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STREET & SMITH'S

DEC. 14, 1935

# Western Story

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CCC IN THE TIMBER *By* SETH RANGER



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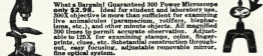
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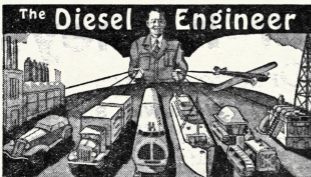
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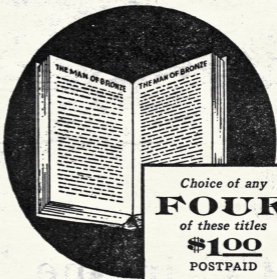
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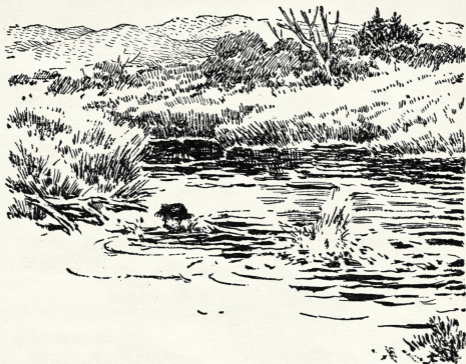
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# CCC in the Timber

## CHAPTER I.

### ONE LAST SUNSET.

**J**ERRY BRYANT straightened his thin, short body, squared his frail shoulders, and raised his steady gray eyes from the wretched, gasping man on the bed to the doctor's sympathetic face. "Let's have the truth," he demanded. "What are his chances?"

"I have done everything within the power of medical science, my boy," the doctor replied; "your father cannot survive another hour."

"Thank you," Jerry said, "I had to know the worst. But you're wrong. It's only noon, and he'll live—to watch one last sunset. You see, he always wanted to quit the job at the plant, go West, and make a new

start. He used to sit in that old chair evenings, watch the sunset, and talk of bottom land, plenty of milk, vegetables, and fresh air. And now——"

His face contorted in a sudden spasm of grief. A swift rush of emotion choked the remaining words. Jerry walked swiftly to the window and stared at familiar scenes blurred now by tears.

The voices of children playing on the hard, bare court, six stories below, floated upward. He heard the pulley squeak as Mrs. Delaney pinned her weekly washing on the line and hauled it out. Vaguely he noticed the O'Conner baby peering between the bars of the fire escape across the way.

The city's roar, constant, de-



## By SETH RANGER

Author of "Mavericks of the CCC," etc.

manding, and all-powerful, beat against his eardrums. It was like the thunder of distant surf. With the first breath of life his father had heard that roar. He was hearing it now as he died—forty-three years of ceaseless din.

The doctor regarded Jerry's slight figure sadly as he speculated on Jerry's thoughts. Twenty-one is too young to accept the responsibilities of a widowed mother and six brothers and sisters, the doctor reflected. Fate was unjust to the Bryants—it took the father and left the burden on the son's shoulders before he was ready for it.

Even the glorious sunsets of distant horizons were denied them. Their suns set behind the walls of man-made canyons. The doctor was

moved to drop a heartening hand on Jerry's shoulder, but he checked the impulse. Sympathy might break the youth when the heed of courage was greatest.

Jerry Bryant's hand brushed the moisture from his eyes, and he whirled about with the confidence of one who has weighed many things and arrived at a decision. As the gray eyes met the doctor's, the older man felt the impact of some tremendous force generated deep within the frail body.

The doctor withdrew, and Jerry stepped to the bed and looked down. Every breath of the dying man required effort. His hands, scarred and stained from years of toil, opened and closed. Jerry could not recall ever seeing those hands clean. His

father worked too hard and the grime went too deep for ordinary cleansing methods. Nor could he remember seeing his father when he wasn't tired. Sometimes he relaxed and watched the sun, but he always appeared tired out.

Terrible doubts intruded in Jerry's hour of grief to assail him. One moment he felt a strong conviction that his father was as great a hero as ever received a medal for valor on a battlefield. He did not offer his life in a single blast of glory, lashed by the excitement of blazing guns and charging men. He offered it daily, by degrees. And by degrees it had been accepted until now but a shred remained.

The next instant doubt rushed in to whisper that the dying man was a coward. He was afraid—afraid to quit the job at the plant and strike out on his own; afraid to venture beyond the walls of the city that imprisoned him.

**T**HE hours dragged, and it seemed to Jerry that as his father's life ebbed there came a proportionate flow of responsibility to his own shoulders. The subdued voices of his brothers and sisters came from the adjoining room. In the hour of tragedy there was peace among them—the petty quarrels of childhood were forgotten.

His mother came in and seated herself. He saw fear on her dead-white face—fear of death's approach; fear of the uncertain future. Mary Bryant came softly, fearfully, and looked a long time. Then she left, crying.

"What of Mary?" Jerry asked himself. Mary with her beauty and promise of voice. A sweatshop job or an unhappy marriage founded on the urge to escape drudgery.

Lillian, fourteen and as pale as her dying father, came. She stifled a constant cough with her handkerchief, stared even longer than Mary, then left, dry-eyed and trembling.

The afternoon passed slowly, and as slowly the sun swung past a wafer-like tower, blazed a golden trail into the sordid room, and touched the gasping man's face. He turned slightly, and his lips whispered:

"Kitty?"

"Yes, Con," his wife answered, dropping to her knees beside the bed.

"I'm tired, Kitty," he said; "so tired. I guess I'd better quit the job at the plant and start West before it's too—late!"

Hardly breathing, Jerry Bryant watched the sun move on. He watched it with fascinated, unblinking eyes, knowing this time his father would go with it. It dropped slowly behind another vaulting tower and left the room gray and dreary.

A strange peace lay on his father's features, and with it a dignity the hard-working little man had never known before—the dignity of marble, attainable only in death.

After a while Mrs. O'Conner came and led the stunned widow and younger children away.

"What will we do now Con's gone?" Mrs. Bryant sobbed over and over again. It was a cry in the darkness of grief, as old as time itself.

In his own mind Jerry Bryant answered the question.

Two days later Jerry sat in a dim chapel, heavy with the odor of flowers, while his father's lodge brothers performed the final rites.

"A loyal husband and devoted father," the chaplain intoned, and Jerry noticed his father's folded hands were free of stain for the first time. "He exemplified the courage

that is the heritage of our people," the chaplain continued.

"He was afraid to break away and better himself. He was a coward," the voice of doubt rushed in and gave the lie to the chaplain's beautiful phrases, tormenting Jerry beyond endurance.

It was over at last, and the family returned home. Mrs. Bryant broke the depressing silence that evening.

"Mr. Morgan is coming this evening to offer you a job in the plant," she said.

"That's nice of him." Jerry tried to be matter-of-fact.

"You won't refuse?" she exclaimed, alarmed by his expression.

"Let's not talk about it now," he insisted.

"Jerry! You *are* going to refuse!" Her tone was frightened. "What will become of us? What are you thinking of?"

"Please let's not go into it now," he pleaded.

Mrs. Bryant fumbled in her purse, found a nickel, and hurried away to phone Mr. Morgan of the situation.

"He's probably upset, but I can straighten him out," Morgan assured her.

## CHAPTER II.

### A BARGAIN.

**M**R. MORGAN proved to be a shrewd, alert little man. He had inherited a good slice of the plant, and the welfare of his employees was always of vital importance to him. True, he was inclined at times to regard them as cogs in the vast machine thousands called the "plant." But he was also an intensely human person, and the employees' affairs were his affairs. Twenty-five or thirty times a year he called at humble homes death had visited, gave comfort to the

stricken, and arranged employment for some one.

"Four generations of Bryants have worked in our plant," he informed Jerry, "and I hope you will be the fifth."

"Thank you, Mr. Morgan," Jerry answered, "but I'm at the crossroads. With me it is now, or never. If I take a job with you, I'll never be able to let go."

"What are you going to do?"

"Enroll in the civilian conservation corps," Jerry replied. "Roughly a million men have passed through it. The membership is to be increased to six hundred thousand. To some it's a vacation at government expense. To others it's a big chance—the break most of us expect will come along sometime. That's the way I look at it."

"Utter madness, Jerry——" Mrs. Bryant began.

Mr. Morgan silenced her with a gesture, and Jerry continued:

"There's always been a movement West—first trappers and hunters; then the emigrant trains; after them the thousands who traveled on the newly built railroads. They were mostly on their own. Now there's another movement. The government pays our fare and gives us thirty dollars a month, food, shelter, and clothes for six months, then takes on a new bunch. In six months' time I hope to fit myself for a lumber-camp job in the Puget Sound country."

"Madness, Jerry!" Mrs. Bryant repeated. Hers was the dire fear of those long rooted to the same ground. "It's a country of big mountains, big trees, and big men. And you are——" She choked back the remainder.

"Go ahead and say it," he quietly suggested. "And I am small physically and frail. Say that among big

men I'll be crushed and sent back a failure, beaten and my spirit gone. That can happen! Don't think I'm not afraid of being lost in the shuffle. I've felt fear twinges, if you want to call them that, ever since I decided to make the break. And that's why I am making it—before it is too late."

"Mr. Morgan, you must do something to bring him to his senses," Mrs. Bryant half sobbed.

"Mrs. Bryant, please leave us alone for a few minutes," Morgan quietly suggested. "I want to get at the meat of this thing."

"We'll go into the bedroom," Jerry said.

He led the way and closed the door.

"Now what's behind all this?" Morgan's tone was warm, inviting confidence. He had led many a man by the nose because of his warmth.

"Father died in this room, Mr. Morgan. Before he died, he used to sit in that chair and talk of a place out West," Jerry explained. "He'd watch the sunset, too. Queer about fathers. We take them for granted, make our demands, never wondering how they are going to meet them. We leave that worry to them. I thought of that as I watched him die. I remembered the older he got, the more he stooped, as if he must be nearer his work because his pace was slower. Understand?"

"I think I do. Go on, my boy," Morgan said.

"He was always tired and worried. He gave his life for us. Was he a brave man or a coward? I don't know."

"He was a brave man, Jerry," Mr. Morgan said.

"But afraid to make the break," Jerry argued, then he went on with growing bitterness: "He had to die to have really clean hands. He had

to die to lose that tired, lashed expression. And when he was dead, I saw something in his face I had never seen before—the qualities of leadership; strength of character. I wondered why I went through it all—the watching him die; the terrible thoughts that he was a coward as well as a hero. I know now! It was to wake me up."

"Jerry, I am small of stature. I was born a boss. The men respected me because they had to," Morgan explained. "You are frail, sickly. You may not even pass the physical examination into the CCC."

He saw the color drain from Jerry's face. He went on: "The world assumes a big, burly fellow is a natural leader. The small man must prove himself. You are handicapped at the start in a big, rough country. And yet"—Morgan's eyes twinkled for the first time—"as one small man to another, let me say this—the world frontiers are littered with the bones of burly men who underestimated the small man's capacity to give battle. We small men are imposed on as children at school. So we start fighting back from scratch. We learn to use brains instead of brawn. Whereas the easy-going big fellow relies on brute strength, and in the scheme of things is taken for granted. Result, other things being equal in training and talent, the small man has the edge."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Jerry informed him, relieved.

"Providing you can enter the CCC, I can be of help," Morgan continued. "Just what is it you want?"

"I want the toughest spot in the Puget Sound area," Jerry answered without a moment's hesitation. "I want to find out if I'm worth a whoop—and I want to find out in a hurry."

"Then what?"

"If I hang on," Jerry told him, "I'll keep an eye out for some good bottom land and a cabin. I'll bring the family out as soon as I can. That will take the younger ones off the streets; it'll give Lillian's lungs a break. And if things work out as I hope, maybe something can be done for Mary's voice."

"I'll gamble with you, Jerry," Morgan offered. "I'll arrange through influential friends at Washington to see that you are sent to the toughest camp in the Puget Sound area. You've got six months to establish yourself or—fail. If you establish yourself, you'll have my congratulations. If you fail? Then you are to become a cog in the plant."

"We Bryants make good cogs?" Jerry tried to keep the bitterness from his voice.

"Perfect," Morgan answered. "And I can't understand why I am offering to help you unless it is——" He paused, and then his words carried a sting. "Unless it is I have a deep-seated hunch you'll return, defeated, and in a mood to settle down."

"If I don't make the grade," Jerry assured him, "I'll return and go to work at the plant. Thanks. You've been honest from the first."

They shook hands, and Morgan encountered Mrs. Bryant near the door.

"You straightened him out?" she asked eagerly.

"Sometimes it is best, Mrs. Bryant, to allow a very young bird to test his wings," Morgan answered. "If he turns out to be an eagle, there is satisfaction in watching him soar to the heights. If he is to prove a road runner, then it is well to learn it at once and plan accordingly. Give Jerry his chance. Good night,

and remember—there'll always be a job for him at the plant."

"So he failed," Mrs. Bryant told herself desperately when Morgan was gone. "Now I've only one chance left—Josie Marshall. If Jerry goes West, Josie will lose him." She put on her only hat and hurried to the Marshall home five blocks away.

**J**OSIE'S eyes and hair were brown and carried warm, friendly lights. She stood five feet two inches in high-heeled shoes, and weighed a hundred pounds. Every inch and pound was vivid personality. She wore the cheap little engagement ring Jerry had given her with more pride and happiness than more fortunate girls display over a thousand-dollar jewel set in platinum.

"It's about Jerry," Mrs. Bryant began as soon as she sat down and caught her breath. "The ordeal of watching his father die was too much. He is full of CCC nonsense—all for going West and starting there. Mr. Morgan couldn't do a thing with him. Now it is up to you, Josie. You know what it means!"

"Just what does it mean?" the girl asked quietly.

"To me a constant worry. He isn't built for rough work," the mother explained. "He'll go under and come back to us sick and beaten. He may never get over it."

"And suppose he finds his place and fills it?" Josie suggested.

"He'll outgrow us if it is a big, important place," Mrs. Bryant answered. "He'll send for us, of course. But he will be too busy and—— I guess it's because I've lived here all my life. The thought of leaving frightens me. And you—— Oh, Josie, don't you see it will mean new friends to Jerry? And a girl—

a girl trained to understand this new life and the new Jerry?"

"I hadn't thought of that," the girl answered. And some of the light left her eyes. She was suddenly grave. "If he goes, he'll be burning his bridges."

"And you'll tell him what you think of the whole, crazy scheme?" Mrs. Bryant inquired.

"Yes," the girl promised, "I'll tell him. Ask him to come over to-morrow night."

Mrs. Bryant returned home to find every one in bed. She peered into Jerry's room. The small brothers slept peacefully at his side, but Jerry's eyes were wide open. Sleep was not for him. Under the tremendous momentum of what had transpired he was hurtling toward his goal in life.

"What did Josie say?" he asked quietly. "You went to her, of course, to line her up against the plan!"

"She'll talk to you to-morrow night," the mother answered.

At daybreak Jerry Bryant ate a hurriedly prepared breakfast and left for the nearest CCC enrollment office. He had an idea he faced a tough day—a day of hurdles, ending with Josie Marshall.

When the office opened, Jerry pushed his way to a counter and filled out a form. A clerk accepted it doubtfully.

"You'd better stay out of this game," he advised; "you ain't in the best of shape. It's a man-sized job."

"You're no Apollo yourself, buddy," Jerry retorted, holding his temper in check. "Suppose we find out what the doctor says?"

"Right now we break all records in giving service," the clerk, stung by Jerry's retort, snapped.

He placed the youth's application on the top, and a few minutes later

he was ushered in to a businesslike navy doctor.

The latter, detailed for this unexpected type of shore duty, was brisk and thorough.

"Reject!" he said.

"Why?"

"Well—er——" the doctor said.

"All right!" Jerry interrupted. "I'll say it! I'm an underweight, colorless, unimpressive piece of humanity. I looked as if I would be a liability rather than an asset to the government and——" He stopped. Within the week another doctor had felt the impact of the force behind Jerry Bryant's gray eyes. "Put down exactly why I'm being rejected. I'm going to get a show-down on this."

"Physically unfit for the type of service required in the CCC," the doctor scrawled. "Recommend rejection." He straightened up. "And the doctor's recommendation usually goes," he added. "Now what?" He was interested. So many accepted rejection without a murmur.

"I'm going to see Judge Maxwell," Jerry replied. "He's the biggest duck in this political puddle."

"I'm afraid you won't get past the fourth assistant secretary, Bryant," the navy doctor observed.

**T**HE doctor was wrong. The third assistant secretary greeted Jerry. The office was filled with people of varying degrees of importance who had, or thought they had business with the judge. The secretaries were trained to make each man feel his business was important, yet send him on his way happy—and without meeting the judge.

The secretary was all sympathy. "Really," he said, "there is nothing the judge can do about it. The doc-



tor's verdict is final. Your determination to enter the CCC in spite of physical handicaps is commendable and——"

"Thanks," Jerry said shortly. At that moment the judge ushered a beaming individual out a side door and sent him on his way with a slap on the shoulder. At that moment, also, Jerry vaulted the counter, brushed past the secretary and his three assistants, and slipped through the door. The judge turned, amazed and somewhat alarmed. The smile froze on his face. He had heard stories of cranks.

"I'm packing no guns or knives up my sleeves," Jerry said, without intending to be funny. "I want to get into the CCC and—— Wait! I'll say it. 'I'm sorry, young man, but I can't go behind the doctor's verdict!'" He imitated the booming voice. "Now I am going to make a speech I started to make to the doctor."

"Go ahead," the judge said, at the same time pressing a buzzer that would bring an armed guard.

"I'll admit I'm frail and underweight," Jerry said. "But the papers have been full of what the CCC is doing. Work in forests; flood control; highways; draining swamps, and so on. It rehabilitates young men. They almost harp on that angle. Well, here's one that needs it."

"But, my dear young man," the judge said ponderously, "I have nothing to do with the CCC. And if I did have, I can't go over the doctor's verdict."

"That's your final answer?" Jerry asked. "To-morrow it will be too late."

"Just what are your plans?" the judge asked in a friendly tone.

"I read the papers a lot, judge," Jerry replied. "I suppose if I went

to Colonel Stanley he might do something. He would probably take the case into court and have the CCC declared unconstitutional because it discriminated against a certain type of American citizen—the undernourished type. He wouldn't do it for love of me. He would do it to get in a couple of stiff punches at you. And how he'd love it."

"Hm-m-m!" A twinkle crept into Judge Maxwell's eyes. "You are a remarkable young man, so remarkable in fact I wonder why you are wasting your peculiar talents on the CCC. And you *do* read the papers. Hm-m-m."

The telephone interrupted.

"Oh, hello, Morgan!" the judge said.

Morgan's voice was loud enough for Jerry to catch snatches of what he said. "Don't think—by the doctor. But if he does—him—to the toughest camp—Sound area."

"My dear Morgan," the judge replied, "I am leaving for Washington to-morrow. I'll take the matter up. He shall be sent to the toughest camp, as you suggest . . . Eh? . . . No, I think you are mistaken. The doctors aren't so strict as you appear to believe. Unless he should have a contagious disease, a human skeleton can enroll in the CCC. As you know, the sole purpose of the organization is to protect our forest and rehabilitate our young men."

The judge hung up, then he scrawled a note.

"Now, Jerry, my boy, take this note to Doctor Haller. He is stationed at another enrollment office. You will find him an alert young man with the faculty—so rare in military circles—of—er—enforcing the spirit, if I might say so, rather than the strict letter of a regulation."

The judge opened the door personally and he slapped Jerry's shoulder.

"Good luck, my boy!" His booming laugh filled the office.

**T**HAT evening Jerry faced his last hurdle. He stepped briskly into Josie Marshall's home. The girl's soul was in her brown eyes. Jerry saw pride, fear, and doubt; but nothing remotely approaching selfishness. He felt suddenly weak.

"Mother wanted you to talk me out of it," he said haltingly. "And I didn't give you a chance. I'm in the CCC."

"I promised to tell you what I think, Jerry," the girl answered. "And so I will. I'm glad. My heart fairly sings at times. Again—well, if it were I, I'd be afraid. I'm city-bound, I guess. I'd be afraid of the bigness of the land, and playing a game without training. So I am proud of you, Jerry; terribly proud. This will be good-by. I don't like to see trains pull out of the station."

"You sure are swell," he said. "And that doesn't begin to cover it."

She slowly drew the ring from her finger, smiled wistfully at the cheap setting, then impulsively kissed it.

"Take it, Jerry," she said.

"Josie!" His tone was sharp, with astonishment. "I don't understand. Are you breaking our engagement because I am— What is wrong?"

"You're burning your bridges, Jerry," she answered quietly. "It won't be an easy fight. And you must be free—heart free, too, if need be. No ties to hold you or cramp your style. Maybe I am part of the city—the roar of the traffic; the towering buildings; the bright lights. I feel that I am not, and you'll tell me I'm not because you

are fine and sweet. But we don't know. It is something we must find out. But when it is all over, Jerry, and you've won, if you want me, if I can fit in—darling, I'll come."

Then she held up her lips for his farewell kiss.

## CHAPTER III.

### ONE TOUGH OUTFIT.

**S**ERGEANT BUCK of the Indian Creek Civilian Conservation Corps Camp stepped toward the long line of men and began calling off certain names.

"Bryant!" he muttered. "Jerry Bryant! Who's he and how'd his name get down here?"

"Orders from Washington assigned him to this outfit," the company clerk said. "He got in last night. He's from the East coast."

"Bryant!" The sergeant's voice echoed against a near-by mountain and almost drowned the roar of Indian Creek.

"Here!"

Sergeant Buck stared. He was a tall, broad man. He liked tall, broad men. Bryant was neither tall nor broad. His uniform hung loosely on his frail frame, but his gray eyes were challenging and his fists half clenched. These two details escaped the sergeant. He was interested in the slight figure from the physical standpoint only.

Heads turned. The line of men began with the tallest man who stood No. 1 to the sergeant's left. It ended with the shortest—Jerry Bryant. All eyes fixed on Jerry as if the command, "Eyes left!" had been given. A snicker ran through the ranks, and Jerry's cheeks stained pink. The snicker grew louder, and Jerry's cheeks became a sullen red.

"How'd a pint-sized guy like you get into this outfit?" the sergeant

demanded. Jerry's chin was up, and, in the manner of speaking, the sergeant decided he should knock his ears back. "Speak up, Bryant!" he barked.

"I got in the same way the rest did," Jerry answered.

"Do you realize this is one tough outfit?" the sergeant asked. "And it has been detailed to the toughest area in the Northwest—detailed to a forest reserve that has given rangers and CCC men a lot of trouble?"

"I hadn't heard," Jerry retorted, "but—what of it?"

"Kinda cocky, eh?" the sergeant jeered. "You know all the answers. All right, what's the answer to this one? A pint-sized guy finds himself up against a man-sized job, then what?"

"The pint-sized guy tells a bigger and dumber guy how to do it. Then sees that he does it," Jerry replied evenly.

Laughter rippled along the line. The sergeant grew red in the face and finished the roll call.

"Those who've been called," he said, "get your gear and report to Dave Logg, the forest ranger. That's all!" He dismissed the others and returned to his quarters. "That rooster, Jerry Bryant," he growled, "he's the freshest bird I've met since Spruce Renfro hit camp."

Jerry slipped his shoulders through the pack straps and straightened up. At first the pack did not seem heavy, but after he carried it a minute or two, the straps began to cut. With jaws set and a hard light in his gray eyes, he followed the others. The line squirmed through the forest like a writhing snake. Sometimes the leaders were visible, but mostly they were always around the next curve.

Giant trees loomed up on every

side, and some of them ran a hundred feet before there was a sign of a limb. "As high as fifteen and twenty-story office buildings," Jerry panted. "I never dreamed it would be like this. And those mountains!"

He caught a breath-taking glimpse of the Olympics, grim, snow-capped sentinels guarding the last West. For beyond them lay the restless Pacific. A week ago he had ridden the subway. Now this. "And I might have worked a lifetime in the plant," he reflected, "and nothing would have happened."

JERRY quickened his pace. He was falling behind slowly. His breath came in sharp, tortured gasps, his legs trembled as he climbed the next steep grade.

A big CCC man, with high cheek bones, a flat face, and dented nose, drifted back. He had the largest mouth Jerry had ever seen.

"Havin' trouble?" he drawled. "My name's Mort Lee. Let me fix that pack. You've got the straps too long. She rides low."

"Hauled them up to the last notch," Jerry answered.

"Not enough," Lee briefly observed. "I'll cut some holes. Why don't you get a job in the kitchen? No sense in killin' yourself off like this. I can see right now you'll never make it."

"Got a reason," Jerry answered. "If I stick with the CCC at all, I stick with this bunch. Say, what's in the wind?"

"More than seems to be on the surface," Lee replied. "It's got Dave Logg guessing, and he's one of the smartest rangers in the forest service. Terry Condon and some of the others discovered a timber wolf named Zorn had helped himself to a chunk of government timber. Some cow-puncher in the outfit named it

maverick timber because it wasn't branded, as you might say."

"I understand," Jerry said.

"This maverick timber runs into timber owned by a big logger named Anee Quagg. Quagg hates the CCC, or maybe it's his loggers who hate the boys. They jump the CCC every chance they get. Several bad fires have started in the maverick timber, and in Quagg's. Quagg claims the CCC boys are careless with matches and that's what starts the fires. He believes the CCC should be taken out of the area. Dave Logg has other ideas. There's trails and bridges to be built. But Dave is in a tough spot."

"How's that?"

"If the fires can't be stopped, he'll have to close the area, then Quagg will set up a howl. He has several big contracts to fill. If the ranger forced him to shut down, then he'd lose that business," Mort Lee explained.

"Evidently Dave Logg doesn't believe the CCC lads are the ones who are careless with fire," Jerry observed.

"You're darned tootin' he don't," Lee quickly agreed. "He's pounded that into us from the first. There's something behind all this. That's why we're being ordered in. Officially we're just replacing another CCC company."

"Actually, what are we being sent there for?" Jerry asked.

"Well," Lee drawled, "Sergeant Buck picked fighters for the detail. I've got a hunch there'll be little trail and bridge building and a whale of a lot of getting at the bottom of the trouble. One thing's certain, Quagg's loggers are all through havin' Roman holidays at the CCC boys' expense."

Mort Lee tossed Jerry's pack on

top of his own and started up the trail.

"Just a minute," Jerry said quickly. "I'll carry my own pack. I—mean it!"

Mort's easy-going eyes clashed briefly with Jerry's determined gray ones.

"I think you mean it at that," he said, dropping the pack. "But it's going to be a mighty tough day for you."

A HALF hour later Jerry looked up. They were above timber line. The lower ridges and peaks reared grim, ragged, and bare about the feet of the snow-capped mountains. Two hundred feet above him, but a quarter of a mile away by trail, the head of the line toiled slowly. A voice came suddenly, clear and sharp.

"Hey, stop the train. We're losing our caboose."

"Meaning me!" Jerry muttered resentfully. He could hardly see the taunter because of the sweat drenching his eyes.

"Never mind the caboose," he retorted. "It'll get in under its own power."

"That's Spruce Renfro," Mort Lee said. "Don't get mad! He's a good egg. But you've got yourself a nickname—Caboose!"

"You go on," Jerry answered. "Don't wait for me. I'll show up sometime."

"I guess we'll pretty near have to," Mort admitted; "Dave wants to get to Cedar Valley before dark!"

Mort barged on, his long, powerful legs eating up the trail. Ten minutes later he whistled cheerfully from above, waved, and vanished. Jerry faced the trek alone.

He made it to the upper trail, rested his pack on a convenient boulder, and relaxed. A hanging

glacier gleamed in rare tints of blue and green; a snow-choked gulch, blinding white in the clear air, fed a stream that lay like a carelessly tossed silver thread on a green carpet. A mile above, the stream leaped a hundred feet, and Jerry thought of a bride's veil stirring in a gentle breeze. The stream hurried past, thirty feet away, and Jerry sprawled on his stomach and drank the icy water.

He got up, refreshed.

"I'm living for the first time in my life," he said. "That is, if I don't die, trying to live."

At noon he stopped in a pass, notched in solid granite, and ate his lunch. Loneliness, accompanied by vague fears, came. He repelled the urge to run blindly in an effort to overtake the others. A willed calmness possessed him.

At two o'clock Jerry looked down on a sweep of timber that began almost at his feet and ran to the blue waters of the straits of Juan de Fuca. Tiny steamers dotted the straits; a haze on the south end of Vancouver Island marked Victoria. North-easterly Mount Baker towered with cameo sharpness.

"The country dad had in mind," Jerry said. His eyes followed the shore, broken here and there by an emptying stream or an occasional clearing. As though an unseen finger had pointed to the spot, his gaze stopped suddenly on a square of green set in the timber at the water's edge. Distance diminished it to the size of a postage stamp, but the black speck in the center must certainly be a cabin; and the faint silver line along the edge, a creek.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "That's the place for the family. Such land will grow everything. Wood and water for the taking; trout from the

creek; salmon, clams, and crabs from the sea."

It was a long way off, literally and figuratively, but it was the first stop in the trail he hoped to blaze in this vast land.

HE plodded steadily downward. His knees began to buckle under the constant checking of his burdened body. He rested as often as he had on the climb. Though the sun blazed overhead, it was cool in the big timber. A cathedral stillness filled the valley. These must be cedars, he thought. They were larger, and the leaves were different. The trees seemed older, too.

Tobacco smoke intruded suddenly. Jerry leaped to his feet heartened by the thought the others might be just ahead. Then he remembered Dave Logg had given strict orders there was to be no smoking during the march. Jerry's heart pounded with excitement. Could it be possible, through blundering luck, he might pick up a clew to the series of fires?

He shed his pack and walked slowly through the timber. The rot, littering the forest floor, deadened the fall of his boots. Now and then a twig snapped, and he learned to avoid dead brush. The odor strengthened, and a moment later a man's voice, heavy, harsh, and mocking, said:

"I told you Logg would bring 'em through Granite Pass and save time. That ranger is a smooth one, Mr. Quagg. And did you size up the gang he brought—tough mugs, all of 'em! Spruce Renfro and some of the boys that put the skids under Zorn are in the company. Logg's set for trouble."

"Wood ticks!" Quagg answered. "The boys will take 'em apart!"

"Suppose a bunch of them wood ticks took it into their heads to hit back? You know they could, and they could hit plenty hard. The fool public would be with 'em, too."

"Do you mean raiding logging camps, beating up my men with fists and clubs?" Quagg asked. "Say, let 'em try it, Cramm!"

"That wouldn't be hittin' back," Cramm answered. "I'm thinkin' of that maverick timber!"

Quagg laughed derisively. "The wood ticks couldn't muster brains enough amongst 'em to get away with that kind of a deal! You'd better change your brand of booze, Cramm; it's getting you jittery. Mark my words, Dave Logg will close the district inside thirty days. There won't be a wheel turning until the rains come!"

"I wish I could be certain of it," Cramm growled.

It was so amazing an admission from one whose living depended on logging operations that it set Jerry to thinking. It could mean but one thing—Quagg and Cramm had more to gain by a suspension of operations than by working. On the face of things it didn't make sense. And how could the CCC boys "hit back" as Cramm termed it, through maverick timber?

Jerry crawled closer and after some difficulty located the pair sitting on a down tree. A brief glimpse proved enlightening. Jerry suddenly realized the knowledge he had acquired of human nature in a packed city would serve him well in the big timber. A man's dress or environment might change, but the elements pointing to honesty or treachery remained the same whether that man operated from a skyscraper or Puget Sound logging camp.

IT was heartening to realize most of his city experience with human nature could be applied here. The man addressed as Quagg stood up. He was about the largest man Jerry had ever seen. He was six feet three inches and weighed well over two hundred and forty pounds. The tops of his heavily calked boots flared over fat calves; a paunch spilled over his wide belt. There were two distinct layers of flesh on the back of his neck. His face, covered with a black stubble, was beefy, and the skin carried the unpleasant color marking heavy dissipation. Jerry put the man's age at around fifty years.

Cramm was probably thirty-five years old. He stood six feet and was rawboned. His shoulders were amazingly wide, and his long arms dangled almost to his knees. The hands were massive and scarred from fighting and the injuries incident to logging operations. Like Quagg he wore the calked boots and "tin" (waterproof) pants of the big-timber country. The eyes of both men were black, penetrating, and shrewd. "And they're wide enough across the forehead to think their way out of a tight place," Jerry reflected.

Somewhere behind him, a dead branch cracked sharply. Cramm jerked nervously and glanced sharply at the thicket concealing Jerry.

"I've got a hunch we're bein' watched," Cramm said. "I've had that feelin' right along."

"Who'd watch us? Dave Logg wouldn't leave any one behind," Quagg argued. "He don't know we're up here."

A crash of brush interrupted his words.

"It's a bear!" he exclaimed.

"Bear, nothing!" Cramm jumped

to his feet. "It's a man, running. I'm checkin' up right now!"

Neither Jerry nor Cramm saw the half-grown cub lumbering across the gulch above the former's thicket. But Jerry saw Cramm racing toward him. He slunk up the gulch, avoiding brush and dry twigs, yet striving to remain under cover. Success lay just ahead in a hollow tree.

"If I can squeeze through that hole," he panted, "I'll——"

Cramm's voice crashed through the timber. "It's a wood tick, Quagg! The cuss has been watchin' us!"

"I'd have sworn it was a bear," Quagg bellowed. "Don't let him get away!"

Jerry crawled out of the gulch and tried to gain the trail. The ponderous Quagg headed him off.

"Close in on him!" he bellowed, as Jerry turned back.

Jerry crossed the gulch, believing his slight figure could move faster through the brush and down timber than Cramm's. To his astonishment the big logger never entered the gulch. He crossed it on a network of down timber, running lightly along logs as small as four inches in diameter, scorning the fifty or sixty feet of air that sometimes yawned below. Jerry gained the crest a hundred yards ahead of the logger. Cramm turned him back from the trail and into dense timber.

**T**HERE was nothing to do for it but run. Jerry legged it down a steep slope and into bottom land overgrown with brush. The land was soft and black, brightened here and there with the yellow and green of skunk cabbage.

He doubled back and climbed up the slope a hundred feet and dropped down for a moment's breathing spell. His breath came in

sharp gasps that sent hot stabbing pains through his lungs. His heart pounded furiously. "Can't stand much of this," he thought. But as soon as he was able, he was off again. The lumbering Cramm had picked up his tracks and again turned him back from the forest-service trail.

The man knew the country, and Jerry guessed he was trying to drive him into a trap. A stretch of water, coated with green scum, loomed up ahead, and Cramm's triumphant laugh floated down from a near-by ridge.

"Drove you right into it, eh?" he taunted. "Now, you rat, come up here and take your beatin' or—wal-low in the muck."

Jerry tried to cross a narrow neck of mud and sank almost to his hips. He turned back, worked his way over a rotting log, and hurled himself into the stagnant water.

"Come back here!" Cramm roared. "Or I'll——"

He caught up several rocks and ran down to the water's edge. Stones as big as a fist dropped around Jerry's head and shoulders. A smaller one slashed his cheek. He swam steadily. Sometimes his hands and knees struck the sludge and he all but mired down, yet slowly, surely he cut through the green scum to the opposite side.

There was no sign of Cramm, but he heard the man smashing his way around the swampy hole. The man's eagerness to silence him—an eagerness that wouldn't stop at murder—could mean but one thing, Jerry reasoned. Cramm and Quagg believed he had heard vastly more than had actually reached his ears. Cramm's was the furious pursuit of a desperate man.

A black swamp, studded by cat-tails, stretched from the water's edge to the east. Miles away he could see

mountaintops, but it was impossible to tell what lay directly ahead—the occasional cedars and willows screened the land. Jerry sank to his knees and with difficulty pulled his feet from the clinging muck. From that moment he eased up, confident that a man of Cramm's bulk would mire helplessly, the first hundred yards.

Within ten minutes Cramm's crashing about stopped. Jerry pushed steadily ahead, gained a ridge, crossed it, and dropped into a deep canyon. Clear, cold water brawled over a boulder-strewn bottom. Jerry plunged into the deepest pool and removed the muck from his body and clothing.

This spot had probably not changed in a thousand years. No blaze or trail existed. There rushed over Jerry the gnawing fear he was lost, then he recalled Dave Logg's warning: "If any of you boys get lost, there's no danger unless you lose your head. Remember this—all streams lead to salt water. Stay with the stream and you'll eventually cross a road or trail."

Jerry got up and started—for that road or trail.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE FINGER OF SUSPICION.

**D**ARKNESS came slowly, but it lashed the nearly exhausted Jerry to greater efforts. He had no desire to spend the night in the open without food or fire. And Dave Logg's warning against fire had deeply impressed him. Relief from the constant struggle through thickets and over slippery boulders came suddenly. He looked up at a shadow and found himself under a bridge.

It was a well-built timber bridge, set on cedar piers which do not rot.

Jerry recognized it as the type the CCC built when opening up a new trail. He climbed out of the gulch and examined the soft earth at the bridge approaches. The earth was scarred with the nails and calks of many boots.

"The gang's ahead!" he exclaimed.

Determined to take full advantage of the remaining twilight, he drove his tired body into a steady trot.

The trail turned unexpectedly into a flat—a flat dotted with barracks, lights, and moving men. The night breeze brought the odor of cooking food and wood smoke.

"Hello, Caboose!" "Spruce" Renfro, his clothing and hair brushed, his face spotless, greeted him lightly. "Where's Mort Lee? He went back to give you a hand."

"Yes, where's Lee?" Dave Logg echoed the query at the same time. "And where's your pack?"

"I never saw Lee," Jerry answered. "I got behind and encountered two men, Quagg and Cramm."

"You did?"

Concern filled Logg's face. It deepened as Jerry related what had happened.

"I want twenty-five or thirty men to volunteer to go back and find Lee," the ranger shouted.

Every man in camp offered to go. They were dog-tired, but something in Logg's voice hinted at trouble.

"Lee may be all right," he added, "and probably is, but we're taking no chances. I'd never have left you behind, Bryant, if I'd known Quagg and Cramm were in the vicinity. The chances are, Lee has found your pack, Bryant, and is now searching for you."

"The pack's on the edge of the trail," Jerry explained.

"You'd better get yourself some-



thing to eat," the ranger advised. "Then turn in!"

"I'm not hungry," Jerry answered. "My stomach is in knots. Think I'll turn in."

Some one lent him a blanket, and he flung himself into the first empty bunk. Twitching and cramping muscles denied him sleep for hours. As in a daze he relived the day's events—the silence of the deep forest; the frothing streams; the scum-coated pond and his arms breaking the scum as he swam. Incident after incident trooped vaguely through his mind. But some things stood out, clean-cut and sharp—Cramm's fear the CCC boys might strike back through maverick timber; the logger's confidence Dave Logg would order the area closed, which was the last thing the average logger wanted to happen. And, lastly, the fury of Cramm's pursuit, which could only mean he believed Jerry had heard something dangerous to their plans.

Jerry was awakened by a hand roughly clutching his shoulder.

"You yellow coyote, you ran off and left him, didn't you? Left him to get the devil beat out of him, didn't you?"

"What are you talking about?" Jerry asked, as he opened his eyes and met the hard, accusing gazes of Spruce Renfro and a half dozen others.

"Let's give him part of what Lee got, right here and now," Renfro insisted.

**H**E gave a jerk and pulled Jerry to the floor. As Jerry got up, Renfro's fist smashed into his face. He slashed back, conscious of the inadequacy of his thin arms.

"Cut it out! All of you!" Dave Logg knocked the CCC youths right

and left as he made a path through the crowd filling the barracks. "That isn't the way to handle this! Go to bed, all of you!"

"What happened?" Jerry asked. He was thoroughly awake now.

"Go to bed!" the ranger answered, evenly. His eyes fairly blazed with contempt. He walked toward the door, then lost his temper and came back, towering over Jerry. "I've known a lot of small men in my time. You're the first that ever turned yellow! Why didn't you stay and fight with Mort Lee instead of running like a houn' dog? Nobody's asking you to win any battles. All we expect of a man is for him to fight back."

Dave Logg turned away once more and stalked into the night.

"All right, I'll fight back!" Jerry panted. "And I'll start in on you, Logg!"

He ran to the door, but Renfro and several others fairly hurled him into the bunk.

"Get back, Caboose, where you belong," Renfro ordered. "At the end of the train. And no smart talk, either. This outfit is just spoiling to take you apart."

Jerry returned to his bunk, realizing the others were in a dangerous mood and that a hearing, let alone justice, was impossible until later.

An hour passed, and he heard the distant tramp of feet.

"They're bringin' in Mort Lee," some one said.

"How is he?" Logg's voice asked a moment later. "Isn't that you, doctor?"

"Yes! The boy died about ten minutes ago—fractured skull. He had evidently been in a terrific fight," the doctor answered.

"One of the strongest men in camp," Logg responded. "Generous, too. He'd give you his shirt, and

more. He gave his life for a rat who ran out——”

Jerry rolled from the bunk and was outside before the others could stop him. He was ashen with fury, and the muscles about his lips kept knotting.

“I told you the straight of what happened, Logg. All I’ve got to say is this: If Mort Lee was alive right now, he’d have decency and sense enough not to jump at conclusions, but ask himself if maybe he hadn’t heard the truth. And that’s all I’m going to say for myself—ever. You can believe me or you can all go to blazes!”

He returned to his bunk.

Jerry was awake when the camp was aroused the following morning. Some one had brought down his pack and dumped it contemptuously on the foot of the bunk. He followed the routine, conscious eyes were on him, and reported at the mess hall.

At the rear of the line, Jerry was among the last to fill his mess tin with food, and the cup with coffee. A hush came over the company as he seated himself at a table. The clatter of knives and forks ended, as though at a command. The eyes of those at other tables turned. In silence those at Jerry’s table picked up their dishes, utensils, and cups and walked over to other tables. Again clatter of utensils and hum of voices filled the room. Jerry finished his meal in stony silence and ate his full ration, though every mouthful choked him.

Later he lined up with the others.

“You know why we are here,” Dave Logg said. “Other companies have failed to keep fire out, and we’ve been given the job. Last night Mort Lee was found with a fractured skull. He died on the stretcher. To-day there will be an

investigation. Officially you are to follow out the plans drawn for this area—the extension of the Cedar Valley trail. Unofficially——” He stopped, and his eyes narrowed.

“We get at the bottom of all this!” a man in the ranks growled.

A murmur followed. Dave Logg nodded. When he finished detailing the various parties, Jerry Bryant stood alone.

“Come with me, Bryant,” Logg directed. “There’s a drain to be cleaned out.”

“And when that’s done?”

“When that’s done—take a long walk in the woods with your conscience,” the ranger advised. “There’s nothing like the deep timber for clear thinking and sound weighing of affairs.”

“I found that out, and——” Jerry choked back the remainder, and went to work on the drain.

**S**HORTLY before noon Quagg and Cramm walked into camp. Jerry stared squarely into Cramm’s eyes, but the man’s face betrayed nothing. Dave Logg met them in front of the log cabin which served as the ranger’s office.

“You telephoned in that one of your men was beaten and died of a fractured skull,” Quagg began. “The call went over our line part of the way, and naturally my operator heard it. There’s been friction between my men and yours.” A sneer crept into his voice. “It has reached a point where Quagg loggers are blamed if some wood tick catches a cold. I’m here to say this—there wasn’t a Quagg man in the woods yesterday except Cramm and myself. We were cruising timber. If you want to accuse *us* of beating the boy, you’ll know where to find us.”

"We are accusing no one," Logg retorted.

"I'm just trying to keep in the clear and not have something hung on me," Quagg insisted. "All I want is for you to keep this area open so I can get my logs out. And—keep your wood ticks out of Mill City on Saturday nights when my boys go to town."

He nodded curtly and stalked away, followed by Cramm.

The ranger came over to Jerry and watched him a moment.

"Were those the men who chased you yesterday?" he asked.

"That's what I said. But what of it?"

Dave Logg was conscious of the impact of hidden forces within Jerry, as two others had been in recent days.

"If my own outfit won't believe my story, you don't expect a corner's jury to take my lone word against Quagg's and Cramm's, do you?" asked Jerry.

"Early this morning I quietly investigated certain angles of your story, Bryant," the logger said. "You claim to have come out on Canyon Creek—the third bridge from camp. There's no sign of your trail."

"I came down the stream. The going was easier," Jerry replied. "And, anyway, you're not very smart." He watched the dark-red flush of resentment spread over Dave Logg's cheeks. "If you'd have been smart, you'd have tricked Cramm into taking off his gloves. You might have seen bruised knuckles, proving a recent fight."

"Go on," the ranger ordered.

"When Mort Lee boxed in camp contests, did he work on the body or head?"

"He was a terrific body puncher," Logg answered.

"Maybe Cramm's ribs are black and blue?" Jerry suggested. "Another thing. Quagg almost had tears in his eyes when he asked you not to close the area. Yesterday Cramm was worried for fear you can't be tricked into doing it. But don't take my word for it!"

"What's that?" Dave Logg demanded.

"You heard me. Secretly, Quagg wants you to close the area. You never heard of such a thing? Well, I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't heard it. Now if you don't mind, I'll take that long walk in the forest with my conscience."

**J**ERRY hurried off before the astonished ranger could ask further questions. He picked up the trail leading to the maverick timber and squarely on the border was confronted by a notice tacked to the trunk of a cedar tree.

Stripped of the usual legal terms, it offered the cedar for sale to the highest bidder on a stumpage basis, the timber to be removed under the supervision of the forest service. "And through this timber," Jerry mused, "the CCC can hit back at the Quagg Logging Co. But how? Aw, to blazes with the CCC; it hasn't shown any friendship for me."

He followed the trail to the Moxchuck River—a swiftly flowing stream running between fir-lined banks. The trail forked at the bridge, and the larger fork followed the river.

Jerry walked two miles down the river trail, circled back, and got a general idea of the Quagg holdings and the maverick timber adjoining. It needed no expert logger to understand Quagg was the logical man to buy the government stand in Cedar Valley. Merely extending his feeder

lines would tap the entire stand. Other loggers, to reach the area, would be required to construct extensive main lines.

Jerry arrived at camp to find it deserted except for the cooks.

"Where's everybody?" he asked.

"Fire broke out," one of them answered shortly. "Ranger left three hours ago. You'd better stick around in case you're needed."

A column of smoke twisted slowly above the timber to an elevation of two thousand feet, where an upper current bent it northwesterly.

"It's right in the country we came through yesterday!" Jerry exclaimed. "It looks as if Quagg's determined to force Logg to close things up!"

"You ain't accusin' Quagg of firin' his own timber, are you?" one of the cooks jeered.

"I'm saying nothing," Jerry answered. In the excitement of his first forest fire he unintentionally had aired his opinions aloud.

The cook rejoined his companion.

"That bird from the East coast is plumb crazy. Well, things are happenin' as per schedule. We get a fire before we're settled. That happened to every other company the day it moved in."

At eight o'clock that night Dave Logg led a tired, sooty crowd into camp.

"Got it out," he announced shortly, "but it was a tough one. I circled the area myself and couldn't find a footprint less than forty-eight hours old. So how'd it start?"

No one appeared to know the answer. The cooks announced the evening meal, and Jerry filled his mess tin with the others and took his place at the table. Again the others got up and took their food to ad-

joining tables. Again he ate in stolid silence.

The same thing happened again at breakfast. Between times he encountered a studied silence wherever he happened to go. Conversation among men ended, and was only resumed when he moved on. At ten o'clock the sheriff and coroner's jury appeared and held an inquest.

At its conclusion the jury returned a verdict of murder by parties unknown to the officials.

"As to your story, Bryant," the sheriff said, "I think you're a double-action liar. You might swim that pond, but you'd bog down in the muck afterwards."

"I'm light and I walked a lot on rotten fragments of wood, bunches of grass, and got across where heavier men would have failed," Jerry answered. "Go down there and take a look for yourself!"

"That area burned over to-day," the ranger said. "We let it burn, turning the flames back at the surrounding ridges."

"I think you ran out and left a man to die," the sheriff bluntly announced. "The devil of it is there's no law covering the point. There should be, and it should carry a death penalty."

"Correct!" Jerry snapped.

"My advice to you is to get a transfer," the sheriff said.

"I'm going to stay right here and make 'em like it," Jerry snarled. "I'm beginning to think the whole set-up is made to order."

Jerry reported to Dave Logg for work.

"There's nothing," the ranger informed him. "The others refuse to work with you."

"That makes it just swell," Jerry said. "I don't want to work with them."

Logg regarded him curiously. "You're not fooling me, Bryant," he said; "you're the loneliest man in the world right now."

Jerry's face betrayed nothing, but a quick, sharp breath proved the ranger had called the turn. Jerry licked his lips, and his gray eyes studied the ranger's face until he could regain his composure. "There's no work over the week-end," he said. "Will you do me a favor?"

"What is it?"

"I want to know who Quagg has contracted to supply logs to," Jerry explained.

"Several," the ranger answered after a moment's reflection. "Quagg's smart. He trimmed his margin of profit and kept his camps running during the slack spell when everybody else had shut down. At a guess I'd say Rathbone and the Aldwell people have given him the biggest contracts. In fact, it was only last week Tom Rathbone asked me to give Quagg every possible chance to fill his orders. Rathbone lives down at Mallard Inlet. What've you got up your sleeve?"

"Maybe an ace, possibly only a deuce—I haven't looked yet," Jerry replied.

The army captain in charge of the camp looked in at that moment.

"Quagg just telephoned and suggested we keep our men out of Mill City over the week-end," he said.

"What did you tell him?" Logg asked.

"I told him if he was afraid of his loggers getting hurt to keep *them* out of Mill City," the captain replied. "I'm not forgetting the CCC owes Quagg's men a few lousy socks on their jaws. This present outfit can take care of itself. All this is unofficial, of course."

"Exactly," Dave Logg agreed.

## CHAPTER V.

### AN UNOFFICIAL BRAWL.

A PRETTY girl opened the door when Jerry Bryant called at Tom Rathbone's home. "Dad isn't in now," she explained when Jerry had stated his business, "but we are expecting him any time. I'm Betty Rathbone."

"I'm Jerry Bryant," he answered. "I'll wait, or I can come back later."

"If it is important, perhaps you had better wait," the girl advised. "We may drive up to Seattle this afternoon."

The Rathbone home was located on a bench three hundred feet above Mallard Inlet—a cove on the straits of Juan de Fuca. Beyond the ridge to the west Jerry knew the Moxchuck brawled its way to salt water. To the east the weathered fences and headboards of an Indian burial ground were visible.

While sitting in the room serving Rathbone as a study and office, Jerry examined a wall map of the immediate area. Presently he walked over for closer study. Townships painted green marked Quagg's holdings. Other holdings were marked in different colors. The CCC camps, forest-service trails, and ranger cabins were all indicated, as were creeks and rivers.

Rathbone had penciled a big interrogation mark on the area covered by the maverick timber. A quick step interrupted Jerry's inspection. He turned and met a man of medium build, with keen blue eyes and slightly gray hair. He fairly radiated nervous energy as he extended a strong, brown hand.

"You are Bryant? I'm Tom Rathbone. My daughter said you have been waiting."

"Yes, and looking over the map,"

Jerry replied. "What is the reason for the question mark on that maverick timber?"

"I am merely wondering who will become its owner," Rathbone answered.

"Why don't you bid on it?"

Rathbone threw up his hands. "There's grief enough in the mill business without adding the logging end. If I had had a son, I'd be into both ends up to my ears. Or if my daughter should marry a two-fisted youngster who knows the logging game, I'd back him. But at present I have my hands full. But there, I'm taking up your time."

Jerry sensed it was Rathbone's adroit way of saying he was taking up his own time with idle observations. The man spoke as if he had answered the same query many times.

"Quagg is under contract to deliver logs to you, I believe," Jerry said.

"And that reminds me, you CCC fellows had another fire on your hands to-day, I hear. Every time I see a puff of smoke, I'm scared stiff. What's the matter, can't you get the jump on those blazes?" Rathbone bluntly inquired.

"That's what I'm here for," Jerry informed him. "I'm on my own, understand. Dave Logg didn't send me. May I see a copy of the contract you have with Quagg? You can cover up the figures if you wish."

"An unusual request," Rathbone answered. "But, after all, the figures are generally known." He opened a drawer and handed Jerry a document.

"Quite a difference in present-day prices of logs and those listed here," Jerry observed.

"It came about this way," Rathbone explained. "Quagg offered me

a very low price, providing I would take a large quantity of logs. In turn I got in touch with a number of building contractors and gave them an attractive figure. They in turn scaled down their prices and induced many people to build new homes. It looked like a fine way to take up some of the unemployment slack. Since then the price of logs has jumped. If Dave Logg forces Quagg to shut down because of fire hazards, I'll lose my shirt."

"There're enough logs involved here to keep Quagg's camp busy for several months," Jerry ventured, "and when he's doing that, he can't cut logs and supply them at the present high market figure."

"That's about the size of it," Rathbone conceded.

"He's hoping for a shut-down," Jerry bluntly informed the lumberman. "I heard him say so!" Then he related the incident. "And he's trying to bring one about. Oh, I know I can't prove it, but I'll bet a month's wages he's back of these fires. The contract contains the usual clauses about strikes, floods, and acts of God, which releases him. And also he is released if the forest service closes the area."

"Bryant, I believe you've called the turn!" Rathbone exclaimed. "But, as you say, you can't prove it. The man's clever and he'll never take the rap if he's actually starting these blazes. He'll hire some one to do that, or manage it so neatly there won't be a shred of evidence pointing to him."

"Cramm tried his best to murder me. I only wish I'd heard what they think I heard," Jerry said. "One more question, then I'll go. Is any one in the market for cedar shingles in large quantities? A market that, say, the maverick timber might fill?"

"You bet! I'm shipping several thousand squares of shingles to the Hawaiian Islands as soon as I can get things lined up. I know of several other mills that will bid on that maverick timber as soon as the logs are in the water," Rathbone replied. "As for your going—do you *have* to leave now?"

"No," Jerry confessed.

"I don't mind admitting I've heard the story of Mort Lee's death," Rathbone said. "I let you talk, just to hear what you had to say. I intended throwing you out, as a yellow coward. But I believe you, Bryant. Right down the line I believe you. Though I can't understand Dave Logg's attitude. Usually he's for the under dog, yet apparently he isn't giving you the slightest sympathy. Betty! Oh, Betty! Mr. Bryant is remaining for dinner. Afterwards we'll show him some of the country."

"Thanks," Jerry answered, warmed by Rathbone's sudden hospitality. "It'll be pleasant to sit down and not have everybody jump up and leave the table."

"I admire the way you're hitting back," Rathbone said with enthusiasm. "I want to talk to you. Between us, we may figure some way of getting at the meat of the Quagg coconut!"

**A**FTER dinner Betty appeared, riding a little black mare and leading two others.

"You ride?" Rathbone asked.

"I've never been on a horse in my life," Jerry confessed. "But if things break right, I'm going to have this piece of land." He pointed on the map to the square he had noticed from the high country. "And a horse to go with it!"

"That's the old Sexton ranch," Rathbone informed him. "One of

the earliest on Puget Sound. It's abandoned and overgrown now. But the soil is as rich as ever. Would you like to see it? It's only three miles."

"Show me how to get on a horse," Jerry answered, "and we'll go!"

They rode along the beach, crossed a trout stream choked with spawning salmon, and stopped at a cedar fence that had stood fifty years. The fence, an orchard, and some of the buildings were covered with gray moss. The house, built to endure, needed paint, a few windowpanes, and new front steps. Clover grew so thickly in a forty-acre pasture that weeds were finding it difficult to take hold.

"What do you want it for?" Betty asked.

"The original pioneer didn't know it," Jerry replied, "but he cleared this land and put up the buildings for my six brothers and sisters."

"You can buy it pretty cheap," Rathbone informed him, "but it will take a lot of hard work to put it in shape."

"It'll be open-air work, though," Jerry observed. Lillian, he knew, would love the old place. And Mary, with fresh air in her lungs, might reach a few higher and clearer notes in her singing.

They rode on toward Mill City, and Rathbone dropped back to talk with his daughter.

"Do you know, Betty, I like that young fellow. He doesn't know a spruce from a fir, but he has hard sense. He's got everything figured out and he knows right where he's going."

"Well!" the girl exclaimed. "It has been a long time since you have been as enthusiastic over any one."

"Can't help it," he said. "That's the way I feel. Maybe it's because

he's an under dog. I was one once. Still, that's not all of it."

"Why don't you offer him a job?" the girl suggested. "You are always moaning because there's nobody you can groom to take your place."

"He'd turn it down," Rathbone said. "Well, here we are in Mill City. Quite a few of Dave Logg's wood ticks in town to-night."

"And Quagg's loggers," the girl added.

A good harbor adjacent to dense timber accounted for Mill City's existence. Logging roads tapped the surrounding country, and puffing locomotives dragged in long strings of log-laden trucks. Some of the logs were dumped into the bay to be rafted and towed to mills up the Sound. Others were fed to the Mill City saws. The whine and snarl of saws constantly filled the air. Sparks danced like millions of fireflies above screened stacks, and there was usually the rattle of cargo machinery and the boom of heavy timbers against steel decks.

A strip of pavement debouched from the main highway, ran through town, and joined it again. The street was flanked by frame buildings, the brick Commercial Hotel, several restaurants, a State liquor store, and several retreats for loggers where beer, cards, and free-for-all fighting were in order.

**S**PRUCE RENFRO, accompanied by three others, sauntered over the wooden walks. Jerry thought he caught a tenseness in their stride, a challenge in the swing of their shoulders.

"There's a cocky dude," Rathbone said, grinning.

"He's going to get his head knocked off in about two minutes," Jerry answered. "And I'm going to indulge in three rousing cheers when it hap-

pens. Seven Quagg loggers just walked into that joint, and now Renfro's going in there."

Rathbone stared. "I thought you were a CCC man, under the skin, in spite of what has happened," he said.

"I guess I'm not," Jerry confessed. "I'm going it alone."

A sign above the door read: "Loggers' Rest."

"What an ironical name!" Betty exclaimed.

A hush settled on the Loggers' Rest. Rathbone edged the horses off the street and into a vacant lot directly opposite. The town marshal, sensing a brawl, hurried elsewhere. For this reason he was a very popular officer and was invariably reelected.

The hush within the saloon ended in the crash of glass and a sudden uproar of voices. The batwing doors nearly flew off their hinges, and Spruce Renfro emerged in a spinning ball of bewildered humanity.

"Hah! Hah! Hah!" Jerry roared with laughter. "That was great!"

As Renfro struggled to his feet, two other CCC men landed on top of him. The batwing doors swung back and forth with a note of finality. Three CCC men joined the prone three, and Renfro's voice, clear and sharp, warned:

"Pete's in there! They're working on him!"

"And working on a man means they're stamping his face with calked boots," Rathbone said, "and kicking in a rib or two. These are no pink-tea affairs."

"Just some prankish boys indulging in a little good, clean fun during an evening's relaxation," Betty remarked with fine sarcasm.

Renfro led the charge into the saloon and ran squarely into a mas-



sive fist. His head snapped back, and he crumpled on the walk. The others got in. Renfro staggered to his feet and fell against a door. They saw him go down, then get up again. Above the batwing doors heads moved about in the blue haze of tobacco smoke. Below, legs shifted swiftly. Fists dropped to the knees then exploded against chins. Knees buckled and went down.

Renfro, picked up by two brawny loggers, was swung aloft. On the back swing they catapulted him into the street. His shoulder knocked one of the doors off its hinges. Five CCC men raced down the street and hurled themselves into the fray. Seven more followed.

The building adjoining the vacant lot housed a lodge on the second floor. The ground-floor storeroom was vacant. Suddenly the doors flew open, and a horde of Quagg loggers ran across the street. One knocked Renfro flat in passing. The others attacked the CCC from behind.

"Trapped!" Rathbone exclaimed.

"This is terrible!" Betty panted. "And that poor Renfro boy! His face is a crimson smear."

"Serves him right!" Jerry yelled gleefully. "It serves him——"

He stopped. Spruce Renfro was getting to his feet again. For several seconds he tottered, shaking his head to rid himself of the fogs of unconsciousness, then he staggered in. Strong arms encircled him, and a panting voice rasped an order.

"Finish him this time, Lars! It's Renfro, their leader!"

**T**HE man addressed as Lars stepped back and measured Spruce, but a split second before his fist struck the CCC man's jaw, Spruce's boot crashed against

Lars's massive chin. He dropped. His companion hurled Renfro to the floor, falling on top of him. Then he began driving his knees into the small of Renfro's back. At the same time his fists crashed again and again directly behind the helpless man's ears.

"Why, the dirty——" Jerry panted, then remembered Betty. He dug his heels into his horse's flanks and galloped across the street, and into the thick of it.

"I've been hoping that would happen," Rathbone shouted. "I'd have been disappointed if he hadn't."

"But he's so slim and——well, not like our men," Betty said.

"Show me a pavement-bred kid who can't fight," Rathbone retorted. "I'm going over for a better view."

Clinging to the saddle horn with one hand, Jerry caught up two quart bottles of beer with the other. He leaned down and broke one over the head of Renfro's attacker. The man collapsed across Renfro's body. Beer foamed over the two. A second head bowed under the impact of the other bottle.

"If it ain't Caboose on a horse!" one of the outfit yelled. "Here's more ammunition, boy!"

He tossed two more bottles Jerry's way. Jerry caught one and crashed it down on two convenient skulls before it broke. The horse staggered through the milling crowd until it lurched against a booth wall. Jerry, glancing over the top, looked down on Quagg and Cramm. A bottle of fine Scotch whisky stood on the table between them. It was evident they were drinking and awaiting the outcome of the fight, but were not revealing their presence.

Quagg looked up, and his eyes widened.

"It's Bryant!" he exclaimed.

"Get him quick! He saw your bruised knuckles!"

Cramm caught up the bottle, but Quagg grasped his arm.

"Don't throw it—it's the only bottle that can be had of the brand."

Jerry caught a glimpse of the label as he ducked his head. It read: "Dew o' Grouse Moors—Fine Scotch Whisky."

Cramm's bruised knuckles proved he had been fighting within the last forty-eight hours, and Jerry determined to hang Mort Lee's death on him if possible. Cramm came out of the booth and hurled himself into the fight. Jerry caught two more bottles and waded in. He was doing fine until a logger aimed directly at his head and let fly a half-gallon jug of beer. It struck Jerry's head a glancing blow and shattered the back-bar mirror. He caught the saddle horn and hung on, shaking his head furiously to clear his vision.

As in a distorted fog he saw Cramm's sneering features, then felt the man's hands drag him from the horse. The bewildered animal stumbled through the door and trotted down the street, as if seeming glad to be free.

"Watch out, Quagg!" Cramm shouted.

His muscles knotted, then snapped. Jerry's slight body soared, struck the top of the booth, and crashed up on the table. Cramm fought his way around to the booth door and entered. His breath came in labored gasps, his bloodshot eyes glittered with murderous flame. "You came once—too—often," he gasped.

Jerry squared off, his back to the corner, his fists lifted defensively. Cramm's left hand smashed down Jerry's guard, and his right crashed against the jaw. Far away Jerry heard Cramm's voice pant:

"Drag him from behind the table. Want to—kick—his ribs in. Knows—too—much."

Possibly it was hope born of dire peril, perhaps his ears deceived him, but it seemed he heard a CCC cook yell:

"They've got our Caboose in there—let's get him!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### A CHINAMAN'S CHANCE.

JERRY BRYANT opened his eyes and looked into Betty's pretty face. "Golly!" he muttered. "I ache all over."

"You were hit all over," she answered. "How human beings can take the punishment Spruce Renfro and you got and then live to tell of it is more than I can understand."

"What happened after Cramm knocked me out?" Jerry inquired.

"Well, you got up again—out on your feet, according to the boys—and you laid Quagg low with a whisky bottle."

"A quart of Dew o' Grouse Moors," Jerry said.

"Then you fought Cramm, but he got you down again and jumped on your ribs. About that time the CCC boys broke down the partition and then—"

"I was under the partition," Jerry suggested with a trace of bitterness, "and a mob of fighting men on top of it, I suppose."

"That's what happened. Dad got you out and called a doctor while the fire department turned a hose on the fighters," Betty continued. "You have some cracked ribs and a reputation as a fighter that certainly invites future trouble."

"Who won?"

"The CCC boys this time," the girl replied. "And I guess that is all—except dad, who has taken a

shine to you, insisted you be brought here. And you are to stay in bed several days for observation. The doctor said something about a kick in the head."

The following Tuesday morning a bandaged individual appeared in the room. Only his eyes were visible, and they were bloodshot objects set in black-and-blue pockets.

"I'm Spruce Renfro, Caboose," the visitor announced. "I can dish it out, and I can take it. I got you wrong, Caboose, about Mort Lee. You never ran away. Your story was true. We believe it. I'm here to apologize for myself and the outfit. Now, old hoss, dish it out, and I'll take it."

It looked to Jerry like a fine time to catch his fellow members in the CCC on the rebound. "Forget it," he said; "that's water over the wheel. Now how about it? Are you mugs going to drift out of the CCC into something else, or do you figure to grab the first chance that comes along?"

"It's the little guy telling bigger and dumber guys how to do it, eh?" Spruce suggested, recalling Jerry's retort to Sergeant Buck. "Well, let's have it."

"Since you've been with the outfit," Jerry said, "you've learned plenty about logging. You can drop a tree where you want it; buck it and rig blocks and lines to pick up the logs and lay 'em where you want 'em. If a bunch of us can float that maverick timber down the Moxchuck to tidewater, we can sell it to any one of a half dozen mills. Let's slap in a bid!"

Spruce Renfro whistled. "Boy, there's an idea. Instead of leaving the CCC and hunting jobs in some camp, we start a logging business of our own on a shoe string."

"And stay with the logging busi-

ness for good," Jerry added. "If we outgrow this country, we can go on to Alaska and log for the pulp mills."

"We might go broke," Renfro reflected, "but——"

"But when a man's dead, he can't be killed," Jerry drawled. "We're all of us broke. But somewhere in this land there must be some old sport with money who'll back us."

"Say, I'll talk it over with some of the boys," Spruce agreed. "We'll work something out of this."

"Fighting Quagg in his own back yard, eh?" Rathbone said, coming into the room at that moment. "Don't you know he has that maverick timber sewed up, and there isn't a logger in the country who'll bid on it? You haven't a Chinaman's chance to win out."

"And that's the same chance you were given thirty years ago when you tackled old Flannel-mouth Kelly," Betty exclaimed. "And what happened? You beat Kelly and married his daughter."

"Quagg hasn't a daughter to worry him sick and take his mind off fighting, as in the case of your grandfather," Rathbone replied.

"Will you back us?" Jerry asked.

"Nope," Rathbone answered shortly. "The mill end keeps me in hot water. But"—he leveled a finger at the battered pair—"you lay those logs down in Moxchuck Bay, and I'll buy 'em as they come out—one by one; a square foot or a forest."

"And I've got a hunch that's the way that maverick timber will come out," Renfro admitted; "we'll pack it out on our backs a square foot at a time, or the whole forest will come out in a bunch." He started to go, then stopped. "I pretty nearly forgot. Here's letters from home. One's in a girl's handwriting."

JERRY read Josie's letter first. It was bright and cheerful, expressing quiet confidence of the successful outcome of Jerry's venture into a new land. He found it as bracing as a mountain breeze. Then he read his mother's hurried scrawl. The letter contained an outline of what had happened to the family since his departure. Two paragraphs read:

You have the children all excited at the idea of moving West. I hope they won't be too disappointed if they don't go. I suppose by now you have come face to face with your problems and can understand why I dreaded having you go.

Mr. Morgan called. He said your job is ready whenever you want it. I hardly understand the man. He seemed to urge you to go West, but he is also certain you won't stay there.

"I'll answer this letter right now," Jerry said, "if I can have a pencil and paper."

Betty brought him the necessary writing material and a square board to serve as a desk. Jerry scrawled:

Morgan is a swell guy, but I wouldn't trade places with him. He inherited his money and missed the thrill of taking a long chance. I'm gambling for mine. Some of us are throwing in together and expect to bid on a tract of government timber. All we need is the money for equipment. If we win out on this, we are established and will grow. If we lose, we'll start over again.

Tell the children they're coming West. I've got the place picked out for them.

He described the old ranch in terms that would appeal to the younger children—fishing and clamming for the boys; swimming and sailing for all; a horse to ride, and, for once, all the fresh milk, cream, and butter they would want.

Then he wrote a long letter to Josie telling her of the country, but saying nothing of what had transpired in the Loggers' Rest.

A week after the fight the doctor concluded Jerry Bryant was fit for duty and ordered him back to camp.

"Drop in any time," Rathbone urged, "and make yourself at home. I like to talk to you. And I know Betty enjoys your company. She's never been East, and things commonplace to you she finds very interesting."

"When we figure on that maverick timber," Jerry said after he had thanked them, "we may need a little help. The important thing is to better Quagg's price."

"Drop in any time," Rathbone cordially urged.

Spruce Renfro, waiting for Jerry, heard the entire conversation.

"Boy," he exclaimed when they were out of earshot, "are you sitting pretty! Wealthy lumberman, pretty daughter, no son, takes shine to busted wood tick."

"Aw, forget it," Jerry answered. "They're just nice people."

"Sure. And like most nice people they like a man with courage, who is at the bottom fighting his way to the top. I suppose there's a girl back East?"

"Yes."

"Funny, but three or four months from now she'll seem like somebody you knew a long time ago," Spruce said. "Hundreds of thousands of us have been plucked off the city streets and dumped into the woods. For a few weeks we mill around like bewildered cattle, then we adapt ourselves to the new life. The old life, after that, is far away."

"In three or four months from now Josie won't feel as if I were somebody she knew a long time ago," Jerry argued. "Nor will I. I'm sure of that."

"Wait and see," Spruce retorted.

THEY arrived at the camp just as the outfit lined up for the evening meal. With a mixture of feelings Jerry carried his well-filled mess tins to the familiar seat at the long table. He sat down, and the others trooped around and stopped.

"How about it, Caboose? Can we sit down?" they chorused.

"If you don't, I'll mop up on you," Jerry retorted. "What's happened since the big brawl?"

"Two more fires," one of them replied, "and it looks as if Dave Logg would have to close down sure. Some of the higher-ups are bringing pressure to bear."

Jerry was confident Quagg was starting the fires, but as the man was invariably in town when the forest blazed, it was difficult to connect him directly. "Wouldn't I like to get him dead to rights!" Jerry reflected.

Several days passed before Jerry had an opportunity to talk to Dave Logg, then he got to the point at once. "What do you say to a bunch of us bidding on that maverick timber?"

"I say, amen!" the ranger quickly answered. "And in the same breath I'll add a warning—if the fires force me to close the district, the stuff in Cedar Valley will be included. I'd hate like the devil to see you boys go broke simply because the fire hazard forced me to suspend all logging operations until the rainy season."

"That's a chance we'll have to take," Jerry answered. "It gives Quagg an advantage, too. He can bid on the timber and log it when he gets around to it. We'll have to get it down to tidewater at once because we'll have no financial back-log."

"Have you any money?" the

ranger bluntly inquired. "You'll need cable, a donkey engine, blocks, and other equipment. Lacking a railroad, you'll have to float your logs down the Moxchuck. The river runs through Quagg holdings, and he can block you there. I'm not trying to discourage you, understand. But I do want you boys to go into this with your eyes open."

"I'll have to raise the money somewhere," Jerry answered. "And we'll have to get around the other obstacles."

"If I close the district because of fire hazards," the ranger explained, "there'll be no way of getting around that obstacle."

"Then we've pretty nearly got to keep the fires down," Jerry admitted. "If we do that, there'll be no reason for closing the area. I claim Quagg is starting those fires to force the forest service to close the district. He'll then be free of the contracts he made to deliver logs at a low figure. That, in turn, leaves him free to take advantage of the present high prices."

"Exactly! And if you boys get the maverick timber, he will have a double reason to force me to close things up—it'll not only get him clear of the old contracts, but it will break you, leaving him to buy the Cedar Valley stuff at his own figure," the ranger explained. "Is that all clear now?"

Jerry nodded.

"Good! I don't know where you can raise the money—a few dollars here and there appears to be your only chance—but the old Acme Logging Co. has the equipment you need, and it can be bought for a song," Logg said.

"And I can't sing a note," Jerry moaned. "Spruce Renfro has picked the boys to go along with us, and we'll hold a meeting Saturday

morning to discuss ways and means."

"You'll have to raise ten thousand dollars at least, to buy equipment, do the preliminary work, and pay the government stumpage fee," Logg said. "That's a lot of money."

"But I don't know of any place to make money grow faster than right in Cedar Valley," Jerry replied

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWO CHECKS.

**H**OW good are the boys who are throwing in with us?" Jerry asked Spruce Renfro as they walked toward the recreation hall. The camp was deserted except for those who wanted to try their wings in the logging game.

"Put together," Spruce answered, "they can do anything that has to be done in the logging game except sell the logs. And you've already done that! You know they're fighters. Not a man of them joined the CCC for a vacation. They went into it because it offered them a breathing spell, a chance to build up their bodies and morale and to learn something of the woods. There's only one angle that makes me scared."

"It's hard to imagine you scared, Spruce," Jerry observed.

"It's such a swell chance for us to go places I'm scared stiff that something will happen to block it," Spruce explained. "I've always believed a man was a fool to hang around waiting for a break. This gang hasn't. We're making our own break and"—there was wistfulness in Renfro's normally hard eyes—"it's almost too good to be true, that's all."

Bronzed youths, with bright eyes, reckless mouths, and eager faces, grouped about the two. If enthusi-

asm had been money, they could have bought the maverick timber outright and built a standard-gauge railroad to tidewater.

"Don't worry about fires, Jerry," one of them shouted; "we'll keep 'em down! Just you get things going, and when the time comes, we'll quit the CCC and go to logging."

"I took law at college," another informed him; "I'll draw up corporation papers. We will have to have stock certificates printed."

"Put the price at a dollar a share so anybody with a buck can set in on the deal," a Western CCC man suggested.

"On this money-raising deal," Spruce whispered, "what do you think of this? Most of these lads are tough mugs. Their folks and friends probably figure they'll never amount to much. I know what my people have thought of me up to a month ago. If they realized five cents on the dollar, they'd have been tickled to death. Now I may pay off at as much as ten cents on the dollar," Spruce added dryly.

"I'll offer sixty per cent right now," Jerry said quickly.

"Skip it," Spruce grew serious. "If it was put up to the gang's folks here is a chance to cash in on a real business and sort of make the prodigal sons take root, it seems to me they might make sacrifices to back the scheme. They might borrow a few dollars on the furniture, or some uncle might loosen up if he thought the money wouldn't be wasted."

"I see," Jerry said; "cash in on paternal and maternal hopes."

"That's what it amounts to." Spruce reddened and shifted uneasily. "Or would that be a dirty trick?"

"We've got faith," Jerry answered. "Why shouldn't they have?" Jerry summed up the propo-

sition for them. "A hundred-thousand-dollar corporation," he explained, "par value a dollar a share. All labor will be paid for in stock, at that figure. It's up to you to explain to your people the situation and urge them to back it to the limit. Any amount from a dollar up is acceptable. Write your letters home, now. We've got to hit the high spots if we beat Quagg to that timber."

"I don't need to write," a thin-faced man of twenty-five said. "Here's my money now. I wrote an uncle in Portland as soon as I got wind of this thing, and he sent me a hundred bucks."

Jerry turned to the newly elected treasurer.

"A hundred dollars from Luke Guthrie," he said.

**L**UKE GUTHRIE accepted their cheers and departed. Two hours later he entered the Commercial Hotel at Mill City and telephoned.

Within a half hour Quagg gently knocked on Guthrie's door.

"Come in," Guthrie invited. "Howdy, *uncle*," he said. "Your hundred dollars turned the trick. I'm in on the ground floor. They're going after that timber. When the news gets out, public opinion will be right behind them from Washington, D. C., down."

"Why drag in Washington?" Quagg growled.

"Because this CCC logging deal will supply living proof of what American youth can do if given a chance. It will confirm the proposition on which the CCC was founded," Guthrie explained. "If Jerry Bryant gets away with it, the news will be shouted from the rooftops."

"He's not going to get away with

it," Quagg said evenly. "By the way, Guthrie, I want to see the figures when their bid is ready!"

"Leave it to me," Guthrie answered with confidence; "I'll show you the bid itself."

While Guthrie discussed matters with Quagg, Jerry Bryant and Spruce Renfro sauntered through Mill City and reviewed the scene of the recent battle. New glass had been installed in the Loggers' Rest, and a bartender who had stopped a bottle with his mouth was testing three new front teeth.

"That's the roughest the boys have been in a long time," he said; "times are getting better."

Jerry and Spruce drank a glass of beer to the success of the new logging company, then the latter said:

"Well, I suppose you will canter a bit with the delectable Betty Rathbone this awfternoon, old fellow!"

"They took me into their home after the big brawl," Jerry answered, growing somewhat red, "and I thought I'd drop around and thank them."

"I distinctly remember your thanking them three times the day you left," Spruce jeered. "Come on, you lug; admit you're lonely and can go in a big way for a girl's smile and some home cooking." He gave Jerry a friendly shove and disappeared.

Jerry found his step quickening as he neared the Rathbone home. He *was* homesick, as the shrewd Spruce Renfro had said.

Betty met him at the door.

"I took you at your word," he said, "and dropped in. If you have something else to do——"

"Mother's in the East, and when she is out of town, I stay pretty close to the house and keep an eye on dad. He's inclined to bolt his meals or skip them entirely. I'm tickled pink to see you," she hurried on.

"And is there anything you want to do?"

"What's to be done?" he countered.

"We might pack a lunch and ride over to your ranch," she suggested. "I suppose when you buy it, you'll want to move your family in hurriedly and there'll be little time for planning."

"Something like that," he admitted.

Jerry knew nothing of farming or ranches, and Betty possessed a practical knowledge. An hour after they had arrived at the old place, she was enthusiastic over its possibilities.

"It can be brought down to date," she explained, "and at the same time lose none of its old-time substantial appearance. A new house in that setting would be terrible. But there is no reason why your mother can't have running water. Now if you'll throw a little diversion dam across the creek and then——"

By sundown the water problem and several others had been completed. They ate their lunch on the rambling porch and watched the gold in the western sky slowly fade to pastels and finally the stars come out.

"Another sundown," Jerry said. "And here I am where my father always dreamed of being. He would have asked nothing more than to raise us kids right here."

"You'll know one way or another within ninety days," Betty informed him. "Dad said whether you boys win or lose will be settled in that time. He is pulling for you. Quagg is becoming too big, too powerful and ruthless. He must be checked, and dad believes you can do it. But I couldn't talk him into backing the scheme."

"It is a pretty shaky proposition," Jerry conceded, "but——"

"Oh, it isn't that he's afraid to gamble," the girl hastened to explain. "From the first, he has made it business policy to keep out of the logging end of the business. When the first log comes floating down the river, dad will be there, yelling like an Indian, waving a check and wishing you all the luck in the world. Shall we go now?"

"Yes," he answered, "but——"

"I understand," Betty said; "you don't want to break the spell. You want to dream of Lillian sitting here, her cheeks pink and her cough gone; Mary's golden voice singing; and the boys shouting as they play along the creek bank."

"You understand—everything, Betty," Jerry answered. And it was long after dark before they left the porch and mounted the waiting horses.

**J**ERRY'S Sunday ended in a hurried call from Dave Logg. To the southwest a column of smoke swirled above the green timber. Cedar Valley lay directly in the path of the flames unless they shifted to the west and ran into Quagg's holdings.

Jerry called every man he could find at Mill City, and a Trent Logging Co. locomotive took them within four miles of the blaze. Dave Logg and forty or fifty CCC members, laden with equipment, were just crossing the Moxchuck on a narrow timber bridge.

"Hurry!" the ranger yelled. "No time to be lost. Grab up a pack and break into a dogtrot. Minutes count!"

The fire roared through a cut-over area filled largely with worthless trees and brush. It burned as fast as a man could walk, and the ranger



retreated a half mile before starting a back fire.

"If we make our stand any closer," he yelled, "it's liable to jump over us before we get fairly started."

Small blazes leaped up along a mile front as the CCC men went to work. Then they began shoveling fire lanes to hold the back fire in check. Each unit worked swiftly, with few words spoken. Casual embers fell, burning through woolen shirts and blistering the hot flesh. Men howled, swore, slapped out the embers, and continued work. At times the world shuddered under the power of massed flames eating through a brush-choked gulch.

"There's a creek down there," Logg yelled. "Thousands of trout will die before morning. It'll get a few upland birds, too. Bigger game will escape!"

An occasional deer bounded into the open and disappeared into the cool timber. Here and there a bear, usually trailed by cubs, scrambled to safety. The fire was making a clean sweep of their berry patches along the stream.

At midnight Dave Logg, accompanied by Jerry and Spruce Renfro, set off for the nearest forest-service telephone to report. The ranger at Pilot Mountain answered.

"You've got it licked this time, Dave," he said. "No new blazes. But it's queer—these fires always start a few hours after sunup."

"That's what I've been thinking," the ranger replied. "Invariably between nine and eleven o'clock. I know for a fact there hasn't been a human being in this area since yesterday noon. If they'd started a fire, you'd have seen it yesterday—not this morning. There's only one thing to do—keep closer watch."

He hung up, sent most of the men

back to camp, detailed a few to watch the fire, and then turned to Jerry and Spruce Renfro.

"You two swing entirely around the burned area," he directed; "some poor animal may need killing." He handed Spruce a six-gun. "If you see anything suspicious, let me know. Also watch for smoldering embers outside the burned area. We don't want any new blaze to start. Tuesday we put the pressure on the outfit a little bit—got to get that upper trail through to Granite Ridge. That'll drive a wedge into the heart of things and help get the jump on future blazes. That's all."

Dave left at a brisk pace, his broad shoulders swaying easily under a heavy pack.

"There goes an iron man," Spruce said with admiration. "Where the average man would throw up his hands in disgust when some city mug can't get the hang of woodcraft, Dave grins and starts all over again. Some mistake his patience for dumbness and call him a sap. I made that mistake. But, do you know, Dave didn't hold it against me. He's one of the best friends I've got. Well, let's go. Our legs may stand the gaff a while longer."

It was slow, unpleasant work. Each canyon was heavy with hot air and smoke. Their feet stirred up clouds of ashes, and often they stopped to shovel earth upon a burning ember.

"Here's where it started," Spruce suddenly exclaimed. "Brake ferns grew along here. The fire spread from this point."

"Any footprints?" Jerry asked.

"Don't see any," Spruce replied.

They searched the vicinity for several minutes without result. Each was positive Quagg had started the fire, and they worked on the theory he might have thrown a match or

blazing ball of rags from a distance. Not a footprint was visible.

"Except for this piece of glass," Spruce muttered, "a man might well think no human being had ever passed this way." He indicated a bit of broken bottle.

Jerry picked it up, started to toss it aside, and suddenly changed his mind. Blown in the glass were portions of the name of the brand of liquor it had originally contained: "*w o' Grou—*"

"Spruce, let's see if we can't find the rest of this bottle," Jerry urged. "If I'm not mistaken, the missing glass would complete the brand, Dew o' Grouse Moors! It's a new brand of whisky, and Quagg got the only bottle shipped to this part of the country. It was on the table the night of the big brawl."

Buoyed up by the prospect of unearthing the first definite clew the two thoroughly searched the vicinity without finding a fragment of glass.

"He probably passed through, killed the bottle, heaved it, and it broke on a rock," Spruce said.

"There'd be more of it scattered around," Jerry argued. "I'm taking this along for luck, though."

**A** PEACE of sorts settled on the maverick timber country for the two weeks following the fire. Dave Logg made the most of his opportunity and pushed the Granite Ridge trail deeper and deeper into the forest. He left bridge building until later in the season.

"We can always pack stuff across a stream," he explained, "but getting it through virgin country is something else. Swamp her out, and the bridges and other trail trimmings can come later."

There was mail waiting for Jerry when he returned to the base camp. As usual, Jerry read Josie's breezy

letter twice, then turned to his mother's. Mrs. Bryant's tone was unexpectedly different. She was not only resigned to Jerry's remaining in the West, but was suddenly confident of his success.

"Boy!" he exclaimed. "That sure cheers a fellow up! And she's all excited over the new ranch, too. Well, I'll be dog-goned! What's changed her? And there's no mention that Mr. Morgan is holding the job open at the plant."

The last paragraph in the letter explained everything. It read:

Oh, I almost forgot to mention that Betty Rathbone wrote the sweetest letter. She told me all about the ranch and what could be done with it. She is confident of your success and tells me you are filling out, getting tanned, and are much healthier than when you first arrived.

"Golly!" Jerry said softly. "That's Betty all over. With a few strokes of the pen she clears up all ma's worries. And at the same time lifted some worry from my shoulders."

Spruce poked his head into the barracks.

"Do you realize the Cedar Valley Logging Co. has a post-office box at Mill City and that as president of the company you've neglected your duty of opening the mail—if any?"

"I'm not president yet," Jerry retorted. "Our secretary-lawyer hasn't completed the corporation papers. But we *have* got a mail box."

The two arrived at the post office several hours later, hoping to see a thin letter in the box. It was jammed. Jerry hauled forth a tightly wrapped packet four inches thick, containing first-class mail.

"What'd we better do with it?" he asked.

"I've got a room in the Commer-

cial Hotel for to-night," Spruce replied; "let's take it over there. And while I'm cutting the string around this packet, you can telephone Betty you'll be late for the awfthnoon's canter."

"Why do you persist in saying 'awfthnoon'?" Jerry asked.

"Well, Betty's so dog-goned swell she looks as if she might talk ritzy," Spruce explained. "Though I know she don't."

In the hotel room Spruce opened the envelopes with his penknife, and Jerry glanced through the contents.

"Checks!" he exclaimed. "Checks for stock as soon as it is issued."

"Little checks," Spruce muttered, "from folks that have scraped up a few bucks to back some kid's first play in the logging game. It kinda gets in you inside, don't it?"

"Yes," Jerry admitted, "and it's the cuttingest lash my hide has ever felt. We've got to put this deal through. Here's one for two bucks. Another for seven. And here's one for a hundred and twenty-five. It's signed by—Josie Marshall."

"The girl back East, eh?" Spruce said, and there was a peculiar note in his voice. "Well, here's one from Betty Rathbone, the girl out West. It's for a thousand dollars!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MAVERICK TIMBER.

**J**ERRY BRYANT looked at the two checks. "There's loyalty for you," he said. "And confidence, too. Somehow I hate like the deuce to cash either of them."

"You'll hurt somebody's feelings if you don't," Spruce argued. "Cash the checks and issue stock. This means you've got to quit the CCC, Jerry, and get organized. The rest of us will follow as soon as you're ready for us."

"We haven't money enough yet," Jerry answered. "The two of us can do the paper work Saturdays and Sundays. All these checks total only about three thousand dollars. There'll be some more, but we've got to pick up at least five thousand somewhere."

"What do you think of this letter from a bird named Lafe Banning?" Spruce said. "He offers up to seven thousand dollars, for ninety days. At the end of that time he's to have the choice of buying seven thousand shares, or calling his loan. He reserves the right to step in and take charge of the company whenever in his opinion the loan is jeopardized."

Jerry whistled in amazement, then read Banning's letter over several times.

"He sure protects himself against loss, but leaves the way open to carve himself a swell hunk of cake if we pan out," he reflected.

"It's the craziest proposition I ever heard of," Spruce Renfro said. "If the company crashes, we won't want it, anyway. I can't figure out whether Banning is a *Shylock* or a dead-game sport, gambling for the thrill of it. Suppose we ask Dave Logg?"

It was Monday morning before they saw the ranger. He read the letter and scowled.

"Lafe Banning, eh? The tightest money broker in the Puget Sound country. Shaking his hand is like grabbing a dead mackerel's tail. He's so tight he won't grow flesh on his own face. It's the boniest face you ever saw. And he's even grudging with words."

"I take it Banning looks out for himself," Spruce drawled. "So the answer is 'No,' eh, Caboose?"

"It may be a case of any old port in a storm, boys," Dave observed. "Here's something else—the offer is

conditioned on your getting the maverick-timber award."

The two CCC men exchanged glances.

"It looks as if the next move is to land that timber," Jerry said, "otherwise Cedar Valley Logging Co. won't have anything to log, nor an excuse for existence."

"Rathbone will help you figure things out, Caboose," Spruce informed him. "He told me so!"

"I'll be glad to give you a hand," Guthrie said; "I know a thing or two about costs."

"Thanks," Jerry answered; "I may yell for help!"

"I think this," Spruce said. "Only Jerry should know the exact figure we bid on that timber. If too many learn our price, it will leak out and Quagg may hear it. All he'll have to do is to better it slightly and get the award."

Some of the others who came up confirmed Spruce's suggestion.

"Don't consult me on any point," Dave Logg said. "I'm a government man and don't want Quagg charging collusion."

Jerry wrote Banning informing him his offer was under consideration, then he spent the end of the week with Rathbone and a logger friend who nursed a grudge against Quagg. Three days before the government opened bids on the timber, the Cedar Valley Logging Co.'s offer was ready. Guthrie eyed the envelope containing the bid, then prepared a duplicate.

That night at twelve o'clock, Guthrie arrived at Quagg's house badly winded. The logger was in bed, but quickly admitted the CCC man.

"Here's Bryant's bid," he said. "The company clerk put it in his safe. I watched my chance, sneaked it out, and left a substitute

when his back was turned. How long will it take to go through it? I've got to be in camp before day-break."

"I can do what I have in mind in ten minutes," the logger replied. He steamed open the envelope, scanned the figures, then made several changes. He returned the bid to the envelope, resealed it, and said: "There she is! I'll have a speeder take you to the main forest-service trail."

"Thanks. I'll sneak this envelope into the safe again before noon. How're things?" Guthrie asked.

"Rathbone continues to hound me," Quagg answered. "Unless Logg closes me down soon, I'll have to fill that contract."

**T**HE hour of opening bids found Jerry Bryant and Spruce Renfro tense and badly worried.

"Look, Caboose," Spruce whispered. "The clerk's got seven bids. And the top one is from the Rathbone Lumber Co. He's double-crossed you!"

"I saw that," Jerry answered.

He scowled at Rathbone, and the lumberman winked.

"I thought you kept out of the logging side of the business," Jerry observed, sliding along the bench to Rathbone's side.

"Don't worry, son," the older man answered. "I was afraid if only two bids were submitted somebody might want them rejected because of lack of competition. My friends and I have submitted low bids."

"Bid of the Quagg Logging Co.," the clerk droned. He tore open the envelope and read the figures.

"Did you hear that?" Jerry exclaimed excitedly. "The figure's the same as mine. It means he'll get the business."

Rathbone's bid, as well as those of his friends, was considerably lower.

"Bid of the Cedar Valley Logging Co.," the clerk went on. He read the figures and nodded at Jerry as if to say: "Satisfactory. You'll get the award."

When they were outside of the building, Rathbone cornered Jerry and Spruce.

"Listen, son," he said excitedly. "You put in a higher figure than we agreed on."

"That bid's been tampered with!" Jerry exploded.

"Not so loud, Caboose," Spruce warned. "Somebody will hear you."

"Quagg's figures were my original figures. The ones read were somebody else's," Jerry fumed.

"Jerry," Rathbone said, "a great light is beginning to dawn. Quagg reasoned if he outbid you now he'd have to pay more for the timber than he feels justified. He got hold of your bid in some manner and hiked up the figures, then submitted your figures as his own. He doubtless reasons you will fail. Then, as the next highest bidder, he'll get the timber."

"And just about this minute," Jerry growled, "he's planning my failure. But the point is, we'll get the timber, or at least a shot at it. The next thing is to inform Lafe Banning we'll accept his seven thousand dollars under his terms."

"I advise against that," Rathbone said quickly. "You are putting your head into a lion's mouth."

"There's still time for you to throw in with us," Jerry countered.

Rathbone shook his head.

"Then," the younger man concluded with a faint grin, "it's as Dave Logg said—any old port in a storm. Spruce, I'll see Banning, and you go to the Acme Logging Co. and pick up the equipment at the best

possible price. Squeeze every dollar until the eagle screams."

"I'll go along and help him squeeze," Rathbone volunteered.

Late that afternoon Jerry faced the dour Banning across a battered oak desk.

"I'm a hard man, but a just man," Banning's bloodless lips said. "I'd have none of this personally, but a client foolishly insists on backing you. But remember, where a client is concerned, I regard the money as my own. I'm a hard man, but a just man."

Jerry signed numerous papers that not only bound him hand and foot, but bound the bindings as well.

"I'd like to sell you some stock," he dryly observed; "you'd be a good man to have in the company."

HE deposited the seven-thousand-dollar check immediately, as Spruce Renfro carried a blank check to pay for the logging equipment. A mental estimate of the situation was slightly discouraging. When the cash bond, to secure performance of contract, had been deposited with the government; equipment paid for, and a camp built, there would be little remaining for food. And a logger requires plenty of good food.

Jerry returned to camp and called his gang together.

"To-morrow we pull out of the CCC," he informed them, "and take the big gamble. It's not too late for any one to back out. But once in, you're in to stay until we sink or swim."

"We stick, Jerry," one said, as others nodded. "It'll be the first time in my life I ever worked for myself."

"The first time I ever had a chance to make real money," a second said, "and I've been out of

school five years. Quagg, forest fires, or even Dave Logg can't stop me." His eyes grew almost murderous in their hardness.

Jerry tried to sleep, but with little success. Every half hour he would roll over and look at Spruce Renfro's empty bunk. Then he would wonder how Spruce had fared. "A wood tick matching wits with a smart logger who wants to get all he can out of some old equipment," he muttered. "It doesn't sound promising."

At three o'clock Jerry dozed off, and a half hour later Spruce awakened him.

"The first of the equipment will be on the ground by Thursday," he declared. "Rathbone figured out a fair price, then told me to hop to it and make my own deal. The cuss just stood back and grinned while the Acme superintendent and I sparred. We sparred most of the day."

"What did it cost you?"

"Five thousand! There'll be several hundred to ship it to the mouth of Moxchuck River. From there I figured we could line it up on scows," Spruce replied.

"Five thousand! Cash? Gosh, Spruce, we can't swing it!" Jerry exclaimed.

"Listen, Caboose," Spruce retorted. "It's swung! Acme is taking stock in payment."

Jerry let out a whoop that aroused the bunk house and brought a lurid admonition for silence from the army sergeant.

"We can do the job right, now," exulted Jerry.

"We sure can," Guthrie added. "We can put one gang to cutting trees and bucking them, the rest of us can set up high lead equipment and swing the logs to cold decks along the river bank. Then we call

all turn to and drive them down to tidewater."

"Where Rathbone will be waiting with a check," Jerry exclaimed.

"Guthrie's got the right idea," Spruce said. "Get as much stuff to the river as we can at once, then if Dave is forced to close the area, we can at least drive what we've cut downstream. No fire will be involved, and Dave will give us that break."

Guthrie grinned in the darkness.

**T**WO weeks passed before the last of the equipment arrived and operations really began. Spruce Renfro climbed a two-hundred-foot fir, lashed his safety belt, and began cutting off the top. Jerry watched him breathlessly, hardly realizing he was responsible for the activity on every side. Nor did he recall his retort to Sergeant Buck that he would tell bigger and dumber guys how to do a job beyond his physical capabilities.

Behind Jerry some one yelled, "Timber-r-r-r-r!" He turned and saw a five-hundred-year-old cedar crash to the ground. It dropped exactly where the fallers intended it should, and missed a half dozen smaller trees.

"Timber-r-r-r-r!" yelled Spruce. At the same time he kicked loose with his climbing irons and dropped ten feet, caught, kicked loose, and dropped again. Then he hung on as the top, weighing several tons, left its narrow platform a hundred and sixty feet above ground and crashed to earth.

And so it went, day after day. The donkey engine puffed and snorted, huge logs shot through the air on spinning blocks and descended ponderously on other logs lining the river bank. The hardest, most trusted worker was Guthrie.

A demanding telephone bell ended it suddenly.

"Another big fire!" Dave Logg reported. "How about you loggers giving us a hand? This is the worst yet!"

"We're on our way," Jerry answered.

He sent warning blasts from the donkey-engine whistle, then headed for the fire with his crew behind him.

"Woods are as dry as tinder. If Dave shuts us down, we can't blame him much," said Jerry.

"But it'll be good-by to the Cedar Valley Logging Co. as far as we ex-CCC boys are concerned," Guthrie said.

Dave Logg met them with shouted commands. "Hold her if you can, but if you can't, fall back. Don't get caught. You run the show, Renfro," he concluded. "I've got a bunch of raw recruits from New York smelling their first smoke. I want to be sure they don't make any mistakes."

"I'm not in this," Jerry informed Spruce. "Savvy?"

"Sure," Spruce answered evenly. "Collecting broken bottles?"

Jerry circled the fire and made his way to the point where it started. No footprint existed save his own, yet a piece of glass lay on a near-by rock. Below it, he saw the ashes of a fern brake. He picked it up and read, blown in the glass: "Moors."

Thirty-six hours later he encountered Dave Logg and most of his own gang. They were "dead on their feet" and thought only of rest.

"We got it stopped," the ranger said thickly, "and every man measured up top-hole. After what you've done, I hate to hand you a body blow, but it can't be helped. I'm closing the entire area until the rainy season."

"It's playing Quagg's game," Jerry argued desperately. "It frees him of the Rathbone contract and puts the skids under us. And he brought it about by starting fires."

"That may be true, but there's something bigger than Quagg and Caboose Bryant and his outfit—it's the national forest. You'll never know how close we come to losing it." Logg's jaw hardened. "I'm sorry, boys, but nothing can change my determination."

"Come with me, Dave," Jerry said. "A word in private."

Guthrie edged forward, but Jerry waved him back.

"Quagg will be listening in on your report to-night," Jerry told the ranger. "Will you make this statement? Then we'll see what happens."

The ranger read the statement Jerry scrawled.

"I see what you're driving at," he said slowly. "I'll give you your chance."

HE went to the telephone and called the supervisor of the national forest. By the faintness of the supervisor's voice he knew others were listening in.

"Dave Logg speaking," he said, then followed with a complete report of the blaze. "With your permission," he concluded, "I would like to keep the area open another two weeks. That will enable Quagg to fill his contract with Rathbone. And save Rathbone a big loss. Also the Cedar Valley Logging Co. can get sufficient additional logs to the Moxchuck to enable them to hang on until the rainy season."

"The area should be closed now," the supervisor insisted. "I'm inclined to order——"

"What you say goes, of course,"

Logg quickly agreed. "I am merely suggesting. I'll close the area to all but the employees of the two interested outfits. Quagg will take no chances, naturally," the ranger continued for Quagg's ears. "And I'll vouch for my former CCC boys. At the slightest sign of a blaze I'll close her up tight."

Dave hung up and turned to Jerry, Spruce, and the ever-present Guthrie.

"You've got your chance, boys," he said. "Hop to it!"

"Thanks," Spruce said, mopping his brow. "If you stop us now, it'll mean Quagg or Lafe Banning's client will get the result of our weeks of work."

Jerry did his personal thanking a few minutes later, then he turned in for a night's sleep. At daybreak he left camp and boldly entered Quagg's holdings. All that day, and most of the following Jerry watched Quagg's home. In the late afternoon the man appeared, talked briefly with Cramm, and then boarded a speeder. The speeder left the main line and rumbled into a branch leading toward the national forest.

Jerry broke into a steady trot, climbed ridges, crossed a valley and several small streams, and emerged two hours later at the end of the line. The speeder, which had followed an easy grade, arrived several minutes later. Quagg headed immediately into the woods, and Jerry trailed him.

High above, the sun flooded Pilot Mountain and the ranger station with its golden light. In the forest it was growing dark. To Jerry's astonishment Quagg suddenly stopped, rolled up under a cedar tree, and went to sleep. Jerry gained a point above him and did likewise.

At three in the morning, he

awakened. Quagg continued to sleep. About six o'clock he rolled out, ate food from a paper sack, then struck briskly through the timber. He worked along the next ridge and dropped suddenly into a silver forest—gaunt, gray skeletons of trees killed in some forgotten fire. The area was dense with brush, small trees, and fern brakes.

Making no attempt to conceal his footprints, Quagg walked through the dead forest to the point where it ended like a wedge driven deeply into green timber. He stopped, scowled at the rising sun, fished in his pocket and drew out a piece of broken glass—a fragment that might have come from some carelessly dropped bottle. Quagg set it up carefully on a rock and then seated himself in the brush until certain the sun would strike the glass. Slowly the sun crawled down the ridge to the rock. Quagg changed the glass slightly, then stood up.

"All right, Quagg!" Jerry said quietly. "Stay right where you are!"

QUAGG jerked around, surprised, and looked into a six-gun resting easily on a convenient boulder. "You, eh?" Quagg's eyes narrowed. "All right, what's the next move?"

"I haven't any in mind right now," Jerry answered. "I'm taking one step at a time. Sit down and make yourself at home."

"You win, Bryant," the logger said sullenly. "What's your price?"

"Haven't any," Jerry retorted. "I had an idea you'd pull one more fire to force them to close up the country. So I trailed you."

"Drop the gun, wood tick!" Cramm's voice crashed down from a ledge above.

"Go ahead and shoot," Jerry



taunted; "the report will carry miles on a clear morning and bring a horde of game wardens and forest rangers."

"This is a better way," Cramm said thickly. Then suddenly he jumped.

His boots struck a nine-inch log twelve feet below, crashed through the brittle fiber, and the momentum carried his body against Jerry before he could bring the gun to bear. Cramm's fist crashed behind Jerry's ear and flattened him.

Jerry regained consciousness with Cramm's voice in his ears.

"I picked up his trail early this morning and followed it. Guthrie tipped me off—said the Caboose wasn't in camp. So you're comin' around, eh? All right, you cocky runt, let's see you figure a way out of this."

"You got me," Jerry said dejectedly. "So Guthrie was the spy in camp? It's too bad I didn't learn it sooner."

"What're we going to do with him?" Quagg said.

"Knock him in the head——" Cramm began.

"Knock me in the head the way you did Mort Lee," Jerry interrupted. "Lee probably caught you starting the swamp fire and——"

"Lee caught me," Cramm rasped, "and Lee died. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Plenty!" Jerry replied. "And so does pieces of a broken Dew o' Grouse Moors bottle."

The sun struck the glass, and a bright spot of concentrated light appeared on a clump of dead ferns. The effect was that of a burning glass. The ferns smoldered several seconds, then burst in to flames. It was all clear to Jerry now. Quagg approached and retreated from the point the flames started over the

area to be burned. Thus ashes and charcoal obliterated his footprints.

"There's going to be sadness in the CCC camp in a few days," Cramm grimly observed. "Somebody will write a letter home that Jerry Bryant died in a forest fire!" He yanked Jerry to his feet. "All right, Quagg, I'll pop him off and get it over with," he said. "We've got to get out of here. In a few minutes the lookout on Pilot Mountain will spot this fire."

"Pop who off?"

Spruce Renfro lifted himself from a thicket a hundred feet above. Dave Logg revealed his bulk forty feet to the left. Three of Jerry's associates stepped into view.

"Let's string 'em up right here!" Spruce yelled, advancing angrily.

"I brought a rope along," another echoed.

"Hold on! Hold on!" Dave admonished. "I'm in command. Cramm will be held for murder, and Quagg—on one of several charges. Get going, gentlemen. You can come along, Renfro, when you put that fire out."

"Why did you let them get the drop on us?" Quagg demanded of Cramm.

"I didn't know they were around," Cramm flared back.

"That's right," Jerry added. "The man trailing me was the lookout on Pilot Mountain, miles away by air line. I stayed pretty well in the open so he could follow me with his glasses. Dave Logg and the others kept in touch by telephone, yesterday afternoon and this morning."

"The lookout phoned Jerry's location," Dave added, "and we kept pace. When the fire started, we were less than a quarter mile off."

"All of which," Quagg defiantly retorted, "doesn't deliver any maverick timber to Rathbone."

## CHAPTER IX.

## HOLE CARD.

THE party arrived at Mill City and found Rathbone and Betty waiting.

"How about my logs, Quagg?" the lumberman immediately asked. "I'm threatened with damage suits unless I deliver lumber on time."

"Quagg won't be logging for some time to come," the ranger said. "We caught him setting fires so the forest service would close the area and thus relieve him of performance of contract. Your 'out' is simple, Rathbone—sue Quagg for your loss, or get yourself appointed receiver of Quagg's outfit and deliver the logs to your mills."

"I think I'll do the latter," Rathbone said. "That will keep the carpenters and builders busy in town."

"So you are in the logging business," Jerry gleefully observed. "And you've tried so hard to stay out."

"Maybe it's just as well," Rathbone answered. "You're going to need a job, old son!"

"Me? Why?" Jerry exclaimed.

And his amazement was echoed by Spruce Renfro.

"Here's an official notice from Lafe Banning. His client has elected to take over the Cedar Valley Logging Co., lock, stock, and barrel," Rathbone replied. "According to the contract he has that right if his loan is in jeopardy."

A shade of worry passed across Quagg's massive features. The cunning brain behind the glittering eyes had not given up hope of getting the maverick timber.

"You lose, Rathbone," he said thickly. "Back in your head was the idea you'd take over the operation of my company, and at the same time help the wood ticks move

the maverick timber to your mill pond. It isn't going to work."

"No?" Rathbone softly queried.

"No, because I'm never caught without a hole card," Quagg retorted. He motioned his office manager. "Come here, ink slinger. We've got a raft of logs at Bellingham. Order it towed to Rathbone's mill. It'll fill the contract."

Then he followed the ranger to jail. The moment he was booked, he telephoned his lawyer.

"Arrange bail for me," he directed, "and plan Cramm's defense, but the bail comes first—I've got to be free to protect my property."

"Nobody is going to damage your property," Jerry declared.

"I have a very valuable logging-road bridge spanning Moxchuck River," Quagg said evenly; "if you wood ticks float logs down the river, it might be seriously damaged."

"Shucks!" Dave Logg exploded. "You could float logs from bank to bank, and it wouldn't hurt that bridge. It's practically a suspension bridge. There isn't a pier in the stream."

The expression in Quagg's eyes as he sat down to await bail was baffling—baffling, and supremely confident.

"He's got another hole card up his sleeve," Spruce growled. "O. K., we'll let Lafe Banning's client worry about that one. He wants to run the show. Fine, we'll let him. I'm going to Seattle and enjoy a good spree. I haven't had a let-down since we went into business for myself. Better come along, Caboose."

"As a sort of a chaser," Jerry drawled.

"Caboose! Chaser! It sounds as if you were always on the tail end," Spruce said. "But you're out in front in our affections. How about it?"

"I've got to be on hand to greet Banning's client," Jerry informed him.

"And a bit of a canter along a cool forest trail late this awfternoon," Spruce said, with a glance toward Betty. "I'll see you later."

**W**HAT you need," Betty told Jerry, as soon as they were alone, "is a lunch and a good horse."

"And a girl's shoulder to cry on," Jerry added.

"Your breed doesn't cry on any one's shoulder," she answered seriously. "But you do need a chance to let down, so you can get keyed up again and maybe salvage something, or force Banning's client to make some kind of a deal."

"Lead on, Betty," Jerry urged.

Three hours later they pulled up their horses within sound of the Moxchuck River. The hot weather was melting glaciers, and the stream ran high, though it had not reached the flood stage. Haze filled the forest, obscuring all but the trees a few rods distant.

"Now that we know who started the fires," Jerry protested, "I can't see why Dave Logg closes the district."

"Quagg's fires have filled the lower country with haze," the girl explained. "Oh, I know it was clear enough up where you caught him. But you can see how it is down here. A new fire can't be spotted until it has made tremendous headway. Closing things tight is the only possible decision."

"When I think of the little checks that came in to buy stock and back this, it makes me sick. Those dollars came hard." His thoughts shifted to Josie's check, then Betty's. They were tributes of personal confidence in him.

WS-4A

"I wonder if we couldn't get those logs into the river without firing up the donkey—move 'em by man power," he said at length. "We've got the men. If we could prove to Banning's client we expect to pull through, he might give us a chance."

"The remaining obstacle would then be Quagg's bridge," she said.

"Let's have a look at it," Jerry suggested.

Somewhere a locomotive whistle shrieked and echoed along the granite walls towering above the great forest. They rode toward the sound and presently heard the rumble of wheels and clank of couplings. Air sobbed often. Again and again brake shoes screamed. Out of the haze crawled a locomotive, holding back a long string of heavily laden trucks. Some held three great logs; others five and six. The massed weight was tremendous. Quagg was getting his last trainload out until the rains came.

Betty's eyes, watching Jerry's face, saw the conflict of emotions—wistfulness, dreams unfulfilled, and finally a snarling determination to achieve. He had visualized the Cedar Valley Logging Co. sending trains like that to tidewater; tracks thrusting groping branches into the heart of the forest; scattered camps housing men and equipment.

Her own expression softened. She edged closer, and her hand fell on his shoulder.

"Your father saw a ranch at the end of the sunset trail," she said, "but you saw this. Shall we have a look at Quagg's bridge?"

"Later," he said, "but now——" He leaned toward her, and his arm drew her close. The saddle leather creaked from their shifting weights. His lips touched hers, lingered a moment, then withdrew. "You've backed me from the first, Betty.

I'm not forgetting it. Let's pull this chance out of the fire together. We may never get another as big as this."

They dismounted and walked down to the bridge. A startled cry of dismay came from her. For a long time the two stared at the bridge. The cables supporting the logs spanning the stream had been removed. Underneath Quagg had driven row on row of stout piles to support the structure—and stop the detested "wood ticks" from driving their logs down the Moxchuck to Rathbone's mill pond.

**O**F course," the girl protested indignantly, "he will claim the cables no longer supported the bridge in safety. He can even prove it in court. But the bitter truth is, he drove those piles to block you."

They seated themselves and gloomily watched the Moxchuck, a dirty gray with glacial silt, gurgle around the bridge piers. The mud had piled up on either side wherever the alders and willows had stopped it.

"Notice how quick a few willow branches and mud plugs up those side channels," he said.

"A glacier stream carries as high as a third mud," she answered.

"I wish it was carrying a third logs," he growled. "Hello! Somebody's coming! My gosh, can't we even have a few minutes alone to figure this thing out?"

The intruder was dressed in the impractical clothing exclusive stores sell clients for roughing it. He walked briskly, but his roving eyes tried to see everything at once.

"Look at the poor lug," Jerry said, his sense of humor coming to the rescue. "That's the way I walked the first time I saw big timber. It's

a wonder I didn't step over a hundred-foot cliff."

"He seems to know you, Jerry," the girl said suddenly.

"Golly!" Jerry exclaimed. "It's Mr. Morgan from the plant. Well—by golly!"

Jerry stood up and extended his hand.

"You are a long way from home, Mr. Morgan," he blurted.

"I came to tell you your job at the plant is still open," Morgan said gravely. "I hear you have lost your shirt. I'll pay your way back—"

"I'm not going back. Anyway, you wouldn't journey across the continent to offer me a job," Jerry argued. "What are you here for?"

"Business. And what are you here for?"

"Trying to figure how to get thirty thousand dollars' worth of cedar logs past this bridge," Jerry answered. "Excuse me, I'm forgetting my manners." He introduced Morgan to Betty.

"And what is the answer to your problem?" Morgan asked.

"Run 'em through with one hand and fight Quagg's loggers with the other," Jerry answered.

"Good! Why don't you do it?" Morgan inquired.

"Oh, we had to put our heads in a noose to get money to operate on," Jerry explained. "Now Banning's client is taking things over. We signed a contract to that effect. It's binding, but if we'd had a chance to—"

"Is this the agreement?" Morgan asked, holding up a document.

"Yes! Where'd you get it?" Jerry yelled.

Mr. Morgan tore it into bits and tossed the bits into the stream.

"My boy, I realized we Morgans hadn't had much fun in life. We inherited good jobs. Food, shelter,

and clothing was assured. We never took a long chance. Never enjoyed the thrill of wondering if whether we had made a mistake or not. I found myself envying you, starting at the bottom, with nothing, and jousting with the world. The more I read the letters you wrote to your mother, the more restless I became. I hated the plant. I got in touch with Banning and arranged to finance the proposition. My business training insisted I safeguard my money in case of reverses. And, here I am, to sink or swim with you."

"How's mother, the kids, and Josie?"

"Fine! You boys are having it tough, I hear. No pay, no nothing. Well, I am buying every log Rathbone can't use and am making an advance payment now. That's how confident I am of your success, after talking this over with my representatives," Morgan said.

"Let's go!" Jerry exclaimed. "And get the gang together."

As they rode along the bank, a familiar figure appeared crouched on a rock in the attitude of "The Thinker."

"Hey, Spruce," Jerry yelled. "I thought you had gone on a bust."

"I got to thinking this buzzard Banning represented was taking us to the cleaners, and the first drink didn't taste good. Couldn't get interested in anything except how to beat the cuss," Spruce explained.

"Shake hands with the buzzard," Jerry said, "Mr. Morgan."

## CHAPTER X.

### SOMETHING FROM HOME.

**S**PRUCE RENFRO, hurrying down Mill City's main street, stopped abruptly and watched the stage unload its passengers. "I've seen that woman and six kids

before," he mused, unconsciously brushing his hair and adjusting his tie. "And I've seen that pretty girl. No, I haven't either. I've seen their pictures in Caboose Bryant's cabin."

"Are you Mrs. Bryant, and are you Josie Marshall?" he asked the woman and girl. "I'm Spruce Renfro!"

"Jerry's friend," Mrs. Bryant exclaimed. "Mr. Morgan wrote Jerry is here for good and sent fare money. Where is he?"

Spruce took in a deep breath and prepared for a little deception. At that moment, he knew, Jerry was getting ready for the battle of his life. "Jerry made first payment on a ranch," he said, "so maybe you'd better go down there and make yourself at home. I'll find somebody to haul you down."

"Don't tell Jerry we are here," the mother pleaded; "it's a surprise."

"He'll sure be surprised," Spruce grimly predicted, glancing at Josie and thinking of Betty.

Several hours later Spruce broke through the timber and threw off his coat. The bank swarmed with former CCC men, and in the thick of things stalked Mr. Morgan, trying to help but getting in the way. Cedar logs tumbled from the cold decks as gangs of men levered them free with bars. There wasn't a wisp of smoke from so much as a cigarette.

As the last log splashed into the series of shallow ponds running along the bank, Jerry and Spruce pushed the first into deep water and leaped aboard. It floated ponderously downstream—the spearhead of hundreds to follow.

"We'll keep them moving under the bridge," Jerry yelled as the log swept around a bend.

"We and who else?" Spruce answered. "Look ahead!"

The bridge was black with Quagg loggers. In the midst of them, Jerry noticed Quagg and Guthrie, directing affairs. Spruce drove his pike pole into the river bottom and vaulted to the bank. Jerry followed. The loggers' jeers floated up the canyon.

"We've got to get more men," Spruce said.

"Wait, let's see what happens to that log," Jerry replied.

Men on the bridge drove pike holes into the log, turned it across the stream, and let it jam against piers.

"I get it!" Spruce said. "He's going to pile up every log on his property. Our stuff isn't branded or marked, and there's nothing to prevent him coming along with a cherry picker, lifting the logs to the trucks, and shipping 'em away. That bridge is outside the closed area!"

Three other logs were turned across the current, completely blocking anything that might float on the Moxchuck's surface.

"There's only one way of beating that game," Jerry said. "Leg it upstream, tell the boys to hold back the logs, and set every man to work cutting alders and dumping them, leaves, branches, and all into the river. I'll stay here and see what happens."

**A** HALF hour later a steady stream of half-submerged willows and alders floated past. They piled up against the barrier, then gradually the current sucked them downward until the larger trees lodged on the bottom. Jerry raced upstream and joined the others.

"It's working! Now get the logs into the current as fast as you can.

Spruce, you keep an eye on the bridge and report what takes place."

Spruce Renfro climbed a near-by ridge, then returned almost immediately.

"The water's beginning to back up," he breathlessly reported. "The whole gang is busy hauling out the alders." His eyes glistened at the prospect of a fight.

"Everybody jump a log and come on," Jerry ordered.

At the bend above the bridge they splashed to the bank and went through the woods until they encountered the railroad. Here they turned suddenly toward the bridge and were on the Quagg crowd before the loggers realized it.

"You once said you'd let a bigger and dumber guy handle a job too big for you to tackle," Spruce said. "Keep out of this and tell us how! We don't want you killed!"

"Just this once I'm the bigger and dumber guy," Jerry retorted. "Leave Quagg to me. I think I've figured a way to handle him!"

There followed a confusion of shouts, blows, and the snarling of fighting men.

"Drive the wood ticks back," Quagg bellowed, "then get that brush out. It's damming the whole river."

His angry eyes located Jerry. With a bellow of fury he began working his way through the fighting men toward his lightweight enemy.

"Come on, you big tramp!" Jerry taunted. "I've been waiting for this!"

"And you're going to get it," Quagg panted.

He rushed, and Jerry nimbly sidestepped, crashing his fist against Quagg's temple. The man turned, jeering, and rushed again. He caught Jerry on the brink of the

bridge and held him in a crushing embrace. "Look out, you fool," Quagg warned; "quit wiggling or we'll both be in the stream."

Jerry's foot found lodgment on a logger's back. He kicked with all his strength. Thrown suddenly off balance, Quagg dropped his victim, clawed the air, then plunged into the stream. Without an instant's hesitation Jerry followed. As he came to the surface, he wrapped his legs around Quagg's body and climbed half on his back. The man reached an arm over his shoulder to rid himself of the load, and Jerry's teeth sank in his wrist. He drove his knees again and again into the small of Quagg's back. Then as they went under, he kicked free and swam to the surface.

A fit of coughing stopped Jerry for a moment, then he swam into the fight again. Much the faster swimmer, and with less bulk to handle, he attacked and retreated with the fury of a shark.

"Stop it, you fool!" Quagg belated. "We'll both drown! There's boulders ahead!"

**J**ERRY got his arm around Quagg's neck and forced him under. He stayed until his own lungs were bursting, then came to the surface. Quagg came with him, purple and gasping. Jerry's feet dragged over a rock, then a protruding boulder crashed into his side. Quagg thrust him toward the next one, and the impact sickened him.

"So that's the way you want it," Jerry gasped.

He turned Quagg into the thick of the white water, and felt the man go limp. From head to feet Jerry felt sick—just about as sick as he had ever been.

As in a fog he felt his feet touch bottom, then he got up. Quagg tot-

tered above him like a wounded bear, his huge arms groping. Jerry drove his fist into the man's paunch and felt him wince. In a frenzy he rained blows, then things went black.

In the distance he heard a voice: "The little wood tick licked him. I'd never believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Quagg'll never live *that* down."

Jerry opened his eyes. "Quagg must have nearly killed me," he muttered.

"Nope, you cracked your head on a rock," a voice said. "That's what knocked you out. You're going to be all right."

"Jerry, do you know me?"

He shook his head to clear away the last shreds of fog.

"Why—mother! And—Josie!"

"Yes," Mrs. Bryant explained, "I'm really here. Morgan advanced the money. The children are down on the ranch and they are so happy I shed tears whenever I think of it."

"Hello, Betty," Jerry added, seeing her for the first time. "And you, too, Mr. Rathbone."

Rathbone helped Jerry to sit up.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, pointing to an object floating on the Moxchuck. "It's the first log from maverick timber. And here's the check. Now folks, help me carry him higher up the bank. This place isn't safe."

As they propped his battered body against a log, Spruce Renfro, bleeding from the fight, arrived, puffing.

"The silt and alders turned the trick," he exclaimed. "Water's backed up until logs are going over the bridge in a steady stream. Inside a half hour the whole works will go out. We licked Quagg's outfit to a frazzle."

Jerry smiled. He was too sick and tired to laugh out loud. That laughter would come in future years when he looked back. Now he turned to Betty.

"You've been—grand," he said. "As good a friend as I ever had. You boosted me over the tough spots and——" His eyes misted.

"Why not?" she managed to ask. "Why not?" And her smile was soft as she walked over and joined Spruce.

"You fell for him, like the rest of us did," Spruce said.

"Dad asked me to do what I could. He said Jerry would need a girl's encouragement and understanding. I thought I'd kept my heart out of it, but some of it got in the way." She held her lips tight, then said softly: "Josie is sweet, isn't she?"

Spruce nodded and led her away, and he took the others with him.

Jerry dug into his pocket and pulled out a glittering ring.

"It's your engagement ring," he told Josie. "I got it with the first money Morgan advanced on the maverick timber he is buying."

"It's—lovely," Josie answered, "beautiful. But haven't you got the—other?"

"Sure," he replied.

"That is the real engagement ring," she said softly. "Put it on—Jerry."

He put it on, and for several minutes they sat close, in silence, watching the timber-littered river. Her face mirrored her emotions, and he saw the fear of the city-bred—fear of the vast mountains, tremendous forests, and frothing streams. The fear born of unfamiliarity and the looming mass.

"Can't you conquer it?" he asked quietly.

She nodded and softly replied, "You did!"

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### DEATH VALLEY REPORTS STRIKE

**J**OHAN J. SULLIVAN, veteran prospector who has been chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow in the Death Valley country for the last thirty years or more, was in Tonopah, Nevada, recently, for supplies. For several months now he has been engaged in developing a group of three claims at the south end of the Funeral range in what is known as the Black Mountains. He exhibited several specimens that showed plenty of free gold.

"There is one small streak," he said, "that pans better than \$300, and from two to three feet that goes \$47, and below that six feet that averages better than \$12 a ton."

There is a good road to the property, and an abundance of water can be obtained by gravity from Willow Springs, a distance of four miles.

"I'm operating a small Gibson mill," he said, "but the ore is too hard to get good results. However, I'm saving enough gold to pay all expenses and in the meantime, getting the property well developed for more extended operation and a large mill."

He stated there was sufficient ore to feed a fifty-ton mill.





# OVERPLAYED

By GLENN H. WICHMAN

Author of "Wanted Water," etc.

**T**HE time had been when old Jim Stillman's Box S was as tidy and as profitable a little spread as any in the Five Valleys. But times had changed, and misfortune had, of late, relentlessly dogged his footsteps. Hoof-and-mouth disease had been the undoing of three quarters of the Box S stock, but the illness and death of his wife had been the cruelest blow that had befallen him. As a result of this lingering illness, the ranch was mortgaged now to the limit, and as a result of the hoof-and-mouth disease, his equity had vanished into thin air. With it had gone much of his fighting spirit.

The game seemed hardly worth the candle; it was only his memory of the stout-hearted Sarah Stillman that had kept him going at all. Even at that it was six months after her funeral before he again had a grip on himself.

It was mid-afternoon, and Stillman stood in the little living room of the ranch house, looking down the narrow valley that was still his by legal right. All day he had been planning, scheming, figuring a way out. Beef prices were better now, and the hoof-and-mouth disease had finally run its course. What few cattle remained were in fair condition and, given time, would multiply.

Time was the supreme factor in the matter. Regretfully he had come to the conclusion that there wasn't enough time that remained to him to do him any good. It was only the matter of some five months until his notes would be past due and payable. Five months was not enough for the Box S cattle to make an appreciable increase in numbers.

"I'm licked," thought old Jim. "Whipped to a frazzle. If there was only somethin' that I could grab onto. Somethin' I could fight. But a man can't fight time. You can't punch the calendar on the jaw." Fists clenched, he turned and was looking up at a crayon enlargement of his wife. She was smiling at him, smiling at him in all the freshness and courage of her young womanhood. A long time ago that picture had been made. They were just starting out on the road together then, the future all ahead, overcoming obstacles as they came to them, one after another. Hard work, and plenty of it. It wasn't a question of work now, it was a question of time. Five months— "I'm sittin' here like an old granny," concluded Jim, "just waitin' for the ax to fall. An' what under the sun can I do about it?"

**F**ISTS still clenched, he once more turned to the window. It was a relief to see that some one was coming to visit him. A goodly distance down the valley moved a spring wagon drawn by a couple of driving horses. A miniature cloud of dust trailed along behind it. Stillman went out on the veranda and stood there leaning against a post. The team came nearer. Presently he made out an oblong box in the bed of the wagon, a black, oblong box some six feet in length and two

in width. It extended well up under the seat on which the driver sat.

Perspiration stood out in great beads on Stillman's forehead. Six months had passed since he had last seen such a box. It was a coffin! "I'm crazy!" he exclaimed. "Plumb loco! Either that or else this bird who's comin' is out of his head. One or the other of us sure is!"

By the time the wagon had come through the ranch yard and up to the veranda, old Jim's momentary fright had left him. Something bordering on mild amusement had taken its place. Undoubtedly this man was a stranger in the Five Valleys, had become confused in his directions, and had brought his sinister burden to the wrong place. It was a mistake that any one might have made.

He looked more closely at the driver of the wagon and found him to be a cadaverous-appearing, solemn-faced, thin-chested young man dressed entirely in black from his Stetson down to his shoes. Shortly the man brought the team gently to a halt, climbed down off the seat, took off his hat, and stood there before Stillman with a brown satchel held uncertainly in his right hand. He coughed violently for a moment, but the spasm passed.

"Good afternoon, sir," he finally said in a subdued and respectful voice. "I've come for the body."

"There must be a mistake," evenly answered Jim Stillman. "No one here is quite ready to be buried."

A puzzled frown passed over the undertaker's face. "That's odd. I followed the directions implicitly. This is the Box S Ranch, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh—it's the Box S," gasped the rancher. "I'm sorry, but there's no business for you here. Perhaps some day there will be business, but not now."

The man in black dolefully shook his head, coughed again, and made a clucking sound with his tongue and lips. "There's hardly a chance for a mistake in a matter like this. I've come for the remains of a man named Jim Stillman."

"Oh——" interrupted Jim. A chill passed over him; he could feel it running up and down his spine. Then he concluded that some one was playing a joke on him. But that was impossible. He knew of no one in the Five Valleys who would indulge in such a brand of horseplay, especially after his late bereavement. It was unthinkable. "I'm naturally astonished, young fella," continued the rancher, "because, you see, I'm the man you've come for. I'm Jim Stillman!"

It was the undertaker's turn now to be disturbed, yet he took the matter with surprising calmness. With hardly a change of expression he said: "I'm sorry. I've acted in this matter in good faith. Of course, as you can guess, I'm a stranger here. A week ago I established my business in Vacaville. It's known as the William Hackett Furniture Store & Funeral Parlor. I'm William Hackett."

"I'm pleased to meet you," uncomfortably replied Stillman, and at the same time shoved his fists into his pockets, for the undertaker was giving indications of wanting to shake hands with him. "Ain't been to town lately, so I didn't know about you. The last I knew, the harness maker was doin' the undertakin'. By the way—who was it told you I'd cashed in?"

"The man didn't give his name," explained Hackett. "Said he was an old friend of yours and gave me two hundred dollars to see that you were decently buried. I brought out one of my best boxes and I'd every desire

to do a first-class job. I've been well paid——"

"Mebbe you'd better return the money," suggested Stillman. "What did the gent look like?"

"I can't return the money because he said he was leaving this locality permanently. Didn't even have time to remain for the funeral. There was nothing I can tell you about him that will mark him from other men. He looked like a cowman. Medium height. Medium weight. Medium build. There must be thousands of men who look pretty much like he does. Of course, I'll take the coffin back to town an' credit it to your account. No doubt some day——"

"Credit it to my account!" exclaimed Stillman. He shuddered. Then a smoldering sort of anger came to him. Who would have done such a thing? Certainly no friend of his. Was some one trying to frighten him? What would be the object? Two hundred dollars was a considerable cash outlay.

Old Jim's blood warmed in his veins, warmed for the first time in many months. Here was something that he would look into. Deliberately he rolled a cigarette, stood there looking at the undertaker while smoke curled up around his weather-beaten eyes.

"I'd better get movin'," said young Hackett. "It's a long way back to town."

"You can go faster goin' home than comin' out," said old Jim, "because your load'll be lighter. Seein' that this mysterious gent paid for this thing, I might as well keep it. I reckon it's mine."

"Keep it!" gasped the undertaker. "That's an odd idea. Still, it's reasonable. It's yours."

Stillman stepped down off the veranda.

"Gimme a hand an' we'll carry it

into the smokehouse. That'll make a good place to store it. I'm all done smokin' hams. Killed the last porker durin' the winter."

**A** FEW moments and the job had been completed, the smokehouse door closed. Hackett stood there stroking his chin and coming as close to smiling as he had probably ever come in his life.

"Most men, Stillman," he slowly said, "would be frightened out of seven years' growth over what's happened. They'd sell out an' shake the dust of this valley off their heels so fast it'd make your head swim. All men have a touch of superstition in their make-ups. But I take it you're going to remain?"

The rancher stiffened at the question. "Who told you to ask me that, Hackett? Who was it wanted you to plant this idea in my head?"

The undertaker's face blanched a shade. He coughed again, harder this time than before. "Why, nobody asked me to! It was a thought that just naturally occurred to me. If I've been presumptive, I beg your pardon."

"I notice you carry a gun," said Stillman, "in a shoulder holster under your loosely fittin' coat. Queer thing for a man to do, who deals only with the dead."

"Ofttimes I carry money with me," explained Hackett. "There's not too much law an' order around here. It's a habit I got long ago. If you'll excuse me, now——"

"Just a minute," continued Jim Stillman. "How much am I supposed to sell out for?"

The undertaker gave his shoulders a toss, and a touch of anger shone in his dull eyes. "You persist in misunderstanding me, Stillman. What's happened is beyond me to explain. I

merely made a chance remark about your courage, and you insist on turning it into something else. I want nothing at all. I'm sorry now I even mentioned it."

Without a backward glance behind him, Hackett then walked rapidly to the spring wagon, climbed up on the seat, and drove hurriedly out of the ranch yard. He was coughing violently, his shoulders hunched.

Jim Stillman stood on the veranda and watched him go.

"Some jasper's overplayed his hand," he said, chuckling, "an' the same gent's spent a lot of money doin' it. If somebody'd come here this mornin' an' offered me five hundred dollars cash money for my equity in the Box S, I'd have took it an' never even hesitated. Now if somebody was to offer me twenty thousand for what I own, I'd tell 'em to go jump in a lake."

William Hackett and his team disappeared around a bend down the valley. Presently Stillman went into the sitting room and once more stood before his dead wife's picture.

"Things are happening, honey," he softly whispered. "I've got somethin' more to do now than just count off the days until five months are up. An' I'll have to watch myself, if I want to live. It's like the old days." Instinctively his hand went to the battered six-gun that was upon his hip.

Stillman remained in the ranch house as the shadows from the setting sun stretched out to the eastward. He sat in the darkness for an hour and then went noiselessly out through the kitchen door. Forthwith he milked a cow and took care of his one-horse remuda. The Box S carried no hands now; it was, not only figuratively but literally, a one-horse outfit. A coyote called from up in

the hills. Stillman shivered and looked that way. Behind the ranch house the little valley narrowed and became a crooked high-walled canyon with a gravel bottom.

The rancher slept that night with one ear open. Nothing happened. Two more days and still nothing happened. "I'm wearin' somebody down," he thought. "Gradually wearin' 'em down by just doin' nothin'." I was supposed to have gone to Vacaville an' tried to make a deal for my equity. I've set tight. I'm worryin' somebody, an' after they've worried long enough, they'll play another card."

**T**HE fourth night Stillman was not so cautious as he had been on the other three; he slept soundly. That is, he slept soundly until two o'clock in the morning when a smothered feeling in his lungs awakened him. Already fully dressed, he sat bolt upright. The room was filled with smoke, and he could hear the crackle of flames from the adjoining room. An eerie glow came in through the window.

No sooner were his feet on the floor than his brain was working. "They've played the card," he thought, as his hand groped for and found the saddle carbine that leaned against the bed. The smoke strangled him. On his hands and knees he crawled to the window and with one blow of the rifle stock knocked out the pane. It was but the work of a moment to crawl through the opening. He dropped to the ground and ran as fast as his old legs would carry him to the smokehouse. With every step he expected to hear the bark of a gun, but no sound came other than the roar and crackle of the fire.

The blaze spread. The smokehouse burned and then a wagon shed.

"Glad that black box is gone," said Jim Stillman.

It was with the coming of dawn that he discovered a scrawled note of warning that had been nailed to the top pole of the corral gate.

We've given you another hint—you old fool! It may be murder next time!

"Next time," repeated Stillman, as he glanced furtively over his shoulder. It made him rather sad to think that the old house, in which he and Sarah had lived for so many years, was gone. Yet his wife would have been the last person on earth to have cried over it. He thought for a moment of going to the sheriff with his troubles and decided against it. He'd fight his own battles, as he and Sarah had fought them in the old days.

As a starter he'd go to Vacaville and look up this undertaker, William Hackett. After he'd saddled his roan, Stillman walked a half dozen times around the pile of ashes that the day before had been a ranch house, carefully searching the ground. There were footprints there in the loose earth on one side of it, the footprints of two men. Carefully he noted them, a half smile puckering his wrinkled face. Presently he mounted the roan and rode to Vacaville.

"If I wanted to sell," he thought, "I'd naturally go first to that land merchant, Peterson. Anyway, I'll give him the once-over an' see what comes of it."

Peterson's ramshackle office was midway down the short main street of the little cow town. Stillman left his horse at the hitch rack in front of it and went on in. The land merchant looked at him over the rims of his horn glasses and nodded his head in greeting.

"Lookin' for a bargain?" asked old Jim.

"Yeah," answered Peterson. "You are the gent I was hoping would come in. I'll pay you two hundred cash money for what you still think you own of the Box S."

"You ain't very generous," said Stillman. "It ain't a tenth enough."

"Ain't enough!" exclaimed the land merchant. "You're crazy, Jim! Why, your whole darn spread ain't worth the amount of the mortgage. You haven't got anything to sell, since the cattle's mostly died, but I'll make it two hundred anyway."

"It wouldn't be *your* two hundred that you'd be payin' me, would it?" countered Stillman.

"No," admitted Peterson, "it wouldn't. I got a client in El Paso. Had some letters from him, but never seen him. He's a gent with money—could take care of the mortgage an' then wait for the stock to build up—"

"Where's this new undertakin' and furniture establishment that I've heard tell of?" interrupted the rancher.

Peterson chuckled. "Pulled out yesterday. That was sure a fat-headed thing for that bird to do. He couldn't have made enough here to have kept himself in tobacco. No customers."

"Not even *one* customer?" asked Stillman.

"Nope. Not even one. He didn't even pay Longstreet the rent on the store buildin'."

**S**TILLMAN left the land merchant then and crossed the narrow thoroughfare to Gus Longstreet's empty store building. The door was open; he went inside. Only the front half of the room had been cleared of its accumulation of dust and rubbish. "Fly-by-night outfit," concluded Jim. "They never

intended to stay here long nohow. Only long enough to scare the stuffin' out of me." He moved to the rear of the room and saw there in the thick dust the imprint of a man's shoe.

Stillman presently quit the empty store building and, crossing the street at an oblique angle, pushed open the batwing doors of Pete Danford's saloon and went up to the bar. Danford himself was behind the counter; Stillman had known the saloon keeper for many years.

"Greetin's," said Jim Stillman. "Give us both a beer an' then tell me what's become of young William Hackett, the undertaker. I'm on the hunt for him."

"I trust you ain't got business with the guy," said Danford. "But I guess you couldn't have, seein' there ain't nobody left in your family but you. Anyhow, Hackett's gone away, an' I don't reckon he'll ever be back. Felt kinda sorry for the poor buzzard—sick an' broke an' everything."

"Lungs—I reckon," muttered Stillman.

"Lungs," breathed Danford. "He was hopin' to earn some money so he could afford to sit down out in the open somewhere an' let 'em heal up."

"Did he have any friends here?" asked the rancher, as he wiped the suds off his lips. "Anybody that he may have known somewhere else before he came here?"

"Uh-huh," grunted the saloon keeper. "I don't know what you're drivin' at, but there *was* a couple of men he seemed to know. I heard 'em jawin' him a time or two here in the barroom. Must have had some kind of business together an' had an argument over money. Didn't hear much. They're strangers around here." Danford looked around the

room and nodded his head toward the far corner. "Those are the two gents there. The two takin' a snooze behind the poker table. The one on the right calls himself Lefty Jordon. I think the gent on the left's called Luther Hood. Why?"

"No matter," said the rancher. "I think I'll wake 'em up an' have some words with 'em."

Stillman stepped away from the bar and crossed the nearly deserted barroom. For the first time in years he wore twin guns. The time had been when his two-handed draw was a thing of beauty, but it'd been ten years now since he'd pulled a gun in anger. Ten years and he was as old and stiff as a ramrod. On the last occasion luck had favored him. But he had no confidence in his luck any more.

A moment and the rancher stood before the green-topped poker table. "Lefty" Jordon and Luther Hood were tilted back in chairs against the wall, their feet resting upon the top of the table. Both were sound asleep. "Looks like," whispered Stillman to himself, "these poor jaspers missed their sleep last night. Evil-lookin' gents, too, if I ever saw any." He leaned over the table and looked intently at the soles of their feet. "Well, well." He chuckled. "Now wouldn't that beat the Dutch! Mebbe I'm a fool for luck after all."

His nerves were tingling, his blood racing, and a dull-red light had come into his faded eyes. Here was what he had been looking for. Something to grab onto. Something to fight. A pair of as slick-appearing customers as he'd ever cast an eye on. Somewhere about them there was a secret. But the matter would have to be handled correctly, or he would never learn what that secret might be.

"Wake up!" said Stillman, as he

shook the table. "You've slept enough."

Instantly two pairs of feet hit the floor and two men stood there behind the table. Each of them had a hand resting on the handle of a Colt.

**L**LEFTY" JORDON was the first to find his voice, and when he spoke, he was only half awake. "Well—Stillman——" he said and instantly checked himself.

"Shut up! You fool!" growled Luther Hood at his partner.

"Thanks a lot," interrupted the rancher. "Thanks for mentionin' me by name. You know me, yet you ain't been here in Vacaville more'n a couple weeks an' I ain't been to town in a month or more. Strange, ain't it, that you know me?"

By now Lefty Jordon and Luther Hood were wide awake. Evil-looking men they were, too, with surly faces and sneering lips. After the first shock of surprise was over, their confidence had returned in full measure. Only an old man stood there confronting them.

"What are you goin' to do about it?" snapped the man called Jordon.

"Dunno," sighed Stillman. "But this ain't the fittin' place to argue. The saloon keeper's a friend of mine, an' I wouldn't like to muss up his joint. Supposin' that we amble down to the buildin' that the undertaker man moved out of. We'll be alone there. Have quiet to talk things over."

Jordon chuckled. "Not a bad idea. Turn around an' lead the way. We'll follow."

"I reckon it'll be a safe enough thing for me to do," said Jim Stillman. "You won't be jackasses enough to shoot me in the back in broad daylight—not with what's at stake."

"Get movin'," put in Lefty Jor-

don. "An' at the first sign of any nonsense——"

Stillman walked out of the saloon, the two men following close behind him. They went down the board walk and were in front of the deserted store when the rancher stopped.

"Darn my britches!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Say, if here don't come the undertaker now!"

William Hackett was moving slowly up the street astride a decrepit horse. Gone were his fine black clothes, and he was dressed in the tattered habiliments of a saddle bum. Lefty Jordon and his partner swore in unison. At the instant their mouths opened, Hackett spotted them. He shoved his horse in the flanks, came up to the board walk, and got wearily from the saddle. His face was white and drawn.

"The gatherin' of the clan," said Stillman.

"Inside! Both of you!" spat Jordon, as he gave the undertaker a shove.

They all went in quickly enough and started toward the rear of the room. Stillman, Hackett following him, shied off to the right, and in a second they were standing against the wall, their backs to it. Jordon and Luther Hood stood opposite and facing them.

"You three gents have a little matter to explain," began the rancher. "You're three prime skunks, if I ever saw any."

"I'm no enemy of yours, Stillman," hoarsely whispered the undertaker as he turned toward him and raised his open hands level with his shoulders. "I've come back to try an' make right the wrong I've done."

"You make an honest-soundin' noise," said the rancher. "What'd you aim to do about it?"

"I'm unarmed. I can't hurt you. Can't hurt anybody. These rats took my gun." Hackett's right hand came down and went into his hip pocket. He took out some money and tossed it on the floor before the two men who stood opposite. "You gave this to me!" he rasped. "You skunks, you gave it to me, an' now I'm givin' it back again! I took it. I'm ashamed. I did your dirty work!" Hackett choked, began to cough. "You made me!"

"By gosh!" said Jim Stillman. "Daylight's comin'—an' so's the fire-works!"

**B**OTH Lefty Jordon and Luther Hood had drawn simultaneously. Stillman's guns were also in his hands. Then something of the cunning and speed that had once been his came back to him. His Colts flipped up and they roared as they moved. But two men were there, before him, not one. He'd have had his hands full with only Jordon. With an ability he never imagined he possessed, he sprang sidewise along the wall. Again he pulled trigger as slugs brushed by him. Jordon was falling. One of old Jim's screaming slugs had found its mark. Even before Stillman could bring his guns to bear on Hood, he knew that the man had a sure and certain bead on him, that Hood's next slug would find him.

The blurred, lanky body of William Hackett was flying through the air. Things happening so rapidly that no eye could follow them. Hackett's hurtling body hit Hood a resounding blow. Stillman had the will not to fire, yet it was too late in that split second to recall the pressure of his finger. His six-gun roared! The undertaker, his arms around Hood's waist, knocked Hood to the floor. But they no sooner



struck than Hackett disentangled himself and was on his feet.

"You missed me, Jim!" he said. "But you didn't miss him. Look!"

"Dead," said Stillman. "Both of 'em. An' I reckon they've carried their secret with 'em. Too bad."

Men were running down the street and crowding into the store building. Sheriff Eaton came, and after a time some head and tail was made of what had happened. Stillman told all he knew.

"I'll arrest Hackett," said the sheriff, "for taking part in a conspiracy. These men hired him to pretend to open up a business here and to take the coffin out—"

"If you arrest him," interrupted old Jim, "Vacaville's goin' to be short one sheriff."

"Passin' that then, for the time bein'," said Eaton, smiling, "I'd like to know what in the name of Sam Hill they'd want with that one-hoss spread of yours. Mebbe Hackett could—"

"They lived at the roomin' house across the way," put in the pseudo-undertaker. "I didn't know them very well. They gathered me in down in El Paso. Bought me clothes, made me come up here, an' told me it was an honest business we were openin'. I knew almost from the

first that it wasn't honest. But I needed money so badly for a doctor — You can take me, sheriff, any time you want to. But before you do, I've a hunch that in their belongin's we'll find what they were up to. They'd planned to burn Jim's ranch house as their next move."

Everybody crossed the street. In a spare coat of Lefty Jordon's they found the confidential report of a mining engineer. The expert estimated that there was not less than a half million dollars in placer gold in the canyon above the Box S ranch house.

"Come on, son," said Stillman to Hackett. "From now on you an' me are partners. If the sheriff objects, I'll knock his block off."

But Sheriff Eaton had turned his back and walked the other way.

They rode together from Vacaville. The younger man's eyes were dim.

"You don't owe me nothin'," said Hackett. "Nothin' but a kick—"

"The devil I don't," growled Jim. "You saved my life there in that store buildin'. I'm fixin' up them lungs of yours. Fresh air an' the good sun and a half million dollars' worth of eggs an' milk an' a good doctor's medicine. Shucks! I got somethin' to live an' fight for now. Sarah'll be right glad."

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#### TASTE OF WATERMELON FATAL TO GROUNDHOG

**A** TASTY red watermelon proved the undoing of an imported groundhog at Kerrville, Texas. The melon, used as bait, lured the fugitive pet into a wire cage during the night. The groundhog's owner, who had considerable difficulty in keeping it in captivity, brought it from Tennessee.

The second time it escaped, the queer little animal was killed by the bait.



# WOLF HUNT

By GUTHRIE BROWN

Author of "Lefty Horns In," etc.

**T**HORPE considered, eying the young man before him with a shade of doubt. "I've owned this ranch for eleven years," he said, "and this is the first time a man ever asked me for the Rock Creek job. You been workin' here a coupla weeks. You oughta know by this time what you're askin' for."

The grave, hazel eyes of Jim Demery turned away briefly. "I know what I'm asking for." There was a quality in his tone which Thorpe could not understand. "I've fed stock in a winter camp before. I know it's no cinch. But Rock Creek isn't bad. Nothing but horses to look after there."

Thorpe grunted. "Plenty of work, just the same. You won't find it any soft snap."

Jim Demery knew that he would not. He wasn't hunting an easy berth. He was hunting a man, a man whom he was convinced had killed his father three years ago. Bert Loring had been brought to trial and acquitted. There was insufficient evidence. Jim's father had been found murdered in his trapper's cabin. Loring was known to have been in the vicinity at the time, but he could not be connected with the crime. However, Jim held to his own opinion in the matter.

He believed he had worked out a way to bring Loring to justice.

He had traced the man, had discovered that he was selling bootleg liquor to the Indians on a reservation that bordered Thorpe's ranch. The cowboy had got work at the ranch and then asked for the job at the Rock Creek winter camp, which was close to the reservation.

Things were working out just as Jim had planned. A grim satisfaction filled him that November afternoon as he made ready to move. But his content was to be short-lived.

Thorpe had turned away from the talk with Jim to do some thinking of his own. What did that young buck have in his head?—the rancher wondered. At any rate, it was something which Jim evidently had no intention of telling.

"Boss," one of Thorpe's cowboys accosted him, "there's a feller name of Parr here lookin' for you. He just come in with a coupla pack mules and won't talk to nobody but you."

**T**HORPE found the stranger in the corrals near the barn. Parr was a big, lowering man, rather good-looking, but with a set grimness to his face that put any one on guard with him. The rancher waited for him to speak.

"Your name's Thorpe?" Parr asked, and his voice was surprisingly low and pleasant.

Thorpe nodded.

"Mine is Parr," the other went on. "I heard that you ranchers in this section have been having a fight with wolves the last two years."

"That's right," agreed the rancher. "They've thickened up like the devil in these parts, for some reason or other."

Parr nodded. "Been good years for them to multiply, last three, four seasons. I'm a trapper, Thorpe.

I've a proposition to make to the ranchers in here. I'll clean out the wolves on this range—and by that I mean clean them out—for a fair price on each cattle killer I get. I keep the pelts. I came to you because I understand that you are the head of the Cattlemen's Association and free to make a bargain with me."

An expression of relief grew on the rancher's face. "If you're a real trapper, Parr, and will do what you say you will, you can pretty near name your own ticket. How long do you figure to take for the job?"

"Two seasons, maybe," was the answer. "And I'm not holding you up on the price, either."

They discussed terms at length. Having come to an agreement, Parr said:

"I'll have to have a base to operate from, of course. From what I've already learned of the country, your Rock Creek winter camp would be as good as any."

"Way off the center of the range you'll cover," suggested Thorpe.

Parr nodded. "I can establish other camps, as I need them; but that seems a good place to start."

"All right," Thorpe agreed. "One of my men is just getting ready to go there to tend to the winter feeding. You can go right along with him."

Parr, who had started to move away, turned swiftly, his brows drawn down.

"One of your men? But when I'm running trap lines, I don't want any one else around." His tone sharpened. "A cowboy is always a nuisance in a trapper's camp. They get in the way and snarl things up generally. I won't have one of them in mine."

Thorpe was good-humored. "I guess you'll have to find you some

other camp, then," he said. I have to have a man up there to feed a couple hundred head of horses. We carry them through the winter on the hay we cut on those mountain meadows."

This piece of information seemed to upset the trapper unaccountably. As he stood scowling at the ground, the rancher added:

"All cowboys aren't alike, you know. You may have had some unfortunate experience. This is a clean-cut young fellow who'll tend strictly to his own business and let you tend to yours."

"But, I don't want——" Parr began, and stopped himself.

Thorpe looked at him keenly and thought: "Somebody else with something on his mind besides his hat. Let's see how they affect each other." He raised his voice.

"Jim," he called, "come here a minute, will you?"

As the cowboy walked toward them, Thorpe said:

"Jim, meet Mr. Parr. He's to undertake the job of cleaning the wolves off this range. He wants to make his first camp on Rock Creek."

The long, slim brows over the hazel eyes snapped together, and the muscles in the browned face of the cowboy set. He opened his mouth to speak, closed it again. He looked at Parr through narrowed lids, his displeasure plain in his face. The two studied each other with a hostility that Thorpe realized was not at all personal. Neither wanted a companion, no matter who it was. The rancher made an excuse of pressing matters elsewhere, and thought to himself as he walked away: "I'd better keep an eye on those two and find out what's in their heads."

But Thorpe never did find out.

For a while Jim was at a loss.

The last thing he wanted was somebody else in camp with him. That altered his plan. And he could hardly back down, since he had asked for the job. Thorpe was already beginning to eye him with a good deal of interest, and the rancher must not guess the truth. Still, if this man Parr looked after his own business and let Jim's alone

—— The cowboy shrugged his shoulders and accepted the inevitable with the best grace he could muster. And maybe, after all, the still where Loring was getting his whisky supply was not somewhere in the Rock Creek country, as Jim had guessed. Maybe the man was getting his liquor from some one else and not making it himself. In that case—well, Jim would still have to make the best of it, and work out some other plan.

**T**HE camp consisted of a capacious one-room cabin with a lean-to storeroom and woodshed. It had been well stocked for the winter, and the two had little to do but stow their belongings and go about their affairs. They had had little to say to each other on the trip up. They apportioned the necessary camp work between them with a minimum of conversation, also.

The first night, Parr, who naturally had more baggage than Jim, did his unpacking after supper was over. Jim sat in the lamplight and watched the big, rather heavy man move surely and with a surprising lightness of foot among his possessions. The trapper seemed to have forgotten that there was another person present. He carefully inspected traps, ropes, and guns, one after another, laying each aside in order. Last, he opened the pack that contained his bed. A wrapped

roll of something was inside it. After Parr had made up his bunk, he took off the wrapping and spread out on the floor a very large black wolf hide.

Jim uttered an involuntary whistle. "That's a beauty! I never saw one so large. Where'd you get it?"

"I didn't get it," was Parr's only answer. He stood for a long moment looking down at the hide, an expression in his face that defied Jim's analysis. It was as if a profound tenderness were overlaid by something grim, almost murderous. For the instant, the cowboy had the feeling that he stood on the rim of a volcano that might burst into violence any second.

He moved uneasily, and Parr gave him one fleeting glance. A veil seemed to drop across the trapper's face, leaving it expressionless as he again turned to his work.

**J**IM gave less and less thought to his companion as the days went by. The adjustment of both to the life they shared was uncommonly easy. And the cowboy was absorbed in his own problem. Day after day, when his feeding was done, he rode across the line into the Indian reservation. He had learned a good deal about Bert Loring and his habits, before tackling this problem. Loring had run stills in three towns that Jim knew of. The man was not only unscrupulous, but he was greedy. He would not, Jim believed, buy the whisky he was selling. He would make it, and realize a greater profit.

The snow held off unusually late that fall. Otherwise the cowboy's search might have ended sooner. But late one December day, while he was hunting two strayed horses in a shallow canyon just outside the

reservation, he came upon a dugout in the hillside. He had nearly passed it by, so well was it hidden behind a thicket of scrub oak and cedar.

He got off his horse and investigated afoot. Once through the brushy screen, he stopped and pursed his lips to a whistle, decided that any sound might prove injudicious, and stepped from sight while he studied the setting. The dugout was at least twenty feet wide and closed by a heavy wooden door which was securely padlocked. Less than two feet of the roof was exposed. The remainder disappeared under the dirt of the steep hillside above. In this piece of visible roof was a ventilator and a stovepipe. A crack between two logs, above the door, no doubt gave added ventilation.

Finally convinced that there was no one about, Jim went back for his horse. When he was in the saddle, he could look into the crack above the door. But a cloth inside, hung out of his reach, made it impossible to see into the interior. However, he could smell.

He nodded to himself with a grim smile. There was no doubt about what sort of activity was carried on here. A search of the grounds near by revealed mounds of freshly turned earth, where the used mash from the still had been buried.

It was nearly a week later before Jim saw the owner of this plant. He had visited it at nearly every hour of the day, only to discover the door locked and signs that told him some one had been there and gone again.

But one lowering evening, just before dark, he saw a figure moving on the hillside above the dugout. The man was coming down the steep slope with a pack over his

shoulder. Jim whipped out the small pair of field glasses that he carried and trained them on the distant figure.

His heart began to hammer. Yes, it was Loring! Though Jim had never seen the man before, he knew him from photographs. The cowboy shoved the glasses back into their case with shaking hand. Now was the time! Settle it now and have it over with.

Jim took out his gun and examined it carefully. He lifted his reins—and a voice said close to him:

"You about ready to start home?"

His body jerked about in the saddle. Not ten feet behind him stood Parr. The expression on the trapper's face cooled Jim's blood like some icy wind. It was a compound of hate and bitter disappointment and grim resolve—a mixture that left the young man no key to its cause. Jarred, confused, but thoroughly on guard, he answered:

"I got some ridin' to do yet."

Parr replied to that: "I'll ride with you. My horse is tied back here a ways."

His glance shifted deliberately to the figure on the opposite hillside. Then his eyes met Jim's fully, saying as plainly as a look could say that he intended to stay with Jim, whether the latter liked it or not.

**A**FTER that, the cowboy was never able to get anywhere near the dugout without seeing Parr somewhere in the vicinity. Jim could not understand when the man attended to his trap lines. But the pile of wolf pelts in the lean-to was slowly piling up.

Not one of these, however, could be compared with the great black pelt in the middle of the cabin floor. Parr never stepped on it. He always

walked around it, and Jim found himself doing the same thing, with a nameless feeling that was half discomfort, half awe.

Then the first big storm of winter struck the high range, and the two went outside the cabin only for the most necessary work. A grim, armed silence had grown up between them, broken only by the barest necessities of speech. Jim never left the cabin that Parr did not leave it, too. The trapper did not obviously follow the cowboy, but he was invariably in evidence if Jim ventured in the neighborhood of the dugout.

There was no sign of Loring after the storm began. Jim was holding his patience. He had waited a good while to get at his man. He could wait a while longer. He might discover no opening again until spring. Then, he planned, he would find some way to shake Parr and finish the job he had set himself.

When at last the four-day storm was over, the country was blanketed with a sheet of snow that would not go off until June. Both men were completely occupied for the next few days, Parr digging out his traps and Jim searching for stray stock. They came into camp too tired at night to do more than get supper and roll into bed.

Jim felt his tension and watchfulness relax during that time. He had an odd conviction that the trapper was no longer interested in his movements. Parr seemed completely absorbed in his own work. He was more withdrawn than ever. There was a curious, steady light in his eyes, as if he were enjoying a secret satisfaction of some sort.

The cowboy believed that Loring would not visit his still again until spring. But he wanted to make

sure. He was working across country in that direction, one raw, gray January day, searching for six head of horses that had not been accounted for since the storm. He rode along the lower gorge of Rock Creek and at last picked up the track of the strays.

He followed the trail for a mile downstream, finding at one point a hole in the ice, which the horses had pawed open for water. The creek, which was a small mountain river, boiled along under a solid white covering of ice and snow. But Jim did not attempt a crossing. He knew that the ice under the snow was thin yet. He found a place where the stray horses had jumped the creek. But his own broncho refused the leap, and he worked on down, looking for a better crossing.

At one point the creek bed lay between two shelving ledges, and he was forced to climb out and cross a wooded bench above.

Suddenly the ears of his horse pricked forward. Jim's eyes followed the direction. He stopped, staring.

Below him, where the ledge was scarcely a dozen feet above the bed of the creek, Parr was crouched in the shelter of a low-spreading spruce. The trapper's back was toward Jim, his rifle at his shoulder, his attention fixed on something across the canyon.

**F**EARFUL of spoiling a shot, Jim got down and walked forward on the crusted snow to see what the man was aiming at. Then the cowboy froze in his tracks for a minute.

Across the canyon, a man was moving furtively among the trees. For an instant he was plainly visible to Jim, though not to Parr.

Loring! Loring's glance was raking the creekside in the vicinity of Parr's position.

Jim was not able to collect his thoughts for a moment. Those two were stalking each other! Stalking each other with deadly intent. There was murder in the rigid shoulders of the crouching man, in the cautious movements across the canyon.

Jim's action was pure impulse. It seemed reasonable enough to him at the time. He intended that this man Loring should hang, for all the world to see. He neither knew nor cared what Parr's grudge might be. Jim was going to avenge his father's death. It was his right to avenge it. And no man was going to cheat him out of that right!

He saw Loring pass from sight into a grove. He plunged down the hill, and launched himself at the shoulders of the unprepared trapper. Parr's rifle went off in the air and flew from his hands. He turned to meet the attack.

Jim's plan had been to throw him flat behind the tree and hold him there. But the tree was much nearer the edge of shelving rock than he knew. Also Parr was a far stronger man than he had dreamed.

It lasted only seconds. Locked in a furious struggle, they tottered on the slippery edge of the shelf and went down together in a smother of snow. Bullets nicked pieces from the cleaned rock above them, as they fell. Parr yanked Jim violently under the ledge and held him down between knees like a vise.

"Lie still, you young fool!" he growled. Lead was still peppering the rock above.

Jim stopped struggling and ordered:

"Let me up!"

Parr complied as he said: "Stay close in, and he can't hit us. He can't come down close enough to shoot under the ledge. The slope's so steep that he'd go into the creek. And now, you half-baked idiot, what do you mean by this performance?"

"What do I mean?" Jim snapped back at him, shaking snow out of hair and collar. "I mean that I'm gonna see that bird swing, and no man is spoiling my plans if I can get there fast enough."

Parr grunted. "Why put the State to all that trouble?"

Jim did not answer. He was feeling himself over with rapid motions, his eyes searching the snow. He looked up blankly.

Parr's smile was grim. "Yeah, your gun's gone, and so is mine, thanks to your fool play. We can either freeze to death here, or crawl out and let him pick us off like rabbits."

They crouched in the snow, glaring at each other, Jim with a sick realization of the situation into which his headlong action had thrown them. Parr watched him a moment and demanded:

"What's your stake in this game, anyhow?"

"Loring murdered my dad."

"Yeah? That's one I hadn't heard about," remarked Parr. "When was that?"

"Three years ago."

"Three years ago?" repeated Parr slowly. "Where?"

"In the Sonomo Mountains." As Jim answered, some reaction in the man opposite seemed to pull the cowboy's glance up to the grim face. Parr asked, slower still:

"Your dad? What was his name?"

"Bates Demery," Jim replied.

THE cowboy saw the countenance of the trapper change amazingly. That softness with which Jim had once before glimpsed rose in the man's face, seemed to flood his whole body. And it gave no impression of weakness. It seemed to add strength and dignity.

Parr had not moved. With strangely gentle eyes he was searching the features of the younger man. He said in a low voice:

"There is so little resemblance—I didn't dream. And I never heard your last name, didn't even think about your having a last name."

Jim could only stare, not getting the drift for a minute.

"You—did you know him?"

Parr nodded. "We were partners for seven years."

"Then you're— Why, you must be Trapper Jan! And I never knew but what Jan was *your* last name!" Jim's eyes were big with astonishment. "And we've been after the same man all the time."

"I didn't know," Parr acknowledged, "what you were hanging around the neighborhood of that dugout for. And I couldn't dispose of Loring while you were there."

It was Jim's turn to ask: "How did you expect to dispose of him?"

Parr's lips drew into a straight line. "The wolves would have taken care of that—when I was through."

"But"—Jim said it steadily—"that would make you a murderer, like him."

"I don't call it murder," Parr retorted, "when I dispose of a wolf."

They listened, but could hear only the muffled roar of the hidden creek, almost at their feet. They would wait for dark, they decided, and then try for an escape.



Parr asked: "What had you intended doing with him?"

"I was going to catch him and force a confession," was Jim's answer, "then turn him over to the law."

"Force it? How?"

The cowboy's eyes were hard. "Any way that seemed necessary. He got dad in the back. With that kind, I wouldn't worry over methods."

Parr nodded. "One of us must get him now." He spaced the words. "We'll work down the bank after dark, then climb out at different points. One—of—us—must get—him, no matter what happens to the other one."

It was Jim's turn to nod. After a time he asked: "What made you so sure he was guilty? You must've been sure, or you wouldn't——" He hesitated.

"Shoot him down like a wolf?" Parr finished the thought. "Of course, you know the circumstances. I had left your dad in camp, after the best winter we ever had with the trap lines. I went out for supplies, got caught in a blizzard, and nearly froze to death. Laid in a squatter's cabin with pneumonia for six weeks. When I got up, I learned about the killing. And all our hides were gone. It's taken me nearly three years, but I finally traced one of those furs back to Loring. We had a secret stamp on every one of them."

Parr stared out into the gathering twilight. "And you spoiled my aim."

"Yes," Jim admitted. "I sabe how you feel. But—but I can't make it seem right. To go deliberately gunning for a man. In a stand-up fight, yes. But—not that

way. Maybe I'm squeamish, but it seems——"

A piercing scream startled both men to immobility. Then they sprang to the edge of the stream. A hundred yards away they saw an upflung arm, rifle in clenched hand. That was all. Another scream, muffled, the snap and crackle of smashing ice. Then silence settled over the gorge once more, except that the sound of the fast-running water was clearer now, for a new hole in the ice.

PARR and Jim climbed out and made their way back to camp without a word. They cooked and ate their supper, then sat before the fire, smoking.

Parr at last broke the silence. "I—owe you something. I might have been a hunted man the rest of my days."

Jim made a quick gesture and changed the subject. "He was trying to cross over to where he could get a sure shot at us—and went in."

"Queer," mused the trapper aloud, "how the thing was taken out of our hands, at the last. That hide, Jim"—Parr was looking down at the black pelt—"that was the last wolf your dad killed. We'd tried to get that black rascal all winter. I found the pelt when I went back to the cabin the next spring. It was put away where Loring didn't find it. I want you to have it, Jim."

Jim made a quick movement of dissent.

"Yes," Parr stopped him. "He would have liked to see you get it, too. I have his hunting knife. His rifle—went down in Rock Creek to-day."

Jim said soberly: "I guess dad

would rather have things the way they are, than the way you and I planned them."

"I know it," agreed Parr. "I've been a fool."

The cowboy grinned suddenly, for the first time feeling the full force of his relief.

"I haven't been such a wise guy, myself," he said.

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### RARE SHEEP AND ELK BAGGED IN CANADA

**T**HE Snyder Canadian Expedition, which has completed the most extensive scientific expedition ever to go into northwestern Canada, obtained more than two hundred specimens of mammals, among them being the first specimens of black-tailed white sheep and elk to come out of the North, said George B. Goodwin, a member of the expedition, in an interview recently in the American Museum of Natural History, where he is assistant curator of mammals.

The expedition was led by Harry Snyder of Chicago. Making use of airplanes, pack trains, river boats, and dog teams, the party covered in eleven weeks seven thousand miles of wilderness and brought back besides the collections of animals fifteen thousand feet of motion-picture films and many still photographs.

The expedition picked up at Lost Channel an Indian guide named Rabbit Foot. Rabbit Foot flew with the party down the lake-dotted country along the Thelon River in the Barren Lands. Here Rabbit Foot led the expedition into territory where musk oxen roamed, increasing in numbers under the rigid protection of the Dominion government.

Some excellent pictures were obtained of the oxen no more than thirty-five feet away, Mr. Goodwin said. Two herds of between thirty and forty were in the vicinity of the parked airplane. They were being stalked by the interpreter of the party when suddenly they got wind of him. The bulls hesitated whether to charge or stampede. Finally the whole herd stampeded, rushing past within a short distance of the airplane, on the roof of which a man was stationed with a camera, and on into the lake.

The expedition flew to the junction of the Nahanni and Linard rivers and there left the airplane for two flat-bottomed boats.

From the river the expedition made side trips into the country, using dogs to carry saddle packs over the rough, mountainous country. Here it was that the black-tailed white sheep were found. The full quota of six was taken, three of which will go to the Canadian National Museum in Ottawa and three to the American Museum of Natural History.

For the last three or four years Indians of the Northwest Territories have spoken of these sheep, but none has ever been taken by a scientific expedition.

The expedition moved on to Tuchodi Lake in northern British Columbia, and there obtained specimens of blue stone mountain sheep and one of a Rocky Mountain goat. A new race of Northern elk was discovered, and eight of the animals were shot for scientific investigation by the Canadian and American museums.

# Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



MOSQUITOS CAN SWIM BEFORE THEY CAN FLY.

INDIANS MADE THEIR ARROWHEADS BY HEATING THE FLINT ROCK, THEN SHAPING IT BY LETTING DROPS OF WATER FALL ON IT, THUS BREAKING OFF SMALL CHIPS.



ARMADILLOS CROSS RIVERS YET THEY CANNOT SWIM. THEY WALK ACROSS THE BOTTOM.



WOOD RATS RARELY STORE A FAULTY NUT IN THEIR HOMES, THUS PROVING THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO DETECT A BAD MEAT WITHOUT CRACKING THE SHELL.

Mr. Young will pay one dollar for any usable Western "Interesting and True" features which readers may send him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Return postage must be included for suggestions found unsuitable.



# UNEASY MONEY

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Author of "Shorty's Sea Lion," etc.

**T**HE telephone rang out sharply—and Sheriff Joe Cook, in his office at Monte Vista, leaped for the instrument like a trout going for a particularly attractive moth. "Shorty," the sheriff's deputy, jumped, also, but not for the telephone. He grabbed for a high-powered rifle in a rack on the office wall. He poised, ready to seize it.

"Yes, this is me!" Sheriff Cook howled into the telephone. "Yes, I thought so, operator. Thanks! We'll breeze right over there pronto!"

Shorty nestled the rifle in the crook of his arm. He waited while the sheriff dropped a big six-gun into a yawning holster.

"The operator says the telephone is off the hook at Gunkle's notion store," snapped the sheriff, slapping his hat on his head and creating a miniature dust storm in so doing. "The operator says she can hear groaning coming over the wire. She figures it's that stick-up guy again!"

"The wisecracking devil!" exclaimed Shorty, as he ran out the door. "He's getting more nerve every day. He'll be holding up us next, boss!"

"Save your breath!" admonished the puffing sheriff, winded by his mad exit from the office. "We got only two blocks to go—but we got to run! We may be hot on his heels this time!"

They ran. And as they ran—the sheriff with one huge hand clamped down hard, as a precautionary measure, against his flopping holster, and Shorty, with the big rifle under his arm—they started others to running, too. Joe Daly, the druggist, who had come to his store door sniffing at a prescription bottle, carefully set the bottle down on the sidewalk and raced after the two John Laws. Johnny Wells, the justice of the peace, zigzagged across the street, running as fleetly as a deer, and took after the druggist, upsetting Daly's carefully deposited prescription bottle as he whizzed past the drug store. Sam Finney, dozing in his buggy in front of the livery stable, leaped out at the commotion and ran, too.

"It's that stick-up fellow again, I reckon!" yelled Daly excitedly.

"He ought to be lynched!" whooped Sam Finney energetically.

"He's got to be caught, first!" shouted Johnny Wells judiciously.

The sheriff and Shorty, going top speed, didn't do any shouting. They were busy thinking, however. If this was another daylight stick-up, it was the seventh in ten days! A new and clever outlaw, apparently, had come into Monte Vista to set the town on its ear. The robber, popping into business places suddenly, was adequately masked with a woman's stocking pulled down over his head, with holes cut in it for his eyes; he wore gloves, carried a whale of a big pistol, took only money as his loot, bragged about his own cunning, and invariably tied

up his victims so that his get-away was assured.

"Here we are—no crowd here yet!" cried Shorty, skidding to a halt.

Breathless, the two officers ran into the notion store.

"Miss Gunkle! Miss Gunkle!" roared Sheriff Cook, apprehension in his voice.

But Shorty, who had run to the back of the store, was the one who answered the sheriff's questioning whoops.

"Here she is—tied up—partly gagged!"

SHERIFF COOK thudded to the rear. There he helped Shorty cut the cords from Miss Gunkle's wrists and ankles, snatch the loosely tied gag from her mouth, and lift her into a chair.

"Oh, dear me!" wailed Miss Gunkle. "I've been held up by that horrid man in the stocking! Yes, he took every cent I had—more'n eighteen dollars—and you won't catch him, Mr. Cook. No, you won't catch him!"

"Who says I won't?" challenged Sheriff Cook, bristling. He remembered that Miss Gunkle was a leading member of the opposite political party. He suspected that she had not voted for him at any of the times he ran for office.

"He says you won't!" retorted Miss Gunkle instantly, and she talked as if she really believed the robber. "He told me, while he was trussing me up like a Christmas turkey, that he was too smart to leave any clues, too wise to leave telltale finger prints, too fast to let any one get the drop on him."

"Yes," cut in Shorty sarcastically, "and that he was too brainy to walk into any trap, that he was too cute to brag about his crimes to any ac-

quaintance, and that he was too clever to even spend the stolen money."

"Why, yes, he did say all that!" exclaimed Miss Gunkle, in an amazed voice. "But how did you know, Shorty? I don't understand how——"

"He's gave that same little modest speech at each of the other six places he's held up recently," explained Shorty, grinning. "He thinks he's an expert. But the bigger they are, the harder they fall, Miss Gunkle! Now, Miss Gunkle, tell us just what happened."

"Oh," said Miss Gunkle, "excuse me—I'm going to faint!"

And faint she did. But when she was brought back to consciousness by Daly, the druggist, assisted by a large gallery of spectators, her story was not any different from the stories of the previous victims. She had been confronted by the masked robber, suddenly, swiftly bound and gagged, lectured and robbed. The robber had been gone fifteen or twenty minutes before the sheriff and Shorty had arrived, she guessed. After much questioning, which proved in vain, Sheriff Cook and Shorty departed, leaving Miss Gunkle in the arms of neighbors, who had brought spirits of ammonia and such.

"That fellow," growled Sheriff Cook belligerently, "is getting to be a blasted pest! And he's smart—there's no getting around that!"

"He isn't so smart, boss," corrected Shorty quickly. "He's letting his mouth run away with him. By his bragging he's given us even a better description of himself than his victims have given us!"

"How you figure that, Shorty?"

"He's hoarding his loot," said Shorty, "seeing he says he isn't spending it. He is a lone wolf, keep-

ing to himself, since he says he doesn't talk to any acquaintances. He's perpetually armed if he isn't, as he claims, going to let any one get the drop on him. He's alert and circulating right in our midst if he isn't going to walk into a trap, as he brags, for, otherwise, how could he keep track of traps and plans to nab him? And lastly, seeing he boasts about leaving no finger prints, I'd say he was an ex-con, whose finger prints are on record. Now, with all this, we got something to work on—something definite, I'd say, boss!"

Sheriff Cook grunted. He favored Shorty with a discouraging look.

"This newfangled deducting is mostly hocus-pocus," pronounced the sheriff. "I'm still for the old tried-and-true methods of running down and checking every suspicious character in town; jailing all the tramps; sending out all available stool pigeons; watching for signs of sudden prosperity where only poverty has loomed before; and waiting for the break that must eventually come. Maybe some storekeeper will shoot him on his next attempt."

"A cheerful hope," agreed Shorty, nodding, "but not very promising." Shorty's eyes narrowed suddenly. "If I was ordered to solve this case fast, I wouldn't look for the robber at all!" he blurted out.

"Who would you look for—his aunt?"

"No, for something the bird forgot to remember!" returned Shorty, with a deep sigh. "You see, boss, I figure——"

"You had better figure that you hadn't better forget to remember that we got to catch the bozo in person!" snapped Sheriff Cook peevishly. "We're concentrating on *him* and not on anything he forgot! You leave your deducting to amuse your-

self with when we ain't got any pressing business. At the present time we got pressing business. That's for you to remember!"

"You bet!" agreed Shorty smoothly, but there was a glitter in his eyes that belied his honeyed words. He wasn't just ready to argue yet.

**W**E'LL just get busy on this case right now and proceed to run the miscreant to earth promptly," declared Sheriff Cook, as soon as they had reached the office. "I figure the first item in our campaign had better be to warn all prospective victims of the outlaw to be prepared to get a visit from him and to try to be ready to wing him with a shotgun if he does come. Such widespread advice may be of wonderful value."

"You may be advising the merchants to commit suicide that way," protested Shorty, shaking his head sadly. "The outlaw will have the drop and be ready for resistance. A victim wouldn't have a chance."

But Sheriff Cook picked up the receiver of the telephone. He asked for the chief operator, and when he got her, he explained his plans.

"I'm going to call every store in Monte Vista," he informed her, "to warn 'em all about this stick-up guy. Just see that I get good service. I may be busy broadcasting my message for a hour or more. See?"

The answer must have been reassuring, for the sheriff reached for the telephone directory promptly. Then he spoke sharply to Shorty.

"You go out and get started on the second item in our campaign—which is rounding up and chucking in the cooler any tramps or suspicious strangers," ordered Cook crisply. "You should be able to clean up that item by the time I'm

through telephoning. After which, I anticipate, we will start on another item in the campaign. Get going, Shorty!"

Shorty got to his feet with a shrug. He hesitated and seemed about to speak to his superior, but at that moment Sheriff Cook got the A-1 Bakery on the wire. Out of the corner of his eye the sheriff saw Shorty lingering, and waved him on impatiently. Again Shorty shrugged—and went out.

But Shorty did not immediately head toward the railroad "jungles," where a few tramps might always be found. Instead he made for the vicinity of the Gunkle store, the latest victim of the outlaw. He stood across the street from the place for some time, apparently lost in the deepest thought. After that he strolled around in the same immediate neighborhood, merely grunting to passing acquaintances and showing all the signs of abstraction. Finally, taking out his notebook, Shorty drew a crude map. He licked the lead pencil and carefully placed various little cross marks on his map. Then, straightening up, Shorty walked swiftly to the bridge over Conejos Creek. Again he seemed lost in thought as he stared across the bridge toward the near-by slope of Old Baldy Mountain. He eyed the mountain for all of ten minutes.

"Gee!" he said, suddenly coming back to earth. "I'd better go get me a tramp to satisfy Cook. I got to pretend to be following his orders, anyway."

Fifteen minutes later Shorty arrived at the jail with two tramps. The hobos, it seemed, were not greatly averse to going to jail, seeing that both had just slipped from a westbound train and were hungry. Shorty, on the way up, had assured

them: that they'd get a fairly good supper. Turning his captives over to the jailer, Shorty reported at Cook's office.

The sheriff was just hanging up the telephone receiver.

"Well?" he snapped peevishly.

"Jugged two tramps," reported Shorty quietly.

"Two? Why only two? There's usually ten or twelve down back of the tracks. The rest get away from you, you clumsy ox?"

"None got away," protested Shorty, in an injured tone. "I nabbed all there were. There was just two, believe it or not!"

The sheriff went back to his telephone directory.

"I'm well along in the M's now," he said, his tone softening. "You go out and pick up any suspicious characters you can find around the cheap rooming houses and pool rooms. Throw 'em in the cooler."

Shorty gave his superior a strange glance:

"And then what?" he asked softly.

"Then come back here!" The sheriff was getting angry again. "We've got a lot of hard work ahead of us, and I mean to see that we do it. If you been planning on going out to lallygag with any girl this evening or to take in a picture show or to go horseback riding in the moonlight, you had best forget your silly ideas. We're going to work—you report back here!"

The sheriff resumed his telephoning. He called the Modern Grocery and repeated the warning he had been circulating so persistently.

"Listen," he said. "This is Sheriff Cook. I just want to suggest that maybe you might be next on the list of that stick-up guy. If he comes in, greet him with a blast of hot lead. . . . How? I don't give a whoop how you do it but try to co-

operate with us to that extent, please. Let your wife or your helper hide and be ready to shoot. . . . No, you don't have to shoot any customer! . . . How will you know the robber? Well. . . . No, I admit I don't know him myself, sir—but he'll be masked and have a gun. All your customers don't wear masks and carry rods, do they? . . . Well, just be prepared. That's all. Good-by!"

The sheriff sank back in his chair and rubbed his perspiring face with a big red bandanna.

"How some of these dumb store-keepers manage to make a living is beyond me," he gasped weakly. "The silly questions they ask!"

But, with grim resolution, Cook reached for the telephone again. He had a long list to call yet before he could say that he was through. He was getting hoarse as well as out of patience. But he manfully struggled through the rest of the M's, then through the N's, through the O's, which were few, and into the P's and thence into the R's.

He sank back to rest again, and the telephone rang in the interval.

"This is Joe Baker at the Mexicali Café," said a voice. "I wish you'd tell Shorty that as far as I can find out none of my friends have any Mexican jumping beans. And they don't know where there are any!"

"Mexican jumping beans?" repeated Sheriff Cook, slightly bewildered. "What about 'em? Who wants 'em?"

"Shorty was just in looking for some," said the voice. "I'm sorry I can't help him none. You tell him, will you?"

"I sure will!" said the sheriff grimly. He banged down the receiver "Mexican jumping beans, Shorty wants 'em, eh? The dog-gone fool! I send him out to arrest



suspicious characters, and he spends his time looking for Mexican jumping beans. Another of his idiotic hobbies, I'll bet a dollar. Will I tell him? Yes, I'll tell him! I'll tell him with a boot in the pants! I got a big notion to go out and find him and—and——"

But the sheriff restrained himself. Doggedly he picked up the telephone directory again. He started calling where he had left off—in the middle of the R's. Eventually he got through the S's, T's, and U's. There were no V's, only one W, no X's, two Y's, no Z's. The sheriff sank back in his chair. He was sure now of two things. In the first place he had arranged a hot reception for the stick-up with all the merchants of Monte Vista; in the second place he was now free to go out and search for Shorty. But somehow he felt too tired to move just then. He leaned back—and a minute later he was sound asleep, quite exhausted after his hours of telephoning.

And it was probably just as well that the sheriff slept. Shorty did not return to the office that night. And even if Sheriff Cook had gone sailing out, in the majesty of his wrath, to locate his delinquent deputy and to take up with him the matter of the Mexican jumping beans, it was hardly likely that the sheriff could have located Shorty!

**W**HEN morning came—so did Shorty. Sheriff Cook, angry at himself for having slept all night in the office chair, growled a greeting to his deputy that was quite characteristic—and much to the point.

"Where in Hades have you been?" demanded Cook instantly.

"Working," said Shorty, "on suspicious characters, boss."

"Since when have Mexican jump-

ing beans become suspicious characters in this town, sir?" demanded Sheriff Cook heatedly. "I send you out to help me catch a stick-up, but all you chase is Mexican jumping beans! I tell you——"

But the sheriff didn't get the chance to tell Shorty anything just then, because the office door opened furtively and a slouched figure eased in. It was "Old Ed," a town character. The sheriff greeted him warmly.

"I sent for you, Ed, to ask your help!" said Cook. "We got to get that stick-up guy. You've got to help us—you and all the other informers! Keep your ears open. If we don't get some cooperation from you—informers, we're going to vag the whole bunch. Get going, Ed, and spread the word around!"

"Sure will, sheriff!" agreed Ed, backing out hastily.

The sheriff consulted his notebook. He frowned as he scanned a list.

"I got every dog-gone stool pigeon but that crazy, half-witted galoot called Blackie," said Cook sourly. "I got 'em all working hard on the case. I'd say it was a matter of hours only until we have the stick-up in jail. By sending out warnings, arresting all the tramps, putting the word out to all informers, I've done a big part of the work. But you, Shorty, you haven't picked up a single suspicious character! I guess you and me had better go out together now and——"

The telephone interrupted, and Shorty beat the sheriff to it.

"Oh, yes, Bill!" said Shorty answering. "No, never mind. I got 'em. Thanks just the same. Sorry to have bothered you. Good-by!"

Shorty put down the receiver and turned toward the sheriff.

"I'm off on a hot tip—see you later!" he cried, slapping on his

warped Stetson. "So long, boss—see you later!"

And he was gone before the sheriff could say a word or even stick out a foot to trip him. The sheriff pondered for a minute. Bill? Who in heck was Bill? Ah, maybe that Bill at the Cantina Café! The sheriff picked up the telephone directory, ran a finger down a page, called a number. It was a hunch.

"Bill?" he asked. "Say, this is Sheriff Cook. Did you just call Shorty about some Mexican jumping beans? . . . You did, eh? He said he had some, eh? . . . Oh, nothing. I was just curious, that's all. Good-by!"

Sheriff Cook stood up. He grabbed for his hat, saying something under his breath as he did so. He made for the door in great strides.

"I'll Mexican-jumping-bean him!" he exclaimed, his mustache bristling ominously. "I'll demonstrate to that bozo that he can jump higher and faster and farther than any Mexican bean when I land on him! A swell deputy! Send him out for a crook, and he's chasing a jumping bean! I'll have no more of that tommyrot! I'll find him and wipe up the street with him! We'll have another big stick-up here first thing we know—and him fooling away our time! I'll locate him and tan his hide for him!"

But Sheriff Cook, it appeared, was overly optimistic. He didn't find Shorty, although he searched diligently for him. He looked up one street and down the other. He visited several of Shorty's favorite hang-outs—the dog pound, the unloading corral at the railroad yards, the livery stable, a number of cafés, but all in vain. And nobody had seen Shorty, either. An hour passed, and Sheriff Cook halted at the cor-

ner of Main and Pecos streets and leaned up against a lamp post, exhausted and angry.

"Hang that idiot!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

"Hold up the lynching until I show you something, boss!" said a familiar voice at his elbow.

The sheriff wheeled. It was Shorty.

"Come along with me and make it snappy," urged Shorty. "I got a sight for your eyes, I think."

"A jumping bean?" asked Sheriff Cook disgustedly.

"Come on," said Shorty mysteriously, as he beckoned.

The sheriff went, grumbling. But Shorty made no explanations. Instead Shorty headed straight for the bridge over Conejos Street. As they crossed it, Shorty nodded toward Old Baldy Mountain.

"There's a long tunnel over yonder, abandoned since the gold-mining boom around these parts forty-five years ago," said Shorty. "I figure that would be a dandy place for a holdup bird to cache his loot. I think we ought to go in and investigate a little bit, maybe." Shorty looked at his watch. "It may take us an hour to do it but—"

"It's a wild-goose chase," interposed Cook. "There's a million places in these hills to hide loot. The tunnel is one shot in the million."

However, the sheriff followed Shorty. The deputy went only about fifty feet into the dark and damp tunnel before he paused. He snapped on a flashlight and invited the sheriff to step back behind a pile of old mine timbers at that point. Sheriff Cook stepped, but with a question:

"What's the idea now?"

"We're waiting here a few minutes, boss."

"What for? Who is coming?"

"Time," answered Shorty, "will reply to that question, boss."

THE sheriff pondered the answer thoughtfully. At first he was of the mind to bolt out, telling Shorty to go to blazes. But mature deliberation convinced Cook that he could afford to wait a little while to see just what Shorty might be driving at. After all, there was still ample time to shout his war cry, "Mexican jumping beans," and start kicking Shorty up Main Street.

But ten minutes passed and then ten more. After a half hour's wait the sheriff was impatient. Another five minutes and he nudged Shorty.

"What's the idea?"

"Sh-h-h! Here comes some one!"

Sure enough, some one was coming. The sheriff stiffened. It was rather spooky in the old tunnel at that. And it was very dark, too, at that particular point, due to a bend in the tunnel. The sheriff heard the approaching footsteps, and his hair bristled. He put a precautionary hand to his holster, expectantly. The footfalls grew louder.

Shorty nudged Cook. The footsteps had stopped. The sheriff, cocking his head, could hear some one poking around. The sheriff's heart pounded.

"Say, what the——" came a hoarse, hushed voice.

The next second there was a rattle of tin as something dropped with a clatter. The sheriff, startled, was too amazed to move. But he saw Shorty's flashlight beam go stabbing through the inky blackness. He saw Shorty jump from hiding. He saw Shorty's revolver in Shorty's hand and he heard Shorty's quick yell:

"Stick 'em up, brother—stand where you are!"

Sheriff Cook edged around the pile of timbers carefully.

"We got him!" said Shorty triumphantly. "Here's your stick-up, boss—caught by uneasy money—knocked off because he forgot to remember!"

The stranger with the uplifted hands scowled darkly at his captors.

"What did I forget to remember?" he snarled defiantly. "You just had a lucky break catching me here, that's all. I was too smart for you lawmen under ordinary circumstances. I was too smart to leave any clues, too wise to leave any finger prints, too fast to let any one know——"

"All that's granted," agreed Shorty, searching his prisoner, "but you forgot to remember that if you didn't spend your loot, which was always in money, you must, perforce, hide it—and it might be found. Also, you forgot to remember that ill-gotten gains are never of any value. It's uneasy money."

The prisoner looked quickly at the coffee tin on the tunnel floor.

"Pick it up, boss," said Shorty, clicking the handcuffs on the stranger, "and bend an ear there. That's some of the stolen money. Listen to it!"

The sheriff lifted the covered can. Sure enough, there were sounds of movement inside of it. Cook appeared ready to drop the can, too—just as the robber had done a few moments before. But Shorty laughed.

"Uneasy money"—he grinned—"but really nothing but Mexican jumping beans in there! You see, boss, I got a hunch that the robber here might be using this tunnel to cache his loot, seeing that all of his

store robberies were fairly close to the mouth of this tunnel, all in the same region, which might account for his quick disappearance after each robbery.

"So I watched the tunnel. I saw this guy sneak in here. When he came out, I tailed him, found out he was a taciturn stranger living at the New Grant rooms. I went back to the tunnel and found three or four of these coffee cans with loot in 'em without a great deal of searching. But money is hard to identify as stolen. I decided I had to catch him here with it. But that, I knew, might mean days and nights, even weeks, of watchful waiting. I had to get him up here in a hurry. But that, after all, wasn't hard.

"Checking on him at the New Grant, I found he was sort of superstitious. He was always talking about lucky days and signs, good

omens and bad, to the old landlady there. So I put Blackie, one of our informants, to work on him. I dolled Blackie up as a sort of Hindu mystic and sent him in. He managed to gain some of this gent's confidence and put over the message of uneasy money. He pretended to have an uncanny message for the guy here about hidden money that couldn't rest—and this gent came up to see about it.

"When I heard him drop the can, I stepped out—and he was caught!"

Sheriff Cook looked at the coffee can he still held. It was still noisy. It would startle any one who didn't know the secret.

"Next spring," said the sheriff softly, "I'm planting some of these Mexican jumping beans in my garden. I'll always have a warm spot in my heart for them. Come on, Shorty; let's start back towards daylight!"

*A Complete Novel, "BUZZARD BAIT," by WILLIAM LE TEVRE,*

*in Next Week's Issue.*

#### BUYING LAND FOR BIRD REFUGES

**B**UYING of land for Federal migratory bird refuges in New Mexico is under way and details will be announced when the purchases are completed. Regional Director Don Gilchrist of the biological survey said recently. No definite amount is allotted, the total depending on the number of refuges decided upon.

Improvement of the Carlsbad Federal bird refuge has been started with funds allotted by J. Clark Salyer II, head of the survey's migratory bird restoration program. A caretaker has been employed, a steel observation tower 125 feet high erected to help detect refuge violators, and a cabin built so the caretaker can live on the refuge.



# COW THIEF

By B. BRISTOW GREEN

Author of "The Law Rides," etc.

**T**HE six-foot, broad-shouldered young puncher looked down slant-eyed at the only other man at the Silver Dollar bar.

"Pardner," he said gravely, "you happen to know six other good cow thieves besides yourself?"

The small man jerked, and his eyes blinked.

"What the—— Feller, you done made me spill my liquor. I don't know no cow thieves 'less I'm talking to one."

The tall man nodded. "That makes two of us. We need six more," he said calmly, and added: "Brent is my name. If I got you placed right, you're Chet Marvin,

one-time bronc stomper for the Wagon Wheel."

"Yeah, but that don't make me a cow thief."

"No?" Brent flicked the ash from his cigarette. "Kinda figured it might—unless you aim to sit around while Jud Tanner loses his Wagon Wheel spread and goes to prison."

"Huh! What do you know——" Chet Marvin's eyes flashed to the back mirror as three men pushed through the swing doors. "Speaking of cow thieves, there's three if you're partial to skunks."

"Brad Vickers, isn't it?" Brent queried easily.

"In person, and with plenty back-

ing," Marvin rasped. "Reckon he's looking for me."

"Nope," Brent drawled. "He's looking for me."

Chet Marvin snapped a glance at the big puncher. "That being the case, you sure recommend yourself a lot to me."

Elbows resting on the bar, Brent looked up into the face of Brad Vickers, and a tension rippled along his back muscles. A dangerous man, was his quick appraisal. Reckless daring marked the hard-lined face, and wolf cunning gleamed in the close-set eyes.

"You've been around Cottonwood four days, fellow," Vickers said. "You aim to take root here?"

"Just figure to take in the sights," Brent answered softly.

"Them sights don't include the Wagon Wheel range where you was riding three days ago. I'm ramrodding that outfit, and we don't want no trespassing."

Brent's lips edged into a thin smile. "That's the most interesting place I've seen around Cottonwood; specially that east range."

"You keep off the Wagon Wheel while you can tell east from west," Vickers snarled. "I'm warning you."

The drawl suddenly left Brent's voice.

"I got your warning three days ago—a shot from behind some bushes. If you want me off that range, you better make sure of it now. Or do you have to be behind a bush?"

Vickers leaped back in a crouch.

"You're calling me, fellow?"

"Any time."

Chet Marvin's voice knifed through the tension. Two guns had flashed from his holsters to cover Vickers's henchmen.

"You lobos keep your hands still!"

**T**HROUGH a minute's brittle silence Vickers's hand hung above his gun. There came the thump of heavy feet on the porch. A big man wearing a sheriff's star strode in.

Vickers shot a venomous glance at Brent.

"You get away with it this time, fellow, but I'll be seeing you—unless you take a notion to ride the Wagon Wheel when I ain't there."

The sheriff watched the three men file out and turned cold eyes on Chet Marvin.

"Marvin, you get Tanner's old hands out of town. You can't do him no good hanging around till the trial comes up."

"How about Vickers and his gang?" Chet snapped.

"They got to be here when the trial starts. They're witnesses."

"And how!" Chet barked and turned his back on the sheriff.

When the officer was gone, Chet Marvin looked at Brent. There was stormy violence in his eyes and voice.

"Now about them cow thieves you was mentioning—what's the idea?"

Brent ordered drinks and nodded toward the end of the bar. When they were out of hearing of the bartender, he looked around the room. The only other man in the saloon had been the Mexican swamper. He had disappeared.

"It's like this," Brent said. "The Half Circle Dot bought that two-thousand-dollar mortgage the bank was carrying against Tanner's Wagon Wheel spread. It's about due, and they've got Tanner in jail charged with stealing a hundred head of Half Circle steers."

Chet snorted. "It's a frame-up so's Tanner won't have a chance to raise that two thousand. Jud Tanner never rustled nobody's cattle."

He's been on crutches for months with a busted hip."

Brent nodded. "I know. But them steers are on Tanner's west range; all of 'em wearing brand-new Wagon Wheel name plates. Way the court will see it, he figured to sell them steers to lift his mortgage. His own cattle ain't worth two bits a head."

Marvin frowned. "It's plumb curious how Tanner's range got so thick with loco all of a sudden."

Brent ignored the comment and went on: "I got a scheme to save Tanner's hide."

There was sharp suspicion in the glance Marvin shot at Brent.

"How come a stranger rides into Cottonwood and horns into this play so prompt and thorough? You a long-lost son or something?"

"Figure it your own way," Brent said. "I've got reasons, good ones, for not wanting Jud Tanner to go broke or be sent to prison. If I didn't have, I wouldn't be taking the chance of stopping lead from some gun-slinging posse." His eyes bore down on Marvin's. "If Tanner's old hands ain't interested enough to set in, I'll hire a bunch to do it for pay."

"Deal your cards, mister," Chet snapped. "If I like the looks of 'em, I can round up a bunch that would bust a cinch to get the Old Man out of this mess."

For ten minutes Brent talked. When he finished, Chet Marvin studied him silently. At last he said:

"You win, hombre. Seeing you call Vickers that a way, I figure you've got nerve enough to put this play through, but"—an edge came into his voice—"if you've got some notion of double-crossing Jud Tanner—don't do it."

Brent met the threat level-eyed.

"I told you I had good reasons. It means plenty to me to put this play through. The stronger you look after Tanner's interests, the better pleased I'll be."

"All right," Chet said. "Say where and when. I'll have the ringiest bunch of cow thieves that ever flung a loop."

"The time is eleven o'clock to-night. The place, the top of that hogback above the line cabin at the south edge of the Wagon Wheel."

The suspicion left Chet's eyes. "Keno!" he snapped and started for the door. He stopped in mid-stride and came back.

"Pardner, maybe there's one thing you don't know. The Half Circle outfit figured to run them steers home and then prove in court that Tanner stole 'em. The sheriff has two special deputies riding night guard."

A thin smile edged Brent's lips. He pulled a small, flat package from his vest pocket.

"I've been watching those guards," he said. "They've got a habit of coming to the cabin at eleven o'clock for a snack. They don't bother to make fresh coffee. I aim to beat them to that coffeepot and see that they get a good night's sleep." His face tightened sharply. "I don't figure to cut any notches in my guns unless I have to, but see that your bunch comes heeled."

**B**RENT smiled as he watched the little bronc twister leave. He hadn't made a mistake in picking Chet Marvin. The way the man had dragged his irons in the run-in with Vickers showed he could be depended on.

As Brent was leaving, he glanced back. The bartender was talking to the swamper. Brent wondered where the Mexican had been.

When he reached the street, a young puncher hailed him.

"Got a letter for you, fellow."

Brent tore open the envelope, and as he studied the contents, his lips tightened.

"How is Jack Mason, Slim?" he asked.

"Fine. Him and me's got a bet on. He's gambling ten bucks you stretch hemp."

"Better hedge your bet, boy," Brent said. "I'm heading into a salty bunch. I could use you in this play, Slim."

The puncher shook his head. "I got to ride soon as I eat. That's orders."

When "Slim" had gone, Brent stood thinking for a moment and then headed for the sheriff's office. Before he went in, he glanced behind him. One of Vickers's men was watching him from half a block down the street. The law officer was at his desk when Brent entered.

"Mind if I have a word with Tanner, sheriff?"

The sheriff eyed him suspiciously. "Didn't I see you with Chet Marvin in the Silver Dollar?"

"Yeah. I kinda talked Marvin into getting his gang out of town. Showed him it wouldn't do Tanner any good for his friends to go smoking things up."

The sheriff's eyes brightened. "You sure done me a favor." He jerked his head toward the rear. "Jud's in the back room. It wouldn't be right to put him in a cell with that busted leg. He gave me his word to stay hitched, and I rigged him a bunk where he'd be comfortable. Go 'long in."

Brent found the old cattleman with his lame leg propped on a pillow. Their conversation lasted some ten minutes. As Brent went out through the front office, he said:

"Looks like Tanner's in a bad mess."

The officer's eyes darkened. "Don't believe Jud Tanner ever stole any cows."

Brent shook his head solemnly. "Can't tell what a man will do when he gets in a tight place. Hope he gets out of it all right."

As he stepped out of the sheriff's office, Brent swept the street with a searching glance. Vickers's man was watching him from the porch of a restaurant.

An hour later, Brent went to the restaurant for supper. He had to get out to the Wagon Wheel ahead of Marvin and his men in order to take care of the two guards. While he was eating, Vickers's man came in and took a stool at the end of the counter. Brent's nerves tightened. If the fellow trailed him out of town, he would have to be gotten rid of.

When he had eaten, Brent strolled toward the livery barn. Turning through the doorway, he stopped in the shadows and looked back. The man was crossing the street rapidly toward the Silver Dollar.

**S**ADDLING his horse, Brent rode down the street. He could avoid passing the saloon by swinging around the town, but if he was being followed, he wanted to know it.

He rode slowly even after he had left the town, listening for sounds of pursuit. A mile out, he stopped, sitting quietly, ears strained. The night was still, and hoofbeats could have been heard a long ways. Satisfied that he was not being followed, he put his horse to a lope.

In an hour and a half he was riding up the east slope of the hogback where, later, he was to meet Marvin and his men. It would be fully an hour before they got there.



From the top of the ridge, he looked down on Tanner's west range. In the flood of moonlight, he could see the herd of steers bedded down for the night. Then his nerves jerked taut. The night guards were not with the cattle. There was a light in the cabin and two horses standing at the door.

Brent swore. For four nights he had ridden out to watch the guards. Each night they had come to the cabin at eleven o'clock to eat, and now they had come in more than an hour earlier. There was no chance to use that drug he had planned to slip into their coffee.

His fingers spread stiffly and slid along his holsters. He had hoped to pull this off without gun play. Now there was nothing for it but to go down and disarm the guards and tie them up. It was bad business holding up deputy officers.

Leading his horse part way down the hill, he tied the animal to a bush and slipped softly ahead. Near the cabin he stopped, eyes and ears searching the shadows. Only two horses at the door and he heard a voice in the cabin. The two guards were there.

Stealthily he crept to the end of the cabin. His muscles tightened for a leap to the door. A crunching step whirled him to catch the sharp thrust of a gun against his stomach.

"Reach, fellow, quick!"

Brent's hands went up.

"Turn round and get inside!"

With the gun prodding his back, Brent stepped through the cabin door and stopped short before the leveled guns of seven masked men. His guns were snapped from their holsters and thrown on a bunk. With a wrench, his arms were jerked behind him. A big man stepped forward and slugged a vicious blow to his jaw. Brent sagged, half stunned.

When his head cleared, he was bound and gagged. With an effort of will, he kept his eyes closed and listened. One of the men was asking:

"We going to leave him here?"

"No. Drag him out in the bushes and bring his horse to the door. When his gang comes, they'll waste time looking for him."

"What about that fellow you gunned? He's still out on the range."

"Leave him there. We'll haze his horse off and pin the killing on Tanner's gang. Some of you bring our horses up. We've got to get started. There'll be a posse on our tail."

Brent was sure that he recognized that voice. Through slitted lids, he swept the masked faces. With a shock, his eyes stopped on a stocky figure. Above the man's mask showed the brown-skinned forehead of a Mexican.

**T**WO men caught Brent by the armpits and dragged him outside. Twenty feet from the cabin, they dropped him behind some bushes and hurried back.

Futile, bitter fury swept Brent. That voice belonged to Brad Vickers. The Mexican was the swamper from the Silver Dollar. The man must have crawled back of the bar and heard his conversation with Marvin.

For a moment Brent strained against his bonds and then suddenly lay quiet. The men had come out of the cabin and stood talking while they waited for their horses. Through the stillness, their voices reached him. It was Vickers who was speaking.

"We'll get them steers started, and then three of you can handle 'em. The rest of us are heading for town

pronto. Letting one of those guards get away was bad."

"What's the idea going to town? You'll run into the posse."

"Exactly. With five of us riding straight into town, we won't be suspected of this job. We'll swear it was Tanner's bunch gunned that guard and got away with the steers. It's lucky we had our faces covered."

"Yeah, but they'll trail that herd straight to the Half Circle."

Vickers laughed raspingly. "Think I'm a fool? I never had no notion of taking them steers to the Half Circle. Run 'em back into Bear Paw Basin. Soon as the posse goes back to town, we'll take 'em where they won't be found. When the trial's over, we'll cash in on them steers. The Half Circle outfit won't dare make a holler."

Blind rage surged through Brent. Brad Vickers had gotten wind of his scheme and turned it to his own benefit. The sheriff would be quick to believe that it was Tanner's old hands who had stolen the steers so there would be no evidence when Tanner came to trial. He, himself, had told the sheriff that Marvin and his bunch were leaving town. Bitterly Brent cursed himself for walking into that trap at the cabin. Vickers had been clever, leaving just two horses at the door to make him think the guards were there.

Through the bushes, Brent watched the gang get the herd on the move. Then he set doggedly to work to free himself, but the men who had bound him knew how to tie knots. Minutes slipped by in wrenching, sweating effort till he lay exhausted and half suffocated by the choking gag.

As he lay panting, there came the sound of hoofs and voices. A thrill shot through Brent. Marvin and

his men were coming down the slope of the hogback.

Eagerly he watched them ride out and stop near the cabin. There was a minute's silence, and then Chet Marvin's voice lifted with a snarling bitterness.

"Them steers are gone! That double-crossing snake run 'em off himself and figured we'd get the blame. I knowed there was something crooked with his locoed scheme."

Brent strove to cry out, but a choked gurgle was all that came. Then Marvin's voice rose savagely:

"He can't get away with it! That herd can't travel as fast as we can. Come on. We'll pick up the trail. I'm going to sink that hombre with a load of lead."

Again Brent tried to call and twisted his body in an effort to crash against the bushes. The rapid beat of the horses' hoofs drowned the sound.

WHEN Brent finally freed himself, it was past midnight. He limped toward the cabin heavy-spirited with chagrin and self-condemnation. There had been an easier, surer way to save Tanner, but he had wanted to make the Half Circle outfit pay for their crookedness. He had only gotten the old cattleman deeper in the mire and brought on himself the vengeance of the law and the fury of Brad Vickers and Chet Marvin. Old Jack Mason was right; if he didn't stop lead, there was plenty of chance that he would stretch hemp on this deal.

His horse still stood at the cabin door. With bitterness he realized that Marvin didn't know his horse. If the men found the body of the guard, they would think that the animal belonged to him. A shock of new danger shot through Brent.

Marvin, too, would think that he had killed the guard.

Brent found his guns on the bunk. With his weapons in the holsters and in the saddle again, his courage returned. There must be some way to checkmate Vickers and save the herd. His face set grimly as he put his horse up the slope.

When he reached the top of the ridge, he sat thinking. Only three of Vickers's men had gone with the herd. If he could find this Bear Paw Basin, he would take a chance, but he didn't know this section of the range. He would have to pick up the trail and follow it.

Another thought brought a frown to his face. Vickers would know that the posse would follow the herd. He must be sure that there was some place where the trail would be lost.

As he rode down the ridge, a glimmer of hope came to him. He, at least, knew where the steers were being taken. The sheriff didn't. If he could overtake Marvin and his men, they might know where this hide-out was located.

A movement off to the north caught his eyes. Horsemen were coming. The posse!

Brent swung behind a clump of bushes and sat watching. It would be worse than useless to take the trail ahead of the posse. On the open range, they would see him, and there was no explanation he could give for being there. It didn't seem possible that Vickers could have reached town. It must have been the guard who had escaped and taken word to the sheriff.

A bold plan flashed into Brent's mind. At least it offered a chance to find out where the trail would be lost.

Riding back to the top of the ridge, he watched the posse come on the range where the steers had been

bedded down. They swung from their saddles and gathered around something on the ground. Two men picked it up and carried it toward the cabin. Brent knew that they had found the body of the guard. In a few minutes the men were mounted again and riding rapidly in the direction the herd had been driven.

As they disappeared around the end of the ridge, Brent rode down the hill and took up the trail. When he rounded the ridge, the posse was nearly out of sight, and he spurred his horse to a swift lope.

**T**HERE was a hint of dawn in the east when he overtook the posse. With a sharp tightening of his nerves, he saw that Brad Vickers was riding on one side of the sheriff. The man had nerve or else he was sure that the cattle were safely hidden. Brent spurred his horse until he was alongside the sheriff.

The officer looked at him with amazement and suspicion.

"Where the devil did you come from?"

"Heard some of Vickers's men say those steers had been stolen," Brent answered boldly. "I hit the trail after you left town. I'm a friend of Tanner's, and it looks like he might need a friend."

Brent shot a glance at Vickers. The man's face was twisted in a vicious snarl. He had been caught by surprise. Brent was a stranger, not one of Tanner's old hands. It wouldn't do for Vickers to admit that his gang had been in the line cabin when Brent got there. The man kept silent, but Brent read a threat of death in the gleaming eyes.

"Where's Chet Marvin and his bunch?" the sheriff demanded. "You said they had left town."

"Reckon they did," Brent an-

swered. "I haven't seen Marvin since I was with him in the Silver Dollar."

For a time they rode in silence. The trail of the stolen steers was easy to follow in the growing dawn. Rankling bitterness stirred Brent. He had fallen down on the job. Tanner's spread might still be saved, but the Half Circle outfit would profit, and the chances were good that Tanner would go to prison.

It was broad daylight when the posse pulled up on the east bank of Cottonwood Creek, five miles from the point where they had taken up the trail.

Brent's eyes swept the opposite bank. If things had gone as he had planned, those steers would have crossed the creek at this point and would now be scattered among the thousands of cattle on the big Mason spread beyond the county line. Not a hoofprint showed on the other side. The trail turned straight south along the east bank.

The sheriff was puzzled. "Don't see where they could be taking them steers unless they aim to run 'em plumb across the border."

So far the trail was plain enough. Brent wondered where Vickers expected it to be lost. The snarl on the man's face had changed to a worried frown. Something had slipped in Vickers's plan. Had his three men double-crossed him?

"Come on," the sheriff barked. "If them thieves think they can get plumb to Mexico with that herd, they'll never make it."

Again the posse strung out along the trail. They covered the next three miles at a lope. Then the trail turned straight east.

"What the devil!" the sheriff growled. "They're running them steers in circles."

A moment later, Brent caught the

drift of a cloud of dust far ahead. The sheriff saw it and shouted:

"We've got 'em, men! That's the herd!"

With a concerted yell, the posse raced toward the dust cloud. To Brent it seemed that the end had come for both him and Vickers.

If the men driving that herd were from Vickers's gang, he wouldn't dare try to charge them with stealing the steers on their own account. They would turn on him with a charge of murdering the deputy sheriff.

If it should be Marvin and his bunch, Brent knew that he was up against it. Chet Marvin thought that he had been double-crossed. If it came to a show-down, the fiery little horse breaker was likely to drag his guns against the man he thought had tricked him.

**T**HE gap narrowed rapidly. With a shock of amazement, Brent saw that there was only one man with the cattle. He was riding rapidly back and forth across the tail of the herd urging them on. Even through the haze of dust, there was something familiar about the swiftly moving figure.

The tension in Brent's brain tightened. With a rake of the spurs he shot ahead. While he was tied up in those bushes, his horse had been resting. It was fresher than any of the others. With long-reaching strides it pulled ahead.

The lone rider with the herd whirled, and Brent shouted.

"Chet!"

Chet Marvin met him with raised gun.

"Blast you, Brent! You double—"

"Hold it, Chet!" Brent snapped. "Vickers trapped me! I was tied up at the cabin!"

Marvin's teeth flashed in a white grin.

"Shoot at me, fellow!" he barked. "Shoot high, but make it good! I'm running!"

Marvin's gun cracked twice as he whirled his horse. Brent's own gun roared as Chet sped around the herd and out to the front. Again Brent fired, and then the posse closed up, pulling their mounts to a halt.

The sheriff yelled: "That was Chet Marvin! Get after him!"

Suddenly a roar came from the guard who had escaped from Vickers's gang.

"These ain't the steers! They're Tanner's locoed cows from his east range!"

Dumfounded, the men stared at the mournful, half-dead cattle. They were no more than skin-covered racks of bones. Already some were dropping in their tracks.

Brent shot a glance ahead. Chet Marvin was disappearing in the fringe of trees at the foot of a hogback a quarter of a mile away.

One of the possemen broke the silence with a laugh.

"Dangest job of rustling ever I saw. We're right back on Tanner's west range. You'd oughta stayed in Cottonwood, sheriff. Looks like they aimed to park them cows in the town hall."

The sheriff was grimly silent. Brad Vickers's face was white, and in his eyes there was a blaze of fury.

Another man laughed. "What you think, Vickers? Is them the steers the Half Circle's been lawin' about? Reckon Tanner would give 'em to anybody that would get 'em off his range."

Brent's eyes suddenly swung to the hogback, and in the shock of amazement that shot through him, he missed Vickers's reply.

Riding out of a draw in the hills

came six men. One of them was Chet Marvin. Brent ripped steel into his horse's flank and raced toward them. As he closed up, he saw that the three men in front had no guns. Their belts hung on the saddle horns of Chet Marvin and two young punchers riding close to him. Brent jerked his horse to a halt.

"Chet, what the——"

"Hold it, fellow," Chet snapped. "I ain't noways sure of you yet, but you get back there and play this out like you planned—play your hand like you held four aces. Get me?"

Brent's heart leaped. "You mean that——"

Marvin's eyes were bright. "I said—just like you planned."

Then they were back with the posse. Brad Vickers was snarling savagely at the sheriff.

"Them steers was the property of the Half Circle. I'm holding you responsible for 'em."

Cold-eyed, the sheriff swung toward him. "How come you're so anxious about Half Circle property, Vickers, seeing you're Tanner's foreman?"

"Sure, I'm Tanner's foreman." Vickers sneered. "But Tanner's busted. The Half Circle is taking over this outfit soon as that mortgage comes due. Then I'll be running this spread for them."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that, Vickers," Brent snapped as he spurred his horse up next to the sheriff.

**E**VERY nerve in Brent's body was stretched tight. What the end would be, he didn't know, but Chet Marvin had said to play his hand out. Pulling two papers from his pocket, he handed them to the sheriff.

For a minute the sheriff held the

papers without looking at them. His eyes swung from Brent to Chet Marvin and held.

"Marvin, what the devil have you been doing?"

"Catching me some cow thieves," Chet answered sharply. "I had a bunch of steers to deliver to a feller over in Mason County. These hombres tried to steal 'em. You don't reckon I'd let three mangy coyotes get away with nothing like that?"

The sheriff's face stiffened sternly. "Where are them steers, Chet Marvin?"

"Delivered to the buyer, of course," Chet snapped. "Ain't I been telling you?"

Brent's blood raced. Somehow, Chet Marvin had made good. He turned to the sheriff.

"Better read those papers, sheriff. One is a check for two thousand dollars, made out to Judson Tanner, and signed by Jack Mason."

"What in thunder has an outfit plumb over in the next county got to do with this?" the sheriff growled.

"Nothing, except that he bought a hundred Wagon Wheel steers. That other paper is a bill of sale signed by Tanner specifying one hundred steers to be taken from the Wagon Wheel west range."

Brad Vickers whirled on Brent with a hoarse bellow:

"You stole them steers! They didn't belong to Tanner! They was the property of the Half Circle outfit!"

"Let 'em prove it," Brent snapped. "Those steers were on the Wagon Wheel range, and every one of them carried the Wagon Wheel brand."

Brent turned to the sheriff. "If there's any question about the ownership of the steers Jack Mason bought, it won't be any trick at all for Vickers and his gang to round up Mason's five thousand head of cattle

and his forty thousand acres, and sort out any fresh-branded Wagon Wheel stock."

One of the possemen laughed loudly. "No trick a-tall! Time they got that little job done, them Wagon Wheel hides would be made into boot heels and wore out."

Brent grinned, and then his eyes hardened.

"Sheriff, you might ask Vickers how it happened that those steers got on Tanner's range while Jud Tanner was on crutches. You might ask him, too, how the Wagon Wheel east range was sowed to loco weed last winter while Tanner was in the hospital, and his cattle herded on it till they're nothing but skin and bones. Maybe he'll come clean after gunning a deputy sheriff last night."

The other night guard suddenly shouted: "By golly, it was Vickers! That gang was wearing masks, but the man that shot Jack was riding a bald-face sorrel like the one Vickers is on."

Brad Vickers suddenly reined his horse backward. His mouth twisted into a wolf snarl as he glared at Brent.

"Blast you, fellow! Maybe I'm hanging, but I'll get you first!"

With a swift lunge, he snatched for his gun.

**B**RENT'S hand slashed to his own weapon. From behind him, a shot crashed, and Vickers yelled as his gun flew from his hand.

Chet Marvin spurred his horse up. A wisp of smoke still lifted from the muzzle of his gun.

"Not so good, Vickers," he drawled. "You'd do better from behind a bush."

The sheriff's horse shot toward Vickers. Brent heard the click of handcuffs, and the officer whirled.

"Get them wolves Marvin captured tied up," he barked.

For a minute he faced Brent sternly. Then a hint of a smile showed in his eyes.

"Fellow, I don't know what you've been doing, but it looks like it was plenty to save Jud Tanner. Way I figure it, that Half Circle outfit made Jud a present of a hundred head of steers just so's he could lift that mortgage. I'm spreading this before the judge and I'll bet he signs an order for Tanner's release."

Brent, Chet Marvin, and the two young punchers with him sat watching the posse ride off with their prisoners. When they were gone, Brent turned to Marvin with glowing eyes.

"Chet, I fell down on my end of it. Vickers trapped me. But you sure put it over. How did you do it?"

"Getting them steers was the easiest part," Chet answered. "We sighted them from the top of the hogback. There was only three men with the herd. Well," he drawled, "there didn't seem anything else to do so we just went down and took them steers away from the skunks."

"But what did you do with the herd? They left a trail a blind man could follow."

"Fellow"—Chet grinned—"you sure hooked up with a salty bunch of cow thieves. That play was good. Three of the boys took the steers on ahead. When they reached the creek, they kept 'em in the water for a mile before they crossed over. The rest of us put a bunch of Tanner's locoed cows over the same trail. At the creek, we turned along the

bank and made a trail for the posse to follow. But, man, we oughta brought an ambulance. We darn near had to pack them locoed critters the last three miles."

"It was a swell trick," Brent said. "If it hadn't been for you, the whole plan would have fizzled."

"Huh," Chet snorted. "It was you saved Tanner's hide. If you hadn't sprung this scheme on us, the Old Man would have lost his outfit and gone to prison."

Marvin's eyes narrowed keenly. "Who the devil are you, fellow, that you can jam a bunch of rustled steers on old Jack Mason's range and pack around his check for two thousand dollars?"

"Me? I'm Brent Mason, Jack Mason's son. Dad and Tanner have been friends for twenty years. Dad sent me down with a check to take up that mortgage."

"And you had that check all the time! What the—— I don't get it."

Brent laughed. "Dad didn't know how they had framed Tanner with this cattle stealing. I wrote him that I was going to make that bunch of crooks lift the mortgage themselves. He bet me I couldn't do it."

"And you sure done it," Chet said. "Say, mister, ain't you got some more ideas under your horns? I'd sure like to hook up with a high-class rustler like you."

Chet Marvin suddenly hunched over his horse's neck. "Come on, you rannies," he yelled. "Race you to town. Last man up to the bar's a cow thief."

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*In Next Week's Issue, "FREEDOM OF THE WILDS,"*

*by DABNEY OTIS COLLINS.*

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# Montana Bound

A Serial

By **STUART HARDY**

**D**USTY DAN GARLAND saves Kay Pendleton from being murdered by gunmen hired by her cousins, Phil and Andy Carew, who desire to acquire her Horseshoe Ranch. The young woman asks Dusty to marry her; if she has a husband to inherit her property, she feels that her relatives will cease their schemes against her life.

For four generations, the Garlands have become insane at the age of thirty. Dusty, now twenty-nine, is awaiting the family fate. He agrees to marry the girl, saying that he will leave immediately afterward for Montana. They apply for a marriage license at Latexa, the county seat, then return to Moreno,

where Dusty sees two strangers whom he suspects are Carew hirelings. Later he captures one of them—Gil Topaz, a Mexican. He confesses they were hired to kill Kay, who is traveling under the name of Armour.

Dusty takes his prisoner to Marshal Tim Beckett's, to have the fellow tell his story to the law. But at the marshal's door the Mexican is killed by a rifle bullet fired from the livery stable across the street.

Dusty runs toward the livery stable with six-gun gripped hard. And, as he approaches he hears hoofbeats on the wooden floor, and as he enters, a horseman bending low over his mount gallops out of the rear entrance.



## CHAPTER XII.

## MAN IN PANIC.

**I**N sheer rage Dusty sent a bullet after the figure. The roar of the shot, filling the stable, threw thirty horses into panic.

A hundred and twenty hoofs thundered madly on the floor boards. A few mounts whinnied in fright. Others snorted.

Ignoring the commotion, Dusty raced down the aisle of the stable. He saw the shocked, sleepy-eyed Pete Foley, owner of the place, stumble half dressed down a flight of rickety stairs. But he didn't stop to offer explanations.

When he leaped out of the rear door, Dusty saw the mounted man almost a hundred yards away. His six-gun banged twice, though he realized he was wasting his good lead.

He lashed out a husky oath. Turning back into the stable, he had a wild idea of dragging his buckskin out of its stall and racing off in pursuit.

Pete Foley howled: "What in blazes is going on?"

"One o' your customers," Dusty grated, "just killed his partner!"

He was barefooted, and as he ran along the wooden floor, splinters stabbed his soles. But he noticed no pain. He pulled the startled buckskin out of its stall, leaped to its bare back, and went dashing through the stable and out the back door.

With the six-gun still in his hand and only the hackamore in his fingers, he sent the gallant mustang charging furiously through the moonlight. Far away—with a lead of more than two hundred yards—the killer was streaking off with frenzied speed.

"You're faster than he is!" Dusty rasped to the buckskin. "Come on, Banana! Give me everything you got!"

And Banana struggled with all the power of his sturdy legs.

He thundered across grass and into sage; climbed a ridge to a small mesa, and lunged on with amazing power. The night wind tore at Dusty's hair, forced him to squint. When he lowered his face, it was whipped by the buckskin's flying mane.

He had gone scarcely a mile, however, when he reached more rugged country. Scrub oaks and rocks, scattered in wild confusion, presented a thousand obstacles beyond which the fugitive could hide while he rode. In less than ten minutes Dusty realized, with a groan of despair, that he had lost his quarry completely.

He stopped. No use pressing on blindly like this, without a glimpse of the man. He was simply riding into death. If the killer didn't effect an immediate get-away, he might easily aim his carbine over some boulder and shoot Dusty off the buckskin's back.

So, presently, he bitterly conceded defeat. To ride farther without seeing "Rim-rock" Elder was folly. He looked around; dismounted and climbed a high boulder for a better survey of the surrounding country. But in all that vast expanse of moonlit, rocky ground he caught no view of the man he had pursued. When he clambered down from the rock and vaulted to Banana's back, he muttered:

"We let him get away from us that time—but we know what he looks like and we may meet again! Come on, Banana—we're headin' for home!"

**R**ETURNING to Moreno, he found that the shot had roused the town. At least twenty men, most of them half dressed, stood gathered around the body of Gil Topaz in front of the marshal's office.

Instead of riding straight to the crowd, Dusty turned the buckskin into the stable. Foley had lighted a swinging lantern that sent weird yellow light through the place. Leaving Banana in his stall, Dusty walked the length of the aisle, peering closely at the other horses. He found one saddled, with soogans and saddlebags strapped to the cantle, and a carbine jutting out of a boot.

The sight made him halt. A comprehending smile, utterly without mirth, settled on his lips. He nodded, muttered something, and went out to join the crowd in front of Beckett's place.

"Dusty!" called the marshal, coming toward him. "What's all this, anyhow? Dog-gone it, I never did see an hombre who could get mixed up in more shootings than you in so short a time!" There was more irony in the marshal's accusation than he himself realized. It was strange that now, when he desired nothing more than a year of peace, tragedy and trouble had enveloped Dusty Dan Garland.

"Reckon I can explain it pretty clear," he said tightly.

"Wish you would! You claimed as how this dead hombre was tryin' to—murder Miss Armour at the hotel?"

"That's right." Smoldering eyes fixed on the body that sprawled in front of the marshal's door, Dusty told precisely what had happened behind the hotel. The only thing he omitted was mention of the Carews. To speak of them, he realized, would certainly betray the fact that Kay

Armour was in reality Kay Pendleton. And because the girl wished, in order to avoid harassing explanations, to keep that fact secret as long as possible, he was determined to defer to her desire. So he said simply:

"I got him to admit he'd been *hired* to murder her. I figured we could get him to write out his whole confession before you salted him away in the calaboose."

"And how do you account for his bein' blasted down like this?"

The entire crowd, standing hushed and bewildered, listened eagerly to Dusty's explanation.

"He was working with a partner," he snapped. "Fellow by the name of Rim-rock Elder. Reckon you've seen them around town the last day or two."

Several heads hastily nodded. Somebody whispered:

"Sure! Elder spent most his time snorin' in the back of the saloon."

"The way I see it now," Dusty continued, still peering darkly at the corpse, "Topaz came to murder Miss Armour alone. His partner, meanwhile, saddled the horses in the stable. The idea was that Topaz might have to make a quick getaway. Elder wanted to have everything ready. He was waiting. When I showed up with the Mexican, banged at your door, Beckett, and called out what had happened, that buzzard Rim-rock Elder must have been in the entrance o' the stable. Probably heard every word I said—particularly the part about Topaz going to write his story out on paper. That must have scared the gizzard out of Elder. He realized that if Topaz wrote a confession, it would naturally involve him, too. Rim-rock Elder must have got panicky."

"So you figure," muttered Beckett, scowling, "he deliberately killed his

partner so's this Gil Topaz wouldn't write out that confession."

"That's my notion."

There was a moment's silence. Then somebody in the crowd called:

"But why in tarnation didn't this Elder coyote plug *you* instead? If he'd banged you off your feet, Topaz could have made his get-away. They could both have high-tailed out of town."

"Sure," Dusty dryly admitted. "But when an hombre gets panicky and loses his head, he can't think straight. Just shoots and runs. Besides, if they both got away, Elder must have known that by to-morrow morning every sheriff and marshal within fifty miles would've been notified to be on the lookout for Topaz and his partner. And killing me wouldn't have guaranteed shutting up Gil Topaz for good. Topaz might confess again—next time he was caught. This way Rim-rock Elder knows he can count on Topaz *never* to talk. Besides it's easier for one hombre, traveling alone, to make a get-away than for two to do it."

Tim Beckett shot a glowering glance at the corpse on his doorstep. Facing the crowd, he snapped:

"Gents, I'm organizing a posse pronto. We're goin' to poke into the hills and hunt that Elder snake. How many o' you are riding with me?"

At least fifteen men instantly cried out their willingness to go. Dusty smiled. He told himself a posse would be futile. By this time Rim-rock Elder must be miles away, safely lost in the intricacies of the bad lands. But he offered no objection to the posse's starting. He himself didn't join them when men ran off to bring horses and guns.

Instead he glanced toward the Moreno Hotel.

On its porch, with some sort of

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wrap tightly gathered about her slender figure, stood Kay Pendleton.

The sight of her startled him. No doubt, he realized, she had been roused by the shots as had every one else. He became awkwardly conscious of his half-dressed condition—just a pair of corduroy trousers over his underwear, and no boots on his feet. But pushing back the reddish hair that straggled over his forehead, he went to her. She watched his approach anxiously; listened in shocked silence to the report he had to make.

"Dusty," she whispered fearfully, when he'd finished, "I—I hardly know what to say! I didn't want to involve you in trouble like this. It—it doesn't seem fair to have you—"

"Forget it," he advised tersely. "It was a bit of excitement, and it's over. We've got one satisfaction out of it, anyhow. We've got rid of another pair of Carew men."

She nodded dazedly. Her eyes were haggardly fixed on the thing that lay in front of the marshal's house, with a dozen people still gathered about it. And then, of a sudden, she shuddered as she turned unsteadily back to the hotel door.

"What's the use?" she groaned. "Regardless of how many we get rid of, Phil and Andy Carew will keep on sending others! They'll send them again and again—until they win!"

"Or until," Dusty amended as he followed her, "until *we* win."

### CHAPTER XIII.

"I PRONOUNCE YOU—"

**T**HOUGH the search for Rim-rock Elder proved unsuccessful, his disappearance from Moreno served the purpose of bringing temporary peace. Without

Carew hirelings in the town, it became a veritable sanctuary for Kay Pendleton. She determined to remain there until Monday—the wedding day—on the theory that in little Moreno strangers could be readily identified and watched.

But no strangers arrived.

And on Monday, at eight o'clock in the morning, a group of twenty mounted cow-punchers unexpectedly rode up to the Moreno Hotel. People in the street, seeing them, gaped incomprehendingly. Here were men arrayed in all the glory of their Sunday best—on Monday!

Don Elmore, owner of the Double S Ranch and leader of the party, wore a gray city suit whose trousers were tucked into a pair of new shining black boots. Six-guns and holsters seemed somehow anomalous on those flashily dressed men. Yet the weapons were in evidence, and they had been oiled and polished until they appeared lustrously new.

Dusty Dan Garland, who had ridden in at the side of Don Elmore, stiffly dismounted and started up the porch steps just as Kay Pendleton emerged from the hotel door.

At the sight of him she halted with an audible catch of breath. Her eyes widened in amazement.

"Dusty!" she gasped.

For he was almost unrecognizable.

He was freshly shaven, and his red hair had been neatly trimmed. He wore a tremendous new Stetson whose creamy purity had not yet been assailed by dust. There was a polka-dotted necktie knotted in the collar of a pristine white shirt, and a blue city suit distinguished his rangy figure. Like Elmore's trousers, his, too, vanished in polished black boots—boots adorned with silvery spurs and tinkling jingle bobs. His holster was invisible under the jacket.

"Dusty!" she blurted again. "What—what on earth have you done to yourself?"

The mounted riders, all of them having drawn off their sombreros, grinned broadly. Their chuckles, as well as the girl's question, made Dusty flush uncomfortably while he fidgeted from foot to foot. He gulped, looked down at the hat in his hand.

"These are all Double S boys," he explained hurriedly, evading her question. "They're comin' along to Latexa to—to witness the wedding. They'll act as a sort of escort."

"But, Dusty," she persisted, her wide eyes traveling over him in awe, "those clothes——"

"Well," he muttered somewhat testily, "a man gets married only once in his life, normally. I figured I'd get dressed right for the occasion."

"When did you get it all?" she whispered.

At that he grinned. With a side-ward jerk of his head he explained: "Saturday afternoon I rode over to Four Corners and ransacked the general store. Still got my regular duds packed in my soogans. Now, if you're ready to start——"

She was. Unlike Dusty, she wore her habitual riding costume. Her roan mare was already hitched to the hotel rack. While the crowd of Double S cow-punchers smiled down at her, she swung nimbly into its saddle.

And so, with bewildered townspeople gaping after them, the cavalcade loped out of Moreno on the trail to a wedding.

**T**ACTFULLY Don Elmore kept his men twenty yards behind the bridal couple. "Let 'em alone," he cautioned in a low voice. "They've prob'ly got

plenty to talk about that we ain't supposed to hear."

So Dusty and Kay Pendleton rode ahead of the others, side by side; and presently he explained in an uncomfortable voice:

"There's more than just the wedding that made me dress up like this."

"What do you mean?"

"The way I got it, the news of our applyin' for a license has spread. Chances are quite a few newspapers will hear about it and send men up to witness the wedding. After all, you're one of the richest girls in the State." He paused.

She said nervously: "I'd hoped for a secret wedding."

Dusty shrugged. "Nothing we can do about it now. Anyhow, if they're goin' to have newspapermen and a lot of other witnesses on hand, I wouldn't like to have 'em ride off sneerin' to each other that Kay Pendleton went and married some worthless sidewinder who didn't even know how to dress for the wedding. I figured if I were duded up a bit, it wouldn't look so bad for you."

"Thanks," she said huskily.

After that they didn't talk. A new kind of restraint caught Kay Pendleton. She rode stiffly, looking straight ahead. Her lovely countenance was pale. Her eyes were vaguely frightened. From time to time she darted covert glances at Dusty's stony profile. He kept his own gaze fixed stubbornly on the horizon ahead, and what she saw in his expression forced her to bite her lips.

It was after almost an hour's silence that she said with a bitter tremor: "This is the—the most cheerless wedding procession I've ever heard of!"

Dusty didn't immediately reply.

When he did speak, it was evasively to say: "We'll have to go over to the town hall first and get our license. Then we can ride over to Judge Rapp's and—and be married without any trouble. Don Elmore and the boys will see to it that—uh—that nothing happens."

His voice, too, was unnaturally tense. In truth, they both became so strained that their very conversation sounded forced.

"Dusty," she whispered once, turning to him in anxiety, "I—I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you're doing for me. You—"

"Forget it," he mumbled.

And so, with twenty men thudding along behind them, they crossed open range where grazing cattle stared stupidly. They rode over hills into a region of sandy waste land, where junipers clawed at their clothes. Under hot blue skies, with a merry sun blazing out of the east, any bridal couple should have been ecstatically joyous. Yet there was no happiness for these two—only unease and nervousness and a forced poise toward each other.

It was almost noon when they reached Latexa.

Outside the town hall the Double S men dismounted to stretch their legs. They didn't enter, however, when Dusty and Kay Pendleton went in for their license. And the instant they stepped through the large door, they confronted the realization of all Dusty's fears.

A dozen men and women surged forward eagerly to leap at Kay Pendleton with a hundred questions.

She recoiled from them. Dusty had to intervene, to break a passage through the crowd. These people, he gathered from noisy ejaculations, wanted information for the news-

paper public. Who was Dan Garland? Where had he come from? When had they met? How? Where did the couple propose to go on their wedding trip? Was he to conduct the affairs of the immense Horseshoe Ranch near San Marese?

Question after question; Kay Pendleton avoided them as best she could.

Dusty pleaded: "Let's get through, can't you, folks? We want to get this over with as soon as possible!"

Somehow they succeeded, during fifteen minutes of bewildering confusion, in weathering that storm of interrogations. They secured their license. And then, as they started out of the big building, Kay Pendleton halted with a jerk, seized Dusty's arm in a convulsive grip.

Jolted, he stared at her. She was more pallid than ever. Yet her eyes were suddenly furious, flaming.

Following her gaze, he saw two men stride into the building.

One was a tall, powerful, blond giant—a handsome man of thirty with a swagger in his walk and a disarming grin on his broad features. The second was small, wiry, black of hair, with the cunning and brilliant dark eyes of a hawk. He wore clothes as carefully tailored as a gambler's. Both men smiled coldly as they approached. They drew off sombreros, halted.

"Kay!" said the small one. "*Congratulations* to you!"

She whispered tersely to Dusty: "My cousins, Phil and Andy Carew!"

**T**HE names stiffened him, made Dusty Dan Garland instinctively bristle. His jaws set with quick hostile stubbornness, and a hint of danger flashed in his features.

But Phil and Andy Carew were both still smiling in a most ingenuous manner. Andy, the small, dark fellow, actually bowed with all the grace of a Spanish caballero.

"Kay," he said reproachfully, "it didn't seem right for you to do a thing like this without notifying your family."

"What are *you* doing here?" she shot out icily.

Her sharp tone appeared to surprise both men, even to hurt them.

"Why," explained the tall, blond Phil, "we read in the San Marese paper about your intention o' gettin' married. It said as how you were figuring on getting your license here this morning. So, naturally, Andy and I, bein' your cousins, decided we ought to high-tail up and attend the weddin'. You don't *mind*, do you?"

An instant Kay Pendleton's blue eyes blazed from one man to the other. She detested their hypocritical smiles. It would have been better, she thought, if they had openly disclosed their enmity, if they had bitterly opposed her marrying an unknown cowboy.

Instead they stood there, smiling, almost fawning on her. Expectantly they looked at Dusty Dan Garland, their eyes swiftly appraising his long figure.

In choppy syllables, Kay introduced him. Fortunately neither of the Carews offered to shake hands. Knowing what he did about them, Dusty would doubtless have started trouble by refusing so false a show of friendship. The Carews were still mumbling acknowledgment of the introduction when Kay snapped:

"Come, Dusty! The boys are waiting, and so is Judge Rapp!"

"Going to be married immediately?" Andy Carew exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes!"

"You don't mind if we mosey along, do you, Kay? We'd sure like to watch."

She said bluntly: "Do as you like about that." Tugging at Dusty's arm, she all but pulled him out of the building.

Five minutes later the crowd of Double S cow-punchers, now joined by Phil and Andy Carew and the trailing newspaper people, loped out of Latexa toward the small ranch of Judge Rapp.

They were still a quarter of a mile from the place when, rounding a bend in the trail, they saw far ahead half a dozen riders, all of them armed, all of them straddling horses and grimly waiting like an impregnable human wall.

The sight of the strangers checked Dusty's breath.

Were these, he instantly wondered, hombres whom the Carews had hired to halt the wedding? Did this mean another fight?

The six riders started forward. One or two of them, Dusty imagined, lowered hands toward their holsters. But, unexpectedly discovering the twenty cow-punchers who came around the bend some fifty yards behind the bride and groom, the six men reined in on common, startled impulse.

A few of them evinced downright consternation. One or two softly ejaculated oaths that were indistinguishable. Since the large wedding party rode on without changing its pace, the six men quickly pulled their mounts off the trail. They merely nodded mechanical greetings when the cavalcade went by, then uncomfortably coughed in its dust as they glowered after the party.

Dusty grinned.

"Unless I'm all wrong," he whispered to Kay Pendleton, "those buz-

zards were figuring to start a battle right there on the trail and see to it that you and I never got to Judge Rapp's place! It must have given them quite a shock to find we had twenty armed gents trailing us! They didn't dare yank a six-gun."

She looked at him in quick alarm, her face losing color. Because the Carews were far behind them with the Double S crowd, she could whisper: "Do you really think my cousins went that far—to hire half a dozen killers who—"

"Why not?"—bitterly. "They've tried just about everything else, haven't they? Take a look at them now. I've never seen two critters make such a tough job of smiling. Looks to me like they'd rather scream to high heaven."

Huskily, in a vibrant low tone, Kay Pendleton began: "If I thought those six men were waiting there to shoot—"

"No use gettin' excited," Dusty dryly advised. "There's nothing we can do about 'em now. If we question them, they'll deny it sure as to-day's Monday. And the boys just couldn't blast away at 'em on guesswork."

"Still—"

"That's why I brought Don Elmore and the waddies along—in case anything like this happened. Personally, I'd sooner turn my six-gun on your two handsome cousins."

"The same thing applies to them," she said hopelessly. "If you accuse them of trying to—to cause me trouble, they'll deny it. They'll say you're—" She had been about to add "crazy," but she repressed the word as she recalled Dusty's terrifying future. Instead she said quickly: "No. Phil and Andy won't give you any grounds for starting a man-to-man fight. They're too

shrewd to do that. If you notice, they're not even armed."

"Yeah," flatly said Dusty. "I saw that right off. Well, reckon there's nothin' in the way to Judge Rapp's place now. We got the license, and the judge is waitin', so—here goes for better or worse!"

He attempted to speak flippantly, easily, but the tension of his tones betrayed his increasing nervousness. His very throat felt strained and dry. The muscles of his face seemed to be petrified. He hardly dared look at Kay Pendleton now.

She, too, was more rigid than ever. The hand that occasionally fell to rest on her saddle horn trembled.

Presently they spied the small white house that was the home of Judge Randolph Rapp. From the instant they saw it, neither of them could utter a word. Their hearts pounded wildly.

And fifteen minutes later, in the presence of Don Elmore, of Phil and Andy Carew, of twenty armed Double S cow-punchers, and of newspaper people, Kay Pendleton and Daniel Charles Garland were pronounced man and wife.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MONTANA-BOUND.

**E**XACTLY what happened immediately after that, Dusty Dan Garland never clearly recalled. It was an ordeal so confusing, so unreal, that its component incidents became blurred.

He had a vague recollection of Kay being heartily congratulated and even kissed by Don Elmore and the judge. He experienced an instant of furious resentment when he saw her cousins, too, deliberately attempt to kiss her. Kay avoided them somehow—he didn't see by

what means. And the twenty Double S cow-punchers were whooping it up with good old-fashioned yells. Their sombreros waved above their heads as the bridal couple emerged from the judge's door. There were howls and yells and cheery shrieks. Two or three of the cowboys, allowing enthusiasm to run riot, actually drew six-guns and filled the air with festive thunder.

To Dusty Dan Garland, leading his bride toward waiting horses, the whole affair was a bitter travesty on joy. In his chest it stirred a violent, insuppressible storm. Even as he helped Kay into the saddle of her roan mare, he suffered the unreasonable sense of having committed a sacrilege.

When she was mounted, he turned to look with smoldering intensity at Phil and Andy Carew.

They weren't smiling now. The tall blond man and his short dark brother stood, hats in their hands, on the steps of the judge's porch. Perhaps they had been chilled by Kay's iciness toward them. At any rate, Dusty saw for the first time an ungovernable hint of the inner hatred they bore the girl. Traces of it seethed behind their set expressions.

He had little time to waste on the Carews. The cow-punchers were still yelling. One persistent six-gun continued to send its slugs skyward. The judge, a fat and affable man, stood in his door, hands clasped behind his back, and beamed paternally on the two he had joined in holy wedlock.

Somewhat heavily Dusty Dan Garland—stiffly formal in his blue city suit—swung into his own saddle. His face was pale. For a reason he couldn't have explained, he avoided Kay's eyes. He wondered



what these yelling cow-punchers, all friends of his, would say if they knew this had been merely a marriage of convenience, a mockery of the most solemn bond between humans.

Then Kay was at his side, whispering: "Come! We—we'd better ride back to Latexa."

He nodded jerkily. She, too, was very pale. As they rode off to the accompaniment of wild cheers, Dusty looked back with a mechanical grin. He saw that Don Elmore and his cowboys intended to follow. Moreover, the Carews were mounting, too.

"Looks like they're aimin' to trail us right smack into town," he muttered.

"Of course," she said. "They've got to go back that way."

Dusty considered things while they loped through gay sunshine, with the chatter of the cowboys clamorous behind them. The railroad, he remembered, passed through Latexa. He said:

"No need to tell this bunch exactly what we're going to do. You can put up at the hotel for the afternoon. Now that we're married, Don Elmore and his riders will head back for Moreno soon as they've had drinks—to which I'll stand the whole crowd. You can get yourself some rest, meanwhile. There's a train heads south at half past five. By that time the whole gang will be gone. You can hop on that train practically unnoticed, I reckon, and start for San Marese and your Horseshoe outfit. Judge Rapp said as how the marriage certificate would be mailed to you there. Me, I'll hang around till nightfall, then head north. By easy ridin' I figure I ought to reach Montana in six, seven weeks."

TO all this the girl listened without comment, her lips tight, her face colorless. She looked straight ahead with eyes that were suspiciously moist. It was only after a long silence that she said suddenly, in a choked voice:

"Dusty, I—I never realized before how terrible a thing I had asked you to do!"

"There's nothing terrible about it," he protested.

"You—"

She checked herself. At that moment they spied again the six armed strangers who had been blocking the trail half an hour ago. There was something puzzled and impatient in the attitudes of these men. Once more they edged off the trail to allow the wedding cavalcade to pass. This time Dusty Dan Garland grinned at them—a derisive, almost challenging grin. Turning to Kay, he asked:

"You still figuring to make out a will leaving everything to—to your husband?"

"I did it—yesterday."

"Well, then, you sure won't have to worry any more about critters like those we just passed. From now on the Carews will know it's useless to do anything to you. If you were to be—killed"—he stumbled on the word, but went on more firmly—"the entire Horseshoe outfit would come to your husband, not to them. So I reckon you can forget your cousins as long as I'm alive!"

"As long as you're alive?" she echoed empty.

"Maybe," he said in choppy syllables, "from now on they'll do their best to annihilate *me*. Once I'm killed, of course, they're next in line for the family fortune. So, from to-day on, their gunmen will be sent after me, most likely."

"Dusty!"—aghast.

He laughed. "Don't worry about it, Kay. I'll be twisting my way toward Montana, along trails nobody will be able to follow. I'll even change my name, so's there'll be no record o' my passin' through any particular town. After to-day Phil and Andy Carew will never see me again. I'll be all right!"

The girl didn't reply. Dusty peered over the sun-drenched range to his right. Deep in the distance, where the country rose toward hazy blue hills, he could see brown masses of cattle strewn over sloping grasslands. He watched them a while. When he looked back at Kay, he parted his lips to speak.

But not a word tumbled from them.

Instead he stiffened in his saddle, gaped at her in dismay, with a sense of turbulent helplessness gnawing at his heart.

For the first time since he'd known her, he saw tears wriggling down Kay's pallid cheeks!

"Shucks!" he said hoarsely, when at last he could control his voice. "Don't do that, Kay! You—you're supposed to be a happy bride!"

She let her chin sink to her chest. Her eyes closed, and her teeth bit into her lip. The tears ran more copiously than ever.

**A**N hour later Dusty stood in a Latexa saloon with his wedding guests and paid for a riotous celebration. The cowboys drank heartily, toasting the absent bride and the mechanically grinning groom. As liquor increased their enthusiasm, they joined in the rendition of gay songs. And before long the saloon was crowded with curious strangers.

Dusty himself didn't drink much. Standing at the bar beside Don El-

more, he kept looking steadfastly at his glass. Once the owner of the Double S Ranch whispered to him:

"What you figure on doin' now?"

"I—I'm headin' north alone."

"Immediately?"

"Soon as I can get away without stirrin' a lot o' talk."

"You mean you're goin' to desert your bride right plumb on—on your wedding day?"

"That was the agreement," Dusty forced through his teeth. "Reckon the longer I hang around, the worse it'll be for both of us. It—it ain't much fun bein' married this way."

That was all he would say about it. Two hours of celebration found most of the Double S cow-punchers merrily drunk. Their boss finally gathered them together for the homeward ride. And after pausing in front of the hotel to serenade the bride with a last raucous chorus of cheers, the Double S riders galloped thunderously out of town.

Dusty stood in the road, enveloped in their dust, and watched them go. Their departure left him with a strange sense of isolation—almost the feelings of a man left alone on a desert island. He swallowed, frowned down at his boots. When he raised his head, he saw Phil and Andy Carew watching him searchingly from the porch of the hotel. Dusty gazed at them an instant. Then, on sudden determination, he turned and went back to the saloon.

"Can I borrow pencil and paper?" he asked the bartender.

In a minute he was seated at a corner table. Brows contracted, sombrero thrust to the back of his head, he wrote carefully:

DEAR KAY: Well, it's done. You don't have to worry about your cousins any longer. They won't do anything to you now.

I know you're waiting for me to come and say good-by. But I got a hunch that meeting and talking things over will make both of us feel pretty terrible. We agreed that I'd leave you immediately after the wedding. So, by the time you get this, I'll be heading north—Montana bound.

Don't worry about me. I don't think your cousins will ever set eyes on me again—nor will any men they may hire to track me. I know plenty ways of fooling them on a northward ride. As long as you don't tell anybody exactly where I'm bound, they'll never locate me again. From now on, my name will be changed.

Get back to your Horseshoe outfit and run it in peace. If ever you meet a man you really want to marry, you can write me care of Doctor Waverly at Bent Fork, Montana. In about a year you'll be able to divorce me any time you like on grounds of insanity. If you want a divorce sooner, reckon you won't have much trouble getting it from a husband who deserts you on the wedding day. So don't feel that being married to me will spoil your happiness if you should meet a man you *want* as your husband.

That's about all there is to say—except that I wish you all the luck and happiness in the world.

DUSTY.

When the note was finished, he slipped it into an envelope the bartender had given him and addressed it to Mrs. Daniel C. Garland.

The writing of that name—even letting it slip off his tongue in a whisper—stirred a strange ache in Dusty. But he derided the futile emotion, rose brusquely, and strode heavily out of the saloon.

Of the Carews he no longer saw any sign. That relieved him, and he hailed a tow-headed youngster who was running across the street.

"Son," he said, "feel like earnin' some money?"

"Sure!"—with brightening eyes.

Dusty dropped a coin into the lad's hand. He gave him the envelope and directed:

"Run over to the hotel and tell 'em to give this to Mrs. Garland."

"Yes, sir. Thanks!"

He watched the delighted boy

race through the dust to the hotel in which Kay was waiting.

Then, still smiling in that frigid way, Dusty Dan Garland went to his horse at the saloon hitch rack. He climbed into the saddle, cast a final farewell glance toward the hotel, and rode off toward the north—Montana bound.

From now on, he knew, the Carews would probably do everything they could think of to blast him out of this world. For the sake of Kay's safety, he was determined to avoid all contacts with them or their hirelings. But if they did find him and compel a fight—well, he didn't much care what happened. In less than a year he'd be through with life, anyhow.

Dusty gulped down a lump in his throat. He couldn't understand why the sunny country in front of him suddenly seemed blurred and misty. He tried to laugh off the sensation, but the laugh sounded suspiciously like a sob.

He rode on blindly.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE CAREWS STRIKE BACK.

EIGHT miles north of Latexa, Dusty clattered through the shadows of a covered bridge that hung over a muddy creek. As the buckskin's hoofs banged on the noisy boards, a strange idea roused him, and he adopted it as soon as he emerged into sunshine on the other side of the bridge.

Halting the horse, he peered around searchingly. Some two hundred yards away he saw a precipitous hill crowned by rocks and swaying cottonwoods.

"Looks like as good a place as any to sit and watch from," he decided. "Come on, Banana. Let's go!"

He sent the surprised buckskin up the steep rise until it stood concealed among trees and rocks.

Here Dusty dismounted. Tossing the reins over the branch of a sapling, he darted a piercing look back in the direction of Latexa. The yellow trail wound over hills and through grassy valleys where cattle wandered. But on that whole sun-beaten expanse he could see no riders.

Reassured, he unstrapped the soogans from his saddle. From them he took his regular riding gear—ancient checkered shirt and old corduroys. He slipped out of the blue wedding suit and attired himself in his normal clothes. Somehow, as he rolled the blue suit into the soogans, he felt better, closer to reality. True, he still wore the new Stetson and the new black boots with the brilliant spurs and jingle bobs. But when he'd completed the change and leaned against a rock to roll a cigarette, Dusty was far more at ease.

He didn't immediately ride on. Instead he remained among the rocks, hidden, with eyes fastened thoughtfully on the long trail to Latexa.

What he was waiting to see didn't take more than an hour to materialize. He discerned, several miles away, a billow of yellow dust that marked the advance of a small cavalcade. At the first glimpse of it he straightened, brows contracting. Turning to the buckskin, he drew it deeper into the concealment of rocks and trees. Then he himself returned to peer over a boulder at the trail far below.

He counted eight men in the oncoming group. When they were still several hundred yards from the covered bridge, he recognized them, and recognition brought a contemptuous smile to his lips.

Six were the fellows the wedding party had encountered on the trail to Judge Rapp's ranch. The other two—those who rode in the lead—were Phil and Andy Carew!

The blond giant and his wiry, dark-haired brother loped some fifty feet ahead of their followers. There was momentary thunder as the party crossed the bridge. Watching them come out on the other side, Dusty actually grinned.

"You coyotes sure were slow in startin' after me!" He chuckled. "Reckon you figure to catch up with me somewhere on the trail—and load my back with lead. I'm hopin', gents, this is the last we see of each other!"

He waited on the summit of the rise until the eight riders vanished far to the north, beyond the rim of a dip.

Then he mounted again and sent the buckskin eastward.

"I'll head out of the Panhandle and up into Oklahoma," he told himself. "By sundown I ought to be so far that there'll be nothin' to worry about."

His strategy appeared successful. Although he knew the Carews and their followers must be desperately searching a trace of him, he met none of them that day or the next. To avoid all unnecessary risks, he stopped in only one town—merely long enough to buy a supply of food and coffee.

After that he rode northward along a route which avoided all trails. He crossed cattle country and the domain of sheep-herders high on a mesa. He forded innumerable streams. Nights he camped out, usually in the shelter of little coulees. And for five days he encountered no trouble.

But on the fifth evening he found himself in need of additional sup-

plies. So, feeling quite secure, Dusty Dan Garland rode into Dixon City, Oklahoma—and met unanticipated trouble.

IT was almost sundown when he hitched the tired buckskin to the rack outside Dixon City's ramshackle general store. He entered just as the lame proprietor of the place, limping from corner to corner, lighted a few lamps.

Dusty made enough purchases to fill his saddlebags. When he emerged into deepening twilight, he found a gray-mustached, barrel-chested man curiously inspecting his horse.

On the man's deerskin vest glittered the badge of a deputy sheriff.

Carrying bundles, Dusty moved forward with a puzzled frown. Whether it was premonition or general unease that troubled him, he didn't know; he knew only that his nerves suddenly began to twitch. As he set down his bundles, preparatory to opening the saddlebags, the gray-mustached man eyed him quizzically.

"This your horse?" he asked with a curt nod.

"Yep."

Once more the official sent a quick scrutiny over the animal. His stare lingered an instant on the Double S brand that marked Banana's flank. Then, with the same thoroughness he'd lavished on the horse, he inspected Dusty Dan Garland himself.

Stung by indefinable apprehension, Dusty demanded: "Why you askin'? Anything wrong?"

The heavy-chested man cleared his throat.

"I'm talkin' officialy," he explained. "Otherwise I wouldn't be so dog-gone curious. I'm just won-

derin' if I might see what you got in them soogans."

Startled, Dusty stared. He rapped out, "Why?"

"I don't mind bein' frank with you," said the deputy sheriff, and his thumb hooked into his belt close to the six-gun on his hip. "There's a certain hombre I've been asked to watch out for."

"Name of what?"

"Rube Anderson."

A relieved smile instantly dispelled Dusty's tension. "That bein' the case," he said more easily, "you're travelin' up the wrong canyon, sheriff. I ain't Rube Anderson."

"All the same, mind showin' me what you got in them soogans?"

"Not at all."

Obligingly enough, now that his fears had been quenched, Dusty unstrapped and unrolled his soogans. He revealed a poncho, some underclothes, and the blue city suit.

Eying the display in tight-lipped silence, the deputy sheriff nodded. He waited until Dusty had strapped the soogans back to the cante.

"I suppose," the official said unexpectedly, "you've got a bill of sale to show you're the owner of this horse?"

His challenging tone came like a stab. Dusty Dan Garland turned, gaping. He realized in sudden dismay that, though he had secured a bill of sale for the buckskin, he had turned the paper over to Kay at the time he'd given her the horse. And with increasing chagrin he remembered that the excitement of the wedding, and of fighting the Carews' hirelings had made him forget to reclaim the document when he'd repurchased Banana from the girl. He said haltingly:

"Why, no. I—I ain't carryin' a bill of sale with me. But I reckon if necessary I can get it, all right.

Why? Any doubts about my ownership?"

In a dry, noncommittal tone the gray-mustached official inquired: "Where'd you get the horse?"

**B**Y this time several curious cow-punchers had paused to listen. They were looking interestedly from one man to the other.

"I got him," replied Dusty, increasingly puzzled, "down in the Texas Panhandle. Bought him from Don Elmore, owner of the Double S Ranch."

To his utter amazement he saw the deputy sheriff grip the heel of his six-gun. In fact, the weapon was half drawn. In a crisp, uncompromising voice the thick-chested official declared:

"Looka here, stranger. I'll talk straight from the shoulder. A few days ago I got orders to watch out for an hombre named Rube Anderson who'd stolen an S-branded horse and quite a bit of money from a Panhandle outfit. Considering the fact that this hombre got away with some four thousand dollars in cash, every sheriff and law-abidin' citizen in Oklahoma has been asked to keep his eyes peeled for the critter. There's a general description been sent out, and it fits you even better than the clothes you're wearin'. What's more——"

A glimpse of the incredible truth stunned Dusty's mind. He parted his lips, started to ejaculate something. But the deputy sheriff ruthlessly went on:

"What's more, the report is that when this Rube Anderson got away with the horse and the money, he was wearin' a blue store suit. That's why I asked you to open your soogans—to see if you were carryin' such garments. Furthermore——"

ignoring the wild expression that swept over Dusty Dan Garland's countenance, the deputy sheriff drove ahead—"there's a *Double S* brand on your horse. Any brand artist with a running iron can add an S to a former brand. See what I mean?"

"But I tell you——" blurted Dusty.

"Sorry, stranger." Of a sudden the deputy's six-gun was almost completely drawn. "We been asked to hold Rube Anderson till he can be identified by the feller who reported the theft. He promised to come up here pronto to look over anybody we held. Considerin' the evidence of the horse and the blue suit in your soogans, and considerin' your general description, I'm afraid I'll have to hold you in Dixon City till the robbed gent can come up and take a squint at you."

Dusty impulsively started forward—only to discover that the muzzle of the deputy sheriff's six-gun snapped up to point steadily at his chest. He scarcely looked at the weapon. In a thick, savage voice he demanded:

"What's the name o' the hombre who made this charge against Rube Anderson?"

"A Texas gent—name of Andy Carew."

"Carew?" grated Dusty, eyes blazing. "I see! I get it, all right! Does this mean I'm under arrest?"

"It sure does," the deputy sheriff bluntly assured him. "I'm advisin' you to come along without kickin' up a ruckus, Anderson—or whatever your name may be. We got a neat calaboose in town. Reckon we can have this Andy Carew here in a couple o' days. Poke up your arms and turn around while I yank that weapon out of your holster."

## CHAPTER XVI.

ANDY CAREW ARRIVES.

SO Dusty Dan Garland, seething with inarticulate fury, presently found himself in the darkness of a small dobe jail on the outskirts of Dixon City.

He stood at its barred window, with the light of a waning moon illuminating his desperate countenance. Glaring out into darkness, he perceived for the first time how devilishly ingenious the Carew brothers really were.

"This is the orneriest trick I ever heard of!" he rasped to himself. "Using the law to help themselves!"

He saw the ruse clearly. Having completely lost track of Dusty Dan Garland, the Carew brothers had become alarmed. They hadn't known where to seek him. And so, brilliantly inspired, they had seized upon this bit of strategy.

Reporting the theft of a horse that resembled the buckskin, and of several thousand dollars to make the offense more dramatic, they had immediately enlisted the support of the law to arrest a man presumably called "Rube" Anderson. Sheriffs throughout the State would be on the lookout for a roaming cow-puncher who fitted the description the Carews had offered. Nor had they forgotten to mention the blue suit in which they had last seen Dusty. In that manner, by tossing a simple lie into the laps of Oklahoma officials, they had set every law enforcer in the State on Dusty's trail! As soon as he was discovered—regardless of what name he might give—the Carews would be notified. They'd learn where Dusty had traveled.

It was a clever scheme. But it infuriated him.

Gripping the bars, he swallowed

hard. He couldn't, of course, blame the local deputy sheriff. The man was performing his duty. Moreover, to avoid unnecessary complications, Dusty had given his right name. What was the use of concealing it, now that the Carews were probably heading this way? He lashed out a guttural oath, whirled away from the moonlit window, and went to sit rigidly on a rickety cot.

Fuming, however, served no purpose. The jail was well guarded. He had no choice but to remain there for two interminable days and nights.

It was on the third morning that the deputy sheriff arrived to unlock the barred door. With a jerk of his head he snapped:

"Come out!"

"What now?" Dusty demanded.

"We're going to have you identified."

Offering no protest, he accompanied the thick-chested man into an office at the front of the jail—and there faced the small, dark-clad, immaculate Andy Carew.

At the sight of him Dusty glowered, let his fingers curl into fists. He was about to make some harsh expostulation when, startlingly enough, Andy Carew evinced a stare of utter bewilderment. He gaped from Dusty to the deputy sheriff and back again, then cried in amazement:

"Garland!"

"Yes, Garland!" snapped Dusty. "Who the devil did you think you were going to meet up here?"

"Why——" Andy Carew checked himself, blinking. His little black eyes held infinite apology and confusion. Turning to the sheriff, he exclaimed: "This ain't Rube Anderson!"

The official parted his lips, let his jaw sag. "Ain't?"

"Of course not! You—you've made a crazy mistake. I know this man. He's a relative of mine—married to my cousin!"

"What in blazes?" exploded the deputy sheriff. "He—he matched the description perfect! Had the same kind of a buckskin horse. Had a blue suit in his soogans. He——"

"I don't care about all that," Andy Carew insisted. "I tell you it's a mistake. This is *not* Rube Anderson."

**D**USTY himself, narrow-eyed and breathing heavily, offered no interruption. He waited, listening intently to the argument between Andy Carew and the official. One might have imagined, hearing Carew, that he was Dusty's loyal friend, struggling manfully to secure his release and complete exoneration.

And, of course, he succeeded. Within five minutes the deputy sheriff, somewhat flustered and disgusted, was compelled to grant Dusty his freedom. As he waved to the door, he growled:

"Right sorry, mister. You'll find your horse at the livery stable. The rest of your stuff's at my office, includin' the saddle. I'll be glad to return it all to you. I—I guess you got a case if you feel like causin' me trouble for false arrest."

Dusty shook his head.

"It wasn't your fault, sheriff. You couldn't help yourself, I reckon. We'll just forget the whole business."

He went back to his cell and got his sombrero. A minute later he strode out of the jail, a free man—with the black-clad Andy Carew hurrying along at his side.

They were moving along Dixon City's main street when Andy Carew regretfully began:

"I'm sure sorry, Garland, about this trouble. That fool sheriff——"

"Now looka here." Abruptly Dusty halted, faced Kay's cousin squarely. He was sick of subterfuge. He was sick of this man's hypocritical show of friendship. He flung out: "Let's put our cards on the table! There's nothing that'd please you more than to see me stretched out with slugs in my head!"

"Why, Garland!"

"Quit blinkin' at me like a toad! We may as well understand each other. I know dog-gone well nobody robbed you of a buckskin or of any money. You used that story as a trick so's you could locate me, after I gave you the slip in Texas. I don't owe you any thanks for gettin' me out o' that jail. It was you who had me put into it in the first place."

"But look here, man——" blurted Carew.

"Wait till I've had my say," Dusty rapped out fiercely. "You've found me again. Chances are your head is chock-full this minute of a dozen other schemes for plugging me. Once I'm dead, I'll quit being Kay's heir. That means you're in line to inherit the Horseshoe. And then you'll probably start workin' on *her* again."

Wide-eyed, Andy Carew gasped: "I don't know what you're talking about!" Yet those bewildered-looking eyes couldn't conceal the anger that flashed in their depths.

"Whether you understand it or not," snapped Dusty, "I'll tell you this much: Any time I catch you on my trail, I'll know it means war. If you're out to kill me, I won't hesitate in slingin' a couple of slugs of my own. And that goes for any men you may hire, too. Sabe?"

He didn't wait for an answer.



Turning, he strode on alone in the direction of the livery stable. Andy Carew, he didn't doubt, was in town with several followers—ready to trail him out of Dixon City to some spot where, with no witnesses to observe what happened, they would be able to bushwhack him and have done with the whole business.

Within half an hour he tested the theory.

He retrieved his supplies at the deputy sheriff's office. When they were stowed into his saddlebags, he mounted the buckskin and rode out of town. Stirring up clouds of thick dust, he skirted a vast stretch of alfalfa, nodded to frequent horsemen.

He was scarcely two miles from Dixon City when, looking back over his shoulder, he saw six men following him along the trail. Though they were still far behind, he knew instinctively what their presence signified.

"Carew is watchin' me close, sure as Christmas!" he muttered. "Soon as I lit out o' town, he sent his killers after me. Well, I don't aim to give them a chance to-day!"

Deliberately he turned the buckskin's head and started back toward Dixon City.

That those six men would attempt to blaze away at him so close to the town—with plenty of cow-punchers in sight and within hearing distance—he hardly feared. Presently he saw that he was right. His about-face seemingly disconcerted those riders. Long before he reached them they, too, turned and hastily loped back in the direction of Dixon City.

Mirthlessly Dusty smiled.

"Banana," he said to the buckskin, "you and I have to figure out a scheme for foolin' those hambres.

I sure don't hanker to travel all the way to Montana with six killers at my back!"

AT two o'clock that morning, when Dixon City lay as dark and hushed as a desert, Dusty Dan Garland stepped through the back door of a little house on the town's outskirts. He had paid two silver dollars for the use of a bedroom in that dwelling, and since nine o'clock in the evening he had been asleep.

Now, as he moved under the stars, he was tensely alert. Pausing in black shadows, he peered about searchingly. As far as he could see, nobody was watching the back of the house.

That reassured him.

He tightened his gun belt and started hurriedly toward the rear of the livery stable on Main Street. It was with a definite purpose that he had left Banana there. He knew that if he stabled the horse where it could be watched, Carew and his men wouldn't pay so much attention to his own actions. They'd realize they had simply to guard the horse. Without it Dusty Dan Garland would hardly be likely to leave Dixon City.

It was quarter after two when he slipped noiselessly into the back door of the stable.

As he crossed the creaking boards toward Banana's stall, a small, bony, bald figure started out of sleep in a dark corner. He came forward suspiciously, shoulders hunched, eyes searching.

"What you want, stranger?" Then he recognized the buckskin's owner. "Oh!" He straightened. "Didn't know who you was for a minute."

"What do I owe you?" Dusty whispered.

"Huh?"—in surprise. "You figurin' on leavin' now?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a dollar and a half. But if I was you, mister——"

"You're *not* me, so let's forget it."

He paid his bill, saddled Banana, and rode out of the stable by its rear exit. After a last glance from left to right, Dusty headed out through darkness, sending the buckskin at a swift lope toward western hills.

"It'll be morning before Carew and his gang know I'm out of town," he reasoned. "By that time I'll have a four or five-hour start. I won't have to worry about their nibblin' at my heels on the trail."

That knowledge made him feel easier. He rode along a line of willows that hung gracefully over the bank of a shallow stream whose waters glimmered in starlight.

He couldn't guess, of course, that the bald man of the livery stable—having been paid five dollars for the service—was at that moment racing up Dixon City's main street; racing to notify Andy Carew that the owner of the buckskin had just ridden out of town.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE RIVER.

**H**E headed up along Red Water Creek!" the bald man breathlessly reported to Carew.

And Carew, roused from sleep by the startling news, cursed and snapped: "All right! Thanks. Get back to the stable and start saddlin' our horses!"

Within twenty minutes he himself, accompanied by four other men, started at a furious gallop to

follow the course Dusty Dan Garland had taken along the stream.

Dusty, anxious to put as many miles as possible between himself and Dixon City, also rode hard. He was unfamiliar with this country. His eyes strained through the darkness, constantly swung from left to right. Perhaps his best course, he decided, would be to head deep into the western hills and stay hidden among them while he made his way northward.

"By juniper!" he whispered. "What I've gone through in these last couple of weeks is pretty near enough to make *any* hombre feel he's going loco!"

Ten miles from Dixon City, where the creek abruptly bent eastward, Dusty deserted its banks. He continued straight ahead, climbing a long, graveled rise to a mesa on which, he discovered, sheep-herders had settled. He could see sheep in the distance, like fallen white clouds drifting through the darkness. Being inherently a cowman, he instinctively and distastefully grunted at the sight. And thinking of cows made him wonder about the Horse-shoe spread which was Kay's.

He'd heard men speak of it. From what he'd gathered, it was an immense outfit that ran thousands of head.

"If I was a regular kind of husband," he thought grimly, "I'd be down there now, helping her manage the place. I—I'd be one of the richest ranchers in Texas."

The thought made him laugh, but not with any particular enjoyment. As matters stood, he was a fugitive from all his responsibilities as a husband. A fugitive from Kay. A fugitive even from himself—trying desperately to reach the sanctuary of Montana before madness claimed him.

Four miles of hard riding across the mesa brought him to a down grade which, disappointingly enough, ended abruptly on the shore of a swift, deep, black river—a branch of the North Canadian, he supposed.

He reined in, frowning. The river was almost a hundred yards wide. In the darkness it appeared much too swift and dangerous to be easily forded. As black as tar, it raced past him with terrible, soundless speed.

After a moment he leaned toward a cottonwood, snapped off a leafy twig. Tossing it into the current, he watched the celerity with which it was swept downstream, and the sight awed him.

"Sure too risky for you, Banana, to try gettin' across here," he muttered. "Reckon we'd better sashay along the shore till we find a spot that won't drown us."

A lone figure in darkness, he sent the buckskin loping along the bank. Many trees—cottonwoods, willows, oaks, and even occasional cedars—lined the shore. He rode fully a mile without discovering a spot that invited safe fording. In truth, the river seemed to run faster and deeper the farther he followed it.

"Still," he mused, "there's bound to be some spot where it broadens out and runs shallow. Trail herds cross this country and get through the water all right."

SO he went on seeking for more than an hour before, with a violent start, he heard the thuds of horses' hoofs somewhere behind him!

Dusty Dan Garland swung the buckskin around on its hind legs. Presentiment more than anything else sent his hand darting to his holstered six-gun. He bent forward,

squinted through the darkness, listened.

The dull hammerings of the oncoming mounts became steadily louder. Somehow they evoked echoing thumps in his heart. There were two riders, he decided.

He couldn't guess that Andy Carew, losing his trail on the mesa, had known Dusty could go no farther than the swift river before turning aside to seek a fording spot. He couldn't guess that Andy Carew had divided his group into two hunting parties to search the river bank.

All he knew was that he could afford no risks.

"Probably," he told himself, "it's just some strangers headin' about their own business. On the other hand, though—"

His jaws tightened. He looked about swiftly. The only shelter he could discover in the immediate vicinity was the shadows under trees. To hide there with a horse, he surmised, would be almost futile. The slightest movement on the buckskin's part would certainly attract attention in this dead night silence.

So he determined to desert the river bank until the strangers had passed.

With that idea, he rode back in the direction of the mesa. But he'd gone scarcely a hundred yards when, atop a starlit ridge to his right, he spied three horsemen!

They were not the riders he had originally heard. This was a different group. Trapped between the two, Dusty sent a fiery glance from those ahead to the black river bank behind him.

"Sounds like there's only *two* hombres down by the water," he reasoned tensely. "Maybe I'd better take my chance with them instead of with these three."

So he swung the horse around and

started back—just as the men on the ridge spied him.

Instantly one of them yelled.

The cry was echoed by the two riders invisible in the shadows of the river bank. By the very intonations of those shouts, by the harsh triumph they evinced, Dusty knew his presentiment had been right.

"Blast their hides!" he grated, his face going white. "How in tarnation did they know which way I'd gone?"

It was too late to wonder. He couldn't head away from the river bank without riding nearer to the three figures now galloping down the side of the ridge. His best risk, he told himself, was to go back along the brink of the water and take his chances with the two men he hadn't yet seen.

So, with his six-gun half drawn, Dusty Dan Garland bent low over his saddle horn. His eyes were fiery. His face was rugged. He touched rowels to the lively buckskin, and the horse bounded forward with a snort.

The instant it started galloping, the three men far behind him began to yell more vociferously than ever. He heard one shriek:

"It's him, all right! It's him!"

Dusty needed to hear no more. He sent the buckskin flying with all the speed of its slender legs.

**H**E had thundered along less than a hundred yards when he saw two riders coming toward him on the brink of the swift river.

Standing high in their stirrups, guns in their hands, they were ready for trouble. As Dusty drew near, charging straight at them, both men fired.

He saw the streaks of flame. He

heard one bullet crash through foliage a few feet above his head. He heard another shot somewhere behind him.

No turning back now! No swerving aside without having five men charge after him. The only thing to do, he saw, was to take his chances on dashing past the two who blocked the river-bank trail. If he could shoot both of them out of their saddles—

Guns sixty yards ahead of him blazed again. Two sharp cracks.

Dusty responded with a shot of his own. He hardly expected to hit them, but there was a chance—one chance in a thousand—that he'd make them scamper off the trail like scared jack rabbits if he charged with his gun smoking.

He ventured a wild look over his shoulder.

The three he'd seen on the ridge, swerving their course to come after him, were drawing steadily closer. They, too, had begun to shoot in earnest. He had a brief glimpse of red flashes, like fireflies in the darkness. The shots rattled quickly through the hush of the night.

Pallid, he glared forward again.

Only forty yards separated him from the two shadowy figures beside the cottonwoods. Bent low, he aimed at them, squeezed his trigger twice.

To his astonishment, he heard a shriek of agony. One of the men, flinging his arms high, slid awkwardly out of his saddle to thud on the ground!

It was, Dusty realized, a lucky shot. And it left him only one man to face as he thundered onward. He half expected to see the figure whirl and dash off in terror.

But the man toward whom he was riding evidently had courage. He

didn't stir. He raised his six-gun and fired three times in quick succession. And on third shot—

Something banged terrifically into Dusty Dan Garland's left shoulder.

It hit him so hard that, before he could seize the pommel, he was hurled out of the saddle. He landed on the trail with a jarring crash.

Instinct rather than reason made him scramble to his feet, lunge sideways dizzily, blindly, arms outstretched.

He had a vague impression of the lone rider charging down on him with ear-splitting yells. He had,

too, the confused knowledge that three other horsemen were coming straight at him from behind, their guns spitting flame and filling the night with uproar.

He lurched on under the trees, stumbling, his eyes too agonized even to see.

Another bullet slashed viciously at his heel, cutting through the boot to gash his left foot under the ankle.

The sting of the slug made him spin crazily to the right. He lost his balance completely. He fell, rolled over—and plunged into the swift, cold, black oblivion of the river.

To be continued in next week's issue.

In Next Week's Issue

*A Complete Novel*

## BUZZARD BAIT

By WILLIAM LE FEVRE

Mistaken for a tenderfoot, an Arizona man furnishes some surprises to a Montana range.

## FREEDOM OF THE WILDS

By DABNEY OTIS COLLINS

Jake could not understand how a man whose life he had saved could turn him over to the law for money.

*Also Features by*

STUART HARDY

GUTHRIE BROWN

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# Western Battlefields

(The Alamo)

By CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

**T**HE Alamo battlefield is one of the easiest in the country for the traveler to find. It's right downtown in San Antonio, Texas, and is now called the Alamo Plaza. There's where a hundred and eighty heroes, most of them Americans of the old pioneering stock, fought Santa Ana's army of five thousand Mexican regulars for ten days, and killed and wounded *sixteen* hundred of them before they were overwhelmed and slaughtered. The principal building they defended still stands as the Alamo Memorial.

The centennial year, both for the Alamo battle and for Texas independence, is 1936. People from all over the world, particularly former Texans and the descendants of Texans, will make the pilgrimage for the dual celebrations. Many a man who left Texas fifty or sixty years ago to follow a herd of long-horns to distant ranges will bring back his grandsons to pay tribute to the honored dead at the Alamo.

When Texas began its struggle for independence, there was an Anglo-American population of about thirty thousand, together with something like a third that num-

ber of Mexicans and "tame" Indians. There were also several thousand other Indians who were too wild to be counted. These diverse people got along pretty well together, in spite of the fact that elsewhere in Mexico there had always been revolutions going since it split from Spain in 1821. But in 1833, one Santa Ana, an orator, a demagogue, and a smart, slick politician, had himself made a sort of dictator in Mexico and proceeded to make it tough for several minority groups, including the Anglo-Americans in Texas.

There is no doubt that there were a considerable number of Texans who wanted to pull away from Mexico and have Texas annexed to the United States, but considering the fact that Santa Ana continually referred to all the English-speaking colonists as traitors and pirates and had imprisoned Stephen Austin, their peacefully disposed delegate, they could hardly be blamed for that. By 1835 they were so stirred that they rose in arms and chased every Mexican soldier across the Rio Grande.

In this they were aided by several volunteer companies from the United States, who were great on fighting but very poor on discipline and military foresight. They wanted action and lots of it. When they had helped the Texans capture the town of San Antonio, the last stronghold of the Mexican army in Texas proper, they hiked out to lay siege to Matamoras, away down on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. That left but eighty men to defend San Antonio against a recurring Mexican attack, and as San Antonio was the gateway to the settled part of Texas, every one knew it was sure to be attacked as soon as Santa Ana collected an army.

NOT only did the American volunteer companies leave San Antonio to its fate, but the Texas authorities carelessly neglected this very important point in their defense. The Mexicans had been so easily defeated that the Texans just refused to worry about any future attacks from down below. They were too busy arguing over just what their future government was going to be.

Finally Colonel James Bowie was sent with a few men with orders to retire the San Antonio garrison and bring away the artillery at the Alamo and to demolish its defenses.

It had better be explained that the Alamo—the name means "cottonwood tree"—was originally a Spanish mission, consisting of a large church, barracks, and a prison, all surrounded by a good stout wall. Like all these early mission establishments, it was built with an eye to defense against the Indians. After the missions were disestablished by the Mexican government, the Alamo was easily made into a frontier fort.

Colonel Bowie found that there weren't enough teams and wagons in San Antonio to move the Alamo's guns, so he and his men decided to stay and defend the place. A few days later Colonel Travis, of the Texas regulars, arrived with another handful of soldiers. He was the senior officer and took command.

After Travis came the great David Crockett, newly arrived from Tennessee, where, according to his story, he had just been steam-rolled out of his seat in Congress by Andrew Jackson's political machine. On the road to San Antonio Crockett had picked up the most unusual assortment of riffraff to help fight the Mexicans. There was a shell-game gambler, an ex-pirate

who was once a member of Jean Lafitte's famous crew, a pious bee hunter, and a Comanche Indian.

All died like heroes in the Alamo.

On February 23, 1836, the first of the Mexican cavalry appeared before San Antonio, and Colonel Travis moved his little force across the river into the Alamo, where he knew they could sell their lives most dearly.

They were short on rations and short on ammunition. They had issued an appeal to the provisional government of Texas for both men and supplies, but they all knew that there was little chance of their getting either. They hoisted their flag, thirteen red and white stripes and a single white star with the letters T-E-X-A-S, and swore to die defending it.

**O**N the first day of the siege, Davy Crockett walked up to James Bowie and asked to see the famous knife the latter had invented. Gravely hefting the first bowie knife, Crockett asked:

"Colonel, how long would you have to tickle a man's ribs with this thing to make him laugh?"

Just then the Mexicans were seen marching up with a red flag at their head. That meant, "No quarter!"—that they would kill all prisoners. The men in the Alamo were still laughing at Crockett's joke when they saw it. They gave the red flag three derisive hoots and went on laughing at the sallies between Crockett and Bowie.

The first phase of the attack consisted principally of a cannonade by the Mexican artillery. Here's where the famous marksmanship of the Texans came into play. Their long rifles of the famous "Kentucky" type had a range and accuracy that the Mexicans thought nothing short

of miraculous. Their gunners were picked off as fast as they marched up to serve their guns.

From February 23rd to March 3rd, the Mexican cannon fire was entirely futile. Not one man in the Alamo was killed by shell fire. The thimblery gambler was struck in the chest with a grapeshot. Crockett cut it out with a hunting knife! So little was the sharper affected by the wound that he melted down the shot and molded the lead into four rifle balls with which he killed four Mexicans!

Davy Crockett himself, in the diary he kept right up till the day he was killed, tells of the frightful execution he wrought with his own famous rifle, "Old Betsy." A Mexican gunner stepped up with a lighted slow match to torch off a loaded cannon. Crockett shot him down. Another seized the match from the dying man. Crockett got him with "Thimblery's" rifle. With the gambler loading for him, Crockett killed five gunners.

Yet Crockett says he wasn't the best shot in the Alamo. He gives that honor to the bee hunter. Colonel Bowie he calls the hardest worker and most valiant fighter—"worth a dozen men."

On the fourth of March, Crockett writes that the old pirate was chased by a Mexican cavalry patrol of twenty men as he was returning to the Alamo, bearing dispatches. Crockett made a sally with the Indian and the bee hunter. They killed eight Mexicans and shot their way back into the Alamo, carrying the pirate's body.

By the fifth, Santa Ana had become so furious over the humiliation of having his prize army stood off by a ragged handful of Texans that he ordered a general assault on the wall of the Alamo from all sides.



Santa Ana was a cruel, boastful coward. No man's life meant anything to him, except his own. And let it be said right here, that while the Mexicans lacked the Americans' energy, resourcefulness, marksmanship, and general all-around "savvy," they marched to certain death with a bravery that has never been excelled anywhere. The Texans had been saving their artillery ammunition for this assault. When the Mexicans charged in formation, they turned loose everything they had and utterly mowed them down. Civilian eyewitnesses became deathly sick at the sight of the carnage. Santa Ana's officers begged him to call off the assault until the heavy artillery could broach the wall, and thereby save his men. But the dictator, from a very safe distance, sternly ordered it to be taken at all costs.

This same day Crockett wrote: "*Pop, pop, pop! Bom, bom, bom!* No time for memorandum now. Go ahead! Liberty and independence forever!"

This was the last entry in his diary.

**O**N the morning of March 6th the assault was renewed at four o'clock. Santa Ana had several regimental bands massed back of the firing line, and at the zero hour they struck up the *degüello*—the "throat-cutting" tune. At that twenty-five hundred men charged the Alamo in one wave. There were now less than a hundred defenders, and scarcely a man but what was wounded.

Even at that the Texans beat off the attack three times.

On the third assault the Mexicans planted ladders against the wall at widely separated points and began swarming over them. The battle

now became a series of fights to the death between little groups of Texans in the barracks, the prison, and the church, and increasing Mexican bands. Travis was killed while serving a cannon with his own hands, Crockett while flaying down his enemy with the barrel of his broken rifle. Colonel Bowie was in the hospital sick with pneumonia. His body was found in bed, covered over with dead Mexicans.

When it was all over and he was sure he was entirely safe, Santa Ana entered the Alamo and berated his officers because he found five of the defenders still alive. These he had shot immediately, and their bodies thrown on the great fire that consumed the bodies of all the Texans.

Three women, two small children, and a young Negro slave were all that were saved from the massacre.

All that day and all that night the dead Mexicans were buried, until they filled the available consecrated ground. The rest were thrown into the river!

The defenders in the Alamo never learned that over in eastern Texas a group of delegates had signed a declaration of independence on March 2nd.

The massacre of the Alamo was entirely Santa Ana's doing, and it brought that arch tyrant exactly nothing. A few weeks later, when his army met defeat, he turned it into a rout by his hysterical screams of fear. Two days afterward, he was found disguised as a common soldier, trying to hide himself by burrowing in a swamp. He was dragged before the victorious General Sam Houston, where he was only too eager to trade his life for the recognition of the independence of Texas and the removal of all Mexican troops to beyond the Rio Grande.



# End of the Trail

By DABNEY OTIS COLLINS

Author of "Flooded Shaft," etc.

**O**LD Jake Barton, watching the golden-red rope of blackstrap spiral into the mouth of a jug, looked up as he heard some one come into his trading post. A stranger, his mackinaw powdered white, the curled brim of his hat piled with snow. In the light from the hanging oil lamps the man's face, covered with black stubble, appeared gaunt, savage.

Jake turned off the spigot of the molasses barrel, screwed a corncob stopper into the neck of the jug. He carried it to the stove in the middle of the store, around which lounged half a dozen ranchers and prospectors. Their talk had stopped

when the stranger came in. Jake set the jug beside a pale-eyed little man whose faded denims smelled of sheep.

"Gallon an' a half, Ed. That'll be six bits."

"Jest put her on the books, Jake," said the sheépmán. "I'll see you, soon as I sell my clip."

"That's all right, Ed."

With the polite, solicitous air of the born storekeeper, Jake stepped behind the counter and approached the stranger.

"Evenin'. Somethin' I can do for you?"

"Need a little grub," the man answered. Tall, lean, deeply tanned from sun and wind, he appeared to

be a range rider. Yet there was something about him that gripped Jake's attention. Not the toneless voice in which he ordered bacon, coffee, flour, salt; nor the bulge of six-guns under his mackinaw. It was the man's eyes, green and restless like a cat's. Hunted eyes.

Undoubtedly it was the man's eyes that started the chain of half-forgotten pictures moving in Jake's mind. Memories of a face he had seen in a newspaper, or somewhere else; fragments of gossip. One more look, he told himself as he scooped flour into the tray of the scales, and he would be certain.

He set the order on the counter.

"Anything else?"

The man, holding out a bank note, shook his head.

"Comes to two an' a quarter."

The stranger dropped his change into a pocket, picked up the sack of goods, and strode to the door. It opened and shut, a blast of wintry air fluttering the flames of the lamps.

Jake looked searchingly at the men around the stove. If any of them had guessed the stranger's identity, their faces did not show it. But he knew. The man was "Wolf" Cole, stage robber and killer, who had escaped from the State penitentiary ten days ago. Wolf Cole was the most hotly hunted man in the history of southwestern Colorado. The price on his head was five hundred dollars.

**F**ROM its shelf under the cash drawer Jake drew his old cedar-butted .45 and slipped it into the front of his shirt. He moved toward the rear of the store. It was not of the reward he was thinking, or of glory. He was actuated solely by his duty as a citizen. Jake was the kind of man who would

walk twenty miles in a blizzard to vote for a candidate he knew could not win. So highly he regarded his duty to his community, so honorable he was in all things, that the greatest praise that could be given a man in these parts was: He's as good a man as old Jake Barton."

He stepped out of the back door into a knee-deep snowdrift. Head bowed against the biting wind, gun in hand, he went swiftly alongside the log wall. Coming around the corner, he came face to face with Wolf Cole untying his horse from the hitch rack. The outlaw's hands remained on the bridle reins.

Then Jake, having caught the killer flat-footed, did the thing he had known from the first he must do. For, greater even than his passion for doing right, was his sympathy for the hunted. He lowered his gun.

"Get out of this country, Cole," he said thickly. "Somebody besides me might recognize you, next time."

Cole eyed him steadily. Without a word, he flipped the reins over his horse's head, swung to saddle, and galloped into the white night.

"Had to take a look at my horse," Jake explained, joining the loungers around the stove. He spread his fingers close to the stove. "Say, it's gettin' cold. Snowin' hard."

"We was jest sayin'," Ed remarked, "that feller might 'a' been Wolf Cole."

Jake drew up an empty nail keg and sat down. He felt as if he were caught in an undertow from which there was no hope of rescue.

"Couldn't be him," he said. "He's s'posed to be up in the San Juan country. That's a hundred an' forty mile from here."

Ed grunted. "That ain't no ride for a hellion like Wolf Cole. Soon

as he used up one hoss, he'd steal another one."

The hulking, rabbit-lipped prospector called "Gum-boot" snorted: "Humph. What's killin' a few hosses to that man-killer? I heard wuss'n that about him. One time, up in Butte, he killed a bald-headed barkeep, jest to see if the bullet would bounce off his head."

"At that," said Ed, "he ain't any wuss'n the Rawhide Kid useter be."

This started a general discussion of the murderous exploits of the two bad men. Jake listened, with mounting remorse. According to these tales, Wolf Cole was worse even than he had thought—a killing beast he had turned loose on his neighbors. He had betrayed his trust to these people who, only last week, had appointed him a deacon in their church. It was not too late yet, he told himself. He knew the direction the outlaw had taken, the snow trail would be easy to follow—"as good a man as old Jake Barton."

Jake went toward the cash drawer beneath which lay his six-shooter. With the touch of his fingers on the gun butt, the old revulsion swept over him.

"I can't do it!" he whispered. "I just can't see anything hunted down, not even a thing like Wolf Cole."

**W**HILE he stood here, the door opened and a big, broad man with a very pink face came into the post. Six-guns in covered holsters were slung from each hip. It was Sheriff Duncan.

"Howdy, fellers." The sheriff's eyes flicked over the men sprawled around the stove, lifted to Jake. "Jake, how are you?"

"Purty fair, Dunc. How's yourself?"

"Be better if I could ever get my hands on this here coyote." Sheriff Duncan drew from his pocket a sheet of printed paper, spread it open on the counter. The men bent over it.

"Say!" Ed's pale eyes glistened with excitement. "That was Wolf Cole come in here! I told you—"

"What's that?" Sheriff Duncan cut in. "Wolf Cole been here? How long ago?"

"Hour an' a half, I reckon." Ed looked hard at the picture on the reward notice. "Yep. That's the same feller come in here, whiskers or no whiskers. Ain't that what you say, boys?"

They all nodded.

"Ain't no doubt about it," declared Gum-boot. He whistled. "Gosh! If I'd 'a' knowed who he was, I'd 'a' grabbed myself that thousand dollars reward."

Jake looked up from the concisely worded poster. "I ain't so sure it's him. Seems like the feller I waited on wasn't this hefty."

Ed snorted. "Ain't he been on the run for ten days?" He turned to the sheriff. "I see they got a thousand on him now. Last time I heard, it was five hundred."

"Conejos County raised it to a thousand," said Sheriff Duncan, a steely glint in his eyes. "Seems like there was a nester, up on the Frio, that testified against Cole in the murder trial. Soon as Cole gets the chance, he goes back there. All they found in the ashes of the nester's shack was two skeletons."

"Two skeletins?" repeated the sheepman.

"The nester's wife, too," answered Duncan.

"How do you know Cole done it?" argued Jake. "Maybe somebody

else had a grudge against the nester—the cowman he's squattin' on, say—an' he done it, knowin' Cole would get the blame."

"Three different men saw Cole ridin' towards the nester's claim. Recognized him from this picture." The lawman's manner became impatient. "What you say, Jake? Is this the feller that bought the grub?"

The eyes of the man in the cheaply printed picture looked back at Jake. Green and restless like a cat's, he remembered. The mouth, a thin slash, mocked him. He seemed to hear, from far away, the pleading cries of the nester and his wife, the double boom of a six-gun, the crackle of flames.

"It's him, Dunc. I'd swear to it."

"Good." Sheriff Duncan turned to the others. "I can use all the men that can go."

Ed broke the uneasy silence. "I sure would like to help you out, sheriff. But I got a new herder, an' I'm skeered to leave him too long by hisself."

"I got to be gittin' on back to the diggin's," muttered Gun-boot, edging toward the door.

The others followed.

"I'm goin' with you, Dunc." Jake felt himself lifted to the heights. He was going to undo the wrong he had done. "I saw which way he went. His trail will be plain as day, in this snow." His boots moved eagerly across the puncheon floor to the stable behind the building. "Be with you, quick as I can saddle up."

There was no hesitation now. As he knotted the latigo, he heard from the store a faint tapping. Sheriff Duncan, tacking up the reward notice. To Jake it seemed like the clapping of hands, applauding him for seeing the clear white light of his duty.

SHERIFF DUNCAN, muffled to the ears, was waiting in the saddle. Taking the lead, Jake hit into a fast trot. Snow sifted down from a black sky, but the long, ragged marks made by Wolf Cole's horse were plainly visible.

In silence, except for the cushioned thud of hoofs and the fitful moaning of the wind, the two men rode across a sheeted flat that sloped gradually upward. The outlaw was headed, undoubtedly, for the Hell Hole. A wild, lonely waste of erag and canyon some twenty miles to the west. Rendezvous, since the days of "Butch" Cassidy and his wild bunch, of the hunted—beast and man.

With each white mile that passed behind him, the tragedy that had taken place in the nester's shack grew less and less real to Jake. Into the piteous shrieks of the woman, the roar of flames, now intruded the sound of Wolf Cole's fleeing horse. Louder became the frenzied hoof-beats, until he imagined he saw the outlaw, bent low over the horse's neck, looking back with hunted eyes.

Jake shook himself. He glanced at the big, silent lawman. His years at the post rose before him, a solid barrier to the plan that was taking shape in his brain. Peace came to him, because he was doing right. But it would not stay. He was riding down a human being, hunting him to the death. True, Wolf Cole deserved to die. No outlaw in Colorado had ever deserved it more—except, perhaps, the "Rawhide Kid," so the ranchers had said. Yet, as the snow trail grew fresher, Jake began to slacken the pace of his horse.

Sheriff Duncan swept abreast of him. "We're gainin' on him fast!"

"Believe we are, Dunc. He don't suspicion we're after him."

"Come on!" Duncan shot into the

lead. "We'll run him in a hole in another hour!"

Jake looked with strange fixity at the sheriff's broad back. "Run him in a hole," he repeated slowly. The very act of Duncan's taking the lead decided him. He felt detached now, a spectator watching the chase from a clear height.

"He'll never ketch him!" he said fiercely, driving in the rowels. "I won't let him ketch him!" And he thought: "That's why I come. Not to ketch Wolf Cole, but to keep him from gettin' caught!"

He forced his horse past the sheriff. Recklessly he plowed through the snow, searching for the chance he knew must come. Come, it did. On a bald, wind-swept flat the trail was lost. Jake, watching Duncan with jealous attention, was first to see the vague, snow-filling tracks left by Wolf Cole's horse. Calling loudly to Duncan to follow, he raced away at a right angle to the outlaw's trail. Looking back, he saw the lawman coming after him. He smiled. As long as he kept in the lead, Duncan would not know he was being misled.

Jake held his lead, though he forced his horse to its utmost. He had come upon another flat swept bare of snow, before Duncan overtook him. They circled and re-circled the flat. After about an hour Duncan came to where Jake was riding slowly, his eyes intent on the ground.

"Ain't no more use lookin'," said Duncan. "His tracks are covered by this time, anyhow. I'll get him to-morrow."

"We lost him, all right," Jake said, not meeting the sheriff's eyes. To himself he added: "You won't get him!"

"I'll get him to-morrow," Duncan repeated. "He's headed for the Hell

Hole. He can't get away. Know of anybody livin' close by?"

"Pete Simmons lives six or eight miles over towards the mountains. Runs a few sheep. I know Pete well."

Duncan gathered his reins. "All right. We'll hole up there for the rest of the night."

**P**ETE SIMMONS, bullet-crippled, was Jake Barton's brother. No one in this country knew they were brothers, because of the difference in their names. Jake, out of his meager savings at the trading post, had brought Pete here from somewhere up in Montana. He had stocked Pete's little ranch with sheep. Each week he sent provisions by the boy, Estaban, who herded for Pete. He was hoping for the time when he could get enough ahead to pay for the operation that would cure Pete of his deformity.

"You know, Dunc," Jake said, as they rode across the white-mantled hills, "there's some good in everybody—even a man like Wolf Cole."

"Man?" Duncan looked at him above cupped hands which held a match to his pipe. "Wolf Cole ain't a man."

"Call him what you want to. He ain't all bad."

"It's like you to talk that way, Jake. But, take it from somebody that knows, that's all hokum. These hardened criminals ain't got no more feelin' than a snake. No good in 'em, never could be." Duncan held another match to his pipe, puffed noisily. "Was you in this country when the Rawhide Kid was raisin' the devil round here?"

"That was before my time. Heard the boys talkin' about him."

"Well, here's a sample of the good that was in that pertickler bad man.

A sheepman up on the Mescalito took him in, knowin' all the time who he was. But the Kid was packin' a load of buckshot, and the old snoozer felt sorry for him. He nussed him and pulled him through. Then, what did this snake do? He tied the sheepman up, robbed him, and left him to starve to death."

"Did he starve?"

"Not quite. But he would've, if a trapper hadn't happened along."

Jake smiled. "Maybe the Rawhide Kid told the trapper about him, paid him to go there an' turn him loose."

The sheriff shook his head. "Ain't no use talkin' to you, Jake. Go 'head on believin' there's good in everybody, if you want to. Only, there ain't."

"Well, whatever become of this Rawhide Kid?"

"Oh, they got him. He broke out of the pen, same as Wolf Cole. It was a month before they trapped him. Black Canyon, I believe it was, over near the Utah line. My dad was one of the posse that got him. How much further, Jake?"

"Just over the next ridge."

Blotches of blackness against the snow, Pete Simmons's little shake cabin, barn, and sheep sheds lay suddenly beneath them. Lonely and desolate was the little huddle of buildings, eloquent of bitter struggle, misery, despair. Jake thought of his brother, crippled, penniless, cut off from the society of his fellow men.

"The thousand-dollar reward on Wolf Cole would pay for Pete's operation!"

The thought was like a flash of lightning in Jake's brain. Unconsciously he shot a swift glance at the sheriff. He saw Pete whole once more, as God made him—running barefoot through the meadows;

climbing trees; fishing in the creek that curved through a corner of the pasture, back in their old Indiana home. That thousand dollars would make Pete whole!

A hot wave surged through Jake. The guilt of his complicity in aiding Wolf Cole to escape fell from him like a soiled garment. Again he was honest Jake Barton, who lived only to do right. Certainly he would be doing right if he captured Wolf Cole.

As swiftly as it was born, the resolution died. No matter what he was, Wolf Cole was a human being. Jake could not hunt a fellow man down, even to make Pete walk again. In the eyes of the law he was doing wrong. But he could do no other. He looked at Duncan, and felt a wall rise between them. He saw in the lawman only a relentless man hunter, whom he would oppose until Cole made his escape from the country.

They dismounted before the dark cabin. Jake knocked once on the door, pushed it open.

"It's Jake, Pete," he said softly.

There came no answer. Jake struck a match.

"He's murdered!" muttered Duncan, his eyes staring down at the floor.

As steady as rock were Jake's fingers as he lighted a candle. Like rock, also, were his eyes. Pete Simmons lay on his face, one arm under his body, the other outspread. A dark-red stain led from his head to an oblong pool against the wall. His pockets were turned inside out.

Completing his brief examination, Sheriff Duncan stood up.

"Ain't been dead more than an hour. You said he had a Mex herder?"

Jake nodded. "I sent—I mean,

Pete had a little money. Esteban was in the store two days ago, buyin' some things."

"Let's find him."

Footprints, far apart, led from the back door to a long, low sheep shed. Here, cowering in a pile of burlap sacks used for shipping wool, they found Esteban. Duncan dragged him out by the neck.

"I no do it—I no do it!" whimpered the boy, his eyes wide with terror.

"Don't choke him," said Jake.

"You spik!" the sheriff said through his teeth. "Dig up that money!"

"No! No, señor—I no do it!" Esteban cried. His black eyes fixed pleadingly on Jake's. "Listen, señor." The words poured from his trembling lips. "A big, tall man keel Señor Pedro. Black whiskers all over face, so! And eyes"—he shuddered—"green eyes of the lobo."

"You're lyin'," Duncan cut in, looking sharply at Jake.

"No, no, señor. Esteban no lie. I see heem ride up. After while I hear a shot—boom! I see heem go to barn. I wait long time, then I go in—" He flung his arms across his face, moaning.

Duncan whirled him around. "Let's go to the barn."

Jake followed, dazed.

As they came through the door of the barn, a horse nickered. Duncan struck a match, swore softly. It was a black horse. Saddle marks were damp on its hide.

"See!" exclaimed Esteban. "He tek Señor Pedro's horse!"

"Pete's horse was a bay," Jake said.

Duncan nodded. Horse tracks led from the barn toward the night-shrouded mountains of the Hell Hole.

"All right, son," he said kindly to

Esteban. "But you ought to told somebody."

"Ah, señor, I so afraid," murmured the boy. "The lobo eyes!"

"Be with you in a minute, Dunc." Jake waded through the snow to the cabin. He stood with bowed head over his dead brother.

"I feel just like I done it myself," he said aloud. "If I hadn't 'a' thrown Dunc off the trail, you would be livin' now, Pete." Savage purpose mingled with the remorse that gripped his features. "Two wrongs don't make a right, the Good Book says. But I'm killin' Wolf Cole."

Duncan called to him to hurry. He stepped into the night.

"That's hell!" rasped Duncan. "If we hadn't lost his trail—" He broke off, glancing at Jake in astonishment. "If I didn't know it was you, I'd swear you cussed, Jake."

"Maybe I did." Jake came into the cold saddle.

"We'll get him."

"We'll get him," Jake echoed tonelessly.

"You see now how much good there is in an outlaw, don't you?"

"Reckon I was wrong, Dunc."

**K**NEE to knee, in grim silence, the lawman and the avenger followed the killer's trail. The white miles passed behind them. It was very cold. Their saddle leathers creaked. Their eyes were inflamed, watery. Their breath hung like steam before their blue faces. Icicles studded their horses' muzzles. Sharp and metallic their hoofs cracked against the frozen earth.

Through all those weary miles remorse sat upon Jake's conscience. Endlessly he weighed all the good he had done against the evil. Over and over he marched all the years of his



life through the white searchlight of his conscience. No comfort came to him. And always the answer was the same: Pete was dead; Wolf Cole must die.

Duncan kept looking at him, as though he were trying to reconcile this grim man hunter with the gentle storekeeper whose hand was never lifted except in helpfulness to his fellow man.

Night faded into day that would know no sun. Light, reflected from the drab sky, revealed ahead of them a jagged line of mountains. Spires, domes, minarets rose bleak and forbidding above the nigher ridges.

"He's back in there," spoke the sheriff. "That's where they all head for."

Jake nodded, but said nothing.

The trail led them into a canyon which reared its austere walls a thousand feet into the sky. Icy wind moaned through the gigantic rent, rattling the skeletonlike aspens, sighing through the dead limbs of the willows. Shadows hung black in the hollows. The clammy gloom that enveloped the canyon seeped into Jake's troubled soul. The thought came to him that he would never see his little trading post again. Try as he might, he could not drive the thought from him.

They sat their horses, in the veiled light of the noon sun, atop a spur from which spread a granite ocean of ridge and valley. Out of the primordial upheaval rose towers and battlements, peaks and pinnacles, fantastically carved by untold ages of wind-blown sand. Lavishly splashed with reds, yellows, purples, the rock formations were yet more sinister than beautiful.

"Well, there she is," said Sheriff Duncan. "The Hell Hole."

Jake did not answer. He was looking at the vivid streaks of ver-

million that belted a sandstone pagoda. Colossal brush strokes of blood, it seemed to him. He thought of all the human blood that must have stained the tumbled floor of the Hell Hole.

Riding cautiously down this spur into a peak-rimmed basin, they made a discovery that brought a surge of hope. The boot prints of Wolf Cole were mingled with those of his horse. Examining the hoof marks in the snow, they were convinced that the horse had become lame. The end of the trail should come soon.

It came soon. Approaching the base of a huge, black, flat-topped cone, Duncan's horse stopped short, a round little hole appearing in its chest. As the horse's legs crumpled under it and Duncan lunged wildly out of the saddle, there came from the peak of the cone the crack of a rifle. Jake's horse spurted forward. Before he reached the protection of the steep walls, he felt a stinging slash across his shoulder. Duncan, breathless but uninjured, joined him. Savage joy was in his face.

"We got him treed! You go up this side. I'll take the other. He can't get away. But watch out for rollin' boulders."

Jake looked hard up at the black, fluted wall. "Be better if we go up together, wouldn't it? That's tough climbin'. I'll take my rope, an' we'll sorta help each other."

"All right," Duncan agreed promptly. "I ain't the mountain goat I used to be, either." He looked at his dying horse. His lips moved soundlessly.

**J**AKE looped the saddle rope over his shoulder, caught hold of a bush, and started up the wall. He was armed only with his six-shooter, a decided advantage

against the outlaw's rifle. But he needed both hands for climbing. He toiled up the formidable wall, holding on with fingers, knees, toes. Drawing himself up on a narrow ledge, he lay on his back, breathing hard. His heart hammered his ribs. He was dizzy. Duncan, his face corded and crimson, gasping, dropped down behind him.

Not long they rested. Jake drove his aching legs up the mountain. Always his eyes looked upward, to the crags in which Wolf Cole might be hiding. Climbing by fissure and chimney, helping each other up rock faces by means of the rope, they slowly left the earth behind.

Suddenly into the majestic silence a rifle cracked. The report came from above them, its echoes beating against the cliffs like wings of blinded birds. Pressed flat against the wall, Jake listened for the bullet's whine. He heard, far beneath them, a deep, throaty roar.

"Look!" Duncan, clinging to the wall, was staring downward, over his shoulder.

Jake saw midget figures of men scurrying toward the foot of the wall. One lay on the ground.

"Who is it—your men?"

"No. Must be a posse from the pen." The sheriff smiled thinly. "The Wolf's gone now. But let's hurry and get there first. I want to see you get that head money."

"I got to get there first," Jake muttered, struggling on. But it was not of the reward he was thinking.

Recklessly he climbed. Duncan, left in the bottom of a bottle-necked crevice, looked expectantly upward, waiting for the rope. It did not come. He shouted. He cursed. Jake did not answer. With the strength of utter desperation he was ascending a rock face that the most

skilled mountaineer would not have attempted without an ax and hob-nailed boots. His hands were torn, his knees deeply gouged. His breath came in broken wheezes. Madly he climbed, slipping, hanging over precipices, seconds from death, only to struggle on more insanely even than before.

"I got to get there before they do—got to kill Wolf Cole!" he gasped, over and over, until it became almost a prayer. It was as though this achievement were his one hope of eternity.

He dragged his tortured body over the last parapet, and lay motionless. Precious minutes passed before he recovered strength to lift his head. He drew his gun, scowled at his trembling hand. The old .45 was undamaged. He holstered it and came shakily to his feet. On the boulder-littered mountaintop he saw no life. Had the outlaw escaped?

Jake crouched soundlessly toward a huge pile of reddish rock, the highest point of the cone. Then, from the corner of his eye, he caught a stealthy movement, a flash of metal. He whirled, his hand streaking to holster. With the very touch, it seemed, the gun exploded. Wolf Cole, wringing a bleeding hand, reached snarling for his other gun.

"Raise 'em!" Jake came slowly toward him.

Cole, hands in the air, stared at him, incredulous. "You're that old storekeeper—you let me go!"

**J**AKE came on, in silence. He saw only the outlaw's eyes—the eyes of a wild beast, trapped. All else was forgotten, save the hunted eyes. In sudden frenzy he threw his gun to the ground.

"I can't do it—I can't do it!" he cried from the agony that ripped his soul apart. "Go, while you got a chance! Go, I tell you! Don't stand there lookin' at me with them eyes!"

Wolf Cole lowered his uninjured hand to the butt of his gun.

"I can't get away," he said without feeling. "They got me surrounded."

"I'll help you get away. I got a rope. I'll——"

"A rope? You got a rope?" Cole's upper lip drew away from his teeth. "Where is it? There's a chimney over there——"

"I'll get it." Jake ran to the edge of the parapet where he had left the rope. He raced back, filled with strength. Still with his snarling smile, Wolf Cole led the way across the mountaintop to the chimney.

This was a straight-walled shaft, drilled through solid rock to a depth of perhaps a hundred feet. Its bottom fanned out to a ledge. Below this ledge yawned the black mouth of another chimney. Jake's rope was sixty feet long. Taking a half hitch around a dwarf pine, he lowered the outlaw to a cavern about halfway down the chimney. He dropped the rope into the hole. Watching, he saw Cole fasten the rope within the cavern and lower himself to the bottom of the chimney.

"He ought to make it now," Jake said aloud.

Slowly his scuffed boots moved through the rocks to where he had thrown down his gun. His shoulders were bowed. Wrinkles were grooved deep beside his mouth. He walked stiff-kneed, like an old, old man. But his eyes mirrored the peace that was in his heart.

He sat down wearily. While he waited, he fired the remainder of the

cartridges in his gun. This would make the posse think Wolf Cole was still up here, he reasoned.

First to come over the parapet was Sheriff Duncan. His face was dark with anger.

"Got him?" he yelled.

"No. He got away. I helped him get away."

Duncan stopped in his tracks.

"Helped him get away!" He came swiftly forward. "What you talkin' about?"

"That's right, Dunc. I helped him get away. Can't stand to see any man run down an' caught."

"Say, you did do it! That's why you left me down there." Duncan looked closely at him. "You gone crazy, Jake?"

"Looks that way, don't it? But I done it. I'm willin' to——"

Jake broke off, a terrible change in his face. He was staring, loose-lipped, at a short, square-built man who came toward him from the opposite side. When a dozen feet away, this man stopped short. His bright, shrewd eyes, half hidden in puffy folds of fat, fixed on Jake with microscopic gaze. A swift change came also into his face, as quickly vanished.

"Warden!" Duncan said angrily. "This feller here, Jake Barton, let him get away! Helped him get away, so he says."

"Cole didn't get away," the penitentiary warden said quietly, his eyes never leaving Jake's. "He's hanging down there, his foot caught in a rope and his brains knocked out. Slipped, I guess." He said to Jake, the shadow of a smile on his stern lips: "Glad to see you, Rawhide Kid."

Duncan stared at him, then burst into laughter. "What's wrong with you, warden? This is Jake Barton.

Runs a tradin' post over on Coon Crick. Rawhide Kid!" He laughed louder. "Why, he's so all-fired good, half the babies in the county are named after him!"

"I'm glad to hear it," the warden said kindly to Jake. "Maybe the parole board will do something for you. But I've got to take you back."

Jake stood up.

"I'm ready, warden. Glad she's

over. Been waitin' for you all these years."

"Nineteen, isn't it?"

"Nineteen, come Christmas."

Sheriff Duncan swore softly. He remembered what he had said about there being no good in an outlaw. Honest Jake Barton the Rawhide Kid! He couldn't believe it. Yet it must be true. There was the warden taking him back to the penitentiary.

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### NEVADA'S ASSAYING SERVICE

**M**ORE than two thousand mines in Nevada have taken advantage so far this year of the free assaying service of the State analytical laboratory at the University of Nevada, according to a report by Professor William I. Smythe in charge.

The number of samples sent to the bureau has increased during the past few years with a 30% increase during the first eight months of 1935, as compared with the average for a similar period of the last five years.

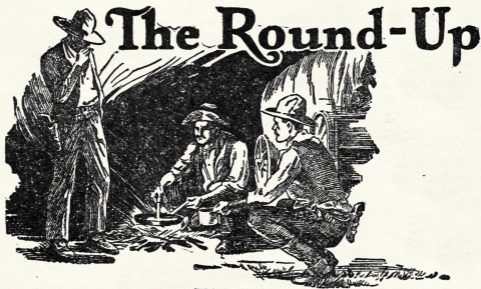
The report showed 2,770 lots of samples with the number of samples at 4,362 and the number of determinations made, 19,781. Of the reports issued 37.3% were on ore showing values of more than \$4 per ton and 16.6% assaying more than \$20 per ton.

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### THE MINING INDUSTRY

**T**HE mining industry—one of our two really basic industries—is in reality a series of industries, each in itself of major importance, employing thousands of men, paying millions in taxes to State and national governments, and furnishing raw materials for a large number of industrial enterprises. In times of normal production there are approximately 25,000,000 persons directly or indirectly dependent upon the extraction and processing of mineral products for their livelihood. Approximately 1,700,000 individuals find employment in strictly mining enterprises.

Products from the mines furnish approximately fifty-six per cent of the total revenue freight handled by Class 1 railroads. The mineral industries contribute twenty-two per cent of the Federal income when normal conditions prevail, and it is estimated that the annual taxes paid by producers of minerals in a normal year is more than \$200,000,000. To operate these properties efficiently, these industries must spend \$350,000,000 annually for equipment and supplies.



# The Round-Up

**F**OLKS, do you like to make others happy? Are you often perplexed as to the best way to accomplish this? Answer to both questions: Yes. Now we'll let you into a secret—the secret is how to make others happy. Just you read what is printed at the end of this Round-up and then use it. No, your money will not be refused if you send in more than one subscription. The money will be received with thanks. We'll be happy, too.

Here's an interesting letter that J. A. Thompson, the man who knows all the ins and outs about mining, recently received. Thompson is the man to go to if you want reliable information. H. J. K., of Chicago, Illinois, writes:

"DEAR MR. THOMPSON: Have been interested in mining for a number of years, and honestly I must confess that this trait, which so nobly is working itself to the fore, has been in my system more or less

all my life. Now, with your help, I'm going to take the bull by the horns, so to speak.

"It's taken quite a bit of courage on my part to finally muster enough strength to write you. The only reason I decided to write is because instinctively, without knowing you, I have come to trust you like a brother.

"I am thirty-two years of age, in the best of health. Outside of trips to North Dakota and Massachusetts, I have lived in Chicago all my life.

"Now if you and several buddies were to start out with the mining fever, lot of courage, each having a little money, and wanting to eke out perhaps a little more than a living, just how would you equip yourself, and where are the best places to go? Also, how would you go about staking a claim?

"By now you have perhaps gathered the type and amount of information I need. Perhaps you could prod me with questions.

"Please give us a good send-off."

And here's Mrs. Ava Hendricks, of McAlister, Oklahoma:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Here comes an old-timer in defense of H. Bedford-Jones. That letter that came out in the August 3rd issue sure did make me sit up and take notice. I have read Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for at least fifteen years and have not missed one single copy so far, and I don't expect to as long as I can get the fifteen cents to buy it with. I have enjoyed the stories by H. Bedford-Jones so much, especially the 'Pawnee Joe' series, and all the rest.

"If that reader doesn't like the magazine as it is, he wouldn't enjoy anything. I think he is just like some other people I know. He must be a professional kicker. H. Bedford-Jones is one of our best writers, and I, for one, sure would hate to see him lose out.

"Thank you to Bob Case for the 'Windy and Lonesome' story. That was fine. Hope you send us another one soon. They are also old friends of mine.

"And, as Case would say, that 'charter member' letter made the hackles on my neck stand up.

"Now, Boss, excuse this messy letter. I am tired, hot, and mad, too. Hope you don't take Bedford-Jones out of our great magazine.

Best wishes to all our writers, and please tell Bedford-Jones to keep up the 'Pawnee Joe' series. My family all like and read Western Story Magazine. And tell Bob Case to send in some more 'Windy and Lonesome' stories."

As to Biffalo Bull and as to gettin' him in our circle, says Frank Bradley, of 38 Lewis Street, Geneva, New York:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: Having been a reader of Street & Smith's Western Story for twelve years, and never having missed a copy, this is the first time I have attended a meeting of the Round-up, but after reading in the July 13th issue what A. B. Cowdery has to say about Roland Krebs, I can't keep still.

"I can't see why some people are so narrow-minded in thinking that just because they don't like a story, the story should not be printed, and that if these particular stories continue to appear in the magazine, they will not buy it. Other people who like the stories might write in and say if you don't print them, they would stop buying the magazine. My advice to you is to keep on printing just as you've been doing. There is not a man living who can please every one.

"Here's hoping we get more of Roland Krebs's stories!"

Street & Smith's WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE,  
79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

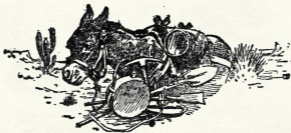
*Gentlemen:*

Here is \$6.00 for one year's subscription to Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, to be mailed to the address below, together with a set of twenty pictures suitable for framing, which depict "A Cowboy's Day."

Name.....

Street and Number.....

City and State.....



# 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.

**G**OLD mining in the South is almost as old as the history of the United States itself. And the industry is still going on. Yes, sir, shining particles of yellow metal may be won to-day in the great Southern gold belt which extends more or less continually and with varying richness up from east-central Alabama, through northern Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia, clear into the corner of Maryland.

Robert Porter, of Miami, Florida, is asking for some information on the old historic gold country of the South.

"I understand," he writes, "that gold used to be mined in the South, in Georgia, North Carolina, and elsewhere. Any information you can give me about gold mining in this sector will be deeply appreciated."

Robert, the South was the first real gold country to be discovered

and exploited in the United States. The early records of the United States mint show that gold was produced in North Carolina way back in 1793. Later a great placer-gold boom occurred at Dahlonega, Georgia, and the United States saw its first real stampede for yellow metal.

In fact the Southern gold fields became so important that by about 1838 the government established two mints in the region—one at Dahlonega, Georgia, the other at Charlotte, North Carolina. It is estimated that some \$50,000,000 worth of gold has been produced by the Southern States, most of it prior to the Civil War, and prior to the opening up of the great Western gold-mining camps that followed so closely upon the stampede of the forty-niners into California.

Incidentally, among the thousands of Americans who trekked west into the first great rush to the California gold fields, almost the only ones who had any actual

knowledge of small-scale placer-mining methods were the prospectors from the Southern gold camps.

It was, in innumerable individual cases, the experienced Southern prospectors who showed their comrades from the East and the middle West how to wield a gold pan, how to build and set up sluice boxes, and how to construct the simple homemade rocker that would so effectively save their gold.

Gold mining was old-stuff to the boys around Dahlonega, Georgia, in 1849. In fact the cream of the rich placer fields there was already beginning to be worked out. But in their hurry to seek the reported fabulously rich new gold fields of the West, some good ground was left behind.

This has been undisputably demonstrated by the fact that gold mining is still going on in the South, and gold is still being taken from the old diggings. In fact there has recently been a decided up-jump in gold production in the Southern States. Last year, for instance, Alabama's gold output increased more than one thousand per cent over the production for the previous year. Georgia's gold production increased one hundred and seven per cent over the same period of time.

Although in the past the greater portion of Southern gold has come from placers, hard-rock mining for the yellow metal is assuming increasing importance. The easier-worked placers are in many instances virtually exhausted, but it is highly probably that rich virgin placers remain to be discovered under some of the fertile bottom lands, and that reworking some of the older gravels may prove to be a highly paying proposition.

About staking claims in the South, Robert, Federal mining laws

apply only to unoccupied portions of the public domain. There is no public domain, as it is understood, in the South. The gold lands are, for the most part, on private property, farms, and what not. In order to prospect such land, some mutually acceptable agreement must be entered into between the owner of the land and the prospector.

Gold mining in the South has a rich and glamorous past. At present, aided by more modern methods of prospecting, mining, and gold recovery, it can look confidently toward an even more glorious future. Yes, sir, shining particles of yellow metal may be won to-day in the Southern gold belt, Robert.

Next R. K. T. mails in a letter from Macon, Georgia, requesting a few brief facts concerning prospecting 'way up in Benewah County in the Idaho Panhandle. And he mentions particularly transportation facilities. There's a lot of wild timber country up there, R. K. T., but the section is far from inaccessible. You've got a good State highway system connecting main towns, the main line of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul cuts through the county, and small boats ply up and down the Coeur d'Alene Lake and the St. Joe River.

Principal metal mineral resources are gold, silver, copper, lead, and zinc. In many areas these deposits have not been very generally exploited in the past, and there's plenty of chance for further exploration and development. Perhaps the best-known mining districts in the county are the St. Joe, which lies to the east of St. Maries, the county seat, and also the Hoodoo and Camas Cove districts. The latter are situated more or less in the southeastern corner of the county.



# 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.

**W**YOMING has great stretches of blue-joint hay and alfalfa lands in the farm-ranch country below the Black Hills. "Wyoming Rancher" can give you home-seeking folks some information about this ranch and farming section.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

It would be a fine thing if all the folks who want homes could have a farm-ranch home like I have here in eastern Wyoming. And this is all possible with a little hard work. We have fine grain crops and lots

of hay in this section of Wyoming. Heavy loam, no stones or sand, and there sure is plenty of blue-joint hay and dry-land alfalfa hay grown here. Yep, I settled in Wyoming, where we have good grain crops and lots of hay for stock, with mild winters and grazing most all the year round.

However, I didn't decide to settle here until I had looked over the entire States and the Provinces of Canada as well. And I will be only too glad to tell you folks about any State in the United States or any Province of Canada. I will tell you about the good points and the drawbacks as I saw them. A lot of people are now homesteading in Canada, but I believe that there is still a majority who would rather buy land in the States where land can be

acquired very reasonably, close to schools and on good graded roads and close to towns in districts that raise good crops. I now have a well-improved farm-ranch located on a paved State highway, and I feel better toward the world and people! I would like to hear from folks who would like to make their own homes and build for a future for themselves.

WYOMING RANCHER.

Care of The Tree.

Here's a girl whose home is in the Northwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a young girl of eighteen, and I would like to have Pen Pals from all over the world, and especially from France, Spain, Australia, Cuba, and Mexico. I skate, swim, ride horses, play tennis, and dance. I have danced on many stages in different cities. I have had many experiences, some of which I will exchange with my Pen Pals. My nickname is Billy, and I am hoping to have my mail box filled, *my pronto*.

GENEVA CRISP.

2210 H Street, Bellingham, Washington.

Evelyn is a junior member.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Life is pretty lonely in this small city, and my real friends are not my age. I am a girl of fifteen years of age. My best hobbies are collecting army and navy insignia, keeping old and new songs, and playing the piano. I would like to have Pen Pals from all over the world, especially from the West. Do not desert me, friends, but write me as fast as you can, and I will try to answer each letter.

EVELYN M. PERRY.

76 French Street,  
Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

A Scotch lassie is speaking up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I wonder if the old Holla could manage a few Pen Pals for a lonely young lady of twenty-four? I honestly am crazy to hear from a Pal from the West. I love horses, although I only get a chance among them when I go to the north of Scotland at holiday time.

I should be pleased to exchange snaps and photographs and I promise to send to my future Pen Pals some real "Scotch heather."

MARIE GRAY.

15 Meadowbank Avenue,  
Edinburgh, Scotland.

Here's that Canadian waddy you-all have been looking for.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I live on a cattle ranch in sunny Alberta, Canada. My favorite pastime is riding horseback. I am twenty-two years old, and



Home seekers will welcome this opportunity to exchange letters with Wyoming Rancher who can tell about the ranching and farming country of eastern Wyoming. Wear your friend-maker membership badges, folks, and fire away with your questions!

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.

I would be glad to hear from all young folks between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, especially those who live in Colorado or Nevada. Let's go, Pals, and see if you can't keep me busy reading and answering your letters. I will exchange snapshots with you-all who drop me a line.

ANDY OF ALBERTA.

Care of The Tree.

From Texas comes a little ranch miss.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a cowgirl of fourteen years. I am looking for friends who will exchange songs with me. I will tell about my country in exchange for information about other countries. Come on, Pals, and sling ink this way.

NELL SPEAR.

Route 1, Cunningham, Texas.

Frank hails from our Northeast.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a lonely boy of eighteen, and I would like to have some Pen friends to take up some of my time. I am a collector of stamps, coins, snapshots, and post cards, so I have many things to trade with you folks.

FRANK ROBERTS.

Route 2, Searsport, Maine.

Joyce is a Queensland girl.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I would like to hear from Pen Pals all over the world, but especially from India and Western United States. I will exchange snaps and answer all letters. I am seventeen years old, and I am interested in riding, dancing, et cetera.

JOYCE MITCHELL.

Glenavon Station, Via Aramac,  
Central Queensland, Australia.

This boy is ready and willing to give out plenty of information.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a boy in the CCC camp in Texas. I came from the coast. I would like to have some one to exchange yarns with. I know considerable about Texas and life on the Gulf. I have worked at almost everything. I have ridden horses. I have worked on boats. And I have even raised cotton and worked in the rice fields.

Boys, I have plenty of friends, but I want to write to some one in other States. I am twenty-three years old.

JOE VOSTATES.

CCC Camp 1806, Willis, Texas.

"Ohioan" has a place on his farm for some young man.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

My business is farming. I would like to exchange letters with a young man who is looking for a good home rather than high wages. I have been through the States and have given help to many. There is some one who needs help. I like to live and let live. It is my intention to give help where it is most needed. If you are worried and have no place to call home, I shall be pleased to hear from you. OHIOAN.

Care of The Tree.

From New Hampshire comes this older member.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am wishing for Pen Pals from far-away countries. I will exchange cards or small souvenirs. I am a married woman of forty-six, but I will enjoy writing to young or old. United States pals are welcome as well as the foreign ones.

MRS. IDA S. HOOPER.

Lock Box 127,  
Henniker, New Hampshire.

Boys, here's a junior correspondent for you.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a young boy of twelve years. I would like very much to have Pen Pals from all over the world. Won't somebody write to me?

1432 Houston Avenue,  
Port Arthur, Texas.

LEROY TANDO.

Here's an hombre who's stationed in Hawaii.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am away off in Hawaii—a very lonesome place to be, but a very beautiful place, also. I am eighteen years old. Come on, Pals; keep me and the postman busy.

PRIVATE JAMES V. SHARPLESS.

Headquarters and Military Police Co.,  
Schofield Barracks, Territory Hawaii.

Ron is a Nova Scotian.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I'm a Nova Scotian of nineteen winters. I would like to correspond with folks all over the world—between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Come on, all you Southerners and Westerners; drop me a line. I'll answer all letters the second day after I receive them.

RON ROBAR.

84 Compton Avenue,  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

A Tennessee miss would like to exchange letters and stamps.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am looking for Pen Pals. I am a girl in my teens. I'll answer letters from anywhere, but I would like to write to girls between fourteen and twenty. I love sports, reading, and music. I also collect stamps.

EUGENIA GOBEL.

Due West Avenue, Madison, Tennessee.

A Westerner would like correspondence from Canada and Alaska.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I would like Pen Pals from Alaska or Canada. I would like to have the folks tell me what their part of the country is like. I will answer all letters and inclose post-card views of California.

MRS. W. H. INK.

Montrose, California.



# WHERE TO GO And How To GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**M**ANY hombres who spent their youth in the friendly, rugged atmosphere of the old West have a yen later in life to return to the scenes of their early years. Such is the case with Ben H., of Wilmington, Delaware.

"The writer was born on a ranch in Montana, Mr. North, and passed his boyhood in that part of the

world. Although for a considerable time now I have been a long way removed from my natural environment and the wide open spaces which I love, I'm planning an early return to the West. To tell the truth, I'm downright homesick for the sight of sunlight dancing off brown buffalo grass; for the sudden action of a bolting, pitching bronc; and for the smell of such chuck-wagon odors as fried sour-dough

flapjacks, broiled venison, and hot coffee.

"What I actually have in mind, however, is a combination of farm and ranch in the Kootenai country of northern Idaho, as that part of the map still seems to me to retain the rugged spirit of the real West. You'll be doing me a big favor, if you'll tell me something about this section, as to farming land, crops, and climate."

That's a good turn which it's a joy to perform, Ben, for Kootenai County, located in the Panhandle of Idaho, is country to talk about. This county has an area of 1,302 square miles, of which 62 square miles are water surface and 414 square miles are in the Coeur d'Alene and Pend Oreille national forests. Of the 515,840 surveyed acres, 228,099 acres are in the 1,348 farms of the county.

Some 6,000 acres of the farm land are irrigated, and in these areas the principal crops are apples, pears, and small fruits. A considerable acreage is also devoted to the growing of alfalfa hay and vegetables. In the remainder of Kootenai County the principal crops are wheat, alfalfa, timothy and wild hay, field peas, oats, barley, potatoes, and silage crops. Oats and field peas are grown for commercial markets, while hay is grown both for market and the feeding of live stock on the farms.

Other major sources of income for farmers in this county are derived

from the sale of dairy by-products, poultry, beef cattle, and hogs. Approximately two thirds of the farmers in the county own dairy cattle and derive some portion of their income from the sale of dairy products.

Since Kootenai County is located west of the Rocky and Bitterroot mountains, the severe winter storms of the Middle West do not reach it. Thunderstorms are almost unknown, and there is no record of either tornadoes or earthquakes. Tempera-

ture ranges usually run from ten degrees below zero in winter to a hundred degrees above in summer, although these extremes are of very short duration. Nights are cool in summer. Prevailing winds are from the southwest.

You'd travel far before finding more scenic country than of

Kootenai County, Ben, with its forests of virgin pine, and its many streams and lakes. Noteworthy is Lake Coeur d'Alene, one of the nation's largest fresh-water bodies, its beauty greatly enhanced by its irregular shore line, immediately bordered by sloping, wooded hills. In this locality, also, you'll find an abundance of game and fish.

Speaking of fishing reminds us of a letter on this subject from Heywood T., of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"Old-time anglers in this section spin such tall yarns about the thrill of ice-fishing in Northern waters during the freeze-over period that

## SPECIAL NOTICE

### RANCH LIFE IN THE SOUTHWEST

Always the Southwest has been a favorite territory with the cattleman and sheepman. Here over the wide, sun-drenched plains roam great herds and flocks, and here also rides the bronzed, sturdy cowboy. Dotted over this colorful country are numbers of cattle outfits, where the stranger may enjoy real ranch life. For a list of the ranches of Arizona and New Mexico write John North, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

I'm out to sample this sport and incidentally to be rewarded, I hope, by a good mess of sweet-tasting fish for my frying pan. Can you pass out any hints regarding tackle, bait, and how to keep warm, Mr. North?"

Plenty, Heywood. You'll find that neither north winds nor snow bother the well-equipped ice fisherman. His first act is to chop a hole in the ice and over it set up a fishing shack with a coke or oil heater. A thick woolen blanket thrown upon the ice and another over the head and shoulders also serve to keep off the cold.

To fasten your ice-fishing lines, place a rounded stick across the hole, and lash another stick to the center, so that it also lies flat on the ice, making a cross of sticks. The end of one stick should be a few inches longer than the other, and a

Kootenai County, located in the Panhandle of Idaho, offers the hombre looking for a farm home in real Western country a chance to realize his dream. Readers interested in this part of the Gem State may obtain additional facts about it from John North.

small white flag is attached to the longer end. The line is attached to the short end, so that when a fish takes the bait the flag is raised, thus signaling the angler.

When the day is warm enough, an ordinary level winding reel may be used on a short casting rod. If a casting rod is used during too severe a spell of weather, however, the line freezes and cracks when an attempt is made to retrieve it. Also the line may freeze solid to the reel after being once wet and reeled again on the spool. A reeling stick, made of any light-weight wood which can be whittled to permit winding the line in large loops, is better.

Don't neglect, Heywood, to take along a pair of rubber gloves, as you'll find them fine for wearing when retrieving a wet line. Minnows, beefsteak, pork strips, or liver make excellent bait.

After a day of ice-fishing, the angler welcomes a hot supper of some easily prepared cold-weather camp dishes. For the benefit of the winter sportsman, John North has collected some mighty tasty new recipes which he'll send to readers upon request.

While some of our readers get their winter thrills from such virile sports as ice-fishing, others, such as Morrie G., of Boston, Massachusetts, prefer a motor trip on the sunny roads of the Southwest.

"I'm all set for a jaunt down to New Mexico, Mr. North, principally to see the wonderful old mission churches, but of course I don't want to miss any of the other sights. Won't you please hand out some tips?"

You've surely got a great treat in store, Morrie, in the old mission churches, their sun-baked adobe walls mellowed by more than three centuries of the brilliant sunshine of New Mexico. Nor are these shrines the only sights to be seen in the Sunshine State. In addition there are the Carlsbad Caverns, eight national monuments, seven national forests, many quaint Indian villages, and numbers of great cattle ranches which sprawl over mesa and canyon.

Readers who are planning winter vacations in New Mexico should obtain copies of the free pamphlet, "Mission Churches of New Mexico," as well as an accurate road map of the State. For an address from which this literature may be secured, write John North.

# GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are cooperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer any letters regarding firearms if accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**A** SINGLE trigger to discharge both barrels of a double-barreled shotgun was first patented by James Templeton, in England, in 1789. His device consisted of a shifting contrivance that connected with a second sear after the first pull. Seventy-six years later an American secured the first United States patent on an article of this kind.

"Doubling" and "dual discharge" are terms applied to firing the second charge too close after the first without the intent of the shooter. This occurred in shotguns, but not in double-barreled revolvers

or rifles, so the manufacturers thought that it was caused by the recoil of the shotgun. To remedy this, they offered a "three-pull" trigger mechanism wherein the second pull did not fire the gun, but prepared for the third pull which was the one actually to set off the second charge.

"Balking" is the term applied to failure to fire the second charge. This happens when the shooter doesn't react to the recoil from the first load, and is just as serious as "doubling," so the inventors have tried their hand at the problem. Actually they have usually resurrected the Templeton idea of a trigger shifting from one sear lock to

another. We shall tell you more about trigger mechanisms in a later issue. In the meantime your questions and comments continue to be welcome.

Care in constructing of small bores.

**B. F. DENTON**, Utica, New York: You are correct; just as much science and skill enters into the making of the .22 rifle and ammunition as the big-bore rifles. This is because small bores offer a bigger market.

**Wild West rifle.**

**M. W. EVANS**, Everett, Washington: The popular rifle of Alaska and the wild West was the .30-40 Winchester with 220-grain soft-point cartridges.

**Small bores on big game.**

**P. B. ANDREWS**, Brazil, Indiana: Small calibers like the .20-20 and the .22 are not suitable for big game, but are all right for squirrels, rabbits, and birds.

**Big game killing power.**

**S. B. NOLAN**, Old Forge, Pennsylvania: The weight of the bullet is important in killing lions, tigers, bear, and elephant, but on other game velocity is more important

than bullet weight, with cross-sectional area of the bullet only second in importance.

**Shot cartridges.**

**T. E. RODGERS**, Hamilton, Ohio: The lightest shot load is the .22 Long rim-fire Cartridge loaded with No. 12 drop shot. It is useful against mice and sparrows. The largest shot cartridges are for the .50-caliber pistols, the .41 Swiss Vetterli Rim-fire, and the .45 A. C. P. for the Thompson Sub-machine gun.

**A good sheriff.**

Sheriff E. J. Welter and his deputies found a gang robbing a filling station near Ottawa, Illinois. Two of the criminals were severely wounded when they tried to escape. Straight-shooting police and sheriffs will soon cure crime.

**Robbery attempts thwarted.**

John Kohney, a cook in the Grenada Café, in Rockford, Illinois, pulled a pistol and stopped an attempted robbery of his cash register. Fred Stilkler, Shebonier, Illinois, drove thieves out of his garage with a blast of gunfire. Claud McCoy saw lights in the store of his friend, Ed Holloway, Gibson, Illinois, got his shotgun, and chased the crooks away without loss to the store.

Peters' and Colt's have resumed sending free booklets to our readers. If you have not received these interesting pamphlets, write us now, and we will put your name on the mailing list.

The government supply of Krag and Russian rifles is exhausted, but the U. S. Rifle (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, is sold to citizens of the United States for \$8.85, under certain restrictions which will be explained to readers who send us a stamped and addressed envelope.



# MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

**WARNING.**—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

**MCNEELEY, NORMAN.**—His real name is Norman Wade Younker, but he is generally known by his grandfather's name, McNealey. He is fourteen years of age. Has gray eyes and light-brown hair. Is five feet six inches tall. Has a large scar on his neck. He ran away from school on April 16, 1935. When last heard from, three months ago, he was in Teton, Washington. He wrote that he intended going on to California. He has two uncles, William and Robert Hudson, who live at 1659 West Eleventh Street, Los Angeles, California. His grandmother is very anxious about him and would appreciate any news. Please address Mrs. Mary McNealey, 24 Wheatrae Avenue, Mansfield, Ohio.

**SCRIMSHIRE, ROBERT E.**—He is my brother, and I have not heard from him since 1922. He was then in California. Has black hair and brown eyes. Is six feet tall and weighed about two hundred pounds. Would be fifty years of age. His sister would appreciate hearing from any one who knows him. Address Mrs. Gussie Adams, R. 2, Oglethorpe, Georgia.

**HILL, HEIRS OF AUGUSTUS ROAN HILL.**—His children were Jimmie, Froyan, Claude, Coen, Cecil, and Cora. They went from near Water Valley, Mississippi, to Arkansas several years ago. I have a message to deliver from Jimmie, the eldest brother, to the others. Please write to Mrs. Maud Hurley, 7-A Lakewood Terrace, Atlanta, Georgia.

**HOLLAND, WILSE.**—When last heard from, in 1904, he was in Arizona. He is a brother of Will Holland who died thirty-five years ago. His brother George died in 1912. Their mother died in 1903. My father, his only living brother, is aged and feeble. He worries himself sick over never hearing from Wilse. Any news of my uncle would be gratefully received. Address Mabel Holland, Bakersfield, Ozark County, Missouri.

**LEWIE.**—Received your letter of September 24th and was so glad to hear from you. It makes me happy to know you feel about me as you do, and I reciprocate the feeling, dear. I'll move, as you ask. Please send me an address by letter so that I can go to you. But why don't you come home? You need not care what people may say. They don't know where you were. All is forgiven, Lewie, so why can't we start all over again? I'll always stick to you, Lewie. The kiddies and Nanna miss you so. There have been papers here for weeks awaiting your signature. You must sign before I can break up and move. I wish you'd come and help me pack up. If you don't like Reading, I'll go wherever you want. Couldn't reach you sooner due to publication dates. All my love, Isabelle.

**HARRIS, WILLIAM.**—Please communicate with your old school chum, K. E. B., of Appleton City.

**SMITH, WYLIE BASS.**—On June 14, 1914, he was a seaman on the S. S. *Point Salinas*, New Orleans, Louisiana. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please write to Clarence Bailey, 395 East Main Street, Cherryvale, Kansas.

**DEAREST DAD AND HUSBAND.**—We are waiting for you to come back and get us. If you can't come, send some one else. We have helped you all we can. It's all up to you from now on. Your chance has been given you as you asked. Please make the best of it while there is still time and save a lot of trouble. Your own people gave all the information and the pictures to the Fed. M., and they brought them here. Also wrote your mother that I had heard. We love you and will come to you if you send us the money, but would rather that you or some one else would come for us so that we can take all our things and not have to come back for a while at least. We can take everything in a two-seated car. We understand and will help you all we can. I will wait here at home until I hear from you. Write direct to me here in my own name, not my mother's. I wrote to Anna and Mom G., but have had no answer. You can trust us, for we love you. Mom L., Sister, Happy, and Sam L. will all help you. Yours, G. L. and L. L.

**KILLEN, CURLY.**—Curly, have you forgotten your old pal, Patsy? I tried every way in the world to get in touch with you. You can't have forgotten Western Texas in the fall of '35 and Dad's ranch. If you need money, let us know. We want you back so much. Everything is the same as it was. Curly was nineteen or twenty in October. Has black curly hair and brown eyes. Is five feet six inches tall and weighed one hundred and thirty pounds. Left jaw is scarred. Is a happy-go-lucky type, always joking. He is well known throughout Western Texas. Any one knowing him please call his attention to this notice. Curly, please write to me at home.

**MAYNARD, CHARLIE.**—Usually signs his name C. J. Nine years ago he left Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for parts unknown. Has not been heard from since. Has black hair and blue eyes. Is five feet ten inches tall and weighed about one hundred and forty pounds. End of his nose is scarred. Has very heavy black eyebrows. His home is near Asheville, North Carolina. Usually works in furniture factories. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly advise Mrs. Violet K. Spell, General Delivery, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

**HAWKINS, LEONARD.**—A letter addressed to you is being held at this office. Kindly advise us of a new whereabouts address. It is signed A. H. Identify yourself when writing. Editor.

**SHORTISS or SHORTIS.**—Please mail information and address. Edwin Horace Shortiss, Druggist, 37 Day Hill Road, Framingham, Massachusetts.

**MY BABY.**—Your baby loves you. Everything is O. K. and will be better than ever. Come home regardless. Wire. Your baby and E. G.

**MARSH, BENJAMIN F.**—Was at the Walter Reed General Hospital, Washington, D. C., last winter and is believed to be still living in Washington. He is about fifty-seven years of age. Short in stature but strong and athletic. If you see this, Benny, write to your old pal. Address Samuel H. Slaughter, General Delivery, Jacksonville, Florida.

**OLSON, WILLIAM and HERMAN.**—Sons of Peter and Jennie Crocker Olson. They were both born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, William in 1908, and Herman in 1911. Their father died in 1910. When last heard from they were living in Harrigan Avenue Home, Boston, Massachusetts. Any one knowing anything concerning them, please write to Mrs. Robert Young, 302 Paris Street, East Boston, Massachusetts.

**MARSHALL, HOMER J.**—Twelve or thirteen years ago you wrote to me at my Lowell, Massachusetts, address from Omaha, Nebraska, giving me information about your parents, Louis and Cynthia Marshall. You were born somewhere in West Virginia. You said that you could prove that it was your sister Mildred who was lost to your parents in Canton, New York, through unavoidable circumstances. I was compelled to live in Europe for a year and discontinued all correspondence with you. When it was possible, I tried to get in touch with you, but failed. If you are in this country now, you please write to me? Will any one knowing this man's whereabouts, please advise me? Address Mabel, care of Western Story Magazine.

**FOSTER, CHARLES WILLIAM.**—Ex-commander, United States Navy. In 1922 was stationed in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Later he lived on Upson Avenue, El Paso, Texas. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly write to H. N., care of Western Story Magazine.

**LOSSEN, JAMES.**—Usually called Jim. He married Lee Garrett in, or near, Springfield, Missouri, over fifty years ago. They had two daughters, Sarah Frances and Alberta Lee. When the eldest child was three years old, he left home and was never heard from again. A few years ago he was seen in Texas. Any one knowing his whereabouts, or having any news of him, kindly write to Mrs. Alva Wolfe, General Delivery, McCleary, Washington.

**ATTENTION.**—Would any of the old Detached Company, 35rd Canadian Infantry, who left London, Ontario, Canada, under the command of Captain Nellie, in 1915, for France, please write to William Moore. I was a member of that company and wounded at Mount Somel. Was sent to England afterward. Would like so much to hear from my former comrades. Also Captain Nellie, if he is still living. The last I saw of him was when he was wounded before the attack on the German trenches. Please address William Moore, 3 Robertson Street, care of Devlin, Glasgow, Scotland.

**CLARK, CLAYTON HALL.**—In 1930 he was in Baker, Montana. Has not been seen since. He is six feet tall and weighed about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. It is possible that he may be using an assumed name. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please write to Fay C. Hall, CCC, 1961, Company F-54, Ashland, Montana.

**RODRIGUEZ, MARQUITA.**—It is possible that she is now married. She used to live at the home of her brother-in-law, C. Prescott, Brooklyn, New York. Any one knowing her, please let her to write to one whom she used to call "mi hijo lindo." My address is Seligman, Arizona.

**FARR DOCTOR.**—Who left Cale Chiropractic College, Los Angeles, California, in September, 1921. Please write to A. Harrell, R. 1, Box 483, Esccondido, California.

**BACKMANN, MRS. RUDOLPH.**—My mother mysteriously disappeared from Seattle, Washington, in 1904. She was the daughter-in-law of Professor and Mrs. George Backmann, my grandparents, who operated a large school of music at Fifth and Pike Streets, Seattle, Washington. Grandfather was also professor of music at University of Washington in Seattle. Mother's maiden name was Marie Sondro or Sanders. She formerly resided in Denver, Colorado, or vicinity. Would be now in her late fifties. Is believed to have another son, Fred or Ed Backmann. Any information concerning my mother or brother would be thankfully received. Address George Backmann, Elliot West Ranch, Duarte, California.

**EVANS, JOYCE.**—Also known as Barbara Blane. Is nineteen years of age. Has bleached-blond hair. Is five feet five inches tall. She was last seen in New York City in July, 1933. Her home is supposed to be in Ohio. Is greatly interested in sailors. Any news of her would be much appreciated by Jean, care of Western Story Magazine.

**KELLEY, MCGARRY, JOYCE, and MILLER.**—They are my relatives, and I have lost all track of them. My name is James Leo Joyce. My parents were Patrick L. and Rita Kelley Joyce. I was born in Helena, Montana. An older brother of mine, Bill, married a girl in Moosejaw, Canada. He was killed in the World War. I also fought in the War. When I came back I tried to locate my relatives, but was unsuccessful. I would like to get in touch with my brother's widow. It is possible that she has married again. Surely if any of my people see this notice, they'll send me a few lines. I am not well and am very lonesome for some of my own kin. Please address me James L. Joyce, care of Western Story Magazine.

**BLAKE, JOE, and EDITH.**—He is my father. She is my half sister. I am not quite sure of her given name. Father's right arm is off at the shoulder and he walks with a stiff limp. He would be about forty-two years of age. My sister may be as much as twenty-three. The last heard of them they were in either Detroit, Michigan or Indianapolis, Indiana. That was nineteen years ago. Would appreciate any news. Please address Roy E. Blake, General Delivery, Powell, Wyoming.

**BROWN, HARRY.**—A sailor in the Merchant Marine. Is usually called Ray. Occasional in his ship docks in Brooklyn, New York. He is between thirty-six and forty years of age. Has medium-blond hair. Is six feet tall. Wears glasses. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly advise Reinhardt called Company 41, Twenty-first Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii Territory.

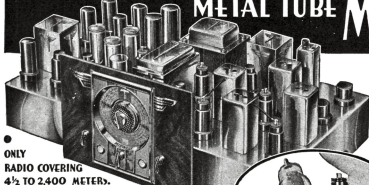
**BAXTER, THOMAS.**—Brother of Mary Anne Baxter Cook. Was last heard from in Nebraska. He had a large family. His oldest son was named Oscar. We always called him Aunt Zale. Would like to get in touch with some member of the family. Any one knowing any of them, please write to Mrs. N. A. C. T., care of Western Story Magazine.

**ROSS, ARNOLD.**—Who was working in Boulder County near Nederland, during the winter of 1916 and 1917. Would like to hear from him. Calvin James, McCoy, Colorado.

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This super Midwest will out-perform \$100 to \$400 sets on a point-for-point comparison. That is why nationally known orchestra leaders like Fred Waring, George Olsen, Jack Denney, Ted Fio Rino, and others use Midwest sets to study types of harmony and rhythmic bases followed by leading American and Foreign orchestras.

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Long Island, N. Y.—After comparing many different makes, I finally decided upon Midwest. It out-performs other radios costing almost twice as much. The crystal-clear tone is so life-like that it sounds as though I am in the studio, actually hearing artists performing.



**TODAY'S FINEST RADIO SAYS TED FIO RITO**

My new Midwest is finest radio I have had pleasure of hearing. Base-Triple control is marvelous . . . enables one to hear every instrument in orchestra.



**METAL TUBES**

This Midwest is engineered from the ground up to use either the new METAL tubes or glass-enclosed counterpart tubes. Octal sockets and newest circuit permit use of either type . . . just as you desire.

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Tummies, perhaps, had tin sides.  
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Sure, have a good laugh. But don't laugh at constipation—unless you have a box of Ex-Lax handy, for pleasant, painless relief. America bought over 46,000,000 boxes last year—more than any other laxative. So it *must* be the best. You'll like its mild yet thorough action and its chocolate taste. 10c and 25c at all druggists.

**When Nature forgets—remember**

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