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MAGAZINE

OCT. 22, 1938

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By W. Ryerson Johnson





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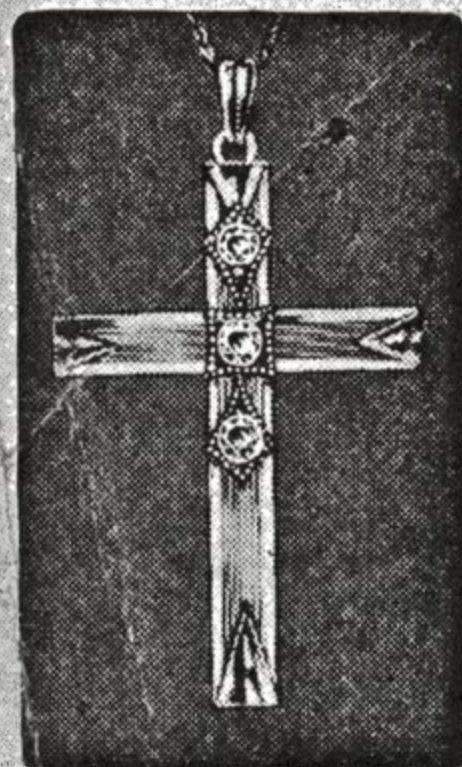
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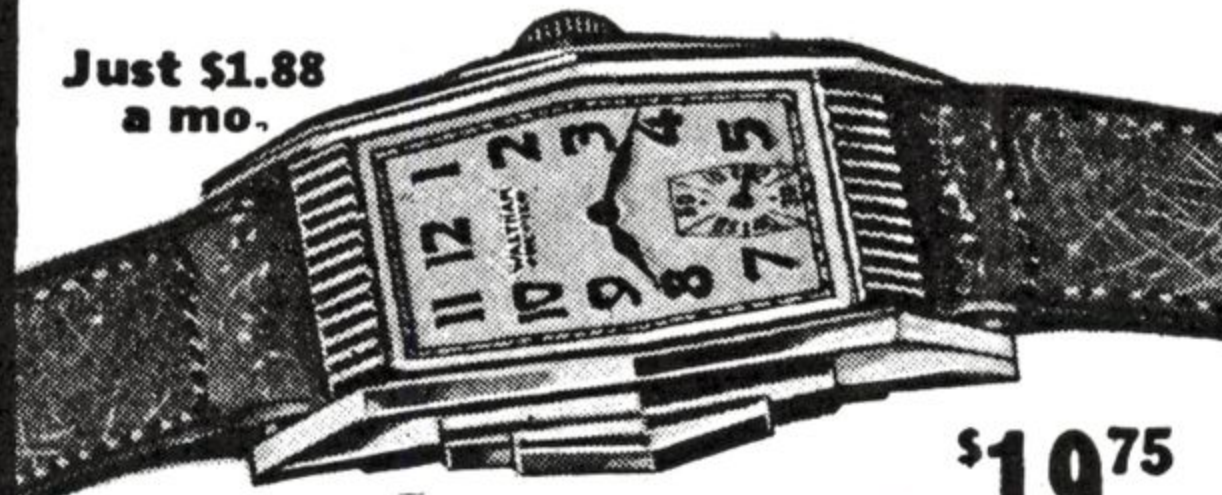
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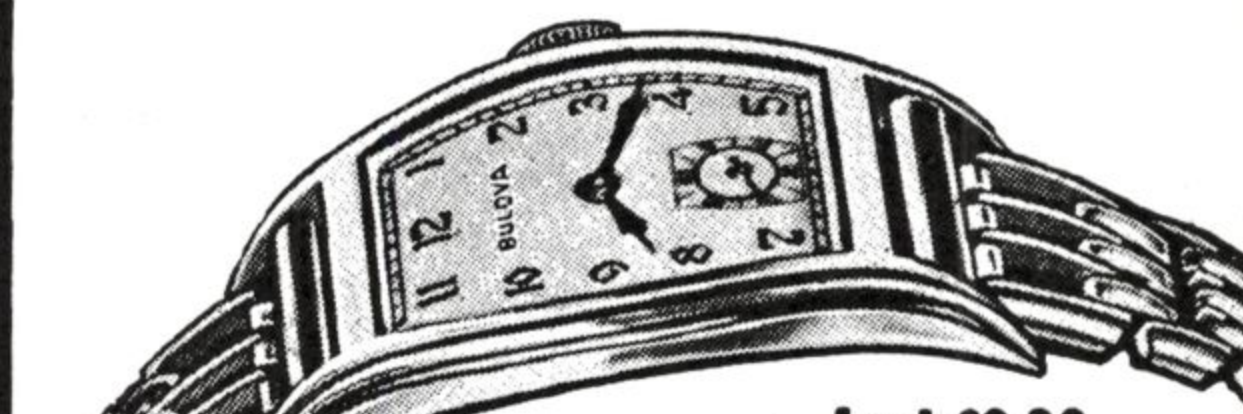
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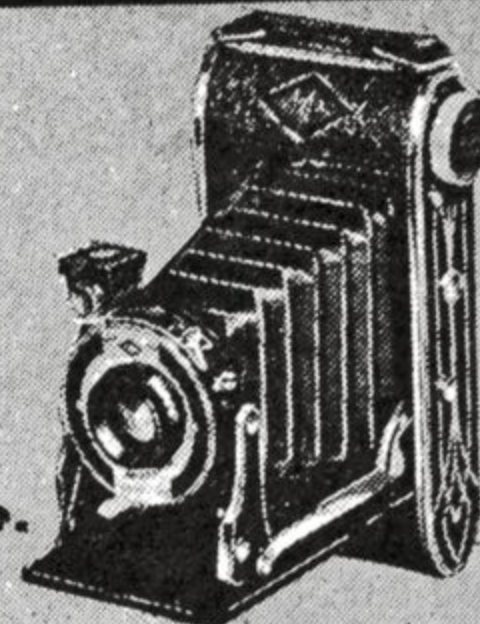
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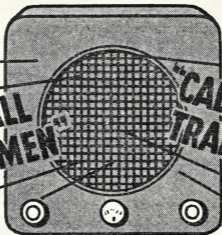
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I jumped from \$18 a week to \$50
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GOOD PAY IN RADIO

HERE'S
How it
Happened
 by **S. J. E.**
 (NAME AND ADDRESS
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"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio, and started training at home for them."



"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make \$5, \$10, \$15 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



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"N.R.I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast. The field is wide open to properly trained men."



Find out today how I Train You at Home
to BE A RADIO EXPERT

J. E. SMITH,
 President
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 Established 1914

Many Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Do you too want a better job? Do you too want to make more money? Radio offers many spare time opportunities for good pay.

Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These

Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time repair jobs pay many \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems, offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500 a year—for hundreds.

I send Special Radio Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP FIX SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also shows coming in Television; tells about my Training

In Radio and Television; shows 131 letters from men I trained, shows what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on penny post card—NOW!

J. E. SMITH,
 President,
 Dept. SKD
 National Radio
 Institute,
 Washington,
 D. C.



**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. SKD
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Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio, and explains your practical method of training at home in spare time to become a Radio Expert. (Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

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THE ROUNDUP

THE other day we received a manuscript. Now there's nothing unusual about that, for thousands of them pour into the office every year. But, as we so often do, we looked at the post mark on this thick envelope first and saw that it read Springer, New Mexico. That meant Bennett Foster. And, of course, that meant a treat for Western Story readers. . . . So you can be sure we read the story post haste and found it something so different, as far as serials go, that we bought it at once, for we're sure you all will like it as much as we did! We're always curious as to how writers go about spinning the yarns which hold us spellbound, so we wrote to Mr. Foster and asked him how he came to write this outstanding story. Here is what he has to say:

"You ask how come **THE MUSTANGERS**. The story was born, you might say, one very hot day last summer.

"An old-timer, perhaps the best friend I have, and I were coming back from riding the Salado. We had put out some strays and were coming in and stopped at a windmill and tank to get a little water, smoke a cigarette and indulge in some shade. Sitting there, we watched a horse band come in. There were about fifteen mares and a stud in the bunch and they were mighty pretty as they traveled toward that tank. All sorrels, and their tails flowing out and the stud coming along behind.

"They saw us at the tank and spooked and circled, so we mounted and rode out a ways and then got down and waited. These horses were just semi-wild. They were running in a big pasture (thirty thousand acres) and they didn't see too many people. Horses are curious, and Frank, grinning at me, said, 'Now wait a minute.' Sure enough. They watered, and then, curiosity overcoming their fear, came toward us and circled all around and stopped in a bunch. There was mutual inspection for about five minutes and then we mounted again and they left. And I got to thinking, 'Well, why not a story about mustangs?'

"The upshot of it was that I collected material for a year and, finally, wrote **THE MUSTANGERS**.

"I want to assure you that the work and many of the incidents are authentic. The plot, of course, is imaginary, but the people are very real and the horse work is real too. So is the country. I can take you right there, and if you want to you can ride the appaloosie. He's fourteen years old, but plenty of horse for a little while at almost any kind of cow work. . . ."

So you see the stories we give you are written right where the action takes place. Mr. Foster has lived in New Mexico since 1916, being away just two years during the war when, like a lot of other Western boys, he joined the Navy. Before making his home in New Mexico he lived in South Dakota and Wyoming, around or on cow outfits most of the time.

We know that once you start riding that wild trail with Reb Battles and his two pards, as they trap wild horses in the high reaches of the San Sabios, you'll want to travel right along with them, for there's adventure aplenty in store for them—and you. So don't fail to be on hand next week, when this new serial, **THE MUSTANGERS**, starts. . . .

There are other treats in store for October 29th—

A box car—a runaway girl—and Big and Willie. . . . With that combination anything was liable to happen—and practically everything did! Yes, Willie and Big are back with us again, and E. C. Lincoln gives you plenty of fun in his tale of these two lovable cowmen, **BOX CAR BUCKAROOS**. . . . When a hard-riding, two-fisted Texan like Lynn Taylor hears that his kid brother is doomed to hang, you can be sure he's going to do his best to break up a necktie party—or die trying. You'll find out what happened in **L. Ron Hubbard's DEATH WAITS AT SUNDOWN**. . . . There never was a figure on any range like the man they called "The Cossack"—and there never were a bunch of Irishmen anywhere like the five O'Felans. What took place when The Cossack met the Irish is engagingly told by L. L. Foreman in a red-blooded novel, **COWMEN CAN'T QUIT**. . . . **THE MYSTERY OF BROKEN ARROW RANGE**, by William Colt MacDonald, is finally solved in a whirlwind finish. . . . Kenneth Gilbert is with us with another stirring animal story, **ANTLERED DEATH**, and there are other stories and features by Eugene R. Dutcher, Charles L. McNichols, S. Omar Barker and Gerard Delano—and, of course, all of your favorite departments. . . .

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The Story of 2 MEN who NEEDED CASH



THIS MAN DOUBTED:

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If you are tired of slaving for small pay, here's your chance to break away and make big money. You can even start in your spare time—see the business grow—have cash in your pocket—be independent. Think of the joy of being a successful business person in your own locality with big, year 'round earnings of your own. Earnings begin at once, the very first day.

LOOK AT THESE UNUSUAL EARNINGS

I have a flood of glowing letters from prosperous, successful men and women telling of unusual earnings they have made with my plans. L. P. Boyne, La., made \$67.29 in a week. Mrs. H. H. Hostick, Nebr., made \$41.75 the first week. Steve Witt, Mo., made \$21.59 in a day. Albert Becker, Mich., \$100.00 in a week. George W. Creed, Ohio, \$95.00 in a week. These exceptional earning reports show the amazing money-making possibilities of my offer to you.

SEND NO MONEY—JUST SEND NAME

I send everything you need. You positively don't risk a penny of your money. There is nothing complicated or puzzling about my money-making methods. You will be the judge and decide for yourself if the earning possibilities are satisfactory. Just give me a chance to explain the facts. It costs you nothing to find out. Send name on coupon or penny postcard. DO IT NOW!

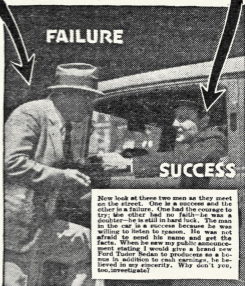
ALBERT MILLS, Pres.
6478 Monmouth Ave.,
Cincinnati, Ohio



THIS MAN ACTED:

He said: "Yes, I need money. I am tired of penny pinching. Your generous offer sounds good to me. It costs nothing to investigate—I have everything to gain. I am going to send my name and find out just what you have to offer me."

A FEW WEEKS LATER



Now look at these two men as they meet on the street. One is a success and the other is a failure. One had the courage to try; the other had no faith—he was a doubter—he is still in hard luck. The man in the car is a success because he was willing to listen to reason. He was not afraid to send his name and get the facts. When he saw my public announcement stating I would give a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan to producers as a bonus in addition to cash earnings, he believed in my sincerity. Why don't you, too, investigate!



STARTED PENNILESS

6 1/2 Months Later Was Worth \$1,200

"Only six and a half months ago I started with your company without a penny to my name, and today (I just finished my balance) I am worth a little more than \$1,200.00. I can hardly believe in so short a time! But it's the truth. Many a day I made from \$15.00 to \$20.00 clear profit. You, Happy Hunter, Hans Coedler, Nebr.,

TEAR OUT—MAIL NOW

Albert Mills, President
6478 Monmouth Ave.
Cincinnati, Ohio

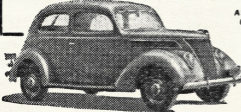
Kush me free facts. Tell me how I can start at once and make up to \$60.00 in a week with a permanent Coffee Agency of my own. Also send me your Ford Automobile offer. This will not obligate me.

Name.....

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(Please Print or Write Plainly)



NEW FORDS
Given as a Bonus

Lead For The Law

By W. RYERSON
JOHNSON

Author of "Cactus Clue," etc.



The sheriff went for his gun when, above the mask, he recognized the killer eyes of Linky Frets.

*If old Tim Hart's ranch—
and life—were to be saved
it would only be by the
gun prowess of the son he
had disowned*

CHAPTER I

TIM HART'S GUNNIES

CLOVER-LIP" MARTIN lunged forward in his saddle. His thick, heavy-set body made the leather creak noisily as misshapen lips squeezed out a flat ultimatum:

"You can take it or leave it!"

Up there on his own ranch house porch old Timothy Hart flinched involuntarily, but his bony fingers snapped one of his rawhide gallouses

against his spare frame, and he gave quick answer:

"I'll leave it! And you can leave the Diamond Five—*pronto!*" The old frontiersman's glance swung to include the thin-shouldered man with the blank eyes who had come riding with Clover-lip Martin.

The barest suggestion of a sigh escaped the lips of the blank-eyed man. His hand eased toward the six in the open-flap holster, and he muttered out of the corner of his mouth to Clover-lip: "Want I should take the old fool, boss?"

Clover-lip said no with a barely perceptible shake of his head. Then those ugly lips, splayed years before by gun lead, and left scarred and bulged in the rough shape of a three-leaf clover, blurted, "I'll raise the ante."

"How much?"

"Five thousand."

"Worth fifty!" old Tim snapped.

"Not under forced sale it ain't."

"This don't happen to be a forced sale."

Clover-lip turned in his saddle and looked at his companion, "He says it ain't a forced sale, Tom."

The man laughed. It wasn't a laugh with the whole face. The mouth only. The unblinking eyes remained as expressionless as before.

Old Timothy Hart snapped his gallow again. "You ain't foolin' me none, Clover-lip. This here, now, gun shadder of yours, you call him Tom Pines, and you got him on your Runnin' M payroll for forty a month and found. But I know and everyone knows he's Blaster McGlone and you're slippin' him an extree sixty a month that don't show on your books. But that ain't scarin' me. I say my Diamond Five ain't up fer forced sale, and I say more further you can take your side-windin' gunhand and git!"

Clover-lip Martin looked thoughtful. For a man who was rated mild, old Tim was doing considerable bucking. If the old spaveen had something up his sleeve, something special, beyond the certain cunning knowledge that Clover-lip already possessed . . . From under his fiercely bushed brows, Martin flung quick glances to both corners of the ranch house and to the windbreak of salt cedars in back of him. There was nothing to arouse his suspicions—only the wind seeping sadly through the feathery branches.

He looked back to the Diamond Five owner on the porch. Old Tim had a reputation for peacefulness that extended back almost to the redskin days. It was a mortal wonder he'd been able to hold his land. He never went holstered, nor allowed his riders to; and he hadn't followed the lead of some of his neighbors when, with the traditional peace of Organ Mountain Valley broken wide open, they had taken to augmenting their cowhands with gunhands.

So hepped was Timothy Hart on the subject of guns that he had even driven his own boy from home when the restless youngster developed an aptitude with six-shooters that made first-water gunners look foolish. Old Tim had harangued his boy and forbidden him the use of guns. It was like trying to train a bird to keep its wings folded . . .

Tim broke in with a dissertation that didn't help his case any with Clover-lip Martin:

THERE'RE things I been champin' to say to your face fer a long time, Clover-lip. I'm a peaceful man, but I rare back when I'm crowded. Fer a new-comer to the valley you been spreadin' out fast. Too fast!"

"What you hintin' at, you old

groundhog?" Martin snarled.

"If I'm a groundhog, you're a range hog!" Timothy Hart bristled. "And when Jeff Lignell that come with me over the plains when we was boys together cashed in to a gulcher's shot, and you took over his K B holdin's, maybe that was jus' one of these, now, coincidences. But I'm warnin' you, Clover-lip, don't be figgerin' to run your brand over my dead body too. I'm maybe-so more peaceful than what old Jeff was, but I ain't near so trustful. And there's Jeff's orphaned daughter livin' with me that I only have to look at to keep reminded."

Clover-lip Martin glowered, but he was secretly worried. This old rannihan—it wasn't natural for him to be talking up like this unless he had a hideout ace. And if that ace should be his gunhawk son . . .

Six years back Timothy Hart's kid had left home; and he had never returned. But word of him had drifted back. Young Harry Hart had blazed a gun-flame trail that had the oldsters comparing him to Billy the Kid!

Clover-lip threw another uneasy glance at the salt cedars which presented a somber green front under the hot sun, with the wind stirring the interlaced branches in soft, whimpering menace. And he shook his head, again at "Blaster" Mc-Glone, who was looking at him in blank-faced anticipation. He attempted to feel out the situation further with words.

"Nice one you are," he blustered, "to be insinuat' and besmirchin' a man's name. You that's fathered Harry Hart, the orneriest gunsmoke hellion left unhung between the borders! How do you know it wasn't your own son come back and put that sneak shot through Jeff Lignell?"

Old Tim winced. No one listened more avidly than he to the dread tales that circulated about Harry Hart. And no one listened so unhappily. God-fearing, peaceful old Timothy Hart couldn't begin to understand the gunman son whose exploits had bowed his father's head in shame and grief, had added years to his appearance in graying hair and worry wrinkles.

But he defended Harry to Clover-lip Martin now. "My son—you're not a one to sit in judgment on him," he flared.

Clover-lip's arrogance fed on the old rancher's confusion. "I'll say this much for you," he taunted, "you're doin' a blame better job of bringin' up Jeff Lignell's girl than you did with your own son. Trim as a wild filly, that girl, and as spirited." His eyes took on an unpleasant gleam, and his blunt hand lifted to paw at his face. "See these scratches? She gave me 'em the other evenin'. I ain't mindin'. I like things with spirit—so I can break 'em! Where's the girl now, you old pack rat? Trot her out here. I'm through talkin' with you."

Old Tim trembled, and his hand reached out for support against the porch pillar. "Clover-lip Martin, you haunch around and git—you and your rattlesnake gunner!" His voice rose to an old man's high-pitched trembling shriek. "You killed the girl's father and took his land. Now it's my land you're after. My land and my dead pardnør's girl. You touch your scaly hands to her once more and I'll—"

"You'll root that porch pillar out and poke me with it, I reckon." Clover-lip stepped out of saddle, took a hitch on his gun belt, and started toward the old man, heeling in with a rolling truculent swagger. "I'm gonna learn you somethin', you

old horn toad. You talk too much. I'm gonna punch your jaws so swollen shut you won't squeak for a month. After that I'll take care of the girl."

Old Tim let out a *yip-ya-hoo* that was ferocious enough to have turned a herd of stampeding cattle. Clover-lip interpreted it as a yell of fear. His coarse features froze in a brutalized grin, and he came on—and that was where he made his first mistake.

CLEARLY, old Tim's frantic yipping had been a signal, but Clover-lip didn't realize it till a gun shot sounded from behind him. On the echoes of that close roar, Clover-lip dug bootheel in dust and turned, his hand striking for his own gun. He didn't see anyone, and his slitted eyes bored into the dense windbreak of salt cedars.

That was where he made his second mistake!

While both his and Blaster McGlone's attention held on the wall of somber green, two riders appeared, one from around each end of the ranch house, and lined their sixes in a cold drop.

"Elevate!" one of the riders ordered harshly.

In the split-second of hesitation that followed the order, a third rider thrust himself from the concealment of the windbreak trees and backed the play of his companions with a laconic, "Pronto, or I don't punch air with the second shot."

Caught in a three-way trap, there was nothing for Clover-lip Martin and his gun shadow to do but call quits. Their arms went into the air, and the man who had come out of the evergreens collected their guns.

Clover-lip blinked at Timothy Hart like an owl surprised by a pine-knot flare.

"You—you——" he sputtered. "What's the meanin' of this? All these gunners——"

"Right unexpected, hey?" old Tim retorted grimly.

"And you," Clover-lip snarled, "a peaceful man that'd never allow a side-arm on the place!"

"Even an old dog can learn him some new tricks if he's pushed around enough."

"Ugliest batch o' gun scum ever I see. Which one is your son?"

The old rancher bristled under the insult. "There ain't nary a one of 'em my son. These is jus' some extree hands I hired to work cows. But if it's necessary to clear the Diamond Five range of varmints afore the cows can be worked, they can do that too!"

Clover-lip scowled. "Maybe they only think they can."

In grim enjoyment of his advantage, Timothy Hart continued the show with a wide wave of his hand. "Crowd 'em, boys," he ordered with the air of a general.

The three he had hired, as he said, to work cows, closed in. Tight-lipped hombres, with a furtive hardness in their eyes and manners, they were a brand that Clover-lip Martin was well acquainted with. Already unarmed, he didn't tarry for debate. With a surly nod to Blaster McGlone, he wheeled his bronc, and they both went riding . . .

WHEN they came through on the other side of the windbreak, out of sight from the ranch house, they slowed their horses.

Clover-lip looked at his gun shadow and actually grinned.

"You don't look much worried, boss," the Blaster said.

"I ain't."

Blaster McGlone regarded him

bleakly. "You would be if you knew what I know."

"I'm listenin'."

"All three of them gunnies I recognized. They're Linky Frets, and Joe Cobolt; and the Mex is Manuel Escobar."

"So what?"

"So it ain't gonna be no push-over, gun-buckin' that crew."

Clover-lip said nothing, but the grin stayed on his misshapen mouth.

Blaster McGlone stared out of his blank eyes. "You never fell for the old man's story that them three was cowhands, did you? They're draggin' a hundred a month if they're draggin' a copper."

"Guess again," Clover-lip told him.

"Huh?"

"They're takin' *two* hundred."

"Huh?"

"Sure. A hundred from Timothy Hart and a hundred from me."

The Blaster blinked his pale eyes very fast, which was as near as he ever came to showing excitement. "Well, I'm a mud-tail maverick! How'd you fix it?"

Clover-lip swelled under the other's admiration. "Nothin' to it. The old man was passin' the word around in town that he was lookin' to hire him some gunners. I'd just imported them three and hadn't showed 'em off yet. I told 'em to approach Hart, which they done. And he hired 'em. Sweet like honey, huh? With his whole damn gun crew in my pay, you might say I've already got the Diamond Five in my saddle bag. The girl too."

"Yeah," the Blaster let out slowly, "there's jus' one thing."

"What's that?"

"If them lead-twisters are worth two hundred, so am I."

"Can't spot you with the old man. Hell, he's already seen you with me."

"Then I reckon," the Blaster said, unsmiling, "it's up to you to make up the hundred-dollar deficit."

Clover-lip shrugged in resignation. "I talk too much," he muttered. "I'm too good-hearted and I talk too much."

CHAPTER II

AN IMPORTANT LETTER

BACK at the Diamond Five ranch house, Timothy Hart pushed inside through the screen door and walked with a gait that had a touch of swagger to it into the long, low-ceilinged room that had been his personal domain through two generations. As a result of his triumphant run-in with Clover-lip Martin, the blood was pounding strongly in his veins; he felt skittish as a colt.

Defying rheumatic twinges, he plunked his spare frame into his old smoking chair and lifted his feet to the battered roll-top desk. The chair creaked comfortably under him. The cane bottom had been out of it these twenty years, and old Tim had been reinforcing it ever since whenever it began to sag too much by the simple expedient of nailing another strip of rag carpet across the top.

He was filling his pipe from the huge earthen jar of crumbled twist when the door on the other side of the shadowed room opened and the girl he had taken to raise as his own came in. At first sight, Lois Lignell appeared more like a gay child than a girl grown to womanhood. Her dark eyes were laughing, her midnight hair in fragrant disarray. But when she came closer, even old Tim without his glasses could see that she was decidedly no child. Everything about her breathed of lovely young womanhood. Slim she was, and diminutive; with skin softly textured

as yucca flower petals. But there was maturity in the curved fullness of her breasts and thighs outlined gracefully against the thin summer percale. Maturity, too, in the firmness of her warm red lips, and in the quiet wisdom that underlay the laughter in her eyes.

She lit the match for old Tim's pipe, and said soberly, "I heard what went on outside, Uncle Timmy."

He patted her soft, sun-browned hand with his calloused one, and puffed to get his pipe going.

"You didn't tell me those three men were gun guards," she said accusingly.

"Didn't see no cause to worry you, jigger."

She refused to be put off. "Things must be pretty bad when you work your cows with guns instead of ropes."

"Now, jigger——"

Her voice grew tense. "If it's come to such a pass as this, and you actually need gunhands around the place, why didn't you send for Harry?"

Old Tim put down his pipe. "I thought it was plain understood that——"

"That I was never to mention Harry's name." She nodded. "It's understood all right. But after all, Uncle Timmy, he *is* your son. And you need him. You need him for those very qualities of his that made you send him away! With—with the reputation Harry's got, he'd be more good to you than all three of these gunmen. And he's your son as——"

"My son and my shame!" Timothy Hart cut in, with a voice like muttering thunder. "What kind of a reputation is it when honest folks the length and breadth of the land speak about him shudderin' and in

whispers? My own son—a gun-crazed killer. And you put up fer him!"

HER face was wan in the shadows of the big room. There was hurt in her eyes. "Don't you think, Uncle Timmy, that some of this talk we hear is way outsize? A man like Clover-lip Martin, for instance—you don't put much store by anything else he says. Why should you be so ready to believe him when he repeats these wild stories about Harry?"

"Harry lives by his gun. Everybody knows that."

"But I'll never believe that Harry did a mean or cruel thing," she defended. "Anybody that he's shot must have deserved it! The West is wide, and still pretty disordered in spots—like here in Organ Mountain Valley right now. There has to be lead for the law——"

"You ever hear 'bout Harry wearin' a law badge?" Tim Hart interrupted bitterly. "No; down on the Brazos they got his picture on reward posters instead!"

"Uncle Timmy, that doesn't prove anything at all! There are dishonest lawmen and honest outlaws. You know as well as I do that Harry doesn't have to be wearing a badge in order to side his guns with the—the decent forces in the West. The law isn't strong enough yet to protect everybody from everything, and until it is, there'll be need for men like Harry with guns for hire."

The spots of color which had bloomed on her cheeks as she talked, deepened, and fire made her eyes glow even brighter. "That's the kind of gunman Harry is, using his lead to help people. And you need help, and if he knew it, he'd want to help you, and the whole thing is as simple as that, only you're too stiff-necked

to admit it!"

But Tim set himself with an old man's stubbornness against arguments with which in his heart he wanted passionately to agree.

"I ain't needin' any help," he muttered doggedly. "And if I was, my boy Harry'd be the last in the world I'd call on . . . He—he wouldn't come anyhow."

Her warm red lips parted eagerly. "He would—if I sent for him."

"You, jigger?" Tim Hart's old voice was amazed.

"I was the last one he saw before he went away, Uncle Timmy. He came to the house that night and he—it was the only time he ever kissed me, and he said if I ever needed him just to let him know, and he'd come no matter where he was."

Tim's gnarled fingers pinched a match from the boxful on the desk. "So that's how it is, huh? You never told me, jigger . . . Whyn't you send fer him then when—when—"

There was an almost imperceptible quiver on her lips. "Things happened so fast. It was all over and daddy was dead, and the ranch was gone—before I knew it. I don't want the same thing happening to you, Uncle Timmy. So won't you please let me send for Harry?"

She came closer and her hands went around the old man's neck. "Please—while there's still time."

The remembrance of lonesome, embittered years pressed with her soft cheek against Timothy Hart's gray-stubbed face, and for a minute he unbent.

"There—there's no way to reach him, jigger."

"But there is! It's pretty certain he's—somewhere in Arizona."

"Where in Arizona?" Tim said dryly. "It's a country spread over a heap of territory."

"Don't you think Harry's known over a heap of territory? Just a letter to Harry Hart, U. S. or Mexico, I'm sure would catch up with him. If you don't realize it, Uncle Timmy, everyone else does—your boy's famous!"

Tim made a growling noise in his throat. "Notorious is a more better word fer it." He lit the match, sucked the flame through the tobacco in his pipe. Lois recognized it for a gesture of dismissal even before he told her, "You had me feelin' soft for a minute, jigger. But my mind's plumb set. I won't have Harry on the place, and I forbid you to write to him."

There was none of that playful gayety on her face as she answered in quiet defiance, "I'm sorry, Uncle Timmy. I've got a letter all ready to mail."

Tim's jaws set sternly. "You're forcin' me to be straight-out with you. I'll have no dealin's with Harry! I couldn't trust him from here to the door. He hires his guns to the highest bidder. If Clover-lip Martin or anyone else was to make him a better offer, he'd turn his guns agin' his own father."

Lois stared in shocked horror. "You—you don't know what you're saying! You couldn't believe—"

"If Harry shows face on the Diamond Five, I'll have my three gunhands run him off!" the old man said with bleak determination.

FROM out on the porch there was a creak of boards under boot leather. Coming at that moment when they faced each other in taut pained silence, the sound held a stealthy, menacing quality.

"Who's that?" Lois questioned under her breath.

"One o' my three gunners, I reckon," old Tim answered grimly.

"I got 'em protectin' me close—from Harry or anyone else."

Her hands dropped to her sides in a little gesture of hopelessness. "You—you're so blind! And so good . . ." She caught her lip hard between her teeth, but it didn't do any good. Her eyes blinked faster, and then the tears burst in a flood. She jerked around, swept out of the room.

Old Tim, with misery in his own eyes, watched her go. Then he raised his voice in a howl of greeting to whoever it was knocking at the outside door.

Two men came in. One of them, as Tim had surmised, was a Diamond Five gunhand—Joe Cobolt. The other, surprising enough, was Sheriff Owen Trecarten. The sheriff, not so old as Tim, was nevertheless dried and gray; a shriveled-up nubbin of a man who had been the law in Organ Mountain County for forty years. The desert sun and wind had scourged him; bullet lead and knife steel both had marked him. But he had held to his frontier principles of broad honesty, dispensing as much legal justice as was possible in a land where men were addicted to making their own law, and by-and-large doing a good job of it.

"Takin' a sashay out this way, Tim, and thought I'd look in," the sheriff said.

"Set and smoke," Tim invited.

"No. I'll be ridin' along almost immediate. I wanted to check up with you about somethin'; but I reckon it ain't no ways necessary now. Couldn't help overhearin'—Cobolt and me—the tag end o' what you said about Harry."

"What about Harry?" old Tim demanded fiercely.

"Been some talk circulatin' in town that you was importin' him to gun-rod the Diamond Five. I was

goin' to caution you, friendly, ag'in' it, there bein' enough trigger-dynamite ready to bust loose in the county the way it already is. But it's plain enough from your talk, you're havin' no truck with him."

"Not now or never. I ain't thinkin' of Harry as my son. It's like I never knowed him."

Sheriff Trecarten nodded somberly.

Before he left, Lois appeared again in the room. Again she was smiling with all the carefree gayety of a child. She had known Sheriff Trecarten since the time, as a toddler of three, she had dragged his belt and holster to him over the floor when he was preparing to take his departure after a pot-luck meal at her father's ranch house.

The sheriff swept off his sombrero. "Sometimes, Miss Lois, I think you ain't changed a mite in seventeen years."

"I'm so glad you stopped by this afternoon," she told him. "I've been wanting someone to mail these letters for me in town."

Deftly, she thrust a neatly-tied packet into his hands and stepped back—and all the sheriff could do was to stand there and feel foolish about it. He was mortally certain, having overheard the conversation, that among the letters was one to Mr. Harry Hart of Arizona. Soft feminine ways and a smile seemed destined to undo in a second all that Sheriff Trecarten had hoped to accomplish by stopping in at the Diamond Five. But common courtesy made it impossible for him to refuse her simple request.

Her eyes, as they met his, were still smiling gayly, but there was a certain flicker of triumph in them that wasn't in the least childlike.

Sheriff Trecarten shoved the letters in his pocket, cleared his throat.

"I reckon, Miss Lois," he commented dryly, "you've growed up more in these seventeen years than I thought."

JOE COBOLT rode to town with the sheriff when he left the ranch house. Cobolt had the same kind of cold blankness in his eyes that Blaster McGlone had.

Another of old Tim's gunhands, "Linky" Frets, angled his horse toward the couple as they hoofed onto open range beyond the salt cedars. Linky Frets hadn't Joe Cobolt's frozen impassivity. He had an animal nervousness of manner, and little eyes which rolled and shifted uncertainly. His lips were loose, and his teeth small and pointed.

Joe Cobolt dropped back and talked with Linky for a moment. Linky rode away in another direction, and Joe rejoined the sheriff. They rode for three-quarters of an hour, not saying much, across a stretch of good grassland and into a region of broken buttes where malpais rock lay in heaped fragments and even the purplish prickly pear and spider-legged *ocotillo* grew sparsely.

Rounding a shoulder of thrusting black rock, they stopped hard, pulling back in saddles, their bronses rearing, as another horseman barred their way on the narrow trail. In the slit between the pulled-down sombrero and the bandana that was tied about the man's face, little eyes glinting restlessly, looked at them searchingly. A yellow oilskin slicker concealed the man's body. In his hand he held a leveled six-gun.

"Get 'em up," he ordered brusquely.

The sheriff's hand was halfway to holster, and he might have risked a snap shot, only Cobolt's horse swerved, stiff-kneed, too close into

the line of fire.

With the stick-up's iron inches close, there was nothing to do but hold quiet and wait.

"Unbuckle your gun belts and leave 'em drop," the gunman said, "with your left hands!"

When the weapons dropped in the dirt, the stick-up wedged his horse in close and padded them down, the sheriff first. He took everything he found in the pockets of both.

When he lifted the packet of letters, the sheriff protested.

"Them's personal. Nothin' in there to do you any good."

"That's fer me to say," the man growled. "I sweep clean. What I don't need I throw away."

"Damn poor pickin's you'll get off the law and a cowpoke that ain't even carryin' payday change," Joe Cobolt said angrily.

"A man gets in a tight sometimes and he can't be particular," the gunman threw back. He stepped his bronc aside, holding his meager loot in one hand. "All right—start ridin'. Jus' to show there's no hard feelin's, I'll leave your guns here—de-fanged. In half an hour you can come back and get 'em if you want to."

The sheriff and Cobolt rode on down the trail.

"Hell of a note," the gunman muttered.

"You think I've gone enfeebled in the pan?" the sheriff wanted to know. "If they was ever a phony holdup . . . I'd know them little slinker-wolf eyes of Linky Frets in the dark!"

Cobolt tensed. "Jus' supposin' it was Linky—you makin' anything out of it?" he inquired silkily.

"Why should I? I don't want that letter delivered to Harry Hart any more than you or Linky or old Tim does. Only make more trouble with

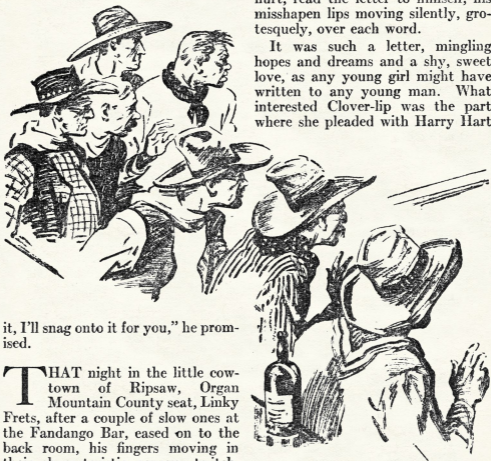
Harry Hart's lead in the air around here. And my obligation to the girl plumb evaporated at the end o' Linky's gun muzzle. I better somehow, though, get my jackknife back!"

Cobolt nodded. "I ever run across

burned in their hide.

Linky Frets gave Clover-lip the letter that Lois had written to Harry Hart. The thick-bodied rancher who was so intent on spreading out in Organ Mountain Valley that he didn't care whom he hurt, read the letter to himself, his misshapen lips moving silently, grotesquely, over each word.

It was such a letter, mingling hopes and dreams and a shy, sweet love, as any young girl might have written to any young man. What interested Clover-lip was the part where she pleaded with Harry Hart



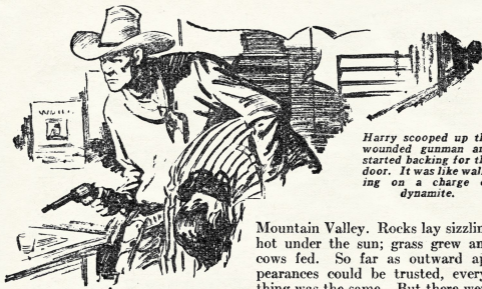
it, I'll snag onto it for you," he promised.

THAT night in the little cowtown of Ripsaw, Organ Mountain County seat, Linky Frets, after a couple of slow ones at the Fandango Bar, eased on to the back room, his fingers moving in their characteristic nervous twitch, his little eyes glancing furtively from one smoke-shrouded card table to another.

When no one seemed to be paying any attention he slipped into a back hallway and knocked four times at a locked door. The door opened and he stepped inside. Clover-lip Martin was there, and Blaster McGlone and two other men with the marks of their gunhawk calling

to come home and side his father with his famous guns against the certain attack of Clover-lip Martin.

When he finished reading, Clover-lip did a curious thing. He rummaged through a clutter of papers and oddments on a wall shelf and located a broken stick of greenish sealing wax. Then he put the letter back in its envelope. He lit a match and held it under the sealing wax,



Harry scooped up the wounded gunman and started backing for the door. It was like walking on a charge of dynamite.

and after the smoky flame had softened it, smeared it on the back of the envelope, sealing it tightly.

"Take it and mail it," he told Linky Frets.

"Huh?" Linky stared, amazed. "After all the trouble I been to—"

Clover-lip Martin's huge fist came down on the round-topped poker table. "Listen close, everybody, while—"

They crowded near to catch the words jetting from his bulbous lips. Greed gave ugly overtones to his voice, and greed put sadistic glints in the eyes of these men, who, by reason of the blood money he paid them, became mere automatons of his brutal will.

The name of Harry Hart sounded often, and the name of old Timothy too; and once, coarsely, the name of Lois Lignell. At every pause in Clover-lip's talk the men jerked their heads in assenting nods, and after he had finished, and their buzz of talk had subsided, they filed out, one at a time, confidence in every step.

For several weeks, then, nothing happened. Life went on in Organ

WS—2F

Mountain Valley. Rocks lay sizzling hot under the sun; grass grew and cows fed. So far as outward appearances could be trusted, everything was the same. But there were those who felt the brooding pressure under the tranquillity, and feeling it, they walked with light uneasy tread, as though a bootheel on any step—the next one or the next—could, like a gun hammer denting the soft copper of a cartridge, set off a blast that would shake the valley from one rock-girt rim to the other.

There was nothing tangible about the menace, so men only waited. Clover-lip Martin's men waited with a smug cruelty of expression, and voiced their confidence by the interchange of hard low-lidded glances. The others waited helplessly, with that fatalism which frontier life, largely ungoverned and unpredictable, engenders—until the day when Harry Hart came riding.

Then everyone quit watching all at once, it seemed . . .

CHAPTER III

HARRY HART RETURNS

HARRY HART had a sturdy, range-bred palomino under him. But though the animal gave evidence of being an excellent cutting pony, there were signs of

elegance in its trappings that marked it definitely as off "range duty." The saddle was single-rigged, and so, more flexible for long, hard riding. Intricate floral designs were impressed in the leather; and the taps enclosing the stirrups, with the ends nearly brushing the ground, were inlaid with silver. The spurs, likewise, were silver mounted.

In the broken-rock range that rimmed the valley, tight-lipped men marked Harry Hart's arrival and signalled the news with sun flashes on a mirror to men holed in ahead. From one to another they flashed his approach as he crossed the Diamond Five property line and jogged on toward the ranch house. Harry intercepted one of the flashes and put it down as an active source of worryment.

After six years on the gunsmoke trail it had become second nature for Harry to anticipate gulcher's lead. So he picked his path to minimize the danger of ambush bullets, though he needn't have bothered, had he only known. Clover-lip Martin's extermination plans called for a course of action more complex, more diabolically far-reaching than the mere triggering of a shot from a mesquite thicket . . .

And so Harry Hart rode on, with the hoofs of his palomino pounding in the coarse rangeland sod, digging their way toward a death trap. Muffled echoes throbbed ahead of him; and behind him dust in the sunlit air hung thinly in a sullen cloud. Harry Hart felt a certain sad loneliness, a melancholy born of the dim trails, and high wide places where the wind sang and wolves at night made eerie ululations at the moon.

But the sadness was not all from the outside. It was inward too, wrapping the heart. Perhaps it had sprung from too great an awareness

of man's cruelty to man, man's distrust of man—and man's inadequacy apart from woman . . .

Harry Hart had been called outlaw, hooter, longrider, killer—and worse. But some—and they were the ones whose lives had touched his closely—men both strong and weak, but invariably, in a broad sense, good, had called him friend.

These things he had in common with the hundred-dollar-a-month gentry riding for Clover-lip Martin: tight lips, hard eyes, a draw that was lightning quick, an aim that was deadly. The run of folks, given to accepting what seemed obvious, not probing beneath the surface, noted the similarities and let it go at that. Stories true, untrue, and half true circulated about him and grew prodigiously with the telling.

Men whose paths had crossed Harry Hart's, however, and who had come to know him and call him friend, were aware that his tight lips, when relaxed, were full and warm. And so with the eyes; the icy blue quartz could melt. And though the hardness might on occasion be tempered with wariness, there was never a furtive quality there.

In one single respect the stories that circulated were but little exaggerated. Harry Hart did have an extraordinarily fast draw; he did shoot straight. A natural aptitude with guns, steady nerves, and methodical practice was the simple answer, though the result was so phenomenal that it was no wonder that men on both sides of the Border credited him with gun prowess that was little short of miraculous.

IN close sight of the ranch house, Harry slowed to a walk, mindful of the mirror flash he had intercepted, and uncomfortably aware that whoever was inside could

have been warned of his approach. He slowed to a walk, but at the last, tossing aside all caution, he put spurs to the palomino's flanks, and the tough little range pony responded with a burst of galloping speed which sounded a reckless tattoo of hoofs on the ranch house gravel.

Two things had dictated the precipitate action—a shout and the roar of a six-gun. Both came from within the ranch house.

Harry knew whose voice it was that had given that high, fear-stricken shout—and it was cut off by the gun blast!

Swerving in close to the porch, Harry slammed out of saddle, ducked under one screened window and came up in front of another, his eyes and his six-gun muzzle coming to common focus within the room.

Slanting in from side windows, the sun lit up the room; and what it pitilessly revealed was enough to have unnerved any man. But Harry held his grip on sanity. Six years of living on the cold thin edge of life had given him a kind of icy composure few men possess, and the sight, terrifying though it was, brought only a look of bleak savagery to his eyes.

Six years of homeless wandering. Six years, some additional months, weeks, days, hours—and a few minutes. It should have been one minute less. How much was a minute out of all that unreckoned time? Enough to see his father dead? Because there was old Timmy, his lank frame folded unnaturally, his long grizzled hair mopping the floor where he feebly struggled to rise, and blood seeping from under him on the scoured pine boards, catching in tiny pools in the web of his fingers.

Harry's eyes didn't dwell consciously on these stark details. He assimilated them during the split-second with which his glance swept the whole room. He saw the other three men in that same all-encompassing glance.

It wasn't until a breath later that they saw him. They were in a shooting crouch, all three of them, eyes creased to slits under wide hat brims, their mouths in tight straight lines on their leathery faces, and their guns lined on the open door.

Easy to see, this had been planned for a cold killing of father and son. But for all their weight of numbers and their advantage of preparedness, there was fear in the muscle-bound tension of these three, fear in the hard ferocity of their expressions as they waited. It was an old, old story to Harry. Men didn't come gunning for him alone any more. Not openly. He was too good with guns. Even when they ganged up on him, as they were doing now, there was this creeping dread which they could never quite shake off or keep from showing.

From out of Harry's dim-trailed past came recognition of one of these three. The one with the nervous little eyes and the squirrel teeth. Linky Frets. It was casual, unimportant recognition, and on the very heels of it Linky rolled his shifty eyes toward the window and screamed in shrinking terror of the gun-lead retribution poised there.

Linky's scream had the shuddering sound of a power saw biting into resinous wood and it had the effect of grooving the attention of the other two instantly toward the window. Almost automatically their guns stabbed where their eyes looked. Three guns going into action against one. But only two shots sounded.

Both of them punched lead through the window screen from outside. Inside, those slugs diverged a little, one of them stopping Joe Cobolt, and the other taking care of the *mestizo*, Manuel Escobar. Linky Frets screamed again and plunked his gun, unfired, to the floor as he heeled around and started toward the side door. Joe Cobolt's body, already unfeeling from that single bullet through the skull, slumped against him in its fall, knocking him violently to the floor. The limp body of Manuel Escobar toppled heavily across them both.

With sheer terror cutting off the screams from his lips, Linky Frets threw off the weight of the dead men, staggered up, and lunged again for the door. Harry had a six-gun bead on him from the window.

Reflex almost squeezed the trigger. But in the last split-wink Harry's mind took control. His mind and his heart. He didn't shoot Linky in the back of the head. He let him go. The blasting of one more gunnie didn't seem important now anyway. Only his father, his gaunt form still now, seemed important.

HARRY'S eyes were dry as quartz dust, but a sob choked for expression in his throat as he rammed through the doorway into the room. He stepped over the two dead gunmen and for one brief moment stood above his father, his body weaving a little as though to a gentle wind, and grief paralyzing him.

He was that way when Lois Lignell came upon him, standing there among his dead, his lethal gun still in hand.

He swerved as he caught her light tread on the porch; his gun hand went half up, then down as recogni-

tion beat upon him.

Lois stared in cold shock. Dead men heaped on the ranch house floor, blood spattered everywhere; and, after six years, Harry here—she couldn't assimilate it all at first. Slim and white, she stood in the doorway. Her lips moved, saying unrealized ordinary words:

"I was down at the harness shed. . . . I heard the shooting and I came running—" Then in the hot sunlight slanting under the porch roof, she shuddered. "You—you killed him! You killed Uncle Timmy!"

Harry started toward her, a tremor passing over the muscles of his own lean body as he saw her small brown hand go to her mouth in horror.

She backed away at his approach and let the screen door slam. "Don't touch me! You—you murderer! All these men—that Uncle Timmy hired to protect him—you killed them. And you killed Uncle Timmy. It—it's true the horrible things they say about you . . . And I thought—when you came back—you would—we would—" Her voice choked on a dry sob. "But you only came back to kill!"

"Lois . . . Lois!" Pain and ineffable tenderness dictated the words, but his very excess of grief made them sound hoarse, rough.

She cringed as he came closer.

He felt utterly beaten, and dimly he wondered where it could end. . . . There were others, no doubt, who had more positive ideas on the subject. Clover-lip Martin, for instance . . .

When Linky Frets scuttled away, panic-stricken and barely able to comprehend the fact that he was still alive, he bolted through the salt cedar windbreak; and not very far on the other side of it he met Clover-

lip, Blaster McGlone, and Sheriff Owen Trecarten, all riding toward the ranch house.

Linky didn't seem surprised to see them. But Clover-lip Martin, at least, was surprised to see the killer without a gun and wearing out boot leather in such a thorough fashion.

The riders drew rein. Sheriff Trecarten stared down curiously at Linky. "We heard the shots. What's happened?"

Linky got it out between gasps. His story was crooked as the trail left by a sidewinder in desert sand, but he didn't have to feign his exhaustion or his terror. With his pointed teeth chattering and his eyes rolling, he said:

"It's Harry Hart! He's come home. He's kilt Cobolt and the Mex. And he's kilt his old man. He almost got me!"

Clover-lip Martin glowered. "Where is he now?"

"Back at the house, I reckon."

"Why'd he do it?" the sheriff asked.

Linky spread his hands wide, hunched his scrawny shoulders. "Kill-crazy, I reckon. He jus' come blastin' down on us. It was over afore we knew it started."

The sheriff jerked his head impatiently at the others. "Come on."

They started riding, with Linky boot-slogging along behind. Blaster McGlone kneed his horse in close to Clover-lip's.

"With two of your gunners rubbed out," he said guardedly, "looks like more responsibility devolves to me."

"You called it," Clover-lip muttered. "Till we get Harry Hart plowed under you keep your mitts glued to your gun butts."

"Glad we see eye to eye on that," the Blaster said.

"What you mean?"

"You jus' admitted that I'm takin'

over two other men's jobs in addition to my own."

"So what?"

"So I'll be takin' over their pay checks too."

Clover-lip swore under his breath. "You ought to been a business man 'stead of a gunman."

"What my old daddy used to say," the Blaster agreed. "He wanted me to go work in his store."

Clover-lip swore some more. "My trouble—I'm too good-hearted and I talk too much."

CHAPTER IV

A DECISION

COMING out of the windbreak on the ranch-house side, the three rode warily. They sighted Harry Hart and Lois facing each other tensely, on the porch. Harry had holstered his gun and he made no move to unlimber it as the party rode close. No one said anything, and the sheriff slid out of saddle and walked forward slowly.

"Hiya, Harry," he greeted with disarming softness.

Harry looked hard at the gray little man under the big hat. Recognition came, and he said, "Hello, Mr. Trecarten." His gun made him the sheriff's master, and they both knew it; but when he had first left the Diamond Five he had been a boy, with a boy's deference for the sheriff's years, and it seemed natural now to address Owen Trecarten respectfully as mister.

"Reckon I'll look inside," the sheriff said.

"Help yourself," Harry told him bleakly.

The sheriff opened the screen door and paused on the threshold, staring at the three bodies grotesquely sprawled on the floor. He turned to Harry. "Your work?"

"Some of it, yeah."

The sheriff chose his words with extreme care. His tone too. He made it sound offhand. "There'll have to be an investigation on this, of course. You can stay over with me in town if you like——"

"And if I don't like?" Harry broke in coldly.

The sheriff stared, while little wrinkle fans at the corners of his eyes seemed to be creasing his lids down under the grizzled brows. They were all staring, Clover-lip Martin and Blaster McGlone in saddle; Linky Frets, lurking at the edge of the windbreak; and the girl, there on the porch with her lip held tight between her teeth. The wind whimpered sadly in the salt cedars.

Suddenly Harry laughed. It was not a pleasant sound—harsh, grating. "Every damn one of you waitin' for someone else to start somethin'!" he said. "Well, come on. I'm only one. Make a play, somebody."

"Take it easy, son," the sheriff cautioned. "I only invited you, friendlylike, to put up with me fer——"

"Put up where—in your jail?"

"Easy, son. Plenty of time fer discussin' things like that after we've all cooled off a mite."

"And after you've had a chance to throw a gun on me from behind! Do I look dumb?"

Clover-lip Martin's splayed mouth was twitching as he tried to get a signal across to his gunner. The Blaster ignored him. But Harry didn't. Harry's hand moved perceptibly nearer the worn walnut butt of his gun in the open-flap holster.

The sheriff fidgeted, hearing behind him the funereal sigh of the wind in feathery branches. Out of his lifetime experience as a frontier peace officer, he, perhaps better than

any of them, was attuned to the tension which was building up to a breaking point. The silence which closed in was the ominous quiet of death.

He cleared his throat cautiously. "Anything I might've said was only in my line of duty, son——"

"When you talk about duty," Harry flared, "don't come sided by a range-rat like him"—Harry indicated Clover-lip Martin—"and gunscum like him"—he flicked a contemptuous glance at Blaster McGlone.

"You ain't understandin' quite," the sheriff interposed.

"I understand I ain't givin' my guns up to the law in this county; and I hope you all understand it, on account if you don't, God help you." His whole lean body tightened suddenly with resolve. Now, looking at the sheriff, it was no longer as a boy to his elder. Sheriff Trecarten was just another man who might have to be faced through gunsmoke.

"I'm steppin' in saddle and ridin'," Harry warned. "Anybody contestin' it'll be promotin' a buryin' like there ain't been around here in years."

HE mounted and nobody made a move to stop him. The bleakness that lay in his eyes became fired, almost as when a shaft of sunlight sets blue quartz to blazing. This wasn't the first time he had used his reputation to save gun lead. He started riding slowly, looking back.

His tight lips moved to throw out a parting admonition. "It's about a hundred feet to the windbreak. My reputation ain't built only on close-in shootin'."

Three guns against his one—and they let him go. It wasn't cowardice which kept their six-shooters hitched to leather; it was a realistic

evaluation of the chances a man would have to take in opening the play.

The moment Harry merged into the concealing windbreak, and the hoofs of his palomino sounded as he drew away in a fast gallop, Cloverlip Martin turned in swollen-faced anger to his number-one gunman.

"I'm payin' you the double wages of three men and you sit there like a bump on a log!" he whispered harshly.

"I wanted to live to collect," Blaster McGlone answered calmly, keeping his voice low also.

"This first deal's his," the sheriff muttered, "but the next one won't be. I'll stay on here with Miss Lois till some of the Diamond Five boys come in; then I'll go trailin'. You two start ridin' and spread the word. Harry Hart ain't good enough to shoot his way through every man in Organ Mountain County."

Riding away from the ranch house, Harry's first thought was to put distance between him and the ranch house. But after the green of the salt cedars had paled to a smudge of gray against the range-land sky, he bent his efforts to covering his tracks. Not for nothing had he lived out the whole of his boyhood on this desert range. He knew the places a hunted man could go, and how he could get there, unseen and leaving no trace of his passing.

Hours later, he drew up in a tiny grass-floored clearing high in the Organ Mountain Range, having left behind him a baffling succession of dry arroyos, beds of broken malpais rock, and salt flats, hard and glittering under the late afternoon sun.

From now on it would be easy. He had only to cross the mountains at Eagle Neck Pass to be in fresh country beyond the reach of any

posse Sheriff Trecarten or Cloverlip Martin could muster.

But then what? No matter where he went he could never get beyond the reach of his own heart-sick thoughts. From here on out his last bridge was burned behind him. During the weary flow of time on the dim trails one thing only had buoyed him up—the almost positive knowledge that one day he would quit these ways of violence and sudden death and haze back to the Diamond Five, there to live in peace and companionship with honest men while shouldering his own small part of the honest work of the world. He would make it all up with the Old Man, and with Lois who had waited so long and so loyally.

But now . . . The Old Man lay dead, his own son branded with the killing! Lois despised him. There could be no love in his life. Only bitterness and hate. He could only go on, with decent men everywhere shunning—or hunting him, go on, shrouded in gunsmoke, killing when he had to—until he himself went down.

He speculated in this fashion, morbidly, while purple shadows fingered deeper and deeper into the mountains with the setting of the sun. But the end of it was a surcease from dejection. He hadn't become the Harry Hart, famed for his gunmanship throughout the West, through any knuckling under to fate. He had always taken fate by the two horns—or, more accurately, by the six-gun barrels—and licked it. And maybe he could do that now! It was a chance at least. Slim. But what had he to lose? Certainly, now, his life meant nothing. But Lois—he had seen Martin's eyes rest speculatively on her. It rested on him to take Lois out from under the grasp of Cloverlip

Martin, for she could still make something out of her life . . .

HARRY rolled a brown-paper quiry with fingers that for the first time this day trembled a little. He struck a match and sucked the flame through the tobacco. He exhaled smoke, a light of grim decision in his eyes. He was seeing, with increasing clarity, what he could do.

There was only one man living who had been witness to everything that had happened today at the Diamond Five ranch house. Linky Frets. The start, then, had to be made with Linky. He had to find that venomous little killer, drag him alive to Sheriff Trecarten, and shake a confession out of him. No easy job, with the whole county, including the sheriff's office primed to shoot Harry Hart on sight!

But there was no alternative. Afterwards the course of action would depend somewhat on the sheriff. Trecarten was an honest lawman. If he could be shown where the truth lay, he could be counted on for staunch support. Just now it was obvious he was being hoodwinked to some degree by Clover-lip Martin. Lois' letter had clearly shown that Martin was the only one who was reaching out, rough-shod, in the valley.

It must have been Martin's men, then, who had mirror-flashed the signals, warning of his approach toward the ranch house. And those men in the house were Martin's men, in spite of Lois' assertion that they had been hired by his father. They had killed his father; they had intended to kill him. And Clover-lip Martin, himself, approaching so opportunely after the shooting . . .

The whole thing smelled! A complicated murder conspiracy, timed

to the minute, wherein Clover-lip Martin got rid of the Harts, father and son; the pretext of bringing the sheriff to the Diamond Five to command Hart to keep riding, had been used to have the old lawman on the scene immediately after the dual killing.

Clover-lip's men undoubtedly were to tell their lie about how Hart had shot his own father, and how they, in retaliation, had dropped Harry Hart. With the bodies still there, and the sound of the gunfire practically echoing in the sheriff's ears, the story would sound good. So good that there wouldn't be any kickback later when Clover-lip took over the Diamond Five brand—and with it, Lois Lignell.

With the sun gone and darkness blanketing the mountains, yellow pin-points of light twinkled far below and to the left in Ripsaw. Harry waited till the moon came out, then he caught up the palomino and rode—down slope, in the direction of the twinkling lights.

Long after midnight, with most of the wan illumination in Ripsaw blanked out, the Fandango Saloon still blazed with light. Late returning parties of hard-lipped men, empty-handed after their search for Harry Hart, lined the bar, washing the dust from their throats with jolts of raw whisky. Wrangling talk ranged loud in the room; and the most insistent of all was the jaw-music of Linky Frets.

AS the only man among them who had faced Harry Hart and lived to tell about it, he had attained a certain distinction. Fragmentary stories had circulated about the run-in at the Diamond Five, and not all of them were to Linky's credit; but he held their grudging attention now as he

strutted at the bar and repeated his story with additional graphic details for the benefit of late comers.

"I says to him, 'Harry Hart,' I says, 'you've shot your poor old father. You ain't fit to be in association with human mankind,' I says. Then I looks him in the eye. 'Make your play, Harry Hart,' I says."

"He got kind of pale, but he seen there wasn't no other way out, so he went fer his gun. I gave him a good lead on the draw, then I went fer mine. I come up fast, like this." Linky demonstrated, dropping his hand to gun-butt, clearing the iron of leather.

"I got two shots in afore he unloaded one. Both of 'em took him, one in the shoulder, one in the stomach somewheres. I had a dead bead on him for a third shot, then the Mex, he got in my way. I had to hold fire and that give Harry Hart a chance. He dropped the Mex and Joe Cobolt too. Joe fell ag'in' me and knocked my gun out of hand. Harry Hart, when he seen me without my six, turned around from runnin' away where he had started, and drewed down on me. I dodged the shot and ducked out the door. I made it to the windbreak where I was goin' to wait fer him to come ridin' through so I could pull him out of saddle and shoot him with his own gun. But Clover-lip and them come ridin' up about that time and Harry Hart sneaked away in the other direction."

"Show us ag'in how you drawed on him," a bar-fly who had been playing Linky for drinks all day, asked thickly.

Linky was pleased to comply. "Like this," he said, going into a crouch and slapping his gun out of holster.

"What would you do, Linky," the

drunk demanded owlishly, "if Harry Hart, he was to come in this saloon right now?"

"I'd shoot his teeth out!"

The drunk made a sound of high-pitched snickering. "Then you best git shootin', Linky, on account he jus' now pushed through the batwings!"

CHAPTER V

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES

LINKY swiveled around. So did every other man at the bar. No one precisely believed what the old souse said, but Harry Hart's name was one to rivet attention.

After they turned to look a silence struck through the big smoky room. No one moved, no one said anything. The place was still as a church—or a graveyard. That was because, out of the mouth of the drunkard had come truth. Harry Hart *had* pushed through the batwings, and now he was standing there, lips tight and eyes sardonically blazing, booted feet wide spread, knees limber, his hand within easy striking range of his gun.

The silence was shattered all at once by a solid clattering. It was the sound made by Linky Frets' six-shooter as the weapon dropped voluntarily from his hand and struck the floor.

"That's right, Linky," Harry Hart said softly. "You know what to do, don't you?"

And now another sound broke the silence—Linky's squirrel teeth chattering.

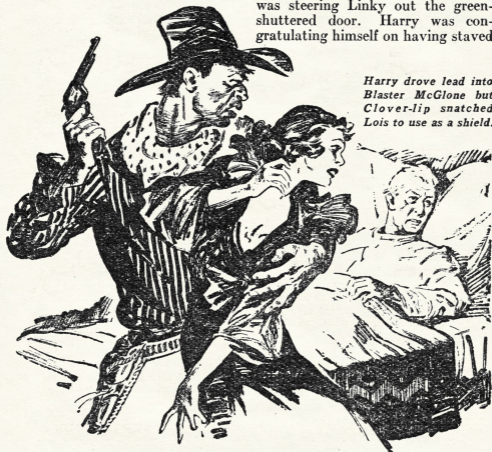
"Come on, Linky," Harry said, still in that voice of deadly softness. "Walk toward the door. We're goin' on a little trip, you and me."

Linky pushed out from among the

men at the bar, scuffing his boots slowly through the scum of dirty sawdust on the puncheon floor, taking one drag step after the other, his glazed stare holding on Harry. He

eyes with his own, and each receiving the impression that he personally was being singled out for hostile scrutiny.

The deadlock held until Harry was steering Linky out the green-shuttered door. Harry was congratulating himself on having staved



Harry drove lead into Blaster McGlone but Clover-lip snatched Lois to use as a shield.

walked like a man in a strange dream.

Halfway to the door he paused, shuddered.

"Keep comin', Linky—if you want to live to tell about it!"

Linky's feet started moving again, and when he came close, Harry started backing with him to the door. There was only the slow shuffle of their boots on the floor, and somewhere in the room a clock nervously ticking. The men at the bar stood as though frozen in ice, each of them seeking Harry Hart's

off the gun-play. A deal like this—you could never tell. It was like freezing ice out of dynamite. Sometimes the dynamite got up and kicked. It was that way now. At this last moment somebody in the mob tried a snap shot from a heeled-up holster. As though jolted into life by that first fateful slug, guns all up and down the long bar broke out, roaring their thunder!

Harry's long-barreled .45 was out, throwing lead where it would do the most good. But the whole mob was



unstrung now, shouting drunken curses, scurrying for cover, blazing wild shots.

Harry felt a pull at his shoulder where a bullet creased a red furrow through the muscle; and out of the tail of his eye he saw Linky Frets slump forward, apparently hard hit. He scooped the wounded gunman up with one arm, backed out the swinging doors with lead splintering the shutters in all directions, and made for his horse at the hitchrack. Slinging Linky across the saddle, he mounted, and spurred his horse.

Lead came cruising after them in the dark. But it was blind lead. Spiteful and close-whining some of it, but ineffective. Swallowing up the roar of guns, then, came the sound of hoofs pounding as pursuit got under way. But Harry knew where he was going. He guided the sure-footed little palomino off the trail and the following hoofbeats smoothed into distance.

Harry didn't ride far. It had been his intention to hustle Linky Frets off to a mountain hideout, there to hold him prisoner till the time was

favorable for the next move. But Linky's wound had spoiled that plan.

IT was Blaster McGlone that plugged me!" Linky gasped, his furtive eyes rolling in pain, as Harry lowered him carefully to the ground to make an examination of

the wound. "Some of the others threw their lead wide, so's not to get me. But not the Blaster. Nobody's life's nothin' to him. He'd shoot right through me to get you—and then sandbag Clover-lip fer my wages."

Harry's eyes glittered in the starlight. "So you admit to takin' money from Clover-lip. I thought it was my old man you'd hired your guns to."

"Sure—sure, your old man," Linky muttered in near delirium. "Reckon I'm like Clover-lip. I talk too much."

Harry's fingers, moving deftly, cut away some of the blood-soaked cloth to get to the wound. The little rattler *wags* hardhit. Harry put a crude emergency dressing on the wound, and lifted Linky again to saddle.

Linky groaned, with his little squirrel teeth sunk into his lip. "I'll die if you lug me out there in the hills!"

"Not takin' you to the hills," Harry told him. "Takin' you back to Ripsaw, and leavin' you with the doc—after you've answered a few questions, with Sheriff Trecarten listenin'."

Linky groaned again. "You're locoed. They'd fill us both full of lead like a sieve if you tried to get back to town."

"That's a risk we take," Harry said grimly.

"How you know the sheriff'll be there? Or the doc either?"

"That's another risk. But the chances are good. They aren't men to get up out of bed to go hellin' over the country with a bunch of gun-blastin' drunks."

Harry knew the back ways into Ripsaw as well as he knew the outland trails in the valley. With the wounded gunman in front of him, he held the palomino to the bulking

night shadows of rock cliffs and mesquite, and at last guided the horse in between Zebu Smallwood's blacksmith shop and the Great Western livery barn. The horse came to a halt in Sheriff Trecarten's back yard. Harry knocked softly on the sheriff's door.

It wasn't an encouraging response that he got.

"Get the hell away and leave a man sleep!" Sheriff Trecarten's irate voice sounded from inside his bachelor shack.

Harry chose to interpret the protest as an invitation to enter. He pulled the latch string. The door swung open and he went inside. Dimly, through the darkness he could make out the sheriff's blanket-swaddled form on the bed in the corner. The bed boards creaked as the sheriff pushed up on one elbow.

"I've told you fellas twice already," he railed, "I ain't gettin' up to go battin' around on no wild goose chase. Danged unaccommodatin' o' Harry Hart to go shootin' up the town in the middle of the night. But I ain't givin' him satisfaction. When I go after that gunsmoke hellion it'll be on my own terms, not his'n. I been ridin' all day; I'll likely be ridin' all tomorrer. Tonight I sleep." He dropped back into the softness of the feather mattress.

Harry went close. "Maybe," he said laconically, "Harry Hart ain't so plumb unaccommodatin' as you opine."

"Huh, what's that?" The sheriff sat bolt upright and stared.

"You don't have to go after Hart," his visitor continued.

"Huh?" The sheriff blinked the last vestige of sleep from his eyes.

"He's come to you."

The sheriff recognized the voice now. He stared, waiting.

"I've got Linky Frets outside," Harry added. "He's bad shot up and I've brought him in to the doctor. But first he's got somethin' to say at you. As eye-witness to all that happened at the Diamond Five, he wants to tell you the truth. Get up and come outside—Mr. Trecarten."

His nightshirt fluttering, the sheriff padded on his bare feet into the yard, with Harry close behind. They bent over Linky Frets. Harry put out his hand gently to Linky's shoulder. He drew his hand away sharply, sticky wet with fresh blood.

"His wound's come open again!"

"Leave me see." The sheriff's deft fingers ran over the body. He held his ear to the heart. After a long moment Trecarten raised his head. "He's dead!"

SILENCE flowed between them. A man lay dead, and with his dying he had brought death to the hopes and dreams of the living. Harry stood up. His voice was bleak as he said merely, "I'll be ridin'." He turned toward the palomino.

The sheriff's hand reached out. "Wait a minute, younker. What was it, now, Linky was primed to tell me?"

"You wouldn't believe it from me," Harry said, moving on toward his horse.

"I'm uncommon curious, though," the sheriff's low voice followed him. "Since you've gone to all this trouble, don't you think you might as well . . ."

Harry turned. "In brief," he said, weariness weighing the words, "Linky was goin' to tell you that it was him and Joe Cobolt and Manuel Escobar that shot my father. On Clover-lip's orders. I heard the shot and came on and ran smack

into a trap they'd set for me. I shot my way out of it. That's about all, except that the whole business was a frame-up to get both the Old Man and me out of the road so everything would be clear for Clover-lip Martin to take over the Diamond Five like he done Jeff Lignell's K B."

"You got any proof for that last, younker?" the sheriff let out slowly.

"No, I haven't." Harry reached a hand to his saddle horn.

"Wait. One thing I've had in mind to ask you."

"I'm listenin'."

"How's it come that after six years you hazed back to your home range, bang in the middle o' all this trouble?"

"I come on request," Harry answered reluctantly.

"You got a letter?" the sheriff asked in a mild voice.

"I got a letter."

"By any chance you got it on you now?"

Harry nodded, puzzled.

"H'm. . . . If you wouldn't mind comin' inside for a minute, and showin' me that letter—"

"Anything to detain me, huh, sheriff?" Harry slashed out. "Till the posse gets back."

The sheriff sighed. "It ain't surprisin' you mistrust me. But maybe it'll help if I tell you the letter is from Lois Lignell."

Harry stared, then he went inside. The sheriff pulled the blinds and lit a lamp. In the yellow glow of light he read the letter Harry took from his pocket. His weathered face remained as inexpressive as wrinkled leather. When he had finished reading he rubbed one flinty finger across the greenish sealing wax on the back of the envelope.

"There weren't no sealin' wax on here when this letter was put in my

hands fer mailin'," he stated. "You wouldn't know anything about that, would you, younker?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Maybe I would then. This letter was lifted from me by some one who didn't want it sent."

"Then why was it sent?" Harry rapped.

"First reason that pops up is that whoever didn't want you here, after readin' the letter, decided to send it and leave you come on—and set jus' such a trap fer you as you've described."

"Who took the letter from you?"

The sheriff didn't answer directly. He said, "I lost a good pocket knife at the same time. Joe Cobolt promised to snag onto it fer me. I think I'll jus' go out and look in Linky Frets' pockets."

Harry waited. The sheriff came back with the knife in his hand.

"Now add it up," Harry said.

IT'S baby arithmetic. Them three gun-riders of old Tim's, he hired 'em when he thought Clover-lip Martin was about to move in on him. I figgered Clover-lip to be mostly bluff, and I thought Tim was gettin' a little teched in the head, worryin' thataway. But Tim's fears, looks like, was legitimate. And all three of them gunmen, it's plain now, was in Clover-lip Martin's pay. It was Clover-lip that opened this letter and sealed it again and sent it on to you. I've seen that dirty green sealin' wax kickin' around his office in the Fandango ever since when he first come to the valley."

Harry's eyes were flinty. "Them's the same kind of figgers I've arrived at. Reckon I can count on the law to look the other way while I take a sashay over to see Clover-lip?"

The sheriff bristled indignantly.

"Wait'll I swap this consarn night-shirt fer some britches and a gun belt, and the law'll do considerable more'n look the other way! I might be slow in addin' up figgers, but once I strike a balance, younker, I hoof right along. I'll deputize you. That's what I'll do—deputize you. Tonight you'll be throwin' your lead fer the law."

Riding out from Ripsaw, Sheriff Trecarten led off fast—and in the wrong direction. Quick suspicion assailed Harry. "How come?" he asked coldly.

The sheriff looked back. "How come what?"

"This ain't the trail to Clover-lip Martin's."

"Hell no. We're headin' fer the Diamond Five."

"Unloose the rest of it," Harry said tensely.

"Haven't you heard about old Timmy?"

"What about him?" In spite of all he could do to keep it calm, Harry's voice had a lift to it.

"Old Timmy," the sheriff said, "bein' composed mostly of somethin' tough as saddle leather, he never cashed to that gun lead. Not yet. He's stove up bad and delirious, but the doc's been with him ever since, and last I heard, figgers to pull him through."

Harry breathed something to himself that might have been a prayer to such gods as he had come to know in the green and rocky solitudes high above the abodes of men.

Aloud he said, "And we're sweatin' horseflesh to get there. Why?"

"To try and beat Clover-lip Martin."

"I get it," Harry said tightly. "Clover-lip naturally won't want the Old Man to come alive and tell about that shootin'."

"That's it. While the posse out

of Fandango is hellin' around, makin' noise, Clover-lip takes his private army and goes to settle old Timmy fer keeps. There won't be nothin' barrin' him. Most o' the Diamond Five riders are away pushin' a herd to the railroad. The rest are ridin' line."

"After all of which," Harry said bleakly, "Clover-lip forces a sale and moves onto the Diamond Five, the same like he done with Jeff Lignell's K B—or maybe he moves onto it by forcin' a marriage."

"We got to kick along fast," the sheriff declared. Then, looking at Harry, he seemed to feel acutely the hopes and fears which racked the mind of his new deputy, and leaning closer to him in saddle, he said, with all the heartiness he could muster, "There's only the two of us, boy, any one else we could count on havin' gone with the posse. But surprise'll be on our side and we'll put our lead fast and straight."

CHAPTER VI

GUN KING'S END

THE Chinese cook was sleeping in his bunk, perhaps dreaming of poppy fields and sing-song girls. A gun barrel thudded against his head—and his sleep became even deeper. The first inking any one at the ranch house had that something was wrong was when a whistle sounded softly from outside the window of the room where Timothy Hart lay white and still in the big four-poster bed.

Doc Saggins said, "Who's there?" He looked out the window, and slumped unconscious across the sill as some one from outside brought the barrel of a six-gun into vicious play.

Lois heard the shuddering thwack of the gun against the doctor's head,

and she started up with a little cry from near Tim's bedside. But by that time the door had been thrust open, and Clover-lip Martin stumped in with Blaster McGlone and half a dozen others pushing at his heels.

Lois shrank back toward the bed, as though with her slim body she could shield old Tim from the menace so starkly threatening. Clover-lip came on and his thick hand reached out and gripped her by the shoulder.

"I'm through playin' easy with you, girlie," he said. He turned to one of his men. "Go ahead, Sleepy."

A man stepped close with six-gun in hand. He put the muzzle of his six-gun against old Tim's ear, and looked to Clover-lip, awaiting final word.

Lois tore her gaze away from that terrible figure and looked at Clover-lip too. "You—wouldn't—dare!"

"Why wouldn't I?" Clover-lip's hard voice asked. "It'll be in the nature of discipline for you. You'll be the only one to know, and you'll swear it was Harry Hart who did it—unless you want the same thing happening to you . . . Go ahead, Sleepy."

"Sleepy" Hone turned attention to his job.

Struggling, wrenching against her captor's grasp, Lois' hand went down to the bed covers and came up fast, holding a six-shooter which Doc Saggins, on his arrival at the Diamond Five, had taken the precaution to cache there. As Lois brought up the unwieldy weapon it struck Sleepy Hone's leveled gun. Metal clanked against metal as Sleepy's weapon was knocked away from its aim at Tim's head.

Two shots sounded. One was from Sleepy's gun whaling its lead

harmlessly into the wall over old Tim's head. The other was Lois Lignell's, unloading close lead into the startled gunnie.

She didn't kill Sleepy. But her shot knocked him back on his heels, lost him his grip on his gun. Following up the play, she swiveled the doc's big six at Martin, denting his thick midriff with the smoking muzzle.

She didn't know what she screamed at him, but it was in the nature of a warning. But it wasn't necessary. Clover-lip was lurching back with ludicrous suddenness. There was a jam at the door as everyone, shouting, cursing, tried to get out at once.

SHE didn't want to kill anybody, so she waited for a tense agonizing moment while the doorway cleared, then blazed a single shot into the darkness to show she meant business in case any one had it in mind to come back.

No one came back. Not then. But from outside guns sounded, and bullets knocked plaster around the room. The slugs came in high, shattering the window, and jangling glass across the foot of Tim's bed.

Echoing the gun shots came Clover-lip Martin's bull voice. "Throw your gun down, you hell-cat, or our next bullets won't come high!"

For answer, Lois lined a shot into darkness.

Doc Saggins, whose hand had been groping in his thick hair, sat up groggily. He shook himself, and as soon as he was able, reached out and picked up the six-shooter dropped by Sleepy Hone.

Clover-lip called his men together under cover of the whispering cedars. "We never tapped the doc hard enough," he slashed. "Now he's

in it, we got to make a clean sweep. Scatter and put your slugs in low. Clean it up fast and let's be gettin' out of here."

The girl too?" Blaster McClone wanted to know.

"The girl too! She's askin' for it. I was soft to let her go this long."

"Trouble with you, you're too good-hearted, boss."

Clover-lip scowled in the darkness, not knowing if the Blaster meant what he said or not. The men, scattering, were triggering the first of their low shots. . . . And inside the house, Lois Lignell's flushed face went white as she read, in the breath-jerking closeness of that gun lead, the death warrants of old Timmy, Doc Saggins, and herself.

The shooting increased suddenly to a thundering fury, and her lips closed on a prayer. Her eyes closed also, squeezing down hard to blank out the details of dying. Regrets flooded in at her . . . she was young to die . . . there was so much to live for. There was Harry Hart! Overwhelming everything else was regret at the bitter things she had said to Harry Hart today. She loved him. She trusted him, really. And now he would never know . . . If, at this last moment, while death reached out, he could come riding to her, his gun could bring life . . .

SHE opened her eyes suddenly to a stunning realization. Though the guns still roared in the ranch house yard, no more lead was slapping plaster within the room. Outside, the confusion grew; men shouted, cursed; and once she heard a name shrill on terrified lips. And then she knew! *Harry Hart had come riding!*

Harry Hart and with him Sheriff Trecarten . . .

They had heard the shooting, of course, as they neared the place; and they had stormed down, spurring their broncs to breakneck speed. The moon, poking out from a low scudding cloud, spotted them in its pale brilliance an instant before they plunged into the concealment of the feathery branched cedars.

Clover-lip Martin, from where he lurked deep among the ghostly trees, shielding his hide from stray bullets, saw Harry and the sheriff, and he let out a frightened yell for help and started throwing lead. Harry and the sheriff opened up full blast, grooving their shots for the saffron gun flares that commenced blooming in the dark on all sides.

Illuminated in eerie patches by the powder flashes, the trees with their drooping branches seemed to form a monstrous grave, sealing them all in. But Harry didn't think of it as a grave. The trees were monuments to freedom rather. Freedom at last to line his lead for something he believed in. He had thrown his guns enough for casual things, bolstering men's selfishness. Now he was fighting for a girl that he loved, for her life and his father's life. His own too, but he didn't think about that.

So in a strange perverse way he was happy. He had come back home, and all his life seemed packed in this high thin moment, where gun smoke was acrid in the nostrils, and branches whipped the face; and six-guns roared, building up their echoes deafeningly under the swaddling trees, as bullets snarled and whined.

Some men were dead and some were dying. Clover-lip Martin's bull voice was stilled. But Harry didn't think the gun-boss was dead. He played a hunch and leaving Sheriff Trecarten to carry on outside, he stole through the trees . . . and turned up in the doorway of

that room where lamplight shone out through the bullet-shattered window. His hunch was good, because there was Clover-lip Martin and Blaster McGlone both in the room.

Clover-lip was struggling with the girl, having come at her by surprise and disarmed her. The doctor was unconscious again from another clonp on the head. But old Timmy, out of his coma, was staring with wide fearful eyes. Too weak to stir from his bed, he could only stare . . . and clutch the bedclothes with his corded hands . . . and wait.

Blaster McGlone was the first to see Harry. His gun hand swiveled around. He fired. But Harry had driven his own lead in a split-wink sooner. The little room rocked to the gun roar as McGlone heeled back and sank to the floor, weighted down with a bullet in the chest.

Clover-lip Martin, while struggling to get in an accurate shot at Harry, shielded himself with the girl's struggling body. The hush of death was already creeping over Blaster McGlone, sapping his strength so that the heavy six-gun in his hand merely scraped against the floor when he tried to raise it for another shot at Harry.

In the smoke-reeking room the Blaster, stricken, caught Clover-lip Martin's hard glance.

"It's up to you now, boss," the Blaster choked. "I'm finished."

"Good riddance," Clover-lip snarled.

"Trouble with you, Clover-lip—you're too good-hearted," the Blaster mumbled, but Clover-lip was paying no attention to him.

AT a sound from the window, Harry swerved. His gun blazed, swapping bullets with Sleepy Hone. Hone's bullet trailed a wake of hot air across Harry's

cheek. Harry's bullet did better. Hone's body made a sharp slapping sound where it struck the ground outside; and Harry whipped his attention back to Clover-lip Martin.

Too late . . .

Shielded by the girl held captive in his arms, Clover-lip was already drawing down on Harry. Close like this, he couldn't miss. This, then, was the end. Life was over before it had well begun. And dying brought no triumph to anyone except Clover-lip Martin. Harry's teeth knifed together, anticipating the bone-crashing thud of close-driven lead.

A shot came, a blasting roar. But it wasn't Harry Hart who dropped. It was, amazingly, Clover-lip Martin.

More amazingly, the man who shot him was Blaster McGlone. Without the strength to lift his gun against Harry, at the last hate had fused his powers and concentrated them in his gun wrist as he triggered one deadly bullet at Clover-lip Martin.

The Blaster slumped back then, his six-shooter knocking against the floor. A red froth was in his mouth, and his cold killer's eyes were glaz-

ing as he strained for a last look at the inert body of the man who had hired his guns.

"Trouble with you, Clover-lip," he wheezed. "You—talked—too much."

Everybody else talked then, all at the same time, including old Tim, who was sitting up white and straight in bed; and Sheriff Trecarten who came wearily in, after the remnants of Clover-lip Martin's army, their leaders out of the fighting, had scattered in all directions.

They quieted down enough finally so that old Tim's thin wavering voice could be heard when he said, looking with fierce pride and fondness at his son:

"I never was one to be sot in my ways, Harry. You've plumb convinced me it might be a good thing on occasion to have a gunner in the family. I—I want you to stay and help us run the Diamond Five, son."

Lois Lignell, looking breathlessly across the wrecked room at Harry, caught the answer in his eyes.

Her cheeks flushed; a trace of the old gayety glowed in her dark eyes. She turned toward the bed, said softly, "He's going to stay, Uncle Timmy."

THE- END.

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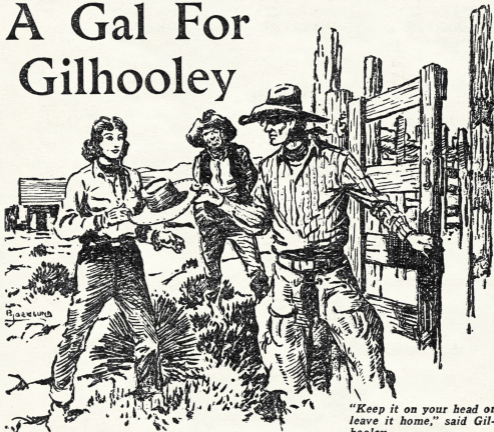
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He took his broncs as they came but short-coupled or willow-slender not one head of willin' womanhood seemed to measure up as

A Gal For Gilhooley



"Keep it on your head or leave it home," said Gilhooley.

By S. OMAR BARKER

Author of "Say It With Skunkweed," etc.

WE got to git a gal for Gilhooley," observed "Dink" Castleberry, tracing a pair of overlapped hearts in the dust and piercing them with an arrow. "A hunderd thousand is a heap o' dinero."

"But spozzin' he no like for wife?" "Lucy" (short for Luciano) Carrero said, peering through the corral fence

at the long back of a cowboy gentling a young bronc.

Dink Castleberry rubbed out the loving-heart design and sketched the outlines of a gal of such generous curves that a judicious slashing of straight lines through them turned her into a passable pair of dollar marks.

"Sure he'll like!" he grunted, with a decisive shift of cud. "Anybody'll

marry anybody for a hunder thousand dollars."

"Don't tie fast to that," drawled the third heel-squatted waddy, "Pokey" Patterson. "Gilhooley ain't never been no hand for the women, an' we ain't got but three weeks, y'know."

"That's jest it," argued Dink. "He ain't no hand for nothin' ixcept fiddlin' with broncs. He got the letter from that lawyer in Louisville three months ago advisin' him that this ol' uncle of his had took wing to the pearly gates, leavin' him this wagonload of money pervided he's lawfully wedded on or before his twenty-fourth birthday, an' all that time he not only don't do nothin' about it, but he don't even tell us, his nearest an' dearest pals so we kin git out an' round him up a party of the second part, to wit, one head of willin' womanhood to help him collect.

"If that buckskin hadn't bucked his pockits wrong-side out so I happen to pick that letter up outa the corral, the secret would still be smolderin' away in his lonely boozem like a bingle-bug trapped in the lick can. Wherefores, if we're goin' to live to be pardners of a waddy rich enough to keep us in the luxury we ain't used to the rest of our lives, we got to shake the knots out of our tails an' hustle! I've got him to kinder admit he'll be twenty-four the twenty-sixth of June, an' here it is already the fifth!"

"Ain't hardly time enough to order him one outa the cattylog, is it?" drawled Pokey.

"No, an' it ain't necessary, no way. There's plenty of weddable womenfolks right here in the neighborhood. We jest got to——"

"Ain't but two within a hunderd miles that I know of," objected

Pokey. "That squatter's daughter an' old Colonel Mitchell's gal."

"One's all it takes, if you ain't a Mormon or a pliggamiss," Dink pointed out patiently.

"What thees you call pleezgammes?" inquired Lucy. "I'm don't remember to forgot thees double-beeg word what minning it ees?"

DINK means a polygamist," explained the good-humored voice of "Gilhooley" himself as he stopped wooling a bronc colt with a saddle blanket and strolled over to the fence. "It means a feller with two or more wives—which is jest two or more too many. If you jiggers are still figgerin' on ways an' means to marry me off, you're jest poundin' sand into an empty rat hole. How many times I got to tell you I ain't of no mind to meddle with matrimony?"

"Now, now, Gilhooley," said Dink soothingly. "You can't jest dismiss it thataway. A hunderd thousand is——"

"Sure, it's a wagonload of money, but I ain't got no wagon!" With a shrug Gilhooley went back to the colt. "Whoa-easy, sweetheart, this saddle ain't gonna hurt you none."

Gilliland Hewling (Gilhooley for short) spoke caressingly as he eased the saddle gently onto the bay colt's back.

"If the dang idjit would jest honey-talk the women like he does them broncs," Pokey complained, "we could jest let nature take its course, an' he'd find hisself married quicker'n wup."

"If never skun no skunks," opined Dink. "An' we can't wait on nature takin' its course. In fact, I done been layin' the ground work by callin' on Miss Jennie Benson, the squatter's daughter, yesterdy evenin' an' perposin' to her—on be-

half of Gilhooley, o' course—an' she says——"

"I know what she say!" broke in Lucy. "She say 'one for the monee, two for the show, three for *no quiere*, an' four for beeg *no!*' She already sweet on 'nother faller."

"Well, her pappy didn't say 'no,' anyways. He says any daughter of his that ain't neighborly enough to marry a man—even a damn cowboy—to help him collect any sum of money above forty dollars, he'll either change her mind for her or plumb wear out the buggy whip. Yonder comes a dust. I expect it's old Benson an' his gal rushin' over to close the deal right now."

"Thees Jannie Banson, she kinda plomp," observed Lucy doubtfully. "Sometheng told me Geelhooley don't gonna like."

"Like or not," said Dink Castleberry grimly, "I've ast her to marry him an' he can't go back on my word. Hey, Gilhooley," he yelled, "quit foolin' with that bronc an' git for the wash trough. Here comes company!"

"To hell with 'em!" shouted Gilhooley and stepped across the trembling bronc.

But the approaching dust didn't dissolve the Bensons. Out of it came galloping a willow-slender, dark-eyed girl in faded blue Levi's on a spirited bay gelding whose lanky tallness showed at once both good breeding and poor feeding.

Dink Castleberry grunted up from his heel-squat to greet her with a purposeful glint in his pale, butter-milk eyes.

"Howdy, Miss Mitchell, howdy!" he beamed. "Shore glad yuh come! Yuh see, ma'am, ol' Gilhooley—well, the fack is, he's schoolin' that bronc out right now to ride over to your place. Bashful like he is, he

begged me to go along to sorter do the talkin' for him—but now you're here—well, I ain't a feller to bat around the brush, ma'am. Gilhooley's about to come into some money, an' will you do us the honor to marry him?"

"But," protested Pokey Patterson, "I thought you said——"

"Shut up!" growled Dink. "Y'see, ma'am——"

"Will I?" The demureness in Selina Mitchell's dark eyes as her glance roved to the cowboy easing the nervous bay colt around inside the corral was deceptive. "You don't think I raised all that dust to get here ahead of the Bensons for my health, do you? Of course I'll marry him! But are you sure Gil—I mean Mr. Hewling—wants to marry me?"

"Why, shore he does!" protested Dink gallantly, batting his pale eyes. "Ain't you both thoroughbreds right off the blue grass? An' didn't he raise the bid plumb to three dollars an' eighty-one cents to buy your box at that box supper social over at the Slow Fork school house last fall? An' ain't he——"

"*Caramba que sí!*" Lucy broke in. "In the bonk-house he all a time speak from the sleep how he lofe you, lofe you, lofe you! I'm theenk he like you, too, because——"

"Never mind about that now," Dink interrupted hastily, distrusting the Mex's discretion. "Main point is, how soon you reckon you could git fixed for the weddin', ma'am? What I always say, when a man's pinin' his heart away for a gal like Gilhooley is for you, ma'am, the sooner the quicker. Hey, Gilhooley, give that bronc a breather for a minute an' come here!"

"To hell with you!" Gilhooley shouted back at him.

"He's jest bashful, ma'am," apologized Dink.

"I'm glad you explained it," said the girl sweetly, but frowning a little. "He does act a little distant, doesn't he? Do you suppose if I threw my hat in there it would—er—sort of attract his attention—or anything?"

"Oh!" groaned Dink, as the sombrero sailed over the fence to land smack under the young bronc's nose. "You shouldn't ort to of did that, ma'am! Gilhooley's spent hours gentlin' that colt, an' now look at him!"

SELINA didn't need to be told to look. Inside the corral the bay colt swallowed his head for a squint at his own belly and went right on from there. Nobody had ever taught him the ten best ways to shed a rider, but he knew them all, from gut-jolting to sunfishing and back again. Atop the fence, the girl held her breath wondering by what miracle the lank-bodied rider stayed deep in the saddle like he did.

"Fonny beezness!" exclaimed Lucy the Mex. "Thees Geelhooley put all morneeng tritting the bronco nice-baby so she's don't weesh for bock but when was happen ennahow he don't ask from notheeng to ride heem!"

"Let's hope he gits up the same spizzerinktum in his courtin'," grunted Pokey Patterson. "Which somethin' tells me he won't."

Ridden to a standstill, Gilhooley left the wide-nostrilled pony to calm down and came striding over to the fence. He handed the girl her hat.

"If you can't keep this thing on your head hereafter," he advised, "you better leave it home."

He turned to walk away again, but Dink grabbed him.

"Now, now, Gilhooley!" he purred. "Is that any way for a gent to talk to his fiancee?"

"His what?" Gilhooley inquired sharply.

Out by the road two men and a rather short-coupled girl climbed out of a rickety buckboard and hurried toward the corral.

Selina Mitchell's small round chin took on a sudden determined look of firmness that was almost grim.

"We might as well be sensible, Gil," she said. "Dink—your friends here—tell me you must get married to collect a fortune left you by Uncle—I mean *your* Uncle Nephi. Purely as a matter of business I—I accept. You can divorce me the same day if you want to, but—"

"Not till I'd learned you some manners around a bronc corral!" Gilhooley interrupted. "But I might as well tell you, once an' for all: once my rope's on a bronc I never turn him back to the wild bunch, an' if I ever got married I'd feel the same way about divorce. But the point is"—he paused to lick the flap-edge of a smoke—"that I ain't gittin' married in the first place—not for Uncle Nephi's money nor a dozen fortunes like it. Now is that clear to everybody?"

"Not to me it ain't!" The burly figure of Squatter Benson heaved panting up onto the fence. Out of a grizzly thatch of eyebrows his deep-set, shoe-button eyes gleamed angrily. "We're pore folks, but we got our pride, an' you cain't treat no daughter of mine thataway! No sir, not after—"

"Why, howdy, Mr. Benson!" Gilhooley grinned faintly. "I'm surprised you didn't bring your shotgun!"

"Hit's in the buckboard, never you mind!"

NOW, pa!" protested Jennie Benson. She was a pleasant-looking, apple-cheeked girl, blushing beet-red now to the roots of her straw-colored hair. "What makes you take on thataway? You know I never——"

"You're never goin' to marry nobody but me!" put in the bristle-jawed young granger who had come with them from the buckboard. "An' if this here gaunch-eyed cow feller thinks jest because he's rich he kin buy you away from me, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll what, sod-buster?" Gilhooley flicked away his smoke and took two steps closer to the fence. Plainly the whole business was beginning to get his goat.

"Now, Eli," protested the girl, tugging him back with fingers made strong by hard labor. "You know it ain't Mr. Gilhooley's fault. An' you ort not to call him gaunch-eyed jest because he's a cowboy an' han'some, an'——" she broke off with something like a simper.

"You'll what, sod-buster?" Gilhooley repeated. He seemed not to hear the feminine snicker emerging from under Selina Mitchell's slouch hat.

"I'll—I'll take a hoe-handle to ye, that's what!" bellowed Eli. He started like a lumbering bear to climb over the fence but didn't quite make it, thanks to Jennie's hold on his shirt-tail.

Gilhooley saw the dismayed look on Dink Castleberry's whaunker-jawed face, and altogether it was too much for him. His temper vanished in sudden laughter, belly-deep and real.

"Looks like old Uncle Nephi's will kinder stirred up the pot, don't it?" he observed. "Bein' an ol' batch hisownself, I sure can't figger what

he had against me to want to sell me into matrimony thataway. Too bad he ain't here to see how it's got the gals slobberin' after me already!"

"Your Uncle Nephi was a Kentucky gentleman," said Selina Mitchell stiffly. "Which is more than I can say for his nephew. You know as well as I do the sentiment that prompted him to make such a provision in his will—and—and you ought at least to respect it!"

"Oh, I respect it all right. I respect lumpy gravy, too, but I wouldn't care for any. So now, if you ladies will excuse me——"

"Hold on a minute, feller!" grunted Squatter Benson stubbornly, waving a pudgy hand toward Dink Castleberry. "This gent come to my house an' home askin' my daughter's heart an' hand in holy wedlock, lawful an' legal in yore behalf, an' as the grievin' parent in this here case, I demand to know what you aim to do about it?"

"Why, that's easy," responded Gilhooley calmly. "Quick as the rest of you clear out, I'm goin' to shoot off his ears, that's what! Now, git, all of you!"

They went, but for a second before Eli tugged her away, Jennie Benson peeped coyly through the fence.

THAT same evening Gilhooley, with neither shave nor shift of shirt, rode over to Colonel Mitchell's. At the feed-lot he paused to look at a score of tall, thin horses nibbling at a scanty scattering of oat straw in the rack. There had been no spring rains, and consequently no grass, but most ranchmen at least had either money or credit enough to buy good hay for their saddle stock.

"Hell," Gilhooley muttered to

himself, "I never reckoned the colonel was that hard up."

Back in Kentucky, he knew, Colonel Mitchell had once been well to do. Some folks had said that was why Linda Parmelee had married him instead of the struggling young lawyer named Nephi Hewling, and as a kid he had seen his Uncle Nephi horsewhip a man for saying it. He remembered Linda Parmelee Mitchell as a frail, sweet-faced woman, and her daughter, Selina, as a freckle-faced spindle-shanks forever pestering around to join him and his gang at "cowboys and bandits." Sometimes Uncle Nephi made them let her.

"You better let her play in your yard now," Uncle Nephi often told him. "You'll be wanting to play in hers when she grows up!"

But at fourteen he had run away and come West, and now cowboying was no longer a mere game. It had been his letters to Uncle Nephi telling about the year-round New Mexico sunshine, he suspected, that brought the Mitchells out here for Mrs. Mitchell's health—too late, for she had died within a year after their arrival. And the colonel, trying to raise thoroughbreds in a country meant for mustangs, had just about gone broke.

Well, why the hell hadn't Uncle Nephi left his money to Selina, then, since he'd always been so damn sentimental about the daughter of the woman he had loved and lost?

"Good evening," said a girl's quiet but impish voice from the moonshadows of a gnarled old cottonwood a few yards from the feed-lot. "Did you-all come a-hoss-thievein' or a-co'tin', pardnuh?"

"If it has to be either, I'll take the hangin'. Where's the colonel?"

"Either that's him you hear snoring or we've got a bullfrog on the

porch. Did you want to ask him for his gal-datter's heart an' hand?"

"I'm more interested in nags than naggin'. I've got a little spare pasture on Vega Creek. You reckon he'll accept the loan of it for these crowbaits on stilts till the rains come?"

"If you were one of the family, he might. Or has Squatter Benson's shotgun got you spooked?"

"Listen here," said Gilhooley roughly. "I rode over aimin' to kinder apologize for rough-talkin' you today over a little joke, but enough's enough an' too much is a-plenty. Purty soon you're liable to have me thinkin' you *aren't* jokin'. This moon's bright enough, we could drive these nags over to Vega Creek in a couple of hours, easy."

"Let me see," said Selina thoughtfully, "A hundred thousand, Dink said, if you're married on or before your twenty-fourth birthday. Do you know what becomes of the money if you don't collect?"

"No, an' I don't give a damn! You goin' to help me push these ponies to some proper feed or have I got to do it alone?"

"Mm! What day did Dink say your birthday was? The twenty-sixth?"

"What difference does it make? Even if I aimed to marry somebody—Jennie Benson, f'r instance—I damn sure wouldn't do it with a bag of money hangin' over our heads! An' to hell with Dink. He's a meddlesome old coot, an'—"

NOW, now, Gilhooley," protested Dink Castleberry's twangy voice from behind the cottonwood. "You can't talk thataway about me behind my back! I'm jest—"

"It sure looks like I can't, don't it? You'll kiote my trail once too often one of these days an' I'll shoot you out from under yourself. Git your horse. We're drivin' some ponies over to Vega Creek for the colonel."

"It'll make you purty late gittin' to Benson's, Gilhooley," protested Dink. "I come past there an' it seems her an' this Eli feller kinder got to snarlin' an' spittin' on the way home, an' Jennie says to tell you——"

"Shut up!" Gilhooley's voice rose to a snort. "Git your horse!"

"Wait!" The impish tone was gone from Selina Mitchell's voice now. "Dad and I won't accept charity if every horse we've got starves to death! And as for your Uncle Nephi's money—I wouldn't marry you, Gil Hewling if you were the last man on earth and had a fence around it!"

"Now, now, Miss Selina, you're jest excited! You don't realize——"

"Good-night! Both of you!"

Gilhooley stood a moment looking after the girl's slender figure running to the house in the moonlight.

"Never you mind about her, Gilhooley," twanged old Dink at his elbow. "Jennie Benson's more the pot-wrastlin' type, anyways, an' while she wouldn't right up an' agree too sudden an' unladylike, still she says——"

"I hate to see good horseflesh goin' hungry," said Gilhooley, disregarding the old buck's chatter, "but I reckon we jest as well straddle an' ride."

Nevertheless in the weeks that followed Selina did herd the colonel's thoroughbreds awhile on a paid for corner of Vega Creek grass. It was surprising how often Gilhooley rode by to see how they were getting along.

But as June dwindled into its twenties, Dink Castleberry's only remaining hope still seemed to lie in the Benson direction. At least, Squatter Benson kept him informed, Jennie and Eli were still at out—and that was something.

THE evening of June 24th was sweet with cricket song when Gilhooley rode over to the Mitchell ranch to find Selina busy with crates and boxes, packing. She came out on the porch in a pair of patched overalls to greet him, her hair in disarray. It had been a week since the cowboy had seen her, and his eyes met hers hungrily.

Gilhooley could spend hours patiently gentling a bronc not to be startled at his touch, but now he seized the girl's hand abruptly.

"It's come to where I've got to say it, Selina," he blurted. "Will you marry me?"

"For a hundred thousand dollars?" The girl drew back her hand. "No, Gil. I—I thought I could do it—— Dad needed the money so badly, but well, he's gone to Chaperito to meet a horse buyer. We're selling out and moving back to Kentucky on Monday. . . . Gil, you're hurting my hand."

"Damn the money!" said Gilhooley vehemently. "Damn it, I—I love you!"

"You don't need to swear so about it! No, Gil! You—you've still got time to collect that legacy. Dink says Jennie Benson is——"

"Damn Dink!" snorted Gilhooley. "An' the same for Jennie Benson! Can't a man—oh, hell!"

Abruptly he took her in his arms and kissed her, then stepped back, looking foolish.

"I'm sorry," he said a little stiffly and strode back down the steps. He

had one foot in the stirrup when she called him back.

It was nearing midnight when his boot reached for the same stirrup again, and as he rode away in the night's cool darkness he thought of Dink Castleberry and chuckled.

In the mid-afternoon of Sunday, June 26th, Gilhooley rode again toward the Mitchell ranch. Suddenly, where the trail wound through thick juniper clumps on Sabina Creek a big gray workhorse burst into view, running madly, bridle reins flapping. In the chicken-catcher saddle, more or less, rode Jennie Benson, her hands clamped to the saddle horn, her hair flying, her voice raised in screams for help.

Gilhooley touched quick spurs to his horse. In less than a minute he caught the runaway, and the next instant, as he stood beside it to re-adjust the loosened cinch Jennie Benson swayed woozily from the saddle and fell into his arms.

"Wup! Easy, ma'am!" he soothed. "I reckon you ain't hurt. Just—wup, here!"

Very suddenly, with surprising strength and vigor for a gal who has just fainted, Jennie Benson threw her arms around his neck and clung there.

Just as suddenly five men and a shotgun appeared from behind a juniper. Squatter Benson and shotgun advanced menacingly. Behind them came the Justice of the Peace from Chaperito, and bringing up the rear, Lucy the Mex, Pokey Patterson and Dink Castleberry. With a buxom gal's arms around his neck, Gilhooley looked fairly foolish.

"Carryin' on with my daughter ag'in, eh?" bellowed Squatter Benson. "I'm a-notion to shoot you down!"

"Now, now, Mr. Benson!" Dink

Castleberry hurried forward officiously. "You can't complain of a little huggin' between a man an' the gal he's fixin' to marry!"

"Oh, he's fixin' to marry her, is he?" grinned Squatter Benson. "O' course in that case, it's different. Specially as Judge Whittaker jest happens to be handy, to tie the knot right here an' now!"

"Hell's bells!" snorted Gilhooley, still unable to pry Jennie's arms loose from his neck. "I ain't——"

"Now, now, Gilhooley," soothed Dink. "No call to git bashful. We seen it all, an' when a feller makes hold to hug a gal in his arms that-away——"

"Thass right," agreed Lucy the Mex solemnly. "He speak more truth from pottery, Geelhooley. More better you joost——"

HOLD on there!" Out of the junipers across the draw came Eli on the run. Red-faced with wrath, he charged into their midst, seized the shotgun out of Squatter Benson's hands, backed off a step and held it ready. "You can't take no gal of mine thataway, cowboy!" He gulped it out. "Git away from him, Jennie, fer I'm goin' to mow him down!"

"Now, now, Eli——" began Dink, but Gilhooley's voice, calm and a little cold, broke in on him as the girl loosened her arms from his neck and stepped away from him.

"Take it easy with that scatter-gun, sod-buster," he said. "I've got a gun, an' I don't want to use it on you unless I have to, but I don't aim to git shot down by a sod-buster on my weddin' day if I can help it—an' I reckon I can! Drop the shotgun or I——"

But suddenly Eli was in no shape to shoot, anyway, what with Jennie's

arms around his neck—and no fooling this time.

"Oh, Eli!" she sobbed. "They—they put me up to it. I wouldn't of done it anyways, only I knew you'd been sort of follerin' me around, an' I thought maybe you'd see it—an'—maybe jest ra'r up an' fight for me if you sure 'nuff wanted me. Oh, Eli!"

"Thees plan," observed Lucy, "she shoots backward."

"Good-by to a hunderd thousand," sighed Pokey Patterson. But old Dink had begun to grin.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "Didn't you mention your *weddin' day*, Gilhooley?"

"I did," said Gilhooley. "If Miss Selina Mitchell hasn't changed her mind since Friday night!"

"Wahoo!" shouted old Dink. "I knowed we'd git a gal for Gilhooley some way!"

"Then what for why we stood around here all day?" inquired Lucy the Mex. "As far as that concerns, maybe the Judge can marry twice for once!"

"Oh, Eli," sighed Jennie Benson, snuggling joyfully under the grip of the granger's big arm, "I always did want to get married in a double wedding!"

"Why," grinned Gilhooley, "it suits me all right, I reckon, if the other bride don't object!"

SELINA didn't object—not even when old Dink, after the double ceremony some three hours later, kissed both the brides. She stood beside her new husband, her hand squeezed in his, and looked happy.

"I shore wish you both all the happiness of a hawg in a corn path, Gilhooley," said old Dink, kinder batting his eyes. "Now about that ol' saddle of mine? Course I can

kinder make out with it a whiles yet, but I been lookin' in the Heiser cattylog, an' when you git around to collectin' the money——"

"What money?" asked the bridegroom.

"Why, that hunderd thousand your Uncle Nephi left you, o' course. Shorely after all the trouble we been to to git you married on your 24th birthday, you ain't fergot——"

"Why, Dink," Gilhooley interrupted him gravely. "You don't think I'd let a girl marry me for my money, do you? Come to think of it, you must of got it wrong about my birthday. I jest told you I'd be twenty-four the 26th—an' I am, but yesterday was my birthday. So this marriage don't draw no bonus, after all."

Dink gulped and looked very sick. "You—you mean you was lowdown enough to fool me—I mean this innocent gal—into marryin' you, thinkin' you was worth a hunderd thousand an'—an'——"

"Forgive him for fibbing to you about his birthday, Dink," smiled the new Mrs. Gilhooley. "You see, he said you were such a smart old coot—I mean—well, he was afraid you might try to marry him off at the point of a shotgun if you knew when the real deadline was, just to make sure he'd get the money. But after—really, he didn't try to fool me, Dink. I—I wouldn't ever have married him if he had."

"Well, damn it to shucks," philosophized old Dink. "I reckon money ain't ever'thing, but it shore seems like a heap when you need a new saddle."

He tugged a bandana from his hip pocket with which to mop his disappointment-furrowed brow, and a letter dropped out.

"It's fer you, Gilhooley. I come

by the mail box this mornin'. I was aimin' to give it to you sooner, but seem like in the excitement—Shucks! It's frum that lawyer in Louisville—prob'ly notiyin' you what a damn fool you are fer losin' all that money. Wup, what's the matter? Somebody else leave you a coupla dollars?"

A queer quirk of a grin was spreading over Gilhooley's face as he read the letter.

"Listen to this," he said, reading aloud:

"DEAR MR. HEWLING:

"It was your Uncle Nephi's oft-expressed hope that you would marry Miss Selina Mitchell, a notion born of his own lost romance with Miss Selina's mother. Knowing of your proximity there in the West, it was with the purpose of promoting this

marriage that certain provisions of his will were made, of which you have been informed. There was a further provision, however, also arising out of your uncle's sentimental attachment to his memories, of which you were not to be informed until *after* your 24th birthday.

"This should reach you June 26th, and will inform you that in the event you have failed to marry as provided, the hundred thousand dollars otherwise willed to you, goes by default to Miss Selina Mitchell, who will be so notified in due time.

"Trusting this is satisfactory, I remain,

"Very truly yours,

"ARTHUR G. THOMSON,
"Executor of the Estate."

It was old Dink, of them all, who first found his tongue.

"Speakin' as the main manager of gittin' this gal fer Gilhooley," he orated, "has anybody got a Heiser saddle cattylog handy?"

JERKY

THE pioneers soon learned the value of many native customs, and put them to their own use. In a country where for several months there would be no ice, fresh meat would spoil in a short time, and yet it was staple food. The Indians cut the flesh of buffalo, antelope and elk into thin strips, which were smoked slightly and then hung on rawhide ropes to dry in the sun. The method was crude and the product far from desirable, but it could be eaten.

The white men improved upon the method by means of a generous use of salt and by cutting the meat in chunks, which after they had been smoked and dried, still retained enough moisture so that they could be cut with a sharp knife. This "jerky" was not as palatable as the "dried beef" we can buy today, but it possessed a good amount of food value, and enough could be carried in one's pocket to sustain a man on a long journey. It was eaten raw, though sometimes soaking in water was necessary before it could be masticated. However, a man whose teeth were good enough to bite through a plug of tobacco could manage jerky without much difficulty.

Indian runners carrying only a small piece of jerky and a little sack of parched corn were known to have traveled from Bents Fort on the Arkansas over Raton Pass to Santa Fe, and among the Apaches and Navajos even greater feats of endurance were performed.

The name was taken from the Spanish word "charqui" meaning beef cut into long strips and dried.

The Wolfer Of Phantom Creek

*The spirit-stifling bondage of prison walls
was waiting to claim Jory unless he broke
faith with one of his wilderness friends...*

By

CHERRY WILSON

Author of "Breed Of The Badlands," etc.

CHAPTER I

"IT'S A CURSE ON US!"

THE folks of Blue Smoky Range who were inclined to be superstitious—and there were plenty of them—said there were some people you had better let alone. They allowed "Wild Jory" was one. Jory, that strange, uncanny boy who had come from God knew where to den up with the wild things in Phantom Canyon! To be one with them! One with that big Lupus beast—dog? wolf? Nobody had yet distinguished which. For Blue Smoky, sensing something weird and unnatural, gave canyon and occupants a wide berth.

But "Rock" Radler, the wealthy Flying Moon cattleman who bred blooded horses as a hobby, was made of sterner stuff. And when he came upon Wild Jory skinning a calf that wore his brand, he jailed the youth like any rustler. Heads had shaken in dire foreboding at what passed between them there. Angered by Jory's silence, his refusal to say a



word in his own defense, the rancher had flared out:

"Folks must be right! They say you're in league with the devil!"

Jory had spoken then. Fixing his burning eyes on Radler, he retorted, "The devil looks out for his own!"

To Blue Smoky, the answer sounded like a threat . . .

Six weeks later, tragedy struck the Flying Moon! Fire Belle, pride of Radler's stables, had been suddenly stricken. All night the rancher had stayed in her stall, working desperately with the veterinarian rushed from Big Coulee. But to no avail!

For now word reached the anxious riders, grouped about the stable door this pale, sultry July dawn, that Fire Belle was gone. And with her, it seemed, went Radler's every hope to win the Desert Classic. A race that was more than a race. That was a life-and-death struggle between the Flying Moon rancher and his bitter rival, Sherm Clark of the Circle Star!

"It's a curse on us!" groaned Radler's oldest cowhand, "Winnemucca," awe on his leathery face that was wet now with unashamed tears. "It's a curse for jailin' that Wild Jory lad!"

An affirmative murmur rose from the men. But "Big Jim," their foreman, scoffed, "It's no curse. It was poisoned camas."

"That's what they say!" shrilled the oldster. "But why did it have to be Fire Belle? It's a curse, I tell you! He worked it from his cell. Him an' th' devil! That's what happened! I knowed all along Rock shouldn't a-jailed him!"

"What else could he have done?" reasoned Big Jim. "He caught Jory red-handed with that calf——"

"What's one calf?" Winnemucca was almost beside himself. "Th' boss could lose a dozen a day, an'

never miss 'em! Now he's lost Fire Belle, an'——" He broke off at sight of the rancher coming out of the stable.

A STERN-JAWED man Rock Radler was, heavy and hard like his name. But his face was gray in the first pink flush of breaking day, and lined with the strain of a lost struggle. And grief was there. For no man loved a horse better than Rock Radler. And he loved none better than Fire Belle. But greater even than grief was his fear of Sherm Clark's triumph when the next Classic was run.

"I'm licked!" he said hoarsely as his men pressed about him, tight-lipped, sorrowing. "There ain't a horse left in my stable that's got even a fightin' chance to win!"

"How about Sure Shot?" ventured one of the men.

Irascible in his loss, Radler snapped, "He's off the blue grass. The rules say state-bred."

"Meteor, then?" some one suggested.

"When Fire Belle had to strain th' livin' heart out of her last year to beat Clark's Larkspur?" the rancher flared. "An' beat him just by an eyelash then! Fire Belle was the pick of our string. The fastest horse we've bred since Desert Queen——"

"Rock," Big Jim broke in suddenly, "you're overlookin' one bet."

Radler stared at his foreman. "What's that?"

"Red Flight!"

Like an electric shock, hope ran through every heart. Red Flight, out of Desert Queen, sired by Humboldt, the fastest horse ever brought to the state! Only three months old that luckless night, now four years gone, when she and Queen, her mother, escaped their pasture and

joined the bands of wild horses over-running the range.

Radler had turned Blue Smoky inside out to recover them. *Did* recover Queen—to his everlasting regret! For in the chase she'd plunged over a cliff and been so badly injured she had to be shot. But the colt had not been with her then.

Radler had given him up for lost until last summer, when range riders began to speak with awe of having seen a glorious, blood-red stallion, racing along some canyon rim. A thoroughbred leader of a wild band. A horse they'd have given their immortal souls to obtain. But taboo to them! For they knew it was Red Flight, grown to magnificent perfection in the wild. Knew that, beneath his mane, burned there in his first week of life, he wore Rock Radler's brand!

Taboo to Radler, also, for reasons he was pouring out to his excited crew:

"I ain't overlookin' that bet!" he assured them. "All night in there, watchin' Fire Belle die, I thought of Red Flight. If I had him, I'd stand my chance with Clark. But"—defeat was bitter on his tongue—"I ain't got him! An' I see no way to get him in the short time left. We can't run him like a mustang. Ruin him for the track. Risk a broken leg, like Queen! An' we can't trap him. We tried that all last summer an' fall. Tried every trick. But he was too smart for 'em. There's no way to get him without a run. An' I won't have that!"

IN the hopeless silence that fell over the group, old Winnemucca pushed up, sinking hard fingers in Radler's arm. His voice shaking, he cried, "There *is* a way, Rock!"

Struck by the dead certainty in

his voice, the rancher asked, "In God's name—what?"

"I don't know," said the old cowhand strangely, "but *Wild Jory does!*"

Jory! Radler's stern jaw set implacably. That queer fellow he'd jailed for stealing a Flying Moon calf. A "wolfer," he called himself. But ever since he came into the country, four years ago, he'd helped himself to calves on the range. Other ranchers had let it pass as of no consequence, or because of their feeling that the boy was "bad medicine." But he meant to see that Jory paid the full penalty of his crime!

"Where does Jory come in on this?" he asked sternly.

"I don't know that either," confessed Winnemucca. "But I *do* know he's allus had his pick of th' wild hosses on this range. An' no one ever seen him run one!"

"That's right, boss!" an excited voice affirmed. "Take that black hoss of his—Tiger. Every puncher in this country tried to catch him. But Wild Jory rode him in—"

"Rode him in," another broke in, "naked of bridle an' saddle—plumb gentle! Nobody knows how he does it!"

"*He bewitches 'em!*" declared old Winnemucca in awe-hushed tone. "He bewitches everything about him! I stopped in th' canyon one day, an' et with him. I seen th' birds flyin' in an' out his cabin door, bewitched! I seen th' chipmunks sittin' on his floor, chirkin' at him like he was kin! I seen a buck deer step over the sill like he lived there! An' then that big black bear come gruntin' around th' corner, an' I got scared—"

"That's loco talk," Radler interrupted sharply. He swung about as if to put a stop to it.

But Winnemucca didn't stop.

"Loco or not," he said stoutly, and the cowboys backed him up. "Jory can do things with animals that other men can't. He's done things more amazin' than catchin' that stallion."

And Radler knew it was true. Suddenly he had the strange, unshakable conviction that Wild Jory *could* catch Red Flight! His eyes began to burn with reborn hope, as the wild sage wastes about now burned to the sunrise hour. Jory could catch the red stallion. But he wasn't the kind you could figure. Would he do it for the man who'd jailed him?—even if freedom was to be his reward? There was but one way of knowing.

So when the day had worn to mid-afternoon, and the shock of Fire Belle's death had been dulled by the acute, pressing need of a racer to enter in the Classic, Radler saddled his horse, and headed for the county jail in Big Coulee to talk terms with Wild Jory!

CHAPTER II

A DEAL

NERVOUSLY pacing his office, a dead cigar clamped savagely between his teeth, Sheriff Tom Keeley told himself he wasn't any more superstitious than the next man. But he sure wished that Rock Radler had left Wild Jory alone. He'd had the lad under lock and key six weeks, and it looked like he'd have him from now on. For the county wouldn't go to the expense of calling a jury just to try Jory. And to save his life, the sheriff couldn't think of any more culprits he could round up to fill out a docket.

But superstitious or not, he thought, there was something creepy about the boy. The way he had of looking at you out of them black

eyes, of looking right through you and saying nothing, while you babbled everything you knew. And, by the Almighty, there'd been queer things happening since his arrest! First off, the water pipes busted. Not that this was so strange—taken alone. Pipes did rust and bust in time. But on top of that, the roof sprung a leak in the big storm which broke the second night Jory was in the jail! Then yellow jackets—dang 'em!—had built a nest in the eaves, and pack rats had moved into the attic!

Now, to cap the climax, word had come in that Radler's prize racer had died this morning, and some folks said Wild Jory was to blame!

Which, decided the sheriff broad-mindedly, was going far. Horses had died before, and would again. But it was certainly queer that it was Radler's horse, when Radler was the man who sent Jory to jail! Queerer still, that it had to be Fire Belle! But there seemed no end to the queer things that could happen around Wild Jory. For example, if anyone had told him he'd ever have a dog in his jail—for this Lupus beast was a *dog* after all, not a wolf as some folks had claimed—if anyone had told him he'd have a dog locked up, fetching and carrying for it, he'd have told them they had bats in their belfry!

But what, he asked himself defensively, was a man to do when a dog just sat on the jail step and wouldn't go? Begging to get in, with eyes and ways that were downright human! Giving you to understand he'd die right there, if you didn't let him. And now he was in there with his master, and the two of them were maybe making more medicine! And what with Jory's wild Tiger horse trying to kick his corral down . . .

A shadow blocked out the sun that

was having a last look in the door before it rolled into the blanket of clouds on the western horizon. A heavy step resounded in the room. And the sheriff turned to see Rock Radler!

Never had he seen the man so hard and implacable. Barely acknowledging the sheriff's hearty greeting, he demanded to see Wild Jory.

Alarmed by the look and tone of the rancher, and convinced he'd come for nothing less than to massacre the boy in his cell, Keeley barred the way.

"Now see here, Rock," he said grimly, "I heard about your racer. An' I heard folks is sayin' Jory's responsible. But he's my prisoner, an' I'm protectin' him to th' full extent of th' law!"

"What the hell are you talkin' about?" cried Radler. "Is everybody crazy! I want to see the boy. I got business with him. Do I see him or not?"

His air of indignation overwhelmed the sheriff's doubts. Of all the queer things that had happened, he thought, Radler's wanting to see Wild Jory was the queerest yet!

He pointed up the corridor and said rather sheepishly, "Go ahead. He's in there. Third floor down."

Radler strode heavily down the hall to Jory's cell. Through the bars, they faced each other—Blue Smoky's cattle king and the mysterious, friendless boy.

Friendless? No! For between him and the Flying Moon man, voicing savage, deep-throated warning, stood one friend, with shaggy, gray coat bristling, who had pleaded—fought—to share imprisonment with him, as he would have shared any fate, starvation, abuse—even death itself. The great wolf-dog, Lupus!

Grateful for the security of iron

bars, Radler said bluntly, "I've come to bargain with you, Jory."

The boy made no answer. He stood beside the cot from which he had risen when Radler appeared at the door—a dim, half-seen figure in the shadows fast-gathering there. A youthful figure. Slight. Almost frail. Somehow pitiful. Still clad in the tattered old shirt and jeans he'd worn to prison. His dark face was paler for his six weeks here. Six weeks of uncertain waiting—not serving his term, when every day would bring nearer the time when he'd be free. Not knowing yet what the number of those days would be! But waiting, living out *dead* days that would have broken the spirit of most men.

BUT Jory's spirit was unbroken. His dark eyes, unwaveringly fixed on Radler, glowed like live coals in the gloom of his cell. Hot with a look the rancher couldn't figure. Not guilt! He'd never shown a flash of that, even when they caught him. He'd acted like it was *his* calf, and was surprised they objected to his taking it! But he wouldn't say a word then. Just looked at them like he was looking at Radler now.

Uneasy under that glance, the rancher cried in a sharper tone that brought the dog a step nearer the door with a deeper, more ominous growl: "I've come to bargain! Do you hear?"

"Yeah," said Wild Jory, silencing the dog with a gesture. "I hear."

At a loss how to begin, Radler stammered, "Did—did you hear I lost my racer—Fire Belle?"

The boy nodded. "The sheriff told me."

"She died this morning," Radler's voice was roughened with feeling.

"Poisoned camas," said Jory, a

toneless statement of fact.

Radler shot him a quick look. "Did the sheriff tell you that?"

"No," said Jory. "But it's bad this time of year. An' I knowed you had it in your pasture."

Awe growing in him, as it had in the sheriff and Winnemucca, Radler cried, "Mebbe you do know everything, like they say! Mebbe you know what it means to me, not havin' an entry for th' Classic this year! How it'll gall to hear Sherm Clark crow he's got th' fastest racer!"

"I know," the boy said quietly.

"I'd rather be torn to ribbons by this Lupus beast," vowed the Flying Moon man, "than have Clark win! An' he *will*—unless I can get my lost racer, Red Flight, runnin' wild on the headwaters of Phantom Creek." Gathering a big breath, he added tensely, "Mebbe you've seen him, Jory?"

The dark face took fire. "Sure."

"Mebbe," Radler gripped the bars in his eagerness, "you could catch him?"

He thrilled with hope as the boy said quietly, "Mebbe."

"But," pursued Radler, "you can't do that locked up here! So I've come to deal. I'll bail you out, if you'll catch the horse and turn him over to me."

There was no flicker of interest in the young face before him. No wavering in the black gaze so hotly fixed upon him. Ages of silence seemed to pass.

Finally Jory, no shade of expression in his tone, asked, "If I catch him—what then?"

"If you have him there, so I can win that race," promised Radler, "I won't press this charge. You'll be a free man!"

Another age-long wait. "If he don't win?"

"Win or lose, the terms are the

same. As long as he's there to run, and I get him!"

"An' if I *don't* catch him—what?"

"If you don't catch him," swore Radler, sick with a sense of the defeat that would be his on Jory's failure, "you'll come back for trial. And I'll send you up like any rustler. Make no mistake there!"

Wordlessly, the boy turned to the small, barred window of his cell. And panic seized the rancher. Jory was rejecting his offer!

"Anyhow, you'll be free while you're tryin'!" he pleaded.

But the boy gave no sign of hearing. Just stood there, staring out at Blue Smoky's mangled mountain rims, stark against the crimsoned heavens. Those mountains he knew so well, every crag and crevice. Mountains he'd once ranged on Tiger, free as the unwearied wind that blew up there. Free as the wild horse, Red Flight, now ranging them. Free as Lupus—*Lupus*—dying in the dead air in this tomb!

"You'd better deal!" cried Radler. "I've known men to get ten years for doing what you done!"

STILL the boy was silent, his gaze now fixing on the black gash between the highest ridges where his cabin was. In ten years snows would cave his cabin in. The wild things he'd gentled would be gone. His five horses up there in the canyon pasture—all as wild as Tiger had been—what would become of them? Would someone take them, force them to yield with quirt, and whip, and spur?

As if he knew what was in his master's mind, the big dog moved to stand beside the boy, thrusting his nose under Jory's palm.

And frantic at Jory's indecision, Radler reminded him harshly, "You can't take that dog to prison! You'd

have to leave him. *Ten years . . . He'd be dead when you got out!"*

Poignantly, as if in perfect understanding, Lupus whined under his breath.

"What do you say, Jory?" Radler demanded implacably.

Slowly the boy turned back, his burning eyes wet with sudden moisture. "There's nothing to say," he told the rancher bitterly. "I'll deal."

CHAPTER III

THE LOST RACER

HAD the devil looked out for his own? Blue Smoky believed he had. Radler had jailed Wild Jory, and Fire Belle was dead. Only one horse could take her place—Red Flight! Only one man could catch Red Flight—Jory! And Radler had baled him out of jail to catch the stallion. A one-sided bargain. Jory had nothing to lose, and everything to gain. If he caught the horse, he'd be free always. If he didn't he'd be no worse off. And he'd have weeks of freedom trying.

But to the boy it was not a one-sided bargain. Red Flight's freedom was to be the price of his own. He must win the horse's confidence and trust, and then betray it. And this price, by Jory's strange standards, was dear beyond thought.

He'd known Red Flight from a colt. Almost from the day he, Jory, had come to Blue Smoky to make his living, as he had done over in Wyoming, catching wolves for pelt and bounty; as he had done ever since he was big enough to hold a rifle, which had been plenty young. For a cloudburst had wiped out his peo-

ple when he was ten. But he'd made his own way in Wyoming till he was man-size, and then, with Lupus, just a fuzzy, little pup, he'd come to Blue Smoky Range.

He'd seen Red Flight, a wabby colt, then, with his mother, Queen. He'd seen the chase for Queen. And he alone had seen the horse grow up to lead a band. He'd hoped the horse would never be caught; that he could always see him running free, king of all wild horses, the very spirit of that wild land. And now he himself had to catch Red Flight, or go to prison, perhaps for ten years!

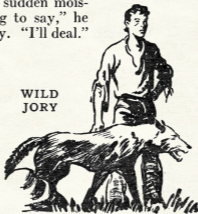
Back in Phartom County, Jory told himself he must be free at any price! *This* wasn't free—on bail, owing every breath he drew to Radler!

And every breath seemed to smother him, as he sat next morning in the door of his little cabin, with the hot sun blazing down, chickadees gossiping in the vines about him, chipmunks frisking around in happy reunion. He weighed his chance of winning where the best horse-hunters Radler could hire had failed last year.

"We got to win where they lost," he told Lupus, lying at his feet, worriedly watching him. "We got to catch Red Flight—or go back to jail!" And taking the dog's head between his hands, he said earnestly, "You got to catch him Lupus, same as you did Tiger!"

The big dog whined eagerly. And abruptly, as one begins a dreaded and inevitable task, the boy rose and

WILD
JORY



went into the cabin. From a small store of food there, he took some dried jerky, salt, and flour. And with these in a sack over his shoulder, together with a blanket caught up from his bunk, he strode swiftly up to the pasture above the cabin where he kept Tiger, and the other wild horses he had tamed.

They came trotting to meet him. And he walked among them, stroking each glossy neck in turn, talking to them as he might have talked to a human. As never, since forgotten childhood, had a human talked to him! For all the friendliness he'd known had come from the wild with which he was so strangely kin.

With the same desperate abruptness that had marked his movements at the cabin, he slipped a hackamore over Tiger's head, led him through the gate, leaped on bareback, and plunged off up the canyon at a mad gallop, the wolf-dog bounding beside him.

Tiger wanted to run. Confinement in the sheriff's corral had been as torturing to him as that cell to Lupus and his master. They raced the steep and dangerous trails leading up to the headwaters of Phantom Creek. Ran, until Tiger was wet with foam, the dog's tongue lolling, and the flush of healthy exercise glowed on Jory's face as the last taint of jail-fog swept from his lungs and brain.

They kept on until the trail, threading a narrow split in a towering mountain rim, suddenly opened on a green, sparsely-wooded basin about a mile wide and two miles long. Steep cliffs walled it in on every hand, breaking at the top into pinnacles, fallen fragments of which covered the slopes with slide rock and boulders from rim to the floor of the basin.

MIDWAY down the basin gleamed a tiny mountain lake, the source of Phantom Creek. And a favorite watering place, Jory knew, for the wild bands of Blue Smoky Range. Here, he'd caught Tiger and all his other horses. There, hidden in a pocket in the rims—a pocket cut by an ancient waterfall—was the corral he'd built then. And in this basin, he'd try to catch Red Flight. But he realized how doubtful the outcome, for no horse he'd ever seen had half the wit and cunning and spirit of the red stallion.

From where he was pulling up, just inside the gap, Jory could see wild horses feeding in the basin. Not Red Flight's band, but one of many that shared this range. He had only a fleeting glimpse of them, when the sudden scream of a hawk circling the blue above warned the mustangs of some alien presence, and they flashed away down the basin, disappearing through a narrow break in the rims at the farthest end.

Tiger pulled against his hackamore, eager to follow the fleeing horses, and Lupus whined eagerly. But Jory held them back.

"We don't care about them," he reminded dog and horse. "It's Red Flight we're after. He'll be here any time. An' we must be ready for him. Come!"

Slowly he rode down the basin, past the little lake dimpling in the sun, and on to the break through which the wild horses had vanished. It was the only other exit and was seldom used by the mustangs, since it necessitated a wide circuit over wild and difficult country to get back to their range.

On this strategic spot, Jory dismounted and made his simple camp. The sack of provisions thrown beside the trail, and the blanket, hung

from a dead cottonwood there, closed this passage to wild horses, as effectively as the strongest fence.

Tiger had no part in his plan to catch Red Flight. And Jory picketed him beyond the gap, out of any possible sight or hearing of the basin. Then he returned on foot to the opening through which he'd entered, where the wild bands, too, would enter when they came. And there in a dense thicket of buckbrush, carefully chosen so the wind would carry the scent away from the gap and out of the basin, he secreted himself with Lupus to wait for Red Flight's band.

They did not come that day, or the next. Other bands came, drank at the lake, grazed, or rested under the fringing willows, and returned to their ranges. But with tireless patience Jory and Lupus waited. Each dawn found them there, and only when deepest darkness fell did they return to camp for food and sleep.

But on the third day, as the high-riding sun looked directly in the basin, Lupus' ears suddenly shot up, and, simultaneously, Jory saw, streaming over the hill beyond the gap, the wild band he was looking for! The finest band in all that range!

On, with flying grace, they came, cutting the slope to where the lake trail ran in. And then the boy's heart gave a mighty bound, as he saw, running higher on the trail, a streak of living fire, glorious red coat glistening in the sun, long silken mane and tail swirling in the wind—the wild leader of the band! The horse that was to be the price of his freedom! Red Flight, lost racer of the Flying Moon!

Through the gap they thundered, within fifty yards of the spot where Jory and the dog were hidden, and raced headlong down the basin, to

circle the lake in cautious reconnoitering, ere plunging in to dip their muzzles in the water. Red Flight held back until the rest had drunk their fill. Then he stepped daintily in, to drink in nervous gulps, tossing his sleek head up repeatedly to test the air with quivering nostrils. For he felt danger in the air. Some danger as yet eluding his keen senses.

And when the band would have scattered out to graze, he rounded them up, and headed them back toward the gap. Impatient with any loitering, he ruthlessly nipped the stragglers into action and drove them away from this danger he sensed, but could not define.

AND now with a warning whisper to Lupus, Jory crawled nearer the trail. Soundlessly, the dog crept after him. Together they crouched in the brush, so close the wild horses ruffled the foliage as they passed. Singly, and in groups, mares and colts went by. Then, when all had passed save their leader, Jory sprang into the trail, yelling and waving his arms.

In a wild rush of hoofs the band was gone, through the gap, out over the range!

But Red Flight, cut off in there, reared with a piercing scream, to whirl and pound back down the basin toward that other opening where Jory had made camp. But nearing the gap, he sighted the blanket draped from a tree, caught the man-scent blowing from it, and spun back, plunging along the basin rims as he wildly sought a way out.

And now Jory turned to Lupus, who waited tense and trembling beside him. "Watch, Lupus! Watch him!" he ordered, his voice tense.

Instantly the dog was gone after the horse—a flashing gray shadow.

This was the way Jory got his pick of the wild horses. This was why he had never been seen to run one! For the present his work was done. From here Lupus must carry on.

Turning, Jory climbed the steep slope to the rim overlooking the whole basin, where he lay in the rocks, a tense spectator to the gripping scene below him.

He saw the stallion clawing up the slide rock toward a break in the wall. Furiously lunging, slipping, sliding, he sent avalanches of shale rattling down behind him. One moment, and Red Flight would have cleared the shale to solid footing, and been gone. But in that moment Lupus bounded out of the rocks, rearing before him, fangs agleam, snarling, barking. And the horse turned and plunged back into the basin.

Like lightning, he raced for the rim opposite where his eye had caught another possible avenue of escape. But fast as he was, a race-horse, the fastest living thing, he could not beat Lupus to that point! For where he must slow and swerve from rocks and hummocks, the wolf-dog's flight was straight. His light feet skimmed the shale that rolled and slipped beneath Red Flight's weight. And again the horse turned in terror from that snarling, wolfish figure!

Hours, this kept up. The stallion running from one point in the basin to the other, the gray shadow always between him and escape, until, spent, trembling, weak from trying, Red Flight suddenly whirled in the center of the basin, charging the dog with a ringing blast of fury. But nimbly Lupus dodged his rushes, keeping as much distance as possible between himself and the horse, trying to show Red Flight he meant

no harm, that he was only following his master's orders to keep him from leaving the basin.

Up there on the rim, tensely watching, the boy muttered to himself, out of bitter knowledge gained in his sad and solitary life, "Even a wild thing gets lonesome. If they can't run with their own kind, they'll take up with other things—like I done!"

CHAPTER IV

JORY'S WARNING

WITH nothing to do but wait, for the care of Tiger and preparation of his scanty meals consumed but a slight fraction of his time, Wild Jory lay through hot, endless days in his camp or on the rims, watching that strange game played out, and thinking of his plight. His black eyes were always hot with that look Radler couldn't figure, the blazing resentment of his heart!

He wasn't a rustler! He was a wolfer. Wolves killed cattle. Pulled down ten or twenty in a night, some of those big lobos did—just to be killing! They destroyed other things, too, grouse, rabbits, little fawns. That's why he didn't mind killing wolves. He'd made them scarce, he and Lupus, on this range. And he was entitled to a calf now and then to live on. Over in Wyoming cowmen would come and tell him to take a calf when he needed it. But Radler put him in jail for it. And unless he caught Red Flight, he'd go back for trial. And the jury would convict him.

Aloud, in the wild heights, this violet twilight, he spoke the thought that ever brought its deep pang of hurt, "Folks don't like me here!"

No, he thought, lying there, a wild, uncanny figure, with the wind toss-

ing his long, black hair, whipping the tattered clothes he wore, folks didn't like him. They thought the devil was in with him, because he could make friends with things! Why, every wild thing would be friends, if you'd let it. All you had to do was let them know they could trust you. He'd never hurt anything in the canyon, or let Lupus. When he had to kill for food, he went a long ways off. And everything in the canyon trusted him. Folks couldn't savvy that.

Even Radler thought he was queer, saying he knew everything. How he maybe knew what it meant to him to win the Classic. You didn't have to know much to know that! Radler and Clark were the big men in Blue Smoky. Each wanted to be biggest. Radler got a racer to show folks *he* was. Clark got one for the same purpose. Then they'd run them in Big Coulee to settle the question. But that didn't settle it. They kept on raising racers and running them to show folks which was the biggest man. Radler was last year. And he'd rather have Lupus tear him to pieces than not be again!

"If that ain't queer," Jory told himself, "I don't know what is!"

Well, if Lupus did his work, Radler would have another racer and go on being queer. And he, Jory, could return to Phantom Canyon, free to be queer in *his* way.

And Lupus was doing his work.

The third day when Jory went out on the rim to lie and watch the basin, he saw that the stallion no longer ran frantically from the dog, nor turned to fight. Instead he was feeding, with only a nervous glance now and then at the gray shape which watched, head on forepaws, a hundred yards away.

Wherever he went that shadow

was with him. He knew now it offered no harm, as long as he didn't attempt to leave the basin. And gradually he gave over these attempts, though often Jory's heart would stir painfully to see that bright head lift and look with longing at the rims, to hear that longing ring out in a shrill call to his band.

Faithfully, for three days, Lupus stayed on the job, not even leaving his post to eat. But Jory knew as soon as he could leave the horse for the briefest spell, he would come, not to camp, but to that corral in the rims where, he'd been trained to come for feed when they made the other captures.

The next morning Jory took food to the corral and waited. And as the heat of day approached, and Red Flight ventured to the lake to drink, relaxing sufficiently to rest beneath the willows and stamp dust against the gnats tormenting at that season, Lupus came. Hungrily he wolfed down the fresh-killed rabbit Jory had snared that morning. Then silently he returned to his vigil.

EACH day the horse became more familiar with his guardian, more familiar with the man-scent often wafted to him, and with his brief, infrequent glimpses of man. Each day, too, Jory knew, he was lonelier, more eager for companionship of any kind. At last the day came when he and Lupus ranged the basin as friends. Jory saw Red Flight pluck grass from almost beneath the dog's muzzle. He saw their comical attempts to play together. The stallion would charge at Lupus, and the dog would crouch as if about to spring. Then, when the horse was within a jump of him, he'd dodge aside, and the two would go galloping down the basin.

One smothering August noon,

nearly a month after the pact had been made in the Big Coulee jail. Wild Jory saw the horse follow Lupus when he came for his rations. Follow to the very bars of the corral! And he knew it was only a matter of time until Red Flight followed him in.

Immediately, Jory went for Tiger and started down the mountains to report to the Flying Moon. But hardly was he out of the basin, when he met Rock Radler, Winnemucca, and Big Jim coming up the trail!

Frank at thought of their going into the basin at this critical time, the boy raced to meet them.

"Go back!" he screamed, over the thunder of Tiger's pounding hoofs. "Go back! You'll spoil all I've done!"

Old Winnemucca, first in line, swerved aside, giving him a wide berth. Even Big Jim gave ground before that furious onslaught of hoofs and words. But Rock Radler, wild with the suspense that had brought him here, would not budge from the trail.

"What have you done?" he cried anxiously. "Have you caught him?"

"Not yet!" blazed the boy, plunging to a stop. "An' I never will if you— Why did you come up here?" he asked bitterly. "Afraid I'd jump my bail!"

"I thought you had," owned Radler bluntly. "A month's gone by. I've waited at your cabin a dozen times, an' had my men wait there. Nobody's seen hide nor hair of you. And the Classic's just three weeks off—"

"Well, now you seen me," the boy cried fiercely, "go back! An' don't come here no more. I'll have Red Flight there when th' race starts."

"When the race starts!" yelled Radler, furious at such talk. "I've

got to have him long before that! He's got to be broke—"

"I'll have him broke!"

"And trained—"

"For what?"

"To run on the track!"

"He was born knowin' that!"

"But my jockey's got to savvy him. Learn to get everything he's got!"

"Red Flight's got to savvy *man*," the wild boy flashed in hot contradiction, "so he'll *give* everything he's got. It'll take me three weeks to teach him that. He won't have time to learn another man. If he runs in that race, I'll have to ride him!"

"You—you—" Radler was sputtering helplessly.

"Why not, Rock?" Big Jim broke in. "Jory's light. An' there ain't a man in the country can ride like him."

"Yeah!" shrilled old Winnemucca from far down on the trail. "Come on, an' let him alone! He knows what he's doin'. *We* don't!"

"I swear I don't!" vowed Radler.

"You don't have to," Jory shot back. "You enter Red Flight in the Classic. I'll have him there."

Beaten, the rancher reined about, heading down over the golden ridges to the Flying Moon, to put in weeks of the most gruelling suspense man ever lived under.

Every day he vowed that tomorrow he'd go up to the basin and demand tangible evidence that Jory was really after the stallion. But always thought of the boy's frenzied declaration that they'd spoil his game, held him back. Surely he'd have some report soon. Jory knew the hell he was living in.

But day by day, the date of the Classic crept up—broke! And no one had seen or heard of Wild Jory or Red Flight!

CHAPTER V

"THEY'RE OFF!"

PART of the colorful, race-mad throng, jamming the Big Coulee track this sparkling, breeze-whipped September first, Rock Radler gave up his last hope of seeing either boy or stallion. He wished he'd never seen Wild Jory or bargained with him! Wished he'd done like everyone else, given the boy a wide berth. Jory had made a fool of him, jumped his bail and gone, leaving him to be a laughingstock for the whole range!

On Fire Belle's death, he could have dropped out of the race with some pride left. Even yesterday he could have scratched the horse, and saved his face. But, no! He'd been bewitched by a crazy promise and held out. Now it was within fifteen minutes of three o'clock, the hour of the Classic. And the crowd was whipped to fever heat with interest in the race and in his entry, Red Flight!

Working through the jam before the grandstand, with gala streamers of red and blue bunting fluttering over him, Radler was besieged with questions from Flying Moon fans, frantic to know what they were backing. How had Jory caught the horse? Was Red Flight as good as they said? Good as his mother, Desert Queen? Where was Radler hiding him? Questions Radler would have given his soul to answer. But unable to do it, he moved on, face set like flint, to join the Flying Moon crew gathered about the paddocks.

Downright sorry for him, Big Jim, who had long ago given up, said sensibly, "Better scratch him, Rock, an' go on home."

Radler wished to heaven he could. He longed to go home, hide his de-

feated head in the privacy of the Flying Moon. But seeing Sherm Clark and his trainer walking the hooded and blanketed Larkspur up and down the paddock lot, his pride rose in revolt.

"No," he said stubbornly. "I ain't runnin' out."

The next moment he wished he had. For directly opposite him, Clark stopped. He was a square-built, compact man.

With a wave at Larkspur, Clark said tauntingly, "Looks pretty good, hey, Radler?"

"Yeah," drawled the Flying Moon man, hiding all sign of feeling. "A nice-lookin' pony. But looks is sometimes deceivin'."

"Yeah?" Clark drawled back, furious. "Well, I've got another thousand bucks that says Larkspur's as good as he looks." Adding, as a cheer went up from his Circle Star punchers, "Good enough to dust that Red Flight of yours—which nobody's even got a look at yet!"

Too game to quit, keeping his pride yet another moment, Radler said, "I'll just take that! And, as he opened his checkbook, he added, "An' raise you a thousand!"

He filled out the amount, and handed the check to the nearest official—Sheriff Tom Keeley, it happened to be—to hold until the race was over.

Had it been an outright gift to himself, the sheriff could not have been happier. For since Radler had bailed Jory out of his jail, things had gone back to normal. He'd torn down the yellow jacket's nest, stopped the leak in the roof, and fixed the plumbing. And he didn't want Jory back again. There'd been whispers that the kid had run out on Radler. But this proved they were wrong. Jory had caught the stallion and won his freedom. Rad-

ler wouldn't be betting two thousand, if he wasn't sure!

But Radler was sure of only one thing. This was Jory's revenge!

"He waited till I entered the horse," he told his men furiously, "then skipped the country! But I'll bring him back, if I have to follow him to the world's end! I'll see he pays the full penalty! Ten years? I wish it was a lifetime! I wish rustlin' was a hanging crime!"

"Hush!" implored old Winnemucca. "Don't talk like that. He said he'd be here when th' race starts. An' th' race ain't started yet."

"No," groaned Radler, "but they're callin' it!"

They were! Loud on the hush settling over grandstand and track, came the megaphoned bawl announcing the big event of the year—the Deseret Classic!

Slumped over the paddock rail, Rock Radler saw the racers filing on the track. Five of them. All state-bred horses, though four were from other ranges. Entered by their owners, he knew, more for the honor of competing in the Classic than in any hope of winning. Always this race had been between Clark and him.

A THUNDEROUS cheer went up, as Larkspur, stripped of hood and blanket, proudly curveted on the track. Lover of horses that he was, Radler couldn't look at the racer unmoved. A trim-limbed, high-stepping chestnut, every inch the thoroughbred. Good as he looked, too, Radler admitted in his heart, remembering the run he'd given Fire Belle last year. To have a racer that could beat him seemed now to the rancher the ultimate of all earthly aim. This crowd thought he had one, had bet on it,

and were straining their eyes out for Red Flight! But Red Flight wasn't here. It would be Clark's race!

Unable to bear it, he was turning from the rail to leave, when a suppressed cry from Winnemucca checked him.

"Look!" gasped the old cowhand. "Look, Rock!"

And swinging to follow the line of the trembling finger—beyond the paddocks to the gate in the outside fence opening on the track—Rock Radler thought he was seeing things, that the vision he saw there was born of his great desire. This vision of a horse—*blood-red, glorious!* He shut his eyes hard, and opened them. The vision stayed, was nearing! An awed murmur breaking around him told Radler other eyes were seeing the same thing . . .

Seeing the wild racer of Blue Smoky, and the wild boy, Jory, being piloted through the gate and down the track by the great, shaggy wolf-dog! Seeing *Red Flight*, coming to run for the Flying Moon!

Reluctantly, the stallion came, jaws open, scarlet nostrils flaring, wild eyes blazing. His gait was nervous, jumpy. He was terrified by this vast assemblage of man, but, somehow, he was held in check by the witchery of the tense, pale-faced boy upon his back!

In one single, surcharged instant the whole picture had changed. Jerked in that instant from the black depths of hopelessness to dizzying pinnacles of confidence, Radler was plunging up the track to meet them, followed by the Flying Moon crew, and paddock's men. To find between him and Jory here, as on that night of Jory's capture, as that day in the jail, that one loyal friend, whose neck hair bristled with savage warning.

Yet it wasn't fear of Lupus that

stopped Radler, but Jory's frantic yell.

"Get back! Red Flight ain't used to people! He'll bolt, an' I can't hold him!"

Radler swung on the coming men. "Get back!" he roared. "Everybody! Get off the track!"

And he backed himself, crying ecstatically, "You got him, Jory! Good boy!"

"Quit yellin'—an' stand away!" cried the boy desperately.

"*Anything!*" raved Radler, with a rebound of faith that was absolute and complete. "*Anything! You* know what you're doin'! Only—get him down there in line! They're startin' the race!"

He backed into the fence, and stopped there, catching the boy's low murmur as he talked to the horse, bringing him under some semblance of control. Then, with Lupus still leading, keeping between the horse and thickest of the crowd, with Jory urging in soothing tone, Red Flight, distrust belching from his nostrils, foaming on his jaws, sidled nervously down the track.

BUT as they neared the line, where Larkspur and the other horses were milling for place, Sherm Clark, whose eyes, heart, and thoughts had been filled with the magnificence of the red horse to the exclusion of all else, saw Lupus, and let out a roar:

"Get that dog off th' track!"

Even as he said this, Jory spoke to Lupus, and instantly the dog turned, vanishing in the crowd.

And now Clark's worried gaze saw something more to object to. Red Flight wore no saddle. Only a blanket, and surcingle wrapped about Jory's knees.

"That horse has got to have a saddle!" he protested to Radler.

In his exultance Radler only laughed. "There's no rule sayin' a horse has to have a saddle in the Classic!"

Clark knew he was right. What rules there were for this race, they had made themselves, and none said anything about a saddle. He subsided in the hope it wouldn't matter. That Red Flight would never get started. And he was justified in that hope!

Try as Jory did, he couldn't get the wild horse up within yards of the other riders jockeying for place on the open track. Terrified by the uproar about him, confusion such as he'd never known, Red Flight was in the air most of the time, snorting, plunging at the fence as if to be over it and gone. Only after a terrific struggle did Jory bring him under control. And in the tension of that moment the noise subsided. There was no sound, but the thud of hoofs on dust, the fast breaths of the excited thoroughbreds, the low-spoken words of their riders maneuvering them in line. In this comparative quiet, Red Flight came on.

The other horses lined up. The starter's flag poised to drop. But at that instant Red Flight reared and whirled away. Three times the heart-breaking performance was repeated. Three times Jory brought the terrorized horse near the starting line, only to have him wheel, and lunge back, trying to escape this bedlam. Sherm Clark was beside himself. This was wearing the edge off Larkspur and the rest.

His own nerves wearing thin, the starter yelled at Jory, "Get that horse up here, if he's goin' to run!"

And Radler, running up the rail, pleaded frantically, "Get him up, Jory! Try to get him up to the line!"



"You ain't goin' to touch him!"
 Wild Jory cried to Radler.
 "It's go back on him or you
 and I can't go back on him!"

"You tell 'em to start th' rest," panted the boy. "It don't matter where I am!"

Radler instructed the starter. And when, again, the five lined up—with Red Flight on his hind legs, six lengths behind—the flag dropped. And a roar rolled over the grounds like booming surf:

"They're off!"

They were off—to the despair of Rock Radler and all who had backed his horse! To the mad joy of Sherm Clark and his Larkspur fans!

For Red Flight had *not* got started! The horse was still plunging back there, while the others were pounding down the track, increasing that distance . . . ten lengths . . . twenty . . .

Then, seeming to realize what was wanted of him, the wild horse lunged after the rest! Widely, madly, he lunged, swerving this way

and that, running in high, uneven strides. While ever the gap between him and the flying field widened. At the quarter pole he was almost a hundred yards behind. And it seemed to Rock Radler, gripping the rail in horror, hearing Clark's mocking laughter, that Red Flight wasn't running, but standing still, was going through the motions, and getting nowhere!

In a nightmare of shame, he cursed himself for ever listening to Jory, taking his word that Red Flight didn't need to be trained to run on the track, had been born knowing that! Whatever had been born in the son of Desert Queen had been forgotten in his life with a wild band! Radler wished, now, that Jory had never brought the horse in. Better—far—to have no entry at all, than have one making this pitiful spectacle . . .

But something was happening!

CHAPTER VI

TO RUN WITH HIS KIND

SOMETHING was happening! Something beyond the ken of Rock Radler, of all that taut grandstand! But something Jory, who knew the wild heart as few men knew it, had known would happen! The blood of Red Flight's racing father's spoke to him. Instincts, dormant all his wild life, wakened. He was no longer a wild stallion, grieving for a lost band, no longer a frightened, bewildered creature in this maelstrom of Man. He was a racehorse, son of Desert Queen, of the mighty Humboldt! That high, uneven stride smoothed out, the red neck stretched, the red body flattened to the earth, and, miraculously, the gap between him and the other horses ceased to widen!

But Jory feared it had happened too late. No horse could overcome that handicap against the fastest horses in the state. Fervently, wildly, the boy wished he'd never brought Red Flight here to know defeat. For in the weeks since the stallion had followed Lupus into that corral—weeks, in which he'd won the horse's confidence and trust—Jory had come to love Red Flight as he never had loved any horse! It was a point of pride with him, pride such as Radler could never feel, that Red Flight win this race.

It had happened too late, but he wouldn't give up. That pride burning through all his being, the boy hung low on the stallion's neck, pleading in his ear:

"Faster, Red Flight! Faster!"

His heart thrilling as he felt the mighty back muscles gather beneath him, heard the hoofs drumming to madder rhythm, saw the gap lessen! Through the cloud of Red Flight's flying mane, he saw the other horses

stringing out. Larkspur bunched with two others in the lead. The other two falling back.

"Faster!" he cried again.

And again felt that thrilling response. Gravel thrown from the hoofs of the pounding horses ahead struck his face with terrific force. Struck the face and breast of Red Flight, but never even checked him. They seemed, instead, to anger the stallion, for Jory felt him surge—strain. And heard, faint, far, across the field, the roar of the grandstand, as the horse ahead slid behind!

Faster, they flew! Another horse was beside—*behind!* Only three ahead of them. But hopelessly far! Already nearing the three-quarter post! Red Flight could never win!

"We can't do it, boy!" Wild Jory groaned. "But run—*run!* Show 'em you got the stuff to win!"

His heart swelled with rapture and pain to feel Red Flight straining every nerve and tendon in running his wild heart out. Not because he was born to run, but because Jory asked for it!

And the boy thought agonizingly, as he'd thought every minute of every day since he made the deal with Radler, how he was repaying that trust. When this race was over, he was turning Red Flight over to Rock Radler to be penned in stable or corral, never to run free again! Never to whistle his challenge from the high rims at the headwaters of Phantom Creek! Free never more to love, and war, and reign, a wild king. But to run when Radler willed, for Radler's glory.

Again Jory felt the sting of gravel, that added surge of anger-born speed, and Red Flight swept in between the two horses trailing Larkspur by half a dozen lengths. And now only Larkspur was ahead, and they were at the stretch!

INTO the stretch they thundered, with Larkspur hugging the rail, and Red Flight leaning close as any veteran. Five thousand people in the grandstand went mad. Rising in one body, crying with one voice, as if there was only one horse on the track:

"Red Flight! Red Flight!"

Cheering in their hearts, as well, the rider! In league with the devil? No! Power to make a horse run like that was God-given! Never more would Blue Smoky view Wild Jory with superstitious fear. Always they would see him like this, flat on Red Flight's neck, his young face, strained, white as death, fighting up inch by inch on the chestnut horse! Fighting within himself a battle they little guessed!

Rock Radler, still gripping the rail with hands numbed by the force of his clutch, forgot he owned the horse, that this would make him the biggest man on the range! For once in his self-centered life he forgot self! And thanked his Maker he had been privileged to see this race!

While Sherm Clark, a true lover of horses, too, forgot in the thrill of that heroic battle that his horse was losing to Radler, forgot that he even had a horse in the running, and cheered as madly as any in that madly shouting throng!

Down the stretch, they came. Red Flight gained to Larkspur's hip. There he seemed to hang. For Larkspur's mettle was up. And as if to help, to pull in their favorite by the very force of their desire, the voice of the crowd went out in one deafening, concerted roar:

"Red Flight! Red Flight!"

It brought Red Flight to Larkspur's shoulder!

"Red Flight!"

They were neck-to-neck, with ten feet to go!

The red nose shot out ahead of the chestnut—the red neck—shoulders. And, winner by half a length, the red stallion flashed under the wire!

Larkspur's rider got his horse under control fifty yards down the track, and turned back. But there was no controlling Red Flight! On, around the track, he ran, the whole mile, with little slackening. Until he neared the gate Jory had entered, opening out on the trails that wound to the hills of Blue Smoky Range.

Here the boy sprang from the stallion's back, whistling for Lupus. And as the big dog streaked up the track to join them, Jory opened the gate, led Red Flight through it, and half-fell against him, spent, shaking, while Radler, Clark, and the still wildly cheering throng rushed toward him.

No need for Jory to stop them. Or Lupus, posted in the gate, to growl warning. For as the stallion lunged against the bridle, Radler pulled up short, holding them back. His Red Flight wasn't used to people yet.

"Great work, Jory!" he applauded warmly. "Great work! An' now your job's done. My men will take him off your hands." He called for his foreman. "Jim!"

"Here, Rock!" Big Jim pushed up.

"You an' the rest of the boys get your horses an' put ropes on that stallion. Take him out to the Flyin' Moon!"

BUT as Big Jim turned to do his bidding, Jory spun the pitching Red Flight behind him, and held him down, crying out with a fierce quiver in his voice:

"You ain't goin' to rope him! You ain't goin' to touch him!"

Radler was stunned by the outburst. "What do you mean?" he gasped.

"I'm goin' back on my bargain! I got to! It's either go back on him or you. An' I—I can't go back on him!"

"I don't savvy, Jory," said Radler.

"I don't savvy myself!" sobbed the boy hysterically. "Or I didn't till now. I thought I could go through with my deal. I thought I could turn him over to you to be penned in a stable, while I went free! But I can't—not after the way he run for me! I—I'd rather be penned up the rest of my life, knowin' he's—runnin' up there—king of 'em all! So I'm turnin' him loose. An' nobody'll ever catch him again. Because now—he knows all th' tricks!"

Before they fully grasped his intention, he turned to the stallion, and, sweeping off bridle and surcingle in a single motion, gave the gleaming hip a slap. Red Flight streaked away like a rocket!

"Quick!" yelled Big Jim. "Winne-mucca—Sam—all of you, get after him!"

But Radler held them back with his sharp cry, "Wait, men!"

In silence they watched the red horse flashing through the gray sage, a streak of living flame, toward the blue peaks that were his range. And as he dropped over the first swell, lost to their view forever, Wild Jory came slowly through the gate, with Lupus tightly pressed to him, fierce, alert, but ready to share any fate.

Straight up to Sheriff Keeley, standing between Clark and Radler, he came.

"I didn't keep my deal," he said, his head proudly high. "So take me to jail."

Helplessly, the sheriff looked at him, at the great dog beside him. He didn't want Jory in his jail. Not because he thought he was bad medicine any more. But he didn't believe

he was a rustler—at heart. Never had believed it! But Rock Radler believed it. And when Rock got his jaw set . . .

"Reckon it's your move, Rock," the sheriff said reluctantly. "You're his bondsman, an' the prosecutin' witness in this case."

But Radler wasn't listening to him. He was looking at the boy. His jaw didn't seem to be so set, nor his voice quite steady.

"I know how you feel, Jory," he was saying huskily. "I felt the same way, watchin' Red Flight run. Felt I wanted to do something for him. Didn't know what. But that's it! What more can a man do for a wild horse than give him his freedom?"

"Nothin', Rock!" Sherm Clark put in huskily. "An' a horse that made a race like that shouldn't have to run again!" He paused. "Reckon the Classic won't mean so much after this, Rock. For as long as Red Flight runs them hills, I'm here to admit you own the fastest horse in the state—in any state!"

He held out his hand. Radler took it. And in their hearty clasp the old rivalry died and a lasting friendship was born. And then Radler turned to the boy waiting there, pale, tense, more than pitiful.

"Jory," he said, placing a hand on the boy's shoulder, "it must get lonesome sometimes up there in the canyon. How'd you like to come work for the Flyin' Moon?"

The black eyes lighted. To run with his own kind at last! He had won that, just as Red Flight had won his freedom. But he had his cabin—all his wild friends . . . He compromised, with a happy grin:

"I'd sure like it—part time. But I got to be up in the canyon an' places some of the year. You see, I got business. I'm a wolfer."

The Story of the West



The white chieftain Pursley was as handy with a battle-ax as any Mandan warrior.

ONE of the early adventurers who made history in the Southwest was James Pursley, a young Kentuckian who, with two companions, set out from St. Louis in 1802 on a hunting trip. The three men intended to cross the prairie to the Arkansas River and descend it and the Mississippi to New Orleans.

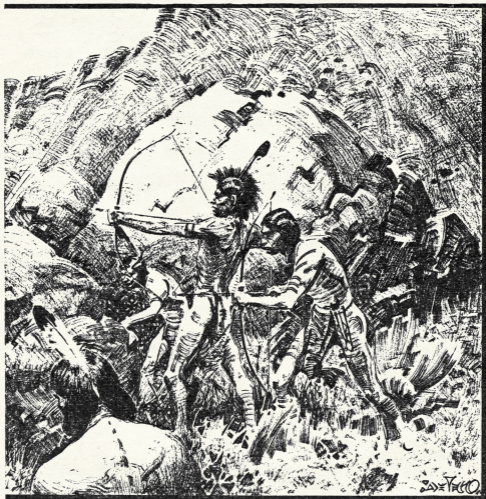
Their plans were totally changed, however, when they woke one morning to find that thieving Kaw Indi-

ans had stolen their horses and packs. Thus stranded, they decided to get back to St. Louis as best they could.

They had gone only a short way on their return journey when they met a French trader who was on his way to the Mandan territory on the upper Missouri. Pursley needed little urging to agree to join him, but the two others returned home.

For the next three years young Pursley, out for adventure, lived

Told in pictures and text by
GERARD DELANO



with the Mandans. In their frequent clashes with the Sioux, their ancient enemies, he gained such a reputation for recklessness and valor that he was made a chieftain. Whenever he was not off on a Sioux scalping party he was sure to be leading his warriors on a long hunting and trading expedition.

It was on one of these trips that he reached Santa Fe. Entering the city

with an escort, he made arrangements for the rest of his band to come in and trade. But James Pursley found Santa Fe too intriguing a place to leave. When the Indians were ready to return to their tribe, their paleface chief bade them farewell and settled down at his old trade of carpentering at which, he found, he could make a very good living in Santa Fe.

NEXT WEEK: LEWIS AND CLARK IN THE NORTHWEST



Folks said Cal Hubbard would walk a mile to avoid a fight, but when it came to a show-down with the proddy Coles he was

Not Too Peaceful

By L. P. HOLMES

Author of "Renegade Star Packer," etc.

YELLOW," spat Frank Cole contemptuously. "Yellow as saffron. He won't pack a gun, so you can't kill him without being hung for murder. And he won't put up his fists. Why, a Basco sheepherder is a roaring lion alongside of that coyote!"

Old Joe McCann downed his drink and shrugged. "Maybe he's smarter than you think, Cole. A man who fancies gun throwing generally ends

up on the lead of a better man—and there is always one better, somewhere. And in sixty years of living I've never seen fist fights prove much of anything, except that a scrambled phiz doesn't improve a man's looks. Me, I don't think young Hubbard is so much afraid as he is just—peaceful."

"He's too cussed peaceful for my taste," rasped Cole. "I like a man with fur on his chest and a little iron in his backbone. Shucks! What I

just called that jasper, I wouldn't take from any man alive. Why, I just about burned the hide plumb off him."

"And how," grinned "Tuck" Cole, Frank's younger brother. "Big as you are, Frank, if you'd called me what you did Hubbard, I'd comb you down if I had to use a pick handle to do it. Trouble with Hubbard, his old man was a sky-pilot. He's full of this turn the other cheek stuff."

Young Cal Hubbard, riding out of Sage City, could well imagine the talk that was going on about him, back in the Elite Saloon, and spots of crimson burned in his lean cheeks. Contrary to what Frank Cole and others might think, there was plenty of red blood in Cal Hubbard. But the teachings of a lifetime could not be thrown aside easily. That gentle old man who had been Cal's father had passed on his philosophy of peace and goodwill toward all men to his son. Ezra Hubbard had hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps and carry the Bible into the frontier camps of hard and ruthless men.

But Cal's mother had been a daughter of the frontier and from her, Cal had inherited a love for the open range and cattle. And so, while the tattered old Bible that had been Ezra Hubbard's most precious possession gathered dust on a shelf in Cal's little cabin on Wolf Creek, cattle breeder's reports, market lists and any other literature pertaining to the science of cattle raising which Cal Hubbard could lay hands on, were read and digested avidly.

Part of the trail from Sage City out to that cabin on Wolf Creek paralleled for about a quarter of a mile the tracks of the Central and Southwestern Railroad. And Cal, as he jogged along, met up with a

long freight, toiling up Tyson's Grade.

As he watched the train idly, Cal Hubbard was thinking forward to the day when one of those freights would bring in a pair of prize breed bulls. For he had a theory about cattle raising. Instead of running gaunt, bony longhorns over limitless miles of range, he believed that by breeding up the cattle to a better beef stock, a man could make more money with a smaller herd which could be kept to the verdant bottoms along Wolf Creek. Less range to patrol, fewer cattle, but more money in the long run. And so, Cal had been saving his money toward the purchase of those breed bulls.

THE train, almost at the top of the grade, seemed to be barely moving. And now, Cal's eyes were caught by a flurry of action on the top of one of the cars. Three men up there seemed to be having a wild struggle. Two of them were after the third. It looked for a moment as though all three were sure to slide off. Instead, only one of them did—and he was thrown off! His arms and legs waved wildly as he fell, and he must have hit hard, for he lay still in the waving wild oats beside the right of way, while the train ground its way along and the other two men, after waving their hands in a mocking, ribald gesture, walked back along the cars toward the caboose.

The old story, thought Cal. Just another hobo, thrown off by a pair of brakemen.

He reined in, staring frowningly toward that sprawled figure beside the right of way. The train topped the grade and rolled on out of sight. Cal touched his pony with the spur and loped over toward the motionless figure.

Dismounting there, he thought for a moment that the hobo was dead. There was a bloody cut on the man's forehead, where he had struck against a rock in his fall. Then the hobo groaned and stirred a trifle. Cal lifted the canteen from his saddle horn and went to work on him.

The tramp was a short, thick-set man, with knotty arms and shoulders. His face lacked much of being prepossessing. The jaw was under-shot and stubborn. His nose was dented and broad. His eyebrows protruded slightly and were marked with the lines of old scars. And the ears puzzled Cal greatly. They were thick, leathery and almost shapeless.

Satisfied that the hobo's arms and legs were unbroken, Cal went to work with the water. In a few moments the man's eyes opened, to stare about him wonderingly.

"What happened?" he blurted.

"They threw you off the train," Cal answered. "Don't you remember?"

The hobo did and he went into a gust of furious cursing.

"That kind of language never got anyone anywhere," observed Cal quietly. "Cursing is a sign of weakness."

The hobo got to a sitting position and stared at him. "You," he mumbled, "sound like a preacher."

"My father was a minister," Cal replied. "Sit still while I wash your head and tie up that cut."

Cal used his own neckerchief for a bandage. The hobo took a long pull at the canteen. Then he got to his feet.

"Well," he shrugged, "that's that. Thanks a lot, buddy. Where's the nearest burg?"

"Sage City is about three miles east of here. But I'm afraid you won't find much of a welcome there. Just last week they ran two other—

ah—men like you out of there."

"'Bos is what you mean," said the fellow with a twisted grin. "Go ahead, say it. I ain't proud. Well, I guess I been kicked out of better towns than this here Sage City."

"It's a long walk to any other town," Cal told him.

The hobo nodded and shrugged. "It's always a long walk, in this game. Take a tip from me, buddy, don't ever go to hittin' the ties. It's a dog's life. Take a gun and blow your brains out first."

Cal was thinking things over. "I'm wondering if you would take a job—with me," he said. "I've got a little spread down on Wolf Creek. I could use a man, though I couldn't afford to pay very big wages."

"A job!" The hobo stared. "You mean punchin' cattle?"

"Yes."

The hobo laughed. He didn't look a bad sort at all when he laughed. "That's good. Me—Spike Barr—punchin' cattle. Why, buddy, I don't know the first thing about such a game. I never rode a horse in my life."

"You could learn."

"Spike" Barr scratched his bullet head, peered at Cal keenly, then shrugged. "I'm game to give it a try. At least I'll eat regular. Where away is this ranch of yours?"

Cal turned to mount his horse. "Crawl up behind," he said. "This nag will carry double."

SOME ten days later, with the shadows of night creeping across the Wolf Creek bottoms, Cal and Spike Barr sat out in front of the cabin, smoking and resting. Supper was over with, and the evening was tranquil and quiet. Spike Barr sighed luxuriously.

"Now that I'm gettin' hardened up to this saddle game, darned if I don't

like it, buddy. Mebbe I'm gettin' old, but I kinda like this quietness and peace."

Cal grinned and nodded. "You got the makings of a real cowhand, Spike. You stick along here with me and we'll make money together, bye and bye."

Spike frowned thoughtfully. "The other day when I went to town for that grub, I heard some talk. Feller named Frank Cole was popping off pretty loud. Making big talk of how him and another jasper named Dexter were going to run you off Wolf Creek. Can they do that, kid?"

"No," said Cal. "No, they can't Spike. This is my range. They'd like to run me off, for they'd like to control Wolf Creek. But they can't do it."

"That's swell," nodded Spike. "I thought that Cole was just a lot of mouth."

Cal did not appear to be listening. Instead, he was gazing intently up the creek, where three riders had just swung into view, approaching the cabin at a jog. Cal's lips tightened slightly and he frowned. Even at a distance, recognition was instantaneous. One of those riders was Frank Cole. Another was old Roe Dexter. The third, a slim figure in divided khaki skirt and cotton blouse, was May Dexter, Roe's daughter.

As the three riders came up, Spike stared, then whistled softly. "There's that Cole guy now," he said. "Wonder what they want?"

"I think I know," Cal answered quietly. "Easy does it, Spike. Let me do the talking."

The three riders reined to a halt. Frank Cole merely stared belligerently. Roe Dexter nodded. May Dexter's smile was grave, the expression in her brown eyes curtained.

"Evening," said Cal, getting to his

feet. "Light down and rest your saddles."

"We ain't stayin' long, Hubbard," twanged Roe Dexter. "This is jest a business call. Frank an' me have decided that we need this Wolf Creek range. We'll meet you fair. We'll give you a reasonable price an' take your cattle off your hands, too."

Cal shook his head. "I'm not interested in selling, Mr. Dexter. I believe I told you that once before."

Dexter snorted impatiently. "Of course you're interested in sellin'—providin' you get your figure. Name your price for the whole set-up—range and cattle. If it's fair, Frank an' me'll meet it. If it ain't, well, mebbe we'll argue."

Cal Hubbard's lean young jaw stuck out a trifle. There was a strange expression in May Dexter's eyes, as though she were weighing him, judging him.

"Suppose we get this right, once and for all, Mr. Dexter," Cal said evenly. "I'm not interested—at any price. My Box H spread is not for sale, not any part of it."

Frank Cole looked at Roe Dexter meaningly. "What did I tell you, Roe? Now—I'm goin' to talk to him."

Cole's eyes stabbed at Cal. "Listen, you yellow-backed whelp," he growled. "You're goin' to talk turkey to Roe and me, whether you want to or not. I'm holding back some, because Roe insisted that I do it, so I'm giving you one more chance to name your price. Get this once and for all. You're getting off Wolf Creek. You can use your head, take a fair price for your outfit or you can pull that meek hypocritical stuff. But if you try the last, I'll sure make you hard to catch. You figure that by not packing a gun, nobody will take a shot at you. Maybe they won't—but there are other ways of

making a simpering gospel hound like you come to time. Me, I aim to use 'em. Now, give me your answer, you saffron-livered louse."

THERE sounded a queer, choking growl from Spike Barr. "Slap him down, kid," he begged. "Push that big mouth of his clear back between his ears. Bust him one! For the love of Mike, bust him one!"

But Cal made no move. His jaw was craggy and hard, his blue eyes bleak. A queer pallor seemed to come and go beneath the heavy tan of his face and throat.

Frank Cole shuttled his glance to Spike.

"Come on," invited Spike. "Crawl off that horse, you loud-mouthed four-flusher. Take a peck at old Spike—if the kid don't want you. Come on! Give me just one poke at you. That's all I ask—just one."

Cole started to dismount. Roe Dexter stopped him with a harsh command. "Hold it! We didn't come here to brawl. We came to talk business. Your answer is final then, Hubbard?"

Cal gave a strained nod. "It's final," he declared thinly.

Roe Dexter swung his horse around. "That's all, Cole. Come on. And you, May. That's all—for this time!"

They rode away. Cal stared after them, rigid and immovable. Spike Barr stepped around him, faced Cal and stared hard into his eyes. He shook his head slowly.

"I don't get it," he said. "You're no coward, kid—and yet you took what that big slob called you. But you took it—in front of that nice-looking girl."

"What is the matter with people, anyhow?" Cal burst out in a suddenly strident voice. "Does a man

have to pack a gun and shoot down other men, or does he have to smash other men down with his fists, just to keep from being considered a coward?"

Spike was staring at him closely. "Put up your dukes, kid," he barked suddenly. "Put 'em up."

Instinctively, Cal complied. Spike nodded. "I thought so. Don't know the first thing about taking care of yourself, do you? Never slung your fists in your life, I'll bet."

Cal shook his head. "No, I never did, Spike. I never could see the need, or the sense of anything like that. My father taught me to believe in peace."

Spike placed his hand on the other's shoulder. "Listen, kid, I'm almost old enough to be your father. I'm going to tell you a few things. Understand, I'm not criticizin' your dad. He was a man of the Bible, who lived in peace, believed in peace and knew nothing else. But you're out bucking the world in a different line of work. You fight, or you'll go under. That's the way life is. Lots of good men fight, not because they like to, but because they have to. It's about time you got that idea through your head.

"Me, I've bumped around this old world a lot and I can read a bluff a mile away. Those two gents are trying to run a big bluff on you. They think you're afraid of 'em—that you'll run. Peace is all right when nothing else is needed, but there's times in this world when the only remedy to a condition is to crawl somebody's frame. You're going to learn how. That girl—you don't like her to look at you like she did, do you?"

"You know I don't," Cal rasped. "It was worse than being flogged with a quirt. I—I think you're right, Spike."

The ex-hobo grinned broadly. "Swell! This is going to be more fun than the night I nearly got the champ!"

CAL HUBBARD rode home in tight-lipped, cold-eyed, shaking fury. It was two weeks since the scene in front of the cabin. He flung from his saddle and stripped his pony with short, vicious jerks. Spike Barr, his sleeves rolled up, his knotty fists white with flour, came out of the cabin. Cal whirled on him.

"Let's get at it, Spike," he almost shouted. "I had to take another tongue lashing again today—and in front of *her*."

"Frank Cole again, eh?"

"Yes. And his wise-cracking brother, too. Come on. Let's get at it!"

"Fine," crowed Spike enthusiastically. "In another week you'll be ready for 'em, kid."

Down by Wolf Creek was a flat, hard-packed stretch of sand, rimmed completely by heavy willows. Ten minutes after Cal arrived from town he and Spike stepped out into that miniature arena. Cal was stripped, except for an abbreviated breech-clout and a pair of moccasins. Spike was naked to the waist and wore a dilapidated old pair of rubber-soled sneaks. Swinging by the wrist laces, Spike carried a set of boxing gloves blackened from hard usage. They set about lacing on the gloves.

"You're really ready now," said Spike, "except for one thing. You got to use your head, kid. You got to box that Frank Cole. He's got thirty pounds of weight on you and those big, rawboned bimbos always pack a wallop, even if they do use a roundhouse swing that a blind man could duck. Your chore is to wear him down, cut him to your size—and then give him the works. But if you

lose your head and tear right into him, he's liable to get a sneaker in that'll flatten you.

"All right, now remember what I told you about keeping on your toes and not wasting punches. Wait until you see a bull's-eye, then sock it. And get that wrist snap into the last couple of inches of your punches."

Cal, still on fire with rage, tore in, got a stiff left jab on the nose and a right across that made his eyes blink. He shook his head and began to box more gaily.

"That's better," puffed Spike. "I'd have laid you stiff with that right hook if I'd wanted to put the heat into it. Think, kid—think all the time. You wouldn't run bull-headed into a .45 slug, would you? Well, figure a punch the same way."

The set of boxing gloves had been the result of a telegram which Spike had got the railroad station agent to send for him. He had not said a word about it to Cal until the gloves had arrived. Then he had gone to work on the cowboy with a vengeance. Every evening there had been a long session in the little arena by the creek. Cal had made one first instinctive objection, and Spike had waxed angry.

"Listen, kid, you're either going to learn enough to knock the ears off that big stiff, or I'm done with you. I'll pull out and hit the ties again, as sure as my name is Spike Barr. And if that ain't enough, I hope that swell girl shrivels you every time you meet her. In a minute you'll have me believing that these people around here are mostly right—that you are yellow. Me, I've thrown enough and stopped enough gloves in my time to know what I'm talking about.

"At one time there was just one man between Spike Barr and the middleweight championship of the

world. That's water under the bridge, of course, but I know enough about the game to help you plenty. I won't make a champ of you but I can teach you enough so you'll be able to make these big mouths around here tip their hats when you go by. Now, do we learn how to fight, or do we quit cold—and you and me part company?"

Cal's answer had been to pick up a pair of the gloves quietly and put them on. He had been as awkward as a school boy at first. But he had the long, smooth muscles of speed and endurance, a quick eye and was fast on his feet. He progressed rapidly, to Spike's huge delight.

The two men shuffled about in the sand, Spike saving his middle-aged legs by making Cal come to him. The younger man was still on fire from the scene with Cole and he went at Spike almost savagely. The ex-hobo grinned as he ducked and weaved, covering up one moment, punching the next. And he knew huge satisfaction in realizing that Cal was growing harder to hit with every lesson. This lean, lithe young cattleman, whose father had been a minister and who had, all his life, listened to the gospel and preachings of peace, had a spark in him this day that belied all his earlier teachings. Cal Hubbard was a fighting man now!

He had a trick of slipping punches that seemed purely instinctive. Four times he made Spike miss by a mere lightning dart of his head. Spike waxed so enthusiastic that he called time.

SWELL!" praised the scarred old battler. "A man who can slip a punch like that is a handful for anyone, anytime. Notice how it always leaves you in position to lam me one? The first time Cole misses

you he's going to be wide open for a body shot. When he is, pour it to him, kid. Get the trick of dropping your knees a little when you slip a punch. Then you can lift one in all the way from your toes. And keep that left just a little higher. All right, let's go another round."

This one was fast and furious. Cal swarmed in until Spike had to give ground in spite of all the cunning he had stored up. Finally, by sheer necessity, Spike tried to hold his pupil off with a stiff right to the jaw. But Cal slipped the punch, weaving inside it and his own right ripped up in a crashing short uppercut to the jaw. Spike went down.

For a moment Cal stared at old Spike on the ground, and Spike stared back, blinking dazedly. Then Cal dropped on his knees beside his partner, his face working with shame. "Spike!" he gasped. "I didn't mean to do that. Honest, Spike, I didn't think . . . I—I'm sorry. I'm——"

Spike shook his head, blinked, grinned widely and wobbled to his feet. "Listen, kid," he mumbled. "You can believe me or not, but that's the first time in my life I was ever knocked off my feet. They used to decision old Spike, but none of 'em ever put him on the canvas. What a kick! And that punch couldn't have traveled over eight inches. Honest, buddy, I'm beginning to feel worried about that Cole bimbo. Sorry! What are you sorry for? Me, I'm tickled to death. All right—that's enough for today. Let's have our swim."

They went over to a deep, cool pool in the creek, doffed gloves and clothes and dove in. A few minutes later Spike looked over the lean, powerful figure of his pupil and nodded happily. "There's a lot of light heavies making the circuits right now who think they're good,

and you could take any of 'em in a round, kid. I'm looking forward to the day!"

The days slipped by until another two weeks had passed. Cal and Spike had been plenty busy during this time, branding calves. Neither had gone near town and had not seen or heard anything of either Frank or Tuck Cole, or of the Dexters.

The bond between Cal Hubbard, cattleman, and Spike Barr, broken down old prizefighter, grew stronger all the time. Spike, remembering all too well the hardships and bitterness of his past life, knew utter contentment on the little ranch along Wolf Creek. He found to his surprise that he liked animals, and that he was utterly happy in caring for the cattle and horses. The warm, flooding rose of sunrise and the cool, blue shadows of sunset filled him with a restful peace he had never known before.

"This," he said one evening, "is my idea of heaven, kid. I bless the day those two shacks kicked me off the rattler. I used to be restless, always wantin' to drift, to keep on the move. But that's gone now. This is home. If you ever decide to fire me, boss, you'll break an old man's heart." He grinned impudently, but Cal could see beyond that grin.

"As long as I got a ranch, Spike, you'll be on it with me."

Spike looked away, blew his nose violently. "Let's get at our trainin'," he said embarrassed.

They had just finished, had their swim and were dressed again, when a lone rider came loping up. It was Roe Dexter. Cal greeted him with curt politeness.

"Listen, Hubbard," began Dexter without preamble. "I'm wishin' you no harm. I admit I want to get hold of this Wolf Creek range. I'd like awful well to talk you into sellin'. But you say you don't want to sell.

Me, I'm willin' to let the matter stand there, in the hope that some day you'll change your mind. But as one man to another, I'm tipping you off. You got plenty of trouble coming up with the Half Moon C outfit. The Cole boys are going to get rough. So far they've laid off because I kept tellin' them that I thought you could be talked into sellin'. But Frank Cole told me yesterday that he was through waitin' for you to decide to sell. He said he was goin' to help you make up your mind."

Cal was inscrutable of eye and face as he listened. Then he spoke curtly. "You sing a different song than you did a few weeks ago, Mr. Dexter. Why?"

Roe Dexter colored, but his eyes remained level. "Somebody with a pretty steady head has been talkin' to me," he admitted. "And I got a selfish reason besides. If trouble starts on this range, it may spread. I've seen such things happen before. It may reach out an' drag me in, one way or another. An' I don't want to be dragged into any range trouble. I'm not as young as I used to be."

Cal nodded slowly. "Thanks for telling me this, Mr. Dexter. But the set-up isn't going to change. This Wolf Creek is my range. I'm mindin' my own business, botherin' no one. I don't want trouble with any man. But I am not going to be talked, bluffed, frightened, or coerced out of what is rightfully mine. If I am let alone, I'll leave everyone else alone. But if anyone starts persecutin' me, they're going to bite off a big chunk of trouble."

THE eyes of the two men met and held. A little smile played about Roe Dexter's lips. "A lot of people have guessed you wrong, Hubbard," he said.

"Even I did—for a time. I can see I've made a mistake. Well, good luck!"

He turned and cantered off. Cal and Spike watched him go. "That jigger has changed his tune a lot since he was here last time," observed Spike thoughtfully. "I wonder why."

Cal shrugged. "He's a good man. He's always had a good name around here, from what I've been able to learn. I wonder who it is that's been talking to him."

Spike threw a keen side glance. "I bet I wouldn't need more than one guess."

The cowman colored slightly. "You're loco. Why should she put in a good word for me?"

Spike laughed softly. "Never figure why, with a woman, kid. They have their own reasons. An' most generally those reasons are good ones."

That night, after they had turned in, Cal rose suddenly on one elbow. "I've changed my plans, Spike. I'm not waiting for Cole to come to me; I'm going after him. What do you think?"

"Smart stuff," grunted Spike. "I'm all for it. Meet him, call him, beat hell out of him. Beat him until he crawls and begs for mercy. Then knock him cold. If I know my four-flushers, and I've bumped into a few in my time, you'll have no more trouble with him after you give him one taste of the dynamite in your fists."

Cal, overwhelmed by a queer exultation, laughed softly. "We'll do it, Spike. They think I'm peaceful, eh? Well, I'll show 'em I'm not *too* peaceful."

They rode into Sage City about mid-morning the next day. The town drowsed peacefully in the bright sunshine and the single dusty

street was deserted and quiet. But Cal and Spike were not disappointed. It was too early in the day for many people to show. Afternoon and evening were the times for activity in Sage City.

They spent a couple of lazy hours at Ben Gallup's blacksmith shop, while Gallup put new shoes all around on Spike's pony. From there they dropped into the Elite and talked for a time with "Fat" Brower. At noon they ate at the hashhouse. Spike ordered the food.

"You got the equivalent of a championship fight comin' up, kid," he said. "You eat what I tell you to."

And Cal, his eyes glinting, smiled and nodded. A cooked leather hat would have tasted just as good as the steak Spike ordered.

By two o'clock the town began to stir. Riders jogged in. Ranchers and their families came rolling in on buckboards. The street filled up with people all unconscious of the fact that an explosion was due to take place as soon as Frank Cole put in an appearance.

Old Joe McGann bumped into Cal and Spike. He grinned genially. "Anyhow, I'm glad to see yuh still all in one piece," he told Cal. "From some of the talk certain people been makin' I thought yuh might be tore to shreds by this time."

"I always said, Joe, that talk never really hurt anybody," Cal laughed.

Joe pursed his lips. "We-ell, yes an' no. There's some kind of talk a man can afford to ignore. An' there's another kind he can't—not an' keep his friends."

Cal nodded seriously. "I know what you mean, Joe. That kind of talk is due to stop. Stick around town. You may get an eyeful."

Joe leaned forward eagerly. "You mean . . ."

"I mean exactly that. But don't spread the news."

Joe chuckled joyfully. "C'mon, I'll buy you a drink."

"No, you won't," Spike broke in. "This kid is in trainin'."

"Wow!" breathed Joe. "It's goin' to be like that, eh? This is the best news I've heard since Heck was a pup. Yuh got my moral support, Cal. I've growed plumb sick of that Jasper's gab."

"Both of us have, Joe," said Cal.

"Look down the street, kid," murmured Spike.

Cal turned and stared. A slow ripple of excitement ran through him, from his heels to his head. He seemed to lift and tense. His jaw stole out and a cold fire built up, far back in his eyes.

Up Sage City's dusty main street rode the Dexters. With them were Frank and Tuck Cole. Frank was riding next to May Dexter and was addressing a laughing remark to her, but he got no answer. For May was staring up the street and seemed not even to have heard Cole's words.

Cole followed her look and a glint of satisfaction came into his eyes.

When they reined in to a hitchrail and dismounted, he called to his brother. "I see somethin' up the street, Tuck. Somethin' yellow. I'm goin' up an' take it apart—an' no foolin' this time."

As Frank and Tuck Cole swagged off, May Dexter looked at her father anxiously. Roe Dexter gave her a thin smile. "Don't worry, honey. Somethin' tells me an awful surprise is due to break loose. You better go into the store. You won't want to watch it."

Then Roe Dexter hurried after the Coles. But May Dexter did not go into the store. A queer, breathless fascination drew her up the street toward Cal Hubbard. . . .

THE Coles moved up to the waiting trio.

"Well, well," sneered Frank, "if here ain't my old friend, the yellow—"

Wham!

Frank Cole staggered back, his hand going to his lips. Cal, with the speed of a pouncing cat, had slapped Cole across the mouth with his open palm.

A low rumble of anger rose in Frank Cole's throat. He charged at Cal with a bull-like rush, wide open in his berserk rage. Cal hit him, a driving right that knocked Cole flat on his back. Joe McGann squalled with pure joy. A shout ran along the street. Men came running from everywhere, jamming around in a jostling, excited mob. The word spread. Young Hubbard had just knocked Frank Cole flat with a single punch! Cole got to his feet slowly.

"Take yore guns off, Cole," barked Joe McGann. "Make this even-stepen."

Joe's cry was caught up by the rest of the crowd. "Take those guns off! Take 'em off, Cole."

Frank Cole obeyed, his eyes never leaving his opponent. Cole took off his vest, his hat, stepped out of his chaps and unbuckled his spurs. The crowd gave a long, shuddering sigh. This was going to be an epic. . . .

Cal, cool as ice, removed his spurs and hat and handed them to Spike. Spike was talking quietly. "Watch your hands, kid. Don't break 'em on that thick head of his. Soften him up in the spud-locker first. Box him. Don't lose your head and fight wild."

The two men stepped out and faced each other. A trickle of blood seeped from the corner of Cole's mouth already. That sock on the jaw had been a blazer.

"I'm goin' to take you apart," growled Cole. "I'm going to tear you to——"

"Save your breath," advised Cal curtly. "You're going to need it."

Cole rushed, not wide open this time, but with his shoulders hunched up to protect his jaw, and his fists driving and flailing. Cal never backed away a step. He slipped two punches Cole threw and lifted both fists into the man's body with everything he had.

Cole gasped, floundered and backed away. A cold, merciless fury seemed to be consuming Cal Hubbard. Something rose out of the depths of his being that was foreign to everything he had ever known before. It was as if a feeling long confined and suppressed had finally broken loose with the utter fury of a long pent flood. He went after Frank Cole savagely.

His left hand stabbed out again and again, like a merciless rapier. He mashed Frank Cole's lips, cut his left eye, brought blood spouting from his nose. And he knew, of a sudden, with cold exultation that he could knock Cole out any moment he wanted to. But he didn't want to do that—yet. He was going to make Cole crawl, make him quit. He was going to show these folks just who was yellow. He even started to laugh—and a fist, whizzing from nowhere caught him squarely on the side of the head.

For a moment Cal thought his neck was broken, that he was knocked flat. But instead he found himself still on his feet, staggering back before the terrific onslaught of a human bull.

"Box him!" shrilled Spike's agonized voice. "Box him, kid!"

Instinctively Cal weaved and ducked, slipping one punch after an-

other, but throwing none in return. Some of the crowd, partisans of Cole, whooped their man on frantically. But Cole was overeager in his clumsy ferocity. He threw prodigious punches at his elusive adversary, but none of them connected fairly.

Cal's head began to clear and the numbness left him. Now he knew, as no one in that crowd but Spike would know, that had that punch been a little closer to the point of his jaw, he would have been knocked cold. Another one like that . . .

Cal saw one start, slipped it and lifted another explosion into Cole's midriff. Again Cole gasped and backed up. And this time, as Cal followed his man, he did not laugh or grow careless. He had a job to do and he went at it with blazing-eyed determination.

He hammered Frank Cole back and back, round and round the ring formed by the avid onlookers. He cut Cole's face to ribbons, beat his body to a quaking, retching hulk. And then, suddenly sick of the whole thing, he straightened Cole with a driving left and put everything he had into a right hand smash, square on the point of Cole's sagging, slaver-ing jaw.

Cal felt something give in his right fist and a sharp, cutting flash of agony ran up his entire arm. Cole went down soddenly and lay there without moving.

Cal stepped away, the back of his right hand bunched and ugly from twisted and collapsed knuckles. Somebody gave a yell of warning. A gun thundered, close behind Cal, so close it seemed that the flame of discharge almost singed his neck. He spun about to see Roe Dexter and Joe McGann struggling with Tuck Cole. The younger Cole had a smoking gun in his hand.

THE crowd went suddenly berserk. "The dirty rat!" bawled a rider. "He tried to get Hubbard in the back. Lynch the polecat!"

Men swarmed in on Tuck Cole, helped disarm him. Roe Dexter silenced the more vociferous ones. "We learned somethin' today," he yelled. "We learned just what these swaggering, big-mouthed, wise-cracking Coles amount to around here. We learned that this range will be better off without 'em. They're both due to travel an' stay gone."

The crowd took up the idea with exultant yells. More than one man in it had known some of Frank Cole's bullying. And the attempted treachery of Tuck Cole was too much for any of them to stomach, even men who had considered the Coles friends of theirs previously.

Cal turned his back on all of it and walked away. Some one caught him by that right arm. It was Spike. "I heard that hand go, kid, I heard it go," whispered Spike anxiously. "That last punch was the hardest I ever saw thrown. We got to get that hand to a doctor."

"You go and locate Doctor Evans," said a quiet, but definitely shaky voice. "I'll take care of—of Cal."

It was May Dexter. Her eyes were misty, her lips quivering a trifle. She took Cal's crippled hand and held it very gently in both of hers. It might have been his imagination but it seemed to Cal that the pain definitely lessened. He managed a twisted smile.

"Hello, May. I—I'm sorry you had to see that."

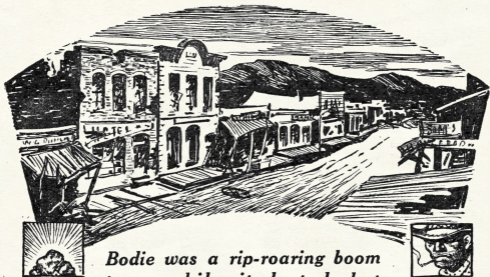
"I'm not," declared the girl warmly. "I've been wanting you to vindicate yourself, Cal. Oh, how I've wanted that! And I saw you do it. I'm glad—glad!"

In the look she gave him there was a vast pride—and something else—something softer, warmer, deeper. They walked off toward Doc Evans' office, with May still holding that crippled hand.

Over at the Elite, Joe McGann was bellowing joyously for everybody to come and drink on him. "An' they called that kid yellow," howled Joe. "What they meant was peaceful—but not too peaceful!"

THE END.





Bodie was a rip-roaring boom town while it lasted—but it didn't last long

Ghost Towns Of The West

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

TODAY if you were to announce that you were a "badman from Bodie," all you would get from those within earshot would be the horse laugh, and probably a raised eyebrow or two.

Most people have forgotten there ever was a Bodie. Only the crumbling, ghostly remains of that once famous mining town are left to remind the wayfarer that here in southeastern California was once the wildest helldorado of them all.

There was a time fifty years ago when being a "big, badman from Bodie" meant something. It was equivalent to stating that the bearer

of the title had majored in violence, taken a baccalaureate degree in murder and mayhem and was a two-gun hombre, untamed and rarin' to go.

That was when Bodie, flushed with excitement of a silver boom which it was hoped would rival the Comstock Lode, bragged that it possessed the "wickedest men, the worst climate out-of-doors and the widest streets of any Western mining town." The old saying about a man for breakfast every morning was literal fact during Bodie's heyday. If the West ever spawned a hard town for hard hombres, Bodie was that town, but it collapsed like a

punctured balloon when the mines petered out.

And Waterman S. Bodie, the prospector who gave this boom camp its name, never even saw the place. His fame was entirely posthumous.

About 1860 the great multi-million dollar Comstock Silver Lode was opened up in Nevada at Virginia City. The discovery naturally lured thousands of miners and prospectors into the little known arid wastes of Nevada, all of whom hoped to find a similar bonanza for themselves. They swept southward across the desert hills by the hundreds, reaching down into Death Valley and the treacherous cliffs of the Panamints.

Among these men were W. S. Bodie and two unnamed companions. In the winter of 1860 they were prospecting north of Mono Lake, and as they threaded a rock-filled canyon on their horses, Bodie suddenly stopped. A piece of float, sparkling with gold had caught his eye. He dismounted, picked up his find, examined it more closely. Gold, sure enough! The party decided to search for the origin of this single rock, the vein outcrop whence it had come.

Unfortunately, just as they started their search a blizzard struck the canyon. They had no shelter, little food. As the cold, windswept snow made a gray blank of the canyon walls, they realized they were forced for the time being at least to give up the search and, in desperate plight, bend every effort to reaching shelter at Mono Lake. But Bodie didn't make it. He froze to death on the way. His partners never went back. His experience had unnerved them. But others heard of the float, and scoured the canyon. Soon a rich stretch of surface ore was discovered on Bunker

Hill, the Standard Mine was established, and Bodie became a definite spot on the mining map.

FOR a time Bodie was no more important than scores of other little one-mine settlements that soon began to sprout all over southern Nevada and southeastern California. In fact, Aurora, a silver camp close to the Nevada-California line was considered much more important and before a survey of the state line was made both states laid claim to it. They didn't fuss over Bodie.

When the survey definitely showed Aurora to be in Nevada, Mono County, California, officials hustled their county records from the silver camp which they had all along claimed as the county seat and set up shop in Bodie, as the nearest and next best town safely on the California side of the line. Still nobody paid much attention to Bodie. It had a good gold mine, a few prospects, a fair share of desert rats who made it their headquarters for further prospecting, and it was the county seat.

Then in '78 silver, the magic metal that had made millionaires galore in Virginia City, was discovered right outside Bodie. Immediately the town leaped into the limelight. Its silver showings were said to have all the earmarks of another Comstock Lode. That was all anybody wanted to know. The rush was on.

Soon Bodie's population jumped to three thousand. The place assumed a rich importance throughout the Western mining country. It was inaccessible, hard to reach. But that meant little. It merely enhanced the glamour. People poured in by stage, wagon team, horseback

or afoot. Someone in a burst of civic pride bethought himself of the almost forgotten prospector, Bodie. So the newcomers dug up old Bodie's bones, held a slap-bang funeral service punctuated with glowing speeches, flowing liquor and a little indiscriminate shooting. Then they ceremoniously buried the miner in a new grave, surmounted by a headstone fitting the founder of such a rich and solid city as Bodie was about to become—they hoped.

The whole thing, ably reported, made good reading, nice publicity for the potential investors in Bodie's silver mines. Publicity was one of Bodie's biggest troubles from the very start of its amazing mushroom growth, and perhaps a strong contributory cause later on to the swiftness of its collapse.

Bodie got ahead of itself, and of the real potential mineral possibilities of its environs by the ridiculously extravagant claims that were made for its new-found mines by stock promoters and others of their ilk long before the properties in question were actually proved up.

The town expanded like a suddenly opened umbrella into the wild, unlimited speculation in stock certificates that too often used to take the place of serious mine development, even when the stocks backed mines that might have been worth developing. Fortunes were made overnight in paper by men who never troubled to investigate the mines the stocks were supposed to represent. Bodie, while it lasted, was a stock promoter's paradise. They flocked to it in droves, and behind this flashy element trailed gamblers, dive-keepers, con men and plain, unvarnished robbers. The gunnies came along because Bodie was wide open and far enough away

from the reach of home town sheriffs to be at least temporarily safe. Bodie, while it flourished, was no place for a sissy.

BUT even smart money can be fooled. Promoters of one of the least hopeful of the wild-cat mines in the district, the Bodie Mine, decided to use stock in the mine at twenty-five cents a share instead of cash wherever possible. They paid their workmen in stock, and made all the purchases they could in the same medium. For a two-bit drink, they handed the bartender a share in the Bodie Mine, if he would take it. They bought meals and had their laundry done on the same basis.

Then the unexpected happened. A rich stringer of ore was struck in the mines, and the shares they had been distributing wholesale skyrocketed. They first shot up to ten dollars, then climbed hourly. In a few days, and before the astonished and chagrined promoters could buy them back they hit a peak of \$55. Tough on the promoters, but fun for those who had accepted paper instead of cash. Turning their stock in at top prices miners in the Bodie who thought they had been working for a not too sure four dollars a day found they had been making more than \$800 for eight hours underground. A Chinaman who had laundered two shirts for two twenty-five-cent shares realized \$110 on that single item. Bartenders with handfuls of the once doubtful stock were able to buy out the saloons in which they worked.

It was great while it lasted. But neither Bodie, nor the Bodie Mine held up. The stringer petered out. Investors who came in at top prices lost heavily. Other mines in the neighborhood slumped along with

the Bodie, or never opened up into real producers at all.

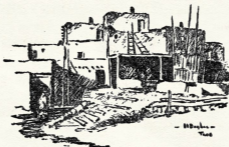
To cap the sad climax new and fabulously rich gold strikes were made in southern Nevada, the strikes that later produced Goldfield and Tonopah. Moreover these Nevada strikes held up. The people in Bodie departed hurriedly for the scene of the new booms. From being a second Virginia City, Bodie became an almost empty ghost town. Only a few die-hards remained. The very name of Bodie became anathema to mining men, and more importantly perhaps to mining investors. Faith in the town was gone, killed quite as much by the promoters' initial overenthusiasm as by any real lack of opportunity in the region. But killed nevertheless.

All that remained on the dreary site of crushed hopes north of Mono Lake that marked Bodie were empty brick buildings and the notoriety of a short-lived mining town that had become famous for its wildness. Mines were gone, but Bodie's reputation lingered on. Years after the boom had subsided

there was still bite and meaning in the phrase "a badman from Bodie."

But that too has been forgotten in the resurgence of mining activity that has lately been taking place around the old boom town. It is a new generation of prospectors who are learning about Bodie today. They come in by car and truck over the dirt road that leads from Mono Lake nineteen miles across the open country to Bodie itself. And perhaps with the aid of modern mining methods and fresh discoveries of metal this re-born mining center, which never had a fair chance to reach its proper stature, may soon take its rightful place among the gold and silver mining camps of southeastern California.

The work has begun. Bodie is getting increasing recognition among western mining men. Even the California Division of Mines reports that last year Bodie was one of the most active gold mining districts in Mono County. One mine was employing fifty men. So watch out for Bodie. There may be a lot of life in the old town yet!



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Bait For A Gunwolf

By GUNNISON
STEELE

Author of "Owhoot Warning," etc.



*A sneaking thieving killer
deserves to get his neck
stretched and Limpy Greer
knew there was no antidote
for a hangnoose*

IF old "Limpy" Greer hadn't been so absorbed in watching the antics of the great black stallion in the pole corral, he might have noticed the dust cloud breezing across the alkali flat below his log cabin sooner. As it was, the rider was no more than a hundred feet away when the ragged clatter of hoofbeats jerked the gaze of the wiry, gray-bearded oldster away from the corral.

Few visitors came to Limpy Greer's isolated little horse ranch. And this rider, Limpy quickly saw, was a stranger—a burly, gunbelted gent with dark, hawkish features. Limpy could see that there was something wolf-wary about the rider as he rode up and stopped. And he knew that a man didn't ride a bronc till it was lathered and wabbly-legged, for nothing. Suddenly, unaccountably, Limpy wished he hadn't left his gunbelt hanging on a chair in the house.

The burly man's little black eyes had been probing at old Limpy. But now, as he swung to the ground, his gaze shuttled to the prancing black in the corral.

"You own that stud, old man?" he asked point-blank.

"Yeah, I own him," Limpy nodded. "Why?"

The big man gestured toward his jaded sorrel. His voice was a whining, nasal twang. "My bronc's done," he said. "I need a fresh hoss. How much for the black?"

Limpy Greer, nettled by the

stranger's cockiness, shook his grizzled head curtly. "That hoss ain't for sale, mister," he said, "not at any price!"

The stranger's cold eyes snapped, and harshness crept into his nasal voice. "Is that so?" he sneered. "Didn't yuh hear me say I had to have a bronc?"

"I'll sell yuh a bronc, or trade yuh one," Limpy offered pleasantly. "But not Nero, here. I got some fantails in a pasture over yonder a-piece——"

The hawk-faced man had been half-turned toward the corral, but now he whirled, and there was a long-barreled gun in his hand. Limpy Greer's leathery features didn't change expression as he looked at the gun, but his old eyes gleamed frostily.

"Fantails, hell!" the stranger rasped. "That stud's what I want, and I aim to have him. Listen to me, you ol' goat, and mebby you won't get hurt. I've got men on my back-trail, and I'm in a hurry. On that stud they never would catch me. So if you won't sell 'im, I'll just take 'im!"

A chillness seemed to wash over Limpy Greer. From the first, the big man's evil features had held a queer familiarity. Now, suddenly, he remembered seeing that face on a reward flyer in Apache Pass a month ago—"Hawk" Peters, outlaw and killer, wanted in half a dozen counties for various crimes.

But it wasn't the stark menace he saw blazing in Peters' eyes that caused that chill feeling. It was the thought of losing Nero, the big black stallion, that bothered Limpy Greer most.

"Listen, mister," he said. "I'll give yuh a hoss, the best I've got, besides the black there. But not Nero—hell, I'd rather lose an arm

than him. He was leader of a bunch uh broomtails up on the mesa. Two years I trailed him. It was a sort of game. Then I caught him, and tamed him, much as he'll ever be tamed. Couldn't nobody else ride Nero, anyhow——"

Hawk Peters paced forward, jabbed the gun-muzzle roughly into Limpy's stomach. "Cut out the gab, ol' man, and get busy," he snarled. "Didn't I say I had men on my trail? Throw a rope on that stud, and a kak. I'll show yuh whether Hawk Peters can ride 'im or not.

LEADENLY, Greer obeyed. There wasn't anything else he could do. He'd heard that Hawk Peters killed for the vicious pleasure of killing. He knew that the outlaw, upon the slightest provocation, would shoot him down in cold blood. But his mind was busy as he uncoiled a rope and went into the corral. He tried to figure some way to keep from losing Nero. But there didn't seem to be any way. The big killer was watching his every move, with a gun ready to blast him down if he made one wrong move.

"Hurry up, ol' man," Peters called irritably. "You think I got all day?"

Limpy led the stallion out. While Peters, gun in hand, watched, he changed the saddle from the jaded sorrel to Nero. On the saddle horn was a bulging gunny sack, and Limpy figured that the sack held the reason a law posse was riding Hawk Peters' back-trail. Furtively, Limpy looked off across the alkali flat, hoping to see a dust cloud. But the flat was empty, motionless except for the dancing heat-devils.

Desperately, Limpy racked his brain. Out here, he didn't have a chance against Hawk Peters. But if he could get him inside the cabin . . .

He straightened up after tightening the girth. "You look hungry, mister," he said casually.

"Hungry?" Hawk Peters grunted, and cursed nasally. "Yeah, I'm hungry. Ain't et nothin' since mornin'. Ain't had time!"

The big killer cursed some more and looked thoughtfully along his back-trail. Then he glanced at Limpy Greer again, and grinned. "Say, that's an idea, ol' man. Them lawdogs ain't in sight yet. You got any grub in the house?"

Old Limpy covered his elation with a scowl. "No, by hell—not for a hoss-thievin' skunk like you! I ain't gonna—"

"Yuh'll do just like I say," Hawk Peters snapped. "With that black devil between my laigs, I got plenty time to eat a bite before I start. Get into the house, now—and don't try no tricks, or I'll let yuh have it!"

Limpy didn't protest. He knew that Peters' gun-muzzle was close to his back as he went toward the house, walking with a limping, rolling gait that a crooked leg, a present from a fighting bronc years ago, gave him. Inside the three-room cabin, Hawk Peters immediately spotted the gunbelt and gun hanging on a chair, and appropriated them. He prodded Limpy into the kitchen.

"Now, get busy!" he ordered. "Cook me up some grub. And remember, I'm watchin' yuh! One little move, and you'll get just what I gave that goat-faced ol' gent back there in the Apache Pass bank this mornin'!"

Limpy Greer, reaching upward toward a shelf for a slab of bacon, tensed suddenly.

"What's that, mister?" he asked. "Did you kill somebody?"

Hawk Peters laughed, flatly, cruelly. "A fat, whiskery little old hombre," he said. "Seems like he

thought a lot of that bank's money. When he grabbed for a gun, I let 'im have it. It was kinda funny, the way his toes curled up."

There was a stunned, dazed light in Limpy Greer's squinty eyes. "Not ol' Gabe Trent?" he whispered, playing desperately for time. "Gabe was a swell gent, mister, and he'd never harm a fly. For twenty years me and Gabe was saddlemates. Then, finally, Gabe met a blue-eyed girl, and got married. Done right well, Gabe did. He got to be a banker over in Apache Pass. Never was a finer man than ol' Gabe. Mister, you hadn't ought to of shot Gabe like that."

"Now, ain't that too bad!" sneered Peters. "You get busy, now, and throw that grub together, or mebbey you'll get a dose o' medicine outa the same bottle!"

THE bewildered light was still in Limpy Greer's eyes as he went about preparing the meal. Things were happening just a little too fast for him. First, he was about to lose the black—and now old Gabe Trent, the best friend he had in the world, was dead, murdered by the same skunky gent who was trying to steal Nero. A rising tide of anger drove some of the bewilderment from Limpy's mind.

But there didn't seem to be anything he could do. On some pegs over the door in the next room was a rifle. But he wouldn't have a chance to get to that rifle, for Hawk Peters was watching with suspicious eyes every move he made.

"You got salt?" the killer asked.

Limpy was silent. There ought to be some way to get the best of this outlaw, he knew. Once Peters was on the black stallion, it would be too late. He could laugh at all efforts at pursuit. The black was

mean, tricky, a regular devil-horse, but Limpy Greer wouldn't have taken a fortune for him. The oldster squirmed inwardly as he thought of what Hawk Peters would do to Nero. And there was old Gabe Trent . . .

All of Limpy's supplies were on a long shelf nailed across one end of the tiny kitchen. Hawk Peters watched as the old man fried bacon, mixed a pan of batter for bread, and warmed up a pot of beans. When the food was on the table, he placed his six-gun beside his plate, and ordered Limpy to sit in a chair at the other end of the table.

A helpless, beaten look on his seamed face, old Limpy watched the big outlaw wolf down the meal he had set out. Obviously Hawk Peters was half-starved, for the food vanished at an amazing speed. Limpy watched, a puzzled, speculative light in his eyes. Once, after most of the food had vanished, a grin twitched his bristly lips.

"What yuh grinnin' about, you ol' coot?" Hawk Peters asked suspiciously.

"Who, me?" Limpy grunted. "Nothin'. Is that purty good grub, mister?"

"All right for a hungry man," Peters said. He paused, smacked his lips. "Say, since you mention it, this grub ain't so hot. It tastes bitter!"

Limpy tried, unsuccessfully, to appear puzzled. "Bitter?"

Sudden suspicion leaped into Hawk Peters' black eyes. He spat a mouthful of food to the floor, reared to his feet and grabbed up his gun from the table.

"You damned ol' goat!" he yelled. "What'd you put in that grub?"

Limpy Greer didn't look puzzled now, and he didn't seem bothered by Peters' sudden outburst. With

a taunting grin he said calmly, "You'll find out, purty soon!"

"I'll find out right now," the bad-man snarled, and paced around the table to stand menacingly over the wiry oldster. "That grub was bitter as hell. And I feel funny inside. Damn you, if you . . . What'd you put in them vittles?"

"I'll show you," Limpy offered coolly.

He got to his feet, went to the shelf and took down a tin can. From a tiny hole in the lid he poured a small amount of snowy-white, powdery substance into his palm. He looked at Hawk Peters, his lips grim and tight.

"This is what I put in that grub," he declared.

Peters grabbed the can, turned it to where he could read what was on the label. His inky eyes seemed to bulge out as he stared at the skull and cross-bones on the label, and read the black-type words: WOLF POISON!

The outlaw snarled a curse, and smashed the can against the wall. His dark features worked with rage, and an overwhelming terror. "Damn you, you've pisoned me!" he howled. "I'll die like a doped coyote!"

"Just the way yuh oughta die," Limpy said flatly. "A polecat that'll kill an ol' gent like Gabe——"

"Mebby I'll die, but you won't be alive to see it. I aim to tear you to pieces!" Peters snarled furiously.

He leaped like a pouncing cat, great hands reaching for Limpy's throat. But the old man ducked under the clawing hands, darted around the table.

WAIT just a minute, Peters," Limpy said sharply. "Then go ahead and kill me, if you want to. How bad do you want to live?"

"It's too late to talk about that," the killer raged. "But I can——"

"Mebby it's not too late," Limpy interrupted. "Peters, did you ever hear of such a thing as an antidote for poison?"

Hawk Peters paused. Hope flashed across his face. "An antidote?" he mumbled. "Yeah, sure! Have you got somethin' to counteract that wolf poison?"

"All fixed up," Limpy nodded calmly. "I was afraid I might get ahold of that stuff by mistake, it bein' there on the shelf like that, so I allus kept that antidote handy."

"Then what're yuh standin' there for?" Peters cried. "Cain't you see I'm dyin'?" That hellish stuff's beginnin' to take hold. It's beginnin' to hurt. Hurry and bring that remedy!"

"Ain't no hurry," old Limpy grunted. "You need to feel some pain in yore belly, like ol' Gabe did when you shot him. The world'd be better off if yuh died. Mebby I'll just——"

"Damn you, ol' man," Hawk Peters grated savagely, and raised the gun that was still in his hand. "Get that medicine, pronto, or I'll cut you in two!"

"Go ahead," Limpy taunted. "Kill me—and in just a little while you'll feel like a million knives are rippin' at yore guts. You couldn't find that antidote, not in time. Go ahead, kill me! How does yore stomach feel now?"

"Awful," Hawk Peters groaned, and clutched with his empty hand at his stomach. "Mister, out yonder on my saddle is a sack fulla money. Bring me that medicine, and all that money's yores!"

"All the money in the world couldn't buy that medicine!" Limpy Greer said contemptuously.

"Then what do you want?"

"That gun in yore hand," Limpy said flatly. "And the one in yore belt. Pitch 'em over here on the floor."

Without hesitation, Hawk Peters obeyed.

"Now bring that antidote," he begged frantically. "Hell—that poison—I can feel it burnin' and eatin'——"

Limpy Greer took the guns from the floor. A contemptuous look spread over his seamed old face. "Peters, you've got a powerful imagination!"

"Imagination?" the big killer whimpered. "What—what do you mean?"

"I mean you won't need that antidote," Limpy declared bleakly. "In the first place, you ain't got guts enough for poison to work on. In the second place, you ain't swallowed no poison."

Peters licked his stiff lips. "Don't lie to me!" he gibbered. "You aim to let me die. Didn't I see what was wrote on that can?"

"Sure," Limpy nodded. "And I put a hefty dose of that stuff I showed you in the grub you ate, like I said. But it wasn't wolf poison. I used up the last of that poison a month ago."

"If it wasn't poison that made that grub so bitter, what was it?" Hawk Peters said, dazed.

"Just a double-dose of common bakin' soda," Limpy Greer chuckled. "Mice knawed a hole in my soda package a few days ago, and I poured the soda into that empty can. It came in right handy, too."

"You tricked me, damn you!" Hawk Peters grated impotently. "You made me think I was gonna die."

"You'll die, all right," Limpy said grimly. "So far as I know, there ain't no antidote for a hangnoose!"

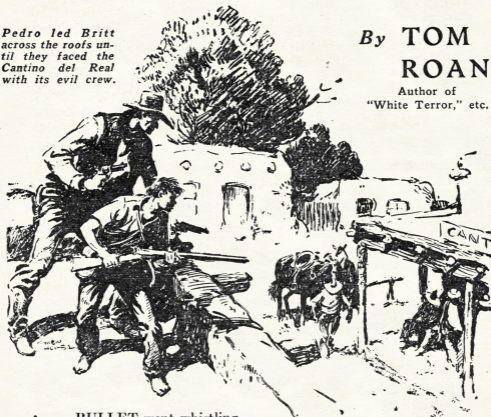
For Tom Britt and every other Ranger rash enough to enter that lawless hell-hole on the Pecos searing lead penned the warning that

Buzzards Wait At Los Chinos

Pedro led Britt across the roofs until they faced the Cantino del Real with its evil crew.

By **TOM
ROAN**

Author of
"White Terror," etc.



A BULLET went whistling through the dazzling sunshine that made an inferno of Culebra Flats. It came from a hidden gunman on a piñon-fringed knoll three hundred yards north of the old trail. On the heels of that bullet crack came the splintering crash of a rifle, a rolling and echoing report

that changed everything from hot silence to a fierce thunderstorm of sound.

The lone horseman on the tall bay rocked forward in his saddle. The bay snorted, made several wild lunges, and the man rolled limply to

the ground. A little cloud of dust boiled up, slowly settled again and the silence once more settled over Culebra Flats.

Not a muscle had moved in the man after he struck the ground. He was a tall, lean-faced, sandy-haired fellow of about thirty, clad in brown range clothes. A pair of single-action .45s were at his hips. His hat was still on his head. He faced the way he had been riding with the lowering sun in his eyes. The bay had gone on, to whirl after a few yards and stand there snorting back at his master.

It looked as if another Texas Ranger had died on the dreaded Culebra Flats.

The minutes dragged. The silence was long and painful, broken only by the spasmodic snorting and stamping of the bay as the animal stood there looking back at his master. Once the horse nickered. He whirled, moved off a few yards, and then came back to his original place. A shadow sweeping over the ground and the walls of brush made him scream and stamp furiously. A lone buzzard had appeared high in the sky. Even vultures knew the meaning of a shot on Culebra Flats.

Soon the first buzzard was joined by a second, then a third, a fourth, and a fifth. A slow and patient circling started. The bay kept stamping his feet and snorting. He nickered shrilly when the slow-swimming circle overhead started easing earthward. He beat the ground with a fit of pawing. He was doing that and nickering again when the circle changed with a suddenly hurried flapping of wings that took the buzzards higher and higher in the air.

Now the animal turned and snorted at something else. It was a

short, thick-set man with a dark face and a black beard who stepped noiselessly out of a wall of cactus and mesquite twenty feet beyond.

A cocked rifle was in the man's hands. His bulletlike black eyes scanned the limp form of the Ranger carefully. Finally he took a few swift paces forward, the rifle ready. He was not watching the trail. His eyes seemed glued on the Ranger. A diabolical grin was beginning to streak his face. His right toe struck the root of a cactus. It made him stumble a little to one side. A yell followed, and the man sprang, trying to leap back in the brush as his rifle, now out of balance, exploded, sending a bullet high in the air.

The Ranger was coming up. From a dead-limp thing lying there in the trail, he became a jerking, rocking, swaying streak of lightning. The ivory-butted .45s flew from his holsters into his hands. Culebra Flats seemed to shake and roll with the harsh echoing and crashing of the shots thundering from the Ranger's guns.

It was as if the man with the rifle never had a chance. The bullets seemed to tear him off his feet and lift him in the air. He whirled, the rifle flying out of his hands. His hands made one panic-stricken dive for the black-butted guns at his hips, but before he reached them, a bullet whirled him around on one heel, and he pitched face-forward in the dust.

It was one of the oldest tricks one man could play on another, and "Big Tom" Britt had used it before. Anything was fair in a game where one man's life was pitted against the life of another who would shoot without warning from ambush. Playing it out with his would-be killer like that had been the only thing he could do.

FOR Tom Britt was going through to Los Chinos, and a man could not take wings and fly to that lawless hell-hole on the Pecos. He had to cross the deadly Culebra Flats to get there, and in the past two months three Rangers had tried it—and the buzzards had picked their bones somewhere in the mesquite and cactus thickets.

He heard another noise now. He whirled, guns still ready. A furious beat of hoofs were sounding in the brush. They were from the direction of the knoll, and the Ranger dived onto his horse. He mounted, and stood up in his saddle so that he could see over the tops of the brush and cactus.

In another moment he would have been too late. A bobbing, big-hatted head was disappearing in the brush six hundred yards away and going like the wind. Britt caught a glimpse of the man's horse. It was a big, raw-boned gray, and for a moment the Ranger was about to drop back in his saddle and give chase.

But that would have been foolish. One man could scarcely expect to catch another with that much of a start in all this thicket of brush and cactus. Britt dismissed all thought of a chase, and rode toward the knoll.

It was dangerous business. Britt knew that, but he took the risk. Other men might be hiding up there on the knoll. The one who had galloped away might be a decoy to make him think that the knoll was deserted. He advanced cautiously, a man long used to fighting in any kind of country. When he reached the knoll there was no sign of anybody up there, and a quick look at the surroundings told him that there had been only two men in the beginning.

Here was the place where they had

been lying on their bellies under the low limbs of a clump of piñons. Back here was where the horses had stood. Britt looked around for a moment, and found the dead man's horse, a wall-eyed, star-faced black gelding with a huge Spanish saddle on its back and a cruel Spanish quilt hanging from the saddle horn.

Britt untied the horse, and started on back to the dead man. As he recrossed the knoll he again saw the rider who was fleeing on toward Los Chinos. The man was far away, still riding as if the devil were after him, a hunched figure in his saddle.

"Going on back to report, I suppose," thought Tom Britt grimly. "Well, anyway, I'll try to remember that big hat and the raw-boned gray, and maybe we'll meet at closer quarters in Los Chinos, brother."

He went back to the dead man, dismounted, and rolled him over on his back. His first shot had been enough to kill the man. It had struck him heart-high in the left breast, tearing a hole through him large enough for a man to cram his thumb into. A second bullet had been lower, hitting the man's middle.

Ranger Britt killed a man when he had to kill him, and there was no trace of sympathy as he stood there looking down into the black-bearded face.

"I don't know you," he half-growled, "and the chances are you knew me only by my garb. You could have been alive, and you would have been if you hadn't joined up with some gang in Los Chinos. But," he shrugged, "you joined up. From Los Chinos you came, and back to Los Chinos you're going."

He loaded the limp form across the saddle of the black. He tied it in place with a saddle rope, and wrapped the black's reins loosely about the horn of the big Spanish

saddle. A slap on the rump started the animal on his way, and Britt mounted and followed him.

Every mile of the way into Los Chinos was like riding through a mile-long den of rattlesnakes. At any moment the brush might burst fire and bullets. Tom Britt studied every knoll and every clump of mesquite. He scanned the walls of cactus and brush, a man with his guns ready and every muscle tense with expectation.

The same trick would not save him the next time. Whoever jumped him would make sure to pump him full of bullets before they dared to advance. The dead man there on the gelding had been a cocksure fool, and the man who had fled would make certain that no other bushwhacker took such a foolish chance.

But mile after mile passed, and nothing happened. The horses clacked along, little trails of dust rising behind them. Just before sundown, Los Chinos was in sight. It was beyond the western drop-off of the flats. Adobe walls glistened in the lowering light where roofs still shimmered with heat.

LOS CHINOS did not look like a hair-triggered town from the distance. Great old pepper trees filled its broad plaza. Sleepy-looking saddle horses stood at hitchracks along the streets. It looked quiet, utterly peaceful, not at all like a town that had a habit of going crazy every three or four years. In the doorways of the adobe dwellings hung bright strings of peppers. Children and goats and dogs romped in the vacant lots. There was nothing about the town to suggest lawlessness until Britt turned into a side street.

He was simply following the black gelding, knowing that the horse

would take his dead master to the man's usual hangout. It was not at all surprising to Britt when the horse came to a halt in front of the Cantina del Real and edged in to the low hitchrack.

It was a dirty, wicked-looking street. Men lounged about, Mexican, whites and half-breeds. None of them appeared to notice the horse with its ghastly burden. It was as if no horse carrying a dead man or a live one had come down that street. Britt turned his mount in beside the black, tossed his reins over the hitchrack, and dismounted. His swinging left foot had no more than touched the ground before a ragged Mexican youth thrust a soiled and badly crumpled note into his hands.

"A man heem tell me geeve heem to you, señor," explained the boy. "*No se cobra nada.*"

Britt unfolded the note. He had an idea of what he was going to find written on the paper. He was not fooled. Scanning the penciled scrawl, he read:

Give my love to the buzzards, Ranger. We know why you are here. Three Rangers have we fed to the carrion crows, and to them we'll feed you before morning. Adios.

"You said there was no charge." Britt slipped his hand in his pocket, and handed the youth a silver dollar. "Thanks. It was worth it. It'll be worth ten just like that one if you'll show me the man who gave you the note."

"But—but, señor, I do not know heem!" exclaimed the youth, staring with wide-eyed amazement at the shiny, new dollar in his grimy hand. "And—and eef I did, eet would be thees." He dragged his forefinger across his throat to indicate the slash of a knife.

He was gone with that, leaping

backward as if he expected a blow in spite of the dollar. Britt made no attempt to halt him. He knew these ragged kids of the streets. That dollar would have its own chance to soften the youth. Britt felt that he might see him again, and as if the boy had not spoken to him at all, he strolled on into the Cantina del Real.

On the street he had seen something that made him want to laugh. There were fully a dozen grayish-white horses on the street, all of them big and raw-boned, and now, just inside the cantina door, he smiled as his blue eyes swept the room, taking stock of everything in sight.

Eight men in the cantina wore the same big, sloppy-looking kind of Mexican sombrero that he had seen on the man galloping across the flats on the gray. Evidently Los Chinos had had plenty of time to prepare for him.

And it was a villainous crew inside the drinking, dancing and gambling dive. A sleepy-looking bartender leaned on the long bar to his left. At the greasy tables lounged others, men and women who looked as if they would rather cut a throat without pay than to find a pile of silver under their chairs. Six men at a card table in the corner did not even glance up. Three wore those big hats, and Britt had a feeling that one of them was the man he had seen on the flats.

"*Buenas tardes, Señor Ranger,*" grunted the bartender, giving his drooping mustaches a swipe with the back of his hand. "*Tengo mucho gusto de encontrarle.*"

"That's nice," nodded Britt. "I'm glad somebody is pleased to meet me. There's a dead man at the door. He belongs here, and his friends

might stir out to take charge of the body and the horse."

"A dead man!" The bartender's eyes widened with mock surprise, and he forgot to speak now in Spanish. "How did it happen, señor?"

"I shot him." Britt looked the man squarely in the eyes. "I have an idea that you know all about it—and did long before I got here. You're Juan Garcia, and you make it a business to know things, especially things like this—"

"Señor, you cannot talk to me as if I am a dog!" The bartender suddenly started to straighten. "I am a gentleman—"

"You're a liar—and a damned one!" Britt cut in.

A PISTOL shot in that quiet room would not have been much louder than the sudden smack of Tom Britt's big hand across the bar. It caught the bartender on the side of the face, hurled him to one side, threw him off his feet, and sent him smashing down on the glassware on the drainboard under the bar.

Britt half-whirled now, his eyes watching everything. He saw the shock that had gone over the crowd. It was as if something had jarred the room with a blow. The men at the card table tensed. Two flinched as if about to get to their feet. That was all that did happen. There was just that one shock, that tenseness, those flinching jerks, and the room was still.

"Señor Ranger," the bartender was stumbling to his feet, a thin line of blood seeping from the left corner of his mouth, "since when has the law the right to strike an innocent man down? Since when has it become—"

"You can cut all that, Garcia!" said the Ranger coldly. "I came here

to bully and to bull-rag this whole damned town. In the past two years Los Chinos has had five marshals shot down in cold blood. Three of them were Mexicans born on this side of the Rio. The others were white. Honest people, Mexican or white, haven't a ghost of a chance in this town since you and your crew moved in. You're the gun boss of this town. You know it. I know it. Your murdering thugs have killed three Rangers who were on their way here. Your note said they were killed——"

"My note!" the man snarled. "What note!"

"This one!" Britt rammed forward the wrinkled paper the Mexican youth had given him. "You were born in El Paso and went to school there. I know all about you. I make it a point to know about people like you. But I didn't come here to argue. You get some of your crew outside to take care of that body on the horse. Don't stand and argue with me about it. I won't take it. That's one of your men out there. I know it.

"Don't start to yap back at me!" Britt's right hand lifted again warningly. "I'll knock you into the hot place. You know what you've got to do. And now I'm walking out the door. Get this: If a shot is fired or a knife thrown, I'll wheel and pump this room full of lead—and the first man I'll kill will be Juan Garcia, and that's you, you fat-faced cow."

"*Si, señor.*" There was murder shining in Garcia's eyes now. They were hot little eyes, as quick as triggers in their glancing about. "But let us suppose that I decide that the dead man will not be touched?"

"Then I'll come back here and kill you if the body is not off the street in fifteen minutes." There was a

chill smile on the Ranger's face. He meant every word he was saying. "Does it go?"

"Señor Ranger," murder was still shining in Garcia's eyes, but his voice was like the purring of a cat, "on a second's thought, it will be a pleasure to have the body removed. Pedro!" His voice jumped to a roar as he looked at the card table. "Angelo! José! On your feet! There's a dead man outside! Take him down to One-eyed Gonzales, and tell the beggar to bury him."

"Many thanks, Garcia." Britt tipped his hat. "Your whole-hearted cooperation in the matter warms me without measure."

And with that he turned and walked out the door.

Not a sound followed him. He had bearded the tiger in his den, and had walked out of the den. Ignoring danger that might yet come from the cantina, he paused there in front of it long enough to roll and light a cigarette. As he moved on and mounted his bay, three men came out the door, two of them short and stumpy, the third a tall skeleton. The tall man caught up the reins of the black gelding, and the men started slouching off down the street with the horse bearing the body of the dead man behind them.

Britt moved on, heading for the better quarter of the town. He was all the law and order of this place now. How long he would last was a question that did not trouble him in the least. A Texas Ranger took what came to him, good, bad or indifferent. In Los Chinos he would smoke it out with them—and either the law would win or the lawless crowd would continue until another Ranger came to try his hand at the job.

He found a stable for his horse, and saw that the bay was fed and

watered. It was time now for him to think of something for himself to eat, and he found a respectable-looking little café down a side street. He went quickly inside, glancing at the white man of fifty behind the counter who was just beginning to light the lights.

TAKE the table back in that corner, Ranger," half-ordered the man behind the counter. "It's safer."

It looked made to order for him. It was in a small alcove in the rear wall. There were no windows looking directly in on it, and Britt sat down with the first sense of security he had felt in Los Chinos.

A girl came from the kitchen. She was tall, light-haired and blue-eyed. Britt guessed she was the daughter of the man behind the counter.

"You're in danger, Ranger." She told him that in a low tone. "It's all over town that you were coming. They'll get you tonight."

"Thanks." Britt grinned up at her. She was very pretty, and he appreciated her friendliness. "I've been given some notice of my expected—er—death. They evidently go to great pains to get the news broadcast."

"They do." She glanced toward the door anxiously. He could not see it for the shoulder of the wall. "The Garcia crowd runs everything in Los Chinos. But I suppose you know that."

"I didn't until a horse carrying a dead man pointed it out to me. But you can tell me more, I'm sure. You see," he leaned forward as if studying the menu, "my orders were vague. A Ranger's orders often come that way. All I know is that a lot of killings have gone on here, that Rangers came before me—"

"And died, yes!" she cut in. "Well,

I know some things. My father knows, also. I'm Jerry Rivers, and my father," she glanced at the counter, "is Frank Rivers. This is our third year in Los Chinos. We had a mine in Mexico—"

She paused abruptly as the man behind the counter started to whistle a low tune. The look she flashed Britt was one that told him somebody was coming in at the front door, and then she was moving away to return a few minutes later with tray loaded down with a huge bowl of soup, a platter of bread and a pot of coffee.

Britt had already taken stock of the two men who had come in to take seats on stools at the counter. Both were Americans, big, burly fellows. One man red-bearded, with a black hat slouched on the back of his head. The other looked like a dude. His face shone from a recent shave. His clothing had been newly pressed, and his boots and spurs shone.

"Red Jackson and the Faro Kid," whispered the girl as she brought Britt a steak. "They're after you. Don't turn your back to them. They'll gun from behind every time."

"Yes, sugar, please," he nodded, speaking in a tone just loud enough to carry to the counter. "And you might tell me, ma'am, where the jail is in town. I'll want to put up there for a few days."

"We have rooms here, Ranger," she began. "Upstairs we have—"

"Only they're all taken, Jerry!" cut in the voice of Frank Rivers from behind the counter, and it was a voice shorn of any hint of friendliness. "I rented the last one an hour ago. Sorry, Ranger."

The two men at the counter snickered. "Red" Jackson turned his head to one side. He spoke to the

"Faro Kid" in a low voice, but it was one intended to carry to Britt's corner just the same.

"Frank maybe don't like the idea of buzzards lightin' on his roof, don't yuh reckon?"

"I'm told they ain't healthy," cackled the Faro Kid. "They've been right bad of late."

It was a quiet bid for trouble, but Britt ignored it. He did not want to start anything in this place. And now that she had given him his steak, the girl kept away from Britt's table.

He ate slowly, and the two men at the counter seemed to be playing over their food. Finally, as if they were tired of it, they got up, tossed money on the counter, and strolled out.

It was Britt's time to go now. He could not stay here and talk to Rivers and his daughter. A man could get people into trouble very quickly doing something like that. But as he moved up the counter and was paying his check, Rivers spoke to him in a guarded tone and without looking up.

"Watch 'em, Ranger. Bad medicine. Cow an' pony rustlers. They run stuff for the Garcia bunch. Dangerous. Come again, but be careful of what you say."

"Thanks, and good night."

Britt strolled on to the door, every nerve tense and expectant as he stepped outside and moved to one side to take the light from behind him that outlined him like a silhouette in the doorway.

Darkness had settled like a black wall while he was in the café. He stood there blinking for a moment before he caught the bulky outlines of two men propped back in the deep shadow of a doorway across the street.

IT was Red Jackson and the Faro Kid. They were waiting for him. That was a certainty, and he moved straight to them, a man who never hesitated to take a situation by the heels. They stiffened, each standing there with his thumbs hooked over heavy gun belts. Britt spoke, and his voice was like ice.

"There's a curfew in town, gents. It's time to turn in."

"What's a curfew?" sneered the Faro Kid. "I'd like to see one."

"Yeah, an' so'd I," put in Jackson. "Does it run on hind laigs or crawl on its belly?"

"Listen, and get this straight." Britt was close to them now with his thumbs hooked over his own belts. "I'm running this town as long as I last. Get off the street or I'll throw you in jail. It's trouble you want, and I know it. Do you want it now? We might as well get it done."

"We'll wait," Jackson snickered. "But we've listened to yore sad little tune, an' now yuh can listen to mine. Yuh ain't no man to play. I know it. Yo're plenty fast with the hardware yuh pack, but yo've got a job on yore hands here. Meanin', after it's all said an' done, that yo're a slick gunman, but yuh can't shoot it out with this town of Los Chinos."

"That doesn't answer my question." Britt's voice was low. "Do you want to take advantage of that curfew I mentioned?"

"Oh, we'll knock along, *Mister Britt*." Jackson laughed, and there was a strange silkiness to the sound. "Yuh won't mind us goin' down to Juan Garcia's an' playin' a few games of marbles, will yuh?"

"Sure, that'll be fine," nodded Britt grimly. "But stay there when you get there. I don't want to fool you, and I'm telling you straight when I say that I'll kill you both if

I catch you on the street again to-night."

"Regular rawhide, ain't he, Red?" mocked the Faro Kid.

"Sun-cured, yeah," agreed Jackson, taking his pal's arm as they moved on. "The buzzards are gonna have damn tough eatin'."

Britt wasted no more talk on them. He simply followed them up the street, keeping close to them until he was near the stables where he had left his horse. He was about to swing abruptly away when something flashed through the darkness from a roof overhead.

A knife whizzed past him, just clearing his left shoulder. He heard its metallic clatter as it struck the street, and then the night quiet was drowned out in the sudden crashing of guns.

Only one long shriek really lived through the din. It came from a man who was foolish enough to look over the edge of the roof above Britt after he had sent his knife spinning down. His figure outlined itself up there against the night sky, as he stiffened outward, hands thrust blindly in front of him. Like a diver plunging into a pool, he came on down, a big lifeless thing that hit the street like a wet sponge. One of Britt's bullets had caught him just above the left eye.

Something had misfired in the plans of the Faro Kid and Red Jackson. They were the lead-ons, the ones to bring Britt to the proper place for the slaughter. The man who had been on the roof had moved a moment before he had been supposed to swing into action, and the devil was to pay now.

The Faro Kid and Red Jackson made a foolish as well as a fatal mistake. They whirled like snarling wolves in a trap. They tried to unholster their guns when they should

have flung on and dived into a doorway. Shots drowned out their wild burst of oaths as they faced Britt, for his tattooing bullets killed them both before the barrels of their weapons could clear their holsters.

It was up and going now. All the tension and waiting had been cast out of the picture by the reverberating thunder of the guns. Britt went down to his knees, shaking his head. For a moment he was out of the fight, addled, uncertain. It would have been the end of him if the loop of a rope had not hissed out of a doorway to close around his shoulders and jerk him to safety.

A THOUSAND pardons, señor!" hissed a voice in Spanish. "It is out me, Pedro Chacon, the one who gave you the note. Come this way quickly. I know a way of escape from the mob surrounding you."

It was as dark as it could be. A man could not see his hand before him, but Britt followed the youth. There was a taste of blood in his mouth. A racking pain was making his head throb wildly. A bullet had grazed him high on the skull. He pulled his hat tighter to keep back the blood, and blindly kept on in the darkness.

"This way, señor!" hissed Pedro again in Spanish. "A mob hides in the stables where you left your horse. They were so sure of themselves. Come. We, too, will take to the roofs. It is the only way."

Britt felt the youth's hand on his shoulder. His feet bumped the bottom step of a steep flight of stairs. As they ascended a crack of light showed overhead.

"The roof now, Señor Ranger," whispered Pedro. "Be very careful. There are many men in the town who will try to aid you if you can

show them that there is a ghost of a chance of winning the fight. Juan Garcia has no friends among the better class."

Britt knew that, and had known it from the beginning, but he expected no help from Los Chinos. This was a Ranger job, an old-fashioned clean-up campaign. Hit, ram, and tear hell out of it!

It was like that again when he once reached the roof. A gang on a roof across the street opened up at him. He started lead flying into them. The gang scattered, stumbling and falling, colliding with one another, a wild scramble to get out of the way.

"From roof to roof you may go now, Señor Ranger," encouraged Pedro. His voice, Britt realized, was surprisingly cultured. "May your aim keep true, and may their aim remain as bad as it has been."

It sounded simple enough, but it was not. Men were crowding to a roof ahead of him. Britt's shots drove them back, and the whole town seemed to explode into a wild fit of shooting. He did not understand it for a long time.

"Señor Ranger," Pedro breathed when another lull came in the firing, "you have help. Wait here for me. I, too, would like to do something in this."

He lifted a trap door, and was gone. In a few minutes he was back with the clumsiest-looking weapon Britt had ever seen. It was more than a gun. It was a cannon, a long-barreled, hand-made shotgun with a bore that looked like the mouth of a tunnel.

"My grandfather's," explained the youth, dragging the straps of two heavy leather pouches across his shoulder and hurrying along beside Britt. "I wish to turn it loose by the front door of the Cantina del

Real and see the roof fall. For weeks Juan Garcia has worked me, and his only pay has been slaps and kicks and threats to cut my throat if I failed him."

They were getting close to the place at last. Traveling over roof after roof with Pedro showing him the way, Britt came to a place where he could see the big cantina.

He was not watching Pedro when the youth fired. The boy merely laid his old shoulder cannon on the edge of a roof, took careful aim, and pulled the trigger with both hands.

Pedro yelled with triumph. He heeled over backward as if a mule had kicked him. And down below, across the street, there was a showering and crashing of glass, the smashing of chairs, and a rush of booted feet. Little Pedro sat up and yelled, then started to wail. Britt left him there as he climbed down from the roof, and then headed across the street with shots roaring around him.

He banged into the front doors of the cantina. All the women and girls had left it. In the light stood Garcia, hunched now like a huge ape in front of the bar, his wide eyes staring at a dead man on the floor and a wreckage of bloody splinters that had been a heavy plank before Pedro's charge of shot and cut slugs of lead had come raining through the door.

"Reach, Juan!" Britt boomed a warning at the man, but Juan Garcia did not heed it. He snarled something, and dived toward the foot of the bar with guns appearing from somewhere and filling his hands.

"Get him!" roared the Mexican. "Down the Ranger!"

He had his back to the Ranger now, and not even Britt was quick enough to down him before a long black barrel rammed itself between

his legs from behind. Pedro's hell-scattering gun let out one more roar, and kicked the youth into insensibility on the floor as its heavy charge split the end of the barrel and went on to cut Juan Garcia into a mass of bloody ribbons.

The rest was hell with the lights out. Short, jabbing gashes of flames jerked at each other. Lights were knocked out. Tables crashed, chairs splintered into wreckage. Men went down, sobbing and cursing, some against the wall, some in the middle of the floor or spilling over the tables.

Suddenly it occurred to Britt that he could not be doing all the shooting. Bullets were coming in at the windows and from the back door. Many men in Los Chinos were in this thing, taking a quick, hot part in it. As hands flung up and men started surrendering, the noise of the shooting outside died away, and Britt found himself standing there, the only man in the room with guns in his hands.

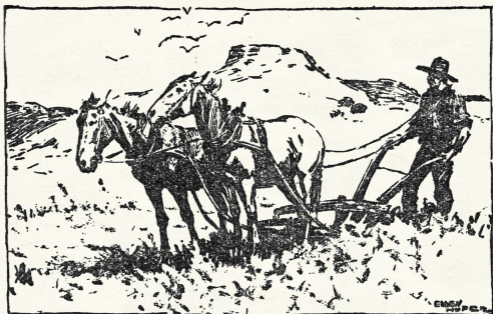
Then, out of the darkness in back

of the cantina came Frank Rivers. Behind him streamed others, whites and Mexicans. Rivers spoke in a husky voice.

"Buzzards have quit waitin' for men in Los Chinos, Ranger. You played 'er right. You waited until they was all set an' started, an' then you banged in. We was all lyin' back, waitin'. Thanks. There's a right nice room up at my place for you, an' the man who used to be mayor of Los Chinos wants to shake your hand. You see, I was the mayor until Juan's bunch moved in . . ."

It was nice in Los Chinos when morning came. The breakfast was exceedingly good. Ranger Britt sat on one side of the table. Jerry Rivers sat on the other. Even young Pedro had sense enough to keep to the counter where Frank Rivers fed him royally. Big Tom Britt was going to like Los Chinos after all. He knew it every time he looked into those big blue eyes across the table.





WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

John North will be glad to mail a list of books on the subject of this new plan of subsistence to anybody who sends his name and a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

ONE of our readers, Tom B., of Trenton, N. J., opens up a subject I've wanted to talk about for quite a spell because it affects so many readers who live in Eastern cities and towns, and whose work won't let them pack up and go West to a new country.

"I've worked in Trenton all my life," Tom says, "doing mechanical work, and don't make more than \$25.00 a week when I work steady. I've got a wife and two kids cooped up in a little three-room apartment. They're not healthy and don't get

the kind of food they need. I'm always worried for fear of losing my job, and we can't see any way of improving our condition as things are going. I can't get much ahead, and it wouldn't be wise for me to quit my job and go somewhere else, only to find conditions worse in a new locality. You've helped so many, maybe you have some advice that would help me."

I've had a lot of the same kind of inquiries from other people and I'm glad to answer them. There is an idea that has been growing for several years which can mean almost

a new life for people like Tom B. It's generally called "subsistence farming" and has been one of the greatest blessings that ever hit this country.

Now don't lose hope. You don't have to have a five-hundred-dollar down payment, and you don't have to be a farmer. The idea of subsistence farming is for you to raise food for yourself and your family in your spare time, and also own a home of your own and become independent.

You start making your plans by watching the want ads for small farms. You only need three or more acres, not over ten at most, and a small house. In Jersey, where Tom B. lives, I've seen abandoned farms offered for sale for a hundred dollars down and ten dollars a month, six hundred dollars full price. You want cheap land and a cheap house without conveniences.

Take a road map and draw a circle not more than forty miles in radius around your place of work. Spend your evenings and holidays combing this for possible farms. In the meantime, write the Department of Agriculture for its book on "Subsistence Farming," and their list of publications relating to it.

You pick out a little place that will be convenient to your job. You've got free books from seed houses and the government that tell you, step by step, how to raise a family vegetable garden. Naturally you need milk, so you get government pamphlets on milk goats

and cows. One good cow will give you twenty quarts of fresh milk a day such as you can't buy in stores. The extra milk left over after you've got all the butter and milk you need can be made into cheese, from directions furnished free by the government. Any more left over is fed to chickens. You can buy baby chicks at first for a nickel apiece.

The house will have inconveniences, but you're handy with tools. The government books tell you how to install your own plumbing, paint, paper your house, and even how to build barns and chicken houses. You can keep a few rabbits for extra meat. A pair of rabbits will give you a hundred pounds of meat a year superior to chicken meat. You might keep one pig and have a couple of hams and bacon and plenty of pork for the winter. And all of this while holding your job!

Reliable figures show you that this is a practical plan. As it is, you earn \$1200.00 a year and every penny of it goes for living expenses and a few clothes. But if you live like this only \$600.00 goes out the first year for expenses, and the other \$600.00 you've got invested in a home, live stock, tools and improvements. The next year your expenses are less and the investment has increased. You've got at least \$1200.00 invested in a home. And you have independence! If you miss a week's pay, you've got a cellar full of food, milk, meat, and a roof over your head! And what a feeling of satisfaction! Of course it's a new life!

We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North supplies accurate information about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains, and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability. Be sure to enclose a stamped envelope for your reply.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



WITH more than a hundred separate, listed gold placer areas, and a total production of better than \$150,000,000 in placer gold to date, Montana is certainly deserving of the prospector's attention. Jimmy Kendall, of Boston, Massachusetts, thinks so too, judging from his recent communication.

"Two things about the glamorous West have always fascinated me," he writes. "Gold prospecting, and Montana, with its mining and cattle country. I am going out there in the near future, and wish you could give me some general data on the placer gold sections of that State. Where are they? What part of the state is the best for gold prospecting?"

That takes in a heap of good gold territory, Jim, but we'll do our best to summarize it for you, starting in, by eliminating the more or less barren (from a gold placer point of view) sectors, namely most of the northern counties clear across the state, with the exception of the minor Gold Butte area in Toole County and some good placer districts that radiate from Libby in Lincoln County.

About 12 miles south of Libby more than \$100,000 in placer gold has been obtained by rockers, small scale sluicing, and hydraulicing the auriferous creek gravels in Libby, Cherry, Little Cherry and Howard creeks. A newer area in Lincoln County is Sylvanite, 16 miles north of Troy, where gold has been found in the Yaak River and its tributaries.

For areas where gold placer districts are thicker than fleas on a hound dog there are Broadwater, Powell, Granite, Jefferson, Silver Bow and Madison Counties, in the southwest-central part of the state. This takes in the old tremendously rich bonanza country of Alder Gulch, which has yielded over \$50,000,000 in placer gold from the time it was discovered in 1863. Other favorable districts in Madison County are Norwegian Creek, 6 miles north of Norris, and Lower Hot Springs, almost the same distance southeast of Norris. In fact, there are several other districts around Norris of proven gold placer worth.

German Gulch, a \$5,000,000 placer producer, lies up in Silver Bow County, about five miles out of Gregson. And fourteen miles south of Butte Fish Creek and its tributaries is another spot from which

appreciable amounts of placer gold have been obtained.

Jefferson County offers a whole cluster of gold bearing creeks southwest of Helena—Basin, Boulder, Cataract, Jack and Rocker Creeks, to name a few. In Lewis and Clark County there are the Magpie Gulch and Lincoln districts, as well as a good half dozen other sectors in which placer gold has been recovered.

Then there is the famous Confederate Gulch district in Broadwater County along the southwestern slope of the Big Belt Mountains, about fifteen miles north of Townsend. Confederate Gulch and its feeders are credited with \$12,000,000 in placer gold to date, and another \$5,500,000 from Avalanche, White and neighboring gulches. Three types of placer gold here—stream gravels, ancient channels, and gravel bars.

Broadwater County also has a placer area, which is still considered favorable, ten miles west of Toston around Eagle, Slim Sam Creeks and Cow Creek below Radersburg. And you can add the several sectors around Townsend such as Hellgate, Indian and Grasshopper Creeks.

Coarse gold features Gold Creek in Granite County. Though Phillipsburg itself in the same county has been primarily a silver producer, some placer gold has been recovered there, and getting further out, say ten miles west to Rock Creek the placer prospector can find more gold-bearing ground. As a matter of

fact, there is still room for some more or less pioneer placer prospecting in many of the streams draining the Phillipsburg Mountains, also the forks of Rock Creek that drain the Sapphire and Anaconda Ranges, many of which, from the scattershot prospecting done in them to date, show colors of yellow metal, and give promise of reward for more careful consideration.

There are plenty of other Montana placer districts spread through the western part of the state, and more thinly eastward, but the far eastern edge of the state is not so promising. For instance, although gold has been reported in the gravels of the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone River in Carbon County near the Montana-Wyoming boundary, the gold is very finely divided, and little if any actual production has come from there.

Similarly, there are two unimportant placer areas in Judith Basin County, Running Wolf Creek, fifteen miles out of Stanford, and Yogo Creek, twenty-five miles southwest of Hobson.

To K. L., Memphis, Tennessee:—Skeletalized, the steps necessary to acquire title to a placer claim in Montana are (1) Actual discovery of mineral on the ground; (2) Posting location notice; (3) Marking claim corners and boundaries within 30 days; (4) Performing demonstrable discovery work within 60 days; (5) Filing proper certificate of location within 60 days.

We desire to be of real help to our 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 published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by HELEN RIVERS



YES, sir! Western Story Magazine sure 'nough gets around, friend William, and your letter started us doing a little thinking. Just for the fun of it, we got out the globe to see what countries we could find that have never been represented in The Old Holla, and, as far as we know, the only ones we haven't heard a peep out of are Persia, Turkey, Russia and Poland. Quite a record, when you consider how much territory that covers. We're sure mighty proud of our "Foreign Legion." Many thanks for your letter and here's hoping you get stacks of mail.

Dear Miss Rivers:

I have been astounded by the number of different places I have found your magazine, Western Story. I have come across it almost everywhere I have been—France, Belgium, Ireland, Italy and here in the "old country," and always it maintains its great standard. So,

congratulations on a wide circle of satisfied readers. I have just answered one of the letters in The Hollow Tree and would like to have one published for myself. I am twenty-four years old and would like to hear from Pen Pals living in Hawaii or Bermuda who could give me some idea of the conditions there—the cost of living, and the points of interest, because I'm planning on going to either one of those islands soon.—William G. Smith, Carrree, Oreston Lane, Evingham, Surrey, England

This Pen Pal collects everything—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Pen Pals from all over the world are what I want! I'd like to hear from girls and boys whose hobbies are collecting things—anything. I'm twenty-one, an art student, and my two most important collections are of elephants of which I have almost two hundred, and my poems. But I also have collections of quite a few other things. I like to read, write letters and dance, and am interested in everything, so please write me about your hobbies and other interests.—Grace Kelly, 2017 St. Anthony Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dick will be a sincere friend—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a lad of fifteen born in Marietta, Ohio. I'm interested in photography and radio and would like to hear from Pen Pals who would like a sincere friend to write to. I will exchange snapshots, and I promise some interesting facts and pictures of my home town. Will you contact me?—Dick Fowler, 115 New Street, Marietta, Ohio

Zelma wants to hear some tall tales—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I'm a Scotch-Irish Texas girl interested in practically everything. I would especially like Pen Pals who could tell me about stirring adventures they have had or strange incidents in their lives, but everyone is invited to write, and I promise interesting letters to all.—Zelma Barnes, La Pryor, Texas

One of our Canadian friends is looking for a friendly argument—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am one of those persons with the "traveling bug," but up until now I haven't been able to do as much of it as I would like. I am twenty years old and like writing and arguing—on a friendly basis—about life and people in general. I also like music, dancing and collecting popular song hits. My favorite outdoor hobbies are camping and photography and I have many interesting pictures. I am mostly interested in Pen Pals from Alaska, Australia and New Zealand, but letters from elsewhere will also be welcome. I will be more than glad to cor-

respond with anybody around my own age and tell them what I can about Canada.—Frank McCann, 1129 Barclay Street, Vancouver, B. C., Canada

Miriam won't be lonesome for long—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am sixteen years old and considered very pretty. I would like to have Pen Pals from all over the world, but especially from the West. My favorite sports are swimming and skating. I will answer all letters and exchange photos, so come on and write to a lonesome girl.—Miriam Gale, R.F.D. No. 2, Royal Oak, Michigan

He's covered 80,000 miles in his short lifetime!

Dear Miss Rivers:

I would like to make friends with people through The Hollow Tree. I am an ex-soldier and have served six years with the regular Army. I can't enlist again on account of bad hearing. I have been stationed with the 26th Infantry in Plattsburg Barracks, New York, the 59th C.A.C. at Fort Mills, Philippine Islands and the 62nd (A.A.) C.A.C., Fort Totten, New York. I am thirty-five years old and a truck farmer. I love traveling and in the past fifteen years have covered about 80,000 miles. I have visited the Panama Canal Zone, Honolulu, Hawaii; Guam, the Philippine Islands, China and Japan. I know quite a bit about native life in the Islands as I served as a member of the police force and came to know the people well. If you would like to know about my adventures and travels, I'd be very glad to tell you. I would also like to hear from any one living in Chebanse, Illinois, who might have known my paternal grandparents.—Donald MacClaren, 4 Jackson Avenue, South Glen Falls, New York

A little Swiss miss pays us a visit this week—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am a twenty-year-old Swiss girl looking for Pen Pals, boys and girls, my age from all over America and Canada, especially those living in California. My favorite sports are walking, swimming and driving, and as a hobby I collect pictures of film stars. I also enjoy reading and music. Anyone who would like to know what is going on in this small bit of earth called Switzerland, write to me. I promise to answer all letters.—Alice Hurter, Schanzenstr. 13, Basle, Switzerland

And here's another stamp collector—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Please try to find room in The Hollow Tree for a lonely Alabamian. I am fifteen years old and collect postcards and stamps for a hobby. I'll be glad to exchange them with anyone who is interested, so come on, Pen Pals from everywhere, and write to me.—Charles Boyd, Duncanville, Alabama

Calling all jitterbugs—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Here is a lonesome California girl who is hoping to find Pen Pals through your department. I am fifteen years old and in my last year of junior high school. Reading and swing dancing are my favorite pastimes and I am con-

sidered exceptionally good at the latter. I will be glad to send a snapshot to anyone who requests one, so come on, Pen Pals, and drop me a line.—Lorraine Branning, 8623 Denver Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Information wanted here about farm land—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I wish to make friends and get some information on farm land in every state in the Union. My hobby is collecting songs, of which I have about 4,000. I will exchange them with Pen Pals, especially those living in Mexico, Hawaii and foreign countries, but all are welcome to write, so come on, young or old, tall or short, regardless of race, and drop me a line.—Clarence Willingham, c/o F. A. Wright, Rt. No. 4, Randlett, Oklahoma

That cottage high on a hill sounds ideal—

Dear Miss Rivers:

Is there room in your Hollow Tree for a young bride who would like to hear from folks in your country, preferably those over twenty-five years of age? I live in a bungalow on top of a hill overlooking our fair city and I get plenty of lovely views. I'm interested in everything and have plenty of time to write letters. I have also traveled a lot and can give anyone who is interested a pretty clear picture of this far southern land. The longer the letter the better and here's hoping I receive a huge stack in the near future.—Mrs. Doris Storer, "Paratibo," Balmacewan Road, Maori Hill, Dunedin, New Zealand

"Laddie" is a bullet collector—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am sixteen years old and would like Pen Pals from all over the world, of any age, sex, or color. I collect stamps, bullets, coins, etc. and will be interested in anything you are. I will answer every letter, so hurry and sling some ink this way.—"Laddie" Vacek, Rt. No. 1, Box 22, Avon, South Dakota

Lots of letters wanted here—

Dear Miss Rivers:

I am twenty-nine years old and was born and raised in Amsterdam, Holland. I am married and living in the country and although I still have lots of fun, outside of my little family of four I haven't a relative in this country and it gets pretty lonesome for me at times. I have just answered four letters in your Hollow Tree and hope I get replies. I play the piano and the drums in orchestras. I would like to hear from Pen Pals from far and near, young or old, girls only—no boys.—Bertha Loppe, Box 136, Hawthorne, New Jersey

Cheer up these C.C.C. boys—

Dear Miss Rivers:

We are a couple of lonely C.C.C. boys stationed here at Boulder City and we'd like to hear from Pen Pals from all over the world. We want to correspond with boys and girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Let's hear from you soon, Pals. We will exchange snapshots with all who write.—Ernest Horvath, James Partlow, C.C.C. Company 2536, Boulder City, Nevada

MISSING DEPARTMENT

There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notices, 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.

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.

NOTICE—I would like to hear from my old friends who were on the South American mule boat which was taking mules to the Boer War in Durban, South Africa. I still have my cattleman's certificate dated April 4, 1901. One of the fellows on the boat was Briggs of East Alto, another was "Skinny" Morrison from Litchfield, Illinois, and "Big George" was another. My nickname was "Buck." Any one who was on that boat please write to William Matherly, 2317 Lafayette Avenue, Mattoon, Illinois.

HERBERT or HEBARE, FRANK—He has been missing since May, 1932, at which time he was in Jackson, Mississippi, and I have not been able to find a trace of him since. He has blue eyes, black hair and is about 5 feet tall. He is of French descent and was raised in Red River, Louisiana. Any information will be appreciated. Write to Mrs. Quincy Nugent, General Delivery, Vicksburg, Mississippi.

NOTICE—We are trying to find a girl who was born in the Judge Mercy Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah, on June 13, 1913. Her name at birth was Moran. While still an infant she was taken by some people to be raised. If any one knows her whereabouts please write to "Kathleen," in care of the Missing Department, Western Story Magazine.

ALLEN—I'm trying to locate relatives of Doctor William Allen who was killed in a bridge crash at Marlin, Texas, several years ago. He was my cousin and his father's sister was my grandmother. I am the daughter of J. C. Nance who was generally called "Josie." Mrs. A. H. Carender, Rt. No. 1, Lowell, Arkansas.

NOTICE—I would like to know the whereabouts of Helen Vyss and Belle McManus O'Neil. They are two very dear friends whose addresses I can no longer find since moving up to the farm. Please write to "Marg," in care of the Missing Department, Western Story Magazine.

YOUNG, ALBERT LEE—He is my husband and left Mesa, Arizona, on July 26, 1938. He is 40 years old, has brown hair and blue eyes, is 5 feet, 11 inches tall and weighs 175 pounds. "Albert, please let us hear from you. The children are heartbroken and we all love you." Mrs. A. L. Young, 238 W. 2nd Avenue, Mesa, Arizona.

LEWIS, THOMAS—He is about 5 feet 7 inches tall and has dark brown hair and dark eyes. He is about 28 years old and his home town is Vails Gate, New York. He went to the Men's Social Center, Salvation Army, in Springfield, Massachusetts, and left there in February, 1936, leaving no address. If any one knows his whereabouts, will they please get in touch with me? Or if you read this, Tom, will you please come to my home as soon as possible? It is a matter of great importance. Martha M. Long, 19 Johnston Street, Newburgh, New York.

STEEN, MATTIE E.—She is my mother and I haven't seen or heard of her since I was 6 years old. My mother and father lived in Texas and were separated when we children were small. My sister's name is Gladys Marie and my name is Ruby May. My mother and father nicknamed me "Duckie." If any one has any information concerning my mother's whereabouts, please write to Mrs. Ruby May Parker, General Delivery, Victor, Colorado.

KLEIN, WALTER—Have lost track of him through change of address. If you see this, kindly write to me, pal, I miss your letters. Your faithful old Pen Pal, Estelle Boris, 405 Nichols Street, Utica, New York.

BENNETT, JAMES LESTER—He is my son and was taken from his home at 103 1/2 E. Water Street, Portland, Oregon, in February, 1925, by his father when he was seven years old. He is 20 now. His father, George Bennett, is about 75 years old. Any one having any information about my son please communicate with me immediately. Mrs. Lillie Bennett, 230 N. American Street, Stockton, California.

HOLMSTROM, ANTON CHRISTOFER—He is my brother whom we haven't seen for some years. He is about 60 years old. We are not sure, but we think he may be a sailor. If any one has any information about him, please write to Miss Christine Holmstrom, 212 E. 50th Street, New York, New York.

HEDGE, DEXTER—Any one knowing the whereabouts of this boy who was last heard of at Chico, California, three years ago, please notify his mother. She is alone and needs him. Any information will be appreciated. Mrs. Ida Hedge, Tellico Plains, Tennessee.

WHITE, ED—He has been missing for 40 years. Last seen in Carthage, Indiana. He had two brothers, Sam and Will. Ed disappeared after the death of his mother and has not been heard from since. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to "A. V. M. R." in care of the Missing Department of Western Story Magazine.

WEYKER, ANTHONY—He is about 70 years old and was last heard of in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Any one knowing his address, please write to D. H., in care of the Missing Department, Western Story Magazine.

HANTHORN, ZILDA—I would very much like to get in touch with this girl. She is an old friend of mine whom I have lost track of. I know she is living in Chicago but I do not know her address. Any information will be appreciated by Alfred Lee Johnson, R. R. No. 1, Bringham, Indiana.

LEITHE, CORLISS and JESSE—I am very anxious to locate these two brothers of mine. Corliss was last heard from in 1928 when he was in North Dakota and Jesse in 1930 from Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Corliss is 35 years old and has gray eyes and brown hair. Jesse is 32 and also has dark hair and gray eyes. If any one knows their whereabouts tell them to write to their sister, Theresa. Mother has worried about them all these years. Any information will be gratefully received. Mrs. F. Vaughan, 620—11th Avenue, W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

NOTICE—I would like to hear from all ex-soldiers who were in Fort Logan, Colorado, in 1923. I was in Company C-38. Lawrence Hicks, 2120 S. 5th Avenue, Maywood, Illinois.

McALPINE, LEWIS—I would like to get in touch with my brother. He left Moosemin, Saskatchewan, Canada, about thirty-two years ago. He married a girl named Minnie. If any one knows his whereabouts or any of his family, please notify John Henry McAlpine, 2702—12th Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

BENNETT, JOHN T.—He was born in 1900 at Fishkill Landing, Dutchess County, New York. If any one knows his whereabouts, will they please communicate with me? "John, there is something I would like you to know—your Dad." Mr. John T. Bennett, 727 Keeper Street, Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

CHURCH, MARY LOUISE—She was born in Grand Ledge, Michigan, on April 12, 1917. When she was 5½ years old she was taken to the Coldwater Children's Home in Michigan and later was adopted. We have been unable to locate her since then. Her brothers are Frank Church, 721 Beulah Street, Lansing, Michigan; Archie Church, 206 Valley Road, Valley Farms, Lansing, Michigan; and Chester Church, 114½ W. Genesee, Lansing, Michigan. Her sisters are Goldie Church Schools and Muriel Church Eggert, of De Witt, Michigan. Won't someone who knows our little sister, Mary, please help us find her? Mrs. Goldie Church Schools, Rt. No. 1, Webb Road, De Witt, Michigan.



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EDITOR, WESTERN STORY

79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Name..... Age.....

Address..... Oct. 22nd issue

Here are the names of the stories I liked best in this issue:

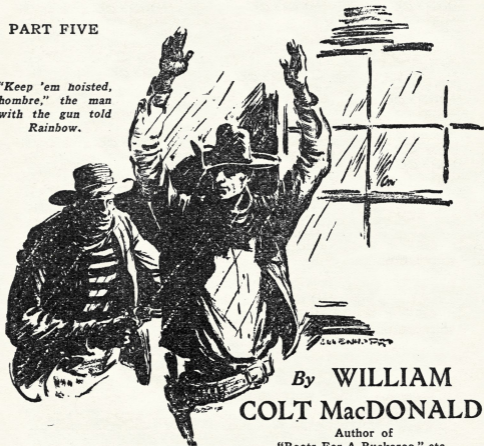
First..... Third.....

Second..... Fourth.....

The Mystery Of Broken Arrow Range

PART FIVE

"Keep 'em hoisted,
hombre," the man
with the gun told
Rainbow.



By WILLIAM
COLT MacDONALD

Author of
"Boots For A Buckaroo," etc.

The Story So Far:

AN attempted robbery is foiled when Matt Kaiser, owner of the Bearpaw Ranch, kills a bandit who has held up Alex Bishop. Bishop had been carrying a sack containing seven thousand dollars in gold double-eagles. When the sack, which had been sealed with Bishop's own ring, is opened it contains silver pesos instead of gold. Rainbow Rhodes and Frosty Ferguson, two amateur range detectives, decide to try to solve the mystery.

A rumor spreads that Kaiser was seen talking to the holdup man before the rob-

bery. Moreover, Bishop learns that Kaiser now holds the note which he signed to obtain the gold. If Bishop is unable to repay the note within a few weeks, which seems likely, Kaiser will foreclose on the ranch.

Rainbow, after examining the sack in which the gold was carried, discovers that the wax seal on the draw string was made, not with Bishop's ring, but with a casting taken from that ring. Suspicion falls on Pardee Haynes, the banker who had arranged the loan for Bishop. Rhodes now believes that the holdup was plotted by Matt Kaiser, Pardee Haynes, and the lat-

ter's brother, Gibson, a meat packer in a near by town who had supplied the gold for the loan.

CHAPTER XVI

"DON'T TOUCH THOSE IRONS!"

RAINBOW straightened up, then raised his arms in the air. "They're hoisted, hombre," he drawled.

"Provin' yo're plumb sensible," the man behind him laughed shortly. "What in hell you sneakin' around here for?"

Before Rainbow could answer, Jeff Knight's voice sounded through the bunk-house window, "Did you say something, Buckshot?"

"Yeah, and so will you," answered Buckshot, "when you see what I've done trapped."

Chairs scraped inside the bunk-house, then the door was flung wide. Jeff Knight and another puncher stood there, looking out.

"What the hell!" Knight growled. "Who you got there, Buckshot?"

"I dunno who he is," drawled Buckshot. "When I went out to move the rain bar'l, I see this hombre sky-lighted against a fork o' lightnin', just ridin' over the hill. I waited under the tree to see who it was. He 'lights from his bronc, 'bout two feet away. He didn't even see me an' I didn't say nothin', waitin' to see what he wants. When he starts skulkin' up under this window, here, I throws down on him and——"

"Cripes!" Knight exclaimed as he came closer, "It's Rhodes." He started to laugh. "First time I ever knew a rainbow to come before it finished rainin'. Come in, feller, come in, before you get wet. I'd certain hate to see you get soaked—with anything but a gun-barrel. If he don't move fast, Buckshot,

crack him one alongside the conk."

"Howdy, Knight," Rainbow said calmly. "Is this the way you usually receive your guests?"

"When they sneak in," Knight nodded shortly. "I didn't hear you announcin' your arrival."

"You got me there," Rainbow grinned. "Matter of fact, I did want to talk to you, Knight——"

"G'wan! Get on inside," ordered Buckshot.

Rainbow walked into the bunk-house, tinglingly conscious of the gun-muzzle pressed against his back-bone. It was a neat enough place, with blankets folded in four of the six bunks ranged along one wall. In the center of the room was a table, holding an oil lamp. At the far end several saddles and other gear were stacked against the wall. Apparently, Buckshot was the only one with a gun on him. Knight was unarmed, as was the tousle-headed young puncher who had appeared at the door with him. Their guns and belts hung on pegs driven into the wall near the doorway.

And then, Rainbow noticed a fourth man in the room, a stockily built individual with staring eyes and a dazed, vacant expression on his face. The man wore cowman's togs and sat on a chair across the room from the bunks in a slouching position, his hands dangling between his legs. He didn't appear to be taking any interest in what was going on. Suddenly he opened his mouth and said tonelessly, "Hime-baugh."

Rainbow looked at the man. "Sounds interesting, anyway," he commented.

"Probably does," Knight grunted irritably. To the tousle-headed young puncher he said, "Get his gun, Happy."

The puncher stepped forward, un-

buckled Rainbow's belt and gun, and placed them on the table.

"Now if you'll just keep away from that gun, Rhodes," Knight said shortly, "maybe we can enjoy your visit." His voice took on a mocking tone, "Perhaps you should be introduced to the boys. Rainbow Rhodes, this is Happy Milligan. The gent who received you with his hardware is known as Buckshot Herrick."

"Happy" Milligan grinned widely. "Buckshot" Herrick was about forty, with a prominent Adam's apple, a long nose and a complexion like dried leather. His legs were bowed in their faded overalls; his eyes black and piercing.

"Glad to know you hombres," Rainbow grinned. "I've often wondered what sort of a crew Knight had. You both look fairly harmless."

Happy's grin widened. Buckshot Herrick chuckled. "That's to be seen. Depends on what Jeff says."

HAVEN'T you forgotten one introduction, Knight?" Rainbow continued, glancing at the dazed-looking man on the chair.

"It wouldn't do no good to introduce him," Knight growled. "He wouldn't know about it."

"Himebaugh," the man on the chair said tonelessly.

"He knows enough to introduce himself, anyway," retorted Rainbow. "Well, what do you intend to do about me? You can't hold me here, you know?"

"That's your idea," Knight said sarcastically. "Happy, get some rawhide and tie his hands. Buckshot, if he makes a move, plug him. After all, Rhodes, you're trespassing on private property. If you got shot, nobody could blame me." For an instant his eyes blazed with hatred.

Happy came up with a long strip of rawhide. "Hands behind you, Rhodes," Buckshot added. "And move fast, get me!" Happy bound Rainbow's wrists behind him.

"You might as well sit down, Rhodes," said Knight. Happy shoved a chair over with his foot, and Rainbow seated himself. The others found chairs near by. For a time the only sound was the drumming of rain on the bunk-house roof.

Finally Knight broke the strained silence. "What you doing here, Rhodes?"

"Your face seems to be healing right well, Knight," Rainbow smiled.

Buckshot grinned. "So you're the hombre that massaged Jeff's features with—"

"Cut it, Buckshot," Knight snapped.

"Don't talk thataway to me, Jeff," Buckshot said loftily. "I reckon I could still take you across my knee. Why don't you cooperate with this hombre and see what he wants. From all I hear, he done a good job on a couple of Bearpaws in—"

"Dammit!" Knight roared, "I asked him what he was doing here. He wouldn't answer."

"For one thing," Rainbow said, "I wanted to talk to you. Untie me and we'll *habla* man to man. You can't hold me very long, anyway. My pard knew I was coming here."

Knight smiled thinly. "Suppose we told your pard you never got here. I could hold you a long time, Rhodes, and nobody'd be the wiser."

"Himebaugh," came the toneless utterance.

"S'help me," Happy burst out, "that coot is going to drive me nuts, Jeff. He says that reg'lar as clock-work all the time he ain't sleeping."

"Forget it," Buckshot said. "The poor hombre ain't doin' no harm."

"What's the setup, Buckshot?"

Rainbow asked, nodding toward the man who kept saying "Himebaugh."

Buckshot looked at Knight. When Knight shook his head Buckshot said, "Jeff is boss, mister. He says it's none of yore business."

Knight looked uneasy. "Look here, Rhodes, whether his name is Himebaugh or not, don't concern you—leastwise, not as much as it concerns me. I'm not sure if that is his name. He was that way ever since I found him."

"Found him where?" Rainbow asked.

"Never mind," Knight said sulkily. "You've made your play over to the Flying-B, pretending you're going to locate Alex Bishop's missing gold. You got them to thinking you're pretty damn smart. Well, maybe I'll find that gold first. Then they'll see you ain't the only one got brains—"

"Providing," Rainbow cut in, "you haven't already found the gold. You know more than you're admitting, Knight. Who is this Himebaugh feller—"

"I tell you it's none of your business, Rhodes. I'm playing my cards, not you. I aim to win this pot, and I figure to keep you here until I do if—"

"Himebaugh," came the monotonous voice.

"Steve?" Rainbow asked quickly.

A FLICKER of sudden interest passed across the deranged man's eyes, then disappeared. "No," he muttered, as though with an effort, "George."

"By golly!" Happy yelped. "Rhodes has got him talking. He never said anything but 'Himebaugh' before."

Knight looked uncomfortable. "Never mind that. He'll talk for us,

too, one of these days."

Himebaugh was staring at Rainbow now, his forehead wrinkled with futile concentration.

Rainbow finally gave up waiting for further words. He turned back to Knight, "All right," he said quietly, "what are you going to say when Frosty and Sheriff Jordan commence asking questions about that fish-line?"

"Fish-line?" Knight frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't stall, Knight," Rhodes said sternly. "You know what I mean."

"S'help me, I don't," Knight protested. Happy and Buckshot were eying him curiously now.

"I suppose you'll deny," continued Rainbow, "that you had a room just above the spot where Steve Himebaugh dropped, after he'd grabbed that money sack from Alex Bishop?"

"No, I don't deny that," Knight answered promptly. "The noise woke me up, and I stuck my head out of the hotel window to see what was going on."

"From all I hear," Rainbow grinned, "it's a wonder you could get your head through the window, that morning."

Knight looked sheepish. "I know, I'd been drunker'n a boiled owl the night before—" He broke off suddenly, "Now I know what you mean by fish-line. I don't remember it, but they tell me I had a line with a hook on it and was fishing for bottles in the Starlight—"

"Are you sure," Rainbow said sternly, "that you didn't do some fishing out your window and snag a sack of gold money?"

Happy and Buckshot uttered startled exclamations. Knight's eyes opened wider. "Say-y," he stuttered, "you're not trying to say I had a hand in that business?"

"You're under suspicion," Rainbow said coldly.

"You're on the wrong track, feller," Buckshot said angrily. And Happy chimed in, "You're crazy, man. Jeff couldn't do that."

"You'll have to prove you're innocent," Rainbow told Jeff.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Knight slumped weakly in his chair. "I never thought anybody would figure I had a hand in that game. Oh, look here, Rhodes, you're making a big mistake."

Rainbow considered. Was the man innocent, or was this clever acting? Buckshot and Happy were aiding Knight in protests against his guilt.

"Untie me," Rainbow said. "That will be one bit of proof that you're not running a crooked game."

"Nothing doing," Knight said promptly. "You stay here for a spell, until I figure what to do with you. If I let you go now, you'd tear into Powder Rock and tell Jordan about Himebaugh here."

"I probably would," Rainbow agreed. "Why shouldn't I? Two Himebaughs were mixed into the game that put Alex Bishop in a jam. What are you doing here with the man? There's something queer afoot. This Himebaugh—George Himebaugh, if that's his name—is the hombre that was going to sell Bishop a herd. I want to have the straight of this. Frankly, Knight, it looks bad for you."

"Better come across, Jeff," Buckshot advised. "Square yourself as much as possible. You don't have to let this hombre go."

Knight looked worried. "Look here, Rhodes, I haven't any connection with Himebaugh—that is, nothing I can't explain. You see, I found him."

"Found him?" Rainbow said skeptically.

"A few weeks ago," Knight went on. "I'd been at the Flying-B one night. When I left I decided to come to Powder Rock and get a drink before heading home. You know that bridge across the Broken Arrow River, just before you get in town?" Rainbow nodded. Knight continued, "Just as I was crossing over, I heard somebody groan. I slid down the banks and found this—this crazy galoot—sprawled in the stream. Only his head was sticking out. He'd been shot, in the head, but it hadn't killed him—"

"Tough hombre," Happy put in.

Knight frowned at the interruption. "Anyway, I dragged him out. He was about half-conscious. I figured somebody had shot him, then figuring he was done for, had dumped him in the water to sink, or float away beyond town. I tried to bring him to. He came out of it enough to speak one word, 'Himebaugh.' Well, I was anxious to clear up Alex Bishop's trouble as the next man—probably more anxious—and when I heard that name, I figured I'd run onto something. I packed him home with me without telling anybody, hoping I could learn something, but he's been this way ever since."

"Haven't you had a doctor for him?"

KNIGHT looked a bit shamefaced. "I didn't want anybody to know I had him here. You see, Rhodes, I realize Alex Bishop isn't particularly keen about me as a son-in-law. I thought maybe I could learn something from Himebaugh and clear up the mystery about his gold, then perhaps I'd stand better with Alex. As far as a doctor is concerned, Buckshot has a lot of medical knowledge. He

and Happy have taken good care of Himebaugh, fed him well, doctored him. We've been hoping he'd come to his senses and talk, but he just stays daffy——"

Buckshot broke in. "My old dad was a doctor, and he taught me a lot of things. I was going to be a doctor myself, but I never got no further than to be a veterinary. But I've had a lot of experience treating gunshot wounds and such. I don't think Doc Meade, in town, could do no more than I've done. What this hombre needs is a brain specialist. I took a slug from the back of his neck, near the spine. He's healthy enough now, but the shot affected his mind. There's a nerve twisted there, some place. But we been hoping every day, that'd he'd remember what happened——"

"Himebaugh," said the dazed man.

"George Himebaugh," Rainbow said quickly.

"George Himebaugh," Himebaugh repeated mechanically.

"Matt Kaiser," Rainbow said.

Himebaugh frowned, then shook his head.

"Alex Bishop," Rainbow spoke swiftly.

A flicker of memory showed momentarily in the dull eyes, then abruptly died out. "George Himebaugh," he repeated stolidly.

Rainbow thought a moment. "Dave Powell."

The name brought unexpected results. Himebaugh's face became convulsed with rage. A wild cry left his throat. Jumping from his chair, he reached for a six-shooter hanging on a nearby peg. Buckshot and Knight leaped across the room and seized the man. He struggled fiercely for a moment, then suddenly relaxed. His eyes became dull again and he settled back in his chair.

Buckshot looked at Rainbow.

"Hell!" he said, wiping his forehead. "It was like you touched a spring." Knight stared unsteadily at Rainbow. Happy was speechless with surprise. "You sure got action," Happy gasped at last.

"Try him again, Rhodes," Knight said. "Maybe we'll learn something."

Rainbow shook his head. "I'd be afraid to. Too much shock might unsettle him completely. Maybe if we take it easy, we'll learn more in time. He's got a grudge against Powell, no doubt about that. I wonder if it was Powell who shot him."

Knight laughed nervously. "You're going to stay here, Rhodes, until we find out. You've got the system. We'll just have to keep you out of sight if your pard comes asking questions. I've got as much right to solve this mystery as you."

"You're talking like a fool, Knight," Rainbow said. "You'd better release me."

"Don't do anything you'll be sorry for, son," cautioned Buckshot.

Knight whirled toward the older man. "You going back on me, Buckshot?"

"Never have yet, have I?" Buckshot said simply. "You're the boss. I owe your old dad something for helping me out years ago. I'll back your play, son, even if I don't agree with you."

"Let's hear no more about it then," Knight snapped. "The same goes for you, Happy."

"You're the boss," Happy nodded. "I'm glad you realize that," Knight said sulkily. "Let's turn in. Rhodes, tomorrow you work on Himebaugh some more."

"It looks thataway," Rainbow said carelessly.

"Happy, you put Himebaugh to bed, then spread some blankets for

Swiftly as a rattler Arapahoe Chilton struck but Rainbow was a fraction of a second faster.



Rhodes," Knight directed.

"I'd like to get a breath of air before I turn in," Rainbow said. "Pretty dang smoky in here. I've had a headache, most all day. It's not getting any better."

"Aw, go to bed and sleep it off," Knight growled.

"Now, Jeff," Buckshot protested, "no use being too hard on Rhodes. I guess it won't do any harm to let him step outside the door a minute."

"All right," Knight consented reluctantly. "You're responsible though. If he makes a break to run, plug him with your six-shooter."

"I'll do that," Buckshot replied. He took Rainbow's arm and led him to the door. It was still raining, though not as hard as it had been. Rainbow stepped just outside.

"That air sure feels good," he said, sniffing.

"You dang pack-mule," Buckshot

protested, "why don't you stand in the doorway? You'll get wet."

"It's not raining hard," Rainbow said.

Buckshot shrugged. "It's your funeral. But don't try any tricks."

Rainbow nodded. Rain dripped from the eaves and ran down his back. Within a short time he was soaked to the skin. Buckshot watched him warily and told him again he was crazy to stand there getting wet.

Rainbow smiled. "I always did like rain. It feels good."

"Well, you ought to have had enough by now," Buckshot growled. "Come on in."

"How about putting up my pony for the night," Rainbow stalled.

"Aw, yore hawss is all right," Buckshot grunted. "He's under that cottonwood. Maybe he enjoys rain like you do. Come on in now."

RELUCTANTLY, Rainbow stepped inside. Knight glanced at him. "You look like you got soaked. Well, turn in when you get ready. I don't just

trust you, Rhodes, so I'm going to sit up a few hours. Later I'll wake Happy and he can take a spell watching you."

"How about taking off these rawhide ties on my wrists, then?" Rainbow asked. "So long as you're putting a guard on me, it shouldn't make any difference, and I could sleep better."

Knight laughed scornfully. "I'm not taking any chances. Turn in. If you can't sleep, that's your hard luck."

Rainbow crossed to the bunk pointed out to him, and tumbled in. The others, with the exception of Knight, followed suit. Knight dragged some old newspapers up on the table and spread them out to read. From time to time, he glanced at Rainbow. Buckshot and Happy were soon snoring. Himebaugh slept heavily, his breathing sounding through the room.

Rainbow lay facing the light, his eyes closed. After a time, his breathing became deep and regular, with now and then the suspicion of a snore at the end of each exhalation. Knight frowned down at him. "That hombre sure sleeps easy," Knight muttered. "With his wrists tied behind him, thataway, and wet through, it's a wonder he can get any shut-eye at all."

Before long, Knight's head commenced to nod. Once he straightened with a jerk to glance sharply at Rainbow, then at Rainbow's gun and belt on the table before him. The gun was still there. Knight relaxed again and tried to renew his interest in the newspapers.

Three hours slipped past in this fashion, but Rainbow was far from being asleep. Though his eyes were closed, his bound wrists, behind his back, were extremely busy. The rawhide thongs, holding his hands to-

gether, had been wet through while he stood outside, "getting some fresh air." And wet rawhide stretches!

Moving as cautiously as possible, Rainbow felt his wrists slipping a trifle. He exerted more strength; and the rawhide began to give. A half hour passed as, little by little, Rainbow worked toward escape. At last a small thrill ran through him as the rawhide thongs dropped off. His hands were finally free.

Rainbow didn't move at once. He flexed his cramped wrists, to start the blood circulating. Meanwhile, through narrowly slitted lids, he watched Knight, who was half dozing again, his chair tilted back against the table on two rear legs. Then Rainbow moved with astonishing swiftness. His body left the bunk, diving straight for Knight's chair. His fingers clamped down on the nearest tilted leg. He jerked hard!

With a startled yell, Knight crashed over backward. Rainbow had seized his gun and belt and drawn the six-shooter. Now he had the room covered. Buckshot and Happy came tumbling from bunks, their eyes swollen with sleep. In an instant, they comprehended what had happened. With one accord they started toward their guns hanging on the wall.

"Don't touch those irons!" Rainbow warned. Buckshot and Happy lifted their hands in the air and froze to immobility. Half stunned by his fall, Knight scrambled up from the floor, cursing fervently. He too raised his hands in the air.

Rainbow backed a few paces to keep the whole room in eye range. Only Himebaugh snored peacefully on. "You, Happy," Rainbow ordered, "collect those guns on the wall, open the door and toss 'em out in the mud."

"Don't you do it, Happy!" Knight snarled.

"Got to do it, boss," Happy said apologetically. "This hombre means business."

Happy collected the guns and went to the door. "Chuck 'em a long ways, cowboy," Rainbow ordered. Happy obeyed orders, then came back to the center of the room. Knight muttered curses, though something of admiration showed in the eyes of Buckshot and Happy. "Dang you," Buckshot growled, "I just happened to think of something. You and your fresh air. Bah! Wet rawhide stretches!"

"Dang right, old-timer," Rainbow grinned, "wet rawhide stretches. I'll be pushing on now, hombres. I'll plug the first feller that comes out too soon. Remember that. You, Knight, I can manage to forget what's happened here, if you can. And you know why. That's all. *Adios, amigos!*"

Rainbow turned and ducked through the bunk-house doorway. Untying his waiting pony, he vaulted into the saddle. In an instant he was racing across the range in the direction of the Flying-B. Glancing back, he saw gesticulating figures silhouetted against the light in the K-9 bunk-house. No shots followed him, but he chuckled as he thought of the profanity that was undoubtedly permeating the atmosphere. His pony straightened out, increasing speed. The rain felt cool and clean on Rainbow's grinning features.

CHAPTER XVII

"STOP RHODES!"

THE following morning, Paradee Haynes was just about to enter his bank when he saw Matt Kaiser riding along the main street. Haynes came out to the hitchrack. "Morning, Matt," he said cordially as Kaiser came up.

"H'are you, Mister Haynes?"

"I'm fine, thank you. Lovely rain

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we had last night. My, the grass looks green this morning. I had an idea when it started in, it might last a day or so, but the sun is shining as usual. This will be fine for the stock—"

"Cut out the palaver, Pardee," Kaiser interrupted, low-voiced. "What's on your mind? Anything wrong?" He sat his pony, looking down on the upraised features of the fat banker. No doubt about it, Haynes looked worried.

Haynes dropped his tones also. "I'm not sure if anything is wrong, or not, Matt. I was talking to Hoddy Perkins a few minutes ago. He tells me Rhodes was in his store a few days back, inquiring for plaster of Paris. Perkins was quite surprised that Rhodes hadn't come to me to borrow some."

An explosive oath left Kaiser's lips. "T'hell you say. What do you think? Was it just chance, or has Rhodes made a good guess?"

"I don't know." Haynes rubbed his hands together nervously. "I don't like it, Matt. If anything happened at this late date, I'd—I'd be—"

"Don't lose your nerve, Pardee. Maybe Rhodes really wanted plaster of Paris for something. Howsomever, we can't take chances. He might be on the right track—"

Haynes began to tremble.

"What will we do? Bishop might remember that time I held his ring and—"

"Dammit," Kaiser said irritably, "keep your nerve. Maybe everything is all right and there's nothing to worry about. However, we can't take chances. I'll tell Stover to keep an eye on Rhodes and check every move he makes. If it looks like Rhodes is really learning something, we'll snuff him out, before he has a chance to do any talking."

"That's it, that's it," Haynes said with frantic eagerness. "Stop Rhodes, before he can do us any damage—"

"Better get into your bank, Pardee," Kaiser cut in swiftly. "There's Rhodes now, just riding into town. See? About two blocks down the street?"

Haynes nodded. "And there's his pardner, that Ferguson fellow, waiting for him at the Starlight hitchrack. I wonder why they didn't ride in together?"

"We can't bother with that, now, Pardee. You get into your bank. No use anybody seeing us acting too friendly. Stover's in the Buck-Eye Saloon now. I'll go over and tell him to get right on Rhodes' tail and report to me everything he does. If anything turns up, I'll let you know."

Haynes nodded and stepped hastily away. Kaiser turned his pony back, in the direction of the Buck-Eye. Tying his horse, he went inside and talked in low tones to Stover for several minutes.

Meantime, Frosty was greeting his pardner in front of the hitchrack. "H'yuh, Rainbow! You didn't sleep as long as I expected. I didn't figure to see you until 'long about noon. It was nigh daylight when you arrived back, wet to the skin."

"Too much on my mind to do much sleeping," Rainbow grinned. "I'm anxious to get to Lanceville and talk to Gib Haynes, see if I can learn anything."

"What do you expect to learn?"

Rainbow dropped from his saddle and came around the end of the tie-rail. "I'm not sure yet. What's more important, what did you find out about trains? Or did you forget?"

"Forget hell! That's what I come to town early for, wasn't it? You're lucky, Rainbow. There's a freight through here in about a half hour. The station man says he'll flag it down for you and you can ride the

caboose. That gets you to Lanceville about one o'clock this afternoon. Coming back, there's another freight pulls out of Lanceville about six o'clock. It comes through Powder Rock about nine this evening. If it has freight it stops here; otherwise not. But the conductor on the caboose will see that it slows enough to let you drop off. The station master tells me quite a few of the boys around here go back and forth on those two trains."

"Good work, Frosty. That'll fix me up fine."

"I been thinking of something else," Frosty added. "How about that Himebaugh hombre that's out to the K-9?"

"What about him?"

"Well, he's a sort of a clue, you might say. Do you suppose Knight will try to hide him out some place else?"

RAINBOW considered, then shook his head. "If he did, I could force Knight to produce him. Knight feels that Himebaugh will wake up and do some talking, one of these days. I don't—not unless something happens to take the twist out of his brain. I don't think we need bother much about Knight or Himebaugh, either one, right now. I figure Knight's going to move plumb cautious, until he sees what way I jump."

"Do you think there's any connection between Knight and Matt Kaiser?"

Rainbow hesitated and then shook his head. "I hardly think so. It's fairly probable that George Himebaugh is the man who came to Alex Bishop with the offer of his herd. When Himebaugh had done that much, his usefulness ended. I don't know what happened, but it is my

guess that Kaiser had Dave Powell shot him. Like I told you, Himebaugh really went wild when Powell's name was mentioned. There's a double cross there, some place. I figure that if there was any connection between Knight and Kaiser, Kaiser would know about Himebaugh. In that case, there wouldn't be any Himebaugh by this time. Of course, that's pure guesswork on my part—guesswork and a hunch."

"Your hunches always work pretty good," Frosty mused.

Rainbow nodded. "At any rate, we won't worry about Knight at present. And we'll keep still about what happened last night. You understand why, of course."

"On Pinto's account," Frosty said promptly. "Dang you, pard, are you going to continue bolstering up Knight just for that girl's sake?"

"Why not?" asked Rainbow. "I'd like to see her happy. I don't want her disappointed in the man she loves——"

"I'm not so sure about that last," Frosty cut in. "There's no use you stalling any longer, pard. You think a heap of Pinto, yourself. Don't deny it. I can read it in your eyes when you look at her. An' she likes you too if I'm any judge——"

"Forget it, Frosty," Rainbow said sharply. "I don't want to talk about it. You're mistaken, of course. But we'll forget about it."

Frosty shrugged his shoulders. "Just as you say, pard."

"You say that freight leaves for Lanceville in a half hour?" Rainbow mused. "Well, twenty minutes now, I suppose. Good! We'll have time for just one drink before I head over to the depot. Say, take care of my horse, today, will you, Frosty. I'll take him off your hands tonight about nine o'clock."

IT was shortly after nine that night when the freight train from Lanceville slowed at Powder Rock to allow Rainbow to get off. Frosty was sitting his horse in the shadows at the side of the raised dirt platform, and holding in his hands the reins of Rainbow's pony. Rainbow crossed the platform swiftly and stepped into the saddle. For a moment the two sat quietly, watching the lights of the retreating train vanish in the night. Then they moved off in the direction of Main Street.

"Here," said Frosty, passing Rainbow's gun and belt across in the darkness that enveloped First Street, "put these on now. I been uneasy ever since you left 'em with me."

Rainbow chuckled. "Well, you know, pard, it wouldn't be polite to go calling on a big business man, when I was wearing a gun. But why all the hurry? Has anything happened?"

"Plenty. I'll tell you about it, later. Did you see Gibson Haynes?"

"Yes. Gib Haynes and his packing house are big stuff in Lanceville, Frosty. Leading citizens. Important industry and so on. He kept me waiting nearly all afternoon before he sent an office boy to invite me in."

"What sort of a hombre is he?"

"Looks a lot like his brother, Pardee. Bigger, though. Tips the scales around two-fifty, I'd imagine. Looked like a big fat hawg in that elegant office of his. Boiled shirt and jewelry in his cuffs. Brown carpet on his office floor. That dang carpet is so thick and woolly I nearly sunk to my ankles. That's in his private office, of course. I don't know what his other offices are like. He's got a big packing plant there. Reckon he does plenty business. You should see the desk in his office."

Dang near the size of a house. Big, double, flat-topped affair, for him and his secretary both to sit at, across from each other, with their legs stuck underneath. And you should see that slinking, pasty-faced secretary. Got a pair of weasel eyes that look any place but directly at you—”

“Here I’m wondering what happened,” Frosty broke in, “and you spend your time telling me about a secretary and a desk—”

THERE’S a reason, Frosty, you old beetle,” Rainbow laughed. “I think I got a clue there to what happened.”

“What did?”

“I’ll tell you about it later. I wasn’t in Gib Haynes’ office long. He told me he was a very busy man and—”

“What reason did you give for wanting to see him?”

“I pretended I was a stock raiser. Told him I had about five hundred steers I wanted to sell. Offered ‘em to him at five bucks each. At a bargain price of that kind, I figured he’d think I’d stolen the cows and do business.” Rainbow broke off. “I still don’t understand why he didn’t take me up. He acted like he wanted to get rid of me. And he couldn’t have heard from anybody in Powder Rock about me. I told him my name was MacMillan. All the time I was talking, I was sizing up his office. I could see where his desk had been moved, once. The marks of the legs still remained in that heavy brown carpet—”

“Forget that desk, a minute,” Frosty interrupted testily. “I can tell you why he didn’t swallow your story. Because he knew your name wasn’t MacMillan. He knew before you got there that he was going to see Rainbow Rhodes—”

“Huh!” Rainbow exclaimed. “What do you know about it?”

“Plenty.”

“I’m waiting. Tell it.”



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They sat their horses in the shadow, near the corner of First and Main. Rainbow smoked a cigarette while Frosty talked.

"Right after you pulled out on that freight this morning," Frosty began, "I looked around and saw that Bearpaw hand, Stover, lounging at the corner of the depot. The minute the train was gone, he heads back for Main Street. It struck me then, that maybe Kaiser had had him tailing you—"

"Where'd he go?" Rainbow cut in.

"He headed for the Buck-Eye," answered Frosty. "In a few minutes I saw Matt Kaiser leave the Buck-Eye, cut across the street and go in the bank—"

"Jeepers!" Rainbow exclaimed. "They must have realized that I went to Lanceville to nose around and see what I could learn."

Frosty nodded. "That's what I figured and what happened next, proved I was right. Twenty minutes after Kaiser entered the bank, Pardee Haynes sends his teller to the depot with a telegram to Gibson Haynes in Lanceville."

"Wait a minute," Rainbow said, "how do you know where the telegram went."

Frosty chuckled. "Five minutes after the station master had sent off the telegram, I went in his office while he was out on the platform wrestling some freight around. Banker Haynes' telegram was stuck on a spindle. I didn't have any trouble reading it."

"Pard, you were sure on your job," Rainbow said approvingly.

"Shut up until I tell you what it said, as near as I can remember. It was in the nature of a warning, telling Gib Haynes to keep his eyes open for a tall red-head. It gave a couple of other words, covering your description, and added, 'Don't reveal any of our financial arrangements. Be on guard.' It was signed, 'BPHYR.'"

"What do those initials stand

for?" Rainbow said curiously.

"I'm not sure, but it's my guess they mean Banker Pardee Haynes Powder Rock. The way it looks to me, Rainbow, Haynes uses those initials as a sort of code to tell Gib Haynes to watch himself especial close. It's more'n likely they made arrangements to use initials like that, when referring to anything concerning Alex Bishop's sack of gold. So far as the telegram itself was concerned, the station-master wouldn't be likely to connect it with you. If he paid it any attention a-tall, he probably figured Pardee and Gib Haynes had some sort of business deal on."

Rainbow laughed grimly. "What a fool I was, trying to convince Gib Haynes I was dealing in cattle. He was probably laughing at me up his sleeve—though he acted right nervous too. I figure him as a hombre that scares easy. He prob'ly sent Pardee Haynes a telegram after I left. It's too bad we don't know what he said."

WE do," Frosty said unexpectedly, and added in a grim tone, "That's what's been worrying me. I was afraid Kaiser would have somebody here to shoot you when you got off the train just—"

"What do you mean, you know what Gib Haynes telegraphed his brother? Did you see that message too?"

Frosty nodded. "I loafed along First Street here most all afternoon, figuring Gib Haynes would send an answer. Finally I see the station master give a yellow sheet of paper to a little Mex kid to deliver. I stopped the kid when he come along to where I was, and offered him a dollar to let me see the paper. Naturally, the kid didn't refuse. Then I

give him another dollar to keep his lip buttoned about me seeing it. I reckon he kept his word or I'd have had Haynes and Kaiser on my neck this time."

"Frosty, old pard, you've done noble work," commended Rainbow. "What did Gib Haynes' message say?"

"He knew who you were, all right," Frosty returned. "You didn't fool him a minute after him being warned by Pardee Haynes. You got him scared, too, pard—"

"He probably saw me looking at the marks in the carpet his desk had made, and figured I was seeing too much," Rainbow cut in.

"You will keep mentionin' that desk," said Frosty sourly. "Like I say, I don't know what you done, but he was right uneasy when you left. His telegram to Banker Haynes read, 'Your man has been here. Do not trust. Dispose of his interests at once.'"

"Meaning," Rainbow spoke quietly, "dispose of me. We're hot on the right trail at last, Frosty. Did Gib Haynes sign the telegram?"

"It was signed PGHL."

"Packer Gibson Haynes Lanceville," Rainbow interpreted. "His telegram was slick. For all the station master could tell, it might have been referring to some banking business, or other."

Frosty looked serious. "Listen, pard, those sidewinders are going to rub you out if they can."

"It looks that way," Rainbow agreed. "Do you know where Haynes and Kaiser are now?"

"Haynes, I don't know. Probably home in bed—home anyway. Matt Kaiser was in the Starlight a short time before I went to the depot to meet you."

"Kaiser alone?"

"No. Stover and Dave Powell and

Arapahoe Chilton are with him. Also another tough-looking Bearpaw hand they call Lippy. Chilton was making a lot of war talk relative to what he was going to do to you. He was working up to it, belly-aching about his old pal, Hoot-Owl Morgan. He didn't seem to remember it was *me* kicked Morgan. I figure Kaiser has picked him to wipe you out, pard."

Rainbow was silent for a minute. Then he switched his holster farther around to the front of his thigh. "We can't put it off, Frosty. If I dodge it tonight, I'll only have to meet him some other time. I might as well face it now. C'mon, we're heading for the Starlight."

CHAPTER XVIII

ROARING 45S

BESIDES the Bearpaw men whom Frosty had mentioned, there were several other customers in the Starlight when Rainbow and his pardner pushed their way through the swinging doors. The bar was lined with men, and Cue-Ball Flynn had worked himself into a lather of perspiration filling orders.

Kaiser and his men glanced around when Rainbow and Frosty entered. Kaiser nodded carelessly and turned back to his drink. Rainbow returned the greeting in kind, then he and Frosty elbowed their way to a place at the bar and gave orders to Cue-Ball. While they sipped their drinks, Rainbow was watching every move the Bearpaw men made. The long mirror back of the bar was conveniently located for such observation.

Kaiser stood in the center of his group of men. To his left was Dave Powell and the cowhand named Lippy. To Kaiser's right were Stover and Arapahoe Chilton.

Chilton fixed Rainbow with a steadfast glare, but Rainbow pretended not to see him.

Gradually, Chilton commenced to use louder tones. He cursed Cue-Ball when the barkeep was slow in rendering service. Either he was getting drunk in an effort to bolster his nerve, or he was assuming a drunken manner.

"Hurry with that bottle, Cue-Ball," Chilton snarled. "I want a drink and I want it quick."

"Hush up, Arapahoe," Kaiser said, with some pretense at keeping peace.

"I won't hush up, Matt," snapped Chilton. "You can fire me offn your outfit, but I won't hush up."

Kaiser laughed shortly. "I don't care how much noise you make, Arapahoe. I just didn't want these other customers annoyed."

"Who gives a hoot in hell for any other customers?" Chilton cursed, stepping back from the bar and surveying the room with his flat, beady eyes. "If anybody don't like the way I act, let 'em step up and say so—if they got the nerve." He swayed a trifle in the center of the barroom, slapping the holstered .44s which were tied to his corduroy-clad legs. His flat-crowned sombrero was shoved to the back of his black hair. Cigarette smoke slanted across his swarthy features.

"Who gives a hoot in hell for any other customers?" Chilton repeated, staggering a little. His black eyes were drilling straight at Rainbow who was sure his drunkenness was only assumed.

The Bearpaw cowboy named Lippy laughed scornfully. "Looks like they're all afraid to object, Arapahoe."

"Certain they are," Chilton sneered. "Excepting us Bearpaws, there ain't a man in the place."

A sudden silence descended on the

barroom. Several of the other customers looked uncomfortable. Arapahoe Chilton had the reputation of being a bad man to buck. Cue-Ball glanced from Chilton to Rainbow and Frosty.

"Look, Matt," he protested, "keep Chilton a mite quiet, will you? This don't help my business, any."

"Dang it, Cue-Ball," Matt Kaiser said, "you know I can't do much with Chilton when he gets this way."

"Who says anything against me?" Chilton blustered. "Cue-Ball, for a plugged two-bit piece, I'd shoot out all your lights and send a couple of slugs through your mirror for good measure. How'd you like that?"

Cue-Ball fell silent and moved down to the far end of the bar, where he showed a fresh interest in serving customers.

"You can't put him off much longer, pard," Frosty whispered to Rainbow. "How's for me taking him on for you?"

"He's my meat," Rainbow answered from the corner of his mouth. "You keep hands off, Frosty. I'm just letting him talk on until he thinks he's got me buffaloed. I'll call his bluff when he least expects it."

Frosty looked a little worried. "He's got a bad rep, Rainbow. Those .44s he wears look plumb efficient."

"I'm satisfied with my .45," said Rainbow calmly.

"But you only got one gun. I always said you should pack two, like I do. It's his two to your one." Frosty shook his head, then, crowding close to Rainbow, he drew one of his own guns and stuck it in the waistband of Rainbow's trousers. "There, pard," he explained, "you got two .45s now. Maybe you won't need both of 'em, but I feel better seein' you wear two. That's the same gun as your own. It'll feel natural."

Rainbow nodded silently. Chilton was cursing again and daring anybody to fight him. "Anybody

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don't like my way can get out," he sneered. "I reckon I'll run a few of you 'hombres out, anyway!"

"Now, Arapahoe," Kaiser said soothingly, "don't start any trouble. Everybody's your friend. Just keep quiet an'—"

THAT'S right, Kaiser," Rainbow cut in suddenly, stepping away from the bar, "try and keep that bawling sheepherder shut up. He annoys me and he's annoying a heap of other folks in the Starlight. I don't like it. He's not drunk and you know it. I savvy that he's gunning for me. I've given him plenty of chance to start something, but I reckon he's yellow."

An awed hush settled over the room at Rainbow's words. Kaiser's eyes opened wider. For an instant he couldn't speak. The other Bearpaw men too seemed to be dumb with surprise. Rainbow eyed Chilton steadfastly.

"You cheap would-be badman," he said contemptuously, his words cutting like a whip. "You've made your talk. Now let's see some action!"

There was a sudden tattooing of footsteps as men hastened to get out of line of the gun fire they expected would break any instant. Only Frosty remained at the bar. Cue-Ball had ducked down out of sight. The Bearpaw men and other customers flattened themselves against the far wall, faces tense with excitement. Chilton and Rainbow stood in the center of the room, facing each other, separated by not more than five yards.

Chilton hadn't spoken yet. His eyes were like those of an infuriated diamond-back, his swarthy features contorted with rage. His hands were held well out from his sides, nowhere near his gun butts.

"You, Rhodes, you're asking for something," he rasped.

"I'm waiting for you to try and give it," Rainbow said easily. "Are

you aiming to keep me waiting all night? Have I got to gun whip you to get you started? S'help me, I will, unless you pull those irons right soon."

Chilton lifted his hands farther from his guns and moved over toward the bar, one hand reaching for a glass of whisky, his eyes still on Rainbow's.

"You need killing, Rhodes," he spoke in his flat, toneless voice. "An' you're going to get it. I always make it a rule to take a drink of liquor before I snuff out a hombre. One minute, and I'll take care of you."

Eyes still on Rainbow, the Bearpaw man closed his left hand about the glass of whisky on the bar. Then, swiftly as a rattler, he struck. Seizing the whisky, he hurled it straight for Rainbow's eyes. At the same instant, his right hand moved to his gun. The instant the whisky glass left his fingers, that hand too reached with the speed of lightning for a six-shooter.

But Rainbow was thinking just a fraction of a second faster than his opponent. As the glass of liquor was lifted in the air, he threw his body half across the room, drawing and shooting as he moved. Chilton's guns were already spurting orange flame, the slugs ripping through space occupied by Rainbow an instant before. But even as he fired, Chilton was whirled half around by the impact of Rainbow's first bullet!

Chilton righted himself, cursing, and swung his guns into position again. Rainbow fired once more, shifting position as he unleashed hot lead, then jerked the weapon Frosty had stuck in his waistband and thumbed out two more slugs of lead. Powder smoke swirled thickly

through the barroom.

Abruptly, Chilton paused in mid-stride, dropped his weapons and clawed frantically at the spreading crimson on his breast. He coughed once, then pitched forward on his face!

A sudden yell went through the barroom, then Frosty's voice sounded stern warning, "Stick 'em up, you Bearpaws! None of that!"

Kaiser and the other Bearpaw men were already reaching for guns. Now their hands were flung suddenly toward the ceiling. Men relaxed a bit in their huddled positions at the far wall and began to whisper excitedly to one another.

Rainbow himself had now backed against the bar, his own guns raised and covering the Bearpaw men. He handed over one gun to Frosty with a terse, "Thanks, pard."

"You're welcome. Rainbow, you sure made those .45s roar."

"What's the idea of keeping us covered, Ferguson—Rhodes?" Matt Kaiser demanded. "You downed our man. Let's forget it."

As he spoke, the swinging doors abruptly flew apart and Sheriff Hugo Jordan barged in. He glanced around the room, then at Chilton's body, sprawled on the floor.

"Sufferin' cats!" he rumbled, "you've downed Arapahoe Chilton."

"He asked for it, Hugo," Rainbow said.

"Rhodes is right," Matt Kaiser spoke. "Chilton forced the fight. Ferguson seems to think we were going to take a hand, but he's mistaken."

Jordan nodded, looked at Frosty and Rainbow. "Put 'em away, boys. The shootin's over. Nobody's goin' to take a hand."

A sigh of relief ran through the room. Cue-Ball popped up from beneath his bar and began to set out bottles again. Jordan stooped by Chilton, lifted his head. After a moment he lowered the gunman's body to the floor again. "Dead," he commented shortly.

"I could have told you that, Hugo," Frosty put in. "I know how Rainbow shoots."

Kaiser pushed up in front of Rainbow. Rainbow looked at him steadily and said, "Well?"

Kaiser seemed to be trying to keep his voice steady. "I'm admittin', Rhodes, that Chilton asked for it. But that's no sign his account won't be squared. Remember that."

"I'm not likely to forget, Kaiser," Rainbow said easily. "I'm ready to cross guns any time you are."

"I'll get you," Kaiser snarled, suddenly losing control of himself, "if it's the last thing I do."

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"Want any of it now?" Rainbow asked.

Kaiser backed away, shaking his head. "This deal ain't finished yet."

"Cut it, Matt," Hugo Jordan interposed. "We've had enough shoot-in' around here."

"And things have gone too far," Kaiser retorted savagely, "to be settled any other way. Neither you nor anybody else, Jordan, is going to stop me when I make my play."

Kaiser turned on his heel and stalked out. The other Bearpaw men followed silently.

"You've backed and won another play, pardner," Frosty said.

"In God's name," Jordan demanded, "when is this going to end?"

Rainbow, staring at the door through which Kaiser had passed, didn't have an answer for that. "It can't be long, though," he said grimly. "There's a final show-down due."

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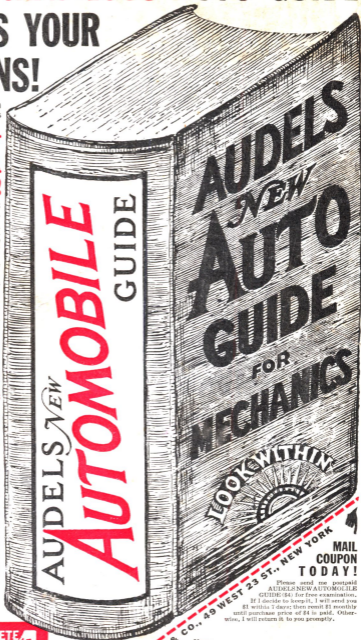
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