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ZANE GREY'S WESTERN Magazine

A COMPLETE ZANE GREY NOVEL

HERITAGE of the DESERT

ALSO SHORT STORIES AND FEATURES

The girl lashed Silvermane's haunches with her whip and drove him into the gate of the corral.

The Heritage of the Desert, Chap. 7

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

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THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT

In 1908 Zane Grey took a trip to the West in company with the famous old plainsman, Colonel C. J. ("Buffalo") Jones. Grey had what he later described as a "magnificent adventure," but the resultant book, "The Last of the Plainsmen," was rejected by an editor who told him there was nothing in it to prove he could write "either narrative or fiction."

It was a temporarily stunning blow, but it did not undermine Grey's faith in himself. He immediately set about the task of writing his first Western romance, putting into it many of the wildly beautiful scenes of Grand Canyon and Painted Desert which had so impressed him during his Western trip. He called it "The Heritage of the Desert," and he had the satisfaction of seeing it accepted by the editor who had turned down "The Last of the Plainsmen" with such critical comment.

The novel tells the story of John Hare, an Easterner who comes to the desert to regain his lost health; and Mescal, a beautiful part-Indian girl. Aside from these two, there towers above the rest of the people pictured in the story the figure of August Naab, one of the most powerful characters ever created by Zane Grey's pen. Naab is an old Mormon rancher, a physical and spiritual giant who holds tenaciously to his humanitarian faith until the depredations of lawless men finally drive him to a great and righteous wrath.

Hare, succored and befriended by the old Mormon rancher, soon makes the desert way of life his own. Motivated by a deep respect and affection for August Naab, friendship for Dave and hatred for Snap—two of Naab's sons—and passionate love for Mescal, he finds himself caught up in a maelstrom of fateful events. He has to fight to save himself, to protect the old rancher, to avenge Dave Naab, and to rescue the desert girl.

Published originally in 1910, "The Heritage of the Desert" foreshadows the series of great stories which made Zane Grey so popular in succeeding years.

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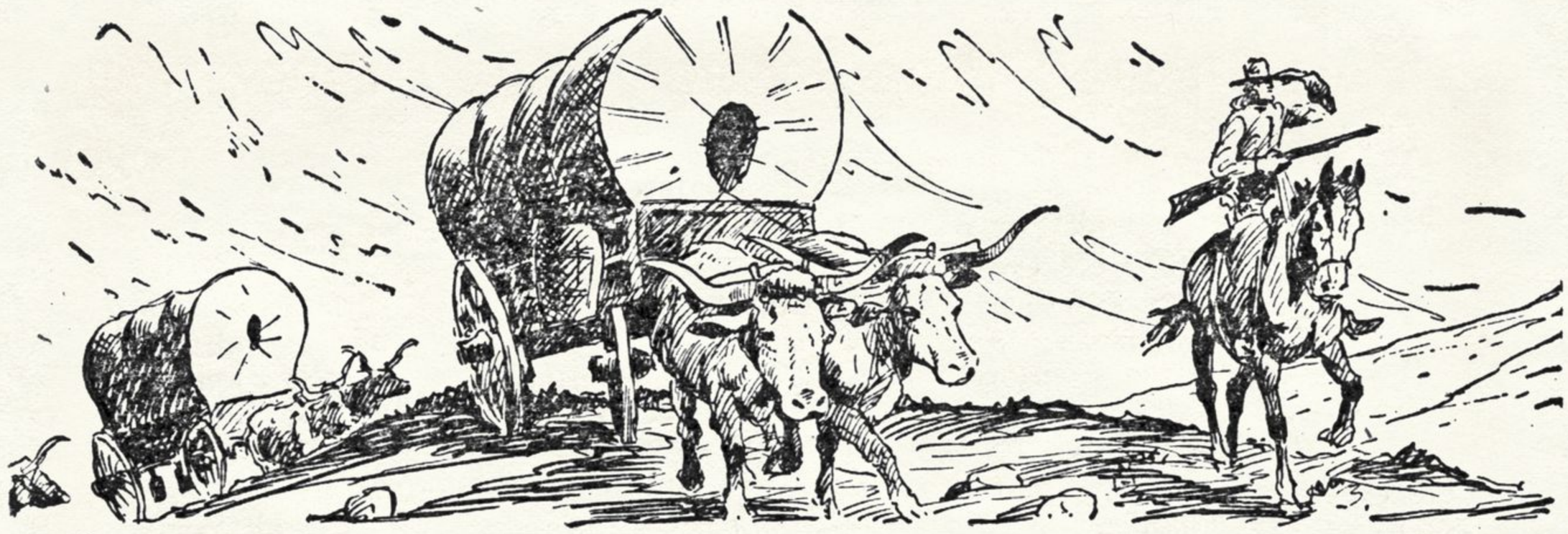

The Heritage of the Desert

By ZANE GREY

CHAPTER ONE

The Sign of the Sunset

"BUT the man's almost dead."

The words stung John Hare's fainting spirit into life. He opened his eyes. The desert still stretched before him the appalling thing that had overpowered him with its deceiving purple distance. Near by stood a somber group of men.

"Leave him here," said one, addressing a gray-bearded giant. "He's the fellow sent into southern Utah to spy out the cattle thieves. He's all but dead. Dene's outlaws are after him. Don't cross Dene."

"Martin Cole, I will not go a hair's breadth out of my way for Dene or any other man. You forget your religion. I see my duty to God."

"Yes, August Naab, I know," replied the little man bitterly. "You would cast the Scriptures in my teeth, and liken this man to one who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves. But I've suffered enough at the hands of Dene."

The formal speech, the Biblical references, recalled to the reviving Hare that he was still in the land of the Mormons.

"Martin Cole, I hold to the spirit of our fathers," replied Naab, like one reading from the Old Testament. "They came into this desert land to worship and

multiply in peace. They conquered the desert; they prospered with the years that brought settlers, cattlemen, sheepherders, all hostile to their religion and their livelihood. Nor did they ever fail to succor the sick and unfortunate. Why should we forsake the path of duty, and turn from mercy because of a cut-throat outlaw? I like not the sign of the times, but I am a Mormon; I trust in God."

"August Naab, I am a Mormon too," returned Cole, "but my hands are stained with blood. Soon yours will be if you keep your water holes and your cattle. Holderness is creeping slowly on you. He'll ignore your water rights and drive your stock. Soon Dene will steal cattle under your very eyes. Don't make them enemies."

"I can't pass by this helpless man."

Suddenly, with livid face and shaking hand, Cole pointed westward. "There! Dene and his band! See, under the red wall; see the dust, not ten miles away. See them?"

The desert, gray in the foreground, purple in the distance, sloped to the west. Far away little puffs of dust rose above the white sage, and creeping specks moved at a snail's pace.

"See them? Ah! then look, August Naab, look in the heavens above for my prophecy," cried Cole fanatically. "The red sunset —the sign of the times—blood!"

A broad bar of dense black shut out the April sky, except in the extreme west, where a strip of pale blue formed background for several clouds of striking color and shape. They alone, in all that expanse, were dyed in the desert's sunset crimson.

Then, as light surrendered to shade, the sinister color faded. One golden shaft shot up, to be blotted out by sudden darkening change, and the sun had set.

"That may be God's will," said August Naab. "So be it. Martin Cole, take your men and go."

There was a word, half oath, half prayer, and then rattle of stirrups, the creak of saddles, and clink of spurs, followed by the driving rush of fiery horses. Cole and his men disappeared in a pall of yellow dust.

A wan smile lightened John Hare's face as he spoke weakly. "I fear your—generous act—can't save me—may bring you harm. I'd rather you left me—seeing you have women in your party."

"Don't try to talk yet," said August Naab. "You're faint. Here—drink." He stooped to Hare, and held a flask to his lips. Rising, he called to his men, "Make camp, sons. We've an hour before the outlaws come up, and if they don't go round the sand dune we'll have longer."

Hare's flagging senses rallied,

and he forgot himself in wonder. While the bustle went on, unhitching of wagon-teams, hobbling and feeding of horses, unpacking of camp-supplies, Naab appeared to be lost in deep meditation or prayer. At length he turned to the campfire; he raked out red coals and placed the iron pots in position, by way of assistance to the women who were preparing the evening meal.

A cool wind blew in from the desert, rustling the sage, sifting the sand, fanning the dull coals to burning opals. Twilight failed and night fell; one by one great stars shone out, cold and bright. From the zone of blackness surrounding the camp burst the short bark, the hungry whine, the long-drawn-out wail of desert wolves.

"Supper, sons," called Naab, as he replenished the fire with an armful of greasewood.

Naab's sons had his stature, though not his bulk. They were wiry, rangy men, young, yet somehow old. The desert had multiplied their years. Hare could not have told one face from another, the bronze skin and steel eye and hard line of each were so alike. The women, one middle-aged, the others young, were of comely, serious aspect.

"Mescal," called the Mormon.

A slender girl slipped from one of the covered wagons; she was dark, supple, straight as an Indian.

August Naab dropped to his knees, and, as the members of his family bowed their heads, he extended his hands over them and over the food laid on the ground.

"Lord, we kneel in humble thanksgiving. Bless this food to our use. Strengthen us, guide us, keep us as Thou hast in the past. Bless this stranger within our gates. Help us to help him. Teach us Thy ways, O Lord—Amen."

Hare found himself unable to control a painful binding in his throat. In 48 hours he had learned to hate the Mormons unutterably; here, in the presence of this austere man, he felt that hatred wrenched from his heart, and in its place stirred something warm and living. That simple prayer recalled the home he had long since left in Connecticut. Now he was alone in the world, sick and dependent upon the kindness of these strangers.

"Mescal, wait on the stranger," said August Naab, and the girl knelt beside him, tendering meat and drink. His nerveless fingers refused to hold the cup, and she put it to his lips while he drank. Hot coffee revived him; he ate and grew stronger, and readily began to talk when the Mormon asked for his story.

"There isn't much to tell. My name is Hare. I am twenty-four. My parents are dead. I came West because the doctors said I couldn't live in the East. At first I got bet-

ter. But my money gave out and work became a necessity. I tramped from place to place, ending up ill in Salt Lake City. People were kind to me there. Someone got me a job with a big cattle company, and sent me to Marysvale. I was ill when I reached Lund. Before I even knew what my duties were—for at Lund I was to begin work—men called me a spy. A fellow named Chance threatened me. An innkeeper led me out the back way, gave me bread and water, and said: 'Take this road to Bane; it's sixteen miles. If you make it some one'll give you a lift north.' I walked all night, and all the next day. Then I wandered on till I dropped here where you found me."

"You missed the road to Bane," said Naab. "This is the trail to White Sage. Dene wasn't in Lund while you were there—else you wouldn't be here."

One of his sons whistled low, causing Naab to rise slowly, to peer into the darkness, to listen intently.

"Here, get up," he said, extending a hand to Hare. "Pretty shaky, eh? Can you walk? Give me a hold —there—Mescal, come." The slender girl obeyed. "Take his arm." Between them they led Hare to a jumble of stones on the outer edge of the circle of light.

"It wouldn't do to hide," continued Naab. "That might be fatal. You're in sight from the campfire, but indistinct. By and by the outlaws will get here, and if any of them prowl around close, you and Mescal must pretend to be sweethearts. Understand? They'll pass by Mormon lovemaking without a second look. Now, lad, courage—Mescal, it may save his life."

Naab returned to the fire, his shadow looming in gigantic proportions on the white canopy of a covered wagon. Suddenly Hare's fugitive glance descried a dark object; he watched intently as it moved and rose from behind the summit of the ridge to make a bold black figure silhouetted against the cold clearness of sky. He saw it distinctly, realized it was close, and breathed hard as the wind-swept mane and tail, the lean, wild shape and single plume resolved themselves into the unmistakable outline of an Indian mustang and rider.

"Look!" he whispered to the girl. "See, a mounted Indian, there on the ridge—there, he's gone—no, I see him again. But that's another. Look! there are more."

"Navajos," said Mescal.

"Navajos!" he echoed. "I heard of them at Lund; 'desert hawks' the men called them, worse than Piutes. Must we not alarm the men? You—aren't you afraid?"

"No."

"But they are hostile."

"Not to him." She pointed at the stalwart figure standing against the firelight.

"Ah! They must be close by. What does it mean?"

"I'm not sure. I think they are out there in the cedars, waiting."

"Waiting! For what?"

"Perhaps for a signal."

"Then they were expected?"

"I don't know. I only guess. We used to ride often to White Sage and Lund; now we go seldom, and when we do there seem to be Navajos near the camp at night, and riding the ridges by day. I believe Father Naab knows."

"Your father's risking much for me. I wish I could show my gratitude."

"I call him Father Naab, but he is not my father."

"A niece or granddaughter, then?"

"I'm no relation. Father Naab raised me in his family. My mother was a Navajo, my father a Spaniard."

"Why!" exclaimed Hare. "When you came out of the wagon I took you for an Indian girl. But the moment you spoke—you talk so well—no one would dream—"

"Mormons are well educated and teach the children they raise."

He realized suddenly that he had found pleasure in her low voice; and he regarded her closely. He had only time for a glance at her straight, clean-cut profile, when she turned startled eyes on him.

She held up a hand, slowly bent toward the wind, and whispered, "Listen."

Hare heard nothing save the barking of coyotes and the breeze in the sage. He saw, however, the men rise from round the campfire to face the north, and the women climb into the wagon and close the canvas flaps. And he prepared himself, with what fortitude he could command, for the approach of the outlaws. He waited, straining to catch a sound. Then a stronger puff of wind whipped in, bringing the rhythmic beat of flying hoofs. The sound grew into a clattering roar. A black mass hurled itself over the border of opaque circle, plunged into the light, and halted.

August Naab deliberately threw a bundle of greasewood upon the campfire. A blaze leaped up. "Who comes?" he called.

"Friends, Mormons, friends."

"Get down—friends—and come to the fire."

Three horsemen advanced to the foreground; others, a troop of eight or ten, remained in the shadow, a silent group.

"Dene," whispered Mescal.

Hare noted the clean-shaven face, the youthful, supple body, the cool, careless mien. Dene's eyes glittered as he pulled off his gauntlets and beat the sand out of

them.

"Are you the Mormon Naab?" he queried.

"August Naab, I am."

"Dry camp, eh? Where's the rest of you fellers?"

"Cole and his men were in a hurry to make White Sage tonight. They were traveling light; I've heavy wagons."

"Naab, I reckon you shore wouldn't tell a lie?"

"I have never lied."

"Heerd of a young feller thet was in Lund—pale chap—lunger?"

"I heard that he had been mistaken for a spy at Lund and had fled toward Bane."

"Hain't seen nothin' of him this side of Lund?"

"No."

"Seen any Navvies?"

"Yes."

The outlaw stared hard at him. "Naab, I'm shore comin' to visit you some day. Never been over thet range. Heerd you had fine water, fine cattle. An' say, I seen thet little Navajo girl you have, an' I wouldn't mind seein' her again."

August Naab kicked the fire into brighter blaze. "Yes, fine range," he presently replied, his gaze fixed on Dene. "Fine water, fine cattle, fine browse. I've a fine graveyard, too; thirty graves, and not one a woman's. Fine place for graves, the canyon country. You don't have to dig. There's one grave the Indians never named; it's three thousand feet deep."

"Thet must be in hell," replied Dene. He leisurely surveyed Naab's four sons, the wagons and horses, till his eye fell upon Hare and Mescal. With that he swung in his saddle as if to dismount.

"Get down, get down," returned the Mormon. The deep voice, unwelcoming, vibrant with an odd ring, would have struck a less suspicious man than Dene.

The outlaw swung his leg back over the pommel. "Two-Spot, you look 'em over," he ordered.

The third horseman dismounted and went toward the wagons.

Hare became conscious that his fear had intensified with the recognition of Two-Spot as Chance, the outlaw whom he would not soon forget. In his excitement he moved against Mescal and felt her trembling violently. "Are you afraid?" he whispered.

"Yes, of Dene."

The outlaw rummaged in one of the wagons, pulled aside the canvas flaps of the other, laughed harshly, and then with clinking spurs tramped through the camp, kicking the beds, overturning a pile of saddles, and making disorder generally, till he spied the couple sitting on the stone in the shadow.

As the outlaw lurched that way, Hare took Mescal in his arms and leaned his head against hers. He felt one of her hands lightly brush

his shoulder and rest there, trembling.

Shuffling footsteps scraped the sand, sounded nearer and nearer, slowed and paused.

"Sparkin'! Dead to the world. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

The coarse laugh gave place to moving footsteps. The rattling clink of stirrup and spur mingled with the restless stamp of horse. Chance had mounted. Dene's voice drawled out, "Good-by, Naab. I shore will see you all some day." The heavy thud of many hoofs evened into a roar that diminished as it rushed away.

Hare tried to rise, but power of movement had gone from him. He was fainting, yet his sensations were singularly acute. Mescal's hand dropped from his shoulder; her cheek, that had been cold against his, grew hot; she quivered through all her slender length. Then he was whirling in darkness; and he knew no more.

CHAPTER TWO

White Sage

THE night was as a blank to Hare; the morning like a drifting of hazy clouds before his eyes. When he awakened he lay upon a couch on the vine-covered porch of a cottage. He saw August Naab open a garden gate to admit Martin Cole. Martin was not the same man who had shown fear on the desert. His welcome was one of respectful regard for his superior.

"Elder, I heard you were safe in," he said fervently. "How's the young man?"

"He's very ill. But while there's life there's hope."

"Will the Bishop administer to him?"

"Gladly, if the young man's willing. Come, let's go in."

"Wait, August," said Cole. "Did you know your son Snap was in the village?"

"My son here!"

"He's drinking and in an ugly mood. It seems he traded horses with Jeff Larsen, and got the worst of the deal. There's pretty sure to be a fight."

"He always hated Larsen."

"Small wonder. Larsen is mean; he's as bad as we've got and that's saying a good deal. Snap has done worse things than fight with Larsen. He's doing a worse thing now, August—he's too friendly with Dene."

"I've heard—I've heard it before. But, Martin, what can I do?"

"Do? God knows. Dene is here in White Sage, free, welcome in many homes. Some of our neighbors, perhaps men we trust, are secret members of this rustler's band."

"You're right, Cole. There are

Mormons who are cattle thieves. To my eternal shame I confess it. Under cover of night they ride with Dene."

"August, Dene had no great task to win them. He rode in here with a few outlaws and now he has a strong band. We've got to face it. Someone must kill him. Yet bad as Dene is, he doesn't threaten our living as Holderness does. Dene steals a few cattle, kills a man here and there. Holderness reaches out and takes our springs. Because we've no law to stop him, he steals the blood of our life—water—God's gift to the desert! Someone must kill Holderness too!"

"Martin, this lust to kill is a fearful thing. Come in; you must pray with the Bishop."

"No, it's not prayer I need, Elder," replied Cole stubbornly. "I'm still a good Mormon. What I want is the stock I've lost, and my fields green again."

August Naab had no answer for his friend. A very old man with snow-white hair and beard came out on the porch.

"Bishop, brother Martin is railing again," said Naab, as Cole bared his head.

"Martin, my son, unbosom thyself," rejoined the Bishop.

"Black doubt and no light," said Cole despondently. "I'm of the younger generation of Mormons, and faith is harder for me. I've had trials hard to bear. These Gentiles, this rancher Holderness and this outlaw Dene, have driven my cattle, killed my sheep, piped my water off my fields. Our young men are drifting away, and the few who return come with ideas opposed to Mormonism. Our girls and boys are growing up influenced by the Gentiles among us. They intermarry, and that's a death-blow to our creed."

"Martin, cast out this poison from your heart. Return to your faith. We may suffer here and die, but our spirits will go marching on; and the City of Zion will be builded over our graves."

August Naab bent over Hare. "I would like to have the Bishop administer to you," he said.

"What's that?" asked Hare.

"A Mormon custom, 'the laying on of hands.' We know its efficacy in trouble and illness. Let him administer to you. It entails no obligation. Accept it as a prayer."

Thereupon Naab spoke a few low words to someone through the open door. Voices ceased; soft footsteps sounded without; women crossed the threshold, followed by tall young men and rosy-cheeked girls and round-eyed children. A white-haired old woman came forward with solemn dignity. She carried a silver bowl which she held for the Bishop as he stood close by Hare's couch. The Bishop put his hands into the bowl, anointing them with fragrant oil; then he placed them on the young man's

head, and offered up a brief prayer, beautiful in its simplicity and tremulous utterance.

The ceremony ended, the onlookers came forward with pleasant words on their lips, pleasant smiles on their faces. Mescal flitted by with downcast eye, with shy smile, but no word.

"Your fever is gone," said August Naab, with his hand on Hare's cheek.

"It comes and goes suddenly," replied Hare. "I feel better now, only I'm oppressed. I can't breathe freely. I want air, and I'm hungry."

"Mother Mary, the lad's hungry. Judith, Esther, where are your wits? Help your mother. Mescal, wait on him, see to his comfort."

Mescal brought a little table and a pillow, and the other girls soon followed with food and drink.

They said I fell among thieves, mused Hare, when he was once more alone. *I've fallen among saints as well.* He felt that he could never repay this August Naab. "If only I might live!" he ejaculated. How restful was this cottage garden!

Hare fell asleep. Upon returning drowsily to consciousness he caught through half-open eyes the gleam of level shafts of gold sunlight low down in the trees; then he felt himself being carried into the house to be laid upon a bed. Someone gently unbuttoned his shirt at the neck, removed his shoes, and covered him with a blanket. Before he had fully awakened he was left alone, and quiet settled over the house. A languorous sense of ease and rest lulled him to sleep again. In another moment, it seemed to him, he was awake; bright daylight streamed through the window, and a morning breeze stirred the faded curtain.

The drag in his breathing which was always a forerunner of a coughing spell warned him now; he put on coat and shoes and went outside, where his cough attacked him, had its sway, and left him.

"Good morning," sang out August Naab's cheery voice. "Sixteen hours of sleep, my lad!"

"I did sleep, didn't I? No wonder I feel well this morning."

"Go in to breakfast. Afterward I want to talk to you. This'll be a busy day for me, shoeing the horses and packing supplies. I want to start for home tomorrow."

Hare pondered over Naab's words while he ate. The suggestion in them, implying a relation to his future, made him wonder if the Mormon intended to take him to his desert home.

Naab was waiting for him on the porch, and drew him away from the cottage down the path toward the gate. "I want you to go home with me."

"You're kind—I'm only a sort of beggar. I've no strength left to work my way. I'll go—though it's

only to die."

"I haven't the gift of revelation —yet somehow I see that you won't die of this illness. You will come home with me. It's a beautiful place, my Navajo oasis. The Indians call it the Garden of Eschtah. If you can get well anywhere it'll be there."

"I'll go—but I ought not. What can I do for you? Nothing."

"No man can ever tell what he may do for another. The time may come—well, John, is it settled?"

"It's settled—I—" Hare faltered as he put his hand in Naab's. The Mormon's grip straightened his frame and braced him. "No one ever called me John. I don't know the name. Call me Jack."

"Very well, Jack, and now let's see. You'll need some things from the store. Can you come with me? It's not far."

"Surely. And now what I need most is a razor to scrape the alkali and stubble off my face."

The wide street stretched in a straight line to the base of the ascent which led up to the Pink Cliffs. A green square enclosed a gray church, a schoolhouse and public hall. Farther down the main thoroughfare were several weather-boarded and whitewashed stores. In front of the largest store were a number of mustangs all standing free, with bridles thrown over their heads and trailing on the ground. The loungers leaning against the railing and about the doors were lank brown men very like Naab's sons.

"We'll buy what you need, just as if you expected to ride the ranges for me tomorrow," said Naab. "The first thing we ask a new man is, can he ride? Next, can he shoot?"

"I could ride before I got so weak. I've never handled a revolver, but I can shoot a rifle. Never shot at anything except targets, and it seemed to come natural for me to hit them."

"Good. We'll show you some targets—lions, bears, deer, cats, wolves. There's a fine forty-four Winchester here that my friend Abe has been trying to sell. It's just the gun for you to use on wolves and coyotes. You'll need a Colt and a saddle, too.

"By the way," he went on, as they mounted the store steps, "here's the kind of money we use in this country." He handed Hare a slip of blue paper, a written check for a sum of money, signed, but without register of bank or name of firm. "We don't use real money," he added. "There's very little coin or currency in southern Utah. We use these checks, which go from man to man sometimes for six months. The roundup of a check means sheep, cattle, horses, grain, merchandise or labor."

They went into a wide door to tread a maze of narrow aisles between boxes and barrels, stacks of canned vegetables, and piles of

harness and dry goods; they entered an open space where several men leaned on a counter.

"Hello, Abe," said Naab; "seen anything of Snap?"

"Hello, August. Yes, Snap's inside. So's Holderness. Says he rode in off the range on purpose to see you." Abe designated an open doorway from which issued loud voices. Hare made out a crowd of men at a rude bar. Abe went to the door and called out, "Hey, Snap, your dad wants you. Holderness, here's August Naab."

A man staggered up the few steps leading to the store and swayed in. His long face had a hawkish cast, and it was the sage-gray of the desert. His eyes were of the same hue, cold yet burning with little fiery flecks in their depths. He appeared short of stature because of a curvature of the spine. He wore a blue flannel shirt, and blue overalls; round his lean hips was a belt holding two Colt's revolvers, their heavy, dark butts projecting outward.

"Howdy, father," he said.

"I'm packing today," returned August Naab. "We ride out tomorrow. I need your help."

"All-l right. When I get my pinto from Larsen."

"Never mind Larsen. If he got the better of you let the matter drop."

"Jeff got my pinto for a mustang with three legs. If I hadn't been drunk I'd never have traded. So I'm looking for Jeff." He bit out the last words with a peculiar snap of his long teeth.

August Naab looked at him with gloomy eyes and stern shut mouth. Hare realized that this son was a thorn in his side, a black sheep.

"Say, father, is that the spy you found on the trail?"

"This is John Hare, the young man I found. But he's not a spy."

"You can't make anyone believe that. He's down as a spy. Dene's spy! His name's gone over the ranges as a counter of unbranded stock. Dene has named him and Dene has marked him. Don't take him home, unless you want another grave for your cemetery. Ha! Ha!" Snap Naab swayed to the door and stepped down, all the time with his face over his shoulder, his baleful glance on Hare.

August engaged the storekeeper in conversation, introducing Hare and explaining their wants. They inspected the various needs of a range rider, selecting, in the end, not the few suggested by Hare, but the many chosen by Naab. The last purchase was the rifle Naab had talked about. It was a beautiful weapon, finely polished and carved.

"Never had a chance to sell it," said Abe. "Too long and heavy for the riders. I'll let it go cheap, half price, and the cartridges also, two thousand."

"Taken," replied Naab quickly.

"August, you must be going to shoot some?" queried Abe. "Something bigger than rabbits and coyotes. It's about time—even if you are an Elder. We Mormons must—" he broke off, continuing in a low tone, "Here's Holderness now."

A newcomer stooped to get in the door. He outtopped even Naab in height, and was a superb blond-bearded man, striding with the spring of a mountaineer. "Good-day to you, Naab," he said. "Is this the young fellow you picked up?"

"Yes. Jack Hare," rejoined Naab.

"Well, Hare, I'm Holderness. You'll recall my name. You were sent to Lund by men interested in my ranges. I expected to see you in Lund, but couldn't get over."

Hare met the proffered hand with his own, and was impressed by an indefinable subtlety, a nameless distrust, as colorless as the clear penetrating amber lightness of the eyes that bent upon him.

"Holderness, will you right the story about Hare?" inquired Naab.

"You mean about his being a spy? Well, Naab, the truth is that was his job. I advised against sending a man down here for that sort of work. It won't do. These Mormons will steal each other's cattle, and they've got to get rid of them; so they won't have a man taking account of stock, brands, and all that. If the Mormons would stand for it the rustlers wouldn't. I'll take Hare out to the ranch and give him work, if he wants. But he'd do best to leave Utah."

"Thank you, no," replied Hare.

"He's going with me," said August Naab.

Holderness accepted this with an almost imperceptible nod, and he swept Hare with eyes that searched and probed. Then he turned back.

Hare, feeling that Holderness wished to talk with Naab, walked to the counter and began sorting his purchases, but he could not help hearing what was said.

"Lungs bad?" queried Holderness.

"One of them," replied Naab.

"He's all in. Better send him out of the country. This isn't good judgment, Naab, to take him with you. Even your friends don't like it, and it means trouble for you."

"We've settled it," said Naab coldly.

"Well, remember, I've warned you. I've tried to be friendly with you, Naab, but you won't have it. Anyway, I've wanted to see you lately to find out how we stand on several things—to begin with, there's Mescal."

"You asked me several times for Mescal, and I said no."

"But I never said I'd marry her. Now I want her, and I will marry her."

"No."

"Why not?" demanded Holderness. "Oh, well, I can't take that as an insult. I know there's not enough money in Utah to get a girl away from a Mormon. About the offer for the water rights—I'll give you ten thousand dollars for the rights to Seeping Springs and Silver Cup."

"Ten thousand!" ejaculated Naab. "Holderness, I wouldn't take a hundred thousand!"

"You refuse? All right. I think I've made you a fair proposition," said Holderness, in a smooth, quick tone. "The land is owned by the Government, and though your ranges are across the Arizona line they really figure as Utah land. My company's spending big money, and the Government won't let you have a monopoly."

"Holderness, this is a desert. No men save Mormons could ever have made it habitable. The Government scarcely knows of its existence. It'll be fifty years before there's any law here. Listen. This desert belongs to the Mormons. No Mormon would refuse you or your horse a drink, or even a reasonable supply for your stock. But you can't come in here and take our water for your own use, to supplant us, to parch our stock."

"Bah! Once more I make you the offer."

Naab scorned to reply.

Holderness whirled on his heel, jostling into Hare. "Get out of my way," said the rancher, and his open hand sent Hare reeling against the counter.

"Jack," said Naab, breathing hard, "Holderness showed his real self today. Let us go."

On the return to the Bishop's cottage Naab did not speak once. Hare dropped wearily into the chair on the porch; and presently fell into a doze, from which he awakened with a start. Naab's sons, with Martin Cole and several other men, were standing in the yard. Naab himself was gently crowding the women into the house. When he got them all inside he closed the door and turned to Cole.

"Was it a fair fight?"

"Yes, an even break. Snap was quicker. Larsen's gun went off as he fell. That trick you taught Snap saved his life again."

"Where's Snap now?"

"Gone after his pinto. He was sober. Said he'd pack at once. Larsen's friends are ugly. Snap said to tell you to hurry out of the village with young Hare, if you want to take him at all. Dene has ridden in; he swears you won't take Hare away."

"We're all packed and ready to hitch up," returned Naab.

"Father!" Dave Naab spoke sharply from where he stood high on a grassy bank. "Here's Dene now, riding up with Culver, and some man I don't know."

A clatter of hoofs and rattling

"Taken," replied Naab quickly.

"August, you must be going to shoot some?" queried Abe. "Something bigger than rabbits and coyotes. It's about time—even if you are an Elder. We Mormons must—" he broke off, continuing in a low tone, "Here's Holderness now."

A newcomer stooped to get in the door. He outtopped even Naab in height, and was a superb blond-bearded man, striding with the spring of a mountaineer. "Good-day to you, Naab," he said. "Is this the young fellow you picked up?"

"Yes. Jack Hare," rejoined Naab.

"Well, Hare, I'm Holderness. You'll recall my name. You were sent to Lund by men interested in my ranges. I expected to see you in Lund, but couldn't get over."

Hare met the proffered hand with his own, and was impressed by an indefinable subtlety, a nameless distrust, as colorless as the clear penetrating amber lightness of the eyes that bent upon him.

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A clatter of hoofs and rattling

of gravel preceded the appearance of a black horse in the garden path. His rider bent low to dodge the vines of the arbor, and reined in before the porch to slip out of the saddle with the agility of an Indian. It was Dene, dark, smiling, nonchalant.

"What do you seek in the house of a Bishop?" challenged August Naab.

"I shore want to see the young feller you lied to me about," returned Dene, his smile slowly fading.

"No speech could be a lie to an outlaw."

"I want him, you Mormon preacher!"

"You can't have him."

"I'll shore get him."

In one great stride Naab confronted and towered over Dene.

The rustler's right hand quivered and shot downward. Naab's act was even quicker. A Colt gleamed and whirled to the grass, and the outlaw cried out as his arm cracked in the Mormon's grasp.

Dave Naab leaped off the bank directly in front of Dene's approaching companions, and faced them, alert and silent, his hand on his hip.

August Naab swung the outlaw against the porch post and held him there with brawny arm. "Do you think we fear you and your gunsharp tricks? Look! See this!" He released Dene and stepped back with his hand before him. Suddenly it moved, quicker than sight, and a Colt revolver lay in his outstretched palm. He dropped it back into the holster. "Let that teach you never to draw on me again." He doubled his huge fist and shoved it before Dene's eyes. "One blow would crack your skull like an eggshell. Leave me and mine alone from this day. Now go!"

He pushed Dene down the path into the arms of his companions.

CHAPTER THREE

The Trail of the Red Wall

AFTER the departure of Dene and his comrades Naab decided to leave White Sage at nightfall. When twilight closed in Naab had his teams ready and the women shut in the canvas-covered wagons. Hare was to ride in an open wagon, one that Naab had left at White Sage to be loaded with grain. When it grew so dark that objects were scarcely discernible a man vaulted the cottage fence.

"Dave, where are the boys?"

"Not so loud! The boys are coming," replied Dave in a whisper. "Dene is wild, swears he'll kill us all. But Chance and the rest of the gang won't be in till late. We've time to reach the Co-

conina Trail, if we hustle."

"Any news of Snap?"

"He rode out before sundown."

Three more forms emerged from the gloom.

"All right, boys. Go ahead, Dave, you lead."

Presently the leaders turned into a road where the iron hoofs and wheels cracked and crunched the stones.

Hare thought he saw something in the deep shade of a line of poplar trees; he peered closer, and made out a motionless horse and rider, just a shade blacker than the deepest gloom. The next instant they vanished, and the rapid clatter of hoofs down the road told Hare his eyes had not deceived him.

One of Naab's sons came trotting back. "Think that was Larsen's pal. He was laying in wait for Snap."

"I thought he was a scout for Dene. Hurry along and keep the gray team going lively."

Hare watched the glimmering lights of the village vanish one by one, like Jack-o'-lanterns. The horses kept a steady even trot on into the huge windy hall of the desert night. Fleecy clouds veiled the stars, yet transmitted a wan glow. A chill crept over Hare. As he crawled under the blankets Naab had spread for him his hand came into contact with a polished metal surface cold as ice. It was his rifle.

Hare soon yielded to the warmth of the blankets; a drowsiness that he endeavored in vain to throw off smothered his thoughts. Some hours later the whip of the cold wind across his face recalled the actuality of the night ride. When Naab stopped the team and, climbing down, walked back some rods to listen, Hare listened, too, but the movements of the horses and the rattle of their harness were all the sounds he could hear.

Naab returned to his seat; the team started, now no longer in a trot; they were climbing. After that Hare fell into a slumber in which he could hear the slow grating whir of wheels, and when it ceased he awoke to raise himself and turn his ear to the back trail. A rose-red horizon lay far below and to the eastward; the intervening descent was like a rolling sea with league-long swells.

"Glad you slept some," was Naab's greeting. "No sign of Dene yet. If we can get over the divide we're safe. That's Coconina there, Fire Mountain in Navajo meaning. It's a plateau low and narrow at this end, but it runs far to the east and rises nine thousand feet. It forms a hundred miles of the north rim of the Grand Canyon. We're across the Arizona line now."

Hare followed the sweep of the ridge that rose to the eastward, but to his inexperienced eyes its

appearance carried no sense of its noble proportions.

"Don't form any ideas of distance and size yet a while," said Naab, reading Hare's expression. "They'd only have to be made over as soon as you learn what light and air are in this country."

The sun rose and warmed the chill air. Hare began to notice the increased height and abundance of the sagebrush, which was darker in color. At length Hare, tired of looking upward at the creeping white wagons, closed his eyes.

Some unusual noise roused Hare out of his lethargy. The wagon was at a standstill. Naab stood on the seat with outstretched arm. George and Dave were close by their mustangs, and Snap Naab, mounted on a pinto, reined him under August's arm, and faced the valley below.

"Maybe you'll make them out," said August. "I can't and I've watched those dust-clouds for hours. George can't decide, either."

Hare, looking at Snap, was attracted by the eyes from which his fathers and brothers expected so much. Suddenly the remarkable vibration of his pupils ceased, and his glance grew fixed, steely, certain.

"That's a bunch of wild mustangs," he said.

The sons wheeled their mustangs and rode to the fore; August Naab reseated himself and took up the reins; the ascent proceeded. But it proceeded leisurely, with more frequent rests. At the end of an hour the horses toiled over the last rise to the summit and entered a level forest of cedars; in another hour they were descending gradually.

"Here we are at the tanks," said Naab.

Hare saw that they had come up with the other wagons. George Naab was leading a team down a rocky declivity to a pool of yellow water. The other boys were unharnessing and unsaddling.

"About three," said Naab, looking at the sun. "We're in good time. Jack, get out and stretch yourself. We camp here. There's the Coconina Trail where the Navajo go in after deer."

It was not a pretty spot, this little rock-strewn glade where the white hard trail forked with the road. The yellow water with its green scum made Hare sick. The horses drank with loud gulps. Naab and his sons drank of it.

It came home to Hare that the tension of the past night and morning had relaxed. He sat with his back to a cedar and watched the kindling of fires, the deft manipulating of biscuit dough in a basin, and the steaming of pots. The generous meal was spread on a canvas cloth, around which men and women sat cross-legged, after the fashion of Indians.

All had finished eating, except

Snap and Dave Naab, when one of the mustangs neighed shrilly. Hare would not have noticed it but for looks exchanged among the men. The glances were explained a few minutes later when a pattering of hoofs came from the cedar forest, and a stream of mounted Indians poured into the glade.

The ugly glade became a place of color and action. The Navajos rode wiry, wild-looking mustangs and drove ponies and burros carrying packs, most of which consisted of deer hides. Each Indian dismounted, and unstrapping the blanket which had served as a saddle headed his mustang for the water hole and gave him a slap. Then the hides and packs were slipped from the pack train and soon every cedar tree circling the glade and every branch served as a peg for deer meat. Some of it was in the haunch, the bulk in dark dried strips. A group of fires, sending up curling columns of blue smoke, and surrounded by a circle of lean, half-naked, bronze-skinned Indians, cooking and eating, completed a picture which afforded Hare the satisfying fulfillment of boyish dreams.

"Jack," said August Naab, "our friends the Navajo chiefs, Scarbreast and Eschtah, are coming to visit us. Take no notice of them at first. They've great dignity, and if you entered their hogans they'd sit for some moments before appearing to see you. Scarbreast is a war chief. Eschtah is the wise old chief of all the Navajos on the Painted Desert. It may interest you to know he is Mescal's grandfather. Some day I'll tell you the story."

Hare tried very hard to appear unconscious when two tall Indians stalked into the circle of Mormons; he set his eyes on the white heart of the campfire and waited. For several minutes no one spoke or even moved. The Indians remained standing for a time, then seated themselves. Presently August Naab greeted them in the Navajo language. Another interval of silence followed before they began to talk.

"Jack, come round here," said Naab at length. "I've been telling them about you. These Indians do not like the whites, except my own family. I hope you'll make friends with them."

"Howdo?" said the chief whom Naab had called Eschtah, a stately, keen-eyed warrior, despite his age. The next Navajo greeted him with a guttural word.

"Shake," finally said Eschtah, offering his hand.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Scarbreast, extending a silver-braceleted arm.

This sign of friendship pleased Naab. In his ensuing speech, he lapsed often into English, saying "weak—no strong" when he placed his hand on Hare's legs, and "bad" when he touched the young man's

chest, concluding with the words "sick—sick."

Scarbreast regarded Hare with great earnestness, and when Naab had finished he said: "Chineago—ping!" and rubbed his hand over his stomach.

"He says you need meat—lots of deer meat," translated Naab.

"Sick," repeated Eschtah, whose English was intelligible. He appeared to be casting about in his mind for additional words to express his knowledge of the white man's tongue, and, failing, continued in Navajo: "Tohodena—moocha—malocha."

Hare was nonplussed at the roar of laughter from the Mormons. August shook like a mountain in an earthquake.

"Eschtah says, 'you hurry, get many squaws—many wives.'"

Other Indians, russet-skinned warriors, with black hair held close by bands round their foreheads, joined the circle, and sitting before the fire clasped their knees and talked. Hare listened awhile, and then, being fatigued, he sought the cedar tree where he had left his blankets.

Sleep did not come so readily; he was not very well this night; the flush of fever was on his cheek, and the heat of feverish blood burned his body. He raised himself and, resolutely seeking for distraction, stared at the campfire. Some time must have passed, for only three persons were in sight. Naab's broad back was bowed and his head nodded. Across the fire in its ruddy flicker sat Eschtah beside a slight, dark figure. At second glance Hare recognized Mescal. Surprise claimed him, not more for her presence there than for the white band binding her smooth black tresses. She had not worn such an ornament before. That slender band lent her the one touch which made her a Navajo. Was it worn in respect to her aged grandfather? He fell asleep with the picture in his mind of Eschtah and Mescal, sitting in the glow of the fire, and of August Naab, nodding silently.

"Jack, Jack, wake up." August Naab bent over him, shaking him gently. "Not so well this morning, eh? Here's a cup of coffee. We're all packed and starting. Drink now, and climb aboard. We expect to make Seeping Springs tonight."

Hare rose presently and, laboring into the wagon, lay down on the sacks. He had one of his blind, sickening headaches. The familiar lumbering of wheels began. Despite jar and jolt he dozed at times. After a while the rapid descent of the wagon changed to a roll, without the irritating rattle. By and by there came a halt, the din of stamping horses and sharp commands, the bustle and confusion of camp. Naab spoke kindly to him, but he refused any food, lay

still and went to sleep.

Daylight brought him the relief of a clear head and cooled blood. The camp had been pitched close under the red wall. A lichen-covered cliff, wet with dripping water, overhung a round pool. A ditch led the water down the ridge to a pond. Cattle stood up to their knees, drinking; others lay on the yellow clay, which was packed as hard as stone; still others were climbing the ridge and passing down on both sides.

"You look as if you enjoyed that water," remarked Naab, when Hare presented himself at the fire. "Well, it's good, only a little salty. Seeping Springs this is, and it's mine. This ridge we call The Saddle; you see it dips between wall and mountain and separates two valleys. This valley we go through today is where my cattle range. At the other end is Silver Cup Spring, also mine. Keep your eyes open now, my lad."

How different was the beginning of this day! The sky was as blue as the sea; the valley snuggled deep in the embrace of wall and mountain. Hare took a place on the seat beside Naab and faced the descent. The line of Navajos, a graceful straggling curve of color on the trail, led the way for the white-domed wagons.

As far as Hare could see red and white and black cattle speckled the valley.

"If not overstocked, this range is the best in Utah," said Naab. "I say Utah, but it's really Arizona. The Grand Canyon seems to us Mormons to mark the line. There's enough browse here to feed a hundred thousand cattle. But water's the thing. In some seasons the springs go almost dry, though Silver Cup holds her own well enough for my cattle."

"What's that?" Hare asked, noting a rolling cloud of dust with black bobbing borders.

"Wild mustangs," replied Naab. "There are perhaps five thousand on the mountain, and they are getting to be a nuisance. They're almost as bad as sheep on the browse. They are wilder than any naturally wild animal that ever ran on four legs. Wait till you get a look at Silvermane or Whitefoot."

"What are they?"

"Wild stallions. Silvermane is an iron gray, with a silver mane, the most beautiful horse I ever saw. Whitefoot's an old black shaggy demon, with one white foot. They fight my horses and lead off the mares. I had a chance to shoot Silvermane on the way over this trip, but he looked so splendid that I just laid down my rifle. Why—here! Jack! quick, get out your rifle—coyotes!"

Naab pulled on the reins, and pointed to one side. Hare reached back for the rifle. Naab whistled, stopping the coyotes; then Hare

shot. The ball cut a wisp of dust above and beyond them. They loped away into the sage.

"How that rifle spangs!" exclaimed Naab. "It's good to hear it. Jack, you shot high. That's the trouble with men who have never shot at game."

The nearer Naab got to his home the more genial he became.

The sun was in the west when they began to climb a ridge. A short ascent, and a long turn to the right brought them under a bold spur of the mountain which shut out the northwest. Camp had been pitched in a grove of trees of a species new to Hare. From under a boulder gushed the sparkling spring, a grateful sight and sound to desert travelers. In a niche of the rock hung a silver cup.

"Jack, no man knows how old this cup is, or anything about it. We named the spring after it—Silver Cup. The strange thing is that the cup has never been lost nor stolen. But—could any desert man, or outlaw or Indian, take it away, after drinking here?"

The cup was nicked and battered, bright on the sides, moss-green on the bottom. When Hare drank from it he understood.

That evening there was rude merriment around the campfire. Snap Naab buzzed on his jews'-harp and sang. He stirred some of the younger braves to dancing, and they stamped and swung their arms, singing, "hoya-heeya-how-ya," as they moved in and out of the firelight.

Hare would have stayed up as late as any of them, but August's saying to him, "Get to bed: tomorrow will be bad!" sent him off to his blankets, where he was soon fast asleep. Morning found him well, hungry, eager to know what the day would bring.

They rode out of the gray pocket in the ridge and began to climb. There was nothing to see; frequently it seemed that they were soon to reach the summit, but still it rose above them. Hare went back to his comfortable place on the sacks.

"Now, Jack," said August.

Hare gasped. He saw a red world. His eyes seemed bathed in blood. Red scaly ground, bare of vegetation, sloped down, down, far down to a vast irregular rent in the earth, which zigzagged through the plain beneath. To the right it bent its crooked way under the brow of a black-timbered plateau; to the left it straightened its angles to find a V-shaped vent in the wall, now uplifted to a mountain range. Beyond this earth-riven line lay something vast and illimitable, a far reaching vision of white wastes, of purple plains, of low mesas lost in distance. It was the shimmering dust-veiled desert.

"Here we come to the real thing," explained Naab. "This is

Windy Slope; that black line is the Grand Canyon of Arizona; on the other side is the Painted Desert where the Navajos live; Coconina Mountain shows his flat head there to the right, and the wall on our left rises to the Vermillion Cliffs. Now, look while you can, for presently you'll not be able to see."

"Why?"

"Wind, sand, dust, gravel, pebbles—watch out for your eyes!"

Naab had not ceased speaking when Hare saw that the train of Indians trailing down the slope was enveloped in red clouds. Then the white wagons disappeared. Soon he was struck in the back by a gust which justified Naab's warning.

The afternoon grew apace; the sun glistened on the white patches of Coconina Mountain; it set; and the wind died.

"Five miles of red sand," said Naab. "Here's what kills the horses. Getup."

There was no trail. All before was red sand, hollows, slopes, levels, dunes, in which the horses sank above their fetlocks. The wheels ploughed deep, and little red streams trailed down from the tires. Twilight came with the horses still toiling.

"There! Thankful I am when we get off that strip! But, Jack, that trailless waste prevents a night raid on my home. Even the Navajos shun it after dark. We'll be home soon. There's my sign. See? Night or day we call it the Blue Star."

High in the black cliff a star-shaped, wind-worn hole let the blue sky through. In the pitchy blackness under the shelving cliff they picked their way cautiously, and turned a corner. Lights twinkled in Hare's sight, a fresh breeze, coming from water, dampened his cheek, and a hollow rumble, a long roll as of distant thunder, filled his ears.

"What's that?" he asked.

"That, my lad, is what I always love to hear. It means I'm home. It's the roar of the Colorado as she takes her first plunge into the Canyon."

Chapter Four

The Oasis

AUGUST NAAB'S oasis was an oval valley, level as a floor, green with leaf and white with blossom, enclosed by a circle of colossal cliffs of vivid vermilion hue. At its western curve the Colorado River split the red walls from north to south. When the wind was west a sullen roar, remote as of some far off driving mill, filled the valley; when it was east a dreamy hollow hum, a somnolent song, murmured through the cottonwoods; when no wind stirred,

silence reigned, compressed, strange, and breathless. Safe from the storms of the elements as well as of the world was this Garden of Eschtah.

Naab had put Hare to bed on the unrooofed porch of a log house, but routed him out early, and when Hare lifted the blankets a shower of cotton-blossoms drifted away like snow. A grove of gray-barked trees spread green canopy overhead, and through the intricate web shone crimson walls, soaring up and up to shut out all but a blue lake of sky.

"I want you to see the Navajos cross the river," said Naab.

Hare accompanied him out through the grove to a road that flanked the first rise of the red wall; they followed this for half a mile, and turning a corner came into an unobstructed view. The river was red and swift; it slid onward like an enormous slippery snake; its constricted head raised a crest of leaping waves, and disappeared in a dark chasm, whence came a bellow and boom.

"That opening where she jumps off is the head of the Grand Canyon," said Naab. "It's five hundred feet deep there, and thirty miles below it's five thousand. Oh, once in, she tears in a hurry! Come, we turn up the bank here."

On a sandy strip of bank the Navajos had halted. This was as far as they could go, for above the wall jutted out into the river.

"The Navajos go in here, and swim their mustangs across to that sand bar," explained Naab. "The current helps when she's high, and there's a three-foot raise on now."

The mustangs had to be driven into the water. Scarbreast led, and his mustang, after many kicks and reluctant steps, went over his depth, wetting the stalwart chief to the waist. Bare-legged Indians waded in and urged their pack ponies. Shouts, shrill cries, blows mingled with snorts and splashes.

Dave and George Naab in flat boats rowed slowly on the downstream side of the Indians. Presently all the mustangs and ponies were in, the processsion widening out in a triangle from Scarbreast, the leader. The pack ponies appeared to swim better than the mounted mustangs, or else the packs of deer pelts made them more buoyant. When one-third way across the head of the swimming train met the current, and the line of progress broke. Mustang after mustang swept down with a rapidity which showed the power of the current. Yet they swam steadily with flanks shining, tails sometimes afloat, sometimes under, noses up, and riders holding weapons aloft. But the pack ponies labored when the current struck them, and whirling about, they held back the Indians who were leading them, and blocked those behind. The orderly procession of the start became a bro-

ken line. Here and there a Navajo slipped into the water and swam, leading his mustang; others pulled on pack ponies and beat their mounts; strong-swimming mustangs forged ahead; weak ones hung back, and all obeyed the downward will of the current.

So the crossing of the Navajos proceeded, never an instant free from danger in that churning current. The mustangs and ponies floundered somewhat on the sand bar, and then parted the willows and appeared on a trail skirting the red wall. Dave Naab moored his boat on that side of the river, and returned with George.

"We'll look over my farm," said August, as they retraced their steps. He led Hare through fields of alfalfa, in all stages of growth, explaining that it yielded six crops a year. Into one ten-acre lot pigs and cows had been turned to feed at will. Everywhere the ground was soggy; little streams of water trickled down ditches. Next to the fields was an orchard.

"I can raise any kind of fruit in such abundance that it can't be used. My garden is prodigal. But we get little benefit, except for our own use, for we cannot transport things across the desert."

The water which was the prime factor in all this richness came from a small stream which Naab, by making a dam and tunnelling a corner of cliff, had diverted from its natural course into his oasis.

Between the fence and the red wall there was a wide bare plain which stretched to the house. At its farthest end was a green enclosure, which Hare recognized as the cemetery mentioned by Snap. Hare counted 30 graves.

"I've the reputation of doctoring the women, and letting the men die," said Naab, with a smile. "I hardly think it's fair. But the fact is no women are buried here. Some graves are of men I fished out of the river; others of those who drifted here, and who were killed or died keeping their secrets. Five sons of mine, not one of whom died a natural death, found graves here—God rest them! Here's the grave of Mescal's father, a Spaniard. He was an adventurer. I helped him over in Nevada when he was ill; he came here with me, got well, and lived nine years, and he died without speaking one word of himself or telling his name."

Three huge corrals filled a wide curved space in the wall. Snap Naab's cream pinto, a bay, and a giant horse of mottled white attracted Hare most.

"Our best stock is out on the range," said Naab. "The white is Charger, my saddle horse. He's a weight carrier and he can run some. You're fond of a horse—I can see that."

The cottonwood grove, at the western curve of the oasis, shaded

the five log huts where August's grown sons lived with their wives, and his own cabin, which was of considerable dimensions. It had a covered porch on one side, an open one on the other, a shingle roof, and was a roomy and comfortable habitation.

Naab was pointing out the schoolhouse when he was interrupted by childish laughter, shrieks of glee, and the rush of little feet.

"It's recess time," he said.

A frantic crowd of tousled-headed little ones were running from the log schoolhouse to form a circle under the trees. There were fourteen of them, from four years of age up to ten or twelve.

This recess time completed Hare's introduction to the Naabs. There were Mother Mary, and Judith and Esther, whom he knew, and Mother Ruth and her two daughters, very like their sisters. Mother Ruth, August's second wife, was younger than Mother Mary, more comely of face, and more sad and serious of expression. The wives of the five sons, except Snap Naab's frail bride, were stalwart women.

"Now, Jack, things are moving all right," said August. "For the present you must eat and rest. Walk some, but don't tire yourself. Anyway, make yourself at home."

Hare found eating and resting to be matters of profound enjoyment. Before he had fallen in with these good people it had been a year since he had sat down to a full meal; longer still since he had eaten wholesome food.

For several days Hare was remarkably well, for an invalid. He won golden praise from August at rifle practice, and he began to take lessons in the quick drawing and rapid firing of a Colt revolver. "My lad," said August, "it doesn't follow because I'm a Christian that I don't know how to handle a gun. Besides, I like to shoot."

In these few days Hare learned what conquering the desert made of a man. August Naab was close to threescore years; his chest was wide as a door, his arm like the branch of an oak. He was a blacksmith, a mechanic, a carpenter, a cooper, a potter. At his forge and in his shop, everywhere were crude tools, wagons, farming implements, sets of buckskin harness, odds and ends of nameless things, eloquent proof of the fact that necessity is the mother of invention. He was a mason; the levee that buffeted back the rage of the Colorado in flood, the wall that turned the creek, the irrigation tunnel, the zigzag trail cut on the face of the cliff—all these attested his eye for line, his judgment of distance, his strength in toil. He was a farmer, a cattleman, a grafter of fruit trees, a breeder of horses, a herder of sheep, a

preacher, a physician.

Best and strangest of all in this man was the instinct and the heart to heal. "I don't combat the doctrine of the Mormon church," he said, "but I administer a little medicine with my healing. I learned that from the Navajos." The children ran to him with bruised heads, and cut fingers, and stubbed toes; and his blacksmith's hands were as gentle as a woman's. Anything hurt or helpless had in August Naab a friend.

As the days passed the children grew less shy and came readily to Hare. They were the most wholesome children he had ever known. He told them stories, and after school hours they would race to him and climb on his bed and beg for more.

He exhausted his supply of fairy stories and animal stories; and had begun to tell about the places and cities which he had visited when the eager-eyed children were peremptorily called within by Mother Mary.

Other developments surprised Hare. The house of this good Mormon was divided against itself. Precedence was given to the first and elder wife—Mother Mary; Mother Ruth's life was not without pain. The men were out on the ranges all day, usually two or more of them for several days at a time, and this left the women alone. One daughter taught the school, the other daughters did all the chores about the house, from feeding the stock to chopping wood. The work was hard, and the girls would rather have been in White Sage or Lund. They disliked Mescal, and said things inspired by jealousy.

It struck him on hearing this gossip that he had missed Mescal. He asked little Billy about her.

"Mescal's with the sheep," piped Billy.

One day upon his return to the house he saw Snap's cream pinto in the yard, and Dave's mustang cropping the grass near by. Hare walked down the avenue of cottonwoods and was about to turn the corner of the old forge when he stopped short.

"Now mind you, I'll take a bead on this white-faced spy if you send him up there." It was Snap Naab's voice, and his speech concluded with the click of teeth characteristic of him in anger.

"Stand there!" August Naab exclaimed in wrath. "Listen. You have been drinking again or you wouldn't talk of killing a man. I warned you. I won't do this thing you ask of me till I have your promise. Why won't you leave the bottle alone?"

"I'll promise," came the sullen reply.

"Very well. Then pack and go across to Bitter Seeps."

"That job'll take all summer," growled Snap.

"So much the better. When you

come home I'll keep my promise."

Hare went to the orchard, but his stay of an hour availed nothing, for on his return, after threading the maze of cottonwoods, he came face to face with the man he wanted to avoid.

Snap Naab, at the moment of meeting, had a black bottle tipped high above his lips. With a curse he threw the bottle at Hare, missing him narrowly. "If you tell father you saw me drinking I'll kill you!" he hissed, and, rattling his Colt in its holster, he walked away.

Hare walked back to his bed, where he lay for a long time with his whole inner being in a state of strife. It gradually wore off as he strove for calm. Then his attention was diverted by a clatter of ringing hoofs on the road; a mustang and a cloud of dust were approaching.

The mustang turned in the gate, slid to a stop, and stood quivering, tossing its head, black as coal, with freedom and fire in every line. Mescal leaped off lightly.

A gray form flashed in at the gate, fell at her feet, and rose to leap about her. It was a splendid dog, huge in frame, almost white, wild as the mustang.

She wore fringed and beaded buckskin. "I've come for you," she said.

"For me?"

"Down, Wolf!" she cried to the leaping dog. "Yes. Didn't you know? Father Naab says you're to help me tend the sheep."

He looked up at her, at the black sweep of her hair under the white band, at her eyes, like jet; and suddenly realized that he liked to look at her, that she was beautiful.

Chapter Five

Black Sage and Juniper

AUGUST NAAB appeared on the path leading from his fields.

"Mescal, here you are," he greeted the girl. "How about the sheep?"

"Piute's driving them down to the lower range. There are a thousand coyotes hanging about the flock."

"That's bad," rejoined August. "Jack, there's evidently some real shooting in store for you. We'll pack today and get an early start tomorrow. I'll put you on Noddle; he's slow, but the easiest climber I ever owned. He's like riding—what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing," said Hare, flushing.

"Lad, I know of few circumstances that justify a lie. You've met Snap."

Hare kept silent.

"Drink makes my son unnat-

ural," said Naab. He breathed heavily as one in conflict with wrath. "We'll not wait till tomorrow to go up on the plateau; we'll go at once."

Then quick surprise awakened for Hare in the meaning in Mescal's eyes; it left him with a glow of an emotion half pleasure, half pain.

"Mescal," went on August, "go into the house, and keep out of Snap's way. Jack, watch me pack. You need to learn these things."

Mescal came at his call and, mounting Black Bolly, rode out toward the cliff wall, with Wolf trotting before her. Hare bestrode Noddle. August, waving good-by to his womenfolk, started the train of burros after Mescal.

How they would be able to climb the face of that steep cliff puzzled Hare. The yard-wide trail curved upward in cork-screw fashion round a projecting corner of cliff. The stone was a soft red shale and the trail had been cut in it at a steep angle. It was so steep that the burros appeared to be climbing straight up. August walked in the rear.

The first thing that struck Hare was the way the burros in front of him stopped at the curves in the trail, and turned in a space so small that their four feet were close together; yet as they swung their packs they scarcely scraped the wall. At every turn they were higher than he was, going in the opposite direction, yet he could reach out and touch them. He glanced up to see Mescal right above him, leaning forward with her brown hands clasping the pommel. Then he looked out and down; already the green cluster of cottonwoods lay far below. The trail changed to a zigzag along a seamed and cracked buttress where ledges leaned outward waiting to fall. Then a steeper incline, where the burros crept upward warily, led to a level ledge heading to the left.

Mescal halted on a promontory. She, with her windblown hair, the gleam of white band about her head, and a dash of red along the fringed leggings, gave inexpressible life and beauty to that wild, jagged point of rock, sharp against the glaring sky.

"This is Lookout Point," said Naab. "I keep an Indian here all the time during daylight. He's a peon, a Navajo slave. He can't talk, as he was born without a tongue, or it was cut out, but he has the best eyes of any Indian I know. You see this point commands the farm, the crossing, the Navajo Trail over the river, the Echo Cliffs opposite, where the Navajos signal to me, and also the White Sage Trail.

"With this peon watching here I'm not likely to be surprised. That strip of sand protects me at night from approach, and I've never had anything to fear from

across the river."

Naab's peon came from a little cave in the wall and grinned the greeting he could not speak. Naab gave him a bag from one of the packs, spoke a few words in Navajo, and then slapped the burros into the trail.

The climb thenceforth was more rapid because less steep, and the trail now led among broken fragments of cliff. The color of the stones had changed from red to yellow, and small cedars grew in protected places. Hare gave up trying to estimate the altitude.

"Hang on, Jack," cheered August. "We're almost up."

At last Black Bolly disappeared, likewise the bobbing burros, one by one, then Noddle, wagging his ears, reached a level. Then Hare saw a gray-green cedar forest, with yellow crags rising in the background, and a rush of cold wind smote his face. For a moment he choked; he could not get his breath. Presently he realized that the trouble was not with the rarity of the atmosphere, but with the bitter-sweet penetrating odor it carried.

"Ha! that's good!" said Naab, expanding his great chest. "That's air for you, my lad. Can you taste it? Well, here's camp, your home for many a day, Jack. There's Piute. How do? how're the sheep?"

A short, squat Indian, good-humored of face, shook his black head till the silver rings danced in his ears, and replied, "Bad—damn coyotee!"

"Piute—shake with Jack. Him shoot coyote—got big gun," said Naab.

"How-do-Jack?" replied Piute, extending his hand, and then straightway began examining the new rifle. "Damn—heap big gun!"

"Jack, you'll find this Indian one you can trust, for all he's a Piute outcast," went on August. "What Piute doesn't know about this side of Coconina isn't worth learning."

In a depression sheltered from the wind lay the camp. A fire burned in the center; a conical tent, like a tepee in shape, hung suspended from a cedar branch and was staked at its four points; a leaning slab of rock furnished shelter for camp supplies and for the Indian, and at one end a spring gushed out. A gray-sheathed cedar tree marked the entrance to this hollow glade, and under it August began preparing Hare's bed.

"Here's the place you're to sleep, rain or shine or snow," he said. "Now I've spent my life sleeping on the ground, and mother earth makes the best bed. I'll dig out a little pit in this soft mat of needles; that's for your hips. Then the tarpaulin so; a blanket so. Now the other blankets. Pull up the blankets, and then the long end of the tarpaulin. If it rains or snows cover your head, and sleep, my lad, sleep to the song of the

wind!'

From where Hare lay, resting a weary body, he could see down into the depression which his position guarded. Naab built up the fire; Piute peeled potatoes with deliberate care; Mescal, on her knees, her brown arms bare, kneaded dough in a basin.

Naab called him to supper, and when Hare set to with a will on the bacon and eggs and hot biscuits, he nodded approvingly. "That's what I want to see. You must eat. Piute will get deer, or you may shoot them yourself; eat all the venison you can. Then rest. That's the secret. If you eat and rest you will gain strength."

The edge of the wall was not a hundred paces from the camp; and when Hare strolled out to it after supper, the sun had dipped the under side of its red disc behind the desert. He watched it sink, while the golden-red flood of light grew darker and darker.

The bleating of sheep aroused him and he returned to camp. The fire was still bright. Wolf slept close to Mescal's tent; Piute was not in sight; and Naab had rolled himself in blankets. Crawling into his bed, Hare stretched aching legs and lay still, as if he would never move again.

A thin coating of frost crackled on his bed when he awakened; and out from under the shelter of the cedar all the ground was hoar-white. As he slipped from his blankets the same strong smell of black sage and juniper smote him, almost like a blow. His nostrils seemed glued together by some rich piny pitch; and when he opened his lips to breathe a sudden pain pierced his lungs. The thought following was as sharp as the pain.

Pneumonia! What he had long expected! He sank against the cedar, overcome by the shock. But he rallied presently, for the wildness of this country, and the spirit it sought to instil in him, had wakened a desire to live. He put his hand under his flannel shirt and felt of the soreness of his lungs. He found it not at the apex of the right lung, always the one sensitive spot, but all through his breast. Little panting breaths did not hurt; but the deep inhalation, which alone satisfied him, filled his whole chest with thousands of pricking needles. In the depth of his breast was a hollow that burned.

When he had pulled on his boots and coat, and had washed himself in the runway of the spring, his hands were so numb with cold they refused to hold his comb and brush; and he presented himself at the roaring fire half-frozen, dishevelled, trembling, but cheerful.

"Up with the sun!" was Naab's greeting. Following the wave of his hand, Hare saw the sun, a pale pink globe through a misty blue,

rising between the golden crags of the eastern wall.

"Did you hear the coyotes last night?" inquired August. "No! Well, of all the choruses I ever heard. There must be a thousand on the bench. You'll have practice with the rifle, but don't neglect the Colt. Practice particularly the draw I taught you. Piute has a carbine, and he shoots at the coyotes, but who ever saw an Indian that could hit anything?"

"Damn—gun no good!" growled Piute, who evidently understood English pretty well. Naab laughed, and while Hare ate breakfast he talked of the sheep. The flock he had numbered 3000. They were a goodly part of them Navajo stock; small, hardy sheep that could live on anything but cactus, and needed little water. In the winter he drove them down into the oasis; the other seasons he herded them on the high ranges where the cattle could not climb.

"Get the forty-four," concluded Naab, "and we'll go out and break it in."

With the long rifle in the hollow of his arm Jack forgot that he was a sick man. When he came within gunshot of the flock the smell of sheep effectually smothered the keen, tasty odor of black sage and juniper. Sheep ranged everywhere under the low cedars.

"They're spread now," said August. "Mescal drives them on every little while and Piute goes ahead to pick out the best browse. Watch the dog, Jack; he's all but human."

Nimble, alert, the big white dog was not still a moment. His duty was to keep the flock compact, to head the stragglers and turn them back; and he knew his part perfectly. He never barked. At times when he was working on one side a crafty sheep on the other would steal out into the thicket. Then Mescal called and Wolf flashed back to her, eager, spirited, ready to take his order. A word, a wave of her whip sufficed for the dog to rout out the recalcitrant sheep and send him bleating to his fellows.

"He manages them easily now," said Naab, "but when the lambs come they can't be kept in. The coyotes and wolves hang out in the thickets and pick up the stragglers. The worst enemy of sheep, though, is the old grizzly bear. Usually he is grouchy, and dangerous to hunt. Let's get off into the woods some little way, into the edge of the thickets—for Piute always keeps to the glades—and see if we can pick off a few coyotes."

August cautioned Jack to step stealthily, and slip from cedar to cedar, to use every bunch of sage and juniper to hide his advance.

In the course of a mile, without keeping the sheep near at hand, they saw upward of 20 coyotes, five of which Jack killed in as many shots.

"You've got the hang of it," said Naab, rubbing his hands. "You'll kill the varmints. Piute will skin and salt the pelts. Now I'm going up on the high range to look for bear sign. Go ahead, on your own hook."

Hare was regardless of time while he stole under the cedars and through the thickets, spying out the cunning coyotes. Then Naab's yell pealing out claimed his attention; he answered and returned. When they met he recounted his adventures in mingled excitement and disappointment.

"Are you tired?" asked Naab.

"Tired? No," replied Jack.

"Well, you mustn't overdo the very first day. I've news for you. There are some wild horses on the high range. I didn't see them, but found tracks everywhere. If they come down here you send Piute to close the trail at the upper end of the bench, and you close the one where we came up. We made the gates to keep the sheep in, and they'll serve a turn. If you get the wild horses on the bench send Piute for me at once."

They passed the Indian herding the sheep into a corral built against an uprising ridge of stone. Naab dispatched him to look for the dead coyotes.

"Mescal, hadn't I better take Black Bolly home?" asked August.

"Mayn't I keep her?"

"She's yours. But you run a risk. There are wild horses on the range. Will you keep her hobbled?"

"Yes," replied Mescal reluctantly. "Though I don't believe Bolly would run off from me."

"Look out she doesn't go, hobbles and all. Jack, here's the other bit of news I have for you. There's a big grizzly camping on the trail of our sheep. Now what I want to know is—shall I leave him to you, or put off work and come up here to wait for him myself?"

"Why—" said Jack slowly, "whatever you say."

"If he comes down it's more than likely to be after dark. Don't risk hunting him then. Wait till morning, and put Wolf on his trail. He'll be up in the rocks, and by holding in the dog you may find him asleep in a cave. However, if you happen to meet him by day do this. Don't waste any shots. Climb a ledge or tree if one be handy. If not, stand your ground. Get down on your knee and shoot and let him come. Mind you, he'll grunt when he's hit, and start for you, and keep coming till he's dead. Have confidence in yourself and your gun, for you can kill him. Aim low, and shoot steady. If he keeps on coming there's always a fatal shot, and that is when he rises. You'll see a bare spot on his breast. Put a forty-four into that, and he'll go down.

"Now, Jack, I'm off. Good-by and good luck. Mescal, look out

for him. So-ho! Noddle! Getup! Biscuit!"

Piute came stooping toward camp so burdened with coyotes that he could scarcely be seen under the gray pile. With a fervent "damn" he tumbled them under a cedar, and trotted back into the forest for another load. Jack insisted on assuming his share of the duties about camp; and Mescal assigned him to the task of gathering firewood, breaking red-hot sticks of wood into small pieces, and raking them into piles of live coals. Jack did not do justice to the supper; excitement had robbed him of appetite.

The sunset drew him to the rim. Dark clouds were mantling the desert like rolling smoke from a prairie fire. He almost stumbled over Mescal, who sat with her back to a stone. Wolf lay with his head in her lap, and he growled.

"There's a storm on the desert," she said. "Those smoky streaks are flying sand. We may have snow tonight. It's colder, and the wind is north. See, I've a blanket. You had better get one."

He thanked her and went for it, returned to Mescal and sat beside her.

"You love this outlook?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you sit here often?"

"Every evening."

"Haven't you been lonely?"

"No."

"You'd rather be here with the sheep than be in Lund or Salt Lake City, as Esther and Judith want to be?"

"Yes."

Twilight and falling dew sent them back to the camp. Piute and Peon were skinning coyotes by the blaze of the fire. The night wind had not yet risen; the sheep were quiet; there was no sound save the crackle of burning cedar sticks.

Jack talked of cities, of ships, of people, of simple things in the life he had left, and Mescal listened, became absorbed. She did not seek her tent till he ceased; then with a startled "good night" she was gone.

From under the snugness of his warm blankets Jack watched out the last wakeful moments of that day of days. A star peeped through the fringe of cedar foliage. The wind sighed, and rose steadily, to sweep over him with breath of ice, with the fragrance of juniper and black sage and a tang of cedar.

Every succeeding day was like its predecessor, only richer. Every day the hoar-frost silvered the dawn; the sheep browsed; the coyotes skulked in the thickets; the rifle spoke truer and truer. Every sunset Mescal's changing eyes mirrored the desert. Every twilight Jack sat beside her in the silence; every night, in the campfire flare, he talked to Piute and the peon.

The Indians were appreciative

listeners, whether they understood Jack or not, but his talk with them was only a pretense. He wished to reveal the outside world to Mescal, and he saw with pleasure that every day she grew more interested.

One evening he was telling of New York City, of the monster buildings where men worked, and of the elevated railways, for the time was the late 'seventies and they were still a novelty. Piute vigorously interrupted Jack, demanding to have this last strange story made more clear. Jack did his best in gesture and speech, but he had to appeal to Mescal to translate his meaning to the Indian. The result, however, was that Piute took exception to the story of trains carrying people through the air. He lost his grin and regarded Jack with much disfavor.

"Heap damn lie!" he exclaimed with a growl, and stalked off into the gloom.

Piute's expressive doubt discomfited Hare, but only momentarily, for Mescal's silvery peal of laughter told him that the incident had brought them closer together. The ice being broken, she began to ask questions, shyly at first, yet more and more eagerly, until she forgot herself in the desire to learn of cities and people.

Lambing time came late in May, and Mescal, Wolf, Piute, and Jack knew no rest. All in a day, seemingly, the little fleecy lambs came, as if by magic, and filled the forest with piping bleats. Then they were tottering after their mothers, gamboling at a day's growth, wilful as youth—and the carnage began. Piute slept not at all, and the dog's jaws were flecked with blood morning and night. Jack hung up 54 coyotes the second day; the third he let them lie, 70 in number.

One night when sheep and lambs were in the corral, and the shepherds rested round the campfire, the dog rose quivering, sniffed the cold wind, and suddenly bristled with every hair standing erect.

"Wolf!" called Mescal.

The sheep began to bleat. A rippling crash, a splintering of wood, told of an irresistible onslaught on the corral fence.

"Chus—chus!" exclaimed Piute.

Wolf flashed like lightning under the cedars. The rush of the sheep pattering across the corral was succeeded by an uproar.

"Bear! Bear!" cried Mescal, with dark eyes on Jack. He seized his rifle.

"Don't go," she implored.

"Listen! I won't stand that. I'll go. Here, get in the tree—quick!"

"No—no—"

"Do as I say!" The girl wavered. He dropped the rifle and swung her up. "Climb!" With Piute at his heels he ran out into the darkness.

Chapter Six

"You're Going to Get Well!"

PIUTE'S Indian sense of the advantage of position in attack stood Jack in good stead; he led him up the ledge which overhung one end of the corral. In the pale starlight the sheep could be seen running in bands, massing together, crowding the fence; their cries made a deafening din.

The Indian shouted. A large black object was visible in the shade of the ledge. Piute fired his carbine. Before Jack could bring his rifle up the black thing moved into startlingly rapid flight. Then spouts of red flame illumined the corral. As he shot, Jack got fleeting glimpses of the bear moving like a dark streak against a blur of white.

When certain that the visitor had departed, Jack descended into the corral. He and Piute searched for dead sheep, but found none. If the grizzly had killed one he must have taken it with him. They repaired the break and returned to camp.

"He's gone, Mescal. Come down," called Jack into the cedar. "Let me help you—there!"

Piute found woolly brown fur hanging from Wolf's jaws.

"He's nipped the brute, that's sure," said Jack. "Good dog! Maybe he kept the bear from— Why, Mescal! you're white—you're shaking."

Mescal went silently into her tent.

The sheep quieted down and made no further disturbance that night. After breakfast Jack tried to get Wolf to take the track of the grizzly, but the scent had cooled.

Next day Mescal drove the sheep eastward toward the crags, and about the middle of the afternoon reached the edge of the slope. Grass grew luxuriantly and it was easy to keep the sheep in. Moreover, that part of the forest had fewer trees and scarcely any sage or thickets, so that the lambs were safer, barring danger which might lurk in the seamed and cracked cliffs overshadowing the open grassy plots. Piute's task at the moment was to drag dead coyotes to the rim, near at hand, and throw them over. Mescal rested on a stone, and Wolf reclined at her feet.

Jack presently found a fresh deer track, and trailed it into the cedars, then up the slope to where the huge rocks massed.

Suddenly a cry from Mescal halted him; another sent him flying down the slope. He bounded out of the cedars into the open.

The flock had spread, and streams of jumping sheep fled frantically from an enormous silver-backed bear.

As the bear struck right and left, Jack sent a bullet into him at long range. Stung, the grizzly whirled, bit at his side, and then reared with a roar of fury.

But he did not see Jack. He dropped down and launched his huge bulk for Mescal. The grizzly hurdled the streams of sheep.

Terror for Mescal dominated Jack. Checking himself with a suddenness that fetched him to his knees, he levelled the rifle. It waved as if it were a stick of willow. The bead-sight described a blurred curve round the bear. Yet he shot—in vain—again—in vain.

Above the bleat of sheep and trample of hoofs rang out Mescal's cry, despairing. She had turned, her hands over her breast. Wolf spread his legs before her and crouched to spring, mane erect, jaws wide.

By some lightning flash of memory, August Naab's words steadied Jack's shaken nerves. He aimed low and ahead of the running bear. Down the beast went in a sliding sprawl with a muffled roar of rage. Up he sprang, dangling a useless leg, yet leaping swiftly forward. One blow sent the attacking dog aside. Jack fired again. The bear became a wrestling, fiery demon, death-stricken, but full of savage fury. Jack aimed low and shot again.

Slowly now the grizzly reared, his frosted coat blood-flecked, his great head swaying. Another shot. There was one wide sweep of the huge paw, and then the bear sank forward, drooping slowly, and stretched all his length as if to rest.

Jack, bounding up, made sure the bear was dead before he looked at Mescal. She was faint. Wolf whined about her. Piute came running from the cedars.

"I couldn't run—I couldn't move," she said, shuddering. "He'd soon have reached me."

Hare laughed away his own fear and turned their attention to the stampeded sheep. It was dark before they got the flock together again, and they never knew whether they had found them all. Supper-time was unusually quiet that night.

So the days slipped by. June came, with more leisure for the shepherds, better grazing for the sheep, heavier dews, lighter frosts, snow squalls half rain, and bursting blossoms on the prickly thorns, wild-primrose patches in every shady spot, and bluebells lifting wan azure faces to the sun.

The last snow storm of June threatened all one morning, hung menacing over the yellow crags, in dull lead clouds waiting for the wind. It was brief in passing. Wind-driven toward the desert, it moaned its last in the cedars, and swept away, a sheeted pall.

Jack marched into camp with a snowy burden over his shoulder. He flung it down, disclosing a

small deer; then he shook the white mantle from his coat, and, whistling, kicked the fire logs, and looked abroad at the silver cedars, now dripping under the sun, at the rainbows in the settling mists, at the rapidly melting snow on the ground.

"Got lost in that squall. Fine! Fine!" he exclaimed and threw wide his arms.

"Jack!" said Mescal. "Jack!"

"Well?" he replied, in surprise.

"To look at you!—I never dreamed—I'd forgotten—"

"What's the matter with me?" demanded Jack.

"Oh—Jack! You're going to get well!" Her lips curved in a smile.

"Mescal—Mescal!" he cried brokenly. Blindly, instinctively he kissed her—a kiss unutterably grateful; then he fled into the forest, running without aim.

Twilight had enfolded the plateau when Hare traced his way back to camp. Mescal was not there. His supper awaited him; Piute hummed a song; the peon sat grimacing at the fire. Hare told them to eat, and moved away toward the rim.

Mescal was at her favorite seat, with the white dog beside her; and she watched the desert where the last glow of sunset gilded the mesas.

"Mescal, I didn't know I loved you—then—but I know it now."

Her face dropped quickly from its level poise, hiding the brooding eyes; her hand trembled on Wolf's head.

"You spoke the truth. I'll get well. I'd rather have had it from your lips than from any in the world. I mean to live my life here where these wonderful things have come to me."

The wind blew her dusky hair; he could not see her face; he tried gently to turn her to him. The hand he had taken lay warm and trembling in his, but it was not withdrawn. As he waited, in fear, in hope, it became still. Her slender form, rigid within his arm, gradually relaxed and yielded to him; her face sank on his breast, and her dark hair loosened from its band, covered her and blew across his lips.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Silvermane

LITTLE dew fell on the night of July 1st; the dawn brightened without mists; a hot sun rose; the short summer of the plateau had clearly begun.

As Hare rose from his breakfast, his whistle was cut short by the Indian.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Piute, lifting a dark finger. Black Bolly had slipped her halter, and she moved toward the opening in the cedars, her head high, her black ears

straight up.

"Bolly!" called Mescal. The mare did not stop.

"What the deuce?" Hare ran forward to catch her.

"I never knew Bolly to act that way," said Mescal. "Jack look at Wolf!"

The white dog had risen and stood warily shifting his nose. He sniffed the wind, turned round and round, and slowly stiffened with his head pointed toward the eastern rise of the plateau.

"Hold, Wolf, hold!" called Mescal.

"Ugh!" grunted Piute.

"Listen, Jack! Did you hear?" whispered the girl.

The warm breeze came down in puffs from the crags, and presently it bore a low, prolonged whistle.

"What is it?"

"Wild mustangs," said Mescal.

"No," corrected Piute, vehemently shaking his head. "Clea, clea."

"Jack, he says 'horse, horse.' It's a wild horse."

The whistle rang down from the ridge, splitting the air, strong and trenchant. Black Bolly reared straight up.

Jack ran to the rise of ground above the camp, and looked over the cedars. He beckoned for Mescal. She ran to him, and Piute, tying Black Bolly, hurried after.

Jack pointed to a ridge rising to the left of the yellow crags. On the bare summit stood a splendid stallion clearly silhouetted against the ruddy morning sky. He was an iron-gray, wild and proud, with long silver-white mane waving in the wind.

"Silvermane!" exclaimed Mescal.

"What a magnificent animal!" Jack stared at the splendid picture for the moment before the horse moved back along the ridge and disappeared. Other horses, blacks and bays, showed above the sage for a moment, and they, too, passed out of sight.

"He's got some of his band with him," said Jack. "Mescal, they're down off the upper range, and grazing along easy. The wind favors us. I'll slip round through the cedars, and block the trail leading up to the other range, and you and Piute close the gate of our trail at this end. Then send Piute down to tell Naab we've got Silvermane."

Jack ran from tree to tree, avoiding the open places, taking advantage of the thickets, keeping away from the ridge. He climbed the slope, and threaded a way over masses of fallen cliff until he reached the base of the wall. The tracks of the wild-horse band were very fresh and plain in the yellow trail. Four stout posts guarded the opening, and a number of bars lay ready to be pushed into place. He put them up, making a gate ten feet high. This done,

he hurried back to camp.

When Mescal and Jack drove in the sheep that afternoon, rather earlier than usual, Piute had returned with August Naab, Dave, and Billy, a string of mustangs and a pack train of burros.

"Hello, Mescal," cheerily called August, as they came into camp. "Well Jack—how you've filled out!" He crushed Jack's hand in his broad palm, and his gray eyes beamed. "I've not the gift of revelation—but, Jack, you're going to get well."

"Yes, I—" He thumped his breast significantly and smiled.

"Black sage and juniper!" exclaimed August. "In this air if a man doesn't go off quickly with pneumonia, he'll get well."

He questioned Piute and Mescal about the sheep, and was greatly pleased with their report. He shook his head when Jack spread out the grizzly pelt, and asked for the story of the killing. Mescal told it, and Naab's great hand resounded from Jack's shoulder. Then he came back to the object of his trip upon the plateau.

"So you've corralled Silvermane? How many horses with him?"

"We had no chance to count. I saw at least twelve."

"Good! Jack, the history of that stallion wouldn't make you proud of him. We've corralled him by a lucky chance. If I don't miss my guess he's after Bolly. Well, Dave, shall we thirst him out, or line up a long corral?"

"Better have a look around tomorrow," replied Dave. "It'll take a lot of chasing to run him down, but there's not a spring on the bench where we can throw up a trap corral. We'll have to chase him."

"Mescal, has Bolly been good since Silvermane came down?"

"No, she hasn't," declared Mescal, and told of the circumstance.

"Bolly's all right," said Billy Naab. "Any mustang will do that. Keep her belled and hobbled."

"Silvermane would care a lot about that, if he wanted Bolly, wouldn't he?" queried Dave in quiet scorn. "Keep her roped and haltered, I say."

"Dave's right," said August.

Black Bolly broke her halter about midnight and escaped into the forest, hobbled as she was. The Indian heard her first, and he awoke August, who aroused the others.

"Don't make any noise," he said, as Jack came up, throwing on his coat. "Bolly's loose, broke her rope, and I think Silvermane is close."

The slight breeze favored them, the campfire was dead, and the night was clear and starlit. They had not been quiet many moments when the shrill neigh of a mustang rang out. The Naabs raised themselves and looked at

one another in the starlight.

"Now what do you think of that?" whispered Billy.

"No more than I expected. It was Bolly," replied Dave.

"Bolly it was, confound her black hide!" added August. "Now, boys, did she whistle for Silvermane, or to warn him, which?"

"No telling," answered Billy. "Let's lie low and take a chance on him coming close."

Jack strained his hearing, yet caught no sound except the distant yelp of a coyote. Moments went by.

"There!" whispered Dave.

From the direction of the ridge came the faint rattling of stones. Presently sharp clicks preceded the rattles, and the sounds began to merge into a regular rhythmic tramp. It softened at intervals, probably when the horses were under the cedars, and strengthened as they came out on the harder ground of the open.

"I see them," whispered Dave.

A black, undulating line wound out of the cedars, a line of horses approaching with drooping heads, hurrying a little as they neared the spring.

"Twenty-odd, all blacks and bays," said August, "and some of them are mustangs. But where's Silvermane?—Hark!"

Out among the cedars rose the peculiar halting thump of a hobbled horse trying to cover ground, followed by snorts and crashings of brush and the pound of plunging hoofs. The long black line stopped short and began to stamp. Then into the starlit glade below moved two shadows.

"Silvermane and Bolly!" exclaimed August, "and now she's broken her hobbles."

Wheeling about her, neighing, and plunging, he arched his splendid neck and pushed his head against her. Suddenly Black Bolly snorted and whirled down the glade. Silvermane whistled one blast and thundered after her.

"It's one on me," remarked Billy. "That little mare played us at the finish. Caught when she was a yearling, broken better than any mustang we ever had, she has helped us run down many a stallion, and now she runs off with that big white-maned brute!"

At breakfast the following day the Naabs fell into a discussion upon the possibility of there being other means of exit from the plateau than the two trails already closed. It was advisable to know the ground exactly. Billy and Dave rode in opposite directions around the rim of the plateau. It was triangular in shape and some six or seven miles in circumference; and the brothers rode around it in less than an hour.

"Corralled," said Dave.

"Good! Did you see him? What kind of a bunch has he with him?" asked his father.

"If we get the pick of the lot it will be worth two weeks' work," replied Dave. "I saw him, and Bolly, too. I think we can run her into a cove under the wall and get her. Then Mescal can help us run down the stallion. And you can look out on this end for the best level stretch to drop the line of cedars and make our trap."

The brothers, at their father's nod, rode off into the forest. Naab had detained the peon, and now gave him orders and sent him off.

"Tonight you can stand on the rim here, and watch him signal across to the top of Echo Cliffs to the Navajos," explained August to Jack. "I've sent for the best breaker of wild mustangs on the desert. Dave can break mustangs, and Piute is very good; but I want the best man in the country, because this is a grand horse and I intend to give him to you."

"To me!" exclaimed Hare.

"Yes, and if he's broken right at the start, he'll serve you faithfully and not try to bite your arm off every day, or kick your brains out. No white man can break a wild mustang to the best advantage."

"Why is that?"

"I don't know. To be truthful, I have an idea it's bad temper and lack of patience. Just wait till you see this Navajo go at Silvermane!"

After Mescal and Piute drove down the sheep, Jack accompanied Naab to the corral.

"I've brought up your saddle," said Naab, "and you can put it on any mustang here." He rode with August all over the western end of the plateau. They came at length to a strip of ground, higher than the bordering forest, which was comparatively free of cedars and brush, and when August had surveyed it once he slapped his knee with satisfaction.

"Fine! better than I hoped for! This stretch is about a mile long, and narrow at this end. Now, Jack, you see the other side faces the rim, this side the forest, and at the end here is a wall of rock; luckily it curves in a half circle, which will save us work. We'll cut cedars, drag them in line, and make a big corral against the rock. From the opening in the corral we'll build two fences of trees; then we'll chase Silvermane till he's done, run him down into this level, and turn him inside the fence. No horse can break through a close line of cedars. He'll run till he's in the corral, and then we'll rope him."

They returned to camp and prepared supper. Mescal and Piute soon arrived, and, later, Dave and Billy on jaded mustangs. Black Bolly limped behind, stretching a long halter, an unhappy mustang with dusty, foam-stained coat and hanging head.

"Not bad," said August, examining the lame leg. "She'll be fit in a few days, long before we

need her to help run down Silvermane."

Mescal's love for the mustang shone in her eyes while she smoothed out the crumpled mane and petted the slender neck. "Bolly, to think you'd do it!"

When darkness fell they gathered on the rim to watch the signals. A fire blazed out of the black void below, and as they waited it brightened and flamed higher.

"Ugh!" said Piute, pointing across to the dark line of cliffs.

"Jack, look sharp!" said August. "Peon is blanketing his fire. See the flicker? One, two—one, two—one. Now for the answer."

Next day Jack helped the brothers cut down cedars while August hauled them into line with his roan. What with this labor and the necessary camp duties nearly a week passed, and in the meantime Black Bolly recovered from her lameness. Twice the workers saw Silvermane standing on open high ridges, restive and suspicious.

"It'd be worth something to find out how long that stallion could go without water," commented Dave. "But we'll make his tongue hang out tomorrow. It'd serve him right to break him with Black Bolly."

Daylight came warm and misty; veils unrolled from the desert; a purple curtain lifted from the eastern crags; then the red sun burned.

Dave and Billy Naab mounted their mustangs, and each led another mount by a halter. "We'll go to the ridge, cut Silvermane out of his band, and warm him up; then we'll drive him down to this end."

August delayed about camp, punching new holes in his saddle girth, shortening his stirrups, and smoothing kinks out of his lasso. At last he saddled the roan, and also Black Bolly. Mescal came out of her tent ready for the chase.

Hare walked, leading two mustangs by the halters, and Naab and Mescal rode, each of them followed by two other spare mounts. August tied three mustangs at one point along the level stretch, and three at another. Then he led Mescal and Jack to the top of the stone wall above the corral, where they had good view of a considerable part of the plateau.

The eastern rise of ground, a sage and juniper slope, was in plain sight. Hare saw a white flash; then Silvermane broke out of the cedars into the sage. One of the brothers raced him half the length of the slope, and then the other coming out headed him off down toward the forest. He was running easily.

Hare watched the stallion with sheer fascination. He veered off to the left, out of sight in the brush, while Dave and Billy galloped up to the spot where August had tied

the first three mustangs. Here they dismounted, changed saddles to fresh horses, and were off again.

Silvermane twinkled in and out among the cedars, and suddenly stopped short on the rim. He wheeled and coursed away toward the crags, and vanished. But soon he reappeared, for Billy had cut across and faced him about. Again he struck the level stretch. Dave stopped short on the rim. He shot away to the left and flashed through the glades beyond. The brothers saved their steeds, content to keep him cornered in that end of the plateau. Then August spurred his roan into the scene of action. Silvermane came out on the one piece of rising ground beyond the level, and stood looking backward toward the brothers. When the great roan crashed through the thickets into his sight he leaped as if he had been stung, and plunged away.

The Naabs had hemmed him in a triangle, Dave and Billy at the broad end, August at the apex, and now the real race began. August chased him up and down, along the rim, across to the long line of cedars, always in the end heading him for the open stretch. Down this he fled with flying mane, only to be checked by the relentless brothers. To cover this broad end of the open required riding the like of which Hare had never dreamed of. The brothers, taking advantage of the brief periods when the stallion was going toward August, changed their tired mustangs for fresh ones.

"Ho! Mescal!" rolled out August's voice. That was the call for Mescal to put Black Bolly after Silvermane. In a flash she was round the corral, with Silvermane between her and the long fence of cedars. The gray stallion lengthened his stride in a wonderful way. He raced down the stretch with his head over his shoulder, watching the little black. Seeing her gaining, he burst into desperate headlong flight. If he had been fresh he might have left Black Bolly far behind, but now he could not elude her.

August Naab let him run this time, and Silvermane, keeping close to the fence, passed the gate, ran down to the rim, and wheeled. The black mustang was on him again, holding him in close to the fence, driving him back down the stretch.

The brothers remorselessly turned him, and now Mescal, forcing the running, caught him, lashed his haunches with her whip, and drove him into the gate of the corral.

August and his two sons were close behind, and blocked the gate. "Hold here, boys," said August. "I'll go in and drive him round and round till he's done, then, when I yell, you stand aside and rope him as he comes out."

Silvermane ran round the cor-

ral, tore at the steep scaly walls, fell back and began his weary round again and yet again. Then he ran blindly; every time he passed the guarded gateway his eyes were wilder, and his stride more labored.

"Now!" yelled August Naab.

Mescal drew out of the opening, and Dave and Billy pulled away, one on each side, their lassoes swinging loosely.

Silvermane sprang for the opening with something of his old speed. As he went through, yellow loops flashed in the sun, circling, narrowing, and he seemed to run straight into them. One loop whipped close round his glossy neck; the other caught his head. Dave's mustang staggered under the violent shock, went to his knees, struggled up and held firmly. Bill's mount slid on his haunches and spilled his rider from the saddle. Silvermane seemed to be climbing into the air.

Then August Naab, darting through the gate in a cloud of dust, shot his lasso, catching the right foreleg. Silvermane landed hard, his hoofs striking fire from the stones; and for an instant strained in convulsive struggle; then fell heaving and groaning. In a twinkling Billy loosened his lasso over a knot, making of it a halter, and tied the end to a cedar stump.

The Naabs stood back and gazed at their prize.

Chapter Eight

The Breaker of Wild Mustangs

FOR a few days after the capture of Silvermane, a time full to the brim of excitement for Hare, he had no word with Mescal, save for morning and evening greetings. When he did come to seek her, she avoided him.

Hare nursed a grievance for 48 hours, and then, taking advantage of Piute's absence on an errand down to the farm, and of the Naabs' strenuous day with four vicious wild horses in the corral at one time, he walked out to the pasture where Mescal shepherded the flock.

"Mescal, why are you avoiding me?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"Nothing," she replied.

"But there must be something. You have given me no chance to talk to you, and I wanted to know if you'd let me speak to Father Naab."

"To Father Naab? Why—what about?"

"About you, of course—and me—that I love you and want to marry you."

She turned white. "No—no!"

"Why not? What's wrong? You must tell me, Mescal."

"I am pledged to marry Father Naab's eldest son."

"What did you say?" he asked slowly. Mescal repeated her words in a whisper.

"But—but, Mescal—I love you. You let me kiss you."

"Oh, Jack, I forgot," she wailed. "It was so new, so strange, to have you up here. It was like a kind of dream. And after—after you kissed me I—I found out—"

"What, Mescal?"

Her silence answered him.

"But, Mescal, if you really love me you can't marry anyone else," said Hare.

"Oh, you don't know, you don't know. It's impossible!"

"Impossible!" Hare's anger flared up. "You let me believe I had won you. Your actions were lies."

He threw his arms around her and held her close. "It can't be a lie. You do care for me—love me. Look at me." He drew her head back from his breast. Her lips were parted. He kissed them again and again, while the shade of the cedars seemed to whirl about him.

She leaned back in his arms, supple, pliant with quivering life, and for the first time gave him wide-open level eyes.

"You do love me, Mescal?"

"I—I couldn't help it."

There was a pause, tense with feeling.

"Mescal, tell me—about your being pledged," he said at last.

"I gave him my promise because there was nothing else to do. I was pledged to—to him in the church at White Sage. It can't be changed. I've got to marry—Father Naab's eldest son."

"Eldest son?" echoed Jack, suddenly mindful of the implication. "Why! Snap Naab already has a wife."

"You've also forgotten that we're Mormons."

"Are you a Mormon?" he queried bluntly.

"I've been raised as one."

"Would not Father Naab release you?"

"Release me? Why, he would have taken me as a wife for himself but for Mother Mary. She hates me. So he pledged me to Snap."

"When was this—this marriage to be?"

"I don't know. Father Naab promised me to his son when he came home from the Navajo range. It would be soon if they found out that you and I—Jack, Snap Naab would kill you!"

"I mightn't be so easy to kill," said Hare darkly.

"Don't speak to Father Naab. Don't let him guess. Don't leave me here alone," she answered low.

"How can I help but leave you if he wants me on the cattle ranges?"

"I don't know. You must think. He will keep me with the sheep as long as he can, for two reasons—because I drive them best, he says, and because Snap Naab's wife must be persuaded to wel-

come me in her home."

"Mescal, there's one question I wish you'd answer. Does August Naab think he'll make a Mormon of me? Is that the secret of his wonderful kindness?"

"Of course he believes he'll make a Mormon of you. That's his religion. He's felt that way over all the strangers who ever came out here. But he'd be the same to them without his hopes. I don't know the secret of his kindness, but I think he loves everybody and everything. He's been a father to me, and I love him."

"I think I love him, too," replied Hare simply.

With an effort he left her at last and mounted the grassy slope and climbed high up among the tottering yellow crags; and there he battled with himself. He could not give her up—and yet—

Twilight forced Hare from his lofty retreat. He thought he had renounced his hope of Mescal; he returned with a resolve to be true to August, and to himself.

"Well, Jack, we rode down the last of Silvermane's band," said August at supper. "The Navajos came up and helped us out. Tomorrow you'll see some fun, when we start to break Silvermane. As soon as that's done I'll go, leaving the Indians to bring the horses down when they're broken."

"Are you going to leave Silvermane with me?" asked Jack.

"Surely. Those desert stallions can be made into the finest kind of saddle horses. I've seen one or two. I want you to stay up here with the sheep. Then when we drive the sheep down in the fall you can begin life on the cattle ranges, driving wild steers. There's where you'll grow lean and hard, like an iron bar. You'll need that horse, too, my lad."

"Why—because he's fast?"

August nodded gloomily. "I haven't the gift of revelation, but I've come to believe Martin Cole. Holderness is building an outpost for his riders close to Seeping Springs. He has no water. If he tries to pipe my water—" The pause was not a threat; it implied the Mormon's doubt of himself. "Then Dene is on the march this way. He's driven some of Marshall's cattle from the range next to mine. Dene got away with about a hundred head. The barefaced robber sold them in Lund to a buying company from Salt Lake."

"Is he openly an outlaw, a rustler?" inquired Hare.

"Everybody knows it, and he's finding White Sage and vicinity warmer than it was. Now the Mormons are slow to wrath. But they are awakening. Men of the Holderness type are more to be dreaded. He's a rancher, greedy, unscrupulous, but hard to corner in dishonesty. Dene is only a bad man, a gunfighter. He and all his ilk will get run out of Utah."

Silvermane snorted defiance from the cedar corral next morning when the Naabs, and Indians, and Hare appeared. A half-naked sinewy Navajo with a face as changeless as a bronze mask sat astride August's blindfolded roan, Charger. He rode bareback except for a blanket strapped upon the horse; he carried only a long, thick halter, with a loop and a knot. When August opened the gate, the Indian rode into the corral. Silvermane snorted a blast of fear and anger.

Into the farthest corner of densely packed cedar boughs Silvermane pressed himself and watched. The Indian rode around the corral, circling closer and closer, yet appearing not to see the stallion. Silvermane pranced out of his thicket of boughs; he whistled, he wheeled with his shiny hoofs lifting. In an hour the Indian was edging the outer circle of the corral, with the stallion pivoting in the center, ears laid back, eyes shooting sparks, fight in every line of him. And the circle narrowed inward.

Suddenly the Navajo sent the roan at Silvermane and threw his halter. It spread out like a lasso, and the loop went over the head of the stallion, slipped to the knot and held fast, while the rope tightened. Silvermane leaped up, forehoofs pawing the air, and his long shrill cry was neither whistle, snort, nor screech, but all combined. He came down, missing Charger with his hoofs, sliding off his haunches. The Indian, his bronze muscles rippling, close-hauled on the rope, making half hitches round his bony wrist.

In a whirl of dust the roan drew closer to the gray, and Silvermane began a mad race around the corral. The roan ran with him nose to nose. When Silvermane saw he could not shake him, he opened his jaws, rolled back his lip in an ugly snarl, his white teeth glistening, and tried to bite. But the Indian's moccasined foot shot up under the stallion's ear and pressed him back. Then the roan hugged Silvermane so close that half the time the Navajo virtually rode two horses. But for the rigidity of his arms, and the play and sudden tension of his leg muscles, the Indian's work would have appeared commonplace, so dexterous was he, so perfectly at home in his dangerous seat. Suddenly he whooped and August Naab hauled back the gate, and the two horses, neck and neck, thundered out upon the level stretch.

Jack watched the horses plunge at breakneck speed down the stretch, circle at the forest edge, and come tearing back. Silvermane was pulling the roan faster than he had ever gone in his life, but the dark Indian kept his graceful seat. The speed slackened on the second turn, and decreased as, mile after mile, the imperturbable

Indian held roan and gray side to side and let them run.

The time passed, but Hare's interest in the breaking of the stallion never flagged. He began to understand the Indian, and to feel what the restraint and drag must be to the horse. Silvermane would have killed himself in an hour; he would have cut himself to pieces in one headlong dash, but that steel arm suffered him only to wear himself out. Late that afternoon the Navajo led a dripping, drooping, foam-lashed stallion into the corral, tied him with the halter, and left him.

Later Silvermane drank of the water poured into the corral trough, and had not the strength or spirit to resent the Navajo's caressing hand on his mane.

Next morning the Indian rode again into the corral on blindfolded Charger. Again he dragged Silvermane out on the level and drove him up and down with remorseless, machine-like persistence. At noon he took him back, tied him up, and roped him fast. Silvermane tried to rear and kick, but the saddle went on, strapped with a flash of the dark-skinned hands. Then again Silvermane ran the level stretch beside the giant roan, only he carried a saddle now. At the first, he broke out with free wild stride as if to run forever from under the hateful thing. But as the afternoon waned he crept weariedly back to the corral.

On the morning of the third day the Navajo went into the corral without Charger, and roped the gray, tied him fast, and saddled him. Then he loosed the lassoes except the one around Silvermane's neck, which he whipped under his foreleg to draw him down. Silvermane heaved a groan which plainly said he never wanted to rise again. Swiftly the Indian knelt on the stallion's head; his hands flashed; there was a scream, a click of steel on bone; and Silvermane jumped to his feet with a bit between his teeth.

The Navajo, firmly in the saddle, rose with him, and Silvermane leaped through the corral gate, and out upon the stretch, lengthening out with every stride, and settling into a wild, despairing burst of speed. The white mane waved in the wind; the half-naked Navajo swayed to the motion. Horse and rider disappeared in the cedars.

They were gone all day. Toward night they appeared on the stretch. The Indian rode into camp and, dismounting, handed the bridle rein to Naab. He spoke no word; his dark impassiveness invited no comment. Silvermane was dust-covered and sweat-stained.

"Here, my lad," said August Naab, throwing the bridle rein over Hare's arm. "Take him and know this: you've the swiftest horse in this desert country."

CHAPTER NINE

The Scent of Desert Water

SOON the shepherds were left to a quiet unbroken by the whistle of wild mustangs, the whoop of hunters, the ring of iron-shod hoofs on the stones. For Hare, time seemed to stand still. He rode with Mescal behind the flock; he hunted hour by hour, crawling over the fragrant brown mats of cedar, through the sage and juniper, up the grassy slopes. He rode back to camp beside Mescal, drove the sheep, and put Silvermane to his fleetest to beat Black Bolly down the level stretch where once the gray, even with freedom at stake, had lost to the black.

Mescal and Hare were together, or never far apart, from dawn to night. Only a touch of hands bridged the chasm between them.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, interrupting their silence.

She leaned against the rocks and kept a changeless, tranquil, unseeing gaze on the desert. Then she turned to him with puzzled questioning look and enigmatical reply. "I wasn't thinking."

"You looked so earnest. Do you ever think of going to the Navajos?"

"No."

"I don't know why, but, Mescal, sometimes I have the queerest ideas when I catch your eyes watching, watching. You look at once happy and sad. You see something out there that I can't see."

When they returned to the campfire, Hare fell naturally into a talkative mood. Mescal had developed a vivacity which contrasted strongly with her silent moods; she became alive and curious, human like the girls he had known in the East, and she fascinated him the more for this complexity.

The July rains did not come; the mists failed; the dews no longer freshened the grass, and the hot sun began to tell on shepherds and sheep. The spring ran lower and lower. At last the ditch that carried water to the corral went dry, and the margin of the pool began to retreat. Then Mescal sent Piute down for August Naab.

He arrived at the plateau the next day with Dave and at once ordered the breaking up of camp.

"It will rain sometime," he said, "but we can't wait any longer. Dave, when did you last see the Blue Star water-hole?"

"On the trip in from Silver Cup, ten days ago. The water hole was full then."

"Will there be water enough now?"

"We've got to chance it."

"That's so," replied August. "I wish I had brought Zeke and George. It'll be a hard drive,

though we've got Jack and Mescal to help."

Piute led the train on foot, and the flock, used to following him, got under way readily. Dave and Mescal rode along the sides, and August with Jack came behind, with the pack burros bringing up the rear. Wolf circled them all, keeping the flanks close in, heading the lambs that strayed, and, ever vigilant, made the drive orderly and rapid.

The trail to the upper range was wide and easy of ascent, the first of it winding under crags, the latter part climbing long slopes. It forked before the summit, where dark pine trees showed against the sky, one fork ascending, the other, which Piute took, beginning to go down. Hare was glad when through a wide break ahead his eye followed the face of a vast cliff down to the red ground below, and he knew the flock would soon be safe on the level.

A blast as from a furnace smote Hare from this open break in the wall. The air was dust-laden, and carried besides the smell of dust and the warm breath of desert growths, a dank odor that was unpleasant.

The sheep massed in a flock on the level, and the drivers spread to their places. Piute swung the flock up to the left into an amphitheatre, and there halted. The sheep formed a densely packed mass in the curve of the wall.

Dave Naab galloped back toward August and Hare, and before he reached them shouted out, "The water hole's plugged!"

"What?" yelled his father.

"Plugged, filled with stone and sand."

"Was it a cave-in?"

"I reckon not. There's been no rain."

August spurred his roan after Dave, and Hare kept close behind them, till they reined in on a muddy bank. August dismounted and climbed high above the hole to examine the slope; soon he strode down with giant steps, his huge fists clenched, shaking his gray mane like a lion.

"I've found the tracks! Somebody climbed up and rolled the stones, started the cave-in. Who?"

"Holderness's men. They did the same for Martin Cole's water hole at Rocky Point. How old are the tracks?"

"Two days, perhaps. We can't follow them. What can be done?"

"Some of Holderness's men are Mormons, and others are square fellows. They wouldn't stand for such work as this, and somebody ought to ride in there and tell them."

"And get shot up by the men paid to do the dirty work. No. I won't hear of it. This amounts to nothing; we seldom use this hole, only twice a year when driving the flock. But it makes me fear for Sil-

ver Cup and Seeping Springs."

"It makes me fear for the sheep, if this wind doesn't change."

"Ah! I had forgotten the river scent. It's not strong tonight. We'll camp here and start the drive at dawn."

"I'd like to know," said Hare to Dave, "why those men filled up this water hole."

"Holderness wants to cut us off from Silver Cup Spring, and this was a half-way water hole. He's set himself to get our cattle range and he'll stop at nothing."

"If Holderness works as far as Silver Cup, how will he go to work to steal another man's range and water?"

"He'll throw up a cabin, send in his men, drive in ten thousand steers."

"Well, will his men try to keep you away from your own water, or your cattle?"

"Not openly. They'll pretend to welcome us, and drive our cattle away in our absence."

"Then you can't stop this outrage?"

"There's only one way," said Dave, significantly tapping the black handle of his Colt.

"And I suppose, if your father and you boys were to ride over to Holderness's newest stand, and tell him to get off, there would be a fight."

"We'd never reach him now, that is, if we went together. One of us alone might get to see him, especially in White Sage. If we all rode over to his ranch we'd have to fight his men before we reached the corrals. You yourself will find it pretty warm when you go out with us on the ranges, and if you make White Sage you'll find it hot. You're called 'Dene's Spy' there, and the rustlers are still looking for you. I wouldn't worry about it, though."

"Why not, I'd like to know?" inquired Hare, with a short laugh.

"Well, if you're like the other Gentiles who have come into Utah you won't have scruples about drawing on a man. Father says the draw comes natural to you, and you're as quick as he is. Then he says you can beat any rifle shot he ever saw, and that long-barrelled gun you've got will shoot a mile. So if it comes to shooting—why, you can shoot. If you want to run—who's going to catch you on that stallion? We talked about you, George and I; we're mighty glad you're well and can ride with us."

The bleating of the sheep heralded another day. With the brightening light began the drive over the sand. A red haze of fine sand eddied about the toiling sheep and shepherds. Piute trudged ahead leading the old Socker, the leader of the flock; Mescal and Hare rode at the right, turning their faces from the sand-filled puffs of wind; August and Dave drove behind; Wolf, as

always, took care of the stragglers. An hour went by without signs of distress; and with half the five-mile trip at his back August Naab's voice gathered cheer. The sun beat hotter. Another hour told a different story—the sheep labored; they had to be forced by urge of whip, by knees of horses, by Wolf's threatening bark. The flock straggled out to a long irregular line; rams refused to budge till they were ready; sheep lay down to rest; lambs fell. But there was an end to the belt of sand, and August Naab at last drove the lagging trailers out upon the stony bench.

The sun was about two hours past the meridian; the red walls of the desert were closing in; the V-shaped split where the Colorado cut through was in sight. The trail now was wide and unobstructed and the distance short, yet August Naab shook his head in anxious foreboding.

It quickly dawned upon Hare that the sheep were behaving in a way new and singular to him. They packed densely now, crowding forward, many raising their heads over the haunches of others and bleating. They were not in their usual calm pattering hurry, but nervous, excited. On the top of the next little ridge Hare heard Silvermane snort as he did when led to drink. There was a scent of water on the wind. Hare caught it, a damp, muggy smell. The sheep had noticed it long before, and now under its nearer, stronger influence, began to bleat wildly, to run faster, to crowd without aim.

"There's work ahead. Keep them packed and going. Turn the wheelers," ordered August.

What had been a drive became a flight. Piute had to go to the right to avoid being run down. Mescal rode up to fill his place. Hare took his cue from Dave, and rode along the flank, crowding the sheep inward. August cracked his whip behind. For half a mile the flock kept to the trail, then, as if by common consent, they sheered off to the right. With this move August and Dave were transformed from quiet almost to frenzy. They galloped to the fore, and into the very faces of the turning sheep, and drove them back. Then the rear guard of the flock curved outward.

"Drive them in!" roared August.

Hare sent Silvermane at the deflecting sheep and frightened them into line.

Wolf no longer had power to chase the stragglers; they had to be turned by a horse. All along the flank noses pointed outward; here and there sheep wilder than the others leaped forward to lead a widening wave of bobbing woolly backs.

By August's hoarse yells, by Dave's stern face and ceaseless

swift action, by the increasing din, Hare knew terrible danger hung over the flock; what it was he could not tell. He heard the roar of the river rapids, and it seemed that the sheep heard it with him. They plunged madly; they had gone wild from the scent and sound of water.

The flight became a rout. The sheep had almost gained the victory; their keen noses were pointed toward the water; nothing could stop their flight; but still the drivers dashed at them, ever fighting, never wearying.

At the last incline, where a gentle slope led down to a dark break in the desert, the rout became a stampede. Left and right flanks swung round, the line lengthened, and round the struggling horses, knee-deep in woolly backs, split the streams to flow together beyond in one resistless river of sheep. Mescal forced Bolly out of danger; Dave escaped the right flank, August and Hare swept on with the flood, till the horses, sighting the dark canyon, halted to stand like rocks.

The long nodding line of woolly forms, lifting like the crest of a yellow wave, plunged out and down in rounded billow over the canyon rim. With din of hoofs and bleats the sheep spilled themselves over the precipice, and an awful deafening roar boomed up from the river, like the spreading thunderous crash of an avalanche.

Chapter Ten

Riding the Ranges

MESCAL sorrowed, and Wolf mourned in sympathy with her, for their occupation was gone, but both brightened when August made known his intention to cross the river to the Navajo range, to trade with the Indians for another flock. He also wanted to find out what kept his son Snap so long among the Navajos.

"I'll take Billy and go at once. Dave, you join George and Zeke out on the Silver Cup range. Take Jack with you. Brand all the cattle you can before the snow flies. Get out of Dene's way if he rides over, and avoid Holderness's men. I'll have no fights. But keep your eyes sharp for their doings."

It was a relief to Hare that Snap Naab had not yet returned to the oasis, for he felt a sense of freedom which otherwise would have been lacking. He spent the whole of a long calm summer day in the orchard and the vineyard. The fruit season was at its height. Grapes, plums, pears, melons were ripe and luscious.

That night Hare endeavored to see Mescal alone for a few moments, to see her once more with unguarded eyes, to whisper a few words, to say good-by; but it was impossible.

On the morrow he rode out of the red cliff gate with Dave and the pack horses, a dull ache in his heart; for amid the cheering crowd of children and women who bade them good-by he had caught the wave of Mescal's hand and a look of her eyes that would be with him always. What might happen before he returned, if he ever did return!

From the broad bare summit of the stony divide Jack saw the Silver Cup valley range with eyes which seemed to magnify the winding trail, the long red wall, the green slopes, the dots of sage and cattle. Then he made allowance for months of unobstructed vision; he had learned to see; his eyes had adjusted themselves to distance and dimensions.

Silver Cup Spring lay in a bright green spot close under a break in the rocky slope that soon lost its gray cliff in the shaggy cedared side of Coconina.

The camp of the brothers was situated upon this cliff in a split between two sections of wall. Well sheltered from the north and west winds was a grassy plot which afforded a good survey of the valley and the trails. Dave and Jack received glad greetings from Zeke and George, and Silvermane was an object of wonder and admiration. Zeke, who had often seen the gray and chased him too, walked round and round him, stroking the silver mane, feeling the great chest muscles, slapping his flanks.

"How are things?" queried Dave.

"We can't complain much," replied Zeke.

"Been over Seeping Springs way?"

"Yes. Holderness's cattle are ranging in the upper valley. George found tracks near the spring."

"We'll see Holderness's men when we get to riding out," put in George. "And some of Dene's too. Zeke met Two-Spot Chance and Culver below at the spring one day, sort of surprised them. Said they were tracking a horse that had broken his hobbles. But they seemed uneasy, and soon rode off."

"Did either of them ride a horse with one shoe shy?"

"Now I think of it, yes. Zeke noticed the track at the spring."

"Well, Chance and Culver had been out our way," declared Dave. "I saw their tracks, and they filled up the Blue Star water hole—and cost us three thousand sheep."

Then he related the story of the drive of the sheep, the finding of the plugged water hole, the scent of the Colorado, and the plunge of the sheep into the canyon.

Neither Zeke nor George had a word in reply. Neither did the mask-like stillness of their faces change.

"I'd like to know," continued Dave, calmly poking the fire,

"who hired Dene's men to plug the water hole. Dene couldn't do that. He loves a horse, and any man who loves a horse couldn't fill a water hole in this desert."

Hare entered upon his new duties as a range rider with a zeal that almost made up for his lack of experience; he bade fair to develop into a right-hand man for Dave, under whose watchful eye he worked. His natural qualifications were soon shown; he could ride, though his seat was awkward and clumsy compared to that of the desert rangers, a fault that Dave said would correct itself as time fitted him close to the saddle and to the swing of his horse. His sight had become extraordinarily keen for a newcomer on the ranges, and when he had learned to know what it was that he saw, to trust his judgment, he would have acquired the basic feature of a rider's training. But he showed no gift for the lasso, that other essential requirement of his new calling.

"It's funny," said Dave patiently, "you can't get the hang of it. Maybe it's born in a fellow. Now handling a gun seems to come natural for some fellows, and you're one of them. If only you could get the rope away as quick as you can throw your gun!"

Jack kept faithfully at it, unmindful of defeats, often chagrined when he missed some easy opportunity. Not improbably he might have failed altogether if he had been riding an ordinary horse, or if he had to try roping from a fiery mustang. But Silvermane learned rapidly the agile turns and sudden stops necessary, and as for free running he never got enough, so that Hare, in the chasing of a cow, had but to start Silvermane, and then he could devote himself to the handling of his rope. It took him ten times longer to lasso the cow than it took Silvermane to head the animal.

Branding the cows and yearlings and tame steers which watered at Silver Cup, and never wandered far away, was play according to Dave's version. "Wait till we get after the wild steers up on the mountain and in the canyons," he would say when Jack dropped like a log at supper. During these weeks of his hardening up Hare bore much pain, but he continued well and never missed a day. At the most trying time when for a few days he had to be helped on and off Silvermane—for he insisted that he would not stay in camp—the brothers made his work as light as possible. They gave him the branding outfit to carry; a running iron and a little pot with charcoal and bellows; and with these he followed the riders at a convenient distance and leisurely pace.

Some days they branded 100 cattle. By October they had Au-

gust Naab's crudely fashioned cross on thousands of cows and steers. It was well into November before the riders finished at Silver Cup, and then arose a question as to whether it would be advisable to go to Seeping Springs or to the canyons farther west along the slope of Coconina. George favored the former, but Dave overruled him.

"Father's orders," he said.

"How's this branding stock going to help the matter any, I'd like to know?" inquired George. "We Mormons never needed it."

"Father says we'll all have to come to it. Holderness's stock is branded. Perhaps he's marked a good many steers of ours. We can't tell. But if we have our own branded we'll know what's ours."

Many gullies and canyons headed up on the slope of Coconina west of Silver Cup, and ran down to open wide on the flat desert. They contained plots of white sage and bunches of rich grass and cold springs. The steers that ranged these ravines were wild as wolves, and in the tangled thickets of juniper and manzanita and jumbles of weathered cliff they were exceedingly difficult to catch.

Well it was that Hare had received his initiation and had become inured to rough, incessant work, for now he came to know the stuff of which these Mormons were made. No obstacle barred them. They penetrated the gullies to the last step; they rode weathered slopes that were difficult for deer to stick upon; they thrashed the bayonet-guarded manzanita copses; they climbed into labyrinthine fastnesses, penetrating to every nook where a steer could hide. Miles of sliding slope and marble-bottomed stream beds were ascended on foot, for cattle could climb where a horse could not.

The days and weeks passed, how many no one counted or cared. The circle of the sun daily lowered over the south end of Coconina; and the black snow clouds crept down the slopes.

As for Hare, true to August Naab's assertion, he had lost flesh and suffered, and though the process was heart-breaking in its severity, he hung on till he hardened into a leather-lunged, wire-muscled man, capable of keeping pace with his companions.

When the mustangs were brought into camp the day's work began. The darkening blue sky and the sun-tipped crags of Vermillion Cliffs were signals to start for camp. They ate like wolves, sat for a while around the campfire, a ragged, weary, silent group; and soon lay down, their dark faces in the shadow of the cedars.

Snow drove the riders from the canyon camp down to Silver Cup, where they found August Naab and Snap, who had ridden in the day before.

"Now you couldn't guess how

many cattle are back there in the canyons," said Dave to his father.

"I haven't any idea," answered August, dubiously.

"Five thousand head."

"Dave!"

"Yes. You know we haven't been back in there for years. The first cattle we drove in used to come back here to Silver Cup to winter. Then they stopped coming, and we almost forgot them. Well, they've got a trail round under the Saddle, and they go down and winter in the canyon. In summer they head up those rocky gullies, but they can't get up on the mountain. So it isn't likely any one will ever discover them. They are wild as deer and fatter than any stock on the ranges."

"Good! That's the best news I've had in many a day. Now, boys, we'll ride the mountain slope toward Seeping Springs, drive the cattle down, and finish up this branding. Somebody ought to go to White Sage. I'd like to know what's going on, what Holderness is up to, what Dene is doing, if there's any stock being driven to Lund."

"I told you I'd go," said Snap Naab.

"I don't want you to," replied his father. "I guess it can wait till spring, then we'll all go in. I might have thought to bring you boys out some clothes and boots. You're pretty ragged. Jack there, especially, looks like a scarecrow. Has he worked as hard as he looks?"

"Father, he never lost a day," replied Dave warmly.

August Naab looked at Hare and laughed. "It'd be funny, wouldn't it, if Holderness tried to slap you now? I always knew you'd do, Jack, and now you're one of us, and you'll have a share with my sons in the cattle."

But the generous promise failed to offset the feeling aroused by the presence of Snap Naab. With the first sight of Snap's sharp face and strange eyes Hare became conscious of an inward heat, which he had felt before, but never as now, when there seemed to be an actual flame within his breast. Mescal's dark, beautiful eyes haunted him. Even now she might be married to this man. Suspense added its burdensome insistent question, but he could not bring himself to ask August if the marriage had taken place.

Thenceforth he no longer vexed himself by trying to forget Mescal; if she came to mind he told himself the truth, that the weeks and months had only added to his love. And though it was bittersweet there was relief in speaking the truth to himself. He no longer blinded himself by hoping, striving to have generous feelings toward Snap Naab; he called the inward fire by its real name—jealousy—and knew that in the end

it would become hatred.

On the third morning after leaving Silver Cup the riders were working slowly along the slope of Coconina; and Hare having driven down a bunch of cattle, found himself on an open ridge near the temporary camp. Happening to glance up the valley he saw what appeared to be smoke hanging over Seeping Springs.

He studied the hazy bluish cloud for some time, but it was so many miles away that he could not be certain whether it was smoke or not, so he decided to ride over and make sure. He expected to get back before dark, but it was of little consequence whether he did or not, for he had his blanket under the saddle, and grain for Silvermane and food for himself in the saddle bags.

Long before Silvermane's easy trot had covered half the distance Hare recognized the cloud that had made him curious. It was smoke. He thought that range riders were camping at the springs, and he meant to see what they were about. After three hours of brisk travel he reached the top of a low rolling knoll that hid Seeping Springs. He remembered the springs were up under the red wall, and that the pool where the cattle drank was lower down in a clump of cedars. He saw smoke rising in a column from the cedars, and he heard the lowing of cattle.

"Something wrong here," he muttered. Following the trail, he rode through the cedars to come upon the dry hole where the pool had once been. There was no water in the flume. The bellowing cattle came from beyond the cedars, down the other side of the ridge. He was not long in reaching the open, and then one glance made all clear.

A new pool, large as a little lake, shone in the twilight, and round it a jostling horned mass of cattle were pressing against a high corral. The flume that fed water to the pool was fenced all the way up to the springs.

Jack slowly rode down the ridge with eyes roving under the cedars and up to the wall. Not a man was in sight.

When he got to the fire he saw that it was not many hours old and was surrounded by fresh boot and horse tracks in the dust. Piles of slender pine logs, trimmed flat on one side, were proof of somebody's intention to erect a cabin. In a rage he flung himself from the saddle. It was not many moments' work for him to push part of the fire under the fence, and part of it against the pile of logs. The pitch-pines went off like rockets, driving the thirsty cattle back.

He tore down a portion of the fence enclosing the flume, and gave Silvermane a drink, then put him to a fast trot on the white

trail. The tracks he had resolved to follow were clean-cut. A few inches of snow had fallen in the valley, and melting, had softened the hard ground. Silvermane kept to his gait with the tirelessness of a desert horse.

Long before sunset he had reached the slope of the mountain and had begun the ascent. Half way up he came to the snow and counted the tracks of three horses. At twilight he rode into the glade where August Naab had waited for his Navajo friends. There, in a sheltered nook among the rocks, he unsaddled Silvermane, covered and fed him, built a fire, ate sparingly of his meat and bread, and rolling up in his blankets, was soon asleep.

He was up and off before sunrise, and he came out on the western slope of Coconina just as the shadowy valley awakened from its misty sleep into daylight. The snow thinned and failed, but the iron-cut horse tracks showed plainly in the trail. At the foot of the mountain the tracks left the White Sage trail and led off to the north toward the cliffs.

Hare searched the red sage-spotted waste for Holderness's ranch. He located it, a black patch on the rising edge of the valley under the wall, and turned Silvermane into the tracks that pointed straight toward it.

As he neared the ranch he came into rolling pasture land where the bleached grass shone white and the cattle were ranging in the thousands. This range had once belonged to Martin Cole, and Hare thought of the bitter Mormon as he noted the snug cabins for the riders, the rambling, picturesque ranch-house, the large corrals, and the long flume that ran down from the cliff.

Hare reined in at the door and halloed.

A red-faced ranger with sandy hair and twinkling eyes appeared. "Hello, stranger, get down an' come in," he said.

"Is Holderness here?" asked Hare.

"No. He's been to Lund with a bunch of steers. I reckon he'll be in White Sage by now. I'm Snood, the foreman. Is it a job ridin' you want?"

"No."

"Say! thet hoss—" he exclaimed. Snood's whoop brought three riders to the door, and when he pointed to the horse, they stepped out with good-natured grins and admiring eyes.

"I never seen him but onc't," said one.

"Lordy, what a hoss!" Snood walked round Silvermane. "If I owned this ranch I'd trade it for that stallion. An' stranger, who might you be?"

"I'm one of August Naab's riders."

"Dene's Spy!" Snood looked Hare over carefully, with much

interest, and without any show of ill will.

"I rode in to Seeping Springs yesterday," said Hare, eying the foreman. "There was a new pond, fenced in. Our cattle couldn't drink. There were a lot of trimmed logs. Somebody was going to build a cabin. I burned the corrals and logs—and I trailed fresh tracks from Seeping Springs to this ranch."

"The hell you did!" shouted Snood, and his face flamed. "See here, stranger, you're the second man to accuse some of my riders of such dirty tricks. That's enough for me. I was foreman of this ranch till this minute. I was foreman, but there were things goin' on thet I didn't know of. I kicked on thet deal with Martin Cole. I quit. I steal no man's water. Is thet good with you?"

Hare offered his hand.

"Them fellers you tracked rode in here yesterday. They're gone now. I've no more to say, except I never hired them."

"I'm glad to hear it. Good-day, Snood, I'm in something of a hurry."

With that Hare faced about in the direction of White Sage. He reached the village in the twilight. He arrived at the Bishop's barnyard, where he put up his horse. Then he went to the house.

It was necessary to introduce himself, for none of the Bishop's family recognized in him the young man they had once befriended. The old Bishop prayed and reminded him of the laying on of hands. The women served him with food, the young men brought him new boots and garments to replace those that had been worn to tatters. Then they plied him with questions about the Naabs, whom they had not seen for nearly a year.

Later Hare sought an interview alone with the Bishop's sons, and told them of the loss of the sheep, of the burning of the new corrals, of the tracks leading to Holderness's ranch. In turn they warned him of his danger, and gave him information desired by August Naab. Holderness's grasp on the outlying ranges and water rights had slowly and surely tightened; every month he acquired new territory; he drove cattle regularly to Lund, and it was no secret that much of the stock came from the eastern slope of Coconina. His friendship with Dene had become offensive to the Mormons, who had formerly been on good footing with him. Dene's killing of Martin Cole was believed to have been at Holderness's instigation. Cole had threatened Holderness. Then Dene and Cole had met in the main street of White Sage. Cole's death ushered in the bloody time that he had prophesied. Dene's band had grown; no man could say how many men he had or who they were. Chance and

Culver were openly his lieutenants, and whenever they came into the village there was shooting.

The Bishop and his sons tried to persuade Hare next morning to leave the village without seeing Holderness, urging the futility of such a meeting.

"I will see him," said Hare.

As he rode many persons stopped to gaze at Silvermane. He turned the corner into the main thoroughfare. As he dismounted he heard the loungers speak of his horse, and he saw their leisurely manner quicken. He stepped into the store to meet more men, among them August Naab's friend, Abe.

He asked for spurs, a clasp-knife and some other necessaries, and he contrived to whisper his identity to Abe. The Mormon was dumbfounded. When he came out of his trance he showed his gladness, and at a question of Hare's he silently pointed toward the saloon.

Hare faced the open door. The room had been enlarged; it was now on a level with the store floor, and was blue with smoke, and noisy with the voices of dark, rugged men.

A man in the middle of the room was dancing a jig. "Hello, who's this?" he said, straightening up.

It might have been the stopping of the dance or the quick spark in Hare's eyes that suddenly quieted the room. Hare had once vowed to himself that he would never forget the scarred face; it belonged to the outlaw Chance.

"Hello! Don't you know me?" he said, with a long step that brought him close to Chance.

The stillness of the room broke to a hoarse whisper from some one. "Look how he packs his gun."

Another man whispered, "There's not six men in Utah who pack a gun thet way."

Chance heard these whispers, for his eye shifted downward the merest fraction of a second. The brick color of his face turned a dirty white.

"Do you know me?" demanded Hare.

Chance's answer was a spasmodic jerking of his hand toward his hip. Hare's arm moved quicker, and Chance's Colt went spinning to the floor.

"Too slow," said Hare. Then he flung Chance backward and struck him blows that sent his head with sodden thuds against the log wall. Chance sank to the floor in a heap.

Hare kicked the outlaw's gun out of the way, and wheeled to the crowd. Holderness stood foremost, his tall form leaning against the bar, his clear eyes shining like light on ice.

"You slapped my face once." Hare leaned close to the rancher.

"Slap it now—rustler!"

In the slow, guarded instant when Hare's gaze held Holderness and the other men, a low murmuring ran through the room.

"Dene's spy!" suddenly burst out Holderness.

Hare slapped his face. Then he backed a few paces with his right arm held before him almost as high as his shoulder, the wrist rigid, the fingers quivering.

"Don't try to draw, Holderness—thet's August Naab's trick with a gun," whispered a man hurriedly.

"Holderness, I made a bonfire over at Seeping Springs," said Hare. "I burned the new corrals your men built, and I tracked them to your ranch. Snood threw up his job when he heard it. He's an honest man, and no honest man will work for a water thief, a cattle rustler, a sheep killer. You're shown up, Holderness. Leave this country before someone kills you—understand, before someone kills you!"

Holderness stood motionless against the bar, his eyes fierce with passionate hate.

Hare backed step by step to the outside door, his right hand still high, his look holding the crowd bound to the last instant. Then he slipped out, scattered the group round Silvermane, and struck hard with the spurs.

Men were crossing from the corner of the green square. One, a compact little fellow, swarthy, his dark hair long and flowing, with jaunty and alert air, was Dene, the outlaw leader. He stopped, with his companions, to let the horse cross.

Hare guided the thundering stallion slightly to the left. Silvermane swerved and in two mighty leaps bore down on the outlaw. Dene saved himself by quickly leaping aside, but even as he moved Silvermane struck him with his left foreleg, sending him into the dust.

At the street corner Hare glanced back. Yelling men were rushing from the saloon and some of them fired after him. The bullets whistled harmlessly behind Hare. Then the corner house shut off his view.

Chapter Eleven

The Desert Hawk

TOWARD the close of the next day Jack Hare arrived at Seeping Springs. A pile of gray ashes marked the spot where the trimmed logs had lain. Round the pool ran a black circle hard packed into the ground by many hoofs. Even the board flume had been burned to a level with the glancing sheet of water. Hare was slipping Silvermane's bit to let him drink when he heard a halloo.

Dave Naab galloped out of the cedars, and presently August Naab and his other sons appeared with a pack train.

"Now you've played hob!" exclaimed Dave. He swung out of his saddle and gripped Hare with both hands.

The other Naabs trotted down the slope and lined their horses before the pool. The sons stared in blank astonishment; the father surveyed the scene slowly, and then fixed wrathful eyes on Hare.

Hare told all that had happened.

August Naab's gloomy face worked. "I see—I see," he said haltingly.

"Ki—yi-i-i!" yelled Dave Naab with all the power of his lungs.

"Be still—boy!" ordered his father. "Hare, this was madness—but tell me what you learned."

Briefly Hare repeated all that he had been told at the Bishop's, and concluded with the killing of Martin Cole by Dene.

August Naab bowed his head and his giant frame shook under the force of his emotion. Martin Cole was the last of his life-long friends. "This—this outlaw—you say you ran him down?"

"Yes. He didn't recognize me or know what was coming till Silvermane was on him. But he was quick, and fell sidewise. Silvermane's knees sent him sprawling."

"Father," began Dave Naab earnestly, "Jack has done a splendid thing. The news will fly over Utah like wildfire. Mormons are slow. They need a leader. But they can follow and they will. We can't cure these evils by hoping and praying. We've got to fight!"

"Dave's right, dad, it means fight," cried George.

"You've been wrong, father, in holding back," said Zeke Naab.

"Let's ride to White Sage," put in Snap Naab, and the little flecks in his eyes were dancing. "I'll throw a gun on Dene. I can get to him. We've been tolerable friends. He's wanted me to join his band. I'll kill him." He laughed as he raised his right hand and swept it down to his left side; the blue Colt lay on his outstretched palm.

August Naab's huge bulk shook again, not this time with grief, but in wrestling effort to withstand the fiery influence of this unholy fighting spirit among his sons. "I am forbidden. We'll drive the cattle to Silver Cup," he decided, "and then go home. I give up Seeping Springs. Perhaps this valley and water will content Holderness."

When they reached the oasis Hare was surprised to find that it was the day before Christmas. The welcome given the long-absent riders was like a celebration. Much to Hare's disappointment Mescal did not appear.

Christmas Day ushered in the short desert winter; ice formed in

the ditches and snow fell, but neither long resisted the reflection of the sun from the walls. The early morning hours were devoted to religious services. At midday dinner was served in the big room of August Naab's cabin.

In all his days Hare had never seen such a bountiful board. Yet he was unable to appreciate it, to share in the general thanksgiving. Dominating all other feeling was the fear that Mescal would come in and take a seat by Snap Naab's side. Then Mescal entered and took the seat next to him. She smiled and spoke, and the blood beat in his ears.

The moment was happy, but it was as nothing to its successor. Under the table cover Mescal's hand found his, and pressed it daringly and gladly. Her hand lingered in his all the time August Naab spent in carving the turkey —lingered there even though Snap Naab's hawk eyes were never far away.

In the afternoon Hare left the house and spent a little while with Silvermane; then he wandered along the wall to the head of the oasis, and found a seat on the fence. The next few weeks presented to him a situation that would be difficult to endure.

The clatter of hoofs roused him. Mescal came tearing down the level on Black Bolly. She pulled in the mustang and halted beside Hare to hold out shyly a red scarf embroidered with Navajo symbols in white and red beads.

"I've wanted a chance to give you this," she said, "a little Christmas present."

For a few seconds Hare could find no words. "Did you make it for me, Mescal?" he finally asked. "I'll keep it always."

"Put it on now—let me tie it—there!"

"But suppose he—they saw it?"

"I don't care who sees it." She met him with clear, level eyes.

"Mescal! What's happened? You're not the same. You seem almost happy. Have you—has he—given you up?"

"Don't you know Mormons better than that?"

"But Mescal—*are* you going to marry him? For God's sake, tell me."

"Never."

"Still you're promised, pledged to him! How'll you get out of it?"

"I don't know how. But I'll cut out my tongue, and be dumb as my poor peon before I'll speak the word that'll make me Snap Naab's wife."

Presently he spoke. "I'm afraid for you. Snap watched us today at dinner."

"He's jealous."

"Suppose he sees this scarf?"

Mescal laughed defiantly. She swiftly turned her face away as his hand closed on hers.

"Mescal, do you love me?"

She raised her free hand to his

shoulder and swayed toward him. He held her a moment, clasped tight, and then released her.

The drama of the succeeding days was of absorbing interest. Hare had liberty; there was little work for him to do save to care for Silvermane. He tried to hunt foxes in the caves and clefts; he rode up and down the broad space under the walls; he sought the open desert only to be driven in by the bitter, biting winds. Then he would return to the big living room of the Naabs and sit before the burning logs. Mescal was engaged upon a new frock of buckskin, and over this she bent with her needle and beads. When there was a chance Hare talked with her, speaking one language with his tongue, a far different one with his eyes.

In the evenings when Snap came in to his wooing and drew Mescal into a corner, Hare watched with covert glance and smouldering jealousy. Snap's courting of the girl, the cool assurance, the unhastening ease, were like the slow rise, the sail, and the poise of a desert hawk before the downward lightning-swift swoop.

It was intolerable for Hare to sit there in the evenings, to try to play with the children who loved him, to talk to August Naab when his eye seemed ever drawn to the quiet couple in the corner, and his ear was unconsciously strained to catch a passing word. That hour was a miserable one for him, yet he could not bring himself to leave the room.

Early in the winter Snap Naab had forced his wife to visit his father's house with him; and she had remained in the room, white-faced, passionately jealous, while he wooed Mescal. Then had come a scene. Hare had not been present, but he knew its results. Snap had been furious, his father grave, Mescal tearful and ashamed. The wife found many ways to interrupt her husband's love-making. She sent the children for him; she was taken suddenly ill; she discovered that the corral gate was open and his cream-colored pinto, dearest to his heart, was running loose; she even set her cottage on fire.

One Sunday evening just before twilight Hare was sitting on the porch with August Naab and Dave, when their talk was interrupted by Snap's loud calling for his wife. At first the sounds came from inside his cabin. Then he put his head out of a window and yelled. Plainly he was both impatient and angry. It was nearly time for him to make his Sunday call upon Mescal.

"Something's wrong," muttered Dave.

"Hester! Hester!" yelled Snap.

Mother Ruth came out and said that Hester was not there.

"Where is she?" Snap banged on the window sill with his fists.

"Find her, somebody—Hester!"

"Son, this is the Sabbath," called Father Naab gravely. "Lower your voice. Now what's the matter?"

"Matter!" bawled Snap, giving way to rage. "When I was asleep Hester stole all my clothes. She's hid them—she's run off—there's not a damn' thing, for me to put on! I'll—"

The roar of laughter from August and Dave drowned the rest of the speech. Hare managed to stifle his own mirth. Snap pulled in his head and slammed the window shut.

"Jack," said August, "even among Mormons the course of true love never runs smooth."

Hare finally forgot his bitter humor in pity for the wife. Snap let nothing interfere with his evening beside Mescal. His hawk's eyes were softer than Hare had ever seen them; he was obliging, kind, gay, an altogether different Snap Naab. He groomed himself often, and wore clean scarfs, and left off his bloody spurs. For eight months he had not touched the bottle. When spring approached he was madly in love with Mescal. And the marriage was delayed because his wife would not have another woman in her home.

It was Hare's habit, as the days grew warmer, to walk a good deal, and one evening he strolled out toward the fields. While passing Snap's cottage Hare heard a woman's voice in passionate protest and a man's in strident anger. Later as he stood with his arm on Silvermane, a woman's scream caused him to grow rigid. When he went back by the cottage a low moaning confirmed his suspicion.

That evening Snap appeared unusually bright and happy; and he asked his father to name the day for the wedding. August did so in a loud voice and with evident relief. Then the quaint Mormon congratulations were offered to Mescal. She appeared as pleased as any of them that the marriage was settled. But there was no shyness, no blushing confusion. When Snap bent to kiss her—his first kiss—she slightly turned her face, so that his lips brushed her cheek, yet even then her self-command did not break for an instant. It was a task for Hare to pretend to congratulate her; nevertheless he mumbled something. She lifted her long lashes, and there, deep beneath the shadows, was unutterable anguish.

Several days went slowly by, bringing the first of April, which was to be the wedding day. August Naab had said it would come before the cottonwoods shed their white floss; and their buds had just commenced to open. The day was not a holiday, and George and Zeke and Dave began to pack for the ranges, yet there was an air of jollity and festivity. Snap Naab had a springy step and jaunty mien. Once he regarded Hare with

a slow smile.

Piute prepared to drive his new flock up on the plateau. The women of the household were busy and excited; the children romped.

The afternoon waned into twilight, and Hare sought the quiet shadows under the wall near the river trail. He meant to stay there until August Naab had pronounced his son and Mescal man and wife. The dull roar of the rapids borne on a faint puff of westerly breeze was lulled into a soothing murmur.

A slender form rounded the corner wall. It was Mescal. The white dog Wolf hung close by her side. Swifly she reached Hare.

"Mescal!" he exclaimed.

"Hush! Speak softly," she whispered fearfully.

"Good God! You are to be married in a few minutes—What do you mean? Where are you going? this buckskin suit—and Wolf with you— Mescal!"

"There's no time—only a word —hurry—do you love me still?" she panted, with great shining eyes close to his.

"Love you? With all my soul!"

"Listen," she whispered, and leaned against him. A fresh breeze bore the boom of the river. She caught her breath quickly: "I love you!—I love you!—good-by!"

She kissed him and broke from his clasp. Then she disappeared in the darkness of the river trail.

Chapter Twelve

Echo Cliffs

WHEN thought came clearly to him he halted irresolute. For Mescal's sake he must not appear to have had any part in her headlong flight, or any knowledge of it.

With stealthy footsteps he reached the cottonwoods, stole under the gloomy shade, and felt his way to a point beyond the twinkling lights. Then, peering through the gloom until assured he was safe from observation, and taking the dark side of the house, he gained the hall, and his room. He threw himself on his bed, and endeavored to compose himself.

While Hare lay there, trying to gather his shattered senses, the merry sound of voices and the music of an accordion hummed from the big living room next to his. Presently heavy boots thumped on the floor of the hall; then a hand rapped on his door.

"Jack, are you there?" called August Naab.

"Yes."

"Come along then."

Hare rose, opened the door and followed August. The room was bright with lights; the table was set, and the Naabs, large and small, were standing expectantly. As Hare found a place behind

them Snap Naab entered with his wife. She was as pale as if she were in her shroud. Hare caught Mother Ruth's pitying subdued glance as she drew the frail little woman to her side. When August Naab began fingering his Bible the whispering ceased.

"Why don't they fetch her?" he questioned.

"Judith, Esther, bring her in," said Mother Mary, calling into the hallway.

Quick footsteps, and the girls burst in impetuously, exclaiming, "Mescal's not there!"

"Where is she, then?" demanded August Naab, going to the door. *"Mescal!"* he called.

"She hadn't put on her white frock," went on Judith.

"Her buckskins aren't hanging where they always are," continued Esther.

August Naab laid his Bible on the table. "I always feared it," he said simply.

"She's gone!" cried Snap Naab. He ran into the hall, into Mescal's room, and returned trailing the white wedding dress. "The time we thought she spent to put this on she's been—"

He flung the dress into the fire. His hands tore at the close scarf around his throat as if to liberate a fury that was stifling him; his face lost all semblance to anything human. He began to curse, and his father circled him with iron arm and dragged him from the room.

Morning disclosed the facts of Mescal's flight. She had dressed for the trail; a knapsack was missing and food enough to fill it; Wolf was gone; Noddle was not in his corral; the peon slave had not slept in his shack; there were moccasin tracks and burro tracks and dog tracks in the sand at the river crossing, and one of the boats was gone. This boat was not moored to the opposite shore. Dave Naab rode out along the river and saw the boat, a mile below the rapids, bottom side up and lodged on a sand bar.

"She got across, and then set the boat loose," said August. "That's the Indian of her. If she went up on the cliffs to the Navajos maybe we'll find her. If she went into the Painted Desert—"

Morning also disclosed Snap Naab drunk and unconscious, lying like a log on the porch of his cottage.

"This means ruin to him," said his father. He gave orders for the sheep to be driven up on the plateau, and for his sons to ride out to the cattle ranges. He bade Hare pack and get in readiness to accompany him to the Navajo cliffs, there to search for Mescal.

The river was low, as the spring thaws had not yet set in, and they crossed swiftly and safely. The three burros were then loaded, two with packs, the other with a heavy water bag.

"See there," said August, pointing to tracks in the sand. The imprints of little moccasins reassured Hare, for he had feared the possibility suggested by the upturned boat. "Perhaps it'll be better if I never find her," continued Naab. "If I bring her back Snap's as likely to kill her as to marry her. But I must try to find her. Only what to do with her—"

"Give her to me," interrupted Jack.

"Hare!"

"I love her!"

Naab's stern face relaxed. "Well, I'm beat! Though I don't see why you should be different from all the others. It was that time you spent with her on the plateau. I thought you too sick to think of a woman!"

"Mescal cares for me," said Hare.

"Ah! That accounts. Hare, did you play me fair?"

"We tried to, though we couldn't help loving."

"She would have married Snap but for you."

"Yes. But I couldn't help that. You brought me out here and saved my life. I know what I owe you. Mescal meant to marry your son when I left for the range last fall. But she's a true woman and couldn't. August Naab, if we ever find her will you marry her to him —now?"

"That depends. Did you know she intended to run?"

"I never dreamed of it. I learned it only at the last moment. I met her on the river trail."

"You should have stopped her."

"I couldn't. I'm only human."

"Well, I'm not blaming you, Hare. I had hot blood once. But I'm afraid the desert will not be large enough for you and Snap. She's pledged to him. Snap will either have her or kill her. I'm going to hunt this desert in advance of him, because he'll trail her like a hound. It would be better to marry her to him than to see her dead."

"I'm not so sure of that."

During the talk they were winding under Echo Cliffs, gradually climbing, and working up to a level with the desert, which they presently attained at a point near the head of the canyon. The trail swerved to the left, following the base of the cliffs. The tracks of Noddle and Wolf were plainly visible in the dust.

They trailed the tracks of the dog and burro to Bitter Seeps, a shallow spring of alkali, and there lost them. The path up the cliffs to the Navajo ranges was bare, time-worn in solid rock, and showed only the imprint of age. August Naab shrugged his broad shoulders and pointed his horse to the cliff. It was dusk when they surmounted it.

They camped in the lee of an uplifting crag. Daylight showed,

Echo Cliffs to be of vastly greater range than the sister plateau across the river.

August Naab followed a trail leading back toward the river. For the most part thick cedars hid the surroundings from Hare's view; occasionally, however, he had a backward glimpse from a high point, or a wide prospect below, where the trail overlooked an oval hemmed-in valley.

About midday Naab brushed through a thicket, and came abruptly on a declivity. "The Navajo camp," he said. "Eschtah has lived there for many years. It's the only permanent Navajo camp I know. These Indians are nomads. This plateau ranges for a hundred miles, and everywhere, in the valleys and green nooks, will be found Navajo hogans. That's why we may never find Mescal."

Hare's gaze traveled down over the tips of cedar and crag to a pleasant vale, dotted with round mound-like white-streaked hogans, from which lazy floating columns of blue smoke curled upward. Mustangs and burros and sheep browsed on the white patches of grass. Bright red blankets blazed on the cedar branches. There was slow colorful movement of Indians, passing in and out of their homes.

August Naab whooped when he reached the valley, and Indian braves appeared, to cluster round him, shake his hand and Hare's, and lead them toward the center of the encampment.

The hogans where these desert savages dwelt were all alike; only the chief's was larger. August Naab drew aside a blanket hanging over a door, and entered, beckoning his companion to follow. A fire blazed in the middle of the hogan, and sent part of its smoke upward through a round hole in the roof. Eschtah, with blanket over his shoulders, his lean black head bent, sat near the fire.

Hare followed August's example, sitting down and speaking no word. His eyes, however, roved discreetly to and fro. Eschtah's three wives presented great differences in age and appearance. The eldest was a wrinkled, parchment-skinned old hag who sat sightless before the fire; the next was a solid square squaw, employed in the task of combing a naked boy's hair with a comb made of stiff thin roots tied tightly in a round bunch. The third wife, much younger, had a comely face, and long braids of black hair, of which, evidently, she was proud. She leaned on her knees over a flat slab of rock, and holding in her hands a long oval stone, she rolled and mashed corn into meal.

There were young braves, with bands binding their straight thick hair, silver rings in their ears,

silver bracelets on their wrists, silver buttons on their moccasins. There were girls who looked up from their blanket-weaving with shy curiosity, and then turned to their frames strung with long threads. Then there were younger boys and girls, all bright-eyed and curious; and babies sleeping on blankets.

At a touch of August's hand Hare turned to the old chief and awaited his speech. It came with the uplifting of Eschtah's head, and the offering of his hand in the white man's salute.

"The White Prophet is welcome," was the chief's greeting. "Does he come for sheep or braves or to honor the Navajo in his home?"

"Eschtah, he seeks the Flower of the Desert," replied August Naab. "Mescal has left him. Her trail leads to the bitter waters under the cliff, and then is as a bird's."

"Eschtah has waited, yet Mescal has not come to him."

"She has not been here?"

"Mescal's shadow has not gladdened the Navajo's door."

"She has climbed the crags or wandered into the canyons. The white father loves her; he must find her."

"Eschtah's braves and mustangs are for his friend's use. The Navajo will find her if she is not as the grain of drifting sand. But is the White Prophet wise in his years? The desert has called. White blood and red blood will not mix. Eschtah's forefathers have called the Desert Flower."

"It is true. But Eschtah's white friend seeks Mescal; he has brought her up as his own; he wants to take her home, to love her better, to trust to the future."

"The white man's ways are white man's ways. Eschtah understands. He gave his granddaughter to his friend. She has been the bond between them. Now she is flown and the White Father seeks the Navajo. Let him command. Eschtah has spoken."

Eschtah pressed into Naab's service a band of young braves, under the guidance of several warriors who knew every trail of the range, every water hole, every cranny where even a wolf might hide. Mile after mile the plateau was covered by these Indians, who beat the brush and penetrated the fastnesses with a hunting instinct that left scarcely a rabbit burrow unrevealed. The days sped by; the search proceeded westward; and after many miles of wild up-ranging they reached a divide which marked the line of Eschtah's domain.

Hare rode as diligently and searched as indefatigibly as August, but he never had any real hope of finding the girl. To hunt for her, however, despite its hopelessness, was a melancholy satisfaction, for never was she out of

his mind.

Nor was the month's hard riding with the Navajos without profit. He made friends with the Indians, and learned to speak many of their words. Then a whole host of desert tricks became part of his accumulating knowledge. In climbing the crags, in looking for water and grass, in loosing Silvermane at night and searching for him at dawn, in marking tracks on hard ground, in all the sight and feeling and smell of desert things he learned much from the Navajos.

One day August Naab showed in few words how significant a factor the sun was in the lives of desert men. "We've got to turn back," he said to Hare. "The sun's getting hot and the snow will melt in the mountains. If the Colorado rises too high we can't cross."

They were two days in riding back to the encampment. Eschtah received them in dignified silence, expressive of his regret. When their time of departure arrived he accompanied them to the head of the nearest trail, which started down from Saweep Peak, the highest point of Echo Cliffs. It was the Navajos' outlook over the Painted Desert.

"Mescal is there," said August Naab. "She's there with the slave Eschtah gave her. He leads Mescal. Who can follow him there?"

The old chieftain reined in his horse, beside the time-hollowed trail, and the same hand that waved his white friend downward swept up in slow stately gesture toward the illimitable expanse. It was a warrior's salute to an unconquered world.

"The slave without a tongue is a wolf. He scents the trails and the waters. Eschtah's eyes have grown old watching here, but he has seen no Indian who could follow Mescal's slave. Eschtah will lie there, but no Indian will know the path to the place of his sleep. Mescal's trail is lost in the sand. No man may find it."

Chapter Thirteen

Renegade

AUGUST NAAB hoped that Mescal might have returned in his absence; but to Hare such hope was vain. The women of the oasis met them with gloomy faces presaging bad news, and they were reluctant to tell it.

Snap Naab's wife lay dangerously ill, the victim of his drunken frenzy. He had tried to kill his wife and wreck his cottage, being prevented in the nick of time by Dave Naab, the only one of his brothers who dared approach him. Then he had ridden off on the White Sage trail and had not been heard from since.

The Mormon put forth all his skill in surgery and medicine to save the life of his son's wife. He bade Hare, after he had rested awhile, to pack and ride out to the range, and tell his sons that he would come later. It was a relief to leave the oasis, and Hare started the same day, and made Silver Cup that night.

"Hello, Jack," called Dave Naab, into the dark. "I knew that was you. Silvermane sure rings bells when he hoofs it down the stones. How're you and dad? And did you find Mescal?"

Hare told the story of the fruitless search.

"It's no more than we expected," said Dave. "The man doesn't live who can trail the peon. Mescal's like a captured wild mustang that's slipped her halter and gone free."

"What's your news?" inquired Hare.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Dave with a short laugh. "The cattle wintered well. We've had little to do but hang round and watch. Zeke and I chased old Whitefoot one day, and got pretty close to Seeping Springs. We met Joe Stube, a rider who was once a friend of Zeke's. He's with Holderness now, and he said that Holderness had rebuilt the corrals at the spring; also he has put up a big cabin, and he has a dozen riders there. Stube told us Snap had been shooting up White Sage. He finished up by killing Snood. They got into an argument about you."

"About me!"

"Yes, it seems that Snood took your part, and Snap wouldn't stand for it."

"What will the Mormons in White Sage say about Snap's killing Snood?"

"They've said a lot. They've outlawed Culver, and Snap will be outlawed next. Jack, you can't be too careful. Snap will ride in here some day and then—"

And it was only on the third day after Dave's remark that Hare, riding down the mountain with a deer he had shot, looked out from the trail and saw Snap's cream pinto trotting toward Silver Cup. Beside Snap rode a tall man on a big bay. When Hare reached camp he learned that Dave had already caught sight of the horsemen, and had gone down to the edge of the cedars. While they were speaking Dave hurriedly ran up the trail.

"It's Snap and Holderness," he called out sharply. "What's Snap bringing him here for?"

"I don't like the looks of it," replied Zeke.

"Jack, what'll you do?"

"Do? What can I do? I'm not going to run out of camp because of a visit from men who don't like me."

"No." The dull red came to Dave's cheek. "But will you draw

on him?"

"Certainly not. He's August Naab's son and your brother."

"Yes, and you're my friend, which Snap won't think of. Will you draw on Holderness, then?"

Hare unbuckled his cartridge belt, which held his Colt, and hung it over the pommel of his saddle; then he sat down on one of the stone seats near the campfire.

"Steady, you fellows," said Dave, with a warning glance. "I'll do the talking."

Holderness and Snap appeared among the cedars, and reined in their mounts a few paces from the fire. Dave Naab stood directly before Hare, and George and Zeke stepped aside.

"Howdy, boys," called out Holderness with a smile which was like a gleam of light playing on a frozen lake.

Dave studied the cattleman with cool scorn, but refusing to speak to him, addressed his brother. "Snap, what do you mean by riding in here with this fellow?"

"I'm Holderness's new foreman. We're just looking round," replied Snap. The hard lines, the sullen shade, the cruelty had returned tenfold to his face.

"New foreman!" exclaimed Dave.

"That's what I said," growled Snap.

"You're a liar!" shouted Dave.

"It's true, Naab; he's my new foreman," put in Holderness, suavely. "A hundred a month—in gold—and I've got as good a place for you."

"Well, by God!" Dave's arms came down and his face blanched to his lips. "Holderness!"

"I know what you'd say," interrupted the ranchman. "But stop it. I know you're game. And what's the use of fighting? I'm talking business. I'll—"

"You can't talk business or anything else to me," said Dave Naab, and he veered sharply toward his brother.

"Snap Naab, you're going against your father, your brothers, your own flesh and blood?"

"I can't see it that way."

"Then you're a drunken, easily led fool. This man's no rancher. He's a rustler. He ruined Martin Cole, the father of your first wife. He's stolen our cattle; he's jumped our water rights. He's trying to break us. For God's sake, ain't you a man?"

"Things have gone bad for me," replied Snap sullenly, shifting in his saddle. "I reckon I'll do better to cut out alone for myself."

"You crooked cur! Now then, what do you want here? Be quick. This's our range and you and your boss can't ride here. You can't even water your horses. Out with it!"

At this, Hare, who had been so absorbed as to forget himself, suddenly felt a cold tightening of the

skin of his face, and a hard swell of his breast. The dance of Snap's eyes, the downward flit of his hand seemed instantaneous with a red flash and loud report. Instinctively Hare dodged, but the light impact of something like a puff of air gave place to a tearing hot agony. Then he slipped down, back to the stone, with a bloody hand fumbling at his breast.

Dave leaped with tigerish agility, and knocking up the levelled Colt, held Snap as in a vise. George Naab gave Holderness's horse a sharp kick which made the mettlesome beast jump so suddenly that his rider was nearly unseated. Zeke ran to Hare and laid him back against the stone.

"Cool down, there!" ordered Zeke. "He's done for."

Dave Naab flung Snap backward, almost off his horse. "Damn you! Run, or I'll kill you. And you, Holderness! Remember! If we ever meet again—you draw!" He tore a branch from a cedar and slashed both horses. They plunged out of the glade, and clattering over the stones, brushing the cedars, disappeared. Dave groped blindly back toward his brothers.

"Zeke, this's awful. Who's to tell father?"

Then Hare sat up, leaning against the stone, his shirt open and his bare shoulder bloody; his face was pale, but his eyes were smiling. "Cheer up, Dave. I'm not dead yet."

"Sure he's not," said Zeke. "He caught the bullet high up in the shoulder."

Dave sat down very quietly without a word, and the hand he laid on Hare's knee shook a little.

"When I saw George go for his gun," went on Zeke, "I knew there'd be a lively time in a minute if it wasn't stopped, so I just said Jack was dead."

"Do you think they came over to get me?" asked Hare.

"No doubt," replied Dave, lifting his face and wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Listen, I hear horses," said Zeke, looking up from his task over Hare's wound.

"It's Billy, up on the home trail," added George. "Yes, and there's father with him."

August Naab galloped into the glade, and swung himself out of the saddle. "I heard a shot. What's this? Who's hurt?—Hare! Why—lad—how is it with you?"

"Not bad," rejoined Hare.

"Let me see," August thrust Zeke aside. "A bullet hole—just missed the bone—not serious. Tie it up tight. I'll take him home tomorrow. Who's been here?"

"Snap rode in and left his respects."

"Snap! Already? Yet I knew it —I saw it. Snap surprised you, then?"

"No. I knew it was coming."

"Jack hung his belt and gun on

Silvermane's saddle," said Dave. "He didn't feel as if he could draw on either Snap or Holderness—"

"Holderness!"

"Yes. Snap rode in with Holderness. Hare thought if he was unarmed they wouldn't draw. But Snap did."

"Was he drunk?"

"No. They came over to kill Hare." Dave went on to recount the incident in full. "And—and see here, dad—that's not all. Snap's gone to the bad." He told of his brother's treachery.

For long moments there was silence broken only by the tramp of the old man as he strode heavily to and fro. At last the footsteps ceased, and Hare opened his eyes to see Naab's tall form erect, his shaggy head rigid.

"Hare," began August presently. "I'm responsible for this cowardly attack on you. I brought you out here. This is the second one. Beware of the third! What was the reason I taught you my trick with a gun?"

"My flesh sickened at the thought of killing a man, even to save my own life; and to kill—your son—"

"No son of mine!" thundered Naab. "Remember that when next you meet. If you have felt duty to me, I release you."

Zeke finished bandaging the wound. Making a bed of blankets, he lifted Hare into it, and covered him, cautioning him to lie still.

He rode home next day, drooping in the saddle, with the strong arm of August Naab upholding him. His wound was dressed and he was put to bed.

In three weeks he was in the saddle again, riding out over the red strip of desert toward the range. He sought lonely rides more than ever, and, like Silvermane, he was always watching and listening. His duties carried him half way to Seeping Springs, across the valley to the red wall, up the slope of Coconina far into the forest of stately pines.

The days flew by; spring had long since given place to summer; the blaze of the sun and blast of flying sand were succeeded by the cooling breezes from the mountain; October brought the flurries of snow and November the dark storm clouds.

Hare was the last of the riders to be driven off the mountain. The brothers were waiting for him at Silver Cup, and they at once packed and started for home.

August Naab listened to the details of the range riding since his absence, with silent surprise. Holderness and Snap had kept away from Silver Cup after the supposed killing of Hare. Not a steer had been driven off the range that summer and fall.

So for Hare the months had gone by swiftly; though when he looked back afterward they

seemed years. The winter at the oasis he filled as best he could, with the children playing in the yard, with Silvermane under the sunny lee of the great red wall, with any work that offered itself.

Chapter Fourteen

Wolf

ON THE anniversary of the night Mescal disappeared Hare did not sleep and when the dawn lightened he knew what he must do.

After breakfast he sought August Naab. "May I go across the river?" he asked.

The old man looked up from his carpenter's task. "Mescal?"

"Yes."

"Yes, you may go. It's a man's deed. God keep you!"

Hare filled one saddle bag with grain, another with meat, bread, and dried fruits, strapped a five-gallon water sack back of Silvermane's saddle, and set out toward the river. At the crossing bar he removed Silvermane's equipments and placed them in the boat. At that moment a long howl, as of a dog baying the moon, startled him from his musings, and his eyes sought the river bank, up and down, and then the opposite side. An animal, which at first he took to be a gray timber wolf, was running along the sand bar of the landing.

"Pretty white for a wolf," he muttered.

The beast began trotting along the bar, every few paces stepping to the edge of the water. Presently he spied Hare, and he began to bark furiously.

"It's a dog all right; wants to get across," said Hare. "Where have I seen him?" Suddenly he sprang to his feet, almost upsetting the boat. "Wolf! Hyer! Hyer!"

The dog leaped straight up in the air, and coming down, began to dash back and forth along the sand with piercing yelps.

"It's Wolf! Mescal must be near," cried Hare. With trembling hands he tied Silvermane's bridle to the stern seat of the boat and pushed off. At length the bow grated on the sand, and Silvermane emerged with a splash and a snort.

"Wolf, old fellow!" cried Hare. "Where's Mescal? Wolf, where is she?" He threw his arms around the dog. Wolf whined, licked Hare's face, and breaking away, ran up the sandy trail, and back again.

"All right, Wolf—coming." Never had Hare saddled so speedily, nor mounted so quickly. He sent Silvermane into the willow-skirted trail close behind the dog, up on the rocky bench, and then under the bulging wall. Wolf reached the level between the canyon and Echo Cliffs, and then

started straight west toward the Painted Desert. He trotted a few rods and turned to see if the man was coming.

Hare noted the dog occasionally in the first hours of travel, but he gave his eyes mostly to the broken line of sky and desert in the west, to the receding contour of Echo Cliffs, to the spread and break of the desert near at hand. It was only when his excited fancy had cooled that Hare came to look closely at Wolf. But for the dog's color he could not have been distinguished from a real wolf. His head and ears and tail dropped, and he was lame in his right front paw.

Hare halted in the shade of a stone, dismounted and called the dog to him. Lifting Wolf's paw he discovered that the ball of the foot was worn through; whereupon he called into service a piece of buckskin, and fashioning a rude moccasin he tied it round the foot. Wolf licked his hand, turned toward the west as if anxious to be off.

Again they faced the west, dog leading, man following, and addressed themselves to a gradual ascent. When it had been surmounted Hare realized that his ride so far had brought him only through an anteroom; the real portal now stood open to the Painted Desert. The immensity of the thing seemed to reach up to him with a thousand lines, ridges, canyons, all ascending out of a purple gulf. The arms of the desert enveloped him, a chill beneath their warmth.

As he descended into the valley, Hare felt the air growing warmer and closer. By mid-afternoon, when he had traveled perhaps 30 miles, he was moist from head to foot, and Silvermane's coat was wet. Looking backward Hare had a blank feeling of loss; there was no familiar landmark left.

At sunset Hare made his camp beside a stone which would serve as a windbreak. He laid his saddle for a pillow and his blanket for a bed. He gave Silvermane a nosebag full of water, and then one of grain; he fed the dog, and afterward attended to his own needs. He scooped out a little hollow in the sand for his hips, took a last look at Silvermane haltered to the rock, and calling Wolf to his side stretched himself to rest.

He awakened and arose before any color of dawn hinted of the day. While he fed his four-footed companions the sky warmed and lightened. A tinge of rose gathered in the east. The air was cool and transparent.

When they started the actions of the dog showed Hare that Wolf was not tracking a back-trail, but traveling by instinct. There were draws which necessitated a search for a crossing, and areas of broken rock which had to be rounded,

and steep flat mesas rising in the path, and strips of deep sand and canyons impassable for long distances. But the dog always found a way and always came back to a line with a black spur that Hare had marked.

Then quite suddenly it vanished in the ragged blue mass of the Ghost Mountains. Hare had seen them several times, though never so distinctly. The purple tips, the bold rock ribs, the shadowed canyons, so sharp and clear in the morning light—how impossible to believe that these were only the deceit of the desert mirage!

The splintered desert-floor merged into an area of sand. Wolf slowed his trot, and Silvermane's hoofs sunk deep. Dismounting Hare labored beside him. Often he pulled the stopper from the water bag and cooled his parching lips and throat. The waves of the sand dunes were as the waves of the ocean. The morning breeze, rising out of the west, approached a rippling line, like the crest of an inflowing tide.

Silvermane snorted, lifted his ears and looked westward toward a yellow pall which swooped up from the desert.

"Sand storm," said Hare, and calling Wolf he made for the nearest rock that was large enough to shelter them. The whirling sand cloud mushroomed into an enormous desert covering, engulfing the dunes, obscuring the light. The sunlight failed; the day turned to gloom. Then an eddying fog of sand and dust enveloped Hare. His last glimpse before he covered his face with a silk handkerchief was of sheets of sand streaming past his shelter.

Then he waited patiently while the steady seeping rustle swept by, and the band of his hat sagged heavier, and the load on his shoulders had to be continually shaken off, and the weighty trap round his feet crept upward. When the light, fine touch ceased he removed the covering from his face to see himself standing nearly to his knees in sand, and Silvermane's back and the saddle burdened with it. The storm was moving eastward, a dull red now with the sun faintly showing through it like a ball of fire.

"Well, Wolf, old boy, how many storms like that will we have to weather?" asked Hare, in a cheery tone which he had to force. He knew these sand storms were but vagaries of the desert wind. Before the hour closed he had to seek the cover of a stone and wait for another to pass. Then he was caught in the open, with not a shelter in sight. He was compelled to turn his back to a third storm, the worst of all, and to bear as best he could the heavy impact of the first blow, and the succeeding rush and flow of sand.

It was good to get into the sad-

dle again and face clear air. Far away the black spur again loomed up, now surrounded by groups of mesas tinged with green. That surely meant the end of this long trail; the faint spots of green lent suggestion of a desert water hole; there Mescal must be, hidden in some shady canyon.

So he pressed on down a plain of bare rock dotted by huge boulders; and out upon a level floor of scant sage and greasewood. He entered a zone of clay dunes of violet and heliotrope hues; and then a belt of lava and cactus. Reddish points studded the desert, and here and there were meager patches of white grass.

As he went on the grass failed, and streams of jagged lava flowed downward. Beds of cinders told of the fury of a volcanic fire. Soon Hare had to dismount to make moccasins for Wolf's hind feet, and to lead Silvermane carefully over the cracked lava. For a while there were strips of ground bare of lava and harboring only an occasional bunch of cactus, but soon every foot free of the reddish iron bore a projecting mass of fierce spikes and thorns.

Hare thought there must be an end to it sometime, yet it seemed as though he were never to cross that black forbidding inferno. He was sorely spent when once more he stepped out upon the bare desert. On pitching camp he made the grievous discovery that the water bag had leaked or the water had evaporated, for there was only enough left for one more day. He ministered to thirsty dog and horse in silence.

His little fire of greasewood threw a wan circle into the surrounding blackness. Not a sound hinted of life. He longed for even the bark of a coyote. Silvermane stood motionless with tired head. Wolf stretched limply on the sand. Hare rolled into his blanket and stretched out with slow aching relief.

When he awakened the blazing globe of the sun had arisen over the eastern horizon, and the red of the desert swathed all the reach of valley. Hare pondered whether he should use his water at once or dole it out. The sun would be hot and would evaporate such water as leakage did not claim, and so he shared alike with Wolf, and gave the rest to Silvermane.

For an hour the mocking lilac mountains hung in the air and then paled in the intense light. The day was soundless and windless, and the heat waves rose from the desert like smoke.

In the heat of midday Hare reined in his horse under a slate bank where there was shade. His face was swollen and peeling, and his lips had begun to dry and crack and taste of alkali. Then Wolf pattered on; Silvermane kept at his heels; Hare dozed in the saddle. His eyes burned in their

sockets from the glare, and it was a relief to shut out the barren reaches. So the afternoon waned.

Silvermane stumbled, jolting Hare out of his stupid lethargy. Before him spread a great field of boulders with not a slope or a ridge or a mesa or an escarpment.

When Silvermane started onward Hare thought of the Navajos' custom to trust horse and dog in such an emergency. They were desert-bred; beyond human understanding were their sight and scent. He was at the mercy now of Wolf's instinct and Silvermane's endurance.

Chapter Fifteen

Desert Night

THE gray stallion, finding the rein loose on his neck, trotted forward and overtook the dog, and thereafter followed at his heels. With the setting of the sun a slight breeze stirred, and freshened as twilight fell, rolling away the sultry atmosphere. Then the black desert night mantled the plain.

For a while this blackness soothed the pain of Hare's sun-blinded eyes. It was a relief to have the unattainable horizon line blotted out. In and out, round and round, ever winding, ever zigzagging, Silvermane hung close to Wolf, and the sandy lanes between the boulders gave forth no sound.

A pale light in the east turned to a glow, then to gold, and the round disc of the moon silhouetted the black boulders on the horizon. To Hare it was the crowning reminder of lifelessness; it fitted this world of dull gleaming stones.

The dog moved onward with silent feet; the horse wound after him with hoofs padded in the sand; the moon lifted and the desert gleamed; the boulders grew larger and the lanes wider. So the night wore on, and Hare's eyelids grew heavy, and his whole weary body cried out for rest and forgetfulness. He nodded until he swayed in the saddle; then righted himself, only to doze again. The east gave birth to the morning star. Hare could not bring himself to face the light and heat, and he stopped at a wind-worn cave under a shelving rock. He was asleep when he rolled out on the sand-strewn floor. Once he awoke and it was still day, for his eyes quickly shut upon the glare. He lay sweltering till once more slumber claimed him.

The dog awakened him, with cold nose and low whine. Another twilight had fallen. Hare crawled out, stiff and sore, hungry and parching with thirst. He made an attempt to eat, but it was a failure. There was a dry burning in his throat, a dizzy feeling in his brain, and there were red flashes before his eyes. Wolf refused meat,

and Silvermane turned from the grain, and lowered his head to munch a few blades of desert grass.

Then the journey began, and the night fell black. A cool wind blew from the west, the white stars blinked, the weird moon rose with its ghastly glow. Huge boulders rose before him in grotesque shapes, tombs and pillars and statues of Nature's dead, carved by wind and sand. But some had life in Hare's disordered fancy. They loomed and towered over him, and stalked abroad and peered at him with deep-set eyes.

Hare rode on into the night, tumbled from his saddle in the gray of dawn to sleep, and stumbled in the twilight to his drooping horse. His eyes were blind now to the desert shapes, his brain burned and his tongue filled his mouth. Silvermane trod ever upon Wolf's heels; he had come into the kingdom of his desert-strength; he lifted his drooping head and lengthened his stride; weariness had gone and he snorted his welcome to something on the wind. Then he passed the limping dog and led the way.

Hare held to the pommel and bent dizzily forward in the saddle. Silvermane was going down, step by step, with metallic clicks upon flinty rock. Whether he went down or up was all the same to Hare; he held on with closed eyes and whispered to himself. Down and down, step by step, cracking the stones with iron-shod hoofs, the gray stallion worked his perilous way, sure-footed as a mountain sheep. Then he stopped with a great slow heave and bent his head.

The black bulge of a canyon rim blurred in Hare's hot eyes. A trickling sound penetrated his tired brain. His ears had grown like his eyes—false. Only another delusion! Yet he listened, for it was sweet even in its mockery. Soft murmuring flow, babble and gurgle, little hollow fall and splash!

Suddenly Silvermane, lifting his head, broke the silence with a great sigh of content. It pierced the dull fantasy of Hare's mind; it burst the gloomy spell. The sigh and the snort which followed were Silvermane's triumphant signals when he had drunk his fill.

Hare fell from the saddle. The gray dog lay stretched low in the darkness. Hare crawled beside him and reached out with his hot hands. Smooth cool marble rock, growing slippery, then wet, led into running water. He slid forward on his face and wonderful cold thrills quivered over his burning skin. He drank and drank until he could drink no more. Then he lay back upon the rock; the madness of his brain went out with the light of the stars, and he slept.

When he awoke red canyon walls leaned far above him to a gap spanned by blue sky. A song

of rushing water murmured near his ears. He looked down; a spring gushed from a crack in the wall; Silvermane cropped green bushes, and Wolf sat on his haunches, waiting. Hare raised himself, looking again and again, and slowly gathered his wits.

He drank long and deeply. When he had eaten, his strength came back.

At a word Wolf, with a wag of his tail, splashed into the gravelly stream bed. Hare followed on foot, leading Silvermane. There were little beds of pebbles and beaches of sand and short steps down which the water babbled. The canyon was narrow and tortuous. For an hour he went down steadily without a check, and the farther down the rougher grew the way.

The canyon narrowed as it deepened; the jutting walls leaned together, shutting out the light; the sky above was now a ribbon of blue, only to be seen when Hare threw back his head and stared straight up.

The sand and gravel and shale had disappeared; all was bare clean-washed rock. In many places the brook failed as a trail, for it leaped down in white sheets over mossy cliffs. Hare faced these walls in despair. But Wolf led on over the ledges and Silvermane followed, nothing daunted. At last Hare shrank back from a hole which defied him utterly. Even Wolf hesitated. The canyon was barely 20 feet wide; the floor ended in a precipice; the stream leaped out and fell into a dark cleft from which no sound arose. On the right there was a shelf of rock; it was scarce half a foot broad at the narrowest and then apparently vanished altogether.

While he hesitated Wolf pattered out upon the ledge and Silvermane stamped restlessly. With a desperate fear of losing his beloved horse Hare let go the bridle and stepped upon the ledge. He walked rapidly, for a slow step meant uncertainty and a false one meant death. He heard the sharp ring of Silvermane's shoes, and he listened in agonized suspense for the slip, the snort, the crash that he feared must come. But it did not come. Seeing nothing except the narrow ledge, yet feeling the blue abyss beneath him, he bent all his mind to his task, and finally walked out into lighter space upon level rock. To his infinite relief Silvermane appeared rounding a corner out of the dark passage, and was soon beside him.

The canyon widened; there was a clear demarcation where the red walls gave place to yellow; the brook showed no outlet from its subterranean channel. Hare kept on, conscious only of the smart of bruised hands and feet and the ache of laboring lungs.

Time went on and the sun hung

in the midst of the broadening belt of blue sky. A long slant of yellow slope led down to a sage-covered level, which Hare crossed. He descended into a ravine which became precipitous. Here he made only slow advance. At the bottom he found himself in a wonderful lane with an almost level floor; here flowed a shallow stream bordered by green willows. Wolf took the direction of the flowing water.

He gazed ahead with straining eyes. Presently there was not a break in the walls. A drowsy hum of falling water came to Hare, strange reminder of the oasis, the dull roar of the Colorado, and of Mescal.

His flagging energies leaped into life with the canyon suddenly opening to bright light and blue sky and beautiful valley, white and gold in blossom, green with grass and cottonwood. On a flower-scented wind rushed that muffled roar again, like distant thunder.

Wolf dashed into the cottonwoods. Silvermane whistled with satisfaction and reached for the long grass.

Wolf appeared in the open leaping upon a slender brown-garbed form.

"Mescal!" cried Hare.

With a cry she ran to him, her arms outstretched, her hair flying in the wind, her dark eyes wild with joy.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Thunder River

FOR an instant Hare's brain reeled, and Mescal's broken murmurings were meaningless. Then his faculties grew steady and acute; he held the girl as if he intended never to let her go.

She slipped out of his arms breathless and scarlet. "Tell me all—"

"There's much to tell, but not before you kiss me. It has been more than a year."

"Only a year! Have I been gone only a year?"

"Yes, a year. But it's past now. Kiss me, Mescal. One kiss will pay for that long year, though it broke my heart."

Shyly she raised her hands to his shoulders and put her lips to his. "Yes, you've found me, Jack, just in time!"

"Mescal! What's wrong? Aren't you well?"

"Pretty well. But very soon I should not have had any food at all."

"But your peon—the dumb Indian? Surely he could find something to eat. What of him? Where is he?"

"I found him dead one morning and I buried him in the sand."

Mescal led Hare under the cottonwoods and pointed to the

Indian's grave, now green with grass. Farther on in a circle of trees stood a little hogan skilfully constructed out of brush. The twitter of birds and hum of bees were almost drowned in the soft roar of water.

"Is that the Colorado I hear?" asked Hare.

"No, that's Thunder River. The Colorado is farther down in the Grand Canyon."

"Farther down! Mescal, I must have come a mile from the rim. Where are we?"

"We are almost at the Colorado, and directly under the head of Coconina. We can see the mountain from the break in the valley below."

"Come sit by me here under this tree. Tell me—how did you ever get here?"

Then Mescal told him how the peon had led her on a long trail from Bitter Seeps, how they had camped at desert water holes, and on the fourth day descended to Thunder River.

"I was quite happy at first. It's always summer down here. There were rabbits, birds, beaver, and fruit—we had enough to eat. I explored the valley with Wolf or rode Noddle up and down the canyon. Then my peon died, and I had to shift for myself. There came a time when the beaver left the valley, and Wolf and I had to make a rabbit serve for days. I knew then I'd have to get across the desert to the Navajos or starve. I hesitated about climbing out into the desert, for I wasn't sure of the trail to the water holes. Noddle wandered off and never came back. After he was gone and I knew I couldn't get out I grew homesick.

"Then I wanted you, and I'd cry out. I knew I must send Wolf home. How hard it was to make him go! But at last he trotted off, looking backward, and I—waited and waited."

She leaned against him. The hand which had plucked at his sleeve dropped to his fingers and clung there. Not for an instant since his arrival had she altogether let loose of his fingers, or coat, or arm.

"My mustang—Bolly—tell me of her," said Mescal.

"Bolly's fine. Sleek and fat and lazy!"

"Oh! how I want to see her! Tell me—everything."

"Wait a little. Let me fetch Silvermane and we'll make a fire and eat. Then—"

"Tell me now."

"Well, Mescal, it's soon told." Then came the story of events growing out of her flight. When he told of the shooting at Silver Cup, Mescal rose with heaving bosom and blazing eyes.

"It was nothing—I wasn't hurt much. Only the intention was bad. We saw no more of Snap or Holderness. The worst of it all was

that Snap's wife died."

"Oh, poor Father Naab! How he must hate me, the cause of it all!"

"Don't blame yourself, Mescal. What Snap might have done if you had married him is guesswork. He might have left drink alone a while longer. But he was bad clean through. I heard Dave Naab tell him that. Snap would have gone over to Holderness sooner or later. And now he's a rustler, if not worse."

"Jack—you want to take me back home?"

"Of course. What did you expect when you sent Wolf?"

"I didn't expect. I just wanted to see you, or somebody, and I thought of the Navajos. Couldn't I live with them? Why can't we stay here or in the canyon across the Colorado where there's plenty of game?"

"I'm going to take you home and Father Naab shall marry you —to—to me."

"Did—did you tell him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say? Was he angry? Tell me."

"He was kind and good as he always is. He said if I found you, then the issue would be between Snap and me, as man to man. You are still pledged to Snap in the Mormon Church and that can't be changed."

"Snap will not let any grass grow in the trails to the oasis," said Mescal. "Once he finds I've come back to life he'll have me. I'm afraid to go home."

"There's no other place for us to go. We can't live the life of Indians. I'll take you home. You are mine and I'll keep you." He held her tightly with strong arms; his face paled, his eyes darkened.

Silvermane walked into the glade with a saddle girth so tight that his master unbuckled it only by dint of repeated effort.

"Mescal, can we get across the Colorado and find a way up over Coconina?" asked Hare.

"Yes, I'm sure we can. My peon never made a mistake about directions. There's no trail, but Navajos have crossed the river at this season, and worked up a canyon."

The shadows had gathered under the cliffs, and the rosy light high up on the ramparts had chilled and waned when Hare and Mescal sat down to their meal. Then in the twilight they sat together content to be silent, listening to the low thunder of the river. Long after Mescal had retired into her hogan Hare lay awake before her door.

He bestirred himself at the first glimpse of day, and when the gray mists had lifted to wreathe the crags it was light enough to begin the journey. Hare lifted Mescal upon Silvermane. He walked beside the horse and Wolf trotted on before.

Gradually the trees thinned out,

hard stony ground encroached upon the sand, boulders appeared in the way; and presently, when Silvermane stepped out of the shade of the cottonwoods, Hare saw the lower end of the valley with its ragged vent.

"Look back!" said Mescal.

Hare saw the river bursting from the base of the wall in two white streams which soon united below, and leaped down in a continuous cascade. Step by step the stream plunged through the deep gorge, a broken, foaming raceway, and at the lower end of the valley it took its final leap into a blue abyss, and then found its way to the Colorado, hidden underground.

The flower-scented breeze and the rumbling of the river persisted long after the valley lay behind and above, but these failed at length in the close air of the huge abutting walls. Silvermane clattered down the easy trail at a gait which urged Hare now and then from walk to run. Soon the gully opened out upon a plateau through the center of which, in a black gulf, wound the red Colorado, sullen-voiced, booming, never silent nor restful.

"Jack, this is mescal," said the girl, pointing to some towering plants.

All over the sunny slopes cacti lifted slender shafts, unfolding in spiral leaves as they shot upward and bursting at the top into plumes of yellow flowers.

They traversed the remaining slope of the plateau, and entering the head of a ravine, descended a steep cleft of flinty rock. Then reaching a level, they passed out to rounded sand and the river.

"It's a little high," said Hare dubiously. "Mescal, I don't like the looks of those rapids."

Only a few hundred rods of the river could be seen. In front of Hare the current was swift but not broken. Below was a smaller rapid where the broken water turned toward the nearer side of the river, but with an accompaniment of twisting swirls and vicious waves.

"It's safe, if Silvermane is a good swimmer," replied Mescal.

"Silvermane loves the water. He'll make this crossing easily. But he can't carry us both, and it's impossible to make two trips. I'll have to swim." Hare led Silvermane up the sand bar to its limit. He removed his coat and strapped it behind the saddle; his belt and revolver and boots he hung over the pommel.

"How about Wolf? I'd forgotten him."

"Never fear for him! He'll stick close to me."

"Now, Mescal, there's the point we want to make, that bar; see it? Here's my gun. Balance it on the pommel—so. Come, Silver; come, Wolf."

In two steps Silvermane went in

to his saddle, and he rolled with a splash and a snort, sinking Mescal to her hips. His nose level with the water, mane and tail floating, he swam powerfully with the current.

Keeping upstream of the horse and even with Mescal, Hare swam with long regular strokes for perhaps one-quarter of the distance. But when they reached the swirling eddies he found that he was tiring. The water was thick and heavy; it compressed his lungs and dragged at his feet. He whirled round and round in the eddies and saw Silvermane doing the same. Only by main force could he breast his way out of these whirlpools. When a wave slapped his face he tasted sand.

As the current grew rougher he began to feel that he could scarcely spread his arms in the wide stroke. Gradually his feet sank lower and lower, the water pressed tighter round him, his arms seemed to grow useless. He ceased to struggle, and drifting with the current, soon was close to Silvermane, and grasped a saddle strap.

"Not there!" called Mescal. "Hang to his tail!"

Hare dropped behind, and catching Silvermane's tail held on firmly. The stallion towed him easily. The waves dashed over him and lapped at Mescal's waist. The current grew stronger, sweeping Silvermane down out of line with the black wall which had frowned closer and closer. Mescal turned to him with bright eyes; curving her hand about her lips she shouted:

"Can't make the bar! We've got to go through this side of the rapids. Hang on!"

In the swelling din Hare felt the resistless pull of the current. As he held on with both hands, hard pressed to keep his grasp, Silvermane dipped over a low fall in the river. Then Hare was riding the rushing water of an incline. It ended below in a red-crested wave, and beyond was a chaos of curling breakers. Hare had one glimpse of Mescal crouching low, shoulders narrowed and head bent; then, with one white flash of the stallion's mane against her flying black hair, she went out of sight in leaping waves and spray. Hare was thrown forward into the back-lash of the wave.

The current threw him from wave to wave. He was dragged through a cauldron, blind from stinging blows, deaf from the tremendous roar. Then the fierce contention of waves lessened, the threshing of cross-currents straightened, and he could breathe once more. Silvermane dragged him steadily; and, finally, his feet touched the ground. He made out Mescal rising from the river on Silvermane, as with loud snorts he climbed to a bar. Hare staggered up and fell on the sand.

"Jack, are you all right?" inquir-

ed Mescal.

"All right, only pounded out of breath, and my eyes are full of sand. How about you?"

"I don't think I ever was any wetter," replied Mescal, laughing. "It was hard to stick on holding the rifle. That first wave almost unseated me. Silvermane is grand, Jack. Wolf swam out above the rapids and was waiting for us when we landed."

Hare wiped the sand out of his eyes and rose to his feet, finding himself little the worse for the adventure. Mescal was wringing the water from the long straight braids of her hair. She was smiling, and a tint of color showed in her cheeks. The wet buckskin blouse and short skirt clung tightly to her slender form.

"All wet," said he, "you and I, clothes, food, guns—everything."

"It's hot and we'll soon dry," returned Mescal. "Here's the canyon and creek we must follow up to Coconina. My peon mapped them in the sand for me one day. It'll probably be a long climb."

Hare took the bridle over his arm and led the way into a black-mouthed canyon, through which flowed a stream of clear water. Wolf splashed and pattered along beside him. Beyond the marble rock this canyon opened out to great breadth and wonderful walls. They climbed little ridges, making short cuts from point to point, they threaded miles of narrow winding creek floor, and passed under ferny cliffs and over grassy banks and through thickets of yellow willow. As they wound along the course of the creek, always up and up, the great walls imperceptibly lowered their rims.

The canyon grew narrower toward its source; the creek lost its volume, patches of snow gleamed in sheltered places. At last the yellow-streaked walls edged out upon a grassy hollow and the great dark pines of Coconina shadowed the snow.

"We're up," panted Hare. "What a climb! Five hours! One more day—then home!"

Hare built a fire under a sheltering pine where no snow covered the soft mat of needles, and while Mescal dried the blankets and roasted the last portion of meat he made a wind-break of spruce boughs. When they had eaten, not forgetting to give Wolf a portion, Hare fed Silvermane the last few handfuls of grain, and tied him with a long halter on the grassy bank. The daylight failed and darkness came on apace. Mescal slept in the shelter of the spruce boughs with Wolf snug and warm beside her. Hare stretched his tired limbs in the heat of the blaze.

When he awakened the fire was low and he was numb with cold. He took care to put on logs enough to last until morning; then he lay down once more, but did

not sleep. The dawn came.

"Mescal, if we're on the spur of Coconina, it's only ten miles or so to Silver Cup," said Hare, as he saddled Silvermane.

While ascending the last step to the rim Hare revolved in his mind the probabilities of marking a straight course to Silver Cup.

"Oh! Jack!" exclaimed Mescal suddenly. "Vermillion Cliffs and home!"

"I've traveled in a circle!" replied Hare.

Hare mounted in front of Mescal, and put the stallion to an easy trot; after two hours of riding they struck a bridle trail which Hare recognized as one leading down to the spring. In another hour they reached the steep slope of Coconina, and saw the familiar red wall across the valley.

"I smell smoke," said Hare.

"The boys must be at the spring," rejoined Mescal.

"Maybe. I want to be sure who's there. We'll leave the trail and slip down through the woods to the left."

Hare crossed the line of cedars and reached the edge of the valley a mile or more above Silver Cup. Then he turned toward it, still cautiously leading Silvermane under cover of the fringe of cedars.

"Mescal, there are too many cattle in the valley."

"They can't all be ours, that's sure," she replied.

"Holderness!" With the word Hare's face grew set and stern. He kept on, cautiously leading the horse under the cedars, and so worked his way along the curve of the woody slope till further progress was checked by the bulging wall of rock.

"Only cattle in the valley, no horses," he said. "I've a good chance to cut across this curve and reach the trail. I don't believe Dave and the boys are at the spring."

He climbed up in front of Mescal, and directed the gray out upon the valley. Soon he was among the grazing cattle.

"Jack, look at that brand," said Mescal, pointing to a white-flanked steer. "There's an old brand like a cross, Father Naab's cross, and a new brand, a single bar. Together they make an H!"

"Mescal! You've hit it. I remember that steer. He was a very devil to brand. He's the property of August Naab, and Holderness has added the bar, making a clumsy H. It wouldn't deceive a child."

They had reached the cedars and the trail when Hare looked through a network of cedar boughs to see a fence of stripped pines. Farther up were piles of unstripped logs, and close by the spring there was a new cabin with smoke curling from a stone chimney. Hare guided Silvermane off of the trail to softer ground and went on. He climbed the slope,

passed the old pool, now a mud-puddle, and crossed the dry wash to be brought suddenly to a halt.

Wolf had made an uneasy stand with his nose pointing to the left, and Silvermane pricked up his ears. Presently Hare heard the stamping of hoofs off in the cedars, and before he had fully determined the direction from which the sound came three horses and a man stepped from the shade into a sunlit space.

Hare was well screened by a thick cedar; and since there was a chance that he might remain unseen he chose to take it. Silvermane and Wolf stood still in their tracks. Peeping out from his covert he saw a man in his shirtsleeves leading the horses—a slender, clean-faced, dark-haired man—Dene!

The blood beat hotly in Hare's temples and he gripped the handle of his Colt. The outlaw had two halters in one hand and with the other he led his bay horse by the mane. Then Hare saw that he wore no belt; he was unarmed; on the horses were only the halters and clinking hobbles. Hare dropped his Colt back into its holster.

Dene sauntered on. When he reached the trail, instead of crossing it, as Hare had hoped, he turned into it and came down.

Hare swung the switch he had broken from an aspen and struck Silvermane a stinging blow on the flanks. The gray leaped forward. The crash of brush and rattle of hoofs stampeded Dene's horses in a twinkling. But the outlaw paled to a ghastly white and seemed rooted to the trail, in his starting eyes was the terror of the supernatural.

The shoulder of the charging stallion struck Dene and sent him spinning out of the trail. In a backward glance Hare saw the outlaw fall, then rise unhurt to shake his fists wildly and run yelling toward the cabin.

Chapter Seventeen

The Swoop of the Hawk

"JACK! the saddle's slipping!" cried Mescal, clinging closer to him.

Hare pulled hard on the bridle, and finally halted the stallion. Hare swung down, and as he lifted Mescal off, the saddle slipped to the ground.

"Lucky not to get a spill! The girth snapped. It was wet, and dried out." Hare hurriedly began to repair the break with buckskin thongs that he found in a saddle bag.

"Listen! Hear the yells! Oh! hurry!" cried Mescal.

"I've never ridden bareback. Suppose you go ahead with Silver, and I'll hide in the cedars till dark, then walk home!"

"No—there's time, but hurry."

"It's got to be strong," muttered Hare, holding the strap over his knee and pulling the laced knot with all his strength, "for we'll have to ride some. If it comes loose—good-by!"

Silvermane's broad chest muscles rippled and he stamped restlessly. Mescal had the blanket smooth on the gray when Hare threw the saddle over him. The yells had ceased, but clattering hoofs on the stony trail were a greater menace. While Hare's brown hands worked swiftly over buckle and strap Mescal climbed to a seat behind the saddle.

"Get into the saddle," said Hare, leaping astride and pressing forward over the pommel. "Slip down—there! and hold to me."

The rapid pounding of the stallion's hoofs drowned the clatter coming up the trail. A backward glance relieved Hare, for dust clouds some few hundred yards in the rear showed the position of the pursuing horsemen. He held in Silvermane to a steady gallop. The trail was uphill, and steep enough to wind even a desert racer, if put to his limit.

When Silvermane struck out of the grove upon this slope Hare kept turning keen glances rearward. The dust cloud rolled to the edge of the cedars, and out of it trooped half a dozen horsemen who began to shoot as soon as they had reached the open. Bullets zipped along the red stone, cutting little puffs of red dust, and sang through the air.

Hare slashed his steed with the switch. Then distance between him and his pursuers grew wider and wider and soon he was out of range. The yells of the rustlers seemed at first to come from baffled rage, but Mescal's startled cry showed their meaning. Other horsemen appeared ahead and to the right of him, tearing down the ridge to the divide.

The direction in which Silvermane was stretching was the only possible one for Hare. If he swerved off the trail to the left it would be upon rough rising ground. Not only must he outride this second band to the point where the trail went down on the other side of the divide, but also he must get beyond it before they came within rifle range.

"Now! Silver! Go! Go!" Fast as the stallion was speeding he answered to the call. He was in the open now, free of stones and brush, with the spang of rifles in the air. The horsemen cut down the half mile to a quarter, lessened that, swept closer and closer, till Hare recognized Chance and Culver, and Snap Naab on his cream-colored pinto. Seeing that they could not head the stallion they sheered more to the right. But Silvermane thundered on, crossing the line ahead of them at full 300 yards, and went

over the divide, drawing them in behind him.

Then, at the sharp crack of the rifles, leaden messengers whizzed high in the air over horse and riders, and skipped along the red shale in front of the running dog.

Silvermane was like a level-rushing thunderbolt. It was a perilous ride down that red slope, not so much from the hissing bullets as from the washes and gullies which Silvermane sailed over in magnificent leaps. Hare thrilled with savage delight.

"Outrun!" he cried, with blazing eyes. "Silver has beaten them."

The rustlers continued on the trail, firing desultorily, till Silvermane so far distanced them that even the necessary lapse into a walk in the red sand placed him beyond range when they arrived at the strip.

"They've turned back, Mescal. We're safe. Why, you look as you did the day the bear ran for you."

"I'd rather a bear got me than Snap."

It was still daylight when they rounded the portal of the oasis and entered the lane with the familiar wall on one side, the peeled fence pickets on the other.

A Navajo whom Hare remembered stared with axe idle by the woodpile, then Judith Naab dropped a bundle of sticks and with a cry of gladness ran from the house. Before Silvermane had come to a full stop Mescal was off. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him, then she left Judith to dart to the corral where a little black mustang had begun to whistle and stamp.

August Naab, bareheaded, with shaggy locks shaking at every step, strode off the porch and his great hands lifted Hare from the saddle. "Every day I've watched the river for you," he said.

"Mescal—child!" he continued, as she came running to him. "Safe and well. Thank the Lord!" He took her to his breast and bent his gray head over her.

Then the crowd of big and little Naabs burst from the house and came under the cottonwoods to offer noisy welcome to Mescal and Hare.

"Jack, you look done up," said Dave Naab solicitously, when the first greetings had been spoken and Mother Ruth had led Mescal indoors. "Silvermane, too—he's wet and winded."

"Ah! What's this?" questioned August Naab, with his hand on Silvermane's flank. He touched a raw groove, and the stallion flinched. "Hare, a bullet made that!"

"Yes. I came by Silver Cup."

"Silver Cup? How on earth did you get down there?"

"We climbed out of the canyon up over Coconina, and so made the spring."

Naab whistled in surprise and he flashed another keen glance

over Hare and his horse. "Your story can wait. I know about what it is—after you reached Silver Cup. Come in, come in, Dave will look out for the stallion."

Hare went to his room and bathed himself and changed his clothes, afterward presenting himself at the supper table to eat like one famished. Mescal and he ate alone, as they had been too late for the regular hour.

Naab and his sons were waiting for Hare when he entered the sitting room, and after his entrance the door was closed. "Tell us all," said Naab, simply.

While Hare was telling his adventures not a word or a move interrupted him till he spoke of Silvermane's running Dene down.

"That's the second time!" rolled out Naab. "The stallion will kill him yet!"

Hare finished his story. "You know Holderness had taken in Silver Cup?" inquired Hare.

"I guess we knew it," replied Dave for him. "While I was in White Sage and the boys were here at home, Holderness rode to the spring and took possession. I called to see him on my way back, but he wasn't around. Snap was there, the boss of a bunch of riders. Dene, too, was there."

"Did you go right into camp?"

"Sure. I was looking for Holderness. There were eighteen or twenty riders in the bunch. I talked to several of them, Mormons, good fellows, they used to be. Also I had some words with Dene. Snap and Dene, all of them, thought you were number thirty-one in dad's cemetery."

"Not yet," said Hare. "Dene certainly looked as if he saw a ghost when Silvermane jumped for him. Well, he's at Silver Cup now. They're all there. What's to be done about it? They're openly thieves. The new brand on all your stock proves that."

"Jack, you can see I am in the worst fix of my life," said August Naab. "My sons have persuaded me that I was pushed off my ranges too easily. Dave brought news from White Sage, and it's almost unbelievable. Holderness has proclaimed himself or has actually got himself elected sheriff. Scarcely a day goes by in the village without a killing. The Mormons north of Lund finally banded together, hanged some rustlers, and drove the others out. Many of them have come down into our country, and Holderness now has a strong force. But the Mormons will rise against him."

"They need a leader," replied Hare sharply.

"Dad figures this way," put in Dave. "On the one hand we lose our water and stock without bloodshed. We have a living in the oasis. There's little here to attract rustlers, so we may live in peace if we give up our rights. On the other hand, suppose Dad gets

the Navajos down here and we join them and go after Holderness and his gang. Of course we'd wipe out the rustlers, but some of us would get killed—and there are the wives and kids."

"Remember what Snap said?" asked Hare suddenly. "One man to kill Dene! Therefore one man to kill Holderness! That would break the power of this band."

"Ah! you've said it," replied Dave, raising a tense arm. "It's a one-man job. But it won't be easy. I tried to get Holderness. He was wise, and his men politely said they had enjoyed my call, but I wasn't to come again."

"One man to kill Holderness!" repeated Hare.

August Naab shook himself, as if to throw off the grip of something hard and inevitable. "I'm still master here," he said. "I give up Silver Cup and my stock. Maybe that will content Holderness."

Some days went by pleasantly for Hare, as he rested from his long exertions. The races between Silvermane and Black Bolly were renewed on the long stretch under the wall, and Mescal forgot that she had once acknowledged the superiority of the gray.

"Here, Jack," said August Naab, one morning, "get a spade and come with me. There's a break somewhere in the ditch."

Hare went with him out along the fence by the alfalfa fields, and round the corner of red wall toward the irrigating dam.

"Well, Jack, I suppose you'll be asking me for Mescal one of these days," said Naab.

"Yes," replied Hare.

"There's a little story to tell you about Mescal, when the day comes."

Work on the washed-out bank of the ditch had not gone far when Naab raised his head as if listening.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked. "I thought I heard shots." Suddenly he dropped the spade and his eyes flashed. "Judith! Judith! Here!" he called.

Wheeling with a sudden premonition of evil, Hare saw the girl running along the wall toward them. Naab sprang toward her and Hare ran at his heels.

"Father!— Father!" she panted. "Come—quick—the rustlers!—the rustlers! Snap!—Dene—Oh—hurry! They've killed Dave—they've got Mescal!"

Hare bounded forward to be flung back by Naab's arm.

"Fool! Would you throw away your life? Go slowly. We'll slip through the fields, under the trees."

Sick and cold, Hare hurried by Naab's side round the wall and into the alfalfa. They left the fields and went on more cautiously into the grove. The screaming and wailing of women added certainly to their doubt and dread.

"I see only the women—the chil-

dren—no—there's a man—Zeke," said Hare, bending low to gaze under the branches.

"Go slow," muttered Naab.

"The rustlers rode off—after Mescal—she's gone!" panted Judith.

Hare cast caution to the winds and dashed forward into the glade. Naab's heavy steps thudded behind him.

In the corner of the porch scared and stupefied children huddled in a heap. George and Billy bent over Dave, who sat white-faced against the steps. Blood oozed through the fingers pressed to his breast. Zeke was trying to calm the women.

"My God! Dave!" cried Hare.

"Hard hit—Jack—old fellow," said Dave. His face was white and clammy.

August Naab looked once at him and groaned.

"Dad—I got Chance and Culver —there they lie in the road— not bungled, either!"

Hare saw the inert forms of two men lying near the gate; one rested on his face, arm outstretched with a Colt gripped in the stiff hand; the other lay on his back, his spurs deep in the ground, as if driven there in his last convulsion.

August Naab and Zeke carried the injured man into the house. The women and children followed, and Hare, with Billy and George, entered last.

"Dad—I'm shot clean through —low down," said Dave, as they laid him on a couch.

Naab got the children and the girls out of the room. The women were silent now, except Dave's wife, who clung to him with low moans. He held out a hand to Hare.

"Jack, we got—to be—good friends. Don't forget—that—when you meet—Holderness. He shot me—from behind Chance and Culver—and after I fell—I killed them both—trying to get him. You—won't hang up—your gun—again—will you?"

Hare wrung the cold hand clasping his so feebly. "No! Dave, no!" Then he fled from the room. For an hour he stood on the porch waiting in dumb misery. George and Zeke came noiselessly out, followed by their father.

"It's all over, Hare." His deadly quiet and the gloom of his iron face were more terrible to see than any grief.

"Father, and you, Hare, come out into the road," said George.

Another motionless form lay beyond Chance and Culver. It was that of a slight man, flat on his back, his arms wide, his long black hair in the dust. Under the white level brow the face had been crushed into a bloody curve.

"Dene!" burst from Hare.

"Killed by a horse!" exclaimed August Naab.

"Silvermane!" said George.

"Who rode my horse—tell me—quick!" cried Hare, in a frenzy.

"It was Mescal. Listen. Let me tell you how it all happened. I was out at the forge when I heard a bunch of horses coming up the lane. I wasn't packing my gun, but I ran anyway. When I got to the house there was Dave facing Snap, Dene, and a bunch of rustlers. I saw Chance at first, but not Holderness. There must have been twenty men.

" 'I came after Mescal, that's what,' Snap was saying.

" 'You can't have her,' Dave answered.

" 'We'll shore take her, an' we want Silvermane, too,' said Dene.

"Then Holderness spoke from the back of the crowd: 'Naab, you'd better hurry, if you don't want the house burned!'

"Dave drew and Holderness fired from behind the men. Dave fell, raised up and shot Chance and Culver, then dropped his gun.

"With that the women in the house began to scream, and Mescal ran out saying she'd go with Snap if they'd do no more harm.

" 'All right,' said Snap, 'get a horse, hurry—hurry!'

"Then Dene dismounted and went toward the corral saying, 'I shore want Silvermane.'

"Mescal reached the gate ahead of Dene. 'Let me get Silvermane. He's wild; he'll kick you if you go near him.' She dropped the bars and went up to the horse. When she had him loose she leaped off the fence to his back, screaming as she hit him with the halter. Silvermane snorted and jumped, and in three jumps he was going like a bullet. Dene tried to stop him, and was knocked twenty feet. He was raising up when the stallion ran over him. He never moved again. Once in the lane Silvermane got going—Lord! how he did run! He was gone in a cloud of dust before Snap and the rustlers knew what had happened. Snap came to first and spurred down the lane. The rest of the rustlers galloped after him."

August Naab placed a sympathetic hand on Hare's shaking shoulder. "You see, lad, things are never so bad as they seem at first. Snap might as well try to catch a bird as Silvermane."

Chapter Eighteen

The Heritage of the Desert

MESCAL'S far out in front by this time. Depend on it, Hare," went on Naab. "That trick was the cunning Indian of her. She'll ride Silvermane into White Sage. The Bishop will take care of her. She'll be safe for the present in White Sage. Now we must bury these men. Tomorrow—my son. Then—"

"The time has come!" said George Naab.

"Yes," replied his father harshly.

A great calm settled over Hare; his blood ceased to race, his mind to riot; he knew the old man had found himself.

"Zeke, hitch up a team," said August Naab. "No—wait a moment. Here comes Piute. Let's hear what he has to say."

Piute appeared on the cliff trail, driving a burro at a dangerous speed.

"He's sighted Silvermane and the rustlers," suggested George, as the shepherd approached.

Naab translated the excited Indian's mingling of Navajo and Piute languages to mean just what George had said. "Snap ahead of riders—Silvermane far, far ahead of Snap—running fast—damn!"

"Mescal pushing him hard to make the sand strip," said George.

"Piute—three fires tonight—Lookout Point!" Naab waved the Indian toward the cliff, and lapsed into a silence which no one dared to break.

Naab consigned the bodies of the rustlers to the famous cemetery under the red wall. It was noteworthy that no Mormon rites were conferred on Culver, once a Mormon in good standing, nor were any prayers spoken over the open graves.

Hare's slumbers that night were broken. He dreamed of a great gray horse leaping in the sky from cloud to cloud with the lightning and the thunder under his hoofs, the storm winds sweeping from his silver mane. He dreamed of Mescal's brooding eyes. He dreamed of himself waiting in serene confidence for some unknown thing to pass. He awakened late in the morning and found the house hushed.

The day wore on in a repose unstirred by breeze and sound, in accord with the mourning of August Naab. At noon a solemn procession wended its slow course to the shadow of the red cliff, and as solemnly returned.

Then a long-drawn piercing Indian whoop heralded the approach of the Navajos. In single file they rode up the lane, and when the falcon-eyed Eschtah dismounted before his white friend, the line of his warriors still turned the corner of the red wall. Next to the chieftain rode Scarbreast, the grim war lord of the Navajos. His followers trailed into the grove, full a hundred strong.

"The White Prophet's fires burned bright," said the chieftain. "Eschtah is here."

"The Navajo is a friend," replied Naab. "The White man needs counsel and help. He has fallen upon evil days."

"Eschtah sees war in the eyes of his friend."

"War, chief, war! Let the Navajo and his warriors rest and eat.

Then we shall speak."

When the afternoon waned and the shade from the western wall crept into the oasis, August Naab came from his cabin clad in buckskins, with a large blue Colt swinging handle outward from his left hip. He ordered his sons to replenish the fire which had been built in the circle, and when the fierce-eyed Indians gathered round the blaze he called to his women to bring meat and drink.

Hare leaned against a tree in the shadow and watched the gray-faced giant stalking to and fro before his Indian friends. A long while he strode in the circle of light to pause at length before the chieftains and to break the impressive silence with his deep voice.

"Eschtah sees before him a friend stung to his heart. Men of his own color have long injured him, yet have lived. The Mormon loved his fellows and forgave. Five sons he laid in their graves, yet his heart was not hardened. His first-born went the trail of the fire-water and is an outcast from his people. Many enemies has he and one is a chief. He has killed the white man's friends, stolen his cattle, and his water. Today the white man laid another son in his grave. What thinks the chief? Would he not crush the scorpion that stung him?"

"It is well."

"The white man's foe is strong," went on the Mormon; "he has many men, they will fight. If Eschtah sends his braves with his friend there will be war. Many braves will fall. The White Prophet wishes to save them if he can. He will go forth alone to kill his foe. If the sun sets four times and the white man is not here, then Eschtah will send his great war chief and his warriors. They will kill whom they find at the white man's springs. And thereafter half of all the white man's cattle that were stolen shall be Eschtah's, so that he watch over the water and range."

"Eschtah will watch the sun set four times. If his white friend returns he will rejoice. If he does not return the Navajo will send his warriors on the trail."

August Naab walked swiftly from the circle of light into the darkness; his heavy steps sounded on the porch, and in the hallway. His three sons went toward their cabins with bowed heads and silent tongues. Eschtah folded his blanket about him and stalked off into the gloom of the grove, followed by his warriors.

Softly Hare slipped into his room. Putting on coat and belt and catching up his rifle he stole out again stealthily, like an Indian. In the darkness of the wagon shed he felt for his saddle, and finding it, he groped with eager hands for the grain box; raising the lid he filled a measure

with grain, and emptied it into his saddle bag. Then lifting the saddle he carried it out of the yard, through the gate and across the lane to the corrals.

Black Bolly whinnied and thrust her black muzzle over the fence. Hare placed a caressing hand on her while he waited listening and watching.

Letting down the bars he led Bolly out into the lane. It was the work of a moment to saddle her; his bridle hung where he always kept it, on the pommel, and with nimble fingers he shortened the several straps to fit Bolly's head, and slipped the bit between her teeth.

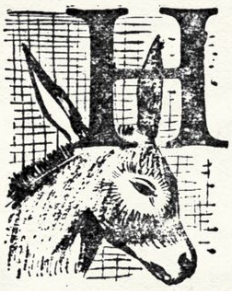
Before mounting he stood a moment thinking coolly, deliberately numbering the several necessities he must not forget—grain for Bolly, food for himself, his Colt and Winchester, cartridges, canteen, matches, knife. He thrust the long Winchester into its saddle sheath, and swung his leg over the mustang.

The house of the Naabs was dark and still. The dying council fire cast flickering shadows under the black cottonwoods where the Navajos slept. The faint breeze that rustled the leaves brought the low sullen roar of the river.

Hare guided Bolly into the thick dust of the lane, laid the bridle loosely on her neck for her to choose the trail, and silently rode out into the lonely night.

Chapter Nineteen

Unleashed



HARE, listening breathlessly, rode on toward the gateway of the cliffs, and when he had passed the corner of the wall he sighed in relief. Spurring Bolly into a trot he rode forward with a strange elation. He had slipped out of the oasis unheard, and it would be morning before August Naab discovered his absence, perhaps longer before he divined his purpose. Then Hare would have a long start.

The strip of sand under the Blue Star had to be crossed at night—a feat which even the Navajos did not have to their credit. Yet Hare had no shrinking; he had no doubt; he must go on.

In the blackness of the night it seemed as if he were riding through a vaulted hall swept by a current of air. The night had turned cold, the stars had brightened icily, the rumble of the river had died away when Bolly's ringing trot suddenly changed to a noiseless floundering walk. She had come upon the sand. Hare saw the Blue Star in the cliff, and once more loosed the rein on Bolly's neck.

With hands resting idly on the pommel Hare sat at ease in the

saddle. The billowy dunes reflected the pale starlight and fell away from him to darken in obscurity. So long as the Blue Star remained in sight he kept his sense of direction; when it had disappeared he felt himself lost. Bolly's course seemed as crooked as the jagged outline of the cliffs. She climbed straight up little knolls, descended them at an angle, turned sharply at wind-washed gullies, made winding detours, zigzagged levels that shone like a polished floor; and at last (so it seemed to Hare) she doubled back on her trail.

Hare was glad though not surprised when she snorted and cracked her iron-shod hoof on a stone at the edge of the sand. Bolly had crossed the treacherous belt of dunes and washes and had struck the trail on the other side.

The long level of wind-carved rocks under the cliffs, the ridges of the desert, the miles of slow ascent up to the rough divide, the gradual descent to the cedars—these stretches of his journey took the night hours and ended with the brightening gray in the east. Within a mile of Silver Cup Spring Hare dismounted, to tie folded pads of buckskin on Bolly's hoofs. When her feet were muffled, he cautiously advanced on the trail for the matter of 100 rods or more, then sheered off to the right into the cedars. Presently he caught the dull gleam of a burned-out campfire. The dawn broke over the red wall as he gained the trail beyond the spring.

He skirted the curve of the valley and led Bolly to a dense thicket of aspens in a hollow. This thicket encircled a patch of grass. Hare left her there free. He drew his rifle from its sheath and bent his steps diagonally up the slope.

He climbed swiftly until he struck the mountain trail. Then, descending, he entered the cedars. At last he reached a point directly above the cliff camp where he had spent so many days, and this he knew overhung the cabin built by Holderness. He stole down from tree to tree, from thicket to thicket. The sun raised a bright crescent over the red wall.

Hare descended the slope, his eyes keener, his ears sharper with every step. Soon the edge of the gray stone cliff below shut out the lower level of cedars. While resting he marked his course down the last bit of slanting ground to the cliff bench which faced the valley. This space was open, rough with crumbling rock and dead cedar brush—a difficult place to cross without sound.

Hare went on with a stealth which satisfied even his intent ear. When the wide gray strip of stone drew slowly into the circle of his downcast gaze he sank to the ground behind a thick bush on the edge of the cliff.

A little cloud of smoke rose lazily and capped a slender col-

umn of blue. Sounds were wafted softly upward, the low voices of men in conversation, a merry whistle, and then the humming of a tune.

Hare peered over the cliff. The crude shingles of the cabin first rose into sight; then beyond he saw the corral with a number of shaggy mustangs and a great gray horse.

"Silvermane!—My God!" he gasped, then in a flash of agonized understanding he whispered, "Mescal—Mescal!" His nails dented the stock of his rifle.

From the cover of the bush he peered again over the cliff. The cabin with its closed door facing him was scarcely 200 feet down from his hiding place. One of the rustlers sang as he bent over the campfire and raked the coals around the pots; others lounged on a bench waiting for breakfast; some rolled out of their blankets; they stretched and yawned, and pulling on their boots made for the spring. The last man to rise was Snap Naab, and he had slept with his head on the threshold of the door. Snap had slept with his belt containing two Colts, nor had he removed his boots. Now the tall Holderness, face shining, gold-red beard agleam, rounded the cabin whistling.

Hare watched the rustlers sit down to breakfast, and here and there caught a loud-spoken word. Snap Naab took up a pan of food and a cup of coffee, carried them into the cabin, and came out, shutting the door.

After breakfast most of the rustlers set themselves to their various tasks. Several men were arranging articles for packing, and their actions were slow to the point of laziness; others trooped down toward the corral. Holderness rolled a cigarette and stooped over the campfire to reach a burning stick. Snap Naab stalked to and fro before the door of the cabin.

Holderness's clear voice rang out: "I tell you, Naab, there's no hurry. We'll ride in tomorrow."

While Hare watched the hours sped by. Holderness lounged about and Snap kept silent guard. The rustlers smoked, slept, and moved about; the day waned, and the shadow of the cliff crept over the cabin.

Out in the valley it was still daylight, but under the cliff twilight had fallen. All day Hare had strained his ears to hear the talk of the rustlers, and it now occurred to him that if he climbed down through the split in the cliff to the bench where Dave and George had always hidden to watch the spring he would be just above the camp.

Hare crawled back a few yards and along the cliff until he reached the split. Face foremost he slipped downward with the gliding, sinuous movement of a

snake, and reaching the grassy bench he lay quiet. Jesting voices and loud laughter from below reassured him. Lying flat, he crawled stealthily to the bushy fringe of the bench.

A bright fire blazed under the cliff. Men were moving and laughing. The cabin door was open. Mescal stood leaning back from Snap Naab, struggling to release her hands.

"Let me untie them, I say," growled Snap.

Mescal tore loose from him and stepped back. Her hands were bound before her, and twisting them outward, she warded him off. Her disheveled hair almost hid her dark eyes.

"I'll starve before I eat what you give me."

The rustlers laughed. Holderness blew out a puff of smoke and smiled. Snap glowered upon Mescal and then upon his companions. One of them, a ruddy-faced fellow, walked toward Mescal.

"Cool down, Snap, cool down," he said. "We're not goin' to stand for a girl starvin'. She ain't eat a bite yet. Here, Miss, let me untie your hands—there. Say! Naab, damn you, her wrists are black an' blue!"

"Look out! Your gun!" yelled Snap.

With a swift movement Mescal snatched the man's Colt from its holster and was raising it when he grasped her arm. She winced and dropped the weapon.

"I didn't—intend—to shoot—you," panted Mescal.

"Naab, if this's your Mormon kind of wife—excuse me!"

"We Mormons don't talk about our women or hear any talk," returned Snap, a dancing fury in his pale eyes. His right hand slowly curved upward before him and stopped taut and inflexible.

"See here, Naab, why do you want to throw a gun on me!" asked the rustler coolly. "Hevn't you shot enough of your friends yet? I reckon I've no right to interfere in your affairs. I was only protestin' friendly like, for the little lady."

"Snap, he's right," put in Holderness smoothly. "You needn't be so touchy about Mescal. She's showed what little use she's got for you. If you must rope her around like you do a mustang, be easy about it. Let's have supper. Now, Mescal, you sit here on the bench and behave yourself."

Snap turned sullenly aside while Holderness seated Mescal near the door and fetched her food and drink. The rustlers squatted round the campfire, and conversation ceased in the business of the meal.

To Hare the scene had brought a storm of emotions. He was conscious of an ever-mounting will to rescue Mescal, which was held in check by an inexorable judgment;

he must continue to wait.

Meanwhile the darkness descended, the fire sent forth a brighter blaze, and the rustlers finished their supper. Mescal arose and stepped across the threshold of the cabin door.

"Hold on!" ordered Snap, as he approached with swift strides. "Stick out your hands!"

Some of the rustlers grumbled; and one blurted out, "Aw no, Snap, don't tie her up—no!"

"Who says so?" hissed the Mormon, with snapping teeth. As he wheeled upon them his Colt seemed to leap forward, gleaming in the ruddy firelight.

Holderness laughed in the muzzle of the weapon. "Go ahead, Snap, tie up your lady love, but do it without hurting her."

Snap turned to his task, bound Mescal's hands securely, thrust her inside the cabin, and after hesitating for a long moment, finally shut the door.

But the strain, instead of relaxing, became portentous. Holderness suddenly showed he was ill at ease; he appeared to be expecting arrivals from the direction of Seeping Springs. Snap Naab leaned against the side of the door, his narrow gaze cunningly studying the rustlers before him. Suddenly he pressed back against the door, half opening it while he faced the men.

"Stop!" commanded Holderness. "You don't go in there!"

"I'm going to take the girl and ride to White Sage," replied Naab.

"Bah! You say that only for the excuse to get into the cabin with her. You tried it last night and I blocked you. Shut the door, Naab, or something'll happen."

"There's more going to happen than ever you think of, Holderness. Don't interfere now, I'm going."

"Well, go ahead—but you won't take the girl!"

Snap Naab swung off the step, slamming the door behind him. "So-ho!" he exclaimed sneeringly. "That's why you've made me foreman, eh?" His claw-like hand moved almost imperceptibly upward while his pale eyes strove to pierce the strength behind Holderness's effrontery.

"Naab, you don't get the girl."

"Maybe you'll get her?" hissed Snap.

"I always intended to."

Surely never before had passion driven Snap's hand to such speed. His Colt gleamed in the light. *Click! Click! Click!* The hammer fell upon empty chambers.

"Hell!" he shrieked.

Holderness laughed. "That's where you're going!" he cried. And he shot his foreman through the heart.

Snap plunged upon his face. His hands beat the ground like the shuffling wings of a wounded partridge. His fingers gripped the

dust, spread convulsively, straightened, and sank limp.

Holderness called through the door of the cabin. "Mescal, I've rid you of your would-be husband. Cheer up!" Then pointing to the fallen man: "Some of you drag that out for the coyotes."

The fellow who bent over Snap curiously opened the breech of the sixshooter he picked up. "No shells!" he said. He pulled Snap's second Colt from his belt, and unbreeched that. "No shells! Well, damn me!"

Holderness laughed harshly, and turning to the cabin he fastened the door with a lasso.

It was a long time before Hare recovered from the startling revelation of the plot which had put Mescal into Holderness's power. He changed his position and settled himself to watch and wait out the night. Every hour Holderness and his men tarried at Silver Cup hastened their approaching doom. Somewhere out on the oasis trail rode a man who, once turned from the saving of life to the lust to kill, would be as immutable as death itself. Behind him waited a troop of Navajos, merciless as wolves.

Twice, when the rustler chief sauntered nearer to the cabin door, as if to enter, Hare covered him with the rifle, waiting, waiting for the step upon the threshold. But Holderness always checked himself in time, and Hare's finger eased its pressure upon the trigger.

The night closed in black; the clouded sky gave forth no starlight; the wind rose and moaned through the cedars. One by one the rustlers rolled in their blankets and all dropped into slumber while the campfire slowly burned down.

Hare, watching sleeplessly, saw one of the prone figures stir. The man raised himself very cautiously; he glanced at his companions, and looked long at Holderness, who lay squarely in the dimming light. Gently he slipped aside his blankets and began to rise. He stepped between the rustlers with stockinged feet which were as noiseless as an Indian's, and he went toward the cabin door.

He softly edged round the sleeping Holderness, showing a glinting sixshooter in his hand. Hare's resolve to kill him before he reached the door was checked. What did it mean, this rustler's stealthy movements, his passing by Holderness with his drawn weapon! Hare knew instantly that this softly stepping man was a Mormon; he meant to free Mescal.

As the rustler turned at the door his dark face gleamed in the flickering light. He unwound the lasso and opened the door without a sound. "Hist!" he whispered into the cabin.

Mescal must have been awake;

she must have guessed instantly the meaning of that low whisper, for silently she appeared in the doorway, silently she held forth her bound hands. The man untied the bonds and pointed into the cedars toward the corral. Mescal vanished in the gloom. The Mormon stole with wary, unhurried steps back to his bed and rolled in his blankets.

Hare rose unsteadily, felt his way to the cedar slope, and the trail, and then went swiftly down into the little hollow where he had left Bolly. Guided by a suspicious stamp and neigh, he found her and quieted her with a word. He rode down the hollow, out upon the level valley.

The ground was like a cushion under Bolly's hoofs, giving forth no sound. The mustang threw up her head, causing Hare to peer into the night fog. Rapid hoof beats broke the silence, a vague gray shadow moved into sight. He saw Silvermane and called as loudly as he dared. The stallion melted into the misty curtain, the beating of hoofs softened and ceased. Hare spurred Bolly to her fleetest. He had a long, silent chase, but it was futile, and unnecessarily hard on the mustang; so he pulled her in to a trot.

Hare kept Bolly to this gait the remainder of the night, and reached Seeping Springs at dawn. Silvermane's tracks were deep in the clay at the drinking trough. He rested a few moments, gave Bolly sparingly of grain and water, and once more took to the trail.

From the ridge below the spring he saw Silvermane beyond the valley, miles ahead of him. This day seemed shorter than the foregoing one; it passed while he watched Silvermane grow smaller and smaller and disappear on the looming slope of Coconina. Hare's fear that Mescal would run into riders from Holderness's ranch grew less and less after she had reached the cover of the cedars. That she would rest the stallion at the Navajo pool on the mountain he made certain. Late in the night he came to the camping spot and found no trace to prove that she had halted there even to let Silvermane drink. So he tied the tired mustang and slept until daylight.

He crossed the plateau and began the descent. Before he was halfway down the warm bright sun had cleared the valley of vapor and shadow. Far along the winding white trail shone a speck.

"Ten miles—fifteen, more maybe," said Hare. "Mescal will soon be in the village."

It was near sundown when he rode Black Bolly into White Sage, and took the back road, and the pasture lane to Bishop Caldwell's cottage. John, one of the Bishop's sons, was in the barnyard and ran to open the gate.

"Mescal!" cried Hare.

"Safe," replied the Mormon.

"Thank God!"

"Mescal told us what happened, how she got caught at the sand strip and escaped from Holderness at Silver Cup. Was Dene hurt?"

"Silvermane killed him."

"Good God! Did Holderness shoot Snap Naab?"

"Yes."

"What of old Naab?"

"He called the Navajos across the river. He meant to take the trail alone and kill Holderness, keeping the Indians back a few days. But his plan must be changed, for I came ahead of him."

"For what? Mescal?"

"No. For Holderness. He'll be coming tomorrow, possibly by daylight. He wants Mescal. There's a chance Naab may have reached Silver Cup before Holderness left, but I doubt it."

"What is your plan?"

"Hide Bolly and Silvermane in the little arbor down in the orchard. I'll stay outside tonight, sleep a little—for I'm dead tired—and watch in the morning. Holderness will come here with his men, perhaps not openly at first, to drag Mescal away. I'll meet him when he comes—that's all."

"It's well. I ask you not to mention this to my father."

Hare met the Bishop and his family with composure, but his arrival following so closely upon Mescal's increased their alarm.

Hare ate in silence. John Caldwell did not come in to supper; his brothers mysteriously left the table before finishing the meal. A subdued murmur of voices floated in at the open window.

Darkness found Hare wrapped in a blanket under the trees. He awoke to a dawn clearer than the light from the noonday sun.

He could not stand still, and his movements were subtle and swift. His hands took a peculiar, tenacious hold of everything he chanced to touch. He paced his hidden walk behind the arbor, at every turn glancing sharply up and down the road.

A band of horsemen closely grouped turned into the road and trotted forward. Some of the men wore black masks. Holderness rode at the front, his red-gold beard shining in the sunlight. The steady clip-clop of hoofs and clinking of iron stirrups broke the morning quiet. Holderness, with two of his men, dismounted before the Bishop's gate; the others of the band trotted on down the road.

Hare stood calm and cold behind his green covert watching the three men stroll up the garden path. Holderness took a cigarette from his lips as he neared the porch and blew out circles of white smoke. Bishop Caldwell tottered from the cottage rapping the porch floor with his cane.

"Good morning, Bishop," greeted Holderness blandly.

"To you, sir," quavered the old man.

Holderness stepped out in front of his companions, courteous, smiling, entirely at his ease. "I rode in to—"

Hare leaped from his hiding-place.

"Holderness!"

The rustler pivoted on whirling heels. "Dene's spy!" Swift changes swept his mobile features. Fear flickered in his eyes as he faced his foe; then came a glint of amusement, dark anger, and the terrible instinct of death impending.

"Naab's trick!" hissed Hare, with his hand held high. The suggestion in his words, the meaning in his look, held the three rustlers transfixed.

In Holderness's amber eyes shone his desperate calculation of chances. Hare's fateful glance, impossible to elude, his strung form slightly crouched, his cold deliberate mention of Naab's trick, and more than all the poise of that quivering hand, filled the rustler with a terror that he could not hide.

"Naab's trick!" repeated Hare mockingly.

Suddenly Holderness reached for his gun.

Hare's hand leaped like a lightning stroke. Gleam of blue—spurt of red—*crash!*

Holderness swayed with blond head swinging backward, the amber of his eyes suddenly darkened; the life in them glazed; like a log he fell clutching the weapon he had half drawn.

Chapter Twenty

The Rage of August Naab

"TAKE Holderness away—quick!" ordered Hare. A thin curl of blue smoke floated from the muzzle of his raised weapon.

The rustlers started out of their statue-like immobility, and lifting their dead leader dragged him down the garden path with his spurs clinking on the gravel and ploughing little furrows.

"Bishop, go in now. They may return," said Hare. He hurried up the steps to place his arm round the tottering old man.

"The deeds of the wicked return unto them! God's will!"

Hare led the Bishop indoors. The sitting room was full of wailing women and crying children.

"Where are your sons?" asked Hare.

"I don't know," replied the Bishop. "They should be here to stand by you. It's strange. I don't understand. Last night my sons were visited by many men, coming and going in twos and threes till late. They didn't sleep in their beds."

Hare left the cottage. He picked

up his rifle and went down through the orchard to the horses. Hare saddled the stallion to have him in instant readiness, and then returned to the front of the yard.

He heard the sound of a gun down the road, then another, and several shots following in quick succession. A distant angry murmuring and trampling of many feet drew Hare to the gate. Riderless mustangs were galloping down the road; several frightened boys were fleeing across the square; not a man was in sight. Three more shots cracked, and the low murmur and trampling swelled into a hoarse uproar.

A black dense throng of men appeared crowding into the main street, and crossing toward the square. The procession had some order; it was led and flanked by mounted men. But the upflinging of many arms, the craning of necks, and the leaping of men on the outskirts of the mass, the pressure inward and the hideous roar, proclaimed its real character.

"By Heaven!" cried Hare. "John Caldwell spent last night in secretly rousing his neighbors. They have surprised the rustlers."

He vaulted the fence and ran down the road. A compact mob of men, a hundred or more, had halted in the village under the wide-spreading cottonwoods. Hare suddenly grasped the terrible significance of those outstretched branches.

"Open up! Let me in!" he yelled to the thickly thronged circle. Right and left he flung men. "Make way!"

"Dene's spy!" they cried.

The circle opened and closed upon him. He saw bound rustlers under armed guard. Four still forms were on the ground. Holderness lay outstretched, a dark red blot staining his gray shirt. Flinty-faced Mormons surrounded the rustlers. John Caldwell stood foremost, with ashen lips breaking bitterly into speech:

"Mormons, this is Dene's spy, the man who killed Holderness!"

The listeners burst into the short stern shout of men proclaiming a leader in war.

"What's the game?" demanded Hare.

"A fair trial for the rustlers, then a rope," replied John Caldwell. The low ominous murmur swelled through the crowd again.

"There are two men here who have befriended me. I won't see them hanged."

"Pick them out!" A strange ripple of emotion made a fleeting break in John Caldwell's hard face.

Hare eyed the prisoners. "Step out here," said he to one.

"I reckon you're mistaken," replied the rustler, his blue eyes intently on Hare. "I never seen you before."

"I saw you untie the girl's hands. If I save your life will you

quit rustling cattle?"

"Will I? Damn me! I'll be straight an' decent. I'll take a job ridin' for you, stranger, an' prove it."

"Cut him loose from the others," said Hare. He scrutinized the line of rustlers. Several were masked in black. "Take off those masks!"

"No! Those men go to their graves masked." Again the strange twinge of pain crossed John Caldwell's face.

"Ah! I see," exclaimed Hare. Then quickly: "I couldn't recognize the other man anyhow; I don't know him. But Mescal can tell. He saved her and I'll save him."

"Hurry back home," said Caldwell in Hare's ear. "Tell them to fetch Mescal. Find out and hurry back."

Hare slipped out of the crowd, sped up the road, jumped the fence on the run, and burst in upon the Bishop and his family.

"No danger—don't be alarmed—all's well," he panted. "The rustlers are captured. I want Mescal. Quick! Where is she? Fetch her, somebody."

One of the women glided from the room. Hare caught the clicking of a latch, the closing of a door, hollow footfalls descending on stone, and dying away under the cottage. They rose again, ending in swift footsteps. Like a whirlwind Mescal came through the hall, black hair flying, dark eyes beaming.

Oblivious of the Mormons he swung her up and held her in his arms. When he raised his face from the tumbling mass of her black hair, the Bishop and his family had left the room.

"Listen, Mescal. Be calm. I'm safe. The rustlers are prisoners. One of them released you from Holderness. Tell me which one?"

"I don't know," replied Mescal. "I didn't see his face; I can't remember his voice."

"Think! Think! He'll be hanged if you don't recall something to identify him. He deserves a chance. Holderness's crowd are thieves, murderers. But two men were not all bad. That showed the night you were at Silver Cup."

"Were you at Silver Cup? Jack!"

"Hush! don't interrupt me. Think!"

"Oh! I can't. What—how shall I remember?"

"Something about him. Did you see his hands?"

"Yes, I did—when he was loosing the cords," said Mescal eagerly. "Long, strong fingers. I felt them too. He has a sharp rough wart on one hand, I don't know which. He wears a leather wristband."

"That's enough!" Hare bounded out upon the garden walk and raced back to the crowded square.

The uneasy circle stirred and opened for him to enter. He bent over the three dead rustlers lying with Holderness, and after a moment of anxious scrutiny he rose to confront the line of prisoners.

"Hold out your hands."

One by one they complied. The sixth rustler in the line, a tall fellow, completely masked, refused to do as he was bidden. Twice Hare spoke. The rustler twisted his bound hands under his coat.

"Let's see them," said Hare quickly. He pulled up the bound hands, in spite of fierce resistance, and there were the long fingers, the sharp wart, the laced wristband. "Here's my man!" he said.

"No," hoarsely mumbled the rustler.

"You fool!" cried Hare. "I recognized you. Would you rather hang than live? What's your secret?"

He snatched off the black mask. The Bishop's eldest son stood revealed.

"Good God!" cried Hare.

"Brother! I feared this," groaned John Caldwell.

"Damn you, Hare!" shouted the guilty Mormon. "Why didn't you hang me? Why didn't you bury me unknown?"

The silent crowd of Mormons with lowered and averted eyes made passage for Hare and Caldwell. Then cold, stern voices in sharp questions and orders went on with the grim trial. The constant trampling of many feet, the harsh medley of many voices swelled into one dreadful sound. It passed away, and a long hush followed. But this in turn was suddenly broken by an outcry:

"The Navajos!"

Hare thrilled at that cry and his glance turned to the eastern end of the village road where a column of mounted Indians, four abreast, was riding toward the square.

"Naab and his Indians," shouted Hare. His call was timely, for the aroused Mormons were handling their guns ominously.

Onward came the band, Naab in the lead on his roan. The mustangs were spent and lashed with foam. Naab reined in his charger and the keen-eyed Navajos closed in behind him.

The old Mormon's glance passed over the dark forms dangling from the cottonwoods to the files of waiting men. "Where is he?"

"There!" answered John Caldwell, pointing to the body of Holderness.

"Who robbed me of my vengeance? Who killed the rustler?" Naab's stentorian voice rolled over the listening multitude.

Someone pointed Hare out. Naab swung from his saddle and scattered the men before him as if they had been sheep. His shaggy gray head and massive shoul-

ders towered above the tallest there.

"You killed Holderness?" roared Naab.

"Yes," whispered Hare.

"You heard me say I'd go alone? You forestalled me?"

"I—did."

"By what right?"

"My debt—duty—your family—Dave!"

"*Boy! Boy!* You've robbed me." Naab waved his arm from the gaping crowd to the swinging rustlers. "You've led these white-livered Mormons to do my work. How can I avenge my sons—seven sons?"

He loosed Hare, and strode in magnificent wrath over Holderness and raised his brawny fists. "Eighteen years I prayed for wicked men," he rolled out. "One by one I buried my sons. I gave my springs and my cattle. Then I yielded to the lust for blood. I renounced my religion. I paid my soul to everlasting hell for the life of my foe. But he's dead! Killed by a wild boy! I sold myself to the devil for nothing!"

"August, young Hare saved two rustlers," spoke up an old friend, hoping to divert the angry flood. "Paul Caldwell there, he was one of them. The other's gone."

Naab loomed over him. "What!" he roared. "Judas Iscariot! False to thyself, thy kin, and thy God! Thrice traitor. Why didn't you get yourself killed? Why are you left? Ah-h! for me—a rustler for me to kill—with my own hands! A rope there—a rope!"

Hare threw all his weight and strength upon the Mormon's iron arm. "Naab! Naab! For God's sake, hear! He saved Mescal. This man saved Mescal."

August Naab's eyes were bloodshot. One shake of his great body flung Hare off. He dragged Paul Caldwell across the grass toward the cottonwood as easily as if he were handling an empty grain sack.

Hare suddenly darted after him. "August! August!—look! look!" he cried. He pointed a shaking finger down the square. "August—the Bishop's coming. Paul's *father!* Do you hear?"

Naab loosed his hold. His frame seemed wrenched as though by the passing of an evil spirit, and the reaction left his face transfigured.

"Paul, it's your father, the Bishop," he said brokenly. "Be a man. He must never know."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Mescal

SUMMER gleams of golden sunshine swam under the glistening red walls of the oasis. Shadows from white clouds, like sails on a deep-blue sea, darkened the broad fields of alfalfa. Circling

columns of smoke were wafted far above the cottonwoods and floated in the still air. The desert-red color of Navajo blankets brightened the grove.

Half-naked Indians lolled in the shade, lounged on the cabin porches and stood about the sunny glade in idle groups. They watched the children tumble round the playground. Silvermane browsed where he listed under the shady trees, and many a sinewy red hand caressed his flowing mane. Black Bolly neighed her jealous displeasure from the corral, and the other mustangs trampled and kicked and whistled defiance across the bars.

It was the morning of Mescal's wedding day.

August Naab sat astride a peeled log of driftwood in the lane, and Hare stood beside him.

"Five thousand steers, lad! Why do you refuse them? They're worth ten dollars a head today in Salt Lake City. A good start for a young man."

"No, I'm still in your debt."

"Then share alike with my sons in work and profit?"

"Yes, I can accept that."

"Good! Jack, will you come into the Mormon Church?"

"No, August, I can't. I feel—differently from Mormons about—about women. If it wasn't for that! I look upon you as a father. I'll do anything for you, except that."

"Well, well," sighed Naab. The gray clearness of his eagle eyes grew shadowed and his worn face was sad. But he loved life too well to be unhappy. The shade passed from his face like the cloud shadow from the sunlit lane.

"Mescal's father—can you tell me more of him?"

"Little more than I've already told. He was evidently a man of some rank. I suspected that he ruined his life and became an adventurer. His health was shattered when I brought him here, but he got well after a year or so. He was a splendid, handsome fellow. He spoke very seldom, and I don't remember ever seeing him smile. His favorite walk was the river trail. I came upon him there one day and found him dying. He asked me to have a care of Mescal. And he died muttering a Spanish word, a woman's name, I think."

"I'll cherish Mescal the more," said Hare.

"Cherish her, yes. Beautiful she is and good. I raised her for the Mormon Church, but God disposes after all, and I—"

A shrill screeching sound split the warm stillness, the long-drawn-out bray of a burro.

"Jack, look down the lane. If it isn't Noddle!"

Under the shady line of the red wall a little gray burro came trotting leisurely along.

"By George! it is Noddle!" ex-

claimed Hare. "He's climbed out of the canyon. Won't this please Mescal?"

"Mother Mary," called Naab toward the cabin, "send Mescal out. Here's a wedding present."

With laughing wonder the womenfolk flocked out into the yard. Mescal hung back shy-eyed.

"Mescal's wedding present from Thunder River. Just arrived!" called Naab cheerily. "A dusty, dirty, shaggy, starved, lop-eared, lazy burro—Noddle!"

Mescal flew out into the lane, and clasped the little burro's neck. Noddle wearily flapped his long brown ears, wearily nodded his white nose; then evidently considering the incident closed, he went lazily to sleep.

August Naab married Mescal and Hare at noon under the shade of the cottonwoods. Eschtah, magnificent in robes of state, stood up with them. The members of Naab's family and the grave Navajos formed an attentive circle around them. The ceremony was brief. At its close the Mormon lifted his face and arms in characteristic invocation.

"Almighty God, we entreat Thy blessing upon this marriage. Many and inscrutable are Thy ways; strange are the workings of Thy will; wondrous the purpose with which Thou hast brought this man and this woman together. Watch over them in the new path they are to tread, help them in the trials to come; and in Thy good time, when they have reached the fulness of days, when they have known the joy of life and rendered their service, gather them to Thy bosom in that eternal home where we all pray to meet Thy chosen ones of good; yea, and the evil ones purified in Thy mercy. Amen."

Happy congratulations of the Mormon family, a merry romp of children flinging flowers, marriage dance of singing Navajos—these, with the feast spread under the cottonwoods, filled the warm noon hours of the day.

Jack lifted Mescal upon Black Bolly and mounted Silvermane. Piute grinned till he shook his earrings and started the pack burros toward the plateau trail. Wolf pattered on before, turning his white head, impatient of delay. Amid tears and waving of hands and cheers they began the zigzag ascent.

When they reached the old camp on the plateau the sun was setting behind the Painted Desert. With hands closely interwoven they watched the color fade and the mustering of purple shadows.

Twilight fell. Wolf crouched all his long white length, his sharp nose on his paws, watching Mescal. Hare watched her, too.

The night shone in her eyes, the light of the fire, the old brooding desert spirit, and something more.

WHETHER *it's a buckfight or a bullfight, Uncle Duff Mason never can stand to miss out on the excitement. That, as you'll find out, is why he happens to be still a bachelor—which doesn't seem to bother him much except when he plays with five-year-old Belinda Wheeler. And it's the strain of choosing in a crisis between the welfare of little Belinda and her big brother that leads to Uncle Duff's "arranging" a match between Ol' Champ, his dun-yellow longhorn, and Jace Wheeler's $500 Hereford bull. This fine story is published here for the first time.*

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

By S. OMAR BARKER

I RECKON Uncle Duff was sort of a heller all right. Everybody said he was, and I never did hear him deny it. But nobody seemed to know just what they meant by it. He wasn't a drinking man, but he could help unravel a town with just as much whoop and holler as the next one. He was a crack shot with a pistol, yet in a time when most horseback men held it an obligation of honor to settle their differences with lead, Uncle Duff, moderate of size and slender, did his fighting by hand, and according to his own code.

"If it's an honest disagreement," he advised me, "fight it out fair. But if you've been jumped on unreasonable, wrastle him down an' git your thumb in his eye!"

He was a competent cowhand and a middling success in his own brand, but he was liable to waste half a day for a whole roundup crew matching bull-fights. If anybody ever needed a leg cut off Uncle Duff would have come a-running and brought his own saw—unless he happened

to be too busy painting red stripes on a live horny toad to amaze little Belinda Wheeler with, the next time her ma let me fetch the kids over when I went after mail.

Mostly Uncle Duff and I rode together, but Wheeler's was one place he kept away from.

Even Ma said she would just as soon try to understand the ways of a wolf as she would Duffey Mason's, and she was his own sister. She seemed to think what he needed was a regulator. "Here you are," she would scold, "goin' on thirty-one, sound in wind and limb—why the dickens don't you find you a good, honest girl and get married?"

"Maybe I'd rather go fishin'," Uncle Duff would drawl, throwing me a wink. That always made me grin, because everybody knew the only time Duff Mason had ever gone fishing in his life was the time he turned up the bellies of a wagonload of mudcats and suckers with a charge of powder in a hole on Bedalong Creek. He hadn't been fish-hungry; just liked to see the splash.

At 34 Ma was a strong-minded woman, else she couldn't have been kin to Uncle Duff. She refused to be sidetracked. "Women was created a-purpose so men could marry," she said severely. "It's the Lord's will, Duff Mason, and you know it!"

"If that's what Gran'pa God was aimin' at," drawled Uncle Duff, "it's a wonder he didn't create more of 'em purty!"

That was another thing that made tongues cluck—this "Gran'pa God" talk that he had learned from the Mexicans the time he trailed a stolen horse all the way to Taos without telling anybody he was going—and didn't get back for two years.

"If you thought Becky McGuire was so tarnation purty," said Ma, thumbing straight for the supposed sore spot, "why in the name of creation didn't you marry her when you had the chance?"

This made Uncle Duff bat his granite-blue eyes a little, but if it sure enough quicked him he never let on.

"Ain't it funny," he chuckled, "how a man forgets things he ain't reminded of over two or three times a week?"

"Shame on you!" With Ma barking on your trail you might as well run for a hollow log. "My own brother! I just can't get over it!"

"Give yourself time, Sweet-Lickin'," grinned Uncle Duff, using the name Ma told me he had made up for her while licking a cake batter crock when he was a five-year-old. "It's only been ten or twelve years!"

"Eight," Ma corrected him with a sigh. "Little Jace Wheeler is goin' on seven. And to think that if you hadn't set more store by

watchin' a couple of ol' surlies do battle than by gettin' to your own wedding, such a boy might have been yours!"

"Gran'pa God forbid!" said Uncle Duff. Although he was fond enough of Becky Wheeler's little girl, he made no bones about considering her son a pest. "If that little egg-sucker was mine, I'd drop him on his head an' shorten his neck a little. Besides, it wasn't bulls I was watchin' fight that time—it was a pair of buck deer that I happened onto on Big Hump Mesa." He turned to me, and there was a gleam of excitement in his eyes just from the remembering of it. "Seven hours them bucks had their antlers locked, Bub, before they give out! If I hadn't been there to untangle 'em, they'd have laid there an' starved to death. A man don't git a chance at a sight like that but once in a lifetime, Bub!"

It must have been a fine, wild thing to see, and I wondered if I would ever have such a chance. At 13 the only thing I didn't admire about Uncle Duff was him calling me Bub. Ma had torn the wagonsheet by naming me Mansfield out of some book she'd read, so of course I needed a nickname. "Buck" would have suited me fine. But Uncle Duff took a notion to call me Bub, and he was a hard man to wean.

In the year since a stumbling bronc had sent Pa off to The High Pasture and Ma and me here to the Wagon Mesa country to live with Uncle Duff, I'd heard Ma wring him out a dozen times about leaving his bride-to-be waiting at the church while he watched a buckfight. Only Ma never could seem to remember whether it was a buckfight or a bullfight. Her mind ran more toward other things.

"Buckfight or bullfight," she continued her chiding, "it doesn't matter a whiff! You can't blame a prideful girl for getting mad and marrying another man!"

"You never have heard me blame her, have you?"

"Not out loud. But you won't neighbor with them. You won't —"

"Me an' Jason Wheeler just ain't the same breed of dog," said Uncle Duff curtly.

"I notice you make over that little daughter of his a-plenty whenever she comes over here to play!"

Uncle Duff blew a puff of smoke up past his nose, probably to hide the look that came into his eyes at the mention of five-year-old Belinda Wheeler, dark-eyed and sweet as a red velvet-flower.

"That proves what I'm tryin' to tell you," Ma persisted. "You ought to marry and have a little girl of your own instead of havin' to steal the chance to pet somebody else's because you're scared her pa might take a shot at you!"

That quicked him. Ma sure knew how to stir his dander.

"Scared hell!" he said with a sharp hardness like the cut edge of a piece of rawhide. "I'll play dolls with B'lindy on her own front porch any time I take a notion to—an' who'll stop me?"

"Then why don't you?" Ma inquired sweetly.

"Because I ain't took a notion to—yet," said Uncle Duff.

Uncle Duff had paddled little Jace Wheeler once at our house for rubbing fresh cow sign in Belinda's hair, and the little booger had spread the word that his pa aimed to make a ge-bang business of it if Uncle Duff ever showed up on his premises. Maybe some folks got it in their heads that was why Uncle Duff kept away from there—except for the times I aim to tell about. But to me it was plain that whatever my Uncle Duff took a notion to do, no fear of either God or man ever stopped him.

Right now he took a notion to yank loose Ma's apron strings when she turned to stir a kettle of wild grape jam. "Don't you fret about me an' Jason Wheeler," he drawled with the perfectly sober face those oldtime cowhands knew so well how to put on when they was joshing. "If trouble busts loose, I can always run for the church!"

"Shame on you!" said Ma. But she had to hide a smile, and I laughed right out loud, because I had been there and seen it happen. There wasn't much of Uncle Duff's hell-arounding that I ever missed.

At that time Wheelerville was just Jason Wheeler's house and store, Frenchy Pinard's blacksmith shop, and the little plank shack with a steeple on it that Wheeler had built for a church—preached in several times a year by some stray circuit rider, used the rest of the time by Wheeler himself to store grain in. Some said Jason had built the church as bait with which to promote a settlement around his store. But if he had it didn't work.

Uncle Duff claimed that all anybody needed in those days to start a town was a barrel of whisky and a gourd. But he had tried that himself, and it hadn't worked either. He had added another gourd and a little stock of goods to the whisky barrel and set up a store at the foot of Wagon Mesa, aiming "to git rich an' famous." But Uncle Duff was born to the saddle, not a prune counter.

He got into the habit of leaving the store open for folks to help themselves and leave the money in a cigar box while he was out with the cattle. Business might have thrived even on that basis, for it was 90 miles to Gap City and most range folks run pretty strong to honesty. But one day a cowhand named Jake Lang

held a match to the bunghole to see how empty the whisky barrel was. Uncle Duff spied the smoke from not very far away, but he had a bullfight going, and by the time he found out which old surly could shove the hardest, his store was a pile of ashes.

The next day two wagonloads of goods unloaded at Jason Wheeler's place over on Bedalong Creek and Jace went into the mercantile business. It may have seemed peculiar to Uncle Duff that Wheeler was so ready to start a store when his own burned down, especially as Jake Lang was a Running W cowhand, but he never made an issue of it. Instead he hunted Jake up and thanked him.

"I'm built too short in the pockets for a damn counter jumper anyhow, Jake," he said. "You done me a favor by burnin' me out. But I ought to thumb Jace Wheeler's eyes out for puttin' you up to it."

"I tell you it was an accident, Duff!" Jake protested. "Wheeler never had no hand in it!"

"Sure," said Uncle Duff. "I hear he's goin' to sell everything from dog-irons to didies in that new store of his."

"He sure is!" Jake was enthusiastic. "Even got ol' Doc Roseberry to pick him out a shelf of medicines to cure everything from skunk bite to the hollow gut."

"Best cure for skunk bite that I know of," observed Uncle Duff dryly, "is to bite the skunk first."

"You oughta come over an' see what a layout he's got," Jake urged. "Beats haulin' from Gap City all to hell!"

"Maybe I will," said Uncle Duff, tilting his tall crowned hat over one ear while he scratched above the other. "Any of them new bulls of Wheeler's I might match a fight with for ol' Champ?"

"The Runnin' W don't buy high-class bulls just to git a horn run through 'em. If I was you I wouldn't mention matchin' a bullfight to Jace Wheeler."

"If you was me," drawled Uncle Duff, "you'd shorten your lip a little before somebody steps on it."

It had been a few days later that Uncle Duff, Brazos Bill, Jug Johnson, and I cut out a little ol' pot-bellied dogie bull and drove him over to Wheeler's. You never saw such a sorry-looking burr-tailed scrub in your life, but salty. The way he had gone on the prod when roped had tempted Uncle Duff to have a little fun.

Uncle Duff and Brazos Bill V'd their ropes on this little bull while Jug Johnson and I choused him from behind. He was plenty frothy by the time we stopped between Wheeler's store and the little plank church. There he sulled. Uncle Duff let out a whoop, and Jason Wheeler came stomping out

of the store, followed by Jake Lang and several others. Jason was a tall, red-necked man, broad of hip and shoulder, with bristly red eyebrows.

"Howdy, Mr. Wheeler," drawled Uncle Duff in that dead sober way of his. "I hear you're in the market for hundred-dollar bulls. Now here's a high-class, purebred Scandinoovian sway-back, that I'll sell you for ninety-nine an' a case of prunes!"

"This scrub?" That Jason Wheeler was a humorless man was betrayed in the tone of his scorn, and the cowboys all began to grin. "Do you think I'm crazy?"

"If I did, do you think I'd come over here an' offer you this fine young male at half what he's worth?"

"Worth? Why, I wouldn't give a dime for him! Get him out of here!"

"I hear you're a good judge of cattle, Mr. Wheeler," urged Uncle Duff soothingly. "Prob'ly the best in the Territory. Before you miss this bargain, kindly step down an' feel the taller on this bull's brisket!"

The brisket was plainly pure hide and hair and cockleburrs, and the cowboys' grins widened.

Wheeler stepped down off the store porch. "Hup!" he growled, making a shooing motion with his hat. "Huy-yah! Get this scrub off'n my premises!"

He ought to have been around cattle and cowboys long enough to know better. The scrub bull's tail gave a single switch, then arched a little up close to the root. His ears stood forward. He pawed at the earth, took a couple of short, stiff-legged steps, snuffed wind from his nose, and charged.

Uncle Duff's and Brazor Bill's ropes had looked fairly secure to the saddle horns, but now they suddenly slipped their dallies and fell slack. As Mr. Wheeler sidestepped, one of the scrub's stubby horns raked his hip pocket. By the time the little bull could whirl to charge again, the red-necked storekeeper was racing toward the open door of the little plank church, and it seemed to me that I could smell laughter in the whoops with which all of them, even Jake Lang, helped him run.

Whether the bull would have followed him on into the church without a little judicious guiding, no one will ever know. Looking in through the window I saw Mr. Wheeler treed on a pile of grain sacks and the bull having it out with a pair of plank benches and a tangled rope.

"Jake!" Wheeler yelled. "Fetch me my gun and I'll shoot the son of a so-and-so!"

It never was right clear whether he meant the bull or Uncle Duff, who was now standing in the doorway, rolling a smoke and giving no sign of amusement beyond a twinkle in his eye.

He turned to Lang. "Jake," he said, "hadn't you better fetch the man his go-bang?"

It was Becky Wheeler, still slender as a young girl, her long brown hair loose in the wind, who came running out of the house then and put a stop to the show. "Never mind the gun, Jake!" she said sharply, then bowed right up to Uncle Duff, her brown eyes flashing. "This is a fine thing, Duff Mason! Aren't you ever going to grow up?"

The look Uncle Duff gave her had something in it, I don't know what. "What for, Becky?" he said, and this time the soberness didn't look to be put on. He turned to the rest of us. "All right, boys, let's git this calf outa here before he busts a horn!"

The five of us worked him out without too much trouble, even with little Jace Wheeler in the way. Pretty soon we had the tow ropes fresh rigged on him, ready to go.

Nobody looked very mad now except Wheeler, and I thought Becky's presence had him tapered off a little, too. He waved a big hand toward the meeting-house, which was some messed up inside. "Who's goin' to pay this damage, Mason?"

Uncle Duff took time to lean down and give little Belinda Wheeler a willowbark whistle he fetched out of his pocket, then shrugged. "Why, if the bull won't, I reckon I will. How much?"

"Never mind it!" said Becky Wheeler quickly. "Only—please, Duff—I wish you wouldn't come here stirring up trouble!"

Without answering, Uncle Duff forked a couple of sawbucks out of his wallet and handed them to me. "Pay the man, Bub," he said. "An' look out you don't git bit."

I will say for Jason Wheeler that one of the tens was all he would take.

As we rode away, Brazos Bill had just started to rehash the bull sale for a warmed-over laugh, when a whizzer of a rock caught Uncle Duff behind the ear and like to knocked him out of the saddle. When we turned to look, we saw little Jace Wheeler cutting the dust for the house with his ma right after him.

"Gran'pa God!" said Uncle Duff, rubbing the bump, "I never knowed a mule could kick that high!"

That was the ruckus Uncle Duff had referred to when he told Ma that he "could always run for the church."

It took a pretty good range bull to bring $50 in those days, so when Jason Wheeler shipped in a $500 white-face from Missouri, it gave folks almost as much to talk about as the epidemic of throat disease that came to plague the country only a few weeks later. It was a different kind of talk, of course, because Wheeler's bull

didn't kill anybody's kids, but the diphtheria did.

I don't know whether Wheeler put the new bull in his west boundary pasture on purpose to tantalize Uncle Duff or not. But Uncle Duff he couldn't wait to go take a look at him. Brazos Bill and I rode with him down along our side of the stout four-wire fence between the two properties one evening, but the new bull was off in the scrubbery somewhere and we didn't sight him.

Uncle Duff never said anything, but the next morning he was gone before I got up, and toward noon Ma and I heard the doggonedest bellering you ever listened to, off down the draw.

"It's ol' Champ an' Wheeler's new bull talkin' fight!" I said.

"But I thought you told me Champ ranged over on Plum Creek!" said Ma, biting her lip.

"Oh, well," I told her, "bulls always drift around right smart."

That didn't fool Ma any. She knew as well as I did how come Champ to turn up all of a sudden over here next to the Running W fence. "I hope Duff don't cut Jason Wheeler's wire just to see two ol' surlies fight," she said uneasily.

"Uncle Duff never cut another man's fence in his life," I said. But I couldn't help wondering just how stout that four-wire fence of Wheeler's was. I rigged my pony and rode down there as quick as I could.

Ol' Champ was a high-hipped, dun-yellow bull about seven years old that had whipped every bull on Uncle Duff's range. In the longhorn breed, bulls never did grow great long horns like the steers did. Champ's were as thick as a man's leg at the butt, with an upswing that in about 15 inches tapered into polished black points as hard as flint and sharp as a bodkin. I doubt if he would have weighed 1000 pounds, but as Uncle Duff said, it was "all gristle an' go-git-'em."

Down on the first flat I came onto Uncle Duff sitting on his horse with one leg crooked around the saddle horn watching excited cattle putting on a parade up and down opposite sides of the fence. Strange cattle always act snuffy when they first come together and when a couple of bulls pair off and begin bowing up to each other, it reminds you of the way a crowd of human flock to a fist fight. That's the way it was there on the flat.

Wheeler's deep-loined new Hereford bull was mighty pretty. His red was the reddest I'd ever seen on a cow animal and the white of his head the whitest. His horns looked a little shorter than Ol' Champ's, and whitish at the tip, but plenty stout and sharp. With his thick, curly neck all bowed up, his nostrils blowing the dust, he was crowding the fence just about

as close as Ol' Champ was. It surprised me to see a cowpen bull showing just as much fight as a longhorn of the range.

Either one of them was stout enough to have ripped that fence down, but you could see that neither was going to risk being caught off base long enough to do it. Bulls don't open a battle by trying to hook each other. They circle for position, then crash their heads together head on and push.

Uncle Duff didn't say anything when I rode up. I hooked my leg over the saddle horn, the same as his.

"Ol' White-Face looks mighty heavy," I commented.

Just then the Hereford ran his tongue out about a foot and let out a short rusty blast. Ol' Champ just stood there solid, snuffing wind through his nose but never batting an eye.

"I'll bet Ol' Champ can whip him," said Uncle Duff, with a calculating quirk of his head. "I'd sure give a purty to see him try!"

"You reckon that fence will keep 'em apart, Uncle Duff?" I inquired hopefully.

"It's a purty stout fence," said Uncle Duff. He stepped off his horse and picked up a stout-looking stick. He stuck it behind the top wire like a lever and put on a little pressure. "Staple seems plenty tight," he said—and at that moment Jason Wheeler and Jake Lang rode up out of a gully a few yards away. Uncle Duff didn't move away from the fence.

"Mason," said Wheeler, lofty as all get-out, "I paid five hundred dollars for that bull. If you turn that scrub longhorn of yours in on him and get him hurt there'll be trouble."

"When there is," said Uncle Duff, "I'll be there."

"I'm just warnin' you," said Wheeler.

"Mr. Wheeler," said Uncle Duff, shucking his coat, "which side of this fence would you rather fight on?"

Wheeler's answer to that was to give a single significant slap at the butt of his gun and ride away. Jake Lang sort of grinned and followed him.

I never did see anything eat on a man more than the idea of matching a fight between those two bulls did on Uncle Duff. Sometime almost every day White-Face and Ol' Champ would rendezvous at the fence line for a spell of "paw and beller," and Uncle Duff didn't often miss being on hand to watch them.

But when Ma tartly suggested that somebody might saw off a few posts so the fence could accidentally fall down, and get all this foolishness over with, Uncle Duff spoke up pretty sharp.

"That white-face is valuable property," he said, and it sounded to me as if he was mainly laying it on the tawline to himself. "Gittin'

him hurt would be might' nigh the same as stealin'!"

It wasn't very long afterward that we heard that a sickness which Doc Roseberry called diphtheria had broken out in Gap City. Next it was spreading out among the nesters. We heard that two Ramadeaux children over on French Creek had died with it, quick. It gave us something more vital to talk about than Jason Wheeler's new bull. We heard that Doc Roseberry had a medicine called antitoxin which needed only a single dose to cure the disease if he got to it in time. But it was a medicine that had to be shot into you with a needle, and with people living so far apart, old Doc Roseberry was having a hell of a time trying to answer every call.

Then the word got around that Jason Wheeler had bought a batch of the stuff to sell at his store, and the nester-folks were buying it and shooting it into their ailing children themselves whether they knew how or not—even whether they knew for sure that it was the diphtheria. To make it easier for country doctors, or for folks who weren't doctors, to use, the antitoxin was put up in single doses, each supposed to be sufficient for one case, not measured out in units according to need as it is now. But there were cases where the child died anyway, and some parents feared the medicine almost as much as they did the disease.

Uncle Duff got the notion that maybe folks weren't using it right, and rode all the way to Gap City to get Doc Roseberry to show him "the right way to squirt them hooperdamics." After that he rode far and often, but came home often, too, always with anxiety in his eyes.

"Any news?" he would ask, and Ma would shake her head, meaning that neither her young'un or the Wheelers had come down with it yet.

Even with all his going and coming, Uncle Duff still found time once in a while to take a *pasear* down the fence and speculate on the forbidden pleasure of matching that bullfight. That's what he and I were doing the morning that Frenchy Pinard, his rheumatic legs comfortless in the saddle, came riding over.

"Those Wheeler keeds," he said, "they go seeck in the night. All cowboys out on the works—the Papa ride for the Docteur heself. But Meez Wheeler afraid they die before he return back. She like you to come—queeck!"

That was how we went—quick. Uncle Duff ordered me back to the house, but I didn't mind him. After that I don't think he noticed whether I came along or not.

Becky Wheeler's face was as gray-white as wet paper when she came to the door. "Duff," she said,

"we're in a fix. Jason sold out all the antitoxin. He couldn't refuse folks, and he expected to get more. This morning I looked again—and found one dose, back of the shelf."

"Well, one dose is better than none," said Uncle Duff.

"But—but don't you see, Duff? It's enough for *one* of the children—but not for both! They choke so bad, and their fever's so high! Duff—I'm scared!"

Uncle Duff put the needle in a saucepan and poured boiling water from the teakettle over it. "Becky," he said quietly. "I reckon you'll have to tell me which one to save—an' which to risk."

"I can't! Oh, God, I can't!" Becky's voice had a faraway, whispery sound to it. "Duff—I want you to go in there—alone—and do what God tells you is right. And whether they live or die, promise me never to tell me—or anybody—which one you gave it to!"

Duff looked at her a long time without batting those granite-blue eyes of his. "I'm afraid me an' Gran'pa God ain't on close enough speakin' terms for that," he said finally. "But I reckon I'll promise you."

I didn't suppose he even knew I was there, but as he went into the bedroom, he turned in the door. "You git back outside, Bub," he ordered sharply. "Don't you know this damn stuff is ketchin'?"

I went outside quickly and slipped around to the bedroom window. Uncle Duff must have found the room too hot for his liking, for I had to duck down below the sill when he came over and opened the long-faced lower sash a few inches.

When I peeked again he was still standing there, his head turned sidewise and a little up, like he was talking to somebody taller than he was.

"Look here, Gran'pa God," he was saying, as if speaking to a friendly neighbor, "if this was a bullfight I'd know what to do. But the way it is, it looks like you've got me between a rock an' a hard place."

Then he went over to the corner where the bed was, and I never could crane my neck enough to see which one of the sick kids he shot the medicine into. Ornery as he was, I couldn't help feeling sorry for little Jace.

Uncle Duff was a long time coming out. I was waiting on the front porch when Becky came to the door with him.

"I've done all I can do," I heard him tell her. "The rest is up to Gran'pa God. But I'll stay till Jason gits back with the doctor if you want me to."

"You look all wore out yourself, Duff," she said. "Jake and the cowboys will be in off the work, and Mrs. Pinard's coming to stay with me. Whyn't you go on home

and get some rest?"

I'd seen Uncle Duff in many a mood, but never tight-strung and drawn around the gills like he was as we rode back toward the ranch. Once my pony stumbled and bumped into his a little.

"Gran'pa God!" he said, sharper than he had ever spoken to me before. "Can't you hold that damn nag's head up?"

As we rode up the boundary fence, there were those two bulls up along the wire again, talking fight. At first I thought Uncle Duff was going to ride right on past without even looking at them. Then all of a sudden he reined up.

"Bub," he said, "let's you and me match us a bullfight!"

The sound of it somehow put me in mind of the way I've since seen men with a bad case of the drooptail reach for a bottle of whisky.

With a couple of stout sticks and a rock it didn't take us long to loosen staples and let down the wire. To my surprise it was White-Face that made the invasion, bowed up and snuffing to beat the band, while Ol' Champ took time out to paw some more dirt up on his narrow back.

By the time we got back on our horses, they were stiff-tailed and circling for position. Then their big bony foreheads crashed together and their backs began to hump up with the strain of a mighty pushing that budged neither one of them a foot. A couple of frolicking steers bowed up and blatted and pranced around them, but the battling bulls paid them no attention.

"Purty well matched!" said Uncle Duff, and something of the old gleam was back in his eye.

Then the Hereford's superior weight began to tell, and Ol' Champ began to give ground.

"He's goin' to git licked, Uncle Duff!" I cried, with very real concern. "That white-face has got him goin'!"

"Ol' Champ's been pushed before," said Uncle Duff.

In another moment I saw what he meant. Instead of losing footing and letting himself get hooked down when he had to back up too fast, the wiry longhorn broke free, sprang sideways with incredible nimbleness and whirled to horn the white-face in the shoulder as he surged past. It was a vicious gouge, but it did not down the Hereford. With a grunt he arched around with his meaty neck bowed and again the head-on battle of the push began.

Time after time in the next hour White-Face seemed to gain an overpowering advantage, only to have Ol' Champ's spry footwork beat him out of it. Then finally one of Ol' Champ's horn thrusts found a soft spot between two ribs, and the white-face went down, never to get up again.

"I love to see 'em fight, but I hate to see 'em git horned down an' killed," was Uncle Duff's comment as we rode on home. "That white-face put up right smart of a battle!"

It had been an exciting but not a pretty thing to see. I felt shaky and sort of sick inside. I was scared, too, wondering what Wheeler would do when he found out what had happened to his bull.

At the ranch Uncle Duff stopped only to swallow a cup of coffee, then allowed he would take a *pasear* over to French Creek to see how the sick folks over there were making out, and Ma didn't try to stop him. He seemed in mighty good spirits.

"There's a young widow woman over there," Ma said sort of to herself after he left. "Who knows?"

It was some after sunup when he got back the next morning.

"Saddle me a fresh horse while I see if I can beg your Ma out of a cup of coffee, Bub," he said. "I'm goin' to ride over an' see if Wheeler's back with the doctor yet. You recollect he said there'd be trouble if anything happened to his bull—an' I promised him I'd be there."

I didn't ask whether I could go along or not. When I climbed my horse Uncle Duff looked at me mighty hard but didn't say anything, so I went.

Jason Wheeler and old Doc Roseberry came out on the porch as we rode up. Both of them looked pretty gaunt in the face.

"Duff," said Wheeler, "I don't know as it matters a damn now, but I can't help wantin' to know which one—"

"Which won?" broke in Uncle Duff. "Why, that longhorn whipped him four ways from the jack! Your white-face put up a purty fair fight for a cowpen critter, but—"

"I ain't talkin' about bulls, Duff," cut in Wheeler. "I want to know which one of my children you give that medicine to?"

"Gran'pa God!" said Uncle Duff, sort of quiet. "You mean one of 'em died?"

"The kids," said Doc Roseberry, squinting through his pipe smoke, "are both doin' all right. My godfrey, what you fixin' to do with all that money, Duff? My fees ain't that high!"

Uncle Duff had dismounted and was stiff-legging it up the porch steps with a thick wad of bills which he shoved into Jason Wheeler's hands. "Payin' for a bullfight, Doc," he breezed. "An' by the Gran'pa it was worth it!" He turned to bat his granite-blue eyes challengingly at Mr. Wheeler. "I'm buyin' me a dead bull, Wheeler," he said. "If five hundred ain't enough, come over an' see if you're man enough to pull my whiskers for the balance! So

long, gents!"

Jason Wheeler stared at the money in his hand, then at Uncle Duff's back as he reached for his horse. "Hold on here! I don't ask no money from you, Duff!" he began. "I—"

But that didn't stop Uncle Duff. Becky Wheeler came out the door, just as he swung into the saddle, her lips parted as if to call to him; but that didn't stop him either. And whatever Uncle Duff was a-notion to do was good enough for me. We left out of there in a fog of dust.

"Sure 'nough, Uncle Duff," I asked him as we loped away, "which one *did* you give the medicine to?"

"That, Bub," he grinned back at me, "is between me an' Gran'-pa God!"

And so it might have remained if old Doc Roseberry hadn't later told Ma in confidence that he had noticed hypodermic needle pricks in the skin of both little Belinda and Jace. Half a dose of antitoxin each, he figured, had somehow been enough to stave off the strangling till he got there.

Maybe Gran'pa God had something to do with that, too.

GREAT WESTERN SHORT STORIES

A Quiz

SEVERAL short stories of the great American West have become classics of their kind—how many of them do you remember? See if you can match the titles of the great Western short stories given in the left-hand column with the correct authors among those listed in the right-hand column. Then turn to page 189 to check your answers. If you get 6 right you pass; a score of 7 is fair; one of 8, good; 9, excellent—and if you get 'em all, you've done some right smart remembering!

1. "An Ingenue of the Sierras"	—Ernest Haycox
2. "The Winning of the Biscuit Shooter"	—O. Henry
3. "The Caballero's Way"	—Zane Grey
4. "Wine on the Desert"	—Stewart Edward White
5. "Beyond the Desert"	—F. R. Buckley
6. "A Shot in the Dark"	—Max Brand
7. "Tappan's Burro"	—Owen Wister
8. "Stage to Lordsburg"	—Eugene Manlove Rhodes
9. "The Two-Gun Man"	—Henry Herbert Knibbs
10. "Gold-Mounted Guns"	—Bret Harte

UNCLE BILLY *and the* DOOLIN GANG

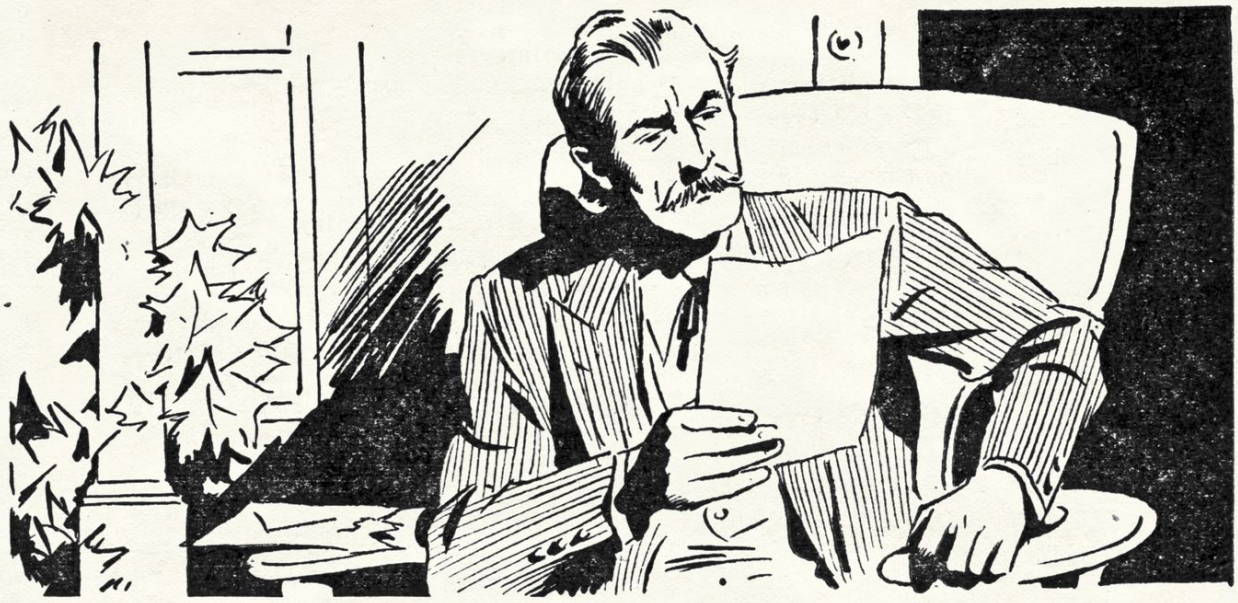
Story by **CARL SMITH** *Pictures by* **H. E. VALLELY**

BILLY TILGHMAN, regarded by many as the greatest law officer of the Old West, was called from retirement to break up the dangerous Doolin Gang. The duel between Tilghman and Bill Doolin, and its outcome, are the subject of this pictorial treatment of one of the historic episodes of the Old West.

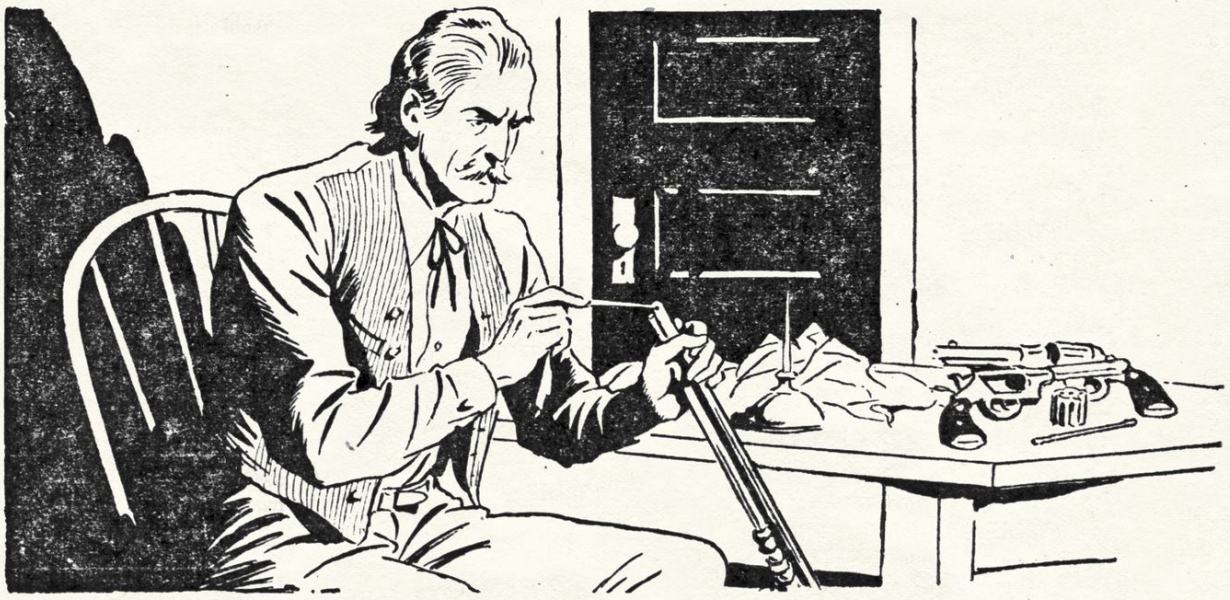
One of the frontier's most redoubtable desperadoes was operating in Oklahoma in the 'nineties. He was Bill Doolin, leader of a band of outlaws whose raids and hold-ups kept the territory in constant turmoil. Honest settlers barred their doors and kept to their cabins when word went around that Doolin's gang was riding.

There also lived in Oklahoma at the time a quiet, soft-spoken gentleman known as "Uncle Billy" Tilghman. This unassuming man had been marshal of Dodge City when it was a roaring cow town at the terminus of the Chisholm Trail. He had killed more badmen than Doolin could shake a Winchester at.

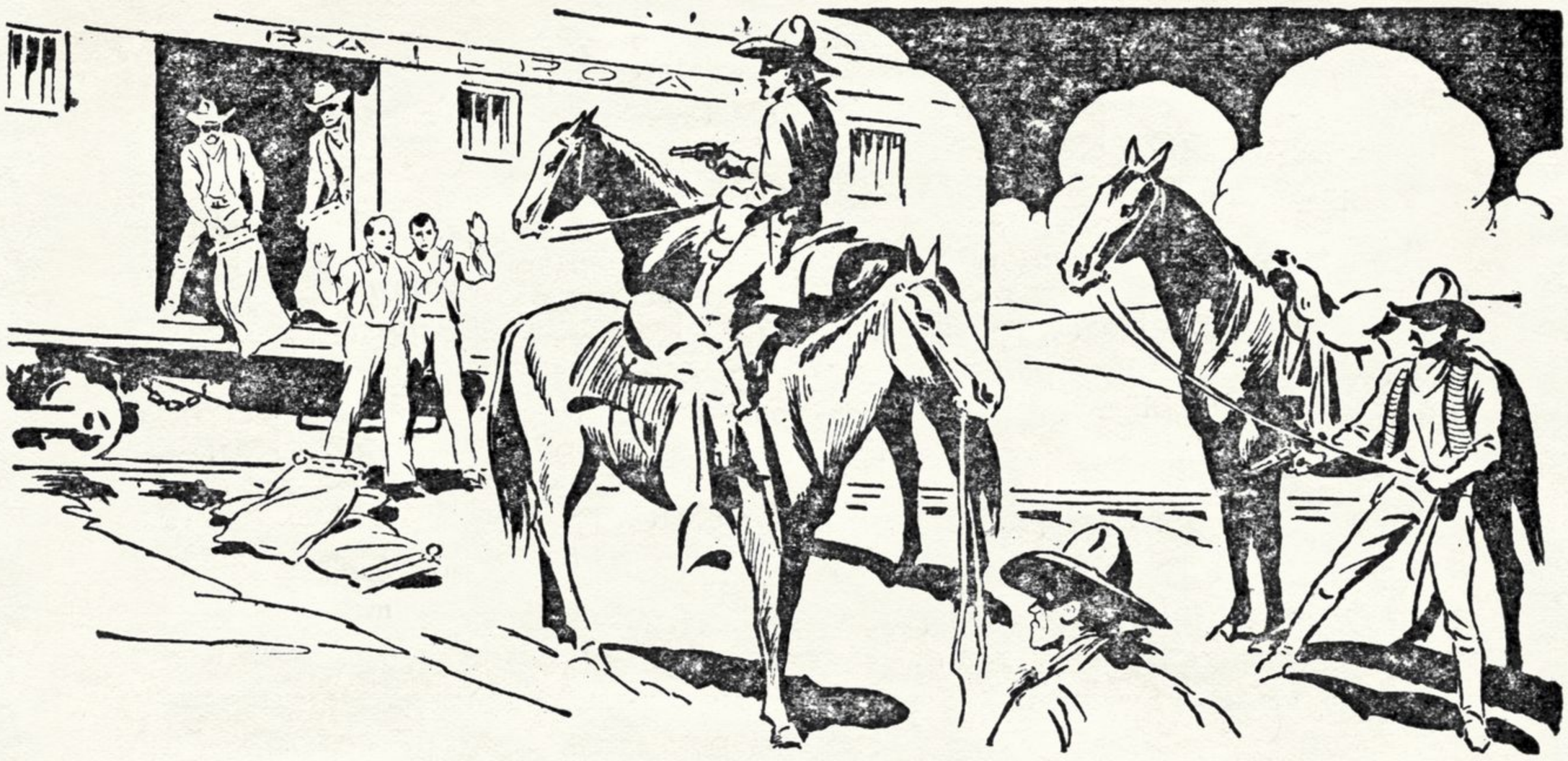
Tilghman had also been an Indian fighter, scout, and rancher, and there was no doubt of his courage. However, Uncle Billy preferred peace to gunplay, and generally tried to enforce law and order by persuasive words before resorting to his Colt. Still, it was a fatal mistake to draw on Bill Tilghman.



Uncle Billy had retired after a long and honorable career as frontier peace officer, his fast draw and unerring aim having made possible a comfortable old age. But his services continued in demand, and one day Uncle Billy received a letter from the White House, calling upon him for his help.

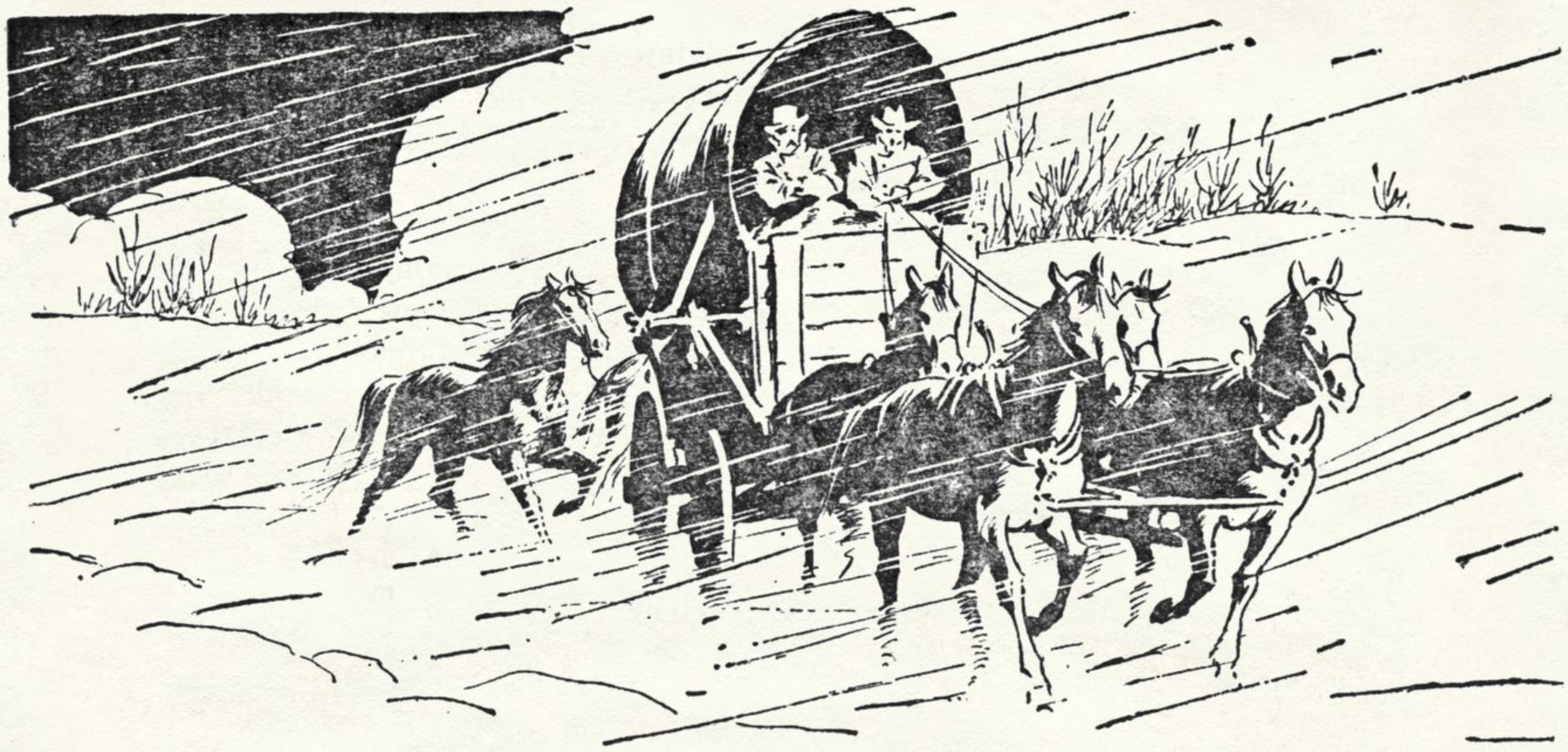


Whenever there was a job nobody else could handle, the cry went up for Billy Tilghman. Even though he had determined to hang up his guns for good, this request from Washington could hardly be ignored. So it happened that in 1895 Uncle Billy was given the job of breaking up the Doolin gang.

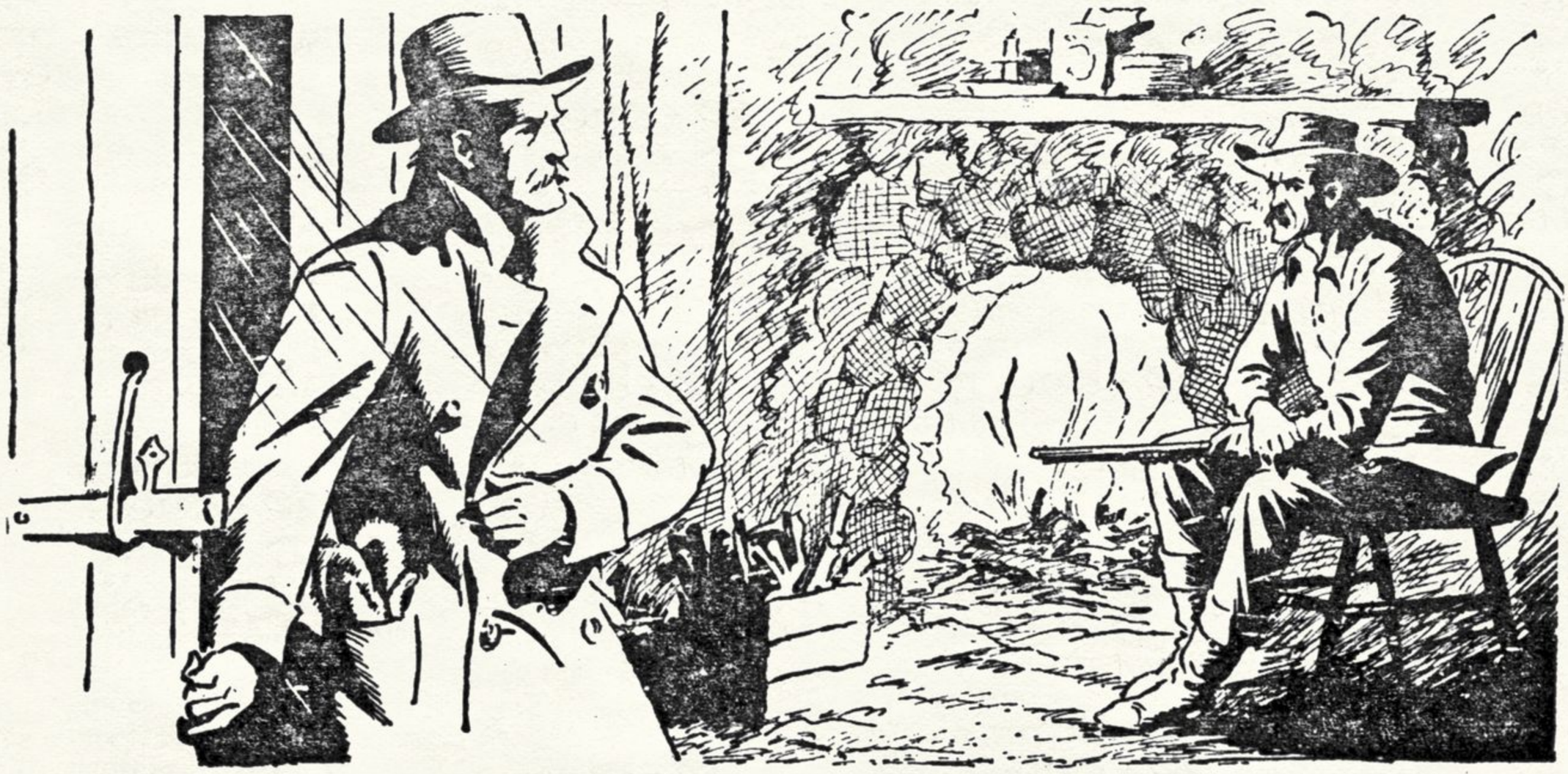


Doolin had been a member of the infamous Dalton gang, and when that was broken up he organized one of his own. Specializing in train and bank robberies, he cruised a wide section of Oklahoma, so terrorizing the inhabitants that they feared to help the authorities by giving information against him.

There were a number of small ranchers in the region who actively aided the gang. In return for a small share in the gang's loot, they gave Doolin and his men shelter and concealment when they needed it. Their ranches formed a kind of underground railway by which Doolin ranged the territory.



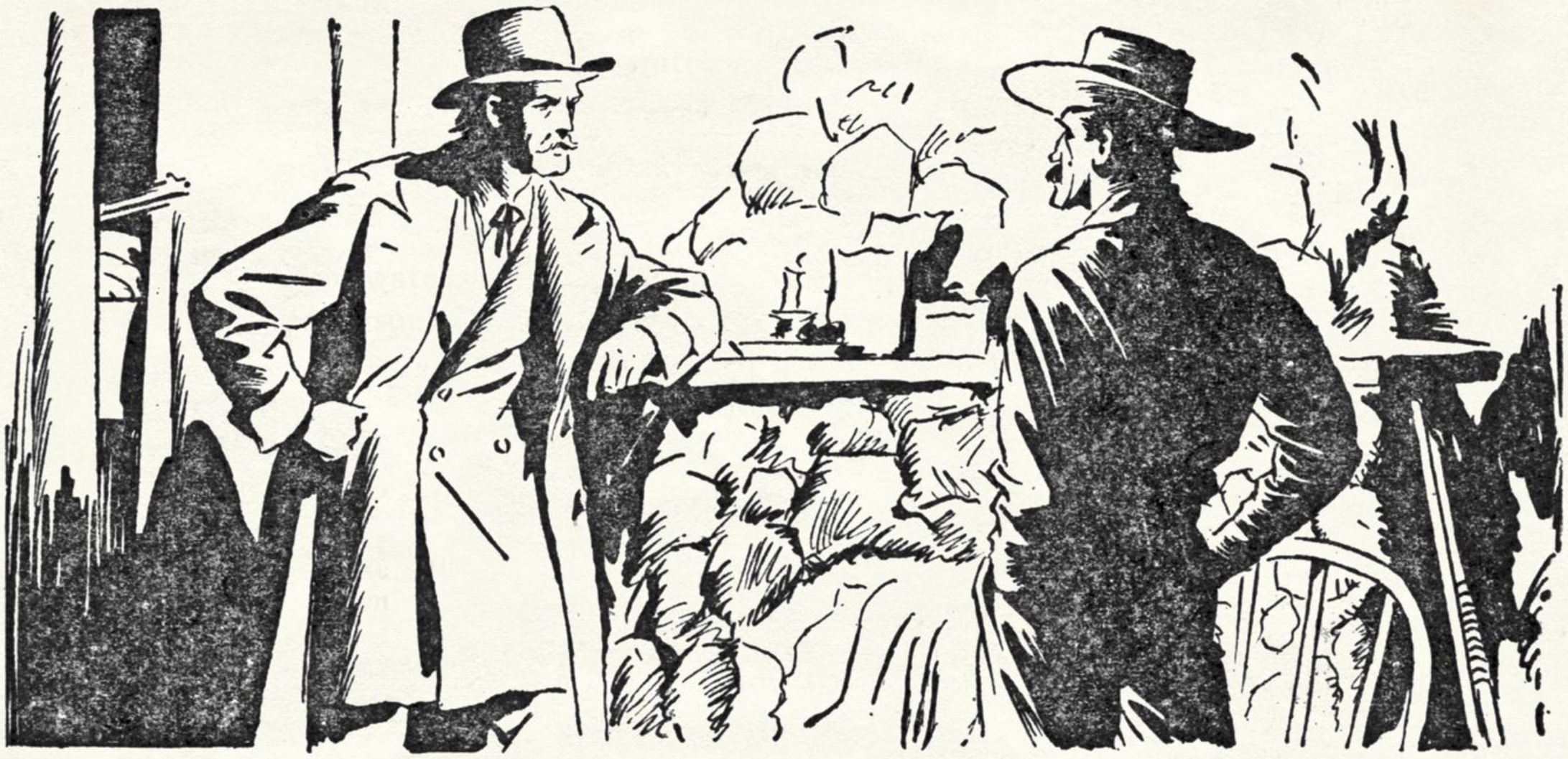
In order to break up the gang, Tilghman decided to move first to destroy this "underground railway." He learned which ranchers were giving Doolin shelter. One bitter January day Uncle Billy and a deputy set out from Guthrie in a covered wagon, heading for the ranch of one of Doolin's allies.



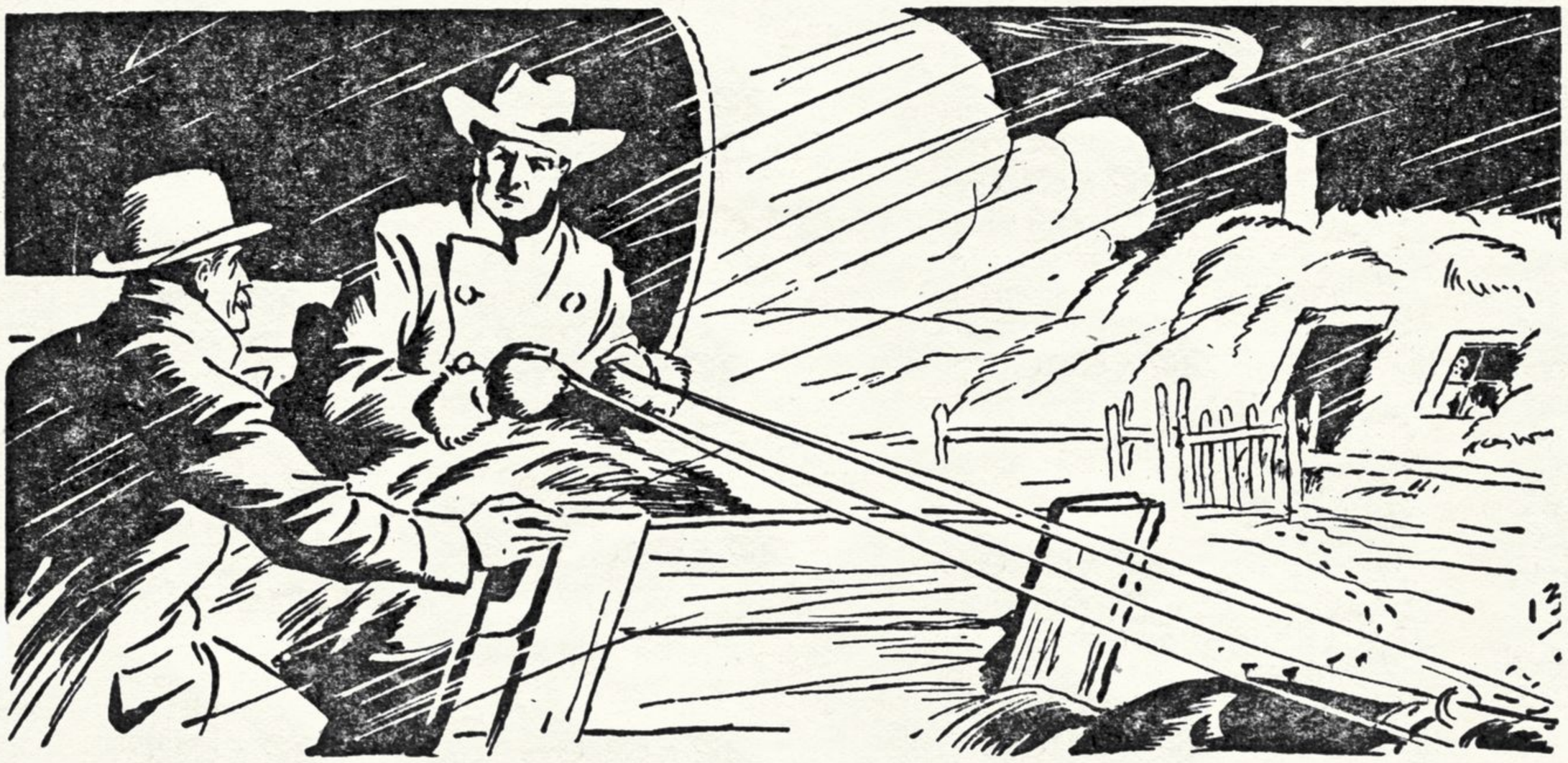
After a long, cold drive they arrived at the ranch. Tilghman told his deputy to wait in the wagon while he brought the rancher out. No one answered when Uncle Billy knocked at the door, so he pushed it open and walked in. The rancher sat by the fireplace, armed and hostile.

Uncle Billy nodded pleasantly. "Howdy, Frank. Thought I'd stop in and warm up a little." As he turned his back to the fireplace, his gaze swept a row of curtained bunks lining one side of the room. A chill not caused by the cold touched him—where the curtains parted, firelight glinted on metal!

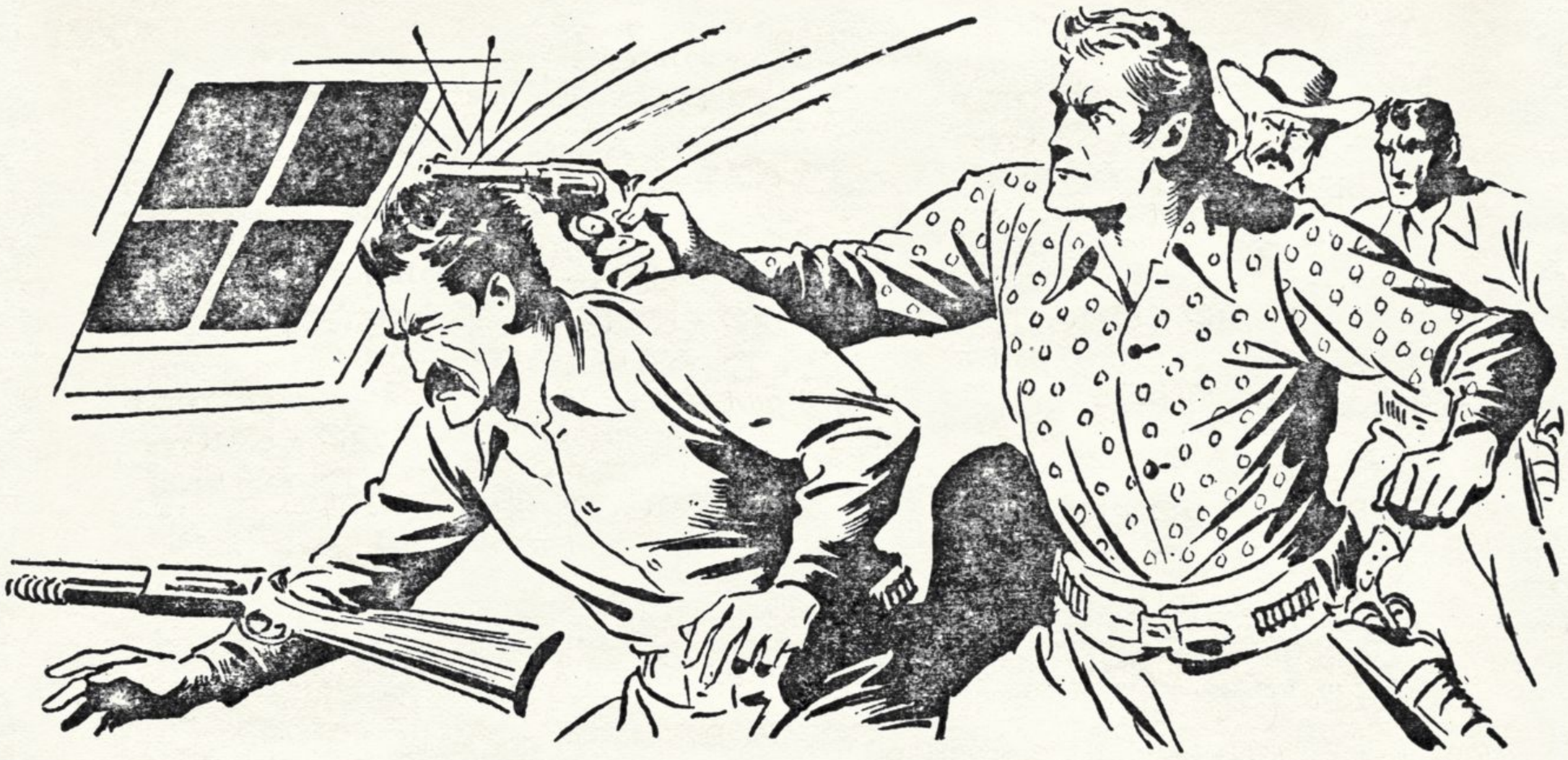
Uncle Billy had the sharp eyes of an old Indian scout, and they had identified the light-reflecting muzzles of the rifles edged up to the openings. Counting a pair of rifles in each of four bunks, he realized he had walked in on the entire Doolin gang. Eight killers had him covered.



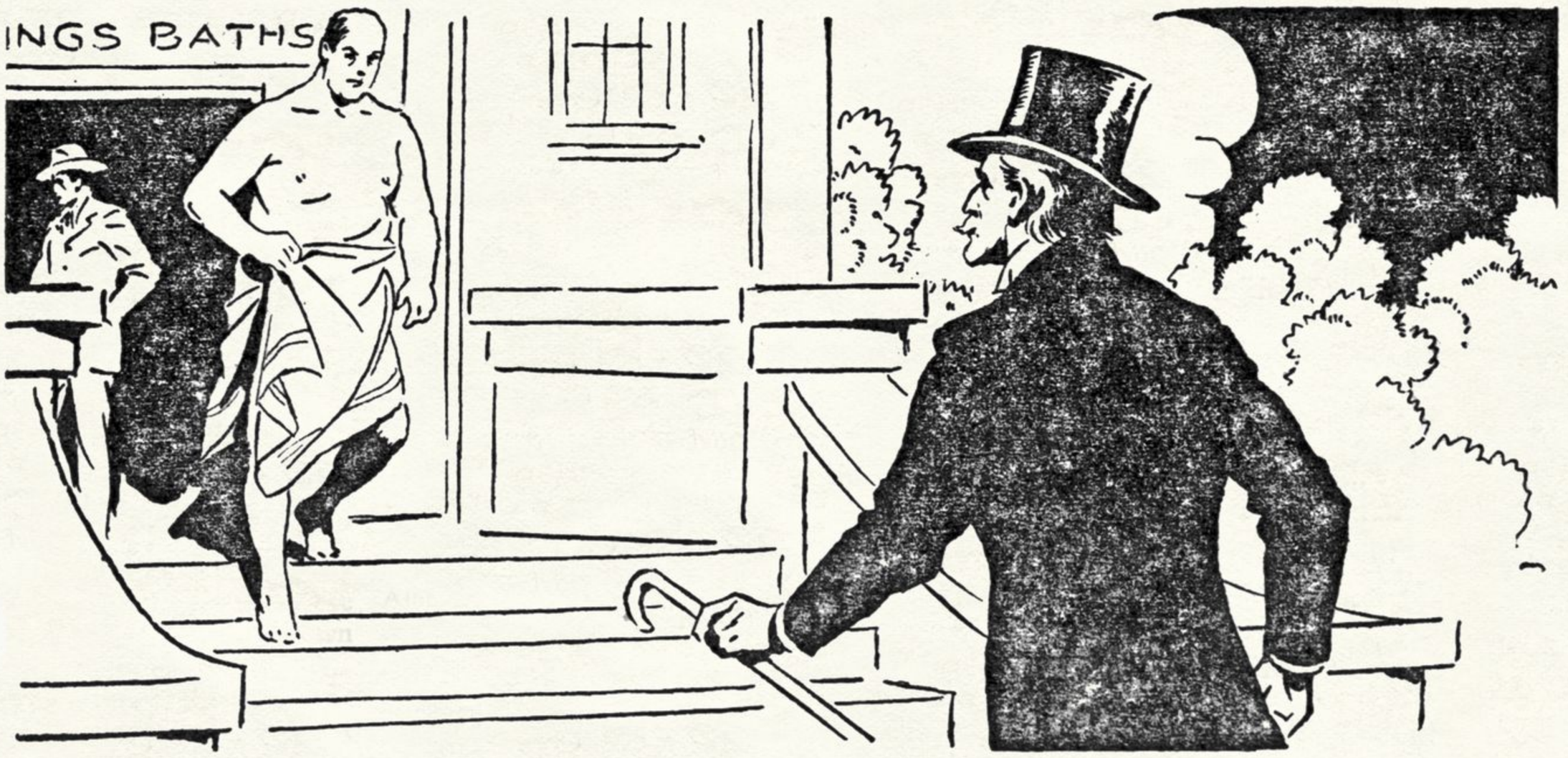
Tilghman knew he was a dead man if the gang suspected he had come out after them. He would have to bluff. "Frank, me and a friend are headed for Bowman's ranch in a wagon, but it looks like this road is drifted pretty bad ahead. Thought you could tell me the best way to go." The tension eased a bit.



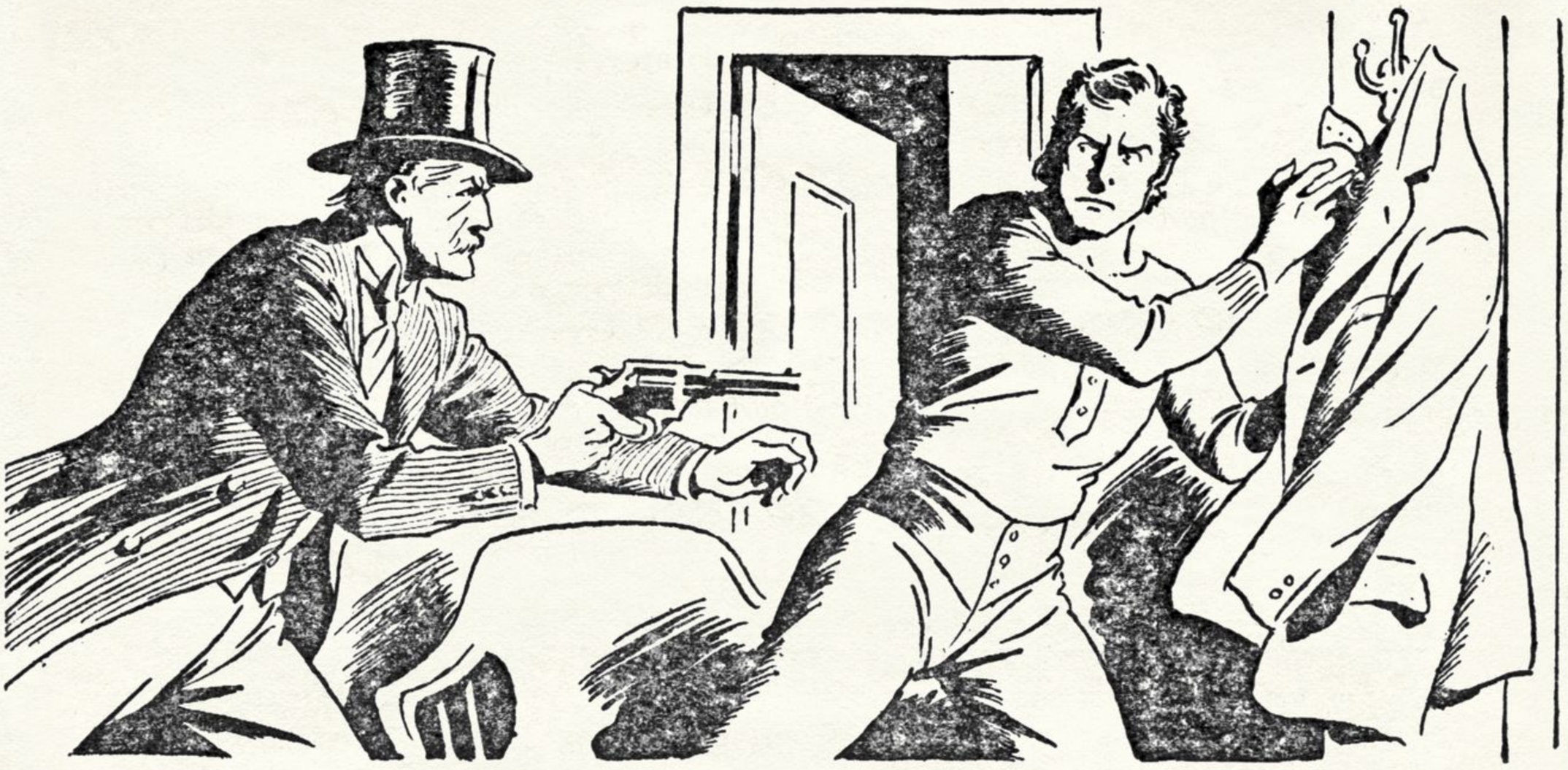
Knowing he might hear the crash of a rifle behind him at any instant, Tilghman forced himself to talk casually to the man. It worked. After several minutes he drifted toward the door, walked to the wagon, and climbed in. "Drive away slow and don't look back," he said. "The whole gang's in there."



When Tilghman returned with reinforcements, the gang had gone. Later he heard that an outlaw sprang to the window as he walked away, saying, "I'll kill the so-and-so!" Doolin knocked him down, saying, "He's too good a man to shoot in the back." Uncle Billy was grateful, but still dogged Doolin's trail.



An intercepted letter told Uncle Billy that Doolin, suffering from rheumatism, had gone to Eureka Springs for the hot baths. Tilghman started for the spa at once, disguised in a silk top hat and a Prince Albert coat. There was little resemblance to the old frontiersman Doolin knew.



Tilghman learned that Doolin was soaking in one of the baths. He walked in empty-handed and found Doolin getting into his clothes in the dressing-room. Doolin ignored the top-hatted stranger until he stepped close, drew a gun, and ordered Doolin to raise his hands. Doolin dived for his own gun.

Uncle Billy knew Doolin had vowed never to be captured alive, but remembering how Doolin had saved his life at the cabin, he held his fire. He lunged at Doolin, pinned him to the wall, and with his own gun jammed into the bandit's middle, struggled to get Doolin's gun. "Don't make me shoot, Bill!"

For Doolin, however, it was a choice between dying then or later, on the gallows. He ignored the gun in his ribs and exerted all his strength to bring his own to bear. "Give it up, Bill," Uncle Billy panted. "I don't want to kill you, but if you get that gun down any more, I'll have to."

Tilghman finally persuaded Doolin to surrender. He had every legal and moral right to kill him, but Uncle Billy didn't like to shed blood when he could avoid it. Doolin's decision not to fight it out to the death proved wise, for members of his gang organized a mass jail break and rescued him.

Thus Tilghman's hard work went for nothing. Doolin lived a few years more, to die with a gun in his hand, being killed by U. S. Marshal Heck Thomas, one of Uncle Billy's friends. Tilghman himself was nearly 80 when he was shot to death while attempting to disarm a drunken prohibition agent. Characteristically, Uncle Billy had not drawn his own gun. His penchant for giving the other man the breaks betrayed him at last and ended the long career of one of the most respected peace officers the West ever knew.

WARE'S KID, *that taciturn 110-pound bundle of Ranger dynamite, follows a long trail as he seeks the killer of Eph Carson —so long that he tangles en route with Sam Bass and a band of murderous Apaches, consecutively. The solution is something of a surprise even to young Ware. This novelette was first published in* Frontier Stories *in 1927.*

Wanted---?

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

WARE'S KID jogged into Dallas, coming from Austin pursuant to special orders of the adjutant general, which covered the proposed capture or burial of one Dell Spreen, who was charged with murder and robbery down El Paso way.

Horsemen passed him; farmers in wagons with their families about them. All gave the smallish figure on the black stallion a more than usually curious glance. He was dressed like a Mexican dandy—a huge black sombrero, heavy with silver bullion, shading a lean brown face and sun-narrowed gray-green eyes; a waist-length jumper of soft tanned goatskin, fringed from shoulder to elbow and with a bouquet of scarlet roses embroidered upon the back; *pantalones* of blue, with rows of twinkling silver buttons on each side of the crimson insert in the outer seam.

But the crowd passed on unwittingly. For his white-handled Colt hung awkwardly high upon his belt and the canny readiness of sleek, brown Winchester stock to his hand was not readily apparent. Too, he was obviously no more than 18 or 19 years old.

On the main street Ware's Kid pulled up, this time to stare broodingly up the shallow canyon of brick and wooden buildings.

A drowsy idler upon a saloon porch, leaning comfortably against a post with feet in the

dust of the street, promised information. Ware's Kid spurred over and at sound of the stallion's feet the lank one opened his eyes lazily.

"Sher'ff's office?"

"Git to hell out o' here an' find out, if you-all's so cur'us!" snarled the loafer.

"Sher'ff's office?"

Finding icy greenish eyes boring into his face, eyes lit by an uncanny electric sparkling, the loafer sat suddenly stiff-backed. "'Scuse *me!*" he cried shakily. "But I—I .shore thought you-all was a greaser! Yo' clothes an' yo' —yo'—"

Ware's Kid ignored the profuse flow of apologies. Having received his directions, he rode on. The lounger mopped damp brow with a sleeve and peered after the tall black and its small rider. "Gawd! He's a mean 'n', I bet you!"

Ware's Kid swung down before the sheriff's office and hitched the stallion to a splintered post. With carbine cuddled in his arm, he crossed to stand in the doorway of the office. His roving eyes made out, in the duskiest corner, a small figure squatting against the wall.

Ware's Kid went inside. The squatting one was a boy of 15, barefooted, in faded overalls, gingham shirt, and ragged hat upon towy hair. His round eyes were of the palest blue and he had neither brows nor lashes, so that his gaze seemed unwinking, like a snake's.

"Sher'ff?" grunted Ware's Kid.

The boy jerked his head toward the street door and shrugged silently. Ware's Kid, after a long stare, lounged over to another corner and himself squatted upon his heels.

He wondered if he were really to find Dell Spreen here in Dallas. He had not been in Carwell with Sergeant Ames, on the day three months past, when Simeon Rutter and two O-Bar riders had spurred into the tiny, sleepy village, with the word of the murder and robbery of Eph Carson, Rutter's partner.

But the sour-faced Ranger sergeant had told him of the crime and of his investigations at El Castillo, the long, low rock wall from behind which Eph Carson had been shot.

Piecing together the testimony of Rutter and the punchers and adding the result of his own observation, Ames had made a fairly complete story. Carson had been on his way back to the O-Bar with about $7,000 of his and Rutter's money. During his absence, up Crow Point way, this gunman Spreen had ridden up to the O-Bar and asked for Carson. Told that he was absent, Spreen had said grimly that he would wait.

But shortly after breakfast on the day of the murder, while the ranch house was deserted except

for two Mex' cooks, Spreen had disappeared. None had since seen him. Spreen knew that Carson was to return with a large sum of money. The whole ranch had known it.

Evidently, said Ames, Spreen had ridden up the Crow Point trail to ambush himself where it ran along the rock wall in the desert—El Castillo. He had not waited long—there were but two cigarette stubs in the trampled sand. Eph Carson had come squarely into range of the steadied rifle. Then—two shots and the wizened little cowman had side-slipped from the saddle to sprawl face downward, dead. Having robbed the body, Spreen had vanished as if the ground had swallowed him.

Ware's Kid went over the details of his own investigation. He had located the niche in the wall which had held the murderer's .44 rifle. He had re-created the murder; had interviewed Rutter and the O-Bar boys.

The dark, bitter-tongued rancher had told how he had ridden with the punchers up the trail toward Crow Point, when Carson's failure to return had alarmed him. Told how they had found Carson sprawled upon the sand, found his horse a quarter-mile away with bridle reins caught in the *ocotillos.*

Two weeks after the murder a peremptory summons had come to Ware's Kid from headquarters in Austin. He had found the adjutant general determined to stamp out the wave of crime then sweeping the border country. He wanted this Spreen killed or taken.

Ware's Kid was aroused from his thoughts by footsteps. A stocky man clumped inside the office and sat down at the battered desk.

"Mawnin'," nodded the stocky man. The rigidity of his angular face was broken up by curiosity, as wide, alert brown eyes roved over the Mexican finery. "Somethin'?"

"Do' know," shrugged Ware's Kid.

He noted that the man wore a deputy sheriff's badge upon his open vest. He was, perhaps, 29 or 30, though dark mustache and tiny goatee made him seem older. He was dusty as from long riding.

"Do' know," repeated Ware's Kid. "Sher'ff?"

"Sher'ff's up to Austin, a-pow-wowin' with the gov'nor. Art Willeke—Art's chief dep'ty—he's ramblin' 'round the ellum-bottoms, Denton way, huntin' Sam Bass."

Mention of the notorious outlaw, who was just then keeping Rangers and peace officers frantic, solved a part of Ware's Kid's puzzle. He had been wondering whether or not to take the local officers into his confidence; tell them frankly whom he sought.

"Kind o' interested in Bass," he

told the deputy, thoughtfully. "Ranger. Headquarters Troop. Name's Ware."

"Ware?" cried the deputy, staring hard and somewhat unbelievingly. "Heerd about you-all! Glad to meet you!" He shook hands and sat down again, still eyeing Ware's Kid doubtfully. Then the boy in the corner came silently to the desk. The deputy nodded to him, hesitated, and turned to Ware's Kid. "Mind if I talk to him, private?" he asked apologetically.

Ware's Kid went outside to lean against the wall. He could hear the boy's excited whispering, an occasional explosive grunt from the deputy. Then he was called inside. The boy was gone.

The deputy glanced up at Ware's Kid with the odd, appraising stare he had given the small figure at first mention of his name. "My name's Bos' Johnson," he remarked abruptly. "You-all make yo'se'f to home, here. I'll be back, right soon."

He was gone 15 or 20 minutes and when he came in again, his face wore that expression of grim rigidity which Ware's Kid had marked upon him when first he had come into the office. "A'right," he grunted. "Le's git yo' hawss to the stable. Then I'll buy you-all a drink."

They saw to the stallion's stabling, then crossed the street to a low, brick saloon. There were not many in it—a cowboy or two, a knot of farmers standing together far down the bar. But, drinking alone, was a huge man with sullen, red face and close-set black eyes. He turned at the pair's entrance, staring.

"Whisky," said Bos' Johnson tonelessly. Ware's Kid nodded agreement.

The big man watched, tugging at long mustaches and snorting loudly as if at his private thoughts. He watched belligerently while the bartender poured the drinks for Ware's Kid and Bos' Johnson. "Bartender!" he bellowed suddenly and crashed a huge fist upon the polished bar.

"Yes, sir!" replied the bartender. His pasty face was gray-hued. "Yes, sir, Mr. Branch."

Bull Branch continued to glare menacingly at him. "Bartender!" he growled. "Since when is Mexicans 'lowed to come a-shovin' in yere a-drinkin' with white men? You-all chase him out'n here 'fore I git mad."

Slowly the bartender inched toward Ware's Kid—who had not yet seemed even to glance in Bull Branch's direction. When he was still six feet away, the Ranger turned his head a trifle—and regarded the bartender. The unhappy man stopped instantly, shrinking back before the uncanny electric sparkling in the gray-green eyes.

Slowly, then, Ware's Kid

wheeled to face Bull Branch. "Where *I* come from ever' gent kills his own snakes."

"Whut?" roared Bull Branch, lowering big head on bull neck and glaring ferociously. *"Whut?"*

"Pop yo' whip, fella!" Ware's Kid invited him, still in the bored drawl.

Bull Branch gaped amazedly. Deliberately he pushed back his coat flaps and put huge hands upon his hips. The pearl-gripped butts of two Colts showed, almost under his fingers. Then he bore slowly down upon the Ranger, who stood sideways to the bar, with left elbow resting on its edge. Bos' Johnson moved unobtrusively away from the bar and out of possible line of fire. But Bull Branch made no move to draw his guns, merely came on ponderously.

What followed was blurred like the action of a rattler's head as it strikes. The left hand of Ware's Kid moved—so rapidly that none there actually saw it move. It caught up the whisky glass from the bar and flipped the stinging liquor squarely into Bull Branch's face.

As the huge figure reeled, hands going to tortured eyes, Ware's Kid shot forward. He twitched Branch's Colts from their holsters and hurled them into a corner. He rained blows upon Bull Branch's face—leaping clear off the floor to reach that height.

It was cat-and-mastiff. Blindly Bull Branch tried to push him off, but those hard fists, landing with force terrifically out of proportion to the small body behind them, cut his face to ribbons, closed his eyes to puffy-lidded slits, drove sickeningly into his mid-section. He staggered about the barroom, grunting, whining, helpless. At last some instinct seemed to show him the door. He broke for it at a staggering run and Ware's Kid, with a Comanche yell, leaped upon his back and spurred him through it, catching hold of the lintel and swinging down to the floor as Bull Branch lurched through and fell sprawling upon the veranda floor outside.

When he came back, the bartender was half crouched against the back bar, with eyes bulging.

Bos' Johnson waggled a hand at the bartender. "Set 'em up, bartender!" he gasped. "This 'n's on the house. Ware! Mebbe they won't neveh hi'st no monument to you-all here, but Bull Branch —he'll remembeh you-all plenty!"

Back in the sheriff's office, Johnson turned suddenly serious again.

"I got you-all into that trouble with Bull Branch."

Ware's Kid merely waited, brown face, gray-green eyes revealing nothing of his thoughts.

"Wondered if you-all really was Ware an', if you was, how much o' the talk was so. Because

—I shore do need some help!"

"Fer what?"

"To go out with me tonight an' stand up to Sam Bass's gang!"

Ware's Kid studied the grimly earnest face. From the beginning he had sensed something unusual about the deputy. He thought that Johnson was usually a happy-go-lucky cowpuncher and a man efficient with either hands or weapons. "A' right!" he grunted curtly.

"You-all willin'?" cried Johnson. "Then here's the layout. They're goin' to stick up the eastbound T & P ag'in at Eagle Ford. Figger folks won't be expectin' lightnin' to hit twict in the same place. Me 'n' you, we'll be in the weeds 'long the track."

"How-come just us two?"

"I could raise a posse," Johnson admitted. "But—how'm I goin' to know the fellas I line up ain't in with Bass? No! I'm goin' to line my sights on Simp Dunbar an' before I let some dam' spy carry word, I'll go it by myse'f!"

"Simp Dunbar? Who's he?"

"He's the skunk that killed my cousin, Billy Tucker! Two weeks ago, oveh in Tarrant. Man! I'd give a black-land farm to git me Simp Dunbar oveh my front sight. An' I shore will! 'Twas like this. Bass's outfit loped up to a saloon on the aidge o' Fort Worth, where Billy, he was havin' a drink. The' was some kind o' wranglin', Billy bein' the kind as won't back down fer no man livin'. Simp Dunbar—I've knowed him all my life fer a useless cuss an' Billy knowed him, too—he shot from off to one side."

Ware's Kid nodded silently. More and more, he liked Bos' Johnson. "A' right. We'll hunt 'em up," he grunted. "How-come yuh know they're goin' to be at Eagle Ford?"

"My spy told me. Had him a-watchin' fer 'em last two weeks. That boy."

"What's name that other little station—east o' here?"

"Mesquite?"

"Didn't even know there was one," shrugged Ware's Kid, with a ghost of a grin. "Johnson, we'll be at Mesquite, not Eagle Ford, tonight. Boy's lyin'. In with Bass, likely. Feelin' I got, an' mostly my feelin's is right."

Johnson was won over to acceptance of the altered plan, if but half willingly. He admitted that he knew nothing much of the boy, who had appeared in the office a month before offering to spy upon the Bass gang.

They waited until nearly dark, then ate at a Chinese restaurant. It was pitch-dark when they went swiftly to the stable where Johnson's horse, with the big stallion, had been fed an hour before. They saddled, talking a little for the benefit of any ears that might be stretched toward them, of the western road—that toward Eagle Ford.

For a couple of miles they rode swiftly eastward, then turned south on the road to Mesquite. Johnson led, because of his knowledge of the country. Soon he checked his mount and jerked the Winchester from its scabbard. Ware's Kid already cuddled his carbine in the crook of his arm.

Suddenly, not 50 yards ahead, a man scratched a match. The Ranger jerked his carbine up. Gently he kneed the stallion around, feeling, rather than seeing, that Johnson was doing likewise. There was no alarm while they moved back 100 yards and slipped off their animals.

"Let's hitch the hawsses an' sneak up!" whispered Johnson.

They returned to the point from which they had seen the flare of that match, the stocky deputy making no more sound than a shadow—than the Ranger himself. Then they halted, squatting on their heels, to listen.

"Late again!" a boyish voice complained. "Hell!"

"Don't ye fret, Bub," a harsh voice answered the youngster. "She'll be a-ramblin' along right soon. Ingineer, he'll see that log an' he'll jerk her back onto her tail right suddent!"

"Ever'body lined up?" inquired a pleasant voice—Bass's, Ware's Kid surmised. "Yuh-all know where yuh work?"

As the voices answered in affirmative grunts, the Ranger began moving soundlessly to circle them to get nearer to the point where the train would stop. Johnson followed until they were squatting in a little open perhaps 50 feet from the track, sheltered by a fallen tree.

Minutes ticked off, then there was the sound of the train, far away. The rails before them began to hum. The train was upon robbers and officers with a roar. Came a frantic squealing of brakes and the scream of the whistle.

The train had barely halted when there was a rattle of shots along the track. It was so dark that there was no clue to the robbers' positions save the orange flames that stab-stabbed the night. Ware's Kid wasted no time thinking of that, but ran crouched over up to the track, where he could fire at the robbers' shot-flashes. From here he went into action with coldly precise fire from the carbine.

"Who's that dam' jughead?" someone roared. Evidently, thought Ware's Kid, he was believed to be some misguided member of the gang, firing into his own people.

From between the cars came shots to answer the gang, now. It was pandemonium, there in the pitchy night, with the heavy roar of Colts and the sharp, whip-like reports of rifles. A man could but guess, by the relative positions of

the flashes, at whom he shot.

Suddenly a high, clear, voice rang out, crying a name over and over again, penetrating even the staccato din of the firing. "Simp Dunbar! Where you-all? Simp Dunbar—"

A voice answered, but there was no diminution in the firing. Ware's Kid crawled down the track, having reloaded his carbine. With his first shot a man cried out shrilly. He pumped the lever and —his carbine jammed. He spat a bitter curse. He knew instantly what had happened—he had slipped a .45 pistol cartridge into a .44 carbine.

A huge shape hurled itself at him. Mechanically he threw up his carbine and the oncoming man ran into it. Then Ware's Kid, tugging at the butt of his seldom used Colt, leaped aside. A roar sounded, almost in his ear. Then a hand caught his shoulder. Instinctively he stepped close to his assailant, turned like a flash when a pistol brushed him, dropped his Colt and caught the fellow's gunhand with both of his and hung on grimly.

"Somethin's wrong, boys! Let's git out o' yere!" a cool, half-laughing voice was shouting.

The fellow with whom Ware's Kid grappled was swinging terrific blows at his lighter opponent. But the Ranger's head was against his chest; the big fellow's fists grazed their mark. But he was tiring with his bulldog grip on the other's gunhand. Suddenly he released his hold and tried to leap backward. A heel caught on a bunch of grass and he stumbled. A flash and roar from in front of him, a stinging pain across his head. He crashed flat.

He came to, conscious of a dull headache and, next, of a dim light over his head. After a moment of blinking, he perceived that he was sitting in a chair of a railway coach. Next he realized that the train was moving.

"How d' you-all feel, now?" inquired an anxious voice.

Painfully he turned his head and saw Bos' Johnson's worried face opposite him.

"Right puny!" he grunted.

Johnson grinned widely, relief in his brown eyes.

"What happened?"

"Bullet creased you-all. You-all been pickin' daisies might' nigh a hour."

"The hell! Where we goin'? Gang git away?"

"Goin' into Dallas. Yeh, gang high-tailed it—all but Simp Dunbar," said Johnson. "Reckon they'll most all be a-lickin' some sore spots, though. Me 'n' you-all did right smart o' shootin'! I hollered fer Simp an' like a dam' jughead, he spoke right up. I snuck up onto him an' told him who I was."

He lifted his arm and in the loose flannel of his shirt beneath

it, showed a great hole with charred edges. "Might' nigh got me, first crack! But I worked buttonholes up an' down his front 'fore he could shoot ag'in!"

"How-come yuh found me?"

"By lookin' around," shrugged Johnson affectionately. "You dam' red-eyed li'l runt! You-all think I'd hike out an' leave you-all out there, some'r's, fer the gang, mebbe, to find? I come runnin' up about the time you-all tumbled; see that hairpin right on top me —an' me with an empty gun! I yelled like a Comanche an' damned if he neveh broke an' run."

Ware's Kid leaned back wearily in the seat.

Johnson stretched his bowed legs comfortably and took off his Stetson. "Wisht I had a chaw," he grumbled.

"Got the makin's."

"Don't use her thet-a-way. I neveh could learn to smoke, some way." He threw his head back and closed his eyes.

The Ranger, watching him, turned suddenly cold all over. For upon the brown, sinewy neck that had been always hidden heretofore by the silken neckerchief shone a long white scar that stretched evenly three quarters of the way around it.

A stocky, dark-faced, dark-eyed man, with a white scar circling evenly around his neck—so Simeon Rutter and the O-Bar hands had described Dell Spreen. True, they had seen him clean-shaven, and, believing him guilty of murder, they remembered his features and eyes as murderous.

"Dell Spreen!" he called in a low voice.

Bos' Johnson moved like a cat, to half draw his Colt. Then he saw the derringer that covered him with twin barrels. For an instant he hesitated, then shoved the Colt back into its holster and slumped.

"So you-all come afteh *me,*" he said. "I been lookin' fer somebody to show up. That's why I got me a job as dep'ty. Figgered whoever come'd spill his tale in the office an', seein' me wearin' a badge, wouldn't suspicion me. Specially since I neveh used my own name in the O-Bar country. But you-all shore fooled me."

"Hate like hell to do it!" Ware's Kid wriggled miserably. "But I'm a Ranger. I got to take yuh back."

"I ain't blamin' you-all. But—might's well shoot me, right now, as to put me up 'fore a jury in that country. Ever'thing's ag'inst me—specially bein' a strangeh. That's why I high-tailed it, soon's I heerd he'd been found.

"I ain't denyin' I went to the O-Bar figgerin' I'd mebbe have to kill Carson. I was goin' to git back the money he stole off'n my brotheh an' sisteh. Goin' to git it back or try the case before ol' Jedge Colt. But if I'd killed him,

it'd been from the front."

"Yuh—yuh mean yuh never killed him?" cried Ware's Kid. Then the surge of hope died. Of course Johnson would say that.

"D' you-all figger me that-a-way? Knowin' no more about me than you do?" Johnson asked.

Slowly the Ranger shook his head.

"Looky yere!" argued the deputy. "Eph Carson an' my brotheh, Sam, they was ranchin' it oveh on the Brazos. Carson's a tough hombre, remember. He's gamblin' a lot. Well, he sells ever' last head o' stuff on the place while Sam's down in Fort Worth. Time Sam gits back with my kid sisteh that's got a share in the ranch, Carson's done gambled away the money. The's a row, o' course. Sam, he's got more guts than gun-sense. Carson nigh kills him.

"Time I come into it, Carson's rattled his hocks. Two years afteh, I'm ridin' down in the El Paso country. Hear about Eph Carson o' the O-Bar. I go high-tailin' it oveh an' hang around four-five days, but Carson don't come. Then I start out fer Crow Point a-huntin' him.

"Then, hell-bent, comes the Mex' cook's helper-boy. I kept a cowboy from beatin' him to death, one day. Says Carson's killed an' robbed an' ever'body says I must-'ve killed him. Well, whut do I do? Try to tell them red-eyed O-Bar boys as how I was intendin' to kill Eph Carson, mebbe, but neveh got no chanct? Like hell! I figger the job I come to do is done. I leave that-'ere country in a mile-high cloud o' dust."

Bos' Johnson rose to cup his hands against the window glass and peer out into the night. Missing no slightest movement of his prisoner, the Ranger studied again the wide, powerful shoulders, the bandy legs.

Johnson turned slowly. "Dallas! Be in soon," he said. "Then—I ain't blamin' you-all none, Ware. But just—well, sort o' between us, I wisht I could make you believe I never done it. I sort o' took to you-all from the beginnin' an—"

"'T ain't a bit o' use," interrupted Ware's Kid, "'Cause—I know yuh never done it!"

Ostentatiously he returned the derringer to his jumper pocket. "'S all right, Bos'. Yuh got to go down to Austin with me. Got to ex-hibit yuh some to the adj'tant gin'ral, to make him sabe. But that'll be all. Listen: I went snoopin' around some myself, down at Carwell. Found where the fella that killed Eph Carson had waited. Point one: there was two brown cigarette stubs on the ground. Yuh-all say yuh don't smoke, an' the's no stain on yo' fingers.

"I found where this fella's stood with his rifle in a sort o' notch. His footprints was still pretty plain. Well, yo' feet, Bos', point in,

like a pigeon's. This fella's showed in the soft dirt under the rock overhang, a-pointin' out!

"But point three's the big 'n': I stand five foot seven, an' that notch he rested his Winchester in was level with my eyes. Short as yuh-all are, it'd be mighty near over yo' head! Now, he never stood on nothin', 'cause the' ain't nothin' the' to stand on. An' he never fired from no saddle. 'Cause I found where his hawss'd been tied back in the brush."

"Man, but you-all shore wiped some cold sweat off'n me!"

"Took a bigger man than ary one of us. That's what we're goin' to show the adj'tant gin'ral. Then I'm goin' to ask him to let me go back to Carwell to find the fella that really done the killin'."

Up out of the glaring yellow sand the long, low, narrow barrier of black rock jutted abruptly. "El Castillo"—the Castle, the Mexicans had named it, long ago. The name fitted as well as such names usually do. Actually it more resembled a stone fence 50 yards long, which, in height, varied from three to ten feet, and, in thickness, from a foot to four, even five, feet. The top was jagged—sharp saw teeth of inky rock.

Ware's Kid squatted on spurred heels at the Castle's western end, where the trail forked to run on either side of the wall. Not much of a trail, this—the deep, loose, perpetually drifting sand soon effaced impressions; but generations of travel had made a lane between walls of greasewood and cat-claw and cactus.

It was near the Ranger's position, on this dimly marked track, that Eph Carson had died—shot from the saddle without a chance to return the murderer's fire.

Having left Dell Spreen in the care of the adjutant general in Austin and returned swiftly to Carwell, Ware's Kid had come without being observed to the scene of the murder.

He got up and the great, black stallion, which had stood behind him as he squatted now followed like a dog to the spot where Eph Carson's murderer had lain in wait. Ware's Kid knew the place well.

Fella leaned up ag'inst the rock, right here, he re-enacted the scene mentally. *Lined his sights on Carson. Carson was comin' up t'other side from over Crow Point way. Fella drilled him plumb center. Went out an' took seven thousand out o' Carson's saddle bags. Stood right here. Standin' on the ground. No hawss tracks closer'n that cat-claw yonder. Good size' fella. Had to be, to rest his rifle in that crotch.*

Mechanically he studied the rock wall and the sand that swept away from its foot. Something bright in the sand, in the very spot where they had found the

murderer's tracks. He stooped. But it was only a glassy bit of rock. He held it, staring absently, his mind upon the mystery. From the little sand dunes behind him, to northward, came the flat, vicious report of a rifle. A bullet slapped the rock wall almost in his face. It had passed within six inches of his head. Instantly, another followed.

Ware's Kid moved like a rattler striking. He was sheltered from the bullets within two steps, standing behind his stallion's bulk. His hand slapped the saddle horn; he was in the saddle without touching stirrups and lying flat upon the black's neck. The great rowels dug the stallion's flanks; he surged forward magnificently; within two strides he was galloping. The Ranger, chased by bullets that buzzed spitefully about his ears, swung the black around the end of the Castle.

Halfway down the length of the stone wall he slid the stallion to a halt. Here was a place where he could peer across the top between two teeth of rock. His great sombrero hung down his back by the chin-strap; from the scabbard beneath the left fender had leaped a sleek Winchester carbine. He cuddled the carbine in the crook of his arm as, with green-gray eyes squinting coldly, he studied the sand dunes behind which his antagonist lay hidden.

A thin smoke-cloud was drifting upward above the dunes. Ware's Kid rested the carbine in the crotch of the wall-top. He sighted carefully and drove three .44's to dust along the crest of the dunes, some 15 inches apart. Instantly the other rifleman replied with a rolling quartette of bullets that bunched most efficiently beneath the Ranger's carbine muzzle.

He watched narrowly without replying in kind. At last he shrugged and whirled the stallion, to ride off south and east toward the O-Bar ranch house.

He could have stalked the sand dunes from which the unknown bushwhacker had fired. There was cover of a sort up to the very base of the dunes. But the ambusher's fire had been entirely too craftsmanlike, too nearly deadly, to make the prospect of scaling the low slope before him seem anything but the brief preliminary to a funeral. Ware's Kid preferred to ride off with a whole skin and calculate upon another meeting under conditions more equal.

A half mile, perhaps, he galloped without turning. Then, reaching for the field glasses, he checked the stallion. Far behind him, a horseman streaked it eastward. The Ranger studied rider and brown horse through the glasses.

"Mebbe he's tall," he grunted at last. "But—mebbe he's just a-

forkin' a little pony."

For ten miles he kept the stallion at a mile-eating running walk. He had never been at the O-Bar house, but he knew its location from hearsay, and so, when the black began climbing a steady incline, studded by boulders and covered with taller-than-ordinary mesquite, he nodded to himself.

The stallion made the incline's top and paused for a moment, expelling its breath in a great snort. At the sound, the flaxen-haired girl on the lookout rock turned sharply. She and Ware's Kid stared, one at another, her great, dark eyes meeting his narrowed gaze levelly.

"Howdy!" he drawled.

"Good morning," she replied, still examining him calmly.

"Trail to the O-Bar?"

"Yes. The house is a mile away. But there's nobody there except the cook and his helper. Do you want to see my father, Sim Rutter?"

Ware's Kid stared. He recalled nothing about a daughter on the O-Bar. And that Simeon Rutter, huge, gaunt, black-haired, black-eyed, black-bearded, grim and taciturn, should have such a daughter as this slim, fair-skinned creature seemed somehow unbelievable.

She seemed to read his thoughts. "I've been away at school—Las Cruces—convent, you know," she enlightened. "But I'm not going back—I hope."

"Stay here, huh?"

"I want to go back East! To New York—Philadelphia—Boston—oh, all the places I've read about. Europe, too. I'm trying to get my father to sell the ranch and go traveling with me. All over the world. I've been trying to persuade him for two years. But I think he'll do it, now—maybe. His partner was killed, you know. He's all broken up over that. He doesn't say much, but it was an awful blow just the same. I think he'll sell out."

"Got to be goin'," grunted Ware's Kid.

"I'll ride with you. Will you get my horse? He's tied to a cat-claw over yonder."

The Ranger got the pony and brought it back. He sat his stallion, holding her animal's reins. She waited for an instant, but he was blind to her expectation that he would help her into the saddle. So she swung up unaided and jerked the reins from his hand.

As they rode almost stirrup-to-stirrup toward the ranch house, Ware's Kid studied her covertly from beneath half-lowered sombrero brim. It dawned upon him suddenly that not yet had he seen her smile. The large blue eyes were somber, always; she seemed to brood upon something.

"I hate it!" she burst out. "Oh, how I hate it!"

Then they rode on silently

again, the creak of saddle leather, the scuffing of the animals' hoofs the only sound, until they dismounted in the ranch yard.

There was but one horse in the cottonwood-log corral, a black gelding as large as the mount of Ware's Kid.

"My father's home," she said tonelessly. "Come in."

They went around the house and, upon the rough veranda that shaded its front, found Simeon Rutter with feet cocked upon the rail, big, shaggy head upon his chest. He looked up at the sound of their footsteps and sun-narrowed black eyes softened amazingly as he saw his daughter.

"Hello, Baby!" he rumbled. "Wonderin' where yuh was." Then, to Ware's Kid, "Howdy, Kid. What're yuh doin' down here ag'in? Thought they sent yuh up to Austin, or some'r's."

"Did. But sent me back. I got Dell Spreen."

"Yuh did! That's shore good hearin', Kid!" He came swiftly to his feet, with great hands clenched. "Where's Spreen, now?" he demanded.

"Austin. Lookin' up more evidence."

Simeon Rutter cursed the law's dawdling ways, its coddling of an assassin. Ware's Kid but half listened.

"How many big men in this country?" he asked abruptly. "*Big* men?"

Rutter stopped short to stare at him. Then he considered the question, eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Don't know. Me, o' course. An' Curly Gonzales over Crow Point way. Lamson—that crazy puncher on the D-5—an' Slim Nichols on the Flyin' A. All I think of. Why?"

The Ranger hesitated. "Spreen says he never killed Carson," he said slowly.

"Yeh. An' what?"

"An' if he did—well, I don't know how he done it!"

"What're yuh drivin' at?"

"How could a little fella—littler'n me—shoot Carson, restin' his gun in a crotch near as high as he could reach?"

Scowling, Simeon Rutter considered this problem. "That *was* a high crotch—one that we found his tracks under," he admitted. "But, hell! He was sittin' on a hawss, or else standin' on somethin'. O' course he denies it! 'Spect him to own right up?"

"Yeh. Course, he'd say he never. But I been thinkin'. Wasn't no hawss tracks under the crotch. Nothin' to stand on. Nothin' we could see, anyhow. So wondered who'd be tall enough to shoot out o' that crotch, standin' on the sand. An', too—"

He hesitated for an instant before he decided to tell of the morning. "An', too, somebody bushwhacked me out at the Castle today!"

"Bushwhacked yuh! What for? Who'd be a-bushwhackin' yuh?"

"Don't know. Fella on a dun. Good shot, too. Purty good, that is."

"Here!" cried Rutter suddenly. "Too much funny business about this. I want to see that place ag'in. Git yo' hawss, Kid. Let's take a *pasear* out to the Castle an' look around."

He went swiftly down to the corral and got the lariat from his saddle. The black gelding retreated to a corner, snorting, whirling. Rutter sent the loop spinning over its head and hauled the animal to him by sheer brute force.

"So dam' many hawsses none gits rid enough!" he rumbled irritably. "Wilder'n antelope, all of 'em."

He saddled swiftly and swung up. Ware's Kid was already mounted. They turned past the front veranda and Rutter waved to his daughter, who had come outside again. He seemed another person when near her. The grim shell of him cracked and a tenderness odd in a man so apparently harsh-grained showed for a moment. "Goin out to El Castillo!" he shouted at the girl. "Back when I git back, Baby."

They rode silently for miles. Rutter was one after the Ranger's own heart, taciturn, efficient in his business. Staring at his companion's broad back, Ware's Kid nodded approval. He thought of what the girl had said—of her father's repressed sorrow over his partner's death. He could understand Rutter's vengefulness toward Dell Spreen.

"If yuh're right about this height business," Rutter growled suddenly, "I don't know what we're goin' to do about it. Too long ago, now. Not that I'm admittin' yuh're right! But, just in case yuh are, how can we find out where these fellas—Curly Gonzales an' Lamson an' Nichols—was that day? Fella don't always recollect just what he was doin' three months ago. By George!" he whirled sideways in the saddle.

"That mornin', me an' August Koenig—one o' my hands—was ridin' nawth o' the house nine-ten mile. An' we met Lamson headin' for Elizario!"

"What kind o' fella's Lamson?"

"Oh, same's most. Gits kind o' crazy spells. Been kicked on the head a long time ago by a bronc' an' once in a while he flies up. But he's a good puncher an' I don't know why anybody'd think he'd shoot Eph Carson. Lamson's seen trouble—seen it fair an' square, through the smoke. No-o, I wouldn't put him down for that kind o' killer."

"Yuh found Carson right after noon, didn't yuh?"

"Yeh. I got fidgety, him not comin' in the day I figgered. So when me an' August got back to

the house, an' Eph hadn't come in yet, I took August an' Yavapai Wiggins an' we rode out. Found Eph 'long about two o'clock, lyin' in the trail. Seven thousand, about, he was packin'. All gone."

"Mostly yo's, they say."

"'Bout four thousand," Rutter nodded gloomily. "But 't wasn't the money riled me so. Old Eph, he never knowed what hit him. Nary chanct to git his six-shooter out. Like I told yuh then, right after it happened, I figgered Dell Spreen 'cause he'd hung around the ranch three days, waitin' for Eph. Wouldn't tell nobody what he wanted. Just looked mean. An' packed his *cantinas* an' high-tailed it that very mawnin'. I gethered yuh never found the money on him?"

"Fo' dollars, 'bout," shrugged Ware's Kid.

They came to the Castle and reined in the animals on the spot where the murderer of Eph Carson had waited. Silently Simeon Rutter stared at the crotch in the rock wall in which the assassin had rested his rifle barrel. Slowly, unwilling even now to concede weight to the theory the Ranger had advanced tentatively, he nodded. "The' wasn't no hawss tracks closer'n that cat-claw yonder."

He swung down and pulled his Winchester from its scabbard, then moved over to the crotch in the wall. Even for one of his height it was a strain to level the barrel with butt at shoulder. He nodded again and set the rifle down. From a shirt pocket he brought Durham and papers.

Ware's Kid slipped from the saddle and came swiftly over to where Rutter stood. He stooped and dug into the sand at the rancher's feet, then straightened.

"What's it?" asked Rutter.

It was a large, pearl-handled pocketknife, tarnished from much carrying, with four good blades and one broken blade-stump. Rutter licked his cigarette, jammed it into his mouth and took the knife from the Ranger's hand, staring thoughtfully.

"See it before?"

Rutter shook his head. "Umm —no, reckon not. Not many like that carried in this country. But somebody ought to know it. We'll ride into Carwell pretty soon. See. But right now I want to ride Eph Carson's back-trail. Got a idee. Mebbe she won't pan out."

They could only guess that Eph Carson had come along the regular trail and follow through the dim lane between the greasewood and cacti. They rode silently, with eyes roving from trail to skyline and back again. The afternoon wore on; evening came. To westward, up-thrusting hills, jagged, fantastic, drew nearer.

"Huecos!" grunted Rutter, and Ware's Kid nodded. He knew this ancient watering place of the desert people.

"Guess we better hole up there t'night," Rutter grunted, staring across the flat to the beginning of that welter of arroyo-cut hillocks. "Mawnin' we can head back to Carwell an' see 'bout that frog-sticker. Or we can look over some more trail."

"Yo' idee?" queried Ware's Kid. "Yuh said yuh had one."

"Tell yuh about it come mawnin'," said Rutter. Far back in the grim black eyes lurked a shadowy amusement. "Ain't quite ready to back her up clean to the tailgate. Got anything to eat?"

"Dried beef, *tortillas,* coffee, can o' plums."

"Dried beef an' *tortillas* is a meal," grinned Rutter. "Let's head for the Tanks an' camp."

"Better hole up in the old Butterfield station," counseled Ware's Kid. "Healthier'n sleepin' 'longside the main tank. Apaches don't stick no closer to the reservation than ever, I reckon."

"Not so close, by God!" swore Rutter. "Yuh're right, Kid. Them dam' feather dusters stops here or at Crow Springs or the Cornudas, reg'lar, comin' from Mescalero to Chihuahua. Stage station she is. We'll make it."

They nodded agreement and spurred the horses on through the dark. At the deserted stage station—a rude dwelling made by walling in the mouth of a natural cavern—they swung down.

The Ranger sniffed like a hunting dog. "Some seep water up the canyon a piece," he muttered. "Good enough for the hawsses. But I'll take the canteen an' git some real water at the Tanks, for us."

He unsaddled the black stallion and swiftly Rutter followed his example. Rutter got out the food and coffee pot from the Ranger's saddle bags while the latter, bearing a canteen, started up the canyon to the main "tank."

Ware's Kid moved silently, for all his high-heeled boots. The canyon floor was of hard-packed earth, but studded with loose stones, and he placed his feet carefully. One never knew who might be using the Tanks.

He passed close along the left-hand wall, decorated with Indian pictographs and the names of pioneers, and so came to the low cavern in which was the spring-fed well, or "tank." More cautiously than ever he moved now. The rock apron before the cavern was pitted with *metate* holes, where prehistoric tribes had ground their corn, rude mortars still used by the Apaches who camped there. It was tricky footing and trickier still inside, where one approached the well-lip over a stone floor worn slick as glass by countless feet.

Inside the cavern-mouth he squatted for a moment and listened. He heard nothing from without or within and slid his

feet carefully forward, balancing himself with left hand upon a rounded slab that divided the cavern into two sections.

So he was awkwardly balanced when a sinewy arm shot around his throat from behind and a *hough* sounded in his ear.

A smallish, rather insignificant-seeming figure was Ware's Kid, but 110 pounds of wiry, flashingly quick, steel-strong body.

Now he moved automatically, fairly shouting, "Indians!" Sideways he whirled, and so the Apache's knife went wide in its downward drive. Back shot the Ranger's head, to smash into the Indian's face. It broke his strangling hold and Ware's Kid turning half in air, his feet were sliding so, shot a vicious fist into the Apache's midriff, then had the buck by the throat and was gripping him about the body with legs closing like scissor-blades and fending off flailing arms with elbows spread.

The Apache was powerful, but before he had much opportunity to struggle Ware's Kid had banged his back-head against the rock. He managed a long, loud, gasping groan. Feebly his knife-hand rose. The Ranger loosed the throat for an instant and fumbled for the weapon. It sliced his palm. Then he seized it and buried it in the Indian's body.

When the Apache was limp—wise men made very sure that Apaches were really dead—the Ranger stood up shakily and groped for the entrance. A stone slid down into the canyon and he hurled himself forward out of the cavern. As he gained the middle of the canyon, running like a quarter-horse, there was thud after thud of feet dropping from the rocks to the hard ground.

He ran on his toes, hoping that he could make camp sufficiently ahead of these fleet Indians to warn Rutter; hoping, too, that Rutter had the horses together.

At last he sensed the camp just ahead. And from it came a rifle-shot, then another. The bullets sang past him perilously close.

"It's—Ware's Kid!" he gasped. "Injuns—comin'!"

"Thought yuh was one of 'em!" grunted Rutter, with no particular alarm evident in his heavy voice. "How close?"

"Right behind! No time to saddle! Fork 'em bareback!"

He paused only to snatch his precious carbine from its scabbard on the saddle, then scooped up the bight of the lariat with which the stallion was picketed. He vaulted upon the stallion's back. Muffled sound in the darkness near by told that Rutter was following his example.

Up the canyon the darkness was suddenly punctuated in a half dozen places by orange flames. Bullets thudded into the ground, into rock walls, around the white

men. The firing was a continuous roll, its rumbling multiplied by the canyon walls.

Ware's Kid had slashed the lariat with his belt knife. Rutter, apparently, had done the same. For when the black stallion surged ahead, toward the safety of the open land, Rutter was close behind. They galloped furiously for perhaps half an hour. The moon came out and flooded the desert with a white light that reminded the Ranger of Billy Conant's New Fashion Saloon in El Paso when the electric lights were turned on.

Being lighter and, perhaps, the better rider, Ware's Kid led. He had lost a 100-dollar saddle, but he was phlegmatic about that. It was all in the game. They were lucky—he especially—to be riding away with their hair. A sudden groan from Rutter aroused him from his thoughts and he looked backward under his arm in time to see the big man slide sideways off his gelding and roll over upon his side.

Mechanically Ware's Kid whirled the stallion and glared half a dozen ways at once in search of the assassin. But the broad expanse of greasewood and cacti lay quiet in the incandescent moonlight. So he rode back to Rutter and slid to the sand.

"Got me!" Rutter gasped. "Back yonder. Thought I—could make it—back to the ranch—see—my girl—but—"

"Let's see," grunted Ware's Kid practically.

He explored the blood-caked shirt-front and lifted a shoulder-point in a little gesture of fatalistic resignation. There was a .44 hole in Rutter's chest. How he had ridden this far was the marvel!

"Want me to—sign a paper?"

At the painful whisper, Ware's Kid looked down curiously into Rutter's grim-lined face. "Shore," he nodded, after a moment, thinking to humor a delirious man. "If it'll ease yuh."

"Knowed yuh—had the deadwood on me—when yuh—found my knife! But I—wasn't goin' to—let yuh see Carwell ag'in—ever! Yuh tried to—make out yuh never—suspicioned. But I knowed! I'd've got yuh—'fore mawnin'. Dam' near got yuh—yeste'day mawnin'—at the Castle. Seen yuh—pokin' round—pick up somethin'—skeered me an'—I whanged away. Hadn't missed—wouldn't be here. 'Twas on the—cards—I reckon." He stopped wearily, breathing in labored wheezes.

Ware's Kid squatted beside him, staring down with expressionless face.

Suddenly Rutter's wheezes became louder, quicker. After a moment the Ranger understood that it was horrible laughter. "Reckon my gal—will do her travelin'—now. Always after me—to sell out. I

done for Eph Carson—'count o' that. None o' that—money was mine. All his'n. I wanted it. I—"

Ware's Kid bethought himself suddenly of what Rutter had said about signing a paper. He fumbled in his jumper pocket and found a letter of the adjutant general, the letter which had summoned him to Austin three months ago and so had brought him, indirectly, to sit here tonight. A stub of pencil was there, too.

"A' right!" he snapped. "Sign the paper!"

He supported the murderer's head and shoulders and crooked his knee so that Rutter could lay the paper upon it. It was slow, painful work, but at last he held the curt scrawl up in the moonlight and painfully spelled it out: *Dell spreen never killed eph Carson I done it and robbed him—Simeon Rutter.*

Presently Rutter died—without pain, apparently. Ware's Kid rolled a cigarette and lit it.

"He shore fooled me!" he grunted admiringly. "He shore did! An' like to killed me twict! At the Castle an' tonight. He never took me for no Injun. He was aimin' to down me. Just fool's luck I'm here, alive an' kickin', an' with this-here paper."

He got up, thinking to ride for Carwell and tell his story, show the confession. Suddenly he thought of the girl, the wistful-eyed, sad-faced girl at the O-Bar ranch house. He squatted again and made another cigarette.

Slowly but surely he mulled the business over. It came to him finally that there were really but two persons to be considered—Dell Spreen, sitting around the adjutant general's office up at Austin, and that girl of Rutter's. Absolute vindication of Spreen was easy; the means lay in his hand, here. But that would mean a blow at a girl who had had no part in her father's cold-blooded deed. He pondered the problem. At last, he nodded.

He would ride back to Carwell, but the paper would remain in his jumper pocket. He would tell of Rutter's death; lead a posse after the Apaches. He would also show the townsfolk the spot from which Eph Carson had been shot and explain the impossibility of Dell Spreen—a man shorter, even, than himself—committing the murder. This might not clear up the mystery to everyone's satisfaction, but Dell Spreen had no intention of coming back to this part of the country anyway. When the adjutant general saw the confession it would clear Spreen officially.

Something like this Ware's Kid thought out. He got up again and snapped his fingers to the black stallion.

"Reckon she's poor law—this way," he reflected. "But she's shore as hell good Rangerin'!"

MESQUITE

By BLISS LOMAX

HERE *is a grim tale of a wronged husband and the terrible justice he deals out to the slick stranger whom he befriends and who then cheats him and wrecks his previously happy home. It was included in William Targ's* Western Story Omnibus *in 1945. "Bliss Lomax" is one of the pseudonyms of a very popular Western author.*

IN THE darkened house, shades lowered against the heat of the long hot desert afternoon, Myra Russell hurried to the window, tall and slim, as a madly driven pony pulled up before the stage-office, across the street. It was Brent Hayes.

"Ed Russell just pulled a man out of the Malo!" she heard him say, as men ran forward, questioning. "He's bringin' him in now!"

She dressed hurriedly. Her husband, big, rawboned, was at the door by the time she had finished. "Myra, will you fix a bed for this man?" he asked. "He's all in."

"Why, yes, Ed. What happened?"

"I went out to look at some horses. I was comin' back by way of Malarena Crossing when I heard a cry—and there he was, in the quicksand up to his shoulders. His horse was gone clean out of sight. He'd

missed the ford by only a few feet, but you know the Malo."

The doctor arrived a few minutes later, and they watched as he examined the man. "We'll feed him some whisky," he said. "He's just suffering from shock—wonder who he is?"

They shook their heads. The young man, in his middle or late twenties, was a stranger to them all. Even in repose he was rather handsome, his clothes of finer quality than usually seen in San Leandro.

"You think he'll be all right, Doc?" Russell asked.

"Yes, in a day or two. He'll have to be kept quiet."

Myra glanced questioningly at her husband. "Ed—are we going to keep him here?"

"Well—" he answered thoughtfully, "we've got room enough." The low, rambling adobe, built more on the lines of a ranch house than a dwelling in town, was large beyond their needs. "I don't know where else to take him. You don't mind, do you, Myra?"

"No," she said simply. "We'll put him in the room at the end of the hall." She found herself beguiled by the distraction Ed had brought home in the person of Dick Womack.

"Is your husband away?" he asked, as he sat in the rocker on the porch, the day following his rescue.

Myra inclined her head. "He'll be back tonight," she said easily. "He's gone pretty much of the time. He runs the stage lines."

By adroit questions he drew out the story of the past five years, since her marriage to Ed Russell.

"San Leandro is pretty dead, isn't it?" he remarked.

"Yes—there's nothing much doing."

"Don't you ever long to get away?" he queried meaningfully.

"Sometimes—" she murmured, her lids lowered.

He withdrew from the brief contact with her to glance over the town. There were no telegraph wires, no railroad. He would meet with no questions—except Myra's. But he would need a job.

Russell unexpectedly supplied one; Ed found himself liking the man. There was something glamorous about Womack that suggested a life of ease, good living, the excitement of strange cities. It appealed to Ed, principally because he himself had always been a plodder, the rim of the desert country his farthest horizon.

"If you can keep books," he remarked the next morning at breakfast, "I can use you. What do you say?"

"I say fine!" Womack replied deliberately.

Myra poured him a second cup of coffee, and only then did she meet his gaze—one level glance.

Womack continued to live with the Russells. When Ed was away, he examined Myra's plain, soft face and realized a growing hunger

for her, some promise of intensity in her very plainness whipping him on. She no longer smiled so readily; Womack thought he knew what was worrying her.

Often, after supper, they sat on the porch, conversing desultorily. When darkness fell he made it a point to stroll up the street and while away the evening in the Band Box saloon, to make sure he didn't overplay his hand.

It was usually after midnight when he returned to the darkened house. Myra was always in her room. He wondered whether her door was locked, the thought keeping him awake for hours.

The evening that she set chairs out behind the house, on the plea of greater coolness there, he felt that he had won a victory. They talked about everything except what was on their minds. Slowly the sunset faded out. Beyond the palo verde tree the sky was mauve. Then it shadowed, and dusk settled.

Pensively Myra rose to go in. He preceded her with the chairs; and in the darkened house he put his arms around her tenaciously.

San Leandro saw less than usual of Ed Russell in the days that followed. The Government had accepted his bid on several new mail contracts. It meant building a station at Cochinilla Wash, and purchasing additional equipment.

His mind was not on business as he drove into town one hot afternoon two weeks later, in a flat-bed wagon, the springs bowed under a heavy load. Pulling up at the barn, he glanced across the street apprehensively. Abbie Bassey and Mrs. Pope, the wife of the postmaster, were just passing the house. He was relieved to see them go on.

Old Dobe, his stable boss, lank and desert bleached, emerged from the office to take the team.

"Just let 'em stand for a minute, Dobe," Ed told him, starting across the street.

As he reached the porch, Myra stepped out, cool and immaculate in the starched blue linen she affected. She appeared momentarily self-conscious. "Well, you're back."

"Yeah. Just got in. You goin' down the street?"

"I've a little shopping to do," she said hurriedly.

"If you'd been a minute sooner, you could have walked down with Abbie and Mrs. Pope. They just went by. I thought they was goin' to stop in."

Myra's head went up. "I'm just as well satisfied they didn't," she said. Her tone was sharper than she intended.

Ed caught it. "What's the matter? Abbie been gettin' in your hair? I thought you was good friends."

Myra did not succeed in wholly dissembling her annoyance. "I guess if the truth were told, that old snoop hasn't a friend in town. Will you be home tonight?"

"Yes. I'll be in two or three days this time. You run along, now, if you've got somethin' to do."

She nodded. "I'll have supper about six."

Abbie Bassey and Mrs. Pope observed her as she passed the post office.

"Humph! Her!" Mrs. Pope sneered. "Somebody ought to speak to Ed Russell before it's too late."

Abbie pursed her mouth acidly. "According to what I hear, it's too late already. Not that there's a man in San Leandro who'd think of speaking!"

They reckoned without Jim Bickel, the town marshal. Russell and he were cronies. In the doorway of the stage-barn they chatted with their customary informality. Womack was in the office, bent over his books. Bickel nodded toward him.

"Reckon you made a ten-strike when you picked him up, Ed," the marshal commented. He had a walrus mustache, but the rest of him was shark-skin, brown and leathery. "I notice the women flockin' in here regular. Your San Leandro business must be pickin' up a heap."

"Why—why, no! I ain't noticed any difference." Russell hesitated, frowning. "You don't mean there's anythin' out-of-the-way goin' on, Jim? I won't have that."

"Shucks, no!" Bickel declared guilelessly. "I guess Womack is all right. You wouldn't have him stayin' at your house if he wasn't. What's that you got under the tarp?"

"Why, Jim, I got a piano for Myra," Russell confessed. "She's been wantin' one for three years. It's to be a surprise. Will you give me a hand, Jim? I want to get the piano in the house before she gets back."

With the help of Dobe and Jose, one of Russell's hostlers, they soon had it installed. Bickel shook his head to himself as he walked up the street. "It's a damn shame!" he muttered.

Ed found the office empty when he got back, Womack having stepped over to the post office. He sank into his swivel chair, a smile wreathing his face. As he waited for Myra to return, Dobe came to the door to ask about some horses.

"If you get time tomorrow, you better clean this place out," Ed suggested. "Get rid of this old harness and stuff. With women comin' in here we got to spruce up a little."

Dobe looked at him blankly. "Wimmen? What wimmen? I ain't seen any around here—unless yo're speaking of Miz Bassey. She's been comin' in here every Monday for three years for her package of Peruna. She ain't fussy," he grumbled as he turned away.

Leaning back in his chair, Russell was puzzled. *Why'd Jim give me a yarn like that?* he asked himself. He was about to give it up

when something in Bickel's remembered words made him pause. A bleak look came into his eyes. *Was he tryin' to tell me the man's makin' a play for Myra?*

But why hadn't Myra spoken to him, if anything was wrong? Surely she would not allow such a situation to hem her in. She was too level-headed for that.

I reckon there ain't nothin' to this at all, he pursued, more coolly. *I'd 've heard somethin' about it before now. Why, it would make so much talk in this town that Myra—* He stopped, dumbfounded, as he remembered her annoyed reaction to his mention of Abbie Bassey, San Leandro's worst gossip.

"Good Lord—" he groaned. He threw down his cigar violently, to stare glassy-eyed at the floor. Under the impact of his mounting rage against Womack, his huge frame trembled. *I'll square this in a hurry!*

He seldom carried a gun any more, but there was a .44 in his desk. He produced a key and unlocked the drawer. "No!" he muttered. "I can't do it! It would shame Myra! I've got to keep her out of this."

At the end of five minutes he had fought himself into a cold, emotionless calm. Taking up his hat, he left the office. In the Band Box saloon he found several friends, who joined him in a drink. He lit a fresh cigar, talking with them, trying to beat back the sense of disaster which had engulfed him. For the first time in his life he was conscious of an air of diffidence hovering between himself and these men whom he had known so long.

With a smile that was no little effort in itself, he walked out. Home was the last place in the world he wanted to be just then, but Myra would be waiting supper. Nearing the house, he heard the deep, full tones of a piano. He had forgotten about it. Unimportant as it was now, he was conscious of a fresh stab of pain as he recalled how he had looked forward to Myra's surprise and elation.

Womack changed all that, he thought, a fresh wave of bitterness sweeping him.

His courage failing him momentarily, he paused before setting foot on the porch. As he stood there, mastering his emotion, Myra struck a chord or two and then lifted her voice in a song that was a favorite with him: *"When other lips and other hearts, Their tales of love shall tell—"*

In the old familiar lyric he found a poignant significance such as the author could hardly have intended. What could have made her sing that song now? It was only an absurd coincidence, but he read something prophetic in it. The next moment, Womack's soft tenor reached him; Myra and he were singing together.

Something died in Russell, understanding flooding him. In his torment he had seen Myra fighting

off Womack, despising him. Not for a moment had he imagined it was like this.

So that's the way it is. Noiselessly he lowered himself into a porch chair. He sat there for a long time. The door opened without his being aware of it.

"Ed!" Myra exclaimed. "How long have you been here?"

"Just a minute," he lied, pulling himself together. "I was sittin' here listenin' to you play. Was you surprised when you found the piano?"

"Was I!" There were spots of color in her cheeks. "It's wonderful!" She didn't throw her arms about him and bury her head on his shoulder as she usually did when he brought home even a trifling gift. He was glad she did not; he knew he couldn't have stood it.

He was pretending to examine the piano when a man banged on the door. It was the driver of the Magdalena stage. There had been a cloudburst about Cochinilla; he doubted that he could get through.

"You'll have to go around by La Canada," Ed told him, grateful for the interruption. "I'll go back to the barn with you."

The departure of the Magdalena stage wound up things for the night. Ed sat in the office, slouched down in his chair. Dobe poked his head in at the door, prior to climbing the stairs to his quarters above. Long-winded as a rule, he limited himself tonight to a brief, "I reckon I'll be turnin' in."

He knows, Ed thought, listening to him clump up the stairs. *I guess they all know.*

An hour and more passed as he sat there. Across the way, Myra had stopped playing. For a moment he caught her shadow against the window as she turned out the light. Suddenly he found himself gazing into the future, going through the years without her—barren, blank.

"No!" he whispered, his face contorted with anguish. "I couldn't make it without her!"

It got him nowhere to call himself a fool for having brought Womack home and then to have turned around and left him alone with her for days. He admitted all that, but it belonged to the past now, along with whatever had happened. His problem concerned tomorrow.

The folly of emptying a gun at Womack struck him forcibly. *I certainly can't do that,* he warned himself. *If Myra thinks she's in love with him it would be the surest way of losing her.*

Although he took it for granted, now, that Womack was stealing from him—the man was losing too much money at stud games—he had not bothered to look at the books, for sending even a guilty man to prison seldom affected a woman's love. And men lived to come out of prison. He did not propose to resort to anything so unpromising and indefinite. But rolling the matter over again in his mind, he

was electrified to discover what appeared to be a means to the end—conclusive, final!

The express book was handy. He discovered a number of discrepancies, some of them dating back to within a few days of the morning Womack had first taken charge of the books.

Still poring over them, he realized someone was standing in the doorway. He glanced up to find Womack facing him. "I didn't hear you come in," he said.

"You were busy, I guess," the other observed. "I saw the light and wondered who was in here." His glance went to the open express book. "I haven't entered today's business," he volunteered. "I usually do that the first thing in the morning."

"That's all right," Ed assured him, "I was wonderin' how long it's been since we had anythin' for the San Juan Minin' Company. Been almost three weeks. Their business used to be worth two hundred a month to us."

"Tom Hughes tells me they're closing down," Womack explained, somewhat relieved. "You staying up much later?"

"No, I'll be goin' over to the house."

Womack waited for him to lock up.

"Have any luck tonight?" Ed queried casually.

"No, they cleaned me." The words were accompanied by a mirthless chuckle.

They had almost reached the porch when from off across town came a flat, muffled crack.

"Sounded like a gunshot," Womack said uneasily. Ed nodded. They listened for a second shot, but all was still.

Because he never knew what hour of the night he might be called, Russell had his own room. With no thought of sleep, he stretched out and gave himself over completely to the details of the step he proposed taking. No trace of pity for Womack softened his resolve. He had saved the man's life; now, with grim justice, he would take it; trick him out of it in a way that must forever make it appear to Myra to have been an error of judgment on the dead man's part—an error that would always remain coupled in her mind with not only her own disillusionment, but the everlasting proof of how cheaply he had held her.

A few minutes after seven Myra awakened him. She closed the door behind her as she entered. He knew at a glance something was wrong.

"Ed, will you get dressed right away?" she demanded breathlessly. "Jim Bickel is here."

"Bickel? What's he want?"

"He's come for Dick," Myra gasped, her hands fluttering nervously. "Cal Springer was killed last night. He claims Dick did it—"

"What?" Ed asked incredulously. "Cal Springer's been killed, you

say?"

"Somebody shot him," Myra explained, scooping up his clothes and handing them to him. "They found his body out in the mesquite a hundred yards from his cabin a few minutes ago. He'd been robbed—"

Russell shook his head sadly. "That's too bad. I always liked Cal. He was a gambler, but a mighty good friend to me. He loaned me money when no one else—"

"Ed, won't you hurry?" she entreated. "Bickel is waiting."

"Why, sure!" he mumbled, drawing on his pants. "I'll be ready in—" He stopped, recalling why Bickel was there, and stared speechlessly at Myra for a moment. "What's Womack got to do with this?" he demanded.

"Nothing," she said, steadying herself. "Dick lost to Springer last night and had to give him an I O U for part of it. They had an argument. Dick admits he said he'd get Springer for it."

"Oh, I see," Russell muttered as he bent to pull on his boots. He had himself in hand again.

"No, you don't, Ed!" she exclaimed sharply. "Bickel found that I O U in the brush this morning—torn to bits. He won't listen to reason."

"What reason, for instance?"

"Dick says he was with you when the shot was fired—that both of you heard it. That's a fact, isn't it, Ed?"

He drew in his breath heavily. Without his lifting a finger, fate had delivered Womack into his hands. All he had to do was deny the other's story. It would put a noose around Womack's neck.

"Suppose you let me talk to Bickel," he suggested cautiously.

There was a strained, desperate air about her; and something courageous, too. Russell had the feeling that she was steeling herself to tell him the truth, to say frankly that she loved Womack. It filled him with horror. He knew if it were ever put into words it would be just that much harder to forget.

"Then you didn't hear the shot?" she asked. Her voice was toneless.

"Why, sure I did!" he exclaimed, trying to dissemble his agitation. "We were steppin' over from the office. We both spoke about it." He was glad to get it out, to put himself on record. What a fool he had been to consider even momentarily any plan but his own! "It's only the time I'm hazy about," he said thoughtfully, or so he pretended. He knew the hour well enough. "Did Bickel say when the shootin' happened?"

"A few minutes past one," Myra informed him. A trace of color was stealing back into her cheeks.

Ed noted it with relief. "Well," he declared confidently, "that puts Womack out of it. Open the door and we'll get this over with in a hurry."

Myra hesitated as she put her hand on the knob. Ed sensed that

she was deciding whether to let the moment pass with so much unsaid. Hurriedly then, as though escaping from something which she found too much for her, she stepped into the hall.

Womack and Bickel were waiting in the living-room.

"Ed, let me introduce our popular and well-known marshal, Mr. Bickel." Womack said it with a laugh, but the laugh was a sneer in itself. "He's got it all figured out that it was me who shot Cal Springer." The next instant every vestige of his indifference had fled. His body stiffened and his face went hard. "Ed, put this gent right!" he snapped. "You *know* I couldn't have fired that shot!"

Bickel sat back, a bored look on his face.

He figures I'll make certain Womack won't get out of this mess, Ed told himself. "You mind steppin' out on the porch a minute, Jim?" he asked.

The door closed on them.

"Ed," Bickel said bluntly, "we got this rat where we want him."

"Suppose you tell me what you know, Jim," Ed suggested.

Bickel had little to add to the story as Myra had told it. "The evidence is only circumstantial, but that'll be enough in his case," he concluded.

Ed shook his head. "Jim, you're barkin' up the wrong tree. Womack's right when he says he was with me when that shot was fired."

"What!" Bickel glared at him incredulously. "See here, Ed—do you mean you'll testify to that effect?"

"I'll have to, as I see it. He was with me."

The marshal shook his head pityingly. "Nobody saw you with him, did they?"

"No, they didn't; I reckon my word will be enough, though—"

"It'll be more than enough!" Bickel burst out furiously, as unbelief gave way to exasperation. "If that's the way you want it, Ed, all right."

"I wouldn't want it any way but the way it was," Russell declared without hesitation, determined that Bickel should win no admission from him that he had any reason for wishing Womack out of the way. "I don't like the idea of his gettin' into an argument over a card game or askin' for chips he can't pay for. But after all, he's only workin' for me, Jim."

Nothing was said about Womack's I O U having been torn to bits. It wasn't necessary, Ed thought, appreciating Bickel's effort in his behalf.

Cal Springer's unexplained death filled the town with excitement that barely touched Russell. His mind was locked in a vise, and Womack and Myra were always in his train of thought. He felt he was only marking time; his plans were complete; to set them in motion he needed only to bait the trap.

Womack was writing up some

outgoing express as Ed entered the office in the middle of the afternoon. As they talked about the shooting, Russell glanced across the street. The new piano was silent.

"Bickel still blowing off about me?" Womack inquired.

"No; he told you he was mistaken. I guess that ended the matter in his mind." Watching the other, he wrote several letters. He felt Womack was watching him too. *Maybe he's afraid I'll start goin' over the books,* Ed told himself. "You been to the bank yet?"

"I'll be going in a few minutes," Womack replied. "By the way, Pete Denzler had a look at the horses we're getting rid of. He said he'd be back."

Womack was just leaving when Pete stepped through the door. He ran the San Leandro livery and did some freighting into the Datils. "Hi, Ed!" he said, waving a pudgy hand. A fat, apoplectic little man, he draped himself over a chair and puffed into his white mustache. Womack was back from the bank before he got down to business.

"I've decided to take those horses, Ed. I'll give you forty-five dollars a head for 'em—spot cash!" he declared, producing a roll of bills.

The horses were worth more than he was being offered, but gazing at the fat roll of yellowbacks in Denzler's hands, Ed knew he had found the bait he wanted for Womack. It was a few minutes after three; the money would have to be left in the office safe overnight.

Denzler had not finished counting out the money when Myra appeared in the door. "Have they—found out anything yet?" she asked.

"No; it's just as much a mystery as ever who shot Cal," said Ed. He asked Myra if she was going down the street.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Ott's to have a dress fitted," she answered him.

She and Pete started out together. The latter turned in the doorway. "I suppose you'll be here for the funeral tomorrow, Ed. The lodge will conduct the usual services."

"Say, I'm glad you remembered to mention it!" Russell exclaimed, welcoming the query for reasons of his own. "I was figurin' on goin' up to Cochinilla in the mornin'. I'll change my plans and go this afternoon."

Alone with Womack, he handed him the money. "I hate to keep that much in the safe. Just be sure you lock things up if you step out."

He had Jose saddle his horse. A few minutes later he rode up to the office door and called Womack out. "If the San Juan is closin' down we'd better get a settlement out of them. I know there's some money due us. We'll go over their account in the mornin'. If I forget it, remind me."

Womack's head went up an inch or two. "Right," he muttered.

That got to him, Ed told himself

as he jogged away. *He knows the jig is up the minute I start checkin' the San Juan account. With a chance to get his hands on upwards of a thousand dollars, he'll grab it and run.*

He realized there were several ways a man might go in fleeing that country. Only one, however, would put him beyond danger of pursuit by daylight. That was the old Malo trail. Ten miles east of the river, it turned to head for the border. Womack had missed that turning once; he would figure not to miss it a second time.

And he would not get into trouble at Malarena Crossing again. On several occasions he had ridden out to the ford, only a mile or two from town. It was plainly marked by the sagging stakes that had stood there for years. It was all as simple as that in Russell's mind.

Ahead of him the Cochinilla road, carved deep into the face of the mesquite-covered plain by the wheels of his own stages, uncoiled its long white miles.

As afternoon merged into evening, he pulled up to survey the rolling plain. It was a silent sea on which nothing moved. Swinging the big bay out of the road, he struck off in a wide circle to the southwest. In that direction lay the Malo.

An hour later, in the fading after-glow, he came in sight of the crossing. It was a barren approach, the sluggish river, sullen and dark, wandering aimlessly through the gray vastness of the desert. He scanned the trail for minutes.

Unhurried, he dropped his rope over the stake that marked the lower edge of the crossing. It came out with a hollow, sucking sound as he backed his horse away. A few minutes later he had it driven into the mire again. But now it stood to the north instead of the south of the other stake.

He cautiously tried the false crossing, making certain that the quicksand ran in close. Satisfied that it did, he backed off to view his handiwork. Even to his eyes, and he had been using the ford for ten years, there was nothing to suggest that Malarena Crossing was now a death trap.

In a shallow arroyo, below the crossing, he hobbled the bay. Leaving the horse there, he returned to within a few yards of the trail, where he crawled into a clump of mesquite. He had nothing to do now but wait.

It was time for Womack to be coming along. For a few minutes after the Lordsburg stage pulled out he would have the barn and office to himself, time enough for him to loot the safe and saddle a horse. But the minutes fled without bringing him. Russell's uneasiness grew. Maybe the Lordsburg stage had been late.

Nothin' to worry about yet, he argued. But he did worry, and when another half-hour had passed

and Womack had not appeared, he found cold sweat standing out on his forehead.

He had been so sure of what Womack would do. Now he couldn't be sure of anything but that the other had taken the money and flown. Perhaps even now he was well on his way to Lordsburg, or heading for Arizona by way of Blue Mesa. Perhaps he was not alone. It was a crucifying thought, but there was iron in Russell, and he put it away from him.

Every minute that passed made the next longer, less endurable; he glanced at his watch. It was a quarter-past nine. He decided to wait another 15 minutes. If Womack did not come by then he'd put the stake back and get to town as quickly as he could.

The 15 minutes were almost up when a faint drumming of hoofs reached him. He raised up on his elbow and listened intently. The sound was unmistakable now. Screwing his eyes in a piercing squint, he swept the desert; but the vagrant night wind had set the mesquite to nodding, and at a distance, in the pale, eerie glow of the stars, it took on strange, fantastic forms that resolved into a solitary horseman one moment, and became a ghostly caravan the next, and he could not be sure whether he saw the rider or not.

Confident again, Russell did not question but what it was Womack, moving along at a comfortable pace that would bring him to the crossing in two or three minutes.

As he waited, a voice drifted to Ed. He recognized it. His face tightened. "Womack—" he muttered. "I called the turn."

Breathless, he waited, the passing second a lifetime. And then he saw Womack—riding down the trail alone, humming a song as he moved along leisurely. He passed within a few feet of Russell. At the water's edge he hesitated only long enough to be sure he was between the stakes.

Eyes stony, Ed turned away, but he found it possible to pity the man. A moment later Womack's terror-stricken cry, the sound of water being threshed to spray, the frightened bawl of a horse, filled the night.

Russell trudged back to the arroyo and got the bay.

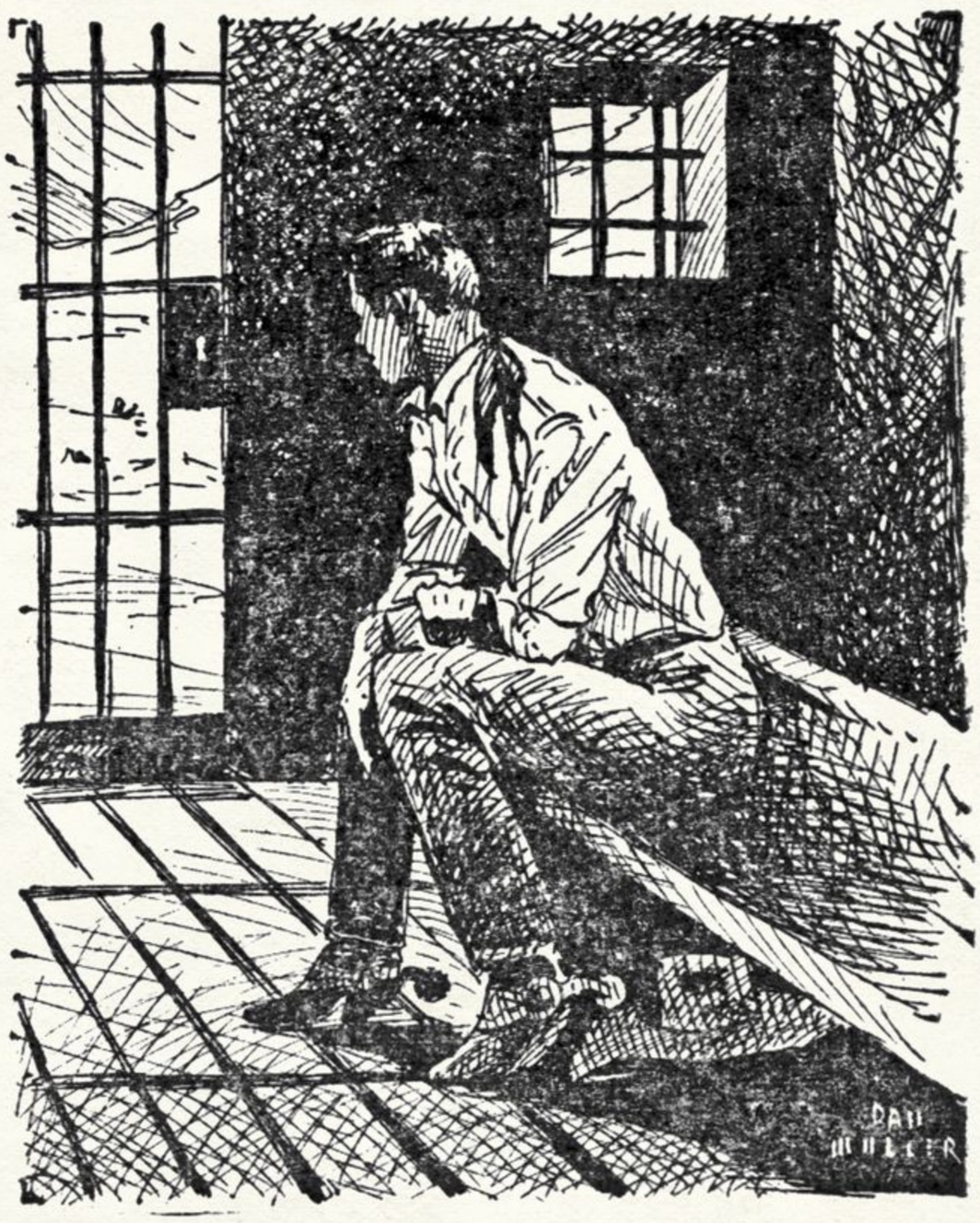
The night was still again. The dark and treacherous Malo purled along with a sinister gurgle, its surface unbroken save for Womack's drifting hat.

He watched an eddy catch it and carry it toward the opposite bank. He knew it would be found and brought to town. And thus would Womack's tragic end be established.

His hands steady, though he was white of face, Ed replaced the stake. There was nothing to keep him there any longer. *I might as well be movin'*, he said to himself. *It's a long ride to Cochinilla.*

The Cactus Kid *and the* Artist's Life

By DAN MULLER



SURE, the Cactus Kid's a rogue—he's just a trifle too careless with other people's horses to keep on the right side of the law. Nevertheless, even a rogue can appreciate nature, it seems, and it's clear as daylight to him that he can't put any of it on canvas for others to appreciate too if they string him up for that job he pulled with the Deacon's Appaloosa gelding. So "justice" is cheated—or is it? Dan Muller, author and illustrator of this sketch, is one of America's leading cowboy-artists.

OUTSIDE the sun was shining—a bright, warm Arizona sun. The air was balmy, with the least suggestion of breeze to let you know unmistakably that you were in the great Southwest. The sky was a cross between azure and turquoise, and clouds fleecy, opalescent, milky white—like so much buttered popcorn. The distant sandhills were gold-colored, their richness enhanced by reflections of the blue above, and the pale purple shadows set off the shimmering white alkali.

So the Cactus Kid looked at the scene—so like a painting—even like a framed painting. Unfortunately for the Cactus Kid, the frame included seven vertical bars, and three horizontal. He looked at the scene, and he contemplated his situation. In about 21 hours he was scheduled to be chaperoned to a near-by cottonwood, where an old mare, aptly called "Calamity," would be the innocent means of launching the Kid on what was indubitably a one-

way trip. After a stout manila lariat had been carefully placed in position about his sun-tanned neck, and the other end thrown over a limb of the gallows tree, someone would slap Calamity on the rump, and—

After about 18 minutes, making due allowance for the fact that the Kid did not weigh much on the hoof, it would all become painless for him, and his legs would stop kicking. The Cactus Kid knew this because he had attended many such reunions when he did not bear the necessary credentials entitling him to occupy the seat of honor on old Calamity's back. He could foresee every move—and he bemoaned the fact that he did not pack enough beef on his frame to make his neck snap, instead of stretch.

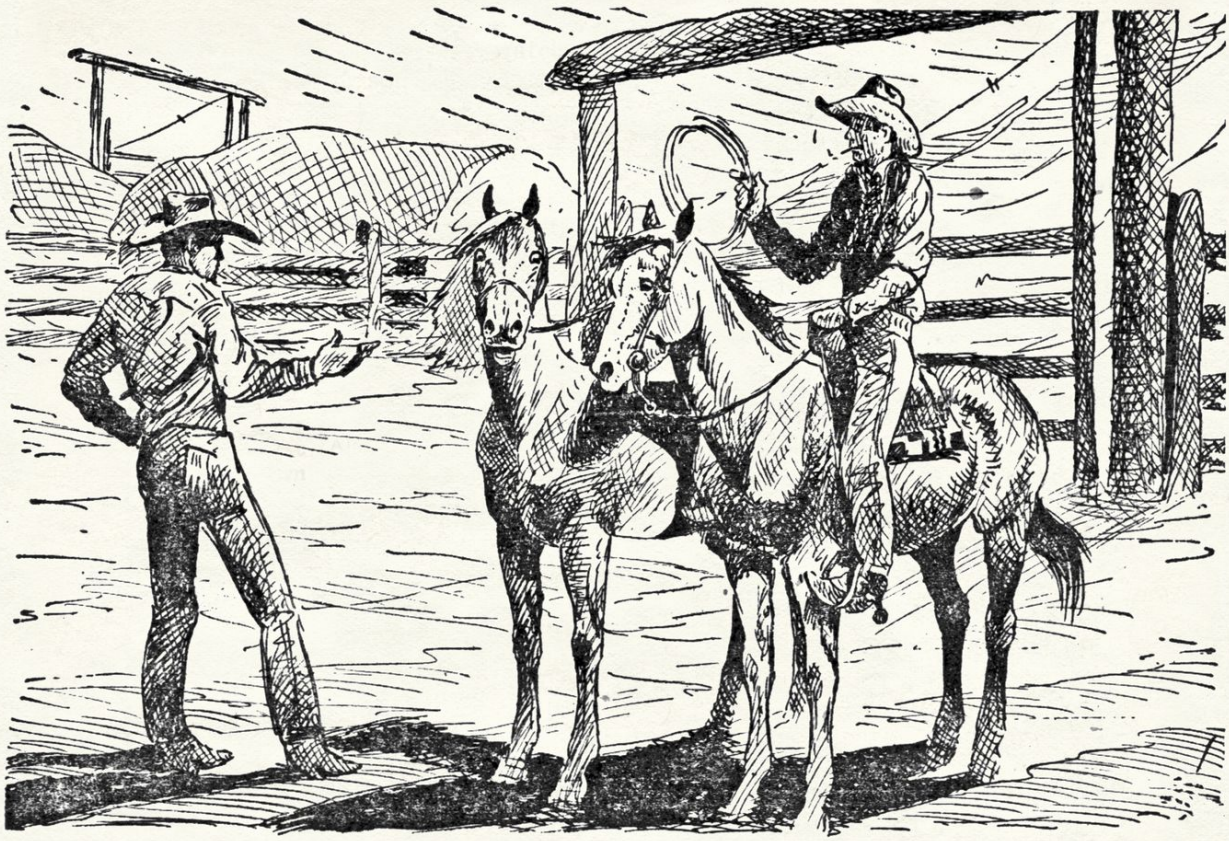
These thoughts were followed by a hundred others racing through his mind. He saw Annabelle O'Keefe, his childhood sweetheart, as she climbed onto his old roan pony on the way to school. He had wanted to wed up with her then, figuring as how there would never be another gal quite like her. Then he thought of the time he almost drowned swimming the Shoshone, up in the Big Horn country.

Then he began to count off the jails he'd been in, for the Cactus Kid had seen the inside of a good many jailhouses, clean, unclean, and downright filthy, in his short span of years. He'd done a few stretches, and been paroled more than once on account of his youth.

And now he was in for a little matter of selling a man a hoss—a legitimate enough thing ordinarily (if it's yours to sell). It happened that the Cactus Kid had heard of Deacon Talbott's standing offer of $200 for an Appaloosa to match the one he owned. The Deacon craved a matched pair for his buckboard, and he allowed he'd have the finest driving-team in the valley if he could get a mate for his gelding with the spotted rump.

If ever a man thought a lot of his hoss, Deacon Talbott was that man. Even his wife ran a pretty poor second. He kept the Appaloosa, whose hide he refused to let be touched by a branding iron, on a small strip of fenced-in pasture two miles from the house, where the gelding had the run of the whole pasture to himself.

It so happened that the Cactus Kid was a bit low on silver when he heard about the Deacon's search, and his fertile brain naturally concocted a simple scheme for providing the Deacon with his heart's desire. Late of an afternoon he rode out to the pasture, opened the let-down wire gate, shook out a loop, and dabbed it around the wide-eyed gelding's neck. Then he made a hackamore halter out of the end of his reata, snubbed the Appa-



loosa to his saddle horn, took a roundabout trail, and rode into the Deacon's yard just as the light of day was fading fast.

The astonished Deacon rubbed his bald head excitedly, and opined as how he'd swear that this Appaloosa was his own if he didn't know the gelding was out in the pasture at that very minute. Then he rubbed his hands together, smiling as he thought of the sensation to be caused when he and the missus drove to church Sunday behind his pair of perfectly matched Appaloosas.

He looked the gelding over from all angles, and the Cactus Kid warned him not to get too close, as the gelding still needed a bit of gentling and might let one fly at the Deacon—while all the time he kept a-prodding the Appaloosa in the ribs on the near side.

Well, Deacon Talbott was as good as his word. The Cactus Kid got his $200 in folding money—and the Deacon got *his* Appaloosa. It wasn't until the next morning that, after a restless night, the Deacon saddled up a pony and hightailed it to the strip of fenced-in pasture to bring the Appaloosa in to see his new mate. Then, of course, the truth hit him like a sudden hailstorm with the sun a-shining—he had been had.

The Cactus Kid was many miles away, headed north, but the law

reached out a long arm, gathered him in, and deposited him, not gently, in the little one-hoss hoosegow of adobe and vermin, where the Alcalde went through the motions of conscripting a jury, the members of which not only hated to lose hosses, but hated even more the thought of missing out on their continuous siesta. They voted the Cactus Kid guilty long before the trial opened in the back room of the Buckhorn Saloon, and six minutes after the court had decreed the Kid was to be the main attraction the next morning they drank the Kid's health in the front room.

So here he was, his usually alert mind unable to produce anything but useless and sentimental reminiscence. The Kid's throat was dry, and his lips twitched. Would the rope hurt much—would it press too close to his left ear for comfort? Would it irritate his hide? Would his knees behave, or would he have to be helped up onto Calamity's back? Would he act like a man—or would he go to pieces like Smoky Price had when he was the guest of honor the year before?

His head in a whirl, the Cactus Kid lay down and shut his eyes to see if his brain maybe wouldn't come to his rescue as it had that time he held three aces and two kings—and him dealing from a cold deck. He dozed off a bit, and when he came to a couple of hours later, he thought he had an idea—it wasn't much, but perhaps it was worth a try. Anyway, he had nothing to lose, had he?

Along toward suppertime dusk, the barefooted Mex came with the Kid's tray of vittles. Armitas was surprised to find the prisoner not dejected, as he logically—and according to all the deputy's experience—should have been, but seemingly cheerful and happy. He set the tray down and carefully backed out of the cell—he was taking no chances—and locked the door behind him.

With a show of relish, the Cactus Kid ate the ancient beef and the boiled spuds, drank the muddy coffee, and then, after smearing the contents of the ketchup bottle over his forehead and face, draped his body gracefully on the floor, with his legs propped on the edge of the cot. Then he grasped the tray, lifted it, and dropped it with a crash that brought Armitas to the cell at the semblance of a run, calling loudly on his patron saint. He peered in through the bars of the door.

The Kid lay still, holding his breath.

Armitas let himself in. Was he afraid? *Carramba,* no—did he not have his peestol? He placed one hand on the butt of the ancient six-gun and cautiously nudged the body on the floor with his toe. The Cactus Kid's legs slithered off

the bunk, and lay still, in an awkward position.

Armitas felt in his pocket for a match, and lit it. *Madre de Dios!* Blood—*muchas* blood! He made the sign of the cross, and started to lift the Kid back onto the cot.

It was then that the Cactus Kid reached behind Armitas and easily withdrew the gun from the holster. He prodded the astonished Mex in the belly with it, and five minutes later emerged from the cell, Armitas now being fastened with his handcuffs to the cot, his frightened eyes glaring from above the greasy bandanna that gagged his mouth.

Figuring that stealing one more hoss wouldn't get him hanged any sooner, and being at least a middling good judge of hossflesh, the Cactus Kid selected a rangy, deep-chested bay tied to an adjacent hitching rack, and, by traveling all night, reached the border safely. Once across, he slapped the bay sharply on the rump after having tied up the reins. The pony would find his way home, he knew, and they couldn't very well lay the theft to his doorstep with any certainty.

And after that experience, it is pleasant to be able to relate, the Cactus Kid was a changed man. Embarking on an art career, he began to record on canvas the beauties of life all around him—the desert, the blue skies, the mountains and the sand hills, the

riders, and the hosses he had loved so well, if not wisely—and the initial impetus could only have come that day when he had gazed sadly, contemplatively, at a landscape through a stone-and-steel-barred frame.

So what if strict justice had not been satisfied in the case of the twin Appaloosa hosses? The world had gained one more agent in the task of translating its manifold beauties for the eyes of those alive to them.

Of course, it can be argued that the Cactus Kid, by means of a snide trick, had cheated the local inhabitants of the entertainment to be derived from witnessing a spectacle enjoyable to most, if not to all. And that, to some ways of thinking, is a more serious charge.

A Western Classic

The Ole Virginia

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

STANDING OFF *a band of Apaches on the prowl is nobody's idea of a picnic. However, the old-timer tells his rapt listeners how he did it, alone and barehanded—with the aid of three charges of dynamite. This tale first appeared in book form as Chapter 1 of the author's* Arizona Nights *(1907). The "fresh, outdoor quality" of Mr. White's work noted in* Twentieth Century Authors *is abundantly evident in this tale.*

THE RING around the sun had thickened all day long, and the turquoise blue of the Arizona sky had filmed. Storms in the dry countries are infrequent, but heavy; and this surely meant storm. We had ridden since sunup over broad mesas, down and out of deep canyons, along the base of the mountains in the wildest parts of the territory. The cattle were winding leisurely toward the high country; the jack rabbits had disappeared; the quail lacked; we did not see a single antelope in the open.

"It's a case of hole up," the Cattleman ventured his opinion. "I have a ranch over in the Double R. Charley and Windy Bill hold it down. We'll tackle it. What do you think?"

The four cowboys agreed. We dropped into a low, broad watercourse, ascended its bed to big

cottonwoods and flowing water, followed it into box canyons between rimrock carved fantastically and painted like a Moorish facade, until at last in a widening below a rounded hill, we came upon an adobe house, a fruit tree, and a round corral. This was the Double R.

Charley and Windy Bill welcomed us with soda biscuits. We turned our horses out, spread our beds on the floor, filled our pipes, and squatted on our heels. Various dogs of various breeds investigated us. It was very pleasant, and we did not mind the ring around the sun.

"Somebody else coming," announced the Cattleman finally.

"Uncle Jim," said Charley, after a glance.

A hawk-faced old man with a long white beard and long white hair rode out from the cottonwoods. He had on a battered broad hat abnormally high of crown, carried across his saddle a heavy "eight square" rifle, and was followed by a half-dozen loloping hounds.

The largest and fiercest of the latter, catching sight of our group, launched himself with lightning rapidity at the biggest of the ranch dogs, promptly nailed that canine by the back of the neck, shook him violently a score of times, flung him aside, and pounced on the next. During the ensuing few moments that hound was the busiest thing in the West. He satisfactorily whipped four dogs, pursued two cats up a tree, upset the Dutch oven and the rest of the soda biscuits, stampeded the horses, and raised a cloud of dust adequate to represent the smoke of battle. We others were too paralyzed to move. Uncle Jim sat placidly on his white horse, his thin knees bent to the ox-bow stirrups, smoking.

In ten seconds the trouble was over, principally because there was no more trouble to make. The hound returned leisurely, licking from his chops the hair of his victims.

Uncle Jim shook his head. "Trailer," said he sadly, "is a little severe."

We agreed heartily, and turned in to welcome Uncle Jim with a fresh batch of soda biscuits.

The old man was one of the typical "long hairs." He had come to the Galiuro Mountains in '69, and since '69 he had remained in the Galiuro Mountains, spite of man or the devil. At present he possessed some hundreds of cattle, which he was reputed to water, in a dry season, from an ordinary dishpan. In times past he had prospected.

That evening, the severe Trailer having dropped to slumber, he held forth on big-game hunting and dogs, quartz claims and Apaches.

"Did you ever have any very

close calls?" I asked.

He ruminated a few moments, refilled his pipe with some awful tobacco, and told the following experience:

In the time of Geronimo I was living just about where I do now; and that was just about in line with the raiding. You see, Geronimo, and Ju, and old Loco used to pile out of the reservation at Camp Apache, raid south to the line, slip over into Mexico when the soldiers got too promiscuous, and raid there until they got ready to come back. Then there was always a big medicine talk. Says Geronimo:

"I am tired of the warpath. I will come back from Mexico with all my warriors, if you will escort me with soldiers and protect my people."

"All right," says the General, being only too glad to get him back at all.

So, then, in ten minutes there wouldn't be a buck in camp, but next morning they shows up again, each with about 50 head of hosses.

"Where'd you get those hosses?" asks the General, suspicious.

"Had 'em pastured in the hills," answers Geronimo.

"I can't take all those hosses with me; I believe they're stolen!" says the General.

"My people cannot go without their hosses," says Geronimo.

So, across the line they goes, and back to the reservation. In about a week there's 52 frantic greasers wanting to know where's their hosses. The army is nothing but an importer of stolen stock, and knows it, and can't help it.

Well, as I says, I'm between Camp Apache and the Mexican line, so that every raiding party goes right on past me. The point is that I'm 1,000 feet or so above the valley, and the renegades is in such a devil of a hurry about that time that they never stop to climb up and collect me. Often I've watched them trailing down the valley in a cloud of dust. Then, in a day or two, a squad of soldiers would come up and camp at my spring for a while. They used to send soldiers to guard every water hole in the country so the renegades couldn't get water. After a while, from not being bothered none, I got to thinking I wasn't worth while with them.

Me and Johnny Hooper were pecking away at the Ole Virginia mine then. We'd got down about 60 feet, all timbered, and was thinking of crosscutting. One day Johnny went to town, and that same day I got in a hurry and left my gun at camp.

I worked all the morning down at the bottom of the shaft, and when I see by the sun it was getting along toward noon, I put in three good shots, tamped 'em

down, lit the fuses, and started to climb out.

It ain't noways pleasant to light a fuse in a shaft, and then have to climb out a 50-foot ladder, with it burning behind you. I never did get used to it. You keep thinking, "Now suppose there's a flaw in that fuse, or something, and she goes off in six seconds instead of two minutes—where'll you be then?" It would give you a good boost toward your home on high, anyway.

So I climbed fast, and stuck my head out the top without looking—and then I froze solid enough. There, about 50 feet away, climbing up the hill on mighty tired hosses, was a dozen of the ugliest Chiricahuas you ever don't want to meet, and in addition a Mexican renegade named Maria, who was worse than any of 'em. I see at once their hosses was tired out, and they had a notion of camping at my water hole, not knowing nothing about the Ole Virginia mine.

For two bits I'd have let go all holts and dropped backward, trusting to my thick head for easy lighting. Then I heard a little fizz and sputter from below. At that my hair riz right up so I could feel the breeze blow under my hat. For about six seconds I stood there like an imbecile, grinning amiably. Then one of the Chiricahuas made a sort of grunt, and I sabed that they'd seen the original exhibit your Uncle Jim was making of himself.

Then that fuse gave another sputter and one of the Apaches said, *"Un dah."* That means "white man." It was harder to turn my head than if I'd had a stiff neck; but I managed to do it, and I see that my ore dump wasn't more than ten foot away. I mighty near overjumped it; and the next I knew I was on one side of it and those Apaches on the other. Probably I flew; leastways I don't seem to remember jumping.

That didn't seem to do me much good. The renegades were grinning and laughing to think how easy a thing they had; and I couldn't rightly think up any arguments against that notion—at least from their standpoint. They were chattering away to each other in Mexican for the benefit of Maria. Oh, they had me all distributed, down to my suspender buttons! And me squatting behind that ore dump about as formidable as a brush rabbit!

Then, all at once, one of my shots went off down in the shaft.

Boom! says she, plenty big, and a slather of rocks and stones come out of the mouth, and began to dump down promiscuous on the scenery. I got one little one in the shoulder blade, and found time to wish my ore dump had a roof. But those renegades caught it square in the thick of trouble.

One got knocked out entirely for a minute, by a nice piece of country rock in the head.

"Otra vez!" yells I, which means "again."

Boom! goes the Ole Virginia prompt as an answer.

I put in my time dodging, but when I gets a chance to look, the Apaches has all got to cover, and is looking scared.

"Otra vez!" yells I again.

Boom! says the Ole Virginia.

This was the biggest shot of the lot, and she surely cut loose. I ought to have been halfway up the hill watching things from a safe distance, but I wasn't. Lucky for me the shaft was a little on the drift, so she didn't quite shoot my way. But she distributed about a ton over those renegades. They sort of half got to their feet, uncertain.

"Otra vez!" yells I once more, as bold as if I could keep her shooting all day.

It was just a cold, raw blazer; and if it didn't go through I could see me as an Apache parlor ornament. But it did. Those Chiricahuas give one yell and skipped. It was surely a funny sight, after they got aboard their war ponies, to see them trying to dig out on horses too tired to trot.

I didn't stop to get all the laughs, though. In fact, I give one jump off that ledge, and I lit a-running. A quarter-hoss couldn't have beat me to that shack. There I grabbed old Meat-in-the-pot and made a climb for the tall country, aiming to wait around until dark, and then to pull out for Benson. Johnny Hooper wasn't expected till next day, which was lucky.

From where I lay I could see the Apaches camped out beyond my draw, and I didn't doubt they'd visited the place. Along about sunset they all left their camp, and went into the draw, so there, I thinks, I sees a good chance to make a start before dark. I dropped down from the mesa, skirted the butte, and angled down across the country. After I'd gone a half mile from the cliffs, I ran across Johnny Hooper's fresh trail headed toward camp!

My heart jumped right up into my mouth at that. Here was poor old Johnny, a day too early, with a pack mule of grub, walking innocent as a yearling, right into the hands of those hostiles. The trail looked pretty fresh, and Benson's a good long day with a pack animal, so I thought perhaps I might catch him before he runs into trouble. So I ran back on the trail as fast as I could make it. The sun was down by now, and it was getting dusk.

I didn't overtake him, and when I got to the top of the canyon I crawled along very cautious and took a look. Of course, I expected to see everything up in

smoke, but I nearly got up and yelled when I see everything all right, and old Sukey, the pack mule, and Johnny's hoss hitched up as peaceful as babies to the corral.

"That's all right!" thinks I, "they're back in their camp, and haven't discovered Johnny yet. I'll snail him out of there."

So I ran down the hill and into the shack. Johnny sat in his chair—what there was of him. He must have got in about two hours before sundown, for they'd had lots of time to put it on him. That's the reason they'd stayed so long up the draw. Poor old Johnny! I was glad it was night, and he was dead. Apaches are the worst Injins there is for tortures. They cut off the bottoms of old man Wilkins's feet, and stood him on an anthill—

In a minute or so, though, my wits gets to work.

Why ain't the shack burned? I asks myself, *and why is the hoss and the mule tied all so peaceful to the corral?*

It didn't take long for a man who knows Injins to answer those conundrums. The whole thing was a trap—for me—and I'd walked into it, chuckleheaded as a prairie dog!

With that I makes a run outside—by now it was dark—and listens. Sure enough, I hears hosses. So I makes a rapid sneak back over the trail.

Everything seemed all right till I got up to the rimrock. Then I heard more hosses—ahead of me. And when I looked back I could see some Injins already at the shack, and starting to build a fire outside.

In a tight fix a man is pretty apt to get scared till all hope is gone. Then he is pretty apt to get cool and calm. That was my case. I couldn't go ahead—there was those hosses coming along the trail. I couldn't go back—there was those Injins building the fire. So I skirmished around till I got a bright star right over the trail ahead, and I trained old Meat-in-the-pot to bear on that star, and I made up my mind that when the star was darkened I'd turn loose. So I lay there a while listening. By and by the star was blotted out, and I cut loose, and old Meat-in-the-pot missed fire—she never did it before nor since—I think that cartridge—

Well, I don't know where the Injins came from, but it seemed as if the hammer had hardly clicked before three or four of them had piled on me. I put up the best fight I could, for I wasn't figuring to be caught alive, and this misfire deal had fooled me all along the line. They surely had a lively time. I expected every minute to feel a knife in my back, but when I didn't get it then I knew they wanted to bring me in alive, and that made me fight

harder. First and last we rolled and plunged all the way from the rimrock down to the canyon bed. Then one of the Injins sung out:

"Maria!"

And I thought of that renegade Mexican, and what I'd heard about him, and that made me fight harder yet.

But after we'd fought down to the canyon bed, and had lost most of our skin, a half-dozen more fell on me, and in less than no time they had me tied. Then they picked me up and carried me over to where they'd built a big fire by the corral.

Uncle Jim stopped with an air of finality, and began lazily to refill his pipe. From the open mud fireplace he picked a coal. Outside, the rain, faithful to the prophecy of the wide-ringed sun, beat fitfully against the roof.

"That was the closest call I ever had," said he at last.

"But Uncle Jim," we cried in a confused chorus, "how did you get away? What did the Indians do to you? Who rescued you?"

Uncle Jim chuckled. "The first man I saw sitting at that fire," said he, "was Lieutenant Price of the United States Army, and by him was Tom Horn.

" 'What's this?' he asks, and Horn talks to the Injins in Apache.

" 'They say they've caught Maria,' translates Horn back again.

" 'Maria nothing!' says Lieutenant Price. 'This is Jim Fox. I know him.'

"So they turned me loose. It seems the troops had driven off the renegades an hour before."

"And the Indians who caught you, Uncle Jim? You said they were Indians."

"Were Tonto Basin Apaches," explained the old man—"government scouts under Tom Horn."

Carlos: "I theenk tonight we shall rustle Senor Duke Rawlins's cows."

Manuelo: "But Senor Duke is very queeck weeth the shooting irons—the reesk ees very great, Carlos."

Carlos: "True, Manuelo, but we play for the beeg steaks."

A man of the cloth, getting off the train in a Wyoming town to stretch his legs, saw no restaurant near, so walked into a saloon and ordered a glass of milk. The barkeep slyly spiked it with a stiff jigger of rye.

Draining the glass to the last drop, the reverend gentleman murmured, "*Lord,* what a cow!"

THE GRAND CANYON *of the Colorado has stirred hundreds of thousands of visitors to tremendous depths of emotion. Something of its impact has been put into words in this piece taken from the author's* Pinon Country, *one of the "American Folkways" series published by Duell, Sloan & Pearce.*

The Canyon

By HANIEL LONG

After three days Captain Melgosa and one Juan Galeras and another companion, the three lightest and most agile men, made an attempt to go down. They returned about four o'clock in the afternoon, not having succeeded in reaching the bottom. They said they had been down about a third of the way, and that the river seemed very large. Those who stayed above had guessed some huge rocks on the sides of the cliffs might be about as tall as a man, but those who went down swore that when they reached those rocks they were bigger than the great tower of Seville in Spain.

—Castaneda's *Narrative of the Coronado Expedition*

IGGER than the great tower of Seville; the first response by white men to the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. The Spaniard could be vivid when he was startled. Take another phrase from Castaneda, "The country was so flat you could see the sky under the belly of a horse."

The Canyon is beyond a human being's range of response. We can say vivid things, even poetic things, but they make a curious collection when you see a group of them (a little book of things people have said has been printed). I visited the Canyon first by rail, and the porter told me of his first sight of it. "I took my head in my hands and walked back and forth, moaning, 'How come that big hole thar?' "

Witter Bynner once told me that at his first sight of it he thanked heaven for the relief of an indifferent bluejay wheeling over the depths. Count Hermann Keyserling in *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher* was reminded of something Kant had said, and a few pages later is not sure that he agrees with whatever it was Kant said, for after all Kant had never seen the Canyon. A Chi-

cago business executive took a single look from his hotel window, then pulled down the shade, and never lifted it again while he was there.

The extent to which erosion will go is terrifying. This colored panorama of destruction was caused by a not very big stream carrying silt and pebbles. There is a tiny petrified crab in a case in the museum at Yavapai Point. It was disturbed thousands of feet down, uncovered thousands of years later, by the river. But it is perfect. Lucky crab, to be in evidence at all; we shan't be—that reflection is bound to come to everyone who sees it, I suppose. And as one is sure to have a number of such reflections, bearing on man against the cosmos, I think of the Canyon as first of all an exercise for the intelligence.

Most sensitive persons wherever you meet them are still deep in *Weltschmerz*. The way the Southwest helps is not its remoteness from the crowded places of our age, as Easterners seem to think. Nothing is remote any longer. You can leave New York at dusk and have breakfast at your dude ranch in New Mexico or Arizona the next morning. What the Southwest does is to remind you constantly of the great age of the earth and the brief span, so far, of the human race.

Once I was talking to Erna Fergusson about the Canyon. She knows it gives me a kind of seasickness and sleeplessness—what I call cosmic vertigo. But she also knows that I go to see it whenever I can. I asked her how she herself handled such a spectacle. She gave me the exact answer I was after. She told me about hearing James Harvey Robinson give the lectures that went into that fine book *The Mind in the Making:*

"Here was a man who thought history should include all human experience, so we could understand the present and deal with it better.

"He did something I've never forgotten. He showed us a clock dial to illustrate human culture on this planet. He allowed twelve hours for the whole show, with today as high noon. That meant our civilization began in Egypt only twenty minutes ago. The Greeks precede us by only seven minutes. Scarcely half a minute has passed since the invention of the steam engine showed that starvation and slavery could be brought to an end.

"It makes it seem foolish to shed tears over the ineptitudes of us babies not yet out of human kindergarten. Maybe not yet even admitted to our kindergarten."

The Canyon, I think, lectures you to much the same effect as Dr. Robinson. You are forever hearing people say that Congress and the President should be made to visit it once a year. Hitler would

have been a vastly different man, too, if he had only seen the Canyon. All Americans should be required by law to see it while they are still young and impressionable. Their way should be paid if necessary. Americans need to experience the feeling of time the Canyon gives. We are too much in a hurry. We have funny ambitions. This is the way people talk about the Canyon; they feel it as educational, and able to improve you. If they don't come away obviously improved themselves, and go home and start being better citizens, still they have registered a moral shock of some kind.

Probably we need hope more than the Vitamin B or Haliver oil pills nearly everybody who can afford them takes today. This hope really lives in a lot of little things we are feeling even if we are still in our pre-kindergarten stage—for example, that we don't like pleasures other people are debarred from because they are sick, or poor, or handicapped. A feeling like that, which comes out in Whitman and Emerson and other American writers, is working inside us in its molecular way, to help build the new world of man. Many things can cause it in us, and among them is certainly the sight of the Canyon. It debunks the ego like nothing else.

Many people make a pilgrimage to the Canyon every year. Once I went there with Gustave Baumann, stopping along the way at the near-by Painted Desert country and the Blue Forest. Those devastated areas are like a million butterflies fluttering in the luminous air, over debris of tortoiseshell. They are like a million leopards leaping on a million zebras in a world of opal. And they are an exceedingly cold world of geometry in which for millions of years the rhomboid has pertained to the parallelogram, and neither to anything else. Utterly irrelevant, and utterly beautiful.

I said to Baumann, "It isn't a million painted butterflies, it's a million gray-blue rhinoceroses of the Heroic-Romantic-Ego ages, perished in a bunch here."

"Looks to me like a New England barnyard turned to stone," he answered.

We got out of the car and took a long saunter down below in the great basin. Red trunks were severed from red thighs, and the heads also lay apart. Gray seaweed or hair comes down from the tops of the mounds. Those shapes—"elephant's guts," Baumann called them, those kidney and liver shapes.

The rhomboid keeps on addressing the parallelogram in ambiguous color. Miles away on the horizon the high blue heads of mesas rest on sloping shoulders till the mirage guillotines them. Convoluting clouds trail like

spray or hair. Where there is only sand very little can grow. Even the sagebrush quits at last, leaving it to the clouds to do something.

Near Lee's Ferry we saw the first signs of the Canyon. We came to a place where everything was parallel and long shadows from the clouds streaked the buttes and brought out unsuspected forms. Baumann began to talk about the Canyon, the nightmare of it from a painter's point of view.

"You see a wonderful composition and when you look back again, it's gone. See how fast those clouds are moving.

"This is the reason nobody can paint the Canyon. There was a fellow came out from Chicago some years ago. He had an eight-foot canvas-stretcher in his car. He said he *knew* he could paint the Canyon.

" 'Have you ever seen it?' I asked him.

" 'No,' he said.

" 'Then take your stretcher and start right back to Chicago.'

"He thought I was trying to keep the Canyon to myself. But four months later he came back. He had his picture, of course, but it was no good, just like everybody else's. He said he kept seeing swell compositions and losing them. He was tired and a little frightened.

"Then there was a woman about ten years ago. At first she did some very nice things, seized little parts of the living country; but she soon grew tired battling with the shadows, and used to sit quietly by a tree and paint the tree."

Last year my wife and I stayed at the Canyon several days. We walked the rim at night, saw the moon come up and drop long streaks of silver and jet into the depths. I could feel no feeling, for I was all chronology, zoology, geology, geometry, algebra, and astronomy. Those outer worlds where I am not at ease captured me. But I broke free the moment we took the road homeward. We decided to return via Flagstaff. Flagstaff is a grove of pine trees, but it has houses under the pines, and a good many babies and dogs.

At the Canyon we had looked through telescopes at the earth laid bare for a mile below us. At Flagstaff we visited Dr. Colton's Museum, which sits in a prayerful attitude at the foot of the San Francisco peaks. Those peaks tower a mile in the air and are framed in the great windows at the end of the museum hall. Dr. Colton has spent a pious and useful life, really wonderful, making charts of the strata of the peaks and getting examples of birds, trees, flowers, and stones from each stratum. We saw these charts in the museum.

I admire Dr. Colton out of the ordinary. At the same time, I be-

lieve a day will come when a man will build a museum in an ordinary little town, perhaps in Texas, or Kansas even, deprived of everything spectacular, but sitting on the old earth nonetheless, and perhaps beside a quite ordinary and uninteresting dry river or creek, with some scraggly cottonwoods on the banks. And this museum will be filled with the common things one might find in any field—yet, touched by the right kind of science and the right kind of religion, they will be absorbingly interesting and revealing.

Something of this sort could happen, and perhaps in a small way is happening, to history and biography, domains generally consecrated to the celebration of the ego. But that is something yet again, as Baumann says.

Answers to "Great Western Short Stories" Quiz on Page 129

1. Bret Harte
2. Owen Wister
3. O. Henry
4. Max Brand
5. Eugene Manlove Rhodes
6. Henry Herbert Knibbs
7. Zane Grey
8. Ernest Haycox
9. Stewart Edward White
10. F. R. Buckley

"Riding backward makes him sick!"

Free-for-All

SILVERMANE, the great wild stallion in "The Heritage of the Desert," may not play such an important part in the story as does the equine hero of Grey's "Wildfire," but he does contribute considerably to the yarn's dramatic interest and color. The chasing and capture of Silvermane make up one of its most vivid and exciting episodes, the climax of which is pictured in artist George Prout's frontispiece.

The bands of mustangs such as the one led by Silvermane never actually constituted the important source of saddle stock that is popularly thought, although occasional individual specimens were worth the trouble of catching and breaking. They had to be taken before they were two years old—otherwise they were not likely to get over a constant urge to return to their wild, free existence. Incidentally, the term "mustang" was sometimes used to designate only horses which had been running wild for generations. Hence, when Piute, in Chapter 7 of the novel, insists on calling Silvermane a wild horse rather than a mustang, it may be an indication of his belief that the stallion was born in captivity and subsequently ran wild.

"Between a Rock and a Hard Place" is a yarn which can speak pretty much for itself, but we will say that the editorial staff considers it one of the finest short Westerns of this or any year. S. Omar Barker, its author, writes quality verse as well as fiction, and we hope to have his work appear often in the pages of ZGWM.

After the lapse of one issue, we bring back 'Gene Cunningham's Ranger Ware again in "Wanted —?" Cunningham, whose facile pen has produced, among many other noteworthy books, the monumental study of gunfighters entitled *Triggernometry,* has written a brand new story for ZANE

GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE. It'll be coming up soon, so be on the watch for it. In the meantime, we'll see that young Ware reprints come along at frequent intervals, and—if you readers want them—we may be able to run some of the best of Brother 'Gene's old yarns about Shelley Raines or Gip Drago. So if you have any sentiments, pro or con, on the suggestion, let's have 'em!

The name "Bliss Lomax"—see the story titled "Mesquite" on page 161—is a pen-name of one of America's foremost Western writers. He has become a well-established novelist and seldom turns out a short nowadays. However, ZGWM will reprint one of "Bliss Lomax's" o'd stories occasionally.

Dan Muller's little tale, "The Cactus Kid and the Artist's Life," may well have a little bit of the autobiographical in it. Dan, who at one time rode for "Buffalo Bill" Cody, freely admits to a youthful predisposition for collecting horses which once landed him in a Wyoming jail. There, until he was paroled in Cody's care, he passed the time by drawing with charcoal on the whitewashed cell walls. That was the beginning of a notable career which eventuated just last fall in an all-Muller exhibition in New York. Dan, who made the illustrations for "Cactus Kid," also did the drawing for "The Hills," Henry Herbert Knibbs's poem on the inside back cover, as well as some of the other pictures in this issue.

All lovers of outdoor fiction were grieved last October when Stewart Edward White, author of "The Ole Virginia," passed away at the age of 73. White, who began writing while studying law at Columbia, will be long remembered for such exciting novels as *The Westerners, The Blazed Trail,* and *The Silent Places.* The volume, *Arizona Nights,* from which the story in this issue of ZGWM is taken, also contains "The Rawhide," a novelette considered by White to be his "most coherent" piece of writing.

The critics hailed Haniel Long's book, *Piñon Country,* published in 1941, as a deftly written, penetrating, and provocative word-picture of the beautiful region centering in northern New Mexico and Arizona. The chapter entitled "The Canyon," reprinted as this issue's fact-feature article, struck the editors as a brilliant presentation of some of the effects produced by one of the world's greatest natural wonders. Mr. Long, who was born in Burma—his father was a missionary—now lives in Santa Fe. He is a publisher, a poet, and a biographer.

Earl Sherwan, whose fine cover pictures contribute so much to the attractiveness of ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE, is a rising young Milwaukee artist.

Coming up in the next issue: "The Lost Wagon Train," Zane Grey's complete novel, will take you back to wild and dangerous days on the Great Plains in the Civil War and post-Civil War years. There's color and action a-plenty in it—indeed, it's one of Zane Grey's shootingest, which ought to be enough said.

There will be two new short stories, "Grandpap's Gold Bricks," by Ray Spears, and "Here's Mud in Yore Eye," a Paintin' Pistoleer yarn by Walker Tompkins. J. E. Grinstead's "Trailing Old Prince" will be an outstanding reprint number; "When a Document Is Official," by Frederic Remington, eminent in the gallery of old-time Western greats, will serve as the ZGWM classic; the fact article will be Eric Thane's "Mountain Men," a chronicle of some of those very whang-leather-tough trapper-scouts who made American frontier history. Other features will round out what looks like a bang-up issue.

—THE EDITORS.

FIVE OR MORE NOVELS *by* ZANE GREY *will be reprinted in the next six issues of ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE (as well as short stories and other features) at a cost to you of only $1.50. Watch for them as they appear, or, if you would prefer to receive them regularly by mail, use the convenient subscription form below.*

THE HILLS

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

SHALL I leave the hills, the high, far hills
That shadow the morning plain?
Shall I leave the desert sand and sage that gleams in the winter rain?
Shall I leave the ragged bridle-trail to ride in the city street—
To snatch a song from the printed word,
Or sit at a master's feet?

To barter the sting of the mountain wind for the choking fog and smoke?
To barter the song of the mountain stream for the babble of city folk?
To lose my grip on the god I know and fumble among the creeds?
Oh, rocks and pines of the high, far hills,
Hear the lisp of the valley reeds!

MUSTANG DRIVE Painted by O. Weighorst