

15

STREET & SMITH'S

APRIL 21

# Western Story

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BY  
ROBERT J. HORTON





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Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. George C. Smith, Jr., President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Artemas Holmes, Vice President and Secretary. Copyright, 1934, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1934, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries except The Guianas and British Honduras, \$7.00 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, \$9.00 per year.

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30x5	28-20	3.15	1.15
31x5	28-21	3.25	1.18
28x5	50-18	3.35	1.15
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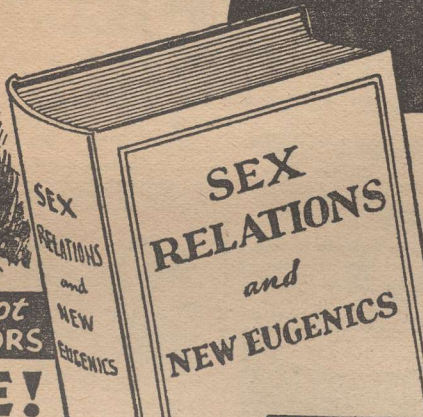
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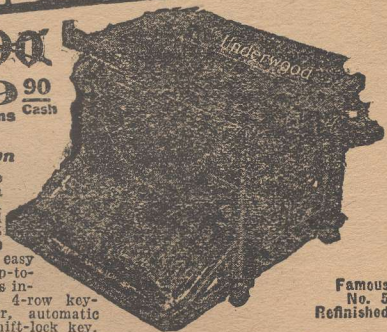
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# Braggin' Bill's Music

By C. WILES HALLOCK

**T**HERE ain't no livin' man can fill  
The mighty boots of Braggin' Bill!

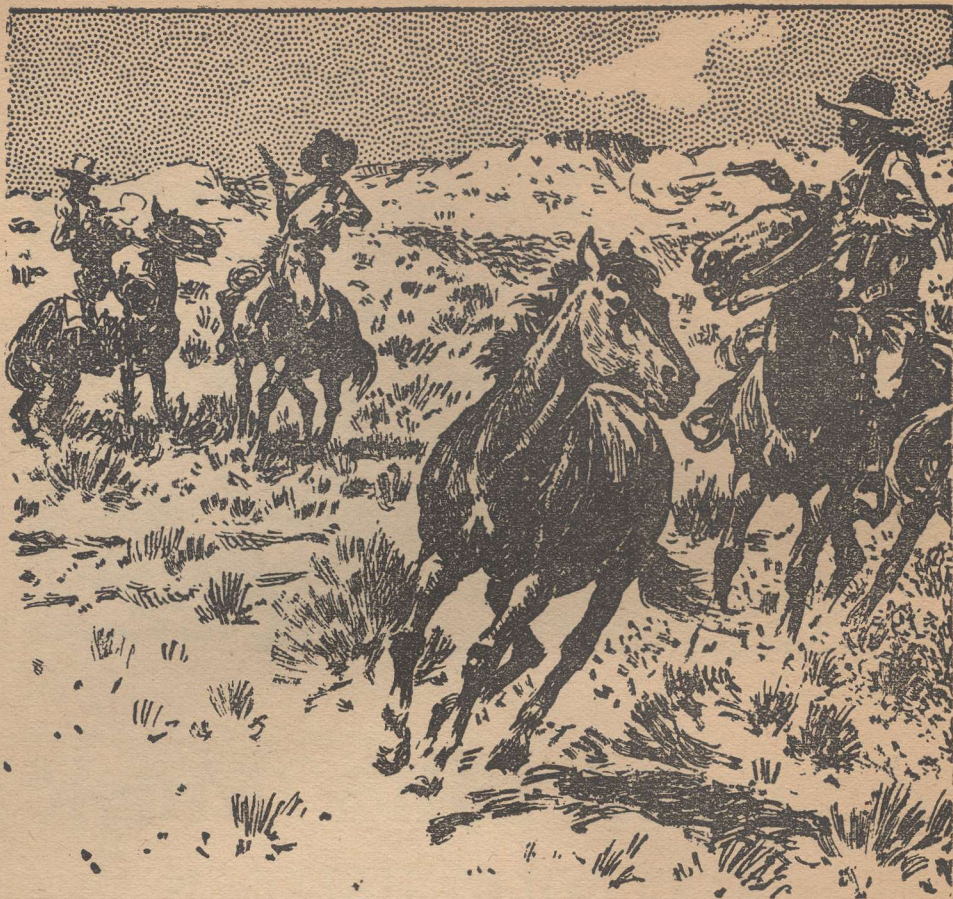
In Texas, back in '73,  
When longhorn cattle used to be  
Considered very stylish beef—  
Though wild and tough beyond belief—  
Bold Braggin' Bill once drove—alone—  
Two thousand steers to San Antone,  
And checked them critters' headlong fight  
In mad stampede, one stormy night!  
Six hundred miles he drove them steers,  
With pandemonium in his ears  
For sixty days—Bill ain't no quitter—  
And never lost a single critter!  
But one dark night disaster loomed.  
Fierce lightnin' flashed; loud thunder  
boomed!

And though refreshin' rain was needed,  
That mighty herd of steers stampeded!  
With snorts and squeals of wild dismay,  
Bill's flighty mustang ran away.

But Bill just vaulted from the saddle  
As quick as "scat" and climbed astraddle  
Of one of them wild longhorn brutes,  
And uttered high-pitched yells and hoots.  
Then, ridin' fearless and alert,  
Bill pulled apart his rawhide quirt,  
Which netted him—all raveled out—  
Eight slender thongs, both long and stout.  
He stretched them strings above the brow  
Upon the horns of that he-cow,  
And made a reg'lar rawhide harp,  
With tones plumb true and clear and sharp!  
He plucked them strings, he sang and  
played

A tender Spanish serenade,  
And if you'll take Bill's solemn word,  
He soothed that mad, stampedin' herd!  
They went to San Antone as ca'm  
And dog-goned gentle as a lamb!

"'Cause music, it's got charms to still  
And soothe the savage beast!" says Bill.



# MEN HUNTERS

By ROBERT J. HORTON

Author of "Flying Spurs," etc.

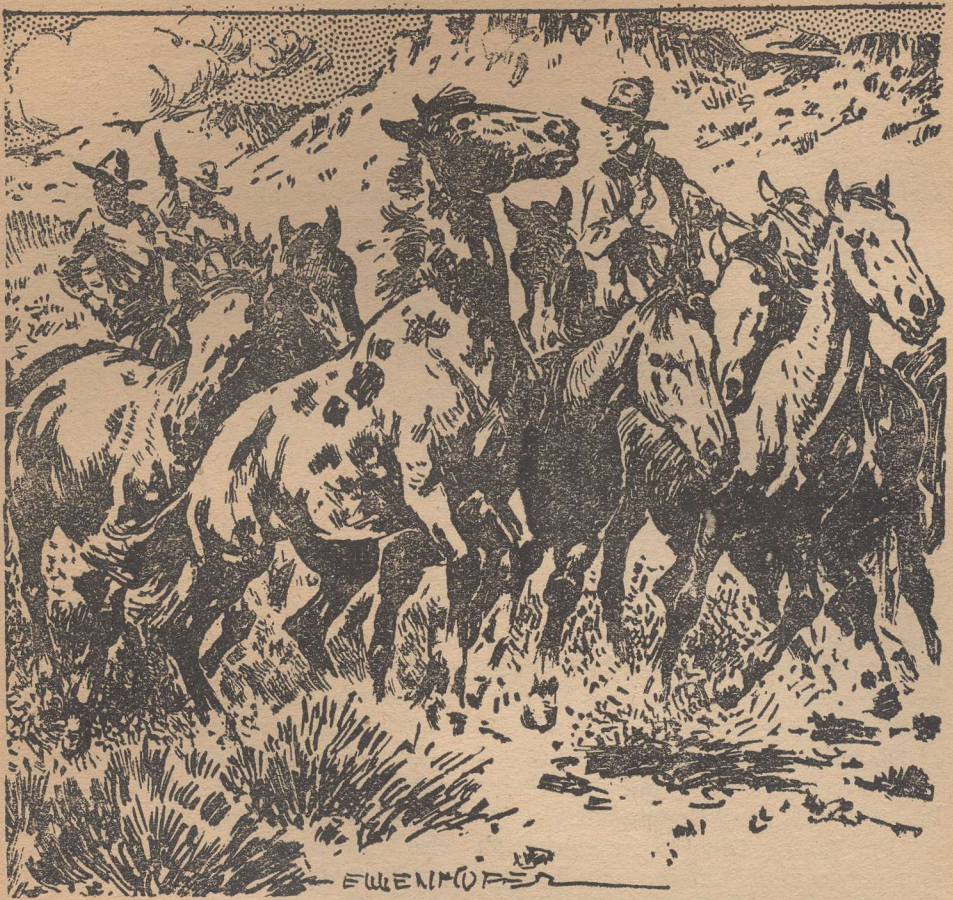
## CHAPTER I.

### A MAN IS RECOGNIZED.

**Y**OUNG "Buck" Granger, ex-cow-puncher, erst-while assistant to Mel Davitt, famous range sleuth and investigator, but now ranching on his own hook, was in a pleasant mood. With the aid of Fred Ferguson, Buck was driving ten horses westward toward

his place four miles south of the town of Milton.

It was mid-afternoon of a sunny day in April. The grass was green, the sky was blue, and the air was sweet. Buck had a good string of horses. He had bought them that morning and he had driven a good bargain. Although naturally cheerful, the fact that he had made a good deal made Buck all the more joyous. He whistled and sang in the saddle,



and Ferguson, who was to be Buck's range boss, caught his mood and sang, too.

They had eleven miles to go, which was no distance at all in that vast northern range. They were on a fairly good road, and the horses were holding it well, having ceased being fractious. The Clark punchers had helped them the first few miles, but now Buck and Ferguson were able to handle the remuda alone.

Buck glanced casually behind over the way they had come and suddenly twisted in the saddle for a better look. About a mile back a cloud of dust was swirling in the sun. Ahead of that dust, kicking it up, a small group of horsemen was

approaching at a sharp gallop. Buck's brow wrinkled.

"Hey, Fergie!" he called. "Look behind there and tell me what you see."

Ferguson turned in his saddle and gave vent to an exclamation.

"Must be some of the Clark boys following us up, Buck. Maybe we forgot something or—maybe they're riding on into town."

"None of them said anything about going to town," Buck scoffed. "If any had been going to town, they'd ridden along with us to help with the stock. And we didn't forget anything. I paid Old Man Clark his money, took my bill of sale, and got the horses. Everything was in order. Look how fast

He put Fergerson's body on his horse, climbed into the saddle behind it, and began the ride to town. He felt responsible, in a way, for his friend's death. He shouldn't have started for the outlaws, outnumbered as they were. He realized now that he had recognized the notorious Powell from the start. He shouldn't have permitted his anger to get the best of him. He should have played safe. Where was the knowledge he had gained from his association with the experienced, cool, calculating Davitt? That famous man hunter never would have gone up against such odds. Buck's thoughts flew in all directions and became distorted, vague, confused.

He reached Milton at sundown. Shortly afterward he entered the office of Sheriff Hal Drew in the county jail.

"Sheriff, let me see that file of reward notices you've got," he said. "I want to look at a certain picture and read a certain description."

Drew looked at him curiously, opened a drawer of his desk, and took out a sheaf of papers. He put them on the desk, and Buck speedily ran through them and extracted one notice. He inspected this at length. Then he handed it to the sheriff who already had learned of the killing of Fergerson.

"You heard about Fergie, sheriff?" Buck asked.

"I just heard about it, that's all, Buck. I expect you can give me the details so I can get to work on the case."

"There's the man who did it," said Buck.

The sheriff looked at the notice and started up in his chair.

"Not—you must be mistaken, Buck. Not Powell!"

"Yes, Powell!" Buck exclaimed

vehemently. "That thief and killer—murderer!—is up here. They were going to steal my horses that I bought from Clark this morning. The world spun around my head when I saw them start to run off my stock right under my eyes, and I rode in on them. There was gun play, and Fergerson got it. Powell shot at me, and the bullet hit my pard. They're up in the Snake Creek brakes."

He rose and walked rapidly to the door.

"Wait a minute! Where are you going?" the sheriff demanded.

"I'm going to tell Mel Davitt," Buck replied calmly as he went out the door.

## CHAPTER II.

### DAVITT HOLDS BACK.

**I**N the private office in the rear of the State Bank of Milton, Mel Davitt was closeted with Sylvester Graham, president of the bank, and father of Virginia Graham, the girl Davitt hoped to marry.

"You know Hal Drew doesn't want another term as sheriff," the banker was saying. "He has had three terms and he proposes to quit and devote his time to his real-estate business. Of course I'm not saying he could be elected again," Graham added hastily; "the point is he's going to refuse to be a candidate."

"And the idea is to wish the job on me," Davitt drawled. "Now what makes you think I could be elected?"

The banker smiled. "You're forgetting that I can throw the vote in any direction I wish. I haven't got a machine exactly, but I've got a lot of mortgages in the vault, and all the cattlemen are my friends. Some folks say I'm hard and all that, but

I'm generally respected, and people listen to me. But aside from that, everybody knows you're the best man for the job."

"Humph!" Davitt grunted. "I might be all right on individual cases, hunting down an outlaw or busting up a gang; but running an office on a big scale is a different thing." His fine, strong features resolved into a frown.

"You'll have deputies to help you," Graham pointed out. "You are just trying to side-step the nomination and you know it."

"I don't *want* it!" Davitt exclaimed. "What's more, I won't take it! I'm through man hunting. I promised Virginia. I've put away my guns. I'm buying that ranch up there and I propose to run a good bunch of cattle. I've got plenty of money right here in this bank. And I don't feel that I'm capable of filling the office satisfactorily. I'm not cut out to be a sheriff."

Now this wasn't exactly true. For Mel Davitt had been chief investigator for one of the largest and most powerful cattlemen's associations in the State. He had broken up a dozen bands of outlaws and cleared a whole range of rustlers. He had resigned when his work was done and had taken private cases at big fees, always going after big game and never bothering the little fellows. His reputation was known the length and breadth of the State. He had never failed to get his man.

Sylvester Graham leaned back in his chair, and his bushy brows gathered in a frown.

"When that notorious bandit, the Crow, held up my bank last year, why do you think I sent for you?" he inquired.

"You sent for me to get the Crow and your money back, of course," Davitt answered readily. "Well, I

got him—with the help of Buck Granger."

Graham made a grimace. "That Granger is altogether too fresh and he has a swelled head. Say what you want, he'll never get over his—he'll always be a cow-puncher at heart."

"You don't like Buck because he's particular about fees and rewards," Davitt said with a grin. "Why, he has a good account here. As a banker I should think you'd be glad to see a young fellow get ahead and build up a bank account." He knew the real reason Graham didn't like Buck was because the former cow-puncher was independent and had chided him, Graham, on money matters more than once.

"He'll go broke," Graham growled. "That is, unless he takes my advice, and I doubt if he'll take it. But to get back to this sheriff business, Davitt, I expect you to accept the nomination, and I guarantee you'll be elected. In fact, the people want you."

"I'm washing my hands of it," Davitt said rather sharply. "No one is going to force me back into that game. I'm going to run cows and steers — thoroughbreds—Herefords and shorthorns, mostly shorthorns, I reckon." There was enthusiasm in his voice.

The banker lifted his brows and pursed his lips.

"There's plenty of time for that," he purred. "You're only thirty. A couple terms as sheriff will be a good experience for you and give you a big prestige. "Besides"—he looked at Davitt with cunning in his eyes—"if you refuse, I don't see how I can sanction any engagement between you and Virginia, and I know she wouldn't marry against my will." It was Graham's trump card.

Davitt leaped to his feet, his eyes flashing with anger.

"So *that's* it!" he cried. "You think you've got a club over my head! I'm pretty sure Virginia loves me, but you'd gamble her happiness and mine for what? To put a tool in the sheriff's office! It's a dirty trick!"

GRAHAM flushed and cleared his throat. He looked down and fussed with some papers on his desk. Finally he looked up and met Davitt's cool gaze.

"Sit down, Mel," he said quietly. "I've something to tell you."

It was a different Sylvester Graham that Davitt saw now. The hardness was gone from the man's eyes; the stern lines of his face relaxed. Davitt sat down.

The banker leaned on his desk and toyed with a paper knife.

"Perhaps I was wrong in saying what I did," he said slowly. "No, I guess it wouldn't be right. So—I'll take it back. But, you see, I don't want you in the sheriff's office as a tool. I would like to see you there for the good of the county. I have a bank here and I'd feel safer. You're experienced, capable and your very presence in that office down there where Hal Drew is now would keep the lawless element away. Besides—besides that, Mel—it's the highest office the county can offer and it would be an honor for the—the family." Sylvester Graham smiled.

Mel Davitt was silent. The man on the other side of the desk was not the cold, calculating banker he had previously known. It was as though Sylvester Graham had drawn back the curtain momentarily and revealed a phase of his character which Davitt had not suspected he possessed. Davitt was thinking hard.

Finally Davitt rose and went to the door. There he turned.

"I'll talk it over with Virginia," he said.

Graham nodded. "Very well."

As Davitt was walking briskly toward the Graham home, a man came running after him. Davitt continued on his way.

"Buck Granger's in town," the man said excitedly, falling in beside Davitt.

"That's nothing new," Davitt said in an annoyed tone.

"But he's looking for you. I thought I'd tell you."

"He'll find me in due time," Davitt said crisply.

"But something has happened. Eleven miles east. Buck's pal, Fred Ferguson, was killed this afternoon!"

Davitt stopped. He looked hard at his informant in the dim light. No, the man hadn't been drinking. He was deadly serious.

"How was he killed?" Davitt demanded skeptically.

"He was shot—murdered—by an outlaw by the name of Powell."

Davitt started. Then: "I'm not interested," he snapped out, and walked on, leaving the man standing with his mouth open.

Davitt didn't believe it. He'd wait and see Buck. Meanwhile, he had this sheriff business to talk over with Virginia. Just to talk to Virginia about *anything* gave him a thrill. He loved her. He had promised her never to take the danger trail again and he would keep his promise. Without her father's knowledge, he had turned his guns over to her to show good faith. There was quite a bit Sylvester Graham didn't know, for that matter.

Virginia gave him both her hands and smiled at him after she had admitted him to the house. She was a

glorious girl, with a burnished copper sun in her hair, hazel eyes, a skin as soft and clear as a mountain flower. Davitt just stood and looked at her in the subdued glow of the lamp in the living room. Then he found his voice.

"Virginia, your father wants me to run for sheriff."

"I know," she said. "His heart seems set on it. He has often spoken to me about it."

"But I want to go into the cattle business," Davitt complained. "I just left your father at the bank where we were talking about this sheriff business. I told him I was coming over to see you. Do you think I should run; I mean, do you want me to?"

"You would make a splendid sheriff, Mel," she replied seriously.

SHE looked at his tall, straight form; his broad shoulders and slim waist; he had the build of the natural-born rider. Then she remembered his exploits, his former calling as a man hunter, and her eyes momentarily clouded. But being a sheriff was different.

"Then *you* do want me to accede to your father's wish?"

Before she could reply, there came a thunderous pounding at the door. They both hurried out and found Buck Granger there.

"I've got to see you right away, Mel," Buck announced.

"Well, you can't see me right now," Davitt said irritably.

"But it's important, Davitt," Buck protested. "It's——"

"I'm talking over something even more important with Miss Graham, Buck," Davitt said sharply. "You go over to the hotel, and I'll meet you there shortly. We can talk up in my room."

Buck saw Davitt was very much in earnest and he left reluctantly.

"Now, Virginia," said Davitt, when they were back in the living room, "I don't mind running for sheriff—I wouldn't mind *being* sheriff—providing you agree with your father in the matter."

"It seems to me that you should judge for yourself, Mel."

"I've already told you my views. Now tell me what I want to know."

"I think you'd make an excellent sheriff, Mel," said the girl with a friendly smile. "Yes, I agree with father."

At that moment the front door opened, and Sylvester Graham came in. He looked at the two of them with an eager light in his eyes.

Davitt scowled at him.

"You win, Graham. I'm going to run!" he announced.

"Fine! Fine!" The banker seemed positively delighted as he wrung Davitt's hand. "It'll be a great thing for the county. I must go back to the office." The next minute he was gone.

"He isn't going to any office," Davitt scoffed. "He's—but let's sit down, Virginia, and talk about some other things."

In the meantime the news of Ferguson's death and the presence of the outlaw Powell in the county had spread like wildfire through the town. It brought the men out on the main street where they gathered in groups to discuss the menace of the desperado's invasion of the north range. Stockmen in particular were much concerned. Powell carried something besides two guns; he carried a name to inspire terror. And every one in the street knew there was but one man in the county who could match guns with the infamous outlaw. That man was Davitt. But Davitt had quit chasing out-



laws. Well, the sheriff would send out posses. And little good *that* would do!

Next came the electrifying news that Mel Davitt was going to run for sheriff. Sylvester Graham had made the announcement, so it must be true. The news was received with intense enthusiasm, and Powell was, for the time being, forgotten. Tongues buzzed. There was no doubt but that Davitt would be elected. If Davitt were only sheriff now—

Hal Drew was calling for men to join the posses. They were to start an hour before dawn. He wanted every available man who could qualify. Stockmen who were in town prepared to start for their various ranches to recruit men for the chase. Milton fairly seethed with excitement, and feeling over the killing of Fergerson was bitter. It was pure luck that Buck Granger hadn't been killed, too.

Mel Davitt appeared upon the street, walking toward the hotel. A great cheer went up—and as suddenly died. Davitt took no notice of them. The groups separated, stepped aside to let him pass. The ensuing quiet might have been the silence of respect. But Davitt knew better.

He entered the hotel, grim-faced, and went up to his room where Buck was waiting.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A DECISION IS MADE.

**T**ELL you it *was* Powell!" Buck Granger exclaimed in indignation as Davitt lolled on the bed smoking a cigarette. "I've got eyes, and he was within six feet of me. I never saw such a wicked look on a man's face in my life!"

"Describe him again," Davitt requested calmly.

Buck got to his feet and paced the room, occasionally gesticulating as he described the outlaw who had murdered Fergerson. Davitt listened with his eyes half closed.

"And to make sure," Buck finished, "I went to the sheriff's office and checked up on the reward notice. I know what I'm talking about, Mel. I wouldn't have tried to buck against him but I was clean daffy mad."

"It's him, all right," Davitt said in a queer voice.

Buck looked at him quickly.

"What you thinking about, Mel?"

"I'm thinking how lucky you were, my young buckaroo."

"Why would he want to run off with a measly ten head of stock—ten horses, Mel? They wouldn't make him any money."

"He likely wanted them for fresh mounts in a pinch," Davitt replied dryly. "He could cache them in the brakes and have them handy, if he plans a job of any kind around here. You butted in and made him mad. They beat it when they saw they'd knocked a man out of the saddle. They've probably gone back and got your horses by this time—*maybe* not."

"Just how bad *is* this Powell, Mel?" Buck asked seriously.

"They don't come any worse," Davitt replied. "I'd heard of Powell but never saw him. He was never in any territory I worked. He must have been chased hard down south to come 'way up here, unless he's heading for Canada. He's bad medicine."

Buck looked closely at his former chief and frowned.

"You've got something on your mind, Mel. You might as well spill

it. You know we've worked together and you can trust me."

"Buck, I'm going to run for sheriff."

"No!" Buck exploded. "When did you get that idea in your head?"

"I decided about three quarters of an hour ago." Davitt explained how he had arrived at his decision. "I've got to run."

"Dog-gone!" Buck exclaimed. "You'll be a big bug if——"

"If I'm elected—yes," Davitt drawled. "Graham says it's a sure thing, and from what he told me, I guess it is." He paused, puffed hard on his cigarette, and resumed. "There's a bunch of people down in the street, Buck, and they're talking about two things: about Powell killing Ferguson and about me running for sheriff. Do you see the connection?"

"Can't say as I do, exactly," replied the bewildered Buck.

"I could tell by the way they acted when I came up the street, Buck. They expect me to go after Powell. I've pretty near got to do it to get elected. If I sit on my hands and don't go, well, you know what the opposition will say. It'll be the big talking point against me."

"But you've quit man hunting," Buck protested.

"My being a candidate for sheriff changes things. I know that's what they think. I could see it in their faces."

"But Hal Drew is making up half a dozen posses. He's sent out the call for all hands that can ride and pull a trigger. He's still sheriff, and it's up to him. They ought to know that."

"But they don't," Davitt said wryly. "They haven't got any faith in posses. They're looking to me to do my stuff. Too many of

them have ridden with posses in the past, and got nothing but the ride."

"Well, if you go, I'm going with you!" Buck declared.

"I wouldn't ask you, Buck; and I wouldn't turn you down."

"Don't forget this Powell's got a tough gang with him."

"If I go, it'll likely be the hardest job I ever tackled," said Davitt, getting up from the bed. "I'm going down and see Drew."

"Lot of help you'll get from him," Buck scoffed.

"That's just the reason I'm going down to see him," Davitt said with a smile. "If I go, I won't want any help; I mean, I won't want any interference." He paused at the door. "I'll meet you here in an hour or so." Then he went out.

**I**N the street Davitt was conscious of that same expectant attitude on the part of the crowd. Men looked at him furtively. Talk was hushed as he passed group after group. But he nodded and spoke to people this time. When he reached the jail, he and Drew went into the latter's office and closed the door. During the conference which followed, Davitt told the sheriff what he suspected—details of which he was to explain to Buck later—and the plan of action was determined, with the sheriff cooperating.

Half an hour later Davitt left for the Graham home, and almost immediately Sheriff Drew sent out the word countermanding the order for men to report to form posses.

This created another sensation in the town. It was now evident that the sheriff didn't intend to send out posses. The townspeople wondered. Very likely Drew had come to the conclusion that it would be futile to send posses after Powell. This was

what the crowd had thought all along. For any outlaw as smart and cunning as Powell would have no trouble in avoiding bands of horsemen. This had been demonstrated more than once. Drew was showing some sense, and the men of Milton were satisfied. But what was *not* known was the fact that Drew had sent out special deputies to stop and question any riders who should leave town. Meanwhile regular deputies began making the rounds of saloons and gambling places, checking up on lawless characters known to be in Milton.

It was ten o'clock when Davitt entered the Graham living room for the second time that night. Virginia was radiant and obviously under the impression that he had come back to visit with her. Sylvester Graham was sitting at the table reading a newspaper.

"Virginia," said Davitt, "get my guns."

The color faded from the girl's face instantly, and Graham looked up.

"But Mel—you gave them to me with the promise that you—that you——" Virginia faltered as she saw the look on his face.

Graham put down his paper.

"What's this?" he asked. "Did you give your guns to Virginia? I don't understand."

"He gave them to me, father, when he quit his profession of man hunting, to show his good faith," the girl explained.

"Oh, I see," said Graham. "Now he wants them back. What do you want them for, Davitt?"

"I'm going after Powell," Davitt replied easily.

The girl gave a little cry and stepped back, her eyes wide.

"But there's no necessity for it!" Graham exclaimed. "Drew is still

sheriff, and it's his duty to go after Powell. He's making up posses now. There's no need for you to take any such risk."

"The posses are called off," Davitt said impatiently. "They couldn't catch as slick an outlaw as Powell, anyway. And Drew hasn't got a man who could stand up against Powell in a gun play. I'm now a candidate for sheriff, which changes things all around. The people *expect* me to go after Powell, and if I want to be elected, I've got to do it. Since I've declared myself for the job as sheriff, I propose to get the job." He turned to the girl.

"Virginia, please *get my guns!*" His voice rang with authority.

THE girl's face was as white as newly fallen snow as she went out of the room to get the weapons left with her in trust.

"Graham, I've got a hunch," Davitt said to the banker, "and in all my experience with outlaws, nine times out of ten my hunches and deductions have proved correct."

"What's your hunch?" Graham asked, visibly impressed.

"Powell didn't just ride up here to pull a job, nor is he on his way to Canada. He was *sent* for! You know very well there is a certain element in this county, right here in this town, and over in that lawless town of Burrell, that doesn't want me as sheriff. And there's been talk about my running for the office for months. This element had no way of knowing I didn't want the office. They knew there was a lot of influence behind me—you, the stockmen, even Hal Drew himself—and they expected me to run. What's more, they believed if I ran, I'd be elected. They don't want me elected, and I'm convinced they decided there was just one way to stop

me. That way—well, you can figure it out for yourself.”

Graham rose in his chair, his face pale.

“You don’t mean——” He read the answer in Davitt’s eyes and dropped back into his seat, his whole manner betraying consternation.

“Exactly,” Davitt said grimly. “They imported Powell to get me!”

“It’s an outrage!” Graham thundered. “It’s—it’s atrocious!”

“Nevertheless,” Davitt drawled, “such things are done.”

“But that business out east—the horses, the killing of Ferguson, and that?”

“To get me out on the trail,” Davitt said calmly. “It was an unexpected opportunity for him, I figure, and he took advantage of it pronto.”

“Isn’t there anything Drew can do?” asked the worried banker.

“He’s working with me,” Davitt replied. “Now maybe this is all guesswork on my part, Graham; maybe I’m wrong. But in *any* event, if Powell is staying in the county, he’s here for no good purpose. I may know if my theory is correct before the night is over.”

Virginia came into the room with Davitt’s gun belt, with its worn, black holster sheathing a heavy weapon. In a shoulder holster was a lighter gun. He donned both in a matter of moments. Then he turned to Virginia with a flashing smile.

“If I get to be sheriff, young lady, this is the kind of work I’ll have to do. But I’ll probably never have another such tough customer.”

Graham had risen. He held out his hand, which Davitt took.

“There’s just one thing that Virginia and I ask of you,” the banker said soberly. “Be careful.”

“Why, that’s my principal stock in trade,” Davitt sang cheerfully.

A few minutes later he was walking briskly up the street toward the hotel. This time all eyes were turned on him frankly. There were greetings. A different sentiment prevailed. The crowd knew. The calling off of the posses was explained. Davitt was armed! Rumors were dispelled. Doubt and uncertainty and concern were swept away. The news flashed up and down the street, into resorts and stores and cafés. It was a sensation that overshadowed all that had gone before.

Mel Davitt was going after the outlaw, Powell!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FIRST STROKE.

**B**ACK in his room in the hotel once more, Davitt told Buck what he had already told Sylvester Graham. Davitt was singularly cheerful; it was as if he were glad to be back on the danger trail.

“Now we’re working on our own again, Buck,” he said. “You must have thought I was dreaming here on the bed while you were describing Powell. I was really figuring the thing out and I believe I’m right. I’m not going to let you take any gun risk in this business. But you’re invaluable in other ways. Understand, if there’s gun play, you’re *out!*”

“I’ve heard that before,” Buck observed dryly.

“This time I mean it, Buck. Powell is dynamite. Now, we can’t out-guess him. If he was here to pull a bank robbery or something of the sort, we might be able to figure out his moves. But I’m convinced he’s up here to get me. He can’t come into town to do it very well, so he plans to draw me out of Milton.

I'm going to let him do it. In fact, I'm going to go out to look for him, and there's where you'll come in strong as a guide. You know the country east of here, and I don't. I expect you know how to slip into Burrell by the rear door."

"Holy smoke!" Buck exclaimed. "Are we going to that town? Why, the devil himself runs *that* place!"

"It would be a natural hang-out for Powell and his gang of cut-throats for that very reason," Davitt pointed out. "Yes, we may have to go there. But, if my hunch is worth anything, our first work is right here in Milton." Davitt proceeded to roll a cigarette.

"Well," Buck growled, "it all sounds a little far-fetched to me, but you're the boss, and I'm ready for orders. There's a pile of reward money on this Powell's head, I reckon."

"You'd be interested in that," Davitt said, laughing. He sobered quickly and lighted his cigarette. "Now listen, Buck. Although I've been here a year, you know this town better than I do, and when you were punching cows for the Payne outfit, you circulated in all sorts of places. You should know all the saloons and gambling dens, and the shady characters in them."

Buck nodded. He was all attention now.

"The whole town knows the posses are out of it," Davitt went on. "Also the whole town knows my gun is back on my hip where it can do the most good. That means I'm back on the trail. Now if there's anything in my theory that Powell was brought up here to get me, an attempt will be made to get word to him that I've slung on the old six-shooter. Buck, who would be likely to take that word?"

Buck cocked his head and considered this question.

"I should say Toad Remer," he said at last.

"Do you know where to find him?"

"If he's in town, he'd likely be down at the Red Front."

"Do you suppose we could find out if he's there without making ourselves conspicuous?"

"They'd spot us in a second," Buck declared. "Still, we might be able to get a peek into the place by the rear door. But if he's going, I don't see what good it would do us to know if he's in the Red Front." He looked at Davitt with a puzzled frown on his face. Then: "Oh, I see. You want to stop him."

"No, I don't want to stop him," Davitt denied. "I want to follow him."

"Don't believe it could be done," Buck said dubiously. "Toad is crafty. He'd know if he was followed, I expect."

"What is he? A gambler?" Davitt was curious.

"A tinhorn. He's a mean little shrimp, too. Fair hand with his gun and he's done a lot of dirty work for the cheaper gambling places. I understand he's killed a couple men—left them in the alley. Hal Drew has had him down there several times but he never could pin anything on him for sure. He's a good rider. I expect if there was word to be sent to Powell, he'd be the man to take it."

"Does he know Powell?" Davitt asked.

"I don't know, but he'd know where to find him. If Powell is up here for the purpose you think, I wouldn't be surprised if it had been Toad who went south to get him."

"Let's go down to this Red Front

and take a look," said Davitt, rising. "We can go down an alley so we won't be seen."

THEY went down a back stairway and left the hotel by the rear door. Buck led the way through the shadows behind the buildings facing on Main Street until he reached a long, low structure at the lower end of town. This was the most miserable section of Milton.

At the rear of this building were several hitch rails. A few horses were tied here. They looked them over, and Buck pointed to one in suppressed excitement. This was a sleek bay built for speed rather than endurance.

"Toad's got three horses," he said in an undertone, "and I believe that's one of them. Let's see if we can peek through the window."

There was a dimly lighted window in the rear of the building to the right of the door. But there was a shade drawn, and it prevented them from seeing inside.

"There's nothing for it but for me to sneak in," Buck whispered. "I — Look out!"

There was a sound at the rear door, and they flattened themselves against the wall of the building in the deepest shadow. In another moment the door opened, and a diminutive figure slipped out. Davitt felt Buck touch his arm and thus knew the man who had come out of the den was "Toad." They had arrived just in time.

Toad went to the horse Buck had pointed out and looked at it. But he made no move to untie the animal. He seemed to be making sure that the animal was all right. Presently he stared down the alley, keeping well in the shadows. But Davitt had caught a faint glimpse of

the man's face in the starlight and he understood at once why Toad would be selected if there was dirty work to be done. It was a mean face stamped with evil and dissipation.

They followed Toad and saw him slip into the rear door of a larger building.

"That's the Eureka, the second largest gambling house in town," Buck said.

"Yes, I know," Davitt said. "Now he went in there for something. Instructions, maybe. He's going to ride, for he has his horse ready. Here's a crack in this shade at this window."

There were two windows in the rear of the Eureka, and it was the window of the private office where Davitt stood. He peered through the slight crack in the shade but could see only the center of the office and just a streak of that. Yet it was enough. He saw an object cross that streak, and it was not a form or a hand. It was like a small oblong shadow flitting across a beam of light. Yet it conveyed much to Davitt.

"Something was passed," he told Buck as he drew away from the window. "It looked like a package. I'm not going to follow Toad, I'm going to grab him; but not here where we might be heard. Come on."

Davitt halted in the shadow of a dark building midway between the Eureka and the Red Front. Here they waited for Toad and they didn't have long to wait, for soon a ray of yellow lamplight shot from the open rear door of the Eureka. It was blotted out in another few moments, but it betrayed the exit of Toad from the place.

When Toad was almost opposite

them, Davitt stepped out to confront him. What happened next took place with incredible speed.

**T**OAD leaped aside, seeming to turn in the air as Davitt strove to grasp him. There was a veritable blaze of fire, but Davitt's gun was out like a winking star spitting flame and lead. Toad went down, still shooting aimlessly. In the short space of split seconds Davitt had sheathed his gun and picked Toad up in his arms.

"Get the sheriff and a doctor," Davitt told Buck in short, crisp tones. "I'm going to carry him up to the room."

Then he started on the run with Toad in his arms. He sped up the alley and entered the hotel by the rear door before the people in the street or resorts even knew where the shots had been fired. He climbed the rear stairs, hurried to his room, and deposited his burden on the bed. Then he lighted the lamp and turned to examine the target of his bullet.

Toad's eyes glittered, and his lips were curled back in a snarl against his yellow teeth. Then he began to curse in a cracked voice.

Davitt got the man's coat off. He could feel a package in one of the side pockets. He tore open Toad's shirt and saw the red stain of blood. It was swelling rapidly, making a round blot on the man's undershirt. Davitt ripped this open and saw the blood welling from a wound in the man's side. He soaked his handkerchief in cold water and pressed it against the bullet wound. The cursing had ceased. Toad was staring at him with a frightened look in his eyes.

"Is it—bad?" he managed to gasp out.

"It doesn't look very good, Toad," Davitt said. "You shouldn't have

gone for your gun so quick, but maybe you had good reason. You got in the first shot while you were still in a spin after jumping. I'd come clean if I were you. This wound may plant you."

The man's face had gone deathly white. He looked ghastly.

"I was looking through a crack in the shade of the Eureka office window, Toad, and I saw the package passed," Davitt said quietly.

Toad's lips moved, but no words came, and Davitt realized that the man was unable to speak.

The doctor came and took charge. He shook his head doubtfully.

When the sheriff arrived, Davitt speedily explained what had happened. The sheriff took a small package wrapped in brown paper from Toad's coat. When it was opened, it was found to contain a roll of bills. The notes were in fifty and twenty-dollar denominations. The sheriff counted them.

"A thousand dollars!" he exclaimed, staring at Davitt.

"I reckon my hunch was correct," Davitt said. "Toad had a horse out there, saddled and ready to go. I believe he was to take that money to Powell as a payment for Powell's services. Everything checks up, Drew. I tell you, Hal, these cheap gamblers and crooks sent for Powell to get me."

"It looks that way," the sheriff agreed. "Well, nobody can get out of this town to-night except on legitimate business, and any rider who leaves has got to be known. I've got a cordon of men around town to stop any rider. Toad, there, would have been stopped and brought back. Now, let's see. Mike Murphy runs the Eureka and he must be handling the funds at this end. Somebody will be raising

money in Burrell—that's the other end. You can bet that Powell's guns can't be hired cheap. And Murphy has a half interest in a place in Burrell!"

"Then *there's* where Powell is likely to be," Davitt pointed out. "That town, I understand, is running wide open and wild, and he could go in there without fear of being molested."

"I've let them go out there," Drew said wryly, "without paying much attention to them. The town's tucked down in the south-east corner of the county, practically in the river brakes, away from everything, you might say, and if I raid it, the bad ones merely cross the river into the next county, wait a day or two, and then come back. The only way to clean it up is to burn it up, and I can't do that."

"Take it to Powell, you!"

The shrill voice rang through the room, and Davitt and Drew whirled to look at the figure on the bed.

"He's delirious," the doctor said calmly, feeling Toad's pulse.

"Delirious or not, he said enough in that one yell," the sheriff remarked grimly. "He's repeating what Murphy must have told him. Do you think he'll kick out of it?"

"I can't tell yet," the doctor replied. "It's doubtful."

The little group sat about for half an hour waiting for another outburst from the wounded man, but none was forthcoming. The sheriff had pocketed the money. Davitt was cleaning his gun. Finally Drew got to his feet.

"I reckon the thing for us to do is to go and have a little talk with Murphy at the Eureka," he said.

"I was thinking the same thing," Davitt agreed. "And then Buck and I will start for Burrell."

## CHAPTER V.

### A BIGGER JOB.

IN the hallway Davitt took Drew by the arm and spoke guardedly. "This job is going to be bigger than I thought," he said. "It isn't just a case of getting Powell before he can get me. I want to find out who is behind all this. There's a lawless and dangerous element at work here, Drew. They know you're quitting the office of sheriff and they're preparing to run wild. Besides, I naturally have a big personal interest in the matter. I want to know who these people are that want to blot me out so badly."

"And I want to know, too," Drew declared grimly. "They're not going to bust out and mess things up during my last few months in office and smudge my record. We've at least got the goods on one of them—perhaps the ringleader—and that's Mike Murphy."

Although it was now midnight, the street still was thronged. But Davitt's quick action in getting Toad into his room left the crowds with no clew as to who had been shot, and those who did know were keeping it to themselves. One of these was Murphy.

No one, not even the most casual stranger, would have had any trouble picking out Mike Murphy as proprietor of the Eureka. He stood at the lower end of the bar; a big man with a florid face, thick black mustache, square jaw. He wore a stockman's hat and a fancy checked vest across which was strung a heavy, gold watch chain with an ornate charm. In his red necktie was a diamond horseshoe pin; in one corner of his mouth he gripped a fat cigar.

He surveyed the sheriff calmly as the latter, with Davitt and Buck,



approached him. His eyes snapped, however, when he glanced at Davitt. For Buck he had a patronizing look.

"Let's go into your office, Murphy," the sheriff told him.

"Sure," Murphy said in a slow, confident voice which needed but a slight change in tone to be insolent. "I was waiting for you."

"Why were you waiting for me?" Drew asked when they were in the office.

"I guess you've got some money of mine," Murphy replied as he settled himself in the swivel chair at his roll-top desk. "I take it that you frisked Toad after he was shot."

He made no attempt to conceal the fact that he had given Toad the money.

"Then you don't deny that you gave Toad that thousand dollars?" the sheriff said coolly.

"Of course not!" Murphy returned sharply. "Have you got it?"

"Yes, I have it, Murphy. What did you give Toad the money for?"

"To take over to Burrell," was the calm answer. "Our place over there has had some heavy losses in the last few days, and they need more money."

"Now isn't that some answer?" the sheriff said in a tone of disgust. "How far would a thousand dollars go in a gambling house as a house stake? And especially a gambling house over in Burrell where the stakes are higher than they are here! When did they send for this money, Murphy?"

"What's the idea in all these questions?" Murphy flared.

"You'll find that out in a minute. When did they send for this money? Don't forget that I'm sheriff of this county, Murphy, and I've a right to ask questions. I've

got mighty good reason to ask them."

It was plain that Sheriff Hal Drew was roused.

"They sent for it yesterday," Murphy said angrily.

"No one came into this town from Burrell yesterday," Drew said sternly. "You'll have to think up a better one than that, Murphy."

"Which is all you know about it." Murphy sneered. "Our messengers don't come in and out of town so the whole country can see them."

"Why didn't the messenger take the money back with him?" Drew purred.

For several long moments, there was silence while Murphy glared.

"He had to go right back—right away. I didn't think it was safe to send the money by him in broad daylight. Some of those tough hombres over in Burrell might be waiting for him outside the town or on the road. I decided to send it with Toad at night. Why was Toad shot?"

"Because he was too free with his gun," Drew snapped. "You're a first-class liar, Murphy! No one came over here for a thousand dollars, and you were not sending that thousand to Burrell."

"I'll let you call me a liar because you're sheriff!" Murphy cried hoarsely, his face dark. "If you wasn't sheriff—"

"*I* say you're a liar, Murphy, and *I'm* not a sheriff," Davitt put in smoothly.

Murphy's face purpled with rage.

"You're worse!" he choked. "You're a cheap gunman!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say cheap," Davitt told him. "I reckon it would cost more to hire my gun than you're paying for Powell's."

There was a change in Murphy's

manner instantly. He steadied, and his eyes narrowed as he surveyed Davitt coolly.

"Just what kind of a riddle is that?" Murphy demanded.

"It isn't a riddle, Murphy," said Hal Drew. "Toad said that money was for Powell. Now why should you be sending money to on outlaw who committed a murder almost as soon as he got in the county?"

"Toad's a liar, and you're trying to frame me up!"

SHERIFF DREW glanced at Davitt and then he sat down in a chair beside the desk. He spoke in a cool, businesslike tone.

"Now, Murphy, let's get this thing straight. No one is trying to frame you. I've got a pretty fair reputation in this county, and you know better than to accuse me of attempting to frame anybody. We have reason to believe that Powell didn't just drift up here. We believe he came up here for a definite purpose and that he was sent for. Naturally he would have to be paid. Davitt was looking through a crack in the shade at this window here. He saw the package of money passed. He stopped Toad, and Toad started to shoot—to protect the money, I suppose. Davitt shot him down in self-defense. Toad is hard hit and delirious. He shouted out that the money was to be taken to Powell. So you must have something to do with Powell's being here. You've got to prove to me that you haven't!"

"Why would I want him up here?" Murphy demanded.

"To get me, maybe," Davitt put in.

He had watched Murphy closely while Drew had been speaking. He had seen the conflicting emotions which had shown on Murphy's face

—surprise, chagrin, cunning, uncertainty. Murphy was on the defensive.

"If we wanted to get you, we could get some rat to shoot you in the back!" Murphy roared.

Mel Davitt laughed softly and put a hand on Drew's shoulder.

"That's enough, Hal," he said. "Murphy has let the cat and all the kittens out of the bag. That little word *we* did it. Why does he say *we*? Ask him who the others are." He chuckled again.

Murphy shoved back his chair with an oath.

"*Steady!*" Drew commanded. "You couldn't get a rat to shoot Davitt in the back and you know it! None of the riffraff in this town would have the nerve to do it! Even Toad would balk. And you know if such a thing happened, I'd close this town up tighter than a drum. Not a card would fall; not a wheel would turn. No, Murphy, it would have to be done by an outsider and a gunman—a mighty good one—to make it seem natural. You've given yourself plumb away. *You're under arrest!*"

Murphy's face went white. He gripped the arms of his chair and leaned toward the sheriff.

"You can't arrest me," he croaked. "You can't prove anything!"

Hal Drew put a hand in a side pocket of his coat. When he drew it out, the lamplight gleamed on white steel.

"Close that safe and your desk," he ordered.

Murphy's eyes seemed to pop from his head as he stared at the handcuffs.

"You're—you're not going to put those on me are you, sheriff?"

"I'm taking no chances," Drew returned crisply. "I'll take them

off when I've got you in a cell. If you want to leave that safe open, it's all right with me. I'll give you fifteen minutes to call in your cash from the bar and gaming tables and lock it up. I'm closing the place!"

The cry which came from Murphy's white lips was almost a shriek.

"I'm going to get to the bottom of this plot to get Davitt," the sheriff said grimly, "and to get to the bottom, I'm going to start at the top. I reckon you're at the top, Murphy. If you want to save your cash, call it in!"

"But the players!" Murphy wheezed. "They've got to check in."

"You've got fifteen minutes," Drew warned, looking at his watch.

Murphy swore and called loudly for his head bartender. He gave an order, and shortly afterward the cash was brought in from the bar. Murphy put it in the safe. He pulled down the shutter of his desk.

Outside, in the gaming room, players were cashing in their checks, for the head bartender had shouted the order to the slot men. There was intense excitement and confusion among the spectators. It was unheard of—the closing of a gambling place in Milton. But it was being done, as all soon found out.

Leaving Murphy handcuffed in his office in the custody of Buck, who long had been a special deputy, Drew and Davitt went outside where the sheriff speedily cleared the place. The bartenders donned their street clothes, and the lights were put out, except for one near the front entrance. The head bartender had the keys to the doors.

In less than half an hour after Sheriff Hal Drew had made his decision, the Eureka was dark and de-

serted, and the determined official was on his way to the jail with his prisoner.

Davitt and Buck walked to the hotel.

"Murphy's as guilty as they make them," Davitt told Buck. "It didn't take Hal Drew long to make up his mind. There's good stuff in that man. We'll get to the bottom of this thing yet."

"When are we riding out, Mel?" Buck asked cheerfully.

"Go get the horses ready," was Davitt's answer.

When Davitt opened the door of his room, he saw the doctor closing his case. There was a sheet over the figure on the bed.

"He said some more about taking it to Powell," the doctor remarked. "The money seemed to be on his mind."

Davitt nodded and looked again at the white sheet.

Toad was dead.

## CHAPTER VI.

### RIDING VISITORS.

**D**AVITT found Buck with the horses at the rear of the hotel. He looked the mounts over. Davitt's horse was a chestnut gelding; a thoroughbred from the famous Marcus Daly breeding farm. No horse north of Butte was so fast. At the rodeo the previous fall, Davitt's horse had gone a mile in one minute, thirty-eight and four fifths seconds. Buck's horse was a bay gelding. It was one of the finest and fastest animals ever bred on the Payne ranch. Mounted on these horses, the pair could leave any other riders on the North Range miles behind almost in a space of minutes.

They were to need this speed this day.

"I want to stop and see the sheriff a minute on the way out," Davitt said as they mounted. "I won't be long."

"I sent word to Betty so I'm all set to go," Buck remarked.

"Jumping coyotes!" Davitt exclaimed. "For the moment, I forgot you're married, Buck. I don't believe you better go along, for there's a risk involved." He spoke in a worried voice.

"And there's rewards involved," Buck said dryly. "Betty's sister is down to the ranch, so she isn't alone. She doesn't want me to miss a chance to make a good piece of money."

Davitt had to laugh in spite of himself. He might forget the money end, but Buck could be depended upon to remember it.

"Besides, Betty knows I can take care of myself," Buck added.

"Yes, there's quite a bit of truth in that," Davitt conceded.

They rode down to the jail where Davitt found Hal Drew alone in his office.

"I thought you might have gone home," Davitt told him.

"Nope," said the sheriff, pushing his hat back on his head. "I'm staying up waiting for more prisoners. It'll be daylight in a couple of hours, anyway."

"More prisoners? What do you mean by that?"

"The boys I've got strung around outside town picked up three in the last hour. One of them worked in the Eureka, and the other two belong to the same no-good crowd. I figure that those who're in with Murphy are trying to get word out to Powell and to persons in Burrell, and I'm going to grab every rider on suspicion."

"How's Murphy taking it?" Davitt asked.

"He's closed up like a clam. Wants a lawyer. I told him he could see the county attorney. I'm going to close the Red Front this morning."

"Great Scott! Maybe you're going a little strong, Hal."

"Don't worry," said the sheriff with a grin. "None of that crowd has a vote, except the proprietors and a few employees. You're due to succeed me, Davitt, and I'm going to see that you're protected. I'm busting up a gang right here in town that I've been after a long time. At last I've got something definite on them. This plot against you gives me my chance, and I'm taking it."

"But we're not absolutely sure of the plot, are we?"

"What!" Drew exclaimed. "With Murphy giving that Toad a thousand dollars to cart off and Toad yelling about Powell in his delirium? It's open and shut. Of course there's a plot. I could read it all over Murphy's face, and before I'm through with him, he'll talk to save his skin!"

"Well, I'm starting out," Davitt said soberly. "Let me see that reward notice with Powell's picture on it."

Drew got out the notice, and Davitt studied it intently.

"I've never seen Powell, but I'd recognize him in a wink," Davitt said, handing back the notice. "The point is: Does Powell know me by sight?"

Hal Drew shrugged. "That I couldn't say," he confessed.

"If he doesn't, he's out of luck," Davitt pointed out. "He'd have to have somebody identify me."

"You're not a hard man to describe," Drew said dryly. "I'm of the opinion that even if he hasn't

seen you somewhere down south, he'd know you on sight."

"Another thing, Hal; I wonder how well I'm known in Burrell."

"Don't worry," said Drew, holding up a hand. "There are plenty who know you over there. If you're going to Burrell, Davitt, watch yourself like a hawk. This is a mighty dangerous mission you're on. I—I'm really concerned." The sheriff showed it by his look.

"You needn't be, Hal," Davitt assured him. "And I'll tell you this: I not only want Powell out of the way, but I want his gang busted up." He hitched his gun belt, and his eyes narrowed.

**H**AL DREW studied him. The sheriff had immeasurable respect for this rider of the danger trail. He had seen him in action and he knew the lightning speed of Davitt's almost incredible draw, his uncanny accuracy of aim. *Davitt never had been known to draw first!*

Davitt turned in the doorway on his way out.

"So long!" he said with a flashing smile.

As they rode out of town, Davitt and Buck passed several special deputies who waved to them.

"One thing is certain," Davitt told Buck; "no news is riding ahead of us."

He set the pace at a swinging lope which the horses could maintain for hours if need be. Presently a soft, gray mist appeared in the east, which was the direction in which they were riding. Gradually this mist brightened, and soon there was a silver band on the eastern horizon. Then came the rose tints and the floating streamers of amethyst which mark the prairie dawn. The great arch of sky, swept clear of

night, seemed to mount higher and higher into a sea of blue, cloudless and clean. It was the signal for the rising of the sun, a disk of gold which rose slowly and majestically from the horizon's purple rim. Now, it was another day.

Davitt and Buck were walking their horses, observing the beauty of the sunrise which never fails to impress range riders. Suddenly Buck cried out and pointed southward. Davitt looked and saw several horses grazing some distance away.

"I'll bet those are my horses, the ones I bought yesterday," Buck told Davitt. "I reckon Powell and his outfit didn't come back for them. What do you think?"

"We'll go down and see," said Davitt, turning off the road.

They rode down, easing their pace as they approached the horses. Although the animals started to trot away, they had no trouble circling them.

"They're my horses, all right," Buck said in a tone of satisfaction. "I'd know them without seeing the brand, and every one of them is wearing the Clark iron. Ten head. Just right. I can pick them up any time, but if we see any of the Clark punchers, I'll ask them to take the horses over to the ranch and hold them for me."

"We're cutting through a corner of the Clark ranch, are we not?" Davitt asked. "I thought you said we'd cut through the southwest corner on our way. I wouldn't want to see you lose your stock." He was gazing intently toward the dim fringe of trees which marked the course of Snake Creek in the north-east.

"Sure we do," Buck said. "Maybe I'll see somebody."

They now were riding back to the

road. Davitt kept his eyes on the distant fringe of trees. Then he surveyed the prairie ahead. It was a sea of green with the gray ribbon of road running through it. Off to the right, in the southwest, a distant clump of trees marked the location of a spring. Burrell was in this direction, about twenty-six miles away. They were riding due east.

DAVITT'S roving gaze constantly returned to that dim fringe of trees along Snake Creek, off to the left, in the northeast. Finally he reined in his horse. Buck halted and looked at him questioningly.

"Where did the shooting take place yesterday, Buck?" Davitt asked.

"Just about here," Buck answered, looking around. "I was going to tell you."

"And Powell and the others, where did they ride to—in what direction?"

Buck pointed toward the fringe of trees which had attracted Davitt's attention.

"Up there," he said. "That's Snake Creek. I don't see why they didn't come back for the horses," he added.

"I'll tell you, Buck," Davitt said, keeping his gaze on the fringe of trees. "I'm not so sure that Powell butted in on you to draw me out of Milton. It looks as if he hasn't been paid any money yet, and I don't think he'd try to get me until he had the money in his pocket. And you can bet that thousand Murphy was sending isn't all he was to get. Maybe they *did* intend to steal the horses. The shooting was forced on them, you know. But he seemed to know about the Clark ranch. Of course when he said he

was familiar with Clark's handwriting and all that, he was lying. I believe he picked up a man—possibly all six of them—in Burrell. And I believe that man, or all of them, know you and me; at least know what we look like."

"It seemed to me that they *knew* me," Buck said.

"Then they would know you would come to me for help!" Davitt exclaimed. "And they would expect me to ride out here with you this morning. It would have been too late to come out last night after you got back to Milton. Meanwhile, Toad was to have come out here during the night with that money. Now we're *getting* somewhere. They would have had the money and would be waiting for us to show up. Powell is just wise enough to know that I won't have anything to do with posSES."

"It sounds mighty reasonable to me, Mel," Buck agreed.

"And they'd wait all night for that money," Davitt continued. "And they'd be here this morning, for it's early. I believe Toad was supposed to bring the money out here and not to Burrell. Drew doesn't know but that a messenger slipped into town after sundown last night. And it would be reasonable that Murphy would refuse to trust the messenger and prefer to send his own man."

"That's figuring it out, all right," said Buck.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the whole outfit was up on Snake Creek this minute!" Davitt declared. "In fact I thought I saw something moving up along that line of trees."

Buck fixed his gaze on the fringe of cottonwoods.

"If they're there, we're liable to have visitors," he commented.

"That's right," Davitt agreed.

"Now we're mounted on two fast horses, and if the gang is up there and tries to stop us, the play is to lead them along and get them strung out, if possible. Then we can take them one or two at a time. Buck, I wouldn't mind wiping that bunch out entirely, although it's Powell I'm after. They murdered Ferguson, and it wasn't their fault that they didn't get you. And Powell is up here to get me—for *pay!*"

"If we have to lead them anywhere, ride southeast," said Buck, pointing in the direction of the clump of trees off to the right. "There are some hay sheds down there. It's part of the Clark range."

"I've got a hunch we're going to get action," said Davitt grimly. "Let's ride along."

They moved on, loping their horses. Snake Creek flowed east, and after they had proceeded some two miles, they had the fringe of trees on their left, directly north, stretching in the same direction as the road. They could see along this line of trees for a mile or more.

Davitt's hunch proved to be correct.

"Here come the visitors!" Buck sang out suddenly.

Six riders had burst from the cottonwoods and were racing toward the road ahead.

## CHAPTER VII.

### FLAMING GUNS.

**T**HE outlaws had no chance to stop Davitt and Buck in the road, for the pair turned off and rode southeast. The outlaws made a vain attempt to cut down and head them off, but the pair merely let their horses out and spurted into a comfortable lead. Mounted on such fast horses, Davitt and Buck could really play with

the six riders who sought to kill or capture them.

"Those are the six men who were with Powell," Buck shouted to Davitt. "Doesn't look as if Powell's around."

"They're probably riding under his orders just the same," Davitt called back. "We've got to bust that gang up, Buck!"

Davitt set a pace which kept their pursuers just far enough behind to prevent them from using their guns. Maintaining this pace gave the outlaws the impression that they were pushing their mounts as hard as they could. It was a lure. For the outlaws expected to catch up sooner or later.

There was a long stretch of open, rolling prairie in the direction in which Davitt and Buck were leading the others. The pair could have left the six riders far behind had they so wished, but this was not the plan. When Buck looked at Davitt, he saw the old grim look of the man hunter on his face. Davitt was determined to wipe this band out, just as he had wiped out other bands in the past. Buck knew what was coming—gun play, fast and furious!

Davitt kept looking back; in fact, it seemed as though he rode without looking ahead at all. Davitt was expecting their pursuers to string out. Surely some of the outlaws' horses must be faster than others and these should draw away and go into the lead. But no such thing happened.

"They won't string out, Buck," Davitt shouted. "We're going to have to take them in a bunch. Where's the best place?"

"The hay sheds," Buck answered. "There are three of them on the ranch about two miles east. We went too far along the road to make the others without turning back."

"Take the lead!" Davitt commanded.

As Buck swung ahead of Davitt, he changed their direction so they were racing due east. Davitt closed in beside him.

A chorus of yells came to them on the wind as they changed their course. Then the barking of guns, but no whine of bullets. It was futile for the outlaws to shoot at that distance.

"They think we're making for the Clark ranch house," Buck called.

"And that shooting shows they mean business," Davitt answered grimly.

He looked back to see their pursuers spread out and riding all six abreast. It seemed unreasonable that all six horses should be so evenly matched in speed. It was plain the outlaws intended to stick together. Despite the fact that the bandits had fired their guns, Davitt could not bring himself to believe that Powell had given them orders to shoot to kill. He would find out when they reached the hay sheds. Davitt's eyes narrowed. All this menace was directed at him, engineered by the lawless and cheap gambling element of Milton and Burrell. Leaning forward in the saddle, his eyes flashing fire, Davitt resolved that his first official act, if he was elected sheriff, would be to clean up Burrell. Not an outlaw or shady character would find refuge in the county!

Buck shouted to him and pointed ahead.

Davitt looked and saw three large, brown blots on the green of the flowing plain. The hay sheds! There were cattle to be seen, too; scattered on the range beyond the sheds—mere dots on the prairie.

"Come on!" Davitt shouted.

"We'll spurt and get there well ahead of them. We want to be all set when they arrive!"

THEY let out their horses and raced at a mad gallop for the sheds. The prairie literally flowed under their horses' ringing hoofs like green water. Another chorus of yells came on the wind, but the sounds were faint. Davitt looked back and smiled grimly. The outlaws were urging their horses for all they were worth. Some were using quirts. It was a good sign. They had no intention of stopping. But then, why should they? These were desperadoes; hard, tough characters, accustomed to riding and shooting. Powell wouldn't travel with any but experienced, tested men; men he could depend upon in a bank robbery or a raid upon gambling places, or even at rustling. And these men would be doubly daring and dangerous because they were three to one in number!

Davitt and Buck reached the sheds in a cloud of dust for the ground about the sheds was bare. Davitt saw it would be some minutes before the outlaws could arrive. The sheds were empty, for the hay which had been stored in them had been used to feed cattle during the winter. The sheds were in a row with a space of about twenty feet between them.

"We'll dismount and put the horses in separate sheds," Davitt told Buck quickly. "They'll figure we're inside, too, and that's why we want to be *outside*. We'll get behind the sheds and meet them with gunfire! We've got to work fast."

It was almost a mere space of moments before the horses were in the sheds and Davitt and Buck were outside, concealed from view of the



oncoming riders, their guns in hand. Davitt had forgotten the risk Buck was taking; he only knew they were working together as they had worked before. But if Buck had not been present, Davitt would have fought the outlaws alone. This was a personal matter. Heretofore, Davitt had gone after men who had committed crimes involving others; he had worked for pay on the side of the law; this time he was, so to speak, working for himself. He had barely time to think of this when the outlaws arrived to the accompaniment of thundering hoofs.

The dust rose in a cloud. Davitt could see the guns in the hands of the outlaws as he leaped into the space between two of the sheds. Buck was in the other space. Two of the outlaws saw Davitt at the same time. Their guns came up to be snapped forward with the roar of shots.

But Davitt had leaped aside and gone down on one knee, his gun flaming in the dust as he fired twice. The shots came so fast, so close together, they seemed one long report. One of the men toppled headlong from his saddle and fell on his face on the ground. The other slumped and slid out of the saddle as his horse reared. His foot was caught in the stirrup, and the horse bolted, dragging the lifeless form, kicking it free in the grass quite some distance away.

Buck was shooting, and another riderless horse raced away. Davitt ran for the front of the sheds. Buck was shouting to him, and he whirled in his tracks just as a rider rounded the shed behind him. Again that lightning leap and drop to the knee as the outlaw fired. The muzzle of Davitt's gun dipped as the bullet left it, and the outlaw flung up his hands, his weapon spinning in the

air, and leaned back. His horse lunged and sent him plunging backward to the ground.

"*They're beating it!*" yelled Buck, running toward the shed where he had put his horse.

Davitt saw the two remaining outlaws riding away from the sheds like mad.

"We'll get 'em!" he shouted. "Don't shoot 'em. We want 'em *alive!*" He ran for his horse.

**T**HERE were shouts and the pounding of hoofs in another direction now. As Davitt mounted, he saw two riders coming from the east where the cattle were grazing. These would be Clark cow-punchers who had heard or seen the shooting.

But there was no time for explanations. The two outlaws who had gotten away were galloping like mad for the trees along the river in the south. Davitt and Buck started after them at racing speed, reloading their guns as they rode.

This was a time when speedy horseflesh counted; when the superb qualities and performance of the thoroughbred figured mightily; when breeding asserted itself.

Davitt drew away from Buck. His horse fairly flew across that sea of green, mane and tail straight in the wind. But Buck was coming fast. The two outlaws were leaning over their horses' necks, expecting a rain of bullets. The distance between them and their relentless pursuers shortened. They could never make the river!

Suddenly the outlaws' horses seemed to falter. They were being checked! Davitt could hear Buck shouting triumphantly. Then the hands of the outlaws went up high above their heads as their horses

came to a halt. It was a surrender, and a capture! A finished job.

When Davitt rode up, the two men stared at him out of eyes in which there was no malice; only wonder, commingled with awe.

"Keep reaching!" Davitt ordered in a stern voice.

He saw at once that these men were typical outlaws of the worst and most despicable kind. As he looked at them, his gaze was brimming with contempt. They saw this and exchanged glances.

"Take their guns, Buck," Davitt said when Buck arrived.

Buck secured the weapons.

"Aren't they a pair of sweet, scurvy rats!" he exclaimed. "It'll be a shame to dirty a couple of ropes on their necks!"

The men squirmed in their saddles and put down their hands.

"Are you Davitt?" one of them said to Davitt.

"Who did you think you were chasing?" Davitt demanded in return.

The man had no answer to this and remained silent.

"Was you going to take after just anybody who came along the road?" Davitt asked in an icy voice. "It's too bad you rode away from those sheds," he added in disgust. "You're just making us trouble!"

"I'm for letting them have it right here and now!" Buck exclaimed.

Davitt was surprised to see that Buck meant what he said. Then he remembered the killing of Ferguson. Buck had a reason for feeling vindictive.

"They'll get it soon enough," Davitt said. "Shooting is too good for them." He pointed up toward the hay sheds and spoke sharply to the outlaws.

"Turn your horses and ride up to

those sheds," he commanded. "Hustle right along just as fast as you rode down here."

"I figure you'll see we get a square deal, Davitt," said the man who had spoken before.

Davitt whipped out his gun.

"Are you going to *ride*?" he demanded.

The outlaws drove in their spurs and started at a mad gallop for the sheds with Davitt and Buck following close behind.

WHEN they reached the sheds, they found four Clark cow-punchers there. They had been attracted by the shooting. They stared at Davitt as if they saw an apparition. Instinctively, all four glanced at the butt of his gun which protruded from the worn black holster.

"I'm Tompkins," one of them said. "We were with the herd back there when the shooting started. You sure made a job of it."

Davitt looked around, his face set in grim lines. There were four motionless forms on the ground about the sheds.

"Have you looked at them?" he asked, pointing to the bodies.

"They're all dead," Tompkins replied in a soft voice.

"Good shooting!" was Davitt's comment. "They, and these two prisoners, and an outlaw by the name of Powell, constituted a gang that killed Buck's man Ferguson yesterday afternoon. Buck stood in with a lot of luck, or they'd have got him. They tried it. Do you know any of them?"

"No," Tompkins answered, shaking his head and looking at the other punchers who also shook their heads. "I reckon they had it coming to 'em."

"They were after *me* this morn-

ing," Davitt explained further. "Broke out of the trees up along Snake Creek and took after us. We let them down here where we'd have a chance around the sheds. Do you want to round up the horses these dead ones rode and take the saddles and bridles off them?"

"Sure. We'll do that," Tompkins replied readily.

"And say, Tompkins," Buck put in. "The gang started to run off those ten horses I bought yesterday morning, but beat it after killing Fergie. I had to leave the horses and take Fergie's body into town. The horses are down below here about six miles. Will some of you fellows go down and drive them back to the ranch and hold them for me? We've got more work to do."

"Sure. We'll do that, too," Tompkins said.

"Those things will have to be planted," Davitt said, pointing to the forms on the ground. "I'll get Clark to send down some more men. I reckon that'll straighten things out down here."

Tompkins was looking curiously at the two prisoners.

"Are you going to take those fellows into Milton?" he asked.

"Haven't got time now," said Davitt, shooting a look of contempt at the two outlaws. "I'm going to take them over to the ranch. Maybe Clark will send them in for me. Drew will be glad to get them."

Tompkins nodded. It was plain he was somewhat stunned by what had happened.

"All right, Buck," Davitt said briskly. "You lead the way to the ranch, and I'll see that this pair follow you. Let's go."

The four punchers stared after them as they started off at a gallop for the Clark ranch house.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SOME INFORMATION.

WHEN Davitt and Buck arrived in the courtyard in the midst of the ranch buildings, with their two prisoners, Bob Clark himself came out of the house to greet them.

"Hello, Davitt," the stockman boomed; "lo, Buck. I was wondering if you fellers would ever get out this way. Glad to see you." He looked askance at the two rough-appearing prisoners.

"Glad to see you, too, Bob," Davitt returned. "I don't know if you'll be so enthusiastic when you hear all the favors I'm going to ask of you. I've got two bad ones here and I want to put them where they'll *stay* put till I can get them into Milton where Hal Drew's waiting for them."

Clark's brow wrinkled. "There's nobody in the bunk house," he said, "but you'd have to tie 'em up, for I can't lock the place and the windows are open. Maybe we can lock 'em up in the blacksmith shop. Yes, that'll be the best place."

"The bunk house will do for the time being," Davitt said. "I want to make medicine with them later and I know Buck will enjoy watching them for a little while."

"I hope they try to get away," Buck put in grimly.

Clark called the barn hand to take charge of the horses, and the two outlaws were taken to the bunk house where Buck stood guard with his gun across his knee. Davitt and Clark went into the comfortable, spacious living room of the ranch house.

"Buck and I killed four men down by your hay sheds an hour ago," Davitt announced, taking out his tobacco and cigarette papers.

The stockman's bushy brows went up, and he was all attention in an instant. He knew Davitt's reputation well and respected and admired him.

"I reckon you must have had good reason," he said. "Are you back on the trail again? I heard you'd quit."

"I'm going to run for sheriff," Davitt told him, "and that's how those four men came to be killed and—well, a lot of things have happened since I made up my mind about eight o'clock last night."

"Snakes of Jupiter!" Clark exclaimed, extending his hand. "Well, you ought to make a good sheriff. Old Graham talked you into it, eh?"

"Well, he wasn't entirely responsible," Davitt said. "Let me tell you what's going on around here, Bob."

He then told the stockman what had taken place during the night and morning. He omitted no details and laid particular stress on Powell. Clark listened attentively and when Davitt had finished, he struck the palm of his left hand with his right fist.

"By Harry, that outlaw Powell was here on the ranch!" he exclaimed. "He was here yesterday, too. Just such a man as you describe with the meanest pair of eyes I ever saw. Said he wanted to look at some horses, and I told him I had none to sell. I told him about selling ten head to Buck and said that was all I could spare. As a matter of fact I let Buck have those as a favor, and let him sting me on the price in the bargain."

"So that explains how he knew about Buck and the horses!" Davitt ejaculated. "He *did* want the horses after all, and that gang we just cleaned out was likely going back for them this morning."

"Must be it," Clark agreed. "It all dovetails."

"Now I want to get those two prisoners into Milton, Bob, and I haven't got time to take them myself. I wonder——"

"I'll call in six men and send them in with them," Clark boomed. "It's a good thing you busted that gang up before they had a chance to get into *my* stock, maybe."

"I'm going to talk with those two prisoners a few minutes and then I reckon Buck and I better snatch forty winks before we start for Burrell," Davitt said. "I don't want to get there before dark, anyway."

"Are you going to Burrell?" Clark asked, plainly startled.

"Yes. I believe Powell is there. Murphy's got an interest in a gambling place down there and—well, you can see the connection."

"He owns part of the Prairie Queen," said the stockman. "I'll send some men along with you, although I can't spare 'em for long."

"Never mind," Davitt said with a negative gesture. "A crowd would spoil things. I've decided to try to *capture* Powell, instead of shooting it out with him. Once in jail, Powell will spill the beans on everybody. Clark, I never saw a bad man yet who wasn't a coward when he got behind the bars!"

"They'll pot you over there!" the stockman warned. "That's the one town in the county that would hate more than anything else to see you sheriff. It isn't Milton. They wouldn't hesitate a second about shooting you in the back."

"I'll keep one eye over my shoulder," Davitt said grimly.

"I hate to see you go," Clark said dubiously. "And I want to put you wise to something. Be careful on the edge of town. Lots of times, if they think anything is liable to pop

up, they have lookouts strung around the place. This looks like one of the times—with Powell there."

"I'm not sure he's there," Davitt said, rising.

"I'd be willing to bet on it," was Clark's comment. "It's the natural, made-to-order hang-out for a critter of his stamp."

**D**AVITT found the two prisoners sitting on separate bunks and Buck tipped back in a chair by the door with his gun on his knee.

"They never made a move," Buck complained.

Davitt sat down on a bench by the table and faced the outlaws.

"I want to ask you two straight off if you want to answer a few questions," he said coldly. "There are a lot of men on this ranch who haven't any use for the likes of you, and every one of them has a rope."

He paused significantly. The eyes of the men were fixed on him; gleaming and glittering.

"Maybe you noticed the cottonwood trees as we rode in," Davitt went on, flipping the ash from his cigarette. "Fine, big trees with limbs that reach out like an arm to hold something—a rope, say."

He paused again, and his eyes were narrowed and hard. The outlaws stirred uneasily. They remembered what had happened to four of their number.

"Now Buck and I haven't time to take you into Milton to jail," Davitt said. "We're goin' to turn you over to six punchers from this ranch. I can tell them to see that you get to Milton or I can keep my mouth shut. If I keep my mouth shut, they can take you anywhere they want to. I won't care, the sheriff won't care, and the law-abiding citizens of

this county won't care. I'll keep my mouth shut unless you answer my questions!"

"How do we know we're sure of getting to Milton if we *do* answer the questions?" one of the men growled.

"You have my word for it," Davitt replied tersely.

The outlaws looked at each other. It was plain they were worried but were trying hard not to show it.

"What do you want to know? We don't know much."

"Where are you from?" Davitt asked casually.

"Wyoming."

"Did you come up here with Powell?"

The spokesman for the two hesitated. "Yes," he said finally.

"It won't do you any good to try to protect Powell," Davitt pointed out, "because Powell will soon be in the same fix you are or worse. In fact, I'm giving you a chance that he isn't going to get! Now how long have you been up here?"

"Three days," was the surly reply.

Davitt leaned forward.

"Now be careful of *this* one," he warned. "How did Powell happen to come up here?"

"Why, he—travels around, and we—"

Davitt rose abruptly and started for the door.

"All right, Buck; keep your eye on 'em till the men come and then just turn 'em over," he said briskly.

"Where are you going?" called the outlaw who hadn't spoken before.

"I'm going out," Davitt said sharply. "I'm not going to sit here and listen to lies and evasions. If you two don't want to talk, you can take the consequences." His hand was on the knob of the door.

"He came up here because he was sent for," the outlaw said slowly.

Davitt turned.

"You're sure of that?" he asked narrowly.

"I saw the messenger," was the answer. "Are you goin' to give us a break?"

Davitt went back to his chair and proceeded to roll another cigarette and light it before he replied:

"I'll see that you get to Milton safely and I'll speak a word to the sheriff. But one more attempt to side-step a question and I'm through. What did this messenger look like?"

"Small man, pinched face, hook nose."

"Toad!" Buck exclaimed. "I thought so from the first."

"What was Powell supposed to do up here?" Davitt asked quietly.

"I don't know exactly. He didn't tell us in so many words."

"But why did you take after Buck and me this morning?"

"Orders," was the surly answer. "Powell said to stop you and hold you. But we wasn't goin' to hurt you."

"I'll pass over that lie," Davitt said shortly. "How did you know it was me?"

"Because you was with that other fellow. We got the orders yesterday afternoon, and that's all there is to it."

This sounded reasonable, and Davitt believed the man was speaking the truth. Powell had doubtless told them that Buck might come back with another and that the other man would be he, Davitt.

"Were you expecting a messenger last night for any reason?"

"No."

This seemed reasonable, too. Murphy wouldn't be sending any money to these common bandits; he

would send it to Powell himself. Then Davitt thought of something.

"Did Powell stay with you last night up on Snake Creek?"

"No."

"I've got one more question," Davitt said easily, rising. "You needn't be afraid to tell me what I want to know because I believe I already know the answer." He puffed slowly on his cigarette and eyed the two glowering outlaws.

"Where's Powell now?" he asked suddenly, the words stinging in their ears.

For several long moments, there was silence.

"I think he's in Burrell," the outlaw snarled. "Now do we get a break?"

"You go to jail safely and maybe get life instead of the rope," was Davitt's answer as he opened the door and went out.

Davitt saw the barn hand, and they inspected the blacksmith shop and found it could be padlocked. The prisoners were taken from the bunk house and locked in the shop. Then Davitt and Buck went back to the bunk house to get some sleep.

When they woke, it was late afternoon. They hurried out to find that Clark had sent the prisoners on into town.

"They told me you'd talked with them and found out what you wanted to know, and I didn't see fit to wake you up," Clark explained when they saw him. "They were scared stiff for fear the boys would string them up to a cottonwood. I had to give them my word nothing of the kind would happen. You were right, Davitt, about bad men being cowards when they're caught. Come in the house and have something to eat."

An hour later Davitt and Buck

rode away. Both had ropes on their saddles. They headed south toward the river.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A DARING CHANCE.

NIGHT laid a blanket of black over the brooding plain. A northwest wind had sent dark clouds scuttling across the sky, sweeping it clear of stars. The river was a murky shadow moving slowly among twisted ridges where gnarled pines bent and weaved like grotesque groping hands. A cluster of dim, blinking yellow lights marked the bend in the stream where Burrell squatted.

Davitt and Buck had stopped some little distance from the town.

"Little good it'll do them to have lookouts posted on a night as dark as this," Davitt said.

"About all they could do would be to listen," Buck said. "No one could recognize anybody in this sea of ink. If anybody is out watching, they'll be close in near what lights there are."

Davitt was unlimbering his rope, shaking out the loop.

"You're sure you know where to go, Buck? You can find your way around all right?"

"I've been over here about twenty times," Buck replied with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "I don't reckon they've moved the town around any."

"Thanks." Mel Davitt chuckled. "Well, let's go on in."

They walked their horses along the uneven road until they could see dim beams of light shining in a street. The ridges fell away suddenly, and they were on the edge of town. A figure scurried ahead of them. Davitt's loop snaked out, and the rope straightened. The lookout was jerked off his feet, and

Buck was on him before he could recover sufficiently from his astonishment to cry out.

"Good work," Davitt said. "Over to the side of the road with him. Here's the gag. I'll tie him. I had a hunch there'd be somebody here, and it's a good thing we were ready."

It was the work of minutes to truss the man up and gag him.

"Now we can go on in without causing suspicion," Davitt said. "Anybody who sees us will think we're all right because we must have passed the lookout. I reckon that fellow didn't think we were all right, though."

"You want to go right to that Queen place first?" Buck asked.

"We've got to put the horses somewhere," Davitt answered. "There must be hitching rails behind the Queen. We want to be able to get to them fast in case we should have to shoot our way out."

"Come on," Buck said. "The Queen's in the center of town."

The main street was a dingy affair with its dilapidated buildings and the faded glow of lights in dirty windows. There was one bright spot midway its length, and Davitt assumed that this was the Prairie Queen gambling place in which Murphy had an interest. The street appeared to be deserted. It was too early in the season for Burrell to have anything like its full quota of transients, and the cowhands were all out for the start of the spring round-up.

Buck turned off the main street, and they picked their way slowly in utter blackness behind the squalid buildings to where lights shone feebly from the rear windows of the Prairie Queen. There were no sounds of revelry. It was only nine o'clock, but the town seemed dead. This suited Davitt's purpose. He

was prepared to take a desperate chance. He pulled his hat low over his eyes.

AS Davitt had predicted, there were hitch rails behind the Queen. And five horses were tied there. Davitt and Buck tied their horses at the first rail, away from the feeble rays of light, away from the other horses. It was so dark here the horses could hardly be seen.

After they had tied the horses, Davitt and Buck both inspected the other horses tied to the rails. These were cow ponies with the exception of one, a big bay.

"That looks as if it might belong to somebody like Powell," Buck said. "Dog-gone, I can't remember whether Powell's horse was a bay, a chestnut, a brown, or a black. I reckon I was too excited yesterday to notice. But this horse would carry a big man, and there's a mighty good saddle on it. It's no cow-puncher's horse."

"There's no use guessing about horses," Davitt said. "Let's see if we can get a look inside."

They went to the first window and found it had no shade. It was dirty, but they could see inside the resort. It was a long room with the customary bar on one side and gaming tables filling the rest of the space. There were not many in the place.

"Looks like a dull night," Buck observed. "We can see the bar better from the other window."

Davitt was inspecting those who were playing poker and the spectators. None of these bore any resemblance to Powell. He joined Buck at the other window where they could see the length of the bar. There were barely half a dozen cus-

tomers drinking, and none of these was Powell.

"He isn't here," Buck said in a disappointed tone.

"Maybe it's too early for him," Davitt commented. "What other place would he be likely to be in? There are plenty of places here."

"We'll try up the street," Buck said. "There are plenty of places here, but they're not all open."

They went up behind the buildings to the next set of lights which denoted windows. This was a café, and they passed on. At the next windows they looked into a saloon which was practically deserted. Powell wasn't there. They went on and inspected two more places without result. In less than an hour they had looked into every saloon and gambling place in town where the windows were not shaded. The result of their search was nil.

"Dog-gone!" Buck exclaimed softly. "Do you suppose he's in bed?"

"Where's the hotel?" Davitt asked.

"It's across from the Queen. But we can't go in there without being spotted. They know me too well, although I haven't been over here in a year."

They were standing at the lower end of the street. Davitt was fast becoming impatient.

"I wonder, now, if they would know me?" he said as if he addressed the remark to himself.

"They probably would," Buck said. "It would spoil things right if somebody recognized you and spread the news."

"We're not getting anywhere wandering around looking in windows," Davitt said in a vexed tone.

"We—— Look! there's somebody down there crossing the street from the hotel to the Queen."



"He's a big man, too," Buck said in excitement. "He's about Powell's size, I'd say. We better get down there for another look into the Queen."

THEY hurried down behind the buildings again, stumbling and groping in the dark, until they arrived at the rear of the Prairie Queen. They peered through the window and saw a big man with a red beard at the bar. He was in the act of raising his glass and he appeared to be a bit unsteady.

Buck stepped back from the window clutching Davitt by the arm.

"It's him!" he said excitedly. "It's Powell!"

"That's who it is," Davitt agreed. "And he's been drinking."

He again stepped to the window and peered into the room. He noted that Powell, who was taking another drink, had steadied. Since he had come from the hotel, it was not improbable but that he had been sleeping and had just got up. The drinks he was taking might be eye openers. He was a huge man with a powerful frame. And Davitt didn't fail to notice that Powell wore two guns.

"Buck, come here. Do you know that bartender?"

Buck looked through the window.

"No, he's a new one," he said.

"Well, look at the card players and spectators and see if you know any of them or have seen any of them in Milton."

Buck went to the other window where he had a better view of the tables. Davitt continued to study Powell. He never had seen him before.

"I don't know *any* of them," Buck declared, returning. "And I never saw any of them in Milton. This is a strange crowd to me."

"The chances are better than

even that none of them know me," said Davitt, hitching his gun belt. "Buck, you watch that bunch at the tables and if any of them make suspicious moves, open the door and shout, break a window—anything to give me the warning. And be ready to untie the horses."

Davitt started around the building.

"Wait!" Buck cried softly, startled. "What're you going to do?"

"I'm going in!" Davitt announced grimly and disappeared.

Davitt paused at the front of the building to make sure his gun was free in its holster. He pulled his hat lower over his eyes. It was not unusual for visitors to Burrell to wear their hats in this fashion. He walked briskly to the front door and entered the resort.

Powell shot a glance at him, and Davitt was ready to draw. But the outlaw turned back to his drink. Davitt could see the men at the tables, but they merely looked at him curiously. He signaled the bartender and ordered whisky. When the bartender brought the bottle and glasses, he leaned forward and spoke to him in an undertone.

"I'm looking for a man named Powell," he said; "I've got a message for him from Murphy."

The bartender looked at him searchingly but said nothing.

Davitt poured out his drink and saw the bartender speak to Powell. The outlaw looked around immediately. Davitt was holding his glass in his left hand; his right was on the edge of the bar, ready for action. Powell downed his third drink. He was steady as steel now. He started toward Davitt, and Davitt knew the real test was at hand. He must interest Powell more in what he said than in his looks.

"You looking for somebody?" Powell asked gruffly.

"I'm looking for a man named Powell," Davitt said in a low voice. "I've a message for him."

"Who from?" Powell asked, lowering his voice.

"I'll tell *him* that," Davitt answered.

"Go ahead. *I'm* Powell."

Davitt beckoned to the bartender.

"Is this the man?" he asked.

The bartender nodded. "That's him."

**D**AVITT gave Powell one straight look. Then he knew he had passed the test. It occurred to him that Powell never would suspect he would come to Burrell after him.

"Murphy sent me from Milton to see you," he told Powell. "Toad couldn't come and——"

"Did he *send* anything?" Powell broke in.

"No. He wants to see you. He said it was safe to come to-night. He said to tell you the man you want is up north looking at a ranch."

Powell swore. "Do you work for Murphy?" he asked with the slightest trace of suspicion in his thick voice.

"I'm one of his slot men and take the wheel Saturdays."

"Did you see anybody on the way out here?" Powell asked.

"No. But I had orders to keep off the road."

"Did Murphy say anything about—money?" Powell growled.

"He said if you mentioned it to tell you it was waiting for you but that there was a change in plans."

"I believe he's a double-crosser!" Powell exploded. "Why didn't he come himself?"

"Well—he's got a pretty big business there. We're running fifteen

tables, a wheel, craps, and blackjack. I don't think he wants to let any one else handle the take. He said you could slip in and out without any trouble. Nobody knows you. I don't know what the business is about, but he seems to want it kept secret."

Powell motioned to the bartender to bring him his bottle and he poured out a stiff drink.

"Give him one," he said, jerking a thumb at Davitt.

"How far is it over there?" he asked Davitt.

"It's about twenty miles, but we can make it by midnight. There's a good road after you get out here about two miles."

"Is there any talk about any trouble on the range yesterday?" Powell asked, trying to put a casual note into his voice.

"Yes, a man got shot. The sheriff went out to-day but came back at sunset. I think there's a lot of them going out to-morrow to try and find out who did the shooting."

Powell put down his glass with a bang.

"I'm going over there with you!" he announced. "And if I think Murphy is trying to double-cross me, I'll leave him stiff on one of his own crap tables. Wait here till I get my horse. Where's yours?"

"I've got it out back here," Davitt said, striving to keep a jubilant note out of his voice. "It's been looked after."

As Powell hurried out the front door, Davitt went out the rear.

"He didn't recognize me!" Davitt told Buck. "Reckon he never dreamed of my actually being in this town. Told him Murphy wanted to see him in Milton, and he's going over there with me. Get on your horse and try and keep us in sight. We're starting right away."

"Aren't you going to draw down on him and tie him up outside of town?" Buck asked in surprise.

"No," Davitt said with a rippling chuckle. "I'm going to let him ride right on in of his own free will!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE PAY OFF.

ALL the way to Milton in the blackness of the night, Davitt had to continue in his assumed rôle as messenger. For every now and then Powell would shoot a fresh question at him, and Powell was adept in the art of questioning. Davitt had had to act before, but never in his career had he done a better piece of acting than on this night.

As they approached Milton, Davitt found himself marveling that Powell had consented to accompany him. Yet it wasn't so extraordinary after all. Powell was depending on his guns. He was confident that in event of sudden trouble he could shoot his way out, as indeed he could under ordinary circumstances such as he had encountered many times in the past. He knew no one in Milton could match guns with him. He thought Davitt was up north. Or *did* he?"

This was the question which compelled Davitt to be on the alert every instant. There was a possibility that Powell *had* recognized him; that the outlaw planned to turn his guns on him near town, or in it, and endeavor to collect his fee from Murphy on the spot! There was no telling what Powell might do, for he was undoubtedly the most dangerous and accomplished outlaw that had ever entered the county.

When the lights of the town came into sight, Davitt began to keep an eye out for special deputies Drew

might have posted. Since no word had apparently reached Burrell during the day, Davitt believed the guard about the town had been maintained. If a guard were to call him by name, the fireworks would be on. As it was, he couldn't draw down on Powell and complete his capture in the dark. It would be too uncertain.

So they rode directly toward the upper end of town where the road merged into Main Street.

"You going to ride down the middle of that street?" Powell demanded in a menacing tone.

"We'll turn off," Davitt replied. "Leave it to me. I'm familiar with this town and I know what I'm doing."

This had a double meaning, but naturally Powell didn't catch it. His question, however, indicated that he really was not aware of Davitt's identity. And for that matter, when Sheriff Hal Drew had said that Davitt would not be a hard man to describe, he had been wrong. An ordinary description of Davitt would fit any number of tall, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted cow-punchers on the range. Davitt's extraordinary characteristics could not easily be described.

As they neared the upper end of the street without seeing any sentries, Davitt remembered that Buck was somewhere behind them. He expected him to ride in close to them at any moment. But he didn't want any help from Buck in getting the best of Powell and taking him to jail. All he needed now was some light, however faint. This he would have in a few minutes.

There were many people in the street, as there had been the night before. Speculation as to the outcome of Davitt's mission was rife.

The jailing of the two outlaws and the report of the gun fight at the hay sheds on the Clark ranch had caused a tremendous sensation. It was the sole topic of conversation and had brought the crowds back to the street. Men in the cow towns like to talk in the open.

Davitt was checking off the seconds in his mind. A little more light—just a little more light. They were entering the upper end of the street. He could see Powell's eyes glittering. A horseman came galloping up the street. A little more light—

"Hello, Davitt," the rider called as he swept past.

Thundering guns on the night air!

Powell's horse lunged to the bite of the spurs. Next moment Powell was out of the saddle, surefooted in the dust of the street where he had free, certain action for his guns while his horse trotted to one side and stopped, reins dangling. Wicked curses were flowing from the outlaw's lips as Davitt flung himself from his horse where he would have made too good a target.

"*Reach for the sky, Powell, or you'll gather a bullet!*" Davitt sang in a ringing voice.

Then came that incredible draw as Powell whirled and tipped his guns; fast as light, sure as death.

There was a spurt of flame at Davitt's hip, another—and another! Winking fast came the shots, and Powell's guns dropped in the dust. He fell to a sitting posture, uttering horrible oaths in a hoarse voice. There was a bullet in each of his arms and another in his shoulder!

"I had to do it!" Davitt cried as Buck came thundering in with a cloud of dust at his back.

Men came running up the street. Some one shouted what had happened. The word spread on the

wings of magic. A great cheer went up that rang like a silver bell in Mel Davitt's ears.

IN the sheriff's office Mike Murphy was telling his story. He sat at the desk across from Hal Drew, whose face was cold and stern. Davitt was there, and Buck Granger. Sylvester Graham leaned forward in a chair, listening intently. Outside the jail a big crowd was milling, talking excitedly.

Nothing could prevent Mel Davitt from getting the nomination for sheriff; nothing could prevent his election in the fall.

One by one Mike Murphy implicated the proprietors of second-rate gambling houses and saloons, and certain notorious characters in Milton and Burrell, in the plot to get Davitt and thus prevent him from becoming sheriff of the county. Murphy was talking to save himself. He spared no details. When he had finished, he looked up at Hal Drew.

"That's all of it," he said dully. "I've told you everything. I would have told you anyway, I guess, even if those two outlaws hadn't talked out to Clark's place and Powell hadn't been shot down and captured. Now, sheriff"—his voice became a whine—"can't I go and open up my place?"

"No!" Hal Drew said sternly. "I'll give you exactly twenty-four hours to get out of Milton and out of the county! And you'll have plenty of company, for I'm going to run out every man you've mentioned. I'm going to close every dive in this town so that when Mel Davitt takes office, he'll have a clean Milton with which to start!"

"But, sheriff!" Murphy pleaded. "I——"

"That's all!" Drew said, rising. "You and the rest of your crowd are through! Now you can go and put your affairs in order. If you're in town at midnight to-morrow, you'll go right back in that cell!"

"We better go home," Sylvester Graham said, taking Davitt's arm. "Virginia will be waiting up to see you."

"And say, sheriff," Buck Granger chimed in cheerfully, "there'll be the little matter of rewards to be settled. I was in on this, you know. There ought to be a lot of money on Powell."

"You'll get your share," the sheriff said as the laugh went up.

Sylvester Graham snorted. "That's all he thinks about—

money! But you could give that fellow a million dollars, and he'd always be a cow-puncher!"

**V**IRGINIA GRAHAM met them at the door. There were no preliminaries so far as Mel Davitt was concerned. He led her by the hand into the living room, took her in his arms, and kissed her while her father looked on.

"Well, it won't be bad to have a sheriff in the family!" was Sylvester Graham's comment.

"Let's go out in the kitchen, Virginia," Davitt said in a happy voice. "Your father wants to read, and I want something to eat."

They went into the kitchen.



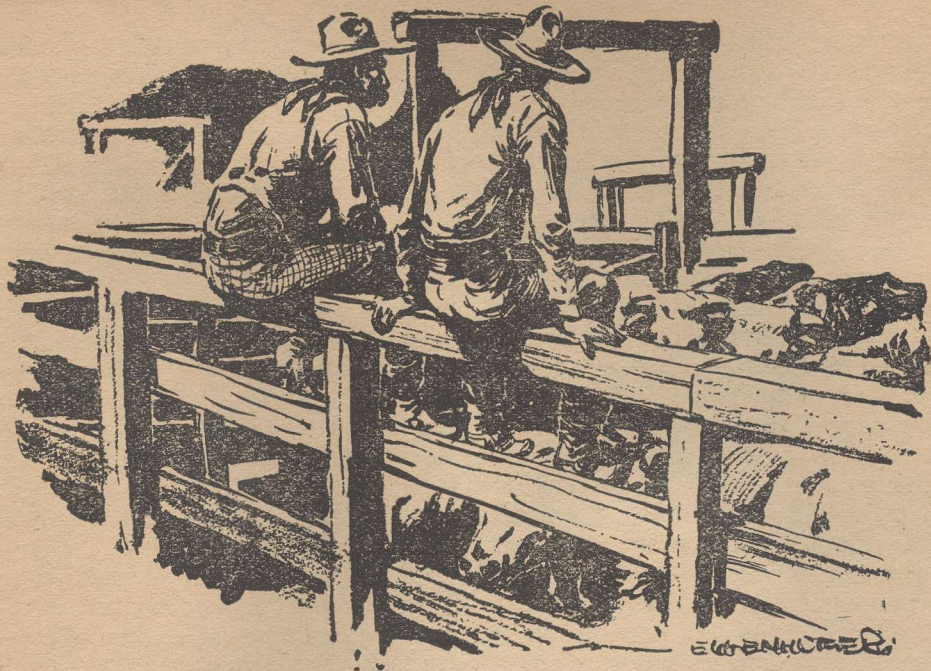
*Startling Stories  
of land, Sea  
and air!*

# TOP NOTCH

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# THE LAST TRAIL NORTH

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Author of "A Four-eyed Maverick," etc.

**T**HE evening before the Flying Pitchfork beef, a thousand strong, was to start north to summer range, old Jeb Sims worked late. The other cowhands had already gone wearily to the bunk house to snatch a few hours' sleep before trail work began at dawn. The ranch had grown still in the night. Jeb was puttering about the tack wagon, which was drawn up close to the bull pen, when young Pete Malone—sole owner of the Flying Pitchfork since the passing

of hard-bitten old "Mugs" Malone two years before—came slowly through the moonlight toward him.

Pete, too, was tired. His lean shoulders were slumped a little, his arms swung loosely. The silvery light made his boyish features seem more gaunt, his eyes black pools of shadow. Jeb straightened up with an effort as he approached, but Pete strode by without a word. He clambered up the stout palings of the bull pen and perched on the top-most rail. Jeb made his last loop in the rawhide—he was stretching a

"cuna" beneath the running gear of the wagon—dusted his hands, and mounted up beside Pete.

Together they sat in silence for a space, looking down at the bulls.

The seventeen monarchs of the Flying Pitchfork herd, looming in the shadows like placid, ruminating mountains, represented a dream of young Pete Malone's. He had often sat thus, studying them, his jaw cupped in his hands. That he was here now, instead of resting after the long day of preparation for the trail, was proof enough that they were uppermost in his mind. In buying them, he had "shot the works." This close to seventeen tons of superior beef—heavy-lidded, white-faced, massive—represented the best shorthorn strains of a continent. They also represented a chattel mortgage of twenty-two thousand dollars on the entire Flying Pitchfork herd.

**M**UGS MALONE would have turned over in his grave, Pete knew, if he could have seen such prodigal recklessness. Though Mugs himself had not been averse to even a long-shot gamble, he would have classed this as sheer, blind folly. To Banker Scroggins, on the contrary, it had not been an evidence of gambling instinct, but of vision. Enthusiastically—in his tight-lipped way—he had approved Pete's dream. He had been glad to provide the funds.

All of which was rather strange, considering that the land holdings of the Flying Pitchfork, as a legacy of lean past years, were already mortgaged to the limit. Jeb had pondered the layout with secret misgivings while Pete had been combing the continent for his blooded stock. He couldn't help but ponder it now. Why should

Banker Scroggins, who had gunned for Mugs Malone with the patience of a renegade Sioux down through the years, be thus willing to back Pete's play?

It didn't ring true, somehow. It wasn't in the cards. Particularly when Scroggins's son, Rufe, a chip off the old, twisted block, was gunning for Sally Rand, Pete's girl. They had been childhood sweethearts, Sally and Pete, a closed corporation. Lately, Rufe had tried to cut in. It was incredible that he should stand idly by and allow his father to pave his rival's path. It was contrary to human nature, to the laws of life and chance.

Of late, Jeb had worried over Pete's affairs but vaguely, at an increasing distance. His fears had apparently been groundless. Scroggins had actually put up the funds, secured by the chattel mortgage. The bulls were here. This fall, when the first of the blooded yearlings were put on the market, Pete would be in the clear. He would pay off the chattel. The land mortgages would be extended. He would marry Sally. He would be beyond Scroggins's reach, beyond all Rufe's schemes.

Pete was young, moreover. New prospects would stretch before him, new vistas beckon fair and far, should he fail here. He was just making the turn, with the race yet before him. He, Jeb, was coming into the home stretch. The problems of his own small world were crowding in upon him. When he faced them, he must face them alone. Time was when he would have turned to Mugs Malone, as Mugs had turned to him in stress or storm. They had grown up together, pioneered the range together, eaten bitter dust for thirty-eight years, side by side.

But Mugs was gone. His marker

reared among those of other old-timers on the ridge above Hebo. He, Jeb, would soon join him there, the dust and toil and futile swirl of things forgotten. Together—who knew?—they might ride forth along other and sunnier trails, side by side.

Pete, and his problems, meanwhile—like these aristocratic mountains of beef ruminating in the checkered shadows below them—were of another generation, another world.

**W**ELL, Jeb," said Pete, at length, "we start for the home ranch to-morrow. I'm letting you lead off with the bulls."

"O. K.," said Jeb.

So quiet it was, so motionless the air, that their barely audible tones seemed to raise up brittle echoes in the shadowed buildings. The saddle string, held in the feed lot in readiness for the morrow, had ceased their restless stamping. In the great sweep of adjoining pasture, along the creek, the cows and calves had all bedded down. From their high perch, the ranch and the slumbering range was outspread about them in the vivid moonlight, brooding and still.

"We'll follow a half day behind, as usual," Pete continued. "Take it easy the third afternoon out. I want the bulls to look good when we go through Hebo at sundown. We'll close up to within a quarter mile on that stretch."

Jeb turned his head to look at him. Clefts deepened on his seamed, bitter features as he grinned slowly.

"Got you, son. We'll put on a show for the benefit of the village. Blooded bulls in the lead. Good beef, a thousand strong, bringing up the rear. Mostly on Sally Rand's

account, eh? And Rufe Scroggins? It'll be an eyeful, at that."

Pete did not grin in return. Chin cupped in his hands, he continued to look down at the bulls.

"Rufe doesn't count, old-timer. Not that way. Sally's with me, win, lose or draw—I hope. It's Banker Scroggins I want to impress. And the Stockman's National, across the street."

"The Stockman's National?"

"The note's due this week," Pete explained. "Scroggins has promised to renew. But it's only verbal. If he changes his mind for any reason, I've persuaded the National to take it over. If the beef looks good. Particularly the bulls. Sabe?"

Jeb nodded.

"Take it easy the third day out, then." Pete stretched himself, yawning, and pushed back his sombrero with a weary gesture. "You know beef. You know bulls. Watch then like a hawk. Graze them at Stony Meadows. Let them rest three, four hours. We'll overhaul you there, and you can lead off through Hebo."

"O. K.," said Jeb.

Pete threw a leg over the rail, preparing to descend. He halted, as though reminded of a detail that had been submerged in the press of larger affairs. Momentarily, in the vivid moonlight, it might have been the quizzical, unwinking, unyielding eyes of Mugs Malone that peered forth upon Jeb.

"Old son," said he, "it'll be your last trail north with Flying Pitchfork beef."

Jeb's face was in the shadow, for which he was thankful. He sat motionless, his teeth clenched on his chew.

"Yeah?"

"Yes," said Pete. "I've been watching you, Jeb. You've been



failing fast, since dad went. You're the first in the saddle at sunup, and the last to check in at night. Just like to-night. But you haven't got the strength any more. The spirit's willing—too willing—but the flesh's weak. So——”

“Now wait, Pete.” Jeb strove for words to fight off a moment he had always known was inevitable. “You wait, son. Sure I'm getting along, but what of it? I'm spry as a cricket and tougher than rawhide. Leave me take my turn with the boys——”

“Nonsense,” said Pete. “And have you pass out in harness, like a good old plug driven to the limit?” He placed a hand on Jeb's shoulder. “No argument, old son. It's settled. I won't see you starve, of course. I'll take care of you. You helped make the Flying Pitchfork. You were riding for me before I was born! I'd have taken you off the pay roll before, except that I was hard-pressed. I'll have to hire another hand to take your place. I'm taking the chance now, with Scroggins renewing the note. It came to me to-day, when I saw you dashing around, that time was passing. You won't see many more winters. You're shaking right this minute, you old wolf! You'd go till you dropped, eh?”

“I ain't tired,” Jeb denied. “It's turned cold.”

“It'll be a scorcher to-morrow,” said Pete, turning away. “Best roll in, old son, and grab your forty winks. It won't be so bad on the trail. Those overstuffed grand standers won't need much wrangling. Five days more, Jeb! When you check in the bulls up yonder, your trail work's done.”

He descended stiffly and strode across the lot. His lean figure faded

beyond the bunk house. The jingling of his spurs died away.

JEB watched him go, turning his head owlshly, his body slumped and motionless. When Pete was gone, he shifted his position a little, spreading his knees. He lowered his head still more until his face rested on his clasped hands. Hunched thus, he sat, immobile, while the brooding ranch again grew still in the night.

He was alone, so it seemed; alone at the bull pen and in all the world. He spoke his thought aloud, after the manner of those who look back from far horizons, across the dust of weary years.

“So this is the end of it, eh?—Well—it won't be long, Mugs.”

A tiny sound roused him. Blinking over his shoulder, his first thought was that Pete had returned. Even when he recognized the other, he was not sure at first but that his failing eyes had played him a sorry trick. The last person he expected to see—on Flying Pitchfork ground and at this hour—was clambering swiftly and silently up the heavy palings.

Rufe Scroggins heaved up into the full moonlight, threw a leg over the top rail, and perched beside him. The whites of his eyes glistened in the shadow of his sombrero. A finger on his thin lips motioned silence.

Jeb looked about him at the silent buildings, and down at the bulls. He turned back to Rufe, his heavy-lidded eyes unwinking.

Rufe regarded him smilingly.

“Nice night, Jeb. A little cold, maybe.”

“What you want?” Jeb demanded. “What you doing here?”

“It's all right,” said Rufe. “Pete's

gone. He won't be back. The hands are all asleep. We can talk."

Jeb continued to study him, his stolid features a mask. The sheer effrontery of this self-assured youth was staggering. Yet the Scroggins, man and boy, were known to be the type of gamblers who never placed a bet unless the winnings were sure.

"Smooth down your hackles," said Rufe calmly. "Unfold your ears. I've got trading talk to make. Raise an alarm, and what happens?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm here representing the Scroggins State Bank. Of Hebo. Just dropped in to look over the beef. Anything wrong with that?"

"Not a thing," Jeb agreed. "So I'll just give Pete a yell. He'll tell you all about the beef."

"Now wait, you cross-grained old lobo. I'm here to talk to *you*. I've got a deal to put up to you. You can take it or leave it. If you take it, there's plenty in it for you. Just when you need it the most. And nobody the wiser. If you don't take it—and if you've got half the mentality I think you have, you'll never turn it down—it's O. K., too. I'll make other arrangements. There's more than one way to skin a cat. But get this, Jeb. If you don't play ball with me, you're agreeing to keep what I say under your hat. Understand?"

Jeb shook his head. "You're up to some skullduggery. I've got to tell Pete."

"You'll tell him nothing."

"No?"

"It'll be your word against mine. You're a broken-down old goat, with one foot in the grave. Senile decay and rickets have sneaked up on you. The old concrete's cracked wide open. I laugh it off. Tut, tut—and all that sort of thing."

"Pete would believe me."

"Would he?" Rufe grinned slowly. "If you forced me to it, I could put up a good story myself. Sure there's skullduggery afoot. You sent word up to Hebo that you wanted to see me to-night. You had figured out a sweet li'l scheme to cut Pete's throat. You stayed up, after all the others had rolled in. Even Pete. You waited here for me, at the bull pen. We've been talking for five minutes already, thick as thieves." He spread his hands. "Looks bad, what?"

"You're a yellow-bellied snake, Rufe. You know danged well——"

"Sure, sure," Rufe soothed. "It won't come to that. I'm just suggesting, in case you don't feel like tucking a thousand nice, shiny simoleons into the ol' sock against a rainy day—and they're tromping close on your heels, Jeb—that it'll be smart to figure you never saw me to-night. You don't know anything and proud of it."

Jeb shifted his position uneasily.

"A thousand, eh?"

"Cash money." Rufe nodded. "Iron men. Coin of the realm. Just like finding it."

"I don't like it," Jeb muttered. "I hadn't ought to even listen to you, Rufe. But talk fast." He peered about him. Though his leathery cheek was already bulging, he tore off another chew. "It's about the bulls?"

**R**UFE drew forth the makings and rolled a cigarette. He lighted it, moving closer to Jeb to shield the flare. He tossed the burned match into the pen and remained close, lowering his voice.

"Yeah, it's about the bulls. Dad overreached himself on this deal. He figured Pete would never make the grade. Where would he find markets for blooded yearlings on

this man's range? At the tariff he'd have to charge? But Pete—blast him—has rustled around and got the young stuff sold in advance. He's made a good enough showing that the Stockman's National is ready to back him if we don't. But with the bulls gone, his blue chips are gone. His hand's played out. Like Pete said a while ago, the Flying Pitchfork's sunk."

"Hh-h-h," said Jeb. "You heard us talking?"

"Sure I heard you. I was hiding around the corner yonder, waiting for Pete to go. I heard every word you said. It made the tie more binding. Pete's going to take you off the pay roll, eh? Turn you loose on the range with the rest of the broken-down plugs?" His cigarette glowed. "There's gratitude for you! A fine, noble, open-handed play."

"Now that ain't right, Rufe," Jeb objected. "Give Pete his due. He don't aim to see me starve. You heard him say he'd look out for me."

"Bah!" said Rufe pitingly. "Use your bean, you old fox. Get wise to yourself. Don't you know yet that there's a new deal at the Flying Pitchfork? What's it to Pete if you spent forty years working for him and his sainted dad, Mugs Malone? What's it to him if you worked yourself bow-legged for Mugs? Mugs let you, of course. Why not? You were making hay for the Flying Pitchfork——"

"Just a second, Rufe." Momentarily, something that was neither old nor helpless peered forth from Jeb's bleached eyes. "Go the limit with Pete, if you've a mind to. He can take care of himself. Leave Mugs out of it. You haven't got the equipment to discuss him. You won't even savvy what I mean when I say that he was a friend of mine. The only one. He was the kind of

gent to whom you could turn when all else failed. He's gone now." He slumped again, his momentary fierceness fading. "What's your point?"

"The point is," said Rufe, "your usefulness to Pete is done. The minute the bulls are delivered to the home ranch, he's in the clear. He fires you off the pay roll, thereby saving forty bucks a month. Sure he'll look out for you!" He snorted. "He'll give you a hand-out every time he sees you around town. If he doesn't pass you on the other side of the street. Certainly. Happy to oblige, old son; but how in blazes do you happen to be living this long?"

Jeb huddled lower.

"Sho, Rufe! He aims to do better by me than that. Somehow or another, I got the idea——"

"Listen," said Rufe. "For once in your life get your feet on the ground. Face facts. Read the cards as they fall. Look at the record. You and Mugs rode into this range forty-odd years ago, looking for free land. Mugs was, that is. You were just trailing along. You were riding good horses, the pair of you. You weren't old then. The world was at your feet in those days, the blue sky the limit. Here was the Promised Land. Something like that, eh?"

"I was twenty-four," Jeb said, nodding. "Mugs was twenty-six. The grass was belly-deep."

"Mugs took a claim up north, where the present home ranch is. You filed on a claim somewhere this side of Hebo. The record doesn't show where, because you didn't prove up on it. Why didn't you?"

"The ground wasn't so good," Jeb muttered. "I got lonely."

"The truth of it is," said Rufe, "that you didn't care whether school

kept or not. You were living from day to day—and there was plenty of days. You weren't happy unless you were trailing with Mugs. So you just rode off yore homestead, one fine morning, and unrolled your blankets at the Fying Pitchfork. That was jake with Mugs. He was hard-pressed, at first. Cash was scarce. Good hands were hard to find."

"Hands he could trust," said Jeb. "Don't forget that."

"Sure," agreed Rufe. "So he took you in. He stood for your drinking and carousing. He paid your gambling bills and your fines. Whenever you were jittery and shaking and cold, you came creeping back to Mugs. He was glad to see you. Why not? When you were sobered up, you threw a wider loop than any other rider in these parts. You knew beef. You'd have died for Mugs. You were ready to back his every play, sight unseen. So there was always beans and a bunk waiting. And a place on the pay roll."

"He was a good man, was Mugs Malone," said Jeb. He looked out across the brooding range, at far horizons. "A danged good man."

"And he's gone now," said Rufe. "Dead and buried. You've outlived him, Jeb. You're still stumbling along. Who you going to turn to now, when you're hungry and cold?"

"I'll see him again," said Jeb. He cleared his throat. "You bet I will. I've thought of it more than once. I don't know about the hereafter and them things, Rufe. They're too deep for me. But I know I'm going to see Mugs again."

"Phooey!" said Rufe.

"He's out yonder somewheres, waiting for me," said Jeb. "Looking back, his leg looped over the horn. We'll ride along like we used to.

Laughing like that. Over those sunshiny hills. Where nobody's hungry nor lonely no more, and the cold wind never blows."

"Horse collar!" said Rufe.

"We will, too," Jeb insisted. "No use to argue with me, Rufe. I *know* it. It won't be long. Every time I pass the cemetery up above Hebo, where they buried him, I always wave my hand—like that. 'Well, Mugs,' I say, 'I'll be seeing you.' Just now——"

"All right, all right," said Rufe tolerantly. "Let it pass. The point is, Mugs is out of the picture. Whatever he owed you, or you owed him, is buried with him. The chapter's closed. Pete's a new deal—and he's dealing you out. He's making it plain that he doesn't owe you anything. You surely don't owe him anything. It that correct?"

"Maybe so," Jeb muttered. He hung his head. "It looks like it."

"This range is thick with foot-loose waddies," said Rufe. "They're young and strong. They've crowded you out. Like Pete. You'll spend the summer looking for a spread. You won't find it. You thought of that when Pete told you that you're off the pay roll, didn't you? You sat here, after Pete was gone, talking to yourself."

"It struck me all of a heap," Jeb admitted. "I didn't dream I was that close to the finish."

"The winter's longer," said Rufe. "Boy, the way the wind'll scream! Being hungry and thirsty is bad. Cold's worse. You've seen those crippled old stiffs hanging around the livery-stable heater in winter-time. Where do they come from? Who are their folks? You'll be amongst them, Jeb. Who gives a whoop where you eat and sleep, or how you warm your bones when

the snow's driving deep? Not Pete. Remember, Mugs is gone."

"Don't, Rufe," said Jeb. "It used to be, I was scairt of nothing. Me and Mugs. We backed each other's play." He shivered a little, clasping and unclasping his hands. "What do you want of me? What's this deal?"

Rufe's cigarette had gone out. He rolled another, lighted it, and inhaled the smoke deep.

"It's a natural, Jeb," said he. "All you have to do is obey orders. And the thousand's yours. Listen close." He lowered his voice. "Pete told you to graze the bulls at Stony Meadows, eh? Just this side of Hebo? Fine. You do that. Only thing is, be sure to have them graze along the creek. I'll have the wild parsnips out on the bank, where the bulls can get at 'em."

Jeb stared at him, as though doubting the evidence of his ears.

"Wild parsnips? At Stony Meadows?"

"The rankest poison on the Western rangs," Rufe went on, in huge enjoyment of the other's astonishment. "Oh, I know the State veterinarian's supposed to have all the wild parsnips marked and posted. There isn't any this side of Sprague River. That's what *he* thinks. But I saw 'em there. Right along the creek. Under the bank."

"Why——" Jeb was overcome. "That used to be a regular night camp when we moved the herd! I've grazed 'em there forty times."

"So has Pete." Rufe chuckled silently, slapping his thigh. "Which makes it shock-proof. Beginning to get the picture, you old fox?"

"Lawsy!" Jeb breathed. "He told me to graze the bulls there. He told me to let 'em rest three, four hours——"

"And at the end of three hours

they'll be toes up," Rufe said. "All the veterinarians between here and the Jordan couldn't save 'em. Who's to blame? Nobody. It's just one of those things. And for obeying orders, and nothing else, old Jeb Sims tucks away one thousand nice, shiny shekels. He won't starve now. He'll be safe and warm in winter. No horse blanket for him, in the livery-stable loft; and folks passing by on the other side of the street. To blazes with 'em all! Perfect, what?"

**J**EB looked at him unwinking for a space, then down at the bulls. They were quiet in the shadow. Huge and massive they loomed—heavy-lidded, unconcerned—unaware of inscrutable and interlocking designs that weave forever through the destinies of beef and men.

"Pete's through with you, eh? Forgotten what Mugs owes you? O. K., old son."

"I can't do it, Rufe." Jeb seemed to shrink in stature. "You know that."

"You can," said Rufe. "You've got to. Think. Face facts."

And suddenly Jeb began to tremble. He lowered his head to his clasped arms, shutting both Rufe and the bulls from sight.

"Go away," said he, in a muffled voice. "Go away from me, Rufe. While I—I figure this."

Rufe Scroggins, who was proud of his knowledge of both beef and men, lowered himself silently to the ground. He stood beyond the corner of the barn, in the shadow, his cigarette glowing in his cupped hand.

Jeb joined him there. He walked shamblingly, his face bleak and grim. It was as though a personality risen up from bygone years peered again upon Rufe.

"I'm calling you, Rufe. Wipe that grin off your face. The ante's raised."

"What d'ye mean?"

"I let the bulls graze at Stony Meadows. You have the wild parsnips out on the bank. I let the bulls eat 'em. It that it?"

"That's it."

"Pete's the son of Mugs Malone," said Jeb. "I can never show my face at the Flying Pitchfork again nor cross Pete's trail. It costs money to travel. Three thousand, and it's a deal."

"Three thousand! Why, you sanctimonious old cutthroat——"

"Cash money," said Jeb, between his teeth. "No certified check. Iron men. Paid at Stony Meadows. Put up or shut up, Rufe. You've argued me into this. I'm weakening fast."

Rufe hesitated, being the son of Banker Scroggins. Knowing men, he did not hesitate long.

"It's a deal."

**W**ITH the Duke of Wellington in the lead, Alexander the Great on the right flank, and King Tut II on the left, the seventeen bulls plodded slowly around the bend in the narrowing canyon. They crowded each other without resentment on the sage-lined highway. Their massive horns clicked without malice. Petty jealousies and ancient feuds—three days out from the home ranch and two yet to go—were already forgotten. It was hot, and their tongues hung out.

Jeb saw, peering ahead through the tawny dust, that Rufe was waiting beneath a juniper beside the flat. The thin spiral from his cigarette whipped away in the sweltering wind of mid-afternoon. His splendid trappings—Rufe was "duded up" as

for some special occasion—gleamed in the shadow. As the bulls turned aside into the flat, heading for the lush grass bordering the creek, he spurred forward, grinning and intent.

Jeb cursed him with bitter emphasis.

"I've aged fast in three days, Rufe. At each night camp, Pete came ahead to see the bulls. I couldn't look him in the face. Me and Mugs rode out more than one storm together! Let's see the color of your money."

"Look it over," returned Rufe, with relief. He riffled the corners of a sheaf of new currency that bulged his breast pocket. "Thirty hundreds. Swing 'em farther to the right, Jeb. Let 'em work up the creek."

Jeb spurred ahead to look at the parsnips. They lay on the bank, the damp black earth still clinging to their twisted roots. The tops of wild parsnips, both knew, were harmless. The tubers, buried deep in the bog and therefore seldom found by grazing cattle, comprised the most virulent poison pest of the Western range. No cattle eating them, and chewing the cud, could hope to survive.

Spread out here, in tempting array, they comprised a banquet of the gods. The monarchs made the most of it. Jeb wrung his hands as the Count of Strathmore's great tongue encircled an uprooted parsnip and tucked it away. Others of the peerage followed suit, spreading out along the bank, lumbering ahead in line, one by one.

Rufe presently cast an exultant, significant glance at Jeb. In silence both withdrew to the shade of the junipers on higher ground. Rufe tossed the sheaf of currency to Jeb,

who counted it silently and thrust it in his hip pocket.

"I'll stick around," said Rufe. "They're sunk now. When they lie down and start chewing the cud, it's final."

The sun sank lower in the west. One by one the bulls sought out shade on the slope. With vast and explosive sighs they relaxed to rest and ruminant. They chewed the cud in unison—mountainous, bulging, heavy-lidded.

"That's that," said Rufe. "They'll never get up again. Adios, Flying Pitchfork!"

Jeb made no reply. His leg looped over the saddle horn, chin resting in his hands, his haggard eyes were turned toward the broadening valley to the south. Far away, a dust pillar, looming motionless against the brazen sky marked the coming of the main herd.

**A**T sundown the streets of Hebo were cleared for the Flying Pitchfork beef. Trail herds without number, down through the years had passed through the canyon village. Those bearing the Flying Pitchfork brand were known to be the cream of the range. Many loiterers stood in doorways, their faces turned toward the pillar of dust approaching from the south. Horsemen had reined up at intersections, to help haze the cattle through.

Among these latter was Sally Rand. It appeared that she had ridden in casually, by merest chance, at this particular hour. Rufe, watching from across the street, knew better. Pete's horse stood near her, reins trailing. Sally was dressed her best. She, too, faced toward the south, lips parted.

Banker Scroggins was at the curb, at Rufe's stirrup, a cigar projecting

from one corner of his thin-lipped mouth. From the other he spoke guardedly:

"You sure about this business, Rufe? You *saw* them eat the parsnips, eh? Then why hasn't one of Pete's hands come smoking with the news, long since? Why hasn't Pete been over here, crying his eyes out, instead of hobnobbing with that blasted National outfit ever since he came in? If there's been any slip-up here, my boy, I'll make you sweat."

"Don't worry," Rufe soothed. "It's in the bag. They're running their bluff to the end. Pete's goose is cooked."

"It better be," returned his father. "Jeb traded you out of your eye-teeth. D'ye think three thousand dollars grows on bushes? On the other hand"—he chewed his cigar savagely—"it's cheap at the price. I'll take the Flying Pitchfork. You use your blasted talents getting a rope on Sally. And that'll be the end of the Malones in this man's country. It's been a long trail, Rufe!"

"Here they are!" Many voices passed the warning along the street. "They're coming!"

Because the wind was from the south, up the canyon, dust obscured the herd. The long rumble of hoofs was on the air, growing louder, swelling in volume. Cows muttered anxiously. Calves bawled through the tawny gloom. The shouts of riders came from swing and drag, closing the files. Square-fronted buildings, near and far along Main Street, threw back the myriad echo.

Then, the dust thinning as the watered surface of the street was achieved, a small detachment took form. They were small only in numbers, closely grouped. Seventeen in all. Huge, ponderous ani-

mals, moving forward shoulder to shoulder.

"The bulls in the lead," came an old-timer's voice. "Man—there's beef!"

"Bulls?" said Banker Scroggins. He cast an intent, ferocious glance upon Rufe. "Did he say—*bulls?*"

"It can't be," returned Rufe.

**B**OOTH moved forward to peer past the marble columns. The banker's teeth clenched on his cigar. Rufe, stared, open-mouthed.

The bulls were coming. The Duke of Wellington was on the right flank, King Tut on the left. The Sultan of Sulu, having come up from the rear, led by a nose. White-faced, lethargic, deceptively placid of bearing, the close to seventeen tons of royal beef moved slowly, their great horns clicking.

Jeb rode behind, lounging in his battle-scarred saddle. If there was exultance in his heart—the knowledge that comes to an old trooper that his great moment is here and he is living it to the fullest—he gave no sign of it. The pockets of his ragged jumper bulged with rocks of the approximate size of walnuts. One of these, with an expert and apathetic flirt of the wrist, he bounced off the Sultan's rotund back.

"Shake a laig, funny face," said he. "Release the anchor, you over-stuffed grand stander!"

"Now there you are, Rufe!" said the banker, with bitter relish.

"I don't understand." Rufe passed a shaking hand over his eyes. "I saw them, I tell you. I waited right there——"

"Bah!" said the banker. "Three thousand dollars, you nitwit!—I might have known you didn't have

the caliber to deal with a wolf like Jeb."

Jeb, drawing opposite, proved that flesh was frail. He turned to look at them, pushing back his sombrero. With a glance at the bulls, he swerved aside. His faded eyes glittered frostily. His leathery cheek bulged with an enormous chew.

"Lo, Scroggins," said he. "Hi, Rufe. These bulgin' macaroons look good?"

Rufe made no reply. The banker, of sterner mold, nodded.

"They look fine, Jeb," said he, chewing on his cigar.

"They ought to," returned Jeb. "I watered and grazed 'em at Stony Meadows. Did you know I homesteaded that quarter, Rufe? Before you was born and while your dad was still a bank clerk over in Necada. I turned it back to the government when I went to work for Mugs Malone. It's good soil, though, such as there is of it. Danged if the parsnips I planted there forty years ago ain't spread clean along the creek!"

Rufe stared at him, open-mouthed. The banker nodded.

"Now there you are, Rufe. What an amusement tax you turned out to be!"

"It's all right, Rufe." Jeb glanced at the bulls and tightened the reins. "It would have fooled better men than you. Not one in a hundred could have told the difference, after forty years. Like you said, it made it a natural. The whole deal was a natural. Even persuading you that I was ready to cut Pete's throat—and him the son of Mugs Malone!" He grinned. "There was a poker player. Ol' Mugs, I mean. You could have taken a lesson from him, Rufe."

"Jeb!" Pete's voice came with mock sternness across the mounting



uproar. Having emerged from the Stockman's National, he had mounted to the saddle beside Sally. He waved his hand toward the north. "The beef's coming. Prod the bulls."

"O. K.," said Jeb. "Pete's switching the note over to your friends across the street, Scroggins. The bulls looked good. He's paying off a part of the said note, also. Who'd have thought a toothless an' broken-down lobo like me would have three thousand smackers tucked away in the ol' sock?"

"Jeb!" Pete's voice was peremptory.

Jeb reined away, poised for flight.

"You know what Pete meant, Rufe, when he said he was taking me off the pay roll? I'm to live in the shack I helped Mugs build, up on the home ranch. I'm to have Mugs's old bunk and his blankets. I'm to work when I please and loaf when I please, an' take orders from nobody. I'm to take my ease as long as I aim to live, an' the tariff's paid. It was in Mugs's will. Pete

would have done it before, except he was hard-pressed. Tough, ain't it?"

Rufe said nothing. Banker Scroggins said nothing. Jeb spurred away.

The bulls, being trail-weary, had plodded on in compact formation, turning neither to right nor left. Jeb overhauled them and fell in at their heels. Behind him, a roar of approval—coming from spectators who knew good beef—rose and swelled above the long roll of hoofs. The main herd of the Flying Pitchfork, a thousand strong, was coming through.

Jeb did not look back. The last houses of the village were left behind. Far up on the ridge, against the splendor of sundown, many crosses were agleam. There was no weariness in Jeb's pose as he looked toward the heights; no imprint of bitter trails. About him, rather, was the air of one who rides with understanding and congenial company, into smiling hills.

"Well, Mugs," said he, hand up-flung, "I'll be seeing you."

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## AGAIN THE DEADLY FEMALE

**I**T'S the women who cause the trouble, even among mosquitoes. Papa mosquito of the Anopheles family has nothing more alarming than a threatening buzz, according to Doctor C. P. Coogle, who is at Houston, Texas, conducting the government's war on malaria control. Papa is a vegetarian and has nothing with which to bite you.

But when mama comes flitting around, she means business and you'd better duck, Doctor Coogle warned. She has all the equipment necessary to give you a nice case of chills and fever.

And the women of the species have more time to make trouble. They live several months, while the male members of the family die of old age in three days.

It was Doctor Coogle who recently discovered chiggers biting on mosquitoes, giving them fits. If there is anything biting the chiggers, he doesn't know.

"We haven't come to that yet," he said.



# ROCKER CREEK FUGITIVE

By JOSEPH F. HOOK

Author of "Ending At Scratch," etc.

**S**PEEDY" KEYES was mighty proud of the new washbasin bench he was making, and he had good cause to be. In the first place, he never dreamed it was in him to do so neat a job with hammer and saw; and, in the second place, he had packed those few boards clear from the trading post at Chinook to his claims on Rocker Creek, a matter of thirty-odd miles.

"Dog-gone it!" he exclaimed pleasantly, stepping backward and admiring his handiwork, although the bench was not quite complete as

yet. "I wish Miles wasn't so busy and could hop over and take a look at it. Darned if I ain't got half a mind to holler to him."

Speedy stood there in indecision, glancing repeatedly from the bench to the crest of a near-by hogback, on the other side of which were Miles Foster's cabin and placer claims. But finally he changed his mind and went back to work.

"Guess I'll wait till the bench is finished," he decided. "It'll look better then."

However, although he did not know it, Speedy Keyes had an audi-

ence. It consisted of one man, who was peering out from behind the trunk of a spruce at the edge of the clearing, watching the progress of the work with interest.

When Speedy's hammer once more awakened the echoes, the watcher stepped out quietly from behind the spruce and slowly approached the cabin. Speedy, whose back was toward him, remained unaware of his presence until a twig snapped under his boot.

When he spun around, a look of fear leaped into his eyes for a brief moment, but vanished when the newcomer thrust out a hand.

"Well, well, well!" Speedy exclaimed. "If it ain't Shack Shackleford hisself! What in the world are you doin' 'way up here in the mountains, Shack?"

**T**HE newcomer was a big man, with shoe-button eyes, and a face that was pale and drawn, denoting a life that had been spent in places where the sun rarely shone. He was wearing high-topped boots, a heavy mackinaw, and a peaked cap.

"Hullo, Speedy!" sang out "Shack," shaking the other's hand vigorously. "So this is where you hang out, huh? I heard that you and Miles Foster was placer minin' up here, and that you'd both done purty well. Thought I'd take a look."

"Yeah, I guess you heard right," Speedy acknowledged modestly. "Of course, we ain't struck it rich, nor nothin' like that, but we're washin' out more'n wages every day."

"And Miles Foster—where's he hang out, Speedy?"

"Just tother side of that hogback, there," Speedy said, pointing to it. "His claims and mine join on the

top of it. I'll holler to him, and he'll come a-runnin'. A feller's voice carries a long ways in these here mountains."

"No, don't do that!" Shack hurriedly protested. "You'll spoil my fun, Speedy. I've planned to s'prise him, see? I'll visit with you for a while, and then I'll sneak over there and shock Miles out of about ten years' growth."

"That'll be O. K., by me." Speedy grinned. "He'll shore be both surprised and tickled to see you, Shack, 'cause few folks ever drift up this way. I guess me and Miles is the only placer miners for miles around."

"Well, Speedy," Shack observed, glancing around at the cabin and the claims, "how'd you like to be back poundin' a key?"

"Hey, lay off that stuff," Speedy smiled. "You would remind a feller of the time he was a wage slave! No, this beats poundin' a key. Tell you what, Shack, I was a durned fool for not goin' out prospectin' long before I did. Look at the work and misery I'd 'a' saved myself!"

"Yeah, and look at all the gold you'd 'a' got!" Shack nodded in agreement. "Oh, well, what's the use of wishin' that? You've done purty well, as it is, and you're still young."

They fell silent for a few moments. There was a question trembling on Speedy's lips that he wanted to ask, but wasn't quite sure just how the other would take it. However, Shack relieved his fears by broaching the subject himself.

"I got outta stir 'bout a month ago," he remarked.

"How long a time does that make you served, Shack?"

The other man's eyes blazed for just a moment, and then the light

went out of them, leaving them glassy, cold, expressionless.

"Ten years," he replied quietly. "I got life, you remember."

"Ten years!" Speedy repeated in an awed whisper. "Gosh, Shack, it don't seem that long since——"

"Mebbe not to you," the other interrupted grimly. "But to me it was—well, they might just as well have made me put in the full hitch."

"How're you fixed, Shack?" Speedy inquired, willing to change to a more pleasant subject.

"That's just what I come up here to talk to you about. You two fellers is the only ones left that I can turn to. I ain't got a thin dime, Speedy, on the level. Could you lemme have some dust till I git on my feet ag'in? I'll pay you back."

Speedy picked up the hammer and drove a nail thoughtfully into the new washbasin bench.

"Tell you what, Shack," he finally replied, straightening up. "I'll see what I can do presently. I want you to stick around here for a few days and visit with me and Miles."

**H**E drove a few more nails into the bench while he waited for Shack's reaction to the invitation. But the man remained silent, also.

"I'm kinda glad, Shack," Speedy went on, a trifle hurriedly, "that you ain't holdin' nothin' ag'in—that you—er—that you've decided to let bygones be bygones. I mean, you ain't got it in for me and Miles 'cause of what we——"

"Oh, that?" Shack said, laughing shortly. "Why, no, I ain't holdin' nothin' ag'in' you two boys. I just had a lesson comin' to me, and I shore got it. No, that's all O. K., Speedy. But I ain't hankerin' none to lay around here. I gotta hustle

back and land me a job. Could you lemme have about, say, fifty bucks in gold dust, pal?"

The placer miner laid down the hammer and pulled out his wallet. He took out some bills and began counting them.

"Let's see what we got here. There's two twenties and two fives. That makes fifty bucks, and it's every last cent of ready money I got. Here, take 'em and welcome, Shack."

The blue-steel barrel of a six-gun brushed the proffered hand and the bills aside, and when Speedy glanced up quickly at the bigger man's eyes, he saw there, as though reflected in a mirror, bitter hatred and burning cruelty. The bills fluttered from his limp fingers, and he sat down heavily on the new washbasin bench.

"Why—why, Shack!" he cried in amazement. "I don't savvy——"

"Aw, can the chin music!" Shack snarled. "I've listened to too much of that already. I don't want them bills—now. I want yore dust and nuggets—all of it. When I put up that stall about the fifty bucks, I figgered you'd go after yore poke, and then I'd know where you kep' it cached."

"But, Shack——" Speedy tried again.

"Now, git an earful of this, feller, and git it good and straight," Shack cut in. "You must be purty brainless to imagine I'd trudge thirty miles, clear away from somewhere to nowheres, jest to borrow fifty bucks, or to visit you and Miles Foster. D'yer know just why I come here?"

"N-no, Shack," Speedy stammered.

"Well, I come up here to kill the two of you and to swipe yore gold, you dirty rats! I've waited ten years for this chance to git even with

you two. I told you they let me outta stir. Well, they didn't no such thing. I lammed."

"Me and Miles only told the truth!" Speedy cried.

"Yeah, and that's what got me a life sentence," Shack growled. "You told the prosecutin' attorney I was drunk when you handed me the orders at Taplow, and that I cussed you and threw 'em into the injine fire box. And Miles Foster, the low-down skunk, backed you up, 'cause he was afraid of losin' his job as station agent."

"But what else could we 'a' said, Shack?" Speedy argued, stalling for time and racking his brains to find a way out of his dilemma. "You was drunk, and you did burn them orders, without even lettin' your fireman read 'em. And then you run past the Half Moon sidin', where you should 'a' got in the clear, and rammed into the Limited, killin' the——"

"Stop it, you fool!" Shack shouted. "D'yer think I wanna be reminded of—well, what happened? You didn't need to have told that I was pie-eyed, or said what I did with them runnin' orders."

"You mean—you mean that I should 'a' lied, Shack? You figger I'd oughter've took the blame?"

"Aw, what's the use talkin' to a fool like you?" Shack cried angrily. "Anyway, it's too late now for me to tell you what you'd oughter've done and said. But I am goin' to tell you what I'm goin' to do to the two of you. I'm goin' to kill you, as I said, and then I'm goin' to camp right here, where nobody never comes. That's the sorta place I been huntin' for a month. And when snow flies, I'll be all hunky-dory for the winter. By spring the law will have got tired huntin' me, and by that time I'll be on the lam for some

other place, with yore gold to spend. What d'yer think about that, you rat?"

**S**PEEDY was thinking a good deal about it, but he was too frightened at the prospect of a sudden death to make any adequate reply. However, in order to appear nonchalant and to do some further stalling for time, he picked up his hammer and tried to drive another nail into the new bench. Because of his nervousness, he missed the head repeatedly, and Shack Shackelford guffawed loudly.

"Oh, ain't you the brave boy, now!" he jeered. "Lemme see you drive another nail. It's better'n a picnic!"

Speedy was glad of the respite, and did a lot better with the next nail.

"Say, what's that thing you're makin', anyway?" Shack demanded, suddenly curious.

"That? Why, that's a washbasin bench," Speedy explained in a faint voice. "I—I got it pretty near done."

"Fine and dandy! I can use that bench this winter. Stick in a few more nails, feller, and finish it, 'cause I never was any good with a saw and hammer. Besides, I'm goin' to be one busy man purty soon. I gotta kill you, then sneak up on that other rat, acrost the hogback, kill him, too, and then bury both of you."

Speedy almost dropped the hammer at that announcement. But when he drove home the final nail, Shack motioned toward the cabin door with his gun.

"Git inside there," he ordered, "and haul yore gold outta where you've got it caught. And don't try no more stallin', like you did with them nails, or I'll carve pieces

offn yore hide with my knife. Hustle up! Where's that gold, you runt?"

Speedy made a great pretense of looking everywhere for it until Shack jabbed him viciously in the ribs with the gun.

"Yeah, I thought that'd produce results!" Shack sneered, as the miner dived under the bunk and soon reappeared with two well-stuffed leather pokes, which he laid on the table.

The gunman's eyes lighted with greed when he saw them, and he seemed to derive a lot of satisfaction from running his fingers up and down their bulging, smooth sides.

"How much in them two pokes?" he demanded harshly. "I'm an injineer, not a miner."

"Three thou—three thousand—about," Speedy replied, prying his tongue loose from the roof of his mouth that had gone suddenly dry. "A s-season's—a whole s-season's clean-up," he added wistfully and hesitatingly.

"And I guess Miles Foster's got as much, or mebbe more, huh? Come on, you rat, and spit out an answer. Has he?"

"I—I guess—mebbe," poor Speedy managed to mutter.

Shack raised the muzzle of the gun slowly until it was in a direct line with the middle of the miner's fear-laden eyes.

"If you ever went to church and learned to pray," he said, "now's yore chance. When you say 'Amen' aloud, I'll let you have it between the eyes. And don't you try no more stallin', or I'll shoot afore you've got 'em all said."

To save his life, Speedy was so afraid that he could neither think of a prayer or utter a word. Instead, he just stood there, with both hands resting on the table to support his

trembling knees, staring with eyes that pleaded for mercy.

But, presently, he did manage to wrench his gaze from the horrible fascination of that menacing gun muzzle, and let it pass over the other man's head to the open door. He saw the sun shining through the interlaced evergreen fronds, making intricate patterns of gold on the ground beneath. The sky above was as blue as the sea, giving no hint of the snowstorms that would soon be howling down out of the north to change that paradise of green and gold into a wilderness of white.

IT did seem good to Speedy to be alive, with all that beauty before him, as well as the promise of a golden future, and it didn't seem at all real to him, at all possible, that death could be so close. But Shack's impatient order brought him back to the actual reality of things.

"When in hell are you goin' to say 'Amen'? Are you sayin' yore prayers or recitin' 'Pilgrim's Progress' to yorself? Stop yore blasted stallin'!"

"Yessir—I mean nossir, Shack!" Speedy cried in a hoarse whisper. "I'm pretty near to the 'Amen.'"

A shadow fell across the threshold, but Shack did not appear to have noticed it. Speedy had, however, and again raised his eyes above the other's head.

The next moment, he saw a sight that gladdened his thumping heart, and it was with the greatest difficulty he managed to choke back the cry that welled to his trembling lips.

Miles Foster was silently crossing the threshold, creeping up behind Shack Shackelford. He was holding one of those old Colts, a relic of thirty years ago, and he was gripping it hard.

Step by step he crept up, while Speedy found his voice and prayed as he had never prayed before, doing his utmost to keep the gunman's attention riveted upon himself while he watched Miles's catlike approach with eyes that stood out from his head.

And when Miles was directly behind Shack, up went his hand that held the heavy, long-barreled gun until it hung poised over the man's skull. Just then Shack noticed the movement and direction of his victim's eyes, as also the eager, anxious light in them.

"Oh, no, you don't!" He laughed sneeringly. "I ain't goin' to fall for a gag that's got whiskers on it. You can't make me look around, while you lay one on my jaw. No, sir. I'm goin' to count three, and if you ain't said 'Amen' by then, I'll blow the top of yore head off. One! Two——"

"Amen!" Miles Foster yelled out, and brought the barrel of the heavy and ancient Colt down on Shack's skull with all his might.

Shack went down without a groan. Speedy reeled back against the cabin wall and did likewise. Only, he came down on the old washbasin bench and mashed it flat. Miles picked up a bucket of water and sloshed it in his face.

"Snap out of it, Speedy!" he

shouted. "Don't go and pull a faint on me, now! We gotta tie this wal-loper up!"

"I ain't fainted yet, Miles," Speedy sputtered, dashing the water out of his eyes, "but that don't mean to say I ain't goin' to. Gosh, I thought you'd never show up!"

"Well," Miles said, kicking the gun out of the felled man's limp hand, "I didn't pay much attention at first to what you was hammerin' about, seein' as how you've been workin' on that new bench so cussed long. But when you let up for a spell and then started in ag'in, I sorta pricked up my ears and ketched yore message. But you'd better practice up a bit, feller, 'cause you're rusty and yore sendin' is shore terrible."

"Miles," Speedy said, getting to his feet somewhat shakily, "you've often heard me say I was sorry I didn't start out in life as a prospector 'stead of a telegraphist, since we struck it so lucky here on these claims. Well, I'm takin' all that back, right now."

"You ain't got nothin' on me, at that." Miles Foster grinned broadly. "You've heard me make the same crack about startin' out as a station agent and the time I lost. Well, I'm takin' that back, too, and I'm tellin' you I'm glad I learned what that little key in the office was chatterin' about all the time."

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## TOW RAFT THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES

ONE of the largest log rafts in the lumber history of Tacoma, Washington, was towed to Tacoma from Oregon, three hundred and fifty miles north. The raft contained four hundred and fifty thousand board feet of lumber, contained in one hundred and fifty huge spruce logs.



# TWO-FISTED PARD

By CARLOS ST. CLAIR

Author of "Jack Pot," etc.

**I**T started when Stem-winder threw Bill Davis for a couple of loops, and sat him down so hard that a whole firmament of stars presented themselves to Bill's bewildered gaze. Bill got up and shook himself, and swore, with all the while a sort of half-apologetic grin on his dark face—quite in the usual course of things. Stem-winder was as tough a green bronc as they'd had in the 2 Circle V breaking pens for some time, and there had been no special disgrace about Bill's taking the air. Jeb

Cassidy, the foreman, ran clanking over to help Bill up—and it was then that a marvelous change took place in Bill.

Instead of starting for the bronc, to climb aboard before the critter got any false ideas as to who was top hand of this shebang, Bill's two fists bunched, an ugly snarl wiped the half grin off his face, and he came stamping across the packed clay of the round corral to where Lew Wilson draped a lean and gangling length astride the bars.

Before Lew had any notion what



was up, Bill's fist connected with his jaw, and Lew went down in a flurry of spurred boots, hair chaps, and black sombrero. He was up again faster than he'd gone over, his own fists ready, but staring in gaping puzzlement at his erstwhile pard.

That was the funny thing about it. No later than five minutes ago, when Lew had thrown Bill's saddle across the rough chestnut colored barrel of the outlaw, and eared the bronc down while Bill climbed aboard, they'd been as close as cockleburs in a broomtail's mane. And while that friendship of Bill's and Lew's was not the most natural thing in all the world—for there was scarcely two men more closely matched for top honors in anything that they might turn a hand to—still it had seemed genuine enough, and had even weathered through their both falling in love with the same girl. That girl was Ann May Varney, the boss's daughter. And it was Ann May's appearance, now, that put a stop to the sudden ruction between Bill and Lew.

**L**EW, ready to spring, had just ground out: "Why, you loped-eared son of a cow pilot, you reckon you're goin' to get away with anything like that?"

And Bill had cut in with a savage: "I'll teach you, you diamond-back, you snake in the grass."

Ann May's clear voice stopped their fists in mid-air. "Bill! Lew!"

They both respected her, and their anger hadn't grown to such proportions, then, to prevent their heeding the urgency of her command.

Bill drew back with a muttered threat:

"I'll get you yet, you double-crossin' skunk."

Lew just stood there, still flabbergasted, but with little white knots

of muscle working at the corners of his broad mouth.

It was lucky enough, too, that Ann May had happened by and put a stop to the fight, for the boss himself was coming down from the house, and one thing he wouldn't tolerate was fighting among the hands. "A country divided against itself," he liked to quote in his sonorous voice, "is bound to fall. There'll be no civil war, big or small, on the 2 Circle V. Any waddy gets his mad up so bad he can't stand himself, better go out and tackle one of them longhorn steers—or else ask for his time."

Now, before the boss suspected anything amiss, Bill went over to where Stem-winder was snuffing dust, like an angry bull. Lew climbed back up on the fence.

The bronc tossed Bill again. Natural enough, Bill being too mad to see straight, let alone top a ton of exploding dynamite. The boss, looking over the bars, said:

"Huh. Ain't losin' your grip, Bill? Better let Lew up, before that bronc's plumb spoiled."

That didn't help matters any.

Bill and Lew had always paired up together in the bunk-house double-deckers—Bill top, Lew bottom—and on cold nights they'd cut their blankets in together. Now, Bill got leave from Jeb Cassidy to shift his blankets to an empty bunk in the far end of the long bunk house. Lew and Bill quit speaking. Lew still didn't know what it was all about, but he didn't aim to ask, either. Bill could get down off his high horse and talk things over, or he could take a run and jump in the big arroyo, down below the barn—it was all the same to Lew. Or so Lew told himself.

Inside the scuffed old leather vest, Lew's heart was sore. You couldn't

be pards with a man, five years hand running, like he and Bill, and get over it on a minute's notice. Bill could, evidently. Not him. Why, there was that time in the rodeo arena, down at Monte, when the steer he, Lew, had bulldogged, broke away from him and had all but gored him when Bill, running out afoot, had distracted the brute's attention and taken one of the long horns across his own ribs. And he'd returned the compliment when Bill, caught in the van of a stampeding herd, had been shoved across the brink of the Falls Creek chasm. Lew had gone down after him, thinking to find no more than Bill's broken carcass, and had brought Bill, pretty well bunged up but still alive and kicking, on his back, inch by scrapping inch up the sheer face of the canyon wall.

So it went on like that for a couple of weeks. Bill looked ugly every time Lew came around, and as if he might be ready to carry out the threat he'd made. Lew steered clear of him. He knew too well what it would mean if the boss caught Bill and himself in the kind of scrap that it would be if he and Bill ever locked horns. Lew wasn't in any mind to leave the 2 Circle V. He'd managed finally, some weeks before, to pop the question to Ann May, and she'd said "Yes." It was a secret yet, but as soon as he had a stake for a little place of his own, they were going to marry. Lew's tender thoughts of Ann May went a good way toward assuaging that sore spot in Lew's chest about Bill, but it still rankled.

As time went on, Lew suspected Jeb Cassidy, the foreman, of egging Bill on. Up till then, though Jeb had always been pretty impartial with the men—shading

things in Lew's favor, if anything—and when it came time for the fall round-up, Lew decided his suspicions were mistaken.

"That leg of mine, that broom-tail fell on, two years back, has been botherin' some," Jeb told Lew confidentially. "I been figurin', Lew, to appoint you round-up boss. Want it?"

"Want it?" Lew was agrin from ear to ear. "Will a dry hoss drink when he comes to water?" he chortled. "Sure I want it, Jeb, if you're sure you won't be ridin' yourself."

Fall round-up was the big job of the year, and the position of round-up boss a coveted one—a position which required unusual skill as well as judgment, directing the bunching of the cattle and pacing the gathered herd toward the round-up pens. There was no question that Lew could handle it—no question, either, but that Bill Davis would have been just as capable.

Lew didn't blame Bill for the black looks cast in his direction. "He's going to feel worse still," Lew told himself, "when me and Ann May make our announcement, after the round-up. That extra money I draw down as round-up boss is goin' to hurry things along some, and it's goin' to hurt Bill worse than porcupine quills in a dog's nose."

Bill was still in love with the girl, Lew knew—though any one could see that Ann May cared for him less than any of the half dozen other cowboys who had shined around her. Lew had thought that Bill was resigned to the fact, till this sudden flare-up had proved otherwise. Lew hadn't told Bill, in so many words, his and Ann May's secret, but, pards as they'd been, he had hinted at it pretty strong. No doubt, Bill had brooded over it, and suddenly went

berserk. That was the only way Lew could figure.

The choice of Lew as round-up boss in Jeb's place was announced by the "big boss" himself, at supper time, in the cook shack.

Lew saw Bill's dark face go almost white, and saw Jeb Cassidy's hand on Bill's arm, trying to quiet him. But evidently Jeb hadn't succeeded. After supper, Lew stopped for a minute's talk with the boss, and was the last man to leave the cook shack. Bill was waiting for him, outside the door. Lew was hardly clear of the threshold, when Bill stepped up and thrust a flushed face within two inches of Lew's nose. There was liquor on his breath. Lew tried to side-step. Bill caught his muscle in a wincing grip.

"I'm fed up," Bill grated. "I've had enough of you. Put up your dukes and fight, or stand there and take a beatin' like the yellow tuck-tail coyote that you are."

Lew said: "Look, Bill, don't be a donkey. The big squeeze——"

"To the bowwows with the big squeeze," Bill blared. "You seem to have a stand-in there—well, mebber you can talk him into thinkin' that you never started this here fight. All right, then; if you don't aim to raise your fists, mebber this'll change your mind." He drove in a crashing right that would have landed fair on Lew's square chin, had he not thrown up a sudden shoulder to take the first slashing brunt. Even then, the force of the blow made his brain spin.

Still he tried to reason. "Bill, you're drunk. This whole thing's cuckoo, anyhow. We're pard. Look, Bill. You haven't forgotten down at Monte—that bull——"

Bill sneered. "Nor the Falls Creek stampede? That's what you're really thinkin' of, ain't it,

Lew—with you playin' the big hero and haulin' me up out of that canyon more dead than alive? No, I ain't forgot. I been thinkin' about that quite a lot—only I never seen the straight of it, till just here lately, you dirty, double-crossin'——"

He finished the remark with a crashing left. But Lew's fists were ready this time. He caught Bill's driving fist with his own right, and came under it with his left—a sharp blow to Bill's ribs.

Bill broke loose and flailed wildly for a minute, while Lew planted two more telling blows.

Bill cried out: "Damn this black. I can't see my own fists, let alone this cur's."

A voice, from among the men who had quickly ringed about them, called: "Into the cook shack. There's light aplenty there."

Lew cursed. "Bill," he said, "don't be a fool. You know what this means, if the boss——"

Bill laughed, high-pitched and excited, as if he sensed the desperation in Lew's voice, and meant to take advantage. "All right," he panted, "into the cook shack, boys. I'll show this fellow up for the yellow snake he is."

**L**EW tried to hold them back. There was a chance, outside here, that the vastness of the night would swallow the sounds of conflict—enough, at least, to escape the boss's none too acute ear. But inside the cook shack, he'd be sure to hear the sounds of battle and come r'aring back with blood in that old warrior's eye of his.

There was no stopping it, however. Lew's back was to the cook-shack door, and he couldn't hold against the pressing pack. They were in the room with a rush, Lew retreating, his fists still raised to

fend Bill's wild blows, and to take advantage of each opening with a well-timed thrust of his own. He collided with the long trestle table and heard it crash. It threw Lew off his balance just a little. Bill's fist collided with his chin and then slid off, but there was pain enough to rouse Lew's fighting blood at last. He swore a tremendous oath and went for Bill in earnest now—dynamite in both bunched fists. For five minutes, then, the battle raged. Just as Bill went down on both his knees, groggy and all but licked, the voice of the boss sounded across the din.

Lew stood back, his bunched fists falling. Bill still knelt there, groggily.

The boss asked: "Who's responsible for this dog fight?"

Lew waited for Bill to speak. Bill welshed. Lew's lip curled a little as he said:

"It was me that knocked him down, Mr. Varden, if that's what you want to know."

The boss said, very sonorously: "Well, Lew, you know the rules. A country divided against itself cannot stand. The same goes for a State, or a town, or a cattle ranch. It's round-up time, and we're short-handed, or I'd send the both of you high-tailin' pronto. But with Jeb laid up, I need a round-up boss. Bill, if you can play the man a while, instead of a fightin', snarlin' cur, the job is yours. Lew—you started this—you're fired."

Lew thought sure Bill would say something then, but he didn't. Jeb Cassidy was helping Bill get up. Lew thought Jeb might step in and tell the straight of this. Jeb must know it was Bill who had insisted on hostilities. Lew had seen Jeb standing not far back of Bill, out-

side the cook shack, when he had first stepped out.

Bill still kept mum. So did Jeb.

Lew couldn't believe, for a minute, that no one was going to say a word. That meant—why, that meant he was fired, sure enough—kicked out—he'd have to leave—leave the 2 Circle V—Ann May. They couldn't marry now. The Old Man would tell Ann May that Lew had started this—flat against his orders—and Ann May would believe it. She was mighty loyal to her dad. And even if she didn't, what would he have to offer her? He was just a cowboy, without a job. And a cowboy who had been kicked off the 2 Circle V, no matter what his story, would have a pretty hard time finding a berth on another ranch within a week's riding.

For a long time, Lew stood there, turning these bitter thoughts over and over in his mind. When he finally looked around, the room was empty, except for old "Uncle Billy" Rogers, the cook, who was clearing up the scattered débris from the upset table.

Uncle Billy said: "Sho now, Lew, it did look to me like it was Bill Davis who started ructions. I don't know rightly, and none of the other boys does neither, but the bets is on Bill startin' that there scrap. If he did, and kept mum, and left you to hold the sack—well——" Uncle Billy's look was ominous—as his voice trailed off.

The word was on Lew's tongue to say: "You're right, Uncle Billy. It was Bill who started that scrap, and lied out of it by keeping mum." But then Lew saw that, after all, it was just the lie that was the real crime. They'd broken one of the boss's pet rules, fighting, but there was no disgrace about it—stigma of a sort,

getting the sack, but no deep soul-eroding fault, like that lie of Bill's. And if he spoke now, Uncle Billy would tell the boys, and even if the boss himself didn't believe it, the boys would, and that was something, job or no job, that Bill could never live down. After all, for five long years, he and Bill had been pards. Bill was groveling in the mud now—the mud of that lie—whether any one knew it or not. Lew couldn't step up and out of his own predicament on Bill's shoulders.

He said: "Shucks, Uncle Billy. I knew the rules, and I busted 'em to kingdom come, pickin' that scrap with Bill. He had a drink in him, too, and that always did make Bill wild. Guess I got what was comin' to me. But look, Uncle Billy, I got to see Miss Ann May, before I pull my freight. Reckon you can get a word to her—tell her to meet me in half an hour, out by the night corral? I'll wait until she comes."

**I**N the bunk house, Lew packed his duffel sack, while the others sat silent on their bunks and watched him, strangely subdued. But when Lew shook hands and said good-by, they were voluble at last, with sincere expressions of regret, and unanimous decision that that was a fool rule of the boss's, anyhow.

"Fool rule or not," Lew said, "we busted it. Bill's playin' in a little luck, that's all—the boss needin' a top hand for the round-up—or we'd both be out. Well, so long, boys—mebbe I'll be seein' you sometime."

When Lew came to shake hands with Bill, Bill didn't look up. Lew made it easy for him. He knew how Bill must feel. Jeb Cassidy was the only one left for Lew to say

good-by to, but he had disappeared, when Lew looked around.

Lew went out to the night corral and stood up against the bars, waiting for Ann May. He waited a long time. She was breathless when she came at last, dressed, Lew saw, in boots and riding breeches. She held a sombrero in one hand, and something square and boxlike tied up in a flour sack, in the other. She said:

"Lew, I'm going with you."

Joy gripped Lew's throat like the closing fingers of a giant but beneficent hand. But then he knew that couldn't be. He took her shoulders.

"No, Ann May, I reckon I can't do that. I got a little savings, but it isn't much. I haven't any place for you to lay your head. I haven't even got a job. Besides, Ann May, you can't disgrace your pap. He fired me, and you——"

Ann May said hotly: "It's a silly rule. And anyhow, I'd bet my last red cent Bill Davis started that fight you had. That's the second time, besides. What I can't understand is why you and Bill should fight at all. You used to be such pards."

Lew said: "I wonder, too. I'd give a pretty just to know. I sort of hate—well, goin' off and leavin' that unsolved."

Ann May said, surprised: "You mean you've no idea what's ailing Bill?"

"Well, yes, of course," Lew said, "I got a notion. I reckon it was you, Ann May—though it all come up so sudden, I ain't quite sure."

"You mean, Bill thought he had a chance with me—and that you had spoiled it?"

"Well, I know he loved you," Lew said uneasily. "You can hardly blame a man for that."

"That's out, then," Ann May said flatly. "I told Bill long ago, weeks

before that day when he came to you in the round corral, that I planned to marry you, and he was fine about it."

Lew whistled. "Well, I can't savvy then what's bitin' him. But there's no use to waste time on him now. And as for you and me, Ann May—if I can make a stake somewhere, why, I'll come back, but you're not to wait, you understand. You're far too good for me, and always was—though I reckon if I'd stayed on here, where your dad could sort of keep his eye on things, we could 'a' worked it out. But now, it's off. Don't make it any harder than it's got to be."

Ann May said, and her voice was very small: "No use, I guess, to go to dad. I met Jeb in the hall, as I was coming out. He'd been in the office, talking. I heard him tell dad it was all your fault. I still believe he lied, but dad believes him, and you won't say a word in your own defense."

Lew said uneasily: "If Jeb saw you coming out, Ann May, all dressed for ridin', he may suspect. Run on back, honey—there's a girl."

"I told him," Ann May answered stubbornly, "that I meant to go away with you."

"But look, Ann May, he'll tell your dad, and raise all Cain with you."

She laughed. "I don't believe he will. You see, he took me in his arms and tried to kiss me; said he knew that he could make me love him, once you were gone. I slapped his face, and I don't believe he'll say a word to dad."

"Jeb Cassidy! He loves you, too? You're a witch, Ann May."

"He doesn't love me now," she said. "He was wild with rage. Well—when are we starting, Lew?"

IT took Lew a full two hours to persuade the girl it couldn't be, he couldn't take her, young and guarded as she'd always been, knocking about the world with him. They said good-by, at last. It took Lew some time, after that, to catch his private mount. Daylight had come, and there were light and signs of life stirring in the bunk house, as Lew saddled up. He'd hoped he would be gone before any one appeared to wonder what had kept him. He hurried now, and in his haste broke a saddle cinch. He was still there, mending it, when the boys came sleepily to feed and turn the night stock out.

Lew, with his thoughts turned solely on the girl that he was giving up, had had small thought in these last hours for any other. But now, seeing Jeb Cassidy and Bill together, the foreman's tall head bent to whisper something to the somewhat sullen Bill, a great and revealing light illumined suddenly the dark corners of Lew's brain.

And with that light, a sudden berserk rage rose in him. He dropped the mended cinch and started for Jeb Cassidy, his features twisting and his blue eyes ablaze.

Jeb Cassidy looked up and met Lew's gaze. His face went ashen. He turned to Bill, trying to whisper, but in his panic his tones were loud and shaken.

"Bill," he cried, "look out for Lew. He means to kill you—he's got the killer look. Your life ain't worth a cent unless you get him first."

Bill looked up, dazed and startled. He hadn't even known that Lew was there until he saw the tall on-striding figure and the rage-contorted face. Bill doubled up his fists and would have leaped to meet him. Jeb caught him back and sud-

denly thrust a gun between his doubled fingers.

"Get him, Bill—your life or his," Jeb mouthed and then sprang back.

Bill glanced a moment helplessly at the weapon. He couldn't bring himself to use it—not quite yet. He gripped the butt and took one swift step forward to intercept Lew's inexorable advance.

Lew's whole thought, whole purpose was centered on Jeb Cassidy. He'd seen Jeb hand that gun of his to some one—hadn't even realized that it was Bill—and had seen Jeb spring away. Bill's sudden onrush took Lew completely by surprise.

He tried to brush Bill off, but then he realized that Bill meant business. He'd have to settle Bill before he could do anything with Jeb. He dodged the viciously descending six-gun in Bill's fist. It only grazed his cheek, but landed with a dizzying thud upon his shoulder.

"Bill," Lew stammered, shaken by the blow, "can't you see what's at the bottom of all this? It's Cassidy—Jeb Cassidy."

Bill drove a smashing left to Lew's square chin. Lew ducked, and at the same time reached to grasp the wrist that would have sent the six-gun crashing to his head again. They wrestled for a moment, while Lew gasped:

"That first day in the round corral—Jeb rushed to pick you up, when that bronc tossed you. He told you some lie, Bill, about me, then—made you see red."

Bill snarled an oath, and Lew was not alert enough this time to evade the short-arm jab that landed in his ribs.

"Tryin' to squirm out, eh?" Bill rasped. "Denyin' you put that cocklebur inside my saddle blanket,

when you threw my buckin' hull astride that bronc?"

A little groggy from that kidney blow, Lew shook his head, and fending off another thrust with a hard forearm, he panted:

"So that was it—you thought I put a bur inside your saddle blanket. Well, that was only Jeb a-startin' ructions. And don't you savvy, Bill, what Jeb's plan was, when he made me round-up boss? I'll bet he told you, Bill, I'd pulled some string or other with the boss. You didn't know Jeb did it just to make you sore."

Bill said: "You think I'm fool enough to listen to you," and with a mighty effort, wrenched free the wrist Lew held.

**L**EW had a chance to drive a shattering blow to Bill's unguarded middle. He passed it up, bent all his efforts to fending off the savage fusillade of blows and punches that Bill rained on him, right and left.

And Lew kept talking, as he dodged and parried. "It was Jeb who fed you all that liquor, Bill, last night. He knew, as well as me, drink makes you proddy. And it was Jeb who worked you up to lay for me, outside the cook shack; and it was Jeb, when you complained about the dark, suggested that we go inside, where the boss was sure to hear us fighting."

"You lie," Bill panted. "It's all a lie. You double-crossed me because you're jealous—want me out of here. It's not enough that you should have the girl. You want to be top hand in everything. Jeb Cassidy's my friend. And you, you low-down skunk, you're goin' to pay——"

But now, Lew saw he had to let Bill have it. Till now, he had not

struck a single blow, had only parried Bill's savage onslaught. Lew jabbed him quick, now, one above the heart, one to the stomach. Bill grunted and gave back a little.

Jeb Cassidy, from the side lines, bleated: "Shoot him, Bill, you fool!"

Bill tried to bring up the gun. With one smashing blow, Lew knocked it from his fingers, leaving Bill's right hand paralyzed. Lew rained him, then, with blows, his hard fists beating on Bill's cranium, his cheeks, his mouth, his nose, like bullets; hammering his brisket, pommeling his quivering middle. Bill was helpless beneath the onslaught; his own blows futile. The savage drumming of Lew's hard fists, first right, then left, was all that held him upright.

As suddenly as he had begun that punishment, Lew was done. As Bill clung to him, gasping, Lew finished with his speech.

"And then you lied, Bill, when the boss did find us there—you lied because Jeb told you to. You let me take the gaff, the two of you—let the boss believe that it was me who'd started ructions."

Bill muttered weakly: "But, Lew, Jeb wouldn't have no reason to have it in for you—unless it was true—those things he told about you."

Lew laughed through flaring nostrils. "Except," he said, "that it was Jeb who wanted to get rid of me. He's crazy about Ann May. He knew she liked me, figured if I went away, he'd have the inside track. I found that out last night.

But even then, until I saw the two of you together here this morning, I didn't savvy what it was about. It's true, Bill, ain't it? Jeb was at the bottom of all this?"

Bill said dazedly: "Why, Lew—Lew—if I thought that skunk had tried to come between us——"

He turned with blazing eyes to where, a moment since, Jeb Cassidy's voice had sounded. But Jeb had disappeared.

Old Uncle Billy Rogers, who, at the sound of conflict, had come running from the cook shack, chuckled. "Jeb saddled up and left like he was in a powerful hurry. I reckon he won't be comin' back. If I was you, Lew—take an old sourdough's advice—I'd just go up and make a clean breast to the boss."

Lew shook his head, and his swift glance, tender as a woman's, flicked the sunken shoulders of his pard.

Bill must have felt it. He straightened suddenly.

"We'll go together, Lew. I mean to tell the boss I lied about that fight last night—lettin' him think it was your fault. If anybody's fired, it's me."

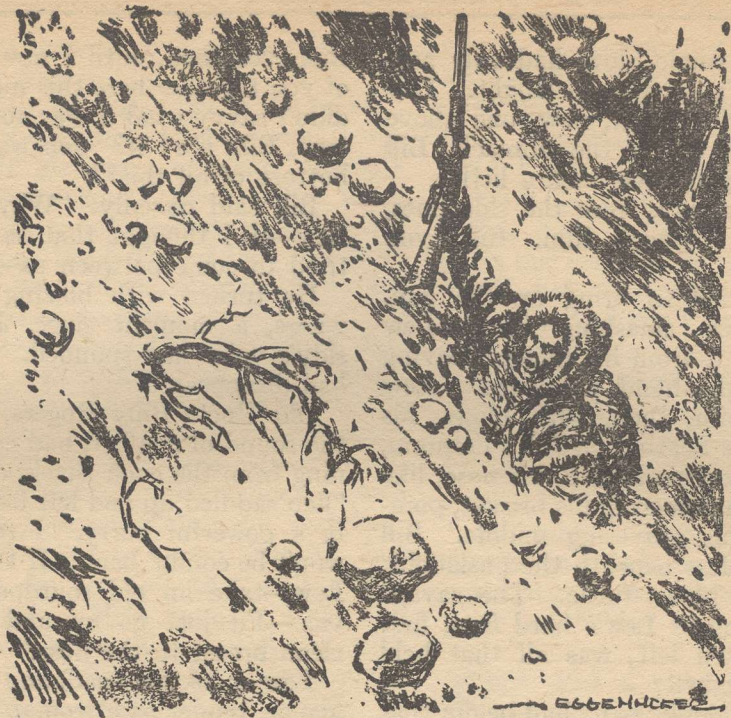
Lew made some protest, but Bill was master of the situation, now. At last, the two pards moved together toward the house.

Uncle Billy, looking after them, opined: "They'll fix it up. Jeb's goin' leaves the outfit shy a good top hand, and the boss, for all his crazy notions, ain't no fool. Ann May'll have her say-so, too. Between 'em all, I reckon it'll turn out hunky-dory, after all."

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THE musk ox, an animal which is neither ox nor sheep, but having some of the characteristics of each, is found in the northern part of Greenland and in the Canadian barren grounds from Hudson Bay to the Mackenzie River.





# GOLD GUARD

By SETH RANGER

Author of "A Wolverine's Way," etc.

**T**HE drummer, who sold "Rawhide" Sully hundreds of tons of trail grub annually, wiped the frost from the north window of the trading post and let out a yell. "Snowslide!"

Sully saw snow a thousand feet above Gorge Creek break from the main mass and come roaring into the canyon. The air was filled with thunderous reports, and the log structure in which they stood shook dangerously.

"Early thaw," Sully drawled; "she'll freeze up again, an' we'll get more snow."

Ice and snow were still tumbling

into the gorge, and the drummer was watching, fascinated, when suddenly his face drained of color.

"There's a man, and he's caught."

Sully saw a slight figure flatten against the face of a cliff on the edge of the trail. Briefly he was outlined, an insect of a man against a granite wall, then a deluge of snow blotted out everything.

"He's done for," the drummer groaned.

"Like as not," Sully replied, "and yet—there he is, runnin' and tryin' to get in the clear before the next slide comes. He's a plain crazy fool to come through Gorge Creek durin' a thaw."

Sully wiped the moisture from his spectacles, adjusted them carefully, and peered at the slight figure.

"That's prob'ly Bill Kehoe."

"Who is Bill Kehoe?" the drummer inquired.

"Just another young cuss tryin' to beat Alaska," Sully replied. "My tradin' post, as you know, is in the palm of a hand, as you might say. The main trail, a sort of an arm, ends here, and five trails branch out like fingers—long fingers clutchin' thousands of square miles of country. It seems like everybody passes my door sooner or later. I've seen 'em come, full of hope; seen 'em leave, licked. I've seen 'em turn back and lick the country, too. Often it's a little thing that changes a man's life."

"What, for example?" the drummer asked.

"A man loses an outfit in the rapids and he's licked. He comes out of the country cussing and hating himself and the North. Another man loses an outfit and he comes out fighting mad. He's cussing, too, but he buys him another outfit and goes back into the fight. The smart prospector, trapper, or whatever he is, cashes in on his hard luck, turns experience into profit. The quitter goes back Outside—where he belongs," Sully said.

"There must be something wrong at the Silver Bow Mine," the drummer ventured, "or no man would be coming out through Gorge Creek during a thaw."

"I've known homesick youngsters to mush five hundred miles in sixty-below weather for a letter from home," Sully answered, "and then not get the letter."

The drummer's face was hard, as a rule. The fierce competition he had, made it that way, but something like pain crossed it.

"Five hundred miles in sixty-below weather and then not get a letter," he muttered. "I couldn't take that."

"A lot of others can't." Sully wiped his spectacles again and watched the lone musher. He was moving drunkenly, with every mark of utter exhaustion. "Yeah, that's Bill Kehoe."

"We'd better go out and get him," the drummer suggested.

"If he falls and can't get up, we'll go out," Sully replied. He smiled, the smile of a man who understands the human heart. "A man likes to finish the last thousand feet alone, if he can."

"I'll bet ten dollars Kehoe's sick," the drummer offered. "Look at his face—gray and lined."

"I'll bet he's either quitting the country or after mail," Sully countered. He opened the door as Kehoe lurched up the steps, then closed it behind him.

**K**EHOE'S expression was that of a man who had conceded he was going to die, then had unexpectedly been given a reprieve from death. "So, I made it," he said thickly. He leaned his rifle against the log wall and squirmed free of a light pack. Then he shed his parka and stamped melting snow from his moccasins.

Kehoe, physically, was even smaller than he had appeared on the trail—not more than five feet three inches, and slender. But his legs were straight, and he had good shoulders. "When does the **next** steamer leave Seward, and how **long** does it take to mush to the nearest railroad station?" he asked.

"If you pulled out in the morning," Sully answered, "you could make it to steel in three days and

catch a train that'll arrive in Seward before the steamer sails."

"Thanks! Any mail for me?"

Sully shot a glance at the drummer. He had won the bet on two counts. Kehoe was asking for mail and quitting the country.

"Yeah, some letters in pink envelopes," the trader answered. "They smelled right nice when they first came. But perfume don't have much chance against dried salmon and baled furs." He walked to the end of the store which served as a post office and took a packet of letters from the compartment marked "K."

The drummer felt relieved. At least there was mail for this tired young man. He saw Kehoe's fingers tremble as he opened the first letter. Some of the exhaustion left his face, and there was something rather fine, something any man might treasure, in his eyes. He seemed to forget everything but the priceless words in the letter.

It was the sort of writing a young girl very much in love uses in addressing the youth of her choice. She underscored important words, and her periods were tiny round circles which lent distinction to each page. She dotted each "i" with a circle, too.

The drummer noticed, for the first time, that a deputy marshal's shield was pinned to Kehoe's shirt.

"What's he doing with that?" he whispered.

"Do you remember Gold Guard Jack Kehoe?" Sully answered.

"Yeah, guarded millions in dust during the Klondike days and never lost an ounce!"

"He married a widow woman," the trader explained, "and a couple of years later Bill was born. He kinda ailed from the first, so they took him Outside. Jack, big as a

mountain and able to lick his weight in wild cats, is a man you'd never forget. I often wondered what had become of him, but never heard until this kid showed up last summer. I heard him talk and saw between the lines. His old man, unconsciously of course, had given the boy the idea he'd never amount to much in a man's country. Or maybe any other country. He'd sort of protected him, as you might say. The boy was out to show him, so what does he do but come North and ask for a job as gold guard."

They glanced at Bill Kehoe, who was hurrying through the letters, in an effort to get everything in a minimum of time. Later they would be read slowly, again and again.

"Out of regard for Jack, the marshal swore the kid in as deputy and sent him to the gold mine up in Silver Bow Valley, where there ain't much gold, and nothing would happen if there was," the trader concluded.

"The hope of a boy, the faith of his girl, his attempt and failure all rolled into a few words," the drummer mused. "And I'm in on the end of it."

"The end, or maybe the beginning of the second chapter," Sully suggested.

They walked back and seated themselves near the stove.

The back of one letter was visible. A sudden, sympathetic interest in Bill Kehoe prompted both men to read:

—and so you must remember, Bill darling, *size* has nothing to do with it. *Bigness* in human activity is not measured by *physical* proportions.

The first test is so important. All of us want to quit when things don't go right. *That* is but *human*. It's proper to be *afraid*, too. But cowardice is permitting fear to *govern* our actions, not the admission we are afraid. I

know my darling boy is going to succeed. I am impatient to join you. As soon as I can be a help and not a burden, Bill dear, I'll come, and we'll—

The drummer whispered behind his hand, "Would you like to make another bet—that he goes back?"

"Not by a danged sight," Sully answered.

**B**ILL KEHOE finished the last letter, smiled, and read them over again. He got stiffly to his feet at the conclusion of the second reading. He seemed to have grown in stature physically as well as morally.

"I'd like to sleep here to-night," he said, "and then hit the trail the first thing in the morning."

"The trail for the railroad?" Sully softly drawled.

Kehoe flushed slightly. "No, the trail back to Silver Bow Valley. It doesn't look as if I'll have to go Outside after all."

And both forgave him the attempt to save his face.

"Anything doing up at the mine?" Sully asked.

"Naw, the boys are still working away. You know how it is, Mr. Sully, the next foot is always going to hit the big pay. I'll take the mail in, if it's all right with you, though." He picked up his pack and started upstairs to the rooms above. He would follow the custom of the country and help himself to any bed that was unoccupied. Bell hops who carried packs, unlocked doors, and turned on lights were unknown in Northern road houses.

The two men exchanged significant glances. The drummer was the first to speak.

"That kid was too offhand in his answer about what the mine is producing. They're in the money, and you know what that means, Sully."

"Yeah, a big stampede," the trader replied.

"Hadn't you better double that last order?" the drummer suggested. "A stampede will clean you out, Sully."

"Triple it," Sully answered.

"Thanks," the drummer said as he pulled on his parka. "I'm going over to the signal corps office and send out a wire."

The trader realized the importance of time. If the shipment arrived before the break-up, it could be taken over the surrounding swamps on the ice. After the break-up a long pack-train detour would be necessary.

The United States army operates the telegraph system in Alaska. A uniformed man accepted his message without comment, but not so a swarthy stranger who loafed near by. He read the message, in Morse code, as it was sent, and his eyes narrowed in satisfaction.

"Two and two," he said softly, "have always made four."

"Yeah?" his companion asked.

"Yeah! Figure it out. When I saw Bill Kehoe comin' out of the Gorge Creek Canyon, I says to myself, 'He couldn't stand the gaff!' I was wrong. He comes out, don't he? He makes a bee line for Sully's post. In a half hour or so, the drummer who sells Sully most of his supplies legs it for the telegraph office and wires to triple the last order. That means Sully's expecting a stampede. And"—he paused and leveled a dramatic, and rather dirty finger at his companion—"that means Kehoe told Sully they've struck it at Silver Bow and to get ready for a stampede."

"A hurry-up shipment so they can take it over the ice in the swamp country," the second suggested.

"Yeah, and that ain't the only thing that can be taken over the ice," the first said.

"Meaning?"

"The gold. Remember it ain't Jack Kehoe guarding that gold—it's his pint-sized kid, a chechahco who don't know anything about handling a tough gang, freely spraying lead." He stared briefly at his companion. "We've found out what we came here for. Let's hit the trail and tell the others. There's no time to be lost."

**T**HE drummer awakened Sully early the following morning. "You'd better take a look at Bill Kehoe," he advised; "he's been out of his head, half the night."

The trader climbed the stairs and gave the delirious man a brief examination.

"Exhaustion," he declared, "exhaustion and something else. He got a terrible nerve shock on the trail—something to do with losing his grub and having to kill a ptarmigan for food. He shot the bird, and then something happened." He listened to the mutterings, and finally shook his head. "I can't make it out."

"They tell me to cash in on my experience," Kehoe muttered, "but I can't cash in on *that*. The rifle shot—"

"What happened, Kehoe, when you fired your rifle at the ptarmigan?" the trader asked.

Horror filled the semidelirious eyes, and Kehoe shook with terror.

"Better give it up," the drummer advised; "in his shocked condition it only makes him worse."

Bill Kehoe was better the next day, and when the trader asked him about the rifle shot, he shook his head.

"It's something I want to forget,"

he answered. "It scared hell out of me, because it came without warning. A *man* meets problems that come without warning. He doesn't go to pieces."

"Things happen in the North that don't seem related," the trader explained in a kindly tone. "Sometimes they happen years apart, then all at once a situation bobs up, and a man cashes in on these seemingly unrelated experiences. It's all a part of the makings of a sourdough."

"When can I head for Silver Bow?"

"Not for a week yet. You've got to get them nerves calmed down," Rawhide Sully answered.

The week passed slowly, the thaw ended, and the slides no longer thundered into the valley. With the first-class mail on his back and sufficient grub to see him through, Bill Kehoe returned to the mine. As he reached that part of Gorge Creek known as Hell's Canyon, a warm breeze came down from Silver Bow Valley. The second spring thaw was at hand, and for the first time something of a panic gripped the lone musher. He shot apprehensive glances at the snow-crested ridges and kept to the middle of the canyon and ran nearly a mile and a half without slacking his pace.

Bill Kehoe was still panting when he reached the mine bunk house. The men, in damp clothing, were sitting near the oil-drum heaters after a day underground. They looked up in surprise, and "Red" Murphy, the burly foreman, said:

"Thought you'd gone for good. What changed your mind?"

Again, Bill Kehoe could not admit he was a beaten man when he left the mine. "I went out for the mail," he said evenly. "Here's

everything Sully was holding for the boys in this camp."

He tossed a heavy packet onto the table. Red Murphy began sorting the mail and calling off names. Kehoe gulped down some hot tea. He was too tired to eat, but when he was alone, he read the pink letters again and found in them a sustaining strength. He liked the line, "The first test is so important." It suggested succeeding tests would be easy to meet if he proved successful in the first. And she was coming to join him as soon as she could be a help and not a burden. That filled him with a warm glow. He thought he was ready for the first test.

**I**T came at noon the following day—came without warning. Every man in the valley, except the cook, was at the table eating, and the cook was standing near Red Murphy, talking, when a sawed-off shotgun muzzle smashed through the window.

"Stay right where you are," a voice snarled, "and keep your hands in the air."

Red Murphy raised his hands, but his accusing eyes centered on Bill Kehoe.

"So you went for the mail, eh? You dirty little rat."

Bill Kehoe's face grew red. It was not the red of guilt, but the red of amazement that is so often mistaken for guilt.

"Red, you don't think——" he began.

"Sure I think," Murphy snarled. "How else did this gang know we were in the money? Nobody else has been out. You're the only man, and you knew."

"But I never even told Rawhide Sully. I never——"

"Shut up!" Murphy rasped.

The door swung violently open,

and two men with sawed-off shotguns barged into the room.

"Get up," one of them ordered; "stand face to the wall, hands up."

They got up slowly, like men who play for delay, hoping for a chance to turn the tables. Each stared at Bill Kehoe with accusing eyes. He had betrayed them! Red Murphy was right. Bill knew of the strike, and he was the only man to go out of the valley.

Unfriendly hands explored their pockets and bodies, removing knives and guns, rendering them helpless. Next, they would take the gold. In all the North, no clean-up had been taken after more heartbreaking toil. The gold lay in sodden sands on the edge of and under a brawling stream. No pump could hold back the water, so they had to wait until the gravel froze to bed rock and the stream became solid ice. Then they sunk shafts, thawing, removing a few inches of gravel, and thawing again. Always they wore icy garments, always they were miserable and cold.

When they thought of this, it required the utmost self-control to keep from hurling themselves at the vicious shotguns. A few would die, of course, but they might save their hard-won treasure and contribute a portion to the families of those who had died.

The married men were thinking of their families Outside. Some wives worked all day; there were children working part time, too. The promise of deferred reward helped the women and children over the rough spots. It made a man's blood boil to think the rewards of this common sacrifice would go to the armed vultures swarming through the dining room.

There were five of them, thoroughly searching the buildings and breaking every weapon they found.

"You'd better go with your gang," a man at Bill Kehoe's side snarled, "or we'll hang you to the nearest tree. Don't think you can make us believe you're innocent by staying here."

Bill could see the man's neck swell from murderous fury. Bill whirled.

"How'd you learn about the gold?" he shouted at the leader.

"Rawhide Sully tipped it off when he tripled his season's order of trail grub, right after you showed up," the leader answered. There was a note of self-satisfaction in his tone as if he wanted these men to know how he had figured it out.

"See?" Bill cried desperately. "I didn't——"

"You're together, you rat," Red Murphy said thickly.

The raiders smashed the office to splinters after locating the cache, hoping to find concealed gold.

"Fifty thousand," the leader summed up, "not bad. Let's go, boys!"

When the raider who covered them from the broken window left, Bill Kehoe could feel the warm air against his cheek. The spring thaw was on with a vengeance, now. "More snowslides," he muttered. "More——" He stopped, and a strange glint came into his eyes.

He started to move, but a voice snarled: "Stay where you are." The raider left to cover the retreat was still holding them in line.

"Stay where you are," Murphy repeated; "we're goin' to settle with you, Kehoe, when the others are gone."

Bill Kehoe hardly heard. He was turning over the thing which had come to his mind. It was a desperate plan, and there was every chance he would be killed, but it was the first test—his test not only

as gold guard, but as chechahco making his bid for a place among sourdoughs.

There was a lot about that first test in those pink letters. How did a man force himself to perform an act, when every instinct of self-preservation warned him against it? There seemed to be but one answer—hurl himself into the play and cut off all retreat.

**H**AD old-timers been present, they would have noticed much about Bill Kehoe which suggested Jack Kehoe, gold guard, in action. He was the first man to leave the wall, and he ran to the stove and caught up a rifle barrel which had been used as a steam point and later a stove poker.

"Get him!" Murphy shouted.

"I'll smash the first man's head who tries to stop me," Bill snarled. Then he leaped through the open door.

The raiders were already a mile down the trail, and in another few minutes would be mushing through Hell's Canyon. The sheer walls surrounding Silver Basin made it impossible for the miners to circle and cut in ahead of the five grim men. Besides, there wasn't an available weapon in camp.

Bill Kehoe held the rifle barrel as though it were a complete weapon and followed the raiders' trail. Behind, the miners stared curiously. Bill stuck to the brush until the first man entered the canyon, then he glanced at the canyon walls—almost sheer, with their snowy crests blinding in the sunlight of a clear day. Beyond them the peaks that were always white. It was a land to inspire a man with the courage to tame it.

"Get back," the last gold robber roared, "or I'll let you have it!"

"Drop that gold, or I'll lay every one of you down in the trail!" Bill retorted. He looked at the crests again, and Rawhide Sully's words came to him: "Then all at once a situation bobs up, and a man cashes in on these seemingly unrelated experiences."

Bill's flesh was cringing, but his spirit drove cringing flesh closer and closer until he was within range of the shotgun. The rear guard threw the weapon to his shoulder and fired. The buckshot spread, clipping twigs all around Bill and paralyzing his left arm. He saw blood coming through his clothing—his blood, warm and red. It came in pulsations and spread in a series of little waves over the fabric.

High above he saw an uneasy movement in the thawing snow. On the steeper slopes it heaved like an awakening giant; then, like a giant, it relaxed for another rest.

Bill Kehoe experienced a sudden and exulting zest for the game. He was matching wits with outlaws and, curiously, was not afraid. He gripped the rifle barrel tighter and ran forward.

"Drop that gold," he snarled, "or I'll fire."

The leader stopped and yelled at the rear guard: "Pour it into him, Steve!"

They all stopped to watch the result, yet ready to hunt cover in case the dark object Bill carried proved to be an effective weapon. Steve tossed the gun to his shoulder and fired. Something struck Bill's ribs, and he felt sick all over. The landscape blurred, then cleared. He looked up. The giant was stirring again. He crouched and ran low, as if to gain cover where he might open up on them.

Steve emptied the shotgun, then laughed as Bill went down. The

laughter ran through the group as Bill got up, turned, and ran. He ran drunkenly, like a bewildered and mortally wounded deer, running into objects, falling down and rising again. It was funny to see a man running into things, that way.

The leader laughed. "You blinded him, Steve."

STEVE'S answer was lost in a sullen roar, high above. An entire mountain seemed to be moving. The snow field was heaving and buckling like surf on a rocky coast. It piled up like water, then broke and roared down the slope—thousands of tons of ice and snow, gouging out other thousands of tons of rocks and debris.

The five raiders dropped gold, weapons, and packs as they fled. Compared to the slide, they diminished with the passing seconds, until they resembled minute black insects skipping over the snow. Choking, inhuman cries came from their throats, and as if they did not exist, the mass rolled over the land. One moment they were there. The next they were gone. The last thunderous echo died, and a sepulchral silence prevailed.

Red Murphy, followed by the others, ran to Bill Kehoe.

"Are you bad hurt, kid?" he demanded.

Bill wiped a crimson smear from his face.

"I'm blind," he said thickly. "That last shot got me. Gosh!" He caught his breath with a sharp, rasping intake. "I can see. I'm all right—"

"Dog-gone right, you're all right," Murphy cried, with relief. "It's the dangest thing I ever saw, worthy of your old man—that walking within range so they'd fire and the concus-



sion would start the slides. How'd you ever think of it?"

Bill wiped his eyes again and stared at the slide. He was thinking the gold was safe and could be recovered in the summer by washing away the débris. He was thinking, too, of something a girl had written about the first test and physical size not always being the measure of a man's bigness. That girl could come North, now, any time, and he could take care of her. Measured by the yardstick of the North, Bill Kehoe knew he stood shoulder to shoulder with the biggest.

"Why're you so still?" Red

Murphy anxiously inquired. "You aren't going to faint, are you?" He took Bill's arm, fearing some of the buckshot might have reached a vital spot. "You haven't told us how you come to know concussion would start a slide?"

"I learned that down on Gorge Creek when I fired at a ptarmigan," Bill answered. "The concussion started a slide that buried me alive. It was two hours before I could get clear, and all the while boulders were dropping about. It just about shattered my nerve."

"Just about," Red Murphy agreed, "but not quite."

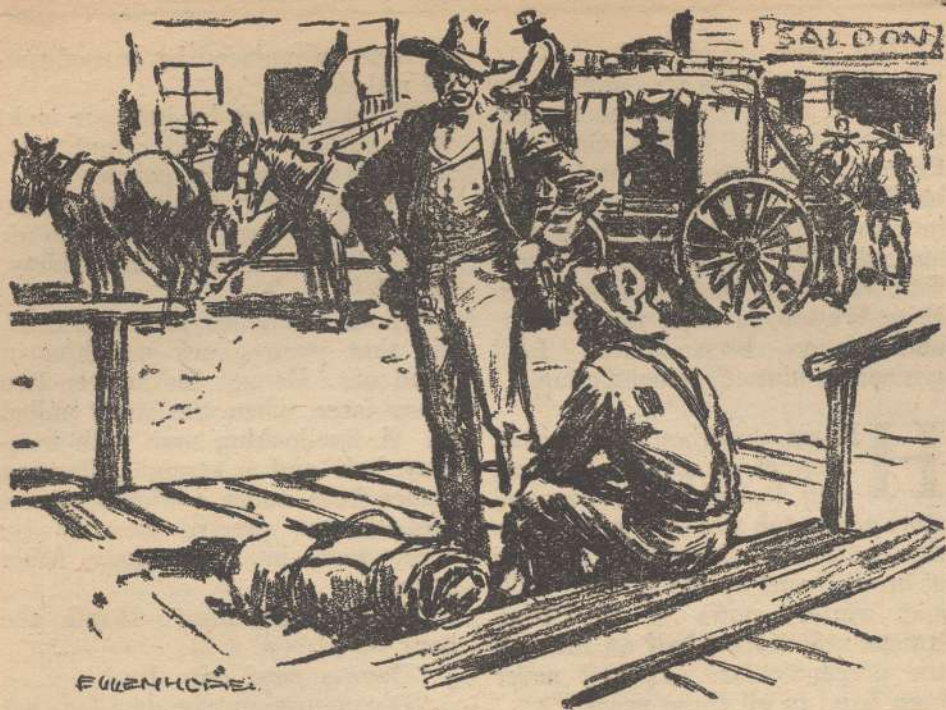


*Baffling Crimes!*

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# BUNDLE STIFF JOE

By GUTHRIE BROWN

Author of "Crazy Cow Thief," etc.

LATE one nice June afternoon, "Lodi Joe" walked into Salt Wells. Salt Wells was an unprepossessing little town on the edge of the High Range grasslands. It was decorated with chewed hitch rails and faded saloon signs, its one rutty street inches deep with alkali dust. But here it had been that Lodi Joe, in knee pants and bare feet, long ago pegged tops and built kites and robbed magpie nests.

Lodi eased his bundle from his shoulder and took off his hat. He looked up and down Main Street, narrowed, laughing eyes gleaming out from under scraggly gray locks. "Lucky" and "Happy" this bundle

stiff had often been nicknamed. Though he might not possess a dime, Lodi was still "lucky." He was imbued with a quenchless mirth of spirit, a youthful exuberance and perennial interest in things and folks. Out of pure waggery, he had come back to his boyhood home to see what changes the years had wrought.

"Get out of the street, you!"

Lodi jumped and snatched his bundle from beneath the shod hoofs of a sorrel stallion. Two riders swept past him in a billow of acrid dust and pulled up, less than a hundred yards away, before the pool hall. A man in the doorway greeted the horsemen.

"'Lo, Price. 'Lo, Bill."

Lodi squinted his eyes at the man who was tying the sorrel stallion to the hitch rail. Yes, that was Price Walton, sure as a gun! Same old Price, too, riding down any one in his way and cussing them just like when he was a kid. Many a fistic encounter had Lodi had with Price Walton, in those far-off days, and always been licked. Lodi grinned to himself, remembering.

HE sat down on the broken step of an empty building and looked at the general store across the street. Lew Macy's sign, battered into an illegible scar of brown paint by the summer hails and winter snows of the High Range, still tipped half an inch off the perpendicular. It had never been fixed in all these years.

A handsome young fellow on a fast shave-tail rode in from the north at a lope. There was something vaguely familiar about the way he carried his shoulders and sat his horse. Lodi frowned, trying to recall what that reminded him of.

As if he had been waiting for the appearance of the rider on the black horse, the powerful, rather squat frame of Price Walton pushed through the door of the pool hall.

"Hello there, Curt!" he called. "All set?" Lodi detected a controlled note of eagerness in the tone.

The youth on the black nodded with a smile that seemed a trifle hard. "You bet! Only the old man is on his way in from the railroad, and we'll have to put off our session till night."

A flash of intense annoyance crossed the face of Price Walton, a darkly seamed face with a bitter mouth. But the look was gone at

once, to be replaced by one of rueful resignation.

"Wouldn't that be just our luck! Well, you'll be around, about nine, say? Same place, of course."

"I'll be there," the youth promised. There was a defiant set to his chin. "Better make it nine thirty, though."

Who in the deuce, pondered Lodi, did that young buck put him in mind of? He got his answer two hours later, when the stage pulled in. A fine-looking man with iron-gray hair and a straight, flashing glance from under a wide-brimmed Stetson was greeted heartily by every man in sight along Main Street.

"Hello there, Jim! How's the boy?"

"Have a good trip, Jim?"

"D'you close up the deal for that Cane Valley ranch?"

"Say, you ain't goin' to move over there and leave us, are you?"

"Course he ain't! Think Jim Merriam would ever leave the High Range?"

"Wa-ait a minute, boys!" protested Jim Merriam, throwing up his hands. "I can't answer but one question at a time. Come on in the hotel here, while I get me a cup of coffee. Anybody know if Curt has got in yet from the ranch?"

"Sure, he's here. Rode in quite a while ago."

"Rode?" repeated Jim Merriam, pausing to look at the speaker. "Why, he was to take me back to the ranch to-night."

"Yeah, but he said that Charley Hooker was goin' to be along about nine o'clock, and he'd take you home." The speaker laughed. "Mebbe Curt's got a girl hid out on you somewheres, Jim."

"Can happen," responded the rancher with a grin.

Lodi Joe was thinking, "Old Jim Merriam! Well, I'll be darned! Good old Jim, with a growed-up son of his own! And it seems like only yesterday that Jim and me went fishin' together, and he give me his biggest trout to take home to ma. And he handed Price Walton a devil of a lickin' once, for pickin' on me. And he—gosh!" Lodi lost himself in reminiscence, grinning happily as memory after old memory came back to him out of the years.

"Well," said a voice above him, "you're a cheerful bird."

**L**ODI looked up, straight into the eyes of Jim Merriam. The gaze of the big rancher narrowed a moment, as some faint reminder stirred far back in his brain. But the unkempt hair, the wrinkled skin, and the five-day beard balked recognition. Merriam drew a hand out of his pocket.

"Here, just for luck. Now, now, don't get up on your hind legs! I like to see 'em take it on the chin. If you're so rich, stick it in your pants for a souvenir."

He was gone down the glaring whiteness of the bumpy street. Lodi looked at the ten-dollar bill in his palm, then at the disappearing figure. No one else was in sight at the minute. And that was like Jim, too. He wouldn't have done it with any one looking on.

The hand of Lodi closed hard on the currency. Old Jim hadn't known him! Of course he hadn't known him! How could he recognize a boyhood crony in the bristly, dirty bum he'd found sitting on a broken step? But Jim hadn't patronized him, either. He had sort of seemed to like him, because he'd been sitting there grinning to himself.

A deeper gleam kindled in the

bright eyes of Lodi Joe. He'd go and have a talk with Jim. How surprised he'd be! Yes, sir, he'd go and have a good old rag-chewin' and chin fest with that same Jim Merriam. He could just see Jim's eyes dance, when he knew whom he'd given that money to. Lodi smoothed out the bill with unconscious reverence. It'd take two bits for a hair cut. And then there'd be a shave—yeah, and a bath.

He stood up and shouldered his bundle. A man brushed by him with the impatient query:

"Do you have to take up the whole sidewalk?"

That was Jim's boy! Lodi grinned after the straight young back, his thoughts busy elsewhere. His shoes were about gone. And his hat was a wreck. The remainder of his clothing was not so bad. It would pass, with a good brushing. He had a clean shirt and a red tie in his bundle. But he'd have to hire a room to dress in. No changing socks in an alley this time. Let's see—there'd still be enough left to buy some good cigars and a few drinks. He and Jim would sit and smoke and sip their drinks, with their feet on the table, maybe, and talk over the old days and laugh about the time that "Old Man" Siesel's mule team jerked out the front of the manger, and there he was lying under it like a turtle, with a mule standing on top. Lodi bet that Jim would remember that.

Lodi Joe sucked in his breath sharply for a moment. Gee, when had he talked with a man that way? Like—well, a man.

With heart thumping rather faster than usual, he pushed open the barber-shop door. The two chairs in the place were occupied by swathed and lathered patrons, and he sat

down among other waiting customers.

A man put his head in the doorway and swept the room with a cold blue gaze. He was a man rather under medium size, slim and blond, the type whose age is hard to guess. Lodi had seen such eyes and such hands before, and he felt a passing surprise that that sort of man should be in a place like this. The newcomer inquired:

"Price Walton here?"

One of the attendants pointed a thumb downward at the face over which he was bending. The man at the door said:

"Wanta see you when you're through, Price."

"Ugh-huh!" grunted the man in the chair, his speech hindered by soap.

Lodi Joe's eyes glimmered with mischief. It tickled his fancy to sit here and watch Price Walton being shaved, all unbeknown to Price. When the man at last sat up, he saw the down-at-heels figure on the corner.

"Huh, Ches," he remarked, getting out of the chair and reaching for his coat, "I didn't know you were runnin' a charity place here."

The barber followed his glance and said sharply:

"I'm not. Out, you! I don't want any tramps loafing around this place."

Lodi Joe looked at him with twinkling eyes and asked:

"My money not as good as Price Walton's?"

"Your money?" There was amused contempt in the barber's tone.

Lodi's laughing glance traveled around the room, then he picked up a paper, crossed his knees with great leisure, and became absorbed in the local headlines.

Walton glared at him, then stalked out.

THE soft mountain dusk was setting in as Lodi once again stepped into the street. He passed the lighted windows of the pool hall, and saw the broad back of Jim Merriam. The rancher was playing pool with his son and another young fellow. Lodi studied the face of Merriam as he stood chalking a cue and watching Curt make a difficult shot.

Lodi walked on up the street with an unusual thoughtfulness in his face. He hadn't given the idea much attention, in his catch-as-catch-can life, but it must be pretty fine to have a family, to have a son like that, that you could love, and be proud of, and play pool with, and—golly! It must be just about the greatest thing in the world.

Lodi stubbed his toe on a loose board in the sidewalk, and his thoughts skidded to a stop. "Hi, there, bum," he admonished himself, "have you gone and got sentimental this late in the day? Now, what size was that hat I got me in Philly, three year ago?"

Never did bride array herself with greater care than Lodi Joe used that night. It had been so many years since he had "dressed up" that the process made him sweat. He tied and untied the vermilion cravat until he was limp and the silk limper. Carefully he scuffed his shoes and carefully he rumbled his hat, in order that their newness might not call too violent attention to shiny elbows and baggy trousers. He brushed his hair across the most obvious thin spot until his scalp grew pink.

He was giving himself a final solemn inspection in the mirror, when his sense of humor finally reas-

served itself. All of a sudden he grinned, cocked his hat over one ear, and opened the door with a flourish. He felt all at once strangely young and irresponsible, as if those boyhood days he was going to recall with Jim Merriam had come back with a rush. Yet, under it all, was a frightening little ache in his throat and an uncomfortable pounding against his ribs. This was meaning so darn much more than he wanted it to mean. If—if Jim should be just decent and kind, instead of, well, chummy—why, the joke would be on him. His shoulders stiffened to meet the blow, then his common sense came to the rescue. The man who had handed him that bill to-day, he would never be merely decent. His hand grip would hurt, and he would roar his head off at the quirk of fate which had given Lodi Joe a new pair of shoes.

Head up, eyes once more sparkling normally, Lodi strode down the dark hall to hotel door No. 12. The room Jim Merriam was using was situated on a cross hall, and the door opened as Lodi turned the corner. He halted, then retreated a few steps. Curt Merriam was coming out of his father's room, and Lodi heard Jim's voice.

"Good night, son. We'll look for you home to-morrow. Tell you what you might do, if you're staying the night at the Bass place. You might ride by Annersley's in the morning and look over those yearlings he's been trying to sell me."

"All right," was the reply. "Good night."

The voice of the youth sounded oddly off key to Lodi. He heard the door close and a moment later a whispered oath followed by:

"You sure been long enough!"

"I couldn't help it," Curt's whisper answered apologetically. The speakers were walking toward Lodi, and he flattened himself into a dark doorway. "The old man was ready to gas all night. Wanted me to stay till he started home."

There sounded a chuckle with no mirth in it. "So you told him you were going over to see a Bass girl."

"Had to tell him something, didn't I?" The tone was jerky, as if Curt were laboring under suppressed excitement.

"Well, let's get a move on us. This is goin' to be a big night, boy."

L ODI saw the speaker slap Curt lightly on the shoulder as the two passed down the dim cross hall toward the back door of the hotel. It was the blond man with the cold blue eyes. Lodi Joe stiffened involuntarily with a sense of impending danger. He didn't know the man, but he knew the breed. That kind was no sort of proper associate for the son of Jim Merriam. Besides, there was something in the youth's voice—was it worry, fear, defiance, or all three? On pure impulse, Lodi decided to follow the two, far enough anyway, to see what they were up to.

They went down street past the general store and around the end of the building. There was a light in the rear, where Lew Macy was laboriously casting up the monthly accounts. But Curt Merriam and his companion did not go to the back door. Lodi followed them past it to an L in the building where they were swallowed in the black shadow. They did not go on into the street again, or he could have seen them against the light. For several minutes, he listened, but no sound gave him a hint of what had become of them.

"Hm-m-m," thought Lodi at last, and turned back. He knocked on the back door and entered at the storekeeper's command to "Come in!"

Lew Macy looked at the visitor in surprise. He shoved a battered eye shade to the top of his head for a closer inspection and asked mildly:

"Well, stranger, what can I do for you?"

"Answer a question, if you don't mind," Lodi responded, sitting on a corner of the pine table, which served as desk, and swinging a leg, "I'd kinda like to know what you got in that basement of yours, where you used to keep apples and potatoes in the winter."

The storekeeper gave an audible gasp. "Why—why, how'd you know what I used to keep in that basement?"

Lodi waved a dismissing hand. "That ain't the point. What you got there now?"

"What's it to you?" demanded Lew Macy.

"No bold front goes with me, Lew. All I want of you is a way into that basement so's I won't be seen."

"Who are you?" was the storekeeper's next question. He was plainly uneasy. "Say, are you a city dick?"

"Mebbe," acknowledged Lodi, seizing the guess thankfully. "And mebbe it'd be as well for you if you showed me how to get down there on the quiet, without no more gab on the subject. I ain't," Lodi added, "goin' to make no trouble for you personal, Lew."

**T**HE keg wasn't too comfortable a seat, and the knot hole was not in an ideal position. Lew Macy confessed that he had sometimes watched proceedings

from this vantage. "And what's a poor man to do?" the storekeeper had plaintively inquired, "when they offer you such a thumpin' rent for just half o' your basement? Wouldn't *you* partition it off and put in a secret door for 'em?"

Lodi grunted a noncommittal reply and got from Macy an exact idea of the location and operation of that door in the shadowed L of the building.

"But why such a lotta trouble to cover up?" he wanted to know.

"Cause this State has got a rock-ribbed law against gamblin', and this county has got a sheriff that's pure poison to any one he finds bustin' that particular statute."

Macy retreated, and Lodi bent to the knot hole. His body grew rigid a moment, then he swallowed hard. Price Walton, the blond man, Curt Merriam, and two others sat about the table in the middle of the twelve-by-fourteen room. A big lamp, suspended from a beam above them, furnished light.

"Well, boys," Walton was saying, "here we are once more. Curt took us to such a cleanin' the last few times that I guess we're fools to ever play with him again. But here goes. No man's luck can last forever. Guess your old man would be some surprised, Curt, if he knew how much cold cash you been pack-in' around with you the last week or so."

Curt Merriam's good-looking face was tense, but he spoke quietly. "I'm telling you fellows at the start that after I clean up to-night, I'm through with this for good. I promised you I'd give you another chance at me, so here I am, but this is the last time."

The blond man laughed. "Boy, you're never through. Once it's in

your blood, you can't get away from it."

Lodi, occupied by his own thoughts, did not hear the reply. He'd seen many a gambling game, in many a tough place. He knew, as well as if they had said it aloud, that these men were out to fleece young Merriam. There was an unholy light in the eye of Price Walton, whenever it rested on Curt's face, and there was a steely glimmer in the glance of the blond man. The remaining two were toughs of the rolling-stone variety, who were ready for anything—for a consideration.

Jim Merriam should know this! Even as he turned to go, Lodi remembered Jim's face while he watched his son at the pool table. In it had been not merely a love profound and tender, but also a pride and a trust which grew out of the fiber of the man's own sterner honor. Lodi sank back on the keg. Could he call Jim down here to witness this ugly thing? But—but—why, look here! Pretty soon it would be time for Jim to leave town, and Lodi and he had not had their talk yet! They mustn't miss that. It meant too much. Lodi's throat felt dry and tight. He had to have that talk with Jim!

He looked again through the knot hole. "Blackjack!" he thought. "There ain't nothin' in this world you can lose faster at."

He sat through an hour, two hours, three hours. He stuck it out, made himself sit still, watching the business out to the black end. He didn't know what he was going to do, exactly, when it was all over, but instinct told him to let the affair run its course. He saw the blond man deal. Even Lodi, who had seen much, had never witnessed greater venal skill. Here, surely,

sat the king of card sharps, in alliance with Price Walton. Lodi guessed the probable agreement. The blond man was to get his out of the winnings, the other two were mere hirelings.

PRICE WALTON at first expressed sympathy with Curt's mounting losses. Then the tone became faintly contemptuous, just enough to prod the youth. He suggested that Curt quit while quitting was good, since he could not seem to play.

Tight of mouth, sweating, dogged, Curt stuck with it. Lodi saw him stripped of every cent. Then he began writing checks, writing very carefully.

Walton leaned back and yawned.

"One o'clock, boys. What's the use of goin' on any longer?"

The cheeks of Curt Merriam were livid. He spoke through stiff lips:

"But you can't stop now! I got to get those checks back! I got to! Don't you see you can't stop now?"

His voice rose shrilly, and Walton barked a savage order:

"Shut up!"

The man rose from the table, and the frantic Curt clutched at him. Walton flung off his hand with an oath. He stood over the amazed youth.

"Ain't you got it yet, you little rotter? You whelp of a stuck-up dog that thinks he's better'n me!"

Curt started to his feet, the color pouring back into his face. Walton slammed him down in the chair.

"What'd you think, anyway, you little cotton-brain? That I was pettin' you along because I loved Jim Merriam? That I was just oozin' gratitude for the beatin' he once gave me? And for that mortgage of old Carmody's he cheated me outta closin' up? And for the loan I



couldn't get at the bank, 'cause he told 'em I wasn't a good risk? Say, you pup, I been waitin' many a year for this chance. And have I got it on him good now? I ask you!"

He spread out four checks fan-wise and flourished them in the face of the dazed youth.

"You think *you* can play black-jack. Wow, what a laugh!" He flung back his head and suited the action to the word. "We let you win, till you got the fever, and then we played." He shook the checks before Curt's face again. "Forged your old man's name, didn't you? What could be sweeter? Not only do I get the dough, but how much more will Jim Merriam cough up, to keep this quiet?"

Curt sat rigid at the table, staring at the man, his eyes like burned holes in a board, as the enormity of the thing crashed upon him. He tried to rise. Walton did not have to push him back this time. He was too weak to stand. Walton drove the knife deeper, calling the worst names he knew, venting the balked spleen of years.

Lodi did not stay to see more. He slipped away to the basement stairs and blew out the candle which Lew Macy had left burning for him.

The door in the dark L had been fitted adroitly, and oiled with care. It was meant to open without a sound, and did. Pressure on the invisible button released the catch. The door swung inward. Lodi had it nearly closed before any one sensed his presence. The four men were intent on Curt. Before they could turn—"Stick 'em up!" snapped Lodi Joe.

The blond man hesitated for the quiver of an eyelash.

Lodi said coldly, slowly: "You, blondy, don't reach for that rod you're wearin' under your arm.

Higher. Keep your backs turned, like good little boys."

THEY had barely glimpsed the intruder, hat pulled low over his eyes, right hand in his coat pocket, gun muzzle poking up the corner. They felt his fingers run swiftly over them.

"Nice little rod, blondy. Thanks. No more hardware. No, Price, I ain't after your money—yet. Walk to the wall, boys. Turn around. Keep your hands up, all but Price there."

Walton scowled, trying to think where he had seen this man before. "Why," he gasped, "if it ain't that bundle stiff that——"

"Shut your trap, you big hick!" It was the vicious hiss of the blond man. "You wouldn't know a flat-foot when you saw one, naturally!" The tone was loaded with scorn.

Walton stared, jaw sagging.

"Gosh," thought Lodi Joe, "wouldn't all them cops that's run me outta parks feel flattered!" His voice was soft:

"They say your county sheriff don't let much grass grow under his feet, once he starts." He let this sink in. "Price, give the boy back his checks. Yeah." Lodi waggled the blond man's neat blue automatic gently. "Also every cent o' money he had when he started this game. Too bad, Price. But when you hired a card sharp to do your dirt, you should go and get you a real expert, not some second-rate cheat that ain't smooth enough to fool anybody but a bunch o' small-time, tinhorn, would-be gamblers."

Having paid his respects to all and sundry, Lodi subsided and watched the dazed Curt count the crumpled bills that Walton fished from his pockets. When, to Lodi's question, the youth stated that he

had it all, he was ordered to "Come along. Put them checks in your vest pocket, careful," commanded Lodi. He stood at the door. "You birds sit quiet for one hour, and this business is finished. If you so much as touch this door before that——" He waved a suggestive hand, and the door closed after him.

Outside, he said, "Come back to the corner here, kid. Get out those checks, and we'll burn 'em."

Lodi lighted the match, and they watched the yellow paper crumble to charcoal. With his heel, Lodi ground the black bits into the earth and looked up at the face beside him in the dark.

"You cured, son?"

Curt Merriam was shaking. "Yes, yes!" he breathed. "How can I ever thank you? How——"

"Sho' now!" Lodi flourished a hand. "All in the day's work with me, kid. Go on home."

"You bet I will! And I'll tell dad——"

"Not for six months, you won't. First get back your self-respect, prove to yourself that you're sure enough cured, then tell him the whole yarn."

Curt was thoughtful a minute. "I guess that's right."

**L**ODI JOE caught a chuck wagon that had started for its range camp at midnight. On this he rode for three miles, through the cold mountain darkness. A horse went lame, and the driver climbed down for an examination.

"Stone in his foot," he announced. "Will you hold matches for me while I get it out?"

"I got a candle in my pocket," said Lodi. "We can use that."

"Well, say!" exclaimed the driver. "That luck. A candle is darn handy sometimes."

"Yeah," agreed Lodi, grinning to himself in the dark, "it sure is handy."

*Coming Next Week, "FOOLED TO FORTUNE," by E. W. CHESS.*

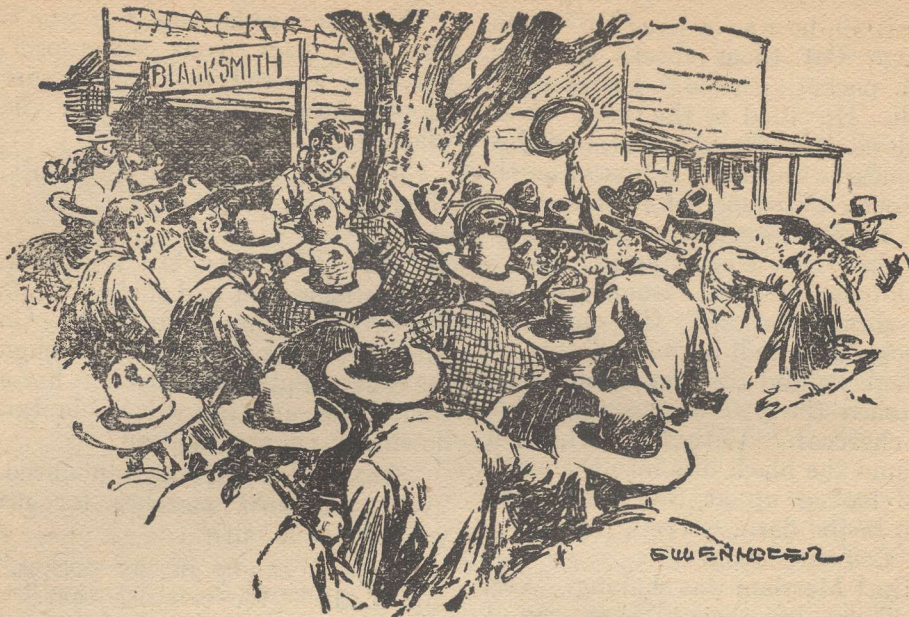
### CAMPBELL GOT THE HUSKY

**B**OBBY BING, a black-and-brown Husky dog, may not be sure of his own name, but he has a court record behind him that might be envied by any dog either in or out of the mushing business.

Bobby—or Bing—was claimed by two men, Hector Campbell and Jack Angelaki. Angelaki said Campbell stole him. Bobby Bing was Exhibit A in Magistrate O. F. Wright's court at Flin Flon, Manitoba.

The dog was released in court, and both mushers called him. One shouted "Bobby," the other, "Bing." It was too much for the sleigh dog. He barked and raced around the courtroom while spectators howled in glee to see him show equal affection for the two claimants.

Magistrate Wright threw the case out of court, and Bobby is back on the trail—with Campbell.



# THE SHERIFF'S BARGAIN

By **GLENN H. WICHMAN**

Author of "Hep Raises An Army," etc.

**O**UTTA the way—you loafers!" roared Sheriff Donovan. "Stand back! Hand me that prisoner!"

"The bank cashier was killed in the holdup!" some one in the mob shouted. "We're hangin' the skunk!"

"Not to-day you ain't!" corrected Donovan. "Mebbe to-morrow you will, but not to-day!"

The bandit had already slipped the loop of the lariat from around his neck. He was a sun-tanned, strappingly built, rather pleasant-faced youth of perhaps seventeen or eighteen. Color was gradually com-

ing back into his face; he grinned uncertainly.

The mob began drifting back toward the bank. They knew the sheriff well enough to know that he meant exactly what he said and would do exactly as he said and that to argue over it was merely a waste of time. They had a surprising amount of confidence in him, too, those men of Jasper Hill. Perhaps it was because he was so sure of himself.

"Flat-wheel" Hawkins and his gang had raided the bank at Jasper Hill. It had been a neat, quick, businesslike job. The gang had

materialized out of what was apparently a peaceful group of pleasure-bent punchers and then, when the job was completed, had just as quickly vanished in the direction of the near-by Saw Tooth Mountains.

Hawkins and his men had ridden off with some thousands of dollars in plunder and had left behind them in Jasper Hill two items of interest. One was the bank cashier, with a hole neatly drilled in his forehead. The other was one of Hawkins's own men, who, oddly enough, *had no holes in him whatever*. He had been found in front of the bank hitch rail, flat on his back in the dusty street, staring up at the blue sky. When some one had kicked the youngster in the ribs, he had obligingly scampered to his feet and hoisted his hands.

The whole thing had been planned as only Flat-wheel could and did plan things. Sheriff Donovan, for instance, had been inveigled into a poker game in a rear room of the Cowpoke's Saloon at just the right moment. When the uproar started, the man with whom he was playing made a dash for the door. The fellow had beaten the sheriff through the door, had banged it shut behind him, and locked it on the outside—all this being accomplished in about the length of time it would have taken a burro to wag its tail twice.

But it took Donovan almost five minutes to kick down the door. When he finally dashed out through the portals of the Cowpoke, Flat-wheel Hawkins and his gang of desperadoes had already departed for points unknown. That is, all but one of them had departed. There was the young fellow who had been found lying by the hitch rail.

Already justice was about to be visited upon the young bandit. The business end of a lariat had been

draped around his neck, he was being prodded down the short street toward the blacksmith shop in front of which grew a huge cottonwood with a conveniently protruding limb.

Sheriff Peter Donovan had run down the street as fast as his legs would carry him. Long experience in such matters made it perfectly obvious to him what had happened and what was about to happen. Likewise he had an abiding conviction that hurried lynchings were *never* in order. They were too hasty, in the first place, and too utterly lacking in decorum in the second place. There was always plenty of time in which to hang a man after all the facts in the case had been established beyond the shadow of a doubt and after the prisoner had been wrung dry of useful information. This latter appealed especially to the sheriff. He liked to wring men dry of information. This impressed him as being of vastly more importance than leading a posse off hell-bent for election, the said posse having very little idea where it was going.

Donovan had reached the mob by the time the mob reached the blacksmith shop. He elbowed his way through the men, scattering them to the right and left like nine-pins in a bowling alley. There had been mumbles over his actions, but he paid no heed.

The mob had gone.

AS Donovan stood looking at the prisoner, his own face went white. A lump formed in his throat. He kicked at a clod of dried mud underfoot to cover his confusion. For it was the first time in years, there was an empty feeling around his heart, a dull pain in his breast, a sense of utter, desolate loneliness. Although this was the

first time he had ever seen the prisoner, there was no need for the youth to tell him who he was. An expression around the mouth, something about the far-away look in those hazel eyes, the tilt of the chin—the bandit was as indelibly marked as though he had been branded with a running iron.

"Well, kid," grumbled the sheriff, apparently having some difficulty in controlling his voice, "I guess you're due for a rope's end. March ahead of me down there to the lockup. I wanta talk to you."

"O. K.," answered the bandit. "Right decent of you to have kept 'em from stringin' me up."

Donovan watched the broad back of the prisoner, noted the stride of the legs, the swing of the arms, the confident toss of the head. He was sure now, doubly positive, and realizing that there was no chance of being mistaken, he was suddenly sick all over.

"Sit down," said Donovan, as they entered the room in front of the jail that served him as an office. "Wait a minute. Mebbe I'd better frisk you first."

With deft fingers the sheriff searched for a hidden gun or knife, but found nothing to arouse his suspicion. The prisoner sat down in a chair in front of the battered desk.

"You don't look to be wounded," observed Donovan. "How comes it that you let 'em gather you in so easy?"

"I fainted—fainted dead away." The bandit grinned rather sheepishly.

"Fainted," mumbled the sheriff. "That's a new one. Never heard tell of a guy like you faintin' before. By the way—what's the name you go by?"

"Thad Hawkins." There was a

moment's pause, and then he continued: "I'm kind of ashamed to admit it—but I'm Flat-wheel Hawkins's son."

"Uh-huh," grumbled Donovan. "So it was Flat-wheel an' his gang did the job. I sort of suspected as much. Was your old man ridin' with 'em, himself, in person?"

"Nope. Paw's up at the hideout. He don't ride so much any more but he figgers things out for the rest of us."

"So you feel kind of ashamed that you're Hawkins's boy?"

"Yeah. I've thought some lately of bustin' away from him altogether, driftin' off some place an' gettin' a decent job. I'm plumb tired of high-trail ridin'."

"Well—well," mumbled the sheriff. "That's interestin'. Mighty interestin'. But you oughta have thought of that a couple days ago. It's kinda late now. The bank cashier was killed in the holdup, an' accordin' to the law that means you've gotta be hung. As far as you're concerned, you might as well look upon yourself as bein' dead already."

Donovan was watching the youth's face. There was not a sign of fear there, not even a trace of it. A somewhat humorous expression was playing around his eyes. He seemed actually to be enjoying himself.

"So you fainted dead away, Thad? Like a schoolmarm that's seen a mouse."

"Yeah. Passed out right there in front of the hitch rack. Didn't come to until the boys had rode off. I guess they didn't notice me, or one of 'em would have grabbed me."

Donovan's eyes wandered away from the bandit, out through the open door and into the dusty street,

but he saw nothing of what was happening there. "This kid's lyin' to me," he thought. "He never fainted at all. He laid himself down there in the street on purpose. Now why would he do that for? He could hardly have expected to escape bein' hung—as it was he missed it by about the width of a hair."

THE sheriff's thoughts wandered back through the reaches of time. For going on twenty years, Flat-wheel Hawkins had been operating up and down the ridge of the Continental Divide, from Canada to the Mexican border, back and forth like a bobbin in a loom. He never lingered long in one spot, was as shifty and cunning as a timber wolf. Peace officers almost without number had been on his trail, had ridden it long and hard. Forty or more of Hawkins's men had been killed at one time or another, but the brains of the outfit had always managed to escape. There had been close calls. Once, years before, he had collected a slug in the thigh. When the wound healed, one leg was shorter than the other.

Donovan half smiled. It was *he* who had fired that slug!

Flat-wheel Hawkins was now in the Saw Tooth Mountains, had been there for going on a month. It was five years since he had last visited these parts, five years of comparative peace for Las Lomas Valley. But he was back now, striking out at intervals from his hiding place like a rattler. Three weeks before he had descended upon the town of Red Dog farther up the valley and nearly cleaned out the place. A mighty effort had been made to track him down. But the Saw Tooth Mountains was about the easiest spot on earth for men to lose them-

selves in—the posses had all failed, even Donovan's.

And now Hawkins had struck at Jasper Hill, and had had the misfortune to leave one of his men behind him.

"I suppose you know who I am?" asked the sheriff.

"Sure. Peter Donovan. Flat-wheel's talked about you a lot. Ever since I can remember, he's jawed about Peter Donovan. Seems like you're the only man he's ever met that he's afraid of. It was you that gave him the slug in the hip that shortened his leg. He ain't ever forgot that."

"What else did he ever say about me?"

"Nothin'. But he aims to get you some day. He seems to be gettin' sorer an' sorer at you all the time. That's one reason why we come down to the Saw Tooth Mountains."

"Try an' remember," mumbled Donovan. "Sure he ain't told you nothin' more about me?"

"No, he ain't. But if I was free, I'd quit him. I can't stand him any more. He treats me worse 'an he does the other men."

"Shucks!" thought the sheriff. "This kid's tone don't carry conviction. He's playin' a part that somebody's taught him just like he was a show actor. He's repeatin' lines that Flat-wheel put into his head."

A full three minutes passed, and then the bandit said:

"I'm comin' clean, sheriff. I flopped down there in front of that hitch rack on purpose. It was my way of givin' Flat-wheel the go-by. In exchange for you not hangin' me, I'm goin' to do somethin' for you. Listen—I'm willin' to lead you to where Flat-wheel Hawkins is!"

If the sheriff felt any surprise, he failed to show it.

"All right, son. We'll organize a

posse right away. Twelve or fifteen men oughta be enough."

"Hold on there!" interrupted Thad. "That wasn't what I said. I said I'd take *you* to where Flat-wheel is. He'll be alone there. You an' he'll be all alone together."

Donovan ran his fingers through his thinning hair, that had long since turned gray around the temples. "Thunderation!" he mumbled to himself. "No fella on earth ever took the chance that this young buck did. If I hadn't showed up exactly when I did, he'd be as dead as a mackerel by now. Flat-wheel planned it. He knew I'd never let 'em hang the boy out of hand, that the kid would have a chance to speak his piece, like he's speakin' it now. But suppose I hadn't got out from that rear room in the saloon when I did——"

The sheriff's brow was furrowed with a frown. Hawkins had been quite willing to sacrifice his son on the slim chance that a meeting might be arranged between himself and the sheriff. And that meeting would be nothing more than a trap, a fatal ambush.

"It took a lotta nerve for you to lay down out there in the street," mumbled Donovan. "A darn sight more nerve than it would have to have rode away."

"Livin' with Flat-wheel ain't any bed of roses either," said Thad. "I'm leavin' him just as soon as you've got your iron on him. That's our bargain."

"Uh-huh," grunted the sheriff. "I think that'd be a pious idea."

**W**ITHOUT explaining to any one in town what he was up to, Donovan, accompanied by the youthful bandit, rode out of Jasper Hill and headed for the Saw Tooth Mountains. Thad

rode ahead of him and slightly to the right, setting both the pace and the direction.

"Tell me," presently asked the sheriff, "did you ever shoot a man?"

Thad glanced around, half smiling. "No, I never did. That's one thing that gripes Flat-wheel. I ain't afraid—but I never killed a man. I never had to."

"Where is it that you're leadin' me to, son? I got a hankerin' to know."

"To a cabin in a coulee. Flat-wheel's hidin' out there all by himself. The men who did the job at Jasper Hill will be miles an' miles away. Scattered here an' there in bunches."

Presently they left the flat country and were in the rolling hills to the north. The sheriff was all caution now, guarding as best he could against a possible ambush. Time after time he insisted that they give wide berth to clumps of boulders and knots of brush. Thad willingly complied; he began avoiding them himself without orders.

The noon hour passed. It was well along toward sundown and they were miles into the hills when the bandit raised his hand and dropped back beside the sheriff.

"The cabin's down in the hollow over the next rise," said Thad. He was looking quizzically at Donovan. "You think it's all boloney about me wantin' to leave Flat-wheel, don't you, sheriff? You think I'h just leadin' you into somethin'."

"I've thought so," admitted Donovan. "We'll see."

They came to the top of the rise. Below them was a sparsely wooded coluee and in the center of the little basin was a weather-beaten cabin.

"There you are," said Thad. "Help yourself. It's all yours."

Flat-wheel's in that shack. I'm unarmed. It'll be just between the two of you. Go on down, sheriff, an' do what's on your mind."

"Guess again," said Donovan. "I'm not a complete idiot. Thad, you go down an' tell your paw that there's a gent up here in the brush who wants to see him. Tell him anything you want to, but get him up here. Of course, you won't mention my name."

Thad's face had gone white, as white as it had been when the lariat was clutching at his throat in Jasper Hill that morning.

"He'll kill me!"

"He won't," muttered Donovan. "He won't if you're as clever with him as you've been with me. I'm not walkin' up to that cabin an' collectin' a volley of lead for my trouble."

"All right," finally agreed Thad. "I'll try it. He's been wantin' to meet you for a long time. He's been boastin' that he wanted to meet you. That's why I brought you here instead of to—*Flat-wheel's beat me once too often!*"

The sheriff took a rifle from his saddle boot.

"Have in mind I got you covered, Thad. Walk straight up to the door an' come out with Flat-wheel. No-body but Flat-wheel."

Donovan stood there behind the brush, the rifle in the crook of his arm, and watched the youth walk down the slope. A moment and he had pushed open the cabin door, stood there evidently speaking to some one on the inside. Thad backed out, and then Flat-wheel himself came in sight. The leader of the bandit gang hesitated only for a moment. Then he began walking, limping as he walked, up the slope toward the sheriff.

DONOVAN slipped the rifle back into the saddle boot, hitched up his belt, and made doubly sure that his solitary six-gun holster was in order.

When Hawkins was fifteen feet from him, he stepped out into the clear. The bandit stopped in his tracks; his mouth sagged open; his face, livid with rage, was hideous to behold.

"Thad," he roared, "you lied to me!"

His hands hovered over his cedar-covered gun butts. It was clear to the sheriff that if it had not been for him, the youth would have died right then. But Hawkins dared not turn toward Thad.

A long minute of silence. It was the sheriff who broke it.

"Well, Flat-wheel—here we are. It's been goin' on how many years since we last met?"

"You skunk!" rasped Hawkins. "If I didn't have a lyin' double-crossin' whelp of a son, you wouldn't be here now!"

"Hard words, Hawkins. We made a bargain once. Do you remember what it was?"

"Shut up!"

"I'll recall it to your mind," said Donovan. There was sorrow in his voice, sorrow and regret. "It'll be just as well for Thad to hear it, too. I don't think he ever has."

"You sentimental fool!" spat Flat-wheel.

"Thad," began the sheriff, "I'm goin' to tell you a story an' I want you to listen. Once there were two men an' a woman, two young men an' a young woman. One of the men was a dashing, domineering chap an' handsome in his way. The other fella was not so good-lookin' an' had no dash at all. This man I've first mentioned swept the girl



off her feet with a whirlwind courtship. They were married.

"Thad, the man's name was Henry Hawkins, commonly called Flat-wheel, an' the woman's name was Helen Ware—your father an' your mother. The third man, the man who lost out so completely, was Peter Donovan.

"Your father, Thad, turned out to be a buzzard from the word go, yet your mother loved him dearly. She was that kind of a woman—I honor an' admire her for it. Hawkins had no fondness for honest toil. A year after the marriage an' he was ridin' the high trail, ridin' it high, wide, an' handsome. You were born. Two years an' your mother died."

Donovan paused. He was looking at Hawkins now, looking at him with steely eyes.

"Flat-wheel, you must still remember the day when I caught up with you in Montana. After I plugged you in the hip, you were at my mercy. If I didn't finish you off, the law would. Yet I gave you a chance on account of Helen Ware's son. I made a bargain. You were to see to it that Thad was to be raised in some quiet town and when he grew to manhood, you were *not* to force him into your line of business. You were to give him every opportunity to lead a decent life.

"In return for that I agreed never to molest you. To leave it to other lawmen to run you down. But the bargain meant nothin' to you. I didn't know that until to-day. It's disappointed me a heap. But all the time you've been afraid of me. To-day you decided to get rid of me. You risked the life of what should be the dearest thing in the world to you on the slim chance of trappin' me.

"The boy wasn't to bring me to you at all. You'd arranged an ambush with your men—somewhere else. You took advantage of that superb courage that Helen Ware gave Thad to trap me. No man ever missed a lynchin' by a narrower margin than he did. Yet the trap didn't work. You overplayed your hand. Even with your own son, you overplayed it. As strange as it may seem, Hawkins, I think he's had aplenty even of his own father."

"The kid looks like her," said Hawkins. "I hate him like I got to hate her. She loved you, Donovan. I could see it in her eyes."

"Shut up!" barked the sheriff. "Your mouthings offend me. It's you an' me, Flat-wheel, standin' here in the bushes with fifteen feet of air between us. I once made a bargain with you. You weren't man enough to keep it. I'm makin' another bargain now. Sometime within the next sixty seconds I expect you to reach for your gun. If, at the end of that time, you haven't reached for it—well, I'll reach for mine."

"Please!" interrupted Thad. "Give him another chance! Please! I'm sorry now!"

"The seconds are passin', Hawkins," breathed Donovan. "They're passin' fast."

There was a crafty smile on Flat-wheel's lips.

"I ain't got no intention of shootin'," he said, as he began raising his hands. "I surrender."

But the sheriff hadn't been born yesterday, or the day before that. It happened exactly as he had expected it would. When Hawkins's hands were level with his shoulders, his right hand suddenly shot holsterward.

It was a good draw and a fast one.

But Donovan's was that necessary split second faster. The sheriff sprang sidewise as he fired. Their guns roared almost simultaneously. Flat-wheel clutched madly at his throat and crumpled up there in the grass. Donovan recovered his equilibrium instantly, stood there looking down at the man he'd known for so many years.

"I always wondered," mumbled Thad, "why it was he treated me like a dog. Was it because I looked like my mother?"

"Son," mumbled Donovan, "it's about a thousand miles as the crow

flies between here an' Pendleton. I always did have a hankerin' to start a one-horse cow ranch up in that country. You an' me are ridin' there together. An' when we get there, your name's goin' to be changed. From now on you're Thad H. Ware, the 'H.' standin for your—your mother."

"Gosh!" breathed Thad. "Then you're not goin' to have me hung?"

"I will," answered Donovan, "unless you take to callin' me Uncle Pete."

"Uncle Pete," said the youth, "we'll ride to Pendleton."

*A Thrilling Novel, "THE FIGHTING KID," by a famous author,  
W. C. TUTTLE, in Next Week's Issue.*

### HIRED MAN FINDS FORTUNE

**J**ACOBUS JONKER'S hired man recently found a diamond on his employer's claim in South Africa. Jonker sold the diamond for £63,000.

The stone is as large as a hen's egg. It has been named by the government diamond department the Jonker Diamond and is officially registered as follows:

"Seven-hundred-and-twenty-six-carat stone, extra blue white and pure, found at the Elandsfontein alluvial diggings in the district of Pretoria."

Jonker described the precautions he took to insure the safety of the stone:

"I entrust everything of value to my wife," he said. "That night we bound the diamond in a cloth and tied it round my wife's neck. I saw her to bed after carefully locking and barring all the windows and doors except the front door. There my two sons, myself, and two friends kept guard with loaded revolvers until dawn. Then I handed the diamond for safekeeping to the manager of the Premier Diamond Mine."

Jonker is sixty-two years old and has been at various diggings since 1916. Several years ago he found a stone which he sold for £1,050 and later two others worth £96 and £350. He plans to buy two thousand acres of land near Belfast, Transvaal, and become a sheep and cattle raiser.

Johannes, the native laborer who has been at Jonker's diggings for years, was not excluded from his project.

"Johannes will go with me and is going to get a good present," his employer said.



A Serial

# GUN GIFT

By MAX BRAND

**E**MBITTERED by the loss of of his right hand, Daniel Finlay, who practices law in the town of White Water, finds pleasure in being a secret trouble maker. 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.

The lawyer tells Witherell that Mary Wilson is engaged to John Saxon, a hard-working young fellow who has a place in the mountains where he has a small herd. And by praising Saxon, Finlay sets Witherell's mind against that young man.

As a result, Witherell shames Saxon before the people of White Water, by making him dance to the tune of a six-gun; then Witherell and his companions burn Saxon's place and rustle his herd. Unable to gain redress, or the money for a new start, Saxon despairs. About to commit suicide, he is stopped by Finlay, who gives him a revolver and prevails upon him to learn to use it, for the sake of revenge.

After two months' practice with the .45, in the wilderness, Saxon returns to town and secures a job as bouncer at Lefty Malone's Rolling Bones Saloon. Witherell comes to the place, and Saxon kills him in a gun duel. Finlay then reminds

Saxon that Witherell's brother, a notorious desperado known as the "Solitaire," will seek to avenge the killing. The lawyer sends Saxon to Boots Russell, who formerly rode with the Solitaire, but has fallen out with him. Boots agrees to join forces with Saxon against the Solitaire and the four men who ride with him.

Boots recruits three other hard young men, Del Bryan, Joe Pike, and Tad Cullen; also Arthur William Creston, a huge Negro, who cooks for the group. They locate the Solitaire's hang-out. In a gun battle the Solitaire beats Saxon to the draw, and a bullet furrows Saxon's scalp. But two of the Solitaire's men are killed, and one wounded, and the noted desperado is forced to flee with the survivors. Left behind is the loot of many robberies. Saxon, as chief of the group, takes one third of the cash, and the others divide the remainder of the treasure.

Returning to White Water with his share, Saxon tells Finlay what he has done. The lawyer insists that Saxon turn over the money to him, saying that he will find the rightful owners. Finlay then plots to have Saxon killed by the Solitaire, so that he may keep the money for himself.

Approaching Finlay's house the next night, Saxon encounters the Solitaire. In the dark their battle, with guns and then with bare hands, is inconclusive, the Solitaire fleeing when the town is roused.

After this failure of his scheme, Finlay arranges with Saxon to accompany him, two days later, to the Lumber & Mining Bank in Stillman which has been raided by the Solitaire. Ostensibly this trip is to be made to return the stolen money.

Saxon then returns to his men, to

find that two of them, Del Bryan and Joe Pike, have been celebrating at Stillman, and have been arrested on the charge of robbing the Stillman bank, and are to be taken to jail at the State capital. Assisted by the others of his crew, Saxon succeeds in freeing Bryan and Pike from the custody of the officers.

On the following morning, when Finlay and Saxon are to go to Stillman, Mary Wilson is visited by Molly, a friend of the Solitaire's, and is informed by her that Saxon is on his way to be murdered. The two girls then ride to attempt to overtake Saxon.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE BETRAYAL.

IT had been midnight before Saxon and his five men gained the shack again. They made a small fire and cooked coffee and bacon and ate the bacon between slabs of stale bread, hungrily, wolfing it down. Then Pike, as they were getting ready for bed, made a speech.

"I would 'a' done you dirt, chief," he said. "And then you done this for me. Why, I would 'a' done you dirt. And then you done this."

He completed this speech with a wide gesture which at once invited wondering comment and at the same time swept aside all words as useless. Del Bryan said nothing, but he watched Saxon with the fond eyes of a dog that will take a beating and return to the master's hand. And Saxon said nothing except, cheerfully:

"It's time to turn in!"

But, as he wrapped himself in his blanket and lay down, a king of men and conscious of his monarchy, he asked:

"Boots, how's the Stillman Pass, now?"

"Always damned rough," said Boots.

But Boots remembered that remark when, in the morning, the chief and one horse were gone from the camp, without a word left behind him. The others, after their long ride of the night before, had slept rather late; the sun was on top of the pine trees before they came out of the shack. And as they looked around vainly for their leader, Creston said, almost to himself:

"There's something wrong."

Boots took him by the arm and led him aside.

"What made you say that—that there was something wrong? What d'you know, Arthur?"

"I don't know nothing," said Creston, "but I *feel* something like Christmas morning when there ain't no turkey in the house and there ain't no chicken, neither. I dunno where the chief went, though."

"Stillman Pass," muttered Boots.

He looked toward those high, ragged mountains, and saw the clouds overwhelming them; and something overwhelmed the mind of Boots.

"The last thing that a gent says at night is the first thing in his head in the morning," said Boots. "Stillman Pass—Stillman Pass. Arthur, I'm going to ride there, and maybe you'd better come along. Don't say nothing to the rest of 'em. Most likely it's a fool idea of mine. But I got prickles up my spine, and that may mean as much as Christmas turkey does to you. Come on!"

**B**IG John Saxon, in fact, had ridden down through the cool brightness of the dawn at that moment when the sky is as beautiful as at sunset. The chill

wind carried to him the fragrance of the pine trees and the sound of the waters that rushed and called along the slopes.

For breakfast, he pulled his belt a notch tighter.

A jack rabbit jerked away from behind a rock and ran crookedly, like a snipe dodging down wind. Instinctively he pulled his Colt and blazed away. Two bullets knocked dirt into the fur of that jack rabbit; the third shot smashed its back.

John Saxon rode on, and let the fresh meat lie. He had a strange little working of guilt in his heart, having killed that game out of mere wantonness of spirits, so to speak.

After all, he thought, there may be a justice which weighs all things in delicate scales, and balances motives and deed together, and finds lives of men and beasts akin in value. That queer discontent and trouble remained vaguely in the back of his mind all the way into White Water.

He could not look at the place in quite the same spirit that had been his the day before. He had come in like a hero, on that day. He had been able to rejoice and look men in the eye. If there were a crime on his conscience, it was that he had permitted his gang to take the plunder from other robbers. But was that really a crime in the eyes of the law?

He could not tell what the answer might be, but the guilt of it certainly did not weigh heavily on his spirits.

It was another matter to board a train and tear two of his men away from the hands of the law. To be sure, they were seized as robbers of a bank—whereas they had done no more than to rob other bandits. But this it would be impossible to prove, no doubt. And, once in the hands

of the law, other crimes would probably soon be proved against them. He had taken his men away from the power of the law. Yes, he felt that he would have taken them had they been even more guilty, and of greater crimes than robbery. Pride would have made him try—pride and that odd sense of ruling power which was now in him.

But now, certainly, the law had a definite claim against him. To be sure, very few people had seen his features clearly. His hat had been pulled well down. The flare of the electric torches in the drawing room had served to show the faces of the deputies and the prisoners, rather than the faces of the rescuers. Only Bunny Tucker, perhaps, would be apt to give damning testimony. And that testimony might be silenced by the ten ten-dollar bills which had been lodged in the porter's pocket.

Nevertheless Saxon was glad—very—to be taking this trip with Daniel Finlay, to-day. He was glad that he was to ride down into Stillman and repay to the bank all the share of the spoils which had fallen into his hands. Perhaps that might still leave him guilty in the eyes of the law, but human eyes are not as the eyes of the law. And wherein is a man criminal if he will wash his hands clean of the results of the crime and refuse the illegal profit?

**W**HEN he got to the Finlay place, it was still so very early that the street was empty, but he found that Finlay already had managed to saddle his horse—poor fellow, thought big John Saxon, using his stump of a wrist and one hand—and now he was prepared to depart.

But when Saxon went into the little house, he had a new sign of the thoughtfulness of Finlay, as soon

as he had shaken the left hand of his host.

"Have you eaten, my lad?" asked Finlay. "I left some bacon and scrambled eggs on the stove, and there's coffee left. The food is still warm. You have a hungry look, John. You'd better sit down and fill up a bit."

Saxon sat down, with a smile and ate, rapidly and largely. Suddenly he broke out:

"You think of everything, Mr. Finlay. There ought to be—there ought to be a special sort of a happiness for you, one day!"

"Do you think so?" asked Finlay. And there was a sudden and a curious pain in his face. "Do you think so, John?"

Then his eyes went wandering, as though a doubt had come to him.

"I have my own sins; I have my own sins!" muttered Finlay, only half aloud.

After that, he got out a packet of money and made Saxon count it bill by bill. His total share of the plunder was there, and Saxon checked off the sum.

"As though I'd doubt you, Mr. Finlay!" he said, laughing.

"Ah, well," said Finlay, "business is business, and doubts are better settled before they begin. Money is like soot, John. It soon is sticking to the hands."

A moment later, they were jogging up the street. Long before the sun was up, they were nearing the pass itself, over which clouds were gathering, crumpling against the sides of the peaks as waves crush in spray against the rocks by the sea; but these aerial waves remained suspended, recoiling a little and then clinging again, while fresh tides of vapor came sweeping in.

Looking up at this scene, it was very much as though they were be-

neath the ocean, and the force of the wind was as water currents tugging at them. It was very cold, and Finlay was sure that it would soon begin to snow. In fact, the air had a wintry nip to it, and drove easily through the clothes and started goose flesh prickling over the body. And every moment the upper sky filled more with the swirling masses of the clouds.

"Aye," said Saxon, "if I were herding beef towards Stillman, I'd begin to hurry them on."

"What do you think?" asked Finlay. "If you had the chance, would you be happy to go back to ranching again?"

Saxon laughed. "I don't know," he said. "I feel every day, now, as though I were sitting in at a game with high stakes on the table. And that's a good deal of fun."

"Yes, high stakes, high stakes, my lad," said Finlay. "Life or death—life or death!"

He did not say it with the half-melancholy tone of a moralist, but with the hard-lipped savagery of one who knows what he is talking about and has had the relish of the forbidden taste. And Saxon was deeply surprised and a little troubled.

But there had been pain in the life of Finlay. There had been a great deal of pain, and there was little wonder if hardness and bitterness crept into his voice, now and again.

They rode on into the heart of the main pass, a great, rough country with runs of water everywhere corroding the old trail, until they came to the side of the Stillman River itself, running sometimes sleek and dark with speed and sometimes riffing into white down a steeper descent, and sometimes rushing with angry thunder among the jutting rocks that broke up from its bed.

Just above one of these cataracts Finlay, who had been looking about him from time to time, pulled up his horse.

"We'd better water the horses here, John," he said.

"They don't need water yet," said Saxon.

"Ah, my lad," said Finlay, "how can we tell? The poor dumb fellows have no tongue to tell us. We'd better ask them, John."

Saxon, half smiling, but rather touched by this kindness of heart, dismounted willingly enough and led his horse to the edge of the water. Finlay, by an odd chance, led his down at a good distance and came to the edge of the stream a full ten yards off.

But the horses, though the water was there, and though they spread their forelegs and lowered their heads as if about to drink, merely smelled at the speeding water and then tossed up their heads again.

Finlay remounted at once, and Saxon, about to do the same, heard behind him a sudden shout in that same clear, bell-like voice which he had heard before:

"Saxon, fill your hand!"

Aye, *this* was the end! Colder than the mountain wind that voice of the Solitaire drove through Saxon. He drew his own gun as he spun about, but he had time for no more than the first fleeting glimpse of the Solitaire, not shooting from the hip, but standing erect, with one hand behind his back and the other arm extended with the gun like a duelist on his mark. Saxon could see the cold cruelty of the smile on that handsome face. Then the gun spoke, and the weight of the bullet striking John Saxon, staggered him backward and sent him plunging into the full sweep of the mountain stream.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

DANIEL FINLAY, turning in the saddle, saw the man he had betrayed fall back into the water with a quantity of mud and sand from the bank toppling after him. The strong current instantly seized on the dark cloud of the mud and shot it down the stream toward the teeth of the cataract. And now the dark patch was hurled away among the rocks. Daniel Finlay still waited, expecting to see the body flinging this way or that among the stones, or, at least, a crimson stain in the froth of the current. But he was able to make out nothing at all.

Conscience was no giant in the soul of Finlay, but when he looked where big John Saxon had been standing and saw now the raw margin of the cave-in, and above it the Solitaire and three riflemen with him, something stirred vaguely in the lawyer. But he was comforted, instantly, by the knowledge that he had nearly sixty thousand dollars in his wallet. He was a made man. He could retire when he pleased from work; he could leave an estate which would make him a solid man in the esteem of the world after him. He had gained at one stroke, through murder, the essence of respectability—a fortune to invest.

He called to the Solitaire: "It's better for me to be seen riding furiously from this place, Solitaire!"

He turned his mustang and put it into a dead gallop.

"Wait a minute!" shouted the Solitaire. "Let's have a look at that money!"

The lawyer did not seem to hear.

"Shall I fetch him back?" asked one of the men, raising his rifle.

"I've got half a mind to," said the

Solitaire. But then he shook his head. "No matter what he makes out of it, it's been worth a lot to me. That was through the heart that I slammed Saxon. D'you see?"

"Nope. It wasn't through the heart. He would 'a' fallen on his face, likely, if it had been through the heart," said the man whose rifle was lifted still, as he stared yearningly after the disappearing figure of Daniel Finlay.

A grizzled fellow whose beard looked like a close-growing gray moss on his face, answered: "He started to fall on his face, and then he pitched back, because the bank caved in."

"That bullet went through his heart. I felt it go through," said the Solitaire, with a queer smile. "But we'll search the stream. Fred, go down below the rapids and see if you can spot anything. Pete, you walk along the rapids themselves and take a look. I'll give a glance to the water here."

"Thorough is what you are, chief," said grizzled Pete.

But he went off at once to make the search, while the Solitaire stepped a few paces along the bank and paused at the edge of the water just above the spot where John Saxon lay submerged.

The shock of the bullet had left his side and left shoulder numb; the sudden fall had half-dazed him; and then the grip of the icy water restored his wits. Blindly reaching out with his right hand—the left hand was almost useless—he clutched a root from which the soil had been washed away, and so he lay, just at the surface of the stream with a bit of brush thrusting out to screen his face as he breathed.

The pull of the current, even close inshore, was very strong; the pain from the wound now commenced



and grew quickly to a commanding agony. But he could hear the changing voices of the cataract, and they poured strength of terror into that good right hand of his which anchored him to safety.

**T**HAT was how he lay, staring with blank eyes up through the meager screen of the bush and into the whirling shadows of the stormy sky above him, when he heard the voices of the Solitaire and his men; and then a shadow sloped across him, and Saxon submerged himself. Looking up through the water, he could see the Solitaire standing at ease, with the wind-whipping his clothes and jerking up the wide brim of his sombrero. With one hand resting lightly on his hip, he surveyed the stream; and right at his feet lay the watery image of John Saxon.

Saxon was minded to crawl out of the water. Perhaps if he lay wounded at the feet of the Solitaire, he would receive mercy? No, he knew by a perfect instinct that there could be no forgiveness for him!

And now, as his lungs were bursting, and the blood rushing into his staring eyes, he vaguely saw the Solitaire step back.

Saxon pulled himself up to the surface. But the most agonizing part of the struggle remained for him. He wanted to draw in a vast, gasping breath. It would come in with an audible groan. Instead, he had to sip the air noiselessly, like a small bird sipping water. Little by little, gradually, his lungs were filled, emptied, filled again; but the agony seemed as though it would never end.

He could hear voices that cleared as his distress diminished a little. He was growing weak as the blood

ran from him. Why did not the bloodstain in the water draw attention like a red flag? He could not know how a riffle in the current covered the stain with a white froth and so concealed it from all except a very careful examination. He could not know, also, that the very surety of the Solitaire was blinding him to what lay at his feet.

For the Solitaire, Saxon was dead and gone through the tearing teeth of the cataract. His men came up to report that there was nothing to be seen, but when the water below the rocks was probed, it was found to be very deep, and no doubt the body was down there in the shadows, snagged on some rock. It might be a month before it broke loose, to be rolled and battered down the length of the stream.

The snatches of words that Saxon heard assured him of these details in the minds of the searchers. Then, distinctly, he heard the Solitaire give the order to mount.

"He rode right into the trap like a blind fool!" he heard the Solitaire saying. "I wish there'd been ten thousand people around to see me cut him down like an ox!"

Afterward came the departing beat of the hoofs of the horses. And still Saxon counted enough seconds to make two minutes before he dared to draw himself out of the water.

Lying flat on his face, he turned his head and looked down the trail, and there he saw, in the vague distance, the disappearing forms of the four riders. There had been no intention of making a fair fight of it. The Solitaire was to try his hand first, but if he failed, his riflemen would make sure of the little job of blasting the life out of the body of John Saxon.

"If ever I meet him again," said

Saxon to his soul, "I'm going to be able to kill him!"

But all of that was in the infinite future. Life—the life of the instant was what he had to struggle to retain.

SHelter came first. The sky was black, now, across the whole of the narrow mountain horizon that closed in the gulch, and the wind came in sweeping strokes that made his body shudder with its force. The first snowflakes whirled into his face. They seemed to Saxon like ghostly stones, pelting him. There was whirling in his mind like the confusion in the sky. And the wind was as cold as the running ice water of the mountain stream.

He headed for the shelter that first offered—an outcropping of big rocks not far away. But from the sign, he knew that the horses of the Solitaire and his men had been tethered here, and perhaps one or all of them might return to find out something that had been left behind them.

Therefore he had to push farther on.

Nausea began to work in him. He had heard that such nausea came to men who were bleeding fast. And he could not get enough air.

The horrible air hunger kept stifling him though he opened his mouth wide and let the pure wind blow into his throat. It seemed to help his breathing, but it did not help enough.

He was going to die, he felt. Life was running out of him too fast. Then he remembered that some one had said that bleeding to death was the easiest way of dying.

Well, let the theorists try it, then!

The man's part was to keep struggling to the end. He had to get his clothes off, make the bandage, tie up

the mouth of the wound, and then, wringing his clothes, drag them on again.

All of these things, he knew that he could not accomplish, but he must struggle on to the end. He dragged off coat and shirt and saw the wound. The horrible furrow began at the breast bone and ripped right across the ribs and then through the flesh of the shoulder. His bones had been strong indeed to sustain the impact, and his body had by chance been turned just enough to make the bullet glance.

For the third time he had stood before the Solitaire, and for the third time his life had been spared. And a strange confidence grew up in him, a thin fountain of surety which said that he was destined, eventually, to lay the Solitaire dead.

If only he could husband and revive the thin, dying flame of consciousness which remained to him now!

He made the bandage. He could not use his left hand for the work of tearing the cloth, because at the least effort with his left arm the blood burst out in appalling streams. He had to grip with his teeth and his right hand, and so rend the cloth into strips. Holding one end of the cloth in his teeth, he could then wind the bandage around the quantity of moss with which he first padded the mouth of the wound.

The pain was dying out. There was little sensation except that the cold with icy fingers probed the delicate depths of the wound.

But he made that bandage hold.

His naked body was blue, when he removed the last of his clothes and wrung them. Afterward, he began pulling them on. And the damp clothes clung to his skin and would hardly be persuaded to come over him again.

When they were on, once more, they seemed to give him no shelter. They were simply wet surfaces through which the wind blew, chilling him more and more.

He stood up, determined to run until his circulation was restored, but nauseating dizziness made him drop to his knees again.

**H**E must have a fire. Fortunately there remained dry matches inside the pouch of oiled silk in which they were always wrapped. Once he had a fire, the warmth would bring some life back into his body. So he crawled away on hands and trembling knees into the brush.

He was very sick. He was very weak. He was so weak that the air seemed to be filled with slanting lines of gray and white. Then he was aware that these lines were the streaks of the falling snow. The wind had increased; it was whipping the snow down in almost horizontal lines, and that was why the brush was dry.

He tried to pull at and break a dead bush which might give him fuel. But that mighty right hand which never had failed him was nerveless and weak now. And the horror of the air hunger was increasingly moment by moment.

He lay flat for a time, thinking only of his breathing. Then he heaved himself to his elbows and laid hold on a branch with his teeth. There was still strength in neck and shoulders and jaw. He tore that branch from the shrub and then sat up, the precious bit of dry wood between his legs, sheltered from the blast of the wind by his body.

He got out the twist of oiled silk. His fingers were very thick and they were so soft with weakness that it

was hard for him to get hold of a thing as small as a match.

After he got hold of it, how would he scratch it?

His clothes were wet. The soles of his shoes were wet. But there was the lee side of a boulder just beside him. He scratched the match on that.

The flame sputtered blue—and went out. Another died in the same way.

He pressed closer to the big stone, and started to take a third match when his clumsy hand slipped and the entire lot of matches showered out into a drift of soft snow. He made a frantic gesture to save them, and only buried them deeper in the snow.

Then, for five fainting seconds, he sat swaying, with eyes closed, surrendering to death.

Afterward, he rallied. Somewhere, in a book or from the lips of his mother, he had heard that only cowards give up the fight. This was a fight—and at the far end of the bitter trail he would win for his reward a chance to stand for a fourth time in front of the Solitaire.

He dug into the snow and picked out the matches. The heads of them still seemed hard, but when he scraped them, one after another, against the rock, the heads crumbled without giving forth flame.

When they were gone, to the last one, he saw that the face of the rock had become wet. He had been trying to scratch the last matches through a film of water!

At that, he laughed a little, but only a little because his lungs were empty of precious, life-giving air.

He knew, now, that he was to fail. However, he did not want to die like a coward, so he started crawling.

The world was spinning about him. And the falling snow covered

the mountains with a false twilight. He had lost all sense of direction, and all that he had to judge it by was the force of the wind. So he crawled against the teeth of the wind, feeling somehow that this was the better way.

He stretched flat on the ground for a moment, to rest. And after a time, he found himself stiff and cold and knew that he had lost consciousness during the interval.

To die that way, on the ground, like a frozen snake!

He got to his elbows. He got to his knees. He swayed to his feet.

Walking into the wind was somehow the best way. But his knees were buckling under him. He leaned into the wind; he leaned on the hard, quivering arms of it, and went forward until a wall of darkness closed over his mind, and he felt himself falling.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### FINLAY'S STORY.

**T**HAT morning was Sunday, and Daniel Finlay, as he rode swiftly out from under the clouds that covered the Stillman Pass into the bright, hot sun of the lower plain, knew what he would do. He was inspired by the sound of the church bells that chimed thin and sweet from the little steeple, and they spoke cheerfully to Finlay of the best tactics which he could pursue.

The thing was so clear to him that he laughed a little, and then looked back over his shoulder at the cloud masses which were thickening and lowering over the mountains around the Stillman Pass. In his pocket lay sixty thousand dollars, very nearly, of future comfort. In his heart lay a vast assurance that, having done so much, he could not now go wrong!

So Daniel Finlay felt such cheer within him that it was hard for him to compose himself for the part which he had to play. Only by degrees did he think himself into the proper frame of mind. A mile from the town, as the bells had stopped chiming, he put the spurs to his mustang and made it race at full speed, until the froth flew back from its mouth over its breast and shoulders, and the sweat ran down in streams along its sides. Desperately, Daniel Finlay was seen to dash into the main street of White Water.

At the doors of the church he drew rein. Inside, he could hear the notes of the organ, the monotonous sweetness of the hymn lifted by uncertain voices.

Daniel Finlay did not pause. He ran up the steps and cast open the doors. As they crashed back, the organ stopped suddenly; a scattering of voices maintained the hymn for only an instant, and then there was a silence out of which grew the whispering sound of intaken breaths. Men and women began to rise. For they saw Daniel Finlay striding down the aisle of the church with one arm raised to demand attention; it was his right arm, the handless arm which all of White Water knew so well and pitied so profoundly.

"Friends!" cried Daniel Finlay. "If there's courage and honor and faith and kindness among you, I come to demand a rightful revenge—I come to demand justice."

The minister rushed down the aisle. He, good man, had in his great heart nothing but compassion for the sufferings of men and women in this world and the divine hope of offering to them a higher happiness. And when he saw the tall, thin, rigid form of Daniel Finlay standing in the door of his church, black as night against the outer flare of the sun-

light, it had seemed to Joseph Hunter that the devil incarnate was on his threshold.

But then, in a moment, he recognized the mysterious and most respected lawyer, Daniel Finlay. The minister was quickly at the side of the lawyer. Now he cried:

"Come into the pulpit, Mr. Finlay. Speak to us where we can all hear and see you! What has happened?"

"No pulpit," cried Finlay, recoiling a little. "Let me call to the manhood of the men of White Water, standing among them. I will not be raised in a pulpit above their heads. For Heaven knows that after this day my *heart* shall never be raised high."

"Mr. Finlay," said the preacher, "we know, we all know, something of your goodness and of your secret works of charity and kindness. If you have been wronged, tell us openly, and we will openly try to do you justice."

"Yes!" called many strong voices.

Sunday is a day for best clothes and drowsiness and quiet voices; into this Sunday had burst a voice crying for justice, and that voice came from highly revered Daniel Finlay. So every man, young or old, who sat in that congregation on this day, was instantly on his feet.

"Yes," they called. "Tell us exactly what has been done to you. If anybody——"

"Nothing has been done to me, except to make me a witness! A witness, friends, of the foulest outrage that was ever perpetrated in this world," called Finlay.

HE clapped against his forehead that eloquent stump of his right arm, and for a moment, he seemed totally overcome. He even reeled a little, as though

recoiling from his thoughts, and the kind preacher caught him and supported and steadied him.

The men of the congregation crowded close around him, until the preacher called for more room, and air for Mr. Finlay, and at once the crowd gave back, those in front shouldering strongly against those behind. Every face was determined; grim would be the revenge of these men upon whomever Daniel Finlay denounced.

At length Finlay appeared to recover, and though he had to rest part of his weight, leaning his left hand on the shoulder of the minister, he raised his stub of a handleless arm and cried rather weakly, but in tones that passed instantly through the deadly silence of the church:

"Murder, murder, murder! They have murdered the noblest soul and the greatest hero we have seen! John Saxon is dead!"

He paused here, his head sinking. It seemed as though he would fall to the floor, except for the sustaining arm which the minister instantly passed under those frail, narrow shoulders.

Through the church ran a deep-voiced murmur of men saying softly, deep in their throats: "John Saxon—dead! John Saxon—murdered!"

Perhaps, at that moment, the picture of Saxon on his horse, surrounded by the shouting children, rode suddenly into every mind. And now he was gone—murdered! The terrible grief of Daniel Finlay, overwhelming that good man, that noble man—was it not to be seen how he shuddered and almost fell to the ground?—took hold on all that congregation. They, too, felt grief. And they felt also a fierce flame of anger. They would know more!

"In the Stillman Pass," cried Daniel Finlay. "There his body was

swept down the river and torn to shreds in the rocks of the cataract. And I stood by, weak, helpless, and saw the murder done! Vengeance! Vengeance! God give power to honest men to revenge this foul murder!"

"We'll have it!" called a number of voices in answer. "We'll follow the murderers to the end of time."

But other voices called for silence. "Hush," they said. "Poor Finlay is trying to speak again, if his strength holds out!"

Said Daniel Finlay, his voice so low that only through that stillness could it have made way to every mortal ear and every swelling heart: "Many things about John Saxon, unknown to you, are known to me. I could tell you how he led men against the murderous crew of the Solitaire. I could tell you how he scattered the brigands and drove the Solitaire before him. I could tell you how he brought back nearly sixty thousand dollars which he had torn from the ruffians, the robbers, and how he asked me if he had a claim to it. But when I pointed out that the money should return to the hands of the bank in Stillman, known to have been robbed by the scoundrels led by the Solitaire, instantly John Saxon, that clean-handed, that faultless hero and gentleman, agreed.

"To make that restitution, I rode with him this morning from White Water. But in the depths of the pass, when we had paused to water our thirsty horses, a volley of shots rang out. John Saxon fell headlong into the river. I saw his body whirled down toward the cataract. In my despair, I rushed into the water. But hands dragged me out. I found myself surrounded by masked men. They searched my clothes. They snatched from me the

wallet which contained that money which rightfully belongs to the bank in Stillman. Then they flung me aside and, leaving me stunned, went shouting and laughing on their way.

"I have come back to you—I have come back to you—to ask——"

At this point, his voice failed entirely. The minister received the limp burden of that falling body. He was lowered into a chair, where he lay gasping.

That crowd of awed and angry men waited only until the messenger was seen to recover. Then they rushed from the church to find their weapons and their horses.

But Daniel Finlay, presently, walked with bowed head at the side of the minister. And women who saw them go wept with pity for the good lawyer whose heart was broken.

When he came to his house, Joseph Hunter would have gone in with his broken companion, but Daniel Finlay drew himself up with what seemed the last of his strength and said:

"Mr. Hunter, you are very kind, but I prefer—I must be alone."

So the minister withdrew.

That was how it came about that Daniel Finlay sat behind his locked doors listening to the departing thunder of hoofs as man after man, armed to the teeth, swept out of White Water toward the Stillman Pass and its thick hood of clouds.

Daniel Finlay, listening, smiled. He closed his eyes, still smiling, and in his good left hand he clutched more closely the wallet which contained the money.

It was his now. No man in the world would dare to imagine that he possessed it. No man except the Solitaire, and this day he had served the Solitaire in such a manner that he could never expect harm from the bandit.

All was well. A perfect scheme had been perfectly executed. And there was peace in Finlay's soul.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### THE SEARCH.

**L**ONG before Mary Wilson and Molly were in the heart of the Stillman Pass, the snow had begun to fall on them. Looking back, they had a strange sight of the brilliant rim of the western sky where the sun was still shining with powerful rays, though close over their heads the clouds rushed, and there seemed to be galloping horses inside the mist. But the air grew more and more dim, and as they entered the pass, all their horizon was covered by the dense upper layer of the clouds.

More than once Mary Wilson looked to her companion. They had put on slickers, and the wind rattled and flapped the hard rubber and beat heavily against them from one side or the other. And every time Mary, in her despair, glanced aside at the other girl, she received a smile and a nod of encouragement.

"They'll go slow through a wind like this. Think of that old skeleton of a Dan Finlay. Your man wouldn't let Finlay risk catching a cold in his precious bones. We'll overtake 'em, all right. There! I think I saw something around that shoulder of the hill."

They galloped on, harder and harder. But when they came toward the center of the pass, Molly turned grim. At last, they reached the point where the river ran close to the old trail, and here she pulled up her mustang.

It was the place which she had heard Finlay and the Solitaire agree upon, and now it was empty. Aye, but not empty of all traces.

"Horses have been led down to the water, there," said Molly. "Look yonder, where the tracks come out from among the rocks, too."

The wind drowned her words and blew an air pocket inside her cheek. She swung down from the saddle and followed the tracks among the boulders, dragging her unwilling mustang into the wind, with Mary Wilson close behind.

They found the sign of the horses. They pushed farther in, and the sign disappeared.

"We've got to cut for sign," said Mary Wilson. "We'll leave the horses here and go on foot. You take that way and——"

The wind stifled her again. It was snowing fast. White patches continually appeared on the slickers and were blown away again. The wind staggered Molly, and as she bucked into it, she told herself that she was a fool. Why should she go through this for the sake of another woman's man? And suppose that a whisper of what she was doing or attempting to do, should ever come to the ears of the Solitaire?

But she kept remembering, also, those days when she had walked hand in hand with Mary to school, and how they had laughed at one another. There was a certain savage faith in Molly. And there was in her that courage which in some people can almost take the place of honor:

Besides, she had seen big, handsome, blond-headed John Saxon waving his hat to his friends, with the white of the bandage like a crown around his head. And he had looked to her like a hero, and something more.

That was why she kept wading through the wind among the rocks and through the shrubbery, though

sometimes a snowy gust stopped her like a wall.

Off to the side, now and again, she had a glimpse of Mary Wilson, hunting also, ignorantly, knowing little of the facts that were in the mind of Molly, but blindly doing as she was bidden. And pity and scorn flooded through Molly again.

**T**HEY were following a lost trail for a lost cause, she was sure. The thing had happened. Those horse tracks that came out from among the rocks were the tracks of the horses of the Solitaire and his men. They had intercepted Finlay and his gull and they had flung the dead body of the victim into the hungry waters of the Stillman River.

However, it was best to make sure. It was best to take every chance to the very last before giving up all hope for such a man as John Saxon. And suppose that that big man and the Solitaire were to meet again, hand to hand, how would the thing turn out?

She could not help a cruel wish that she might see the thing. And when it took place, she wondered which man she would wish victory to.

She was in the midst of that thought when she stumbled over a body that lay face down, half covered with a snowdrift. But she saw the blond hair and the bandage around the head.

She called for Mary Wilson, cupping her hands, yelling across the wind. She saw her cry take hold of the other girl and bring her at a staggering run toward the spot.

Would Mary Wilson scream when she saw the fallen man? Or would she faint at the sight of the corpse?

Molly, on her knees, thrust her hand under the body and felt the

heart. But there was nothing to feel. That heart was as still as a stone, and the body was cold—ice cold. It was strange that it should be so cold, and yet not rigid.

But under the tips of her sensitive fingers she felt, now, a faint pulsation—a faint and far-away movement of the dying life.

Mary Wilson, dropping to her knees beside the inert body, put her hands under the head, between the tenderness of the face and the hard rock on which it lay.

No, she did not scream, and she did not faint, but with wild, haunted eyes she waited for the verdict. She was a woman, thought Molly, almost angrily. After all, who could tell? Perhaps the weak, pretty, silly thing had something in her that was worthy of John Saxon.

And throwing up her hands suddenly, Molly shouted: "He's alive! Mary, Mary, he's living! We're going to save him!"

She thought she was yelling a lie; she felt that the wind was battering her lips because they lied so. But it was worth any pain to see what happened in the face of Mary, when she heard that.

They turned the body, heavily, with labor. What a big man he was! And how could the life of such a monster be such a delicate will-o'-the-wisp, summoned away by the first gesture?

His eyes were closed. His jaw was set. His mouth compressed to a straight line. Up to the moment of his fall he had been striving, and still the indomitable spirit was fighting on, in the thin dream which was all that remained to John Saxon of existence.

His left side was blood-soaked. Under the coat there was no shirt. There was a great, clumsy bandage drawn crudely over a padding of



moss which had been used to check the flow of the blood.

What had happened? Having wounded their man to such a degree, why had the Solitaire and his gang failed to finish him? Or had John Saxon fought with such terrible strength and courage that the Solitaire and all the rest were beaten off?

It seemed incredible.

But thinking was a matter of half a second. Action, action, action—they must have action now. They must have shelter from that wind, and a fire to thaw the freezing, half-naked body.

"Take that shoulder of him. I'll take this. Drag him!" shouted Molly.

Mary Wilson took the wounded shoulder. Fresh blood squeezed out on her hands, and her face went white. But she gritted her teeth and pulled with all her might. Yes, there was something to her besides prettiness.

They dragged John Saxon under the lee of a great shell-shaped rock. They laid him there.

"Get brush! Get brush for a fire! Tear off dead branches. Get firewood!" shouted Molly, and ran to start the work.

The tough wood bent, but it would not give. She remembered that there was a little hand ax in a case at the back of her saddle and she raced away to get this. When she returned, she saw that Mary already had gathered a little heap of wood and, with a desperate face, was fighting to break away more.

The ax was the answer to that question. The good steel sheared through the shrubs at the bottom of the trunk, cutting the tough wood like butter, in the strong hand of Molly.

They made the pile of firewood low. Some of the branches would have to serve as a bed for the wounded man. Mary, with deft and steady fingers, kindled some dead leaves that were luckily dry. The flame blew sidewise, went out in a thin drift of smoke and a glowing coal, then rekindled under the draft and took hold. The fire began to crackle. They put on more wood. The fierce flame shot up, became a monster, ate, and roared. And the life-giving heat sprang out around them.

Molly piled on wood. Mary, still grimly silent, was gathering more wood, stripping off the soft, small branches, and making the bed on the ground. When there was some shelter from the cold and the damp of the soil, together they rolled the heavy body onto the bed. They pushed the fire closer.

And Mary, on her knees, listened with her head against the breast of John Saxon, counting the dull, small strokes of the heartbeat.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### TWO RIDERS.

**S**TAY there close; watch him all the time; keep that fire up; and don't get scared if he starts talking like a loony," said Molly. "I'm going to ride for help. We need men to handle him; we need a doctor."

Mary made a silent gesture of acquiescence. She kept her eyes fixed upon Saxon as though she were reading a book of many pages of fine print. Every instant seemed to be telling her something new and important. And Molly noted that with another strange little quail of jealousy.

She was glad to get back to her mustang and mount it and fight its

head around into the wind and so get down the pass, half blindly, through the smothering hands of the storm. The snow walked toward her in gigantic images that dissolved under her eyes and rushed by her with a shriek. She could not keep the mustang at more than a hard trot, and even that gait had it slipping and sliding half the time.

Head down, teeth set, she almost failed to see the two dim forms that struggled past her up the grade. She half thought that they were illusions of the mind; then she made sure that they were horsemen, and she shouted to them.

It did not matter who they were. They were not apt to be the men of Solitaire, and any other men in the whole world would be useful to her now. She rode straight at them, and found, first, a gigantic Negro on a huge gray mare, and beyond him none other than the man she had discarded for the Solitaire—little buck-toothed Boots! She would rather have had any one other than Boots. Shame moved in her vaguely. But her courage was far greater than her shame when she thought of the need in which Saxon lay. She pushed her mustang right up to the horse of Boots and put a hand out to him. He kept his own hands on the pommel of his saddle and merely stared at her.

"You can hate me and damn me, Boots," she called to him, "but come and help me now, will you?"

She saw the quick response in his face.

In his sullen daydreams he had often begged chance to give him this opportunity—she would come to him haggard and desperate, in the utmost need, and he, with a stony face listening, would at last consent to lift his hand and help her.

"I'm on a trail, Molly," he told

her. "But I'll come along, if it's not far."

"It's not ten minutes," she declared. "Boots, you have the best heart in the world; I know you'll do what you can, because you've got the biggest heart!"

"How can there be a big heart in a runt like me?" asked Boots. "What is it, Molly? The Solitaire?"

He spoke the name hungrily. But she shook her head.

"You've been out in the hills so long you've probably never heard of him," she said. "But you'll want to help. Follow me, Boots!"

Not the Solitaire—but a man—another man! Boots took the bitter taste deep in his throat and grinned at the wind as he followed her. Big Arthur William Creston pressed on at his side. The wind caught the tails of their slickers and flapped them noisily. The wind pried at their sombreros. They rode through a nightmare of confusion.

**T**WISTING up through the rocks, they came suddenly on the flutter of the open fire, the girl bending beside it, and the extended form of John Saxon. And a great cry came out of the throat of big Arthur Creston.

"Saxon! Saxon!" he shouted at Boots. "It's the chief! It's Saxon!"

Boots was already out of the saddle and running to the spot. But Creston turned to Molly as she was dismounting.

"You know who laid him out!" he said. "You know who did it! Gimme his name!" he begged.

She stared at the convulsed hideous face of Creston.

"The Solitaire!" she said. And, as she said it, she watched the hate wrinkle the face of Creston still more.

Well, she was betraying the Solitaire into the hands of many men. But they would have to be men of steel before they could make him pay for what he had done. She herself could not tell, at this moment, whether she hated him more than she loved him, or dreaded him more than she gloried in his fierceness and his strength.

She stood aside, staring down at the scene of Boots, and the girl, and big-handed Creston.

The eyes of Saxon were open, but they were unseeing. His head turned restlessly from side to side, and a burning color was in his face.

Boots said: "We've got to get him into better shelter. The woods, up there. We can whack up a lean-to."

"It's cold," said Saxon. "It's cold!"

"We're goin' to have you warmed up, chief," said Creston. "You can lay to that. We'll get you fixed up fine. It's me, chief. It's Creston talkin'."

"It's cold!" repeated Saxon. "It's terribly cold."

Creston and Boots wrapped him in blankets from head to foot. Still he shuddered and muttered that it was cold. They lifted him. They placed him in the saddle on Creston's horse, and Boots led the mare while Creston steadied the slumping figure that loomed above. Mary Wilson hurried beside, clutching the blanket ends to make them hold about the body of the rider. And Molly? She simply led on the other horses and formed a rear guard. All of those others seemed to have a greater right to minister to big John Saxon.

Aye, but he would have been dead, by this time, except for her!

She felt that she was in the strangest rôle in the world, helping

the great antagonist of the Solitaire. Yet she felt that it was almost the only right thing that she had ever done in her life.

The slope brought them into the trees, where the wind screamed with a louder voice than ever, but touched them with muffled hands. Once well inside the woods, they paused in the middle of a thicket and all fell to work. The two girls could care for John Saxon and kindle the fire. The two men with swift hands and a rapid fire of ax strokes cut saplings with which they walled in—using the standing trunks of the thicket—a solid windbreak. They leaned more saplings across the space where Saxon lay by the fire. In a short time, all was fast, and Saxon lay in a sort of wooden tent, open at both ends. But a saddle blanket tied firmly over one end stopped some of the draft, and now the fire was moved out opposite the open face of the lean-to. The heat of it came flooding in. The wind and the snow were kept out. And the aching weight of Saxon was eased on a deep bed of boughs.

**C**RESTON never traveled without provisions. His kit was unlimbered, and they began a bit of cookery for the benefit of Saxon. Weakness was plainly his trouble. When they opened the bandage and re-dressed the wound, making use of the underskirt of Mary Wilson for that purpose, all four of them crowded close to consider the hurt, and plainly it was nothing to cause death. Some of the bone of the ribs might have been chiseled away, and the flesh was badly torn, but it was only the loss of the blood that was really dangerous. Long rest and quiet and plenty of nourishing food would put him right.

What had seemed desperate an hour before now began to be almost a simple matter.

There was one very strange thing. The wounded man, fully delirious now, could recognize only one name, and this he attached to the wrong person. To Mary Wilson and Creston and even to Boots he never turned his eyes, but he kept looking at Molly and calling her, "Mary!" He kept using that name over and over again, and something shrank and shuddered in the soul of Molly as she listened.

She saw wonder and fear, also, in the face of Mary Wilson, whose swift glances kept lifting from Saxon to her friend. Jealous? Well, the best of women can be jealous, of course.

Creston went out to ride off with his mare and get a doctor from a little village back in the mountains. Boots remained there, staring at the woman he loved as she crouched beside Saxon. Saxon wanted to hold her hand, and she gave it to him. Saxon brushed impatiently aside all others, and in his delirium seemed to cling to her. It was she who fed him. The great, inert weight of his head lolled back on her arm, and his eyes went up trustfully to her face after every mouthful.

He was very weak, and he was utterly in her hands.

She felt on herself the savage jealousy of the eye of Boots; and the cold, aching jealousy of Mary. And she was content. Her heart was filled.

It was late in the afternoon before big John Saxon at last fell into a sleep, and she felt his forehead with her bared arm. He had eaten; strength was running back into his veins; and he was now far less in the hands of the fever. When he awakened—well, he would be sure

to know well enough the difference between Molly and Mary.

Perhaps that was why Molly got up suddenly.

"I have to go back," she said. "He's going to be in his right mind when the sleep leaves him. He's going to be in the saddle, inside of a week. He's going to be as strong as ever in two weeks. A fellow like that—you can put him down but you can't hold him down!"

She added: "Boots, you don't know anything about me, in this. You didn't see me up here."

"I never clapped eyes on you for weeks," agreed Boots. And suddenly the old, yearning admiration burned in his eyes.

"And you haven't seen me to-day at all, Mary," she cautioned Mary Wilson.

Mary Wilson followed her out of the lean-to.

"Are you going back—to him?" asked Mary. "Don't go, Molly. Besides, if he finds out what you've done, he'll hate you. It's you who saved John Saxon. The whole world ought to know that. No, we won't talk—but the whole world ought to know it!"

"There's no use in that, Mary," answered Molly. "I'm glad I helped your man. You keep your grip right hard on him, or one of these days maybe I'll wrangle him away from you. So long!"

She mounted and went off down the slope toward the bottom of the pass.

The wind had fallen somewhat; the clouds had lifted, and Molly could see the iron-gray of the mountains all the way up against the paler gray of the sky. There was still a little snow falling, and the gusts of wind knocked level sprays of white out of the hollows and down the

pass. It seemed to Molly a fitting sort of a day for her return. For she was returning to a life that seemed old and dead, since she had tasted something new and better.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE RETURN.

**I**T was one of the errands of Molly to get word to the Wilson family that Mary would not be home—and where she could be found.

That message, slipped on a bit of paper under the kitchen door in the twilight of the day, brought a wave of hope to a very desperate household. It gave the needed clew to the men of White Water who had been searching all of that day, and out of the town a human river flowed up into the Stillman Pass. That river reached the camp. Mr. Wilson and the sheriff moved at the head of it, and the first thing the sheriff did was to spot big Arthur William Creston and pull down a gun on him.

Creston simply said: "Go and take me. I don't care. I'm kind of tired of hidin' out, anyways. But ain't you got a doctor with you? There wasn't no doctor up in the hills."

They had a doctor with them, of course.

The doctor spent three days and nights up there in the mountains, not because big John Saxon needed such attention, but because the doctor knew that this was very good for his reputation. He saw that the entire community had fixed upon John Saxon as its pet hero, and the doctor intended to make the most of curing the invalid.

The excitement in White Water, in fact, was very great. It is one thing to have a town hero, and it is quite another to have a chance to

take care of him. White Water had that chance, and it made the most of it.

If any one wanted a further thrill than the proved heroism of big John Saxon, it was provided by the romantic truth that the girl he loved had found him in the snows of the Stillman Pass and saved his life. There was nothing about that other girl; there was no need of her; she would have spoiled things, in the public eye.

The fact that mattered was that Mary Wilson was at the side of John Saxon up there in the mountains, where the best pair of tents in White Water had been sent to house the invalid and the nurse, to say nothing of the other little tents that sprang up, so that there was an entire camp devoted to the care of John Saxon.

We love above all the creatures that depend upon us. White Water had respected and looked up to its brand-new hero. Now it began to love him, and the more that it did for him, the more affection it felt for him. John Saxon, having been three times brought to the verge of death by the Solitaire, was in two cases considered the victor; in the third case he was considered the victim of a cowardly betrayal. No matter how often Saxon tried to tell the truth about the first two encounters, people merely smiled and shook their heads. They knew a hero when they saw one; they knew a hero's modesty!

Other benefits extended, suddenly, to Arthur Creston, the big Negro. It was true that the law had a case against him, but when White Water learned that Creston had been devotedly tending its hero, White Water decided that the case against the Negro should be dropped. The sheriff told him so and saw the grin

that made the features of Creston all disappear.

But all that Arthur William Creston said was: "They oughta give the boss a shave, sheriff. He can't flourish none when he's got that beard growin' all over his face. You take a clean man and he can't get on none in dirt!"

IT was a week before they brought John Saxon back to White Water. He wanted to ride in, as he was quite capable of doing, but the doctor laughed him to scorn. White Water would not hear of it!

John Saxon wanted to go in quietly, without any blaring of trumpets, but the sheriff himself frowned on this. So did all the other leading citizens who had sent up the tents, and supplies, and all sorts of delicacies to eat. Particularly the banker wanted to ride his horse somewhere in that procession, and a great many others wanted to have a place, here or there. Any one who could be attached to John Saxon was sure to be forever in the memory of the public of that whole-hearted town.

And Finlay?

Oh, he had not gone up into the mountains because he knew that others would do the talking for him, and tell how he had made his impassioned appeal in the church, and how he had practically collapsed at the end of it, broken-hearted.

In fact, Saxon had heard that story not once but many times, and he had been deeply moved. It was not the loss of the money to the bandits. That did not matter. It was the grief and the shock to that preëminently good man, Daniel Finlay, that disturbed John Saxon.

So the entry into White Water was made exactly as Saxon did not want it to be made. They had him

in a big horse litter. The sheriff rode on one side of it, and Mary Wilson rode on the other, and the banker was just behind her, very pleased. There were a lot of others in the cortège, including big Arthur Creston, grinning from ear to ear. And Boots was with the rest of them.

The whole population of White Water turned out onto the sides of the street to shout and cheer as Saxon went by, propped on pillows, looking a little pale and thin, with that big white bandage again around his head like a crown.

He saw those people laughing and smiling. He heard them clapping hands and stamping and shouting, and it seemed to him that these were the kindest, the gentlest, the most faithful people in the entire world.

And Daniel Finlay?

Oh, he managed to be noticed, too. You may be sure of that. He simply took up his stand at a fence, behind a thick group, and stood there silently, quietly, the way a modest man should do—a fellow who did not in the least want the public eye, a fellow who was there simply to gladden his eyes with the sight of John Saxon.

But of course he was noted at once. That crowd opened up in front of him. He was at the base of a living funnel when Saxon passed, and a dozen hands were pointing out Finlay to Saxon, who saw him at once and called out to halt the horses.

They were halted. He called to Finlay, and the lawyer came unwillingly, modestly out, and was gripped by the hand of John Saxon, while every one cheered more loudly than ever before in honor of this meeting between tried friends and true.

Afterward, Finlay walked with

downward head beside the litter until it came to the hotel, and he went up the stairs in the hotel and sat among the first with Saxon in his room—the best room in the hotel, and gladly donated to him, free of charge, by the management, which knew on which side its bread was buttered.

Lefty Malone came in among others. He carried his hat in his hand. One eye was black and blue and swollen.

"The boys keep carryin' on just as though you was back there in the Rolling Bones," he said. "They gotta have something to stand up to, still, and I'm the goat!"

OTHER people kept flooding in until the doctor declared in favor of quiet, and Mary Wilson. It was not until this point in the celebration that Daniel Finlay modestly slipped from the room, and modestly left the hotel, and modestly walked back to his house with his head a little bowed. Every one noticed him, of course. But not even by side glances did he need to take heed of their admiration and sympathy and pleasure; out of the very air he could drink in his increased notoriety.

Two or three people called out: "Well, he's back! It's a pretty happy day for you, Mr. Finlay, I guess!"

At that, he would raise his head, as though out of profound thought, and faintly smile on the speaker, and pass on.

The good minister stopped him and gripped his hand, warmly, in silence.

A bit farther on, the banker hurried up and slapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"A welcome day's work for all of us, Finlay," he said. "And I think before the things ended that the

whole world is going to realize that honesty is the best policy. Always works out that way in the long run. What a fine fellow John Saxon is! Who would have guessed—I mean, who would have thought the scoundrels would set a trap for him like that? A lucky thing that the brutes didn't send lead into you, Finlay. A mighty lucky thing! Men without law are without mercy, as a rule!"

Daniel Finlay answered with a vague word or two.

As he reached his home, he was feeling that he had fortified his position as it never had been strengthened before. There were plenty of good citizens in this town who would now fail to believe their eyes and their ears, if testimony against him should appear. He tried to conceive of a way in which they could be convinced of his guilt, but he found that the effort overtaxed his imagination.

So he walked up the steps to his house, pushed the door open, and found on his threshold a fold of paper which, when he opened it, proved to be covered with penciled print.

Come over where you saw me the last time. Come fast, and bring some money.

That was what he read.

He crumbled the paper. He scratched a match and lighted it and saw the paper turn into a tossing flicker of yellow flame. Then a blackened cinder with glowing golden spots on it dropped toward the floor. It turned from black to gray. On that gray ash he trod with his heel.

The message was gone out of the world of paper and pencils, but it remained in his mind.

He started walking up and down,

angrily. He began to compose a speech to his own heart, and he illustrated it with some of his famous handless gestures; but suddenly he realized that he was not dealing with a public audience, but with the profoundly crafty brain of one man.

He did not have a throng to influence, but the bright, keen eyes of the Solitaire.

There were many questions which the Solitaire might have to ask him; there were many answers which it might be hard for him to make.

First, there was the matter of the money. He thought, for an instant, of saying that he had abandoned the money on the way, out of fear—that he had cached it under a rock.

But when he thought of the fierce, steady eyes of the Solitaire, he changed his mind about that. He got out the stock of bills. He had to close his eyes as he beheld the fresh beauty of them. They spoke to him more eloquently than any oratory. To part from any of them would be like parting from his own flesh and blood.

And yet he had to make a sacrifice.

AT that very time, in the White Water Hotel, Mary Wilson was saying: "There's one thing that I have to tell you, John. I promised not to say a word about it to any one—but that didn't mean you. I've got to let you know that I don't deserve one stick of praise for finding you. There was another girl!"

"Another girl?" asked Saxon, amazed.

"You know the girl who lives in the old Borden place on the edge of the town?"

"I know the old Borden place," said Saxon.

"And you know Molly, too—the one who's living there now!"

"I don't know her."

She was half pleased and half angry.

"The prettiest girl in White Water," she said, "the one who——"

"No, she's not the prettiest girl in White Water," said Saxon with decision.

"She really is," said Mary Wilson, smiling. "The very prettiest. The one with the bright, bright lips. Sometimes she rides and she has a jeweled quirt—think of it!"

"Ah, I know the one. I know *about* her, too," said Saxon. "What are you doing with a girl like that, Mary?"

"She's all right. She isn't as bad as people say," said Mary Wilson. "She's the one who knew that there was danger to you. She's the one who came to me early that morning and told me to keep you from riding with Daniel Finlay, no matter where Daniel Finlay wanted to go."

"Keep me from riding with Finlay? Ah, she knows the Solitaire!"

"But how did the Solitaire know, beforehand, where you were going to ride with Finlay?" asked the girl.

Saxon started, and stared at Mary Wilson. He said nothing. She, having planted that one seed of distrust, went on:

"Molly was the girl who urged me to ride on to Stillman Pass. Even she knew that you were going that way. How? Did you tell any one you were going? Did Mr. Finlay tell any one?"

Saxon still was silent. He started shaking his head. It was wrong. It had to be wrong. It was one of those mysteries which, some way or other, are always answered. One word will generally serve to brush the darkness away and give the light.

There was a sort of fear and suf-



fering mixed with a certain brightness in the face of Mary Wilson.

"I've just been thinking it over—for hours—every day and every night," she said. "But the main thing is to tell you about how Molly took me up there into the Stillman Pass. And how she helped. She did a lot more than I did."

"Not more than you did," insisted Saxon.

"Yes, a great deal more. And you know, John, for a time, you didn't recognize me. You were delirious. But something about Molly entered your mind. You looked at her and you'd smile and call her 'Mary.' She was the only one who could take care of you. She fed you, when you were too weak or too much out of your mind to eat. Afterwards, you went to sleep holding her hands."

He closed his eyes, frowning until the old wound in his head began to ache.

Then he said: "I begin to remember. She had a nice voice. I begin to remember a lot about her—out of that delirium."

Mary said, with only a very faint smile: "I hope that you won't remember too much, John."

He looked up at the ceiling, still frowning. After a while he began to smile at his thoughts.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE SOLITAIRE'S ACCUSATION.

**D**ANIEL FINLAY, before that interview between Mary Wilson and Saxon had ended, was walking across the town in the first dark of the night, and by entangled bypaths and crooked lanes he came, at last, to the old Borden house. It had, as usual, a light in the front room. He stopped at the sight of it, for he knew that

somewhere near that light would be Molly.

To face the Solitaire would be bad enough, but to face her might be worse.

At last, he rallied himself and went on. There was plenty of courage in Daniel Finlay. Anger, now, was dulling his nerves to other impressions and to other dangers. For one thing, the wad of greenbacks inside his coat pressed against his very heart and caused him pain there.

He carried a bulldog revolver inside his coat. For a left-handed shot, he was not at all bad with a gun. Not that he expected that he would use it but, in case of a pinch, he even might work in hot lead on the Solitaire. His gun would have the advantage of being totally unexpected by the enemy.

He went up to the front door, knocked, and was invited by the voice of Molly to enter. The voice came from the rear of the place, so he passed around to the kitchen door and entered there. Molly was cooking. The smell of crisping bacon was in the air, and the smoke of it. She wore rubber gloves. He could see that she hated the fumes and the grime of her work.

She had a pair of little emerald earrings in her ears. They swayed and sparkled as she leaned at the stove. Somehow, he thought of a great, brutal hand gripping those jewels and tearing them out of the flesh.

"Hello, Danny," she said, without giving him a glance. "How's my old sweetheart?"

"I've been welcoming the hero home," said Finlay.

He walked to the inside door and looked into the front room. A table was set for two, but there was no sight of the Solitaire.

"No," said Molly, "he isn't here yet. Bring some cash?"

"It was a lot of noise," said Finlay.

"Oh, I was there, and saw the crowd. Saw nice little modest Danny standing away back in the crowd. Just a real good, quiet boy is what our Danny is."

"Stop it, Molly," said Finlay.

She opened the oven door and pulled out a pan of brown-topped biscuits. A thin cloud of smoke rolled into the room.

"Look good, don't they?" said Molly. "Going to eat with us?"

"No," said Finlay shortly.

"All right," she answered. "I'll call in the Solitaire. He's feeling pretty solitary, at that. This yelling around for John Saxon burns him up a good bit. Just so you'll know where to step, Danny."

She went to the front door and sent the thin, clear note of the signal whistle shrilling across the night.

As she came back, she said: "Sort of hard on a fellow like the Solitaire to have to sneak around in the woods while the crowd's all hoarse, cheering for his murdered man. And sort of hard on Danny, eh?"

He said nothing.

"What did you feel like, shaking hands with the hero?" asked the girl. "Little bit giddy? Didn't you wish that the Solitaire had shot a little straighter or that John didn't have such a tough set of ribs?"

Still Finlay said nothing, but with bent head he was looking up at her.

"Mind you," he said sternly, after she had met his eye calmly for some time, "you play fair with me, or I'll make trouble for you. Understand?"

"I'm sort of tired of a lot of things, Danny," she answered. "But I'm mostly tired of you."

A soft step sounded in the front

room. The girl went in, carrying a heaped platter of biscuits.

"Little old Danny, the honest lawyer, is already here, Solitaire," she said, jerking her head over her shoulder.

It was the Solitaire, as Finlay now saw. The big man stood back by the farther wall, smoothing the sleek of his hair.

"Hello, Daniel," he said.

"Hello, Solitaire," said Finlay and walked forward, holding out his hand.

"Back up," said the Solitaire.

Finlay halted.

"I want to know a few things," said the Solitaire. "Who did you talk to? How did that Wilson girl know where to go, straight off, to find the hero, eh?"

"Why, you mean the speech I made in the church?"

"No, not the speech in the church. That was all right. You had to make a speech sooner or later or you'd 'a' choked. Must have been pretty good to make a speech in church, eh? They say the great lawyer was pretty near in a faint by the time he finished. All worked up about the bad bandits, eh? But that's not what I mean. It wasn't the speech in church. An hour before that—yes, two hours before, maybe—Mary Wilson started for the Stillman Pass, and there's where she found her man. If it hadn't been for that, Saxon would have been a dead one, because he would have been frozen, even if lead and water couldn't kill the cat."

He pointed a sudden finger at Finlay and added quietly: "Finlay, you talked! Who did you talk to?"

That gesture caused a tremendous reaction in Finlay. He was on the verge of snatching out his gun and making answer with it. But he checked himself.

"Solitaire," he said, "I don't know what to say to you. I'd like to say a lot of words. The truth is that I didn't speak to a human soul."

"Then who did?" asked Solitaire. "Did I walk in my sleep to Mary Wilson and tell her I was going to kill Saxon that day?"

"There were three of us on the inside," said Daniel Finlay, but without glancing at the girl.

"Oh, that's the tune, eh?" said Solitaire.

"Danny wants to bring me into it," said the girl. "He doesn't want to leave me out in the cold. Nice old Danny."

"Shut up the nonsense and talk," said the Solitaire. "Did *you* talk to Mary Wilson?"

"Well," said Molly, "I was out all that day. I had plenty of time to go talk to her. Aye, and to ride up into the pass, as far as that goes."

"You did," said the Solitaire. "You had plenty of time. There's enough devil in you to make you do a thing like that just to spite me. Or maybe you've had a good look at Handsome John Saxon. Is that it?"

"Good old Solitaire," said the girl. "Of course that was it. I fell in love with Saxon, and that's why I told his girl how to save him. You poor dummy!"

"It doesn't ring true," said the Solitaire suddenly. "If she wanted to help Saxon, she would have done it herself, and taken all the glory for it. Finlay, you're the one who talked!"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### FINLAY'S LUCK.

**T**O Finlay, of course, the thing was perfectly open and apparent. Some one had talked. That some one had to be Molly. He turned his head toward

her, and she, with the assurance of a very devil, merely winked at him without changing the rest of her expression in the very least. She admitted her fault, by that wink; she also challenged him to do anything about it.

And he, the master of lying inventions, saw that his hands were tied and that, in fact, there was nothing that he could say! Having lied a thousand times in this matter, now he was nailed to the cross by another lie. Back in his throat worked his anger, and the words of the denunciation came right up to his teeth, but he took a firm grip and forced back his emotion.

He could see that he was walking on a very narrow ledge between life and death, for the Solitaire was in a killing humor. Finally Finlay said:

"Solitaire, there's no use talking. You've made up your mind already. But I want to point out one thing to you. The scheme to save John Saxon might have worked, and in that case I would have lost nearly sixty thousand dollars. Does it seem at all sensible to you that I'd throw that much money out the window?"

The Solitaire's blazing eyes fixed themselves more deeply than ever on the soul of the lawyer.

Then, strange to say, it was the girl who said: "It *is* hard to think of Danny giving up a dollar. Eh, Solitaire?"

The Solitaire glared at her, and back again at Finlay. A sudden twitching of the muscles along one side of his face seemed to Finlay the certain prelude to the final action. Death, perhaps, was a split part of a second away when Finlay said:

"We made our compact, Solitaire. I was to get the money, and you were to get Saxon. I received the

money. Through no fault of mine, by chance you failed to receive Saxon. But now you fail to see that I am still willing to carry out the contract and that I am able to do so!"

"Able to do so?" snarled the Solitaire. "Do you think that I'll trust you again?"

"You will," answered Finlay, "because you'll realize that I'm the only man in the world capable of delivering John Saxon into your hands. You know that he has the people of the town around him. You know that he's being watched and guarded day and night. And I'm the one power in this world, Solitaire, capable of making him walk to this house as soon as he's able to leave the hotel room."

As he spoke, he pointed steadily to the front door of the house, as though it might at that moment open and give them a view of the handsome face and the big shoulders of John Saxon. The Solitaire actually cast a glance over his shoulder in that direction. Then he began to walk up and down the room.

"I haven't finished," he said. "I'm going to probe at the thing till I find out the truth. One of you is a traitor and a liar, and I'll find out the one!"

He stared at them both, then he continued his pacing through a long moment during which the lawyer began to breathe again. Finlay stared not at the Solitaire but at the girl, and she looked back at him, totally unabashed.

Suddenly the Solitaire paused and struck his knuckles against the table. The force of the blow caused the dishes to jump a bit, and there was a light shivering tingle from the glasses that died out like an echo.

"I told you to bring money.

Where is it?" demanded the Solitaire.

FINLAY, in putting up the greenbacks, had made them into two small packages, of five thousand dollars each. Now he rallied himself a little and gathered his courage.

"You haven't a right to a penny of the money," he declared firmly. "But, since bad luck didn't give you your part of the bargain, I've brought some cash to you. Here's five thousand dollars."

He laid one packet on the table.

"You give me five and you keep fifty-five, eh?" said the Solitaire. "Do you think that I'm a cheap fool, Finlay?"

"I think you're a dangerous man, Solitaire," said the lawyer. "But I know that you want Saxon more than you want cash. This five thousand is a gift to you, not a right of yours."

"Why, a man might think that you're talking in court!" said the Solitaire. "You old hypocrite, are you yammering about 'right' and 'wrong'?"

"There ought to be a sort of honesty even among thieves," said Finlay calmly.

Here the girl put in: "Danny is pretty good at this. He has a steady nerve, eh, Solitaire?"

"I've a mind to steady his nerves for him so that they'll never quiver again!" said the Solitaire.

"I know you've a mind to shoot me down," said Finlay. "I know that, but I'll still stand up for what I think. If you spray lead into me, you're taking me instead of Saxon. Is that the choice you want to make?"

The Solitaire bowed his head a little, in thought. He picked up the

packet of money and threw it to the girl.

"Keep this," he said. "I'll take what I want of it later on."

She caught the packet out of the air and hurled it straight back at the Solitaire's head. It whizzed by his cheek.

"Keep your dirty blood money," she said. "I don't want it."

It seemed to Finlay that the outlaw would hurl himself straight at the girl, such a devil appeared in his eyes at that moment. Instead, he caught a breath and then laughed.

"Makes me feel better," said the Solitaire. "You hell-cat!"

"Call me what you please," answered Molly. "But I won't touch blood money." She turned on her heel and went into the kitchen.

The Solitaire snapped: "I'll hear from you later on, Finlay. I don't know how long it's safe for me to hang around this place. You may sell me to the sheriff. Somebody might see me. But at any rate, I'll try to stay close to the town for a few days. Mind you, Finlay, if Saxon doesn't turn up—here, inside this house—within a few days, I'm coming to call on *you!*"

"I understand," said Finlay.

"Do you? Then get out!" commanded the Solitaire.

Finlay got. He went through the kitchen and said softly to the girl:

"I remember everything, Molly."

She was pouring the water off some boiled potatoes into the sink. Clouds of steam rolled swiftly up around her. Through those clouds she called cheerfully over her shoulder:

"Good old Danny! I'd hate to have you forget."

He went out into the night and walked slowly, very slowly, with a pause in every step, back toward the lights of the town.

**B**AD luck was in the air for Daniel Finlay, on this night. The events that moved down on him started at a great distance and did not have him in mind at all. They started with the taking of the Stillman loot from the hands of the Solitaire and his men. And this evening some of that loot was changing hands in the back yard of the White Water Hotel where the guard which was posted to see that no one climbed up to the window of Saxon's room was composed of his own trusted men. These were, at the moment, Boots, Cullen, and Creston. Pike and Del Bryan were also ready to serve when their time came; they were ready to risk identification as the robbers who had escaped from the train at Tunnel.

Now Creston paced up and down, his little head turning restlessly toward every light and sound, while Cullen and Boots sat on the edges of a blanket which was spread on the ground and played two-handed poker. Two-handed poker is a strange game. The big hands come only now and then; the entire scale of betting is very different; and after a couple of hours in which the fortunes of the game had fluctuated this way and that to the extent of only a few dollars, Cullen grew restless. When he was nervous, his old wounds ached; and now he was in actual pain as he suddenly drew to a pair, got another pair, and shoved five thousand dollars onto the blanket.

Boots looked up quicky. This sign that the sky was the limit did not bother him. He was holding only a wretched trio of sevens, but he instantly covered that bet and raised it five more.

In one minute they had rashly exposed their entire shares of the Solitaire's loot, and stacked thousands

of dollars were heaped on the blanket. Then Boots raised with the whole little heap of jewels that had fallen to his lot, and by the same means, Cullen saw him.

Three sevens beat a pair of trays and a pair of queens. Boots gathered up the treasure without apparent excitement.

"Want any part of it?" he offered.

"Oh, the devil with it," said Cullen. "There's plenty more where that lot came from. I'm going to walk over to the Rolling Bones and get a drink. You two hombres can handle this job, all right."

"Sure we can handle it," said Boots.

So Cullen walked away. But when he came to the street and felt in his pocket, he found that he had bet every one of his paper dollars and that he did not have a single dime in silver. This was annoying. But, in his present mood, he was almost glad to be spurred into action of some sort.

He turned down the first dark cross-street and when he met the first pedestrian, pulled out a Colt and stuck it into the stranger's stomach.

Under the dark of the night and the shadowing trees which grew along the way, it was hard to make out any features of the stranger, except that he was rather tall, with thin shoulders. But it was easy to make out his left-handed gesture inside his coat.

Cullen was tempted to put lead into this fool. Instead, he struck down with his own gun across the forearm of his victim. A weapon slithered down to the ground and landed with a heavy thump.

"All right, brother," murmured Cullen. "That was a fool play of yours, but I'm a simple and kind sort of a dummy. Are you Daniel

Finlay? Just shove up your hands before you talk back."

Finlay, after grinding his teeth for an instant, answered calmly: "My poor fellow, if it's money you want, I can give you—let's see, I think there's fifteen dollars in my pocket."

"Yeah?" answered Cullen. "Only fifteen bucks? Would you try to make a gun play when another gun was rammed into your stomach, and just for the sake of fifteen bucks?"

"The instinctive reaction," said Finlay, "of a man taken violently by surprise."

"Instinctive bunk," said Cullen. "You've got a bale of coin on you. Stick up those hands, and I'm going to have a look-see."

Finlay drew in his breath. It came out slowly with the words: "What do you gain by this, my friend? You insult a helpless man and you'll get no cash. As a matter of fact, however, rather than endure this humiliation further, I'll take you to my house and give you as much as——"

"What a sweet old gag that is!" said Cullen. "Look, Finlay. You gotta reputation for brains. I've heard a lot about you. And I hate to do this because you been a friend to a friend of mine. But I didn't like that gun play, brother. It sure didn't make any hit with me. If I'd delayed action a little, you would 'a' salted me full of lead. Now—get those hands up in the air, and get them quick!"

In his voice, though he spoke quietly, there was something which made Finlay forget even the other five thousand in his inside coat pocket. He hoisted his hands, and the touch of Cullen went rapidly over him.

Those practiced fingers found the spare change in the pocket of the

lawyer's trousers and the little fold of bills in his vest. Then they touched the paper wrapping of the parcel of the inside coat pocket and drew it out.

"What's this, brother?" asked Cullen.

"That?" said the lawyer. "That's nothing but a few loose notes I've been taking on a recent case."

"Yeah?" said Cullen, fingering the

packet and finding something familiar in the dimensions of the papers it contained. "You sure that it ain't some notes that you got *out* of a recent case? I'll keep it and see. A lawyer can be a liar, and I guess you're a lawyer, all right. Now, walk along and spread the alarm. So long, Finlay. Sorry that you happened to be the first gent I bumped into here."

To be concluded in next week's issue.

In Next Week's Issue of Street & Smith's

## WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

# The Fighting Kid

By W. C. TUTTLE

You'll find action, romance, and humor in this dramatic Western novel by a famous writer.

# The Barking Dog

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

Why was the stage to Nugget City held up solely in order to murder one of its passengers? And who was the mysterious young woman in the coach, traveling alone? These questions filled the mind of Jerry Hawley, the third passenger, who was on a mission of his own, an errand dangerous and important.

Also Features by

Max Brand

E. W. Chess

And Others

15c A COPY

AT ALL NEWS STANDS

# COWBOY LINGO

By RAMON F. ADAMS

(Continued from last week's issue)

## THE BRONCHOBUSTER.

The breaker of wild horses is known as a "bronc peeler," "bronc twister," "bronc snapper," "bronc breaker," "bronc scratcher," "bronc squeezer," or "rough-string rider." What are called "contract busters" are usually owners of small ranches, or else are men who, as itinerants, wander about the range and temporarily lease their services to such establishments as cannot afford a first-class rider of their own.

When the rider mounts an unbroken horse and is ready to begin the battle of conquering the beast, he yells to the men who hold the ropes to "shoot," "turn loose," "ease up," "throw off," or "let 'er go." From the "op'ra house," or side lines, comes the unwelcome advice to "stay with 'er," "cinch 'er when she bucks," "rise to the trot," "tickle 'er feet," "waltz with the lady," "throw in yo' gut hooks," "bust 'er wide open," "shove in the steel," "rake 'er," or "scratch 'er."

When the horse "hides his head and kicks the lid off," or "warps his backbone and hallelujahs all over the lot," the comments upon its ability are such as "frolicsome little beast," "real hunk o' death," "little gravedigger," and perhaps the rider is warned that the horse will "buck his whiskers off," or "he'll throw you so high the birds'll build nests in yo' hair 'fore you light."

If the horse is a bucker of ability, breaking it is "like ridin' a cyclone with the bridle off," and "it takes a

man with whiskers to ride him." Of the man making a good ride it is said that he is "stickin' tighter'n a tick makin' a gotch ear," or it is "jes' like buckin' off a porous plaster," and you "couldn't chop him loose from that hoss with an ax." About the man who has little riding ability it is said he "couldn't ride a covered wagon," or "couldn't ride nuthin' wilder than a wheel chair."

When the horse "unloads" its rider, it "turns the pack" and the victim is said to be "chucked," "dumped," "spilled," "landed"; or that he "bit the dust," "chewed dirt," "ate gravel," went "grass huntin'," "kissed the ground," "landed on his sombrero," or "sunned his moccasins." One cowboy of our acquaintance, in relating his experience with a vicious horse, said: "I had trouble gettin' my wood on him, an' when I did get my tree laced up, it didn't do me much good 'cause I didn't get settled 'fore I goes sailin' off, flyin' low an' usin' my face for a rough lock till I lost enough hide to make a pair of leggin's." Another, telling of a similar experience, admitted that he "pulled leather till he nearly pulled the horn out by the roots," but he lost his hold and soon went flying off, "his hind legs kickin' round in the air like a migratin' bullfrog in full flight"; he added that he "didn't break anything, but all the hinges and bolts were loosened." Such sentences illustrate the typical speech of cowboys. It seems to come to them as second nature. An-



other rider made the statement that he once was thrown in a cactus patch, and "it took a week to pluck him so he wouldn't look like a porcupine." We once heard one cowboy tell another who had just been thrown pretty hard, "If you'd try 'er ag'in an' manage to hit the same place, you'd git water, shore."

It is not uncommon for a vicious horse to kill its rider, and such a horse is said to "have a notch in his tail." The cowboy on a headstrong runaway horse, if he is in open country, lets it go "till he runs down his mainspring."

#### THE ROUND-UP.

The work of the round-up, branding, and the trail has fewer slang expressions, though it has many different technical words all the cowboy's own such as given in our dictionary.

Every cowboy looks forward to "comin' grass," the name he gives to spring, because it brings the "calf round-up" to break the monotony of winter idleness or detail work and gives him the opportunity to renew old friendships as well as to work off some of his surplus energy.

A "pool round-up" is when ranchers pool their resources and men to gather their stock, usually over a wide territory. "Moonshinin'" is working on round-up in

a country so rough that packs have to be used in place of chuck wagons. The term also means a night ride and a dry camp. "Combings" are the final cattle driven in from circle on round-up. Orders from the boss are called "powders."

#### BRANDS AND BRANDING.

Brands are the trade-marks of the owner and they take many forms and names, but when the cowboy sees a brand from an outside range which has no numerals, letters, or familiar figures by which it may be called, he solves the situation by making it a "fluidy mustard." A brand with a group of interlocking wings with no central flying figure is a "whang doodle," while a wide U atop another letter U equally wide, but inverted, receives the curious name of "wallop." Brands themselves, as well as branding irons, are often called "irons."

American cowboys, in speaking of the intricate Mexican brands, do not attempt to translate them, but refer to all of them briefly, but descriptively, as "the map of Mexico" or as "a skillet of snakes." An animal that has changed ownership often and has been very much branded is said to be "burnt till he looks like a brand book."

To bulldog a calf so that a brand could be "slapped on" is to "mug" it.

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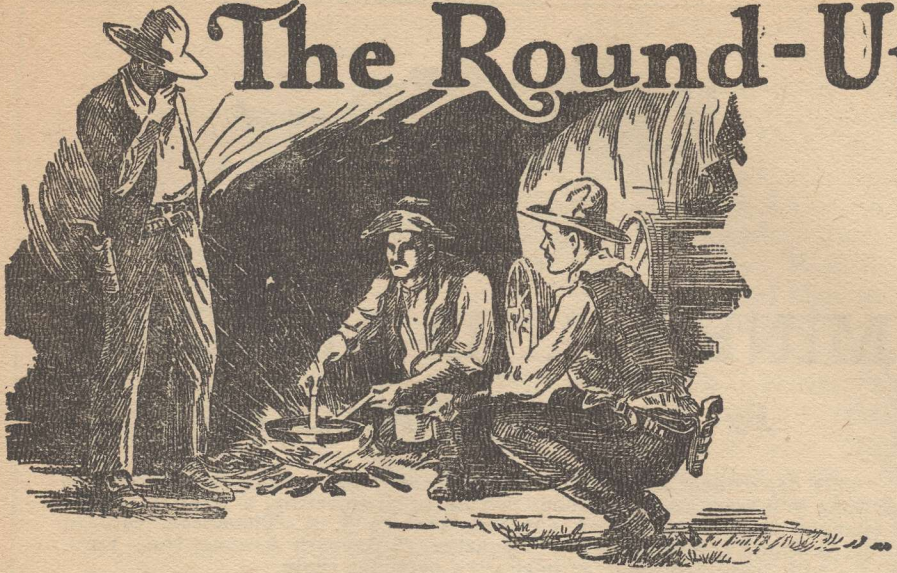
*A New Serial,*

**"THE BARKING DOG,"** by CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS,

*Begins in Next Week's Issue.*

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# The Round-Up



**I**T has been truly said that more can be gleaned of the history of a country and its people through well-written fiction than by the perusal of histories and articles.

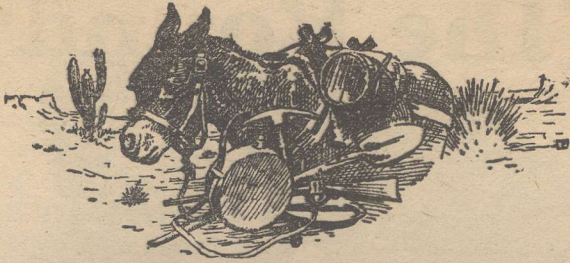
While we have never suggested that the first purpose of Western Story Magazine was that of teaching the history of the West and its people, we do contend that during the many years of this magazine's life, it has taught much about the West, and the pioneers who made the West. Also, it has told much of those who are now living in the West, those who sustain it and make it constantly rise and grow in accomplishment.

Western Story Magazine was the first magazine to print nothing but Western stories and informative items about the West. And its stories are more than "action" stories. Stories that are simply action stories consist largely in characters galloping wildly in all directions.

After Western Story Magazine had attained a wide popularity, many sought to imitate it—many continue to try to imitate it. So far,

Western Story Magazine holds its preëminent lead. As to our success, we attribute it largely to our always holding a high respect for our readers' intelligence. Yes, we give you much more than just action stories. It is true that the characters in the stories are active, that we have dramatic and stirring situations, but the characters are characters and not just names, and the situations are real and vital. There is flesh, as it were, on the bones of the story.

As examples of what we have been talking about, read next week's issue. There is "The Fighting Kid," a complete novelette by W. C. Tuttle; the last part of Max Brand's great serial, "Gun Gift"; a complete novel, "Fooled To Fortune," by E. W. Chess; a humorous story by the inimitable Roland Krebs, "Buffalo Bull's Swallow Tale"; "Patriarch of the Peaks," by Frank Richardson Pierce; "No Cow Pony," by H. Fredric Young; "Idaho's Big Idea," by Hugh F. Grinstead. And besides other features, this big one—the first installment of "The Barking Dog," by Charles Wesley Sanders.



# 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.

**T**HE small-scale placer operator who strikes the Buena Vista district on the east slope of the Humbolt range in Nevada is heading for good gold country, and that's just what Cliff Jackson, of Atlantic City, New Jersey, intends to do in the very near future.

"Have got a prospecting trip all planned out to the Buena Vista district, Nevada," writes Cliff. "What do you think of that location? Anything you can tell me about it will be deeply appreciated."

We think you are pointed in the right direction, Cliff. With good chances to make wages, or better, if you have any kind of luck at all and are not afraid of a little hard, healthy, muscle-building outdoor work.

The Buena Vista or Unionville district lies in Buena Vista Canyon

some thirty miles north and east of Lovelock. Lovelock in Pershing County will be your nearest supply town. Gold was discovered in Buena Vista and neighboring canyons a long time ago. The placers there are reported to have been worked as far back as the late 1840s.

Recent activity has renewed interest considerably in the old-time camp. Within the past year or two several new paying placer discoveries have been made, mostly above Unionville in Bella Vista Canyon, where the gravels run six to ten feet deep with a two to three-foot pay streak lying just above bed rock. Among the several small-scale placer operations carried on in the district during the last few years earnings were reported as high as ten dollars per day.

The big handicap is scarcity of water. Therefore any one planning to tackle that neighborhood with

simple placer apparatus should count on using devices that are economical in their use of the well-known  $H_2O$ —a rocker, for instance, tightly fitted together so that it doesn't leak and equipped with tubs set below the open lower end to catch and save for re-use the wash water that has been poured through the machine.

Is a knowledge of practical mining essential to the discovery of a gold lode? That is the question H. D. M., of Mobile, Alabama, brings to the Mines and Mining Department in a recent letter.

Not necessarily, H. D. M., although naturally a basic knowledge of mining is a big help. From a purely prospecting viewpoint, it is not essential. Make your discovery, and you can soon get miners to develop the lode for you. As a matter of fact few of the early prospectors in the West were in any strict sense of the word "miners." They discovered new prospects, new lodes, and new mines. But they seldom worked them. For the most part they sold their discoveries—and moved on to hunt a new deposit.

As a matter of fact many gold lode mines have been discovered by fellows who were not even experienced prospectors. Trappers have discovered valuable mineral deposits in the Canadian north country. Timber cruisers have done the same in our own Northwest. Campers, hunters, railway surveyors, and others traversing unfrequented territory have uncovered gold veins that later developed into fabulously rich mines, but in the main the majority of worth-while mineral discoveries are made by those definitely on the hunt for them.

"Can you tell me how to construct a very simple beach-sand concentrator for separating gold from

beach sands?" asks M. B., of Santa Barbara, California.

We could probably build you one, M. B., better than we can describe it. But here goes.

The most simple contraption is merely a wide floor, or bottom made of heavy planks. Inch and a half will do nicely. Four foot square a good size. But that is just a suggestion. Make it larger or smaller to suit your convenience. Keep it pretty wide, however. On this floor fasten low riffles, or crossbars. Half inch high a good thickness, and about an inch wide. Space them about four inches apart. It is a good idea to hold them in a single frame, or grate by longitudinal strips so that the whole bunch can be lifted out of the concentrator at once. Not necessary though.

Now for the operation. Set the concentrator out near the edge of the sea where the receding backwash of the waves will wash the gold-bearing black sand over it. The gold particles will be caught by the riffles.

Naturally the apparatus has to be moved occasionally as the tide comes in, or goes out so that it is always in a position to get the proper washing by the waves.

This devise, simple as it is, is no toy. Of course it is a crude method of gold saving, and not so efficient as others. As a rocker for instance. But it will catch gold. Wages have been made with nothing fancier than a concentrator of this type on the gold-bearing beach sands near Crescent City on the Pacific coast of California.

Just one tip concerning actual operation. It is a good idea to anchor the concentrator against sliding sideways, or floating off altogether by placing heavy rocks at the corners.

# 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.

**T**O the northward of Bakersfield is the Kern River country, the Greenhorn Mountains, and Pozo Creek. "Pozo Creek Sam" can tell you folks about prospecting in Tulare and Kern counties of southern California.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Some information that I gained last fall might be a help to would-be prospectors in regard to White River and Pozo Creek, as my pard and I tried to prospect to its source. We outfitted with two months of chuck, at Bakersfield, and carried a re-

covery unit. A good recovery unit sure surpasses a lot of screen wire and a heavy old sluice box, as we used it both dry and wet, and it was very portable and easy to pack. We went in east about thirty miles from Ducor. Roads are very steep, and we found our path blocked everywhere by fencing. We found that White River is not worth working in itself, is very dry, and all on deeded land. But in regard to Pozo I will say that we went far enough and learned enough to want to tackle it again. We talked with parties at Ducor whose folks averaged thirty dollars a day on Pozo thirty years ago. On account of a ranch there, however, one cannot get in from the east, and my advice is to go up Kern Canyon and then cross over the

Greenhorn Mountains and come down on its head. Another obstacle is that no map can be obtained, as the Greenhorn Mountains are not mapped, so that it would take some time to trace out and find its head in the mountains. One would just have to prospect all the gulches and small creeks till one found it, as some are not gold-bearing.

We gave it up as we wanted to reach the north before we were snowed in. We went from there to Mariposa. It's sure dry in there. Then we went along the old Mother Lode highway to Sonora. We sure had some experiences. It took us three days to go sixty-eight miles. We had to rebuild road and move rocks. The trails were very narrow and steep on the mountainsides. We found much activity at Sonora and especially up around Columbia. I would advise that district for prospecting, as in the old days nineteen millions were taken from Woods Creek. The creek is only a little over twenty miles long and offers good sniping yet.

If any of you folks are interested in going into the Kern country, I'll say that a trip into there would not be very expensive for a grubstake for two. Some day I want to prospect that section right by going over the Greenhorn Mountains. But that will be another story.

If there's anything that I can do for you old-timers, or chechahcos either, don't hesitate to speak right up.

POZO CREEK SAM.

Care of The Tree.

Just speak right up to this Arizonan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I live in a country that has the reputation of being "wild and woolly." Perhaps I can tell any one who is interested something about it. I would appreciate receiving lots of letters and will try to answer all.

CHARLINE MYERS.

Box 142, Litchfield Park, Arizona.

These folks are anxious to get back to the States again.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

We, my wife and I, are stuck 'way up here in the snow country where there is really from six to seven months of winter. It is our intention to return to the good old States just as soon as possible, and as the Pacific States are the only ones we have

been in, we think that by getting correspondents in all States, that we will have a better idea where we want to go. Believe me, we are sure homesick for the States. So come on, readers, either married or single, men or women between the



You folks who would like a real adventure trip might get in touch with Pozo Creek Sam, who can tell you about outfitting for a prospecting trip over the Greenhorn Mountains of California. Wear your friend-maker membership badges, folks, and speak up pronto.

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.

ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, and we will try to answer all letters. We can tell you in return quite a lot about Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, Alberta, and the southern tip of Alaska.

LYLE E. FARNESSE.

Route 2, Ohaton, Alberta, Canada.

You would-be hunters and trappers—just speak up pronto.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am living alone in a camp up in Maine. I am looking for a good pard who would like to trap and hunt, but he must have his own grubstake.

F. H. GOFF, SR.

R. F. D., Union, Maine.

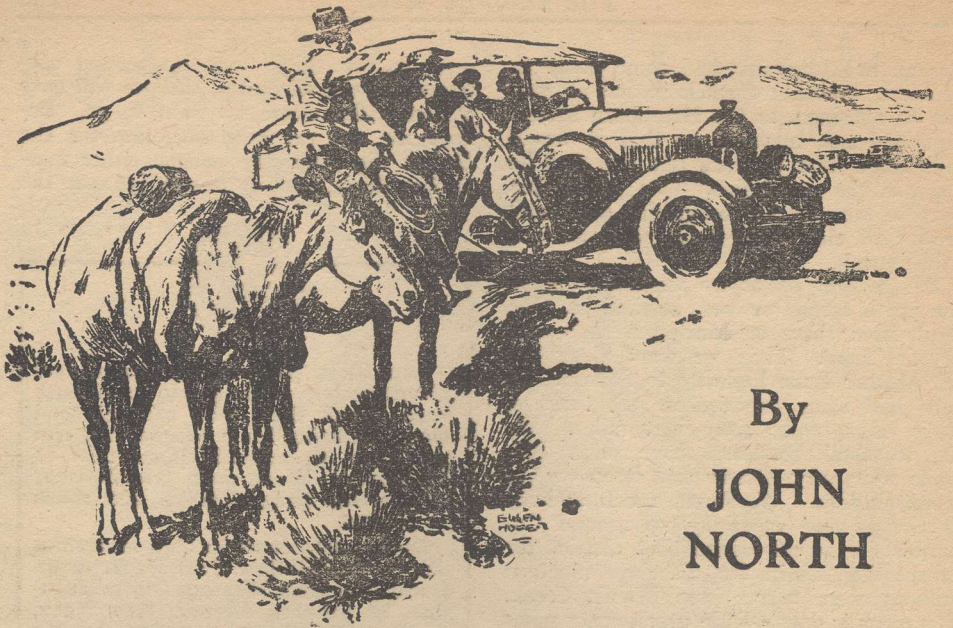
Elsie is looking for new friends.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I want to hear from Pen Pals everywhere—those who like to travel, camp, hunt, fish, climb mountains, and really live in the open. Where is that Pal who loves the log cabin and the good old fireplace? I promise an answer to every one.

ELSIE MAY LIBBY.

North New Castle, Maine.



By  
**JOHN  
NORTH**

# WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE

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.

**M**ANITOBA, rich in forests, lakes, streams, and wild life, draws the man who loves the outdoor West. Bound for this Canadian province, Hugh C., of Portland, Maine, craves a few facts about it.

"My buddy and I plan to cross the border into Canada this spring, Mr. North, with the idea of spending a couple of months roaming around up there. We are both experienced woodsmen and are looking forward to a whale of a vacation.

Manitoba is the province we are making tracks for, and we'd welcome any facts from you about it, as to resources for outdoor life. We want to camp, fish, canoe, swim, and see all the sights. A man-sized order, I admit, but my gratitude will be of equal dimensions."

Although we are no prophet, we venture to predict that Hugh and his partner have a mighty grand trip in prospect. Manitoba offers much to the hombre who loves the great outdoors. Few places on this continent can compare in scenic beauty

with the Lake of the Woods, and the picturesque Winnipeg River, just north of it. An all-weather highway of great scenic beauty also connects Winnipeg and Kenora, and we'd advise Hugh to traverse it, as the country tapped by this highway abounds in forests, lakes, and streams, and the fishing, hunting, boating, and bathing facilities are of the best.

North of Winnipeg is Lake Winnipeg, and on its lower western shores are many delightful resorts, reached by excellent motor roads. At Matlock Beach there is Sans Souci Park, an attractive spot where model cabins, boating and fishing will be found. On the east shore are Grand Beach and Victoria Beach. Several passenger steamers ply this great lake to visit historic Norway House, a two-hundred-year-old Hudson Bay Co. post where the fur trade is still carried on.

Another spot which we would advise Hugh to visit is the Riding Mountain National Park, one hundred and seventy-seven miles northwest of Winnipeg, one of the most beautiful and attractive of Canada's great national parks. It may be reached over several good all-weather highways. This park, twenty-two hundred feet above sea level, is covered with a luxuriant growth of forest and is dotted with numerous beautiful lakes, the largest and most popular of which is Clear Lake. On its shores are located many summer cottages,

cabins, tourist camps, and camping grounds.

In the southwestern portion of the Province, the International Peace Gardens are being established, with an area of three thousand acres equally contributed by Manitoba and North Dakota. Nature has been prodigal with her favors in this area of forest, lakes, and streams. Here Hugh and his partner will be in the real wilderness, for the nearest towns, Boissevain, Manitoba, on the north, and Dunseith, North Dakota, on the south, are ten miles distant.

Well, it's the desire of George T., of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to get away from towns, judging from the letter which we have received from him.

"I'm mortally fed up on cities and the men who live in them, Mr. North, and am all set to try a Western ranch and the company

of some cowboys and horses. Having heard a lot about Montana, I'd like to visit that State. Can you tell me where the Gary Cooper ranch is located? And would it be too much trouble to send me a list of Montana ranches?"

You are certainly heading in the right direction, George T., and can anticipate a mighty thrilling experience. Carefree days on a Western ranch, living the life of the open range, in the company of cowboys and horses, surely ought to make things look different to you. After a few rides over miles of rolling prairies, or up precipitous mountain

## SPECIAL NOTICE

### TRAILS ACROSS THE CANADIAN BORDER

Motorists planning trips across the Canadian border will need a reliable map showing the main automobile roads between Canada and the United States. For such a map write John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. It will be sent to you free upon request.



trails, you'll feel like a brand-new hombra.

The Gary Cooper ranch is located a short distance from the Great Northern Railroad station of Gary, Montana, and here you can partake of all the thrilling activities of an old-time Western cattle outfit. This is true, also, of so many of the ranches dotted over the map of Montana that it is going to be hard for you to pick the winner. To make this job easier, we are telling George where to write for a free folder which describes the ranches of Montana. Any one who wants this address may have it upon request.

While some of our readers are all excited about their summer vacation plans, others, such as Norman H., of Cheyenne, Wyoming, are thinking of more serious matters.

"As I own some land out here in Wyoming, Mr. North, and as I'm mighty fond of animals and want some sort of outdoor business of my own, it's occurred to me that I might try fur farming. If I do, I shall start in a small way and enlarge my activities along with my increased experience. The fur bearer I'm most interested in is the raccoon, and I'd be very thankful if you would give me some information about what sort of country would answer as a site for such a ranch. Could you also tell me how to build the pens and shelters, and offer some tips on how to prepare the pelts for market?"

We surely can and are glad of an opportunity to oblige you, Norman H.

As the raccoon is a woodland animal and by nature a roamer and climber, a site should be selected

which will provide, in so far as possible, for pens of sufficient size, shade, water, and easy drainage. If it is not possible to make provision so that a small tree can be left standing in an inclosure, the land should be cleared in such a manner as to leave small trees in the runways between pens.

Pens should be built if possible on dry ground with a good drainage. The pens may vary somewhat according to individual preference, but it is desirable that they contain not less than fifty square feet of space. Pens with dimensions in length and breadth of 9 by 7 or 10 by 8 feet with a height of 6 feet are suitable. The frames should be of good lumber of about 2 by 3 inches. The wire for inclosing these pens, sides, top, and bottoms, should be 14 or 15-gauge inch mesh galvanized wire. The wire floor of the inclosure should be covered with several inches of light dry earth.

The shelters or dens should be about 2½ by 3½ feet in size. The height should be about 2½ feet at the high end and slope to about 2¼ feet, thus providing a slanted roof. For the inner den or nest box about one third of this space should be partitioned off. The nest box should be connected with the main section by a chute. A door leading to the yard should be located in the main section of the den. If several animals are kept, a building may be made divided into compartments, each connected with an outside yard.

We are telling Norman where to write for a copy of the free pamphlet, "Preparation of Pelts for the Market," and shall be glad to send the same address to other fur farmers or trappers.

# GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are coöperating 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.

**C**HILDREN who have their parents' consent to engage in shooting competitions are encouraged to write this department for our free pamphlets on marksmanship and the privilege of having their names placed on the mailing lists of manufacturers who distribute catalogs which are really handbooks on guns and gunners. Boys and girls as young as twelve years can easily become proficient with the .22-caliber rifle and revolver under adult supervision and with no more danger than accompanies the driving of an automobile or the lighting of a stove. Much of the theory of marksmanship can be learned from booklets; we are glad to supplement that with direct personal advice; the rest is up to the individual.

Until a few years ago gun makers and dealers seemed to think that children were only interested in popping away at tin cans and telephone insulators, but that idea went out with the horse and buggy. The small-bore weapon of to-day is usually an instrument of precision which invites care and skill in its use. Rabbits and squirrels may be scarce targets in most of our civilized areas, but the black bull's-eye holds an equal charm when there are crowded galleries of spectators, pictures in the newspapers, and medals or trophies for those high on the list.

Let's look at this week's mail:

G. F. DUDLEY, San Diego, California: It is true that sometimes a new automatic pistol has a slow,

heavy trigger squeeze which can be corrected only by having a gunsmith grind down the sear notch, but if he goes too deep with his tools, he will enter soft metal. The result is that the trigger pull will be heavier one time than another. The remedy is to replace the ruined part.

#### Shot in rifled barrels again.

L. A. CRANDON, Sapulpa, Oklahoma: To improve results from shooting pellets in rifles and pistols, some home loaders mix the shot with a fifty-fifty binder of vaseline and paraffine. This has a tendency to lump the shot but is supposed to

be easier on the barrel. Reports from readers on their experience with shot in rifled guns will be welcome.

#### A good rule for rifle shooters.

F. B. NEEDLES, Peoria, Kansas: Do not make windage and elevation changes boldly. Change a little less than the rules indicate, and do not change at all unless you are certain that you properly held and squeezed on your last shot. Always aim the same; do not aim higher or lower to compensate for misses, but watch your windage and elevation if other factors are correct.

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.

## AN ARMS ALPHABET

### A.

**ACTION:** The parts of a rifle used in loading and firing.

**ALLOY:** A mixture of metals, especially with lead in making bullets.

**ANTIMONY:** A metal used to harden lead bullets.

**ANGLE OF TWIST:** The inclination of the lands and grooves to the axis of the bore.

**AUTOMATIC:** Self-operated, by gas or recoil. Practically, most automatics are really semiautomatic; i. e., the trigger must be pressed and released for each shot.

### B.

**BALLISTICS:** The science of the motion of projectiles. Interior ballistics concerns motion within the weapon; exterior

ballistics concerns the motion from muzzle to target.

**BALL:** An old term for round musket bullets.

**BAND:** The ridge between two grooves in the rifling.

**BARREL:** The part through which the bullet moves after discharge.

**BOLT:** The moving part of the action which moves within the receiver and closes the breech.

**BORE:** The inside diameter of the barrel. Also, the entire interior of the barrel.

**BREECH:** The back of the bore where the cartridge enters.

**BULLET:** The part of the cartridge projected toward the target.

**BULGING:** Swelling of the barrel, usually due to an obstacle in the bore.

**BUTT:** The rear of the stock.

To be continued in next week's issue.

# 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.

**WILSON, WALTER J.**—He is about fifty years of age. Weighs two hundred and twenty pounds, and is six feet two inches tall. He is a psychologist, author, salesman and turpentine. Was born in Georgia. When last heard from he was in Jacksonville, Florida. Information regarding his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his son, Woodrow Wilson, Chaplain's office, NTS, Norfolk, Virginia.

**WILLENS, JOSEPH MILLER.**—Let me know how you are. Write, or put an ad in the Missing Department. Always think of you, Lem and Rosy are both beautiful children. Lem is a miniature Joe. He always talks of you. Please write, Joe. I love you, too. Write to Moe, 210 East Fifteenth Street, Oakland, California.

**WILLINGER, JOSEPH MILLER.**—He is about forty years of age. Oakland, California, was formerly his home. Hair is very black. Weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. Left eye turns outward. Any one knowing him would do his brother a real favor by writing. Address M. Willinger, 210 East Fifteenth Street, Oakland, California.

**HAGUE, VERNA.**—Would like to hear from her or any one 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 has left an estate. Address Benjamin F. Whitte, R. D. 2, South Solon, Ohio.

**SMITH, HENRY.**—He is my father. About twenty-three years ago he married my mother, Mable Mexico, in Monroe, Michigan. He went away before I was born. I was the only child. He used to communicate with a woman in Victory, Kentucky, and through her I used to hear of him. If he is still living, I could visit him, as I can get a railroad ticket if I am married and have a boy. Please send any information concerning him to Mrs. Ida Mae Anteau, care of George Franisco, Newport, Michigan.

**ELTON, THOMAS.**—I knew him in Seattle, Washington, in 1905 or 1906. I was night watchman in the Model Electric Laundry and he visited me a great deal, both there and at my home. He would be about forty-nine years of age now. Is five feet six or seven inches tall. Has brown eyes and brown hair. His brothers and family owned the Elton Feed and Seed Co., in St. Louis, Missouri, when I knew him. His home was in St. Louis, too. I lost his address when he was attending the university at Rolla, Missouri. He was taking a civil engineering course. Please write to establish communication with him again. Please address George M. Hill, 1317 Seventh Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

**LATHAM, WILLIAM.**—Who left Crosswicks, New Jersey, when he was twenty-one years of age. Was last heard from at Cripple Creek, Colorado. Your brother is very anxious to hear from you. Please write to George Latham, 27 Third Street, Florence, New Jersey.

**ATTENTION, HOWARD, MRS. A., ARCHIBALD, and AMELIA CATHIE.**—It is thirty years since I have heard from them. At that time they lived at Ninety-sixth Street and Riverside Drive, New York City. They were born at No. 11 Charles Street, New York City, and would be now in their seventies. Any information regarding them will be thankfully received by their brother, Arthur Cathie, 223 Euclid Avenue, Mount Clemens, Michigan.

**HAY, CHARLES.**—We are all so worried about you. Please write to Aunt Dode, (Aunt Josie), Mrs. Josie L. Graham, 735 Rigby Street, East Liverpool, Ohio. Any one knowing the whereabouts of the aforementioned, or having any news regarding him, please get in touch with Mrs. Graham.

**WOOD, LEE LEWIS.**—Daddy, Betty and I would like very much to see you. The past is gone, so won't you let us hear from you? We don't want money, but just our daddy. Fourteen years is a long time. We know that you are living. Please send us some word. Helen.

**MOSER, HELEN.**—When a small child she was adopted into a doctor's home in Illinois. Her name was then changed to Bertha. Her foster father died and the family moved to southern Indiana. She is supposed to be still with her adopted mother. She would be about twenty-three years of age. Any information concerning her would be deeply appreciated by her brother, Herschel Moser, 3920 Kennerly Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

**SANDERS, F. H.**—Bert would like to hear from you. Please write to B. C. H., care of Western Story Magazine.

**MILLER, MRS. MAE C.**—She was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Has black hair and blue eyes. Would be about forty-one years of age. Was last heard from in 1926. At that time she was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she had made her home for a number of years. Any news of her, whether living or dead, would be gratefully received by her sister Bertha. Address Mrs. Herman A. Pace, Route 6, Saginaw, Michigan.

**WILL-U-HUSH.**—Please write. We are heartbroken. Don't you know that we love you more than life and will always be waiting? We couldn't do anything rash. Write to us through Western Story Magazine. Address L. H.

**STANLEY, ALBERT W.**—When last heard from he was at 841 Pullerton Street, Chicago, Illinois. That was in December, 1930. He is fair-complexioned. Has dark hair and blue eyes. Wears glasses. Is five feet seven inches tall. Weighed one hundred and forty-seven pounds. Is a baker by trade, but he worked in the check room of the Union Station. His mother is very aged and in poor health. She would appreciate any news of her son. His brother, Harry C. Stanley, will pay one hundred dollars (\$100.00) reward for positive proof of his death, or, if still living, his present whereabouts. Direct all communications to Harry Stanley, 515 West Fifth Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

**FRYER, MAGGIE, ARTHUR, and HARRY.**—They are my sister and brothers, and I have not seen them or heard of them for thirty-five years. We were placed in care of the Children's Aid in Hamilton, Ontario, when we were quite small, and were later given in adoption. A Mrs. Douglas, of Caledonia, Quebec, adopted Maggie. The boys I do not know about. Any information regarding them would be gratefully received by Mrs. Walter Robinson, 125 Ascot Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

**VORBECK, JOHN, JOSEPH, and EDWARD.**—They are my three brothers. I was born in Madison, Illinois, in 1884. When I was seven years old I was adopted by Mose Isehower, and my name became Mary Isehower. I should be very happy to hear from any of my brothers, or from any one who can give me any news of them. Address Mary Isehower, County Home, Route 1, Lamar, Missouri.

**STANFILL, MRS. MAE, HAROLD EUGENE, and VERA MAE.**—Will any of the aforementioned communicate with me as soon as possible? Address Santa L. Stanfill, care of Tom Flores, Route 2, Keithville, Louisiana.

**PURTY or PERTY, MARGARET.**—Was last seen in the Odd Fellows Hall in the summer of 1924. She was accompanied by her mother and brother Ken. Margaret, do you remember Virginia of the Martha Washington School? I am married now. If she, or any one who knows her, sees this notice, please write to Mrs. Virginia Wolganott, 414½-A Deña Vina Street, Santa Barbara, California.

**DAVIS, D. E. and W. E.**—Generally called Ed and Bill. When last heard from, in 1924, they lived at 2404 Staple Street, Houston, Texas. Their present address would be greatly appreciated by their half brother, L. O. Cocknum, Box 174, Lela Lake, Texas.

**CRENSHAW, JOHN REUBEN.**—He was last heard from about ten years ago at Seattle, Washington. His uncle, R. S. Crenshaw, is dead, and it is very important that he get in touch with me as soon as possible. Any information regarding him will be much appreciated by Ed Crenshaw, Box 343, Alton, Alabama.

**SASSE, WALTER.**—Would be between thirty-five and forty years of age. Weighed between one hundred and seventy and one hundred and eighty pounds. Has very thick dark hair. Is a very good singer. Have not heard from him in six or seven years. When last heard of he was in Wyoming. The last time I saw him was in Wally, Wisconsin. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, kindly notify Hazel Sasse, care of Herbert Hagner, Route 1, Kewaskum, Wisconsin.

**HALEY, MRS. LERA.**—Whose last-known address was Valley Junction, Iowa. I am very anxious to hear from her and would appreciate any help in locating her. Address Ralph E. Long, care of Leonard Branch, Saratoga, Wyoming.

**JOHNS, ELLA MAE.**—She is colored. Her home was in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She is my sister, and the last time I saw her was on the N. & W. at Powellton, West Virginia. We were never parted until our father died in Tennessee. She is five feet six inches tall. Has light-brown skin and sandy hair. Is slightly cross-eyed. I have been sick and I would like to see her. Her niece, Annie Mae, who has not seen her since she was seven years old, would also like to know her better. Any one knowing where she can be located, please write to Mrs. Josephine Mills, 321 Fourth Avenue, Montgomery, West Virginia.

**STANLEY, ALBERT M.**—In December, 1930, he was at 841 Fullerton Street, Chicago, Illinois. He is five feet seven inches tall, has dark hair, blue eyes. Wears glasses. When last seen he weighed one hundred and forty-seven pounds. Mr. Stanley's mother is very old and in ill health. She would appreciate any news of her son. His brother, Harry C. Stanley, will pay one hundred dollars for positive proof of his death, or, if still living, his present whereabouts. Direct all communications to Harry C. Stanley, 515 West Fifth Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

**KORSCHGEN, CHARLES LOUIS.**—In 1897 he lived in or around Denver, Colorado. His daughter would be grateful for any information regarding him. She is Mrs. Mae Hain, Route 2, Biggsville, Illinois.

**BRANDT, M.**—Was last heard of in 1893, when in the Spanish-American War. He was born in Courland. There were four children, two girls and two boys, but they were separated when they were young. In 1896 M. worked in a brewery in Pennsylvania. Would like to find both my brothers. Any one knowing any one of this name, kindly notify Mrs. Jessie May, care of this magazine.

**BARNETT, ELLWOOD C.**—The pitcher has been broken. Coleman, Texas.

**TURNER, WALTER.**—Who lived at one time on Pacific Avenue, in San Francisco, California. A friend is asking news of him. She is Mrs. Hazel Wadsworth, 930 West Fifth Street, Los Angeles, California.

**DOYLE, MR. and MRS. HARRY.**—They are friends of mine, and in 1923 to 1925 their home was on Golden Gate Avenue, near Steiner Avenue, in San Francisco, California. Kindly send any word of them to Mrs. Hazel Wadsworth, 930 West Fifth Street, Los Angeles, California.

**CAMPBELL, NEIL ROWE.**—Who left Toronto, Canada, on May 25, 1931. Was last heard of June 4, 1931, when he was in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He is twenty-one years of age. Has brown hair and blue eyes. Is about five feet seven inches tall. His sister would welcome information of any kind. Please write to Dorothy B. Campbell, Box 263, Bradford, Ontario, Canada.

**SCOVILLE, LLEWELYN.**—When last heard from he was in Sacramento, California. That was in 1919. Any information concerning him would be greatly appreciated by his daughter, Marion Scoville, Box 3104, Lowell, Arizona.

**ATTENTION.**—Want to locate the relatives of Ray Coffman. He was killed in an automobile accident just east of El Paso, Texas, on August 17, 1934. His body is in the morgue in El Paso. He was a good-looking and a fine man. Was one eighth Cherokee. Was a cowboy. Had black eyes. Weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds and was five feet nine inches tall. Was somewhere in his early thirties. He said that his mother was a Benge of Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, and that she had a brother living at or near, No-Wa-Ta, Oklahoma. His mother is supposed to be still living. Also had a married sister, but was always very reticent as to her whereabouts. Kindly address any information to C. B. Hamilton, Van Horn, Texas.

**SCOTT, J. NELSON.**—Usually called Scottie. Please write to us, Scottie. We have had lots of bad luck since we last saw you. Little Edna wants to see you. Please get in touch with us soon. Your friends, Mamie and Raymond Cooper, Station 1, Middletown, Orange County, New York.

**GREFFEZ, V. H., SR.**—He is my only brother. Has a son Victor who would be about twenty-five years of age. I have never seen my nephew. His mother and father are divorced. Twenty years ago the mother lived in Iowa. I am sick and alone and long to know if my brother is living or dead. Any information would be gratefully received. Address Sister, care of Western Story Magazine.

**ORENDORFF, THELMA FAYE.**—Dear sister, please write and let me know where you are. I am heartbroken. Clyde Marks, 710 East Fourth Street, Topeka, Kansas.

**LA FORTUNE, ALBERT.**—He is my brother, and I have not seen him for more than twenty-five years. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please notify Mrs. Annie Shannon Blumore, Alberta, Canada.

**LUTES, ZACARIAH, TATMAN, and CYRUS.**—Any one knowing the address of any of the aforementioned, or any of their family, please get in touch with Mrs. Abe Nash, Route 1, Mutual, Oklahoma.

**HART, HARVEY EUGENE.**—Is almost six feet tall. Has gray eyes, brown hair, and fair complexion. His only sister is asking news of him. She is Mrs. Mary E. Brown, 1711 West Main Street, Ottumwa, Iowa.

**DU VAL, GLADYS.**—In 1932 she was living with her sister and brother-in-law, Helen and Dwight Johnson. Sent her a letter to their address in 1933, but it was returned to me. Dear Gladys, if you see this, write to me. I miss you. Come to see me if you can. I live a mile from Nora, Illinois. If you inquire at Nora, they will direct you. Gladys is around nineteen or twenty years of age. It is possible that she is married now. Any news of her will be appreciated by Miss Eunice Ellen Martin, B. R. 1, Lena, Illinois.

**CHAMBERS, WILLIAM.**—Who was an electric-appliance salesman in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1929. Was last heard of in West Virginia. I would be very glad for news of his whereabouts. I have good news for him. Remember the Blue Lantern Tea Room in Somerset, Pennsylvania? Any one knowing his present address, please communicate with Charles McQuade, 1003 Highland Avenue, North Braddock, Pennsylvania.

**ATTENTION.**—James U. Starns enlisted in the United States army at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and was discharged on February 14, 1905, at Jolo Jolo, Philippine Islands. Was a cook in Company K, Seventeenth United States Infantry. Served as a civilian employee in the Quartermaster's department from February, 1905, to July, 1906. Worked as teamster, packer and blacksmith. Was injured in an altercation with a soldier, and died from gunshot wounds in the military hospital at Jolo Jolo, on July 25, 1906. Any one who served with him, or who may know the details of his death, please communicate with his nephew, Private Burnett E. Beach, Company B, Thirtieth United States Infantry, Presidio, San Francisco, California.

**DEVINE, WALTER EDWARD.**—Who left home May 15, 1930. He will be nineteen years of age on April 9, 1934. Has blue eyes and brown hair. Lip is scarred as a result of being kicked by a horse when he was a small boy. Always talked of going West. His mother is worried sick at his absence. Kindly send any news of him to his cousin, Miss E. Schumann, Route 1, Palatine, Illinois.

**BOSLEE, BAUSLY, BOUSLEY, or BAUSLEE, RUTH JEAN.**—Cannot be sure of the spelling of her last name. She was last heard of in Brownwood, Texas, in 1927. Please write to Jess Pierce, 2206 Avenue I, Brownwood, Texas.

**SIMPSON, MISS MARGARET.**—Formerly of Wilmington, North Carolina. Would be most grateful for information as to her present whereabouts. Please address Howard, care of Western Story Magazine.

**MULHOLAND, INA.**—Is thought to have been adopted from the Savage Children's Home by some people named Pipes. Our mother died when we were three years of age. My name was John Mulholand, but it was changed to Norman C. Davis by my foster parents. It is important that I locate my sister. Any one knowing her whereabouts, please get in touch with Norman C. Davis, care of A. O. Skogen, Ronan, Montana.

**NOTICE.**—Will the little lady who left her home in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in 1924, and met a salesman in the Hotel Boulderado, Boulder, Colorado, later going to a hotel on Morgan Seventeenth Street, in Denver, and from there to Fort Morgan, from where she wrote that she had a place to take a private family, please write to Laurene, care of Western Story Magazine? I have lost the high-school insignia.

**CLARK, AVORA.**—Who used to live on Olney Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the divorced wife of Jack Clark. She has a brother, Dorlan, but I do not know his last name. An aunt of Jack's is Mrs. Alice Miller, Vincennes, Indiana. Any one knowing her present location, kindly write to Louise Midkiff, 339 West Lyndale Avenue, Vincennes, Indiana.

**DALE, WILLIAM ROBERT RUNKLE.**—Was born August 4, 1910. Is of slender build. Has gray eyes and brown hair, and high forehead. Right forearm is tattooed. Half of left foot is missing. Was last heard from at Texhoma, Oklahoma, in August, 1929. Any one having any information concerning him, please write to Harry R. Dale, 1410 Jackson Street, Joplin, Missouri.

**SEAG, DOCIE.**—Was last heard of in Greenville, South Carolina. A long-lost friend is anxious to get in touch with her. Any one knowing her, please communicate with Miss Nora Caldwell, 505½ East Frederick Street, Gaffney, South Carolina.

**KILCUP, CHARLES.**—Formerly of Windsor, Nova Scotia. He was last heard of in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His sister is asking the readers to help her find him. Kindly send any word of him to Ralph Blackburn, Centre Burlington, Hants County, Nova Scotia, Canada.

**BALLARD, ROLLA.**—When last heard from he was at 814 Washington Street, Phoenix, Arizona. That was on February 15, 1932. On that date a cousin had a short letter from him. I have not heard from my brother since January, 1919. My cousin tried to communicate with me when she heard from Rolla, but I did not know and she could not locate me. I have just had the news. However, a letter sent to 814 Washington Street was returned to me, marked "Unknown," so it is probable that it is a long time since my brother was there. I would be very grateful for any help in locating him. Address Mrs. Kathryn Lee, 356 East Sixty-fourth Street, Los Angeles, California.

# Blank Cartridge Pistol



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 25c  
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The Wonder of the World. 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 is guaranteed to be so. They will bloom every two weeks, Summer or Winter, and when three years old the bush will be a mass of flowers. It will bloom from 100 to 1,000 flowers on each bush. The flowers are in shades of white, pink, and crimson. The plants will do well both in and out of doors. We guarantee at least three bushes to grow from 50 packets of seed. **Price 25c each, 3 for 75c.**

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Just introduced, noted for its rapid growth. An excellent ornamental plant for the dark green. Forms a good hedge. It is a native of the high hills of the mountains of China. It is a very hardy plant, and is suitable for all climates. **Price 25c each, 3 for 75c.**

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HAYES'S WEATHER PROVEY By watching changes that take place in this remarkable plant accurately forecast the weather many hours in advance. Will show rain, heavy rain, drought, snow, frost, etc. **Price 25c each, 3 for 75c.**

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## Chinese Cabbage

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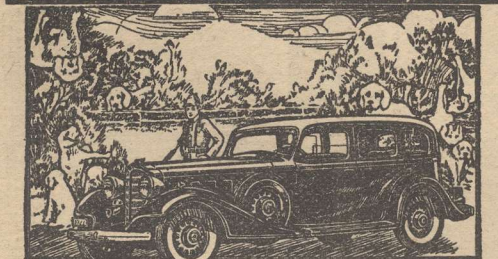


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**\$10,000.00 REWARD** will be paid to any worthy charity if anyone can prove that we do not really give away all these thousands of dollars in cash prizes—or that all this prize money is not on deposit in the bank.

**WRITE QUICK**

Send no money. Mark dogs found, clip picture, mail quick—or write on penny post-card how many dogs you find. For replying I will tell you how you may also win big EXTRA cash rewards and \$2,500 too. Answer NOW! Tell me which you would prefer to win—\$2,500 all cash or Buick and \$1,000.

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So would I, but it takes a long while

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**[No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement.]**

**D**ON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumb-bells, stretchers or any other such contraptions!

Both these ideas are all bunk—and I have **PROVED** it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

### **NATURAL Methods Are All I Need**

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of Dynamic Tension can do for YOURS!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I was a few years ago. Then I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling—flat chested, spindly legs, arms and legs like pipestems. I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study

myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! "Dynamic Tension" is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

### **This Secret Has Helped Thousands**

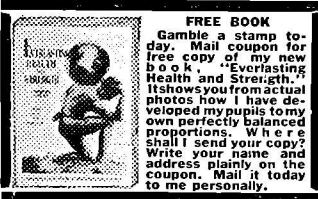
Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what Dynamic Tension has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man can and ought to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance, and muscles that stand out like bridge-cables all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

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I'd like you to know what Dynamic Tension has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book, which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you. I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad, powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid, and muscular, and an evenly-developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

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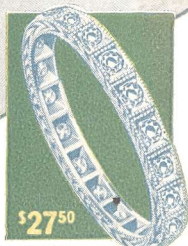
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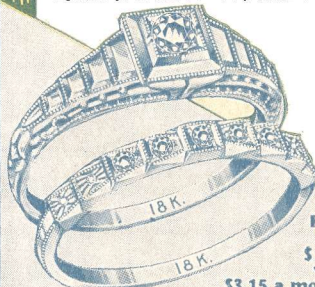
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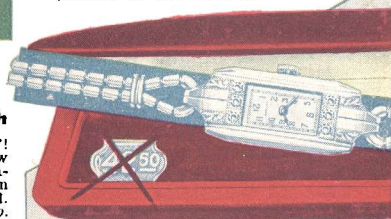
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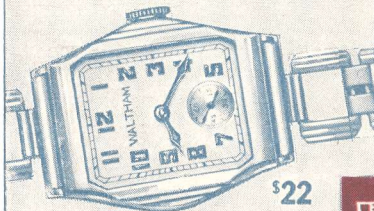
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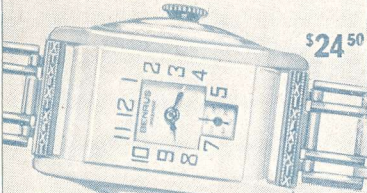
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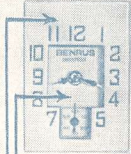
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