, with his Stetson tilted low over smoldering eyes, could see it in the moonlit distance, marked now by a small group of men and horses. His mouth was a bitter slash, and his nerves were taut.

He knew—from what Porcupine and Jud Craven told him as they rode—that in a moment he'd meet Anne Larchmond; she had come from the house with the men as soon as Porcupine had brought the terrible news of her father's death. Queerly, Sandy's heart raced at the thought of the girl. She must be near twenty now. He remembered her only as a spindly child of eleven or twelve whose greatest delight had been to wrinkle a defiant nose and thrust her tongue out at him.

With a bitter smile touching his

lips, Sandy Riggard looked upward; looked deep into the star-glittering Texas skies. "Gosh," he thought, "if only we could get back the peace o' those great ol' days!"

In his throat, however, he crushed a groan. The hope was futile. He had been in Furnace Valley scarcely three hours, and already he'd had several encounters with death, besides having incurred the stubborn enmity of both Sheriff Dan Colby and Sam Winter—in all, a stormy record. And simply because he had come home to claim what his father had willed to him.

Sandy scowled. How he could hope to retrieve the Lonely R now, with Larchmond dead and Sam Winter in legal possession of the outfit, he couldn't quite see. Despite his dogged promise to Porcupine that he'd get the place, he knew he was confronting what seemed an impossibility. Nevertheless he swept the gloomy doubts aside determinedly. Somehow he *must* wrest the ranch from Winter's grip! There *must* be a way!

And then, suddenly, he saw the slim figure of a girl move out from the group near Larchmond's body. A small figure in a riding skirt and man's sombrero; erect, tense, walking toward him a few swift paces, then abruptly halting. There was something terrifying in her very swiftness.

Anne—

At the beginning Sandy feared he was going to meet tears and sobs and hysterics. Such things in women invariably paralyzed him, left him floundering in misery. But the instant he swung off the horse and approached Anne Larchmond, his Stetson in his hand, he knew he'd been wrong about her.

She was utterly self-possessed.

Hers was a frontier heritage. She

came of a line of hard, courageous women—women who had penetrated Texas in the van of civilization. It was a stock that had known death too intimately and too often to flinch before it now.

And so this girl whom the disheveled Sandy faced controlled her emotions incredibly. Her face was white, and her eyes were ablaze. But she gave him no glimpse of tears. Even then, in that dreadful moment, he couldn't escape a sense of amazement at her bewildering beauty. Though he'd known her as a child, the copper-haired girl he saw now seemed an absolute stranger.

"You're Sandy Riggard!" she said, her voice tense.

He nodded dazedly. "That's right, Miss Anne. I—gosh, I'm sure sorry—"

"Your partner told me what happened," she said grimly. Her remarkable courage stunned him. She snapped her eyes up to Jud, who was still mounted. "Well?"

"It—it was Lonely R men, all right!" the Winged Bar foreman told her savagely. "Riggard here plugged one o' the buzzards—Lefty Hobart."

At that Anne sucked in her breath sharply, through hard-clenched teeth. She wasn't surprised. It was as if she had expected Jud's report. Stiffly she swung toward one of the six men at her back—a long-legged, cadaverous cow-puncher with a nose as hooked as a hawk's beak.

"Tom," she flung out passionately, "ride for Sheriff Colby! The whole thing's clear now! *Ridel!*"

The lanky man needed no urging. Without a word he spun around, ran six strides, leaped into his saddle, and sent his horse pounding away toward Furnace. When he had

gone, Sandy peered at the girl in narrow-eyed wonder. He muttered:

"Miss Anne, what d'you mean—the whole thing's clear?"

She answered tersely, yet bitterly, "Sam Winter killed dad because you came home!"

"*Me?*" Sandy's body went rock-hard.

"Yes!" Her eyes blazed straight into his. "Not that it's your fault. Dad got back yesterday after spending a few weeks in San Antonio. When he learned Sam Winter had got hold of the Lonely R, he was furious. He rode over there and told Sam the whole thing was a swindle. Dad said the ranch belonged to you—and dad intended to see that you got it! He told Sam you'd probably be here soon, and he swore he'd help you get the outfit out of Sam Winter's hands. He never had any use for Sam, anyway. Now you're here and—and"—at last, then, her valiant voice broke on a desperate sob—"they've killed him!"

Sandy frowned down at his toes and gulped. He hardly knew what to reply. He felt miserable. He knew only that he'd have given half his claim to the Lonely R for another opportunity to smash his fist into the big, fleshy face of Sam Winter.

IT was after ten o'clock when the thickset, brown-mustached Sheriff Dan Colby, accompanied by two squat deputies and the long-legged Winged Bar waddy, galloped up to the tragic spot.

Because he had already learned all that had happened from the cow-puncher who had summoned him, Colby was prepared for a tense reception. He encountered more than he had anticipated, however. Fifteen Winged Bar cow-punchers,

mounted and r'arin' to go, moved to meet him. They were as ominous as a lynching party. All were armed, and their spokesman, Jud Craven, promptly and hoarsely announced:

"Sheriff, we been waitin' for you! We all aim to ride along as a posse!"

"Ride where?" Colby demanded. "You don't know who killed Old Man Larchmond."

"We know one o' the dry-gulchers was Lefty Hobart o' the Lonely R!" Craven retorted. "We know another Lonely R coyote, Banjo Haines, tried to plug Sandy Riggard an hour ago—an' got plugged hisself! That's plenty to show their outfit was on the warpath to-night!"

Halting his huge chestnut mare, Sheriff Colby snorted. It was apparent that he considered the evidence insufficient. He glowered at the angry faces about him with a touch of resentment, as if he didn't like their attitude. He sniffed, and the "spider" on his nose pranced.

"Generally," he snapped, "when I feel I need a posse, I pick my own!"

"You better pick us, then," warned Jud Craven darkly. "We aim to go anyhow!"

Overwhelmed by a harsh, assenting chorus, Colby didn't attempt to argue. He swung out of his saddle and strode toward the body of Old Man Larchmond. When he saw Anne beside it, he pulled off his hat and smoothed down his bulbous brown mustache.

"I'm mighty sorry about all this, Miss Larchmond," he began quietly. "It's tough on you——"

"Thanks," she interrupted. Her manner was curt, decisive. "Are you ready to ride to the Lonely R, sheriff?"

"Why, I——"

"Because I've been holding my men back long enough! They'd have gone without you, but I wanted the

law on my side. If you're ready, you'd better go. I'm going to help take my—my father's body home meanwhile. Then I'll probably go to the Lonely R myself."

Colby nodded but didn't immediately leave. He inspected both bodies first, bending beside each and examining it carefully. It was only after he had assured himself that one of them, Banjo, near the cayuse, was indeed a former Lonely R man, that he gruffly consented to ride-over to Winter's ranch and "see what's what." Before leaving, however, he turned a penetrating, suspicious frown upon Sandy Riggard.

"Funny," he muttered, "how you're messed up in everythin' that's happenin'."

Sandy hadn't forgotten that this man had burned his father's letter. His voice was hostile when he replied: "The queer part, sheriff, is that these things all happen when I try to claim my ranch—after askin' you for my dad's will!"

"Your ranch?"—in sudden anger. Then Colby abruptly changed his tone and the subject. He nodded to one of the bodies; rapped out: "So you claim Banjo tried to dry-gulch you!"

"Right."

"Did you know him?"

"No. Never spoke a word to him in my life."

"Then why in blazes should he want to plug you?" Colby demanded harshly. "It don't make sense. Folks don't generally go around pumpin' lead into strangers!"

Sandy's mouth thinned. "I'm advisin' you to put that question to Sam Winter, sheriff."

The crowd began to growl. Horses were already champing impatiently. So Colby, after another eloquent grunt, acceded to the common impatience and climbed into

his saddle. Sandy Riggard promptly mounted his own pinto, just as Porcupine came to his side and whispered in anxious uncertainty:

"Listen, Sandy. I don't much like the idea o' runnin' along with this sheriff. Looks to me like he'll grab any chance he sees to put you into trouble!"

Sandy grated: "I know it. But we're ridin' anyhow. I got a hunch there's goin' to be plenty more excitement to-night, an' I don't aim to miss any of it! We're still fightin' for the Lonely R, Porcupine, an' there's no tellin' when a break may come our way. Let's go!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LONELY R.

BECAUSE several of the men were forced to remain behind, helping Anne Larchmond transport her father's body home, the sheriff's self-appointed "posse" finally numbered fourteen men. They rode hard and in silence, the hoofbeats of their horses sounding like a steady roll of thunder. In less than fifteen minutes they crossed the summit of Horny Hog Ridge and looked down upon the Lonely R domain. At once every man of them grew tense. Trouble seemed certain. After all, you couldn't accuse an outfit of being murderers without inviting a fight.

Sandy Riggard's first view of the distant white ranch house which had been his father's sent a strange pang through him. He saw the familiar place drenched in moonlight, a quarter of a mile away; and in moonlight it had always been at its best. A fine, sprawling, spacious old home, built in the years when the Riggard fortunes had flown high. At the sight of it something welled up in Sandy's throat; something he

couldn't swallow. This was *home!* This was where he had been born, raised, taught to gentle ponies and poke cows. When he gazed away toward the left, along the moonlit slopes of the valley, he could distinguish the black masses that were Lonely R stock grazing on some of the best grassland in the county. And morally all this was his—*his!*—if only he could find a way of establishing his claim!

"Here they come!" suddenly snapped Jud Craven. "Looks like the whole dog-gone outfit is up waitin' for us!"

True enough. Several dozen men, converging from bunk houses and elsewhere, were assembling in front of the white ranch house. A reception committee. They weren't mounted; they merely stood still. Sandy soon enough distinguished the big, bearlike figure of Sam Winter, moving out slightly ahead of the others. Winter pushed his sombrero far back on his head and thrust his thumbs into his gun belt. Jud, studying the group, grimly remarked:

"Well, from what I can see, every one o' them coyotes is totin' iron—which is a danged queer way to spend a nice, peaceable evenin' home!"

Somebody else rasped: "It goes to show they was *expectin'* trouble!"

Sheriff Colby, leading the cavalcade, heard all this. He turned a resentful head and rapped back at his posse: "Hang onto your tempers, all of you! *I'm* handlin' this, sabe? I ain't aimin' to have unnecessary fights!"

Nobody answered.

Sandy and the bony Porcupine, inconspicuously riding together in the rear of the posse, glanced at each other significantly. Porcupine, bend-

ing sideward in the saddle, whispered on a sardonic note:

"It must be tough on Colby—leadin' a posse against a buzzard who's his partner. He looks like his stomach has turned kinda sour."

"All the same he's got to go ahead!"

Then, as they approached the Lonely R crowd, all conversation ended. The silence became suddenly intense, dramatic—a prelude to storm.

"Hi, sheriff!"

That was Sam Winter's stentorian voice, booming a hearty greeting. It sounded cheerful and innocent enough, and the big man waved a friendly hand to the entire posse. Yet every one felt he was acting. When the Winged Bar crowd stopped, not one of them dismounted. They sat rigid, frowning.

"What's up?" demanded Winter.

Sheriff Colby cleared his throat and brushed down his thick mustache. He, too, was frowning, but the expression held strange uncertainty, almost pain.

"Sam," he finally said, "there's been hell broke loose in the valley to-night. Old Man Larchmond's been dry-gulched!"

THE news seemed to send an electric shock through the Lonely R crowd; to stun them. They stiffened; started a low, excited clamor. Sam Winter arched astounded brows and gasped:

"Larchmond? Who—who in blazes did *that*?"

"We're tryin' to find out," muttered the sheriff. "An', Sam, I don't mind tellin' you things look kind o' black for your whole outfit. That's why I'm here."

Sam Winter's astonishment slowly faded. In its place came an expression of doubt, and this in turn hard-

ened gradually into a challenging, suspicious scowl.

"Meanin' what, sheriff?"

"Meanin' one o' the hombres who plugged Larchmond was killed by Sandy Riggard here, who chased after 'em. An' the gent who was killed was Lefty Hobart, o' this ranch!"

"Riggard?" Winter repeated the name as if it were the only thing in Colby's speech that mattered. His eyes darted over the Winged Bar posse, and for the first time he spied Sandy in its rear. Instantly his scowl became a mask of anger. Perhaps he still felt the fist on his scarred jaw. "Oh, him, huh? So *he's* with you!"

"What's more," went on Sheriff Colby, "Riggard says as how somebody tried to dry-gulch him, too. He fought it out with the man; plugged him. And this dry-gulcher also turned out to be a Lonely R hand—Banjo Haines."

Sam Winter snorted with something like contempt. Behind him his men growled indistinguishably. But they left the talking to their boss.

"Well?" suddenly shot out Jud Craven. "What you got to say about it, Winter?"

"Why should I say anything?" Sam demanded.

"They was *yore* men!"

"Well, that's where you're plumb wrong."

"Wha-at?" in surprise.

"I fired Banjo an' Lefty a week ago," Sam Winter rapped out. "Neither of 'em was worth his keep. I let both of 'em go, an' I heard they'd joined up with some crowd in the mountains. That's all I know about it!"

It was a lie; Sandy felt certain of it. He leaned forward over his saddle horn, his brows drawn together.

A lie, he repeated to himself, though dog-goned clever. His eyes darted obliquely to Sheriff Colby.

For a moment, the sheriff seemed as disconcerted as everybody else, and as incredulous. But then, despite himself, the suspicion of a smile crawled under his mustache. He seemed, of a sudden, vastly relieved. He looked at the thirty-odd men that were Lonely R hands, and demanded:

"You all back Winter up in that?"

The chorus of assent came like a barrage of shots. Colby drew a deep, gratified breath. He turned to face his indignant posse and waved a hand which tried to dismiss the entire situation as settled.

"Well, gents, that's that," he said. "Looks like we'll have to hunt Larchmond's killers in the mountains."

NO one else spoke. Nor did anybody stir. The tension among the Winged Bar men had become terrific. No doubt all of them felt that Sam Winter had seized upon this shrewd lie as a facile way of squirming out of trouble. And yet—what could they say? Or do? Call the man a liar? Launch an out-and-out range war—with fourteen of them aligned against thirty-seven?

Then, unexpectedly, Sandy Rig-gard spoke. His voice was low, terse, accusing. He hurled his words straight down at the bearish Sam Winter.

"You say you fired Banjo Haines a week ago," he snapped. "You say he went off into the mountains. How come, then, that he was drinkin' with you in the Lucky Horse Saloon at Furnace only three-four hours ago?"

Winter turned his head with a jerk, and now he glared.

"Who's askin' you to horn into this?" he snarled.

"Considerin' that I been in it all night, with a smoke pole in my hand, I figger I got a right to ask questions. You ain't answered me!"

An instant the big man hesitated. All around him there was intense and tingling silence. It was as if war depended on his reply. But Sam Winter's mind was working fast, and he finally replied in scorn:

"There wasn't no law that prevented Banjo from ridin' into Furnace an' havin' a drink! I just happened to meet him at the Lucky Horse, that's all."

"Just accidentlike, eh?"

"Yeah, just accidentlike!"—defiantly. And then, to every one's amazement, big Sam Winter took two belligerent strides toward Sandy's pinto. His face was suddenly ugly, the scar on his chin distended and purplish. "Listen, you!" he flung out hoarsely. "I ain't forgot the swing you took at me to-night! That was just the start o' things, far as I'm concerned! If you'll get down out o' that saddle and put up your fists, I'll hand you back what you——"

Before he finished, Sandy Rig-gard had swung out of the saddle and was facing him. He hitched up his corduroys. There was a tight, almost eager grin on his mouth.

"Come ahead!" he invited.

But Sheriff Colby drove his mare between them.

"Hold on, you dog-gone fools!" he drove out harshly. "I ain't allowin' fights to-night! There has been plenty trouble already! If you two got a grudge to settle, you'll settle it some other time! Right now we got to hunt Larchmond's killers. Private wars got to wait!"

"Listen, sheriff——" protested Winter.

"You heard me! No fights!"

Sheriff Dan Colby exhibited a real tone of official authority. He spoke with violence. The change in him was so astounding that every one, including Sam Winter, gaped at the man. It was as though a statue had come to life; as though a rock had spoken.

Colby won his point. For Winter retired with a grunt of sullen disgust, and Sandy slowly lifted himself back into his saddle. He looked down at the big man who had stolen the Lonely R, his fiery eyes a mute challenge. One thing was positive now: Very soon he and Sam must have a decisive fight. *Very soon!*

"All right, you Winged Bar men!" rapped out Colby, turning. "If you still want to ride with me, come on! I'm headin' home now. No sense tryin' to read sign in the mountains while it's dark. First thing in the mornin', though, you can meet me at my office, if you're so minded. An' we'll go poke into them hills till we find somethin'!"

Sandy turned bitterly to Porcupine.

"Reckon there's nothin' we can do about it now," he whispered in fury. "Let the sheriff make his wild-goose chase into the mountains, if he wants to. You an' me—we're goin' to take a quicker way o' settlin' this whole mess!"

"Huh?" said Porcupine in bewilderment.

"Come on!" snapped Sandy. "We'll try *our way to-night!*"

CHAPTER IX.

SANDY'S WAY.

IT was in a mood of angry frustration that the posse loped away from the Lonely R. The only ones who didn't share the general sense of baffled chagrin were

Sheriff Colby and—Sandy Riggard himself. Sandy felt excited, tingling with a new and harebrained hope.

A quarter of a mile from the Lonely R he nudged Porcupine, then raised his voice to the crowd:

"Gents, I'll be seein' you all at the Winged Bar! I'm ridin' ahead to palaver with Miss Anne. Come on, Porcupine. Ride with me, will you?"

They broke away at a gallop before any one could ask questions. A few of the cow-punchers impulsively moved to follow. But the majority were too sullen, too disgruntled, to care about anything save their failure with the wily Sam Winter. So it was that Sandy and his lean partner were permitted to dash on alone, two shadows racing through the moonlight to vanish over Horny Hog Ridge.

"Wh-what's up your sleeve, anyhow?" panted Porcupine, bringing his pinto close to Sandy's.

"I'm workin' on a new idea, ol'-timer!"

"Sufferin' sassafras! Ain't you had trouble enough for one night?"

"The night's just started, an' I'm just beginnin' to get warmed up proper!"

"But what is th-this idea?"

"We're goin' to hold up the sheriff!" snapped Sandy.

"*What!*"

"An' mebbe hang him!"

"*Wha-a-at!*"

Sandy grinned excitedly. They were galloping down a long slope of grassland into a basin now, and the pintos, though tired, were making good speed.

"I'll tell you everythin'," he promised, "soon as we get fresh horses an' some rope from the Winged Bar! Come on—ride! We got to work dog-gone fast if we expect to get anywhere to-night! If things go like I figger they will, I'll be ownin'

the Lonely R by mornin'! And then—well, we'll see!"

They raced up to the Winged Bar's yellow house within ten minutes. As they swung out of their saddles, amid four clamorous cow-punchers, Anne Larchmond ran out of the shadows of the porch. Sandy whispered to his partner:

"Let me do the talkin'!"

TEN minutes later they were riding again. Mounted on fresh ponies, they tore along at wild speed—in the direction of Furnace. On each saddle horn now hung a lariat, and Sandy, bent low with his hat brim twisted up by the wind, grinned into the darkness ahead. But his grin was mirthless, determined.

He had just informed Anne Larchmond of all that had happened at the Lonely R. And she, outraged, had cried: "That's Sam Winter's way of wriggling out of trouble! He never fired Banjo and Lefty Hobart! Why, I saw those men on the range myself only two days ago!"

Sandy had told her: "Long as the sheriff's willin' to believe Winter, though, we can't prove much. Now, Miss Anne, if you'll lend my partner an' me a couple o' horses for a few hours, mebber I can work out a scheme——"

So they rode hard toward town. It was Sandy's idea to reach the vicinity of Furnace before Sheriff Colby himself returned. His scheme, he knew, was desperate and dangerous. If it failed, he would go to jail. But if it succeeded——

Porcupine suddenly exclaimed: "Did you hear what that bowlegged waddy just said over by the Winged Bar corral?"

"No. What?"

"He said he'd go notify all the

cattlemen in the valley o' what had happened! They all liked Old Man Larchmond. They'd come ridin' in a minute to blaze away at Winter's crowd if we could prove Winter killed the Old Man!"

"Well," Sandy said grimly, "it's good to know we got plenty o' friends for an emergency." Then he pointed to a ridge which was less than half a mile from Furnace. "We'll camp up yonder. Colby is bound to pass this way when he rides home!"

"What if he has them two deputies with him?" Porcupine panted apprehensively.

"He won't," Sandy snapped. "I heard him tell those hombres he'd leave 'em behind to tote the bodies o' Banjo an' Lefty Hobart into town. We'll most likely have him all to ourselves!"

On the ridge, from which they could peer far through the moonlight in all directions, they stopped the frothing horses. There they sat still, waiting and watching. In the valley behind them glimmered the lights of Furnace, like a cluster of fallen stars.

It seemed to Sandy Riggard that they had to wait years. He became impatient, choppy of temper. No doubt, he realized, Sheriff Colby had paused at the Winged Bar to explain matters to Anne Larchmond. Yet he felt as restless as his champion black stallion.

Until, of a sudden, Porcupine whispered: "Look!"

The lean man pointed. Narrow-eyed, Sandy followed the direction of the bony finger—and saw a lone rider. The man was approaching Furnace, like a shadow materializing out of darkness; a wraith moving through the moonlight.

"Looks like the sheriff, all right!"

Sandy snapped after a moment of peering. "Come on!"

They rode to meet the oncoming horseman. Now they moved at an easy lope, frankly and visibly, in order to dispel any suspicions the man might develop. Porcupine had already learned of Sandy's plan. He felt considerable doubt for its possibilities; knew very well failure would bring them both to the wrong side of the law. Yet he rode along with dogged and loyal determination.

It was Sheriff Colby.

They recognized him at a distance of a hundred yards. At the sight of them the official stopped, obviously hesitant, puzzled, perhaps a little uneasy. But they continued so deliberately that some of his anxiety vanished, and he prodded his chestnut mare onward.

"What you two doin' out here?" he demanded as they met. "I thought you had— *Hey! What the—*"

The last words burst from him on a hoarse gasp. For at that instant he found himself gaping into the steady muzzles of Sandy's six-guns and Porcupine's! Both weapons glared straight at his chest.

"H'ist 'em, sheriff!" snapped Sandy.

"What in blazes——"

"You heard me! *H'ist 'em!*"

There was a note so grim and determined in Sandy's low voice that the sheriff sat dumfounded. His eyes grew round, terrified. It wasn't until Sandy's gun darted forward an inch that Colby impetuously thrust his arms high above his sombrero. He had gone quite gray of face.

"I—I don't get this!" he blurted.

"Porcupine," sternly said Sandy, "take the sheriff's gun!"

With willing alacrity Porcupine

Quill urged his horse forward and complied. He thrust Colby's ponderous six-shooter into his own holster.

"And now," curtly announced Sandy, "we're goin' to ride for the hills! I remember a spot in them bad lands that'll be just right. Come on, Colby. *Vamos!*"

The stocky sheriff, gaping from one man to the other as if he had encountered a couple of lunatics, flung out wildly:

"Wh-what's the idea? You fellers gone plumb loco?"

"Mebbe," said Sandy. "Start your horse!"

"What—what in thunder you goin' to do?"

Sandy Riggard softly answered: "I ain't decided yet whether we're goin' to plug you or hang you! But it'll most likely be one or the other. Ride, sheriff!"

CHAPTER X.

CONCERNING A WILL.

EIGHT miles from Furnace they climbed out of the valley to enter a region of gloomy bad lands. A stretch of scrub oak and jagged boulders formed the entrance to a country of low buttes split by deep canyons and crazily twisted gorges. Though Sandy hadn't been here since his boyhood, he remembered the ruggedness of these foothills much as he remembered the goblins and other terrors of his childhood. Especially now, in moonlight, did the region loom forbidding.

They rode slowly, through the black shadows of overhanging cliffs. The farther they went, the more appalled Sheriff Dan Colby became. He moved a yard or two in front of his captors, constantly aware of their six-guns glaring at his back.

"Wh-where the devil you takin' me?" he asked in a husky whisper.

"Tain't far now," Sandy assured him. "We're a-headin' for Fat Squaw Canyon."

"I don't g-get this——"

"We'll talk when we're there," Sandy cut in sharply. "Until then, shut up!"

He and Porcupine exchanged a grim glance. Then they followed their prisoner in silence; and by midnight, when the moon floated almost directly overhead, they reached the rim of Fat Squaw Canyon, in whose invisible depths roared an angry black stream. Here Sandy, dismounting, ordered a halt. He took the lariat from his stallion's saddle horn.

"Porcupine," he said, "use your reata to bind up the sheriff's wrists behind his back. We'll keep this rope to string him up on a tree."

"Hey!" gasped Colby, gaping in horror over his shoulder. "You ain't——"

"Shut up, sheriff! Get out o' that saddle!"

As he spoke, Sandy leveled his gun straight at Colby's face, and the miserable man, choking on a flood of agonized words, swung down to the ground. Instantly Porcupine was behind him with a rope, seizing his arms.

Sandy meanwhile peered about for a tree which appeared to satisfy his needs. He found one soon enough—an oak that bent far out over the canyon. The sight of it brought a contented nod from him. He looked back at Sheriff Colby, whose wrists were now securely fastened behind his back. The thickset official was utterly colorless, haggard. The "spider" on his nose danced in sheer terror of what was to come.

"Now," offered Sandy tersely,

"I'll tell you what's what. Ready to listen?"

"G-go ahead!"—hoarsely. "If this is yore way o' gettin' even 'cause I burned yore dad's letter——"

"Quit stutterin' an' listen!" Sandy snapped. He waited until Porcupine had tightened a final knot behind the sheriff. Then, his eyes narrow and flashing, he spoke in a low, staccato voice; shot his words straight at Colby.

"Ever since I walked out o' your office, sheriff, I've known that you an' Sam Winter was playin' in cahoots in the matter o' the Lonely R. As long as you don't produce the will my dad left with you——"

"*He didn't leave a will, I told you!*"

"I ain't sayin' what you told me"—quietly. "I'm tellin' you what I'm figgerin'. Want to hear it, or should we string you up first to that tree?"

Colby glared upward at a long branch, and a violent shudder shook him. He didn't speak at all.

"As long as you don't produce the will," Sandy continued tightly, "Sam Winter can hold onto the Lonely R. He prob'ly pays you plenty to keep quiet. That ranch is worth a lot, an' I figger he splits with you mighty generous. You, on the other hand, have only one way o' makin' sure that you keep on gettin' your split from Winter. That's to sort o' hold that will over his head like a whip. In other words, I figger you ain't destroyed the thing. You still got it hid somewhere—to use in case Winter ever stops payin'. Savvy what I mean? An' so sheriff—*I want that will!*"

Colby, white as death, sucked in a wild breath.

"Y-you're crazy!" he whispered fiercely. "I ain't got your pa's will!"

"Sure o' that?"

"Absolutely!"

"That bein' the case," Sandy decided with a shrug, "I ain't got no more use for you. So I'm goin' to string you up on that handy-lookin' oak."

HE advanced as he spoke, throwing out a length of the coiled rope across the sheriff's feet. Colby shrank back with a horrified cry—only to feel the hard steel of Porcupine's six-gun jammed against his spine. He stopped then, shivering violently, his mouth hanging wide open, his eyes bulging.

"Don't——"

"Tell me where you've got my dad's will," uncompromisingly said Sandy, "an' nothing'll happen."

"I t-tell you I *ain't* got it!"

"My hunch says different," Sandy retorted, and resumed his terrifying preparations with the rope. His intentions, already confided to Porcupine, were unique and alarmingly original. He had no desire actually to kill Sheriff Colby; no desire "to hang the man by the neck until dead." On the contrary, he planned to hang Dan Colby *by the feet!*

"It's a stunt I saw done up in Montana once," he had explained to Porcupine. "A crowd got hold of a hoss thief, an' they wanted the names o' the other buzzards in his gang. So they strung him up by the ankles, an' he hung head down. Nothin' serious happened to him. But pretty soon he got terrible dizzy an' sick—sicker than he'd ever been in his life, I reckon. He took to moanin' an' howlin' to be let down. But the crowd says he can come down soon as he gives the names o' the other outlaws. Well, it didn't take long. That hombre was so sick hangin' upside down that he'd have done anythin' at all to get on his

feet again. He yowled out the names one after another, an' as a result the whole crowd o' hoss thieves was rounded up an' treated proper."

"An' you figger Sheriff Colby will tell you where he's got your dad's will cached?" Porcupine had asked dubiously.

"Once he's danglin' upside down, he sure will! It ain't much fun, gettin' dizzier an' sicker every second."

Now, however, the sheriff had no way of guessing exactly what Sandy Riggard's plans might be. Recoiling again, he looked with panicky, protruding eyes upon the rope; watched its noose narrowed until it seemed just large enough to be fitted over a man's head and tightened about his neck. Colby shrank back so far that he almost stepped over the precipice into the awful blackness of Fat Squaw Canyon. It was only Porcupine's violent forward shove that saved him. He was shivering crazily now; ghastly of complexion; pleading in chattering syllables:

"Don't! *Don't!*"

"I gave you a chance to talk," Sandy answered grimly. "You wouldn't take it."

"But——"

"No buts!"

By this time Sandy had the noose in his hand. He advanced ominously to the horrified, deathly pallid official. Colby suddenly cringed back against the tree. His knees buckled, sank under him.

"No!" he screamed. "*No!*" And then his insane eyes rose to meet Sandy's in a kind of hysteria. "*I'll tell you!*"

Sandy Riggard halted, glaring.

"Go on!" he flung out thickly. "I'm listenin'!"

"If I t-tell, how do I know you won't hang me a-anyhow?"

"You've got my word for it!"

"Yore word!" Colby, rolling up his eyes, groaned as if that were worse than no promise at all.

But Sandy savagely insisted: "You'll have to take your chances, sheriff! One thing's dead certain. If you *don't* tell me right pronto, up you go on the tree!"

With a moan that shook his entire body, Sheriff Colby went limp. He kneeled there, beside the oak, in a state of utter collapse. His arms bound behind his back, his chin dangling on his chest, he looked as wretched as a criminal awaiting execution. In truth, Sandy all but pitied him. He might even have softened at that moment, were it not for the fact that he was convinced this man's connivance with Sam Winter had caused the murder of Old Man Larchmond, and had almost brought about his own tragic death.

So he resumed in a voice that betrayed no mercy: "You'd better tell me the truth, sheriff! When you tell me where that will is cached, I aim to ride for it right away. If I find it there, I'll come back an' keep you alive. But if you lied, I'll come back sure as blazes an' hang you!"

For emphasis Porcupine Quill jabbed the sheriff's ribs with his six-gun; a sharp, urgent poke.

"Come on!" he rasped. "Talk!"

And then, at last, Sheriff Dan Colby lifted an anguished face. The "spider" on his nose appeared to be lying dead. He said in a helpless, hopeless voice:

"It—it's in my house!"

At that confession a veritable thrill shot through Sandy Riggard. He stepped forward quickly, bent low over the sheriff. His eyes were afire with new hopes of success.

"Where in your house?" he demanded.

"I g-got it cached in the mouth o' the old bearskin that hangs on my wall!"

"Who's at the place now?"

"N-nobody!"

"If you're lyin', sheriff——"

"I ain't lyin'! It's the truth. I live alone."

Sandy flashed a brilliantly agitated look at Porcupine Quill; a look of triumph and celebration. He straightened, stepped back. As he dropped the rope, he demanded:

"Your house locked up?"

"No," Colby moaned. "I never lock it."

And then Sandy Riggard actually grinned. A grin of sheer excitement. He tugged up his corduroys, tightened his gun belt, and snapped:

"All right, sheriff! That's better.

You tell me now where to find your place, an' I'll ride for it. My partner here is goin' to hold you on this spot till I get back. An' if you lied to me, you better start sayin' your prayers right pronto!"

"I didn't lie," whispered Colby. "I just—lost!"

CHAPTER XI.

A SHOCK.

FORTY minutes later Sandy Riggard stood in a room of Dan Colby's small home on the outskirts of Furnace and pried open the jaws of a huge, hanging bearskin. He had lighted the kerosene lamp on the table, so that a dim yellow light aided his efforts. His shadow on the wall loomed large, ungainly. As he forced the lifeless jaws apart, his heart thudded with violent anticipation. The bear's beady eyes were glaring up at the ceiling. Its teeth finally parted;

Sandy thrust his rigid hand into the mouth—and touched paper!

It was as though he had struck a bonanza.

His whole chest pounded now. His eyes glowed. He snatched out the sheet and unfolded it while striding across the room to the lamp. Bending over the light, he read the contents of the single sheet swiftly. It wasn't all triumph he discovered there, in his father's last will; he knew a pang of grief and bitterness, too, as he recognized the familiar bold handwriting. There was a hint of actual reverence in his manner when he finally refolded the paper and thrust it into his shirt. Henceforth, he told himself, the Lonely R was again Riggard property—to be run as an honest, respectable outfit!

His momentary lapse into awe vanished the instant he stepped out of the house. The black stallion, hitched to the porch railing, was waiting in the moonlight. He unbound the reins and vaulted into the saddle joyously.

"Yip!" he snapped. "Let's go, *compadre!*"

Back to Fat Squaw Canyon now! Back to let Porcupine Quill share the exultation of this victory! All that remained to be done was to identify and punish the murderers of Old Man Larchmond. Once that was accomplished, Furnace Valley would have been scrubbed clean!

Bending forward, Sandy Riggard rode hard.

Exactly what he intended to do with Sheriff Colby, he didn't yet know. That, he told himself, was a matter he could discuss with Porcupine. Meanwhile, he wanted only to dash back to his bony partner.

But he didn't.

He failed because something utterly unexpected, utterly demoral-

izing, happened before he was halfway back to Fat Squaw Canyon.

It happened as he topped a low rise.

From that point of vantage Sandy could peer across a vast expanse of moonlit, rolling range. And what he saw stunned him; made him rein in the stallion with a jerk that brought up the horse's forelegs. Sandy sat rigid, peering out of narrow eyes, and his breath was momentarily checked.

Still far away but coming toward him at wild speed, charged a crowd of more than thirty horsemen!

Somehow it was like seeing an impossible mirage.

Who they were, he couldn't be certain at this distance. Their very number, however, instantly roused the thumping suspicion that they must be Sam Winter's crowd! Sandy Riggard's muscles snapped into rocks.

FOR a few moments, he remained motionless, trying to recognize some of those men. The hoofbeats of their horses sounded like approaching thunder, menacing and savage; a roll that grew louder and louder, terrifying. They were scarcely a quarter of a mile away. Instinctively Sandy turned his stallion's head.

And at that instant—

In the lead of the oncoming crowd he discerned a huge, bearish figure on a white horse!

"Winter!" he gasped aloud. "By blazes, it's *him!*"

After that Sandy didn't pause to reason. He turned, jammed his rowels home, and sent the stallion flying off toward the south. Why Sam Winter should be bringing his men this way, he didn't know. With the will in his possession, however, Sandy had no desire to confront that

hostile mob alone. He bent low over the saddle horn, his face desperately strained, and goaded the horse into more speed, and more.

"Yip!" he grated hoarsely. "Show 'em all you got! Come on—yip, yip, yippee-ee-ee!"

The stallion pounded along furiously. Head outstretched, nostrils and eyes fiery, tail horizontal, it raced on in a mad attempt to give all its strength. Sandy glared back over his shoulder.

The crowd, he discovered, had swerved and was following him!

He could hear their yells now. Harsh, strident screams, piercing and full of fury. He looked forward again, gasping:

"What in thunder's busted loose now?"

One thing was clear—they were chasing him! And he had no intention at all of being seized by Sam Winter now! Sandy bent lower, rasping breathlessly to the horse.

But the stallion, gallant as it was, had already carried him some twenty miles to-night. It was tired. The pursuing horses, on the other hand, must have been comparatively fresh. Sandy reached this terrible realization some two minutes later, when he looked back to discover that the whole trowd was rapidly gaining ground!

Something clogged his throat. He leaned forward until his cheek was whipped by the stallion's flying black mane. His stare became feverish.

"Come on, boy! Yip! Yip!"

It was impossible to expect greater speed from those courageously banging legs. He knew it. With a stifled oath he glared back again—just as new sounds crashed behind him.

Shots!

Though Winter's horde was still too far back to be effective in its marksmanship, some of the men were puncturing the darkness with jets of flame. Their roars, too, became more enraged, more distinct.

Gaping back at them, Sandy struggled to understand what might have launched this bewildering onslaught. His mind was dazed, whirling. He——

And then, suddenly, he recognized the figure at the right of Sam Winter. Recognition brought a cry from his throat; a cry at once incredulous and stunned.

For it was Sheriff Colby.

SANDY'S thunderstruck mind darted to Porcupine Quill. If the sheriff was here, what had happened to Porcupine? Where was he? How had Colby got away from him? Had the lean man been *killed* by this mob?

But there was little time to think.

A queer sound, like the drone of a bee, suddenly assailed Sandy's ear, then immediately subsided. A moment later he saw a tiny fountain of earth spurt up almost under his horse's forelegs. Their slugs were beginning to come close!

He lashed out a hoarse oath. Peering back, he saw that he was scarcely two hundred yards ahead of that charging crowd. They were scattered now. Cracks seemed to come from everywhere, and vivid spurts of flame.

"Can't hold out like *this* much longer!" he told himself desperately.

He realized, of a sudden, that his Colt was in his hand. The knowledge brought a savage grin to his lips. One gun against more than thirty! It was almost funny. He didn't expect moderation from those men back there. After what Colby

must have told them about having been all but hanged, they'd kill without compunction.

Glaring ahead, Sandy discerned, perhaps half a mile away, a sharp rise crowned by a mass of boulders. He had a vague, confused recollection of that spot. In boyhood he had sometimes clambered to its summit, pretending among the rocks to be a warrior in a high fortress. He stared at the rise, then abruptly turned his stallion toward it.

"If I can't get away," he thought, "I might as well give the buzzards a fight for their pleasure!"

He plunged on madly. By the time he neared the rise, little more than a hundred yards separated him from the leaders of Winter's crowd. He knew he couldn't hold out more than a few minutes now.

Something slashed his cheek!

Sandy lurched in the saddle as the pain stabbed him. He winced; jerked his gun hand up to his face. Its back touched hot blood that streamed down to his jaws. He gritted his teeth. A lucky shot for somebody. Another lucky shot like that might end the chase completely.

The stallion raced up the rise. As it neared the boulders at the top, Sandy glared back. The whole mob was converging on the hill. They were yelling like Indians. Just a hundred yards behind him!

"Well," he rasped, "here goes! If I gotta lose, I'm goin' to lose fightin', anyhow!"

Without stopping the horse, he swung out of the saddle. His leap brought him stumbling behind a huge rock. The stallion, he saw, was charging on, over the rise and down the far slope. He whirled around behind the boulder to face Winter's oncoming men. He was soaked with sweat, and blood streamed

down from his face to his broad shoulders.

Sam Winter and two others were considerably ahead of the rest of the pack. They reached the bottom of the rise first, and continued upward without pause.

Sandy, his lips fiercely drawn back from his teeth, aimed steadily from behind the rock.

He fired.

Lucky? Maybe. He saw big Sam Winter suddenly fling up both arms. The man's sombrero fell off. He revealed a face stricken by horror, agony. Then he lurched back to drop out of the saddle and crash on the ground! His huge body rolled over and over, like a log, in its crazy spill to the bottom of the hill.

But Sandy didn't watch the fall. He hardly sensed satisfaction. Already he had swung his Colt toward another of the leaders. He wasted two precious seconds in aiming, then squeezed the trigger. A crack. A flash.

The man didn't fall from his saddle. But he reeled, one hand suddenly clapped to his chest. He bent forward limply, while his pony swerved off to the left.

The third of the leaders, finding himself abruptly alone, reined in his mount so that it reared high, whirling around. He was halfway up the slope. He looked staggered, confused. Sandy, firing twice, put a slug into his leg. The man turned his horse, while a yell of pain broke from him. He rode off howling for the others to come.

And the rest of the crowd was coming!

There were only two slugs left in Sandy's six-gun. No time to reload now. He knew he was through. He knew it had all been useless; this whole struggle for the possession of the Lonely R. In that moment he

felt weak, utterly without hope, and faint. Perhaps it was his loss of blood that made him crazily dizzy. He found himself clinging to the rock while his knees sagged under him. Found himself unable to keep his gun steady. It drooped in his hand; weighed tons.

He shut his eyes fiercely. He——

And then, as he sank helplessly to his knees, an astounding realization crept into Sandy Riggard's addled brain. Something completely unbelievable. He forced his eyes open to stare. No doubt about it now.

The rest of the men were *not* coming up the hill!

No. They had stopped at the bottom. In a wildly milling, confused mob they were gaping toward the left. Pointing. Shouting hoarsely. Their firing had incomprehensibly ceased.

Sandy turned his head. His eyes were strangely blurred, and he had to blink to clear them even for a second. He stared an inordinately long time before he actually saw the amazing new sight in the brilliant moonlight.

More men!

How many of them, he didn't know. Hundreds, it seemed. Maybe thousands. The night seemed filled with them. They were charging toward the hill like an army. Yelling. Some shooting. To Sandy they were like figures in a dream. He wasn't sure of what he saw; wasn't sure of anything.

He knew only that while he gaped, a weird darkness was seeping into his mind. His muscles felt oddly limp, useless. He sank lower and lower—until at last, with an unearthly din crashing in his ears, he drifted into oblivion.

Of the battle that raged below him he saw nothing at all.

CHAPTER XII.

NIGHT ENDS.

AT seven o'clock in the morning, when dazzling sunshine streamed into the room, Sandy Riggard lay on a bed in Anne Larchmond's ranch house. His left cheek was heavily bandaged. But he was fully conscious now, and listening in amazed awe to the things Porcupine Quill was telling him. Porcupine sat beside the bed, his bony figure bending forward intently, a frown on his lean face.

"Dog-gone it!" he whispered. "Seems like it's twelve years since we rode into Furnace! An' yet it ain't hardly twelve *hours* since this war started!"

Sandy, lying motionless, urged huskily: "Tell me what happened, will you? I still don't get it."

"Well, it was like this," snapped Porcupine, glowering at the window. "One o' Sheriff Colby's deputies, headin' home with the body o' Banjo Haines, spotted us. He saw us pokin' the sheriff toward the bad lands, at the spoint of our smoke poles. So the gent swung around an' lit right out for the Lonely R to get help. When Winter heard we'd snatched up the sheriff, he got his whole pack o' buzzards into leather an' headin' hell-bent after us. But they had to go slow. From the point where the deputy last saw us, they had to read sign all the way into the bad lands. It wasn't so easy, with only moonlight to help."

"But they located you!" Sandy whispered, his eyes staring up from under worried brows.

"Yep. Them coyotes sure did. I saw 'em comin' from quite a distance, howsomever, an' I sorta tried to get away with the sheriff still tied up. But they spied us an' come pourin' after us like a flood. So me

—well, I wasn't hankerin' to die. An' I couldn't make myself throw a slug into Colby while he was all tied up. I just left him an' rode like blazes an' catfish! Rode straight for the Winged Bar."

Porcupine paused.

"Reckon when Sheriff Colby told Winter you'd streaked out to get the will, they figgered the devil with *me!* You was the one that counted. An' they lit out after you—to get that will back, of course. Me—well, what do I find when I hit the Winged Bar?" Porcupine sat up straight, suddenly grinning like a jack-o'-lantern. "Why, Sandy, I find that the news of Old Man Larchmond's murder has been carried around to all the ranches in the valley! There's more'n sixty cow-punchers present, all of 'em havin' high-tailed over here to tell Miss Anne they're ready to form a posse, a lynchin' party, or anythin' else she's a mind to ask. They sure was hot under the collar, them waddies! They'd been told about Winter's connection with things, an' they was all set for a sizzlin' hot party."

With a feeble smile twisting his lips, Sandy Riggard asked, "Then you told 'em about me?"

"You bet I did! Told 'em everything! Well, sir, them boys up an' started for Furnace like mebbe a tornado was carryin' 'em along! Halfway there we hear shots; also we spot that whole mob o' coyotes chasin' after you. So we—well, you saw the rest, didn't you?"

Still wanly smiling, Sandy closed his eyes.

"A little of it," he admitted.

Porcupine cleared his throat.

"Sam Winter's dead!" he announced. "The sheriff, 'cause he helped conceal a will, is bein' held for the State authorities in his own jail. We got two wounded hombres who're tryin' to save their necks by confessin'—after we sorta stirred confessions up a bit with gun muzzles—that it was Winter who ordered the dry-gulchin' of Old Man Larchmond. And now——"

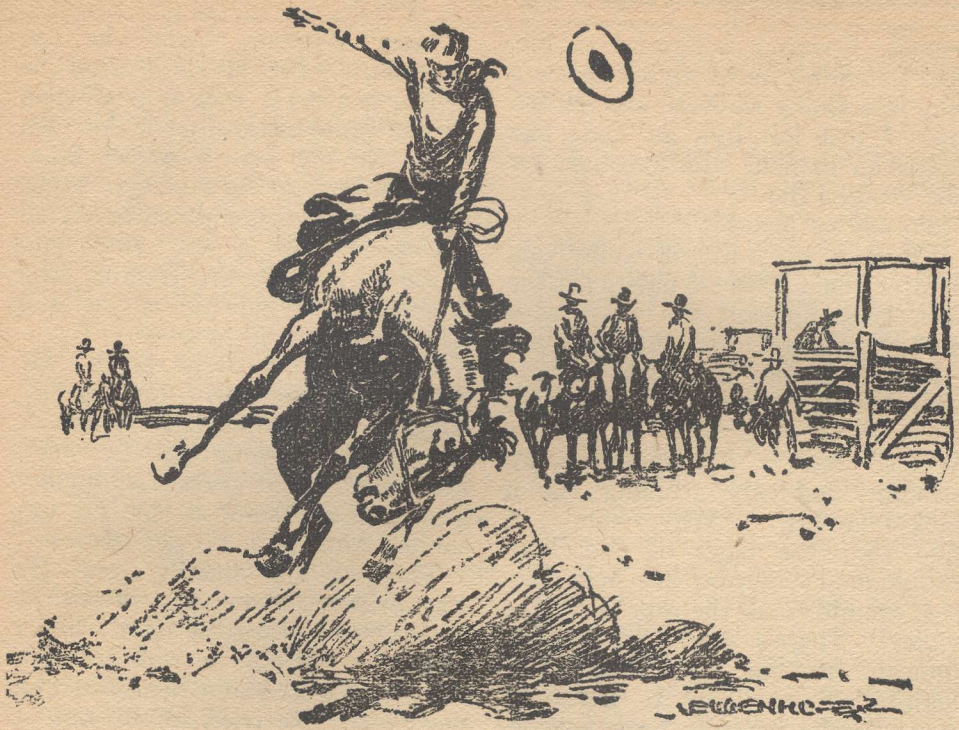
But Porcupine didn't finish. He discovered, suddenly, that Sandy Riggard was staring beyond him at the door. Turning with a start, Porcupine found Anne Larchmond gazing in at them—a somber, unsmiling Anne with worried eyes.

The lean man hastily rose. He was awkward about it; awkward as he shuffled toward the door. For a while, he felt like a wall between these two who would henceforth be neighbors. He tried to slip out of the way.

But then he noticed, in some amazement, that both of them appeared to be staring *through* the wall he formed. They were looking at each other, and Porcupine seemed completely obliterated. For a second, that bewildered him. But abruptly he understood, and a slow grin wrinkled his lean face. Porcupine Quill mumbled something to Sandy and sidled out of the door like a crab, just as Anne entered the room. He passed her as though he were invisible. Nevertheless he paused to whisper:

"You've both had a mighty tough an' tragic night, Miss Larchmond! Reckon mebbe you ought to sorta try to cheer each other up a bit."

Then, Porcupine, grinning queerly, stepped outside and closed the door.



The CALGARY KID

By LLOYD ERIC REEVE

Author of "Two Men and a Gun," etc.

THE stranger, naming himself as Jim Morris, arrived at the Bar Cross afoot, asked Dave Arnold for a job cooking, and Dave, in need of a cook, hired him. Morris was six feet tall; he was broad of shoulder, flat and tapering of thigh, his hard young face weathered and brown. The very last thing he looked like was a ranch cook. Dave and his hands all wondered why Jim Morris preferred a flour-sack apron to chaps. Also, they shortly noticed that he seemed deliberately to avoid horses. They thought it was quite a mystery.

So did Dave's infernally pretty daughter, Madge Arnold. And Madge didn't like mysteries. She wanted to know the answers. Besides, the new cook did have pleasant gray eyes and spoke with a slow, humorous drawl. By the end of the third month Madge's curiosity got the best of her. So early one morning, shortly after the crew had set out on the day's circle, she dressed herself for riding and went down to the chuck house. She found Jim Morris seated beside the stove, peeling potatoes. Madge smiled down at him.

"Good morning, Jim," she

greeted. "I hate to bother you, but the rest of the men are all gone. Could you catch up my horse?"

Jim's lean face flushed oddly; standing up hastily, he set aside the pan of potatoes and wiped his hands on his apron.

"Why, sure, Miss Madge. I'd be right glad."

THEY went outside. The morning air was crisp, flavored with sage, and the great reflection of Indian Mountain still shaded half the lonely valley. Walking briskly, they crossed to the corrals, and Jim, finding a rope, built a quick loop and deftly snared the dodging pinto. Then, as Madge approvingly watched, he snubbed and saddled the pony—with the swift ease of a man quite expert in such matters—and led it out.

"Here you are, Miss Madge," he drawled. "Hope you have a nice ride."

"You caught him up like a top hand," Madge praised. "You must be a good rider."

He grinned faintly. "Saddling a horse," he reminded, "an' riding him are two different things."

Still Madge didn't accept the offered reins. She looked uncertainly at the nervous pinto, and then back at Jim.

"That pony's got a hump in his back," she decided. "Maybe you better top him off for me."

Jim's flush deepened. "That fellow's all right," he hastily assured her. "Why, I've seen you ride the kinks out of broncs twice as bad!"

Madge looked up at him, her bright-blond head tilted in the morning sunlight, her blue eyes innocently wide.

"I just don't feel up to a hard ride this morning," she pleaded. "Iron him out, Jim—please."

Jim Morris stared at the ground, spoke slowly. "I'm uncommon sorry, Miss Madge," he stated, "but I can't do that."

Madge looked directly at him. "Why?"

For an instant, Jim was silent, stirring the dust with his boot toe, then his gaze lifted doggedly.

"You asking me?"

"Of course I'm asking you."

"All right," he snapped bluntly; "I'm afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid to ride that little pinto?"

"Afraid to ride any horse."

Madge stared at him in frank amazement. She had spent half her young life in the saddle, had grown up in the midst of laughing, reckless, hard-riding men. If there was one thing on earth for which she had neither sympathy nor understanding, it was fear. She looked at Jim Morris and shook her head a little sadly.

"So that's the answer. Well, I'm sorry."

"So am I," agreed Jim with faint irony.

She slapped her boot with her quirt.

"Why, you ought to be ashamed!"

Jim shrugged. "What good would that do?"

Madge's eyes narrowed slightly. She took the reins from his hand, turned quickly, and swung lithely astride the pinto. Whirling sideways, the pony bogged its head and burst into a furious blur of crow hops. The slim girl rode straight up, gracefully, her right arm extended. Only a moment later she had reined the little animal motionless, its head up and snorting, ears pricking. Madge looked down at Jim Morris.

"It wasn't so bad," she said. "I'm

still alive." Then, with a crisp laugh, wheeling the pony, she raced swiftly out of the ranch yard.

Jim stared after her. "I can see why she laughed at me," he muttered. "But what I can't figure, is why in blazes she had to act so dog-gone mad!"

He turned and walked back to the cook house. At the door he paused, leaning his shoulders against the wall, his big fingers rolling and lighting a cigarette. He smoked thoughtfully, his eyes bitter.

"It's like that," he mused. "In every deck there's a joker. I should have seen it a month ago. The sweetest girl I ever met, an' now she figures I'm the scum of the earth. Well, Jim, you know the answer—pack up an' pull your freight."

WHEN he had finished the supper dishes that night, Jim went directly to Dave Arnold's office. The cavernous room, acrid with the tang of leather and piñon smoke from the open fire, was soft with lamplit gloom; the bearded rancher sat behind his ancient desk, and in the denser shadows, only half visible, was Madge Arnold, her slim body relaxed in a huge chair. The great-antlered head of a deer brooded above the girl, against the wall. Jim would have preferred her not being present, but now, having already entered, he decided to go through with his announcement, anyway.

"Well, Dave," he came to the point, "I'm quitting."

The old cattleman looked surprised. "Quitting?" he repeated. "Why, what's wrong? Ain't I paying you enough?"

"The pay's all right," Jim said. "I got a hunch to drift, that's all."

"Chut!" Dave protested. "No

sense to that. Better change your mind, son."

Jim shook his head. "I've shuffled an' dealt," he said, "but always the cards come up the same."

Dave chuckled. "It's that apron," he guessed. "You're tired of wearing that apron. Well, if it's a riding job you want, I allow I can fix you up."

Jim's face reddened in the lamplight. He felt Madge's amused, half-scornful gaze from the shadows.

"It's not a riding job I want."

Dave's face was crestfallen. Then he lifted shaggy brows, shrugged his massive shoulders. "All right," he agreed. "I reckon if you got to drift, you got to. Leaving to-night, or you giving me time to rustle a new cook?"

"I'll wait a week," Jim said, and left the office.

SIX nights later Jim Morris was sitting on the long bench behind the cook house, smoking a cigarette. Indian Mountain, shaped curiously like a gigantic warrior with shaven scalp lock, brooded against the distant sky; in the bunk house a cowboy was strumming a banjo, horses moved restlessly in the shadowy corrals, and far out on the luminous, moonlit range a steer lifted its voice in mournful bellowing.

Jim lounged there, moody, visioning a supple girl. Her eyes watched him with amused contempt—her eyes changed, softened with tenderness, and suddenly he was holding her close in his arms. Jim cursed silently and flung his cigarette against the ground.

"You mooning fool," he growled, "just sitting here torturing yourself."

A light step sounded, and Madge

Arnold, in a clinging white dress, came around the corner of the building. She sat down beside him.

"Jim Morris," she snapped, "I don't think much of a coward, but I think a lot less of a liar."

Jim's gaze was steady. "Meaning?"

"Meaning you," she accused. "When Lon Garvin stopped by for supper last night, he recognized you. He said he'd seen you a hundred times and couldn't be wrong. He said you were the Calgary Kid."

Jim Morris lighted a cigarette, flipped out the match, inhaled deeply. Then he turned and looked at the girl.

"All right," he admitted, "I'm the Calgary Kid."

"The Calgary Kid," Madge softly echoed, "the most famous rodeo rider this country has ever known."

"It's been claimed," Jim agreed.

"And afraid of horses?" she asked. "Afraid even to top off an ornery little pinto? It doesn't make sense."

"It doesn't make sense," said Jim. "But it's the truth."

"I hate riddles," Madge stated. "You might as well tell me, because I'll find the answer in the end, anyway."

"Maybe," he agreed. "Still I can see no good in telling you."

"No?"

She stared at him intently. His slow gaze lifted. Now their eyes met, and it seemed suddenly that something flashed between them, something both tender and cruel, both singing and hopeless. Jim looked surprised, then bitter. He laughed shortly.

"That's different," he said. "All right. Here's the story. Up to a year ago I had an idea that there wasn't a horse born that I couldn't ride. Now there happened to be a

horse up at Pendleton that had a right similar idea. He figured there wasn't a man born that could sit him. Well, I went up there, an' him an' me argued the matter. Seems like he was right an' I was wrong."

"He threw you?" Madge asked.

"Threw me an' trampled me," Jim said. "I was in a hospital seven months. The first three months I was out of my head. Those three months was one long nightmare, an' it was uncommon bad. All I could see was wave after wave of horses stampeding over me, pounding me to a pulp with their hoofs. When I got out of the hospital, I tried right off to ride a horse. Well, I couldn't do it. It's been the same ever since. The minute I get up on a horse, I turn sick as a dog an' my head starts spinning. The next thing I know, I'm picking myself up from the ground an' rubbing the hurt place."

MADGE'S face was a pale oval in the moonlight; she seemed to be holding her breath, looking at him. "I'm sorry I baited you," she said simply. "Awfully sorry."

"That's all right," Jim smiled. He watched her with quiet eyes. "You sure hate a coward, don't you?"

"It's nothing I can help," she said. "Something just rises up inside of me and turns over."

"I was right," Jim said. "The thing for me to do is to pack up an' leave."

"Jim," Madge accused, "you hate a coward yourself."

"It sounds crazy," he admitted. "But I do."

"What a terrible thing, Jim, for a man to go through life hating himself! When it's only his imagina-

tion! Why, if you could just forget what's happened, you'd be all right."

"I've shuffled an' shuffled," Jim said, "but the cards always come out the same."

"Maybe the cards are stacked, Jim; maybe you need a new deck."

"It's the Dealer that picks the deck, not me."

"I wonder," Madge said. She leaned toward him quickly. "Now listen, Jim. Once when I was just a little girl, I saw a mouse in my room. It frightened me nearly to death. The next night I refused to sleep in that room. Well, the following day dad caught a little mouse, and made me sit by it for an hour. At first I was scared stiff, but dad stayed right with me and held my hand. We did the same thing every day for a week. Later I got so used to the mouse that I didn't even notice it. I could even take it in my hand and hold it, and—well, I've never been afraid of a mouse since." Madge stood up suddenly. "Good night, Jim."

Jim stared up at her. "Now what's the meaning of the mouse story?"

"Figure it out for yourself," Madge said.

He saw suddenly that her eyes were misted with tears. He sprang to his feet, one hand extended.

"Madge!"

She said, "No!" sharply, and then, with a stifled sob, whirled and fled swiftly around the corner of the cook house.

THE next day the new cook arrived, and Jim Morris, without again seeing Madge Arnold, left the Bar Cross.

The long months dreamed past; white winter came to the lonely valley brooded over by Indian Moun-

tain, glorious emerald spring, the hot golden summer. Dave Arnold and his hands, with four thousand cows to annoy them, soon forgot the strange young cook who had so mysteriously entered their lives for a few short weeks, as mysteriously left.

They forgot, but Madge Arnold didn't. The slim girl lived in a sort of suspended calm, neither laughing nor visibly grieving, but aloof, seeming always to wait. Her father was at first puzzled, and then, by the following autumn, increasingly troubled. One night, in his cavernous office, he suddenly blurted his question:

"What the blazes has got into you, girl? You go around like you was walking on eggs, afraid like you was always going to break something!"

Madge smiled at him from the depths of her huge chair beneath the great-antlered head of the deer.

"It's almost winter again, daddy."

Dave Arnold scratched his bearded chin. "Now ain't that a plumb intelligent answer!" Suddenly he squinted at her shrewdly. "Gone an' got yourself in love?"

The girl shook her head. "I'm afraid not, daddy. The man I might have loved died before I ever met him."

Dave Arnold snorted. "If it's a nice day yesterday," he announced witheringly, "we'll go out an' take a ride to-morrow."

"Still," Madge murmured, "I was crazy enough to draw to an inside straight."

"So did I," Dave recalled. "Once. I went home in my underwear."

"He was dead," Madge said. "Dead as a door nail. But there was one chance in a thousand he'd come back to life."

"Daughter," said Dave Arnold, rising stiffly to his feet and lighting his pipe, "I'm powerful grateful for the way you've explained everything." He stumped to the door of his office, glared back over his shoulder. "An' another thing," he growled. "After this you do like I tell you. You quit riding around all day in this hot sun bare-headed!"

"Oh, daddy!" Madge cried, and flew suddenly from her chair, ran to him, and buried her face against his great tobacco-scented chest. "Daddy," she sobbed, "oh, daddy, what will I ever do?"

He bent his shaggy head, staring at her in miserable bewilderment; his enormous hand clumsily patted her slender shoulders.

"There, little fellow," he muttered helplessly, "everything's all right. It's bound to be all right. It's got to be all right," and then, through his gritted teeth:

"If it was only something I could *kill!*"

DOWN in Los Prados, under a blazing sun, ten thousand people leaped to their feet and howled. They howled as the great horse reared from the chute, in three mighty bounds hurled to the center of the arena, and there exploded in a furious swirl of demon plunging. Dust boiled up in glinting clouds, four churning hoofs made a booming drum of the shaken earth, the lean body of the rider swayed and cracked like a whip.

The horse bawled with the yawping scream of a gigantic cat. It spun like a top. Rearing to its hind feet, it pawed the air with its front, walking in a circle. It smashed ground with a bone-shocking jolt; whirled like a flash, swapping ends, and ex-

ploded again into that lunging hurricane of blind, fiendish pitching.

The rider's eyes blurred. He thought he was falling. The amphitheater, that sea of screaming faces, rose in the air and tipped and swirled around him; earth and sky changed places, blending in a spinning wheel of color. It seemed suddenly that a giant had seized him by one ankle, snapping his body like a cracking rope, knocking his teeth together, smashing him against a stone wall. The old sickness rose up, fear, desperation. For an instant, everything went black.

Ten thousand people watched. They thought they watched the epic battle between a horse and a man. They didn't know that actually the horse was unimportant; they didn't know that the epic battle the man staged was only against himself.

For in this moment of darkness, sick with defeat, there flashed through his reeling mind all the months of bitter struggle behind—those grim battles with himself, the nausea, the horrible dreams at night, the haunting face of a girl inevitably drawing him back from the constantly present precipice—and for the first time now he no longer cared. No longer did he fear the looming fall, the slashing hoofs of a horse; rather he welcomed the release from struggle they must bring. And so feeling, he relaxed, let go with all his straining muscles, and waited for the solid crash of earth, the churning rain of hoofs, the peace and oblivion that would follow.

For an instant, he was unutterably amazed. And then abruptly, even as he felt the hot gush of blood from his nostrils, a cracking in his ears as of pistols, a flame of wild triumph sang through him. For he

realized suddenly that, having accepted defeat, he was still up, riding now as he had never ridden before; instinctively, straight in the saddle, one arm extended, high, wide, and handsome!

That was the miracle. The moment his dazed mind let go, that same moment his lean body, trained these many years, assumed its instinctive balance. Now it flowed easily, naturally, with each massive lunge of the horse, as smoothly as a trim boat might ride a monstrous wave.

A man born anew. Yanking off his sombrero, he fanned wildly. His voice lifted in a shrill yell. His long legs shuttled swiftly, smooth pistons, raking from shoulder to flank, rowels ringing, taking it and giving it back.

Somewhere, far up in the crazed amphitheater, an old cattleman was jumping up and down, bellowing like a locoed steer.

"I tell you it ain't true!" he roared. "No man can ride like that!"

But he could and did. He rode that living hurricane, rode it to the screaming bedlam of ten thousand voices, of popping leather, of thundering hoofs, to the mad roar of blood in his own ears.

And then somewhere, shrilly, sounded the blast of a whistle. The pick-up men wheeled swiftly in. The rider grabbed a pair of brawny shoulders, swung through the air, and landed lightly on his feet at the far side of the second horse.

For a moment, he stood there, swaying slightly, grinning at the roaring thousands. Then he pivoted and ran back toward the corrals, and after him echoed the last frenzied bellow of the old cattleman:

"All right! I've seen it all! Now I'm ready to die!"

IT was winter again. A fire crackled on the hearth. Madge Arnold sat reading a book in the big chair under the great-antlered head of the deer. And suddenly she glimpsed the remembered silhouette, a shadow that drifted across the frosty windowpane. She came quickly to her feet, staring at the door, one hand pressed to her white throat.

"Oh," she said, "it can't be!"

But it was. He opened the door swiftly and came inside. His lean cheeks were ruddy with cold, and there was a powdering of snow across his broad shoulders. He looked at her with eyes as pleasantly gray as ever, and spoke with the same slow, humorous drawl:

"Hello, Madge."

Her voice was little more than a whisper. "So you came back."

"You knew I would."

"What have you brought?"

He took a pair of silver-mounted spurs from his pocket and handed them to her. She read slowly the delicate engraving:

"To the Calgary Kid. Bronc riding. World championship."

The gray eyes were smiling now. "Your story about the mouse did it," he said. "I started off with a broken-down old plow horse. Then some ordinary broncs. Later I got a job taking the rough off a wild bunch, then into a couple of small rodeos, an' from there into the big ones."

"Was it terribly hard, Jim?"

His lips were a little grim. "Uncommon. Plenty of times I thought I'd lost. But then I'd always remember the story of the mouse, an' that would send me back again. I was fighting every minute I was up on a bronc. Not the horse, Madge, but myself. That's what I learned in the end, an' then it was easy."

"The first day I sat beside the mouse," Madge said, "I wanted to scream every minute."

He nodded slowly. "I reckon lots of people bog themselves down, same as me. They get plumb ruined, always figuring they fear something outside themselves—when most likely it's just a bad kink in their own minds." His hands closed on her slender shoulders. "The last horse I rode, Madge, was called the Wild Cat."

"The Wild Cat?"

"It was the Wild Cat," he told her, "that put me in a hospital two years ago."

Their eyes met, and it seemed suddenly that something flashed between them, not cruel, not hopeless, just breathlessly tender and singing. Then her bright-blond head tilted

in the pulsing firelight, and her laugh came swiftly, released, as though peeling up from the unplumbed depths of her grief.

"Why, Jim, you're cured!"

"Well," he amended, "almost."

"Almost?"

The gray eyes were twinkling. "I'm no longer afraid of horses," he admitted. "But there's been a girl that I've been sure wanting to kiss for going on two years now."

"Well?"

"I'm scared to death to try."

Her blue eyes considered him seriously. "Don't you remember the story about the mouse?" she asked finally. "You tried it on horses, and it worked."

He grinned faintly. "So you figure it might work with a girl, too?"

"You could find out by trying."

Jim did.

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SAVAGE WATERS

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Author of "Five-minute Outlaw," etc.

WHEN he saw the canoe swing around the bend in the upper river, Joe Carson's first impulse was to step back swiftly into the willows just behind him. He laid hold on his heavy pack to drag it with him, then hesitated, straightening up. Even at the distance there was something about the lone canoeist that was familiar—the long sweep of his paddle, the set of his broad shoulders, the rakish tilt of his arctic cap.

Then, with relief, he saw that it was Peter de Vore. Bluff, booming Pete, with whom he had begun the summer's prospecting in the upper

Stewart. Though their partnership had lasted a short month—Pete had been inclined to be overbearing in his jovial way, impatient of his, Joe's, cautious and plodding creed—their parting had been friendly enough. They had agreed merely to disagree. Pete had been eager to push on into some of the other tributaries, farther up. He, Joe, had elected to stay with the promising colors found on the North Fork.

That he had been right, and Pete had been wrong, would have no bearing on Pete's attitude. Gold was where you found it. Some made it to-day and others to-morrow. There was plenty left. He could

almost hear Pete announcing these philosophies of the North when word came to him through other couriers of the wilderness—if he had actually heard the news—that Joe Carson had found a pocket down river.

“Good!” he had probably said, with his ready grin. “So li’le Joe’s struck it at last, eh? That’s fine. Strength to his arm. It goes to show that a lad who just plugs along, playing ’em close to his belt, sometimes makes a killing. As for me, I prefer to bet a stack at a time. More action. More gravy.”

Pete was all right, no question about that. And yet, because the two hundred and forty ounces of raw gold in the bottom of his pack—twenty pounds, eight thousand dollars in value—meant more than mere gold to him, Joe did not step out on the strip of sand to hail the canoe. He stood motionless at the edge of the willows, leaving it to the chance of the moment as to whether Pete would see him or pass him by.

PETE saw him just before he drew abreast. His white teeth flashed in an instant grin of recognition. With a careless but powerful sweep of the paddle—Pete was an expert “white-water” boatman—he swung the canoe inshore. He backwatered furiously, the egg-shell craft leaping sidewise across the tossing current, and grounded on the strip of gravel. He reared up like a grizzly in the stern of the Peterboro and drew off a mitten to shake hands.

“Hi, Joe, you lucky li’le rascal!”

“Lo, Pete.”

A flush of pleasure deepened among the freckles on Joe’s youthful, serious face. There was also an inner twinge of guilt. His hesitancy

of a moment before had been an excess of caution, or timidity, after all. Pete’s cheerful acceptance of his good fortune held no faintest tinge of envy.

“I heard you struck it, you shrink-ing wolf,” said he. “I should have backed your hunch instead of chasing rainbows up river. How big was the pot?”

“Not so big. Around two hundred and forty ounces.”

“Don’t kid me,” Pete scoffed. “That jag of dust is your one-way ticket straight to heaven. It’s a big enough stake for that Betty gal who’s waiting for you down in the Oregon country. Eh, you blushing li’le *Romeo*?” His grin broadened. “Strength to your arm, Joseph, me boy. I wish it was me. Dog-gone, wouldn’t I like to see the ol’ Rogue River again!”

This started them off on a discussion of home, two thousand miles away. It had been a mutual bond between them in the beginning, when they had first met on the Stewart that spring. Both had come from Curry County, a rugged, gold-bearing section of southwestern Oregon. Though they had never chanced to encounter each other there, both knew the same creeks, mountain villages, and even individuals. It comprised one topic, among few, over which they had never disagreed.

Pete knew all about Betty, Joe’s girl. Little by little, as he got to know Pete during their month together in lonely camps, Joe had allowed himself to talk about her. He had even showed Pete the locket Betty had given him. It was an old gold locket, small, but very heavy. Except for a thin space between its worn, hinged segments, in fact, it was solid gold. It was an old family heirloom, a lucky charm. Betty’s

grandfather had carried it safely through Gettysburg. Her uncle had flown with it in the Lafayette Escadrille. She had given it to Joe to bring him safely back from the North. He wore it around his neck, the slender gold thread strengthened with a buckskin thong.

He had told Pete about the locket, too, and had showed him Betty's picture in it. He was sorry afterward that he had been so confiding. It had been just before they split up, early in the summer. He hadn't minded Pete's rough humor when it was directed at him, though it had grated on him a little. To have Betty included in the wisecracking, too, hadn't been so good.

But that was all in the past. Pete didn't mention Betty now, after that first crack about the one-way ticket. He just talked about this and that, in his bluff, good-natured way. Finally, drawing on his mittens, he looked up and down the bank and then looked at Joe.

"Well, we'd best shove off," he said. "The days are pretty short, this time of the year. Where's your canoe?"

"I haven't got any," Joe admitted. "I traded it for some grub a while back."

"Good," said Pete. "Get in with me. We'll pull in at the Landing tomorrow night."

Joe hesitated, looking at the river. It was running high. The roar of it, in the canyon below, was like distant thunder.

"I'll make down to the Landing all right, Pete. It'll take longer, but I'll get there."

"Shucks!" said Pete. "It'll take a week afoot. The freeze-up's just around the corner. Look—there's plenty of room. I'm traveling light. I've got an extra paddle. We'll make time like nobody's business."

This put Joe in a kind of spot. There was really no reason, from Pete's point of view, why he shouldn't go along. It would seem foolish not to. The overland trail was a tough one. Here was transportation, and good company. Two days would see them to the Landing. Why was he hanging back?

It wouldn't do to come right out and tell Pete why. Pete, to whom the speeding river was a beckoning highway, wouldn't understand it if he admitted that he was afraid of swift water. It had always been so since that time, as a boy, when he had gone down a mill race on the lower Rogue. In dreams, for years afterward, he had clutched in vain at streamers of moss on the vertical spillway, felt his lungs bursting anew as impact on frightful impact of descending water thrust him down and down into blacker depths.

No use to explain to Pete, moreover, that the unforgiving North had grown more terrifying to him through the lonely summer. Particularly since he had found his gold. The roaring rivers, the gloomy canyons, the thunder-built ramparts had always seemed sullen and overpowering. Resentful of his puny assault upon their mighty battlements. Sneering at his insect trail across the face of their giant dimensions. Now, since he had found his gold, they were aroused and on guard, awaiting the slightest relaxing of vigilance to encircle him and cut off his retreat.

Pete would not understand all this. He would merely turn loose a regular guffaw. When Pete laughed in that way, it was as though the mountains laughed, too. Rumblingly, without mirth. It always made Joe feel small and futile, somehow. Of no force. As if he didn't amount to much.

Pete chuckled now, brushing his hesitation aside.

"Put your pack in here," he directed. "Shove that grub box back. Climb in up front, Joseph, and grab the paddle."

"I'm no so good on the water, Joe apologized, as they trimmed the canoe. "You know that. The river's awfully high."

"Phooey!" said Pete. "I'm the captain. You're the crew. Let me do the worrying, you curly wolf."

THERE were some bad moments, at first, when the river had them fairly in its grip. Away from shore, in the full sweep of it, the canoe seemed to shrink in dimensions, to become fragile and paper-thin. They were like insects riding a chip down a long, roaring chute. Rugged banks and scrub timber galloped by on either side. Great rocks surged toward them, cleaving the surface into billows of foam. In stretches of comparatively quiet water, where sullen currents rode deep, pale streamers of sunlight angled down through the crystal-clear water. Vague boulders crept by in those terrific depths, their green moss wavering.

Having learned, long since, to run his bluff when he was scared the most, Joe gave no sign of his inner fears. He kept on paddling. Having learned, too, that it was impossible to stay scared when nothing happened to justify his fears, a measure of confidence returned. The lilt and balance of the canoe, the studied grace with which it danced aside from dangers in its path, were proof enough that a master craftsman was at the helm.

Pete was unworried, as always; carefree, exultant. His voice rose in song, a hoarse, bellowing note that

was oddly attuned to the deep-toned booming of the river.

From far below them in the canyon, toward noon, a deeper sound crept and strengthened upon the air. It was sustained, prolonged, an unending growl like distant thunder. Joe identified it with relief. It was the stretch of "cultus" water known locally as the Long Rapids, or Lower Portage, a turbulent, boulder-strewn chute whose lower terminus marked the end of the rugged up-country. Below, and on to the distant Landing, the terrors of the river decreased swiftly. In the final stretch it was merely a sluggish current that wound slowly across the willow-clad flats bordering the Stewart.

"I'll be glad to get to the Portage," Joe called over his shoulder. "It'll give us a chance to stretch our legs. Solid ground'll feel good again, for a change, eh, Pete?"

Pete did not bother to make reply. He was just coming into the home stretch of a song that Joe had heard often before, when they had been partners together. It was an ancient saga of the camp meetings, whose all but meaningless refrain had tickled Pete's fancy. He put his heart into it now.

"You need not wait for me, down on Egypt's sands," he bawled.

Each bend brought the voice of the rapids nearer and clearer. Magnified in the narrowing walls of the canyon as through a trumpet, the prolonged roar shook the air. Joe had seen the rapids but once before, on the trip up river. That was at low water, before the spring thaw had melted the immeasurable masses of stored-up snow and ice in the iron peaks. At high water, viewed from the trail, cut by the Mounted Police down the mighty gorge, it should be a spectacle, indeed.

THE last bend careened and straightened out before them. The head of the Portage was in view. A shoulder of rock, thrusting out into the current, marked the landing place where the trail began. The eddy beyond this shoulder formed the last stretch of quiet water. Two hundred yards farther, the tossing crest of the river broke down sharply into space.

"Let's swing over, Pete," advised Joe. "We're pretty far out in the middle. If the current takes us past, we'd never make it back."

"Repay—repay!" Pete belatedly, singing of *Dangerous Dan McGrew*.

"Swing over!" Joe pleaded. "Look, Pete; we're going by!"

Pete cleared his throat with satisfaction, the song being done.

"Ship your paddle," he directed. "Hang on."

Joe obeyed, his lips dry. Pete's dare-devil gesture, in postponing the swing to the bank until the last possible moment, made his heart miss a beat. He stiffened suddenly, jaw set. They were actually going by.

He turned to look at Pete. Pete was grinning.

"Sure," said he. "We're going to ride it down."

Joe did not cry out, or protest, or snatch up his paddle in a futile gesture. It was already too late. The jaws of the current, sliding down to the jump-off, had them in its grip. He continued to look at Pete, unwinkingly.

"Shucks," said Pete, "I've shot the rapids more than once. It's safest, at high water. D'ye think I'm going to spend four hours horsing our stuff down the canyon? We'll be through in four minutes. Turn around, Joseph, me boy." Grinning still, his eyes were mirth-

less. "Get set. We're glory-bound."

Joe turned himself around. There was no time to ponder Pete's madness, or the look he had glimpsed in Pete's eyes. Only seconds remained before the jump-off. That there was a remote, outside chance of surviving the rapids did not cross his mind. To him, the voice of Death itself was thundering in the gorge. His thoughts did not turn to his gold, in that mortal crisis, but to another and greater treasure.

Fumbling at his throat, he removed the locket, raising the loops over his head. He transferred it to the breast pocket of his shirt, buttoning the flap. The thong was frayed, and the chain was frail. It would be safer there. Though the golden trinket that had seen Gettysburg and had soared through the clouds above the "war to end war," might fail its purpose here, it must stay with him always.

There had once been rocks at the jump-off, but these were now submerged. The canoe dipped over, light as thistledown, appearing to leap from crest to crest. There was no sensation of speed about the heaped-up, angry waters. There was an illusion of rising and falling on giant waves—now in the trough, now balanced as on pinnacles of foam—while towering walls careened by.

"Down—down!" Pete's voice was strident in the chaos. "Lower, Joe! And hang on!"

JOE crouched lower, his thought processes suspended. A bend was ahead, with a great wave hanging against the cliff. They rode up this wave as up a mountain, and down again into crashing depths. Green walls reared about them like molten glass. They scuttled out

from under as these walls fell. A straightaway was before them, the very force of the current heaping the foam high in mid-channel. They rode down this crest, held to the narrow margin of safety by Pete's unerring paddle.

Two rocks reared at the next bend, one trailing the other. If the canoe swerved to the right to avoid the first rock, a crash against the towering cliff was inevitable. If they swerved to the left, the second rock was directly in the path, and there was no room between this rock and the wall.

Pete did not attempt to avoid the first of the jagged monsters. Had he done so, the end would have been swift. He held the canoe directly upon it, and at the moment of impact, the splitting of the current itself turned them to the left. Instantly, they were poised above the second rock; and with a mighty thrust of the paddle, perfectly timed, Pete hurled them to the right. A shift of his own weight at the exact moment completed the maneuver.

In the twinkling of an eye, they were past and hurtling on.

For the first time, Joe allowed himself an outside chance of survival. It had been no madness on Pete's part, after all, this business of running Long Rapids. It was a reckless gesture founded on his own self-confidence and his knowledge of the river. It was the kind of thing of which Pete loved to boast, among men of his own hard-bitten breed. It had tickled his somewhat ruthless sense of humor to force such a hair-raising experience upon him, Joe. The delightful inspiration had come to him, and he had yielded to it, grinning.

If their luck held out, therefore, they *might* make it through.

Joe did not actually allow himself

to hope. Yet the difference between utter despair and the concession of even an outside chance is great, indeed—the margin, in fact, between life and a foretaste of death. Thus the crack-up, when it came, caught him unprepared.

Again they were surging furiously down a long straightaway. Again, as in that other crisis, rocks reared above the surface. They were slender rocks, like the fingers of a giant hand upthrust. Just beyond, the raging current swooped sharply down to plunge and lose itself in the bosom of a great, circular pool. Huge was the pool, hemmed in by walls worn smooth by countless ages. Shreds and islands of foam circled lazily on its farther surface. It was fringed with sand and the green of willows.

With a thrill of awe, Joe recognized the spot. It was the Big Pool. It marked the end of the Long Rapids. At low water a sheer fall of some ten feet or so was below the spirelike rocks. At this stage of the river, the falls were gone, swallowed up. A great, curving cascade, bursting through the barrier, rolled down thunderously into the pool.

IT was all over quickly. They bore down upon the brink with the speed of wings. They were into the maze of rocks, leaping from side to side as the current leaped. Two alone were between them and the downward cascade into the pool. Joe, in the bow, was abreast of the first when a mighty surge hurled the canoe full upon the barrier.

The impact was amidships, the canoe being crosswise with the current. It buckled on the instant, shearing in two like brittle paper. With no time to cry out, to voice a prayer or take a breath, Joe found himself struggling in the current.

Cold as molten ice, the water closed over his head. He battled to the surface, struggling to throw off his heavy mackinaw. The moment he was free of it, he crashed, spread-eagle, upon the last rock. The current pinned him there, piling up what seemed like countless tons of pressure upon him, then swept him past.

Bruised by the terrific impact, he clung with desperate strength to the upstream edge of the rock. Though the current tore at him like living hands, he maintained his grip. He saw Pete coming, his teeth bared in a grin of determination. A powerful swimmer, he fought the current grimly.

He, too, had thrown aside his mackinaw. He fended himself from the rock with gorilla arms, clung to it, and swung down upon Joe. The thrust of his great body, with the force of the current behind it, was too much. Though he clung until his fingers seemed to be torn from the roots, Joe was forced to let go.

He rode down into the pool. Because his back was to the mighty cascade, he could see Pete, clinging to the rock. His head was on his shoulder, his teeth still bared in a strange, ferocious grin, his eyes intent beneath knitted brows. It was this picture of Pete's eyes, fixed upon him that Joe carried down with him—down and down into ghostly depths.

Again, as in the long ago, he found himself driven deeper despite his utmost efforts. Impact on succeeding impact barred him from the blessedness of light and life, far above. Never a strong swimmer, he battled on, fighting away from that terrific down current. The pressure of water was like a coat of mail. His lungs were about to burst. He could

feel his very eyes bulge with the effort of holding his breath.

Light, suddenly, was near. He broke surface and floundered there, his breath bursting through his teeth. He was far out in the pool, drifting with the great swing of the current. He saw Pete swimming near by, heading for the sandy shore. Because he himself was too far spent for further effort, he called weakly:

"Pete! Pete!"

Either the roar of the cascade drowned the words, or Pete, himself, was too far gone to help. He did not look back, but lunged on, his arm rising and falling in a rhythmic, overhand stroke. The current swung Joe gently against the wall. There was no foothold. Unplumbed depths were still below him. But his stiffening fingers found a tiny crevice and closed upon it.

"Pete!" he called again.

PETE dragged himself upon the sand, head hanging. He turned himself about, so that he was in a seated position, facing the pool. He raised his dripping head—his shaggy hair was plastered close to his skull now—and scanned the pool. He looked near and far, and for an instant, he seemed to look full into Joe's eyes, across the intervening hundred feet or more. Then he lowered his head to his shaking arms.

Even in his extremity, Joe did not blame Pete for not attempting a rescue. Pete, too, was battered and chilled. He was shaking, no doubt, in his very marrow and soul. No man having won to shore across such water could be expected to put forth again.

Yet his own life span, Joe knew, was measured in minutes. The crystal-clear water was cold beyond belief. If he stayed where he was,

he would speedily be incapable of movement. He must work his way along the face of the cliff, toward the sand. But where was his strength for such an effort?

He lunged along the wall, floundering like a crippled animal until he was incapable of movement, then clung fast. He rested a while and began again. The shreds of his remaining stamina must be wagered cautiously. He could not rest too long, or the inexorable cold would overtake him.

Thus he progressed painfully inch by inch, around the great sweep of wall. He was thirty feet from the sand, then twenty. It seemed like miles. Through water that was like dancing, molten glass, he could see the bank sheer down abruptly into green depths. Would he ever feel the firmness of the good earth beneath his feet?

Belatedly, when he touched bottom, Pete waded out hip-deep to help him in. The weight of his own body was too great when he emerged from the water. His encircling arms slid down Pete's hips, past his knees. He lay prone on the sand, incapable of further movement. Pete stood over him, his shoulders hunched, his arms hanging loosely.

"Get some—wood, Pete." He spoke jerkily, through stiffened jaws. "Quick. I've got—matches. Waterproof safe. Hurry."

Pete leaped away, to prowl drunkenly in the driftwood lodged in the willows above high watermark. He dragged forth fuel. Many of the fragments were heavy and waterlogged, but some were tinder-dry. There would soon be fire, and heat was life.

Joe reared on an elbow. His waterproof match safe was in his right breast pocket. With numbed fingers he unbuttoned the flap and

drew it forth. Automatically, his exploring fingers touched his left breast pocket. The flap was missing; the frayed fabric hung loose and dank.

He looked down slowly. The booming of the rapids—unheard during the preceding crowded moments—rolled forth anew, a savage, triumphant note. The full force of what had befallen him was revealed for the first time in all its pitiless details.

The wilderness had won on the final play. He had lost his outfit and his gold. His pack, being directly in line, had burst asunder at the crash. The six moose-hide pokes containing the dust had winged like plummets to the bottom of the river; and that which the river reclaimed, it would guard forever.

He had lost more than that. His own impact upon the rocks had torn his pocket loose. Its contents had been disgorged into the icy current. The locket, last and greatest of his treasures—symbol of the dreams that had given him courage and strength in his lonely assault on the wilds and life itself—was gone.

THE red flames leaped high. Steam from Joe's clothing, and from blankets, tarpaulins, and other gear Pete had found below the pool, rose through the chill, motionless air of mid-afternoon. Pete was prowling among the rocks at the lower gap for anything more of value that might have escaped the clutches of the roaring river.

He had already brought back the grub box, which had ridden down the flood. Its water-soaked contents were outspread in the circle of warmth. The canoe had been shattered beyond all possibility of repair. Joe's blankets had emerged from his disrupted pack and had

floated on. These had been reclaimed. Enough grub could be salvaged to take them down to the Landing afoot. And after that, what?

Joe lay, his back to the fire, looking at the pool. His bruised body was warm, but the heart and soul of him were chilled and numb. No use to upbraid Pete for his part of the catastrophe, to reproach him with bitter and futile words born of his own despair. No use to condemn himself for his folly in placing himself at the mercy of Pete's reckless whims. What was done could not be undone. The chapter was closed, his gold and his last hope gone; and that was the end of it.

He lay propped on his elbow, his listless gaze probing the limpid, dancing water that held his all. Because the cliffs surrounding the great pool were broken at the south, at his back; the low sun of mid-afternoon was bright on the foam-flecked surface. At this season of the year, no silt or sand was coming down with the flood. It was molten glass, molten ice. Through scrub timber that clothed the ridge above the flat, probing pencils of light shone down into mighty depths.

Joe watched, appalled, yet fascinated by glimpses of that vague, underwater world. Great waves rolled by, thrown back from the impact of the cascade. Shreds and islands of foam undulated lazily. Then, at intervals, would come a stretch of glassy water. Once, during such an instant of calm, Joe saw the contours of great, smooth boulders take form, in the searching pencils of light, far and far below.

He shuddered, closing his eyes. Again, in imagination, the clutch of the descending water was upon him, forcing him down and still farther down into that frightful abyss.

Again he was fighting for air, his lungs bursting, his whole body encircled as in bands of steel.

The moment passed. Solid ground was beneath him. The warmth of the fire was upon his back. He looked at the pool, teeth set. Great waves danced and scintillated in the sunlight. Islands of foam drifted by. He was thankful that a veil had been drawn across what he had seen. Never again, he knew, would he have the courage to embark even upon the surface of such dark, savage water.

PETE returned, empty-handed. The last of the equipment grudgingly tossed aside by the river had been reclaimed. Their worldly wealth was about them, steaming in the heat.

Pete's clothing was practically dry. His usual air of robust self-assurance had returned. He squatted beside a flat stone upon which he had spread the contents of his tobacco can. He thumbed it over, shifting it closer to the fire. From the corner of his eye he studied Joe, who was looking at the pool.

"It's tough, Joseph," said he. "I shouldn't have tried it. My error."

"It's all right," said Joe.

Pete grinned, his heavy brows lowering. A brown paper was dry. He scraped up enough of the weed to roll a cigarette, looking hard at Joe.

"Why don't you cuss me?" he demanded. "Why aren't you crying your eyes out? Go the limit. I've got it coming to me; no question about that."

"It's all right," Joe repeated listlessly. "I'm a free agent. I didn't have to ride with you."

"Bah!" said Pete. "You're not giving me a run for my money. Where's your dust now? Where's

that Betty gal? Where's that ace-high gimcrack—that locket—she gave you, and to which you clung like a sinner to his hope of salvation? Spill it, Joseph, old pal. Tell me plenty. Shoot the works."

Joe made no reply. He was sure, knowing Pete, that this defiant bluster merely covered up an inner sense of guilt. Pete knew well enough that his recklessness was inexcusable. Nothing was to be gained by enlarging on it.

"Well," growled Pete at length, "that's that, then. Let's get out of here, soon as you're able to travel. There's some hard days' hoofing ahead of us, before we make it to the Landing. On short rations, at that."

"The blankets aren't real dry," Joe objected. "They won't be, before dark. Might as well camp here till morning."

"Not me," returned Pete. "This place gives me the willies. Start out now, is my idea. Make camp below here and dry the stuff."

Joe stiffened suddenly, looking at the pool. He leaped up, his bruised body forgotten, and peered beneath a shading hand. He turned his head to look at the cascade, pouring down through the gap, twisted to squint at the sun. Then he snatched a piece of driftwood and thrust it deep, so that it stood upright. With the toe of his boot, at the exact point where the shadow of the stick ended, he marked a cross in the sand.

He returned to the fire, trembling, his face pale between the freckles. He looked hard at Pete. Pete looked back questioningly, his cigarette hanging motionless from his grinning lips.

"I saw it, Pete," Joe spoke in awed tones, gripping his hands together. "When the sunlight hit it, I saw it gleam."

"Saw what?"

"The locket. Down on the bottom. 'Way down. The current swept it into the pool."

"You're crazy," said Pete. "It's heavier than lead. It couldn't come this far."

"I saw it," Joe insisted. "The sunlight hit it once, just a thin beam. When I could see bottom again, it was gone. The sunlight had moved on. That's why I marked the spot. It's right along this line." He sighted past the stick and past the cross in the sand. "Right over there. Toward the middle. Almost under the falls."

He was breathing heavily in his excitement. Pete's amused grin deepened.

"So what?" he demanded. "Supposing you did see it, what then?"

"I'm going to get it," said Joe simply.

"Yeah?" said Pete. "How?"

JOE looked about him, at the willows, at the farther scrub timber. He took two steps in that direction, fumbling for his pocketknife, then halted and turned back. It was futile, on the face of it, to attempt to probe for the locket. No pole long enough and strong enough to penetrate that depth of water could be held against the slow-moving but irresistible current swinging sullenly around the pool.

He delved in his hip pocket and brought forth a slender coil of fish-line. He squatted beside the fire, unwrapping it, his gaze darting about him.

"Now what?" said Pete. "You're going to fish for it, eh?"

"If I could only find something to go on the end," Joe muttered. "Maybe I could hook onto it."

But there was nothing in the meager camp to serve as a grapnel. Joe dropped the line and tore off his

belt. With his knife he cut the buckle free. With a short length of fishline he tied the tongue back in such a manner that it projected at a sharp angle.

"I'll weight it down good," he said. "It's a long chance, but I'm going to try it."

"Phooey!" said Pete. "That hole's a hundred feet deep."

The pool was not that deep. After the first unsuccessful cast, Joe measured off the line by the ancient method of spanning it from thumb to shoulder. Allowing for the angle, and the sag caused by the pull of the current, it appeared to be slightly less than forty feet.

But that depth was staggering enough. To all intents and purposes, it was as the space between stars. After the fourth cast, Joe's improvised grapnel was caught fast in the hidden boulders. He tugged at it as hard as he dared, but it remained immovable.

"To blazes with it," said Pete, after Joe had struggled without success for several minutes. "Let it go. Come back in the spring, if you've a mind to. Look for it at low water."

"No," said Joe, between his teeth. "It'll be gone. It'll be covered up, or swept away. I'm staying here till I get it."

"You'll stay alone, then," said Pete. "The freeze-up's on our heels. Another three, four days and the whole North'll be frozen tighter than a drum. If you want to chance it, that's your business. As for me, I'm heading down to the Landing. I mean—now."

"Wait," Joe pleaded. "You wait, Pete. Don't go."

"I'll split the grub with you," returned Pete. "You've got your blankets. Come along or stay put; it's nothing to me."

Pete had his blankets rolled and his grub packed when a cry of dismay came from Joe. The line had parted, just below the surface. The remaining segment trailed in the current. Joe dragged it in and coiled it slowly, returning to the fire.

Pete slung his pack on his shoulder. Meeting Joe's level, unwinking gaze, he removed it again and lowered it to the ground. He shifted his position so that he stood on legs firmly planted, thumbs hooked in his belt.

THEY faced each other, eye to eye. The boom of the rapids was loud in the upper canyon. Here, within the lesser walls inclosing bank and pool, was comparative quiet.

"Pete," said Joe, "we were partners this summer. For a while. We didn't hit it off too well, but we parted as friends. Isn't that right?"

"That's right."

"You came along with your canoe and offered me a lift," Joe continued. "It was a friendly act, and I appreciated it. When we came to the rapids, you decided to ride them down. I didn't have any choice. We piled up on the rocks. You lost your canoe. The gold burst out of my pack and went to the bottom. We both made it ashore. You've collected most of the outfit that stayed afloat. That's where we stand now, eh?"

"Proceed," said Pete. "I thought you'd have something to say before I left. I've been waiting for it. Beginning to suspect something, is that it?"

"I suspect nothing," said Joe. His cheeks were bloodless beneath the freckles. "Like you said a while ago, it was a mistake in judgment on your part. It's over and past. The point is, before you go, I've got

a favor to ask of you. If you think I'm entitled to it."

"Yeah?" said Pete. He grinned slowly. "What is it?"

"Losing the gold doesn't matter—much," said Joe. "Ten times that amount wouldn't matter. But there's reasons why I'd like to have that locket back. Why I've got to, if it's humanly possible."

"I've wondered about that," said Pete, nodding. "I've been watching you, son. Losing your dust didn't ruin you. Battling for your life in the water didn't get you down. It wasn't until you found you'd lost that penny-ante gimcrack that you fell apart in hunks. It wasn't until you saw it again, there on the bottom, that you come to life again, full of hopes. Just what is there about that gadget?"

"I'll tell you," said Joe. "Maybe you'll understand, and maybe you won't. Don't you laugh at me." He hung his head, writhing with the torture of expressing his innermost thoughts. "Is isn't only because it's got Betty's picture in it. It isn't that she'd feel badly if she knew I'd lost it. It—it's more than that. You've been partners with me, Pete. You know I'm small. And backward. I don't amount to much. I never have. But Betty doesn't know it. She thinks I'm big—inside. Afraid of nothing. She knows I came up North on her account, to make a stake. She never dreamed that I drove myself to it. She wouldn't believe it if I told her I was afraid of the North, of the mountains and canyons, of rivers like this." He shuddered. "When she gave me the locket, when we said good-by, she said to me: 'Only brave men have worn it, Joe. It's yours. It'll bring you back to me.'"

"She said that, eh?" Pete's grin

was twisted and bitter. "Go on, Joe."

"And there's something about it, too, Pete," said Joe earnestly. "I don't know what. It seemed like, as long as I had it, because she believed in it—and in me—that I *wasn't* so small and scared any more. I was scared, all right, but it was like being afraid of the dark. You know all the while, 'way down deep in you, that morning'll come, sooner or later."

"That's enough," said Pete. "I've got it. I'm beginning to see daylight in the swamps. Now your hole card's gone, your bluff played out. You're sunk and sunk right. You're right back where you were before you ever met Betty, before she hung this medal around your neck and made you a hero. Is that it?"

"Don't," Joe muttered, his hands gripped together. "Don't, Pete. I know it seems funny to you. It—it's talking about something you don't understand. You're big and strong. You've never had to face—"

"The point is," said Pete, "where do I come in on the deal? Sure, I wrecked you in the rapids. Sure, I sent your precious locket into the bottom of this pothole. It's tough, and all that. What else?"

"Well," Joe spoke hesitantly, "it's a lot to ask. But I'll make it up to you, somehow. I'm not a very good swimmer. I'm scared, too. That pool's awfully deep. And cold. You're not afraid of anything. You can swim like a beaver. Would you dive in once, Pete, and see if you could get it for me?"

Pete stared at him, his brows lowering. He looked at the pool and back again, and shook his head.

"Dive for it? In *that* water?" A sardonic glitter kindled in his eye. "You don't know how humorous

that idea is, Joseph, me lad. No, I won't dive for it."

"You mean that it's impossible? That even you——"

"Just that," said Pete. "There's other reasons why I'm not trying it." He grinned. "Take a whirl at it yourself, Joe. It's only forty feet deep. And a half a degree above freezing. The current's swirling down there like the mill tails of hell. Peel off your clothes and have at it."

JOE looked over his shoulder at the mighty pool. A spasm of shuddering seized him, so that his teeth chattered. He wrung his hands.

"I can't, Pete."

"Sure you can. Remember, you're brave as a lion. Big as a house. Nothing can stop you."

Joe cast a wild look about him, a hunted, desperate glance. At the grim, towering mountains. At the pitiless sky, metallic and remote.

"I'd better try it, at that," he said in a quavering voice. "If I don't, there's no use struggling along."

"Not a bit of use," Pete agreed. "Might as well give yourself up. You couldn't face li'le Betty any more. She'd see right through the bluff you've been running all the while. 'So you lost it, eh, Joe?' she'll say. 'Well, well! Looks like I hung it on the wrong lad. You don't cast much of a shadow, at that. Funny I never noticed it before!'"

"Don't," Joe pleaded. "You don't have to help me, Pete. That's your privilege. Don't make it harder for me if—if I fail."

He snatched up more fuel from the drift and piled it on the fire. The flames roared high. His blankets were already suspended on stakes to dry. He spread the driest in the circle of warmth, in preparation for his return from the chill

abyss. He did not look at the pool as he thus made ready. His frenzied haste was that of one who battles against time and his own dwindling courage.

With trembling hands he removed his clothing. Great bruises marred the whiteness of his skin, where the savage rocks had battered him. These were already forgotten. For a space, he crouched before the flames, absorbing the fierceness of heat that could not still the shaking of his slender torso or the chattering of his teeth.

Pete backed up to the fire, spreading his hands.

"Big as a house," he repeated sardonically. "Brave as a lion."

With a sharp intake of breath, Joe turned. He charged toward the pool, his feet spurning the sand. At the very brink he halted, plowing deep. He stood for a space, a frail and cowering figure, an arm pressed over his eyes.

He stumbled back to the fire and collapsed upon the outspread blanket. He drew it up about his shoulders, wrapping it round and round, until he was swathed to the chin. Great shudders shook him in succeeding waves. Horror was in his gaze as he looked up at Pete, the horror of one who sees himself at last in a true light, and finds no hope of salvage left.

"It—it's too deep, Pete. And cold. I can't do it."

"You're not even going to try it, eh? Not even a bluff left?"

Joe crouched still lower, so that his bowed head rested on his knees.

"I can't do it," he repeated.

"Phooey!" said Pete. "Of course not. Well, I'm pulling my freight. You going with me?"

"Not to-night," Joe muttered. "In the morning, maybe. I haven't

got the heart. No use going anywhere, seems like."

"O. K.," said Pete. "You've got your blankets. Yonder's your half of the grub. When you come crawling into the Landing, don't tell the boys I didn't do right by you."

HE slung his pack over his shoulder again. He was actually going. Joe, looking up at him piteously, was mesmerized by the quality of his unwinking gaze. In just that way, Pete had looked at him when they had hurtled down into the pool.

"Before I go," said Pete, "there's something I've been spoiling to tell you for quite a while. This is the pay-off. You ready for it?"

Joe looked at him in silence, his trembling suddenly stilled.

"Unfold your ears," said Pete. "Listen close. I met you down at the Landing in early summer. We started up the North Fork together. Why? Because it tickled my fancy to team up with a shrinking li'le half portion like you. I'd have plenty to tell the boys, after summer was over." He chuckled grimly. "It was a horse on me. In more ways than one. Because—look, Joe. It wasn't till we'd been out nearly a month that I got a glimpse of that locket. I'd seen it before."

Joe eyed him unwinkingly. The booming thunder of the river seemed unnaturally loud.

"You'd seen it before?"

Pete nodded. "Betty was wearing it. Down in old Curry County. Fine gal. In fact, she was too good for me. She told me so. She'd already fallen for some one else. A noble, upstanding hero who dreams dreams, kicks wild cats out of the way, and has a habit of wading knee-deep through hostile circumstances. Yeah, she told me all about him.

Sorry and all that, she says. But she's already promised to this lad. She only mentioned his given name, when talking about him." He spoke between his teeth. "She called him Joe."

Joe sat, paralyzed, looking up into Pete's bitter, twisted features. It was as though a good-humored mask had been torn aside. Thus might the mountains themselves have stared down upon him, grinning and intent.

"Beginning to get the picture?" said Pete. "I'll make it good. I pestered Betty plenty. Forget this stalwart pilgrim, I told her, and trail along with me. To blazes with noble Joe. And how does she come back at me? With one of those sweet-in-death smiles that would make a graven image see red. This Joe's a better man than me, she opines. He suits her fine. He's a curly wolf. In fact, she'll never be able to see anybody else, as long as this fearless *Galahad* of hers is roaming the tall timber. She makes the point stick. It's final. So I pull my freight."

He slapped his thigh, threw back his head, and guffawed loudly. In that colossal bellow was no slightest tinge of mirth.

"It's funny, at that, Joe. In plenty of ways. The whole layout, I mean. Even when you began to talk about Betty, up there on the North Fork, I didn't tumble. The woods are full of Bettys. Joes grow on bushes. Even when I saw the locket, almost a month out, I figured I was mistaken. It was only when you showed me her picture that I got the full force of it. You'd been talking all the while about *Betty*—the only gal that ever caught my eye. And this shrinking li'le begonia, *this* blushing and underfed citizen who jumped every time a

bull owl whooped in the night, was none other than Betty's Joe!"

He guffawed anew, wiping his eyes. Joe huddled lower in his blanket. He seemed to shrink visibly in stature.

"Go on, Pete."

"That's all," said Pete. He hitched his pack across his broad shoulders. "For the record, at least. If you're good at guessing, you can figure the rest."

Joe nodded slowly. "You heard about my strike this summer, and knew I'd be going out afoot. It wasn't by accident that you came along. It wasn't an accident when we crashed up yonder. You knew the river. You were a strong swimmer. I'd never make it through. Is that it?"

"No, indeed," said Pete. "What a terrible story to spread at the Landing. I'd deny it quick as a flash. Everybody knows that accidents happen on the rapids."

"When you saw me swimming," Joe continued, "you were surprised. I saw it in your face. You heard me call for help when I was hanging to the wall. You would have let me drown."

"Didn't hear a sound," Pete denied.

"But tell me this," said Joe. "Why didn't you push me back into the water when I made it to shore? It would have been easy to do. Nobody would have known the difference. Eh, Pete? Wait"—he checked the other's facetious reply with an upraised hand whose fingers trembled—"I know. When you saw me looking like a drowned rat, you knew I would suffer more. Just living. I could stay in the North, to be laughed at and pitied. Or I could go creeping back to Betty. When I told you what the locket

meant to me, it made it perfect. Is that it, Pete?"

"Nonsense!" Pete scoffed. "What an imagination you got, son. The only perfect thing about it was when you asked *me* to dive for it. Ho, that was surely good!"

Joe looked away then, turning his gaze back to the fire. He piled on more fuel, so that sparks showered upward toward the darkening sky. The great pool was in shadow now, though the sunlight was still bright on the towering peaks. He huddled closer to the leaping flames, drawing his blanket about him.

"Well, Pete," he said, stirring the coals with a charred stick, "it looks like you've accomplished what you set out to do." His voice was low. "You can go now."

"Is that all?" said Pete incredulously. "Aren't you even going to tell me what you think of all this?"

"You can go," Joe repeated, stirring the coals. "What's done, is done. I've got nothing to say."

"Don't you set there and catch your death of cold," said Pete, with pretended concern. "Shake a leg. Get going. You following me down to the Landing to-night?"

"Not to-night." Joe looked about him, shivering anew. The shadows were deepening in the gorge. "In the morning—maybe."

"O. K.," said Pete cheerfully. "I'll be seeing you. Sweet dreams, son."

Chuckling, he strode away.

JOE knew, even before Pete's dwindling figure had faded against the sky on the down-river trail, that he would never wait till morning. It came to him as he crouched alone by the red, leaping flames, alone and insectlike in the midst of giant and savage

dimensions, that he could not face the coming night, or see another dawn. Stealing in from the eternity of cold and dark that lay beyond the barrens, the night would be long—too long. Grinning ghosts would crowd in with the encircling blackness, shoulder to shoulder. Dawn held no promise, or any succeeding dawn, or all the bleakness and vastness of the world in which he had striven to find a niche in vain.

His losing race was finished, in short; the brief chapter closed. He had demonstrated his inability to cope with circumstances and men. In the end, his bluff had failed. The last, futile card had fallen. The table was empty. Stakes and players alike were gone. Why carry the pretense farther?

Two ways of closing the record were before him. One was easy and painless. No engulfing horror would come with it, no stifling and ghastly terror. By merely allowing the fire to die down, and remaining as he was, a single blanket wrapped about him, he would presently fall asleep. Days hence, when searchers came for him, the tableau outspread on the bank would tell the story. It would be simple, obvious. While drying his clothes, he had underestimated the quality of the cold that had come with darkness. He had dozed off, allowing the fire to die, unaware of the greater darkness creeping in upon him. More than one adventurer of the wilds had passed on in just that casual manner.

The other was swifter, more terrible. He knew, looking at the darkening pool, that it was the way he must go. He had lived in terror and loneliness. He would die in the same manner. But he owed it to himself, to Betty, and to the

winnings for which he had gambled in vain, to make the attempt. If he gave all his strength to it, with no thought of again achieving the surface, he *might* reach bottom. If he could but get his hands on the locket, which brave men had worn, even death could not tear it from his grasp. He would take it with him—in terror, perhaps, but triumphant—across that other and darker river.

He did not shudder now, looking at the pool. He merely appraised his chances of piercing the abyss, the probability of finding the spot where the locket lay. The fact that those chill depths were in darkness now, would make no difference. He must be guided by the sense of touch alone. This should be easy, once he reached bottom. Two large boulders had been revealed by the probing pencil of light, shoulder to shoulder. Lesser boulders had grouped against these two, up-current. Beside these smaller ones the locket had gleamed briefly, brave, then had passed into darkness. If he could reach these two great boulders, the search was over. His questing fingers would find his treasure and close upon it.

HE piled on more fuel, so that the sparks showered upward. This was no gesture of weakness, a concession to the chance that he might return. It was tribute, rather, to the grim finality of his purpose. He knew that he might be forced to more than one attempt. If so, he must warm himself again, gain strength and courage for a new assault.

He stood up, presently, wrapped in his blanket, and studied the stake he had reared and the cross in the sand. An imaginary line between stake and cross, extending out and down into the pool, passed the point

where the locket lay. He estimated distances and dimensions, studied the swirl of limpid, sullen currents. He strode to the water's edge to peer down into the depths.

And all the while, he knew, he was only postponing the moment. He was pretending again to be casual and brave. Deep within him he could feel his heart drumming, like an imprisoned bird beating wildly against inclosing walls. Flesh was frail in the final crisis. Life clung to life.

He cast his blanket from him suddenly and charged upon the pool. He did not hesitate or turn aside. Without a backward glance, his feet spurring the sand, he leaped out and far.

The icy waters closed over him. He clawed down and down. Ghostly currents held on him; strange, up-boiling currents in whose grip he was less than a wind-blown straw. He was swung dizzily round and round, tossed skyward, sucked down again. Before, when he had battled the pool, when his every effort had been devoted to reaching the surface, the whim of these savage forces had seemed to thwart him. Now, when he fought for depth, he was again checkmated.

Losing ground, swinging farther into the heart of the pool despite his utmost efforts, he made for the vague twilight above. He broke surface near the wall and clung there, gasping.

Slowly he returned. He rose up on the sand weakly, his chest heaving, his body blue with cold. He collapsed on the blanket and wrapped it about him, his dripping head bowed on his arms. It was as though every nerve and sinew of him were chilled and senseless, that he would never know warmth or strength again.

It was dark when he leaped up and plunged again into the pool. Again, utterly spent, he achieved the bank. Once more, when the sheen of reflected starlight glittered and danced on the tossing water, he hurled himself blindly into the depths.

It was when he crawled across the chill sand from this third assault that he knew the truth. Fate had reserved its most pitiless gesture to the last. There was one way, and one way alone, that the bottom of the cavern could be reached. And this—as a throwback to his boyhood on the far-off, sunlit Rogue—represented the ultimate among all the terrors that had touched his life.

Only by hurling himself directly under the cascade, yielding his chilled and battered body to the full force of descending waters, could he hope to plumb the abyss.

"But I'm going to do it." He spoke his challenge aloud, through chattering teeth. As in his boyhood, when stronger and fearless playmates had taunted him to an attempt from which his very soul shrank, his voice came, brokenly "You bet—I will."

NIGHT was full-grown. The stars were blazing jewels in the sky. The strengthening splendor of the northern lights rolled out and out above the massive peaks, tremulous and overpowering. Pitiless and inexorable this world had seemed, not so long ago. It was beautiful now. The depths of the pool, into which the frightful impact of the cascade would hurl him, reeling, would be cloaked in utter darkness. The stars would be remote—remote.

He shed his blanket and crossed the sand drunkenly. The water brought no sensation of cold. He

struck out across the waves, bearing directly on the cascade. It was not necessary to thrust himself into it. The instant his outstretched arm touched the molten wall he was caught as in a vise and sucked under.

The impacts seemed vague and of lessening force. The sensation of falling ceased. Pressure increased about him frightfully, drumming in his ears, crushing his chest. Great boulders smote upward through the blackness. There were two, shoulder to shoulder. He clung to them, pulling himself directly into the teeth of the sweeping current. He hooked his elbows over them, his body trailing between, and his questing hand groped in the blackness.

He found the lesser boulders, dank and slippery, and knew that he had reached his goal. His fingers closed upon the locket. It was his right hand, and he clenched his fingers tighter as he straightened his arms and allowed the current to sweep him away.

He did not struggle as he rode on into the blackness. He did not waste his shreds of remaining strength. His moments of consciousness were few—the measured seconds between him and eternity were brief enough—and he needed them all. To taste to the fullest the regal cup here raised to his lips. To stand in the presence of ultimate truths—the dazzling and incredible truths that had heretofore eluded him—that had come to him now, at the final threshold.

For he knew that, having lost, he had won. His hand grasped treasure that he himself had reclaimed, through his own efforts, against overwhelming odds. He had been afraid, it was true. In the late crisis and all lesser crises of his life. He had triumphed over them all. In

spirit he had been invincible from the first, driving on and on, despite the protest of craven flesh. The proof of it was here, held fast in his numbing fingers. Neither man nor hostile circumstances could take it from him.

And the knowledge of it was in his heart. As he faced the end, toward which he was winging through the swirling void, he was neither lonely nor afraid!

Though he had no remote thought, in that reeling interval, that he would ever again see light and life, he locked his teeth in the effort to keep his breath in check. It was well that he did so, for his impact upon the wall all but caused his straining lungs to explode. Pressure decreased about him. He was surging upward. At the instant when he could hold his breath no longer, a radiant and far-flung dome leaped into life overhead. It was the splendor of the stars and the wavering, tremulous glory of the northern lights.

HE clung fast to the wall with his left hand, breathing deep. He was far along the great circle of the pool. He could see the glow of the fire, his warm blankets outspread, the farther line of driftwood. Though the distance between was like a tossing eternity, he knew that he could make it back. He had explored the terrors of the pool and was its master. He had looked upon death and had returned again. All he had discovered in the depths, all its splendid and matchless promise, was beckoning over yonder.

He looped the buckskin thong and silver chain about his neck. Because he trusted neither thong nor chain, he placed the locket between his teeth. He brushed the dank hair

from his eyes with fingers that were clawlike and senseless, and began the return. Having made the traverse before, he knew all the handholds along the wall. They were coated with ice now. The leaping spray was freezing as it fell. Not because he felt the cold, but because he knew that he was doomed unless he remained immersed, he traveled low, creeping like a sluggish insect along the water's edge.

Minutes—ages—later, he crawled slowly up the sand toward the fire. The thirty-foot stretch was the longest of all. He made it to his blankets. He crawled into them, clawed all within reach over him with slow, painful movements. Swathed round and round, he lay, his head pillowed upon his arm; and across that arm, as his clenched jaws relaxed, the locket hung suspended, gleaming dully.

He could not, as yet, feel the heat. His chilled flesh was senseless. Life would presently steal through his veins like smoldering fire. His battered body would throb its protest, to the farthest nerve and sinew. A period of shuddering weakness would follow, violent and uncontrolled. When this had passed, he must pile on more fuel, so that leaping flames would roar defiance to forces of cold and dark. Then, and then only, would the tortured flesh of him be safe and sound and warm.

At heart, he was already warm. With his rigid thumb, as he waited, he pressed against the spring catch of the locket. It flew open, and he saw Betty's face. It was wet, like his own, as with tears. Yet he saw, blinking down, turning the locket toward the leaping flames so that he could see the better, that she was smiling still. The curve of her lips was proud and serene. Her level gaze laughed into his. Confidently.

Understandingly. As for one whose trust has remained unshaken, whose faith has held firm to the end.

THE freeze-up caught him three days out from the Landing, but he made it through. Snow was driving at his back when he staggered into the huddle of log-walled buildings that marked the jump-off to the barrens. It was noon, and the first winter stage was lined up in front of the post, ready to pull out.

He spoke to the swaddled and be-furred driver, reserving a place on the down-river run.

"Clean to the Yukon?" said the hard-bitten one, with a glance at Joe's scarecrow outfit. "It cost plenty dust, brother."

"I've got it," returned Joe. "Can you hold everything for a few minutes while I buy some clothes?"

"Sure can," said the other, his suspicions fading. Frank envy was in his grin. "You're heading Outside, eh?"

"Outside," said Joe.

Self-deprecatorily as always, his slender body clumped with weariness, he entered the huge, smoke-blackened room that was the social and business headquarters of ten thousand square miles of wilderness. Many faces turned in his direction, from gaming table and bar. Men spoke to him guardedly, with a restraint that concealed their inner sympathy. From the furtive buzz of comment that followed, it was plain that the story of his loss in the rapids was generally known.

From a near-by table, Pete raised a hand in careless greeting. Pretending to be engrossed in his game, he studied his ex-partner's every movement. Others were watching Joe, too, as he shed his pack by the

door, opened it up, and fumbled in it.

"Look!" whispered one of those at Pete's table. "Look what he's fetching out of his pack!"

One by one Joe brought forth six moose-hide pokes from his pack. They were bulging and heavy, like fat sausages. Their skins were stretched taut, as though they had been immersed in water and dried again. Joe approached the bar and placed the pokes upon it, beside the gold scales.

"Hm-m-m," said McPherson, the post factor, masking his astonishment, "you got your dust back, eh?"

"Yes," said Joe. "And I'm going outside. I want to buy a parka, mittens, and some other stuff for the trail down river. I've got to hurry. The stage is waiting. We'll select the stuff, and you can weigh out the dust."

He discovered, as he wriggled into a parka, that Pete was at his side, peering at him through narrowed lids. Others stood behind Pete, obviously near bursting with curiosity. A group at the gold scales hefting the pokes, laying bets as to their weight, had their ears cocked in that direction.

Joe studied Pete as he drew on heavy mittens, his boyish features impassive. More than once, on the long trek to the post, he had wondered what his reaction would be in the presence of the one who had tried to hurt him the worst—and had done him the greatest service. Facing him, he found—as on that other grim moment—that he had nothing to say.

Pete was forced to put the question direct.

"I see you found your dust, Joe. That's fine. But how in blazes did you do it?"

He grinned as he said it, for the

benefit of the spectators. Also for the benefit of the spectators, Joe spoke slowly.

"It was like this, Pete. You know I lost a—a——" He hesitated.

"An old keepsake," Pete supplied. "Some gimcrack or another you set store by. Like a rabbit's foot. A locket, wasn't it?"

"A locket." Joe noddod. "You remember, I told you I'd seen it at the bottom. Well, after you left, I dove in after it."

"You dove in!" Pete breathed incredulously. "In *that* water?"

"Lawsy!" said a spectator, in awe. "In the Big Pool!"

"Just before the freeze-up!" added a third. "You must have wanted that trick gadget awful bad, son."

"Well"—Joe hunched his shoulders—"I'd carried it quite a while. I dove in four times, Pete, before I got to the bottom. The fourth time I got under the falls, and the force of it carried me down. It was right where I thought it was, against a couple of big boulders. It seemed like a half dozen smaller rocks were against those boulders, too. After I got out, and got to thinking about it, it seemed like those smaller rocks had felt kind of funny, when I had touched them. So the next morning I went down again. They weren't rocks at all, Pete! They were my six pokes."

Pete stared at him, teeth clenched.

"The locket was solid gold," Joe explained. "It was as heavy, for its size, as a poke of dust. There must be a kind of trough under the falls, worn smooth. The current swept them all down and they hung upon the same boulder. Anyway"—he grinned—"the dust was there. It's a good thing I went down after the locket. It was a break that I found out how to make it to the bottom.

The next trip wasn't so hard. Yeah, I was lucky all around."

THE spectators guffawed aloud. Often, in lonely camps that summer, Joe had cringed at the knowledge that these primitive citizens were nodding and chuckling together, when they spoke of him and his puny assault on the wilds. Their laughter now—which he had formerly feared—rang forth exultantly to the farthest rafters:

"Luck?" snorted a bearded giant. "Don't kid us, son. We ain't so dumb. I filled a royal flush, once, busted in the middle. But I never dived into the Big Pool just before the freeze-up. And that's only half of it." He glared about him. "I ain't going to."

"I seen a lad in a circus," said another. "Twice a day he crawled into a cage with a mess of grinning lions. They were as big as horses, and sold on the theory that some day, when his back was turned, they'd get to bite him in two. Just like he was a pretzel. This soft-spoken lad laughed in their faces and made 'em do a toe dance. All it took was a little luck."

"Speaking of poker," offered a third, sadly, "I tangled with a pilgrim, once, in a no-limit game. He was a blushing and backward lad, like Joe. He didn't know enough about the game to call. He just kept on raising, more scared all the while. I felt sorry for him. And what do you reckon he held when I finally saw him for everything I had but the shirt on my back? Four aces." He groaned. "Did I learn about bluffing from him!"

"All aboard!" came the stage driver's impatient yell. "All aboard for downriver!"

Pete followed Joe out to the stage. This was natural enough, among those who had once been partners. The others held back. What Pete said to him as they stood beside the sled, while the stage driver lined out his dogs, was not the least of the stirring memories that Joe took with him out of the North.

"Damn a man," said Pete, "who isn't man enough to admit it when he's bitten off more than he can chew!" He extended his hand. Again his face was good-humored and reckless, as of old. "Betty was right. You're a better man than me, son. Strength to your arm."

"Thanks, Pete," said Joe.

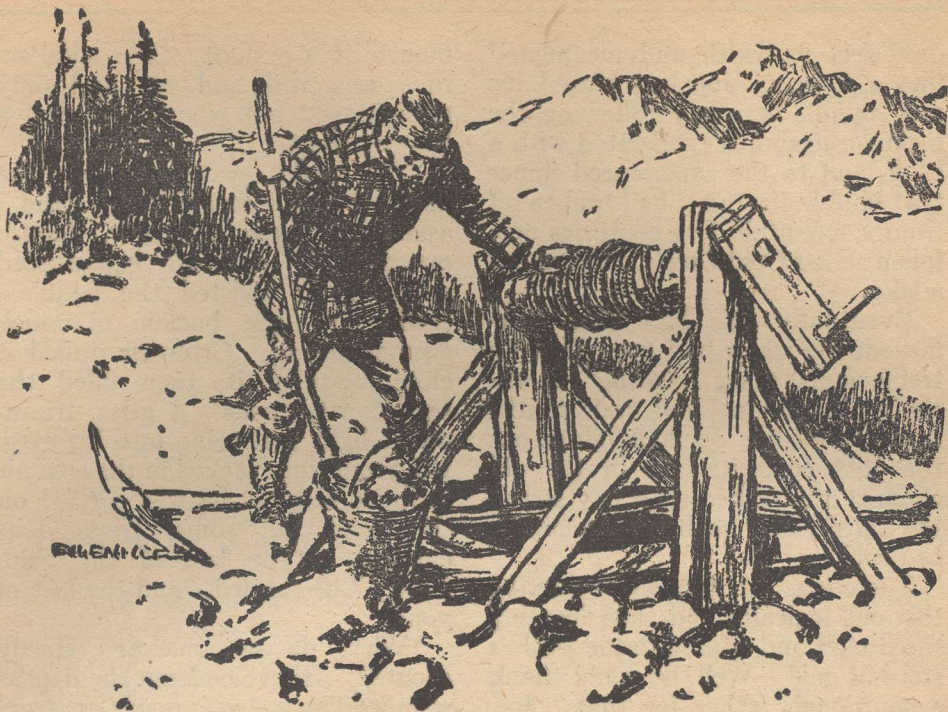
He was overcome, thrilled to the depths of him by the magnificent gesture of one who knew also, how to lose. Their hands gripped hard.

"She's a good girl," said Pete. "None better. Take care of her, Joe."

"I'll try to," said Joe. "You bet I will."

"Just run your bluff to the end, you curly wolf," said Pete, waving him away. "The show-down'll take care of itself. You've learned that already, eh? So long. Good luck."

The long whip cracked. Sled runners sang. Looking back, Joe saw Pete standing there, his arm up-flung. He continued to look back for a space, after Pete was gone. He had noticed before, but never in just this way, how dazzling and overpowering was the beauty of the sunlight on the mighty peaks, upreared above the ramparts of the Stewart.



A WOLVERENE'S WAY

By SETH RANGER

Author of "The Cougar's Prey," etc.

THAT'S the last of the gold," Joe Hardy said as he dumped the shovel of muck into the bucket. "We've cleaned out the pocket, and not a bad pocket at that—twenty-four hundred ounces."

Fifty feet above, his partner, Crimmer, took up the slack in the windlass rope.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Joe Hardy leaned on the shovel and stared at bed rock. They had prospected three miles of Cold Creek before he solved the problem of

locating the pocket. He had known there was gold on the creek somewhere. It followed that if the nuggets were not scattered, there must be a concentration. Gold did not take wings and fly. It remained until man came along and mined it, and so fixing the point of concentration had been the next step.

Trees caught his interest finally. He noticed there was a difference in ages—a stand of timber sweeping through a forest that was at least two hundred years older. This younger stand was roughly a hun-

dred feet in width and meandered like a stream. Joe had blazed his way uphill, patiently following the meanderings until confronted with a bluff, and to the experienced miner that bluff indicated it had broken off from a mountain two centuries ago, fallen across Cold Creek, and created a lake.

Eventually this lake had overflowed; the water had gone out in a tremendous rush, creating an entirely new channel and draining the temporary lake. Joe had figured out the gold concentration in the old channel and picked up a pay streak the third shaft he had punched to bed rock.

There was satisfaction in figuring this out logically and then locating the pocket and adding to the world's store of gold. Well, he could thank a sourdough father for that. Joe, Sr. had taught him all of the tricks of mining, trapping, and woodcraft. In the teaching, he had given Joe a strong body, nearly six feet in length and weighing a hundred and seventy pounds. The weight was carried where needed. And he had taught Joe the importance of calmness in a crisis. "When a man in the North country flies off the handle, nine times out of ten he's licked," old Joe had often said. "Another thing, if you'll give instinct a chance, most of the time you'll catch a warning of danger."

JOE HARDY had been thinking of the pocket and the fact they had worked it out when his partner tightened the windlass rope; now he glanced up curiously as something warned him.

"What'd you say?" he asked.

He could see Crimmer's bearded face and bulging shoulders framed against a sullen sky. Occasionally a stray snowflake drifted across the

mouth of the shaft. The windlass rope was stiff and icy and only straightened out when it carried a heavy weight.

"You said we'd cleaned the pocket," Crimmer answered, "and I asked you if you was sure. Foolish question to ask an experienced miner." He twisted the windlass crank, and the bucket of muck swung upward. Crimmer pulled it clear, emptied it, then filled the bucket with rocks. A grim, triumphant light had come into his eyes. His great lungs sucked in the cold air spasmodically as he was carried on the crest of some tremendous emotion. "The last of the gold, Hardy," he snarled, "and the last of you!"

"What do you mean?" Hardy shouted. His voice from the depths sounded like a strong man's cry from the tomb. There was muffled echo, chilling the blood.

"I mean, you're in your grave," Crimmer shouted. "Now get this! When I hit this country——"

"When you hit this country, you were a chechahco with five hundred dollars in your poke and you didn't know how to build a camp fire on a wet day," Joe Hardy interrupted.

"When I hit this country," Crimmer went on, "you were in jail on a fish piracy charge——"

"Sure! One of the big canning outfits had set a trap, and the salmon the miners and natives in the upper country depended on for food weren't getting up, so I raided the trap, sold the fish, bought grub with the proceeds, and distributed it to the upper country people," Hardy rasped.

"You were in jail. I paid your fine," Crimmer continued, determined to have his say, "I bought the outfit as you didn't have a dime——"

"And in return I led you to a pay streak my old man had told me about," Joe Hardy shouted, "and you've seen more raw gold than you ever dreamed existed. My experience balanced your money, Crimmer. Well, I'm not surprised—much. I've seen it coming. You've fondled the gold every night in the cabin. It's made a hog of you, Crimmer. I wasn't expecting you to make the move just this quick."

Joe realized he should have been on guard, but he knew the answer—eighteen hours a day of thawing and digging had taken a toll in strength, and when a man is physically exhausted, he is mentally sluggish, also.

"I figured I should have sixty per cent of the clean-up, and you forty per cent," Crimmer said thickly. "And you shook your head and said it was the custom of the country to split fifty-fifty. I say, the devil with the country and its customs. I like an earlier custom."

"What's that?" Hardy asked, striving to devise some trick by which he could reach the surface and meet Crimmer on even terms.

"I'm thinking of the first custom—the law of survival of the fittest. The smartest and strongest got the gravy, the sap got what was left. Hardy, I'm helping myself to twenty-four hundred ounces of gravy."

CRIMMER leaned on the windlass and peered down. From boyhood he had been a bully simply because his great physical strength had made it possible for him to inflict his will on others. He had brought tears to the eyes of courageous boys by driving a thumb between their muscles. As a man he had insulted smaller men for the sheer pleasure of watching

physical and verbal resentment die when they estimated his strength. He found pleasure in watching the flush of humiliation steal across a man's face, particularly if he were in the presence of the woman he loved. At such times it was agony for some men to back down.

Crimmer had never known defeat, but this was his triumph. He must enjoy it to the full measure, though it was almost impossible to catch anything of emotion on Hardy's face which was covered with blue muck from the mine. The muck was so thick it was almost clay, and his eyes, burning with fury, were like flames bursting from clay furnaces in a pottery.

"You'll never get away with it," Joe Hardy presently observed; "there'll be a slip somewhere—a clew for a marshal to follow."

"I've thought of everything," Crimmer answered. "This is a hundred miles off the nearest trail. Nobody ever comes this way, and you'll be dead a long time before you're found. Then what'll be found?"

"I don't know," Hardy answered in a dangerously soft voice. "What will be found?"

"You, and a frayed rope. They'll say you slid down the rope into the shaft, and when you tried to climb out, the rope broke. Like this!" He lowered the bucket thirty feet, then taking a hammer, he pounded the rope against the windlass shaft until the strands parted.

Joe Hardy flattened himself against the shaft as the bucket crashed down. It missed his body by a matter of inches. Joe looked up, and saw Crimmer was running down the broken end some twenty feet. With twenty feet hanging from the windlass and thirty feet on the bucket, the full fifty feet would be accounted for.

"You're a smooth one, Crimmer," Joe said; "you don't propose to be convicted by a rope, as you might be if the measurements weren't exactly right. Yes, you're smart. But are you smart enough?"

"Plenty smart enough," Crimmer jeered. "Crimmer isn't my right name. I'll take twenty-four hundred ounces of newly-mined gold to the assay office in Seattle and I'll say pay off at the new rate, roughly thirty-four dollars an ounce. That figures something over eighty-one thousand dollars." He made an elaborate pretense of scratching his head thoughtfully. "What was it you planned to do with your half?" The sneer was maddening.

Joe Hardy was finding it hard not to crack under this man's studied torture. Joe had told him of his dream of opening up a big low-grade gold proposition down on Alice Bay and giving year-around employment to hundreds of men. "Come in with me," he had invited, "and we'll run this clean-up into millions."

Hardy did not answer directly. "Crimmer, you're a wolverene," he said, and his voice was that of a man who had glanced at a column of figures and was adding the total. "A wolverene takes more than he needs, has no respect for the rules of the game, he wastes food, kills for the sheer joy of killing."

"And he's the smartest creature ever turned loose in the North," Crimmer interrupted. "He'll run a trap line, ahead of the trapper, killing everything in it and having the time of his life. He'll get at food caches even suspended from a wire, and he'll scent, avoid, or otherwise elude every trap set for him. He's fit and he survives," Crimmer concluded significantly. He left the windlass, but returned almost immediately. "That father of yours

was something of a wolverene trapper, wasn't he?"

The tone almost stung Hardy into an outburst. He checked his fury with an effort, resolved to give this man no satisfaction whatever.

"It seems to me you've given credit to your father for every trick you know," Crimmer continued in a sarcastic tone; "certainly he was a great wolverene trapper."

"So what?" Hardy snarled.

"Why not figure some way out of the shaft, then trap me?" he suggested.

"You don't think for a minute I've folded up and quit, do you?" the trapped man retorted.

Crimmer sneered and walked away.

It was an hour before he reappeared. He had shed his half-frozen, muck-soiled garments and was dressed for the trail.

"Why don't you squeal, Hardy—it might break my tender heart?" he jeered.

"My father once saw a wolverene attack a trapped wolf," Joe Hardy answered slowly. "The wolf didn't scream or squeal. He didn't beg, either. He fought back. Think it over, Crimmer."

ALONE, Joe Hardy considered his situation. Few men care to die at any time, or any age. But no man of twenty-one, with a girl waiting in the nearest town and a lot of unfinished plans, is going to die without doing something about it.

"Had I been older," he reflected, "I'd have known Crimmer was jealous of me because I could take care of myself in the woods and he couldn't—though he is ten years older, taller, and weighs fifty pounds more. I've just realized jealousy started him brooding and greed

finished it. He sure was plenty vindictive when he sprung the trap. And he waited for the last ounce of gold, too."

Joe took stock of available objects which might help him escape. The bottom of the shaft was covered with muck, ashes, and the ends of wood they had burned in thawing the ground. The shaft itself was frozen solid. There was no chance of digging at the sides, caving off the earth, slowly filling the shaft, and thus gaining the surface. The end of the rope was thirty feet from the bottom of the shaft, and there appeared to be no method of bringing it within reach of his hands. He was rather effectively trapped.

"If I had materials for a ladder," Joe mused, "I might tear up my clothes, use the strips to lash steps to the—— No, that won't work."

Joe's only chance lay in either bringing the end of the rope within reach, or going to the rope. Invariably his thoughts returned to the ladder idea. "I've got to have steps, one above the other," he groaned. "I could dig toe holds in the wall, but there's nothing to hang onto, and the other wall is too far away for me to brace my back against while I worked up. I——"

Suddenly the coat of muck on his face cracked in a grin. "That might be done!" he cried.

He caught up the pick and drove the point into the wall of the shaft. Again and again he struck the same spot, until gradually, a small hole was drilled in the frozen surface. Two feet above the first hole, he drove a second; two feet above that, a third. Standing on the bottom of the bucket, swinging the pick above his head, he completed the fifth hole.

Joe Hardy divided the burned ends of wood left and cut the longest

and strongest into pegs. He built a small fire with a portion of the remainder and partly thawed a heap of clay. Inserting the pegs into the holes, Joe packed them with clay and then dropped to his face to escape smoke fumes and await results.

The cold, sweeping across the land, penetrated the shaft, and slowly froze the clay about the pegs. He tested the first peg cautiously, gradually applying the weight while his heart pounded with excitement. When he found it would hold him, he experienced an odd sense of elation. It was almost as if his father were at his elbow saying, "Good work, my boy; that's using the old head."

He smiled, there in the gloom of the shaft—a smile that again cracked the crust of the blue muck smeared across his face.

He climbed the pegs, and swinging the pick with one hand while his free hand grasped a peg for support, he drove other holes. It was precarious work, for a slip meant a broken leg or hip, and that meant slow and agonizing death.

Night came, the stars hung low and bright, but Joe continued digging and pegging his way slowly upward until the rope was almost within reach. He returned to the bottom of the shaft, built a fire and warmed his hands, working them until the numbness was gone.

"Now or never," he growled at length. "If I get out of here, I'll sure cook myself a good meal before turning in."

HE reflected it had been thirty-six hours since he had eaten. A hungry man is an easy victim for the frost. He climbed until his hand clutched the top peg,

then twisted about, facing the rope. It was dimly visible, stiff with frost and twisted as though the fibers had drawn themselves up in pain. He dug his heels into the wall, then leaped. His right hand caught the rope, held, then slipped as his left hand also caught. He knew blood flowed from the palm of the right hand where the frost-stiffened rope had rasped it, but he clutched tightly and pulled himself up a few inches, at the same time twisting his legs about the rope. Slowly he pulled himself to the windlass and crooked his right arm over the shaft.

For several seconds, he swung, panting, then his feet groped and touched a board. Gingerly he placed his weight on the board, felt it sag, then hold. With a swing he leaped from the board to solid ground.

A minute passed, and there was no sound to break the silence save the beating of the man's heart and the sobbing of his lungs. "Life," he whispered at length, looking at the stars, "is appreciated for the first time."

Joe Hardy followed the familiar path to the cabin. The door was closed, but a window had been broken, and it was not hard to guess the reason. Crimmer wanted the way left clear for prowling animals to destroy whatever remained in the cabin. Otherwise those who chanced upon the spot might view with suspicion, a body in the bottom of a shaft and an empty food cache. They would reason a man whose grub was low, would be getting more—not mining.

"And so he made it possible for those who investigated to believe I was killed in the shaft and the animals came afterwards," Joe mused. "Crimmer had everything figured

out—everything but freezing pegs into the side of the shaft."

He lighted a candle and examined the food cache. It was empty, and that meant Crimmer had destroyed such food as he could not carry. It was not difficult to picture Crimmer destroying the food, a sneer on his harsh features and his lips saying, "If he does get out, then he'll have a fine chance to trap his food. Maybe his old man learned him to do that, too."

The ax was gone with the rifle. "A hunting knife for defense, fuel, and to kill game," Joe muttered, his hand touching the hilt of the knife in his belt. "That's not much in the dead of winter. Crimmer ran true to form, destroying what he could not use—a real wolverene."

He built a fire and crawled into his sleeping bag to rest and to think. With his bare fists, and his body weakened by lack of food, Joe was no match for the powerful Crimmer. Man to man, in physical combat, he was no match at any time. "I could knock him on the head," he reflected, "but I'd have to get him first crack. There'd be no second chance. And if he caught me closing in, he'd drill me with his six-gun."

The subconscious mind is often most active when a tired man is on the border line of slumber. The fire had died low; an occasional flash of yellow streaked across the walls as a vagrant sliver flared, but mostly it was dark. Joe Hardy's breathing grew heavier, then suddenly, there in the gloom, a chuckle broke the silence. "A wolverene always runs true to form, and that's how dad caught the wolverene of Shaman Creek, the wolverene of——" His voice trailed into silence. The last flicker died in the stove. Joe Hardy slept.

WELL before daybreak Joe left the cabin. His belt was tightened to stifle the hunger pains in his stomach, and his broad shoulders carried a bulky and rather heavy burden.

Snow was blowing, but it was not difficult to follow the trail. Crimmer, dragging a sled containing the gold and his outfit, was sticking close to the creek. His trail was visible in the lee of logs where the snow had not blown about. Joe located Crimmer's first camp at noon. Fox tracks accounted for the disappearance of the food scraps Joe had counted on eating. He resented the idea of eating the food Crimmer had discarded, but he also realized the necessity of eating something to combat frost and weakness.

That night Joe slept crouched near a miserable fire, replenished from time to time with branches he had broken off dead trees. At dawn he closed in on Crimmer's camp. He saw the big fellow squatting before the fire, gorging himself. The odor of bacon was in the air, and Joe resented the impulse to settle conclusions immediately. "A good sock on the jaw and I'd go down," he muttered. "Gosh, I'm hungry."

Crimmer left two slices of bacon and a half pound of beans in the frying pan and began packing. Joe's mouth began to water. "Don't dump that food in the fire," he muttered, "don't——"

Crimmer completed his packing, eyed the contents of the frying pan, tried to cram it into an already over-filled stomach, then dumped the remainder into the ashes. "Wolverene," Joe muttered, watching.

The moment Crimmer was around a bend in the creek, the hungry man was on his hand and knees, picking single beans from the ashes and cleaning off the bacon. He searched

about like a wolf, picking up scraps of meat the man had left from the previous night's meal.

As a starved dog leaves the spot where he has found food, so Joe Hardy left Crimmer's camp, with frequent backward glances and lagging steps. An hour later he left Crimmer's trail, swung to the right, and pushed his way through the timber, leaving the stream to Crimmer. When he was a good two hours ahead, Joe returned to the stream and watched the blowing snow cover his tracks. "Good!" he cried. "There'll be no moccasin prints to give me away."

He shed his pack and set to work, his mind on the Shaman Creek wolverene. That creature had sprung carefully set traps; avoided those he could not spring. He had even crawled out on a limb and dropped onto a food cache suspended on the end of a wire. He had torn the cache apart to gratify his desire for destruction, and it was then Joe's father had devised a means of trapping the Shaman Creek devil.

Joe made up as fine a food cache as a hungry man ever looked upon. He crawled out onto the limb of a convenient tree, lowered the cache to within seven feet of the ground, and lashed the wire securely to the limb. Then he spent nearly a half hour in the vicinity below the cache. "It may work, and it may not," he growled, "but I can't linger here any longer."

JOE made his way to the bank, crouched behind a log, and waited. The snow blew steadily, and he watched his track gradually disappear as the particles filled the holes and leveled off the spot.

Less than an hour later Crimmer

came around the turn in the creek. His head was bent low, and a harness attached to the sled cut into the matting of parka about his massive shoulders. The wind, at his back, helped some, and the man was making fair time.

Joe almost stopped breathing. Would Crimmer see the cache, or was his head bent too low? He drew nearer, step by step, then suddenly his head lifted, stared briefly, and was lowered. "He didn't see it," Joe Hardy groaned. "That means I've got to settle it, knife against six-gun."

He raised his head and prepared to rush the intervening space, hoping to take the big man by surprise, but again Crimmer was looking up. He stopped and stared at the cache.

"Food!" Crimmer muttered. And to his keen mind that meant others were in the country. Others who might stumble onto the cabin and find Joe Hardy alive and starving in the bottom of the shaft. Food meant life; the lack of it, death. He shook the harness from his shoulders, and his purpose was evident. He would run, leap, grasp the cache, and his great weight would tear it down. If Joe Hardy or any one else came that way, depending on the cache, they would not find it. Of course, Joe could not escape, but— The doubt had never quite left Crimmer's mind.

He ran, gathering his strength for a leap into the air. Then he leaped. His right foot left the ground a scant twelve inches, then something dark, with jaws, clinging to that foot pulled him down. His body crashed to the snow, and from his thick lips came a cry of pain mixed with abject fear.

Crimmer turned and clawed at his foot. He resembled a trapped bear,

bewildered, frightened, and threshing about. His hands pushed away the snow, disclosing a heavy trap fastened to his foot just above the ankle. He shifted his body, grasped the jaws with his hands, and applied his great strength.

Sweat came to his forehead, and his jaw set from the stress of the physical effort; cords appeared tense against the man's hairy neck, then he collapsed, panting. "I can't get away," he screamed. "I'm caught! I'm not—strong—enough!"

Joe Hardy could hear him breathing; could see the terror growing in his eyes. Again and again Crimmer's hands tore at the jaws and fell back in defeat. Crimmer's resemblance to an animal increased each moment. He was losing his head, pulling, tearing, and hauling at the chain that was fastened to an exposed root. He shifted to the root and tried to tear it out. Eventually craft came into his eyes. He drew his six-gun, aimed it at one of the springs, and fired. There was confidence in his eyes now. This was the way out. He bent closer. The bullet had glanced from the spring.

HE fired twice more, then shot at the chain. The chain leaped from the bullet's impact, but did not part. As the echo of the sixth shot died, Joe Hardy leaped into the open, knife drawn.

"I was waiting for you to empty that gun," he shouted. "Drop it, or I'll sink this knife into you before you can reload."

"Joe! You—"

"Yes, I set the trap. There's nothing in the cache but my sleeping bag and some brush to give it bulk. You're a wolverene, and wolverenes run true to form—destroy what they can't use," he said.

"Joe, you ain't—you're going to kill me, Joe. Joe, you can't do that. Think of the nights we slept together; ate out of the same pan and—don't that mean anything, Joe?" The eyes were wide with terror, and the big hands, clutched together, were expressive of the trapped man's plea.

"I might have thought of a lot of things if you'd played the game, Crimmer," Joe answered. "But getting back to my dad. I never mentioned it, those nights we talked around the fire, because you shut me off, but the Shaman Creek wolverene was a cache robber, and dad trapped him setting traps underneath a suspended cache. If you'd ever let me complete that yarn, you might not have walked into a trap."

"You ain't going to kill me, Joe? Life's sweet."

"No, I'm not going to kill you. I wrapped the jaws of that trap so it

wouldn't break your leg, but you'll have to take things easy for a few weeks. There's a cabin on a flat a quarter of a mile from here."

"I've learned my lesson, Joe," Crimmer cried, and a glitter of hope and something more came into his eyes; "we'll be pardners again, and I'll put my half of the gold into that low-grade proposition you wanted to develop. We'll give a lot of men jobs, year around, and——"

"Too late, Crimmer," Joe Hardy answered. "I've learned a lesson, too. I'll help you to the cabin and see that you've got enough fuel and most of the grub——"

"And my half of the gold?" Crimmer whimpered.

"Your half?" Joe softly inquired. "There's no half—it is all in one lot. We've been working under a new rule, your rule, the survival of the fittest—the gravy goes to the strong, and the sucker gets what's left."

NEW BUFFALO BOSS

A THREE-DAY battle deposed another monarch recently on the huge buffalo ranch of Major Gordon W. Lillie (Pawnee Bill) in Oklahoma.

Old Patriarch, big bull which has led Pawnee Bill's buffalo herd for ten years, was challenged and finally beaten by a younger bull.

The battle raged for three days and three nights, with intermissions when both animals, seemingly by common consent, would sink to the ground exhausted.

A herd of cows and calves ringed the fighters, watching and waiting. Time after time the bulls charged headlong at each other, crashing their shaggy skulls together with the force of piledrivers.

Old Patriarch finally failed to rise. The younger bull nosed the waiting cows and calves into a herd and led them away. Three old cows elected to stay behind with the fallen monarch.

Disconsolately he arose and led his three remaining followers to the south fence of the ranch. He charged the stout fence repeatedly until he cracked off two posts and he and the three cows were free.

Pawnee Bill's ropers recaptured them the following day and installed them in a special corral. Major Lillie has named the winner New Deal.



NUGGETS AND VIOLETS

By W. RYERSON JOHNSON

Author of "Borrowed Time," etc.

SEVERAL times a year "Bonanza Bill" Holst turned aside from the gold trail and looked in at the Bar T. He was "some sentimental," as he expressed it, about the spread where he had drawn pay for so long as top hand.

Of course, there was "Old Man" Pendleton's daughter, Carmen. Carmen's mother had been Spanish, and Carmen loved Bonanza with all her passionate soul—and all her Spanish pride couldn't keep her from letting him know. But Carmen wasn't the reason for Bonanza's frequent Bar T visits. No. Bonanza assured

himself of that every time he looked at her.

Bonanza liked blondes, and Carmen was only a breath-stopping brunette, with smoldering jet eyes, hair like a slash of midnight in a canyon, skin the soft creamy texture of yucca flower petals, and a small red mouth that any puncher in his right mind—always excepting Bonanza Bill—would have ridden to town backward to kiss.

The last time Bonanza showed up at the ranch, Old Man Pendleton backed him up against the corral bars and said:

"Son, I've knowed you since you

weren't no bigger'n a gopher and jist as frisky. I've watched you grow up. You had the makin's of a fine cowman. Then you slipped a couple nobbins in your head and started prospectin'. For three years, you've chased all over hell and Texas, and what's the dividends outside a couple hundred blond addresses all of which you'd swap for a couple hundred new ones? *Bonanza Bill!*—now ain't that a devil of a cognomen for a cowman?"

"A devil of a cog-what?" Bonanza bristled, guessing by old Jim's manner it wasn't a compliment.

Old Man Pendleton loped right ahead. "For all you're sometimes locoeder'n a marijuana Mex, still and surprisin', you got hoss sense—and cow sense. Years are slidin' along under my feet, son. I need a younger man to take holt with me around here. I'm puttin' it to you cold. Want to run this outfit?"

Bonanza managed to convey the impression, pleasantly, that he had no interest in cows except as they were served to him, part at a time, on a platter, rare, with fried potatoes, black coffee, and apple pie.

A FEW days later Bonanza Bill's side-kick, "Whoop-it-up" Farley, breezed in. In a lot of ways Whoop was just a smaller edition of Bonanza. But there were several things about him peculiarly his own. He was as homely as Bonanza was handsome; he had hair red as an Arizona sunset; he had the perpetual animation of a Mexican jumping bean.

As soon as Whoop could get Bonanza off to himself in a corner of the ranch house, he clamored:

"What's the matter with Carmen? She gimme a look like she was up on top a house and I was in a valley, crawlin'."

Bonanza grinned. "Carmen's kind of jealous of you, Whoop, that's all. She knows that when you come, I go." The grin broadened. "She says you ain't a good infloence for me."

Whoop scowled. "Oh, yeah? I hope you fall in love with Carmen and she looks at you like she just done me."

"I don't fall in love," Bonanza said flatly, "and if I did——"

"Yeah, I know; if you did, it'd be blondes. Glad you menchuned it. Brings me right to the point." He hunched down in a rocking chair and started rocking. He had to be moving, always. "Lissen, we're ridin' to Blue Butte."

"Gold?"

"Blondes."

"It's forty-seven miles to Blue Butte."

"It's worth it."

"How many blondes?"

"One—and you can raffle off all your other addresses."

"Forty-seven miles for one blonde? I won't go. Born or made?"

"Born, brother! She thinks peroxide is something to put on cut fingers and watch the bubbles."

"Oh, yeah?" Bonanza rubbed thoughtfully at his jaw. "Forty-seven miles——"

"She works in the Bonanza Café, and they call her Bonanza Babe."

"Huh? Same name's mine?"

Whoop rocked faster.

"I thought that'd perk you up," he said. "But you ain't got a chance. 'Cause why? 'Cause Bonanza Babe is no man's gal. She breaks hearts like she breaks dishes. She's got a special grudge agin' roamin' six-foot Romeos with flashin' teeth in handsome bronzed faces, that thinks they're good with wimmin. She gets 'em so goofy they wear flowers in their buttonholes be-

cause of the sentiment, and give her away all their keepsakes, like them three gold nuggets you keep in the chamois-skin bag for luck. Then she laughs heartless and says, 'On your way, Willie; I gotta clean off the butcher's block for the next lamb.' Interested?"

"Interested, hell!" Bonanza divested himself of. "What's to get interested in that? You know how I handles them kind of girls. You've seen me work."

"Yeah, I've seen you work. But you never had no competition before, son." The rocking chair creaked under Whoop's furious antics. "Interested?"

"Naw! Bonanza Babe!—now ain't that a devil of a— a cognomen for a blond gal?"

"We'll leave in the mornin'."

"She makes 'em so sappy they wear flowers in their buttonhole—she makes 'em give away their gold nuggets in a chamois-skin bag——"

"We'll leave early," Whoop said.

A RED sun slanted its rays across the Rio Toro uplands, diamond-sparkling the dew-drenched zacaton grass and wild oats. Birds caroled from trail-side thickets. Bonanza and Whoop breathed deeply of the early-morning freshness as they swung along at a lazy gallop.

"This," Whoop said, chuckling, "reminds me of the hoss that can't be rode and the man that can't be thrown."

"What reminds you of it?"

"You remind me of it. You and Bonanza Babe."

"I'm listenin'," Bonanza said ominously.

Whoop ran lean fingers under his sweat band, tilted his wide-brimmed Stetson, and clawed thoughtfully at his red hair.

"What I mean is: Here we got two alleged people—Bonanza Bill, that no gal can tie a apron string onto, and Bonanza Babe, that no man can loop a lasso over. Get it? It's goin' to be good, huh?"

"Good for me!" Bonanza's voice got louder and hoarser. "I'll show her who is a butcher's block! I'll learn her to come foolin' around me and——"

"Whoa there, runaway!" Whoop snubbed Bonanza up short. "She never called you no butcher's block. And you're the one that's goin' to her, ain't it, or am I thinkin' about two other people?"

"That's right—run me down! Stick up for Babe and run me down. You've only knowed me twenty years, ever since when I saved your life. My pal!"

Whoop laughed mysteriously. "I'm for you in this deal, Bonanza. I'm for you heads, tails, and midriff, and *don't you forget it!*"

"What do you mean," Bonanza asked, "by that unduly emphasis on, 'Don't you forget it?' Whoop, I'm beginnin' to suspect you of a ulterior motif."

"A what?"

"Card-up-sleeve to you."

"After all these years, pal?" Whoop shook his head sadly, then growled: "What's the idea of callin' on a gal with your six-gun strapped around your middle? They don't wear their hardware on the streets of Blue Butte."

"I always wear a gun prospectin', don't I? Well, there's just as liable to be snakes and varmints in Blue Butte as in the hills. In consequent, I'm wearin' my iron."

"All I gotta say is it looks oncommon comical to see vilits—special English vilits—adornin' a carcass to which a .45 is attached to."

Bonanza looked down quickly and

lifted three violets from his button-hole.

"Hell," he said sheepishly, "I forgot all about 'em. I kind of felt like I ought to wear 'em till we got away from the ranch house, seein' how Carmen arose up early particular to put 'em in my buttonhole with her own fingers. You see how it was, don't you, Whoop?"

"Course I see, you spavined maverick! You think I ain't got no finer sensibilities? I think it was sweet for Carmen to do that. Plumb sweet."

"Yeah—yeah, sweet. But what'll I do with the vilits now? You want 'em? It don't seem hardly fittin' to throw 'em away. I must be gettin' to be one of them sentimentalists, Whoop."

"Yeah, you're a sentimentalist, and me, I'm a red-striped windmill—pumpin' water in Death Valley—without no wind blowin'. If your sensitive soul, now, gnashes its teeth at the suggestion of throwin' Carmen's vilits down where they'll get trod on by the beasts of the way-side, why don't you put 'em in your chamois-skin bag along with the three nuggets? Three nuggets, three vilits—what could be any more sweeter?"

"Yeah—yeah. That ain't a bad idea."

"Huh? You're goin' to do it?"

"I can show 'em to Babe," Bonanza explained, "then she'll know I got a tender heart, a inner soul, carryin' vilits around—not like these other roughnecks. That's what gets wimmin quicker'n anything, Whoop—the strong arm and the inner soul. Pull up your mustang a minute till I get the vilits stowed away."

Whoop watched while Bonanza loosened the strings on the worn chamois bag and poured the three nuggets out in his hand.

"And why," demanded Whoop, "didn't you give Carmen one of the nuggets? You could see how bad she wanted one."

"These is all I got left from that first gold I found," Bonanza said. "Anyhow, I give Carmen a whole handful of dust once."

"Yeah, but this is different. She wants one of these nuggets because of she knows you've been carryin' 'em so long and they mean so much to you."

"These is a set," Bonanza said firmly. "I'm keepin' 'em for a keep-sake. I can't break the set—bad luck." He returned the nuggets to the bag and stuffed the violets in afterward.

"Aw, boloney!" Whoop contributed.

Bonanza made a clucking noise and chided Whoop gently. "You're like all the other roughnecks. You got no inner soul."

Whoop laughed again, that same mysterious way. "Anyhow," he said, "I glean from your discourse that the nuggets is of plumb prime importance, and you wouldn't on no account be separated from 'em. Well, just you keep rememberin' it, son, when I meet you to Bonanza Babe. *Just you keep rememberin'.*"

Bonanza scowled. "Like I have previously said before, I don't like the unduly emphasis. Sounds like cards-up-sleeve to me."

TWO minutes after the partners reached Blue Butte, Bonanza's half-formed suspicions of Whoop melted away like a handful of alfalfa in a barnyard. Up the dusty main street of the town they rode, and hitched in front of the Bonanza Café. They went in, crossed to the counter, and sat down on round-topped stools near the

door. There were a lot of other men at the long counter.

"The goofiest-lookin' bunch of cowmen I ever see," opined Bonanza. "They all look sick. What's the matter with 'em?"

"Unrequiting love," Whoop said.

"Huh?"

"Yeah. Sad, ain't it?"

Bonanza snorted. "You mean these is all lambs for Babe's butcher-in' block?"

"These ain't the half of 'em, brother."

Bonanza snorted again, registering extreme derision. "Why ain't they eatin'? They all got lockjaw or somethin'?"

"They're all waitin' for Bonanza Babe to come out from the kitchen. They're afraid if they look down at their plates, they won't be the first to see her. Anyhow, they ain't much hungry." Whoop nudged Bonanza viciously. "Here she comes! Can I pick 'em, boy, can I pick 'em?"

Bonanza didn't answer. He was staring at the vision of pink-and-white loveliness which came drifting out of the kitchen in a cloud of hazy blue smoke. The vision carried a platter of ham and eggs.

"Whoop," Bonanza said finally, in a still small voice, "I didn't know there was one like it anywheres." He shook his head slowly. "Anywheres."

Whoop stared at him uneasily.

"Hey," he growled, "what's the idea makin' your voice reverend with awe like it was the Grand Canyon you was seein' for the first time?"

"God's own handiwork." Bonanza muttered with additional reverence, and passed his hand over his eyes and gripped the edge of the counter hard.

"Hey," Whoop clipped, "what's

the matter with you? You look sick!"

Bonanza gave him a pale-green look. "It must 'a' been something I ate," he said.

"But you ain't et yet!"

"Maybe—it's somethin'—I'm goin' to eat."

"Are you goin' goof, too?" Whoop demanded fiercely. "Snap out of it, cowboy, and get ready with a heavy line. After all, it ain't the Grand Canyon—just only a high-class blonde. She's comin' our way!" He leaned close and hissed in Bonanza's ear, "Remember, she called you a butcher's block!"

And then Babe was standing across the counter from them, and Whoop was performing the honors:

"You remember me, Babe? Sure—you remember, *heh-heh*. This is my pal, Bonanza Bill. Bonanza Babe—Bonanza Bill. *Heh-heh*, you got somethin' in common right off the range; you got the same names, *heh-heh*."

Bill and Babe stared at each other for a long minute, like two scared kids.

And finally Bill blurted, "Steak—rare."

Whoop groaned. "What a line!" he muttered.

Babe didn't say anything. Just kept looking out of her blue eyes, with her red lips parted a little, softly, moistly. The sun, streaming in at the front window, lighted up her golden hair. It looked like real spun gold, shimmering and on fire. The sun also brought out a rosy blush on her cheeks. Or maybe it was something she saw in Bonanza's eyes that sent the color flaming over her lovely face. Anyway, the whole set-up was so painfully perfect that even Whoop sighed and felt like starting to save

for a ring and a little house somewhere.

"With fried potatoes," Bonanza blurted again, "black coffee, and apple pie."

BONANZA thought some music was starting to play, but it was only Babe checking his order in her melodious voice. She turned and started toward the kitchen to give the order to the cook. She looked back three times on the way with a dreamy far-away look. The customers worshiping at the counter looked back, too, but not dreamy and far away. They looked as if they'd like to grind Bonanza up in the hamburger. Some of them were big enough to tackle the job. Whoop noted with considerable approval that Bonanza was the only man in the house wearing a belt gun.

He pounded Bonanza and whispered hoarsely:

"She fell for you, fella! It was love at first sight, or I'm a hoppin' horn toad! Now yank yourself together and dope out a line of gab for when she comes back with the orders. I mean, *order!* She plumb forgot to take mine!"

Bonanza shook himself a little bit and looked gently at Whoop.

"Podner," he said, "did you ever stop to think that this prospectin' ain't gettin' us nowheres? We have slipped a couple nobbins in our heads. We are crazier'n a couple marijuana Mexes. Driftin' all over hell and Texas, we are just a couple of jackass tramps."

"Hey, lissen," Whoop protested, licking his lips with disquietude.

"And why should I lissen?"

"I'll tell you why!" Whoop hammered. "You ask me; I tell you! I got a plenty big bet on you, see?"

Bonanza nodded intelligently.

"Yeah—I see—yeah. So I was right about the unduly emphasis. You did have a card up sleeve! Well, I'm listenin'."

"Aw, there ain't much to it, pal. I got a wad of money up that says you can make Babe fall in love with you, that's all. Some men here has made up a pool and they're bettin' again' me. They're bettin' Babe will make you fall in love with her."

Bonanza waved his hand wide. "Some of these charmin' gentlemen that has been beamin' at me so friendly?"

"Some of 'em, yeah." Whoop peered anxiously in Bonanza's face. "You won't be lettin' me down, podner?"

Bonanza sighed again. "This," he said sadly, "is a wide, wide strain on friendship. But I'll see what I can do for you, pal. Understand, of course, you are wrecking my life. It will be nothing now but bitter sawdust and sackcloth and alkali."

"Easy, pal, ol' pal—here she comes back! Get a good holt on yourself."

Bonanza gripped the edge of the counter.

Babe floated forward with a tray and stopped. She had that same dreamy far-away look on her face. Her blue eyes met Bonanza's eyes and clung. She started lifting the dishes off the tray.

Her soft lips parted, and music filled the air again. What she said was:

"You ordered pork chops with mashed potatoes, didn't you? I'm sorry, we're all out of that. But the veal cutlets are lovely to-day. I've brought you veal cutlets."

She pushed the dish of spareribs and sauerkraut forward without taking her eyes from Bonanza's.

Bonanza gouged up a bite without taking his eyes from Babe's.

"The fried chicken is fine," he gulped.

"I'm so glad you like them," Babe said, and blushed. She tore her glance away from Bonanza's. Her fingers flitted daintily over some paper roses and sunflowers in a big green vase on the counter. "Oh, yes, the orange pekoe tea! We didn't have any of that either. Will an ice-cold soda pop do?"

"Give him cocoa," Whoop horned in. "He won't know the difference."

It was a jarring note. Bonanza looked at him reprovingly.

"Yeah," he said, basking his quivering glance back at Babe's fingers flitting over the artificial flowers. "Gimme a ice-cold cocoa or a hot sody pop."

"All rightie," she sang, "and here's your raspberry pie."

She pushed forward the pie. Bonanza forked a bite. It seemed to stick in his throat.

"This is awful good mince pie."

"Raspberry," she corrected, and smiled.

"Yeah—yeah, raspberries. It's good, but I can't eat it. I'm not hungry."

"I can't understand it," she chimed. "So many of the boys are that way."

"He ate yesterday," Whoop explained, and helped himself to Bonanza's order.

AFTER a while the owner of the café sidled up and said something to Babe, and she sighed and went to wait on some of the other counter worshipers. The café owner was named Otto Schrupf. He was a complacently heavy young man with a smooth oily skin, high forehead, and a yellow mustache which crawled over his lip, like a caterpillar.

Otto glared at Bonanza, and Bonanza glared back. Otto retreated hastily behind the cash register, with the caterpillar mustache wriggling.

Pretty soon Bonanza reached out and plucked a sunflower from the green vase, shot one last look at Babe, and walked out the door with a kind of stagger. Whoop finished eating, paid the bill, and followed.

Outside he found Bonanza languishing in the sun by the hitch rack, with the paper sunflower sticking in his buttonhole. He looked like a man who has made a brave and tragic decision.

"I know all you're goin' to say, Whoop," he commenced, beating Whoop to the lip-draw, "and don't say it. I did what I could, Whoop, but I couldn't. I am sorry you are going to lose your money. There is only one thing stronger than the friendship of two strong men, and that is love. I am in love with Bonanza Babe. She could even make a butcher's block out of me, and I would like it. That is how much I am in love. I am going to give her my three gold nuggets and the three English vilitis. That, also, is how much I am in love. Of course, I am through with prospecting and being a jackass tramp. I hope that some day, Whoop, such happiness will come to you like I am experiencing."

Whoop took it on the chin. "Well," he drawled, chewing a toothpick, "I knew one of 'em would snub you up some day. Maybe I won't lose any money, anyhow, because of Babe's off her conk the same like you. I heard her quarreling with Otto, the café owner, after you left. She was puttin' more lipstick on her red lips, and Otto says he don't like her to wear lipstick durin' business hours because of he's in the restaurant business and she keeps the

minds of the men off food bad enough as it is. She tells him to go soak his mustache in the bean soup. Yeah, it's easy to see she's as goof over you as you over her. Yeah, this here bet will be a draw."

"I'm glad you won't lose anything, pal," Bonanza intoned, relieved. "It is a horse off my chest." He scowled suddenly. "Who is the guy with the yellow caterpillar mustache? I don't like his face."

"That is Otto Schrumpf, who owns the café, and he is in love of Babe."

"He is, huh?" Bonanza scowled more.

"Yeah, but don't worry none. His is unrequiting love, the same like the customers."

"I got a impulse," Bonanza stated thoughtfully, "to go back and pull his mustache. I would like to have me one more good fight before I settle down, me and Babe, for life, to commune with our inner souls."

"It ain't a bad idea," Whoop grinned, scratching. "But keep one hand ready for a quick draw if you pull the caterpillar, because of Otto is a hot-headed fella that would just as lief grab up his gun from under the counter and lead you—just as lief or a little liefer in your case since he seen plain how Babe looked at you with favor in her blue eyes."

A determined look moved onto Bonanza's face.

"Whoop," he said firmly, "I am a man of action and I have decided something." He hitched up his gun belt and started toward the café door.

"Hey, wait a minute; I want in on this scrap!"

Bonanza stopped firmly in both tracks.

"This," he said with dignity, "is not any scrap. I am all washed up with such roughneck doings. Fights

is a page out of my life that I have tore up and throwed away, and I would advise you, Mr. Farley, to go and do likewise. This is not a fight." He paused impressively. "No, it is a soul mating. I am going to give Bonanza Babe my three nuggets and the English vilits, whereafter I will ontie her café apron and we will walk out the door arm in arm and enter into a new life. I cannot stand for her to remain for another minute in the onwholesome and onrefined envirement of Otto Schrumpf's restaurant."

Whoop stared and spit out the toothpick.

"You mean you're goin' to get hitched, you and Babe, pronto?"

"I mean," informed Bonanza, "I am going to take this here lovely blond woman to wedlock—immediate." He turned and went into the café, and Whoop followed.

BONANZA headed for Babe. Whoop walked to the back to review the situation with some of the betting syndicate. He kept tab on Bonanza out of the tail of his eye. He saw his partner open the chamois-skin bag, lean across the counter, and drop the gold nuggets in Babe's hand. He saw the expression of girlish delight that flitted over Babe's face. He saw Otto Schrumpf glowering from down at the other end of the counter, trying to signal Babe to come and wait on some imaginary customers.

All this was regular, to be expected. What happened next was as regular as a rustler in church. From where Whoop was standing, he caught all the details, like a photographic flash. Babe brushed her hand two or three times across the counter, as though to clear it of crumbs. Otto Schrumpf stopped wriggling his mustache and started

forward. Bonanza looked up, startled, and seemed to catch the restaurant owner's eye. Bonanza moved suddenly around the near end of the counter with a fighting look on his face. Before he got behind the counter, he stopped; his hand jerked toward his belt gun.

A .45 thundered. But not Bonanza's! It was the revolver which Otto Schrupf had grabbed up from under the counter. The bullet creased Bonanza's arm just above the elbow, *spanged* into a glass case, riddled a box of cigars, bored through the case on the other side, clipped a key off the cash register, and cruised up front with enough force left to shatter the window glass.

The counter worshipers ducked for cover. Babe screamed wildly and grabbed hold of the heavy green vase with both hands.

Whoop cursed bewilderedly as he lunged forward; Bonanza had commenced to draw, but Otto Schrupf had shot first! Whoop had never seen Bonanza so slow on the draw.

The second shot was Bonanza's. His bullet blazed a burning path along Otto Schrupf's side ribs and *spl-aa-tted* into a coconut-cream pie. Otto thought he might be dying. He shrieked, turned, and ran for the kitchen. On the way he stepped in some of the coconut-cream pie, slipped, caromed against the counter, and fell heavily, still shrieking.

Bonanza leaped behind the counter. But he didn't chase Otto. He ducked, and his hand reached out for the floor. The next second his whole body was feeling for the floor, but he didn't know anything about it. He was alone in a firmament of colliding stars and whirling long-tailed comets.

NEARLY six hours later a few preliminary shudders coursed over Bonanza's body, and he blinked open his eyes.

"Before you ask me, 'Where am I?'" Whoop said, "I will tell you. You are with me in a room of the Cattlemen's Hotel in Blue Butte. It is about nine o'clock at night."

"Who done it?" Bonanza asked, without much gusto.

"Babe done it."

"Babe?"

"With the green vase. Just behind your left ear."

Bonanza gave a kind of groan and pounded his clenched hands a little bit against his aching head.

"Do I hear music," he muttered, "or do I hear music?"

"What you hear is music. It is comin' from downstairs in celebration of Babe and Otto Schrupf gettin' wedlocked."

Bonanza was silent for a long moment with the silence of a strong man enduring much.

Whoop respected the silence for a while, then he queried:

"Some things I'd like to know—f'r instance, what you got clenched in your fist? I couldn't open it without bustin' the fingers. I didn't like to do that. What you got, the nuggets?"

An ineffable look took position on Bonanza's handsome bronzed face. He said with great gentleness:

"Something more precious than gold." He opened his hand. A little wad of unidentifiable substance was sticking to his palm.

"What is it?" Whoop asked, scratching at his red hair mysteriously.

"It is a vilit," Bonanza said, in a voice as if he were seeing the Grand Canyon again.

Whoop cleared his throat uneasily. "Purty, ain't it?" he said hastily.

"Now you be quiet, ol' pal. You have had quite a blow. You be quiet."

"She ain't got a inner soul," Bonanza said. "It come to me sudden, like when you get throwed on—expected off a bronc. No inner soul——"

"Yeah," agreed Whoop soothingly. "I could tell that myself when I seen her take time out to scrape bread crumbs off the counter when you was in the very act of goin' to lead her into a new life of bliss."

"Bread crumbs!" Bonanza blazed, in a quickly reviving manner. "Them wasn't bread crumbs she scraped so careless off the counter. Them was the three English vilits that Carmen got up early with her own sweet hands special to put in my buttonhole! Like I said, no sentiment, no inner soul—all Babe could see was the gold."

Whoop sat down in a rocking chair and started rocking.

"Well, maybe this ain't a six-mule team off *my* chest! One thing I still don't savvy—what'd you wanta mix it with Otto for?"

"I didn't want to mix it with Otto! He was walkin' toward us behind the counter. I started around to pick up the English vilits before they should get walked on by his big feet. But he thought I was comin' for him, I reckon."

"You went first for your gun, Bonanza. I seen you plain. It's the only time I was ever ashamed for you—you was so slow. Even you let a restaurant man beat you to the draw."

Bonanza sat up on the bed and glared.

"I wasn't drawin'! My holster got caught on the counter somewhere. I was just puttin' my hand down quick to pull it loose, so I could get to the vilits before they got trod on by Otto. I got one vilit."

Whoop laughed while he rocked.

"It is several hosses of different shades, ain't it?" he said.

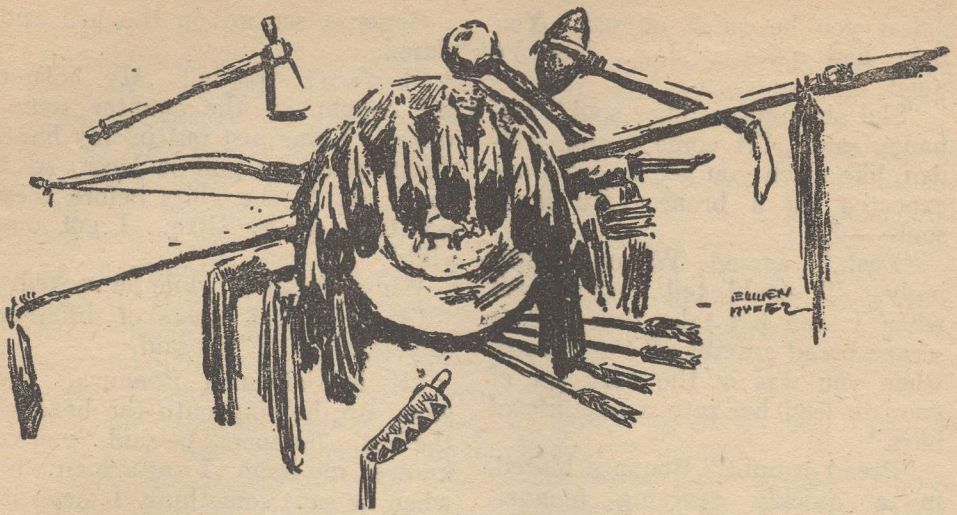
"It is," affirmed Bonanza. He stood up, holding onto the head of the bed. "Whoop," he said, "you've knowed me long. I am a man who when he says something, I mean it. I have said there would be a weddin'. There is. I am going to marry Carmen and quit being a jackass tramp."

"But she ain't even a little bit blond!"

"Blondes!" Bonanza declaimed in a wide manner. "Follies of my lo-coed youth. I'm maturer now. I can see now like I am looking with opened eyes. I have always loved Carmen from the first. She is a sweet girl with an inner soul, and I love her. You've knowed me long, Whoop; in my soberer moments I have always inclined to brunettes."

"Yeah," said Whoop, dry as alkali, "when there wasn't no blondes around, I have sometimes seen you incline to a brunette."

"I will incline to this one," Bonanza said, with firm resolve and the light of a great love in his eyes, "for the rest of my life. Where's my hat? We are leavin' for the ranch, immediate."



INDIAN CUSTOMS

(Coups And Coupsticks)

By CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

THE Indians of the Great Plains made a game of war. They did not go to war to conquer territory, and, with the exception of horses, they generally cared very little about spoils. They played the game for its own sake, and with rules of their own making. According to these rules, the coup was the unit of scoring, just as runs are the scoring units in baseball, and touchdowns in football. When young Bull Elk came home with a successful war party, what he bragged about was not the number of men he had killed, or the scalps he had taken, or even the number of horses he had stolen, though there were exceptions to this. He boasted of the number of coups he had struck.

Now, "coup" is a French word that can't be exactly translated into English. It means both a blow and an achievement. The French half-breeds in the service of the big fur companies found it applied exactly to the Plains Indian's method of scoring in his game of war. For primarily a coup was accounted to a brave who struck, with his hand, or with something held in his hand, an enemy, alive or dead.

Most tribes in the buffalo country recognized a first coup, second coup, and third coup. That is, the first three warriors to reach the body of an enemy slain in battle could count coup in that order. It didn't make any difference who killed said enemy. It was the men who touched the body who made the score. First coup counted the equiv-

alent of three points. The second counted two, and the third, one. Of course, this is only a generality. The count varied from tribe to tribe. Some tribes counted the first coup only. Some, like the Crow, counted coup only on the body of the first enemy killed in an engagement. Hence, when an enemy was seen to fall, there was a wild charge of young Crow braves, each eager to be first to strike the body.

First coup entitled the lucky warrior to many honors and advantages. He could brag about it in public. He could don the war bonnet, or put feathers in his hair in honor of the event. He could decorate his lance or coupstick with feathers, and he could take a wife.

Bragging about such an event was far from being considered immodest by the Indians. It was regarded as a patriotic duty. On the return of a successful war party, a feast was given where the brave who had struck first coup was expected to relate his achievement in the fullest detail. In fact, he was expected to boast all night. This was supposed to warm the hearts of the old men and encourage warlike ambitions in the young.

One curious and almost universal custom was that of giving the warrior who received a wound while in the act of striking coup much less honor than an unwounded hero! The wounded man was expected to do little bragging. His "medicine" was weak.

Even very young boys who struck first coup could marry, while men who had not so distinguished themselves generally waited until they reached the age of twenty-five or thirty. And the brave with the feather in his hair could obtain a better wife for fewer ponies than the ordinary individual.

A TECHNICAL first coup—with all the honors pertaining thereto—was allowed to warriors who performed certain recognized feats of valor. Striking a living enemy while under fire, or snatching the weapon out of his hands, was always a first coup. Stealing a horse that was tied to a lodge in the enemy's camp was likewise. Such a deed had its commercial value, too, because any horse carefully tethered within camp was likely to be a trained war or buffalo pony, and exceedingly valuable. Striking the breastworks of an entrenched enemy was a first coup, and the first man to enter such a fortification while under fire had the unusual honor of "counting twice."

And, by the way, trench warfare in Indian fighting was much more common than might be supposed. Whenever any Indian band found itself outnumbered by its enemy, it "dug in," usually in a willow or alder thicket in a river bottom. The Blackfeet fought Sublet and his band of mountain trappers from just such a jungle trench. The Crows, the Kiowa, the Cheyenne, and Pawnee, all tell of the desperate "last stands" their people made from behind log-enforced redoubts of mud. Indian leaders tried to avoid fighting of this type, because it involved a great loss of life, but ambitious braves who did not have the responsibilities of leadership liked close fighting, as it meant either death or the counting of many coups, and death was not feared by any Indian who believed his medicine was strong.

Coups were not counted unless the warrior could furnish a witness to the deed. In open battle in the daylight a witness was usually at hand, but not in a night raid. For this reason a "wolf," that is a stout

who stole into an enemy's camp, got no credit unless he brought out something to show for his work—as a scalp or a tethered horse. Hence the night raiders took scalps, even when the taking involved great danger. Otherwise it wasn't usual to take a risk for the sake of a scalp.

Of course there was greater danger in rushing into the enemy's lines and taking coup on the body of a foe than in shooting a man from a distance, and for this reason the Indians were right in assuming that the coup was a great test of bravery. But a good deal of inconsistency arose from the fact that often no account was taken of the circumstances under which the coup was struck. For instance: It once happened that a band of Cheyenne flushed a smaller band of Utes in the brush along the rim of a canyon. Shots were fired, the Utes scattered to safety, leaving one of their number, who had fallen over the edge of the canyon and lodged in a juniper bush halfway down. No Cheyenne could reach him to count coup. But several days later other Cheyenne were riding down in the bottom of the ravine and were attracted to the Ute's body by the buzzards. One of them managed to hit the half-consumed carcass with his lariat, claiming first coup as he did so. His claim was allowed.

Another time a young Omaha brave rode straight through a whole Sioux army, killing six of them with his arrows, and so discouraging their lines that they were routed by a charge of an inferior Omaha force. Yet for this feat he received no official credit, because he had not succeeded in touching any one of the Sioux. Later in the day he got second-coup credit for bringing in a bunch of Sioux prisoners—women and children who were wandering

around looking for some one to whom it would be safe to surrender!

SECOND and third coups, being something like consolation prizes in this war game, were awarded to Indians for various deeds of small moment, like stampeding enemy horses under certain dangerous conditions, striking the lodge of a chief or leader warrior while raiding a village, or for taking prisoners. Second and third coups were nothing to brag about.

Of course the possession of a coupstick was in no wise necessary to the act of striking coup, but a good many warriors carried them, just as a good many Englishmen carry canes. Coupsticks were generally small, slender rods of peeled willow. They were variously ornamented—sometimes carved and painted, and often decorated with feathers. When a warrior counted first coup, he tied a little bunch of downy feathers to his stick, or a single pinion from an eagle's wing. With some tribes a feather was added for each additional coup.

Some braves never carried a stick. Some kept tally of their coups on the shaft of a lance, or on the handle of a quirt or club. There was no general or tribal rule about this. Young, dandified warriors were very likely to carry sticks. And, just as young officers in the World War would demonstrate their bravery and nonchalance by leading a charge carrying no other arms than one of those silly little swagger canes, so a young Indian brave would ride full tilt into the ranks of his enemy, carrying nothing but a befeathered coupstick—hoping that his medicine would be strong enough to protect him until he could strike an armed enemy and make his escape.

Special coupsticks were carried by

selected members of some of the warrior fraternities, notably the Crooked Lance and Crazy societies. During a battle, the man honored with the custody of one of these sticks was in constant peril, because he was obliged to plant the stick in the ground at the farthest point of the charge and die there, unless some brother member led him away, or

rode between him and the enemy. But every coup he struck while in possession of this stick counted double, because of the danger he faced. In this case, as in any other where double coup was counted, the warrior was considered to have deliberately "thrown his life away," and to have had it restored to him by some special act of Providence.

In Next Week's Issue of Street & Smith's

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

A Complete Novel

LARRY'S LUCK

By H. Bedford-Jones

Larry Luckin, on the Twin L, had never had a break. And when, through others' crookedness, he faced the loss of his ranch, he saw red. Since he had to go down, he figured it was better to go down fighting—to write finis to his career in hot lead!

OLD-TIMER

By Stephen Payne

Veteran Sam Martin felt that he was piece and part of the Z9 outfit. And though old and crippled and "stove-up," his one determination was not to be laid on the shelf—to keep on holding up his end till he came to the last round-up.

Also Features by

Max Brand

Lloyd Eric Reeve

And Others

15c A COPY

AT ALL NEWS STANDS



GUN GIFT

A Serial

By MAX BRAND

EMBITTERED by the loss of his right hand, Daniel Finlay, who practices law in the town of White Water, finds pleasure in being a secret trouble maker. One day he sees a fine opportunity for mischief when Mary Wilson, a pretty young girl, happens to be noticed by Bob Witherell, a handsome gunman whom Finlay has successfully defended on the charge of robbing a stagecoach. Bob Witherell's brother is the notorious desperado, the Solitaire, and Witherell himself is the leader of a group of reckless spirits.

When Witherell inquires of Finlay who the girl is, the lawyer says that

she is engaged to John Saxon, a hard-working young fellow who has a small place in the mountains where he has a nice start on a herd. By praising Saxon, Finlay sets Witherell's mind against that honest young man.

Later, Witherell makes fun of Saxon in the presence of Mary Wilson; then, drawing a gun, Witherell orders Saxon, "Dance!" Saxon, who has never fired a revolver, runs from the stream of lead directed at his feet—thus furnishing amusement to a large section of White Water.

Witherell and five of his men ride away, and chance takes them past Saxon's place. Witherell sets fire to

the cabin and rustles Saxon's herd. Returning home, Saxon finds his property destroyed. He trails the stolen cattle as far as White Valley, a hole-in-the-wall country frequented by organized rustlers, who have already received his small herd and made it disappear. He encounters Witherell and his men, and accuses him of the theft. The gunman beats Saxon badly in a fist fight, then admits stealing his herd "just for meanness."

Returning to White Water, Saxon complains to Sheriff Phil Walker. The sheriff goes for Witherell, who is in town.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW START.

SAXON went down to the sheriff's office and sat in the blackness of his misery until he heard footfalls approaching. The sheriff came, and with him came big, handsome Bob Witherell, who stood over Saxon and said:

"You want another licking, do you? What kinda lies you been telling about me, you skunk?"

"He stole my cattle," said Saxon. His voice rose to a shout. "He cleaned out my herd, and he burned down my house. You ought to hang him!"

"All right, all right," said the sheriff. "Lemme have your proofs, now that you been talking so loud."

"He's got a horse with a bar shoe on the left forefoot. I trailed that shoe print from my house all the way to White Valley, where the herd broke up."

"Well, that sounds like something," said the sheriff, without conviction. "What about it, Bob?"

"Why, it's a lie," said Witherell. "What would I be burning down

houses for? What's in his house that I would want to burn it down for? Answer me that, sheriff?"

"I dunno," said the sheriff. "It ain't my business to find reasons for things."

"I got a horse with a bar shoe on a forefoot," said Witherell. "And this rat, he tries to gnaw into me account of that, does he? Why, that ain't any proof. I never seen this hombre till the other day, and I played a little joke on him, and made him howl and dance down the street. That's the only time I ever seen him, till the other day I was takin' a ride, and I meet him and he starts givin' me some lip. So I get down and I give him a fair and a square lickin'. I got witnesses to prove it. And if you don't believe it, I'll take him out and lick him again."

It was the sort of a speech that the sheriff could understand. It rang true, to him.

"You talk about prints of horse-shoes, do you?" said the sheriff to big John Saxon. "Well, can you take me over the trail of them prints?"

"It rained a regular cloud-burst yesterday," said Saxon. "You know that prints wouldn't last under a rain like that."

"Then what are you wastin' my time for?" thundered the sheriff. "Get out of here. And—if Witherell licks you gain, I hope he does a browner job than the last one, you big, curly-headed baby! There ain't the makings of half of a man inside of you!"

WHEN Saxon stood again in the open air, his brain was reeling. The law is a part of each one of us. The law is our right hand, to work for us, to defend

us. And the law had failed him, and shamed him.

But there are other powers on which poor, defeated men can lean. So he went straight to the First National Bank, and found the president, Jim Tolliver, just swinging up the board walk toward his place of business.

"Hello!" said Tolliver. "Why, what's happened to you, Saxon? What's happened, my lad?"

They had done business together—there had been a few loans given to Saxon on account of his growing herd, to tide him through lean times of recent years. The banker had always been friendly, almost confidential.

"Mr. Tolliver," said Saxon, "I'm broke. I'm flat broke. My house was burned by Bob Witherell and his gang. They stole every head of my cattle. I'm down to two mules."

"Infernal outrage!" exclaimed Tolliver. "The sheriff—"

"I haven't the right kind of proof," said Saxon. "The sheriff won't budge. I want to talk to you. I've still got the land up there. You know that I'm a hard-working man. I want to know if you'll make a loan to me. A small loan. Something I can make a start on again, and get together a few head of cows, and make the herd grow. You know that I can make a herd grow."

The banker laid his hand somewhat gingerly on the shoulder of Saxon.

"My boy," he said, "I'd like to do what I can, but all I can say is that the bank won't be interested. My personal heart aches for you. But as a banker, I have to obey banking laws. That land isn't salable. And if we lend you money to start your operations again, how can we tell that you won't be wiped out again by this or some other ac-

cident? You seem to have powerful enemies. And all I can do is to give you some good advice. Start in a small way once more—go to work, save your pennies, and then make your beginning once more. But as for advancing you hard cash—I'm sorry; banking practice won't let me do it. My partners—they would simply ask me to resign if they knew of such practices!"

Saxon turned wearily up the street.

He had tried the power of the law and he had tried the power of money.

There remained love. He could go to that. He could let Mary Wilson see his swollen, distorted face, his bloodstained clothing, and weep over him. But there was no point in that.

It seemed to Saxon that he had come, definitely, to the end of the passage, and there was one deep voice that called to him in words which he could understand—that was the distant shouting of White Water Creek.

There was a place just above town where the banks rose in cliffs a hundred feet high, and at the bottom of the cliffs the water rushed in a white froth capable of tearing big logs to pieces. A human body, dropped into that mill, would instantly be shredded beyond all recognition. And it seemed clear to Saxon that the best step in the life that remained to him would be from the edge of one of those cliffs, and so through one stabbing thrust of pain into eternity.

So he walked slowly out of the town.

Half a dozen small boys spotted him, and danced, yelling and mocking, around him: They left him on the edge of White Water, and he went on alone.

HE left the road and climbed a fence, crossed a wide field, and reached the edge of the cliff above the white water. The narrow canyon of the creek was filled with shadow, and the voices rose to him in what seemed to Saxon a cheerful chorus. He looked up for his last glance at the world. It was a flawless day of blue and white, with a soft wind blowing. But he had seen a thousand other days as beautiful as this one, and they all led, in the end, to the misery in which he stood.

As for Mary—well, it was best to step out of her life like this. She would have her freedom. For a few months she would be in anxious doubt. Then she would feel that he had deserted her, and natural resentment would harden her heart against him. But a year or two later, he would be only a memory, and she would marry some one else.

So, to John Saxon, the problem seemed solved in the best way.

He stepped right to the verge of the cliff, and then he heard, behind him, the voice of Daniel Finlay.

He started. There was even a moment's temptation to fling himself headlong in spite of that voice, but his whole plan went awry if he were seen destroying himself.

So he turned, and saw the grim face and the rigidly straight form of Daniel Finlay coming toward him.

"Young man," said the lawyer, "come with me."

"Go your own way, and don't bother me," said Saxon rudely. "I want to be alone."

"Aye," said Finlay. "You want to be alone, like a coward, to dodge a life that's too much for you, to sneak out of it like a thief into a dark alley. John Saxon, because your body has been beaten, is your

soul beaten, too? Are you a man or a sneaking cur?"

It was a sharp sauce, that speech, but it gave a sudden relish of hot anger to Saxon. He even made a step toward Finlay in a threatening fashion.

"Don't bluster at me," said Finlay. "Because I know you for what you are. You may bluster, but if even an old woman lifted a hand, you'd cringe as you're cringing before the thought of Bob Witherell."

Saxon said nothing. The anger that burned in him was at such a white heat that he could find no words. He could think of nothing to do.

Finlay went on: "You've been beaten, shamed, laughed at in public. You've had your house burned over your head and your cattle stolen. And the town laughs at what's happened to you. And Bob Witherell, with the price of your cows in his pocket, sprawls in the saloon and drinks, and laughs. And you, like a wretched dog, are ready to jump off a cliff and put an end to yourself?"

He made that famous sweeping, handless gesture which had impressed so many juries.

"I'm thankful," said Finlay, "that I'm of a different stuff from you! You see me as a man without friends, mutilated, cut off from the happiness of ordinary life. But still I can fight. I can make my way. I can hold my head high! I grow older. There are not so many years left to me, but every one of those years shall be my own. You—you driveling fool—you are throwing away the best part of your life."

And still big John Saxon said nothing. The hot scourge of these words entered his very flesh, but something in him admitted the truth of everything that he had heard.

"Better than to do this," said Finlay, "take a gun. Here. It's a new one, and a good one. Take it and learn how to use it. If there is nothing else that makes you want to live, live to revenge yourself like a man on Bob Witherell. Learn how to use this Colt until it is a part of your flesh, until your nerves run down into the steel. And then go and stand up to Bob Witherell and let the world see that you *are* a man. If you want to die, his bullets will kill you as quickly as a jump from a cliff. If you want to live, stretch Bob Witherell dead on the ground before you, and the joy of life and self-respect will come back to you!"

IT was a well-calculated speech. And Finlay, as he delivered it, was proud of himself. He had seen that down-headed figure dragging slowly out of the town this morning, and already the story of what had happened to young John Saxon had gone the rounds. The tale was too spectacular to remain a secret. And as Finlay, sneering silently, watched the big fellow go off in defeat, a premonition of what was to happen had come across the lawyer's mind.

He was not unhappy about it. Trouble was what he lived to make, and the fact that a few words from him had armed Witherell with the first malice which had led on to all of these other happenings was not a pain, but a rejoicing, in the heart of the lawyer. What led him to slip along in the rear of Saxon, what caused him to interfere at the last moment, was that he surmised new and bigger ways of contriving mischief. Saxon was too good a tool to be thrown away. He was worthy of being used. And Finlay saw the way of using him.

So he stood there, holding out with his left hand the big, shining Colt revolver. And the glance of John Saxon went dizzily from the gun to the face of Finlay.

He gripped the weapon with a sudden gesture.

"Finlay," he said, "I always thought you were a mean man and a hard man. Maybe you are, but you've shown me the right way to go about things. I'm going to take the gun. I'm going to do what you advise me to do! And I'll make myself fit to stand up to Mr. Murderer Witherell, the thief!"

"You can, John," said the lawyer, with a feigned kindness. "I know that you can! Self-confidence comes with training. Some men train themselves until they can hit the sapling, and then they are confident. Other men train themselves until they can hit a twig before they are sure. But the sapling is enough. The man who can hit the sapling can hit the heart—and prove his right to be called brave! Ah, John Saxon, John Saxon, you only need to become familiar with the noise of guns in order to face down Bob Witherell and make your girl stop blushing for shame of you!"

"Mary? Does she blush on account of me?" asked Saxon heavily.

"How can she help it?" asked the lawyer. "The young people in the town pity her. The girls shrug their shoulders. They give her their sympathy. Do you think it's an easy thing for a girl to have her entire town laughing at the man she loves? Do you think that she can keep on loving a man she begins to despise?"

The word stunned John Saxon so that his bruised, discolored eyes began to blink.

And Daniel Finlay drew out of the pain of the other an infinite joy, a relish more delicious to him than

the best of wine. He could already see the picture of Saxon and Witherell standing face to face, ready to draw their guns, snarling insults, or hushed in a deadly, white-faced silence. Witherell would win, of course, but perhaps Saxon would drive one bullet home before he died.

And what would Finlay gain by all of this? Well, he would gain that which was, to him, the keenest of all happiness—the knowledge that he had stood behind the scenes and pulled the wires that made the puppets dance and prance and talk and die.

Hitherto he had used his schemes in many ways, but he had not yet advanced his touch to human lives. It seemed to Finlay that he had wasted his other years. Existence would only begin for him when there was the taste of human blood in his soul.

He heard John Saxon saying: "Everything you say is right. Maybe I'm a coward. I don't know. The game will be in giving myself the acid test. Will you do one more thing for me, since you've started by doing so much?"

"Anything in my power, my dear lad," said Finlay. "Tell me what you want? A little cash? You shall have it."

Saxon shook his head.

"Go to Mary and tell her that you've seen me, and that you have a message from me. I'm going to make a new start—and she'll hear from me after it's made!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE OPEN.

THERE had to be cash. Saxon sold his two mules to get it. He turned that cash into ammunition, a heavy load of it. He bought a bit of salt, and that was

all. He had never been a hunter, but if ever he were to learn to face Bob Witherell, he would have to start shooting straight before long. If he could not shoot enough meat to support him, there was no use hoping to face Witherell.

So, with the Colt revolver, and the heavy weight of ammunition, and the hunting knife at his belt, and the salt in his pouch, John Saxon went back into the mountains.

He stayed there two months. He tramped through the mountains, always hunting, and never once did he remain in the same camp for two nights.

The winds cut him, the rains soaked him, and the snow, above timber line, blinded him with an endless white mist. But he kept traveling, round and round through a small compass, and always hunting, always hunting. If he could not hunt and kill game, he could not hunt and kill his man when the time came.

The wounds he had received in his beating healed. A rough, triangular scar remained over his right cheek bone, and he used to touch this many times a day. It was just above the upper edge of the beard that had grown out over his face, a reddish, sun-faded beard. He studied that scar with the tips of his fingers until he knew every bit of its corrugations. And every time he touched it, he thought of Bob Witherell, big, dark, and handsome.

After he had killed Witherell, Bob's brother, that remote and famous genius of crime called by all men the "Solitaire," would come to find him, and would surely fight the battle out.

He would kill the Solitaire, too.

When he was freezing by night or starving by day, he used to tell him-

self that over and over again. He would kill the Solitaire after he had killed Bob Witherell. And then he would wish that there were ten brothers in the family, so that he could destroy them all. Even ten killings would hardly glut his need of blood.

In the meantime, he trained himself with the greatest care. There was nothing else for him to think about. His mind, indeed, would not go farther forward than the battles which he must fight. As for building up a cattle herd once more, that seemed to him a dream, a vagueness not worthy of a man's attention.

Every waking hour, and in his dreams, he practiced with the gun, or he dreamed or planned for it.

Mere using of ammunition would do little good. A man has to point a gun straight by instinct before he can accomplish anything.

And in a fight there are sudden necessities, the call for a quick draw and a shot that goes straight. There is no chance, in a saloon or during a street fight, to level a weapon and take a careful aim. Gun fights have nothing to do with target practice.

So he used to spend hours every day snatching out the Colt and whirling and pointing it at some object which he had selected before. After that he would lean and look down the sights and see what accuracy there had been in his aim. In order to make that examination, he had to keep his hand as still as a rock. But he learned to do that. All the nerves went out of his right hand, except the nerves of speed.

He made a discovery which was of infinite use.

He could extend his forefinger along the side of the Colt and point, while he pulled the trigger with his middle finger. It was really very simple. For there is a queer instinct

in us that makes us point straight. A man will indicate even a star, very accurately, by pointing, and without sighting down his finger.

THE chief trouble was that the middle finger was awkward. There were few brains in it. It had to be trained and taught before the pull it delivered failed to bring the gun out of line. But every day after the discovery of the new method, the skill of that middle finger increased until it could pull the trigger without stirring the gun from the line that had been aimed at.

There was to be no target practice. Finlay, though he seemed a wise man, had talked of fellows who can hit saplings, of others who can cut a twig. But for him there would be nothing but living game.

He nearly starved in the first week. Then a deer jumped suddenly out of covert, and he crashed a .45-caliber slug of lead right into the head of the poor brute.

The deer fell without a kick. And John Saxon had roasted venison, and all that he could eat of it.

Something rigid and perverse in him kept him from sun-drying or smoking any of that meat. If he were not a good enough shot to supply himself with fresh meat, he was not a good enough shot to face Bob Witherell. So, as the two months went on, he crowded lifetimes of marksmanship, of one sort, into his days.

A fine shot may go hunting for a month out of every year. He may fire two bullets a day, and no more, during that month. But Saxon was crowding months into days. And to make him keen, there was the need of eating, and there was the need of facing Bob Witherell somewhere in the near distance.

If he took a snap shot at a bird

on a branch, the name of Witherell hardened on his tongue.

If a rabbit dodged across his path, the gun said "Witherell" as it exploded.

Every shot had to be a snap shot. A flashing gesture—for hours and hours, he worked on the mere matter of the draw—and an instant explosion of the gun. That was what every shot was during the two months.

His misses ran into the hundreds. He had a hungry time of it for the first month, but after that he began to hit one rabbit in two. There are trick shots who can do better, but not many. Not many who are using nothing but snap shots.

In the second month his clothes went suddenly to pieces. The constant roughing among the rocks and the prickly shrubbery had worn the cloth and rent it, and the constant soakings rotted the fabric away. So he dressed himself in rags and tatters pieced out with deerskin which he tanned after his own way—and a frightful and stiff thing it made, hard as parchment. He made moccasins, too, that would have made a squaw weep. He made them of deerskin, sewed with the thread of unraveled tendons. They were clumsy affairs, but they saved his feet, and his feet were growing as tough as leather. They hardly needed extra protection.

He had been six weeks in the woods when he came to one of the great days of his life. He was climbing among high rocks, above timber line, toward the bee pastures of the uplands where birds big and small may be found, and, coming between a pair of great boulders, he found himself ten feet from a huge mother grizzly with three woolly cubs about her.

The mother had been investigat-

ing an ant hill, having ripped open the ground with her steel-hard claws. And when she was so suddenly surprised by this specter which had come to her up a hard wind, she stood up from her work, and then dropped forward to charge.

John Saxon had just time to remember that the descent behind him was practically a precipice. In the next fraction of a second he had his gun out and sent a bullet home. That shot smashed the nose of the she-bear to bits. It was a lucky shot, perhaps, but big John Saxon did not call it luck. He had been looking at that bright, moist nose as he fired.

The she-bear, in an agony, reared to knock John Saxon off the cliff with one stroke of a forepaw. But John Saxon pumped two bullets through her heart.

SHE fell with the loose of her jawl right across his feet, and he saw the cubs scamper away into the distance. Then, looking down at the huge quarry, he remembered that the Indians of the old days always considered a brave who had killed a grown grizzly more distinguished than one who had counted coup upon a human enemy.

And there had been no chance about the first shot, he kept telling himself. He had marked the nose, and had fired for it.

He ate tough bear steaks for two days, and then went on, determined to try his hand more and more at small game. There were plenty of mountain grouse, but they were so big and so still and so stupid that they hardly mattered. A squirrel moving hastily about on a high branch, showing itself only by glimpses—that made the best target of all. It meant the keying up of nerves to such a degree that an ache

remained in the brain of Saxon for a few moments after he had fired.

Usually he missed, but once in four or five times he began to bring down those little morsels of flesh. And every time one of them fell, he thought of Bob Witherell.

He still had a bit of ammunition at the end of the two months, but then, one day, he sniped a squirrel off a high branch, and, immediately afterward, got one of the squirrel's companions as it dodged away into the foliage of the pine tree. Two small, fluffy bodies came softly dropping down, rather like flying birds than falling dead things.

And he told himself that he was shooting straight enough to find the heart of Bob Witherell, so he prepared to return to White Water.

He made his toilet with as much care as though he were to be presented to a person of importance. As for his ragged clothes, he could only scrub them thoroughly and make sure that they were clean. But he could shave, and he did, though he had only a hunting knife and no soap for the job. But he greased his face with squirrel fat, after he had brought the knife to the finest sharpness he could achieve, and gradually, not without pain, he got off the growth of beard.

Then he stared at his face in the still water of the pool that he was leaning over. For it was a new face. All across the brow and the eyes the skin was sun-blackened. But below, the skin was snow-white. That whiteness crossed his face like a mask, like a disguise. It would be hard to see and remember the features, he thought.

He had scarcely noticed his image in water during those two months. He noticed it now, in detail, and he saw that not months, but years, seemed to have passed over him, for

no small time could, it seemed, have worn away every suggestion of spare flesh from his features. The very shape of his nose seemed different, with a slight outcurve at the bridge that he could not remember having seen before.

And the eyes were smaller. They certainly were more veiled by the lids. The mouth, too, had a smaller curve. It was set in a tighter line, and the cheeks had been worked out to hollows.

He was rather amazed to find himself respecting that new image in the water, considering it the face of a man worthy of attention, not to be treated lightly, no matter what happened.

After that he sat back and started the cleaning of the revolver, using the oil of some rendered fat, working the parts of it with fingers now so familiar with the precious mechanism that he could take it down and assemble it again in pitch darkness, bit by bit, swiftly.

Finally he stood up and started the march for White Water. He came out on the brow of a mountain, that day, and saw the town lying in the beauty of its valley beneath, with the sun glinting on its bright windows as on so many little eyes of fire. And John Saxon smiled, quietly, like a messenger who is bringing home news from the king.

CHAPTER VII.

A BOUNCER.

WHEN John Saxon went down into the town, he thought of Mary Wilson, and wanted to go to her. But he thought of Bob Witherell, and therefore went to the Rolling Bones Saloon, run by "Lefty" Malone. Because when Witherell was in the

town, he usually patronized the Rolling Bones above all other places.

On the way, a dozen small boys saw Saxon without recognizing him. That face, half brown and half white, was so altered that older eyes might very well have been deceived. This troop did not laugh at the stranger. Instead, they followed at his heels or ran before him as though they found in him something as stirring as the strains of a circus band. When they were ahead, they kept turning, gaping, staring up at him and back at him, for it seemed to them that the spirit of the wilderness had descended out of the mountains into the main street of White Water. They had never seen even an Indian so completely in rags, but the tatters hardly mattered. The man underneath them was what counted.

When big John Saxon reached the Rolling Bones, he stared at the familiar face of it for a moment, and considered that sign which for a generation had hung in the window:

WANTED—A BOUNCER.

People laughed when they saw that sign, because the story was that White Water was so extremely tough that no bouncer could hold his job for three days. And that was why Lefty Malone, who had named his saloon so that it would almost rhyme with his own name, kept the placard in the window and a standing offer of twenty-five dollars a week, plus keep, to any one who wished to try the job.

Men showed up now and then who accepted the chance. But none of them lasted long. John Saxon, remembering that he had not a penny in his pocket, that even the salt in his pouch had been used up, that he carried, for a fortune, nothing but

an old Colt and a few rounds of ammunition, shouldered through the swinging doors and advanced to the bar.

All was white-hot outside. All was dim coolness within. But that was all right. Hunting through the aisles of the shadowy forest, he had learned to shoot straight when he had nothing but a half light to aim by. He would shoot straight now if he could find Bob Witherell seated either in the bar or in one of the back rooms, playing cards.

Bob Witherell was not there. In the back room there were five men in the mysteries of poker. At the bar leaned three more men. One of them was "King-snake Charlie," a freighter of a fearsome reputation, a great and hairy-chested man who purposely left his shirt wide open on his chest.

Behind the bar there was, of course, Lefty Malone himself. It was said that Lefty had the strongest pair of legs in the mountains, for they were capable of supporting his great weight for twenty-four hours a day, as long as there was business to be attended to in his saloon. He got his name from the potent effects of his left hook, a punch which he had learned early in life, and with which he had rocked many a loud customer to sleep. One of the points of the bouncer joke was that the proprietor of the place was Lefty Malone.

Lefty said to big John Saxon: "Hello, stranger. What'll you have?"

"A job," said Saxon.

"There's only one kind of a job here," said Lefty Malone.

"That's the kind I want," answered John Saxon.

"You want the job of bouncer, eh?" said Lefty Malone. "How high can you bounce, then? Hey, King-

snake, see how high this hombre can bounce, will you?"

KING-SNAKE laughed. He did not waste time, but stepped in from his place with the full sway of his body and the full sweep of his arm. He hit John Saxon fairly on the chin, and his knuckles tore loose flesh and skin almost to the bone.

King-snake stepped back a little, willing to allow room for his victim to fall, and then he saw, with bewilderment, that the stranger was not falling. He merely stood there with a quiet smile, regardless of the blood that trickled down his chin. Then he took King-snake Charlie by one arm and turned twice with him in the center of the floor, and threw him through the swing doors into the street.

King-snake did not come in again. He rolled in the dust for a moment, clapping his dislocated shoulder. Then he got up and staggered away.

John Saxon was leaning at the bar, letting his blood drip down on the varnish.

"Is that bouncing high enough?" he asked.

"That's high enough," said Lefty Malone. "But this is a lot higher."

And he tried that famous left hook from the hip, with the whole sway of his force behind it.

That blow should have knocked John Saxon, whatever white iron his jaw was made of, clear across the room. But he pulled his face just out of the path of the punch, and, as Lefty pitched forward behind the wallop, sprawling halfway across the bar, Saxon grabbed him by the hair of the head and beat his face into the boards.

At the third bump, Lefty said quietly: "That's enough!"

He was released at once. For a

moment, each man looked at the blood that ran down the face of the other, and each felt that, in a sense, he was staring into a mirror, though the huge, squat image of Lefty was hardly a semblance of that of Saxon.

"I'll take a small beer," said Saxon finally, and Lefty served him.

The two remaining loiterers at the bar did not remain long after this. They went out of the Rolling Bones and told what they had seen. And the town of White Water sat up and cocked its ears.

Lefty said: "You got hands, and you're quick with 'em. Maybe you'll last a week around here, till some of the real men come in. Your room is the first room at the head of the stairs on the left."

Saxon went up to the designated room. It was small and dark, and opened on the rear yard of the saloon-hotel. So Saxon prospected and found a big corner room that overlooked the main street. He took off his rag of a hat and placed it on the center table of that room and came back to Lefty to report.

"I found a better place," he said. "Down at the end of the hall, and front."

"Hey!" shouted Lefty. "That's the best room in the house!"

"It's about good enough for me," said Saxon.

And he tasted this moment, and looked into the eye of Lefty.

"All right," said Lefty finally. "Maybe that's a better room for you to be buried from. A lot of folks may wanta see you laid out before you go under the ground."

He repeated: "Maybe you'll last about a week!"

But Saxon lasted a month.

He had a fight every day, at least once. It was excellent training, he felt. The other men used their fists, but he used his hands. And he had

a good pair of hands. He had built up the strength of them pitching hay, working with a rope, digging in his garden, gripping the reins of hard-mouthed mules, or headlong mustangs. And hands are better than fists when a man has an eye sufficiently fast. The eye of John Saxon was very fast from having shot squirrels out of treetops. It was a little quicker than the snapping lash of a whip. Hands against fists seems very easy for the fists, but that is because most hands have not the spread of John Saxon's, and because most men do not train their eyes for two mortal months shooting at small, moving things and saying, each time: "Bob Witherell!"

If you can tell which way a bird is going to fly after it drops off a branch with a flirt of its wings, if you know which way a squirrel is going to duck its bright little head, or when a rabbit is going to make its spy-hop as it flees—if you can tell these things, it becomes a very simple matter to tell in what direction a fist is going to shoot. Once you know, it is easier still to dodge the fist and put hands on the enemy. John Saxon, like most mountain boys, had done a good deal of wrestling when he was a youngster at school. He remembered all of that skill now, and he invented new ways and means. There is nothing better than an armlock, when all is said and done, if one knows what to do with it after it is laid on. And John Saxon knew what to do with it. He used it for throwing men out through the swing doors of the Rolling Bones.

NEVER once in the month did he have to use a gun. For that, he walked out in the early morning, beyond gunshot sound of the town, and worked two

or three intense hours with his Colt. But there was never a call for the weapon. Out there in the West a man can get for nothing all the trouble that he wants, and he can even specify the brand. Plainly, John Saxon had specified hand work in his fighting, not guns or knives. The men who heard about the reputation of big John Saxon came specially to try their hands against him.

To be sure, there was a Canuck as huge as a bear and as fast as a cat, who forgot himself in the middle of things and pulled a long bowie knife. But his arm was broken before the knife point slid into John Saxon.

Then there was a greaser from the distant regions of the south who had trained for the prize ring, and thought that a mystery was overwhelming him when he felt the paralyzing grip of John Saxon's hands. And he forgot himself and pulled a big knife, also. But a sudden jerk snapped his wrist bone, and he went howling out of the saloon, looking down at his dangling hand.

John Saxon stuck those two knives in the wall above the mirror; not that he wanted to boast, but because it was a special pleasure to him to drift his eyes over the bright, dangerous gleam of the steel many times each day.

Then came an Italian giant, a sailor who had been in the Orient and, it was said, had learned all the mysteries of jujutsu. He and John Saxon battled for two hours, and the Italian was iron, but Saxon was yielding steel which, in the end, conquered. The next day the Italian came again, and a third day he returned, because he would not believe that he had been beaten by a fellow mortal. But on the third day, Saxon secured one of his terrible arm locks and threw the Italian out the swing

doors with terrible force, so that he rolled in the dust of the street.

One day Lefty Malone came in from the street to say: "Out there—you're wanted, Johnnie."

Saxon thought it might be a fresh challenge, and he went, hungrily, for he had not put his grip on another man for five days. But when he came into the bright of the sun with a scowl, one of whose purposes was to shadow his eyes, he found himself looking down at Mary Wilson.

There were some idlers out there on the veranda, with their chairs tilted back against the wall, but when they saw how Mary stood with her head thrown back, looking up at Saxon, they suddenly rose and went off to one side or the other, because, in spite of certain roughnesses of demeanor, your Westerner is, after all, a sensitive fellow.

Mary said: "John, you've been almost a month, here, and you've never come to see me."

He raised his hand with a queer, absent-minded gesture, and touched the jagged scar on his cheek which the knuckles of Witherell had torn in his flesh.

"I sent a word to you by the lawyer," he said. "I told him to say that I wanted to see you as soon as I'd made a fresh start."

She answered: "Will killing Bob Witherell be a fresh start?"

That remark so staggered him that he could not fix words in his mind, and when he rallied himself, he saw that she was going down the street again, slowly, with her head at such an angle that he knew she wanted to be followed and argued with, but he went gloomily back into the saloon.

"Give me a whisky!" he said to Lefty Malone.

It was the second time, only, that he had taken a drink since he ar-

rived at the saloon, and Lefty poured out enough to brim the little glass. Saxon took it in sips, and the saloon keeper said to him:

"How long you goin' to make money for me and take wallops for yourself and leave that poor gal unhappy, Saxon?"

It was money for Lefty Malone, since every man who came to White Water was certain to walk into the Rolling Bones and spend time looking at big John Saxon and his formidable hands. But Saxon, when he heard those first words of human consideration from Lefty Malone, was unable to make an answer for a time. Then he said:

"I know my business, Malone. You know yours. And the best way is to never mix the two together."

"Look," said Lefty Malone, "I've had enough of your lip. You got a good pair of hands, but if you ever take a crack at me, I'm goin' to pull a gun and pay some lead into you, you big ham."

John Saxon smiled down at the whisky as he finished it. There were so many things that Lefty Malone did not quite understand, and chief among them were certain walks into the woods behind White Water in the dawn of the day.

Half a week after that, Bob Witherell came to town.

CHAPTER VIII.

GUN DUEL.

THERE is something glorious about a rascal who is also a man of might, and Bob Witherell was glorious, in a way. He was not like his brother, the Solitaire, but he was glorious, nevertheless. He carried in his eye an infinite defiance. He bore his head like a proud king. And he walked with

the step of a young stallion who leads a herd.

There was the usual herd behind him when Bob Witherell came into White Water. Boots was his chief lieutenant, his buck teeth shining white in his enforced and perpetual smile. They stopped up the street, by chance, at the blacksmith shop of Wiley Ryan, and Wiley told them about John Saxon in the Rolling Bones. Witherell laughed and came straight down the street.

He said to Wiley a thing that was to be remembered afterward. "A dog that's been licked knows the hand of its master!"

He had five men behind him as he entered the Rolling Bones, and John Saxon was not in sight.

"I hear you've got a pretty fine bouncer in here," said Bob Witherell. "Let's have a look at him."

"He don't show himself till there's a need of him," answered Lefty Malone.

"Is there a need for him now?" asked Witherell. And, pulling out a gun, with three swift shots he shattered three bottles that stood on the shelf behind the bar.

Lefty Malone turned and looked at the liquor that dripped rapidly down on the floor, and he heard the last of the broken glass tinkle as it fell. Then he lifted his eye and looked over the six men.

"He'll be in pretty soon, I guess," he said.

In fact, at that moment Saxon came into the door. He spoke words for Lefty Malone, but his eye was upon Witherell gently, steadily, tenderly, taking in all of the man.

"I thought I heard some noise in here," said Saxon.

"Witherell's gone amuck and shot some bottles off the shelf," said Lefty Malone. "I wish you'd throw

him out—and make him pay for the stuff!"

"How much should he pay?" asked Saxon.

"Ten dollars," said Lefty Malone, generous to himself.

Witherell's companions laughed heartily; Witherell himself looked on the face of Saxon, pale below and sun-darkened above, as Saxon stood before him, saying:

"Witherell, pay off ten dollars and get out of the place."

"Here's five of the ten," said Witherell, and laid the five fingers of the flat of one hand across the cheek of Saxon. "And here's the other five," he added, slapping him on the other side of the face.

Saxon caught the arm that delivered the second blow. It was the left arm, and by the lock that Saxon put on it he was able to whirl Witherell and jam him into a corner against the wall with a crash. The blow half stunned Witherell. As he stood there, dazed, Saxon pulled from the vest pocket of his man a small wad of greenbacks and threw them onto the bar.

"Take your change out of that, Malone," he said.

He stepped back.

"Throw him out!" commanded Lefty Malone, full of rage and of joy.

For he was half afraid, when he saw the bewildered faces of the five followers, that there would be no gun play. And he wanted to smell powder burning.

"I'll throw him out after he's rested himself a little," said Saxon.

Witherell stood out from the corner. He had not been badly hurt. It was the shock to his pride that chiefly had amazed him.

"Get out of the saloon," said Saxon, "before I have to throw you out."

"I'm goin' to take you apart!" said Witherell. "You—you——"

HE broke off, unable to find a sufficient word, and he laughed. He looked around at his followers, but they were not laughing. They were looking from him to John Saxon, and their eyes were like the eyes of rats.

Then he understood, suddenly, that they were doubting him. After all, they had seen him picked up and jammed into a corner like a child, but they forgot that he was something more than a wrestler. They forgot that he was an artist of a different sort.

He merely said to Saxon: "Go get a lift to your feet and—dance for me, you!"

He was a little leisurely in his draw. Something made a crooked flash from beneath the coat of Saxon and into his hand, and Witherell had a chance to look down the barrel of a Colt that was held just a shade higher than the hip, and a mere half arm's length in front of Saxon. The ease with which that gun was held meant a great deal to Witherell. It meant a lot to the saloon man, too, who had crouched behind the bar, with only the brutal fire of his eyes above the edge of it.

"Let me see how high you can dance, Witherell," said Saxon. "Now you're covered, let me see you jump!"

"Never!" whispered Witherell.

"I see," said Saxon. "You don't want to dance. You've got the legs for it, but you don't want to dance. Then let me see you pull out your gun, slowly, and hold it down at your side. We'll have an even start in the other sort of a game, Witherell."

Bob Witherell pulled out his Colt slowly, as ordered, and let it hang

down at his side at the full length of his arm, and Saxon devoured him all the while with a little half smile which he could feel on his own lips. Something like love for Witherell came up in him, a passionate satisfaction as he glanced over this splendid sacrifice to death.

Then he lowered his own gun suddenly to the length of his arm.

"Somebody say 'Go!'" said Saxon.

No one spoke. The silence stretched out to a distance. And a strange thing began on the face of Witherell. His eyes started contracting, as though already he were looking through the sights of a rifle. Then they opened again, suddenly and wide.

Off to the side of the room, behind the bar, Lefty Malone began to curse brokenly. Off to the other side, Boots began to say:

"Yes, and I'll count, Witherell. I've always hated your rotten heart. If you finish him, you can take me on afterward. You're half yellow, you dog! I'll give the pair of you the start."

With that he shouted suddenly: "Go!"

The two explosions followed almost in one. They were not quite in unison, for Saxon raised his gun not so far as Witherell. He did not need to raise it, since a man can point straight no matter in what position his hand may be. He hardly more than jerked up the muzzle of his gun, and as the slug from Witherell's weapon went past his cheek, he sent his own bullet home between the eyes of the gunman.

Witherell fell right on his face. His gun banged loudly on the floor, then his body struck. His head recoiled and made the third bump. He lay with one foot turned in crookedly, and that fine, shop-made

boot would never be fitted into a saddle again.

Some one whispered: "He's finished. Witherell's gone!"

There was something impossible about it, grand, and strange. And John Saxon wanted to laugh. He kept himself from laughing and merely smiled, but every breath he drew was a long course of pleasure through his entire soul. He was tasting something—victory, conquest, yes, and death itself.

When a man kills another, he ought to feel a frightful shock, an utter dismay, a sense of guilt and of loss, a sense, too, of the speed with which a mortal can be beckoned away from this world of ours, and of the fragility of our lives.

Three months ago, Saxon would have felt all that shock, but in the meantime he had been hardened. It seemed to him, in fact, that it was not a hardened, but a new soul that was in him.

Then he remembered, with a frightful lifting of joy and no sense of danger, that there were five others from the gang standing against the wall, entranced.

So he turned his head toward them. They were staring. One was agape.

"You fellows," said Saxon, "which of you comes next?"

They said nothing to him.

"Then get out!" thundered Saxon. And there was a wild, blind rage in him. He wanted to flash more bullets from that gun. What were rabbits and squirrels for targets compared with the magnificence of human flesh? He was shamed and angered by the fear these men showed. They ought to stand up to him. The guns could all start barking at once—and still he would not be afraid.

But the others? Well, they turned

and shambled meekly before him, and went out from the saloon. Only one had failed to go, and that was Boots, who stood against the wall.

"All right," said Boots when he saw that he was noticed. "I'm so small that I don't matter. Have a drink with me, will you, Saxon?"

"Get out!" cried Saxon.

"Oh, all right," said Boots. "I know my master's voice!"

And he walked out lightly, with a quick, short step like that of a woman, in his high-heeled boots.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUPERIOR JOY.

WHEN Sheriff Phil Walker came, he looked at Saxon and saw the faint smile still on his face.

"You like it, eh?" the sheriff asked.

Any nondescript denial would have done very well, but the truth came rushing up on the lips of Saxon, and he uttered it.

"Yes," he said, "I like it. I'd like to put you where he is. You're a bully and a crook. I'll put you where he is if you'll pull a gun."

They used to say about that sheriff that he was the toughest man in White Water, and that he loved bullets for their own sake—even the ones that had smashed through his flesh.

They used to say that up to the time that fifty curious men had jammed into the Rolling Bones Saloon and John Saxon had said to him: "I'll put you where he is, if you'll pull a gun!"

For the bold sheriff, on this occasion, said not a word in answer, and did not make a gesture toward his gun, but, instead, tried to pretend that he had not heard, and bent over the body of the dead man.

Saxon, still with that faint smile on his lips, went on: "You're a yellow dog, I see. You're such a yellow dog that you're not worth touching Witherell. He's too good for you. Back up—and get out of here!"

The sheriff jerked himself erect and looked around him. He threw a savage glance around at all those faces of men who had voted for him at the last election. Then, ready to fight, he glanced at Saxon.

His whole face loosened as he saw that deadly little smile. His eyes wandered. He gave his hat a tug, and turned, and walked out of the saloon with his shame upon him.

"Step up, boys, and have a drink," said John Saxon. "I've been having a good time, and I want you all to have the same."

He waved toward the bar, where the crumpled greenbacks of Witherell lay on the varnished wood.

"Bob is paying for another round!" he declared. "But I won't let him. We don't like his money in here. Step up, boys, and take your liquor."

Very strange to say, they all stepped up. They were silent. They felt a little guilty, till one of the men said:

"Well, Witherell had this coming to him, and he had it coming from Saxon. You done a good job, and here's to you, Saxon."

John Saxon stood at the end of the bar with a glass of whisky grasped in his hand, but he did not raise it to his lips. He could not raise it. He was too frozen and benumbed with joy that would not cease.

After a time he was able to say: "There's Boot Hill outside the town. Will some of you fellows come to the funeral?"

Yes, they would come to the

funeral, gladly. Most of the town would come, and most of the town did, but all the way out behind the cart that carried the body of Bob Witherell, Saxon wished that the dead man were still alive—so that he could have the joy of slaying him once more!

Twenty picks and shovels opened the soil of Boot Hill readily. In an old piece of tarpaulin the body was wrapped. When it was laid in the grave, Saxon got down into the hole and closed the open eyes.

He made a little speech, standing there in the hole in the ground.

"I'm not sorry about this," said John Saxon. "I wish he were alive still, so that I could have the killing of him again. And if any man wants to bring me to account for what I've done, I'm ready for him, night or day. I guess that's all."

NO one said a word of answer, because there was no answer to make—except from the mouth of a gun. When he stood up among the crowd once more and looked about him, he saw the pale, staring face of Mary Wilson's father, and he smiled a little more broadly.

After all, now that Witherell was dead and underground, with the big, cruel clods falling down on him, Saxon felt more of a kinship, more nearness to the dead man than to any of the others who were standing about inside the cemetery.

There are, he saw, two types of men. One type is that of the worker. These are the fellows who slave and keep their noses close to the grindstone and think that with the money they make they may be able to buy enough of the joys of life.

There is another and more glorious type, and it is composed of the men who want freedom and will have it—freedom to fly abroad like

the hawks in the sky and to prey, when they are hungry, on the lesser and the lower birds of the air.

It was perfectly natural, perfectly arranged.

There was one superior joy, however, and already he had tasted of it and wanted more, and this was the delight of preying on the hawks themselves.

Suppose that a man could soar above even the eaters of flesh, the very hawks. He, then, would have the superior joy. To slay the Withereills and to outface such bullies as the sheriff—that was to find the greatest delight that a man can find on earth!

He walked back to the saloon when the burial was ended. In his room he rolled his pack, for he had accumulated a few things during his month of service.

Afterward he went down into the barroom, and found there a thick crowd of people who had been at the funeral, and of others who had come into town afterward and wanted to have a glimpse of the slayer.

He walked through them. They gave back before him like water before the prow of a ship, and he said, at the bar:

"I'll take my pay for the last two weeks, old-timer."

Lefty Malone looked up at him with a start. His voice rose to a high whine.

"Hey, you don't mean that! You don't mean that you'd walk out on me like that, do you? Hey, John!"

He came running from behind the bar and led Saxon into the back room.

"You can't go," he said, gripping the arm of Saxon hard. "Look here—you mean money to me. You've meant money ever since you came."

"Then why didn't you raise my pay, you rat?" asked Saxon.

"Because you didn't ask for no increase," said the other. "I'm not tight. Only you didn't ask for no raise. But I'll give you the raise now. I'll give you thirty-five a week."

"Pay me off. I'm going," said the slayer.

He would have laughed. He wanted to laugh when he thought of confining the future majesty of his life, and his glorious freedom, to this saloon and to this small town.

"I'll make it—I'll tell you what I can make it. I'll make it fifty dollars a week. You'll be the best-paid man in the town!" said Lefty.

"Pay me now, and stop the chatter," said John Saxon. "You think that I'll stay on here to draw a crowd, the way a dead horse draws the buzzards? No, I'll take my pay, and I'll go."

He took his pay straightway, and walked out under the open and the stars, with his roll over his shoulder. There was freedom and space, and there was only one thing that he wanted to take with him into it. That was Mary Wilson, and he went straight to her house.

CHAPTER X.

A FAREWELL.

HE found the Wilson house in darkness, the narrow wedge of its roof making a blunt point among the stars. However, he opened the gate and went up the path, careful that his feet should not make a great grinding among the gravel.

Mary always watered the small garden late in the evening, and the good smell of the drinking ground was still in the air, and the fragrance of the flowers was there, also. In

the darkness, this sense of life from the garden soil seemed to fill the air about him. Then he was aware of some one sitting on the front porch. He knew all at once that it was Mary, and that she was waiting for him.

She got up and came down to the lowest step. He put his arms around her.

"You'd better not be kissing me," said Mary Wilson.

"Why'd I better not?" asked John Saxon.

"I don't want you to," she answered. "I don't want you even to touch me."

He dropped his arms from her suddenly.

"You've stopped caring about me?" he asked.

"No, I care just as much about you."

"You've found another kind of a man that you like better?"

"It's not that, so much. It's because you're bad, John. You've turned into a bad man, and I ought not to see you."

"You mean, because I fought Witherell? That's not being bad. That's only being a man. I had to fight him. You know that!"

"Why did you have to fight him?" she asked.

"Why? Are you asking me that seriously?" he demanded.

"When you bend down your head at me and glare like this," said Mary Wilson, "I'm almost afraid of you myself."

"Are you serious," said he, "that you don't know why I fought Witherell?"

"You think you had reasons," said Mary Wilson.

"I only think that, do I?" said he. "Having the house burned, and the cattle stolen, and then being made to dance like a fool in front of the

whole town, and after being beaten up with his fists—when I name those things over, doesn't your blood boil, Mary?"

"No, my blood doesn't boil," said she.

"I'm shamed to hear you say that!" exclaimed Saxon.

"It doesn't boil so much as when I hear you say that you were glad to murder Bob Witherell."

"I didn't say I was glad to murder him."

"Well, but you killed him, didn't you?"

"I did."

"And you're glad that you killed him?"

"Yes."

"Then I said it right before—you're glad that you murdered Bob Witherell."

"There's a difference between a fair fight and a murder," said Saxon, beginning to breathe very hard.

"How could it be a fair fight?" asked the girl. "You're so big and strong and wild that how could it be a fair fight between you and any other man?"

"Mary," answered Saxon, "sometimes a woman says things that drive a man pretty near wild."

"It'd be easy to drive you wild now, John," she replied. "You like being wild."

"I'm trying to hold myself in," said Saxon.

He leaned closer over her, and the starlight let him see her face, delicately made. She seemed so childishly small and very young that he could hardly believe in the bigness of the stubborn nature she was showing now.

"I'm trying to hold myself in," he went on. "But you know that Witherell's been born with a gun in his hand. It was more than fighting fair to stand to him."

"Bob Witherell wasn't walking out two hours every morning," said the girl, "going through the woods and shooting at poor little harmless squirrels and rabbits and letting them lie dead where they fell. Bob Witherell wasn't practicing like that."

THERE was nothing particularly wrong in those walks of his in the dawn, but her knowledge of them gave him a sense of guilt and angered him greatly.

"Who's been talking to you about such things?" he asked.

"Nobody," she answered. "But I went out and saw for myself."

"You?" he demanded. "Have you been spying on me?"

"Why would you call it spying?" she asked. "You come back to town for a month, and you don't come near me all that time."

"I told you I wouldn't come back to you till I'd made a new start."

"It's been a long month for me," said the girl. "There's a good many nights that I can't sleep. And some of them I used to go out and take a walk in the cool of the morning. That was how I happened to hear the shooting, and then I saw you slipping along through the woods like an Indian looking for scalps. I wish that you'd never made your new start. You were always a clean-handed man, but your hands will never be clean again, John."

"The way a woman talks, it's a hard thing for a man to stand and take it," said Saxon. "Would you want me to go all my life shamed, and people pointing me out for a coward?"

"I'd rather that than to have them point you out for a gunman and a killer," she answered.

"Are you through with me? Is that what you mean?" he asked her.

"No, but I've got to start waiting again. I'll never be through with you."

He was so touched by this, and so troubled, also, that he threw out his arms around her.

"Will you kiss me, Mary?" he asked.

"If you want me to—yes," said she.

"Only if it makes you happy, too," said Saxon gloomily.

"Why would it make me happy?" she demanded. "You've been beating and breaking men with your hands. You've killed a man to-day!"

His arms dropped away from her again.

"Well," he said, "I'll be going along."

She began to cry softly. And again his big hands went out and hovered about her.

"Don't touch me," she whispered. "I'd rather be unhappy than have you touch me."

"Mary," he asked, "do you love me a little, still?"

"Aye, I'll always love you," said the girl. "You know that. As long as I live. But I've wanted to be proud of you. I'll never marry a man that I'm not proud of."

"You'll never marry me because I killed Bob Witherell?" he asked.

"Not till something has made you clean again," she answered.

"What would that something be?"

"I don't know. The world does things to people. Maybe it'll do good things to you. I don't know a great deal, John."

"Well, I'd better be going," said Saxon.

She was still crying, her breathing was making small, hissing sounds. Women cry as easily as they breathe, he thought.

She said nothing to stop him.

"Good-by," said Saxon.

He got to the garden gate slowly. He still expected a small rush of footsteps, and her voice, calling him in a whisper, but nothing happened, and he went, head down, along the street.

CHAPTER XI.

FINLAY'S ADVICE.

WHEN Saxon was a block from the Wilson house, the stiffness went out of his hips, though the ache was still in his heart. He paused and looked about him. The weight of the roll on his back was a rather meaningless thing now. He had intended to see Mary, bid her a tender farewell, and then advance into the world to seek a bigger fortune than that which had been stolen from him. It would not take long, he had felt. This new strength in his hands promised him a quick success, to say nothing of the new strength of his will. If he could be shown a job, no matter how big—well, then he could do it!

But after leaving the girl, unhappily, that sense of surety was gone from him. The heavy Colt—was not that the instrument that had put a distance between him and Mary?

He determined, suddenly, that he would return the gun to the hands that had given it to him. One light shone at him from the house of Daniel Finlay, farther down the street, and it was like a guiding signal to him. Somehow he felt that he would find profound understanding in the house of the lawyer.

He went to it at once, as to a harborage. There was no nonsense of a garden in front of it. There was simply a hitch rack at which many a desperate man had tethered his mustang before he climbed up the front steps to ask the advice of the man of the law. The house itself

was a mere whitewashed shanty in which there were only two rooms, stifling hot in summer and bitter cold in winter.

Big John Saxon tapped at the front door and heard, instantly, the dry, harsh voice of the lawyer bidding him enter. So he pushed the door open and stepped into the hot office-living-room-library. The kitchen-bedroom-dining-room was at the rear. This front room was thickly lined, on all sides, with books of the law, most of them old, most of them in buckram bindings. The desk of Daniel Finlay stood in a corner, crosswise, and on it was a reading lamp with a big circular burner, and behind the burner sat Finlay, with the light strongly on his face, and making his eyes shimmer with the powerful radiance.

When he saw Saxon, he stood up from his chair and came forward. He made a gesture with his handless right arm, as though he had forgotten. Then, hastily, he put forward his left hand and gripped the right hand of Saxon warmly. In spite of the heat of the evening and the closeness of the room, the skin of that lawyer's hand was dry and cold.

He looked on Saxon with an almost affectionate glance, but what pleased him was the wonderfully harrowing effect of the past three months. They seemed to have been more than three years, and three strenuous years, at that. John Saxon looked actually bigger, but much less soft. The worthless part of the ore had been heated and beaten out of him; only the iron remained. It was strong iron, and one day it might become steel.

Daniel Finlay, who rightly took to himself a major portion of credit for the change, saw at a glance that he now had at hand a magnificent

tool, if only he could keep it in his grasp and direct the cutting edge of it.

Saxon said: "I've brought back the gun you loaned to me, Mr. Finlay. Here it is."

He laid it on the edge of the desk.

Finlay picked it up and cleared his throat.

"I gave this gun," he said, "to a big, soft-hearted boy, a lad incapable of realizing how much evil there was in the world, how much cruelty, how much danger. It is brought back to me by a man of resolution and courage—the sort of a man that an entire crowd shrinks back from, or follows when he decides to lead. I gave a gun," went on Finlay, "to a child who did not know how to use it. Now it is offered back to me by a man who is the master of it. No, Saxon—the gun is no longer mine. It is yours!"

Saxon shook his head.

"It's cost me my girl. I don't want it," he replied.

FINLAY wanted to laugh aloud. It was all he could do to keep some of his triumph from glistening in his eyes, at least. This was his handiwork, and he rejoiced. He, with his cunning mind, had already caused the death of Bob Witherell. He had caused the girl and Saxon to diverge from one another. Perhaps he would be able to do much, much more.

"She sends you away?" asked Finlay.

"Yes," said Saxon. "There's blood on my hands, she says."

"There is," said the lawyer. "Blood that has washed them clean. Blood shed in the service of society."

"I wasn't serving society. I was serving myself," answered Saxon bluntly. "I hated Witherell, and I wanted to get back at him."

"Tell me, then. Were you sorry when you saw him drop dead?"

"No," said Saxon slowly. "I wasn't sorry. I was glad. I was so glad that I wanted to laugh. It wasn't any shock to me to see him curl up. I liked it."

"The warrior strain in a man," said the lawyer fiercely, "is the finest strain of all. You have it in you, Saxon. I saw it long ago. That was why I gave you the gun. Do you think that I would have given it if I had not known that you would learn how to use it? I saw that you had in you the sort of metal from which a sword could be forged. And the sword has been made. There is a new gleam in your eyes, Saxon. Whatever you were before, you have become a king of men now!"

Saxon stared. "I'm a hobo out of a job," he answered. "That's a lot closer to the truth."

"Because a pretty-faced little girl has spoken a few sharp words to you, do you mean to tell me that you are really dispirited?" demanded Daniel Finlay. "No, no! You know that as you grow greater and greater, as a reputation surrounds you, she will come back to your hand at the first gesture."

"She's not that kind," said Saxon. "You don't know her. She looks small and pretty, but she's as hard as nails! And she's as wise as an old man."

"Was I wrong before when I talked to you?" asked Finlay.

"No," admitted Saxon.

"Neither am I wrong now. The truth has a singular taste that cannot be mistaken; that is the taste which I find now! I know, John Saxon, that you are meant to do great things, passing beyond and above the reach of a woman's com-

prehension, lifting you into a nobler and a wider future. The fire is in you—the fire of genius which dissolves the barriers that close in ordinary men.”

Saxon listened, bewildered.

That the lawyer was wise, he knew. That he was a good man, he took the common word of White Water. That he was a profound hypocrite, John Saxon had no means of knowing. And a shudder of delight and of ambition passed through the soul of Saxon. Perhaps, after all, there was in him a thing that set him apart from other men. Now and again, as he looked back upon his life, he even felt that already he had been aware of it. And the lawyer, of course, had seen all of this clearly!

What was it, in fact, that he was seeing?

“Mr. Finlay,” said Saxon, very troubled, “you’re an older man than I am, and you know a lot more than I do. What is it that you think I ought to do?”

“Go out into the world with that gun as with a sword. Right wrongs. Correct evils. And measure yourself against the thugs and the outlaws and the evildoers!”

THE lawyer allowed a somewhat Biblical strain to come into his speech. His conviction grew; he felt that he was taking in his hand a torch that might kindle a very great blaze indeed.

“Take from the world,” said the lawyer, “what the world has taken from you! Doesn’t that impulse come up in you?”

“Aye,” said Saxon, “it certainly does. But is it right?”

“How can it be wrong?” asked the lawyer. “It is instinct! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!”

“But I thought that was wrong,” said Saxon simply.

“Wrong for kindergarten milk-sops!” exclaimed the lawyer savagely. “There is only one true law, above printing presses—what a man feels in his heart, he must do!”

“What you say—it seems to set a man free!” said Saxon honestly.

He felt, in fact, a foretaste of liberation.

“When you had been wronged, you went to the sheriff, did you not?”

“Yes.”

“And he laughed at you?”

“Well, worse than that!”

“And then you went to the banker. He did not laugh in your face. No, but he laughed behind your back.”

“Did he?” asked Saxon gloomily.

“He did! He was willing to use you so long as he could get out of you the regular payment of plenty of interest—so long as you had valuable securities. The moment they were gone, what did John Saxon, the man, mean to him? Nothing!”

“No,” agreed Saxon. “I suppose I meant nothing. I could see that I meant nothing to him.”

“Is that right?” demanded the lawyer. “Is a man nothing except a title deed to so much property? No, no, we are something more. Even Daniel Finlay, a cripple, a poor man, a despised member of society—even Daniel Finlay feels that he is worth something more than so many dollars—he believes, he hopes, he prays that he may be something more!”

“You are!” exclaimed Saxon, greatly moved as he saw the handless gesture which accompanied Finlay’s outburst. “You’re about the best man and the best brain in the town, Mr. Finlay. We all know that! I know it, for one!”

"If you have the least trust in me, believe that I am advising you for your own good," said the lawyer. And he set his teeth to keep back the smile of triumph.

"I believe it," said Saxon.

"Then go out and spread your elbows at the board. The world owes you a debt. Collect it like a man!"

"Yes," said Saxon faintly.

"Use your strength. When Withere'll fell before you, a taste of joy went through your entire soul. Well, taste that joy again!"

"Mr. Finlay," said Saxon very slowly, "I'm trying to follow you. But—one woman already says that I've blood on my hands."

"The babbling of a silly girl!" said the lawyer. "And if the law should ever touch you—you have *me*. I'll be your shield, my friend!"

He said it so warmly that tears suddenly stung the eyes of Saxon.

"There's nothing for you to gain in all this," said Saxon. "Somehow I feel as though I ought to follow on blindly. There would be a lot of happiness in being free—if it's honest to be free. To trust to what a man's heart says to him, that would be happiness!"

"Then trust to your heart!" said the lawyer. "Besides, how long may the happy road be for you? Do you stop to think of that? Do you stop to think of the danger that lies ahead?"

"What danger?" asked Saxon.

"The Solitaire!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Aye! I'd forgotten about him. He'll come as soon as he knows that Bob is dead!"

"He'll come, and his men with him. Leave White Water, my friend!"

"You mean to run away from the Solitaire?"

"Until you're stronger. Bob Withere'll went down before you, but the Solitaire is a stronger man than his brother."

"That's true, of course."

"Go out into the world. I can tell you the path to follow. Grow stronger. Battle is to be your element. Acquaint yourself with it. Breathe the atmosphere of danger."

Saxon stood silent.

"Gather around you," said the lawyer, "men who will look up to you as to their natural leader. Men who will watch for you and ward for you. Men who will do your bidding freely, because they recognize in you a superior nature."

"How would I find 'em?" asked Saxon, staring.

"I'll find you the nucleus of the crew," said the lawyer. "Go out of this town. Take the southwest trail. When you come to the first forking, turn to the right. You'll come, presently, to a small lean-to in the woods. In that shack you'll find a small man with a big nature. You know him. He has prominent front teeth that make him seem to smile continually. His nickname is Boots. Only I and a few others know his real name. Go to him. By night or day, he will be glad to see you. Talk to him. He will have something to say."

"I'll go to him," said Saxon. "It seems queer, but—well, I'll go."

"Take this with you," said the lawyer, "and remember that when you are in any trouble, I am your friend. Is that clear?"

"Remember it? How could I forget it?" said Saxon, taking the revolver again. "You're the best friend that I've ever had in the world."

Finlay followed him to the front door. He laid his hand on the thick,

muscular shoulder of John Saxon, and said quietly:

"I would offer you some money to give you a start, but I know that a hungry wolf is the best hunter. Therefore I say: Go out and make your way in the world! Good-by, John Saxon, for a little time!"

So John Saxon went down the steps to the street. There he turned, and made out, dimly, the gesture of Finlay, waving farewell.

As for Finlay himself, he turned back into his room with the smile of a happy devil on his lips and in his eyes.

For a moment his exultation was so strong that he was only able to walk up and down, up and down, formulating in his mind the next step which he would take forward in his scheme of things.

Then he forced himself to sit down at his desk, and he began to write with a savage speed, the pen point digging deep into the paper, now and then, and making the ink splutter. It was the formless, clumsy writing of a child, because his left hand had never learned thoroughly how to master the fine work of writing. He wrote:

DEAR WITHERELL: I hope this letter gets to you quickly. I'll send it off by a special messenger at once. The news I can give you is worth your having.

You know, by this time, that your brother was murdered by John Saxon in the Rolling Bones Saloon, while that precious scoundrel of a Boots stood by, without lifting a hand, and let him go down.

I warned Bob many times against Boots. I told him that a man who hated the Solitaire must hate the Solitaire's brother, also. I told him that Boots was only attached to him in the hope of seeing him go down in a fight, before long.

Now comes the proof—and this will be very interesting to you.

I have seen John Saxon.

He came to my house, and wanted to get my advice, because he was afraid that there might be an arrest following the murder of Bob Witherell. He knows that he took advantage of Bob, and he's afraid that the law might work on him.

I told him, frankly, that I would not stir a hand to help him. I lost my temper and called him a wretched blood-sucking scoundrel. And he had the effrontery to stand there and laugh at me!

Ah, Witherell, in all my life as a cripple I was never so moved. I never so wished for the equipment of a normal man. I gripped a paper-knife, like a fool, and was ready to jump at his throat. But he saw what I intended, and simply laughed all the more. He twisted the knife out of my weak hand and threw it on the floor.

Then he told me what he was a fool to confess. He told me that he had joined forces with Boots. That with Boots and the men of Boots he would be able to laugh at the law, after all, and that he really did not need to have my advice and help as a lawyer. He told me that he had killed one half of the Witherell name, and that he would never rest until he had taken the Solitaire out of the way, either by a bullet through the back or poison in his coffee.

I stood there and listened. I was amazed that he had forgotten himself so much as to confess his villainy to me.

As soon as he left, I sat down to write this letter.

Witherell, be careful. Saxon is a dangerous man. He has had a taste of blood, and he relished it! He will want more of it, and the next victim in order must be the Solitaire.

If you wonder why I am taking this trouble to warn you, remember that I was the friend of Bob. Poor Bob is gone. They buried him like a dog in a shallow grave in Boot Hill. I protested, but the brutes waved me aside. Poor Bob is gone, and I pass on to you my good will and my affection. Let me know how I can serve you.

Ever faithfully yours,

DANIEL FINLAY.

CHAPTER XII.

QUEER TALK.

JOHN SAXON went out of White Water down the southwest trail. He turned at the forking as Daniel Finlay had directed him to do, and he came, in time, upon a little shanty of a lean-to which was laid away among the woods.

There was little light. There were stars in a clear sky, and half a moon throwing a silver from somewhere, but not much of the bright showering came through the tall shadow of the trees. However, the keen eyes of John Saxon found the shanty. And he stooped there and went up to the door.

A great hound, whose shagginess appeared even by that light, came rushing out of obscurity and recoiled when it saw the size of the man or his steadfastness.

He tapped at the door, and the hound sat down to watch.

After a long moment, he was aware that a human presence had joined him. No one had appeared at the door, but human eyes were watching big John Saxon. He looked askance, and opposite to the dog he saw a man at the farther corner of the hut facing him, with a glimmering long rifle in his hands.

"Well," said Saxon, "this is sort of like waking up the devil. I'm glad you didn't appear out of the ground at my back, Boots."

The smaller man answered: "Who sent you here, and who are you?"

"Put down your gun and I'll show you," said Saxon.

"I'd rather have you tell me," said Boots.

"I'm John Saxon, if that means anything to you."

"Ah, and are you Saxon? Of course you are."

"Well, Boots," Saxon said, "I was sent up here to see you by a wise man."

"There are a lot that talk and there are few that are wise," said Boots.

"This one is wise."

"You tell me his name, and then I'll tell you."

"His name is Daniel Finlay."

"Hello," said Boots. "Finlay, eh?"

"Aye, he sent me."

"Well, Finlay never does a thing without having a reason for it. What did he say about me?"

"He didn't say much. He sent me to you. So I came."

"You think he's a right man or a wise man?" asked Boots.

And Saxon could see, or thought he could see, the faint and glimmering white of Boots's grin even through the shadow.

"He's a right man," said big John Saxon. "There's not much that I know in the world, but I know that Daniel Finlay is an honest man!"

"Ah, and you know that, do you?" said Boots.

"Don't sneer at me," said John Saxon.

"No?" Boots sneered again.

Saxon took a step toward him; the rifle rose to a level.

"I won't have you sneer at me!" said Saxon, and took a longer step toward the rifle. He grabbed the muzzle of it in his fist. And Boots simply laughed as the gun was pushed away from the direction of Saxon's heart.

"That's all right," he said.

"Why shouldn't I take and twist the head off your shoulders?" asked Saxon.

"Because you're too big to take on a man like my size," said Boots.

"All right," said Saxon. "And who told you that about me?"

"Oh, I've got a pair of eyes," answered Boots. "Here, you can have the gun if you want it."

"I don't understand it," said Saxon, "and I don't understand you."

"So long as I understand *you*," said Boots, "that's all right."

"You're a queer fellow," said Saxon.

"Yeah, but I eat three squares a day and never pay for 'em at the end of the month."

"I don't want to talk like this any more," said Saxon. "It's a pretty smart way of talking, maybe, but I don't like it."

"We'll talk any way you like," said Boots. "We've got to talk that way, because you've got my rifle now."

"There's still a revolver somewhere on you," said Saxon.

"Is there?" answered Boots, letting his good humor appear in a chuckle. "That's a thing that you are not supposed to know. You're a lot brighter than I thought you were."

AT that, John Saxon made a considerable pause. He saw that he was being mocked, and he could not quite understand it. Because Boots knew something about what he could do with his hands, and yet Boots was capable of standing there within the grip of his hand and chuckling in his face.

Saxon made a quick move and caught Boots by the scruff of the neck.

"I've got a mind," he said hoarsely, "to take and——"

As his grip fastened, he shook Boots.

"I've got a mind—to——"

Boots merely said: "Sure, you could do anything you want, but you won't."

"Why won't I?" demanded Saxon.

"Oh, you're too big and too much of a fool," said Boots. "But don't you be afraid. I'm not going to tell anybody."

Saxon was silent.

Boots added: "And Daniel Finlay won't say anything, either."

"Then he thinks that I'm a fool, too?"

"He's as wise as I am, anyway," said Boots.

"All right," said Saxon. "I don't know why I don't break your back, but I'm not doing it."

"Of course you're not," said Boots. "You know that I'm the kind of medicine that you can use."

"How can I use you?" asked Saxon.

"Come along! Finlay told you that!"

"No, he didn't tell me."

"The devil he didn't! You expect me to believe that?"

"It's true. Besides, I'm pretty well fed up with you and the funny way you talk, Boots."

"I'm near fed up with you, hombre," answered Boots. "And still I've got to keep on talking so long as you have me by the back of the neck, I suppose."

"You're laughing at me," said John Saxon. "Let's say that I'm not bright. Anyway, I've got a hold on you. Well, I give up the hold. And so—so long, Boots. I'm sorry that I came here and waked you up this way."

He dropped his hand from the neck of Boots, who merely chuckled and said:

"That's the first time that I ever talked my way out of trouble!"

"I'm tired of your chatter," said big John Saxon.

"Wait a minute," called Boots.

"Well?"

"How did you keep that dog from jumping at your throat?"

"I didn't run—and that's why the dog stood still."

"The same way with me," answered Boots. "I didn't run, and that's why you stood still. Now, let's start and talk sense, Saxon. You mind?"

"Hell, I'm through with you and any sense that you can talk."

"If that's straight, then just take a horse. It's easier riding away from me than it is walking away from me."

"Where'll I find a horse and a saddle and a bridle?"

"Back there in the shed."

Saxon could hear the rustling of the hay as the horses ate.

"Which one shall I take?" he asked, sneering, ready to smile in his turn at some sort of a trick.

"Take the best one, because you're the biggest weight," said Boots, laughing again.

Saxon went into the shed. There might be a joke behind all of this, but, also, there seemed to be a horse—and he was mortally weary of walking.

So he went into the shed, and saw by the slant of the moonlight three fine horses, and a glorious gray mare seventeen hands tall, and made like a statue. He put his hands on her, and she turned her head kindly and shone her gentle eyes at him.

He saddled and bridled her in a wonder of delight.

Then he led the great mare out and mounted her.

"Her name is Mary," said Boots, and laughed in his strange way.

Big John Saxon rode out of view among the trees. There was not even a call after him. He turned the mare suddenly and came back to Boots. There he dismounted.

"All right, dog-gone you," said

Saxon. "I won't ride away till we've talked."

"I knew you wouldn't," answered Boots.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMMON BOND.

IN that world of crime where the two Witherells moved, it was plain that men had mysterious impulses, strange and indecipherable to big John Saxon. He dismounted, saying:

"You would have let me ride away on that gray mare—why? She's worth a lot of money."

"You wouldn't have ridden her far," said Boots. "By the time you got into the throat of the pass yonder, with the moon shining on you, you would have bumped into that big Negro, Arthur William Creston. You know him?"

"No."

"Well, he wouldn't introduce himself except with a rifle bullet—and he can certainly use a rifle. He's right fond of that big mare. Ever since he stole her, he thinks that she belongs to him."

"You mean," exclaimed Saxon, "that you would have let me ride into a murder?"

"Why not?" asked Boots. "If you were hound enough to take the horse and ride away, you were hound enough to deserve a bullet through the brain, the way I see it."

The coolness of this man staggered Saxon again.

"All right," he said. "Here's the mare back—and good-by to you."

"So long," said Boots. "I'm almost sorry to see you go, but you won't go far."

"Won't I? And why not?"

"Because you'll keep thinking and thinking about me, and pretty soon you'll come back."

"You talk like a book," said Saxon.

"I see that we could use each other. That's why," said Boots.

"How could I use you?" asked Saxon.

"How could a lion use a fox?" answered Boots.

"And what good would I be to you?" demanded Saxon.

"I want to see the two Witherells dead. You've fixed up one half of them, and now maybe you've got one chance in ten to get the Solitaire."

"You hate the Witherells? Then what kind of a hound are you for riding with them!"

"I never rode with the Solitaire since he did me dirt. He knows that I'd skin him if I could. Bob knew I hated the Solitaire, but he thought I loved *him*. The fool! I was glad when I heard your bullet sock into his skull. He wasn't the man I hoped he'd be!"

"How big a man did you hope he'd be?" asked Saxon.

"Big enough to stand up to the Solitaire, maybe! I hoped that they'd murder each other one day, and me to stand by and look on at the killings!"

He laughed as he said it, and Saxon peered through the dim light beneath the trees at that queer burst of merriment.

"Two brothers?" said Saxon. "You thought that two *brothers* would fight each other?"

"I thought so, and I wasn't a fool. Bob was jealous of the Solitaire. He was apt to start wrangling any time, and the Solitaire will catch fire at a word. He'll shoot as quick as he'll wink. So I hoped, for a time. But after a while I began to see that Bob would never have the nerve to face the Solitaire. Then you came along and settled the question for me. What Bob wouldn't do, maybe

you'll wangle for me. That's why I'm apt to turn myself into a slave and do what you tell me to do."

"Boots," said Saxon, "you're the queerest fellow that I ever talked to."

"You'll find me the most useful fellow you ever talked to," said Boots.

"Why do you hate the Solitaire so much?"

"Oh, the same old story. You wouldn't be interested. Just a little matter of a girl. You take a little buck-toothed runt like me, and it's hard to find a girl who'll look at me twice. But I found one. A good sort. Marriage was my idea, and maybe a change all around in my way of living. But the Solitaire saw her. She wasn't very much. She wasn't any great beauty. But he felt like wasting a little time, so he paid some attention to her."

"And turned her head?" asked Saxon.

"Yes. And after she'd known a real man, she didn't have any use for me. And that made me a little sour on the Solitaire."

He laughed again, and this time the sound curdled the blood of Saxon.

"I went to the Solitaire and stood up to him," said Boots. "I thought that I had enough nerve to face any man in the world. But I didn't! That's all. I wound up by taking water like a Chinaman. And *that* made me a little more sour on the Solitaire. You see? Well, you'd better come into the shack, and we'll talk things over—that is, if you want me to help."

SAXON leaned his hand against the firm shoulder of the gray mare. He tried to think, but his mind kept whirling. One thing alone remained clear—that he and

Boots had a common bond, and that was their mutual enemy, the Solitaire.

Other than that, he knew that Boots was a criminal, worthy of being outlawed, a cruel devil, no doubt. Still, perhaps the man would be useful in many ways.

All of Saxon's instincts told him that it was best for him to avoid such company as that of Boots and his peers. But Saxon could not help but remember, as a deciding voice in determining his attitude, that Daniel Finlay had specially sent him out here to talk with this very man.

And was not Finlay almost more than a brother to him? Yes, and almost more than a father, also.

That was why he said: "All right. Thanks—I'll stay."

"Good man," said Boots. "Go in and light the lantern. I'll put up the mare."

"That ought to be my job," protested big John Saxon.

"No," said Boots. "You're the boss, and I'm the hired man."

"How much do I pay you?" Saxon laughed.

"The blood of the Solitaire," said Boots. "I'm accepting the promise of payment, d'you see?"

"All right," answered Saxon. "I'll make the promise to pay."

He said the thing lightly. But as he went into the house, his own words followed him and grew great in his mind. He had promised to kill another man, the Solitaire!

Inside the door of the shack he found the lantern, and lighted it. The place was a wreck, but there were a couple of bunks built against the wall, the blankets of Boots on one of them. He put down his own roll on the other bunk, and Boots came in to ask if he was hungry.

Hungry? He was a wolf!

Boots, in a moment, was working

at the rusted ruin of a stove which stood in a corner. He soon had a fire blazing with the rotten boards of the floor, which he ripped up and broke in his hands. And on the stove he assembled frying bacon and simmering coffee.

He ate not a bite of this food, but served it to John Saxon like a servant to a master. And Saxon, rather embarrassed, accepted this service because he did not know how to refuse it. Besides, even after he had learned exactly why Boots would work for him in this manner, he could not help feeling a bit of gratification.

He ate very heartily, and then he lay back in the bunk and smoked a cigarette and felt that he had come to the close of the longest day in his life—a day so huge and embracing that it seemed to him it outweighed all of his previous years.

Boots put the lantern out, but not till he had asked: "Want anything, chief?"

"No, I don't want anything. I only want to know what happened when you faced the Solitaire."

"The same thing happened to me that happens to every man. When I saw him laughing and talking at a distance, I thought that my nerves would be all right. But when I got up close and got ready to make a pass for my gun, the old yellow hell-fire began to burn in his eyes, and turned me into a cinder. I was scared. The courage ran out of me. I started to pull my gun, but it wouldn't come clear. I was staring so hard at him that it makes my eyes ache to remember. And there were fifty men looking on, too, seeing me shamed.

"The Solitaire, he simply walked up to me and jerked the gun out of my hand, and slapped my face, and marched me right about face out of

the saloon. And a couple of bums got hold of me at the door and threw me out into the street. I didn't mind that part of it. I hardly even knew what was happening to me. What counted was the part when I went to pieces in front of his eyes, and he stood there and sneered, and laughed at me. He seemed to know what he was doing to me, and he seemed to wait till I got well paralyzed. I wasn't ashamed then. I was only ashamed afterward, thinking about it. But just then—well, it was the way a

bird must feel when a snake is eating it with its eyes."

Saxon lay still for a long time, thinking over that story. Before he spoke again, he heard a faint snoring that told him his companion was asleep. But, after all, he had not many questions to ask. It seemed to him the most horrible thing that he had ever heard. And when at last he fell asleep, it was to dream all night that out of a crowd of faces, hypnotic eyes had found him and taken possession of him, body and soul.

To be continued in next week's issue.



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COWBOY LINGO

By RAMON F. ADAMS

(Continued from last week's issue)

ROPES AND ROPING.

The rope is the most essential tool in the cowboy's work, and without one he is like a hunter without a gun. He calls his rope by such slang names as "line," "clothesline," "string," "hemp," "Manila," "whale line," "lass' rope," "twine," "cat-gut," and many others. The rope used for a rope corral on the open range is often called a "cable," and one with an extra large noose is called a "Blocker loop," after John Blocker of Texas, a noted roper who used this style, and such a noose is also called "community loop," "cotton-patch loop," or "Mother Hubbard loop."

"Building a loop" is the shaking out of the noose in preparation for a throw, called by some ropers "shakin' out." When one throws a rope intent on a catch, he is said to throw a "hungry loop," but if he misses, he "wastes a loop." "Dab" is a slang word used in speaking of roping, as "dabs his rope on." He is also said to "pile it on," "snare," "smear it," "stack it on," "take the pins from under it," and if he ropes an animal by the hind feet, he "picks up its hind feet" or "heels" it. A "dog fall" is putting a steer down with its feet under it. Throwing an animal violently is "busting" it, or the cowboy states that he "rolled" it.

When the roper's loop slips over the shoulders of the roped animal and tightens around its belly, it is said to be "belly-roped." This

causes much laughter to every one except the roper. To "run on the rope" is said of an animal, especially a horse, when it starts away after being roped and is snubbed up violently. It is a part of the education of the range horse. A "hot rope" is one that has slipped through one's hand until it burned the flesh.

The "piggin' string" or "hoggin' twine" is a short rope used in hog tying. To drag an object with a rope is to "snail" or "snake" it. "Snubbing" is the act of tying a horse's head to some fixed object. The "squaw hitch" is sometimes called a "Mormon tangle," and the little wooden pegs used in making hair ropes are called "doll babies."

CATTLE.

Since the beginning of the cattle industry in America the cowboy has exercised his talents in giving the animals in his charge nicknames and slang titles.

The old long-horned cattle of the brush country of Texas were "brush splitters" and "cactus boomers." Cattle from the coast country of Texas were "coasters," or "sea lions," that "came right out of the Gulf" of Mexico. A "scalawag" was a worthless "cut back," generally wild and old, while a "mossy horn" was a Texas longhorn steer six years or more old whose horns had become wrinkled and scaly; also called a "mossback" or "wrinkled horn."

By the word, "critter," the cowboy means "cow," and the word,

"cow," stands for cattle in general. If the feminine gender is spoken of, it is designated as "she stuff," or if an individual is pointed out, the sex is usually designated as "that two-year-old heifer" or "that line-backed steer."

A "big antelope" or "slow elk" is an animal killed for food that belonged to some one else. Cattle used to "neck" wild cattle to, or as decoys in getting the latter out of the brush are called "gentlers." "Hospital cattle" are weak stock, and "feeders" are called "poverty cattle." Hereford cattle are called "white faces" or "open-faced" cattle, while "muley" or hornless cattle are sometimes referred to as "can't hook" cattle.

Cattle or horses which have been smuggled across the Rio Grande River after being stolen from their rightful owners in Mexico are called "wet stock." Cattle that have to be driven out of canyons onto the plains during a round-up are called "windies." These cattle are usually contrary and hard to drive, and by the time they have been gotten out of the canyon, the cattle, the horses, and the cowboys are about exhausted, hence the name. Wild stock which ranges high in the

cedar thickets are called "cedar breakers."

"Dogies" or "leppies" are orphan calves. A "maverick" is an unbranded animal, but in California, Oregon, and Nevada the term used is "orejana"; "slick ear" is sometimes used but it is more commonly applied to horses. A "wind belly" is an orphan calf, all belly, fat in the middle, and poor at both ends. A thin cow in early spring is often referred to as "just a ball of hair."

When the cowboy speaks of "dusting" a cow, he means that he throws dust in its eyes to protect himself against its charging. To stir up cattle unnecessarily and get them heated is "chousin' 'em," or to "mustard the cattle."

Although a cow is the most stupid of animals, when a cowboy says that a man has good "cow sense," he means to pay him a high compliment.

The cowboy portrays his aptness and originality in describing a stampede. We have heard it said that "stampedin' cattle jes' buy a through ticket to hell an' gone an' try to ketch the first train," and also that a stampede is "like startin' from the back door of hell on a hot day an' comin' out on the run."

To be continued in next week's issue.

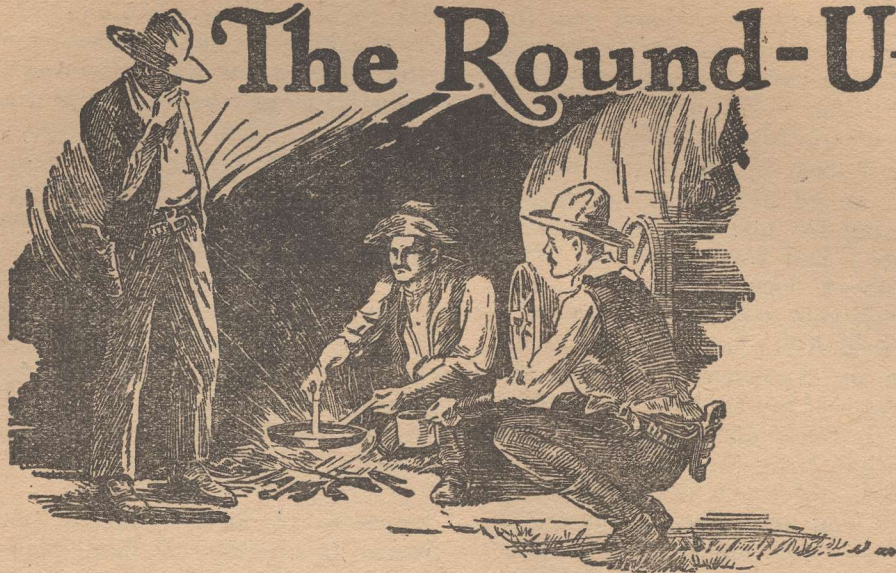
HUNTERS DIDN'T HUNT ENOUGH

BECAUSE hunters haven't killed enough elk, the Wyoming State Legislature was faced with the rather paradoxical problem of keeping them alive.

The State game and fish commission usually feeds around twenty thousand elk in the Jackson Hole country each winter. This year, because of lack of snow, hunters were unable to get at the animals and the usual autumn reduction in the herds failed.

The Legislature is to be asked for fifteen thousand dollars in addition to the regular appropriation to feed the elk the hunters didn't kill.

The Round-Up



FOLKS, we've told you that, after all is said and done, perhaps we've taken as much pleasure and satisfaction from the results that our Missing Department has achieved, as over any effort that we've ever made. There's an old saying that you can't make a six-week's-old calf overnight. We might add that you can't put much character into youth? For why? They haven't had a chance to form character yet. And that's the reason youth doesn't realize a whole lot of things. And one of the things youth doesn't realize, in so many instances, is the value of friends, blood relatives. Blood may be, as they say, "thicker than water," but friendship is not water. It may not be quite as pure "stick to you" blood as relative blood, yet is a pretty good blood—high grade. When you get older, old friends and relatives mean a great deal more to you than when you are young. Truth to tell, it is more often than not the friends that we make when we are young that

stick. We are impressionable then, perhaps, and they can't make dents in us that don't iron out.

We have been prompted to say all that we have said because we think that the Missing Department has achieved something of a record in reuniting a brother and sister. This lady and her brother had been separated for forty-five years, and the Missing Department brought them together. In the slang of young folks of to-day, we'll say, "That's something."

Mrs. Eva Jeffers Hall, 616 North Ninth Street, Rawlins, Kentucky, put the following advertisement in the Missing Department:

JEFFERS, CHARLIE HAMLET, AND ANDREW BYERS: They are brothers and were born in Battle Creek, Michigan. I am their sister, and it is a long time since I have heard from them. If any one knows of their whereabouts, please write to Mrs. Eva Jeffers Hall, 616 North Ninth Street, Rawlins, Kentucky.

Now Mrs. Hall has written to us as follows:

"I am writing to thank you for the wonderful favor you did for me by putting my ad in your magazine last winter (February) and the more wonderful results that I have derived from it. As I said before, I put an ad in your magazine advertising for my long-lost brother, whom I had been separated from for about forty-five years. And through your magazine I have been able to find him, and am now at his home in Waukegan, enjoying the company of my brother for the first time in these many years. I was told that there was no charge for this ad, and words cannot describe or tell you how much I appreciate what you have done for me. You, your magazine, and the results that have been brought me will always be praised by me and my folks. Thank you a thousand times."

We congratulate Mrs. Hall and we congratulate her brother. We're glad that they're together again. Also, we want them to know we feel very happy that the Missing Department was instrumental in bringing about their reunion.

While we are on the subject, here's another letter which came in recently. It is from Mrs. Jessie Brazeau, of 1215 Walsh Street, Fort William, Ontario, Canada. Mrs. Brazeau writes:

"Just wanted to write and thank you for finding a relative who hadn't been heard of for over fifteen years through your Missing Department. It sure is a wonderful thing. I put the ad in about a year ago. A sick war veteran first read it and forwarded it to the party missing. I can't express my thanks enough to your department."

Yes, we're constantly finding them. They haven't all been parted for forty-five years. But when a woman's daughter is away from home and she hasn't heard from her for even months, it seems a long time. Take Mrs. Pearl Green, of Little River, Florida. She hadn't heard from her daughter, but writes now:

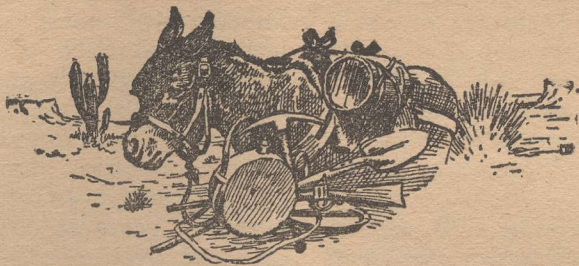
"Just received word from you saying that you were holding a letter there for me from my missing daughter. Please send it to me. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you and the department."

Remember, folks, the Missing Department is entirely free to all readers of the magazine. We will go further than that. It is free to anybody. You don't even have to read the magazine or buy the magazine to use the Missing Department. Can we say more than that?

All the other departments are free, too. If you want to have friends all over the world, write to The Hollow Tree. Should you happen to wish to improve your aim—perish the thought that you're not deadly on the draw—write Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, of the U. S. marines. We know those boys are deadly, sure enough, when they draw a bead on anything.

Perhaps you'd like to know Where To Go And How To Get There. If so, consult John North.

It may be possible that some of you could use a little more gold than you possess at the present moment. You know the government is buying free gold, so they say. Well, if you would sell some gold, write to J. A. Thompson. He may not tell you the exact spot you can go and drive your pick into plenty of it, but he can give you some valuable information as to Mines And Mining.



MINES AND MINING

By J. A. THOMPSON

This department is intended to be of real help to readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be answered in this department in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

DEATH VALLEY'S mineral possibilities have always held a strong lure for the prospector anxious to attempt the ultimate in desert gold hunting. The Panamint range which forms the western wall of Death Valley has come in for its share of prospecting and has produced its share of desert gold. Silver and antimony have also been found there.

Clifford Baker, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is a modern prospector who is mighty interested in the Panamints, particularly the gold that may be found there. He writes us:

"I guess you would call me a gas-buggy prospector because, when I set out for gold, I like, if possible, to strike a camp that I can reach by flivver. Have done some prospecting in Oregon, up around Grants Pass, and also in Idaho, north of Boise. But now I have a strong yen

to tackle the Panamints in Death Valley. Is it feasible to go by car? Can you tell me something of the gold possibilities of the Panamint range, and something of the Death Valley country in general?"

O. K., Cliff. Hop into your flivver. There is a good mineral district on the west or Panamint Valley side of the range by that name which can be reached by car. There is a desert road from Trona, passable, but nothing to brag about, which leads into Ballarat and Panamint, two more or less ghost towns in the district we have in mind. The district itself lies between Wildrose Canyon on the north and an east-west line drawn some two miles south of South Park Canyon. The area is roughly twenty miles long by about fifteen miles wide.

Gold is pretty well scattered throughout the section.

Ballarat lies at the western base of the Panamints. The town Pana-

mint is considerable up the western slope of the mountains, at an elevation in the neighborhood of seven thousand five hundred feet. Branch roads running north and south in Panamint Valley connect with the mining properties already established there.

Concerning climate, Cliff, we sure hope heat doesn't bother you—particularly in the summertime. In Death Valley itself, at Furnace Creek Ranch, an official temperature of 134 degrees F. was recorded in the month of July.

Of course it is cooler in the mountains—slightly cooler. And in the winter, normally, quite a heavy snowfall may be expected at the higher altitudes. Not much rain in that section, either. A government record kept for nine years in Death Valley showed an average annual rainfall of 1.71 inches.

But let's cross over the Panamints again to the section around Ballarat. Most of the present activity is and has been for the past several seasons centered around the gold mines already established there—mines like the Burro, the O. B. Joyful, the Radcliffe, and the World Beater. Also a lot of new prospecting and development work has been done.

However, the silver deposits, once the most productive of the region, are pretty surely in for a big revival. Keep an eye out for silver when you are down there, Cliff.

There are two claims, the Brick Yard Placer and the Brick Yard Placer Extension, in Surprise Canyon, near the point at which Water Canyon empties into it. It might prove worth while to prospect further in that general neighborhood.

The O. B. Joyful Mine in the south branch of Tuber Canyon, about fifteen miles north of Ballarat, is an old property that was discov-

ered in 1893, and has been worked intermittently since then with a reported production of between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand dollars.

For hard-rock prospecting in that section, Surprise Canyon, already well staked, might still show good workable prospects that have hitherto been overlooked. And we don't mean merely the canyon itself, but also the numerous draws, gullies, and smaller canyons that empty into it.

Oregon is by no means the only Northwestern State where hunting pocket gold may be indulged in with a chance to come out a winner. Washington, Oregon's sister State, has its pocket country, too. Ditto northern California. F. W., who sends in his letter from Plainfield, New Jersey, asking about pocket hunting, inquires specifically for information on Washington.

"I was particularly interested in your recent article on gold-pocket prospecting around the Grants Pass area in Oregon," writes F. W. "Do you know of any similar region in Washington where finds are still being made?"

Yes, there is. Around Ellensburg, in the Swauk mining area in the eastern Cascades, pocket hunters are still operating, probably spurred on not a little by the find, some time ago, of a ten-thousand-dollar fortune in a pocket two feet long and eighteen inches wide. Ollie Jordin made the discovery after about a week's work on a claim he had just bought from Roy Milne. Roy himself uncovered a two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar pocket before he sold out to Ollie. Ollie went down three feet farther and opened up his neat little ten-thousand-dollar bonanza.

Though we can't guarantee everybody Ollie's luck, Washington surely has its pocket country, F. W.

The HOLLOW TREE



Conducted by
HELEN RIVERS

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

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, N.Y.

WITH the great Staked Plains stretching toward the westward, is the stock range country just below the Panhandle of Texas. "Charlie, of the Tom Green country," can tell you folks about homesteading and stock raising in the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a forty-five-year-old cow-puncher who can "tromp" the hump off a bronc just as fancy as I could at twenty-five. I worked for a spread west of San Angelo, Texas, a ranch of over eight hundred sections, that carried about forty thousand

cattle—and tromping broncs was a small part of our everyday life. When I quit the spread, I rambled up through Texas, Oklahoma, and took a *pasear* up as far as Elgin, Kansas. All I owned were four head of soogans, a pair of cotton hobbles, a good tarp, and a flour sack for a war bag. Yes, and a pair of bull-hide chaps. I was a little wild, but I was taking cow-punchin' seriously. I was ambitious. A good cowman soon found out that I had it in me, so he staked me in a small way. And I went to rooting for myself, and bein' a good trader and fairly successful, I have since owned two nice outfits of my own. But I am broke again, and want to find a pardner who will and can grubstake me in starting a sheep, cattle, or goat outfit. I know the cattle, sheep, and goat game

backward and am honest and a hard worker, and I sure know just what kind of a man it takes to be a deserving pardner. Furthermore, I know I can qualify, and I will be a slave to any man who will grubstake me.

I tried, with tears in my eyes, to get back in the game last year when goats were fifty cents per head and mohair six cents a pound; sheep a dollar fifty per head and wool at seven cents a pound. But I couldn't do it. Goats are still cheap, and wool is twenty-seven cents, and will be thirty-five or forty cents in another twelve months. It takes so much to start in the cow game that I hope to get in the goat or sheep game instead. Folks, stock is still at the bottom, and the rise is all in front of us. I have a place in view to homestead—in a fine sheep and goat and fairly good cow country, and in the heart of fine range. But a hombre can't do anything homesteading if he can't stock some range, and that's my position, and that's why I'm looking for a good pard. I am chuck full of experience and elbow grease!

CHARLIE,
OF THE TOM GREEN COUNTRY.
Care of The Tree.

From North Carolina comes this new member.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am sending in a plea for Pen Pals among those who are past the forty mark. I am alone, and always enjoy writing letters. So come on, all you lonely Pen Pals—especially you folks from California, Texas, and Oklahoma, and write to me. I will answer all letters. HELEN GOLDEN.

Enfield, North Carolina.

Texans, Arizonans, and Oklahomans—here is your opportunity to speak up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I would like to get in touch with some fellows who live on ranches in Texas, Arizona, or Oklahoma. I have always been interested in this section of the United States and would like to live there if I had the opportunity to do so. So pen me a line telling me about your section of the country, and I will answer all letters. I am twenty years of age.

WALDEN MISHLER.

616 West 137th Street,
New York, N. Y.

A cinematographer is here to yarn with you-all.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I'll start right off by saying I'm a professional cinematographer—which means I'm nothing more than a motion-picture cameraman. And this letter is an effort to establish contacts everywhere on this old globe. At present I am a free lance, and



Charlie, of the Tom Green country, can tell you folks about homesteading and stock raising in west Texas. Wear your friend-maker membership badges, folks, and speak up to this cow-puncher of the Southwest.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

so I can go when and where I please. I've produced news, educationals, reviews, et cetera, which you may have seen at your favorite theater, even if you didn't know it!

I want a thousand feet of moose hunting, so all you hunters or you who live in moose territory—break loose. Or if you're forming an expedition to some out-of-the-way place and need a cameraman, write. Incidentally, I'm interested in a pard, preferably one with a camera, but it isn't necessary. To every one who writes and requests it, I'll send a souvenir film strip that I've actually cut from sequences photographed by myself.

LOUIS LOVENBURG.

Route 2, Box 35, Madrid, Nebraska.

Betty and Alice are hoping to corral some Pals.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

We are two girls who live on a farm, and we do not care for city life at all. We like to be where we can see the colors of sunrise and sunset, and hear the call of the bobwhites in the evening. Most of all we like horses, and we enjoy loping over the country lanes in the evening. We long

to be farther West. Won't some one please write and tell us about the place of our dreams? Come on, you ranch girls, and tell us about your life, for we are sure you have some very interesting experiences to tell. **BETTY AND ALICE, OF INDIANA.**

Care of The Tree.

Here's a California Pen Pals for you folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I have traveled in California quite a bit, as I've been in vaudeville and stock. I did some extra work in the Hollywood movies, too. I am twenty-two years of age, and my home State is Texas. I promise to answer all letters as interestingly as possible. **TOMMIE, OF CALIFORNIA.**

Care of The Tree.

Westerners, just you folks speak right up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am seeking to find a pal, anywhere in the West. I am a lover of horses, dogs, and all animal life. I have a little girl of five who was born up in the mountains of the Big Horns in Buffalo, Wyoming. We lived there for two years. I am thirty years old, have traveled afoot all over the West, and suffered hardships of almost every kind—snow, rain, and blizzards. But the call of the West is in my blood, and it seems to me that the West is the only place where I find happiness and contentment. **MRS. HELEN A. BRUINSMA,**

Route 1, Cazenovia, New York.

Melvin is on the lookout for Pen Pals.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I live in Texas, and I like it very fine. My father owns a ranch, and I will be glad to tell all of my friends who answer this letter all about the ranch, branding, and other ranch things. I will be very glad to exchange snapshots with any one. I am sixteen years old.

MELVIN BAIRD.

4638 Marcus Street, Dallas, Texas.

Here is a would-be rambler who is looking for a Pal.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

In about five months I will be out of the army, and I intend to see the rest of

the world. I have done some traveling already, but I am not satisfied. I wonder if there are any of the old Holla members who are eager for adventure. Please write me, pardns, if you want an honest, square-shooting pardner. **R. OPSAHL.**

Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

From Saskatchewan comes this hombre who is interested in the Alaskan Northwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

At present I am living in this prairie city, but I have spent most of my life in the great outdoors. I am very much interested in Alaska, and I would like to hear from any one in that great Northland, especially the Anchorage to Fairbanks district, but I'll answer letters from any part of Alaska.

I have traveled in almost every part of Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and also have been in most of the Western States. My experience covers activities in a fairly large field. I have been a cowboy, railroader, lumberman, farmer, and lecturer. I will be very glad to write any one wishing information about our Canadian West. **SPIKE.**

Care of The Tree.

Old-timer Wood is back again.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

They say a bad penny always returns. Waal, I am back. My letter, printed in the magazine in July, 1931, brought me many fine letters from many States. During the timber fire in the fall of '31 I lost most of the letters, and I may not have answered all who wrote, but I'm still looking for a pardner to go fifty-fifty with me in a country where winters are not so severe. So come along, all of you—young and old—I'll yarn with you—all about old times in the Black Hills, where Old Man Depression didn't camp.

I'll go ranching, chicken raising, hunting, fishing, prospecting, or any old thing to get by. I am doing a little gold hunting on my own hook. I am past sixty, but still feel young. Folks, grab a pencil and write, if only a few words, as I'm all alone in my den. I live just ten miles from Lead, the home of the greatest gold mine on earth. **A. B. WOOD.**

Englewood, South Dakota.



WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

NEVADA, with its mines and great cattle ranges, its unusual scenery and interesting history, is a State which attracts the Western-minded hombre. Planning a trip out to that part of the country, Pat D., of Houston, Texas, is asking for some advance information.

"This coming summer I expect to do a little touring around the country, Mr. North, and the State I'm most interested in is Nevada. As a

small boy, I used to listen to my uncle spin yarns of the old boom days in Virginia City, when that town was filled with fortune hunters from every land. Those tales made an indelible impression upon my youthful mind, and I've always wanted to trek out there.

"Naturally, however, I'm interested in the present as well as the past, and will welcome any facts you can hand out about this State. Is mining still the leading industry? What about stock raising? Is much

farming done? As you can see, I'm out for all the information available, and will be mighty grateful to you for it."

Well, we are equally glad to pass it on, Pat, and will start with some general facts. As you probably know, Nevada lies principally within the Great Basin, a broad plateau about four thousand feet above sea level, extending from the Sierra Nevada to the Wasatch Range. At fairly frequent intervals the level character of the country is broken by lofty mountain chains crossing the country in parallel lines. The soil is extremely rocky and shows formations representing many geological periods. Much of the country's scenery is unusually beautiful, but rivers and streams are scarce in many large areas, and all but a few find their outlet in inland lakes, or are eventually absorbed in the sand.

In the old days of your uncle's yarns, Pat, mining was the principal industry of Nevada. From the time gold was found near Virginia City in '49, until about '79, this State enjoyed a great mining boom, the Comstock Lode, discovered in '59, ranking among the richest ever found in the world. To-day, mining is still the second of Nevada's industries, for the soil of this State is extraordinarily rich in minerals, and has produced an abundance of gold, silver, copper, lead, tungsten, antimony, manganese, iron, and salt.

At the present time, the first of Nevada's industries is agriculture and stock raising. The natural grasses and forage plants of the country support an average of four hundred and eighty thousand beef cattle and one and a half million sheep from nine to twelve months of the year. The public range lands comprise some fifty million acres, six million of range lands being listed in the National Forest Reserve.

In the north and center of the State, alfalfa, grass hay, wheat, and other grains are raised, also potatoes and sugar beets. Vegetable crops of many kinds bring a substantial profit, and there is an abundant yield of orchard and small fruits, almonds, figs, dates, and pomegranates all being plentiful. The climate of the semitropical region in the southern part of the State is well

SPECIAL NOTICE

HELPFUL HINTS FOR HIKING TRIPS

Spring brings to most hikers an urge for the open country, and however slim the pocketbook a hiking trip is within the means of all. With a pack on his back a hiker can set forth to find adventure on the high road or in the tall woods. To get the most enjoyment out of these vagabond trips, one must have the proper equipment, and yet keep his pack as light as possible. For helpful hints for your hiking trips write John North, care Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

adapted for raising the Egyptian long-staple cotton, which is cultivated with marked success in the Moapa and Las Vegas valleys.

Whether your chief interest is looking at the scenery, mining, or stock raising, we prophesy a grand trip for you, Pat D.

It's the last-named industry in which Walter P., of Cleveland, Ohio, is interested.

"Can you give me any facts, Mr. North, about Billings County, in North Dakota? I'm thinking of locating out there, as I'm looking for a farm and have been told that this

county offers the man with limited means a chance to acquire a home. I'm especially interested in stock raising."

We'd say that Billings County was well worth a little investigating, Walter. This county was the scene of Theodore Roosevelt's ranching experience, back in the '80s, and ranching and semiranch farming still predominate. "Breaks" and rough country, unexcelled for grazing, occupy a large area of the county, extending for ten or fifteen miles on either side of the Little Missouri. Level areas with excellent soil are found about the "breaks" in the eastern and northern part of the county. Springs and small streams abound. Cedar, pine, and shrubs are scattered over the rougher country, and streams are bordered by cottonwood, box elder, and elm. The rich bottom lands along the Little Missouri and its tributaries provide wonderful farmstead locations and produce abundant and sure crops of alfalfa, corn, and other forage.

To assist Walter in finding a suitable location, we are sending him the address of a man who is familiar with farm land in North Dakota. We shall be glad to forward this same address to any other readers who wish help in finding new homes in that State.

Well, George W., of Boston, Massachusetts, is asking for a little help in the way of campcraft, for he is planning a trek across the Canadian border.

"Last summer my partner and I spent three glorious months, Mr. North, up in the Canadian woods, camping, fishing, and canoeing, and we intend to repeat the experience this year. The only fly in the ointment of our enjoyment was the in-

sect pests, such as mosquitoes, black flies, midges, and punkies. Can you, out of your wide experience as a woodsman, suggest any simple precautionary measures which will mitigate the discomfort caused by these pests?"

The most effective means of protection, George, is a flyproof tent, which usually insures a good night's sleep after a hard day of paddling in a canoe or tramping with a pack on one's back. The tent should have a sod cloth, ground cloth, and a cheesecloth door. With the sod cloth well tucked under the ground cloth and a holeless netting on the door, the bloodthirsty mosquitoes can sing without and do no harm. I would also advise you to make camp early, as it is a difficult task after dark, and if mosquitoes are present, a most unpleasant one. Avoid swampy places, marshes, and stagnant water when selecting a camp site. Do not camp in dense woods or in heavy underbrush, but rather in the open, as wind aids in keeping the insects at a distance. An open point or an island a mile from shore is usually free from troublesome insects.

There are a number of protective mixtures on the market for insect bites, but the homemade ones are equally effective. When used during the day, these mixtures should in all fairness to one's skin be washed off at night, and the shelter of the flyproof tent sought. When bites are painful, relief may be obtained by applying household ammonia, glycerin, alcohol, tincture of iodine, or ordinary toilet soap.

We are sending George a well-recommended recipe for fly dope, which is guaranteed to banish these pests. If any other campers would like this recipe, just say the word, and we'll forward it pronto.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are cooperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer any letters regarding firearms if accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

QUALIFICATIONS for a modern rifle stock are that it should be dimensioned to fit the size and shape of the shooter's body; it must have a sling; it must have a large flat butt plate; the forearm must be big around and long; and the comb must be high and thick. The Springfield Models 1903 and 1922, Mark I; Winchester Models 52, 54, and 57; and Remington Model 30-S, all conform to these specifications, as well as must rifles built especially to order.

The older stocks were patterned after the Kentucky Rifle with its curved butt plates, low combs, and sudden drop at the heel. They were suitable for the standing position if

the load did not produce much recoil, but modern shooting has brought with it heavy charges and varied positions.

Ordering a rifle or revolver from a catalogue, unless you know exactly what you want, is like buying clothes before you have tried them on. It may work, but be sure your dealer will allow an exchange if you take this chance. The better way is to pick up a rifle or hand gun, sight it in at a target, and try several "dummy runs" before laying the dollars on the counter.

Indoor Range Backstop.

W. Q. SAUNDERSON, Baker, Oregon: A four-inch iron "elbow" rescued from the rear of a plumbing

shop is the keystone in the construction of an indoor backstop, but a larger size can do. Bolt one face of the elbow to an upright plank and the other face to the top of a box of sand. Paste the paper target over the upright face of the elbow. The bullet falls into the sand if you have cut out a hole in the upright plank. If desired, an electric light can be rigged in an iron box in front of the target to give it light. We are glad to credit Mr. D. D. Hathaway, of the National Rifle Association of America, for this splendid idea which he has given the shooters of the world. It answers the needs of many of our correspondents.

What is a wad cutter?

G. J. H., Pottstown, Pennsylvania: We are glad you asked about wad cutters. We didn't know what they were for years and kept still for fear some one would think we were "dumb." The truth is this: To save disputes about whether a hole in a target is a "9" or "10," the manufacturers have produced a bullet which has almost the same diameter from rear to tip. Winchester called it a "Sharp Corner"; Remington dubbed it a "Sharp Shoulder"; Western Cartridge Co. insisted it was a "Clean Cutter" bullet; but it took Peters to give it the name, "Wad Cutter." Curiously enough, this name stuck. It is also interest-

ing to note that the .38 Caliber Special is the popular size, and that the wad-cutter idea has advanced so far that one company makes it with the bullet seated flush with the mouth of the shell. There is less cost, noise, muzzle blast, and recoil with these wad cutters at twenty yards indoors than other bullets of the same accuracy, but they are practically all made in the .38 Special class.

Undershooting with shotgun.

H. D. FERGUSON, Flagstaff, Arizona: Undershooting with a shotgun is cured by using a straighter stock if your aim is correct.

Sight differences.

S. A. BESNER, Council Bluffs, Iowa: At one-hundred-yard range a peep sight will give a shot group about one inch greater in diameter than a telescopic sight; and an open sight will give a group about two inches greater in diameter than the peep sight.

Caution.

Some cartridges, such as the .32-20, .38-40, and .44-40, were originally adapted to both rifles and revolvers, but to-day many companies give them a "high-velocity" load which renders them absolutely unsafe for pistol or revolver use. Look at the label on the box and save hospital expenses.

Peters's and Colt's have resumed sending free booklets to our readers. If you have not received these interesting pamphlets, write us now, and we will put your name on the mailing list.

The government supply of Krag and Russian rifles is exhausted, but the U. S. Rifle (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, is sold to citizens of the United States for \$8.85, under certain restrictions which will be explained to readers who send us a stamped and addressed envelope.

MISSING

This department 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 your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WILLIAMS, ISAIAH.—Some twenty or thirty years ago he lived at Mrs. Richardson's in either Orba City or Maryville, California. He had two brothers, Alry and Frank. Several years ago he left Paris, Bourbon County, Kentucky, and has not been heard from since. Kindly send any news of his whereabouts to Mrs. Mary Baird, Route 2, Buechel, Jefferson County, Kentucky.

HAUT, MINNIE.—She is a good friend of mine, and I have lost track of her. Any one knowing her address, please send same to Henry Yockman, 294 Sid Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey.

MURPHY, RICHARD GIBBS.—Has been missing for twenty years. Formerly resided in Far Rockaway, New York. His daughter is anxious for some word of him. Any one knowing his whereabouts, or having any information concerning him, please get in touch with Miss Helen Murphy, Box 701, Huntington, Long Island, New York.

GARRETT, CLARENCE.—On July 5, 1932, he was heard from in San Bernardino, California. He is nineteen years of age. Has brown hair streaked with gray. Is of husky build. Send a line to your old friend, Manuel Wright, General Delivery, South Cle Elum, Washington.

RHINEHART, B. W.—Your old friend Manuel Wright wants to hear from you. Address him General Delivery, South Cle Elum, Washington.

BENNETT, F. H.—Usually known as Fred. He lived in Des Moines, Iowa, for a number of years. Four years ago he went to Detroit, Michigan. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please write to his old father who is almost blind. Address H. B. Bennett, Lamesa, Dowson County, Texas.

KAHKONEN, UNTO.—Also called Arthur. When last heard of, a year or so ago, he was in Hamburg, Germany. He is now twenty years of age. Any one knowing him, or able to furnish his present address, kindly write to his aunt, Mrs. Fred Peters, 430 Camp Avenue, Braddock, Pennsylvania.

SCOTT, JAMES.—Is twenty-five years of age. Was born in Tennessee. Is five feet five inches tall. Has brown hair and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. He studied to be a minister. When last heard from he was at the Seaman's Home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly get in touch with Mrs. R. J. Sherman, Box 17, Watts Flats, New York.

GROSSMAN, LILLIAN.—She is a nurse. Was last seen in Jerome, Idaho, in June, 1927. She was then going to Michigan to enter training school. She was with her mother and stepfather, Mr. and Mrs. Bybee. She would be about twenty-two years of age. Is somewhat over five feet five inches tall. She is blond complexioned with blue eyes. Remember Laurence Hays, of Jerome, Lillian? Should she, or any one knowing her present address, see this notice, kindly write to Dolly, 212 Twentieth Street, Merced, California.

FULLER, CLARENCE H.—Was last heard of twenty or twenty-five years ago. At that time he was in the army in the Philippines. He is about five feet three inches tall and weighed around one hundred and fifty pounds. His home was in, or near, Homestead, Pennsylvania, but he came originally from Lima, Ohio. Has blue eyes, sandy hair, and light complexion. Is a plumber by trade. Both his parents and his brother Charley are dead. Any information will be appreciated by N. X. W., care of Western Story Magazine.

STEVENS, JOSEPHINE.—Is also known as Josephine Emery. She is an actress. She was the wife of the late Charles Stevens, an actor. Was last heard of in New York City. Address any news of her to A. L. B., care of Western Story Magazine.

PACHOLSKI, ANTHONY.—Has been missing since 1934. Was seen in Chicago, Illinois, in January, 1933. Has light-brown hair and blue-gray eyes. Has eye trouble which forces him to read very close, though he never wears glasses. On one temple is a scar about the size of a nickel. Is twenty-five years old. Any information concerning him would be much appreciated by Fred I. Pacholski, care of Mrs. Phil Truck, 8449 Saginaw Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

PETTEN, CARL.—If living he is around forty-five years of age. He and his wife separated in 1917, and he went to War. His family heard nothing of him after his enlistment. Mother died eleven years ago. I, his daughter, would like to locate him or some of his relatives. Address Mrs. Charles Manninger, 422 Kingsley Avenue, Winslow, Arizona.

NOTICE.—Would like to locate my mother, or hear from any one who ever knew her. My name is either Lucille Plum or Lucille Tull. I was born in 1903. Mother's name was Esther, and my grandmother's name was Sterling. That is all the information I have concerning myself. I was taken in adoption from an orphanage. Would be very grateful to any one who could give me any news of my mother. Address Lucille, care of Western Story Magazine.

TUCKER, EARL.—Often called just Tuck. Came originally from Butte, Montana. Was last heard of in Bingham Canyon. He is about five feet two inches tall and weighed one hundred and ninety-five pounds. Has light-blue eyes and light curly hair. On one cheek is a scar. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please write to G. G. T., care of Western Story Magazine.

BENNETT, STELLA.—In 1925 she lived at 444 Iglehart Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota. She was born at Ellsworth, Wisconsin. Her mother and father died recently. She has been married since 1925 or 1926. She has one boy, Jerold who is about seven years old. Stella, if you see this, write to your old friend, Fred, in care of this magazine. I have good news for you. Any one knowing her address, kindly get in touch with Fred, care of Western Story Magazine.

SMITH or SCHMIDT, FRED J.—Is between forty-three and forty-five years of age. Has dark eyes and hair. He worked on a Sawley's Island, Rhode Island, in 1910, and was later employed by the Converse Construction Co. in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He then went to Los Angeles, California, where he was last heard from in 1912. Any information regarding his present whereabouts will be deeply appreciated by G. W. A., care of this magazine.

BROOKS, OLENDON J., EMMA, and MARGARET.—They are my half brother and sister and their mother. I have not heard from them in twenty years or more. Their old home was in Ardmore, Oklahoma. The last report of them said that they had moved to Portland, Oregon. Any one knowing where they can be located, kindly notify T. F. Brooks, Sylvester, Texas.

BECKMAN, EMIL.—Was last heard from in 1907. At that time he was in Portland, Oregon. His mother, Louise Beckman, remarried between the years 1922 and 1924. Her second husband was E. O. Lind, of Wheaton, Minnesota, where she now lives. Her other children were Emanuel, Victor, Arthur, John, and Emma. His brother Arthur would be glad to hear from him. Kindly address any news of him to William Arthur Beckman, Star Route 1, Port Townsend, Washington.

MILLER, EDDIE.—Do you remember the good times we used to have in Port Huron, Michigan? When I last heard of you, you had left for Boston, Massachusetts. I am still your friend. Please write to me. Electa Johnson, 233 Orange Street, Jackson, Michigan.

JARDINE, ABIE or TED.—Please write to me. I need you so much. Velma, San Jose, California.

TAYLOR, OSCAR.—He is my brother, and he disappeared from Calgary, Alberta, Canada, in 1920. He enlisted in the Canadian army at Hamilton, Ontario, in 1914. He returned from overseas to Calgary in 1919. Would be about forty years of age. Was born in Wisconsin. Has dark curly hair. When last seen he weighed one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Father, John, Ada, and Berrie are dead. Mother is much worried at your silence. Any information would be gratefully received by his sister, Mrs. Mae Hines, 1215 West Jackson Street, Muncie, Indiana.

STRANG, BERNICE.—Who lived in Portland, Oregon, in 1929. She would be about eighteen years of age. Any one knowing her present address, please communicate with E. J. B., care of Western Story Magazine.

DARTON, MACK M.—Was last heard of in Salt Lake City, Utah. Kindly get in touch with me through Western Story Magazine. M. E. C.

DRINKWATER, CHARLES CRAWFORD.—He was brought up in Baltimore, Maryland. Lived and worked in Indiana. Was last heard from in 1923. At that time he was in Richmond, Virginia. His sister would appreciate hearing from any one knowing his whereabouts. Address Sister L., care of Western Story Magazine.

JACKSON, CLARENCE W.—Son of Nellie and Comfort Jackson. He left his home in Belding, Michigan, about thirty-five years ago, when twelve years of age. It was said that he worked at Lobdells Mill, near Boyne City, Michigan, years ago. His mother and sisters long for some word of him. Any one knowing anything regarding him, please write to Mrs. Eleanore Reed, R. R. 1, Box 11, New Era, Michigan.

VEITH, LEON H., and wife, OLIVE.—When last heard from they were living in Fowlerville, Michigan. Would be glad to obtain their present address. If they should see this, please write to an old friend, Mrs. Eleanore Reed, Route 1, Box 11, New Era, Michigan.

DOUGHTY or PARKER GERTRUDE.—Better known as Babe. Her last known address was Boston, Massachusetts, and Norfolk, Virginia. She has been missing for many months, and it is feared that some misfortune has befallen her. Any help from the readers in locating my friend will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. Nena Sousa, 1614 Brown Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

LESLIE.—Who wrote to Florence through this department. Please communicate with Western Story Magazine.

WAHLES, JOHN.—Was born April 20, 1860, at Ottersburg, Germany. Emigrated to United States from Liverpool, England, about fifty years ago. A sister of his is asking the readers for any possible news of him. She has never heard from him after he left England. Address any information to Mrs. Gus Roemer, 133 Akron Street, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

NELSON or NIELSON, HERMAN.—Was last seen in Meadville, Pennsylvania, in April, 1933. He is about thirty-five years of age. A tooth is missing from the left side of his mouth in the front. Between right eye and ear is a large dark mole. Have good news for him. Must find him soon. Any one able to help me locate him, please get in touch with P. Braymer, 347½ Poplar Street, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

PROUT, WILLIAM.—Would like to secure the names and addresses of any descendants of the aforementioned. In 1911 he, with other citizens, donated the plots of land to the government on which the city of Washington, D. C., now stands. Kindly address all communications to M. E. P., care of Western Story Magazine.

HARRY J.—Liddle, want to hear from you so badly. Please write to Nita, care of Western Story Magazine.

DOROTHY.—Your mother and Aunt Pearl and her family would love to hear from you or see you. Address 15 Coventry Avenue, Yorkville, New York, or care of this magazine.

RICHARDSON, LOUIS ALLEN.—Twenty-seven years ago he left my mother and our children in eastern Wyoming. At that time he had light-brown hair and grey eyes. Complexion was sandy. Weighed one hundred and fifty pounds and was six feet tall. He would be between fifty-four and fifty-five years of age now. It is very possible that he is using an assumed name. Want very much to locate him and would appreciate any information. C. A. Richardson, Hitchcock, South Dakota.

GREEN, DOYLE J.—Would like to hear from you. Why did you leave me without a word, and why have you never come back? I am sorry that I got a divorce after you left. It was the result of urging by Dad and Henry A. I married Gessellah, hoping to make a home for Eudie. But she mistreated us both, and it was impossible to live with him. Don't worry about your getting in trouble because of failure to support your child. The warrant Dad had out for you was void after his death. I have enough from Dad's estate and am not in need any more. I still love you and wish we could at least meet. Are you married? I hope not. I'm with mother now in Wisconsin. Please, if you see this, write to me. He is five feet eight or nine inches tall and weighed about one hundred and seventy pounds. Very well built. Hair is black and eyes are dark brown. Is usually well dressed. Has nice manners. Will be twenty-six years old on July 25, 1934. He used to live at Bertha, Minnesota, and has relatives in Indiana. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly address Mrs. Martha Green Gieselhart, R. 2, Box 78, Luck, Wisconsin.

HAGUE, VERNA.—Would like to hear from her or any of her near relatives. It will be to their advantage to get in touch with me. She was heard of in Springfield, Ohio, about 1889. Paul is dead and left an estate. Address Benjamin F. Whited, R. 2, South Solon, Ohio.

BOLT, CLARENCE.—When last heard from he was in the army at Camp Pike, Arkansas, just after the World War. He has dark-brown hair and is about five feet nine inches tall. Any one knowing his present address, please notify Jerry Bolt, 129 Eighth Street, Valley Junction, Iowa.

FRAZIER, MRS. ROLAND.—She was last heard of when living in Fort Worth, Texas. That was in 1927. Relatives of hers live in Hillsboro, Texas. Have tried to locate her through them but have not been successful. She is an old friend, and I would like very much to get in touch with her again. Please send any information to Mrs. Willie Shahan, 241 Cornelia Street, Bellflower, California.

NOTICE.—Want to get in touch with the children or other descendants of Frank Bennett. Mr. Bennett was my mother's uncle. Forty years ago he was a foreman cooper employed in the Fleischmann Distilleries. In 1914 friends of his in Peekskill, New York, told me that he had died forty years before, and that Mrs. Bennett had passed away shortly afterwards. There are two daughters, one about thirty and the other around forty years of age. The younger one married and went to Boston, Massachusetts. The elder later married a man named Wittler, of New York City. In 1919 they were staying at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. Since then I know nothing of them. Mother died two years ago. Before her death she made me promise to try to find her uncle's family. If any of the readers can offer any information concerning them, kindly address Thomas Baden McGarry, or Rose McGarry, 292 Beaufort Street, Liverpool, England.

WRIGHT, JESSE.—Has brown hair and blue eyes. Is twenty-five years of age. Has a gold crown on tooth next to front teeth. Is five feet eleven inches tall and weighed one hundred and forty-five pounds. The folks are much worried about you. Write to your brother, Emanuel Wright, General Delivery, South Cle Elum, Washington.

MAUD, JAMES R.—Will any one who knows Jimmie please write to me? Was at one time mate on the U. S. S. "Steelmaker." He was last heard from in California in 1930. Address Bessie Meeker, 1153 Nanticoke Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

KELLEY, N. D.—Was last heard from about 1928, in Kingston, Ontario. She arrived in Canada just after the War. Is believed to have two children. Will any of the readers who can give any possible information regarding her please communicate with R. K. Stephenson, 18 Lindley Street, Accomb Roads, Holgate, York, Great Britain.

SHANNON, MARION and MARY.—Of Quincy, Illinois. When last heard from they were living at 119 North Neil Street, Champaign, Illinois. Any one knowing their present address, please inform Ray Cassidy, 6234 Dorchester Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

HARVEY, BILL.—Of Des Moines, Iowa. His last known address was Anamosa, Iowa. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please write to Ray Cassidy, 6234 Dorchester Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

HOLMES, LESTER.—Generally known as Whitey. Was formerly a member of the Forty-fourth Infantry, stationed at Honolulu, T. H. His last known address was Lacatraz Island, California. If any of the readers know where he can be reached, kindly notify Ray Cassidy, 6234 Dorchester Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

PHILLIPS, WILLIAM LYMAN.—Supposedly somewhere in Los Angeles, California. Mr. Phillips is my father's cousin. Father was Frank Toby Lyman Churchill. Churchill was his name through adoption. His mother was Hattie Lyman Howatt. Her home was at 195 New Boston Street, North Woburn, Massachusetts. Mr. Phillips is the son of Grandmother Howatt's sister. My mother is in poor health and wishes to communicate with her nephew as soon as possible. In 1914 and 1915 he settled my grandmother's estate. At least we have been so informed by Fred Noble, of Massachusetts, and Benjamin Howatt, of Greene, Maine. Mother would be deeply grateful to any one who can help her in locating Mr. Phillips. Address any information to her daughter, Mrs. Hattie Lyman Bayliss, 212 Franklin Street, Portland, Maine.

NOTICE.—Would like to get in touch with some of my mother's relatives. She was Mary Belle Bagdale. As a girl she lived in Arkansas. After her marriage to my father, they lived in Dallas, Texas. She has been married once before. Mother died in 1918. I have heard her speak of a brother, but I do not know his name. I believe she had a daughter by her first husband, and that she lived with my maternal grandmother. Please send any information concerning her people to Miss May Pearl Day, Blossom, Texas, R. 2.

SILVA, JOSEPH.—Would be somewhere in his early thirties. As children we were placed in an orphanage. With two sisters, younger than I, he went into the lower home, while I, the eldest, went into the upper. Two weeks after his entry he took him out and gave him in adoption. The home was a Catholic orphanage in San Francisco, California. He was between eighteen months and two years of age at that time. I would be very thankful if the readers would help me find my long-lost brother. Address V. R., care of Western Story Magazine.

DURZO, B. J.—Was last seen in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1919. Would be thirty-four years of age. He is five feet five inches tall. Was an engineer on the Great Northern Railroad. His niece would appreciate any news of him. She is Amelia Durzo, R. 4, Box 20, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

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Japanese Rose Bushes bloom all the year round. Just think of it. Six weeks after planting the seed, the plants will be in full bloom. It may not seem possible, but we positively guarantee it to be so. They will bloom every ten weeks, Summer or Winter, and when three years old the bush will be a mass of roses, bearing from five hundred to a thousand roses on each bush. The flowers are in three shades—white, pink, and crimson. The plants will do well both in and out doors. We guarantee at least three bushes to grow from each packet of seed. Price, 10c packet, 3 pkts. for 25c postpaid.

Chinese Fragrant Tree Fern

Just introduced; noted for its rapid growth. An exceptionally pretty ornamental plant. Leaves rich dark green. Forms grand pyramidal bushes about 10 feet high. Branches very desirable for decorative purposes, wreaths, etc. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

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NATURE'S WEATHER PROPHECY By mysterious changes that take place, this remarkable plant accurately forecasts the weather many hours in advance. Will grow anywhere all the year around. An interesting ornamental plant. Bears large, fragrant, pink, butterfly shape flowers. Seeds, 15c packet, 3 for 40c, postpaid.

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A Vine that Blooms at Night Fills the Atmosphere with Fragrant Aroma One of the most rapid growing vines known. Under favorable conditions this vine has been known to grow over 25 FEET IN SINGLE WEEKS. It is a most INTERESTING SIGHT to indeed the vine has climbed to a great height, and is covered with IMMENSE FLOWERS, from 6 to 7 inches in diameter. It is, in fact, a great novelty, or, unlike other plants, the flowers OPEN IN THE EVENING, and remain open until about noon the following day. In dull weather they will remain open all day. It is a most INTERESTING SIGHT to watch the opening and closing of the flowers as the clouds appear and disperse. As the flowers open they give forth the most DELICIOUS FRAGRANCE, and the whole atmosphere around is full of scented fragrance. It is always the object of favorable comment, and much curiosity is aroused by people passing at night time as to the cause of the charming aroma, frequently stopping in an endeavor to satisfy their curiosity. PRICE, 15 CENTS packet, two packets for 35 CENTS, POSTPAID. JOHNSON SMITH & CO.,

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A very remarkable Eocene plant that has been found to have. Though quite odorless it is said flies will not remain in a room where it is grown. Bears very pretty blossoms; blooms summer and winter. Grow rapidly from seed. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c, postpaid.

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Quite a curiosity. Looks and smells like a banana. In very early stages of its shape and its delicious flavor makes it well worth your while cultivating. Flesh is deep and of exquisite flavor. Very high prices are obtained in choice city markets; as high as a dollar sometimes being demanded for our single specimens. Seeds 10c, 3 pkts. for 25c.

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Marvel of the Philippines. Leaves curl, fronds droop when touched. Apparently resents interference. A handsome shrub for house or garden; very curious and interesting. Seeds, 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

Perfume Plant

Bloom only at night, sending forth the most delightful scented fragrance for quite a distance. Causes much comment. For house or garden. Also valuable because of rare perfume made from it. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

Japanese Nest Egg Courd

Very curious. Produces fruit same size as a hen's egg and color of nest eggs. Matured fruit does not crack. Will serve for any purpose, etc. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c, postpaid.

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A Graceful House or Conservatory Plant Easily Grown From Seed Winter or Summer The Japanese Umbrella Palm is a semi-aquatic plant. It is easily grown from seed either in a bowl of water or in very damp soil. Probably the most usual, as well as the most interesting method, is to cultivate the plant in a bowl or incense burner with water, with two or three inches of good garden soil at the bottom. The seeds soon commence to germinate, and the plant shows a most pretty palm-like appearance, as shown in the engraving. The tops of the stems are surmounted by whorls of most brilliant green leaves. We will send a package of this seed, with full instructions for culture, for only 15c or three packets for 40c postpaid.

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Beautiful hedge plant, grows to 24 feet high and resembling a closely clipped ornamental tree. The globe-shaped or perumal buds are very compact, and of a pleasing light green color. May be grown singly or in the form of a hedge or background. In early autumn the whole bush becomes crimson or blood red. Known as the "Burning Bush" or "Burning Plant," as it is sometimes called. Selected Seeds, 10c

Calabash or Pipe Courd

A luxuriant and rapid growing climber; thrives anywhere. Produces the ornamental fruit in a most interesting and famous African calabash pipe made. Grow this interesting vine and make your own. Seeds with instructions, 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

NEW BUTTER BEANS

Unusually strong and vigorous growing vine. Attains twice the size of ordinary varieties. Grows readily on fences, poles, bushes, etc. One hill will keep an entire family supplied all summer. Seeds 15c packet, 3 for 40c, postpaid.

Butterfly's Own Bush

This plant is a veritable refuge or haven for butterflies. It attracts all the most beautiful types of butterflies to the neighborhood. The very fond of it. It is a pretty plant, being perfectly double flowered, ranging from white to rich crimson, deep red and pink, lilac and other delicate shades. Packet 10 cents, 3 for 25 cents postpaid.

CACTUS FROM SEED

Very curious, odd looking, strange species of plants; will grow anywhere with little or no soil. Flowers are of exquisite beauty and delightfully fragrant. will be astonished as to the old look of the cacti just sprouting. Packet, 10 cents, three packets for 25 cents, postpaid.

Mammoth Peanuts

Peanuts can be easily cultivated. Their culture is very simple and exceedingly interesting. Mammoth Peanuts grow to an astonishing size. It is a good producer, very prolific, and the plants have a thick, heavily ribbed protecting shell. The plant is very attractive, the leaves being of odd shape and a handsome green shade, tinted through the center with white. You will derive much pleasure cultivating this interesting species. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

FERN SEED

Ferns can be grown from seed. Try your luck growing these beautiful plants for indoors or outdoors. Choicest mixed varieties. Packet 10c., 3 for 25c.

Asparagus Sprengerii

The best plant for hanging baskets. Masses of rich, gleaming foliage droop in a very graceful manner. The foliage when cut for decorative purposes keeps weeks in water. The seed pods are very pretty red berries adding to its beauty. Packet, 25c, 3 pkts. for 65c postpaid.

Musk Plant

A universally admired favorite for house, flower garden or greenhouse. A very fine house plant. Lives for years. Is of the sweet scented variety, giving forth such fragrance. Also a valuable account of the perfume that can be made from it. Seeds 15c pkt., 3 for 40c.

Japanese Climbing Cucumber

Unusually strong and vigorous growing vine. Attains twice the size of ordinary varieties. Grows readily on fences, poles, bushes, etc. One hill will keep an entire family supplied all summer. Seeds 15c packet, 3 for 40c, postpaid.

Chinese Cabbage

Novelty from China and should be grown in every garden. It is to be a cross between Celery and Coo Lettuce. Flavor is more mild than any other cabbage. Can be served on the table and can be cooked like cabbage, spinach or lettuce or made into salad. Grows very rapidly, easy to cultivate. You can create quite a sensation by cultivating this remarkable novelty. Seeds 15c packet, 3 pkts. for 40c.

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This splendid ornamental tree is a native of China, and is called the Tree of Heaven, on account of its great beauty. Very hardy, thrives in low soil, no matter how poor, and grows from 6 to 10 feet high. The seed pods are very pretty red berries adding to its beauty. Packet, 25c, 3 pkts. for 65c postpaid.

Kudzu Vine

Most rapid growing vine known. Will grow 20 feet in one week. Luxuriant foliage, lovely purple flowers, very fragrant. Nothing so equal it for shade purposes and quick growth. Seeds 15c packet, 3 for 40c.

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But when your Kidneys need help, don't take chances with drastic or irritating drugs. Be careful. If poorly functioning Kidneys or Bladder make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, Burning, Smarting, Itching Acidity, Rheumatic Pains, Lumbago, Loss of Vitality, Dark Circles under the eyes, or Dizziness, don't waste a minute. Try the Doctor's prescription Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). See for yourself the amazing quickness with which it soothes, tones and cleans raw, sore irritated membranes.

Cystex is a remarkably successful prescription for poorly functioning Kidneys and Bladder. It is helping millions of sufferers, and many say that in just a day or so it helped them sleep like a baby, brought new strength and energy, eased rheumatic pains and stiffness—made them feel years younger. Cystex starts circulating through the system in 15 minutes, helping the Kidneys in their work of cleaning out the blood and removing poisonous acids and wastes in the system. It does its work quickly and positively but does not contain any dopes, narcotics or habit-forming drugs. The formula is in every package.

Because of its amazing and almost world-wide success the Doctor's Prescription known as Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) is offered to sufferers of poor Kidney and Bladder functions under the fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. It's only 3c a dose. Ask your druggist for Cystex today and see for yourself how much younger, stronger and better you can feel by simply cleaning out your kidneys. Cystex must do the work or cost you nothing.



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Doctors and druggists everywhere approve of the prescription Cystex because of its splendid ingredients and quick action. For instance, Dr. W. R. George, graduate Medical Dept., University of Indiana, former Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, and Medical Director for insurance company 10 years, recently wrote the following letter:



Dr. W. R. George

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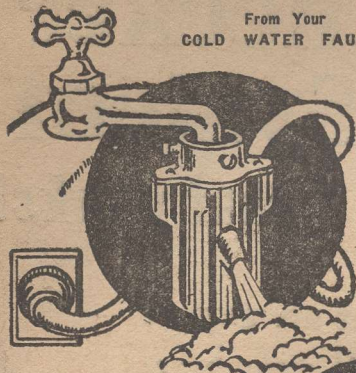
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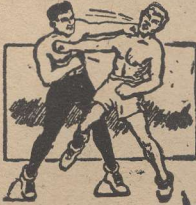
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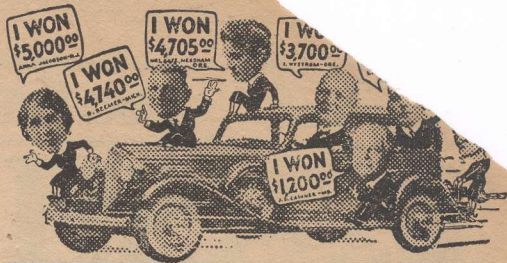


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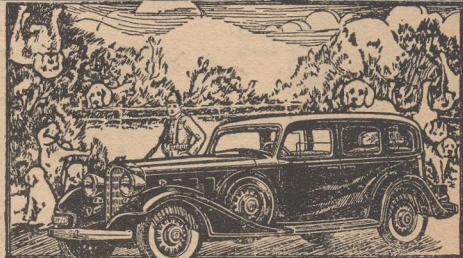


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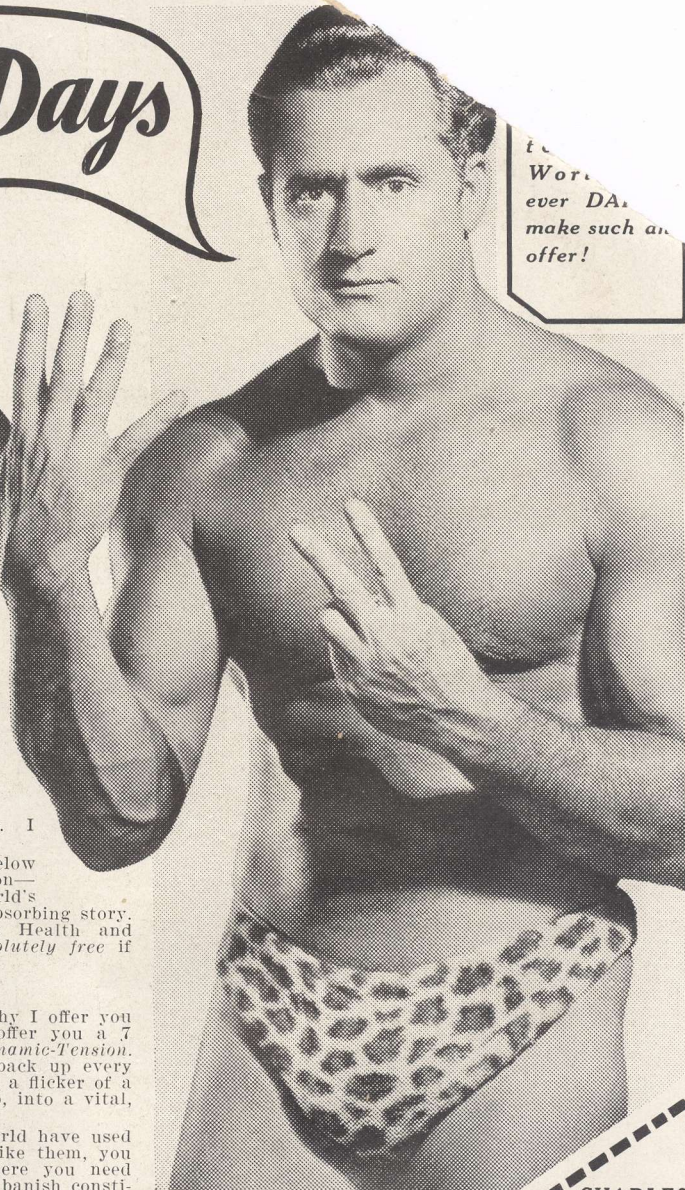
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