

WESTERN^K

STREET
SMITH'S

JUNE '44

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

STORY

15c

JUNE 1944

COBURN
WELLS · SHAW
BLACKBURN · WEST

ALL STORIES COMPLETE



Aren't you curious about the **SHAVING CREAM**

*Guaranteed not to
make shaving a pleasure?*

An ad for reasonable men only who prefer

billows of lather instead of billows of claims

Dear Sir:— Your face has probably been a testing laboratory for a lot of shaving theories and tools, soaps and creams, lotions and salves.

Yet, in the fullness of time and experience, each man learns that shaving is at best a nuisance and a bore. And that even when it is not downright painful, the word *pleasure* shouldn't be mentioned in the same breath with *shaving*.

Does this mean that the future of shaving is all black as a man's beard? Not at all.

For the sake of your comfort (and incidentally, our business) we have lavished our technical skill and resources on producing a quality shaving cream. One which we could offer fairly as a *sensible* shaving aid. One which would do as much as any reasonable man could expect, to make shaving as painless as possible.

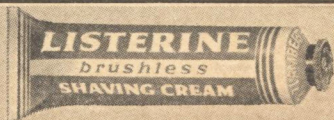
Literally, a fraction of an inch of our Listerine Shaving Cream gives lots and lots of good, rich lather. Brushes up quickly into a big, moisture-laden blanket of foam. And the more water you add, the better . . . because water is really the secret of the whole beard-softening mystery.

If all this sounds like good sense to you, we'd like you to meet Listerine Shaving Cream face to face. Ask for it at any drug counter. The price is low, the tube lasts long; so it is just as smart to buy as it is smartless to use. Sincerely,

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

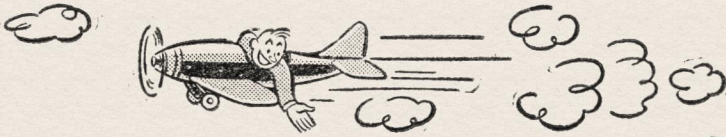


THE **35¢** TUBE THAT LASTS FOR MONTHS



REMEMBER, THERE ARE 2 TYPES OF LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM

*Out of this tube come swell shaves
for men who prefer no-brush cream*



GET ABOVE THE CROWD!

- Aviation is the way to get above the crowd in more than one sense. The great and growing aircraft industry is constantly offering unusual opportunities to men trained to take advantage of them.
- There's no one-hop route to a key position in this exacting, rewarding field. Success demands study from authoritative instructional data under the guidance of an experienced faculty.
- That's what the famous International Correspondence Schools offer you — in your spare time — at low cost. I. C. S. graduates range from mechanics and pilots to the president of one of the leading airlines. Mail this coupon as they did!



INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

SPECIAL TUITION RATES
FOR MEMBERS OF
THE ARMED FORCES!

BOX 4909-P, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send booklet and full particulars about course before which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning Schools

- Air Conditioning
- Heating Plumbing
- Refrigeration

Chemistry Schools

- Chemical Engineering
- Chemistry, Analytical
- Chemistry, Industrial
- Plastics
- Pulp and Paper Making

Civil, Architectural and Structural Engin'g Schools

- Architecture
- Bridge Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Contracting and Building
- Highway Engineering
- Lumber Dealer
- Sanitary Engineering
- Structural Drafting
- Surveying and Mapping

Electrical Schools

- Electrical Drafting
- Electrical Engineering
- Practical Electrician
- Practical Telephony
- Telegraph Engineering

Internal Combustion Engines Schools

- Auto Technician
- Aviation
- Diesel-Electric
- Diesel Engines
- Gas Engines

Mechanical Schools

- Aeronautical Engineering
- Airplane Drafting
- Foundry Work
- Heat Treatment of Metals
- Mechanical Drafting
- Mechanical Engineering
- Patternmaking
- Reading Shop Blueprints
- Shop Practice

- Tool Designing
- Welding, Gas & Electric

Radio Schools

- Electronics
- Radio, General
- Radio Operating

Railroad Courses

- Locomotive Engineer
- Locomotive Fireman
- Railroad Sec. Foreman

Steam Engineering Schools

- Boilermaking
- Combustion Engineering
- Marine Engines
- Steam Electric
- Steam Engines

Textile Schools

- Cotton Manufacturing
- Rayon Weaving
- Textile Designing
- Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Schools

- Accounting
- Advertising
- Bookkeeping
- Business Correspondence
- Business Management
- Certified Pub. Account'g
- Commercial
- Cost Accounting
- Federal Tax
- Foremanship
- High School
- Illustrating
- Motor Traffic
- Salesmanship
- Secretarial
- Stenography
- Traffic Management

Language Schools

- Spanish
- French
- Good English

Name..... Age..... Home Address.....

City..... State..... Present Position..... Working Hours.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. O. 2, England.



Editor
JOHN BURR

STREET & SMITH'S
WESTERN STORY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

JUNE, 1944

VOL. CCXI, NO. 2

NOVELS

- BLACK DYNAMITE, by *Leo E. Wells* 6
THE DOGIE KID, by *Walt Coburn* 42

NOVELETTES

- BOOTHILL BUCKAROO, by *Tom W. Blackburn* . 78
THE SABINE SIGNAL, by *C. K. Shaw* 111

SHORT STORIES AND FEATURES

- TICKET TO TRAVAHU, by *L. Ernenocin* 32
PUZZLE 65
FLYING WHEELS, by *Jim West* 66
TEXAS TRICK, by *Nelse Anderson* 70
RANGE SAVVY, by *Carl Raht* 99
RANGE MAVERICK'S HAT, by *Hapsburg Liebe* . 100
WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE,
By *John Norik* 105
MINES AND MINING, by *John A. Thompson* , . 117
GUNS AND GUNNERS,
by *Captain Philip B. Sharps* 109
COVER BY H. W. SCOTT

The editorial contents of this magazine have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publisher's permission. All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Publication issued monthly by Street & Smith Publications, Incorporated, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Allen L. Grammer, President; Gerald H. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; Henry W. Ralston, Vice President and Secretary. Copyright 1944, in U. S. A. and Great Britain by Street & Smith Publications, Inc. Re-entered as Second-class Matter, February 3, 1944, at the Post Office at New York, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions in U. S. A. \$1.50 per year; to Countries in Pan American Union, \$1.75 per year; elsewhere, \$2.25 per year. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. Any material submitted must include return postage.

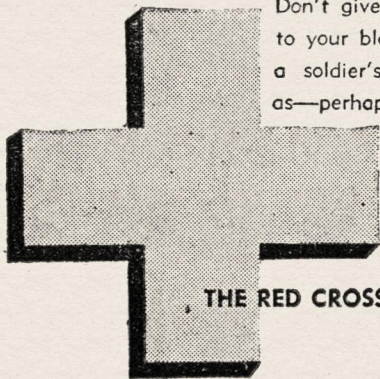
**"WITHOUT IT,
HE'D BE DEAD
RIGHT NOW!"**



"One thing saved him. Plasma. So if he gets well, he has *you* to thank. . . . Housewife Jones, Stevedore Smith, Sophomore Brown!"

And if he didn't get the plasma . . . if he didn't get well . . . would he have *you* to blame? You, who mean to go to the Red Cross blood bank, but never quite get around to it?

Don't give it a chance to happen. Go to your blood bank **NOW** . . . and win a soldier's undying gratitude—as well as—perhaps—his life!



THE RED CROSS NEEDS YOUR BLOOD . . . NOW!

Unless Nevada Colton could find a way to buck Briggs Donlan's gun-slinging crew a rich oil lease would explode into

BLACK DYNAMITE

by LEE E. WELLS



I

NEVADA COLTON saw the shooting. He had just come out of the Pete Saloon onto Kawtown's jam-packed street. A harsh voice close by caught his attention and he stopped, pressing back against the wall. He recognized that voice, heavy, burring and domineering.

"You and Dinero slipped mighty bad, Slick," Brigs Donlan said flatly. "I wanted that Injun lease that Brenton and Edmunds picked up. If them gents get a flow on that lease, there's no telling how much they can pull out from under our own wells."

Nevada Colton's wide lips lost their pleasant grin. His keen hazel eyes cut toward the corner of the saloon. Brigs and Slick Arnold certainly had an undue interest in the lease that Nevada worked for. The cowboy took swift strides to the cor-

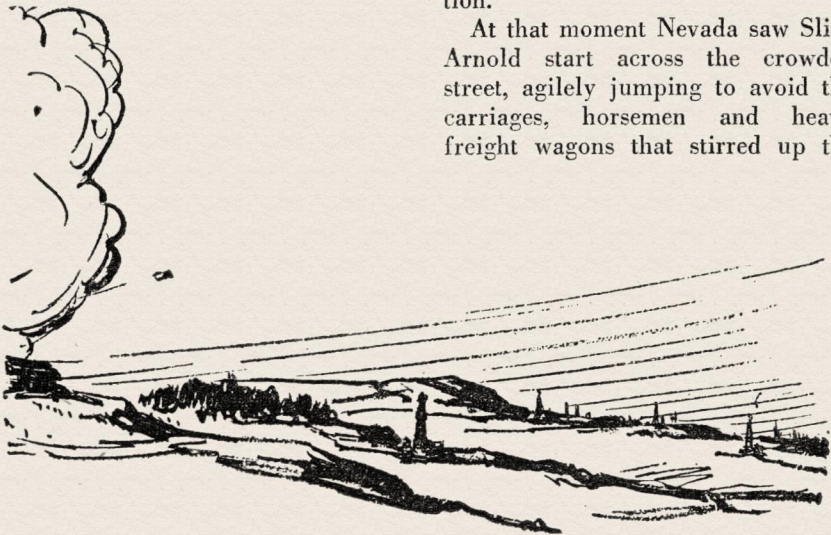
ner and around it before he was seen. This would have to be reported to Sod Edmunds.

Halting once he was out of sight, Nevada rubbed his long chin, removed his battered Stetson and scratched his red hair. His eyes narrowed in a speculative gleam and he addressed a hammer-headed nag close by.

"Now what would them two side-winders be planning?" he demanded. The horse didn't answer and Nevada shook his head. "It ain't going to be straight and open, I'd bet a busted peso on that."

Just then he noticed the young Indian on the planked sidewalk. The Indian was tall and lithe, moving with a cougarlike grace in the crowd that pushed and shoved along the street. His dark face was impassive, but the black eyes glittered with a hate that had the force of a blow. They caught and held Nevada's attention.

At that moment Nevada saw Slick Arnold start across the crowded street, agilely jumping to avoid the carriages, horsemen and heavy freight wagons that stirred up the



ankle-deep dust. The Indian's thin lips drew back in a slight gesture and his brown hand swept down to his gun. It blurred up, leveled.

Nevada jumped forward, long arm reaching out to deflect the six-gun. A passing oilman saw the Indian, shouted in fear and tried to press back in the throng. The six-gun blasted, sharp and flat, carrying above the steady rumble of the wheels and the constant murmur of hundreds of rough voices.

Slick Arnold's hat sailed from his head. The lawyer instantly whirled, white-faced, rounded eyes searching the crowd. His hand swept aside the skirt of his long, black coat and a heavy Peacemaker jumped out of leather.

The Indian did not try a second shot. Turning on soft moccasins, he fled. Nevada was in his way and the Indian's gun swept up. Instantly Nevada jumped to one side, pressing against the wall of the saloon. He craved no gunplay with a crazed Indian. The young man sped the length of the saloon and disappeared around the corner.

Excitement rolled over the crowd and finally Slick Arnold found his voice. "Catch that bushwhacker!" he roared.

Eager men pounded past Nevada but the redhead remained flattened against the wall. He watched Arnold come back to the walk and stand at the corner of the saloon. Though the lawyer had been attacked, he took no active part in the pursuit. Nevada's keen mind was busy with the puzzle. There had been a deep and powerful

motive that had led the Indian to try for Slick's hide.

Slick Arnold holstered his Peacemaker, his long tapering hands still trembling. Some of the natural red color came back into his jowled face and his blue eyes lost their frightened look. He was adjusting his coat when he saw Nevada. Instant suspicion flooded his face. He came slowly to a stand just before Nevada.

"That Injun a friend of yours?" he demanded flatly.

"Never saw him before," Nevada said mildly, "but his aim is sure poor."

Slick's thick lips curled in a suspicious sneer. "Maybe you didn't know that when you hired him."

"I got a six-gun of my own," Nevada replied with sudden grim inflection. "I've always done my own skunk and snake hunting. I reckon you can prove that right now, was you a mind to."

His hazel eyes had grown cold and steady, the wide mouth setting in a straight line under the long nose. At the moment his face, accented by the high cheekbones, looked pointed and bony, carved from hard granite. Slick Arnold licked his lips, shrugged his beefy shoulders.

"I'll find out later, Colton. But you can take a message to your bosses. Tell Sod Edmunds and Oscar Brenton because they won that Injun lease is no sign we're through with them. If I know Brigs Donlan, we've just begun to fight."

"If I know Brigs," Nevada said carefully, "it will be crooked, dirty and ugly."

Slick flushed and his hand dropped

down to his belt. Instantly Nevada became tense and the lawyer's eyes flicked away. Turning abruptly on his heel, he walked toward the saloon, broad back stiff and angry. A frown knotting his forehead, Nevada watched him go.

"Now what in tarnation made him so blasted proddy? That loco Injun nearly caused another shooting."

For awhile Nevada stayed close to the saloon but the excitement of the chase gradually died down. The Indian had disappeared. While Nevada was watching, Kawtown's diminutive fighting marshal, Jack Brolen, pushed his five feet of wiry muscle through the crowd to the Pete Saloon and disappeared beyond the swing doors.

Nevada joined the throng filling the walk and let it sweep him toward the edge of town and the rows of oil derricks that lifted gaunt skeletons into the sky. It was hard to believe that less than a year ago Kawtown had been a small crossroads hamlet. It had served as a shipping point for the nearby ranches and as a place for the cowboys to let off steam on pay days. That was all changed when a wildcat had come in across Comanche Creek at the edge of town.

The population had doubled and tripled overnight and then had soared to amazing gains as more wells came in. Oil workers, speculators, promoters, lease buyers had flooded to Kawtown. In their wake came drifters, easy-money boys, tinhorn gamblers, thin-lipped, hard-eyed men with ready six-guns that could be sold to the highest bidder.

Prices went up like a sky rocket,

every building was jam-packed with money-crazed humans. Tents sprang up, sprawling eastward toward Comanche Creek. Shacks were made of scrap lumber and rusting bits of corrugated tin, salvaged from the quick, wasteful construction of the more substantial buildings.

A little brick building bore the sign "Kawtown Bank" across its front. Nevada entered, pushed open a swing gate by the cashier's cage and entered the president's office. Two men swung to face him.

"You made that Injun deal." Nevada grinned.

Oscar Brenton, behind the desk, folded his hands over his watch-chained paunch and frowned. The lean rancher before the desk looked mildly surprised. He raised sandy brows in a questioning stare.

"How'd you know, Nevada?"

"Heard Brigs Donlan talking about it to Slick Arnold. Brigs is mighty riled about losing the lease and he aims to do something about it. Don't know just what."

Sod Edmunds swung back to the banker, his wrinkled face showing his worry. "You're sure that contract with the Kiowa is plumb legal, Oscar?"

"Air tight," Brenton assured him, smiling. Brenton had a round baby face, pink fat jowls and a friendly pair of blue eyes. He twirled the nugget on the end of the watch chain. "Donlan can't do anything now that the contract and lease are signed."

Sod paced back and forth before the desk. Nevada, watching his boss, could understand the worry that ob-

viously roweled the rancher. Edmunds was a man in his fifties, lean and wiry, legs bowed by long years in the saddle. He stopped his pacing.

"As operating partner in this deal, Oscar, I'm going to take steps to protect us from that Donlan hombre. He'd steal every tool and piece of equipment we've got if he had the chance, and we can't afford to lose a thing."

"Law," Oscar replied quietly.

Sod grunted disdainfully. "Brigs' law, Oscar, and we all know it. He's bought himself some judges, some lawyers and a whole passel of gunmen. Brigs runs Kawtown and there ain't much we can do but keep our guns loose in leather."

"True enough." Brenton sighed. "What's on your mind?"

"Nevada will move into the shack up on the lease and keep an eye on things. The rig's up, the tools are there like we bought them. Nevada's plumb reliable and mighty fast with a six. It's a combination we need. . . . Nevada, you git yourself some grub and get to that lease. Camp there, and keep an eye on things."

Nevada nodded, and left the office. Out on the street, he lost himself again in the crowd. After a quick meal in a crowded café, he got his horse from the livery stable and rode out to the lease.

It sat on the top of a knoll that overlooked Kawtown, a bare space except for rig and shack, bordered on three sides by a forest of derricks. Oscar Brenton and Sod Edmunds, owner of the Circle E, had formed a partnership and leased the land from

the Indian owners. The man who had it before them had gone broke but the new partnership hoped to win where the other had lost.

Nevada took care of his horse and then went outside to sit on the stoop. Twilight had come and Kawtown's lights twinkled below him. Looking at them, Nevada felt out of place up here where the reek of oil was heavy in the air. His job was punching cows, not riding herd on a rig and a pile of tools.

To work off his restlessness, he took a turn around the lease, walking in long strides. He saw nothing suspicious. Tomorrow the crew would be here and the drilling would start.

By the time Nevada reached the shack again, full night had fallen. He could hear Kawtown raising its own particular wild brand of hell down the hill. The rumble of the pumps and drills came to him from every direction. He sat down on the stoop again, sighed and stretched out his long legs.

A slight whisper of sound behind him made him jerk and his hand dropped down to his holster. Instantly something hard and round pressed into his back. A harsh voice whispered close to his ear.

"Very still, amigo! Very still. I not want to shoot."

II

Nevada's taloned fingers quivered, but he held them carefully away from his gun. He did not dare to turn his head, not knowing what slight excuse the man behind might need to kill

him. He felt his six-gun eased from leather.

"Up. Come inside. You will light lamp."

Nevada slowly pulled his long legs under him and arose. As he turned, he saw the slim shadow of the man who menaced him. The man stepped close and once again the gun barrel bored into Nevada's back. The cowboy stepped carefully across the dark room to the table, struck a match and lit the lamp.

"Another room. Good!" the man grunted. "I put gun in holster. Don't try use'm. I watch from other room. Men come pronto. You not see me. Savvy?"

Nevada nodded, grim-faced. His captor circled him and Nevada got his first clear glimpse of the man. His eyes sharpened with surprise. It was the young Indian who had tried to kill Slick Arnold that afternoon in Kawtown. The Indian's dark eyes studied Nevada sharply, thin lips barely moved as he spoke.

"Hang gun belt on chair. Sit down. I be back here in other room. Johnny Warpaint not miss that close. You tell not see Johnny Warpaint. Savvy?"

Nevada slowly unbuckled the belt and hung it on the chair. The Indian stood in the dark doorway that led to the little storeroom, piled high with boxes. The six-gun was a steady, dull-blue menace in his dark hand. He faded back into the shadows of the storeroom and his voice gave a sibilant warning.

"Sit down, amigo. Remember, I can see and hear. I shoot, you speak wrong."

"Yeah." Nevada sighed as he sank into the chair beside the little square table. "I saw you make a try for Slick Arnold this afternoon. Not that I'm grieving about it, but how come?"

"Maybe you know later. Man come now."

Nevada heard the horseman ride up outside. He stiffened, then slowly relaxed. Opening a drawer in the table, he pulled out a battered deck of cards. He had started a solitaire layout when the outer door opened.

Nevada looked up as though surprised. Fighting Jack Brolen stood there, bleak eyes sweeping the room. The marshal was small, just a shade above five feet, but he had the cocky, springy walk of a seasoned fighting man as he crossed to the table.

His chin was square and hard like granite, in complete contrast to the humorous quirk at the corner of his mouth and the pug nose set squarely in the center of his little, round face. His gray eyes were hard and frosty.

"Good game, Nevada?" he asked.

"Dunno. Just started," Nevada answered. He dropped the deck and leaned back in his chair. A crawling sensation hit between his shoulder blades just about where the Indian's bullet would strike if he made a false move. Brolen looked around the room.

"I been chasing an Injun. Ain't seen one around?"

"Shucks, Jack, I been riding herd on a heap of wrenches and pipe all evening. I sure wish my boss would stick to cows."

"I wish everyone would stick to cows," grunted Brolen. "I'd be a

happier man. Oil ain't nothing but an eternal trouble."

He moved away from the table, hard eyes traveling around the room. They rested on the dark doorway and Nevada felt something clutch at his throat. Fighting Jack's small hand dropped to the big gun at his hip and he moved slowly toward the doorway. Nevada found his voice.

"I'll give you a light if you want, Jack. Ain't nothing but boxes and tools there."

Fighting Jack halted a few feet from the door. Indecision showed in the slant of his body. Nevada pushed back from the table and reached for the lamp. The lawman turned, his hand dropping away from his holster.

"Ain't no need, I reckon. You'd have seen anyone going in there."

"Couldn't help it," Nevada agreed, still holding the lamp. "But there ain't no harm making you satisfied."

"Sit down, Nevada." Jack shook his head. He cuffed the broad-brimmed black hat back from his tanned face and sighed. "I'm plumb weary chasing redskins anyhow."

"What'd this one do?"

"Tried to salivate Slick Arnold," Fighting Jack replied. He pulled up another chair and sat down at the table.

"I saw the try," said Nevada. "Seems to me you'd be giving the Injun a medal for it."

"I ought to," Jack agreed. He passed his hand wearily over his face. "Things ain't been right since oil came to Kawtown, Nevada. I'm protecting a bunch of rattlesnakes

and skunks that I would have skedad-dled out of town a year ago. There's times I feel plumb ornery, but I got to do my job."

"I savvy that. But, Jack, seems to me that Injun might have something on his side. Thought of that?"

"Sure, but he should have talked first and shot afterwards. As it is, I can't do nothing but trail him down and bring him in. Slick and Brigs Dolan swore out a warrant and I got to serve it. I reckon the Injun will have a chance to tell his story at the trial."

Nevada laughed mirthlessly and Brolen flushed. The cowboy shook his head. "Jack, that Injun won't have a chance. Dolan owns about everything around here."

"Brigs Dolan!" Jack swore. "Now there's the king snake of them all. I don't savvy how he's done it, but in less than a year he sure got to ramrod Kawtown. What wells he don't own, he either breaks or controls mighty pronto."

"Except this one," put in Nevada. "He's tried to buffalo Sod and Oscar Brenton, but them two don't scare easy."

"But you ain't through yet," Jack warned. He arose. "I'll bet all the blue chips in Kawtown, Brigs Donlan has just begun to fight your boss and his partner."

"He'll know he's been in a ruckus," Nevada promised quietly.

"Fight him all you please," said Jack Brolen, "but keep it legal, cowpoke. I don't want to have to start trailing after you or your boss."

The little man grinned, but Nevada recognized the serious promise be-

hind the light words. Fighting Jack Brolen believed in his lawman's oath and his duty. If the legal papers were handed to him, he'd go after his own father, masking his own feelings and opinions behind the bright badge he wore on his dusty black vest.

Brolen walked to the door, spurs jingling softly. He opened it, listened into the night a moment, and then turned back toward Nevada. His gray eyes were smiling now.

"If you see that Injun, tell him to keep out of my sight."

"If I see him, I'll sure pass the word."

"*Sta bueno.*" Jack grinned and closed the door behind him.

Nevada sank weakly into the chair. His fingers drummed a nervous tattoo on the rough table top. There was a slight stir in the storeroom and he said:

"Come on out. He's gone."

He twisted around to look at the door. The Indian came out, still holding the six-gun. Dark, glittering eyes held Nevada a moment, weighing and judging. Then the impassive face lit with a sudden flashing smile and the Indian holstered the gun.

He pulled a burlap sack over the window and then sat down at the table. Nevada got his first good look at the fugitive. Johnny Warpaint was young, probably around twenty-five. His coarse black hair was parted in the middle, woven into two small braids that hung down to his chest. His face was dark, high-boned and clean-cut, the nose hooked like a

Roman senator's, the eyes well spaced and direct. He wore levis and a checked shirt.

"You had chance for gun when lawman come to door. I could not shoot then. Why you not tell about me?" Johnny demanded.

Nevada scratched his tousled red hair and grinned, the wide lips twisting. He flushed a little and then laughed.

"Now you've asked me a hard one, Johnny. I reckon it's because you made a try for Slick Arnold. If you don't like that rattlesnake, then there's a heap to be said for you."

The Indian's fist clenched in a slow gesture and a muscle knot jumped in his lean cheek. The deep eyes became filled with a hate that made even Nevada feel jumpy.

"I kill Slick Arnold some day. Maybe soon. Then I go far. Maybe join Comanche cousin. Fight white man."

"Hey!" Nevada exclaimed. "That ain't no way to plan your life. You got things all mixed up."

Johnny Warpaint shook his head. "You see things Johnny Warpaint see? You maybe stand by like old woman while white man kill and rob?"

III

Nevada whistled softly, staring at the Indian. His eyes dropped under the steady accusing stare and he spread his hands wide in a helpless gesture.

"I reckon you might have a right to be proddy," he admitted. "But we ain't all that way. There's a

whole heap of us who are really white."

"Many!" Johnny Warpaint exclaimed and his voice filled with scorn. "No, amigo. Only one or two, maybe now and then. Too many speak with forked tongue. Mouth say big words, hands do mean things. Always it has been that way.

"My father and his father fight white man because Indian must live. He need game for food, clothing. He need land to walk and air to breathe. White man want all, kill and burn and rob to get. My father's father die in blazing tepee. My father shot like dog. Big white chief send soldiers. Say we have land of our own. White man never come." Johnny leaned forward, his voice lowering in its intensity. "You sit now on land where white man promise not to come."

Nevada felt that his face and neck were a flaming red. He could give the Indian no adequate reply, only shrug his shoulders in the face of the harsh, logical statements.

"I know how you feel, Johnny, but there ain't a blasted thing none of us can do about it now. You can't go on a killing spree; you'd only lose your own hide."

"I die happy then," Johnny grunted.

"But you ain't helped yourself or your people," Nevada put in swiftly.

Johnny Warpaint leaned back and the frown left his face. He rolled a cigarette and looked about the shack, approving its neatness and cleanliness.

"Johnny have land Big White chief give. Johnny have paper show

land is his." He shrugged. "The paper has forked tongue. Now land is Slick Arnold's. There is oil. Dinero go to Slick and to Brigs Donlan. Johnny get only blanket and beans."

"That's illegal," Nevada disclaimed. His eyes narrowed. "So that's why you threw lead at Slick."

"That's why," agreed Johnny. "Johnny face white man's judge. Injun not man enough take care of himself—and oil well. No! Injun need white man to be guardian. Judge make Slick Arnold Johnny's guardian—like snake take good care of egg!" He spat elaborately.

Nevada's face set in grim lines. "So that's the play. It's a raw, dirty deal all the way around. I wonder how many other Injuns Brigs Donlan has cheated."

"Many." Johnny rose. "I go now. Hide with people until lawman get tired running. Come back then and find Slick Arnold. You Johnny's friend. You speak straight tongue. Your friends deal fair with Clay Mad Bull when you lease this land from him. Johnny tell Clay sign with your friends and not Brigs Donlan."

"I thank you for that," Nevada acknowledged.

"Donlan not finished. He try trick and count coup on you and your friends. Johnny know. Watch Brigs. Need help, send Clay Mad Bull. Johnny come."

The Indian moved quickly to the table and blew out the lamp. Nevada didn't hear a sound but in another moment the door slowly

opened. He could dimly see Johnny's shadowy form as the Indian watched and listened. At last Johnny seemed satisfied and he stood framed in the doorway.

"Johnny go now. Thanks, amigo. I repay."

A flick of movement and he just wasn't there any more. Slowly Nevada pulled himself out of the chair and buckled his gun belt around his waist. He stepped to the door and looked out into the night. The pound of machinery was clear now, a steady throb that was like a giant's heart-beat.

Nevada's eyes lifted to the gaunt derricks and his jaw set angrily. All this wealth had been acquired through trickery and theft. There was a heap of gun smoke and blood in it, too.

This whole territory had been promised to the Indians and the government had moved the tribes in. Nevada's lips curled in contempt. No one had thought this land would be worth much. It had little timber, no mineral wealth, its red clay was cut by deep gullies and flooding rivers. Because of this the white man had made the empty gesture of deeding the land to the individual members of the tribes.

Then had come the joke of Fate. Beneath the worthless land, so cheerfully deeded away, lay a tremendous pool of oil, hidden wealth of untold value. It belonged to the Indian but the white man had forgotten that. There they were, down in Kawtown, stampeding over the rights of such men as Johnny Warpaint, shoving him aside, robbing him. Where that

was not enough to obtain the black wealth beneath the ground, murder would turn the trick.

Nevada awoke at dawn and was ready to meet the partners when they came riding slowly up the hill. Sod Edmunds showed no excitement but Oscar Brenton didn't have his partner's control. His fat jowls quivered and he constantly fiddled with his watch chain as they inspected the tools and the silent rig.

"Sod, we'll know pretty soon if we're rich," Oscar said excitedly.

"Or poor as unbranded dogies." Sod chuckled. He turned. "Here comes the first worker."

A squat man came up the hill on short legs that looked as powerful as tree trunks. Nevada watched him come closer, noting the barrellike chest and the round bullet head that sat deep between the wide shoulders. The fellow's nose had been broken and it seemed to spread over the whole, coarse face. Muddy eyes flicked up to the three men on the rig and then away.

"Where are the rest?" asked Brenton.

"They'll be along," Hank Farger growled, "as soon as I get steam up in the boiler."

He busied himself at the boiler, cleaning ashes out of the pit, building a fire and stoking it so that the flames roared high every time he opened the firebox door. Nevada watched him, feeling an instinctive dislike for the man. Then he forgot Farger as he listened to Brenton's excited chatter about their probable wealth.

"Oil's all around us," the banker said with a wave of his hands at the derricks about the lease. "We'll probably be tapping the same pool, or maybe another just as rich. Brigs Donlan won't have all the pete in Kawtown."

"He has most of it," Sod answered.

"He ain't through trying for us, I heard," Nevada put in cautiously. The two partners swung to face him and Nevada shrugged. "It just ain't like Donlan to lay down. You beat him to the Injun Mad Bull with your lease, but that ain't the end of it."

"The lease can't be broken," Brenton said sharply. "Who gave you this information about Donlan?"

Johnny's name was on the tip of Nevada's tongue, then he thought better of it. The less who knew about the Indian, the safer Johnny would be from Fighting Jack Brolen. Nevada shrugged.

"It's just my own idea about Donlan."

"We've got that taken care of," declared Brenton.

"I'm not so sure," Nevada countered. He pointed down the hill. "Here comes his shyster now. I don't know the other gent."

The partners swung around and saw the two horsemen come slowly up the hill. The three men on the rig platform jumped down and walked to meet the riders. The horsemen drew rein before the shack but didn't dismount. Slick Arnold frowned slightly at Nevada and then erased the frown with an oily smile.

"Good morning, gentlemen. I hear you start drilling today. I hope

you have better luck than your predecessor."

"You hear too much," Sod Edmunds growled. Nevada dropped back, leaning against a corner of the shack, sharp-eyed and suspicious. Slick Arnold's smile grew wider and he laughed.

"Nothing gets by the Kawtown gossips, friend. You should know that. I want you to meet Dinero Jackson."

Dinero Jackson wore a close-cropped bushy beard that only partially concealed thin, bloodless lips. Dark eyes squinted and a perpetual frown wrinkled his low forehead. He wore a long black coat and a flowered vest, both liberally sprinkled with ancient cigar ashes. He jerked his head grudgingly at Sod's drawled greeting.

"I buy up leases," Jackson said in a scratchy voice. "Arnold told me about this stretch."

"We ain't selling," Sod answered. Dinero appeared not to hear him. He stood up in the stirrups and looked over the hill. He squinted at the rig and the boiler, then shook his head.

"Tools and equipment ain't the best. You sit atop a hill here and that might mean a heap of drilling to strike the pool. It's a long gamble you got, gents."

"We're ready for it," Brenton answered shortly. "We figure most of the drilling's done anyhow."

Dinero shook his head. "You might be wrong, hombre, badly wrong. Oil's tricky stuff. Like gold,

it's where you find it. I'll give you fifty thousand for the lease, rigs and tools thrown in. That's mighty fair."

Sod snorted angrily. "Fair! We paid darned near that for the equipment alone. You're wasting your time, Jackson. Best ride back to Kawtown."

Nevada suddenly realized that Hank Farger was no longer stoking the boiler. Farger had straightened and edged closer, muddy eyes alight with interest. As Nevada looked he thought he saw a slight sign of recognition light Farger's face as he caught Slick Arnold's glance. It was gone as quickly as it came so that Nevada could not quite be sure.

"Fifty-five thousand," Jackson raised the ante, "and that's as high as I'll go."

The two partners looked at each other. Brenton eyed Jackson suspiciously. "Whom do you represent?" he demanded.

"Myself. I deal in leases," snapped Jackson.

"You wouldn't be here unless you had a chance to sell to someone else," Brenton insisted. "Who has made you the offer?"

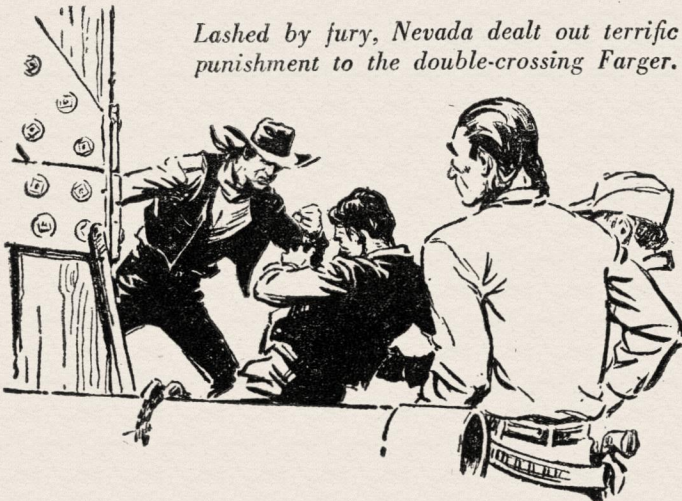
"No one. I'm gambling," Jackson replied angrily.

Nevada pushed himself erect and cleared his throat. He grinned up into the bearded, scowling face.

"Your company gives us ideas," Nevada drawled. "Slick is Brig Donlan's right-hand man, I've heard. Does all his dirty legal work and keeps his gun-slingers from stretching hemp that's been waiting for them."

"We're not dealing with you," Arnold snapped, the smile vanishing.

"No, and you ain't dealing with a bunch of Injuns with no savvy of white man's law," Nevada answered quickly. "I don't reckon you'll be appointed our guardians."



Lashed by fury, Nevada dealt out terrific punishment to the double-crossing Farger.

Arnold's face flushed angrily and his hand dropped down to the holster under his coat. Instantly Nevada's hand slapped leather and his six-gun blurred up, settling in a steady bead on Arnold's white vest. The lawyer paled, hastily jerked his hand away from his gun. Jackson swore and Nevada's gun shifted slightly. The lease buyer stiffened and sat silent.

"Arnold, you're right hasty grabbing for that iron of yours," Nevada warned. "It's plumb unhealthy to make a move like that. You through talking to these skunks, Sod?"

"Long ago," Sod answered. "Me and Oscar don't aim to sell to anyone, let alone Brigs Donlan."

Slick Arnold leaned his bulk forward over the saddle. His voice sounded choked. "There'll come a time you'll be glad to sell to Brigs at any price. Remember that. But I doubt if Brigs will buy. He'll take and there won't be a thing you can do about it."

Nevada's Colt shifted slightly and Arnold caught the movement. He sat back, wary eyes watching the weapon. Nevada pointed toward Kawtown.

"You'd best rattle your hocks, hombres. Tell Brigs that we're plumb unreasonable. Now get riding before this six goes off accidental-like."

The two men scowled, then silently neck-reined their horses and rode slowly down the hill. When they came to the edge of the lease, they pulled up. Arnold twisted around and shook his fist.

"We'll be back, and we'll take over. Remember that."

Nevada raised the six-gun, and the two men set spurs to their horses. In a moment they had disappeared in the forest of rigs that covered the land down to Comanche Creek.

"The place smells better," Sod commented, "now that you cleared it of skunks, Nevada. I reckon we can work in peace now."

"I ain't betting on it," Nevada answered.

IV

The oil crew reported in, and Nevada watched them work for awhile. Farger had steam up in the boiler. There was orderly confusion around the rig, constant movement and hustle. A big freight wagon toiled up the hill with a load of casing. Nevada felt useless and out of place, and at last he returned to the shack. He pushed open the door and stepped inside, then pulled up short in amazement.

"Johnny Warpaint! What in seven blazes are you doing here?"

The Indian smiled. "Lawman look once. Not look again. Johnny maybeso safe. Johnny here where Brigs Donlan come certain like sun rise of morning."

"But—how did you get in? No one saw you."

"White man have poor eyes," Johnny stated simply. "Big bustle. Men move, here . . . there. Johnny walk in. No one see."

Nevada took off his hat and sank down in a chair. A puzzled frown made his face look more rocky and stern. He stared out the window toward the rig, absently watching Hank Farger adjust his gauges and

stoke the firebox of the boiler.

"You can't stay here, Johnny," Nevada said at last. "It ain't that I care, but—"

"Partners know about shooting?" Johnny asked quietly.

"No," Nevada answered slowly, then his eyes lighted. "Say, maybe you *can* hang around! We could sure use another man."

"I work," Johnny said. "Help watch, help fight when Brigs Donlan try to take."

Nevada grinned and arose. Leading the Indian outside, he cornered Sod Edmunds. He introduced Johnny Warpaint and suggested the Indian for a job as watchman, to relieve Nevada now and then. Sod was reluctant at first, but Nevada argued swiftly and well. Besides, Sod seemed to like the appearance of the young man.

"If you say so," Sod surrendered at last. "I ain't never hired an Injun before, but Johnny looks all right. We'll try him anyway."

"I help you good," promised Johnny.

Nevada and Johnny returned to the shack, and Sod went back to the rig. The drilling had been started again and the sound of the machinery was good. It seemed to promise wealth and security and Nevada could visualize the drill boring closer and closer to a huge sea of oil deep under ground.

Johnny listened as Nevada checked over the contents of the storeroom, listed the Indian's simple duties of watching for skulkers. Nevada finished the instructions and gave the Indian a hard, direct glance.

"I ain't caring about your war with Slick Arnold away from the lease," Nevada said bluntly. "In fact, I hope you get his scalp. But I don't want any warpaths leading to this lease so that Sheriff Brolen might figure we was aiding and abetting."

"I savvy," Johnny answered.

The sudden blast lifted them both off their feet and slammed them across the room. They were stunned and deafened. Something heavy hit the roof of the shack and then rolled down the pitch to the ground. As Nevada picked himself off the floor a man outside screamed in agony. Boots pounded in panic toward the rig.

Nevada jumped for the door, Johnny at his heels. They ran outside and Nevada plunged to a halt, eyes wide. The boiler had exploded. A man on the rig platform writhed and threshed, moaning and gasping. Nevada saw Hank Farger's stocky form crouched for protection behind the big woodpile. As Nevada looked, the boilerman straightened and edged toward the rig.

Sod and Oscar Brenton reached the derrick a jump ahead of the foreman. They clustered around the injured man. Nevada swore, spoke a word to Johnny and ran to the rig. It took only a glance to see the damage that had been done. There was no longer any boiler. Live steam had burned the injured man and he had been badly cut by flying scraps of metal.

Sod and Oscar Brenton were too busy trying to help the injured worker to think of their own loss as

yet, but Nevada felt sick. A boiler would cost more than he liked to think about. There would also be the crew's pay during the time they were idle. All of this meant far more money than Sod or Oscar could scrape up.

Nevada swore and turned away from the rig. He caught the wide grin on Hank Farger's face, that swiftly wiped off when the man saw he was being watched. Something hard and truculent came in the set of the rocky chin, and the muddy eyes gleamed contemptuously. Nevada remembered the swift exchange of glances between the boilerman and Slick Arnold.

Nevada jumped down from the rig and advanced slowly on Farger. The man lowered his bullet head between his wide shoulders. His heavy arms hung loose at his sides, the stubby fingers curling up into fists. He licked his thick lips nervously but stood firm.

"How'd it happen?" demanded Nevada.

"I dunno," Farger growled. "She just let go."

"It blew up because you wanted it to," Nevada stated flatly. "You wanted to stop work here."

"That's a lie!" Farger snapped.

"You and Slick Arnold fixed this crooked deal up between you. If Brigs couldn't buy the lease from us, we were to be forced out."

"Prove it," Hank growled.

Nevada nodded slowly. Some of the crew had seen the exchange between the two men and they formed a line on the edge of the rig back of Nevada. Johnny Warpaint glided to

Nevada's side, but the cowboy checked him. He removed his gun belt, dropped it to the ground.

Farger's coarse face lighted. Fighting was something he knew, a contest in which no holds were barred and the enemy was left maimed or dead. His giant arms flexed and he took a half step forward. With no further warning, he charged, arms spread wide to grapple Nevada in a crushing bear hug.

The cowboy side-stepped, pivoted, and his fist cracked against Farger's jaw as the man rushed past. Farger stumbled, tried to catch himself, and ended by plowing his face into the ground. He twisted instantly to his feet, thick lips snarling.

Shaking his head, he lowered it and charged again. Nevada met him squarely this time, snapping the man's head up with a sizzling punch to the nose. Farger bellowed like a wounded bull. His taloned fingers sank in Nevada's shoulder and he tried to pull the cowboy closer. Nevada battered his stomach and ribs and Farger loosed his hold, stumbling back under the steady punishment.

Nevada wouldn't let him get set. The cowboy bored in, rugged face grim and determined. He shifted his attack to the battered face. Farger went down and Nevada stepped back. Farger lay sprawled on the ground, thick chest heaving in his struggle for breath. He rolled over painfully and raised himself up on his hands, bullet head hanging low.

Blood dripped from his battered

nose and mouth. He shook his head as though to clear it and his muddy eyes focused on Nevada's gun belt, lying but a few feet away. Gathering his legs beneath him, Farger suddenly propelled himself forward. His clutching fingers reached for the gun belt, settled around the smooth grip of the heavy Colt. He jerked it free of leather and twisted like a striking snake, the weapon streaking up toward Nevada.

Nevada saw the move too late. Farger had reached the weapon and was already turning when Nevada jumped toward him. In split-second clarity, Nevada saw that he would never reach Farger in time. He saw the Colt come up and for a flick of time looked down the menacing black barrel. Farger's bloody, triumphant grin mocked him and Nevada set himself to feel the ripping blow of the slug.

A gun smashed loudly. Farger's weapon spat flame and smoke. Nevada flinched, even as he threw himself toward the man. He realized that, miraculously, he was not hit. His body struck Farger at the end of a low dive and the big man dropped back. Frantically Nevada grabbed for the gun wrist.

Farger didn't resist. The man lay still and slack under Nevada. His stubby fingers had released the Colt and the weapon lay harmlessly in the dust. Nevada cautiously raised himself, puzzled eyes searching the big body beneath him. It was then that he saw the round, blue hole in the narrow forehead.

Nevada looked up and over his shoulder. Johnny Warpaint held his

smoking six-gun still in his hand. There was no expression on the Indian's dark face as he holstered the weapon. Nevada scooped up the fallen Colt and came to his feet.

"Thanks, Johnny," he said. "I reckon I owe you a heap for that gunplay. I was sure slated for boot-hill."

"Johnny take no thanks," the Indian replied shortly. "Pay back older debt."

Nevada nodded and picked up his gun belt. The dead rigger was to be taken to Kawtown. Sod and Oscar Brenton were standing white-faced and silent on the platform. The tension left the crowd and the workers began to mill around their foreman and the two partners.

"I . . . I guess we're finished," Brenton said in a shaky voice. "We can't afford a new boiler. Even if we could, Donlan has the only ones for sale. He's got us where we can't do nothing."

Nevada straightened. He turned and looked down the hill toward Kawtown and then at Farger's slack body.

"Donlan's getting too big for his own good," he said evenly. "It's sure high time someone called that jasper. I reckon this is it."

"What do you intend to do?" Brenton asked worriedly.

"Farger was Arnold's man, and that means he took orders from Brigs Donlan. Farger blew up our boiler. I reckon it's only fair we get one of Brigs'."

"But where?" demanded Sod.

"The first Donlan well we come

to," Nevada answered flatly. "Johnny, you want a part of this?"

The Indian smiled and nodded. Nevada strode off toward the shack for his horse, Johnny Warpaint close at his heels. They came back, leading extra mounts for Sod, Brenton and another to carry Farger's body.

In a short while the little cavalcade rode down the hill, Nevada leading. Oscar Brenton made feeble protests, doubting the legality of the move. Sod Edmunds said nothing, but he eyed his hired cowpuncher with new respect and thoughtfulness.

Nevada reached the edge of the lease, sharp hazel eyes cutting toward the derricks. He spotted a boiler that looked to be the capacity of the one they had just lost. Halting his horse, he pointed to the well.

"Is that one of Brigs'?" he asked.

Johnny Warpaint nodded. Nevada turned off the road and led the way to the derrick. He loosened the six in its holster. As they came up, a crowd of men emerged from a shack nearby. A big giant of a man in a fawn-gray Stetson stepped before the group. He had a face like chiseled granite and a voice deep with authority.

"What do you gents want?"

Nevada drew rein. He sat straight and tall in the saddle, no emotion showing on his lean face. His level eyes sparked angrily. The big man came toward him in long strides, hands close to a pearl-handled Colt in a low-slung gun belt.

"I'm returning your man, Donlan," Nevada said quietly. "He's across the saddle there. And I came to get that boiler yonderly in ex-

change for the one Farger deliberately blowed up."

Donlan's eyes narrowed. "I keep my boilers."

"Not that one," Nevada replied. "I'm coming after it, Brigs. Make your play if you want to auger."

V

Nevada swung out of the saddle. The group by the shack surged forward but Johnny Warpaint's brown hand shot to his gun. The men froze. Nevada faced Brigs Donlan, waiting. The man who ruled Kawtown stood with fingers taloned over his gun. Nevada's glance flicked over him and he moved steadily forward as though Donlan did not exist. It shook Brigs. His fingers convulsively gripped the gun butt, then dropped away. He stepped in front of Nevada.

"You can't get away with this, cowpoke. I'll have you in jail before nightfall."

Nevada halted. "That's your privilege, Brigs. But you'll find yourself in jail with me. We got witnesses to the explosion and the damage. One man's bad hurt and may die. That will be murder, was you to tangle with the law."

"You still can't prove anything," Brigs taunted.

"Maybe, maybe not. I got a hole card, Brigs. You can call it here and now if you want."

Brigs looked up at Sod Edmunds and Oscar Brenton. The fat banker showed a troubled, worried face. Sod sat silent and wooden, making no attempt to interfere. Brigs' eyes sud-

denly lighted and he grinned pleasantly. He bowed mockingly to Nevada.

"I'm a peaceful citizen and I don't resort to force. If you take the boiler, it will be over my protest, and you will be removing it from property not your own. Now the play is up to you."

"I wouldn't, Nevada," Brenton said hastily, "It's theft."

"Sure," agreed Nevada, "and I hope Brigs tries to do something about it. I'm staying here with Johnny Warpaint. Get that crew and we'll move this machinery where it'll do the most good."

Brenton spurred away, still muttering dire warnings of what would happen. Brigs joined his men by the shack, calmed them with a few low words. One of them started to edge away but Nevada halted him.

"Stand hitched, hombre, until this work is done. Then you can ride for the sheriff all you please."

It was late that night before the boiler had been moved up the hill and installed. The men worked by lantern light. A new boilerman took over in Farger's place and soon steam was up. The drilling started again. Nevada straightened, stretching the kinks out of his back. Every muscle ached from the hard work but it was worth it to see the machinery in motion.

Nevada walked back to the shack and Johnny Warpaint came out of the shadows. He moved so silently that he was beside Nevada before the cowboy realized it.

"I go Kawtown," Johnny said.

"Brigs Donlan very busy. Call Slick Arnold for powwow."

"Cooking up some deviltry," Nevada swore.

"That is true sign. Arnold talk to lawman. Big argue and then sheriff nod head. I watch close and hide, but cannot hear. Maybeso sheriff come."

"I wonder what them skunks are planning," Nevada mused. He looked back at the derrick and the men who worked around it. "They probably figure some angle to stop us."

"Arrest for stealing," Johnny said and chuckled. "Same like Indian."

"No, Brigs ain't so sure but what Hank Farger might have talked too much before he died. That's the bluff I had that Brigs wouldn't call today. It's something else."

"Maybe lawman look for me," the Indian said. "I ride to tribe. Be back."

He melted into the shadows as noiselessly as he had come and Nevada went on to the shack. Sod Edmunds and Oscar Brenton sat at the table. The banker frowned up at Nevada as the tall cowpoke entered.

"I wish you hadn't been so hasty," he complained. "We've laid ourselves open now for any action Brigs wants to take."

Sod grinned at Nevada and fished for tobacco. "Let him howl. I never saw a gent who likes to worry so much. He can't even hear that derrick working."

"Sounds good to me." Nevada dropped on the bunk, staring thoughtfully at the lamp flame. "Brigs will

strike back, but not like you think, Brenton. He'll try to catch us off guard, in some way we haven't even thought about."

Brenton shuddered and sank back in his chair. "I just hope it works out."

"Company," Sod said, raising his head and listening.

Nevada caught it, too, the rapid sound of a trotting horse. The rider came up to the shack and dismounted. Nevada glanced at Sod and arose from the bunk. He faced the door. Brenton moaned and resigned himself to whatever might come.

Fighting Jack Brolen stepped in the door. The little man gave them all a hard, sharp glance. His eyes cut around the room and came to rest angrily on Nevada.

"You pulled a windy on me, cow-poke. I reckon I ought to throw you in jail. Might yet. That goes for you gents, too," he threw at the partners. Brenton grunted and looked pained.

"What's in your craw?" Nevada asked.

"Injuns," Brolen said curtly. "One in particular. Wears the brand of Johnny Warpaint. Understand he's working for you."

Brenton sighed deeply but Nevada cut in before the banker could answer. "He was around but he ain't no more. Look if you want."

"I want," Brolen replied. "I didn't the last time and you had him cached somewhere about. I'll start with that other room."

He slid his gun out of leather and crossed to the storeroom. He



searched it thoroughly. Sod and Oscar Brenton stared accusingly at Nevada, who flushed and avoided their gaze.

"I liked the jasper," he said defensively. "Donlan had double-crossed him through Slick Arnold."

"What's the sheriff want him for?" Brenton asked heavily.

"Uh . . . well, I reckon Johnny done tried to salivate Slick Arnold the other day. I . . . well, that suited me right down to the ground and . . . he stayed here."

Brenton threw up his arms in a wild gesture of resignation and stared gloomily at the lamp. Brolen came out of the other room and holstered his six. He watched the three men.

"Better come with me while I look around the lease," he suggested. "Harboring and hiding a wanted man is punishable by jail in the territory."

Brenton moaned. Nevada smiled without mirth. "Tell me, Jack, did a jasper by the name of Donlan talk to you?"

"No," Brolen answered. His eyes bored into Nevada. "I'm a fair man and I ain't blind to things. But the law's the law and anyone who breaks it has to answer to me. I hope you gents whip Brigs—he's got it coming

—but if that Injun's around here, you'll all land in jail."

He jerked his head toward the door and the three men preceded him outside. Fighting Jack Brolen made a thorough search of the grounds, probing everywhere. At last he was satisfied that Johnny Warpaint was not around and he returned to his horse.

"I reckon you're clear," he said almost happily. He grinned down at Nevada. "Don't ever let me see that buck around here."

"We won't," Nevada assured him and smiled in return. Fighting Jack nodded and rode off.

For the next few days comparative peace reigned over the lease. The drilling continued, the crew boring ever deeper and deeper. Several times operations were stopped while a core was taken. No oil traces showed and the partners would be depressed for hours. Still drilling went on, deeper and deeper.

Nevada remained close to the lease, acting as a guard or occasionally streaking into Kawtown for some bit of equipment or tools when a breakdown occurred. He had half expected Johnny Warpaint to return but evidently the Indian was remaining in the tepees of his tribe.

Fighting Jack had made a couple of return visits but there had been no trace of the Indian. At last the lawman seemed convinced that he was wasting his time and he came no more. It was a relief but still the partners and Nevada expected trouble from Brigs Donlan. They knew

the big ruthless promoter kept a close check on the activities of the lease. In an oil boom town that was easy to do. The report on a core sampling was known to the lowliest tin-horn in the canvas saloons soon after it was taken.

Tension grew on the lease as the drills bit deeper. Nevada quickly discovered that drilling an oil well meant work, back-breaking work, and plenty of it. He dropped into his bunk, dead tired, and arose still aching and weary to face another day of excitement and labor.

Just as this evening, he walked wearily to the shack through the darkening twilight. He sank down on the bunk and smoked a cigarette, staring dully at the opposite wall. The steady rumble of the machinery shook the shack, but Nevada was no longer aware of the sound. He sighed, pinched out the cigarette and arose to cook his supper. He moved slowly to the stove.

He pulled up short, listening. There was a new sound, deep and low, like a growl from far beneath the earth. He heard a loud shout and turned facing the window, gray from the last faint light of day. The rumble changed into a roar and a whistling blast that filled the room with sound.

Even as Nevada looked, the light of the window was blotted out as though a giant hand had rubbed across it. Liquid pattered on the roof. The shouts and orders from the well grew louder, more strident. Nevada galvanized to life and jumped for the door. He ran outside into a rain of black, glistening

drops. His eyes cut toward the derrick.

A big plume of liquid shot high over the crown, blotting out that section of the sky. Nevada stared open-mouthed and then realization struck him. Oil! A gusher! The wildcat lease had come through! Sod and Brenton had won, and Nevada would come in for his share of the bonanza. Nevada found his voice and whooped in triumph. He pounded toward the well to help the crew harness the uncontrolled giant.

That was a herculean task. It was hours before the cap had been placed and the mad flow checked. Nevada was soaked in black oil, his face a dark mask except for the white circles around his eyes. He sank down beside the partners and the foreman on the edge of the platform.

"Where you storing the pete?" the foreman asked Sod.

The rancher wearily shook his head. "We'll build tanks, I reckon, now that we can get the credit."

"I can't hold that pressure forever," the foreman snorted. "She'll blow her top and flow wild again. You got to figure some place to hold the oil, and you got to figure it, pronto."

Sod groaned and Oscar Brenton didn't even look up. The banker stared down at the oil-soaked ground and talked in a bone-weary voice. "There's always something to whip. If it's not skunks like Donlan, it's things like pressure and storage."

Nevada straightened carefully, his back feeling as though it might snap in two. He stood up on the

rig platform and circled it slowly. At the far edge he paused and, scratching his head, looked thoughtfully down the hill toward a dry wash at its base. At last he returned to the partners.

"Give me some dynamite and run a pipe to the wash down there."

Sod looked up. "What do you—"

"He's got it!" the foreman interrupted with a shout. "Blast in both ends of the ravine and let the oil flow into it. That's a perfect tank. I'll give you the connections, cowpoke."

He was on his feet, shouting orders to his crew. Sod smiled gratefully at Nevada. "You got savvy, cowpoke, more'n I have. I'd never thought of that. Brenton, draw up papers giving Nevada ten shares of the flow."

"Dynamite right now," Nevada said impatiently. "We don't know how long that homemade cap will hold."

They worked until dawn. While Nevada studied the ravine and placed the charges, the rest dug a shallow trench to the rim. They connected lengths of pipe to the lip and then made connections ready to slap it in place the moment the cap was removed. The foreman gave Nevada a signal and the red-headed cowpoke sent the plunger home.

The double charge of dynamite let go with a blasting roar. Dirt and rocks jumped high in the air and the ravine walls slid thundering down into the chasm. When the smoke had cleared, Nevada checked the results. Both ends of the ravine were completely sealed. He waved

to the foreman and the crew made the connection to the well.

The three men stood on the rim watching the black fluid pour into the wash. They were bone-weary but they could not pull themselves away. Oscar Brenton sighed.

"Well, we won. Take a good luck, friends. That's all ours."

"Is it?" a raspy voice asked behind them. "Gents, there's a slight mistake. That there black dynamite belongs to Brigs Donlan."

VI

The three men whirled around. Dinero Jackson sat slouched in the saddle, his bearded face split by a twisted grin. Beside him sat two lynx-eyed gunhawks, obviously some of Brigs Donlan's outfit. Oscar Brenton gasped in sudden alarm and Dinero flecked some ashes off his coat. It didn't seem to make much difference.

"Say your piece and get out," Sod told Jackson curtly.

"Proddy!" Dinero exclaimed in mock surprise. "Now we'd expect civility, seems like, and a plumb peaceful powwow. But, of course, it's however you want to take it."

"Quit talking riddles," Nevada said quietly. "You clutter up the scenery and I'm tired of looking at muck."

"Your chatter ain't wanted," Dinero retorted. "I'm talking to the owners."

"He's one of us," Sod said quietly. "We made him a partner."

Dinero looked back at Nevada and suddenly broke into a loud roar of

laughter. The gunhawks smiled coldly. Dinero recovered his breath but he still continued to chuckle.

"That's a good one. He's a partner. You gents is going to split nothing three ways, and that won't be hard to do." Jackson's voice hardened and his close-set eyes glittered. "You leased this land from an Injun named Clay Mad Bull. Ain't that right?"

"That's right," Brenton cut in. "The lease and contract are in perfect order. There's nothing you can do about it."

"The lease and contract?" Dinero echoed. He grinned. "I never thought of that, seein's I didn't have to. Clay Mad Bull has been declared incompetent by the court and he has a guardian."

"Who?" Brenton asked. Dinero struck his chest with a grimy thumb.

"Me. Since Clay can't take care of hisself, I sort of looked over his business affairs. I found an oil lease. It was plumb ridiculous and it's cancelled. I got much better terms from Brigs Donlan. This is *his* lease now."

Nevada growled and stepped forward. Instantly the two renegades flanking Dinero covered Nevada with their guns. The redhead cowpoke pulled up, fuming but helpless. Dinero grinned more widely.

"Thought I'd tell you. Give you a chance to get off the property without no fuss. Brigs will be around tomorrow with the sheriff to take possession."

"He'll have trouble," Nevada warned.

"With Fighting Jack Brolen sid-

ing him?" Dinero asked. "No, cow-poke, it's you gents that will have trouble."

He neck-reined his horse, grinned and waved his hand at the three men on the ravine rim. The gunmen pulled around, holstered their weapons and spurred after Dinero. The three partners watched them go, standing still and stunned.

Sod looked at Oscar Brenton, who stared down at the oil pouring out of the pipe. The rancher rubbed his hand over his wrinkled face in a tired, beaten gesture. He shrugged slightly.

"I reckon we didn't figure on this move, Oscar. Brigs has swept up all the chips."

"Just when we were winning," Oscar sighed.

Nevada wheeled to face them. "I reckon I'm a partner, like you said. I don't aim to take a whipping laying down."

"Sounds mighty fine," Oscar said listlessly, "but what can you do about it?"

"I don't know, but I sure aim to try," Nevada replied through set lips.

He walked to the shack and stripped off his oil-soaked clothing. After a bath and several cups of hot coffee he felt much better though he still had not come to a solution of the lease problem. They had until tomorrow morning to prevent Donlan from seizing the lease.

The door opened and Johnny Warpaint stepped inside. The young Indian smiled a greeting and sat down at the table. He looked sharply at

Nevada who grunted a welcome, pointed to the coffeepot and then returned to staring out the window. Johnny poured himself a cup and sat down opposite Nevada.

"Clay Mad Bull tell me what happen. Clay Mad Bull ready for war-path. White man law again, white man forked tongue. Johnny Warpaint see money go to judge."

Nevada's eyes jerked from the window. His hands pushed against the table edge as he leaned forward. "What was that about money going to the judge?"

"Me see it." Johnny nodded. "Pete Saloon. Slick Arnold give judge money, say it for lease."

"Who besides you heard him?" asked Nevada.

"Three Indian friends. Maybe bartender. Slick maybe little too much firewater. Talk careless. Judge make sign shut up, but too late. We hear."

Nevada drummed on the table, thinking hard. Abruptly he arose and jerked his thumb toward the door. "Hit your cayuse, Johnny. We're riding to the law. I reckon I can break Donlan and help you at the same time."

When they walked into Fighting Jack's office, the little sheriff instantly covered Johnny with his six. Nevada hastily explained the reason for their visit. He told Fighting Jack about the lease and the moves Donlan had made to get it. He spoke rapidly of Clay Mad Bull's farcical hearing and of the passing of money to the judge.

While Nevada talked, Fighting

Jack narrowly watched the Indian. When the redhead had finished, the marshal holstered his six-gun.

"It's enough for me," he said flatly. "I'm arresting Johnny, but he can go on bail, I reckon. Name them gents who heard Slick and the judge and saw the money passed."

Johnny listed them again. Fighting Jack nodded and arose, telling Nevada and the Indian to hold down the jail office while he was gone. He returned several times, in each instance bringing in one of the witnesses Johnny had named. They confirmed Johnny's story and every one of them signed affidavits. When the last one had gone, Fighting Jack grinned at Nevada.

"Them signed papers is enough for me. No wonder Brigs always had his law çases tried under that particular judge instead of the others."

"What do you intend to do?" Nevada asked hopefully.

"Arrest Brigs Donlan, Slick Arnold and Dinero Jackson. For bribery, perjury, embezzlement and fraud. I reckon that'll hold 'em for awhile where they won't do no harm."

"How about the dispossess papers Brigs'll have?"

"Think I'd pay attention to them when I'll have the judge in a cell back there!" The lawman snorted. He scratched his chin and looked at Nevada and Johnny. "It's no more'n fair you two should be at the show-down. Brigs has roweled both of you."

He opened the drawer of his battered desk and pulled out a deputy's badge that he tossed to Nevada. With

a grin the cowpoke pinned it to his shirt and followed Fighting Jack out the door. Johnny Warpaint's dark eyes glistened as he walked with them through the crowded streets.

They came to a low building that was Brigs Donlan's office. Fighting Jack leading the way, the three men pushed inside. Beyond the wood railing that divided the big main office were a couple of Brigs' gunmen. They jerked around to face the lawman. Fighting Jack's six-gun jumped into his hand. His voice cut across the room, cold and deadly.

"Shuck them guns, hombres."

For a second the gunhawks stood immobile, undecided whether to fight or surrender. But the level gun, the grim cowboy and silent Indian on either side of the lawman held too much potential threat. Slowly they unbuckled their belts and let them drop to the floor. Fighting Jack jerked his thumb toward the door.

"Rattle your hocks out of Kawtown. If you're in town an hour from now, you'll slap leather or go to jail. Git—pronto!"

The two men glanced at each other and then at the closed door of a private office. They edged carefully around the three at the barrier and slid out the door to the street. Fighting Jack pushed open the gate in the barrier and crossed to the office door. Without ceremony, he jerked it open.

Slick Arnold and Dinero Jackson had papers spread out on the desk before Brigs Donlan. The big man behind the desk frowned up at the interruption, and then he saw Nevada and Johnny Warpaint. Dinero

started fading to one side but stopped when Fighting Jack's cold glance speared him. Slick Arnold gasped, stood rooted. Brigs Donlan's eyes flicked over the three. Both hands rested on the edge of the desk.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"You, Brigs. Dinero and Slick Arnold."

"What charges?"

"Embezzlement and fraud, Brigs. The three of you worked to cheat Injuns out of their rightful ten percent oil royalties and leases. Perjury, Brigs, since the three of you sure gave some crooked testimony to get those Injuns declared incompetent and be appointed their guardians. Bribery of public officials."

"Strong medicine," Brigs answered laconically. "You got to have a heap of proof."

"We got it," Fighting Jack assured him. "Affidavits signed and sealed. Brigs, this trial ain't going before a man you can buy."

Dinero's head swiveled toward Brigs. The big man sat calm and silent, but his eyes darted about the room as though seeking a means of escape. No one moved. The silence held and built into a tension that became oppressive, stretching the nerves to the breaking point.

"You're all under arrest," Fighting Jack said quietly. "Your days in Kawtown are over."

Suddenly Dinero jumped to one side, stubby hand sweeping aside his coat. His gun flashed up. Brigs dropped below the desk. Slick Arnold squawked fearfully, but he made a play for his gun.

Six-guns rocked the room, beat against the eardrums. Gunsmoke billowed up, thick and acrid. Nevada slammed a slug at Brigs that scarred the desk top and set the man ducking again. Dinero fired at Fighting Jack, crouching and shifting. Johnny's slugs probed the smoke, searching out Slick Arnold.

Nevada saw Brigs rise again. The man fired and Nevada was slapped back against the wall by the impact of the .44. Trying desperately to hang onto his senses, he fired at the shadowy, shifting form behind the desk. The thundering of the Colts almost deafened him and he only dimly heard Slick Arnold's gurgling scream.

He concentrated on Brigs' big bulk. The six-gun bucked back against his palm. A wood splinter flew from the wall beside his head, ripping along his cheek. Nevada felt himself slipping, tried to press himself against the wall. His gun spat orange tongues of flame into the smoke.

It was over as quickly as it had begun. Brigs pitched forward across the desk and rolled to the floor. Powder smoke swirled, trailed toward the window and escaped, lifting the pall from the room. Nevada looked around with pain-filled eyes.

Dinero Jackson lay crumpled against the far wall. Slick Arnold moaned and writhed on the floor. Brigs was dead. The echo of the guns still thundered in the room as the three men looked at one another. Fighting Jack slowly holstered his

gun and came to Nevada. He touched the cowpoke's shoulder gingerly.

"Bored clean through," he grunted. "Ought to heal nice."

He looked at the men on the floor. Johnny Warpaint stood over Slick Arnold, dark face lighted with triumph. "I count coup," he said to the lawman.

"No you don't. He's alive and we need him at the court." Fighting Jack whistled. "We sure cleaned up the board. Brigs is dead. Dinero got him a place in Boothill, and Slick will see a whole flock of bars at the Territorial prison."

He looked down at the desk, glancing over the papers. He picked them up and turned, holding them to Nevada.

"Here's the lease for your well, and Johnny's guardianship papers.

They ain't worth the ink they was written with. Ain't nothing now to keep both of you from getting rich."

Nevada saw the room suddenly spin around like a mad top. He was weak from pain and loss of blood. He felt his knees buckle under him and he slid slowly down the wall. Fighting Jack dropped the papers and jumped toward him.

"Hey, you ornery redhead!" He bent over the cowboy. He grinned over his shoulder at Johnny Warpaint. "Get a sawbones to patch up this hole. I don't aim to loose me a danged good deputy."

"Good man," Johnny grunted. "White man Injun can trust." He left the room.

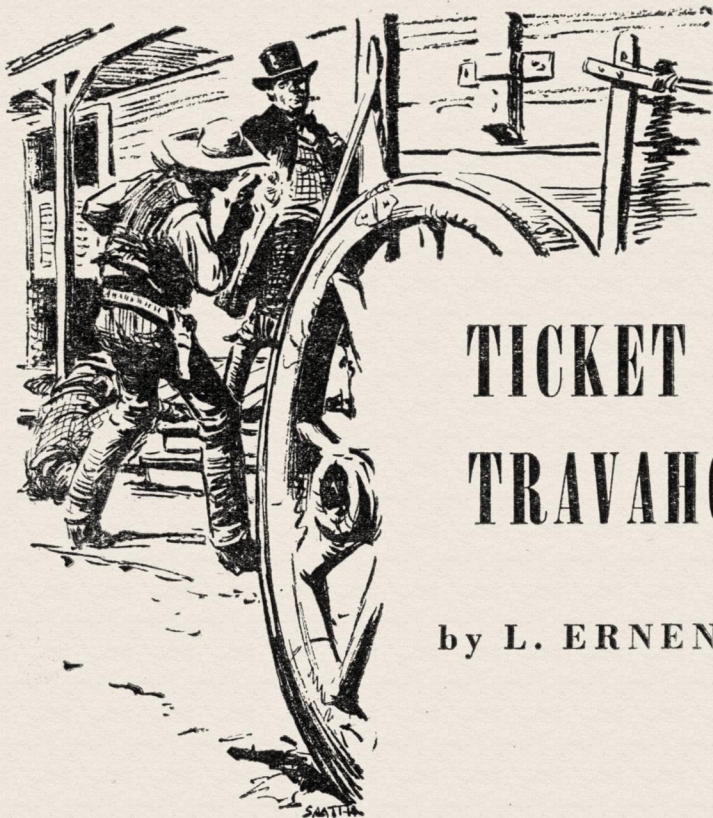
Fighting Jack looked down at Nevada again and nodded.

"That Injun sure called the sign on you, redhead," he murmured.

THE END



"Wa-al, whut're yuh drooling about?"



TICKET TO TRAVAHO

by L. ERNENWEIN

One year of town taming was enough for Lee Farnum, but could he get out of Bonanza without being caught in a cross fire of renegade lead?

THERE was no sign of impending trouble on Bonanza's wide main thoroughfare when Marshal Lee Farnum came out of the Shamrock Hotel at noon. An empty ore wagon stood in front of Lanagan's Livery where the driver was watering his teams; two loafers lounged on the shaded stoop of the Sashay Saloon, and beyond—at the corner of Congal Alley

—a girl leaned out an upstairs window of the Jamboree Dance Hall, drying her shampooed hair in the sunlight.

"A tame town," Lee Farnum reflected, and smiled cynically as he walked toward Meade's Mercantile. For this was pay day at the mines in Nugget Gulch, which meant that Bonanza wouldn't be tame long; it

would be high wide and howling to-night.

Tex Lane, a K Bar cowboy, angled his horse over to the curb. "This your last day, ain't it, marshal?" he asked.

Farnum nodded, surprised at this sudden show of interest in his affairs.

"Well, if you want a ridin' job there might be one open at K Bar tomorrow," Lane reported and rode on to the Shamrock, where his young wife worked as waitress.

Farnum turned into the Mercantile and made his way toward Mayor Meade's office at the rear of the long store. A clerk said: "Town council is in session. They're waiting for you, mashal."

That news didn't surprise Lee Farnum. He'd expected it would be like this, when the time came for him to turn in his badge. And because he'd been waiting, and saving his wages toward this day, he absently fondled the gold watch in his vest pocket.

At the door to Meade's office, Farnum stopped and took out his watch and snapping it open, gazed thoughtfully at the girl's picture pasted in its case. A smile eased his long lips and in this moment Lee Farnum didn't look like a tough, trigger-tripping lawman who'd killed three men during twelve tumultuous months. Standing there with that smile on his lean, high-beaked face, he looked young—almost boyish.

"I've kept my bargain with them, Anne," he said softly. "And now I'm keeping my promise to you."

For a lingering moment he studied the picture, seeing the wistful smile

on Anne's sweetly curved lips and remembering the letter he'd received last week. "The new house is ready to move into," Anne had written. "There's thirty head of good breeder stock in the pens here at TravaHo waiting for us to drive them to our homestead in the hills."

They had drawn the plans for their house together; and worked out the brand they would use on their cattle—A Bar L—combining the first letters of both their names. Because he'd lacked the money to make their dream come true, Lee had taken the marshal job in Bonanza, and living frugally, had saved a sizable stake in one year's time.

Putting the watch back in his pocket, Farnum opened the door and nodded a wordless greeting to the four men grouped around Mayor Meade's big desk. They were Bonanza's leading citizens, these four; between them they possessed the bulk of legitimate business on Main Street. Yet their combined profits were probably less than those of Kingpin Harlequin who owned the Sashay Saloon and levied a rake-off from every joint in Congal Alley.

Mayor Meade had never been very friendly toward Farnum. But now he handed Lee a cigar and said pleasantly: "We've decided we want to keep you with us, marshal, and we're going to increase your pay."

"A very substantial increase indeed," John Braddock, the pursymouthed banker, added.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," drawled Farnum.

But he didn't look sorry as he took

the law badge from his vest and laid it on Meade's desk. He looked glad, like a man shedding an obnoxious burden long endured.

A puzzled frown pushed the smile from Mayor Meade's gray, age-mottled face. "You . . . you wouldn't quit us cold, would you?" he asked worriedly. "Not until we find someone to take your place."

"My year was up at noon today," Farnum said. He didn't attempt to tell them how lonely those twelve months had been, with the saloon crowd hating him and respectable citizens shunning him as if he were some sort of gun-smoke pariah. "I warned you a month ago that no offer you could make would change my plans," he reminded quietly.

Mike Mulqueen, genial proprietor of the Shamrock Hotel, exclaimed: "But thim plans ye speak of can't be *that* important, lad! Think what will happen here with no badge toter to hold Harlequin's hoodlums in check!"

"And this is Saturday," said Sol Ledbetter, who owned three business establishments on Main Street.

"Not only that," Braddock pointed out, "it's the end of the month—which means we'll have that hell-raising crew from the Drag R in town tonight also."

The consternation on these men's faces didn't disturb Lee Farnum. In fact it gave him a kind of cynical satisfaction. For there'd been a lot of Saturdays when he wondered if he would be alive to hear the mission bells ring on Sunday morning; times when the difference between living and dying had depended on the speed

of his right hand. These men hadn't worried about his welfare. Not a bit. To them he was just a gun-smoke galoot with a badge. They'd paid him one hundred fifty dollars a month to risk his hide every time he walked down Main Street after dark.

All these things Farnum remembered. And something else. The day he'd hired out, this same town council had told him about Kingpin Harlequin—how the big saloonman had seized control of every bar, every dance hall and gambling joint in town. "Harequin bribes the county sheriff to stay away from Bonanza," they'd told him. "He pays professional gunmen to guard his graft, and he runs his joints wide open."

But when Farnum had asked if they wanted the joints closed, they'd told him no.

"It would be bad for business," Mayor Meade had explained. "If there was no high life here the miners and cowpunchers would take their trade to Reservtion at the other end of Nugget Gulch. We don't want you to close the joints; we just want them kept under control."

Because Lee Farnum had followed their instructions, Bonanza was wide open. And now these men were afraid.

"We'll double your pay if you'll wait until we get another marshal," Meade declared invitingly.

The thought came to Farnum that these men were ruled by money. Even though they used honest methods for making money, their lives were dedicated to the dollar sign. And so they believed that anything

could be purchased if the price was high enough. But they were wrong.

"I wouldn't wear that badge another day for all the money in your bank," he told them flatly. "I'm buying a ticket to TravaHo on the evening train."

And he strode out of the mayor's office like a man leaving something distasteful behind him.

Kingpin Harlequin stood on the Sashay stoop with Red Goff and the gambler, Sonora. He was fat as a corn-fed hog, this Harlequin. Yet, despite his ponderous bulk and fashionable attire, there was about him a flinty hardness and the brash arrogance of a tyrant. He had a habit of keeping an unlighted cigar in his mouth most of the time, rolling it back and forth between his thick, moist lips, and talking around it, as he did now when he called: "Good afternoon, Kid Law."

It was, Farnum knew, Harlequin's way of showing derision for a city marshal whose orders wouldn't allow him to close the joints. Farnum nodded and, passing along the opposite sidewalk, saw some secret amusement deepen the ruts on Harlequin's jowly face. But there was no amusement on the faces of Goff and Sonora. Those two hated Lee with the vicious, patient hate of their crafty breed. For he had pistol-whipped the dance-hall bouncer a week ago, and had forced Sonora to take his cheater gimmick off the Sashay roulette wheel.

The girl in the Jamboree window shook back her blond hair and called shrilly: "You'll get your needin's

if you come snooping around our place tonight, lawdog!"

And just before Farnum turned into the hotel restaurant she drew a finger across her throat and loosed a hoot of brazen laughter. She hadn't noticed he was no longer wearing the star. Nor had those three on the Sashay stoop. But when Tex Lane's young wife served Lee his dinner she glanced at his badgeless vest and remarked sadly: "So you quit."

Farnum nodded. "I'm footloose and fancy free for the first time in a year," he said smilingly.

"I was hoping you wouldn't quit," said Mrs. Lane.

"Why?" he asked, wondering at her forlorn expression.

"Because my husband is going to ask for the marshal's job."

That astonished Farnum. And it made him understand abruptly why Tex Lane had said there might be an opening at K Bar tomorrow. Tex had decided to quit cowpunching to become a badge toter.

"He's no gun-slinger at all," Mrs. Lane declared dismally. "Tex has never so much as fired a shot at another man."

"Why does he want the job?" asked Farnum.

"Because it pays three times what he was getting at K Bar," Mrs. Lane explained. "We've been saving up for a place of our own, and Tex says we won't have to wait so long this way. But I'd rather wait ten years. I'd rather go without a home forever, than have Tex risk his life getting it."

That was very close to what Anne had said a year ago. The same

words, almost; with the same fear and foreboding in her voice.

A strong sense of sympathy welled up inside Lee Farnum. "I wouldn't worry too much, ma'am," he said, and knew how futile those words must sound to her.

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "I know what will happen if Tex takes the job. It'll give Kingpin Harlequin the chance he's been waiting for—because he hates my husband."

That surprised Farnum. Lane had always steered clear of trouble during his brief visits in town. "Why should Harlequin hate your husband?" he inquired.

"Kingpin wanted to marry me," she explained, a note of revulsion coming into her voice. "He . . . he offered to build me a mansion on Residential Avenue. When I told him I'd rather share a shack with Tex Lane he swore Tex wouldn't live long enough to build it."

"Harlequin's bark is worse than his bite," Farnum said reassuringly. "He told me I wouldn't last a week, but I'm still here. And all in one piece."

"But you're—different," she exclaimed. "You were faster with a gun than the toughs who tried to kill you. Tex isn't any gun-slick. He's just a cowboy, wanting a home of his own."

Which was exactly what Lee Farnum had been the day he came to Bonanza. Just a cowboy wanting a home so bad he'd gambled his hide to get it in one year's time. Harlequin's bunch hadn't known that; nobody knew it except Anne.

But that was over and done with. All he had to do now was pack his valise and buy a ticket to Travaho. And because he had shed this town's troubles when he took off the badge, Lee braced himself to resist any show of sympathy that might involve him in a new marshal's affairs.

"Your husband probably knows what he's doing," he said flatly and began eating his dinner.

Mrs. Lane stood by the table for a moment, as if bewildered by the sudden change in his attitude. "I guess nothing worries men like you," she said presently, turning back to the kitchen. "I guess you've no normal feelings at all."

That, Farnum reflected, was what everyone in Bonanza seemed to think. Just because he had masked his feelings, they thought he never felt fear, or apprehension, or the dismal dread of death. But he'd felt all those things. And felt them aplenty!

Finished with his meal, Lee went upstairs to the bleak and cheerless room which had been his abode for twelve lonely months. Comparing it with the new home he was going to, he felt an urgent thrust of anticipation. He could almost see the house at A Bar L; knew exactly how it would look. There'd be frilly curtains at the windows, and all the little things a girl could contrive to make a house into a home. He packed his few belongings into a battered valise, and for the first time in months, whistled a gay tune.

He was still whistling when he left the room with his valise. But presently, as he started down the stairs,

he heard voices in the lobby—Mike Mulqueen's heavy brogue cajoling: "Now, now, Miz Lane. Ye got nothin' to be cryin' about. Leastwise not yit."

The sound of a girl sobbing came to Lee then. He descended the rickety stairway and saw Mrs. Lane standing at a front window with Mulqueen beside her, watching the street. They turned around as Farnum crossed the lobby and Mulqueen nodded. But Mrs. Lane just stared at him with tear-wet eyes.

There was something like accusation in those eyes, Farnum was thinking, almost resentfully, when he went out to the veranda and sat down. That girl had no right to blame him because her husband was biting off something he couldn't chew.

Farnum shaped up a cigarette and smoked it, watching an ore wagon come down the road from Nugget Gulch, its high wheels dripping dust and the lead team swinging wide for the turn into Main Street. Then he saw Doc Tuttle, Bonanza's boozy medico, step off the Sashay stoop and come across the street, walking with the studied straightness of a man seldom sober.

Tuttle propelled his pot-bellied body to the sidewalk ahead of the ore wagon and, joining Farnum on the veranda bench, wiped sweat from his whiskey-flushed face. "The news has got around that Tex Lane is our new marshal," he reported. "They say he's over to the hardware store now, buying himself a brand-new pistol and holster."

"So," Farnum mused, realizing

how clumsy a combination that would make, and consciously rejecting the thought that Tex Lane was doomed.

"They're making bets that Tex don't last the night out," Doc reported soberly. "Near as I can figger, they've got it planned to whip-saw you into a fight when you start for the depot, and then chop Tex down if he interferes."

So that was it!



Remembering the secretive smile on Harlequin's lips a while ago, Farnum guessed instantly that the fat saloonman *had* noticed his badge was gone—that Harlequin even then was making plans to settle some old scores with an ex-marshal.

Doc glanced at Farnum's valise and said thoughtfully: "You could leave by the back door, and go down the alley to the depot. That way they wouldn't see you leave town."

Farnum had been thinking the same thing. He glanced at his watch. The westbound train should whistle for the crossing east of town in another fifteen or twenty minutes, if it was on time.

"Maybe if you'd take the back

way, Tex wouldn't get drawn into a fight tonight," Doc suggested.

Even though that gave him another reason for dodging trouble, Farnum knew it was a false and futile excuse. Sneaking through the back alley would save his hide; but it wouldn't save Tex Lane. The best it could do was postpone the inevitable showdown for a greenhorn marshal.

Lee glanced at his watch again. Not much time left. Just time enough to ease back through the hotel and walk to the depot. He was reaching for his valise when he recalled Anne's parting words a year ago: "I want you to be careful, and come back safe. But I shan't expect you to do anything you'll be ashamed of, Lee—anything that would spoil your own self respect."

He picked up the valise and turned toward the hotel doorway, putting a strict resistance against the full meaning of Anne's words. He told himself that he had taken enough risks in this town; that there was no need to take another. . . .

Then he saw Mrs. Lane standing in the doorway, heard her exclaim: "Here comes Tex—and they're waiting for him already!"

She rushed out to the veranda, her startled eyes so intent on her husband that she didn't see Farnum, who had to step aside to avoid collision. Mike Mulqueen hurried after her.

The doorway was directly in front of Farnum. The lobby deserted. All attention was directed toward Tex Lane who came sauntering down

Main Street with sunlight slanting off the badge he wore.

Farnum heard Harlequin call tauntingly: "What you doing with that tin star, Lane?"

Glancing at the Sashay Saloon, Farnum saw Harlequin standing there on the stoop with Sonora and Red Goff. As always, the big saloonman was rolling a cigar back and forth between his lips. He had another habit which Farnum had noticed frequently; a habit of tinkering with the gold watch chain that sagged across his bulging, checkered vest. It was a seemingly casual gesture, but it brought Harlequin's right hand close to the hide-out gun he carried in a shoulder holster.

Harlequin's fat fingers were tinkering with that chain now. But Tex Lane didn't seem to notice it. For he said: "There's no tin in this star, Kingpin. Any time you think there is, go get yourself a gun."

Harlequin grinned, and continued to tinker with his watch chain.

Sonora stepped sideways along the stoop. "I've got a gun, Lane," he announced. "And I say that's a cheap grade of tin you're wearing. Awful cheap."

Even then, knowing how surely this game was rigged to make Mrs. Lane a widow, Lee Farnum tried to propel himself into the lobby. And tried to close his ears to a far voice saying: "I shan't expect you to do anything you'll be ashamed of, Lee."

But he couldn't quite make it. Instead he turned and walked to the veranda steps. Still toting the valise in his left hand, he started up the street toward Tex Lane.

The smell of trouble was like a tangible taint against Main Street's hot and windless air. A woman stepped from Ledbetter's Millinery; she looked at Tex Lane, shifted her glance to the Sashay stoop and turned hastily back into the store. It was that plain.

All this while Sonora stood waiting for Tex Lane to accept his challenge; while the silence became so profound that the slight thud of Farnum's boot heels sounded loud to his ears. But those three on the saloon stoop didn't seem to hear him. Their entire attention was directed at Lane, waiting for the first sign of his draw.

"How about it, lawdog?" Sonora taunted.

And Red Goff sneered grinningly: "Mebbe he's deaf."

Kingpin Harlequin didn't speak. He just stood there idly fingering his watch chain, and that told Farnum how this play was rigged. Sonora and Goff would hooraw Lane into anger-prodded action, perhaps even allowing him to beat them to the draw. Then Harlequin, who Lane thought was unarmed, would blast the new marshal down with the hide-out gun!

"I say it's tin," Sonora jeered, "and it's turnin' yellow—like you."

Narrowly watching, Farnum saw Lane's face flush angrily, saw his whole body go rigid.

"You talk too much, Sonora," Farnum called sharply and, watching the quick turn of those three faces, cursed himself for a meddling, sentimental fool.

"Wasn't talkin' to you," Sonora

objected, plainly surprised at this intrusion.

His tallow-white hands were cupped close to gun butts now. Agile, cheating hands that looked like drooping lilies.

"Don't like so much talk, regardless," Farnum said rashly.

Sonora's glance shifted to Harlequin. The big saloonman nodded and made a slight gesture with his left hand. As if on signal, Red Goff moved farther along the stoop, widening the space between them.

Farnum recognized the maneuver instantly. Kingpin Harlequin always called the turn in this town, always took a tinhorn's percentage. By moving Goff a few feet, Harlequin had fashioned a triple-pronged triangle that would make a difficult target to cover.

In this hushed moment of waiting, a train's far-off whistle drifted in from the desert and the sound sent a thrust of impatience through Lee Farnum. Abruptly then he hit upon a scheme that might bring this gun-smoke showdown to quick conclusion.

Without looking at Lane, he asked: "You want to arrest Sonora for disturbing the peace, don't you, Tex?"

That question seemed to startle Sonora. His fishy eyes bugged wide and even Harlequin's fat face showed a brief stir of astonishment.

"Yes, by grab!" Lane blurted.

Convinced that there was only one way to disrupt Harlequin's slick slaughter plan, Farnum started across the street, walking directly toward Sonora who was at the west end of the stoop.

"What the devil you fixin' to do?" demanded the gambler.

"Going to show Bonanza's new marshal how to handle bums," Farnum drawled quietly.

His right hand hovered close to holster; his left held the valise which swung gently to his forward stride. Until a moment ago he'd thought there wasn't a chance to survive this play with the odds three to one against him. For Tex Lane wouldn't be much help. By the time Tex got his new gun free of that new holster the shooting might be over. But now, with each forward step, hope of survival built higher and higher in Lee Farnum. If Sonora let him get close enough. . . .

"You been lucky, Farnum—up to now," Kingpin Harlequin said, slyly endeavoring to draw Lee's attention away from Sonora.

The big saloonman was still tinkering with his watch chain, which gave Farnum another idea that might cut down the odds a trifle. So he asked casually: "What time you got, Kingpin?"

He seemed to ignore Sonora for a second; seemed to be looking directly at Harlequin who was taking out his watch. But Farnum also kept the gambler in the fringe of his vision and saw Sonora's shoulders signal the start of his draw.

Then Lee Farnum did a strange thing. As astounding thing. He flung the valise into Sonora's face and grabbed his gun from holster all in one swift burst of perfectly coordinated action. But because Red Goff already had his gun out, Farnum

didn't fire at Sonora. He sent his first shot at the redhead, took a quick side step and slammed a slug into Sonora a split second before the gambler's guns exploded. Both those bullets whanged so close that Farnum dodged instinctively. Yet his senses were sharpened to such clarity of perception that he saw Sonora's body sag at the middle like a broken reed and glimpsed the flash of Harlequin's hide-out gun.

In the fleeting interval of time it took Farnum's right hand to swing his gun around, his mind registered the unalterable fact that Harlequin was still calling the turn—that the big saloonman would fire first. And Harlequin did.

Yet even then, with the dismal dread of slug-slashed death racing through him, Lee Farnum didn't dodge and when Harlequin fired, the bark of Farnum's gun made a merging blast of continued sound. Lee heard that double-rigged explosion and was remotely aware of a woman's scream somewhere behind him. He felt his gun buck against his palm, heard it blast again and was astonished that he should hear it. For Harlequin had got in the first shot, yet that slug hadn't touched Lee—it hadn't even whined close enough to be heard!

Dully, as a man not sure of his senses, Lee peered through flimsy streamers of powder smoke, saw the cigar slip from Harlequin's loose lips and watched the saloonman's huge body slump to the stoop's dusty boards.

Abruptly then, Farnum remembered the scream he'd heard—and

guessed why Harlequin's slug hadn't hit him. That hide-out gun had been aimed at the man Kingpin Harlequin hated, at the husband he'd sworn wouldn't live long enough to build a shack for the girl who'd scorned a mansion!

Even before he turned, Farnum heard Mrs. Lane cry hysterically: "Harlequin killed him, just like he said he would!"

With that frantic declaration slogging through him, Farnum saw the girl kneel beside her fallen husband; watched Doc Tuttle rush forward with his medical kit. The thought came to Farnum that his scheme of throwing the valise and asking Harlequin for the time had cut down the odds considerably, but it had been Tex Lane's presence on this street which had really saved him. Even though Tex hadn't fired a shot, he'd made a target that Harlequin's hate and insane jealousy couldn't resist.

That ironical realization was strong in Lee when he heard the west-

bound train whistle for the crossing east of town. It occurred to him that he could still reach the depot in time. And because he hadn't sneaked through a back alley, he could go to Anne without shame.

So thinking, Farnum stepped over to where his valise lay beside Sonora's sprawled body. He was picking it up when Mike Mulqueen slapped him on the back and exclaimed: "Ye saved Tex, begorra!"

That didn't make sense to Farnum. Until he glanced across the street and saw Tex Lane sitting with a grin on his face while his young wife helped Doc Tuttle bandage a bullet-pierced thigh.

Whereupon Lee Farnum said, "Thank God," with more feeling than Mulqueen had ever heard in his voice.

Then, ignoring the shouted praise of men behind him, Lee Farnum walked hurriedly to the depot and stepping up the agent's window, said gustily: "A ticket to Travaho!"

THE END

WESTERN YARDSTICK

The Western way to judge a man,
A cowboy or a boss,
Ain't how he parts his pompadour—
It's how he treats his hoss.

—S. OMAR BARKEE.



THE DOGIE KID

by WALT COBURN

When the Dogie Kid discovered whose brand he wore even the guns of two tough border jumpers couldn't keep him corraled

I

ONE-EYED JACK PADGETT and the trail boss called Idaho Jones were talking it over inside the high adobe corral at the Padgett ranch on the Rio Grande. It was supposed to be a horse dicker but the one-eyed border-jumper cowman had dug up a jug of green mescal and the augering

rambled off the subject of the twenty-five head of horses in the adobe corral.

It was a moonlight night but the shadows along the high adobe corral wall were black and the patches of mesquite were dark-shadowed. So that by lying flat and motionless in the brush young sixteen-year-old

Dogie could hear every word they said and his keen ears could even pick up the gurgle of the tilted jug.

Like as not, Dogie had never heard that old saying about an eavesdropper hearing no good about himself. But young Dogie wasn't expecting to hear himself praised by the one-eyed man who was the only father he had ever known. Whippings and kickings and all manner of inhuman punishments were all the boy expected from Jack Padgett. But the man's abuse had given the boy a tough schooling and taught him all the wolf and coyote tricks there were to know and Dogie sensed that there was something more ornery going on than a dicker for a bunch of stolen horses. Padgett was putting over a big deal of some kind, shoving across something foul and ugly on Idaho Jones.

"That Dogie button"—Jack Padgett was getting down to cases now—"will do fer you to take along, Idaho. I've learnt him a short sackful of tricks. Half them brands you bin lookin' at was worked by the Dogie. I'll gamble you can't tell the difference between his runnin' iron work and mine. And, mister, I'm tops—"

"If yuh do say it yourse'f." Idaho Jones had a thick, wheezy laugh. The jug gurgled. He coughed on the raw mescal and cursed it for rank poison. Then he picked up his end of the dicker. "What in thunder do I want with a bald-faced kid that'll be underfoot plumb up the long trail to Montana?"

"Dogie has more cattle savvy than the rest of your lousy, two-bit mongrel outfit put together, man. He'll

outride, outrope, outfox ary cowhand you got. He'll—"

"Your kid is just what you named 'im, Padgett. He's a runt. A wind-bellied, mammyless calf. All horns an' tail bush. He's a lil' ol' Dogie thing you'd like to slough off on a man when you git me half sick on this no-good rotgut booze. Looks like you'd anyhow have a decent drink of likker fer a man that's takin' a bunch of stolen cayuses off your dirty hands—"

"There ain't a cayuse in the bunch an' you know it, Idaho. Them's all quarter horses, mister. That big Mexican outfit kin show you papers on the mares that foaled 'em an—"

"Mebby you got the papers on this Dogie thing?"

Idaho Jones was a huge, paunchy man with a heavy whiskey-veined face and a pair of gooseberry eyes. His whiskey voice was edged now with a keen sharpness. The listening Dogie caught the change quickly.

"Mebbyso," One-eyed Jack Padgett's Texan drawl had its whetted edge now, too. "In which case, Idaho, the Dogie would actually run into big figgers."

The two men were really getting down to a deal now. It was as if the horse dicker with its hours of whit-tling and tobacco-juice spitting, its augering and drinking, had been no more than a preliminary contest where each man had tested out the other's shrewdness and cunning. Like two high-stake poker players playing their cards close to their bellies, winning and losing a few bets, watching, studying one another.

And now the big jackpot was open, each player was checking the bet to the other. And the range orphan called Dogie was the jackpot stakes.

"I got my first pig in the poke to buy, Padgett."

"You won't be tradin' blind, mister. By grab, if ever you was to see the pedigree of that Dogie your eyes would bug out like a toad frawg's so's a man could knock 'em off with a stick."

"Papers kin be forged, Padgett."

"Not this pedigree, feller. And damned well you know it."

"All I know," wheezed Idaho Jones, "is that the kid ain't yourn. And you've had him hid out. The rest of it I don't take no stock in without proof."

"I kin show you proof. Pedigree papers. The marks on the kid's hide. Birthmarks that couldn't be put on there in a million years. And signed papers to go with the kid. This Dogie kid is the only livin' male heir to one of the biggest cow outfits in the country. He's worth a million dollars on the hoof. Ain't I guarded him with my life? He cost me this eye. I had to kill three men to git a-holt of 'im. Like I'd kill you right now, Idaho, if I was to suspicion you of dealin' me a hand from a cold deck."

"Not me, Padgett. Put away that gun. I don't scare thataway. What's your price fer this Dogie?"

"Half what he fetches from his owners when he's delivered. And his sellin' price is set at six big figgers."

Idaho Jones whistled softly. "Why don't you deliver the Dogie and claim the money? What's your average,

Padgett, in splittin' that big money with a feller like me?"

"Just as if," One-eyed Jack Padgett's voice was a snarl, "you didn't know the answer to that. I don't want to hang."

Idaho Jones chuckled. It was an ugly sound. "How do you know I won't double-cross you somewheres along the line?"

"You'll deliver the Dogie kid at the Star Ranch in Montana. I got a man in your outfit that'll be watchin' you all the way up the cattle trail. I got another man staked out at the Star Ranch. And there won't be a day or night that I ain't somewheres clost behind your cattle drive a-trail-in' yuh. And when you git paid off, I'll be somewheres around. You make one wrong move, mister, and you'll be dead before you hit the ground. Together me 'n you kin swing the deal. But neither of us kin win a thing without the other feller. Until that cash money is paid and we're both out o' the country and safe somewheres in South America, me'n you has got to stick together. That's the deal. Take it or leave it."

"It's a deal, Padgett. I'll shake on it. But damned if I'll ruin my insides by drinkin' on it with that rotgut booze."

Their spurs jingled as they got to their feet inside the adobe corral. They were shaking hands on the deal.

"Now pay me fer these ponies, Idaho. And take 'em on to your camp. I'll fetch the Dogie Kid over in the mornin' when he gits back from town."

"A thousand dollars fer a bunch

of stolen Mex cayuses—”

“At forty dollars a head,” said One-eyed Padgett, “you’re doin’ a stealin’ that makes mine look like petty larceny.”

Dogie had heard all and more than he’d hoped to overhear. He slipped off into the night. When he reached the heavier brush he halted and crouched there, watching and listening. He saw One-eyed Jack Padgett and Idaho Jones leave the adobe corral and walk over to the unlighted adobe ranchhouse.

“. . . and mind you, Idaho, you take good care of this letter I’m givin’ yuh. You hand it to the banker at Trail City, in Montana. It gives you authority to open the safety deposit box. You’ll have one key to the box. The banker’ll have the other. The Dogie Kid’s pedigree is in that safety deposit box.”

II

Dogie got his horse where he’d hidden it in the brush and rode off into the night. He was almost shivering with a strange kind of excitement and his insides were knotted into a hard cold lump. He had heard One-eyed Jack Padgett and Idaho Jones dickering for him as though he was some kind of an animal with a pedigree that might or might not be genuine. But now something of his identity was cleared up.

One-eyed Jack Padgett had raised Dogie from the time the kid had any memory of his earlier boyhood years. They had always been on the dodge, hidden out in far-off remote places. Sometimes they went empty-bellied

for days at a stretch and slept out in the open in the rain and cold. Or they nearly died of thirst on the hot sun-blistered desert when the water-holes dried up. Always on the dodge.

When Dogie got old enough he tried to run away. But he never got far. And when One-eyed Jack Padgett overtook him he’d quirt him and kick him or tie him up until he nearly died of thirst and hunger and pain. His tough young hide was marked with scars that would never be erased. And there was one bright-red mark on his young white belly that looked for all the world like the head and neck of a horse stamped there in indelible red ink. Or burned there, as he had always believed, by a branding iron. A horse head. He was both proud and ashamed of the scarlet blemish on his white smooth skin. Now, from the talk he’d just heard, he knew it was the birthmark Jack Padgett had spoken of.

And there was the talk of his pedigree. Unless Padgett lied, Dogie was the only male heir to some big cow outfit. Idaho Jones was to deliver him, like a prize colt or young bull, to the Star Ranch in Montana. Dogie had heard of the outfit. It was called the Lone Star outfit and was owned by the McHenry family. Texans who had moved to Montana for some reason connected with the vicious and blood-spattered fence cutters’ war. Dogie didn’t know much about it. Jack Padgett had always been almighty cautious about letting the boy listen to loose talk around the renegade campfires or tough saloons where they stopped.

Only on rare occasions and

through dire necessity was Dogie allowed to ride anywhere alone, especially to any town or ranch. But today One-eyed Jack had sent him to the little Mexican town for tobacco and salt and a jug of tequila, to get the boy out of the way while he made his big dicker with this Idaho Jones who was taking a trail herd from Texas to Montana.

Now Dogie had time to think over the ugly talk he'd been listening to and he was tingling with excitement. His first notion was to run away. He was forking a good horse that would carry him a long ways before sunrise. Then he decided against it. And in the end he came to a decision that required all the sheer guts and courage he owned. He'd play his string out. He'd go up the long cattle trail with Idaho Jones and his trail herd. He'd let them deal with him like he was a pedigreed colt or prize young bull. He'd find out who he really was. What his real name was. And before he finished he would pay off One-eyed Jack Padgett for every beating and kicking and torturing he'd taken from the big renegade.

Dogie waited until he saw Idaho Jones and three of his tough cowhands headed for their trail camp with their twenty-five head of horses. Then Dogie rode on to the Padgett ranch along the wagon trail, whistling boldly.

Dogie was a little small for his age. Perhaps he would never grow to be over five and a half feet tall. He might never weigh more than one hundred and fifty pounds. He was about five feet four now and he

weighed somewhere around a hundred and twenty pounds. But he was hard-muscled and quick as an animal and a lot stronger than boys of much larger build. He was tough. Rawhide tough, but without a single mean trait. Deep inside where nobody could see, the Dogie Kid hid his boy's great hopes and dreams.

Dogie had hair as wiry black as a terrier's. His nose was short and his mouth was wide and square-cornered and he had a blunt jaw. His eyes were as gray as smoke and set under straight heavy black brows that made him look older than his sixteen or seventeen years. His actions and speech were those of a grown man. And if ever he got away from One-eyed Jack Padgett he knew how to laugh. But with Padgett around Dogie never laughed and his eyes remained always hard and wary and suspicious.

Alone with a horse Dogie was the most happy. He had a way with horses or any kind of animals. He had no fear at all of them and a green bronc soon learned to trust this boy with the easy hands and soft, gentle voice. Dogie loved animals. Horses, most of all. And as he rode on to the Padgett ranch in the moonlight he was thinking of that bright-red horsehead birthmark on his belly and, boylike, he wondered if he wasn't born and so marked with a rare understanding of horses.

The Padgett ranch was no more than a small adobe shack, an adobe corral and a barbed-wire-enclosed horse pasture. Jack Padgett did not even own it. The place belonged to

some Mexican whom Padgett had run off.

One-eyed Jack Padgett was reeling drunk by the time Dogie got there. The man was stumbling around inside the adobe shack, snarling and muttering to himself as he built a fire in the rusty sheet-iron camp stove and put on a pot of coffee to boil.

Padgett's horse had been unsaddled and was wearing rawhide hobbles. Dogie yanked off his saddle and picketed his horse in a grassy clearing beyond the brush, then went on to the cabin with the tobacco, a ten-pound sack of salt and the jug of tequila. It was still bright moonlight. A foul string of cursing greeted him as he came into the adobe cabin.

"Time you showed up, you triflin', no-good, undersized, mangy coyote whelp! What's bin a-keepin' yuh? Gimme that jug. Rustle me some grub. Rattle your hocks, blast you!"

The cussing was water off the duck's back. But Dogie watched the one-eyed renegade's treacherous hands.

One-eyed Jack Padgett was about six feet three and lean of build, big boned with muscles that were long and hard and sinewy. His skin was dry and seamed like old leather, his mouth was a slit in his bony face and his nose was large and predatory. Graying sandy-colored whiskers covered his long, pointed jaw and his greasy hair was the same color and dank and badly in need of shearing. His one eye was bloodshot and small and a pale-green color. Where the other eye had been was a livid scar

that left a deep dent where a bullet had shot part of the cheek bone off. Another man would have covered that unsightly scarred socket with a patch of some kind but Padgett gloried in its sickening effect on weak-stomached folks.

His faded old blue flannel shirt was filthy with dirt and sweat and spotted with tobacco stains, his overalls glazed with the smoke and grease and blood of branding fires and camps. He had taken off his filled heavy cartridge belt and holster and had shoved his six-shooter down into the waistband of his Levi overalls, within easy reach of his right hand.

Padgett's one eye swiveled in its deep socket to watch Dogie and it was as glittering green as the eye of a rattlesnake. He grabbed the jug of tequila, pulled the cork with big yellow teeth, and drank thirstily.

III

The only light in the cabin came from a candle shoved in the neck of an empty whiskey bottle. Its gutting flame shed a flickering light and sent distorted shadows across the old adobe walls. There was an old steer hide nailed across the only window.

"I finally got shut of yuh." One-eyed Jack Padgett barred the cabin door and leaned against it. "Sold yuh to Idaho Jones. I'm deliverin' yuh in the mornin' at his trail camp. You're a-goin' up the trail with Idaho's cattle drive. All the way. Plumb to Montana. Hear me? Try to rabbit on 'im and he'll rope yuh off your saddle and drag yuh till your hide's wore off."

Dogie laid a slab of bacon on the table and began slicing it with a curved-bladed skinning knife. He had his back turned to the big man but out of the corner of his eye he was watching Padgett's shadow on the hard-packed dirt floor. He gave no sign of having heard the man's rasping voice. The boy's silence angered the drunken Padgett.

"Damn your coyote hide! Say somethin'!" His long shadow moved.

"I got nothin' to say about the deal." Dogie's voice was flat-toned.

There was a big homemade braided rawhide blacksake whip with a wooden handle that hung coiled from a wooden stub in the adobe wall near the door. Padgett had taken it from some Mexican. He reached up for the blacksake and the flickering candle light showed Dogie the shadow of the man's moving arm.

Dogie whirled around, the skinning knife in his hand. His smoke-gray eyes were narrowed and hard. His voice was toneless.

"Don't whup me no more, Padgett, or I'll rip you wide open."

"You blasted little runty whelp!" Padgett's voice choked with drunken fury.

The braided lash uncoiled with a hissing sound and the wide buckskin popper caught the boy's face and nicked out a small bit of skin and flesh. The back lash caught the end of the bullwhip in the iron rod that barred the door. Padgett stumbled as he tried to yank it free. He had to take a quick step to keep from falling. His one eye glittered insanely in the candle light.

Dogie was moving now with the



*The
Dogie Kid*

nimble speed of a trapped animal. Padgett made a wild grab at him. Dogie dodged and slashed with the knife and the whetted curved blade cut a deep gash down along the man's forearm and the brush-scabbed dirty back of his big left hand. Padgett let out a snarling bellow of pain and maniacal fury. Yanking the bullwhip free, he stumbled after the dodging boy who had gone under the big rawhide-topped table and bobbed up on the far side.

Padgett, cursing, flecks of tobacco-stained froth on his twisted mouth, charged drunkenly, the braided rawhide whip hissing. He stumbled and lurched forward and the six-shooter was jolted from the waistband of his overalls. Its hammer struck the edge of the little sheet-iron camp stove. One of those Frontier-model Peace-maker six-shooters can be fired by

hitting the hammer with enough force. The gun exploded now with a heavy roar that was deafening in the little adobe cabin. And through the booming crash of the explosion came the horrible agonized scream of One-eyed Jack Padgett.

"Blast your runty soul! You killed me!"

Dogie, crouched on the far side of the heavy rawhide table, the knife gripped in his hand, ready to spring, stared wide-eyed now. For a long moment Padgett stood weaving on his long legs. His long pointed jaw fell slack and his one eye glittered. Then his legs gave way and he went down with a heavy crash and rolled over on his back. The bullet had traveled no more than a few inches before hitting the man. It must have struck Padgett in the hip and ranged upward along his belly and ribs because the whole front of the man's shirt was getting soaked with the dark blood.

Dogie stared, frozen in his tracks. The acrid powder smoke stung his eyes and clogged his nostrils and he was going to have to unclamp his jaws and lips to cough and when he opened his mouth he'd be sick. He had to get out of here and into the clean night air and get his eyes away from the horrible face there on the dirt floor.

Padgett's six-shooter had been thrown across the cabin by its own recoil. It lay near the closed door. Dogie saw it as he stumbled across the cabin, stepping around the sprawled man on the floor. He picked up the gun and slid back the

iron bar and yanked the door open, staggering as though he was drunk.

The draught from the open door guttered the flickering candle light, flattened it, then blew it out, leaving the cabin in darkness. Dogie pulled the door shut and stood there in the clean darkness, legs braced, pulling the fresh air into his lungs until that feeling of nausea left him. His whole body was soaked with cold sweat and he was shaking as though he'd been gripped by chills and fever. He still had the skinning knife and Padgett's six-shooter. He threw the knife away and shoved the gun into the waistband of the new Levi overalls he'd bought in the little Mexican store. He saddled his horse and rode away, looking back across his shoulder for all the world like a coyote. And as he looked he stiffened in his saddle and reined up sharply.

He'd left the cabin in utter darkness, with One-eyed Jack Padgett dead or almost dead, motionless there on the dirt floor. The breeze from the doorway had blown out the candle light. And Dogie would have taken an oath he'd pulled the door shut.

Now the door was open. A flickering light, like a lighted candle showed. Then it was gone as if somebody inside the cabin had quickly closed the door.

Dogie sat his horse, staring until his eyeballs ached, listening until he began to imagine he heard all kinds of sounds in the night. The cabin was a couple of hundred yards away, clean-shadowed in the moonlight. The door was closed. It did not

open. No light showed. Not a real sound came from the closed cabin.

"I'm spooky . . . I must've imagined it . . . Padgett's dead and I'm glad of it . . . Nobody else there or they'd be showin' theirselves. I got the spooks, that's all."

But Dogie did not ride back to the cabin to make certain. He had gone through too much the past half hour. More than his nerves would stand. Light or no light, ghost-lighted or man-made, he wasn't going back there to investigate.

Dogie owned not so much as one saddle horse or pack mule of his own. He stopped long enough to take the hobbles off Padgett's horse and turn the hard-ridden animal loose. Then he rode down into the pasture along the river and roped a big chestnut sorrel gelding, the best horse Padgett owned. He saddled the big horse, then rode on into the night.

IV

The feel of the fresh horse under him gave Dogie a new grip on life. The cold sweat that had soaked him dried on his tough young hide. He was packing his first six-shooter. Five cartridges in it. Padgett had taught him how to shoot and Dogie was a born marksman. But he had never been allowed to own or pack any kind of gun. The feel of the wooden butt in his hand strengthened him. He was forking a top horse. He had a gun. One-eyed Jack Padgett was dead. The Dogie Kid was free!

He had a long trail to ride, Dogie knew. The further he got away from

the Padgett ranch, the faster he rode away from it, the safer he'd be. Since he could remember, Padgett had taught him to fear the law, especially the Texas Rangers.

He'd left a dead man back in that cabin. The dead man was a tough, border-jumping renegade cattle rustler and horse thief, but he was a dead man, just the same. And the law would want to know why and how he got killed.

On several occasions Dogie and Jack Padgett had been stopped and questioned hard and long by the Texas Rangers. Grim, hard-eyed, slow-spoken Rangers with six-shooters and saddle guns. Their eyes had showed hatred and contempt for the one-eyed renegade and the undersized kid. But Padgett had been too foxy ever to be caught with stolen cattle or horses. He'd cussed the Rangers back as boldly as he dared.

"You got nothin' on me and this button. The devil with you."

On that kind of solid ground Jack Padgett had always made his defiant stand, and gotten away with it.

But Padgett was dead and the Rangers would never in the world believe the true story of how it had happened.

"If ever they kin git you locked up in jail, button," Padgett had often repeated, "they got yuh. They kin throw the key away. Let you rot there. I'd ruther die a-fightin' than git jailed. Mark that down in your book, you Dogie—"

Somewhere not too far away Idaho Jones was camped on the river bank with his trail herd. Ride wide of Idaho Jones' trail map, Dogie told

himself. That big trail boss was tough and ornery. His eyes had a mean look. He had built himself a tough rep. He was Padgett's partner. Padgett and Dogie had helped gather a lot of those stolen cattle in Idaho Jones' Figure 8 road iron now.

Jack Padgett and Idaho Jones had long been partners in cattle-rustling and horse-thieving crimes. Idaho had that letter Padgett had given him. The letter that would open a safety deposit box at Trail City, Montana. Now Padgett was dead. But Idaho Jones was far from dead. Idaho had closed the dicker for handling the Dogie Kid. All Padgett's death meant now to that big taller-paunched trail boss was that he, Idaho Jones, had sole ownership now of the valuable Dogie Kid. And Idaho wasn't the man to let go a tail holt.

So travel wide and far around Idaho Jones' trail camp. And keep on riding. Headed north. To Montana. On up the long, long cattle trail north, to a town in Montana called Trail City. To a big cattle ranch that branded a Star. The Star Ranch in Montana, owned by a family named McHenry.

Dogie told himself that he had a long head start and he was lengthening it with every mile. The big chestnut gelding, Ridge Runner, would pack him all day at this steady road trot that ate up the miles.

This big chestnut was what the cow country called an easy keeper. Tough, with plenty of bottom, hard to gaunt up. Camp on good feed and water. Travel by night when it's cool and nobody sights you topping

a skyline. Keep away from towns and ranches. Rob camps along the way for grub.

Main thing was feed and water for your horse. Let him eat and drink and lay down for six-eight hours out of every twenty-four and this big chestnut gelding would pack a kid the weight of Dogie plumb to Montana. Ride into that Star Ranch with head and tail up. Ride into that cow town of Trail City and step off in front of the bank. Tell the bank man to open up that safety deposit box that belonged to Jack Padgett.

"No, I've got no key, Mr. Bank Man. A pot-bellied cattle thief named Idaho Jones is somewhere along the Chisholm Trail with the key in his pocket and a letter from Jack Padgett. . . . Why don't Jack Padgett come hisse'f with his key to open his bank box? Well, Mr. Banker, don't bust into tears, but One-eyed Jack Padgett is a-jinglin' them big silver-mounted Chihuahua spurs of his down in hell where he's a-kickin' the red-hot clods out o' his way. So open up the bank box and lemme look at my Dogie pedigree, Mr. Banker. I kin read. I picked it up along the trail from books. I'm the Dogie Kid from Texas, tougher'n a boot. But some day when I prove it, when I show my proper pedigree papers, I'll own the biggest cow outfit in the country . . . So open the bank box, mister, and let's have a look at my papers—"

The sun rose and Dogie dreamed as the big chestnut carried him along the trail. Mile after mile and hour after hour. About a three-hour rest at a waterhole where the grass was

good and he pillowed his head on his saddle and stared up at the clear blue sky, marking the passing of the time by the sun. Then he saddled and rode on again, the water he'd drunk sloshing around in his hungry empty belly. And that night between dusk and moonrise he found a water-hole and grass and made camp.

There was a sharp bite to the night air and a sweat-damp saddle blanket made slim bedding. There was no wood for a campfire. Hunger gnawed like a pack rat at the Dogie's empty belly. Weariness drugged him into a fitful, nightmare-ridden sleep. He saw that dirty gray face with its swiveling green eye that was the only thing left alive of One-eyed Jack Padgett.

Dogie jerked awake, the big gun clutched in his hand, shivering with the cold and sweating with nightmarish terror. He threw aside the saddle blanket that was damp with horse sweat and clammy cold. His hands and feet and the back of his neck and along his spine felt numb with cold. The blood had caked and scabbed on his whip-torn cheek. Fear, the ugly haunting fear of pursuit had him shivering in the moonlight. But the big chestnut sorrel, Ridge Runner, grazed undisturbed at the end of his saddle rope. He was all alone.

Dogie did not believe in ghosts. At least he claimed he wasn't spooky. But he kept remembering that light he'd seen inside the cabin after One-eyed Jack Padgett had been shot and the candle blown out. A dead man can't light a candle and open a door and shut it again. One-eyed Jack

Padgett was tough. But not that tough.

"If I'd had the guts to ride back there . . . If I hadn't bin a yellow-bellied runty coyote coward—"

He dug a shallow hole in the sandy ground under the mesquite and curled up in it. Pulling the stiff, damp saddle blanket over his back, he lay there shivering with Padgett's six-shooter gripped in his small hand and tried to get some rest.

V

The same round white cold moon shed its light down on the bedded trail herd. The tough cowhands rode their two-hour night guard with saddle guns, circling the bedded cattle as they rode in pairs in opposite directions, four men on guard. Idaho Jones had doubled the guard. The big trail boss was ringy. He had a horn drooped, they said. He'd put an extra man on horse guard with the nighthawk and left a straw boss in charge of the outfit. Idaho Jones was acting like a big bull on the prod when he saddled the best horse in his string and rode away with Bill Cota.

Bill Cota was a renegade of mongrel breed. He was short and heavy-shouldered and had thick bowed legs. His face, deeply pitted with pockmarks and hairless, had a thick-lipped mouth and a flat, wide-nostriled, splayed nose. His eyes were as yellow as an animal's and his hair was as coarse and black as the mane of a horse.

Idaho Jones had left Bill Cota bushed up a ways down the river

when he finished his dicker with One-eyed Jack Padgett and headed for camp with his bunch of horses and three of his men helping him. The big trail boss had given Cota special orders.

"Bush up, Cota. Keep out o' sight. But keep an eye on Padgett. And when the Dogie Kid shows up, watch 'im. Watch the pair of 'em. But don't, whatever you do, let 'em sight you. Savvy?"

"Sure I savvy."

"Like blazes yuh do. But anyhow, Padgett's to fetch the Dogie Kid to camp in the mornin'. Dogie's goin' up the trail with us. I don't want that one-eyed snake to change his mind. I made a dicker with 'im to take the Dogie along. I don't want Padgett er the Dogie to back out o' the deal."

Bill Cota grinned faintly and said he savvied. And about daybreak he had ridden up alone to the trail camp.

"One-eyed Jack Padgett is shot to hell, boss," he reported. "The Dogie Kid has coyoted."

Idaho Jones choked on his black coffee. Then he cursed Bill Cota until he was winded. The mongrel renegade took the cussing in yellow-eyed, wooden-faced silence.

"You let the Dogie git away! You thick-skulled breed!"

"You never gimme no orders to kill the Dogie," said Bill Cota bluntly. "And that's the only way I could've headed 'em off. I was bushed up like you told me. When the Dogie got there he went to the cabin. I was close enough to hear

Padgett cussin' the kid out. Then I heard a shot. And I heard Padgett holler that the Dogie Kid had killed 'im.

"Then the door opened and the Dogie came out. He had a butcher knife in one hand and a six-shooter in the other hand. He stood there lookin' around. Dangerous. There was a candle burnin' in the cabin. I could see Padgett layin' on the floor. Then the candle blowed out. The Dogie shut the door and got his horse and rode off. I'd 've had to kill 'im to stop 'im. Did you want me to kill the kid?"

"No. Which way did the Dogie go?"

"I kin trail 'im. When he rode out o' sight, I went to the cabin. Lit the candle an' shut the door. Padgett looked dead. All but that one green eye. Then he told me to lay him on his bunk and give 'im some booze because he was dyin'. Padgett was a-scairt to die. The yeller—"

"Padgett's dead?"

"Shucks, no. But he thought he was. The bullet hit his hip and cut a long rip up his belly muscle and along his ribs. No more than a deep scratch. And his arm and hand were knife cut. He give up head like a bull at a brandin' fire. I left him workin' on his booze. He said to fetch you quick. And to take in after the Dogie Kid. I told him I couldn't be two places at oncet. I fixed him up the best I could and told him to shut up his bawlin' an' slobberin', that he was a long ways from dead or even dyin'. He was still groanin' an' guzzlin' booze when I pulled out. One-eyed Jack Padgett

ain't so damned ornery tough when he gits his hide scratched. Shore gives up a lot o' head."

"Padgett had a thousand dollars cash in his pockets," Idaho told the breed.

"Did he?" Bill Cota's pock-marked face was wooden. But there was a dangerous glitter in his yellow eyes.

"You robbed Padgett's pockets, Cota." Big Idaho Jones eyed the breed coldly. "You got that money."

"The only way you kin prove that, boss, is to rob *my* pockets. And that's a job no man kin do while I'm still alive." Cota's hand was on a fancy silver-handled six-shooter he packed in a Mexican carved holster.

The eyes of the two men met and held in a long, ugly stare. Big Idaho Jones shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"You think you kin pick up the Dogie Kid's trail?"

"You kin gamble on it, boss."

"Then saddle a fresh horse. Take in after the Dogie Kid. Either cold-trail him or throw in with him. If he's headed for Montana, don't try to stop him. But don't let him git to the Star Ranch or to the town of Trail City, in Montana. Hogtie him and hide him out somewheres if you have to. And send me word back what you're a-doin'. Keep me posted all along the line. And don't let the Dogie Kid git wise to your game. You got that?"

"I got it, boss. What about Padgett?"

"I'll take care of One-eyed Jack Padgett," grinned Idaho Jones.

VI

Young Dogie turned camp robber along the trail. But he stole only enough to take the wrinkles out of his belly and carried along just enough cold grub to last him another day. And he was careful to clean up the dishes he'd dirtied and chop enough wood to pay for his grub. Then he'd ride on again. And after a week on the trail he managed to shake off the nightmares and he no longer looked back across his shoulder like a coyote as he let the big Ridge Runner sorrel travel along at a running walk that never even sweated the big gelding's hair.

There were times when Dogie thought somebody was trailing him. But when he wore out every trick he knew to cover his trail or trap anybody trailing him and caught nobody in the traps, he quit wasting time and traveled on at a steady gait.

Dogie was a hundred miles and more along the trail north before any man sighted him. Then the big Ridge Runner sorrel needed shoeing. And one evening about sundown Dogie rode boldly into a little cow town along the Chisholm Trail and reined up in front of the blacksmith shop.

There was a freight outfit pulled in and the freighter and his swamper and the blacksmith were so busy shoeing the string of freight horses Dogie could not so much as borrow a shoeing hammer and rasp and nails and horseshoes to do his own shoeing job. So he put his Ridge Runner sorrel in the feed and livery barn and went to work as blacksmith's

helper. The blacksmith paid Dogie a couple of dollars and told him to help himself to shoes.

It was past midnight by the time the empty-bellied Dogie, sweaty and grimy, got the last shoe tacked on his Ridge Runner. Blowing out the lantern, he closed the blacksmith shop and went to the barn to put up his horse. He paid the barn man a dollar for hay and a night and morning's feed of grain.

Then, after washing up at the pump, the Dogie Kid went up the street to the Chinaman's to eat a dollar's worth of grub and strong black coffee. He had finished a big steak and spuds and canned tomatoes and was on his third piece of raisin pie when he heard the jingle of Mexican spurs. His head jerked up and he stared up into the hard yellow eyes of Bill Cota.

"Keep your shirt on, Dogie. And take your hand away from that gun. I ain't the law." Bill Cota grinned and sat down across the oilcloth-topped table.

"It's you," Dogie's voice was dry-throated, "that's bin a-trailin' me. You bother me, Cota, and I'll kill yuh."

"Tuck in your shirt tail, button. I ain't botherin' yuh. And you better go easy on the killin'. They hang fellers fer murder. You shot One-eyed Jack Padgett . . . and robbed his pockets of the thousand dollars Idaho Jones paid him fer them horses."

"That's a lie!"

"The law down in Texas says that's what happened," Bill Cota lied flatly. "Take 'er easy, Dogie. I don't give a

damn what you did. Might be I'm the only friend you got right now to tie to."

"I've got just one dollar, Cota. You wouldn't side your own brother without you got paid for it. Idaho Jones sent you after me."

"Mebbe," grinned the pockmarked breed. "Mebbe to the devil with Idaho."

"Meanin' what, Cota?"

"That's what I'd like to know. What makes a bald-faced kid like you so valuable to Idaho Jones and One-eyed Jack Padgett? All these years Padgett's rode close herd on you. Why?"

Dogie eyed the pock-marked renegade with cold suspicion. He was on his guard, ready to shoot if Bill Cota reached for his gun.

"I'm goin' to Montana to find out."

"I got orders," grinned the yellow-eyed Cota, "to keep you away from the Star Ranch and from Trail City. Idaho Jones' orders. Why?"

"You ever bin there to the Star Ranch?"

"I went up the trail with one of the Lone Star herds. Worked for Pat McHenry up there. I got into a little ruckus with young Frank McHenry, Pat's only son and an overbearin', snaky young whelp, and quit. Pat McHenry didn't like the idee of me slappin' his mouthy whelp. The kid stole some money out o' my war sack and tried to throw the blame on me because I was a breed. I set a trap. Laid for young Frank. Ketched 'im robbin' my war sack. I was slappin' the fear into his sneakin' little heart when his old man come up. Pat McHenry jumped me instead of the

kid. Gun-whipped me and run me off for a damned camp robber. And it was his own whelp that was doin' the sneak stealin'. No man kin do that to Bill Cota. Savvy?"

"So you up and quit," grinned Dogie. "I bet the Lone Star shore had trouble gittin' along without you, Cota."

Bill Cota's pock-marked face grinned but his yellow eyes were wicked. Dogie shoved back his chair and stood up.

"I'm pullin' out, Cota. If I find you follerin' me, I'll ketch you in a trail trap and kill you."

Bill Cota grinned. "I ain't botherin' yuh, Dogie. No need fer yuh to pull out in the middle of the night. Rest your horse. But yuh kin gamble on this, button. That when you hit the trail, tonight, tomorrow or next week, Bill Cota will be a-follerin' yuh. Ridin' your cold trail. I know where you're headed for. And just before you git there, I'll trip you up. But till then, my orders is to leave you alone. If you change your mind about lettin' me side you fer a friend, let me know. If you make it worth my while, I'll double-cross Idaho Jones—and One-eyed Jack Padgett. I'm drawin' pay from 'em both."

"Padgett's dead!"

"So he is, Dogie. I plumb forgot. Well, don't let me run you out o' town, button. I'm goin' to git a little drunk between now an' sunrise. I kin pick up your trail after I sleep off my jag. You bin leadin' me along fast. And me your only amigo. The night you shot Padgett I heard him holler that you killed him."

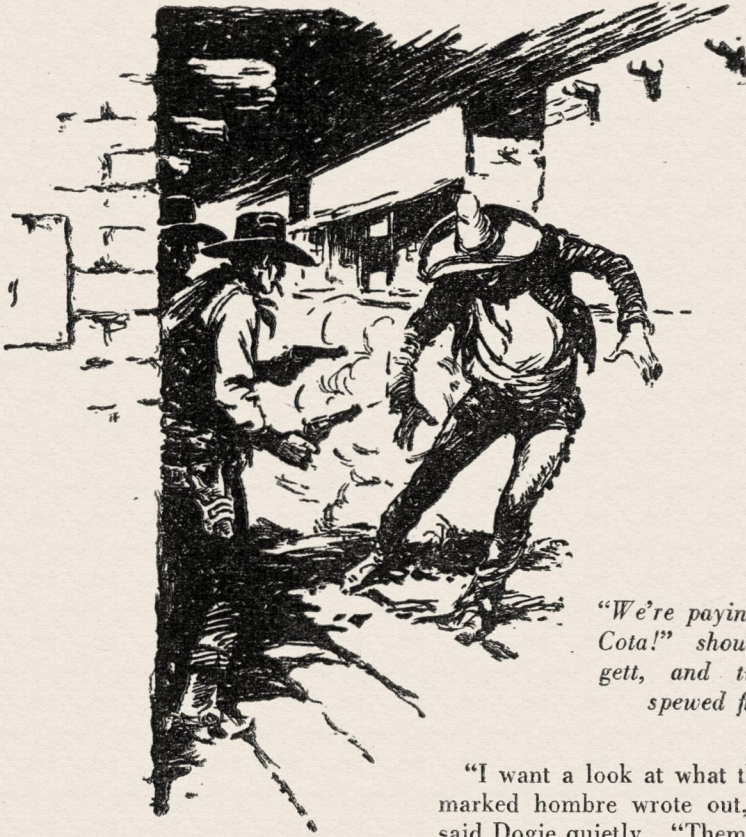
Dogie's tanned face whitened a little. "You was hid out there, that night. It was you that lit the candle and shut the cabin door. If Padgett's pockets was robbed, it was you that robbed him. I reckon Pat McHenry was right when he run you off for a camp robber, Cota. You talk, Cota, when you should be listenin'. Adios and so long. Crowd my trail and I'll gut-shoot you."

Dogie threw his last and only dollar on the counter and left the restaurant. Bill Cota's yellow eyes followed him through the door. But the pock-marked breed made no move to follow him. Outside on the dark street Dogie heaved a big sigh. He felt almost happy.

"Well, you wind-bellied Dogie thing," he told himself, "there's your One-eyed Jack Padgett's candle-lightin', door-shuttin', cold-trailin' ghost. Don't git spooky on me again."

Dogie did not pull out right away. He was suspicious of Bill Cota and he wanted to get a line on the renegade's game. The pock-marked breed was trailing him. Cota claimed to be working for Idaho Jones and One-eyed Jack Padgett. That meant he was the man Padgett had planted with Idaho's trail herd outfit to rep for his Cross P interests.

Dogie waited in the dark street until Bill Cota came out of the Chinaman's eating place. The cow town boasted a telegraph office and Cota headed straight for it. Dogie watched through the window while the pock-marked breed sat down with a yellow pad of telegraph blanks and stubby pencil. It took



"We're payin' you off, Cota!" shouted Padgett, and two guns spewed flame.

about fifteen or twenty minutes. And when Bill Cota paid the telegraph man he peeled a banknote from a thick roll of currency held together by a wide black rubber band.

Dogie crouched in the black shadows of the telegraph station until Bill Cota went up the street to the biggest of the several saloons. Then he walked boldly into the telegraph office. A sallow-faced man with a green eye shade looked up at him through steel-rimmed spectacles.

"I want a look at what that pock-marked hombre wrote out, mister," said Dogie quietly. "Them two telegrams he's sendin'."

"Against the rules, young feller." The man turned back to his telegraph set.

"Mebbeso. But I got to have a look, mister."

"Against the rules." The man had a sharp, unpleasant voice that matched his sallow complexion. "Don't bother me. Shut the door when—"

"Take a good look at this, mister." Dogie's voice was quiet-toned. There was a six-shooter in his hand. "An' hand over them telegrams."

VII

The telegraph operator swallowed. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down in his skinny neck. He handed over the two telegrams, then sat down again in his chair at the telegraph key that kept click-clicking.

Dogie read the two laboriously scrawled messages. They were identical in their blunt wording. One was addressed to Idaho Jones at a trail town down the line. The other was being sent to Jack Padgett at Padgett's Texas post-office address.

Put five thousand dollars cash in the Trail City bank so I can draw it out without trouble right now, or I sell out to Pat McHenry. Got the Dogie on my line and giving him plenty slack rope. You two gents better deal me in or I will make you sorry.

Bill Cota.

Dogie read the two telegrams and shoved them back across the counter at the man with the eye shade.

"Thanks, mister. That's all. Keep it quiet and there's no harm done. No use in your makin' a holler about this."

Dogie walked on up the street to the saloon where he'd seen Bill Cota enter. Standing outside, he could see over the swinging half doors. The pock-marked Cota stood at the bar drinking.

Dogie saddled his horse and hit the trail. He'd made up his mind to travel in the open from here on. He'd ride the grubline, put up at the ranches and towns along the way. Work enough to pay for his grub and horse feed. Play it wide open. But always on guard against Bill Cota.

Dogie was staying overnight at a ranch on the Yellowstone, about a fifty-mile ride from Trail City and the Star range, when Bill Cota caught up with him and then swapped for a fresh horse and rode on.

"It's just to say howdy, Dogie, and so long till I cut your sign again at Trail City. I'm ridin' in the lead from here on. That telegraph man 'way back yonder along the trail told me you'd thrown a gun on 'im and taken a look at my two hole cards. So I'm ridin' on to Trail City to pick up my money. If they pay off, I'll earn it. I'll trip you up before you git to the Star Ranch. But if Idaho Jones and One-eyed Jack Padgett don't lay the dough on the line, to blazes with 'em. I'll make my deal with you."

"Jack Padgett is dead, Cota. Ain't he?"

"One-eyed Jack," grinned the pock-marked renegade, "should be so dead by now that even the buzzards won't go near his carcass . . . So long, Dogie. I'll be cuttin' your sign again."

From there on Dogie rode with his hand on his gun. And it was night when he reached the wild little cow town of Trail City. There was a roundup outfit camped a little ways from town and when Dogie put up his horse at the feed and livery barn the stableman told him that the big Star outfit had shipped out a trainload of cattle that day. Pat McHenry and his tough young son Frank and the Star cowhands were now painting the town red. That is, the stableman

told Dogie, young Frank and the Star cowpunchers were celebrating. Pat McHenry wasn't much of a hand for drinking. He'd be plenty busy trying to keep that wild locoed Frank kid out of trouble.

The owner of the big feed and livery barn was a little full. He had a bottle and gave Dogie a drink. He said he liked to see a young feller who took care of his horse and didn't trust the job to the hired hands around a feed barn. And they were standing there in the dark shadows outside the big barn when it happened.

The town was wild and woolly. Drunken cowpunchers yelled and shot at the lights and the stars as they went from one saloon to the next. And if it hadn't happened nearby, the barn owner and Dogie wouldn't have heard or seen anything of it, for the noise of the celebrating. Even as it was, only Dogie savvied what it was they witnessed.

Three men met in the dark shadows at the end of the main street about a stone's throw from the barn. And Dogie's sharp ears caught the familiar bell tinkle of big rowelled Chihuahua spurs. Then the outlines of the three men. One was tall and rawboned, another a man of huge bulk, the third short and squatty. That tall man was One-eyed Jack Padgett or his ghost. The big man was Idaho Jones. The short one was Bill Cota.

"Kinda surprised, eh, Cota?" That was Padgett's rasping voice.

"I knowed you wasn't dead, Jack." Cota's voice had a brittle sound.

"But you figgered I was dyin' when

you robbed me of a thousand dollars. Fork it over."

"I lost every damn dollar in a poker game back along the trail. So help me, Jack, that's the truth. How'd you git here so quick?"

"Trains," wheezed Idaho Jones, "is faster'n horses. Where's the Dogie Kid?"

"I talked to the Dogie yesterday. He'll be showin' up here tonight. You fellers dealin' me in? For ten thousand?"

"We're payin' you off, Cota," rasped Padgett's voice.

One-eyed Jack Padgett and Idaho Jones must have had the signal arranged between them because their guns spewed flame at the same second and the roar of the two six-shooters blended like one shot. Bill Cota, in that last split second, guessed what was coming. Guessed that split second too late. The rasping scream died in his throat as the two .45 slugs tore through his ribs and into his heart. He was dead before his stocky bowed legs bent and he went down into the thick dust of the dark street with a heavy thud.

"There's his payoff," chuckled Padgett. "The double-crossin' mongrel breed—"

"We better be watchin' fer the Dogie," Idaho Jones cut in.

Padgett squatted on his hunkers beside the dead Cota. "He might've lied about pokerin' off that thousand. . . . Best place to ketch the Dogie is at the feed barn."

The tipsy stable owner turned to say something to the young cowpuncher who had stabled that big

chestnut sorrel. But Dogie was no longer there. He had slipped back into the big log barn and gone out the back way into the feed yard and over the pole corral.

Dogie went in the back way of the biggest saloon. The place was crowded with tipsy cowpunchers. Dogie was looking for Pat McHenry but he'd have to ask somebody to point out the cowman for him.

"Just my size!" a young, nasal voice sounded behind Dogie. And a hand grabbed the back of his shirt collar and yanked. "Made to order! Dance fer your drink, kid! Or fight!"

Dogie's shirt was old and the fabric rotten from many washings. That vicious yank from behind tore its collar off and ripped it down the back and when Dogie whirled, the old shirt was torn from his back. He was wearing no undershirt and save for the ragged remains of his ripped shirt he was naked to his belt when he whirled around.

The cowpuncher grinning at him had stringy black hair and his long face with its pointed chin was flushed and sweaty from booze. The grin on his face was wolfish and in that first split second Dogie was reminded of One-eyed Jack Padgett because here was a younger replica of Padgett's long-jawed face and his grin, only there were two pale-green eyes instead of one.

The drunken young cowpuncher had a six-shooter in his hand and he shot into the floor between Dogie's feet.

"Dance!" he shouted and sent another slug into the pine-board, saw-

dust-covered floor. "Dance, damn you! Or I'll shoot the heels off your boots!"

"Frank!" roared a man's voice. "Stop it, you drunken fool!"

Dogie heard the voice. The gun roared again and it felt like a hornet stinging his leg. The roar of that gun was in his ears and the stinging tang of burnt gunpowder in his nostrils. Dogie jerked his six-shooter, thumbed back the hammer and pulled the trigger. A bullet whined past his cheek and then he saw that long-jawed drunken face change expression. The pointed jaw dropped open and there was a glazed look in the staring pale-green eyes as the young cowpuncher staggered and crumpled like an empty sack at Dogie's feet. Then men rushed Dogie from behind and knocked the gun out of his hand. Somebody hit him across the head with a gun barrel and everything went black.

The next thing he knew cold water was sloshing down on his head and face from a bucket. He blinked his eyes open and strong, rough hands yanked him onto his feet and stood him against the bar. A man held the neck of a bottle against his gritted teeth and told him to drink a-plenty because he'd need it. Dogie swallowed the raw whiskey and when the burn of it sent a glow into his empty belly he felt better.

Then he looked down and saw a gray-haired, gray-mustached man squatted on spurred bootheels and bending over the long-faced young cowhand lying sprawled on his back on the sawdust floor. The green eyes were still wide open but death made

them look glassy.

The gray-haired man got slowly to his feet and wiped blood from his hands onto a big white silk pocket handkerchief. His face was gray and seamed with deeply etched lines and his gray eyes looked from under bushy graying black brows to stare hard at Dogie. He was a short man, only a few inches taller than Dogie, wide-shouldered, deep-chested and lean of flank and belly.

"I saw the whole thing from start to finish." The man spoke in a quiet, soft-toned voice. "Frank got what he asked for. What he's been asking for a long time. You can't be blamed here or in any court of law. I'm Pat McHenry. That's my son Frank you killed. Who are you, young man?"

Dogie wiped his unsteady hand across his soaked hair and dripping face. His brain was clearing. Tattered shreds of his torn shirt hung from his shoulders and he pulled them off and used the torn old faded blue flannel to wipe the water from his chest and belly. Then he heard the grizzled cowman gasp, and he looked up.

Pat McHenry was staring at Dogie's middle. Dogie looked down. There was that scarlet horse-head birthmark, vivid as a blood stamp against his white hide.

"Who . . . who are you, boy?" The cowman's voice was a husky whisper. His eyes were as hard and bright as gray steel. "Where did you get that horse-head mark on your belly?"

"He was born with it, mister!"

That was Idaho Jones' whiskey

voice. The big trail boss shoved through the crowd. The Star cow-punchers gave way. Some of them recognized Jones and muttered his name.

"Where'd you come from, Idaho?" Pat McHenry's voice was still quiet but it was a deadly sort of quietness. "And what do you know about it?"

"Plenty. But I ain't tellin' it here."

"The devil you're not," said the cowman flatly. "Talk fast, Idaho. This young stranger just killed my son Frank. You dealt yourself in cheap. Play your hand out."

"That dead kid ain't your son. He's Jack Padgett's whelp. This young feller with the red horse-head birthmark is your son. The wire cutters switched kids when they burnt you out in Texas. Your missus got killed and a Mexican woman fetched you the yearlin' boy she said she'd saved. You was here in Montana when the wire cutters burnt your Texas ranch. You come back to Texas by train. The Mexican woman met you at El Paso. She showed you the kid. You looked fer that birthmark your wife had wrote you was on the baby boy you'd never seen but the Mexican woman said the birthmark had faded off gradually. That it must've bin a kind o' rash or bruise and not a real birthmark. She lied. Even when she died ten-twelve years later here in Montana, she stuck with that lie. And I'll tell you why, McHenry. Because it was her own kid she was sloughin' off on you. Hers and Jack Padgett's son. She wanted her boy to some day own the big Star outfit—"

"Keep on," Pat McHenry's voice was a hoarse whisper. "Keep on talkin', Idaho."

"Padgett was playin' another game, McHenry. He kept your son. Raised the kid fer his own. Called him Dogie. He aimed to make a big money deal with you fer this horse-head birthmarked son of yours. But he didn't dast make the deal hisself. He hired me to sell you your real son. The price Padgett set was two hundred thousand dollars. But I'll settle here an' now for a hundred thousand cash."

"You must be locoed drunk, Idaho. Why should I pay you a dollar?"

"Step into the back room," wheezed Idaho Jones. "I'll tell you why. Fetch the Dogie Kid along. He'll back up my claim. But fer his own sake, this had better be plumb private and confidential. Between the three of us."

Pat McHenry looked at the Dogie Kid. Dogie was watching Idaho Jones.

"Jack Padgett is dead," said Idaho. "So is a feller named Bill Cota. So is a Star cowpuncher you called Blackie that's bin drawin' big pay all the time from Padgett to keep him posted about this Frank whelp that Dogie just killed. Your Dogie Kid plays fer keeps, McHenry."

Pat McHenry looked hard into Dogie's smoke-gray eyes. The boy returned the searching scrutiny. Dogie was thinking fast now, using all the cub wolf cunning he'd ever learned from the one-eyed renegade Padgett.

"Idaho Jones," said Dogie quietly,

"is right. We better use the back room."

"Very well," the grizzled little cowman agreed coldly. "The back room. Lead the way, Idaho."

Dogie's six-shooter lay on the bar. He reached out quickly and picked up the gun and shoved it into the waistband of his Levi overalls.

VIII

Inside the rear card room Pat McHenry closed the door. There was a hanging lamp burning above the green cloth poker table. The cowman stood with his back against the closed door. His hard gray eyes cut from Dogie to Idaho Jones.

"All right, Idaho. Name your shakedown. You, boy, stay out of it. Looks like they've dirtied you a plenty."

"The Dogie Kid killed Jack Padgett down in Texas, then hit the trail. I sent Bill Cota to trail the Dogie. I just found Cota dead down the street. And Padgett's man Blackie killed the same way. Padgett spent a lot of years learnin' the Dogie Kid to be tough. Looks like he's got the job done. The Dogie Kid's real name is Frank McHenry. He's your real and only son. There's papers in the Trail City Bank to prove it. But this same Dogie Kid has killed three men besides the tough young hellion you raised fer your son, McHenry. If I tell what I know in a law court, my story will hang your Dogie son. For one hundred thousand dollars' cash, I'll keep my mouth shut. You own the bank, McHenry. You kin git in there now and into the vault.

You got that much money in your bank. Pay me and I'll quit the country tonight. Try to crawl out o' it and I'll hang your Dogie son—"

Idaho Jones pointed a thick forefinger like a gun at Dogie.

"You killed Padgett!"

The card room had a window. Its pane was covered with a thick coating of black paint. Dogie had been covertly watching that window. His ears, trained to catch tiny sounds, had been listening.

"How about it, boy?" Pat McHenry's voice was a low growl.

"I never killed anybody," Dogie's voice was barely audible, "but that tough kid in the saloon. Cover Idaho. Quick, mister. Kill him if he tries to stop me."

Dogie didn't have time to wait to see if Pat McHenry was with him. Moving with all that dodging speed he'd learned throughout the tough boyhood years, he dodged in behind the cowman, past the clumsy bulk of Idaho Jones. With a twisting leap that doubled his legs and dropped his head and using his bared back and shoulders to take the impact, he dove, bunched double and backwards, through the black window. The black painted window pane crashed as he went through.

Outside in the darkness a gun exploded. The Dogie Kid crashed heavily on top of the crouched man below the low window. Jack Padgett's hoarse, harsh voice let out a snarling curse. He went down under the Dogie's catapulting impact, shooting wildly.

This was it. The thing Dogie had

dreamed and planned a million times. The killing of One-eyed Jack Padgett. It was the gun that had once belonged to the one-eyed renegade that was gripped tight in Dogie's hand now. And he was thumbing back the hammer and pulling the trigger. And he couldn't miss because he was snarled and tangled in Padgett's long legs as the man kicked and threshed around in the darkness.

Dogie's first bullet must have hit Padgett hard because the man's horrible scream drowned out the crashing roar of gunfire. Padgett's legs quit kicking and his ugly scream died out in a horrible death rattle. Then Pat McHenry crawled through the smashed window and took away Dogie's gun and with his arms around the boy's glass-ripped bare shoulders, led him into the saloon by way of the back door.

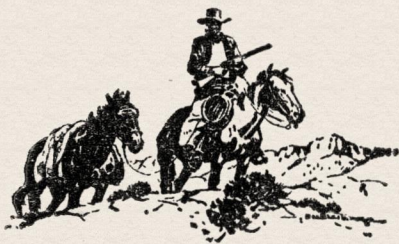
"You'll find Idaho Jones," Pat McHenry told a bunch of now sober Star cowpunchers with guns in their hands, "in the back room. He's dead. And there's another dead renegade named Padgett out in the alley. My son Dogie made the last payoff."

A doctor bathed and bandaged the glass rips in Dogie's back and shoulders. Pat McHenry fed him watered whiskey. The cowman's eyes were misted. He kept looking at Dogie and shaking his head and tugging at his drooping gray mustache.

"I'd've knowed you, son. You're the livin' spittin' image of Pat McHenry when I was your age. . . . Ain't he, boys?" And he would look at a couple of grizzled old Star cowhands who had worked for the Lone Star in Texas when Pat McHenry was

a boy.

"Drink up, you rannyhans!" Pat McHenry kept telling them. "Git drunk! Drunker'n you ever bin in your lives!



"It's on my boy Dogie! And, son, if I git a little full, and holler, it's because there's a big God up yonder in the sky."

Dogie had to strip to the hide and bathe in a big wooden tub of water that could have been warmer. He was a little drunk on watered whiskey and excitement. This little weather-stained cowman with bushy gray hair and drooping gray mustache was his father! The kind of a father he'd dreamed about in his loneliness. The kind of a father who wanted to be called Pat and treated like a pardner.

The storekeeper brought in clean clothes, from socks and underwear to a fine red flannel shirt and a pair of California pants made for Pat McHenry. There was a pair of shop-made alligator boots with the Star brand stitched in the tops, made to order for Pat McHenry, and they fit Dogie like a pair of gloves. When the cowman saw his son could wear his clothes and boots and a new 5X beaver Stetson factory-ordered for him, Pat McHenry was as tickled as a schoolboy.

They found Padgett's letter and key to the safety deposit box in Idaho Jones' pocket. The bank cashier was routed out of bed. The box that had been rented in the name of Jack Smith was opened. In it were legal papers, Pat McHenry's marriage license, young Frank McHenry's birth certificate and an unfinished letter from the cowman's wife who had been murdered by Padgett and his wire-cutter renegades.

". . . and our baby boy, Frank," read the letter, "as I told you when he was born, Pat, has the cutest birthmark you ever saw. A perfect horse's head, like it was stamped there in red ink, on his little round fat tummy, curly black hair that will some day be wiry like yours, and gray eyes, the color of yours, only darker. He's all McHenry, the little rascal . . ."

Pat McHenry folded the letter and put it into his breast pocket. Tears coursed unchecked down his leathery face. He blew his nose and wiped away the tears and took a drink.

"You killed the man who murdered your mother, son," he told Dogie.

They had taken the dead body of the tough young Frank McHenry away.

"I never could like the boy as a father should like his own flesh-and-blood son," declared Pat McHenry. "So when the Mexican woman was dying of lung trouble and asked for a priest, I got one. She told the priest in her last confession that the boy was hers and she was the wife of Jack Padgett. The priest made her tell me the truth.

"I never told anybody. The padre

never talked. I put up with young Frank's hell raising. Never let on. He thought he was my son, but he gave me nothin' but trouble.

"I waited for Padgett's next move. I thought he'd use his own son to blackmail me. I was certain that my son was dead—till I saw that red horsehead mark on the belly of the young cowpuncher who had shot Frank. And then Idaho Jones made his talk and I knew the time had come for the big showdown."

Pat McHenry bought another round of drinks and told Dogie that the big Star outfit was his. Tomorrow they'd ride to the home ranch and next week they'd take a pack outfit and ride every foot and mile of the big Star range together. Pardners.

Dogie told him that he had some horses in that Figure 8 remuda that was coming up the Chisholm Trail with Idaho Jones' trail herd. Pat McHenry said he'd ship a cowpuncher crew to Dodge City by train to pick up the trail herd, claim it and fetch it to the Star Ranch. Cattle, remuda, wagons, lock, stock and

barrel. And the big chestnut sorrel Ridge Runner that had fetched the Dogie Kid all the way from Texas would be boss of the Star remuda.

"And before we leave town, son, we're havin' your name changed," Pat McHenry told his son. "Frank is dead. The name Dogie kind o' fits you. You've lived up to it. Growned into a man in spite of it. So your name will go down on the law records as Dogie McHenry. . . . Fill your glasses, boys. We're drinkin' to Dogie McHenry. And when you've downed your likker, smash your glasses agin' the wall. Hoist 'em high to Dogie McHenry of the Lone Star outfit!"

The owner of the livery barn had been telling about the killing of Bill Cota. He said the same two men had killed the Star cowpuncher Blackie not an hour before that.

"I might've knowed Dogie was a McHenry, Pat," the barnman told the owner of the Lone Star outfit. "The way he taken care of his horse."

And no man ever paid Dogie McHenry a finer compliment.

THE END



Here are 15 scrambled words all cowhands know. Can you dab your loop on 'em? Answers on page 130



1. Dehr
2. Geran
3. Larit
4. Arpaultin
5. Zingrag

6. Mudaer
7. Lankteb
8. Wanlam
9. Quitesem
10. Rormick

11. Gawno
12. Tenecan
13. Fittou
14. Veslow
15. Remanof

FLYING WHEELS



by JIM WEST

In pioneer days, the jouncing, swaying Concord was as epoch-making as the first continent-spanning airliner

LOOKING back on the stagecoach as a relic of pioneer travel in the West, it is difficult to realize that this swaying vehicle careening along behind six galloping horses was in its way as epoch-making as the first transcontinental airline. But it was. It too represented *speed*. Writers of the day spoke of stagecoach wheels as "flying over the ground."

"Through in Twenty Days" boasted the Overland Mail in 1861. Its stagecoaches left daily from St. Joseph, Missouri, for Sacramento, California, and vice versa. The route was the northern Overland via Fort Kearney, the Julesburg crossing of the South Platte, Fort Laramie, Fort Bridger, Salt Lake City, Carson, across the High Sierras and down

through the heart of the California goldfields to Sacramento. The journey covered about seventeen hundred miles of frontier wilderness.

Twenty days to cross the West may sound like a turtle's pace, but in its time it was a tremendous achievement. Compared to the long, dragging months required to make the same journey by lumbering, ox-drawn wagon trains the stagecoach was nothing short of a miracle.

In its heyday the stagecoach stood for de luxe travel across the broad reaches of the empty West. It was advertised as comfortable, ad writers even then having a tendency to adorn the truth. And safe. Shotgun guards rode the stage through dangerous passages of Indian territory.

Delicate ladies with cast-iron stamina made the trip by stage and thought nothing more of it than an exhilarating travel adventure. Passengers, probably too fatigued to carry on at the thundering night-and-day pace, were permitted to "lay over" at any point on the road and resume their seats when there was one vacant. There was an extra charge for baggage weighing more than the twenty-five pounds permitted to be carried free. Weight and space were premium commodities.

As a transcontinental passenger and mail carrier, the stagecoach arrived at a time when speed across the vast distances of the West was a matter of moment. Gold had been discovered in California. The first great westward surge was on. San Francisco had grown almost overnight from a mud-flanked huddle of

frame buildings to a city of opulent, swashbuckling millionaires.

Once the adventurous '49ers, the gold seekers, had proved the yellow riches of the country, many persons from the effete East who would as soon have gone to a dog fight as a pioneer gold camp developed a sudden desire to get to California as fast as they could, and with the least possible hardship. They sensed the chance in trade and merchandising, in lawyering and doctoring and politics, to make more in months in the gold country than they could in years in the settled East.

Whether they went as a temporary proposition, as some did, or stayed to establish the sound business foundations of present-day San Francisco, they were in a desperate hurry to reach their destination.

Western staging meant the Concord coach, a purely American product of Yankee ingenuity turned out by Abbot, Downing & Company of Concord, New Hampshire, and never equalled for its special purpose by any other manufacturer. Without the Concord coach it is doubtful if staging could have conquered the long open miles of the West as successfully and spectacularly as it did.

Prior to the Concord coach, the heavy stages of Europe and England, clumsily built for relatively short dashes over post roads, turnpikes and cobbled streets had little give to them. The vehicle was a stout but stiff and fairly rigid job.

Such coaches were not adapted to rutted pioneer roads in a new country. They broke down. They were

hard on the horses. What they did to the passengers, banging them up and down between their seats and the roof top was a veritable travel torture. -

As early as 1813 Abbot, Downing & Company got to thinking about American coaches designed for American travel. They came out with a breath-taking innovation—thorough braces or leather springs. And they literally suspended the coach body over a strong frame on springs that resembled gigantic razor strops. These were the thorough braces, wide lengths of the best steerhide riveted or laced together until perhaps a dozen strips were used to build a single "brace." The braces ran the length of the vehicle, and were not set transverse like wagon springs.

Hung above the axles on these strong leather slabs the coach became a thing of new life and new possibilities. It rocked fore and aft seasickeningly and it swayed and swung. But the leather absorbed the hard, skull-cracking jounces. Thorough braces changed the passenger's ride into a rhythmic swaying over smooth roads and a series of forward and upward lunges at the bad spots.

However the most important feature of the thorough braces was what they accomplished for the horses. For them the braces took up the shock of bumps and rough spots on traces and the heavy stagecoach tongue. The passenger-laden coach body swallowed most of the jolt.

Had this not been the case pioneer Western stagecoaching as it was

known and marveled at could never have been carried on. Teams traveling at the break-neck speed pride, tradition and the promised schedule demanded would have been killed, maimed or thrown off the road by the snap of the rigid coach tongue every time a wheel struck a high rock, dropped into a hole or rolled over a rough place on the trail.

In addition the forward and upward thrust of free-swinging Concord coach body acted by the immutable laws of inertia to lift and "ride" the entire vehicle over any obstruction the wheels encountered. This further eased the sudden yank on the galloping horses racing the stage across plains, prairies, desert and mountain ranges.

All in all, the thorough brace was one of America's most important early transportation inventions. Through it the Concord coach was ready when the call of gold in California brought the first real demand for fast overland travel across the continent.

So outstanding were Abbot, Downing & Company's Concord coaches many were shipped to customers in rough-roaded countries throughout the world. Concord coaches went to Mexico and South America, by clipper to Australia and South Africa as well as to the West.

New Concord coaches as they left the factory were far from being the bedraggled, creaking, weather-worn hulks still seen here and there as museum relics, or horse opera stage props in the movies. Built of well-

seasoned ash, the body panels of poplar, they were gaily painted (often bright red) and adorned with ornamental gilt scroll-work. The earliest ones had an egg-shaped body with a curved top. Later the flat-top design was introduced. It was the flat-top type that was familiar in the West.

This later coach had room inside for nine passengers, three on each of the three leather upholstered transverse seats. There was room for baggage or more passengers on top. Mailbags and important express parcels were generally carried in the boot under the driver's seat. There was a second boot at the rear.

When no shotgun guard was carried or needed, a favored passenger could be accommodated up front beside the driver. This was traditionally the honored seat, reserved for traveling celebrities or the driver's friends. It afforded the occupant a more hair-raising ride, particularly when the stage was tearing down grade along precipice-edged mountain trails.

The story is told of a thus-honored but apprehensive traveler who

clutched the hand rail and hung on as best he could while the stage skidded around one sharp bend after another in the dark of a starless night. Nervously he asked the driver how he could see where he was going.

"Can't," replied the mountain whip. "I've crossed these hills so often I kin tell where the road is by the sound of the wheels. When they rattle I'm on hard ground. When they don't I gener'y look over the side to see where we're goin' to land."

It finally took the railroads to beat the Concord coach and the men who drove it. Yet in more remote sections of the West smaller stage lines persisted in regularly scheduled runs well beyond the turn of the present century.

Outmoded now, the Concord coach and its flying wheels were of prime importance in the West's early expansion. They aided in building an Empire. For that alone the flying wheels deserve their glamorous niche in history.

And what would the fiction writers do without them?

THE END

SEEING-BELIEVING

THIRST-RELIEVING

What happens when you look at the circles and move your head from side to side?



ANSWER. The circles spin like a wheel.





TEXAS TRICK

by NELSE ANDERSON

Getting those five tough owlhooters in one jail cell was quite a feat—but Hite Larmer made the mistake of locking himself in with them.

THE bespectacled Santos River City doctor half turned in his desk chair to see a stranger, a wolf-lean young man with the dust of long riding on his worn range clothing. The stranger spoke at once.

"Morning, doc. The name is Hite Larmer and I'm from Texas. I got a cowboy pardner named Bid Patterson out here, and he sent me a telegram from this same town sayin' he was snakebit and to come quick. You treated a patient of that name for snakebite?"

The doctor shook his head. "I don't know any Bid Patterson."

"Message came to me in Texas six days ago," Hite Larmer said. "I started on a train, but it fell through a bridge, and so I bought me a hoss and rode the rest o' the way. Doc, how long can a man live and him snakebit?"

"Depends. Sometimes they linger a good while, sometimes they don't die at all."

"Me and Bid wanted to make us some quick money so's we could go

into the cow business for ourselves," Larmer explained. "We'd heard this was good gold country. Bid lit out for here, and he was to send me word if they was anything to it. Er . . . any other doc but you in this section?"

"No. I understand lots of gold was brought out of the hills west of town, long time ago, but I'm not sure anybody's even prospecting there now. Likely there's where you'll find Patterson, if he's still alive. Something queer about this, cowboy. If your partner was able to come to town to send you the wire, he would have been able to come to me for treatment, don't you see?"

Larmer nodded. "Yeah, I see. Still, he might've got somebody else to send the telegram. Well, anyhow and howsomever, I'm not givin' up. Bid was the best pard anybody ever had. Thanks, doc."

He went out, picked up his horse's rein, walked across the street to the sheriff's office. "You happen to know Bid Patterson?" he asked the lawyer.

"I never heard that name before," answered the sheriff, busy with a sheaf of papers.

Hite Larmer hurried to the general store. With the last of his money he bought a meagre supply of hard rations for his grub sack, and an extra handful of cartridges for his old range six-shooter. Then he was in the saddle again, and following the little Santos River toward the hills that lay piled in a rocky and forbidding barrier against the western horizon. He rode briskly, with but a single thing in his

mind—Bid Patterson's telegram worded with the brevity of speech that was so characteristic of him:

COME QUICK SNAKEBITE.

That was around nine o'clock in the morning. At four in the afternoon, Hite was far back in the silent big rock wilderness. The road that had kept following the dwindling river was much grown over with saplings and scrub, but it was still passable for a man on horseback.

Then Hite Larmer learned the why of that road. It led to all there was left of a little, mushroom gold-rush town. Mainly, the sun-blasted houses were of frame construction. A few were of adobe, a few had been built of logs.

He was about to rein into the scrub-choked single street when from ahead came a burst of raucous, drunken laughter. Wary, he pulled back, hid his horse, and advanced on foot, keeping under cover.

The largest of the old houses was of frame, and had two stories; it had been a combination hotel, saloon and dance hall. At an angle across the street there stood a small building of whole logs, with a solid heavy door and tiny barred windows. This, of course, had served as a jail. The town in its heyday had probably been a wild one.

Larmer crept up behind the old jail for a look-see. He could hear voices now. They came from the two-story building beyond, and half the words were oaths. Larmer peered through an iron-barred win-

dow close at his left, gasped, then froze.

In there on the rock floor, unshaven, starved thin, pale and weak, was Bid Patterson!

Patterson moved his tousled head, saw Hite and staggered to his feet. His eyes were brighter than Hite Larmer had ever seen them. He staggered over to the tiny window. Even his whisper was weak:

"Fella, am I glad to see you! With all the diggin' for gold they done here, they never found the mother lode, but I did. I found it—nearly solid ore! Fella, we can buy us a dozen cow outfits if we want that many! Didn't know anything about it when I sent you the telegram, but I'd turned up what I figured to be good sign—"

Habitually taciturn, he broke off, probably in amazement at his extraordinary loquacity. Hite whispered back:

"Telegram said you was snakebit, cowboy. Worried me a heap. How come you in this *calabozo*?"

"I didn't mean I was snakebit when I wired you to come quick," Bid Patterson told his friend. "You see, the name o' this old ghost town is Snakebite!"

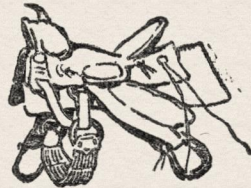
Larmer blinked. If he'd shown the telegram to the Santos River City doctor, or to the sheriff, likely either of them would have set him right. But he hadn't and that was that.

"I came back here from wirin' you to find that the outlaw bunch had picked Snakebite for a hole-up spot," Patterson went on. "Black

Sim Orr, Lije Tate, and the three Arnett brothers. 'Most any sheriff would give a leg to know where they are. They was shy on grub and afraid to go after any, so they took mine an' put me in here so's I couldn't go off and tell. Never give me a bite to eat, not often a drink o' water. Hite, you got anything to eat?"

"Sure. Back in ten minutes or less. I—"

"Don't you let the jiggers see you, cowboy," Bid warned. "They'd shoot you like a rabbit and call it sport. I never know one hour if I'll



be alive the next. Fella, they *are* bad!"

Larmer brought food and water and watched from a corner of the log structure while the starving, famished Patterson ate and drank. The voices of the five outlaws in the sun-warped old building told Larmer that they were playing stud now, and again he heard the harsh laughter of a drinking man. There was promise here, he thought, and he stepped to the barred window and whispered:

"Good time to get you out, Bid, maybe."

"Forget it," Bid told him. "The door to this jail faces the street, and one o' the lowdown outfit has always got a eye on it."

"How about tonight?"

"Worse then. Sim Orr keeps a man on guard here all night, and the fella stays awake, too. A wonder somebody ain't already drilled me so's to get rid o' the job! Best thing you can do now, Hite, is to cut dirt for Santos River City after the sheriff and a posse. Better hustle, cowboy."

Larmer grinned in spite of himself. It was sort of funny, hearing Bid Patterson talk as much as anybody else. The grin faded, and he muttered: "Fifteen-twenty more hours here by yourself, and they could murder you and not a hand lifted to stop it. I'll not leave you thisaway, Bid. Maybe we can rig up a trick—"

"Get goin', Hite!" Patterson cut in warningly.

Hite backed silently into the cover of scrub.

It was close to sundown then. Twilight was settling over Snakebite when Larmer again appeared at the barred little rear window.

"Tough luck, pardner," he breathed. "My hoss is gone. Looks like we'll have to depend on a trick to get you out, after all. A Texas trick, we'll call it, on account we're both from Texas. Don't you sleep too sound in there tonight!"

Again he vanished in the wild growth behind the old jail.

Hite's mind kept busy trying to figure a way of setting Bid Patterson free. If he could find a strong scantling, he might pry out a couple of window bars—but the first sound of that would bring the outlaws helling. He thought of catching them all together, sticking them up and

disarming them. It seemed too risky. He hadn't just himself to think about now.

The best chance, he decided, was to wait until late in the night, when the guard would be sleepy, sneak up behind him and knock him out, and go on from there.

Light showed in the old combination hotel, saloon and dance hall. It was the pale yellow light of tallow dips stuck to the dusty bar by means of their own tallow. Time hung heavy upon Hite and, curious as to what the bad hombres looked like, he stole over to the building, took off his Texas-poked Stetson and peered across a window sill.

He saw four men. The fifth had gone to stand guard at the jail. Two men who resembled each other in lean, wiry build, lay on their blankets smoking. They were undoubtedly the Arnett brothers. Black Sim Orr and Lije Tate occupied dusty old chairs and swapped talk in voices so low that Larmer caught no word of it. Both Orr and Tate were built thickly. Larmer knew Black Sim at sight because of his being so dark. Orr had a wide, short face, a flat chin and short, broad teeth set in a thin-lipped wide mouth. A more villainous face never had crossed the vision of the watching Texan. That outlaw leader was a born killer.

One of the five, Hite knew, had been drinking. None of the four inside showed the least sign of alcoholic influence. This meant that it was Bid's guard—the other Arnett—who was more or less liquored. He should be woozy enough at midnight

to be easily disposed of, Larmer decided.

He was in the act of stealing away in the darkness when a weight as of a boulder drove him to the ground. There was a voice that he didn't hear, and the tallow dips on the dusty bar went out.

Larmer came to hours later to find himself lying on the dusty floor with his wrists tied behind him. The tallow dips were being lighted again, and the man who was doing it was very dark, built thickly, and carried a heavy buckhorn-handled six-shooter in leather under either hip. The other thick-set man, Lije Tate, broke the silence:

"Yeah, anybody with him, Black, they would've showed up. I don't think he's any law scout. No badge hid, or anything. Might be here on a gold hunt, same as the other jigger."

"Might be, yeah," Black Sim Orr grunted.

The Texan kept his eyes closed. He sure would have to do tall figuring pretty soon. To get Bid Patterson and himself out of this hole alive would require fine trick work. And his six-shooter was gone . . .

When the sun's first rays lighted the cobwebby eastern windows, Hite Larmer felt considerably better. He sat up, propped on his bound hands. The time had come to use his wits, and use them as he never had used them before.

He manufactured a grin of a sort, and called: "Hey, where's everybody? This ain't any way to treat a fella, is it? What's the idea, anyhow?"

Playing simple, a good line as long as it held. Black Sim Orr and his lieutenant, Lije Tate, appeared as though out of nowhere. Like his chief, Tate was armed with two guns.

"What the devil was you doin' here?" rapped Sim Orr.

"Why, I'm on a gold jaunt, of course," Hite answered. "Hoss ran off and put me afoot. I just wanted to see what you fellas looked like. You ain't found that main lode yet, have you?"

It was a magic word—gold. The three wiry Arnetts joined Orr and Tate, and all five showed immediate interest. Orr's short, wide countenance worked up a pseudo-friendly smile. He stepped over and cut Hite Larmer's wrist bonds. Hite climbed to his feet, grinning, and began rubbing blood circulation back into his wrists and hands.

"I'm cur'ous to know what hit me last night," said Hite.

Sim Orr was blunt. "Dink Arnett was drunk and didn't have any better sense than to leave his job and go see if the hosses was all right in the rope corral back there. He spied you at a window and lammed you with his gun barrel."

"I'll be danged," Larmer said. The guard he'd intended knocking out had knocked him out!

"You got some information on that main lode, ain't you?" Lije Tate spoke up.

"Sure have," said Hite, still playing it simple. "Reckon I ought to have me a pardner to help work it. Nearly solid, the ore is. Make us couple millionaires, maybe. Look, fellas. How would I know I'd have



to divvy with one man and one man only?"

Black Sim Orr answered: "Give you my oath on that. But how do I know you can find the lode?"

In common with his breed, Hite Larmer despised falsehood. He would hardly have lied outright to save himself. But lying to save Bid Patterson was different.

"Give me my gun back, and let's go," he told Orr. "I'll take you to the big find. Where it is will sure surprise you."

Sim Orr surrendered the weapon, winking openly at Lije Tate. The five of them trailed Larmer across the grown-over street and to the door of the old jail. There Hite turned to Black Sim.

"When Snakebite was built, they set this jailhouse square over that lode, them not knowin'. The jigger who's in there now, he uncovered it tryin' to tunnel under one o' the log walls. Go in and turn over some o' that rock floor and see for yourselves."

He waited tensely to see if they'd fall for it. While they were digging around inside, he'd motion Bid Patterson out and close the door on them. It was only now that he realized just how slim that chance was! What in blazes had been wrong with his think box, anyhow? That

crack on the head, had it addled him?

Sim Orr lifted the heavy iron-bar latch—the padlock was long gone—and pushed the heavy door inward with his foot. He and Tate stepped inside and, with no more than a glance at the starved-thin Patterson, looked the floor over. In a far corner they found loose rock. They knelt and began clawing the rock out. Patterson, his face a dead white, crept to the doorway, in which were crowded Hite Larmer and the three single-gunned Arnetts. Then Sim Orr straightened on his knees with both hands full of gleaming rock.

"Lije, by Satan, the stranger was right! Look at this, and this!"

It was the big strike. The jail had been built over the main lode. Bid Patterson looked angrily at Larmer and growled: "What a pardner you are!"

The gold fever gripped the Arnett brothers, and they rushed to Orr and Tate in the far corner, knocking Bid Patterson aside. Larmer stepped in after them. The weakened prisoner rose, staggered against the door and closed it inadvertently. Larmer caught Bid's arm, with the other hand reached for the door.

The swiveled iron-bar latch had fallen into its socket, and now all seven of these men were prisoners in the stout log jail!

"Who done that?" cried Black Sim Orr, on his feet and ready to pull his gun. "Who's out there?"

His eyes were riveted upon Patterson's white face, and in his eyes

there was cold, stark murder. Hite Larmer sprang to a point in front of Bid, shielding him. Larmer's six-shooter was in his hand, leveled, with the hammer back.

"Don't make me kill you, Black," Hite warned. "Nobody's out there. The door was shut accidental, and it fastened itself."

Orr's wide, short teeth showed in a snarl. His suspicion held. He flicked a glance toward Tate. "Watch out, Lije. There's a trick somewhere."

Too furious to be very smart, Bid Patterson hooted into his friend's ear: "Yeah—a Texas trick!"

Larmer, too, was a little angry, and perhaps he had the right. He'd seen that each of the five outlaws had a gun hand poised. His trigger finger put on slight pressure. Orr noted it, and went yellowish at the gills. Hite's voice cracked out.

"The least move from any of you, Black, and I'll drill you first. Now order 'em all to keep their paws away from their irons, and set down, and you do that same yourself. I sure mean this, Black!"

Sim Orr was looking straight into the barrel of the cowboy's six-shooter. One of his men could get Larmer, but that wouldn't keep Larmer from getting him.

"Plenty o' time, Lije," he growled. "We'll humor him and do what he said. No use takin' a chance now."

The five sat down against the back wall, with their hands nowhere near their weapons. Larmer thought of having Bid Patterson collect the hardware. He threw the idea aside for the reason that one of the out-

laws was sure to grab Bid and shoot from behind him. No use ordering them to toss their guns to him. They wouldn't do it. Any man of them, with a gun in his hand, would shoot—at him.

Patterson was still mad. Larmer had brought the devils to his lode. He forgot that he hadn't told Hite where the lode was. When the tension had eased a little, Patterson said:

"Sure was some trick, Hite. What you aim to do after dark comes, when you cain't see to hold 'em?"

"Maybe," the other Texan said, "the trick ain't all played yet."

"What's the rest of it?"

"That'd be tellin'," Larmer answered. "Lay down there, Bid, and take you a nap."

Bid sat down. Larmer followed suit, but not for a split second did his vigilance relax. He'd been in tight spots before, with Bid Patterson. Somehow it was good to remember that, here in the tightest spot of all.

Hours dragged along with little or no talk. The sun now shone through the small, barred west window of the old jail. Hite was beginning to feel the strain of the long hours of vigilance.

At four in the afternoon there was a faint sound of swift hoofs. The sound grew louder and in a few minutes became thunderous. The five who sat against the back wall of the jail were as taut as so many fiddle-strings. Still with a bead on Orr's wide face, Hite bellowed:

"Here, sheriff!"

The much-wanted Black Sim Orr and his gang were disarmed and in irons very soon afterward. The Santos River City sheriff turned them over to his posse, listened to all that Bid Patterson had to say, looked at ore samples from the big find and congratulated the two cowboys.

"Here's where I'm stuck," the grinning Patterson said to Larmer. "Who sent the sheriff to Snakebite, anyway?"

Larmer grinned, too. "S'pose we say it's the rest o' the Texas trick. I kept it to myself because I wasn't

sure it would work. My hoss ran off yesterday, y'know, Bid. I turned it loose. I didn't have a pencil so I tied your telegram to my saddlehorn, hopin' somebody would see it and be cur'ous enough to investigate and go to the sheriff there—"

The officer took up the explanation. "That's just the way the thing was. A homesteader brought the horse to town, figuring the telegram might be important. I brought a posse with me because I'd understood the Orr outfit was in these hills somewhere. . . . All right, you big gold men from Texas, let's head out for town!"

THE END

MEN WHO MAKE WESTERN STORY



Norman A. Fox

Norman A. Fox is one of the few Western writers who can claim the distinction of having a yarn placed in the Time Capsule at the New York World's Fair, in 1939. This capsule, we understand, is to be dug up 5,000 years hence and, whereas speculation varies as to what readers, if any, of this misty distant age will consider first-class entertainment, we can vouch for the fans as of 1944, with whom Fox is reckoned top hand.

Born in Michigan, Fox was taken at an early age to Montana where his family settled near the Canadian Border. It was

here he "first accumulated saddle sores, tasted the dust of the drag and listened to the lore of the high country." Having completed his schooling, Fox, as he expresses it, "became a square peg in a lot of round holes—until I finally turned to writing.

"Hobbies? Poking into odd corners of the Old West, (and I'm just waiting for the day a man can again get fodder for his assembly-line cayuse) collecting Western curios, Western books, and prints of the work of the late Charlie Russell—whom I consider the greatest of all Western artists. I may be prejudiced, for Montana was also Russell's home stamping grounds.

"We've just moved into a new home where I have a fine isolated room which will be devoted exclusively to a workshop—a dream I've had these many years . . ."

Fox has made an auspicious start, for GUN LAW OF HUNGRY GULCH, featured in our July issue, is the first effort to come from these new and sacred precincts. * * * Also in the next issue: Walt Coburn, S. Omar Barker, Rod Patterson, Jim West and many others.



BOOTHILL BUCKAROO

by TOM W. BLACKBURN

Hunted by the law, Cleve Kinnard deliberately made bullet bait of himself to draw a ruthless killer into a death trap

I

KINNARD reached Oak Flat on the five o'clock weekly from Laramie. He swung dark-faced from the steps of the coach and went directly into the station without even a nod to the two or three acquaintances among the dozen loiterers on the platform. He carried a small bag. He slammed this down on the counter in front of the station agent, old Gilly. Gilly

blinked through his dust-fogged spectacles.

"Cleve Kinnard! Wasn't you expected? Ain't a Clover Leaf rig in town that I know of. Buck rode a saddle horse in this afternoon—"

"I won't need a rig or a trip to the Clover Leaf," Kinnard said grimly. "Just half an hour with Buck Harrigan! Keep this kit till I call for it."

Gilly took the bag, dropped it behind the counter, and stared curiously at Kinnard.

"You . . . you ain't serious, son!" he protested uncertainly. "You and Buck ain't got a quarrel on! Why, shucks, you've been partners half a dozen years!"

"I'd take it hard if my own brother stole from me!" Cleve said curtly and turned out of the station.

Moving doggedly up the main street of Oak Flat, Cleve turned into Reilley's Saloon. The saloonman moved uneasily down his bar and tentatively offered his hand.

"Howdy, Cleve—"

"Give me a double red eye, Reilley," growled Cleve, ignoring the outstretched hand, "and no pepper."

Reilley poured the drink, shoved it across, and spoke firmly.

"Buck's in town, Cleve," he said. "A pair like you've been, tangling is rank foolishness. I want no part of it. See you do your meeting some place else beside here. If you don't, I might take sides!"

"A man that sides a thief is apt to get burnt, Reilley!" Cleve warned.

Paying for his drink, he left the saloon and moved on up the street toward the livery.

So far, he reflected, he was doing a good job of playing out the act Buck Harrigan and himself had worked up between them. It was hard, faking trouble with the best partner a man could have. But the scheme might work. It might trick the gent who was crowding the Clover Leaf and the other Kinnard-Harrigan holdings, force him into a careless move which would expose him. Kinnard chuckled

grimly. Oak Flat was going hook, line and sinker for the play. It might work.

A dozen yards up the walk a small, wizened man with a deceptively careless slouch to his gait, stepped out of a door, saw Cleve, and turned sharply toward him. They met, and the small man touched Cleve's arm.

"Kinnard, I think you and me had better have a talk!" he said with quiet authority. "Supposin' you step in and set for a spell."

Cleve nodded his head in reluctant agreement. Sheriff Herb Drake retained his grip on Cleve's arm. They turned into the doorway the sheriff had quit a moment before. Drake circled his desk, dropped into his chair, and motioned Cleve into a seat opposite.

"Now, Kinnard—what's this business of trouble between you and Buck Harrigan?"

Cleve spoke savagely. "You like having your pockets picked, Drake?"

The sheriff's brows raised. "Old Buck—stealing from you? Listen, are you drunk, Kinnard?"

"No!" Cleve answered flatly. "But I'm mighty riled. You know how Harrigan and me have worked our string of spreads. The Clover Leaf is the biggest. He's run it. I've split my time among the three little ones we've got up on the Platte. We've run the Clover Leaf and my bunch separate and lumped the profit. But we inventory our tallies twice a year. Buck hasn't sold any Clover Leaf through the books the last six months. But his tally is a hundred head short. This is your county.

You'd know whether there was any outside long loopers working your hills. What's the answer?"

Herb Drake scowled heavily.

"It smells, Kinnard—it smells to high heaven. Buck Harrigan wouldn't steal a brick from a gold-paved street. But there ain't any rustlin' in this county!"

Cleve nodded tightly.

"That's the way I saw it. Buck's got a grown girl in school at Omaha. Maybe gals and schools cost him more'n he can make. I don't know. But I aim to find out. Buck and me are going to have a talk and he's going to make it listen good or—"

"Or what?" Drake cut in. "Kinnard, I'm warning you! We've got law and a fair court in this county. If Buck and you have got into trouble, you handle it by the book or you'll run afoul of me!"

Cleve stood up.

"Harrigan and me didn't need the law to build our outfit. We can settle this without it, too. You keep clear, Drake. This is Buck's and my business. We'll handle it!"

Cleve's voice had a harsh ring in the little office. Herb Drake's quiet face took on a bleak look. But he said nothing more. Cleve stepped out into the street. At the far end of town was the shack Buck had bought and made over into a sort of Clover Leaf headquarters for himself and the boys to use when any of them was in town. It saved hotel bills and was homier, a sample of Buck's efficiency. Cleve saw the building was dark. Buck would be waiting there. . . .

He'd want to know how his young

partner's play had gone over. And maybe he'd have an idea or some news of what had happened to the hundred head of stock he had wired Cleve was missing. Buck was smart. He'd known, the minute he missed that Clover Leaf stock, that it wasn't rustlers at work. Stolen cattle were too hard to get out of the basin. Herb Drake did his job too well. Buck had known somebody was trying to make him look like a thief. He had known somebody was trying to drive a wedge into the Kinnard-Harrigan combine.

So Buck had hatched the plan. He and Cleve would pretend the wedge was well driven. They'd act as though the theft had split them up—as though Cleve believed Harrigan was a thief. And the lad gunning for them would expose his hand. Maybe he'd approach Cleve or Buck himself with an offer of help. When that happened, they'd know where to hit, and they could go to work on the gent.

Kinnard drifted on up the street, watching others along the walks. When his chance came to do so unseen, he stepped into a dark alleyway between two buildings, followed in through to back lots, and moved on swiftly toward the rear of the Clover Leaf's darkened town quarters.

The back latch was unlocked. He depressed it, swung the door open, and slid into the single room. As he stepped away from the door, a powerful arm circled his neck from behind and strong fingers clamped his mouth shut. He fought his as-

sailant frantically, trying to get a grip on the man's body. As he did so, another pair of hands in the thick darkness clawed at his belt, lifted his gun, and fired a shot from it. He heard the weapon fall into a corner as the man who had fired it tossed the piece away. The man clinging to Cleve's back gave him a powerful shove. He stumbled across a table, tripped and rammed his head solidly against a wall.

Rockets flashed back of Cleve's eyes. His ears roared. Above the roaring he heard the back door opened and shut again swiftly. Climbing to his feet, Cleve fingered his pockets for a match, found one, and brushed it alight. The flickering flame revealed the thing he had already feared. Buck Harrigan lay sprawled on the floor of the shack, a great hole torn in his chest by a .45 slug at close range. Cleve thumbed another match and bent beside his partner. Buck was dead, now. But he had been alive minutes before. He had been killed since Cleve's own arrival in Oak Flat.

The sudden realization of how their plan had backfired hit Cleve like a blow. Whoever was after Kinnard-Harrigan was smart. Plenty smart. After his own truculent boasts along the street—a part of the play Buck had hatched as a trap for thieves and killers—Cleve knew what the town would think. They couldn't help themselves. They'd have to think it—that young Kinnard had killed his partner over a hundred head of missing cattle.

Cleve wheeled, retrieved his gun from the corner in which it had

fallen, and strode swiftly to the door. He jerked the portal open and walked full into the muzzle of Herb Drake's weapon.

"I warned you, Kinnard!" Drake said quietly. "But you danced, anyway. Now you can pay the fiddler! Walk soft and straight for the jail—or take the same thing you handed Buck Harrigan!"

II

By midnight Oak Flat was in a turmoil. Kinnard could sense it through the windows of his cell. A turmoil which rose in angry proof of Buck Harrigan's standing in this town. It was a restless, wicked thing, almost tangible in the air. Cleve understood it completely. He himself wasn't an Oak Flat man. He belonged further north. That was why Buck and himself had split up the operations of their combine as they had. Buck had always been attached to this town. He had his friends here. He had raised his daughter in the town until she had grown old enough to send off to a "fancy" school.

Cleve had been in and out of the town a lot since Buck and he had thrown together. He had been accepted and respected, as Buck Harrigan's friend. Now he was hated—as Buck's killer.

About midnight Drake, who had been on a swing up through the town, came back to his office heading the corridor dividing the cells of the jail. He shut the front door tightly and fiddled a long moment with its lock. Giving this over, he lifted a

dusty bar from a back corner and slid it through trunnions, closing the portal solidly. Cleve saw that the sheriff's face was pale and that a quick nervousness was running through his usually nerveless body. Drake finally came down the corridor to the gate of Cleve's cell.

"We're going to have company, Kinnard," he said quietly. "Just keep low and watch yourself. This is one time I wish I was outside with the boys—no badge on my vest and my gun in my belt. Buck Harrigan was a mighty good friend of mine! But I've got a duty to the county and the law says a prisoner ain't to be hanged 'til he's tried. We'll keep 'em out!"

Cleve said nothing. Drake went forward to his office again. The ugly tension of the town continued to grow. In fifteen minutes a number of men were beginning to mill toward a common center at the jail. Out the high, angled window of his cell, Cleve caught sight of one trio in particular. They appeared to move from group to group. And they left in their wake an incendiary flame of violence. Cleve called to Herb Drake, pointing these men out. Drake nodded and spoke down the corridor without leaving the office.

"Sim Fenton and a couple of his boys—One-eyed Lloyd and Paso Penn. Don't know them, eh, Kinnard? They're neighbors of yours, just the same. Bought the old Peace-stone acreage next the Clover Leaf about a month ago. They look riled, too. Never did take old Buck long to make a friend out of a man!"

Cleve eyed the trio with fresh in-

terest. Drake was right. It had never taken Buck long to make a friend—or an enemy! Sim Fenton was a long-geared, hatchet-faced man with a pointed arrogance in the way he held himself. He had the looks of a smooth customer, and a hard one. His two riders were nondescript—cowhands or gunhands, maybe both. The three continued to move through the crowd and the crowd kept knotting tighter until even its fringes were out of Cleve's angle of vision. Cleve sank back on the cell cot, then, and waited. There was rope talk on the street and his neck was in the middle of it.

A gun butt rapped on the barred door of the jail.

"Bring him out, Drake!" a voice demanded. "Don't make us come after him!"

The sheriff spoke flatly.

"I'll gut-shoot the first man that comes in that door!"

Those outside seemed to realize Drake couldn't be moved. There was a mutter of consultation, then a heavy blast of firing. Slugs riddled the door. The iron work of the lock was driven entirely out of the planking. Some kind of a ram was battered against the outer side. But the bar and trunnions still held tightly. The blast of shots came again. One trunnion was split from the jamb which held it. The bar fell. The door swung slowly open, unrestrained on the hinges. Herb Drake raised his gun. But no man came through the opening.

Instead, a paper bag arched into the jail, straight at Drake. He

stepped back, avoiding it. The bag struck the corner of his desk and burst, puffing up an explosion of fine wood ash. The dense puff was almost in Drake's face. He snapped out a crisp oath and tried to protect his eyes. But he was too late. Blinded, he fired his piece twice in the direction of the doorway.

One of the men who had been with Sim Fenton on the street dodged untouched through the opening, scuttled to one side of the sheriff, and stroked downward with the barrel of the gun in his hand.

Drake grunted, his knees sagged, and he fell forward. Fenton and his other rider ducked into the office as though a part of the crowd. Drake's keys were seized. A Peacestone hand unlocked Cleve's cell.

"Quick!" the man muttered. "Right behind us and go like blazes! Don't stop for nothing!"

Cleve had been tightened up for a fight. The tightness ran out of him now. This didn't sound like a lynch party! Dazed, he tracked the Peacestone man as he had been directed. Fenton, glancing down the corridor, saw them coming. The man launched himself into the crowd, the gun in his hand blazing.

"Make room or stop lead!" he barked, repeating the warning a moment later.

Startled, the crowd broke. With a Peacestone man on either side of him, Cleve plowed through the ring about the jail, found a horse at hand, reins up, and hit saddle. Fenton and his Peacestone riders were mounting beside him. Somebody in the stunned crowd yelled alarm. A gun snarled

and lead went high over Cleve's head.

"Keep down and ride!" Fenton barked.

Cleve's horse leaped ahead with the others. There was a moment in which they raced through an increasing gamut of lead from Oak Flat's guns. Then they were clear. Cleve swung in beside Fenton.

"Thanks," he panted.

Fenton grinned one-sidedly.

"Good neighbor, eh?" he asked. "Wait 'til we hit Peacestone. We didn't pry you out of there for nothing, Kinnard!"

Just short of dawn Cleve sat at breakfast in the old Peacestone ranchhouse with Sim Fenton and his two top riders, Paso Penn and One-eye Lloyd. Fenton was at ease, obviously satisfied with himself for the way he had handled Cleve's jail break. Cleve did not share his pleasure. He was forced to admit that these newcomers to the county had saved him from a neck stretching. But he remembered watching the three of them working through the crowd earlier and he wondered if Oak Flat would actually have worked itself up to trying to lynch a man from Herb Drake's jail without some expert prodding.

Sim Fenton poured himself a fresh cup of coffee and pushed back in his chair.

"You said thanks back there in town, Kinnard," he said easily. "No thanks were due. That was business for me and the boys. You and old Harrigan had hard words and come to a split trail. You kept on walk-

ing. He didn't. Which makes you spit on a skillet—you got to keep moving fast until the thing's forgot or you hit a hide-out. Travelin' back trails in a hurry takes ready money. That's point one.

"Point two is that you and your partner own a nice string of ranches neither one of you is able to work, now. Harrigan had a daughter, I hear. She'll come out here to dispose of her old man's holdings. I want 'em. I want the whole works. You sell out your half to me, now. That'll give you a belt full of cash. And when she gets here, she'll be more apt to sell her half to me when she finds out I've got yours. That's sense. And that's why me and the boys sprung you, tonight. We didn't want to have to bid at a sheriff's sale after you were hung and take our chances with the girl, too."

An iron stiffness slowly grew in Cleve. Fenton was as cold and hard as obsidian glass. Cleve knew that he was looking at the man who had lifted a hundred cattle from the Clover Leaf to upset Buck Harrigan's tallies. He knew he was looking at the man Buck had tried to outwit—and failed. Sim Fenton, or a gun in his hire, had killed Buck. Peacestone men had been waiting in Buck's town shack when Cleve himself arrived there.

None of this was hunch. It was fact—certain knowledge. But knowledge and proof were two different things. And Cleve realized that with all Oak Flat believing he was an escaped killer, proof would have to be plentiful and convincing to lift the guilt of Buck Harrigan's death from

his own shoulders.

"How much?" he asked Fenton stonily.

The man chuckled.

"That's seeing it right, Kinnard," he approved. "We'll get along, fine. I'll hand you two thousand dollars, currency, for title to your half of Kinnard-Harrigan. I'll have two thousand more waiting for you—across the Canadian border."

"So I'll get out and stay out?" Cleve asked dryly. Fenton's grin widened.

"So you'll keep on taking care of that neck the boys and me risked our skins to save tonight. Four thousand for your share, all told. Save your answer, Kinnard. Let me know, tonight. Paso and One-eye and me have got a little riding to do today. We'll be back by sundown. Meantime, Todd, here—Todd Emmett—will look after you so's you won't be lonesome."

Cleve swung his attention to the man indicated, a man who had been sitting unobtrusively in a corner by the kitchen stove. He had heard of Todd Emmett. The man's unsavory reputation had drifted up from the south. Emmett was dangerously small, far enough into middle years to have a steady, unshakable judgment, and his face was devoid of any fiber of humanity. If a man could devise a living machine of death, the pattern would resemble this Todd Emmett.

Emmett caught Cleve's glance, answered it with a mocking smile, and drawled a taunting question.

"It'll be a long day, Kinnard. Play checkers?"

Fenton nodded at One-eye Lloyd and Paso Penn.

"Let's drift," he suggested. "Kinnard wants time to think."

Lloyd laughed openly. Penn spat at the stove and slouched to the door. The four of them—Fenton and his hands—were sure. Sure as hell. Cleve swung his attention back to Todd Emmett.

III

When Fenton and the other two had ridden out of the yard, Emmett went to a cupboard, rummaged out a battered checker board and a box of checkers. He opened the board on the table, pushing some of the dirty dishes out of his way for room, and glanced inquiringly at Cleve. Time was heavy, a thing which grated at nerves already strung tight by Cleve's knowledge that he had to get out of this house and lost in the hills before Fenton came back with the other two and raised the odds again. Cleve did not like checkers. He did not like a game where a man sat motionless, waiting on the deliberation of another. But he moved to the table.

He had to get clear of Emmett. He had to get off the Peacestone. And he had seen men who prized the game, play checkers before. The wooden men, marching from king row to king row, could absorb a lot of attention.

For two games, Emmett disappointed Cleve. He himself played carefully and to the best of his ability, trying to draw the man in. He won both games. And at the end

of the second, he was afraid his hunch had failed. But when the third setup was ready to move, Emmett hunched forward after giving him a piercing stare, and shoved out a black.

The man was a ruthlessly skillful player. Cleve battled him grimly but at best he could take men only on a two-for-one exchange. As the men on the board thinned, Emmett hunched even further forward. Cleve saw that he was laying an elaborate trap for a sudden, overwhelming kill. And he played carefully into it. Finally the placement was done. Emmett gave a grunt of eager satisfaction and reached to his key man. Cleve moved then.

He leaped forward so violently that a leg of his chair snapped. His chest hit the edge of the heavy table and drove it crushingly against Emmett, the far edge biting deep under the man's short ribs. Emmett's wind left him in a rushing grunt. Cleve's momentum carried the table on, forcing Emmett deep into his chair and the chair itself over backward.

Kinnard somersaulted over the upset table and crashed down on the man pinned under it. Emmett squirmed like a lightning-swift little snake as Cleve fought for the man's gun, spilled from its holster to the floor. It was brief, bitter, mercilessly savage.

Cleve hooked the weapon, smashed two of Emmett's fingers which pried between his palm and the butt plates of the piece, and jerked the gun upward. He let go of Emmett, then. As the man started to roll free, Cleve rapped downward with the gun bar-

rel. It caught Emmett above the ear, split his scalp, and started a trickle of blood down his cheek and onto his neckerchief. The man jerked and collapsed.

Cleve tore the gunman's belt free, saw it was studded with shells, and wrapped it about his own hips as he ran for the door. Fenton had some good horses in his corral. Kinnard cut one out, picked a high-swelled saddle from three or four on the top pole of the corral, and saddled up. In less than ten minutes he was mounted and pounding out of the old Peacestone yard—headed up country toward the broken ridges along the back boundary shared by Peacestone and Clover Leaf.

Knowing what he was looking for made it easier, compensating in part for his but general knowledge of the country outside of Kinnard-Harrigan holdings. Before noon he had tried three slit canyons which cut into the ridges and petered out against the higher slopes. By this time he judged that Emmett would have recovered from the blow which dropped him and would have fanned off after Fenton.

It was a safe guess that the Peacestone crew was already into the lower slopes, combing the hills for the man who had escaped them and pretty certain of the direction he would take. It was a hard thing to figure. There were a dozen or more canyons in which a hundred head of cattle could be bunched and safely held temporarily out of sight. Maybe a full day's riding, hunting them down. Fenton would guess that his escaped prisoner would hunt for the

lost cattle. The man was sharp enough to see that this was the next step. It seemed likely that Fenton's first move would be to go to the cattle, himself.

Cleve spent half an hour riding abreast of the first of the ridges, leaving a plain track across three canyon mouths. He spent another hour circling and twisting, taking advantage of hard ground and creek beds, until his back trail looked like the work of a webbing spider and was nearly as confusing. He muzzled his borrowed horse, hid the animal in a thicket, and sprawled out on a brushy promontory to wait.

It worked. In midafternoon four riders dropped over a spur to the north, following the track he had left, and riding hard. They came on swiftly and proved to be Fenton, with Emmett riding beside him and Lloyd and Penn trailing. They unraveled a good part of the tortuous turnings Cleve had made, coming to a halt down slope and within earshot. The four of them were in as much of a lather as their weary horses.

"So this Kinnard-Harrigan outfit is a soft nut!" Emmett exploded at Fenton. "An old gent and a kid—and dumb! Maybe old Harrigan was an easy mark—he sent for the kid like you said he would instead of huntin' them gone cattle himself. But Kinnard—that's where you missed. He's as ringy as they come! Look at this—snarlin' up his trail and ridin' the seats off'n our britches while he slides in for a look at that herd boxed in Three Mile. We're suckers. If we aim to get him at all, we

better get in there!"

"Why didn't you let us burn a bill of sale out of him and plow him under when we had him?" Paso Penn added. "Playin' cat and mouse with a catamount don't pay no profit. Him bein' alive won't help us with the gal. She'll believe he cut her old man down an' she'll hate his guts!"

Fenton scowled blackly.

"I didn't hire you boys for brains!" he snapped. "When I want advice I'll ask for it. I'll play this my way. Go on in to Three Mile. Kinnard'll come snooping. Get him. Then hit for town. I'm heading there, now. I don't want to miss that girl when she shows!"

The Peacestone bunch split. Kinnard ignored Emmett and Lloyd and Penn, loping into the hills. The stolen cattle were in a canyon called Three Mile. He could find them later when he needed proof. Fenton occupied his attention, for the Peacestone man was headed for Oak Flat. Cleve knew the risk he himself faced in heading toward the town. But Fenton aimed to meet a girl. And that girl had to be Buck Harrigan's daughter.

The play was pretty plain. Fenton would talk business. If Myra Harrigan didn't listen, she'd disappear. Before she turned up again, she would have been made to see reason. It didn't make sense, Myra's showing up here too early to have received word of her father's death and weeks ahead of the end of her school term. But there couldn't be any other girl in this game.

Cleve wondered about Myra. His

affection had always been for her father. He had paid little attention to the daughter the once or twice he had met her when at the Clover Leaf on partnership business. A youngish, freckled girl who kept goading Buck into trying out her ideas of how the combine should be run. Cleve couldn't remember his own home. His idea of a ranch was a place where men raised beef and where women—if there had to be women—did the cooking and kept out of the way. It was a good arrangement. Buck laughed at him.

"My gal's different, son," Buck had said. "You'll see."

They had both let it go at that. Now, Cleve knew, he would see. And he didn't like it. He wanted no woman around when he had a man's fight on his hands. Buck's death made Myra Harrigan his partner. But she could have waited until Kinnard-Harrigan was steady on its feet again and Cleve had caught his breath before she showed up to complicate further the business of the partnership. He swore sourly to himself.

IV

Sim Fenton made straight for town, rode into the main street, and dismounted at the hotel. Cleve watched him from a small knoll west of town, barred from closer approach by lingering daylight. He spotted a strange buckboard in the yard at the livery and surmised that this was how Harrigan's daughter had reached town. Missing the weekly train at Laramie, she had hired a rig to drive her

south. It was like her—headstrong. And this time it meant trouble!

Cleve waited impatiently for night. He watched the street like a hawk, afraid Fenton would trump up some excuse and slip the girl out of town before Cleve could get in. Driven by impatience, Kinnard started down before it was safe. But Oak Flat was at dinner and there was little travel on the street so he was not seen. By the time he was drifting across the weedy open back of town, dark had settled solidly and he rode more easily. He angled in toward the back of the hotel, judging his course to avoid a chance glance from the street. And he watched the weeds for obstacles. When he started out of here, he'd be in a hurry and in no mood to chance a horse stumbling.

Leaving his horse in thick shadows, Cleve moved up to the back of the hotel afoot, flattening against the planking outside of a window letting into the lobby at the foot of the stairs from the second floor. Sim Fenton was sitting tilted back in a chair beside the window, looking insolently up at Sheriff Herb Drake. Drake, aside from a patch of adhesive on his forehead, was his usual nerveless self again. With a wry grin, Cleve realized he was the subject of the conversation between the two. Drake had apparently been taking Fenton to task over the jail break. Fenton seemed untroubled.

"We did you a favor, Drake," these were the first words Cleve caught. "If me and the boys hadn't split through that crowd, you'd have had a hanged prisoner on your hands. Not that you maybe wouldn't have



liked it, but it would have looked bad."

Drake scowled.

"I'll let that ride, Fenton!" he said curtly. "You were accessory to a jail break. I've got a cell that'll hold you, too. What I want to know is what's happened to Kinnard. If

you've thrown in with him or let him get clear, you're into something hired guns can't get you out of!"

Fenton grinned easily.

"I said I did you a favor, Drake," he repeated. "And a little business for myself. Kinnard's ranches aren't going to be worth anything to him. Murderer or not, there's nothing in the law says he can't sell out to me. You can have him back when the town cools—maybe tomorrow. Till then I'll post bail on his carcass, if you want. Satisfy you?"

"The devil with your bail!" Drake exploded. "I want Kinnard. I'll expect him delivered to me tomorrow—or I'll start looking for you, Fenton. And another piece of advice—leave Harrigan's gal be. Comin' home to find Buck dead has shook

her up. Business can wait. See that it does!"

Fenton made no answer. Drake moved across the lobby and disappeared out the street door. Cleve scowled. This wasn't like Herb Drake. Maybe he was quiet, but he was solid, too. And yet it sure looked as if he had knuckled to Fenton. It didn't fit.

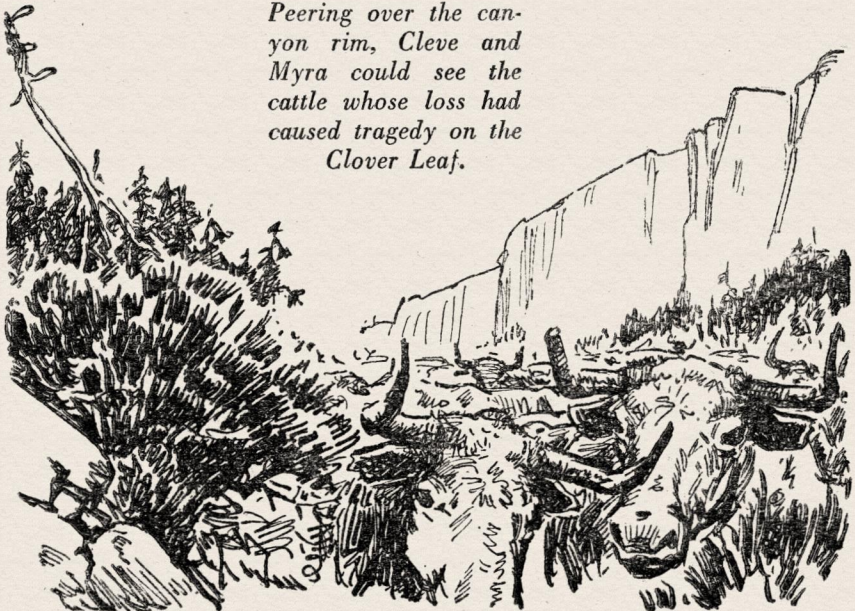
A moment or two after Drake left, the clerk from the desk passed close to Fenton. The rancher stuck out a foot and stopped him.

"Where's Miss Harrigan?"

"I told you she was still upstairs," the clerk answered. "She didn't look good. Maybe she isn't coming down."

Fenton stood up, fished a round

Peering over the canyon rim, Cleve and Myra could see the cattle whose loss had caused tragedy on the Clover Leaf.



coin from his pocket, and flipped it at the clerk. It winked yellowly in the lamplight.

"Anybody wants to know, I've gone out for a drink," Fenton said. "Understand?"

The clerk looked at the gold piece, pocketed it and grinned.

"Yes, sir!"

Fenton turned up the stairs.

Cleve shuttled away from his window. The hotel was old. Its back stairs ran up the rear wall of the building. Cleve took them two at a time, pausing at the first landing to study the windows along the floor. He was about to shove on into the hall and risk working from there when the sound of sobbing came from the window overlooking the far end of the landing. He slid under it, raised, and found the sash was up to relieve the warmth of the evening.

Hooking his hands on the sill, he raised himself soundlessly and tipped his body cautiously into the room. A girl, still dressed in traveling clothes, was lying on the bed, sobbing. Cleve must have made some small sound. The girl raised and started to turn. Half through the window, Cleve froze and sucked in his breath. But a sound from the hall saved him. Heavy footsteps—Fenton's—stopped at the door. Knuckles rapped sharply against the panel.

"Miss Harrigan! Open up, please. It's important!"

Fenton's voice, all right. And it drew the girl's attention. She raised on up from the bed and started for the door. Cleve dropped on into

the room, slid from his jacket, and leaped. The jacket went over the girl's head. He wound it tight, caught her arms in against her sides, and pinioned her helplessly. In the hall Fenton rapped again. The girl was struggling frantically.

"Quiet!" Cleve hissed in her ear. "Quiet and you'll be all right. You've got to get out of here!"

The girl's struggles eased uncertainly. Cleve swept her up, doubled back to the window, and crowded out through the sash with her. Effectively gagged by his tightly wrapped jacket, she began to fight again on the stairs. But Cleve locked his grip on her, reached the ground, and pulled the girl up into saddle with him on his waiting horse. As he prodded the animal into motion, Fenton's voice boiled up from the second floor of the hotel.

"Somebody get a key! Something's wrong in Miss Harrigan's room! She doesn't answer!"

Cleve swore softly to himself and coaxed more speed from his doubly loaded mount. If the darkness of the back lots screened him until he was clear of town—

It was a narrow squeeze and twice he thought he had been seen. But the girl made it easier. Apparently realizing the futility of fighting further, she lay slackly in his arms. And they made it. Half an hour later, deep in the brush on the slope of one of the front ridges, Cleve stopped and unwound his jacket from her head.

Remembering the temper of the freckle-faced youngster on the Clover

Leaf, Cleve braced himself. But there was no torrent. Myra Harrigan stared at him with clear, scornful eyes.

"Start talking, Mister Kinnard," she said bitterly. "That's what you want, isn't it? Or do you intend to shoot me down like you did dad?"

Cleve flinched under the lash of that bitterness.

"I want to talk," he said quietly. "Will you listen?"

Myra watched him narrowly, then nodded. Cleve spoke swiftly, beginning with the wire he had received from Buck and ending with his appearance in the room at the hotel. When he was finished, he looked pleadingly at the girl. She reached in her blouse, brought out a rumpled telegraph blank. Cleve read it:

Come home, daughter. I'm in trouble.
Dad.

It was postmarked a few hours after Cleve had received his own wire.

"Dad wouldn't have admitted anything but the worst trouble to me," Myra said quietly. "That's why I knew when I got that message that the trouble was with you. Any other he would have handled himself, figuring on your help. You're a liar, Cleve Kinnard—and a killer!"

Cleve shook his head.

"Your dad didn't send that message," he said. "When did he ever call you daughter? Never to me. It was always—"

"Sis!"

The word exploded from the girl. She looked at the crumpled message

in her hand. Her eyes widened and her chin tightened. Then she leaned forward.

"You've won a chance, Cleve," she said. "I didn't want to believe this. Look, we're only half an hour from Three Mile Canyon, now. I know the trail. If those cattle are there I'll—"

"—believe me?" Cleve finished.

Myra nodded wordlessly. She climbed into the saddle of Cleve's horse and he swung up behind her. She turned the animal up slope, scented out a game trail, and let the animal out. It was a reckless ride. In half an hour, as the girl had promised, they came out on a knife ridge above one of the slit canyons. This one headed in a twenty-acre box against the main ridge. The cattle were there, a restless shadow on the lighter shadow of trampled grass. Their lowing drifted up the slope.

"It looks like Kinnard-Harrigan have a chore," the girl said slowly. "We've got to get back to town fast. Herb Drake is hunting you. We've got to set him straight. There's been too much happened that Herb doesn't understand. We need him for the rest of it."

Cleve grunted. Myra had changed outwardly, like a bare-limbed poplar leafing into full, graceful growth. But she was the same inside—a cowman's daughter with ideas of her own.

"You can't go back to town!" Cleve argued. "Fenton is watching for you. You'd never see the sheriff! This is a one-man chore. I'm going to hide you some place where you'll be safe. After that . . . well,

I've got a little unfinished business for Buck at the Peacestone!"

The girl wavered a little, seeming to turn wholly feminine.

"You need rest ahead of everything else!" she decided. "There's a Clover Leaf lean-to shelter over the next ridge. Dad kept it stocked for when he worked this corner. We'll have a meal and a little sleep. Then we can talk this out."

Cleve agreed willingly. With Myra out of Fenton's reach for the present, time was not important. And for the last couple of hours he had been growing aware of a nagging weariness. A rest and a hot meal would be more than welcome.

Remounting, they worked their tiring mount over a ridge, dropped into a little valley, and came out on the bench occupied by the Clover Leaf lean-to. Myra swung down and stepped into the building. A moment later she called from the doorway.

"There isn't any wood—there never is. Bring in a few sticks, will you?"

Cleve found a rusty axe imbedded in a chopping stump and moved into the fringe of the timber, hunting for a deadfall. He found one, knocked an armful of knots from the rotting log, and went back to the lean-to. As he broke from the timber, he saw that the horse was gone. Dropping his wood, he plunged in the door of the shelter. A message was scrawled on the warped table:

Cleve:

Turn in. You need rest. By the time you're up, I'll be back with the sheriff. We need him.

Myra.

Kinnard dropped into a chair, swearing softly. And he had thought she had turned all woman—that she was going to feed him and let him rest! He should have known better. Buck Harrigan wouldn't eat or sleep when a fight was brewing. Neither would his daughter. And now the little fool, bent on helping him out of his jam with Drake, was riding for Oak Flat and into a trap!

Cleve tried to persuade himself that Fenton, having lost sight of both the girl and himself, would be lying doggo for a little, hatching up some new scheme. But he couldn't make it stick. Fenton didn't need any new scheme. He just had to keep either Myra or Cleve from getting back to town. And the man would do that. His sentries on the town road were competent and sure.

There was only one track left. Warily Cleve swung away on foot from the lean-to, pushing into the brush on a direct line toward the bowl in which the Clover Leaf lay. Buck Harrigan's riders might be there, waiting for a new boss to show up or laying plans of their own to trip up the murderer escaped from the Oak Flat jail. It was risky. But Cleve knew he needed help, now. And there was no place else to turn.

V

Cleve reached the Clover Leaf just short of dawn. The ranch buildings were dark. But while he stared disappointedly down at them, a light winked up in the cook shack. He started forward, growling inwardly that Harrigan and he had so com-

pletely divided their operations that he did not know the name of a man on Buck's crew and few of the faces. It doubled the risk of something already risky enough.

But the chance was not too much, after all. The only man in the lighted kitchen was the old cook, still half asleep. Cleve batted open the door and snapped a harsh query.

"Where the devil are the boys?"

The cook turned with a rheumatic hobble and winked fogged eyes. He answered automatically.

"The durned fools have blowed their tops!" the old man growled. "Got tired of sittin' their haunches waitin' for Herb Drake to collect old Buck's killer. They've strung off to town to build a fire under the sheriff and left me with all the chores!"

Cleve dropped back out of the doorway without thanks for the information. He trotted wearily to the corrals, found a saddle in the barn, and leathered up the first pony on which he could lay hand. As Cleve swung up, the old man seemed to shake the fog from his head. Suddenly he bleated alarm.

"Wait a minute, you ding-danged coyote!" he bellowed. "Where're you goin' with that hoss? Ain't you — By thunder, you are Cleve Kinnard! Climb out'n that saddle, you back-shootin' maverick!"

Cleve lifted the pony and wheeled out of the yard. A shotgun banged from the shack and bird shot whizzed harmlessly off into the night, along with the old cook's sulphurous imprecations.

Cleve rode hard to overtake the Clover Leaf crew. He needed help—

their help—fast. Once Fenton had picked up Myra Harrigan, he'd start clamping the jaws of his vise together. And fighting Harrigan or no, a woman would stand no chance against Fenton's pressure.

The lights of Oak Flat were in sight when Cleve came up with Buck Harrigan's boys. They halted. As Cleve rocketed in among them, the voice of one snapped exultantly.

"The devil! It's Kinnard, boys. Grab the dirty son!"

Cleve was caught flat. He had hoped to bargain for enough time to talk a little. He was given no chance. They reined close. One lifted his gun. Another spoke bleakly.

"This is your last ride, Kinnard. Enjoy it. But go easy!"

Myra Harrigan shivered. When the Peacestone men had picked her up on the road to town, Fenton had callously ordered her brought to the shack in which her father had been killed. The building was unoccupied and a little apart. It made a good place to hold her. Fenton paid no attention to the stain of Buck Harrigan's blood, still on the floor.

"You'd better see sense," Fenton advised the girl coolly. "This kind of business is bad for a woman—might hurt her. Kinnard killed your dad. The law'll kill Kinnard. You can't run Kinnard-Harrigan alone. A pocketful of cash is worth more than more trouble!"

Myra thought about Cleve Kinnard, out on the mountain. When he found her note Myra knew he would not do as she suggested and

sleep, much as he needed rest. He'd start for town. Fenton had brought all his sentries in. His whole crew was here in the Clover Leaf town shack. Cleve would make it, all right. But he was afoot and it would take time.

Then, too, there was the Clover Leaf bunch. They'd get restless. They'd come in, whooping for justice and looking for her. But this might take time, also. Time! She needed time desperately. Forcing an unsteadiness into her voice, she answered Fenton.

"Show me Cleve Kinnard in a noose or a coffin and I'll sell out to you—fast!"

Sim Fenton grinned.

"Regular little hell-cat for justice, eh?" he smirked. "All right. I'll give you a contract of sale. You deed your share of Kinnard-Harrigan to me. When that's done I'll produce Kinnard like I promised Drake I would."

This was too fast. Myra shook her head.

"I don't want promises. I want Kinnard! Besides, if you don't have the sheriff witness the contract and deed when we sign them, Herb is apt to think you used coercion on me and try to tie you into dad's death. After all, you did help Kinnard get out of jail once—"

"To try to get his half of the combine!" Fenton snapped. "But maybe you've hit on something, havin' Drake as a witness—"

Paso Penn protested. "That's a Harrigan, Sim. They're a slick breed!"

Fenton silenced Penn with a knif-

ing glance. Myra breathed a quick little prayer.

"I want this final and legal!" she insisted. "I don't want to ever have to come back to this county!"

"Go up the street to the printer's," Fenton growled at Penn. "Fetch a deed form and a contract. Pick Herb Drake up on the way back and bring him—alone!"

Herb Drake stepped into the darkened Clover Leaf town shack with eyes sharply cautious. He tilted his head at Myra.

"I gave you straight talk last night, Fenton!" he said somberly. "I told you if you had business with Miss Harrigan to let it go a few days. But you had to kidnap her out of the hotel and pressure her all night!"

Fenton said nothing in denial of the assumption that it was he who had spirited the girl out of the hotel. Myra was puzzled at this. Fenton seemed sure of himself.

"Miss Harrigan's not complain-
ing!"

Myra realized he was checking the bet to her—daring her to reveal who had taken her from the hotel and anything she might have learned before Todd Emmett and Penn and One-eye Lloyd had picked her up on the road to town. She could feel the weight of Herb Drake's distrust of Fenton. A tension was building in the shack. And it was too early for tension. It was only Herb and herself against the whole Peacestone machine.

"Mr. Fenton and I have made an agreement, Herb," she said quietly. "He's going to deliver my father's

killer to you as he promised. I'm going to sell him my interest in Kinnard-Harrigan. I asked him to have you come down here to witness the deal."

Drake stared long at her. Myra met the stare with a masked expression. The sheriff shrugged.

"If that's the way you want it, girl," he agreed. "Draw up your papers, Fenton. But if I don't have that killer in my jail by sundown, you'll be there in his place!"

Fenton made no answer but spread out the two red-bordered legal forms Penn had brought him on the table. He took out his pen and began to fill in the blanks. The point made scratchy sounds on the paper. Suddenly there was other noise. A troop of horsemen reined in before the shack and swung down. A moment later the door battled open and Clover Leaf trooped in with Cleve Kinnard in their midst. Frantic hope surged in Myra Harrigan.

Desperation had been Kinnard's saddlemate all the way into town. Buck Harrigan's old crew was a grim outfit, bent on vengeance. With Herb Drake pitched against him and the Harrigan girl in Fenton's hands, he knew he was headed for a swift neck stretching. When the door of the Clover Leaf town shack opened ahead of his captors to reveal not only Drake, but Fenton and his crew—and Myra Harrigan—elation seized Cleve. With the Clover Leaf to back Myra and himself and with Drake as witness, the whole play could be exploded, now.

His eyes ran eagerly over the room,

swiftly setting odds and making measurements. Herb Drake spoke slowly. His words were for the Clover Leaf, his scorn for Fenton.

"You boys must be working for Peacestone, now! It was Fenton promised to produce Kinnard. But you've got thanks coming from me. You could have hanged this coyote before you brought him in and I wouldn't have blamed you. Buck Harrigan was your boss!"

Keeping her head averted, Myra echoed the sheriff's approval.

"I couldn't have left till I saw dad's killer in the hands of the law," she said quietly.

Kinnard heard this in astonishment. It was patently sincere. *Couldn't have left!* Myra, leaving? Had Fenton resold the girl on Cleve's guilt? It seemed impossible. Yet—He started to protest. Herb Drake shoved him back warningly. Cleve took it. Drake's temper was brittle. The sheriff of Oak Flat would count high however this went. Cleve wanted to ease the lawman's attention from himself. He wanted time to think.

Fenton was hunched triumphantly over some papers on the table under the lamp. Kinnard knew what they were. Legal documents marking the end of what Buck Harrigan and Cleve Kinnard had started out to build. Myra showed so signs of coercion. She looked more like a girl beaten and sick with the treachery of a trusted partner against her father.

Aside from his scorn for Fenton's failure to deliver his prisoner at the hotel as he had promised—leaving that chore to the CL boys—Herb Drake evidenced no hostility toward

a Peacestone man. The skin across Kinnard's temples grew tight and the palms of his hands were wet.

Sim Fenton grinned at Cleve and reached a pen from his pocket with a broad gesture. He offered it to Myra Harrigan.

"This ought to be plenty legal," he remarked. "Plenty of witnesses." He laughed as though at a pleasing joke. Myra shrugged dejectedly, refusing the pen.

"I'll use my own," she said listlessly.

Then the listlessness vanished. Her hand moved surely, plumbing one wide, saddle-stitched jacket pocket. It came out, but not with a pen. A small, beautifully worked revolver with a man-sized bore was clamped in Myra's hand and her fingers were white with pressure. She rammed the weapon forward into the vee of Sim Fenton's breastbone. The muzzle clicked against a button on Fenton's vest and the tiny sound was clearly audible in the sudden silence.

"Herb," the girl said with acid quiet, "you've been hunting the wrong man. Here's your killer!"

"Easy, Myra!" protested Drake. "You're crazy!"

"Am I?" the girl retorted. "Reach in my other pocket. There's a telegram there, supposedly from dad. But it isn't. The office it was filed will show, won't it? And maybe the clerk will remember the face of the man who filed it!"

Cleve had been watching Todd Emmett. The little gunman's eyes flattened like those of a sounding rattler. Cleve followed Emmett's stare.

Sim Fenton had turned ashen—proof, if any was needed, that identification by a telegraph clerk was one thing he had overlooked.

Drake fished out the false telegram. It meant nothing to him, but the color of Fenton's face did. Drake's swift mind jumped from the pre-grooved rut into which it had fallen as a result of the manufactured evidence surrounding Buck Harrigan's death. His eyes flattened as had Emmett's.

"I'd a sight rather hang you than Cleve Kinnard, Fenton!" he said softly. "Start talking! You get another chance to tell a story. Who killed Harrigan?"

Fenton looked around wildly. The man was a fool. Kinnard had been willing to concede him an oily slyness and sharp wisdom. That concession was gone. This swift change of balances caught Fenton offguard. Here, where even a bluff would hold water, he was caving!

Cleve saw the pressure build. Emmett was watching his boss. Kinnard eased back a little, rubbing his shoulder lightly against the nearest CL man. The rider had a gun at either hip. Few men drew both at the same time. And trouble was coming—swiftly!

"Well, Fenton?" Drake wound the tension higher with this gentle prod.

Cleve saw Emmett's eyes dart to the floor. He saw a look pass between the gunman and Paso Penn. And he saw that Myra, still pressing her pocket gun against Sim Fenton's vest, was in the vortex of an upbuilding whirlpool of violence. Cleve

broke it—shattered it into glittering shards and great, ragged pieces. His hand snapped downward, fumbled across the left-hand holster of the CL man beside him, and came up with the gun rasping from leather.

At the same instant, Todd Emmett fired at Fenton. Paso Penn angled a shot across the room at Herb Drake. Emmett missed completely. Drake was touched, lightly. Neither shot had been for keeps, but to provide cover under which the two Peacestone hands could make the door. Penn was in the lead.

Cleve tilted his borrowed gun, but Drake fired from the holster, skewering Penn and slamming him against the wall. Cleve had fired half through a dive. He lunged on, crashed into Myra and, cutting her knees from her, sent her rolling onto the floor.

A CL hand, uncomprehending but inspired, backed hurriedly and flattened his shoulders against the door. Emmett pulled up then, hunched, and his blazing, reckless stare cut across Kinnard. The fire in his eyes was so savage that it burned. Cleve felt its heat as he came to his feet, almost squarely between Emmett and Sim Fenton.

Emmett fired. The slug might have been meant for either Fenton or himself. Cleve couldn't tell. It struck him in the left shoulder and staggered him back against Fenton. The Peacestone boss yelped at the contact of their bodies and flopped heavily to the floor. Cleve thought it possible Emmett's lead had passed through him to tag Fenton, also. But

he wasn't sure and did not turn his head.

The CL crew, grouped about the man at the door, was working on One-eye Lloyd, who had ducked behind a huge oak rocker for shelter from which to return their fire. To Cleve's left Herb Drake was bellowing:

"Wait—you fools! Hold it!"

A slug, glancing from some flat surface in the room, wiped across Drake's face, silencing him with stinging hurt. Cleve, shaken by the racing shock of his wound, swung his gun up carefully. Emmett wouldn't give him time for two tries. There was, in fact, barely time for one. Cleve's borrowed gun smacked back into the heel of his hand with recoil. And, a fragment of a second later, Emmett's six-gun roared again.

That fragment of time between the two explosions measured life and death. Kinnard saw his own shot stir the leather facing of Emmett's range jacket an inch below the dangling tab of a tobacco sack in the man's breast pocket. Emmett's slug stung angrily at Cleve's ear. His hand went up and touched blood where a tiny half moon had been cut from the lobe. Death had not thrown Emmett off more than that!

As suddenly as it had begun, it was over. Herb Drake, angrily nursing a scored forearm, hauled Sim Fenton to his feet. The Peacestone man was swiftly pulling himself together. But he was beaten. It was in his eyes. Drake scornfully disarmed him and snapped steel about his wrists. Fenton made a vague

protesting motion. Drake snarled at him.

"In this state a sheriff can hang a man who hires murder as quick as one who pulls a trigger. You're going into the lock-up, along with One-eye Lloyd, if he outlives the CL lead pumped into him. And you'll have a lot of time to think up a good story. It was your cash that hired Emmett and Penn to kill Harrigan. It was your scheme to trick Kinnard into it and hang it on his neck. What the rest of it was you'll own up to—I promise you that, Fenton! I haven't had a stubborn prisoner that was guilty to work on for a long time."

Fenton's lips flapped in an attempt to say something and failed. Drake turned toward Kinnard. But Myra Harrigan was ahead of him. And one of the CL boys was grinning at Cleve.

"Buck would have liked that show, boss!"

Myra Harrigan stirred.

"Boss?" she asked slyly. "Which one of us are you talking to, Slim?"

The rider looked startled, then his grin returned.

"Why, both of you, I reckon, ma'am—from the looks of it!"

Myra shook her head and tightened her grip on Cleve's good shoulder.

"Kinnard-Harrigan is a one-man outfit from now on, Slim," she corrected. "I'm a woman. Cleve Kinnard is boss."

The rider rolled his tongue in his cheek.

"Um!" he said broadly. "Mebbe-so. But I see you've got him gotched with a CL underbit already!"

He pointed at Cleve's tagged ear lobe.

Myra Harrigan tipped her head back and smiled up at Kinnard. *Roped, throwed and saddled*, Cleve thought, as he chuckled. So he was a sucker with a gotched ear and a fresh brand still smoking on his hide. Shucks! And he had been afraid of this! He bent toward the smiling lips.

He had thought his partnership with old Buck Harrigan had no match. Yet he knew now this wasn't so. Kinnard-Harrigan wasn't finished—not by a long shot; it was hardly begun!

THE END

TEST SIGHT TASTE RIGHT

If the ladder is placed against building,
how far up will it reach?



ANSWER.
It will reach exactly to the top of the building.



RANGE SAVVY

BY CARL RAHT



When the Forest Service took over the control of government grazing lands the major problem was to prevent overstocking the range. But the department received no cooperation from the ranchmen. They were individualists and resented any restrictions placed upon them by the government. A simple expedient finally solved the problem. For every calf born, an older animal had to be sold off the range. In this way the over-all number of stock a cowman owned never increased.



Until gas and food rationing came into effect, the one-time picturesque chuck wagon stood neglected and rusting under the old oak tree beside the ranch barn. The truck had taken its place. For the truck could whisk steaming hot meals to work grounds from the ranchhouse kitchen, and could cover any part of the biggest range in a few hours. Now, with rationing, the old mule-drawn chuck wagon is rolling again and colorful pages of the old days have been reopened, for the duration of the war at least.



To the first exploring trappers in the West, the little fat-tail beaver was both money and food. Beaver pelts were used in trade or barter, and a man's wealth was estimated by the number of pelts he possessed. Furthermore, the beaver's tail, roasted in the live coals of a camp fire, made good eating. The trapper admired the animal's great strength and ceaseless industry, but when the trapper took time out to loaf, he chuckled at the beaver's inability to do likewise, for once the animal ceased gnawing and working with his teeth they grew so long that they became impossible to use and caused the animal to starve to death.

Mr. Raht will pay one dollar to anyone who sends him a usable item for RANGE SAVVY. Please send these items in care of Street & Smith, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Be sure to inclose a three-cent stamp for subjects which are not available.

Wily as he was, the Nipper walked right into a hang noose when he poked fun at that

RANGE MAVERICK'S HAT

by HAPSBURG LIEBE



IN LOOKS the outlawed Nipper Holloway ranked a colorless average. He wore nondescript clothing and rode a horse that looked like scores of others. Little known in that particular section of the Southwest, with nothing about him standing out, he'd been hard to catch—never had been caught, in point of cold fact. Officers of the law didn't recognize him when they saw him.

They knew that the Nipper, so-

called, carried an old knife scar slanting across his chest. A dying man told them this. Jackson Granby, middle-aged desert prospector, it was. Granby put up a hard fight with bare hands both before and after he was fatally wounded, and tore Holloway's shirt off. Holloway had shot the prospector wantonly, following a simple dispute over a canteen of warm water.

It was the greatest mistake of the

outlaw's entire black career.

The Nipper was holed up now, months later, in an old shanty far back in a wilderness of boulders and starved scrub. There was a seep spring for water and grass enough for one horse. He felt safe here. Yet his cook fires always made the thinnest of pale smoke, and each night he slept with a ready six-shooter.

Suddenly a dim blast shattered the thick morning stillness. Holloway sprang up from a late breakfast that had cleaned his grub cache, filled a hand with the black walnut and steel of his six-shooter's butt and ran bareheaded out of the shanty. But no lawman would herald his approach in any such fashion. The Nipper grinned with his teeth clenched as he stared toward the east.

The morning sun was in his eyes. It annoyed him, yet he did not go back into the shanty for his hat. Presently he heard a sliver of rock clatter under a boot heel, and he slipped in behind a nearby boulder.

The newcomer was very young, not past twenty, and very slim, starved-looking almost to scrawniness. He wore the clothing of a scarecrow; range clothing, it was, badly worn and most of it a great deal too large for him.

"Range tramp," Nipper Holloway told himself.

He scowled. If the little tramp started making away with his horse, he'd drill him so quick he'd never know what hit him. But the ragamuffin scarcely looked twice at the horse. He lay down flat at the seep spring and drank, rose and wiped his

thin mouth on a ragged sleeve. Then turning to face the shack, he called:

"You home, hombre?"

Holloway stepped from behind the boulder. His slitted gaze held to the rusty old six-shooter under the youngster's hip. The youngster said:

"Nary bullet in her. Used my last un shootin' my little hoss, back there half a mile or so; he'd fell and busted a leg, and I had to put him out o' his misery. Sure hated doin' that. Good little hoss. Saddle and bridle wasn't worth carryin'. How many miles to Oro City from here?"

The Nipper didn't answer. He had just become aware that he'd overlooked buttoning his shirt, and knew that fully half the long scar on his chest was showing. But if the young stranger noticed the scar he gave no sign. The Nipper did not button his shirt now. After a dragging silent minute, he said:

"I've run into you somewhere before, small cowboy. Where was it?"

Response was prompt and straightforward: "I dunno. I've never saw you anywheres. What makes you think you know me?"

"Your eyes, mebbe," Holloway said. "Gray like the hide of a steel-dust hoss. Steel-dust gray, and uncommon. Yeah, I'd swear I've seen you somewheres before. What's your name?"

"It ain't perlite to ask," the youngster said, "but I'll tell you. My name is Ike."

"Ike who?"

"That'd be talkin' too much," Ike said. "Half o' the men that's been

hung, why, talkin' too much is what done it."

This struck a concordant note deep in Nipper Holloway's villainous make-up; a hundred times, he'd said the same thing himself. He grinned with his teeth clenched.

"*Bueno*. You can keep your name to yourself. Don't matter a hoot no-how. Still, I'll take no chance with you, like I don't take a chance with nobody else. You can gimme that iron you got on your hip there, Ike."

The next second he had the rusty old weapon in his hand. A glance was enough to show him that it held no loaded chamber. He threw the weapon as far away as he could. A little to his surprise, Ike did not protest. Then, out of the sheer diabolical meanness of his heart, Holloway began making sport of the youth.

"Sure is some fancy outfit o' clothes you got on, Ike. Them britches is wide enough for a grand-pappy elephant. Both boots for the same foot. Shirt the color o' nothin'. Old Stetson hat so big it rides on your ears. Cowpoke jobs so hard to find that you have to wear clothes other people has throwed away?"

"Well," Ike said, "the hat ain't so bad. Range work is scarce, all right. Everywhere I've gone, I heard that. Dunno why. How far did you say it was to Oro City?"

"I didn't say. Who's the sheriff there now, y'know?"

"Lemme see," Ike said slowly. "I think it's Tom Eldridge. Why?"

"Wondered if they'd been a election that put him out, that's all," answered the Nipper. "Eldridge ain't so keen, and he's too old anyhow.

I've rode into his town right under his nose and stayed an hour or so, lots of times, and he never knowed any better. I'll throw that in his face, some day, jest to see his mouth pop open and his jaw sag; it'll be a big laugh!"

"Yeah, reckon so," Ike said. "Well, reckon I'll be moseyin' along. On foot thisaway, I—"

"You ain't goin' nowheres, Ike," the Nipper cut in, and his voice was brittle. The muzzle of his ready gun went upward an inch or so. "Because, y'see, I've remembered some things."

"What?"

"Steel-dust eyes like yours," the Nipper said. "They belonged to a desert prospector named Granby. I've heard about you, and I got the whole thing now. Granby was your daddy, and you been huntin' me to shoot me. No wonder you shied at givin' your name!"

Ike nodded and his voice was quiet and bitter.

"I found my daddy dyin' and took him to the doc over in town. He lived only long enough to tell the sheriff about it. He didn't even have a pocket knife on him when you jumped him. That canteen o' water was his, not yours, and he'd already offered to give you half of it!"

Holloway didn't bother to deny anything. He grinned with his teeth set. Ike Granby had more to say:

"I begged Sheriff Tom Eldridge to make me a deputy, but he thought I was too young. I'd rather have taken you in alive to hang, on account a rope is a heap lowdowner'n a clean bullet. I rode and I rode, huntin' you here and huntin' you

there, and I slept on the ground and starved. Trouble was, I wouldn't have recognized you if I'd seen you. I had to find that scar first. It was a job!"

The Nipper's voice came again, brittle as before: "Step into that shack there, smart young un. I got no ca'tridges to waste, but you make a move I don't like and I sure will set one afire in your direction. Step!"

There was nothing else for young Granby to do. The hatless Nipper, shading his eyes with his free hand, followed close. The interior of the old shanty was bare except for sundry wooden boxes scattered over the floor, and Holloway's saddle and bridle and blanket piled in a corner. On one of the boxes lay the outlaw's hat. Littering the top of another was the breakfast the Nipper had left when he'd heard Ike Granby's shot.

"Stand right there," Holloway ordered, pointing with the barrel of his six-shooter, "till I've finished eatin'. Damn pack rats've been stealin' my grub so fast I ain't got none left. Hell, a man cain't live and not eat. I'll leave you tied up to keep you outa' mischief, Ike, whilst I'm gone to town for more grub."

Ike shifted his weight from one poorly clad foot to the other. He said nothing. But his steel-dust eyes were hot.

The Nipper hogged down his last morsel, took out his knife and went toward his saddle to cut off two rawhide tie strings. A slight creaking noise jerked his gaze back to young Granby. With a snarled oath, he sprang and struck the youngster flat

with the barrel of his six-shooter. All Ike had done was to sit down on the Nipper's hat.

Holloway tied Ike's wrists and ankles together behind him with the rawhide strings, saddled up and headed out for town. He did not mean to come back, ever. . . .

The Nipper waited until dusk had fallen to ride into Oro City. No use crowding his luck.

There was the usual evening crowd of cowboys and miners, many of them strangers, in and around the stores and saloons and along the dim street. The Nipper ambled into a general store and bought food supplies. He left his bulging grub sack with the storekeeper and went to a saloon for a few drinks. Too smart to take on an overload, he drank slowly. He grinned at the back-bar mirror. Some day he'd tell Sheriff Tom Eldridge about this, just to see the old fool's eyes pop and his jaw sag.

Suddenly the Nipper's grin faded. For the mirror had shown him a grizzled tall man wearing a law badge and holding a ready gun coming up behind him. Hiding his uneasiness, the Nipper said quietly:

"Too bad, lawman, but you got the wrong jigger. Who do you think I am, anyhow?" He slipped his hands up to shoulder level. "What's your reason for singlin' *me* out o' dozens of other strangers?"

A hush fell upon the crowd and Tom Eldridge's voice could be heard clearly all over the big room. "I had plenty reason for singling you out. Now unbutton your shirt and

let me see if you ain't wearing an angle knife scar a foot long."

While he talked he was reaching for the outlaw's gun. Holloway took the most desperate chance of his life. His left hand struck at the barrel of the officer's six-shooter and his right made a grab for his own weapon. Eldridge seemed to be expecting that. He jerked backward and pulled trigger. . . .

"Put out that light, it hurts my eyes," the Nipper growled weakly. "What the devil is this anyway—a drugstore? Smells like one."

"That light is the afternoon sun shining through the cell window there, and it'll go out for you this same day forever," the Oro City doctor told him, "and the smell is medicine on a bandage. Hey, Tom, he's conscious again."

Sheriff Eldridge walked into the cell and stood looking down at the motionless figure on the narrow bunk. At sight of him, the Nipper remembered. A slim, dog-weary youth had followed the officer in and Holloway remembered more. His pale face made up a scowl for this

son of dead Jackson Granby.

"You wonderin' how I got out o' that rawhide?" Ike Granby asked. "Simple. I rolled into the spring and soaked the rawhide till I could stretch it enough to get loose, that's how. You sure rapped me with that gun barrel. My head aches yet!"

"I hit you because you ruined my hat by setting smack down on it, there in the shanty," Holloway said. His weak voice had a mean ring.

"I set down on your hat a-purpose, Nipper," Ike explained. "I wanted to mash it up bad, so's you'd take mine in place of it, and you did. You'd said you was goin' to town after grub and I thought if the sheriff here seen you wearin' my hat, he'd be suspicious, knowin' I'd been trailin' you for months."

In his steel-dust eyes there was a brightness that seemed almost to glorify his ill-fitting cast-off clothing. The old sheriff smiled and spoke.

"You wondering how I recognized the kid's hat, Nipper? Shucks, any man will recognize a hat he's worn couple years or so. You see, I'd given Ike Granby that hat myself."

THE END



THE OLD-TIMER SAYS:

Those boys of ours can't "come an' get it" till this ruckus is over but we can still dish out all the gun fodder they need if we buy more

WAR BONDS AND STAMPS TODAY!



WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

BY JOHN NORTH

THE wide-open country around Pecos, Texas, retains all the glamour of the early West. It is a sparsely settled cattle domain, a semi-desert incubator of Texas beef. Cactus, sagebrush and yucca-dotted range lands stretch shimmering in the bright glare of the sun to the foothills of the distant mountains.

Where wells can be sunk or water obtained from springs of the far-apart streams, there are irrigated farms. The farms raise cotton, feed grains, alfalfa and the famous Pecos cantaloupes. Up at Red Bluff the dam across the Pecos River forms a reservoir that waters some 60,000 farm acres in the neighborhood and you can fish for bass in the artificial lake. But even so ranching is the principal occupation in the Pecos region.

Pecos was formerly the lusty town center of the adjacent desert cow country. Hitch rails lined the streets. Heavy awnings on wooden uprights projected from the store fronts. Cowboys' spurs jingled on the board sidewalks. According to the records the town was plenty rough.

Gun-shooting cowhands hoorawed into Pecos on many a payday spree or holiday bender. Billy the Kid

dropped in now and then. More importantly Pecos vies with Prescott, Arizona, Cheyenne, Wyoming and other early Western cattle centers in being one of the granddaddys of that typical cow-country event, the rodeo.

Legend tells it that on the Fourth of July in 1884 foremen of the surrounding ranches got together and decided to stage a new kind of competitive celebration. The idea was to find out which spread had the best hands at roping, racing and bronc riding. Prize money was donated by the ranch owners.

This first Texas rodeo made a hit. It became an annual Pecos custom later copied by other cattle centers throughout the State.

"More than any other town in Texas," Pecos is the place Reader M. Y., of Mobile, Alabama, wrote us he some day hopes to visit, "and maybe stay there." To others who, as well as M. T., like their open spaces undiluted by too much civilization Pecos, and the whole trans-Pecos region will always be a thrilling part of Texas.

Modern Pecos is still a ranch-supply center, catering to the needs of the local cattlemen. But today it is an up-to-the-minute city with good

hotels, solid business buildings and its own radio station—Station KIUN.

There is oil deep below the desert surface in the trans-Pecos region. Discovery of this oil in the neighborhood of Pecos helped turn the cow town into a bustling city and added considerably to its prosperity.

Miles and miles of untamed country spread out from Pecos in an open land of weird and mixed geography. There are great, almost flat, basinlike plains and rolling dusty brown hills. Further off are the crests of the high, barren mountains that form part of the southern extension of the Rockies.

South of Pecos a graveled road leads to Fort Stockton, fifty-six miles away. No towns lie in between. Fifty-five miles north of Pecos is the irrigated farming area around the river's Red Bluff dam and reservoir. The farmers often come to Pecos to do their shopping or see the movies.

Highway 30 cuts through Pecos east and west. East, it goes to Midland, Big Springs, Sweetwater, Fort Worth, and Dallas, the heart of the cosmopolitan part of Texas. West, the highway climbs sloping plains towards the far-off clear-cut rim of mountain peaks.

Beyond Sierra Blanca the road tops out of the mountains through a low pass between the Finlay range and the Devil's Ridge. Then it shoots

steeply down to the lush, cotton-growing valley of the Rio Grande, following the valley to El Paso. It is just a little more than two hundred miles from Pecos to El Paso.

All told, the trans-Pecos triangle, a block of land roughly the size of West Virginia, takes in about twenty-five thousand square miles. It reaches west of the Pecos River from the southern boundary of New Mexico to the Rio Grande. Within its compass are the mountains and canyons of the Big Bend and to the north Guadalupe Peak, nearly nine thousand feet high and the tallest mountain spire in Texas.

It's semi-arid, it's wild but in the main it's still cattle country.

To G. V., Columbia, South Carolina: Pineland in the vast piney woods belt of east Texas is essentially a lumber mill town. Even the homes in that vicinity stand out in little stump-spotted clearings of cut-over land back from the center of town.

To R. P., Anderson, Indiana: The lobo wolf of the old West is said to be just about extinct. Now and then, however, one is caught. A recent issue of the *Tombstone*, Arizona, *Epitaph* reports a stockman trapping one of the big beasts that measured seven and a half feet from tip to tip.

Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply. Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.



MINES AND MINING

BY JOHN A. THOMPSON

PROSPECTORS don't need a lot of fancy equipment. They learn by necessity the art of getting along with the materials at hand. A gold pan is a "must" for the placer gold seeker. He requires it to test stream gravels for colors of yellow metal and to pan out dust and perhaps nuggets from a newly found pay streak. He should have one along.

Yet in a pinch a prospector can make an ordinary camp skillet serve his purpose, provided it is thoroughly cleaned and all traces of grease have been burned off. The sides of a frying pan are a trifle steep and not as wide as those of a regular gold pan. But if the gold is there, a skillet, properly handled, will save it.

Similarly a small cast-iron chemist's retort is the correct tool for recovering gold from small amounts of amalgam. That is, from the quicksilver with which it has combined in the bottom of a sluice box. With no other retort at hand many a prospector has instead used a potato.

Judging from his letter, Reader T. J., of Houston, Texas, evidently thought someone was pulling his leg when he heard about using a potato for a gold retort. "If it is so," he asked, "will you please explain how

it works. It sounds like a good trick to know."

It is a good trick to know, T. J., any time you have a small quantity of amalgam to be retorted. "Small quantity" means a piece say up to about an ounce in size.

First pick out a fairly large, full-bodied white potato, the sort of spud that would make a good "baker." Cut it in two halves. In the center of one of the halves scoop out a hole large enough to hold the blob of amalgam you wish to retort. Put the amalgam in the hole; join the two halves of the potato back together and hold them tightly in place with a few strands of wire.

Next, *don't* put the potato in the oven to cook. Take it outdoors to a campfire that has been burning long enough to have a good bed of hot ashes. Nest the potato in the hot ashes and let it bake done, that is until the potato is soft and the outer skin charred and thickened. This generally takes from forty-five to sixty minutes. Be sure you keep plenty of hot ashes on all sides of the potato.

When the tuber is done, rake it out of the coals, let it cool, remove the wire, break the halves apart and a button of sponge gold will be lying

neat as a dollar in the hole. The more volatile quicksilver distilled by the heat will have been absorbed in the pores of the potato.

The quicksilver can frequently be saved for re-use by putting the potato (both halves) in a pan, mashing it to a pulp and collecting the droplets of quicksilver that have condensed in the potato pores. It shouldn't be necessary, but for safety's sake perhaps we had better add: Don't eat the potato. The quicksilver poisons it.

Suppose you haven't any wire around camp to hold the potato halves together? Before someone asks that question, and they're sure to, we'll answer it right now. The spud will still work. In this case cut off about one third of the potato, and throw the small piece away.

In the larger portion scoop out a hole big enough to cover the little ball of hard, gray amalgam. Put the amalgam on an indentation in the bottom of an old frying pan or shovel blade and set the potato over it so that the hole covers the amalgam.

Roast as before, and when the quicksilver has been driven off into the potato the gold button will remain in the indentation in the pan or shovel blade. Be sure to do the job outside, over an open fire, and keep

away from any fumes that may arise in the process.

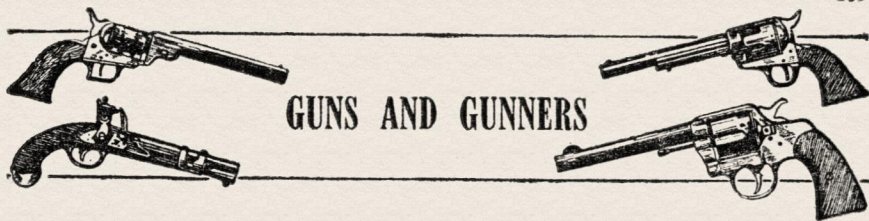
Quicksilver fumes are very poisonous. For that reason it is always dangerous to attempt on-the-spot camp-retorting methods inside a closed cabin or other camp buildings. Some fumes are almost sure to escape. Outside they have a better chance of being dissipated in the air.

There are other more standard ways of recovering gold from quicksilver amalgam of course. If much of such work is to be done a prospector had better do one of the following two things: (a) Save the small amounts of amalgam until he can send them to an assayer and have the work done by an experienced man with the proper equipment, (b) Get himself a small retort and learn how to use it carefully and safely.

But it is well to remember any good-sized white potato will do the job in an emergency. Prospecting is full of just such useful kinks as that.

To W. K. Gadsden, Alabama: The slope or pitch of a sluice box used in saving placer gold depends on the character of the gravel and gold, the kind of riffles used and similar factors. Slopes vary from four to as high as an eighteen-inch drop for each twelve-foot length of sluice. About six to eight inches drop is average.

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, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, 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; please keep them as brief as possible.



GUNS AND GUNNERS

BY CAPTAIN PHILIP B. SHARPE

A LOT of the boys are asking about our military rifles, both in the current war and in the last war. The rifles of the current period cannot be discussed too much in detail at this time because of military restrictions, but those of the last war are really worthy of mention.

Officially the United States had but two rifles at the end of the war. At the start of it, we had but one. The familiar Model 1903 or Springfield, was the standard rifle. This has been discussed in detail in previous issues, and will not be covered again. But while the United States Springfield Arsenal at Springfield, Mass., went "all out" in production of the Model 1903, and while manufacture was revived at Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois, these two plants could not produce enough weapons.

Thus came the official United States Rifle, Model 1917. This was a war-time weapon, and was essentially British. It has been discussed before, and was in full production for the British Government on private contract by three large American plants—Winchester, Remington and Eddystone Arsenal. The United States merely took over the facilities when we got into the war. By standardizing parts and altering design only to handle our cartridge, we stepped up production. Before

the war ended, we had produced in these three American plants, the enormous total of 2,202,429 Model 1917 rifles.

Government standardization did other things to the rifle which became known as the Model 1917. Many thousands of these rifles had been produced for the British as their Model 1914 Enfield. Lack of standardization had naturally increased the costs, so that the British paid an average of \$42 each for these rifles. With the United States system of standardized parts and uniform tolerances to eliminate the problems of hand fitting in assembly, costs were reduced to about \$26 each.

But the Models 1903 and 1917 were not the only rifles used by the United States during the First World War. Despite the high production of these rifles, they were inadequate to equip the rapidly growing army. Rifles were needed for training our troops in this country, as well as for equipping them for overseas duty. So the army looked around for other weapons of value for domestic use.

One of these rifles, made in quantity for a foreign government prior to our entry into the war, was the Russian "Three-line Nagant." These were produced for the 7.62 mm Russian cartridge by Remington, Win-

chester and the New England Westinghouse Company.

About the time we got into the war, Russia was having internal troubles and was approaching civil war. Accordingly, with many rifles manufactured but in storage awaiting shipment, Uncle Sam stepped in and refused to let them leave the country. The army took over 280,049 of these rifles, together with tremendous quantities of ammunition, and used them at domestic training camps.

Following the war, the guns were declared obsolete since they were for a foreign cartridge, and were sold to members of the National Rifle Association at prices starting at \$7.50 and gradually being reduced to \$3.50 as the best of these were sold. Ammunition was sold at \$5 per case of 1000 rounds.

These rifles proved excellent for remodeling into sporters, and as a result, Remington added the Russian cartridge to their line of commercial ammunition, loaded with a hunting bullet.

Many of our friends have asked for an explanation of the name, "Three-line Nagant." It is puzzling until you understand the Russian system of calibers. Russia designates her calibers as "lines." A line is 1/10th inch. Thus three-line means .3 or .30 inch. The British .303 is called the 3-line 03 in Russia.

In addition, the United States purchased many Canadian Ross rifles.

This rifle was, at the start of the war, the official Canadian rifle, known as the Mark II and later Mark III. It was, of course, chambered for the .303 British Mark VII military cartridge.

The Ross was a bolt-action rifle but differed from most types in that it was a "straight pull." In most bolt-action rifles it is necessary to rotate the bolt through the handle to unlock the mechanism before it may be opened to extract and feed a cartridge. With the Ross, the bolt handle and bolt were drawn straight back, eliminating the turn-bolt feature.

This feature was accomplished through the use of a two-piece bolt, the head of which, containing the locking lugs, rotated when the bolt body was withdrawn.

At the close of the war, these rifles, too, were sold to American riflemen, the ammunition at \$5 per case, and the rifles as low as \$1.50 each. Many were made into sporters, and of course the cartridge has for more than forty years been available in American manufacture with sporting bullets.

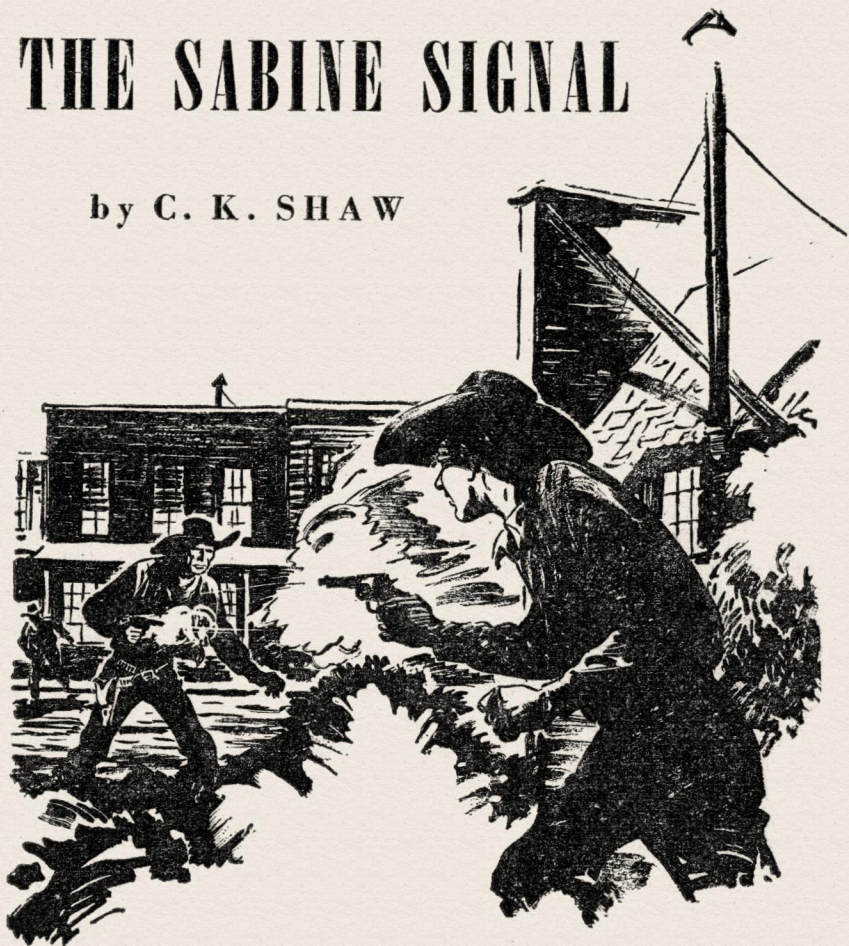
And lastly, all old Krag rifles, then in storage, were revived as training weapons. Millions of rounds of new Krag ammunition were manufactured for the government.

Use of these special rifles did much to relieve the burden of training and to release Models 1903 and 1917 rifles for combat duty.

Phil Sharpe, our firearms editor, is now on active duty as a Captain, Ordnance Department, U. S. A. He will continue to answer all letters from readers. Address your inquiries to Captain Philip B. Sharpe, Guns and Gunners Dept., Street & Smith's Western Story, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Be sure you print your name clearly and inclose a three-cent stamp for your reply. Do not send a return envelope.

THE SABINE SIGNAL

by C. K. SHAW



Even the threat of dry-gulch lead couldn't keep Rob Libby from riding into King McNally's gun-bristling stronghold on the trail of his brother's killer

I

NIGHT was closing in on Boulder Pass as Rob Libby rode beside his brother Ace toward Dead Town, the stronghold of the outlaw, King McNally. The Sierra Mountains seemed

forebodingly quiet to young Bob, and he looked at Ace to see if he had noticed.

Ace Libby had ridden down from the north to hear of the fight Sheriff Burt Noble was making against King

McNally, and was now going to the lawman's assistance. Ace had once deputied under Burt Noble along the Sabine, and they were fast friends.

But this was young Rob's first man hunt. He had come from the south to join his brother in San Francisco, and had found Ace ready for the trip to Dead Town. Ace had argued against Rob joining him but, for the first time, Rob refused to take the advice of his older brother.

"I'm twenty," he had said. "A year older than when you started deputying. I'm as ready now as I'll ever be."

It had always been understood between the brothers that some day Rob would take his place at Ace's side, but back in San Francisco, Ace had spoken to Rob of other work. In alarm, Rob had demanded that he be allowed to come on this job. He believed once they were in the thick of things, his brother would lose this new attitude. Now they were in Boulder Pass, and night shadows were black.

Suddenly Ace Libby spoke. "So far Sheriff Noble is on the losing end of this fight," he said. "He tackled the job with three crack deputies but two of them have been killed. McNally is still strong. This is no ordinary man hunt."

"I'm glad King doesn't know we're coming," said Rob.

"He probably does," Ace replied. "If he keeps a spy in Frisco, that man must have heard I'd ridden down from the north. He'll send word to McNally to be on the watch. But there's one thing they won't know, that you are with me. I told no one

that you were my brother, and even Sheriff Noble doesn't know you by sight."

"Ace," Rob said slowly, "I spoke several times in Frisco of your being my brother. I was kind o' proud of such a famous brother and—" His voice died at the look he saw in Ace's face. "Have I muffed something?" he asked.

"We'll hope not," replied Ace. "Rob, if you happen to meet Sheriff Noble first, when I'm not with you, instantly give him that old Sabine signal."

"Aren't we going to keep together?" Rob asked.

"In this business you never know," Ace said. "There's another thing I want to get off my chest. It's this: if one of us is killed during a fight, the other is to ride on. Understand?"

Rob Libby's youthful face twitched. "You can't trap me that way," he said. "If you get shot, I'll stick around to help you, the same as you'd do for me. Get your paw out and let's shake on it, and stop croaking about what isn't going to happen."

Ace Libby shook his brother's hand. "If I could have turned you into some safer line of business, I'd have done it," he said with resignation. "But you can't make water run up hill."

The trail narrowed and night came on, with the stillness deepening. Ace took the lead and Rob followed. Riding single file, they could no longer speak in whispers, and a louder tone was dangerous. After two miles, they

neared the Dead Town side of the gorge. Suddenly the black walls spread apart and the sky loomed in an oval before them. It was as though a spotlight had been turned on the two riders, and both threw their horses for brushy shelter.

The silence was shattered by the boom of a rifle. Ace Libby lifted in the saddle, tilted backward, then fell to the ground as his horse crashed into the brush. Swinging from his saddle a few feet behind his brother, Rob whipped his rifle free and fired into the spot from which the ambush gun had spoken. A second ambush rifle opened up, and Rob fired again.

Then he realized that Ace was not in the fight.

Creeping forward, he found Ace lying still, a wound above his heart. Soundlessly Rob squatted beside him, something stronger than the lack of pulse telling him that his brother was dead. When his rifle slid from his knees, the slight noise brought a bullet whistling past his head. The sound of the lead brought him back to an awareness of his danger, and he picked up his rifle.

"I'm going, Ace," he whispered. "You felt this coming and told me how I was to act."

His mind functioned so smoothly, it seemed unrelated to his numb body. Ace had said if one of them should die, the other was to go on with the job. As Rob reached his horse, the animal reared back and two rifles cracked lead into the sound. The beast squealed and plunged into the brush. Rob took advantage of the commotion to run on afoot. As he progressed, more

shots were poured after his horse, and this enabled him to keep his enemies located. While the ambushers stalked the animal, Rob moved swiftly toward the Dead Town side of the pass.

He had not tried to catch Ace's horse, for he was certain that beyond the bend he would find horses belonging to the outlaws. He found them, two saddled animals unguarded. He mounted one and rode away at a walk. Behind him, there was now silence.

When he came to a shallow ravine leading back between treed hills, he accepted its shelter, taking time to brush out his tracks as he left the main trail. By now the outlaws should have missed their horse and be aware that their second man was on the road to Dead Town.

After a couple of hours of pushing back into wild country, Rob dismounted beside a deserted miner's cabin to wait for morning. Ace was dead. The repetition of this short sentence had burned a path across Rob's mind. Now all the plans he and Ace had made to ride the law trail together, were ashes.

With the aid of matches, Rob found a mud-caked shirt and pants in the cabin, an old hat and a pair of heavy, worn shoes. A plan had begun to form in his mind. He knew he was not thinking coolly and in detail, as Ace would were he here. Ace had been known as a careful, complete thinker, one who planned with patience. Now Rob's hands were shaking with eagerness to be turned back down the ravine, his scheme a vague thing. Getting back

to bury Ace was a flaming desire that dulled his caution.

He was going back to the danger zone in the clothes he had found and, with the first grayness in the east, he pulled on the worn shirt and pants. At a spring he rubbed mud on his face and hands, rinsed this off and rubbed on more. At last his skin took on a stained, weathered look. He hid his pistol beneath the band of his pants and picked up a broken-handled shovel. His jaws were clenched as he walked toward his horse. He was going back to bury his brother.

When Rob came to the main trail, he left the horse in the brush and went on afoot. He reasoned that the outlaws would long since have given up the search for their second man. Rob told himself that even though they recognized their first victim as the famous deputy, Ace Libby, they would not know his companion was his brother. He was hoping the ambush of the night before was for robbery, and that the thieves did not know the man they had killed.

Rob plodded along in the heavy shoes, head sunk on his chest, mindful of his disguise, yet alertly he watched from beneath the brim of his battered hat. The mouth of the pass lay before him. Around that first bend he would find Ace. He would bury Ace quickly, then he would turn his whole mind to the fight ahead. Finding Sheriff Burt Noble and his one remaining deputy would be the first task.

As Rob Libby came to a spot where

the brush grew close to the trail, a man with a rifle against his cheek lifted from behind a boulder. He was tall and lean, and his face was wholly evil. His close-set eyes were bright with a virulent poison and his lips were cruel. The gun he held was trained on Rob's heart and his trigger finger was tense.

"Get your hands up!" he ordered. "Drop that rifle and shovel!"

To refuse was death. Rob lifted his hands.

The man spoke to a companion who had risen beside him. "I told you Libby's brother would come back to bury him, Blackie. I've dealt with this breed before."

The man addressed as Blackie wore a black beard and his jet eyes were set beneath inky brows. He was younger by several years than the first man, and sullenness rather than triumph showed in his face.

"Don't be too sure this kid is Ace Libby's brother, Amber," he growled.

"A die-hard, ain't you?" Amber taunted. "Wait 'til I tell King McNally that you wanted to give up and go on home! Wait 'til I tell him a lot of things!"

There was a deadly hate between the two men and Rob felt it like a hot blast as he stood simulating a quaking fear. Blackie pointed at him.

"You're callin' that spineless critter Ace Libby's brother?" he growled at his companion. "You'll get laughed out of Dead Town when you fetch him in!"

Amber was angered. "You're talkin' with too long a lip," he snapped.

"Want to try to shorten it?"

Blackie demanded.

"A lot of things'll be took care of after I talk with King," Amber replied, keeping his evil eyes on his prisoner. "You know King put me in charge of this trip, but you ain't helped like you should. You'd rather've seen me fail, then have the glory of gettin' that deputy, Ace Libby!"

Blackie sneered. "Laying in wait and shooting a man in cold blood, ain't nothing to get a swell head over!"

Rob thought for an instant this thrust might lessen Amber's caution, but it didn't.

"Blackie," Amber ordered, "pick up that shovel and bury Ace Libby. King don't like the Pass cluttered up with corpses. . . . So you think gettin' Ace Libby ain't much, huh! Well, I got somebody else 'fore I hit up with you. When King hears *that* and about Libby and his brother, there ain't no doubt but what he'll make me his right bower."

He stepped up and jammed his rifle into Rob's side. "Get marchin' toward the brush, Libby—there's horses there. You and me is goin' to Dead Town."

"My name ain't Libby," Rob whispered hoarsely. "I been prospectin' back in the hills and—"

"Look at his knees knock!" jeered Blackie. "He's scared half to death!"

"He might well be," Amber responded. "Get to work with that shovel. Libby, you come along with me, and don't bother with no more lies. Our Frisco man that brought

word you and Ace was on the way, will be in Dead Town to identify you."

Blackie picked up the shovel, looked at Amber. "Was you lying about getting somebody else?" he asked, a fawning note in his voice. It seemed to Rob there was even a faint fear in the jet eyes.

"I wasn't lyin'," Amber responded. "I'm not talkin' any more 'til I see King—but it's big news, as big as gettin' Ace Libby!"

"Did you get that last deputy?" Blackie's voice burned.

"I'm not talkin' any more," repeated Amber, and ordered Rob to walk toward the horses.

II

It was evening when Amber brought his prisoner into Dead Town. Care had been taken on the trip to avoid meeting anyone, and so twice a circuitous trail had been taken. When Amber drew rein before a large log building, Rob knew they were at King McNally's Place. It was a saloon famous through the mountains as a meeting place of thieves and murderers. It was because of the manner in which McNally had waxed bold, even taking over completely this stage stop on the three-way forking of the trail, that Sheriff Burt Noble had gone into the mountains after the outlaw.

Dead Town was not really a town. There was McNally's saloon, and across the rutted road from it, a Chinese restaurant. A livery stable for the stage horses was in the brushy flat behind the saloon, and scattered

about aimlessly were a few shacks almost hidden by high brush.

Amber cut the rope binding Rob's hands to the saddlehorn and ordered him to dismount. There was still light enough for Rob to get an idea of the spot. Thick brush was everywhere, even crowding to the door of the restaurant. It would offer shelter to a fleeing man, but it would also slow him up.

During the ride Rob had figured carefully just what to do when a breath of opportunity presented itself. He could not wait for this spy from San Francisco to turn up and identify him. That would mean instant death. There was the gun beneath his pants band, and as he pounded his hands together to restore circulation, he kept them near his waist.

There was one first step Rob Libby had decided upon when he should make his break for freedom: that was to get Amber, the man who had killed Ace.

"Get movin'!" Amber snarled at Rob. "Herm Wright, our Frisco man, is in yonder. He'll say fast enough who you are."

Rob cringed. "Then will you turn me loose?" he chattered. "There won't be nothin' to kill me for if I ain't Libby, will there?" His hand slid to the band of his pants, rested there.

The question angered Amber but, before he could reply, the door of the saloon was jerked open and Blackie filled the gap, the sickly light of a swinging ceiling lamp at his back.

"I told King what you was fetch-

ing in as Libby's brother," Blackie said mockingly. "King has sent for Herm Wright. He'll be here in an hour." Blackie stepped back from the doorway as Amber's acid tones bit at him, and called to men inside the door. "Look, fellows, look at what Amber is fetching in!"

With Amber's gun jamming hard in his side again, Rob moved ahead into the saloon. Herm Wright was the San Francisco spy and he would not arrive for an hour. In an hour a better time to strike might come, but right now all eyes were fastened on Amber and his prisoner.

Rob stumbled a few steps across the floor as though he were numbed from fright. Cowering, as glances of five men lined up at the home-made bar struck his face, he mumbled that there was a mistake. Blackie tipped back on his heels and roared a laugh. The men at the bar were tensely quiet.

"Where's King?" Amber snapped. "Send for him!"

One of the five men at the bar leaped to obey.

"Get into that closet yonder," Amber ordered Rob, and pointed to a dark cubbyhole off the main room.

Rob went into the little room, and saw that the door they closed upon him was a flimsy affair of boards stood on end and nailed together with a single crossbar. Through the cracks he could see most of the outer room, and he could hear all of the stormy quarrel that was now taking place between Blackie and Amber. Their voices snapped off when King McNally came in the front door.

Rob could tell the squat man with the long arms was the outlaw chief by the wave of tenseness that swept the room. When he spoke, his voice bristled with anger.

"Quarrelin' again, huh?" he snarled at Blackie and Amber. "I send you out on a big job and you try to cut each other's throats." He thrust his head toward Amber. "So you got Ace Libby. That's good!"

"And I got his brother in the closet," said Amber.

"Blackie says it ain't Libby's brother," King growled.

Amber stepped toward his chief. "King, I'm tired of that long lip of Blackie's. He wanted the job of gettin' Libby alone, an' when you sent me, he was mad clean through. Now he'd like it if I'd muffed the job, but I didn't! It's Rob Libby in the closet, dressed like a miner and doin' a smart job of pretendin' he's scared. King, wouldn't you expect Ace Libby's brother to do somethin' smart like that?"

McNally was impressed by this argument. "If it is young Libby, Blackie will be blowin' out of the other corner of his mouth," he threatened. "Bring the kid out!"

Rob Libby acted on a desperate impulse. Withdrawing the gun hidden beneath the band of his pants, he laid it on the floor. He was banking on the outlaws' returning him to the closet to wait for the San Francisco spy. When Amber jerked open the door and ordered him forth, he stumblingly obeyed. King McNally strode up to him, jerked off the old hat and sent it slithering across the beaten earth floor. Rob shrank into his

collar, and angry indecision flared in the chief's eyes.

"What weapons did you take off him?" he asked.

Amber shifted. "I ain't searched him yet."

"Well, search him!" King thundered.

The job took only a few seconds. "Not even so much as a pocketknife on him," McNally mused. "Let's see the rifle you said he was packin'."

"Blackie brought it in," Amber said tensely.

"You left the rifle in the pass and so did I," Blackie snarled. "You told me to keep my mug out of this affair an' that's what I'm doin'."

The outlaw leader flew into a rage. "One of you is right in this, and one wrong! I'll have plenty of skin off the one that's wrong! I could've told a lot from that rifle."

"It was some rusty," Blackie offered sullenly. "Didn't look like it had been fired in ten years."

Rob knew Blackie was deliberately lying in order to build up a better case against Amber. Amber must have suspected it, too, but he made no charge, for King McNally was speaking.

"Rusty! That don't sound like a Libby! Amber, things don't look so good for you. If this ain't Ace Libby's brother, then you've lost a lot of valuable time when you should've been huntin' him. That kid on the loose in these mountains will be like a gold crutch to Sheriff Noble. You done a good job of gettin' Ace, but remember that job was put into your lap. Herm Wright

gets half that honor!"

Amber slid forward a step. "If this man here ain't Libby's brother," he said, "then the kid's on the loose, all right—but he won't do Sheriff Burt Noble no good. *King, I killed Noble on my way to Boulder Pass!*"

"You killed Burt Noble?" McNally repeated.

Amber took a badge from his pocket and slithered it down the bar. "Look at that!" he said.

"It says 'Sheriff,'" McNally breathed. "Amber, where'd you get this?"

"Off Burt Noble's shirt," Amber replied, in the voice of one who could brag about a killing. "I got him as complete as lead poisonin' can do the job. I rolled him under some brush at Leak Crick crossin'."

"You don't know Burt Noble," Blackie snarled. "He's likely pinned that star on somebody else—"

McNally swung on Blackie. "I sent *you* out for Noble and you failed! You can't stand to see another win where you fell down! From here on out, keep your mouth shut or I'll put a padlock on it that you'll have to have pried off in hell!"

Blackie was cowed by his chief's anger. "If Amber got the sheriff," he said sullenly, "our fight is won."

"There's one of Noble's deputies yet," growled McNally. He looked at Rob. "And if this ain't Ace Libby's brother, we've got a job there. But neither of them is big jobs. Get this kid back in the closet and we'll have a drink. We'll drink to the man that got Ace Libby and Sheriff Burt

Noble—an' we'll drink to a prosperous year for King McNally!"

III

An hour later word was brought to King McNally that Herm Wright had returned and was at one of the shacks.

"Fetch Herm here," McNally rumbled at Blackie. "We'll know soon if we've got Libby's brother or not."

The room fell silent as Blackie left to bring the San Francisco spy. In the closet Rob felt once more to make certain his gun would draw easily. He could not step into the room with the pistol in his hand, for the outlaws would kill him on the instant. He would have time for only one shot and he had to be certain that bullet found Amber's heart. His whole play when he left the closet was going to be against Amber, the man who had killed Ace.

They waited in the room until McNally began to growl with impatience, then the front door flew open and Blackie bounded in.

"Herm's been stabbed!" he cried. "I called but he didn't answer. Then I found him!"

"*Stabbed!*" the outlaw chief thundered.

"Stabbed through the heart," Blackie panted. He opened his fist to display a crumpled paper. "I lit a match to make sure it was Herm, and I found this pinned on him. There's some names on it!"

McNally snatched the paper. "Yeah—names," he snarled. "Names of the next men on the bill. *Amber's heads the list!*"

There was a second of stark silence, then King McNally spoke. "This is the work of Ace Libby's brother. He got Herm Wright first, 'cause Herm was the spy that sent word Ace was on his way to Dead Town. Then he wrote Amber's name, 'cause Amber killed Ace. He's got Blackie's name next and—I'm last!"

Amber reached out and grabbed McNally's arm. "That can't be right! That kid just got away last night. How could he know about Herm Wright, and me and Blackie? There's only one deputy left alive for him to meet up with, and that deputy didn't know about Herm or nothin'!"

Blackie barged up to his chief. "We don't know but what that deputy heard everything we planned. Maybe he even heard Herm bring us the word about Libby. King, there's a lot of inside stuff leakin' out! I'd say there was a spy right here in Dead Town—"

King thrust his head forward from his hunched shoulders. "A spy, yeah. It could be the Chink cook, or that new stable boy or—"

"No," Blackie boomed, "there's more things leakin' out than a Chink cook would ever find out. The spy is somebody we trust! Somebody like the barkeep yonder or—"

"You're a lyin' trouble maker, Blackie!" babbled the barkeeper.

King McNally quieted the man. "Blackie didn't say you *was* the spy, he was just makin' a point—and it was a good one." The chief looked slowly from man to man. "The spy is somebody that rides stirrup to stirrup with us," he rumbled. He

paused, swaying on his thick legs, then continued. "I don't figure it's anybody in this room, but tonight—and until we get this killer kid—I want you all to watch everybody in Dead Town. If you don't watch you'll likely end up like Herm. That kid brother of Libby's ain't far away. We're goin' out to get him."

Rapidly the outlaw chief laid out positions for his men. Blackie was to watch the stable, Amber and two others the restaurant, covering the brushy flat surrounding it. This flat held the shack in which Herm Wright had been killed.

"Ferret," McNally snapped to a small, shifty-eyed man, "you guard the back of the saloon, but first take care of that kid in the closet. *And work fast!*"

Rob watched through a crack as the room cleared. Soon only the man called Ferret and the barkeeper were left. The outlaws had gone out to capture Ace Libby's brother, the man they thought had murdered the spy and left that list of names. Even as Rob tensed against the moment when the Ferret would come to kill him, he wondered about that list of names Blackie had found.

The barkeeper walked to the front door, his shotgun across his arm. "I'll step outside and listen," he told the Ferret.

Rob saw Ferret whirl toward the closet, picking his gun out of the holster that swung from his thin hip. Soundlessly he approached, turned the wooden button that held the door shut, and stood back flat along the wall as it swung open.

"Come out!" he ordered, "an' walk toward the back door of the saloon."

Rob stood motionless. He could not see the Ferret now, but he knew a gun was in the outlaw's hand. Rob's gun too was drawn, and this would be a surprise for the outlaw.

"Come out!" the Ferret snapped. "I'm givin' you a chance for your life in the brush."

Rob knew he was not going to be given any chance. He might be allowed to walk as far as the door to save dragging his body across the saloon; that was all. He continued to stand motionless. The Ferret snarled, realizing his plan to have his victim present his back, had failed. Unafraid of what he thought was a weaponless man, he leaped into view.

"So you don't want a chance to live!" he snarled. "All right take this—"

A gun boomed, but it was not the outlaw's weapon. The Ferret had come at Rob with trigger finger curled for action, then Rob's bullet had caught him. Some trick of fate had tensed the Ferret's finger away from the trigger and his gun was never fired. He fell halfway into the closet. Jerking him completely inside, Rob turned the button on the flimsy door, then ran for the back of the building.

Complete blackness enveloped him as he left the saloon. There was a small clearing at the back and a hitching post, and then the brush.

"Ferret!" came a call from the bartender. "Where are you?"

Rob dropped to shelter as the bartender opened the back door. Just

then steps came from around the outside of the saloon and Blackie's thick growl rolled out at the man in the doorway.

"Has the Ferret finished the miner yet?" he asked.

"Reckon so," the bartender responded. "He's probably packin' him off—though that's a lot of trouble for the Ferret to take."

"Which way did he take him?" Blackie asked shortly. The bartender had stepped back inside. Blackie whistled softly, then gave a low call, and took a step toward the brush.

Rob wondered why Blackie was not at his station and why he was so interested in the Ferret's mission. Before Blackie had time to indicate his intentions further, a yell came from the saloon. The bartender bounded to the back door and threw it wide.

"Blackie—Blackie! Where are you?" he cried.

"Here!" Blackie responded, stepping from shadow.

"The Ferret is dead in the closet. I saw some blood by the door and saw the button turned and—" the bartender choked with the effort of trying to keep his voice down.

"The Ferret's dead?"

"Yeah. I opened that door and found him!"

"Go tell the chief," Blackie ordered. "This adds up to something!"

"Yeah, a batty scared miner with no gun—"

"The miner must have got the Ferret's gun away from him."

"Ferret's gun was still in his hand! Blackie—that kid was Ace Libby's

brother! Amber was right!"

"Then who killed Herm, if the Libby kid ain't on the loose?" Blackie growled. "Better tell King 'stead of standing blatting your brains out!"

The bartender turned and ran for the front of the saloon. Blackie stepped back into the shadow as soon as the fellow left.

"Libby!" he whispered. "Where are you?"

Rob felt his scalp tingle. There was no mistake. Blackie was calling to him. He stood stone still, his gun hugged to his body.

"Libby!" came another urgently breathed plea. "Don't shoot. I want to talk with you!"

He wanted to talk! Rob had a flash of understanding. Blackie knew now that he had been wrong and Amber right. He knew he would suffer at the hands of his chief, so he wanted to deal with the enemy. As this explanation offered itself, Rob remembered that Blackie had tried to get for himself the job of killing Ace Libby. There could be no dealings between them.

Just then commotion burst at the front of the saloon. King's rage rumbled over the flat like thunder, and through this cut the high voice of Amber.

"That miner was the Libby kid!" he announced. "I had the right man! Somebody stabbed Herm to try and save Rob Libby!"

III

Rob crept away through the brush to circle the saloon and cross the road to the restaurant side. That

was where King had stationed Amber the first time, and there was no reason to think he would change. Rob found a narrow trail leading from the road to the door of the restaurant, hedged up on both sides by the thick brush. He crouched here, realizing that if he were spotted there would be no escape.

Amber and two men were sent back to the restaurant and cabins beyond, but they came cautiously, mindful that death had already struck twice in their midst. Amber took up a station near the front of the building and ordered his men back. One growled at thus being sent into the thickets, but Amber's thin voice drove him on. Rob hugged his gun and waited. The moment he had waited for was at hand. The man who had killed his brother could not always



why not make sure that you continue to receive this magazine throughout the year? Don't take the chance that your newsstand will be sold out—act now! Simply by filling out this coupon you can insure a solid year of reading pleasure with your favorite fiction.

WESTERN STORY
 122 EAST 42nd STREET
 NEW YORK 17, N. Y.
 Inclosed is \$1.50. Kindly send me a year's subscription to WESTERN STORY.
 NAME
 ADDRESS
 CITY STATE

keep to black shadows; there would come a second when he would be outlined in the dim starlight.

Rob recalled things Ace had un-tingly repeated. Single words came to him now, carrying a complete picture. Patience, patience—patience. Outwait your enemy—call your shots. Rob waited, and at last Amber stirred. He had convinced himself it was safe to cross the narrow trail.

Rob knew he could kill Amber as he showed himself, shoot him down as Amber had shot Ace. Rob's finger tensed on the trigger—then he lowered his gun. He could not kill Amber like that. He could not avenge Ace in a way that would make his brother ashamed. He would give Amber his chance! No fear came to Rob as this change established itself in his mind. Amber was a skilled killer, but his past knowledge of gunmanship would not be enough. Tonight his cunning would be of no avail. The outlaw was at the edge of the path when Rob lifted from shelter.

"Amber!" he whispered.

The sharp breath of the outlaw was evidence that he knew whom he faced. Guns spit in the instant Rob spoke, two guns that gave out but one echo. They crashed over the black flat in a swollen voice, and to startled Dead Town only one shot had been fired. Men came running.

"Did you get him, Amber?" someone called.

This time Amber had failed. He lay on his face in the narrow path, his long, thin body forever stilled, his killer gun silent. Men came cau-

tiously when they received no answer from him, and Rob was some distance away before the body was discovered and a clamor rose.

But Rob was seen as he crossed the road, and bullets whined over his head. Not dangerously close yet, though men were coming at him through the brush for the finish shots. He ran for the stable. Blackie might have left his post to hear of this third killing, or he might be there waiting still to dicker. But Rob had no intention of dealing with him, even to save his life.

"Libby!" came Blackie's urgent whisper as Rob reached the stable. "Kid, I'm the law. I'm Noble's deputy—the spy! Recollect how I've helped you all along!"

Blackie had heard steps and was taking a chance. He came boldly forward and Rob leaped to meet him. Rob did recollect in a great flash the way Blackie had worked. Blackie was the man who had killed the San Francisco spy, and left that list of names.

"Crawl back to the west corner of the saloon!" Blackie whispered. "There's a lean-to set up on stilts there, crawl under it. It's the ammunition room and I got three loose boards in the floor. Wait for me!"

Blackie leaped into the stable as men's movements through the brush became louder, and in a second Rob heard a horse crash away from the stable. Blackie's gun roared and he shouted to the outlaws that their man was escaping. With their quarry supposedly located, McNally's men rushed in a body to close in. Rob

made his way back to the saloon with little difficulty. He found the lean-to on stilts as Blackie had said, and crawled beneath it.

After their futile search, King and his men returned to the saloon. Rob could hear the angry rumble of their voices, but caught little of the conversation. In one flare-up he made out that Blackie was much in disfavor. Some time passed, and there were steps toward the ammunition room. The door to the lean-to beneath which Rob crouched creaked open, and Blackie's voice sounded clearly.

"I'll count out double rounds of shells for everybody," he said. "I'll shut the door, King, so's I can work faster."

The door closed, and almost instantly Rob saw one of the floor boards lifted. Then another and another. It was scrap lumber, and taking away these three short boards made a square hole large enough for a man to crawl through.

"Come up!" Blackie whispered, lighting the way with a candle. "We'll be safe here for a few minutes."

Rob pulled himself into a room piled with boxes of ammunition and stocked with rifles and pistols. He looked at Blackie and extended his hand.

"Did you kill the San Francisco spy?" he whispered. "Is Sheriff Noble dead?"

"I killed the spy so he couldn't identify you," Blackie said in a low steady voice. Then he nodded. "Burt Noble is dead. I talked with Amber. He mentioned a scar on the left

**CRIME . . .
CAPTURES
THE
COUNTRY**

A blanket crime wave covers the nation . . . but the people love it. Why? Because it's the new 1944 **DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL** . . . a volume full of chills and thrills.

Two booklength novels! . . . **MURDER BY THE STARS** and **THE HOTEL MURDERS!**

Four novelettes!
Many short stories!

By your favorite mystery writers. This prime collection of murder and theft was picked from the cream of the crop published in **DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE** . . . and there's a guarantee for you of solid reading pleasure.

Only twenty-five cents a copy (thirty cents in Canada). Don't delay . . . get your newsstand copy now. If your dealer can't supply you, fill out this coupon.

DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL
At all Newsstands
25c a copy

DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL

122 East 42 Street, New York 17, N. Y.

Enclosed is 25¢ (30c in Canada). Kindly send me a copy of the new **DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL**.

Name

Address Dist. No.....

City State.....

side of the chest of the man he killed. Noble had a scar like that."

There was an instant of utter silence, as though both men thus paid tribute to a great lawman. Then Rob spoke.

"I guess the rest is up to us."

"The rest is up to us," Blackie agreed. "I talked with the sheriff three days ago and he said one of his old men from the Sabine was coming to join him. Then things got too hot for me to risk seeing Noble again. If the fellow is here, we have no way of recognizing him."

"It wasn't Ace," Rob whispered. "He didn't chance trying to send word to Noble. You haven't seen any strangers?"

"A man got off the stage as she stopped yesterday noon and I had hopes for a minute, but he proved to be a friend of Amber's. Not many honest men ride this stage; it's known that King McNally owns it. No, Libby, I think it's just you and me!" His black eyes flashed. "Tonight, the gang is shaken by the loss of three of their members. There'll never be a better time to strike than now—while the iron is already hot. *Are you ready?*"

"I'm ready right this minute," Rob responded. "I'll crawl around and come at them from the front. You take them from this room—"

Blackie stopped him. "The stage is due any minute. If it arrived during the fight, that would mean so many more men to support King. We'll wait 'til she pulls in and leaves again."

Blackie and Rob ceased whispering as they heard the front door of the

saloon open and a strange voice boom out. Both of them looked through a crack in the flimsy door of the ammunition room, and tensed as the stranger made inquiry regarding the stage.

"What time is the mub wagon due?" he asked. "I want to get to Sacramento." He was a broad-shouldered miner with a rifle cradled in his arm. He threw a lank poke on the bar and told the bartender to weigh out his ticket and set up drinks with the rest.

The bartender didn't bother to weigh the dust, just tossed it beneath the bar. "Ain't none over," he growled. "And this stage only goes to Rattlesnake Gulch."

The stranger straightened as though to protest, then catching the hard glances sliding about, he rumbled a laugh instead. "Sorry, boys," he called a little too loudly. "I aimed for to treat you."

"It could be our Sabine man," Blackie whispered to Rob.

"If it is, he's overplaying his hand," said Rob. "King looks suspicious."

"There comes the stage," Blackie responded as the sound of wheels cut through the air. "If the miner takes her down the hill, he ain't our man. If he tries an excuse for staying in Dead Town, King McNally will likely kill him in his tracks. We got to act fast! Be ready to help him!"

"There's a way to identify ourselves to him without letting King know," Rob whispered. "There's the old Sabine signal. A horse hair

picked off the sleeve and tossed aside—like this. Do it carelessly and then wait for a reply. Ace said only Sheriff Noble's most trusted men knew the signal."

Blackie was breathing rapidly, asking sharp questions, practicing the signal.

"It's going through the movements that count," Rob told him. "If there is no hair there, that doesn't matter."

Swiftly they remade their plans. Blackie was to go into the main room and give the stranger the signal. Rob was to wait only long enough to see if there was a response, then crawl back through the hole in the floor and be ready to fight from the front door when Blackie shot out the saloon light. This was all to be after the stage had left.

Blackie had no time to catch the stranger's attention before the stage pulled up at the saloon and the driver swaggered into the room. He was a tall, cold-eyed man with a pistol at both hips. After a sharp glance around the room, he walked toward King McNally.

"Al Hatberg is my name," he said in a thin voice. "I'm drivin' tonight for Collins. Stanley Evens sent me. Read that." He held out a paper toward McNally.

The outlaw chief glanced at the paper. "It's a good enough recommend," he said, "but why did Evens remove Collins?"

"Collins was shot from the seat on Red Clover grade," the new driver replied dryly. "Killed deader than two mackerels."

A growl boiled in McNally's chest. "What was the two guards doin'?"



LITTLE DOLLS OF DEATH—

Strange rites were practiced in the room whose walls were glowing curtains of fire—pagan ceremonies as old as witchcraft itself.

Margo Lane was in the clutches of the Master of the little dolls of death—only the Shadow could save her—Would he come in time?

Don't miss VOODOO DEATH, Maxwell Grant's spine-chilling novel, in the June issue of

THE SHADOW

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

"They was killed, too."

The room was suddenly like a tomb. Death had struck at the gang this night in a two-headed attack: at its heart which was Dead Town, and on the trails.

"Who stuck up the stage?" King demanded in a rage-choked voice.

The new driver hooked his thumbs in his gun belt, seemingly enjoying his importance. "Nobody knows exactly," he said. "Can you spare me a couple of guards down the hill? My scalp's itchin' an' that allus means trouble. A man can't handle four horses and do all the shootin'."

Rob, watching the scene from the ammunition room, saw Blackie give the strange miner the old Sabine signal. The miner's attention seemed to be diverted by the news the stage driver had brought, so Blackie picked another hair from his sleeve. Either the miner was too concerned over other things to notice, or he did not recognize the signal. He stepped nervously toward the front door.

"I guess I won't go down the hill tonight," he said. Feeling the dead quiet, he laughed a little. "Just keep my dust, I'll use the ticket later." He jerked open the door and barged into the night.

"Follow him!" King snapped at two of his men. "Let him use up that dust in a ticket to hell!"

The two men glided away, hands reaching for guns.

"There's been three killin's in Dead Town tonight," King was explaining to the new stage driver as Rob turned away from his listening post to the hole in the floor. "I ain't takin' any chances. *None!*"

IV

As Rob Libby edged around the front corner of the saloon, he saw two forms whisk around the opposite front corner—the outlaws in pursuit of the miner. The latter had given no indication of being the deputy from the Sabine, but Rob still held hope that he was. He felt Blackie would hold off opening the battle until the two men King McNally had sent forth, should return.

The stage was set for the final act. No man could be certain of his cue, yet if he missed that cue, it might mean failure. Rob's blood flowed in a warm stream and his thoughts were as keen as black silhouettes set upon a white background.

Hugging his pistol to him, Rob rounded the second corner of the saloon. He breathed a few words under his breath as though a companion were at his side. From the back corner of the saloon came a scream of terror, and Rob saw a man stumble into the dim light, doubled over a stomach wound. It was the miner, and like wolves, two men were pursuing him. Rob caught the glint of a gun as one lifted his arm to finish off the victim.

Rob's pistol exploded and one of the wolfish pursuers uttered a high scream, then fell. The other leaped back around the corner. Rob did not try to overtake him, instead he pulled the miner back into the shadows of the building.

He shook him slightly. "Are you the deputy from the Sabine?" he asked.

"They stabbed me!" the man

“We’re scrimping on Paper for Jim!”

CORPORAL JIM’S family knows that the food he eats, the ammunition he uses, the blood plasma and medical supplies which may save his life come to him in perfect condition because they are protected by paper and paperboard. That’s why they take every possible means of USING LESS PAPER.

From Jim’s mother who helps the local storekeepers save paper by carrying her own market basket and never requesting useless wrapping for her purchases, to Jim’s kid brother who borrows and lends books, papers, and magazines with all his friends—the whole family is



joining with all the other patriotic Americans from coast to coast who have vowed to save a million pounds of paper for the war effort!

All the magazines in America, added together, USE only 5% of the nation’s paper supply. Yet, out of this comparatively small amount, they are SAVING 450 million pounds this year and RELEASING it for vital war needs.



This advertisement, contributed to the war effort by this magazine, was prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.

groaned. "I'm dyin'!"

"Who are you?" demanded Rob.

"Set me against the wall," the man breathed, stiffening his sagging body. "Give me my rifle. I ain't much of a shot, but I'd like to die slingin' lead at these murderers!"

"Not much of a shot"—then he was not the deputy. Rob gave him his rifle, tried to close his fingers on it, but the man was slowly falling forward. Rob straightened him hastily on the ground, feeling the death shudder go over the body, then raced back toward the front of the saloon. That second man who had been sent to get the miner was now inside and shouting his story. Blackie would shoot for the light any second!

The shot came and the big swinging lamp crashed downward. Rob leaped for the front door and landed inside the room, two pistols spitting flame from his hands. King McNally's insane scream of rage was tearing at the rafters, smothering even the first burst of gunfire.

"Blackie is the spy!" King thundered. "I saw him shoot the light!"

Rob was weaving, sliding always toward the back of the room, firing when he had a sure target. One thing he kept in mind: Blackie was to take refuge behind the bar. He and Blackie must not gun each other. The first panic of the outlaws was fading and they were beginning to wait for a target. King roared at them to get outside and surround the place.

A gun spat into that roar, and the chief's voice chopped off. Even in

the terrific din, a void was felt. The animallike desperation of the men returned. Guns churned the echoes into a mad chorus. Rob crouched down behind an overturned table to drop his empty pistols and refill his hands with a fresh pair from beneath the bands of his trousers. He and Blackie had armed themselves well in the ammunition room. He began to trigger, realizing that Blackie's guns at the bar, were now silent. He emptied his pistols again and this time had to wait to reload. It was slow work, for a bullet had torn a path across his shoulder and another had burned his side. His fingers fumbled. Why weren't the outlaws rushing him? Then he realized they were fighting an enemy at the back door. Could Blackie have left the bar? The explanation came in the form of a chill voice.

"Watch the front door—I've got the back. Pen 'em in! *Remember the Sabine!*"

It was the deputy Sheriff Noble had been expecting! Rob crept away from his shelter to a better line with the front door. He had to stiffen himself against fresh weakness as he waited for a target. When the front door was jerked open, and a form blotted out the dim starlight, Rob fired. The form crumpled. A second form rose up and Rob piled it upon the first. This lifted a human barricade in the path of the fleeing outlaws. At the back door men tried to break through and found a curtain of bullets athwart their path.

Desperately trapped, the outlaws had to exterminate their enemies or die. Guttural curses and thin moans

mingled with the bark of guns. Rob tried to reload his guns and this time he was slower than before. Blood was pouring down his neck, and he knew he had only a few seconds left in which he would be able to keep his feet. He waited only to shove three shells in each gun, then he advanced on the remaining outlaws.

"*Rush them!*" he cried to that spitting gun at the back door.

The next second was a blinding one. Rob did not waste a single one of his last bullets. He placed them carefully, triggering until both hammers fell on empty chambers. Then he clutched his right gun for a club and waited. He was weaving too badly now to advance. He waited for someone to come at him—but nobody came. The darkness swirled

about him, sour with the odor of powder and fresh blood.

Rob was standing, gun clubbed in his right hand when the man from the Sabine cautiously made a light.

"Take it easy, kid," the man said.

The gun clattered from Rob's fingers and he staggered to lean on the bar. "You're the stage driver," he exclaimed.

"Yes," the man replied. "Lew Brown is the name. I held up the stage, figuring I could do Sheriff Noble some good from that angle. We better see about this fellow at the end of the bar."

Rob clung to the bar, trying to think it all out, watching Lew Brown pour whiskey between Blackie's lips.

"He's not so bad off," Brown an-



This Thin Gillette peps up my day!
I get smooth shaves the easy way—
Look better-groomed—save cash and time.
What's more, four blades cost just one dime!

Rigid Inspection Assures
 Absolute Uniformity



Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

nounced. Then he squinted his eyes in thought. "I saw this fellow give the old Sabine signal and knew he was one of Noble's men. Then I heard them talkin' about a fellow named Libby. I used to know a guy by that name, deputied with him."

Blackie tried to pull himself to a sitting position and Lew Brown helped him. Blackie's lips pulled into a grim line. "It looks like the old man with the scythe has had a good night," he whispered.

From the darkness beyond the front door came a Chinese voice. In a moment the cook from the restaurant across the street entered the saloon. A spark of satisfaction glowed in his dark eyes as he looked around.

"The wicked heart of Dead Town has stopped beating," he said softly, pointing to the body of King McNally. "May a new town flower on the ashes. I'll go for hot water now, and bandages."

Lew Brown eased Blackie back to the floor and came to examine Rob's wounds. "Lucky for you they're not

worse," he said after an expert examination. "I can handle both you fellows. Where's Sheriff Noble?"

"He's dead," Blackie whispered. "But McNally has paid!"

The deputy nodded slowly. In the still smoky room his eyes looked grim and regretful.

"Was the Libby you knew named Ace?" Rob asked him.

"Yes," the man replied and waited for Rob to go on.

"Ace Libby was my brother. He's dead too."

Lew Brown straightened. "Kind o' looks like there's only three of us left," he said. "Maybe we could stick together."

Blackie's eyes brightened. "Yes," he whispered.

Rob nodded. "There'll be a lot you can teach us," he whispered. "Especially me—I'm just a beginner in the deputy business."

Lew Brown smiled. "You're sure off at a right healthy start," he replied and to Rob, it was almost as if Ace Libby had told him he had done a good job.

THE END



Answers to puzzle on page 65.

1. herd 2. range 3. trail 4. tarpaulin 5. grazing 6. remuda 7. blanket 8. lawman
9. mesquite 10. rimrock 11. wagon 12. canteen 13. outfit 14. wolves 15. foreman

We're just little people

We're just plain folks . . . but
We're the folks who made this country!
And we're the folks who will save it!

Save it—not only from the Enemy—but from the
danger of Prices Getting Out of Hand.

Here we are this year—after we've paid our taxes
—with 131 billion bucks in our pockets.
But only 93 billion dollars' worth of goods to buy.
That leaves 38 *extra* billion dollars.

Sure, the easy thing to do is to take that 38 billion
and start running around buying things we don't
need, bidding against each other . . . forcing
prices up and up!

Then people want higher wages. Then prices go up
some more—and again wages go up.

And then where are we!

But us little guys—us workers, us farmers, us busi-
nessmen—are not going to take the easy way out.
We're not going to buy a single thing we don't need.
We're not going to ask higher wages for our work,
or higher prices for the things we sell.

We'll pay our taxes willingly, without griping.

We'll pay off all our debts now, and make
no new ones.

We'll *never* pay a cent above ceiling prices.
And we'll buy rationed goods only by
exchanging stamps.

We'll build up a savings account,
and take out adequate life insurance.

We'll buy War Bonds until it really pinches.

Heaven knows, these sacrifices are chicken feed,
compared to the ones our sons are making.



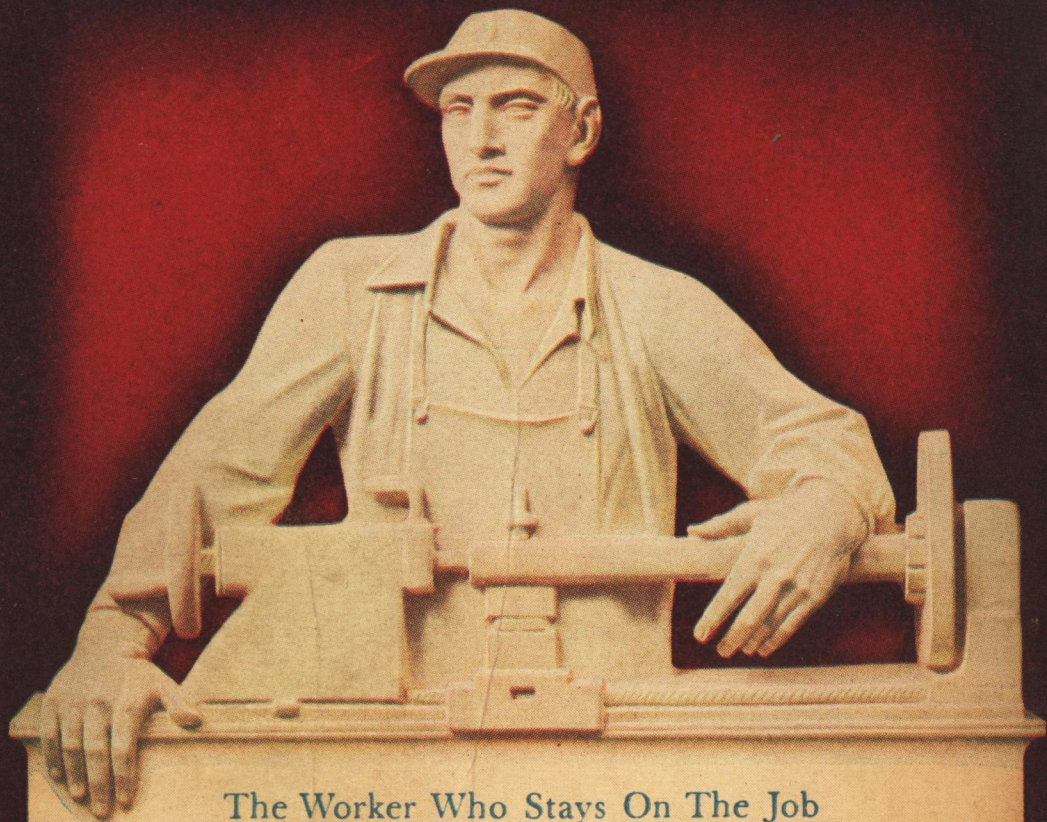
Use it up...Wear it out.

Make it do...Or do without.



A United States War message prepared by the War Advertising Council; approved by the Office of War Information; and contributed by the Magazine Publishers of America.

SALUTE TO A CLEAR-HEADED AMERICAN



The Worker Who Stays On The Job

He knows that minutes count.
Each one is precious to himself—
But precious more
To those who fight, and bleed, and die.

Minutes in which another turning
of the wheel...
Another weapon fashioned...
Another shell made ready for its task...

Can tip the balance of some far-off battle
Not yet fought...
And make the Victory certain—
Where it is only hoped for now.

He stays. Day upon day, he stays
and meets the test...
With purpose clear...and with sense
of honored duty well performed.
He is a Clear-Headed American.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

Published in the interest of the home front war effort... by the makers of Calvert



CALVERT DISTILLERS CORPORATION, NEW YORK CITY