

IDOLS. A story of the Major by L. Patrick Greene  
Robert E. Pinkerton J. D. Newsom G. W. Ogden

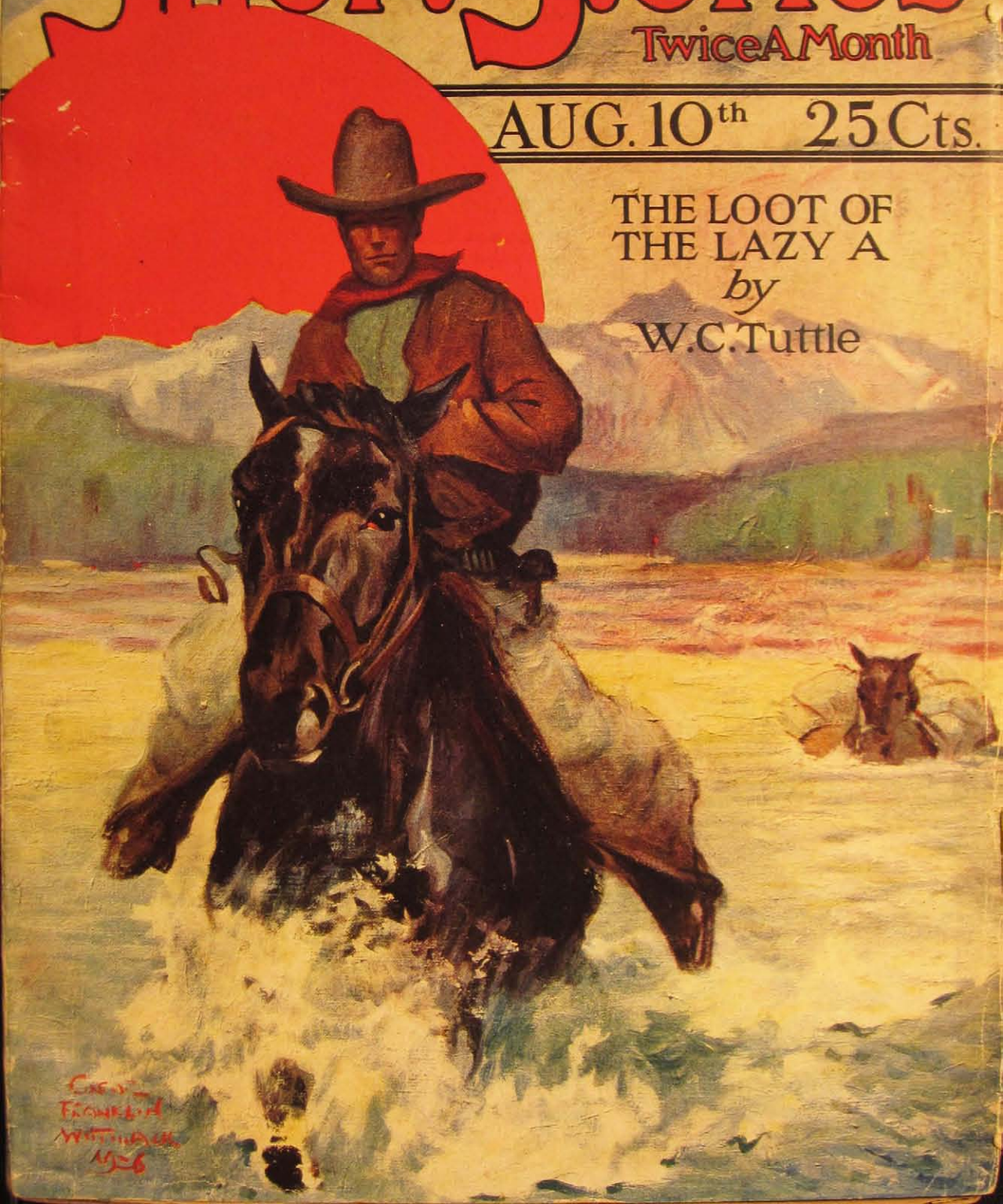
# Short Stories

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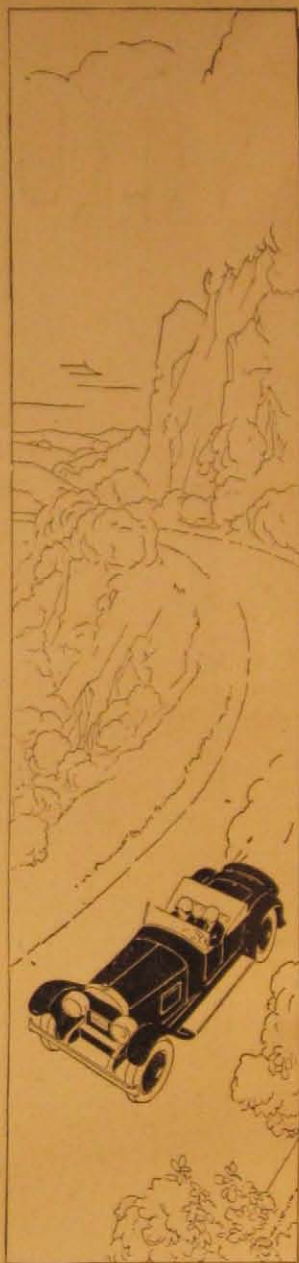
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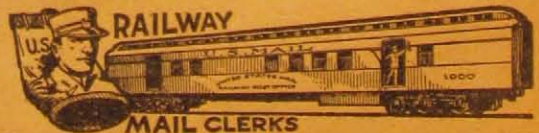
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# Short Stories

Vol. CXVI, No. 3

Whole No. 496

HARRY E. MAULE  
EDITOR

D. McILWRAITH  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



## TIME THE HEALER

IT FURNISHED an eloquent testimonial to the healing qualities of time when, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of the Little Big Horn, aged white survivors of the regiment once commanded by General George A. Custer and equally ancient Indians who had participated in the campaigns leading up to and following that massacre, met on the battlefield and solemnly shook hands in token of lasting peace between the white man and the red. As all will remember, the battle of the Little Big Horn was the beginning of the end as a dominant race for the Indian. It was to be the battle whereby the reds would turn back forever the westward pushing whites. And it was the greatest Indian victory in the history of frontier fighting, for, decoyed into an untenable position, General Custer and his command were wiped out to a man by the overwhelming force of Indians.

With the news of the disaster, a wave of fury swept the country. The public clamored for vengeance. Worse still were the criticisms in that hour of the soldiers who had died; criticisms against their tactics, even against their courage itself. Charge and countercharge flew fast, even while the men who could make no defence lay but newly buried on that lonely knoll by the Little Big Horn. Yet on that very hill Indian and white man met and pledged their eternal friendship, memorialized only the courage and soldierly qualities of both sides.

Why can we not apply the lesson to our own daily lives, even to the small disagreements and bitternesses of existence. Leave unsaid the criticisms, forget the vengefulness, look for the good

now, instead of waiting for fifty years to temper our passions and open our eyes to keener, saner, more understanding sight.

THE EDITOR.



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that staggered a nation—

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## THE MISSING CHANCELLOR

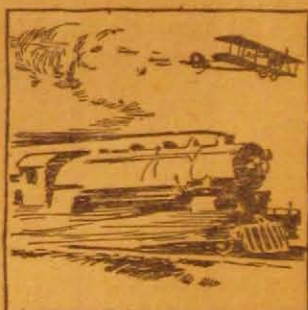
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TWICE  
A  
MONTH

# Short Stories

AUGUST  
10th  
1926



## THE LOOT OF THE LAZY A

*A Complete Novel*

By W. C. TUTTLE

*Author of "Romance," "Straight Shooting," etc.*

---

CULTUS COLLINS ONCE MORE STARTS OUT TO INVESTIGATE FOR THE CATTLE ASSOCIATION, AND FALLS INTO MORE ACTION THAN HE THOUGHT COULD BE FOUND IN THE WHOLE SOUTHWEST. AND THE END OF IT ALL WAS HIS OWN DISCOVERY THAT IT NEEDS MORE STRENGTH TO BE BEST MAN AT A WEDDING THAN TO BE BEST MAN IN A GUN-FIGHT—WITH WHICH RÔLE CULTUS WAS ONLY TOO FAMILIAR

---

**I**T WAS one of those foggy, raining, dismal nights, when all the world seemed one vast drip, drip of water; cold gusts of wind from the bay, where the fog warnings boomed dismally, boat whistles shrilled; while on the streets of San Francisco, little less wet than the bay itself, cable-car motormen danced jigs upon their gongs, seeking to clear the tracks, which they could hardly see in the dim glow of their own headlights.

Standing in the protection of a half lighted doorway, just outside the borders of Chinatown, was a girl. She was dressed in a black suit, black hat. Close inspection would have shown that both the suit and hat were slightly more than well worn, and were also very wet. She carried no umbrella. She was not beautiful, but perhaps it was because of the abject

misery in her big, dark eyes, the utter helplessness of her expression.

She was of medium height, slender, white-faced. In fact, her face was so white against the gloom of the doorway, which blended with her black garb, that it seemed like a white mask suspended invisibly against a dark curtain. The wind swirled past the doorway, showering her with rain, but she did not draw back—only stared ahead, dumbly.

A policeman emerged out of the fog, peered at her, as he went slowly past, glanced up the street toward the clanging of a street car bell, and went on. Possibly he thought she was waiting for a car.

A man emerged from a doorway farther up the street, and came down past her. He was tall, rather slender, his head surmounted by a huge Stetson sombrero, which made him look gigantic in the dim

light. His heels hit hard on the sidewalk, because of the fact that he was wearing high-heeled boots, and in one hand he carried a suitcase.

The street car clanged past before he could reach the corner; so he placed his baggage on the sidewalk, shoved his hands deep in his pockets and leaned against a post, almost directly in front of where the girl stood. He turned and looked directly at her, but turned back and drew his hat farther over his eyes. He shivered a little. He had no overcoat either.

A man came from the opposite direction, swathed in a heavy overcoat, whistling aimlessly. He was a big man, the collar of his coat touching the brim of his derby hat. He did not see the girl until he was almost past her. He stopped and came back to her. It is possible that he did not see the tall man, who leaned against the post.

"Hello, Kid," he said ingratiatingly. "What are you doing out in the rain, all alone?"

The girl did not reply, but drew back against the wall. The tall man turned his head.

"No coat, no umbrella?" The man in the overcoat laughed. "Say, you must be up against it, Kid. You don't look so bad. Snap out of it. Gee, you don't need to shiver on a corner."

"Will you please go away?" asked the girl. "I'm all right."

"I'll say you are, Kid—all right. I like you. Don't be uppish. Come on, and I'll show you a good time."

"Please let me alone." The girl spoke softly.

"Don't try to kid me," laughed the man. "You're going with me and I'll show you the best time——"

The tall man had stepped in behind him and a huge hand, which gripped like a vise, had fastened to his shoulder.

"The lady asked yuh to let her alone, yuh know." The tall man's voice seemed mild, apologetic.

The man squirmed quickly. "Who in hell are you?" he demanded.

"Names wouldn't mean anythin'," the other said mildly.

The man jerked loose. "Then keep your hands off me! This is none of your business! Now, trot along and let us alone."

"Ma'am," the tall man spoke softly, ignoring the threatening attitude of the other man, "do yuh want to go with this man?"

"I certainly do not."

"I reckon that's final, don'tcha think?"

The big man in the overcoat possibly did

not agree with this, and he was foolish enough to swing a right-handed blow at the head of the tall man. The overcoat was a serious handicap. His blow had only traveled half of its arc, when a thick, bony fist, seemingly weighted with lead, caught him under the chin, and he went backward into the street, where he went down in a heap.

The girl stifled a scream, but the tall man's chuckle was reassuring.

"Did yuh know this man, ma'am?" he asked, caressing his right hand.

"No, I did not. I don't know who he is."

"Neither does he—right now. Ain't it cold! I hate this kind of weather. I s'pose it's because I live so much on the desert."

"On the desert?" The girl spoke softly. "Where everything is clean and good—and the sunshine——"

"Have you lived there?"

"Ages and ages ago."

The tall man peered closer at her. "Yuh don't look old."

"I'm twenty-two."

The tall man laughed softly. "Yeah, yo're sure ancient, ma'am. And yo're all wet and shiverin'. Will yuh—? Say, that's funny. I just knocked that feller into the street for askin' yuh to go with him, and I was about to do the same thing. He's gettin' up."

"Yeah, and he's goin' the other way. He's stoppin' at the sidewalk, prob'ly wonderin' what to do about it. Mebbe he don't know what it's all about."

The man had staggered to the opposite sidewalk, where he stood, humped slightly in the rain. His derby hat was out in the street, but he did not seem to miss it. A policeman was coming down that side of the street, and they heard the man say something, which caused the officer to stop.

"C'mon," said the tall man, grasping the girl by the arm. "Yuh never can tell what that jigger will tell the law."

Shielding her as much as possible from the rain, the tall man picked up his suitcase and escorted the girl around the corner and down the block. She did not hold back. There was too much sincerity in the voice of this big cowboy for her to feel afraid.

"Where are we going?" she ventured to ask.

"I know a place," he said jerkily. "It ain't so much to look at, and lotsa ornery folks eat there, but they sure sabe how to

cook a steak, and make soup. Do yuh like soup?"

"Soup?" The girl spoke the word queerly, as though it was something she had once known, but had forgotten.

"Yeah, that's it. Lotsa onions and meat. Here we are."

He led her up a rickety stairs, where the air was redolent with odors of frying meats, garlic; the hundred-and-one odors that make up the atmosphere of a bohemian chop-house, where no questions are asked.

No head waiter met them. In fact they were almost knocked down by a hurrying waiter, carrying a tray of dishes; a short-haired, broken-nosed individual; a one-time artist in the manly art of scrambling ears.

It was warm up there amid all those smells. The tall man led the girl to a vacant booth, which an anemic-looking waiter was cleaning up, and they sat down opposite each other. The tall man had placed his suitcase beside the entrance, where he could watch it. It was the first time they had had a good look at each other.

The girl's face was slightly flushed now, and when she removed her dripping hat, she was really pretty. Her hair was a soft brown. The man's face was long and bony, with a large nose, keen gray eyes and a big mouth. His cheek-bones were prominent, his hair of a neutral shade, neither blonde, brown nor red.

His hands were huge, bony-wristed, flecked with freckles. He was dressed in a cheap brown suit, flannel shirt, and his trousers were tucked in the tops of his high-heeled boots. The girl looked intently at him. There was no denying that he was homely. Then he smiled at her. She caught her breath for a moment—and smiled back at him.

He was not the same man when he smiled. She caught herself staring at him, while the waiter took their order, wondering that a smile should so absolutely change a man. The waiter went away, marveling at the appetites these two must have.

"Ma'am," said the tall man gravely, "my name's Collins. My friends call me 'Cultus'; Cultus Collins, from Cuyamac."

"And I am just Mary Smith," she said simply. "They used to call me Mary Elizabeth—when I had friends."

"When yuh did have, Mary Smith?"

"Yes."

"Uh-huh. Mary Smith, how long since yuh ate a meal?"

"Why—er—this noon."

"Yuh don't need to lie to me, Mary

Elizabeth. Callin' yuh that ought to prove me yore friend—and yuh hadn't ought to lie to yore friends."

Mary Smith looked into the gray eyes of Cultus Collins, and decided not to lie, because he seemed to know that she lied.

"It wasn't a very big meal," she said slowly.

"It wasn't any meal at all, Mary Smith."

"No, I guess it wasn't." And then Mary Smith bowed her head on her wet arms and cried, while Cultus Collins upset a bottle of catsup, trying to pat her on the shoulder and tell her to quit crying. Several diners looked curiously at them, but they were of the breed that mind their own business.

Mary Smith finally stopped crying, dabbed her eyes with a wet handkerchief, and tried to appear brave, while she choked over the first meal she had eaten in two days. Cultus did not question her, nor did she offer any explanation, until the steaks and baked potatoes and soup and salads were but memories, and they were eating huge slices of apple pie and cheese, for which the place was famous.

There were roses in Mary Smith's cheeks now, even if her body was still wet from the rain. Bit by bit she told her story to Cultus Collins. It was not a new tale of woe. Mary Smith had come from



a little town in New England; literally ran a way, because she did not want to marry a certain man, greatly desired by her parents, and because she wanted to see some of the world.

She had saved

enough money to buy a ticket to the Middle West, and by selling a few pieces of jewelry she was able to stretch this ticket to San Francisco, where she had an aunt.

But the aunt was not there. Lack of a business education lost her several fairly good positions. Sickness cost her all her slender savings, and just now she was a week overdue on her room rent, and the room was locked against her. For three days she had haunted the stores, trying to get a position, but they merely looked at her shabby clothes and told her that there was nothing available just now.

Cultus Collins rubbed his chin and wondered what to do. He was not financially

able to give her much assistance. He could give her enough money to square up her room rent and enough for a few days of square meals. But that would not remedy the clothes proposition—and without clothes she could not hope to get a paying position.

"Just what was yuh goin' to do—standin' there in the rain, Mary Smith?" he asked.

She shook her head, her eyes filling with tears. "I—I don't know. My body was numb, and I guess my mind was not far from being in the same state. It was all so hopeless, don't you see?"

"Uh-huh, I see. And yet yuh wouldn't go with that man."

She shook her head. "I was going the other way."

"Toward the bay?"

Mary Smith nodded dumbly. Cultus sighed and shook his head.

"It's a queer old world, Mary Smith. I've been here two days, and I was roomin' in a little place jist up the street from where we met. I was leavin', yuh see. I had plenty of time, but I hurried. That's fate, I reckon."

"It was fate for me," sighed the girl. "The bay seems a long way from here, Mr. Collins."

Cultus smiled widely. "Nothin' like a steak to make a person change their mind."

Another couple had entered the restaurant, and came up to the next booth. The man was fairly young, sleek-haired, flashily dressed. The woman was wearing a brown traveling suit, trimmed with expensive furs, and was wearing a small hat. She was young and beautiful, in an artificial way, but just now her face was contorted with indignation, as she faced the young man.

"I suppose you think that was a smart thing to do!" she fairly snapped at him. "Is it any of your business if I want to take a little trip? Explain yourself!"

The man deposited a suitcase beside the one Cultus had placed near the booth entrance, and took the girl by the arm.

"Don't talk so damn' loud," he advised. "Get in there and sit down, Janice. I just wanted to be sure you wasn't doin' a runout on me. This don't look right to me. I happen to know that your lawyer friend has been up to see you twice in two days, and I know you haven't any need of legal advice. Sit down!"

They sat down in the next booth, but their voices were pitched loud enough for Cultus and Mary Smith to hear what was said.

"I'll explain nothing," declared the girl. "Let that pocketbook alone!— Well, are you satisfied?"

It was evident that the man had investigated her bag.

"You're not very well heeled, that's true. But that don't mean you won't meet somebody at the Ferry Building. I heard you tell the taxi driver where to take you. Now, come clean, Janice. You were going to leave me flat. I've bought you clothes, diamonds, paid your rent, furnished you a car—and you run out on me."

Came a few moments of inaudible conversation, the man's voice was raised in anger.

"What do you care how I make my money? You're getting rather prudish, it seems. I suppose you think that if the police get me, you'll go along, because you spent my money, eh? Well, my money is as good as the money of that dirty bum of a lawyer! He's as crooked as anybody in the district. Sa-a-ay! Are you giving me the gate for that welcher?"

"Your opinions do not interest me," said the girl. "Call me a taxi. I'm sick of your insinuations."

"Aw, pull that stuff and get a vaudeville contract! Why, you little bum, anybody would think you was Bernhardt! Snap out of it! Get away from me? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Fine chance. Na-a-aw! Sit still, or I'll knock you for a loop!"

Cultus was not so interested that he failed to see two men come in. One was the big man he had knocked into the street, while the other was of the same type as the man with the girl. They halted midway of the room, ignoring the gestures of a waiter.

Then Cultus heard the man in the booth say, "There's that dirty welcher now! Leggo me!"

A dish crashed to the floor, as the man jerked away from the girl and stepped out beyond the curtains of the booth. The two men had turned toward it, and the big man had stepped forward, his hand reaching inside his overcoat, as the woman's companion emerged.

There were no preliminaries. It seemed to Cultus that both men knew what this meeting would mean. He saw the man at the booth whip out a snub-nosed gun. The other man was just as quick, and both guns spat rapidly, filling the room with short, snappy reports, both men shooting as fast as they could press the trigger. It was all done in the space of a few seconds. The man at the booth entrance dropped his gun,



turned around, as though to re-enter the booth, but his grasping hands tore down the hanging curtains, pulling them down on top of him, as he fell.

The other man was on the floor, trying to stay on his hands and knees. A frightened waiter had dropped a filled tray, and was running toward the back of the room.

"My God, they hit that girl, too!" somebody yelled.

And then somebody cut off the lights. Cultus and Mary had got to their feet and were at the booth entrance, when the lights went out, plunging the room in darkness. But Cultus had located the exit, and now he grasped his suitcase in one hand, while with the other he clung to Mary Smith, fairly dragging her to the top of the stairs, tearing a way through the frenzied mob.

At the top of the stairs he lifted her up with one arm, fending the strugglers away with his suitcase, and plunged down the rickety stairs and out into the rain, where he let her down. Cultus knew it would only be a minute or two until the police would be there; so he hurried Mary Smith down the street, around a corner, where they found a taxi.

Into this they went, and Cultus told the driver to take them to the Ferry Building. Mary had said nothing, and by the dim light of the cab, Cultus could see that she was very white. He patted her on the shoulder, and she tried to smile.

"Hang onto yore nerve," he whispered, and then his eyes happened to fall upon the suitcase at their feet.



It was not Cultus' bag at all; it was the other one!

Cultus looked at it closely. Only in the dark could it have been mistaken for the battered suitcase Cultus had owned. This one was of fine finish—an expensive thing—and was filled to capacity. But Cultus did not mention it to Mary Smith.

They got out at the Ferry Building and went inside. Cultus bought tickets to Oakland. It would be ten minutes before ferry time; so he led Mary Smith to a secluded seat, putting the suitcase on his lap. It was not locked. He unfastened the nickel buckles and opened the case, while Mary gasped with astonishment. It was filled with women's clothes; dainty things

which seemed to arise from the depths of the case, as they were released from pressure.

On the top were two envelopes. The first contained a ticket and Pullman accommodations to Oreana, Arizona and a hundred-dollar bill. The other was sealed in a plain envelope. Cultus ran the blade of his knife under the flap and opened the envelope without damaging it. Together he and Mary Smith read:

Dear M:

*Introducing Janice Lee, alias anything you want to call her. She knows part of the game, and is a fair actress, if you can keep her sober. Good luck to you.*

Yours,

L.

*P. S. I only gave her a hundred out of that five you sent; so you only owe me a hundred, if it pans out all right. Better see that she gets hers, because I won't swear to her playing on the square, unless you do.*

Cultus looked sideways at Mary Smith, as he sealed the letter and replaced it in the suitcase. He removed the envelope, containing the tickets and hundred-dollar bill, which he handed to Mary Smith.

"Why give it to me?" she asked, looking queerly at him.

"Does fate scare yuh, Mary Elizabeth?" he asked softly. "I was going to Arizona, when yuh made me miss my car. I wasn't headin' for Oreana; but it's on my way."

"But I'm not going to Arizona."

"Listen to me, Mary Elizabeth Smith. Yuh can't buck fate. If I'm any judge of things as they look, that big feller was the one that was sendin' that girl, Janice Lee, out to Oreana, Arizona.

"The big feller is plumb full of lead, and I heard somebody say that the girl was hit. She was behind him, yuh remember. A lot of lead was used this night. You was headin' for the bay, wasn't yuh? Here's a suitcase full of clothes, and I'm sure I seen a trunk check stickin' down in a corner. There's a hundred-dollar bill. From now on, yo're Janice Lee, a pretty fair actress, as long as yuh stay sober. And they better pay yuh what's comin' to yuh, or you'll yelp. Sabe what it means?"

"But—but wouldn't it be wrong?" faltered Mary.

"It started wrong, Mary."

As Cultus fastened up the shining buckles, the ferry-boat passengers came crowding out. He picked up the suitcase,

held out his hand to Mary Smith, and they went out together.

And while they listened to the throb of the engines and the eery wail of the foghorns a police officer reported to a desk-sergeant:

"It was all over when we got there, Searg. Two dead men and a girl they say can't live. They sure did a good job. Everyone else was out of there, but we got a suitcase, which one of the waiters said 'Speed' Evans brought in. Loring, the lawyer, was all shot to pieces."

Another officer came in, carrying the battered suitcase, and the detective bureau assisted in its examination. They found two pairs of overalls, several socks, a red shirt, a lariat rope and several packages of tobacco.

"If that belonged to Speed Evans, it's too bad he got killed," observed a hard-bitte detective, grinning.

"Why?" asked the desk sergeant.

"Why? Because the blamed crook must have been starting out to do something useful in the world."

"What do you know about Loring, the lawyer?"

"Enough," said the detective, "to shed very few tears over his demise."

"And the girl?"

"Speed's girl, Searg. Maybe Loring tried to get her. She's badly shot from liquor. Got two automatic bullets through her, besides. No use investigating. They cleaned up everything for themselves. My gosh, that dump is a wreck."

"Somebody else took a wallop at Loring tonight," said an officer, who had been at the restaurant. "He was all over mud, and his hat was in the street. He tried to tell me what it was all about, but I told him to go home and wash his face."

And thus ended the incident, as far as the police were concerned. Cultus Collins' suitcase was thrown on a shelf, along with a lot more derelict bundles, and the officers went back to their work.

**O**REANA CITY was a typical cattle town of the Southwest; an old place, where the original settlers had builded with adobe, and was still half adobe. Most of the houses were one-story, arranged along a single dusty street, and the alignment of the buildings would have driven an engineer frantic. In early days they had builded along a crooked road, and the crooked road was still the main street of Oreana City.

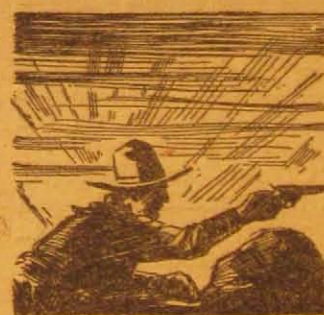
It was located at the end of a branch

railroad line, which served thirty miles of cattle and mining country. An irregular freight and passenger train made daily round trips over the line, making little pretense of a schedule. Oreana City, like the majority of cattle towns, was more unmoral than immoral. The honkatonk was the main center of amusement, and gambling was taken as a matter of course.

A stage line ran from Oreana City to the gold mines of Welcome Creek, thirty miles away. Being an outfitting center for both cattlemen and miners made Oreana City somewhat the pivotal center of that little universe. It was also the county seat.

Three miles northwest of Oreana City was the ranch of the Lazy A; three miles southwest of Oreana City was the ranch of the Star X. Between these two outfits was a feud which had lasted so long that no one paid much attention to it any more.

That is, they hadn't, until the funeral of old Jud Ault, owner of the Lazy A. Over a year previous to the funeral, Jud Ault had been shot from ambush, the bullet injuring his spine and causing partial paralysis. Since then he had never been able to walk. It was generally believed that the bullet was fired by one of Eph Wheeler's



Star X outfit, if not by old Eph himself. But there was no evidence to convict them.

The feud had started so long ago that no one seemed to know just what had caused it. Some said it started over a card game, in which whisky played a prominent part; others said it was over the woman who married Jud Ault and died when their little girl, Faith, was but a tiny slip of a child. At any rate, Jud Ault and Eph Wheeler had been bunkies before this trouble, but had not met, face to face, in over twenty years.

Jud Ault, even before his injury, which finally killed him, was a grim, sour-faced old man, quick of temper. He hated mankind, and did not hesitate to say it. The Lazy A made Ault rich. Mining engineers had urged the old man to lease or sell part of his ranch, which was rich enough to make him a millionaire. But he refused. He hated miners. They dug holes in the ground. He did not want to be rich.

Faith had grown up in awe of her parent; the prettiest girl in the country, but

denied of suitors. Woe unto the gay cowboy who tried to jingle his spurs across the threshold of the Lazy A ranch-house. And when she was eighteen she married Jack Keene, a gambler; ran away with him, spent a short honeymoon, and came back for the paternal blessing.

But what they found was a door closed against them. Never again did Jud Ault speak to his daughter. He drew back in his shell, like an old turtle, even refusing to go to town. And when it was definitely decided that Jud Ault had made his final decision, Jack Keene, gambler, former lawyer (according to Miles Lane, a local attorney, who had formed a friendship for Keene) disappeared from Oreana City—alone.

Not even then did Jud Ault relent and take back his daughter, who had no means of support. Men went to him and urged him to take care of her, even if he did not want to see her, and he cursed them out. There was no doubt in the minds of everyone that Jack Keene had had an eye on the Lazy A, when he married Faith; but had sneaked away like a cur, when he found that his marriage did not mean money.

Then came the Keene baby. Men said that old Jud Ault would relent now. But he never saw his grandchild. Faith Keene lived in a little shack of a house, which Jack had partly furnished. She tried to make a living by taking in washing, but the returns were too small compared to the physical labor involved. Also she was obliged to compete with a Chinese laundry—which some of the cowboys offered to put out of business and give her a clear field. But she declined their offer.

Things were breaking very badly for Faith Keene, when Miles Lane came to her with some money, which he told her came from Jack Keene. She did not wonder why he did not send her this money direct, because she was too thankful to get it. Lane would not tell her where Jack Keene was. Every month the Oreana City lawyer would bring her enough for her monthly wants, and she was able to struggle along and take care of her baby.

East of Oreana City, about four miles, were the tumbledown ranch buildings of the Cross Arrow, owned by "Badger" Hill and his son, known as "Shif'less." They were veritable range derelicts, these two. Badger was a short, squat, bewhiskered sort of a man, who greatly resembled his namesake. His vocabulary was limited to few words—mostly profane.

Shif'less was a big hulk of a man, less

than thirty years of age. He was not unhandsome, in his big, lumbering way. His features were strong, blocky, and his wistful gray eyes seemed to be continually wondering at the world from beneath a huge mop of blonde hair, which seemed forever to stand on end.

It was hinted that the Cross Arrow existed through the taking of oreanas—calves which had escaped the branding-iron of their original owners. Farther to the north, these animals were designated as mavericks. And it was also hinted that Badger Hill was not averse to forcing an oreana—taking a calf away from its mother, that he might later run it on the Cross Arrow and claim it for his own.

Shif'less Hill had, in a way, grown up with Faith Keene, and always admired her from afar. Jud Ault had detested Badger Hill and his big cowpuncher son—making it mutual, because both Badger and Shif'less hated the hardfaced owner of the Lazy A.

Eph Wheeler was a mild-mannered old man, thin-faced, keen-eyed; one of the old type of cattlemen, who cursed with no trace of emotion, and fanned the hammer of his sixshooter, when the need arose, with the air of a man who had a slightly disagreeable task to do, and wished to do it as quickly as possible.

"Dude" Wheeler, the son, was a tall, straight-backed young man, who walked so straight in his high-heeled boots that it seemed as though a gust of wind would blow him over backward. He was thin of face, with a wide mouth, showing excellent teeth when he smiled. His eyes were deep-set, black as India-ink, beneath heavy brows, while his nose was bony.

His love for gaudy clothes had won him his cognomen, and he was the flashiest cowboy in the Oreana country. But Dude Wheeler was a tophand cowboy; ready to fight, drink, gamble or race. He had been taught to hate the Lazy A. But now there was no Lazy A, as far as the Ault family was concerned. Faith had been disowned, and no one ever heard Jud Ault speak of having any relatives. So, as long as there was no Ault family to fight, it seemed that the feud would, or had, died. No one considered that Faith Keene was an Ault.

The Lazy A was in the hands of "Idaho" Breen, who had been Ault's foreman for years. Idaho was small of stature, as gray as a badger and with about the same disposition. Perhaps association with Jud Ault had caused Breen to become cynical, never smiling.

Cleve Sears, the sheriff, had well described Idaho Breen, when he said, "If I was goin' to pick out a man to do a first-class job of murderin' somebody, I'd pick Idaho Breen; 'cause he'd be sure that it was a neat job—and I don't reckon his conscience would ever bother him at all."

Not that Idaho had ever killed anybody—not in the Oreana country, at least. No one had ever heard him mention the feud between the Lazy A and the Star X, but for years he had ridden with a Winchester rifle in a boot under his saddle fender.

It had been hinted that Dude Wheeler had found Faith Ault rather easy to look upon, but, because she was an Ault, he had rarely seen her. Seldom did the Lazy A and the Star X outfits meet in Oreana City, but when they did both sides were coldly civil. They came to the same dances, thereby causing the sheriff much mental anguish for fear of trouble, as he wanted to play square with both sides.

But the Aults were gone now, and there were only Idaho Breen and his three punchers, "Omaha" Woods, "Mex" Leone, and "Pie" Ide. But they were enough. In range language, a man had to be salty to work for the Lazy A. Omaha Woods was broad of beam, with the neck and shoulders of a wrestler and the mustache of a Viking.

Mex Leone was small, slender, almost as black as an Indian; possibly the best bronc rider in the country. Pie Ide was rangy built, tall, powerful. Men likened him to Abraham Lincoln in his facial aspect, but the physical likeness was the only way in which he resembled the great Emancipator. Pie Ide was as hard-bitted as a roundup buckner, but with a sense of humor, which neither Omaha nor Mex seemed to possess.

It was about a week after the funeral of Jud Ault. Shif'less Hill was on his monthly peanut spree. While the other cowboys spent their monthly salary, or a great part of it, for liquor and cards, Shif'less Hill consumed large quantities of peanuts and a sprinkling of peppermint candy hearts; chuckling to himself over the inane inscriptions thereon.

Just now he had strolled to the front gate of Faith Keene's little place, where Faith was sitting on the porch with the lit-

tle boy. She spoke to Shif'less, who opened the gate and came in, sprawling lazily on the steps.

He offered Faith some peanuts, but she declined, smiling at the boyish actions of the big cowboy, who poked a finger at the boy, who chuckled with delight.

"Hyah makin' it?" he asked Faith.

"Oh, all right, Shif'less."

"Uh-huh," Shif'less crunched a mouthful of peanuts, his big hands hanging limply on his knees. "Tha's good, Mrs. Keene. Glad to hear it. Say," he looked up at her quizzically, "I heard that yore dad left a will."

Faith looked blankly at him. "Why, I—I never heard—"

"Well, he did. I heard Idaho Breen tellin' about it. Miles Lane helped him make it out. Idaho signed it, so he said. Some of the boys got to talkin' about the Lazy A, and some of 'em seemed to think that you was agoin' to git it. But Breen said there was a will. He didn't tell much about it, except that there was a niece, or somethin' like that, mixed up in it. I was awonderin' if Miles Lane had told yuh anythin' about it, yuh know."

"He didn't, Shif'less," Faith sighed deeply. "No, I didn't know anything about it."

"Uh-huh. I hear lotsa fellers goin' around, kinda admittin' that Jud Ault was all right. I suppose that's the thing to do, after a man's dead and gone, but they all knowed that—"

"He was my father, Shif'less."

"That's all right. Bein' a father seems to be more or less of a responsibility, Mrs. Keene; but yore dad shucked his. Yeah, he's dead and gone, and you get tears in yore eyes when folks talk about him. Mebbe yo're right. I've got a dad," Shif'less smiled slowly, his wistful eyes fixed upon the little boy on Faith's lap, "and lotsa folks say he ain't worth nothin'. He's a mean voiced, hard-fisted old pelican. Yeah, I know him better than anybody else does."

"They say he steals cattle. But they ain't never caught him at it. Mebbe he's a thief, and he sure uses bad language. Sometimes he gets drunk and acts pretty rough. But as long as I can remember, Mrs. Keene, he's never said a mean thing to me, except," Shif'less smiled and filled his mouth with peanuts, "except the time he said that I shore as hell was a throw-back to my monkey ancestors. Dad hates peanuts."

Faith laughed, and the boy chuckled, as though he understood.



"Yuh named him Jack, didn't yuh?" asked Shif'less.

"Yes," softly. "Jack Keene, Junior."

"Uh-huh. Well," Shif'less got to his feet, brushing the peanut shells off his lap, "I'll be anglin' along. Say, I was jist a-thinkin'. Out at the ranch I've got a little painted bronc. He ain't bigger'n a minute. Been goin' to break him to ride, but he's so small that m' feet hit the ground. I was jist a-wonderin' if little Jack wouldn't like him."

"Oh, that's thoughtful of you, Shif'less, but don't you realize that little Jack won't be able to ride a horse for a long time?"

"Uh-huh. Well, I—uh—tha's all right, too. Yo're welcome. I'll give him the bronc, and keep it out at the ranch until yuh need it. Them painted ones shore live a long time. Well, good day, Mrs. Keene. I reckon I'll git more peanuts, and head f'r home."

Shif'less walked back to the main street, and was heading toward the New York General Merchandise Store, when he met Cleve Sears, the sheriff. Sears was short and fat, with a full-moon sort of a face. His idea of a good time was to sit in the shade and whittle.

"Hello, Shif'less," he said jerkily. Too much fat had made him short of breath.

"'Lo, Cleve," drawled Shif'less. "Whatcha know?"

"I know that Idaho Breen is sore as hell. Know what he done? This mornin', so he says, he found fifty-three Lazy A cow hides in a prospect hole, somewhere between the Lazy A and the road to Welcome Creek. Said the damn' hole was about fifty feet deep, and he didn't know that them hides was there until he smelled 'em."

"Smellin' kinda deep, wasn't he?" smiled Shif'less.

"Prob'ly the smell come out the mouth of the shaft."

"Prob'ly. Still that ain't so bad for him. Hides are worth good money right now."

The sheriff breathed heavily. "I dunno. Idaho's mad. Says he'll show the Star X where to git off at."

Shif'less cracked his few remaining peanuts, poured them into his mouth and began chewing complacently. "Didja hear that old Jud Ault wrote out a will before he died?"

"Somebody said he did. Left the Lazy A to a niece of his."

"And left his daughter out in the cold."

"Yeah, that's true. I hear her husband is sendin' her money every month. That's

how she gits along, Shif'less. He can't be such an awful jigger, if he does that for her."

"Must be all right," mumbled Shif'less. "Don't yuh reckon the feud between the Lazy A and the Star X is ended?"

"It ort to be, Shif'less. Still, yuh never can tell. They tell me that this niece of Jud Ault's is named Ault—Mary Ault. Ordinarily I'd say that a woman ain't got no business runnin' a cow ranch, but if she keeps Idaho Breen there she won't have to do much of the runnin'. Idaho's been in charge ever since Jud Ault got shot."

"Uh-huh. The Lazy A is worth a lot of money, Cleve. I had a talk with one of them minin' engineers 'bout a year ago. He was pokin' around the hills out near our place, and he told me that the surface showin' on the Lazy A was worth a cold million."

"Yeah, I heard it, too. Old Jud knowed it was there. But the Lazy A made him plenty of money—and he hated holes in the



ground. I asked Miles Lane if the old man's will stated that no minin' was ever to be done on the Lazy A, but he said it didn't."

"I was jist wonderin' if Faith Keene couldn't contest that will, Cleve."

"Miles says she can't, because the old man left her one whole dollar. He says he disowned her and didn't want to even leave her the silver dollar, but Miles showed him where she could bust the will, if he didn't mention her at all."

"Uh-huh," Shif'less picked his teeth with a match. "It 'pears to me that them damn' lawyers jist has to be accurate, even if it wrongs the right folks. Well, I'm all out of peanuts. See yuh later, Cleve."

"S'-long, Shif'less."

Shif'less sauntered on up the street. He saw Idaho Breen in front of Miles Lane's office, talking with Lane. They nodded coldly to him, as he went past and entered the store just beyond.

Miles Lane was above average height, slightly stooped. His sandy hair was thin and wiry; his eyes, close-set, were buried beneath beetling brows, which grew together over the bridge of his thin nose. The hinges of his wide jaws were knobby from incessant gum-chewing. But al-

though the jaw was wide at its hinge, it tapered down to a weak chin, which gave his head the appearance of being topheavy.

He invariably wore a winged collar and a stringy black tie, which no doubt gave him a judicial air. Lane was a bottle drinker. Perhaps so because of its economy. And as a result he was very often under the influence of liquor.

"You said she'd be here Wednesday, eh?" questioned Idaho Breen, his cold eyes studying the flushed face of the lawyer.

"Yes; Wednesday, Breen."

"Uh-huh. When is the will to be read?"

"Oh, after she gets here. We'll have the judge and the sheriff there to hear it. I suppose the best thing to do will be to take her right out to the Lazy A as soon as she comes."

"That's what I aim to do, Miles. I was just wonderin' if Faith Keene will make any move to contest the will. It looks as though she could do that."

"If she had enough money to make a fight of it, Idaho. I'm goin' to have a talk with her and see how she feels about it. But she can't do much. The will gives her one dollar. That's a legal point. And everybody around here knows that Jud Ault wouldn't let her in his house. He disowned her."

"No, I don't think she's got a chance to contest the will. In fact, I don't think she ever thought of such a thing. She's proud."

"How much do yuh really think the Lazy A is worth, Miles?"

The lawyer smiled thoughtfully. "The mineral rights are easily worth a million. I talked with those engineers when they prospected it, and they said it was so rich that they were afraid to estimate. One of 'em got drunk and talked. They were employed by Eastern capital, and I happen to know that Jud Ault was offered more money than he knew existed, just for the mineral rights."

"I know that," said Idaho. "I've had assays made, too. Oh, it's there, Miles."

"You bet it's there. Now, what about those cow-hides?"

"Just what I told you. That prospect hole is full of Lazy A hides. That damn' Star X outfit used that deep shaft to get rid of Lazy A hides. They've been eatin' Lazy A meat for years, and I've wondered where they threw the hides."

"Any proof?" asked Lane judicially.

"Proof? No! How can yuh prove who shot a beef? They've all been shot."

"Then drop the subject until you've got

proof, Idaho. There's no use starting a battle with the Star X."

"Just let 'em keep on eatin' our meat, eh?"

"Have you ever eaten any Star X beef?"

"Yo're damn' well right, I have! But not that much."

"The amount doesn't matter. What I want you to do is to forget those hides. If you can get the goods on the Star X, I'm for it. But right now we don't want to stir up any war. Get this girl established out at the Lazy A, Breen. I suppose every cowpuncher in the country will want to marry her."

Breen laughed coldly. "I suppose. My own outfit have taken to washin' their necks, ever since they heard she was comin'."

"She'd be a good catch," Lane laughed softly. "I might marry her myself."

"You better quit drinkin'," advised Idaho coldly.

"I don't drink enough to hurt me."

"Well, I don't want yuh to drink enough to hurt me."

Miles Lane laughed. "I guess you won't get hurt much. Just forget those cow-hides, Idaho. We'll deal with the Star X when we get the goods on 'em. Anyway, rustling is petty larceny beside what we'll get."

Something prompted Idaho to step over to the front window, which looked out on the crooked main street. Leaning against the wall, near the window, was Shif'less Hill, still eating peanuts. Idaho motioned to Lane, who came over to the window. Apparently Shif'less was merely engaged in eating more peanuts.

Idaho watched the big Cross Arrow puncher, who finally dusted the peanut shells off his shirt front, shoved the remainder in his chapps pocket and walked away. He did not even glance toward the window. Idaho stepped back, his eyes squinting narrowly.

"Do yuh suppose that big fat-head was listenin' to what he might hear?"

"I don't think so, Breen. Anyway, what could he hear?"

"Nothin', I reckon. I don't like him."

"He's harmless."

"Yeah, I suppose he is. Except when it comes to stealin' calves."

"Anyway, our conversation was none of his business."

But perhaps Shif'less Hill felt differently about it. He untied his horse at the New York Store hitch-rack, mounted and rode toward home. He had not stopped in

front of Miles Lane's office with the intention of listening. In fact, he had heard only the dull mumble of conversation, until Lane had raised his voice slightly and said:

"Just forget those cow-hides. What do we care? Rustling is petty larceny beside what we'll get."

"Beside what we'll get," muttered Shifless. "Now, jist why did he say that, I wonder?"

Dear Al:

*You heard about me getting shot? It was over a year ago. Since then I've been a cripple—paralysis. Bullet lodged against my spine, and the doctors are afraid to take it away. I've lost my nerve, Al. I'm as old as hell, and they say I'm as bitter as gall.*

*Maybe I am. I haven't a kindly feeling towards anyone. You don't know how it is, Al; to be old, crippled, nothing to look forward to. I can't get around. The damn' doctor won't tell me the truth. If you want honesty, don't expect it after you're old and crippled.*

*Al, I'm not appealing to the Association. I don't want no cow detective hanging around me. But I do want a man who can find out things. I'll pay well. Maybe I'm crazy. I know they are saying I*

*am. But I feel that everything is not right. The old Lazy A is worth a lot of money. I've made my will. But something makes me feel like an old bull, dyin' out in the open, surrounded by coyotes and buzzards,*

*waiting. I suppose they hate me. I don't blame 'em. I've hated a lot in my time. See if you can find the right man, Al. The Lazy A can pay well for what it gets. Hope I'll see you some day.*

*Yours truly,*

*Jud Ault.*

Cultus Collins looked up from reading the letter. A gray-haired man, with kindly blue eyes, was seated at a desk beside him, idly drawing circles on a desk blotter with a pencil. On the walls were detail maps of Arizona, a meat packer's calendar, a framed picture of a longhorn steer. From the adjoining room came the clicking of a typewriter.

"I had a hard time locating you, Collins," said the gray-haired man. "I got that letter nearly three weeks ago."

"Yuh say this Lazy A is at Oreana City?"

"Yes. Have you ever been there?"

Cultus smiled grimly, but shook his head.

"No. Do you believe in fate?"

"In fate? Why, I don't know, Collins. Do you?"

"I'm beginnin' to," Cultus smiled softly, as he folded up the letter. "That's a queer sort of a letter, Al. There's a lot in it; a lot of the soul of a bitter man. Mebbe I better see if I can help him. I dunno what he wants done, do you?"

"No. Perhaps it's merely hallucinations, Cultus. I don't know much about the place. If you take the job, it'll be up to you to go there and see what you can find out. I'll give you a note to Ault; so he'll know you're on the job."

"All right."

The secretary of the Cattlemen's Association penciled a note for Cultus, while the lean-faced cowboy grinned softly over the manufacture of a cigarette; grinned to himself, because he still had an hour to catch the same train that Mary Smith was taking to Oreana City.

Cultus had had no inkling that the Cattle Association was going to send him to Oreana City. He had told Mary Smith good-by, and had promised to join her as soon as possible to help carry out the deception. Neither of them knew what it meant, but there was no question that it was a crooked deal. And now the Association was sending Cultus to the same location.

"What seems so funny to you?" queried the secretary, as he folded the note. Cultus grinned widely, but did not reply. They shook hands and Cultus went back to the busy street of an Arizona metropolis. He headed for the depot, where he found Mary Smith.

Part of the hundred-dollar bill had been invested in a modest gray suit and a small hat. There were roses in her cheeks now, as she sprang up to greet Cultus.

"I've got to buy a ticket to Oreana," he grinned.

"Oh, are you going with me?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Mr. Collins!"

"Well, that's nice of yuh, Miss Janice Lee," Cultus sobered quickly. "Don't forget that's who yuh are, little woman. Forget Mary Elizabeth Smith. And my name ain't Collins. My name's Jones, and I'm from Oklahoma. All you know about



me is that yuh met me on the train, and yuh think I'm buyin' cattle."

"But—but what is the idea?"

"Strictly business, Miss Lee. Unless I'm mistaken, there'll be someone to meet yuh in Oreana City. You don't know, and I don't know what the game is. But let 'em do the talkin', and you'll soon know. I can't be with yuh. But don't be scared. They won't hurt yuh; that ain't what they want yuh for. But I won't be far away. Play the game, Mary Elizabeth."

"Oh, I'll do that, Mr. Jones of Oklahoma."

"Buena muchachoo," smiled Cultus. "I have a feelin' that yo're goin' to be a help in my business this time."

"What is your business, anyway?"

"Bein' Jones of Oklahoma—a cattle buyer."

OFF that shirt! Off that shir-r-rt!" Pie Ide's voice almost lifted the shingles off the Lazy A bunkhouse. Mex Leone stopped putting on a cerise creation, and stared at Ide, who had been shining his boots with Rising Sun stove-polish, which was smelling to high heaven.

"Ain't this my shirt?" asked Mex softly.

"Yore shirt! Sa-a-a-ay, when did you own a shirt like that? I bought that shirt in Phoenix three years ago, Mex. I'm not dressin' both of you jiggers. Omaha's got on a pair of my socks, and if that ain't my red tie he's— Hey, Omaha, that's my collar!

"Yeah, it is, too! You never had none as high as that. My Gawd, if you ever set down hard, you'd slice off yore ears. Now, look at it! Why don'tcha polish yore boots after yuh dress yore neck? Hell, I can't wear that collar now! And there ain't— Wear one of yours, Omaha? That's right neighborly of yuh, cowboy. I've got a fifteen and a half neck, and you've got a seventeen."

"I'd rather have a phonygraft, wouldn't you, Omaha?" asked Mex, searching his war-sack for another shirt. "Yuh can shut off a phonygraft."

"I don't pay no attention to the big scorpion," said Omaha. "He thinks he can claim things by talkin' louder than anybody else. That was my collar. Provin' it to him jist ruined it for both of us. And this tie—"

"Give us the hist'ry of it," begged Pie Ide. "After you've done lied yore soul into purgatory, I'll tell yuh where and how I got that tie. Mex! Didn't I tell yuh to

let that shirt alone? Flimsy? Of course it's flimsy! But yuh didn't need to rip it down the bosom thataway, jist showin' it was flimsy. O-h-h-h-h, why didn't yore folks veal yuh in yore callow youth?"

"Ain't you goin' to shave?" asked Omaha mildly.

"Not with my razor," said Mex. "Every time Pie shaves with my razor I have to pay a barber a dollar to hone the nicks out of it."

"Aw, he's beautiful enough," grinned Omaha. "When that girl takes a look at him, she'll—"

"Wonder how I can stand to live with you two misfits," finished Pie. "Yeah, I'm goin' to shave—with Mex's razor. I'm goin' to wear that flimsy shirt and I'm goin' to accept one of Omaha's clean collars, even if I have to punch some new button-holes to ram my collar-button through."

"And ruin it for me?" wailed Omaha.

"Prob'ly."

"Are you aimin' to make a play for this heiress?" asked Omaha resignedly.



"Jist like a road-runner pickin' a grasshopper," said Pie seriously. "Ain't it legitimate? She's single. There ain't nothin' in the constitution of the State that says I ain't eligible, is there? I'm a clean, whole-souled young feller, and I've got ambitions to be somethin' in the world."

"If you'd 'a' said you was clean-souled, I'd keep still, 'cause yore soul ain't visible," grinned Mex. "You ain't took a bath since yore bronc bogged down in the Little Muddy last spring. With all the land she's gettin' on the old Lazy A, I don't reckon the lady would want any extra real estate, Pie."

Mex dodged gracefully through the doorway, just ahead of the shoe-brush, which Pie hurled the length of the room. It was a good throw—as far as velocity was concerned—but the angle was bad, and Omaha looked up just in time to get the handle of it across the bridge of his nose. Omaha went backward over a chair, landing on the back of his neck near the door, howling bloody murder. Nothing could ever convince Omaha that Pie Ide had not



intended to hit him. He came to his feet, swearing a streak, blood running from his injured nose, eyes half blinded.

His grasping hands came in contact with his belt and gun on a bunk, and he fired one wild shot, as Pie Ide went under a bunk on his hands and knees.

"Gdigyuh!" wailed Omaha. He staggered to the center of the room, one hand held to his streaming nose, as he tried to locate Pie under the bunk.

"What's goin' on in here?" Idaho Breen had just heard the commotion, and had come from the stable. "What happened to you, Omaha? Put down that gun!"

"It was an accident, Idaho!" panted Pie, sticking his nose and eyes out between a drapery of blankets, which hung down over the end of the bunk. "I throwed that brush at Mex, and Omaha walked into it. Take the gun away from him, Idaho."

"I'd wadden't no dab aggcided," denied Omaha. "He idtedded to hid be."

"He throwed it at me," Mex stuck his head around the corner of the doorway. "But you've got my consent to kill him, Omaha."

"Some of you damn' fools are goin' to kill each other one of these days," declared Idaho. "Why don'tcha ever grow up?"

Omaha tossed the gun to the bunk, and turned to the broken mirror to examine his injury. The nose was swelling, and was tinged with purple across the bridge. Idaho grunted disgustedly and walked out, while Pie crawled from beneath the bunk and advised Omaha to hold his breath and stop the bleeding.

"Will thad stob id?" asked Omaha wearily.

"Sure it will."

Omaha tried it, but with no results. "How log?" he asked heavily. "How log do you hab to hold id?"

"All depends on the person," said Pie seriously. "Some die a lot harder than others."

But this time Pie had secured Omaha's gun, and walked outside to join Mex. Idaho was hitching up the buggy team, with the intention of going to Oreana City to meet the train. Idaho had not dressed for the reception of the heiress of the Lazy A, but the three cowboys felt differently about it. All they knew was that Mary Ault, old Jud Ault's niece, was coming to the Lazy A. Idaho had told them that she was a fairly young woman. It was not often that the Lazy A boys dressed

up, but when they did they made an event of it.

Pie had suggested that they all go to the depot to meet her, but Idaho vetoed that idea. Idaho drove away. It would be several hours before train time. Omaha came from the bunkhouse, looking queer with his purple nose, which resembled a potato, in contour.

"All dressed up and no place to go," complained Pie. "It's hours before the train comes in."

"And nothin' to drink on the ranch," wailed Omaha. "I'd sell my soul for a shot of liquor."

"Got over yore hayfever, eh?" grinned Mex. "Yore nose looks like the handle on a door."

"Thasall right," growled Omaha. "Ne' mind my nose."

"It strikes me that somethin' must be done," said Pie. "We can't gloom around here for hours, dressed thisaway. Suppose we go to town, keep out of sight of Idaho, and when the train whistles we can head for home."

"Yore voice is tuned for my heart-strings," said Mex. "How about you, Omaha?"

"Pshaw, I'm halfway there right now. C'mon."

And while the three Lazy A cowboys headed for town, four other riders, "Buck" Wing, "Heinie" Moriarity, "Klondike" Evans and Joe Chevrier, of the Star X, foregathered in the Oreana saloon and gambling house, with enough money in their pockets to make the visit worth while.

Buck Wing was a long-legged, buck-tooth cowboy, with one eye slightly out of line, and one of his ears, in prize fight parlance, was slightly cauliflowered. Moriarity was short, broad of shoulder, typically Celtic, even to his love of battle.

Klondike Evans was of medium height, bald-headed, sallow complectioned, which accentuated the wispy black mustache on his long upper lip. Joe Chevrier was a little, red-faced, French-Canadian, voluble, excitable, the butt of most of the rough jokes originated by Buck and Heinie.

The Lazy A and the Star X outfits had never met since the funeral of Jud Ault. Personally there had never been any bad blood between the cowboys, but they had been loyal to their own outfits, respecting the ancient enmity.

Idaho Breen saw that the Star X outfit was at the Oreana; so he tied his buggy team in front of the New York Store, and gave the Oreana a wide berth. This was

as Pie Ide had expected; so the Lazy A trio tied their horses at the rear of the Oreana and made their entrance through the rear door.

The four Star X boys were at the bar. Omaha, Pie and Mex stopped about midway of the room, looking at the Star X men.

Buck Wing grinned widely. He had imbibed plenty of liquor and his soul was mellow toward everybody.



"S far as I kin see," he said slowly, "there ain't no feud left. Hyah, cowboys!"

And for the first time since the feud started, the Star X punchers shook hands with those from the Lazy A. After about the sixth drink, Omaha offered this explanation:

"This here Miss Ault, which the old man designates in his will-paper as bein' the one he chooses to own the Lazy A, is due to hit Oreana City this evenin'. Idaho Breen aims to take her out to the ranch. That's the reason we're all duded up this-away. When that train toots for Oreana City, we fogs for home and lines up at the front door to welcome her."

"Perfec'ly proper," said Klondike owlishly. "My, my, I don't see how you boys ever got so stylish! I take one look at Pie Ide, and I says to myself, 'Here's a 'Piscopal preacher.' You shee it was that collar that fooled me."

"S one of mine," said Omaha. "Pie punched button-holes in it. Had t' kinda lap the ends over to fit his neck."

"My Gawd, he shore is a dude!" applauded Buck Wing. "Yo're all pretty gaudy, if yuh ask me. Still, it's perfec'ly proper under the circumstances. Whatcha say, Joe?"

Joe Chevrier hadn't said anything. Liquor made him just a trifle mournful, it seemed. He looked gloomily upon the three Lazy A punchers.

"I say not'ing," he replied. "Me, I'm jus' t'ink w'at somebody say 'bout Star X kill Lazy A beef and t'row hide in de prospec' hole."

"Drop it!" growled Heinie. "This is no time to stir up a lot of smelly cow-hides, you frog-eater!"

Frenchy was properly squelched, but continued to glower. He was just drunk enough to hold a grudge, and his remarks

brought a decided chill over the festivities.

"I'm for buryin' any hatchet that might be around," said Pie Ide. "We might as well all be good little friends together."

"Sure thing," agreed Buck Wing. "I'm willin'. But you know yourself, Pie, that Idaho Breen made some remarks that are hard to overlook."

"You say somet'ng true," applauded Joe.

"And I'm goin' to squirsh you, if yuh don't shut up!" snapped Heinie.

"And I'll help yuh," offered Omaha. Heinie glared at Omaha.

"The hell yuh will!"

"If yuh need help," amended Omaha quickly.

"I'm not scare from de Lazy A, you bet," declared Joe.

"You shore don't need to be, Joe," said Klondike warmly.

"Well, yuh can't hold us responsible for what Breen said, can yuh?" asked Pie Ide. "I'd crave to know if we're responsible for what our boss says; that's what I'd crave to know."

"You seems to have a cravin', cowboy," observed Buck coldly. "Folks that crave hard enough usually gits, yuh know."

"Aw, you don't need to git yore tonsils all swelled up," said Pie. "We came here in a peaceful mood. Yo're four to our three, but nobody ever seen the Lazy A—"

"Let's arbitrate," interrupted Omaha. "I'll buy a drink. And we don't care how many Lazy A cows you've rustled. We don't care if you've filled every prospect hole from here to Welcome Creek with Lazy A hides. Whatcha drinkin', gents?"

"Are you admittin' to yourself that we has done such a thing?" Heinie Moriarity hitched up his belt, his eyes snapping.

"Let's have the drink first," suggested Klondike.

Arguments were forgotten for the moment, while seven men drank. Joe Chevrier threw his glass in a cuspidor, smashing it into a hundred pieces.

"I drink no more wit' Lazy A," declared Joe, waving his arms. "I'm insult from w'at Breen say about de cow-hide."

"Why," said Omaha expansively, "don't some of you Star X gents kill that damn' Frenchman? He's a menace to friendship."

"O's a menace?" demanded Joe belligerently. "Tak' dat off! By gosh, I no stand for dat!"

"He ain't no menace," said Klondike. "You hadn't ought to call him that."

"Then why don't he forget them cowhides?" wailed Omaha.

"He's so honest it hurts him," explained Buck Wing thickly.

"Hurts him to be honest," nodded Mex. "I sabe what yuh mean."

"You don't sabe nothin'!" snorted Buck Wing.

"All right, all right," Pie Ide hitched up his belt. "I can see that you Star X whip-poor-wills are pinin' for battle. But we ain't in the market for no wars t'day. We got to remain safe and sane until our new she-boss arrives. After she's kinda inaugurated, we're receptful to anythin' you hedge-hawks nominate. We meets yuh any old place yuh ain't afraid to go, and we'll let yuh choose yore weapons. Yo're four to three, but after the first two has been choosed, I whip the remainin' two."

"You kindo hates yourself, don'tcha?" asked Buck Wing.

"Yeah; but I've got enough to cover you four ant-eaters."

"If you fellers has got any quantity of brawlin' to do, I wish you'd go some'ers else," said the bartender mildly.

"Who's brawlin'?" demanded Klondike. "This here is just an argument among men—so keep out of it."

Both sides knew that there was no chance for peace. Omaha hitched up his belt, spat dryly and said, "All right. You Star X's don't want no peace, I can see that; so we'll go away. That cowhide matter don't mean nothin' to any of us. All I can say is that if yuh ate all the beef that was inside them hides yore shore plenty fat on good meat."

Then the three Lazy A cowboys filed out through the front door and headed down the street toward the Rawhide saloon, just well enough organized to ignore the fact that Idaho Breen might meet them.

"All six of 'em went, eh?" Joe Chevrier looked owlishly toward the front door.

"There was only three," said Klondike.

"By gosh, dere was six went out!" exploded Joe. "I tell you w'at, I'm sore. Jus' now I c'n whip all six—me!"

"You couldn't whip a canary," declared Buck Wing. "Shut up."

"But dey accuse," wailed Joe.

"They ort to be teachd a lesson," observed Klondike.

"They will be," nodded Buck. "I've got a scheme. That train gets in after dark, and there won't be nobody there to meet the girl, except Idaho Breen. How'd it be—?" Buck scratched his chin thoughtfully. "How'd it be to swipe that

girl and take her out to the Star X?"

"I'll buy a drink!" exploded Heinie. "You've spoke yore piece."

WHEN Idaho Breen came to Oreana City he drove his team to the little depot, where he left it to await the arrival of Mary Ault. He went to the depot, where the agent divulged the information that the train would be about three hours late.

"I got a telegram for Jud Ault," he grinned. "Didn't just know how to deliver it—do you, Breen?"

"That's funny, ain't it?" laughed Idaho. "Mebbe I better take it along with me; it might concern the business, yuh know."

"Sure. Here she is. Lookin' for somebody on the train?"

Idaho pocketed the telegram. "Yeah; the new owner of the Lazy A is due in on this train."

"That so? Oh, I did hear about Jud Ault making out a will."

Idaho nodded and walked out to his team. He opened the telegram. It was from the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, and read:

*Sending you best man for job will identify himself.*

*Al Traynor.*

Idaho leaned against a buggy wheel and pondered over the telegram.

"Sendin' you best man for job," he muttered. "What job? A telegram to a dead man! And Al Traynor is secretary of the Association. I wonder jist what job they had in mind."

He folded up the telegram and went back up the street. The sheriff was sitting in front of the New York Store, whittling, his eyes scanning the front of the Oreana saloon. Idaho spoke to him, and the sheriff moved over to give him a seat.

"Yore gang and the Star X gang are over there in the Oreana," offered the sheriff, pointing with his pocket-knife.

"They've been in there for about fifteen minutes, and nobody ain't been throwed out yet."

Idaho scowled heavily. "All gettin' drunk,

eh?"

"All got drunk," corrected the sheriff,



Just at that moment the three Lazy A boys filed out and headed for the Rawhide. None of them were able to follow a chalk-line. They filed into the Rawhide, and the sheriff breathed easier.

"Well, I'm glad that's over," he said thankfully.

The sun had gone down, and it would soon be dark. They were lighting one of the hanging lamps in the Oreana, when Joe Chevrier and Klondike Evans came from the place. Both of them were unsteady on their feet. It seemed that Klondike was trying to argue Joe out of doing a certain thing of which Joe was bound and determined to do.

"My gosh, I'm insult!" roared the little cowpuncher angrily, as they came across the street. "He tak' it off, Klondike!"

"Thasall ri'," mumbled Klondike. "You ain't got no shense. I tell you for-f'rgit it, da-aw-gone yuh. Whatsa use——?"

"Ho, ho!" Joe had seen Idaho and the sheriff. He braced his feet, roaring out his war-whoop, "You sonn-of-a-gonn!"

Klondike made an ineffectual grab at Joe, who had dragged out his six-shooter, staggering out of Klondike's reach.

*Wham! Crash!* His bullet smashed through the window just over Idaho's and the sheriff's heads.

*Wham! Wham!* Two more bullets practically ruined the rest of the window, while Idaho and the sheriff, running like a team of heavy-bodied fire-horses, headed for the sheriff's office.

*Wham!* Another bullet struck the side of the building, as they fell through the doorway. Heinie Moriarity and Buck Wing staggered out of the Oreana, while from the Rawhide, a short block down the street, and almost opposite the sheriff's office, came the boys from the Lazy A, seeking to find what the shooting was about.

*Wham!* Joe's fifth bullet struck the dirt just in front of Omaha Woods, who almost fell over backward, when the spray of gravel blew up in his face. And without any further argument, Pie Ide drew his sixshooter and proceeded to take pot-shots at the Star X gang.

A bullet knocked Klondike's sombrero off, and when he stooped over to get it, another hunk of lead threw gravel in his face; so he forgot the hat and went galloping drunkenly toward the doorway of the Oreana, where he caught his toe on the step and fell halfway through the doorway.

The shooting became general, except Joe Chevrier, who was the cause of the whole thing, and who was tryin'g to stuff more

cartridges into his sixshooter, but with little success. Buck Wing had run in close to the side of the Oreana, while Heinie sat down in the street, shooting across one bended knee.

*Bang!* A note entirely different from that of the six-gun. Joe Chevrier yelped like an injured pup and galloped toward the far corner of the Oreana, grasping at the rear of himself. The enraged sheriff had poked a ten-gauge shotgun through a pane in his office window, and had given the Star X Frenchman something to think about, besides loading his gun.

Heinie's gun was empty; so he crawled on his hands and knees back to the Oreana. The Lazy A outfit had backed to the door of the Rawhide, only to find it barred against them. The saloonkeeper was taking no chances of them using his place as a fort.

"Is anybody hurt?" panted Pie Ide, as they leaned against the barred door.

"I got my mustache full of gravel!" wailed Omaha. "And some of it hit my sore nose."

"Didja see what happened to the frog-eater?" chuckled Mex. "The sheriff busted him with a load of duckshot."

"I wonder what started it?" grinned Pie, as he reloaded his long Colt .45. "Let's go across the street and set on the sidewalk. Them snakehunters are too drunk to hit a house, and it'll soon be dark."

"Yuh didn't see us hittin' anythin', didja?" inquired Omaha, pawing at his mustache. "We're a fine lot of shooters! We never hit anybody."

"We fanned 'em out of the street, didn't we?" fleered Mex. "Didja want to kill 'em, Omaha?"

"Well, I didn't want to kiss 'em. Let's sneak around and get in the back door of the sheriff's office."

"And git a hidefull of duck-shot, eh?" Pie Ide shook his head so hard that his hat fell off. "We've got all the war we can handle, without foolin' with the sheriff and Idaho Breen."

The Star X boys were of the same opinion, as three of them leaned against the Oreana bar. Klondike was bitter. His fairly new Stetson had a jagged hole in the crown.

"Well, what started it, anyway?" demanded Buck Wing.

"Joe Chevrier took a shot at Idaho Breen and the sheriff."

"Danged fool! Did we kill any of the Lazy A?"

Nobody seemed to know. Joe came

through the rear doorway, limping. He had sobered considerably.

"By gar, I'm get stong by forttee bee!" he exclaimed. "Behin' me I'm feel like de centi-peed walk h'all over me."

"Yuh got a load of duck-shot in yore back!" snorted Buck Wing disgustedly. "It's too damn' bad he didn't use a cannon. What made yuh start shootin' out there, you danged Canuck? Yuh shore put us in bad."

"Well," Joe grimaced painfully, "I'm see dat Ida-hoo, and I'm so insult about de cow-hide."

"We might go down and apologize to the Lazy A boys," suggested Heinie Moriarity. "They're probly in the Rawhide."

But that suggestion didn't go well with Buck Wing. Except for the bartender, they had the Oreana all to themselves. What few other patrons had been in there had sneaked out the back door during the shooting, and had given the main street a wide berth. The bartender, while still sticking to the ship, did not feel any too secure.

"I don't apologize to nobody," declared Buck. "If Joe wants to apologize to Idaho and the sheriff——"

"She don't!" snorted Joe. "I'm ver' sore jus' now."

"I'd suggest that we go home," said Klondike, mourning over his sombrero.

"And let the Lazy A think they run us out?"

"Let 'em think what they will. What they don't know won't hurt 'em."

The Lazy A bunch, sitting like three buzzards on the sidewalk, saw the Star X boys ride away from the Oreana hitch-rack, and chuckled with glee. It was too dark to see them get their horses at the rack. Idaho Breen and the disgruntled sheriff also saw them ride away, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"We whipped 'em!" declared Mex.

"We shore did, by golly!" chuckled Omaha. "Here comes Idaho and the sheriff. I suppose they're comin' to congratulate us."

But Idaho Breen was not in a congratulatory frame of mind.

"Why in hell didn't you fellers stay at the ranch and behave yourselves?" he demanded angrily. "Comin' down here and startin' trouble!"

"Who started any trouble?" grunted Pie Ide. "If we hadn't been here to turn the tide you and the sheriff would 'a' had to pull another Alamo. They'd shore made yuh hard to catch."

"You fellers started it! Yuh mixed with that Star X outfit in the Oreana, and made trouble."



"Well, what-cha goin' to do about it?" asked Omaha. "Is this a free country, or are we workin' for a Czar?"

Idaho debated. Good cowhands were not plentiful. He knew he was just on the verge of losing all three of them.

"Well," he said slowly, "I suppose it's all right. But I didn't want you boys drunk when Miss Ault comes. Dang it, that ain't the right spirit, boys. She probly ain't used to seein' a lot of drunken punchers."

"Who's drunk?" demanded Omaha.

Idaho shook his head. "Mebbe I was mistaken. I—I was judgin' from the shootin' that yuh wasn't cold sober. Why, some of yore bullets hit the sheriff's office, and it ain't no ways in the line between where you was and the middle of the street."

"Oh, we didn't want to kill 'em," said Pie Ide. "All we wanted to do was to scare 'em out of town; so they'd let you and the sheriff out of the office."

"My shotgun settled that," said the sheriff, panting heavily. "I handed Joe Chevrier an ounce and a quarter of number fives, and he'll itch for a long time."

"There ain't no fun left, anyway," said Mex mornfully. "I'd jist as soon go home."

"Same here," nodded Omaha. "We was jist killin' time, anyway."

So the Lazy A boys went behind the Oreana, where they mounted their horses and headed for home. Idaho tried to find Miles Lane, but the lawyer was not in evidence. The town had recovered its composure, after the bloodless battle, and there was much speculation as to what would happen next time the two outfits met.

It was almost time for the train arrival, when Idaho went to the depot. He went in the waiting room, where the agent told him the train would be in very soon. Then he went out on the platform and walked around the corner of the depot, with the intention of changing the position of his half broke buggy team, which might get frightened at the train. But as he swung around the corner, three or four men piled upon him, bearing him down by sheer

weight of numbers. An old saddle-blanket was flung over his head, and inside of two minutes Idaho Breen was trussed up like a mummy, and dumped unceremoniously behind the depot.

The train ground ponderously up to the station, and when Mary Smith climbed down the steps, assisted by the gray-haired conductor, she was met by Buck Wing and Klondike Evans of the Star X. Behind her came Cultus Collins, apparently paying no attention to her.

"Howdy, Miss," greeted Buck Wing, a half smile on his face. "Are you Miss Ault?"

"Why, yes," said Mary, who was prepared to be "alias anything she was called."

Klondike grasped her suitcase and she walked with Buck, who guided her around to the hitch-rack, where the frightened team was being taken care of by Heinie and Joe. Mary noted a strong smell of liquor about them.

It seemed settled that Klondike was to do the driving. He got in and took the lines, while Heinie and Joe clung to the bridles of the rearing broncos.

"Head for the ranch," said Buck. "We'll catch yuh."

"You'll go some, if yuh do!" snorted Klondike, surging back on the lines. The team whirled around, almost upsetting the buggy, and went up the main street of Oreana City like a pair of racehorses heading for the wire.

Mary got little view of Oreana City, as she was entirely occupied in clinging to the seat of the open buggy. The road was far from smooth, and they went bouncing off the street into a wide sweep of low hills, gray and blue in the starlight. Klondike clung to the frail lines, content to keep the running team in the road.

The light buggy meant nothing to the broncos; running, wild, cold-jawed. A mile or more reeled out behind them. Klondike knew of a bad spot in the road, where a washout had cut a deep furrow across the highway. To go into this at top speed would mean a smashup. He shortened his lines, braced his feet and pulled steadily. But the cold-jawed broncs did not mind the pull on the straight-bar bits.

Klondike, still half drunk, realized that things were not working out just right. He shot a glance at the girl beside him, who was clinging to the seat with both hands, and surged back on the lines again. He knew the washout was very close now.

*Snap!* The left line broke and came back, striking Klondike in the chest, and

throwing all the pull on the right line. It swerved the team to the right, and a wheel went over a mesquite snag, throwing Klondike off the seat.

Just beyond here an old road turned to the right; an old road, which had not been used for years. The buggy slewed around, skidded dangerously, and then straightened up, as the frantic team headed up the old road.

Mary was thrown off the seat and down against the dash, but managed to get back to the seat. Her mind was in a whirl, as she realized that the driver had been thrown off. She wanted to jump, but realized the danger. The buggy was careening over the old road, possibly half a mile from where Klondike had been thrown out, when the team whirled suddenly, throwing Mary off into a patch of brush, and headed back in the general direction of the Star X, cutting across country.

The cause of their sudden turn was a lone horseman, who had appeared suddenly just a few yards ahead of them. The



team was almost into him, when it turned, and Mary narrowly missed being thrown against his horse. The horse whirled wildly, but he reined it back, dismounted swiftly and ran

over to the girl.

With little difficulty he disentangled her from the bush, which had broken her fall, and placed her on the ground. It was Dude Wheeler, cutting across country toward the Star X, his face a mixture of wonder and astonishment as he scratched a match and looked down into the frightened eyes of Mary Smith.

"Are yuh hurt?" he asked, when he saw her eyes open. She did not say—merely blinked at the match, which burned Dude's fingers before he dropped it.

"I—I don't think I'm hurt—much," she said, as he scratched another match. She managed to sit up and he braced her with one arm. "I guess I'm—I'm badly shaken," she admitted.

"Yeah, I'll bet you are. But how did yuh happen to be up here, all alone with a runaway team?"

"Why, I don't know exactly. The driver fell off, you see."

"Yeah, I see—that much," Dude

Wheeler was lighting several matches, so he might get a better look at this girl.

"Who was the driver?" he asked. Mary shook her head. "I don't know. I just came in on the train tonight, you see."

"In on the train," echoed Dude. He looked closer at her. "Say, are you Miss Ault?"

"Why—er—yes," said Mary, turning her eyes away.

The matches burned out, and Dude did not light another.

"I see," he said slowly. He got to his feet and stood there, gazing across the hills. "Yo're a long ways from the Lazy A," he said. "I dunno what—I wonder—that was a Lazy A team. You don't know who the driver was?"

"No, I have no idea who he was. They just put me in the buggy, and the team ran away."

"I see. I'm Jack Wheeler, Miss Ault. Folks call me 'Dude.'"

"Oh, what a queer name!"

"We own the Star X outfit."

"Isn't that nice? I—I think I've hurt my ankle, Mr. Wheeler."

"I reckon you got off lucky, if that's all."

He helped her to her feet, but she was unable to walk.

"I dunno," said Dude slowly. "It's a long ways to the Lazy A. I hadn't ought to take yuh to the Star X, but it's the nearest place. Can yuh stand alone until I get my bronc?"

Mary clung to the brush, while he led his horse up to her.

"You can't straddle no horse in that skirt," he told her.

"No, I suppose not," admitted Mary. "What will we do?"

"And if I set yuh sideways on that saddle and got on behind yuh, we'd prob'ly both get throwed off, because that bronc ain't broke to pack double. I reckon there's just one thing to do."

He swung her up in his arms, lifted her to the saddle and got up with her, lifting her in his arms as he got into the saddle.

"But you can't carry me in your arms," she protested.

"This is all the evidence in the world against yore idea," he said, as he rode off through the hills. "If you can stand it, I shore can, Miss. I'll try and not hurt yore ankle."

**K** LONDIKE EVANS had landed just off the road, and just hard enough to daze him for a minute or more. When he recovered sufficiently to realize

what had happened, the team was far away; too far for him to even hear it. He was walking circles in the road, when Buck Wing, Joe Chevrier and Heinie Moriarity came galloping up the road, leading Klondike's horse. They drew up and considered Klondike, who was still half speechless from hitting the ground so hard.

"What in hell happened?" panted Buck. "Where's the team?"

"Gone," Klondike puffed heavily and flapped his arms helplessly. "Th-throwed me out! Line busted. I dunno what happened next."

"My Gawd!" blurted Heinie piously. "She'll be kilt!"

"Already killed, I'll betcha!" exploded Buck. "Git on yore bronc, Klondike! We've got to head 'em off."

"Head 'em off?" Klondike lurched to his horse and climbed into the saddle. "Head nothin'! They're miles away and goin' strong. I couldn't even check 'em."

But no one was listening to him; they were spurring ahead as fast as their horses could run.

"Watch for her along the road!" yelled Buck.

Their horses never slackened their run, until they reached the big gate of the Star X, where they found the buggy, almost wrapped around one of the gate-posts. It was the end of the road. Inside the yard were the two horses. One had lost all its harness except the collar and limped badly. The other seemed to be all right.

The boys dropped off their horses, cold sober now, and searched all around. But there was no sign of the girl. Sadly they mounted and rode back toward town, going slowly, searching both sides of the road carefully, afraid of finding the girl dead.

"They'll hang us," wailed Klondike. "I'll betcha they will."

"You get 'bout feefty shot in de hin'-side, and you not scare from hang," declared Joe, who rode standing up in his stirrups. "She's sure kill h'all de joy for you."

"That was a fool thing to do," complained Buck.

"This is a nice time to think about it," retorted Klondike. "It sounded good when we was drunk. Anyway, it was yore idea, Buck."

"Originally, Klondike. You was the one that suggested ridin' a circle and comin' back to the depot, yuh remember. Don't lay it all onto me."

"She was a danged pretty girl, too," said Klondike. "I got a good look at her."

"Sure; and pulled all on one line."  
 "Aw, let up on him, Buck," said Heinie.  
 "We're all to blame. Dude will fire all of us for this, anyway; so we might as well go to town, get drunk and take our medicine. If there ever was four bigger fools, I'd like to see what they look like."

CULTUS COLLINS walked from the depot and engaged a room at the Oreana hotel, after which he went to the Oreana saloon. The sheriff and Miles Lane were at the bar, talking with the bartender, who was explaining the argument between the Lazy A and the Star X. They nodded to Cultus, who sat down at a table and picked up a newspaper.

"I wasn't here to see the fun," laughed Lane. "Lucky that no one was hurt, except Joe Chevrier. Those few shot probably won't hurt him much. Do you know if Miss Ault came in tonight?"

"I think so," said the sheriff. "Idaho was there to meet her, and I saw his outfit go out of town on the run. Just got a flash of the buggy, and I think the girl was in it. Idaho was drivin' a half broke team."

"Joe Chevrier said he had been stung by forty bees," laughed the bartender. "He didn't get much sympathy."

Lane turned to Cultus. "Have a drink with us, stranger?"

Cultus dropped the paper and came up to the bar.

"My name is Jones," he said. "Jones of Oklahoma."

"Mine is Lane." The lawyer introduced Cultus to the rest. "Did you come in on the train tonight?"

"Yeah," nodded Cultus.

"Was there a lady got off here?"

"Yeah. I think her name was Ault. I talked with her a little."

"A niece of old man Ault, who died a while back," said the sheriff.

Cultus squinted at his glass. He had a letter of introduction to a dead man, it seemed.

"She inherited the Lazy A ranch," offered the sheriff.

"She didn't say anythin' about it," said Cultus thoughtfully. "A nice sort of a girl, it seemed to me."

"She'll be rich." The sheriff backed against the bar, holding his glass. "That Lazy A is worth a mint of money."

"Cattle?" asked Cultus.

"Gold. The old man could have sold

out for a million, but he hated holes in the ground. Queer old jigger, Ault was."



"Have you ever been here before?" asked Lane curiously.

Cultus shook his head. "No, this is my first trip. Kinda

lookin' over the cattle crop for a Chicago packer."

"Oh, I see. You——"

Lane's question was interrupted by the entrance of Idaho Breen. He was hatless, a smear of blood across his mouth, and a livid scratch across over his right eye. He spat angrily and lurched against the bar.

"Give me a drink!" he snorted. "Here, gimme that bottle!"

Idaho grasped the bottle and took a heavy swig; so heavy that the bartender gasped. It was probably the biggest drink ever taken in the Oreana. Idaho slammed the bottle back on the bar, wiped the back of his hand across his lips and tried to blink the tears out of his eyes.

"That's what I'd call a snifter," observed the sheriff.

"Sa-a-ay!" Idaho pounded on the bar with both hands, as though to give force to his statement. "A-a-a-ahem-m-m-m! I was assaulted by several men a while ago. They hog-tied me in a dirty blanket and left me out back of the depot. The agent happened to find me. My team's gone—the girl's gone!"

"You was?" exclaimed the sheriff. "Whatcha know—say, I seen yore buggy team go up the street just after the train came in."

"My buggy team?" choked Idaho. "Are yuh sure?"

"Yeah. It was goin' kinda fast, but I'm sure I seen a woman in it, Idaho."

"Yuh did, eh?" Idaho struck the top of the bar with his fist. "It was that damn Star X outfit! They laid for me, and stole the girl! They never left town!"

"Who was the girl they stole?" asked Cultus. Idaho glared at him. "Who are you?"

"This is Jones of Oklahoma," said the sheriff. "Mr. Jones, this is Mr. Breen, foreman of the Lazy A."

"The girl they stole," said Idaho, not offering Cultus his hand, "was the new owner of the Lazy A outfit."



"The girl we spoke about," said the sheriff. "The one that came in on the train with you."

"Oh, yeah—that one."

"Was you there?" asked Idaho quickly. "Didja see her git off the train? Who met her, eh? What'd they look like?"

Cultus grinned widely. "I dunno. It was kinda dark, and I didn't pay much attention."

"It has been over an hour since the train came in," said Lane, looking at his watch. "Have you——?"

"I have!" rasped Idaho. "With a dirty blanket over my head, and part of it in my mouth. I thought I was goin' to have to stay all night."

"Just why would the Star X steal that girl?" asked Cultus.

"Because they hate the Lazy A!" snorted Idaho. "We had a regular battle in the street tonight. Nobody got killed. I suppose both sides were too drunk to shoot straight. They'd do anythin'—them dirty coyotes. I'm goin' out to the Star X and get that girl."

"Think about it a while," advised the sheriff. "Them boys won't eat her. In spite of yore opinion of the Star X, they ain't cannibals. They was all drunk, Idaho; and their idea of a good joke would be to steal the owner of the Lazy A."

"Dirty cow-thieves!" Idaho was very mad, indeed.

"That's a killin' statement," said the sheriff. "Don't let Dude Wheeler hear yuh say it."

"Bad medicine?" asked Cultus.

"Bad enough to resent a statement like that."

"You shouldn't say things like that, Idaho," said Lane.

"Well, by God, I found fifty-three Lazy A cow-hides in——"

"We know that," interrupted the sheriff.

Idaho reached for the bottle and took another drink, as a cowboy came in. He was from one of the small ranches south of Oreana. He nodded pleasantly to everyone.

"I was wonderin' if any of the Lazy A gang were in town," he grinned. "The Star X outfit are down in the Rawhide."

"Down in the Rawhide?" asked Idaho. "How long have they been down there?"

"Well, I dunno. I heard the bartender tell 'em that the Lazy A thought they'd run 'em out of town, and the Star X boys said they hadn't never left town."

Idaho glared thoughtfully. The taste

of the blanket was in his mouth, and he spat disgustedly.

"Did the agent see the girl get off the train?" asked Lane.

Idaho shook his head. "He said he didn't."

"I reckon that Jones of Oklahoma is the only one that's sure she ever came," observed the sheriff.

"I saw a girl get off," corrected Cultus.

Miles Lane cleared his throat softly. "If I were in your place, Idaho, I'd go home and sleep on it. I don't think that girl is in any danger of being hurt, and you can't do a thing tonight."

"That's good advice," nodded the sheriff. "Tomorrow mornin', if the girl ain't showed up, I'll go with yuh to the Star X."

"Yeah, and I'll take my whole gang," flared Idaho. "I've got to hire a horse to ride home on." He stamped out of the saloon, and they heard him going down the rickety sidewalk, heading for the livery stable.

Cultus went back to the hotel, puzzling over what had become of Mary. He could have described the two men who met her at the train, but decided not to. He could identify Buck Wing and Klondike Evans any time, and Cultus wanted to know more of things before he told anybody what he knew.

**D**UDE WHEELER saw the wreck of the Lazy A buggy, when he rode through the gate, with Mary in his arms. In the dim starlight he could see the two horses down near a corral; so he decided that the runaway team had cut back to the road which they had followed to the ranch gate.

He drew up at the porch of the ranch-house and dismounted, still carrying Mary in his arms.

"Your arms must be paralyzed," she said.

"Not exactly," he laughed. "Yo're not as light as yuh was when I first picked yuh up. How's the ankle feelin'?"

"Why, it seems numb, but there is little pain."

"That's good." He picked her up and they went in the house.

The Star X living-room was a commodious place, rough finished, with a huge fireplace on one side. The floor was strewn with Navajo rugs, and many of the chair-seats and backs were of cow-hide, untanned. It was a typical man's abode. At one side of the front door was a gun-rack,

filled with rifles. Loose cartridges, a heavy Colt revolver, coil of spot-cord rope, packages of tobacco and some dog-eared magazines were scattered over the rough table top in the center of the room.

On the floor in front of the fireplace was the skin of a grizzly bear, while over the mantle was a huge elk head, with magnificent antlers. Mary gazed around the room, after Dude had placed her in their easiest chair.



"I'll get some hot water," said Dude. "Mebbe some liniment will help it out. You take it easy, and I'll fix yuh up fine."

Mary watched the tall, straight-backed cowboy

leave the room, and sank back in her chair with a sigh, wondering what would happen next. Her life had been adventurous indeed since she had met Cultus Collins. She had no idea just what she was to do in Oreana City. Thinking it over calmly was impossible for her. She was an impostor. And whether she could carry out the deception remained to be seen.

Someone had entered the room behind her, and she turned to see Eph Wheeler, clad in an old red undershirt, overalls and a pair of mismatched woolen socks. The old man's sparse hair was standing straight up, and his face appeared very thin in the lamplight. He squinted closely at her, glanced toward the kitchen, where Dude was noisily poking wood in the stove, and then came a little closer to her.

"Just who might you be?" he asked curiously. "I thought I must be dreamin' when I heard a woman's voice out here."

"I am Mary Ault," said Mary bravely. The old man's mouth opened, but he did not speak. He rubbed his right hip with his right elbow, frowned at the lamp, shifted his feet.

"Mind sayin' that again?" he asked.

Mary repeated the name. The old man nodded. Dude came in from the kitchen, saw his father, and stopped short.

"Did we wake yuh up, Dad?" he asked.

The old man did not reply; he was too interested in Mary.

"This is Miss Ault," said Dude.

"That's what she said. Where'd you pick her up?"

Dude explained about the runaway and how he had found Mary. He was unable

to tell who had been driving the team, and Mary did not know.

"It's a Lazy A rig," said Dude. "Blue buggy with red wheels. It's wrapped around one of our gate-posts. The horses are down by the corral. I can't imagine what a Lazy A rig would be doin' out here."

"My suitcase was in it," said Mary. Dude walked out, and came back in a few moments, carrying the suitcase, which was none the worse for the runaway. The old man sat down and watched Mary, while she soaked her swollen ankle in hot water.

"So Jud Ault was yore uncle, eh?" he remarked. "Know him?"

"No," said Mary. She hadn't the slightest idea who Jud Ault was.

"He was a dirty old pup."

Mary flinched. She was evidently not related to a saint.

"He turned his own daughter out," continued the old man. "But he was a dirty old pup long before that."

"Dad, I don't reckon she cares to know all this," said Dude softly.

"Well, she ought to. Anyway, she might as well hear it from me, 'cause she's goin' to hear it sooner or later."

"That liniment will take a lot of the soreness out," said Dude. "I'll soak a bandage and——"

"It seems to me yo're takin' a lot of pains with an Ault," said the old man. Dude flushed, but did not reply.

"Been packin' a Winchester for 'em for years; now yo're wrappin' up their ankles."

Mary laughed, because she did not realize how serious had been the hatred between the two ranches.

"What is a Winchester?" she asked.

"A gun," said Dude. His hand trembled slightly and he spilled a little of the liniment.

"Do all men carry guns out here?" she asked. Dude looked up at her, his eyes serious.

"Most of 'em do."

"Tell me about Jud Ault turning his daughter out."

"It's true." Dude did not look up at her. "She married a gambler. Some say he was also a lawyer, but he didn't practice law here. Old Jud Ault wouldn't speak to her again. She lives in Creana City, with her little boy."

"And he didn't leave her anything when he died?"

"A dollar."

"And the ranch is worth a million, they

ay," growled the old man. "Yo're sure lucky."

"I—I didn't know much about it," faltered Mary.

"Lane sent for yuh, I reckon. He made out Jud Ault's will."

"Yes," said Mary, because she didn't know what else to say.

Dude finished bandaging the ankle and took the water back to the kitchen.

"Are you thinkin' of stayin' here to-night?" asked the old man.

"Why, I—I don't know," said Mary.

"I guess you'll go back to town."

Dude came back and the old man turned to him. "Yuh better harness up the team and take her back to the hotel, Dude."

They looked at each other for several moments.

"That might be the best thing to do," said Dude slowly then. "I'll hitch up the team."

He went out, softly closing the door behind him. Mary curled up on the big chair, her chin in her hand. She did not like the old man, who filled his pipe and smoked noisily.

"You'll sell the Lazy A, won't yuh?" he asked, not unkindly.

Mary shook her head. "I'm sure I don't now, Mr. Wheeler."

"Runnin' a cow-ranch ain't no woman's job," he sucked heavily on his pipe. "Of course, you might marry a cow-man."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Yo're a queer sort of a girl. That's about all most girls think about!"

"Do you know much about girls?"

"Hmph! Well, don't they?"

"Do they?"

Eph Wheeler threw his pipe on the table, with a grunt of disgust. "I'm glad yo're goin' back to town! I hate an argument."

"And you start them yourself."

"I do not!" The old man drew himself up angrily, his eyes flashing. "I never—say, I dunno what this is all about. I wish Dude would hurry with that team. You make me mad. Aults always made me mad. You remind me of Jud Ault."

Mary laughed openly at him, and he stalked from the room, swearing under his breath. He did not put in an appearance, when Dude carried her out to the buggy, and Dude did not mention him until they were well on their way to Oreana City.

The moon was up now, and the hills were bathed in a silver glow; blue in the depths, and silver, where the moonlight brushed the ridges; a mystic fairyland,

where the moon and stars came down close to the world. Mary leaned back in the buggy seat and looked at a world she had never seen before.

"Oh, isn't it beautiful!" she said simply.

"Yes'm, it is. I never get tired of these hills at night. The rough edges are all



gone. Lotsa nights I just ride into the hills; ride away back on the ridges. It's like goin' away from the rest of the world.

"I'm sorry dad talked like he did. But he's old, and he hates the Lazy A. There's no women at the Star X. Pretty soon our four cowpunchers will be driftin' home from town, loaded to the gills with liquor—and it might not be a nice place for a lady—the Star X ranch. They're a rough lot. You'll be better off at the hotel. I put yore suitcase in the back of the buggy."

"It's a wonder it didn't get all smashed."

"And you, too."

"Yes, that's true. I'm sorry to have put you to all this trouble, Mr. Wheeler. I just can't imagine what would have happened to me, if you hadn't met that runaway."

"Well, it was kinda lucky. About a hundred yards beyond where you was thrown out, there's a deep washout. I reckon things would 'a' gone to smash in there. It's about thirty feet across—and there ain't no road."

"You mean, a deep rut?"

"Yuh might call it a rut, ma'am; it's about twenty feet deep."

"Oh!" Mary shuddered. "I'm glad I met you."

"Well, so am I," said Dude softly. "And it wasn't any trouble; so yuh don't need to thank me."

"But you hate the Ault family, you know."

"I just wonder if I do. It seems like kind of a small thing to do—this hate. It ain't never got me anythin'. You and Faith are the only Aults I know—and I don't hate either of yuh."

"Faith?"

"Yeah; Jud Ault's daughter."

"The one he turned out of his home?"

"Uh-huh. There's the lights of Oreana City. I'll fix yuh up at the hotel. It ain't no great place, but it's all right. You'll

prob'ly go out to the Lazy A tomorrow."

They drove up to the hotel. Dude carried her suitcase in and Mary was able to walk slowly. The proprietor was reading by the light of a smoky old oil lamp. He stared over his glasses at Mary.

"Give Miss Ault yore best room, Charley," said Dude. "She's only goin' to be here one night."

"Sure, sure! Miss Ault. Huh! Huh! Yes, ma'am! Looks like old Jud, eh? Know her any place. Naw, yuh don't need to register. We never had but one book, and somebody stole it. I suppose they was collectin' horse-thieves' autographs. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The old man bent double over his stock joke, grabbed the lamp in one hand, the suitcase in the other and led the way down a narrow hall.

"I'll put ye in the president's sweet," he chuckled. "It's the only one that the wash-bowl ain't cracked."

Dude watched them turn into a room, and went outside. There was plenty of noise in the Oreana; so he went over. Klondike, Buck, Heinie and Joe were decidedly drunk. They goggled at him owlshly, sobering a trifle. It was rather unusual for Dude to come to town at that time of night. Buck invited him to have a drink, but he declined.

A sudden notion struck him, and he took Buck by the arm.

"I want to talk to yuh, Buck," he said.

"Oh, yeah," Buck held back. "Now lissen to me, Dude. You've——"

"Not in here," whispered Dude. "Come outside."

"Oh, all right. Shay, now lissen——"

Dude drew him outside the saloon and walked him a few steps up the sidewalk, where he braced Buck against the wall.

"I know whasha want," said Buck knowingly. "I didn' know Klondike was gonna busht the lines. Oh, it's an nawful thing, ol'-timer. She mush 'a' been killed. She——"

"You stole that girl, did yuh, Buck?"

"Oh, yesh. Firs' we had a fight with the Lazy A, and the sheriff shot Joe in the pants with a sh-shotgun. Oh, ter'ble! Idaho Breen wash in it, too. Oh, cert'nly! So we tied him up in an old saddle-blanket and stole the girl. We admit it. Cert'nly, we do. We can't deny it. 'S too bad, but it's done, Dude."

"Who knows about it, except you four, Buck?"

"Thasall."

"Did Idaho recognize yuh?"

"'F he did, he's a good li'l recognizer."

"Then don't say anythin' about it, Buck. They can't prove it on yuh; so keep still."

"You mean that, Dude?" Buck goggled owlshly, pawing at Dude.

"Sure I mean it."

"Is—is that girl dead?"

"Not hardly, Buck."

"Oh, my; thash good. Mush obliged, Dude. An' you ain't goin' to fire ush?"

Dude laughed softly. "No, Buck; I think not. Mebbe I'll thank yuh instead. Go back and finish up yore job."

Buck weaved back to the bar, where the other three boys awaited a verdict. Buck leaned against the bar, poured out a drink, a vacant sag to his lower lip.

"Whasa matter?" gurgled Klondike. "What'd Dude want?"

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" Buck sagged back on his heels. "It's a shecret. Dude says to keep our mouth shut about it."

"Zasso?" Heinie nodded solemnly. "Does Dude know about it?"

"Shertenly does," rather loftily. "Oh, shertenly he does."

"And he wasn't awful mad, Buck? Didn't fire us?"

"Nossir. He—he con-con-congratulated ush."

"By gosh, dat's fine!" exploded Joe. "My min' is relieve, but I'm still got de li'l duck-shot in de skin."

"Dude wasn't drunk?" queried Klondike.

"Jus' as shober as—as we are," declared Buck.

"Then it's all right. Here's happy days, gents."

**I**T WAS early the following morning when Idaho Breen and his three cowboys rode in to Oreana City. Each man carried a rifle in a scabbard, and an extra belt of cartridges. The Lazy A was prepared for war. Cleve Sears, the pudgy sheriff, sighed mournfully when he saw them. He wanted to be fair with both sides, even if Joe Chevrier did try to kill him the evening previous. Idaho briskly stated his intentions of going out to the Star X and demanding the girl and an explanation.

"And you better come along, Cleve," he said. "It's yore place to see that we get a square deal."

"No-o-up," the sheriff shook his head. "In the first place, yuh don't know they took her. Last night yore outfit staged a battle with the Star X, which wasn't no-ways decisive. If yuh go out there, all

heeled for a scrap—you'll git it, Idaho. And I'm not goin' to back yore play. And I jist want yuh to know that the law ain't back yuh. If yuh kill some of the Star X, set to kill somebody. That's ag'in the law. If you go out there and git some of yore men killed, yuh ain't got no law to back yuh. If yuh kill some of the Star X, all hell can't save yuh from bein' tried for murder. Better do quite a lot of thinkin' about it, Idaho."

It was a long speech for Cleve Sears to make, and it left him gasping for breath. It also left Idaho breathless.

"Are you backin' the Star X?" demanded Idaho. "You went and used a shotgun on Joe Chevrier last night, and now yuh want to back their——"

"I'm not backin' anybody! Chevrier tried to kill one of us; mebbe both. But that was last night. Yo're goin' out there to pick a fight. Well, go ahead, but remember what I told yuh."

"But I want to find the girl," wailed Idaho. "I'm not lookin' for a war, Cleve. That girl was stolen, don'tcha see? Why, I've got a charge of horse-stealin' I can put ag'in the man who took my team. There ain't no law against killin' a horse-thief."

"Ain't never been no law ag'in it," said the sheriff slowly. "At least, when yo're sure you've got the right man."

"Well, I don't think yo're playin' square, Cleve."

Idaho joined his men in front of the Rawhide saloon, where they sat down to debate over their next move. The sheriff went on up to the hotel dining-room, where he usually ate his meals. He was just in the act of making an attack on a platter of ham and eggs, when Mary limped into the room and sat down.

Cleve Sears was a bachelor, but not feminine-proof. He stared at Mary, and found it difficult to concentrate on breakfast. She paid no attention to him, but ordered her breakfast from the hotel proprietor, who asked her how her "laig" was this morning.

"Much better, thank you," she smiled.

"Don't mention it, Miss Ault. Want yer aigs lookin' up, or blind?"

"I don't think I know what you mean."

"Leave 'em as they lay, or turned over, ma'am?"

"Oh, as they lay," laughed Mary. The man shuffled away to the kitchen. The sheriff's breakfast was unfinished, but he hurried outside and crossed the street to where Idaho and his men were still debating what to do.

"If yo're lookin' for a Miss Ault—she's eatin' breakfast in the hotel," announced the sheriff.

Idaho blinked rapidly. "Over there? Huh! How'd she git there?"

"I didn't ask her," said the sheriff coldly. "I suppose she stayed there last night. Pers'nally, I think you was drunk and didn't meet the train."

"No such a damn' thing! I tell yuh—oh, well, I don't care what you think."

They all filed over to the hotel, and on the way they saw Miles Lane, coming down the street. He was greatly surprised at the news and anxious to see her. The four cowboys stayed in the hotel lobby, while the sheriff, Idaho and Lane went into the dining-room.

Miles Lane lost no time in introducing himself, and also introduced Idaho Breen and the sheriff. Mary had finished her breakfast; so Lane asked her to go to his office with him and Idaho.

"You've got yore credentials, ain't yuh?" asked Idaho. Mary produced the letter, which Lane glanced through, nodding quickly. He turned to the sheriff.

"Cleve, I wish you'd get old Judge Mears and bring him to my office. We don't exactly need him, but I'd like to have him there when we read the will."

The sheriff turned away, and Lane led the way to his office, ignoring the three cowpunchers, who were anxious to meet the girl. Once inside the office, Lane closed the door and motioned Mary to a seat. Idaho lounged against the closed door, looking speculatively at Mary, who tried to appear at ease.

"This letter says to keep you away from



liquor," said Lane seriously. "Maybe you understand that."

"Yes," said Mary softly.

"I'll say that Loring was a good picker," Lane laughed softly. "How much did he tell you about this deal?"

"Not very much." Mary glanced at the floor.

"All right. You'd fool anybody, my dear. I was afraid Loring might send a hard-boiled female."

"Yuh can't tell by the label," laughed Idaho.

"That's true." Lane moved closer to Mary and lowered his voice. "I don't know how much Loring told you, but you don't need to know very much. What you don't know won't hurt you. Just do as we say, and you'll get your money. Is that plain?"

Mary nodded, not trusting her voice.

"All right. We'll read that will, as soon as the men get here, and then you'll go out to the Lazy A. And remember—you are Mary Ault as long as you are here. You play square with us, and you'll get your profit."

"And if she don't—" Idaho Breen hesitated.

"We won't discuss such a remote possibility, Idaho. Now," Lane became quizzical, "will you please tell us what happened to you last night?"

"I—I hardly know," faltered Mary. "A man met me at the train, put me in a buggy, and the team ran away. Another man found me, after I was thrown out, and brought me to the hotel. I hurt my ankle, but it is much better this morning."

"Would you know these men if you seen 'em?" asked Idaho.

Mary shook her head quickly. "It was quite dark, you see."

"Hear any names?"

"No—except the man who brought me in. His name was Wheeler."

"Dude Wheeler, eh?" Idaho laughed harshly.

"That was his name. He was very nice to me."

Idaho laughed, but dropped the subject, because the sheriff and old Judge Mears, the district judge, were coming in. The cowboys from the Lazy A crowded in and listened to Miles Lane read the will of Jud Ault, in which, with the exception of one dollar, the entire Lazy A property was left to his niece, Mary Ault, his brother's only child—an orphan.

The old judge nodded over the legality of the instrument, and the reading was

over. The will had been witnessed by Idaho Breen and Pie Ide.

As they came from the office, Cultus Collins met them near the door. He nodded pleasantly to everyone. Idaho turned to Pie Ide and asked him to go over to the livery stable and secure a rig to take Mary out to the ranch.

Cultus moved in close to Idaho. "I'd like to speak to you on a little business matter," he said.

Idaho squinted narrowly at Cultus, as they moved down the street a short ways away from the crowd. Cultus drew out the letter he had brought to Jud Ault, and let Idaho read it.

"Now, I don't know what it's all about," confessed Cultus. "It kinda seems to me that I've arrived too late; but mebber you know what the old man wanted done."

Idaho's eyes hardened slightly. "I dunno just what—oh, yeah." He looked at Cultus, a half smile on his lips. "I reckon I know what it was about. Yuh see, we've been losin' a lot of cattle. Just a while ago I found a lot of Lazy A hides in a prospect hole about three miles from our ranch. Somebody has been killin' our stock, and the old man was worried about it. There's been bad blood between our outfit and the Star X for years, and that bothered him, too. If you can clean up

all this cattle stealin', yo're a wonder. Do yuh think yuh can?"

Cultus smiled widely. "I dunno; I'll try."

"Fine!" Idaho fairly beamed.

"Yuh better give me a job on the Lazy A," suggested Cultus. "It would kinda mask my real work, don't yuh see?"

"Well," Idaho rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Yeah, I can. You ain't got no horse here, have yuh? No? Say, you git yore stuff out here and put it in the buggy, and you can drive Miss Ault out to the ranch. We'll be along with yuh."

"All right. But I ain't got nothin' to take along. Mebbe I better buy a couple of shirts. Anyway, I'll get along."

"Yeah. Git what yuh need. Ide will be here with the buggy in a few minutes."

Cultus nodded and went to the New York Store, while Idaho went back and



threw Miles aside, showing him the telegram he had, which was sent to Jud Ault. Then he told Miles about the letter of introduction Cultus had from the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, and of how he was going to keep Cultus out at the Lazy A, to hunt rustlers.

"His name is Jones, isn't it?" asked Lane.

"That's the name he gave last night. The letter he had didn't mention any names. But Jones or not Jones, he'll hunt rustlers to his heart's content; and I'll have him where I can watch him all the time."

Lane laughed softly. "It's working out fine."

"Better than that, Miles. How do yuh like our heiress?"

"Better than I thought I would. She sure fits the part. Why, you'd almost take her for a decent girl."

"Almost," grinned Idaho. "Loring knew what we needed. The only thing that worries me is that Loring is in a position to demand more money. He knows too much."

"Let him try anything like that, and I'll send him to the penitentiary for life," growled Lane. "Here comes the rig."

They helped Mary into the buggy, while one of the boys got her suitcase from the hotel. She gave Lane the check for the trunk, and Idaho promised to send a wagon after it. Cultus came from the store, carrying a bundle, and Idaho motioned for him to take the lines. Lane hastened to introduce Mary, and Cultus smiled.

"I met Miss Ault on the train," he said. "I didn't know who she was at that time."

"We'll lead the way," said Idaho. "Head straight out of town and take the road that leads to the left."

Cultus nodded and drove slowly up the street, while the men crossed the street and mounted their horses.

"Hang onto yore nerve," cautioned Cultus. "I'm goin' to stay at the Lazy A and hunt rustlers. I had to show my hand, in order to keep an eye on you, Mary Elizabeth. This is a game, and we'll play it together; but don't let anybody know, because it's a dangerous pastime. They're goin' to ride in close now; so be careful what yuh say to me."

Mary nodded and looked straight ahead, as the cowboys spurred in close to them.

"Yore name is Jones, ain't it?" said Idaho, leaning from his saddle.

Cultus nodded quickly. "Bill Jones, to be exact."

"From Oklahoma?"

"That's the place."

"Uh-huh," Idaho straightened in his saddle, and there was a smile on his lips, as he looked straight ahead. Perhaps he didn't know it, but there was also a smile on the lips of Jones of Oklahoma, too, and he was also looking straight ahead.

OLD JUD AULT had had little pride in appearances, and as far as the Lazy A was concerned he was content to let it run down. The old ranch-house was half adobe, two stories; a very livable place, but not much to look at. A wide veranda extended the width of the front, on the ground level, with the old flagged floor still intact. The big living-room was much the same as that of the Star X, which was of decidedly masculine flavor.

Old Wang Lung, a wizen-faced old Celestial, presided over the culinary end of the Lazy A. He had been with the Lazy A for many years, and was known as "Hop," for no reason at all. He had accepted both Mary and Cultus without comment. He was jealous of his kitchen, and woe to anyone who intruded.

Idaho Breen had told the boys confidentially that Bill Jones, of Oklahoma, was an Association detective. Cowboys, as a rule, do not care much for a range detective; and this rangy, homely specimen, with the solemn visage, rather amused them.

Pie Ide tried to frame up some practical jokes to play on the detective, but discarded each one shortly after its inception.

"I jist can't do it," he confided to Omaha, as they sat on the top pole of the corral together. "I git a swell idea for a joke on him, and then I can't seem to pull it off. He looks at me with them funny eyes, and I kinda—you know how the hair raises up on the back of a dog when it's scared? That's the way I kinda crinkle."

"Well, you ain't scared of him, are yuh?" Omaha smoothed his mustache and stared at Pie Ide. The tall cowboy shook his head.

"It ain't exactly bein' scared, Omaha. But somethin' tells me that he knows all about that joke. Even when I think of a new idea, he looks at me just as though he knowed what I was thinkin' about, and that the joke was as old as the hills."

"Aw, he ain't so smart," said Omaha. "He's been here a week and he ain't done nothin'—much."

"I know. He was over to that prospect hole, where Idaho found them cow-hides. I asked him what he thought of 'em, and he jist looks at me kinda funny and says, 'I think the cows that wore all them hides are dead.'"

Omaha snorted. "He did, eh? Gawd, he sure is a detective!"

"Idaho don't think much of him," said Pie. "I heard him ask Jones the other day how long he figured the Lazy A was goin' to pay him a salary, if he didn't do some detectin'."

"What did he say, Pie?"

"He said he was doin' his best. Idaho asks him how he goes about it to find a rustler, and he says he usually tries to put himself in the place of the rustler. I dunno what he meant, and I don't think Idaho did, but Idaho says, 'Well, have yuh done it in this case?' Jones says he had, but it didn't seem to work out. Idaho asks him what he intends to do now, and Jones says, 'Well, mebber I'll put myself in the cow's place, and kinda work it out from that angle.'"

"I think Jones is a plain damn' fool," said Omaha.

"I think," said Pie slowly, "that that is jist what Jones of Oklahoma wants us to



think. Omaha, the Association ain't in the habit of sendin' fools on a job of this kind."

"Thasso? Huh!

I never seen a cow-detective that had sense enough to pour sand out of a boot."

"Allasame, I'm glad I'm pure," grinned Pie. He lifted his head and squinted toward the main gate. "Here comes Miles Lane. Do yuh know, Omaha, I'm beginnin' to suspect that he's stuck on our new boss."

"Danged fool!" growled Omaha. Pie laughed softly. "Lotsa fools around here, it seems to me. Even Cleve Sears, our estimable sheriff, ain't losin' no chances to come out here."

All of which was very true, much to the disgust of Idaho Breen, who met Miles Lane at the front door.

"Well, what do yuh know?" asked Idaho.

Miles produced several pieces of mail, among which was a letter directed to Mary Ault. Idaho looked closely at it, put it in his pocket, and looked over the rest of the

mail. The front door was closed behind them.

"That letter was mailed in Oreana City," observed Lane. Idaho nodded, and walked to the far end of the veranda, followed by the lawyer. Idaho took out the letter and tore open the flap. It read:

*My dear Miss Ault:*

*By this time you probably realize that there is little friendship lost between your ranch and mine, but after all there is no reason why we cannot be friends. You understand that I can't very well come to see you at the Lazy A, and I do want to see you again. Can't you meet me in town? Just drop me a note, and I'll be waiting there for you. Make it soon.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*"Dude" Jack Wheeler.*

Idaho snorted disgustedly and tore the letter into shreds, scattering them in the breeze.

"Not going to give it to her, eh?" queried Lane.

"Don't look like it, does it?"

"Suits me. How is she?"

"All right. Sa-a-ay! Dude Wheeler's got a lot of nerve! I'd like to see him moonin' around here!"

Lane laughed softly. "You've got to expect those things. She's a pretty girl."

Idaho looked closely at Lane. "You ain't lettin' that bother you, are yuh? Her looks don't mean anythin' to you, do they?"

Lane flushed slightly. "Not a bit."

"Well," said Idaho softly, "they better not, Miles. I'll be glad when everythin' is fixed up, and she's out of here. By God, I can't git any work out of three fool punchers, who insist on wearin' white collars and takin' baths."

"How about Jones of Oklahoma?"

Idaho grinned. "That poor fool. I wonder if the Association was playing a joke on the Lazy A, or if they jist wanted to git rid of Jones. Every day he saddles his horse and goes ridin' in the hills—alone. But he ain't found out anythin'."

"Where does he ride?" asked Lane.

"Oh, I dunno. I don't pay much attention to him."

They sauntered back to the front door and went into the house. Mary was curled up on a couch, reading an old magazine, but started to leave the room, when they came in. She had grown to dislike the Oreana attorney.

"Don't go," said Lane. "You're always running away, it seems."



"She wanted to go to town today," offered Idaho. "But I told her we'd get anythin' she wants."

"Sure we will," nodded Lane.

"Does that mean that I'm a prisoner here?" asked Mary indignantly.

"Have it that way, if yuh want to," replied Idaho. "This deal is almost settled, and we're not takin' any chances on you."

"But what harm would there be in going to town?" she asked.

"You'll stay here," declared Idaho. "You can go when we tell yuh to go—and then we don't care where yuh go, just so yuh go a long ways from here. You'll be well paid for the job, and yore only instructions, after yuh leave here, is to forget that yuh ever seen the place. I reckon Loring explained that to yuh."

Mary turned her attention to the magazine, glad to drop the subject. Lane and Idaho went outside and finished their conversation, while Mary stared out of the window. She had virtually been a prisoner since she arrived at the Lazy A. Hop served her meals to her in the living-room, keeping her away from the dining-room and from any contact with the men.

She had had no chance to talk with Cultus. Breen had treated her respectfully enough, for which she was grateful, but she did want a few words with Cultus. Idaho Breen took no chances on her, and stayed close to the ranch, while Miles Lane handled the legal end of the inheritance.

As yet she had been told nothing of what they wanted, except that she was Mary Ault, the new owner of the Lazy A. She had been given the room formerly occupied by Jud Ault, which had been scrupulously cleaned by Hop. As far as physical comforts were concerned, she was all right.

The Lazy A had furnished Cultus with a horse and saddle, and Breen had told him to do as he pleased. Cultus realized that Mary was more or less of a prisoner, but there was nothing he could do to relieve the situation. He also knew that Breen was little interested in the stolen cattle, except that he would like to make some trouble for the Star X.

That Idaho Breen and Miles Lane intended to loot the Lazy A was easy to see. Cultus realized how easy it would be for him to prove that Mary Smith was not Mary Ault, but it would be difficult to prove that there was no Mary Ault. It would only serve to brand Mary Smith as an impostor, and him as her confederate.

Cultus surmised that Breen and Lane in-

tended to merely use the girl as a tool to get the ranch cheap. The letters proved that the girl who was shot in San Francisco was Janice Lee, or at least she was not Mary Ault. After associating with the three cowpunchers at the Lazy A, Cultus decided that they were not in the plot. It was evident that they believed, as did everyone else, that Mary Ault was genuine. In fact, there was no reason for anyone to think otherwise.

On the same day that Lane brought the letter from Dude Wheeler, Cultus rode in at the tumbledown Cross Arrow, and met Badger and Shif'less Hill. The old man was sitting on his little porch, clad in a sleeveless undershirt, faded pair of overalls, without boots or socks—his bare feet resting on the porch-rail, while he slumped back in a rickety chair, smoking his pipe.

He unbent enough to remove his pipe from his mouth and to grunt a welcome. Cultus dismounted, tied his horse, and sat down on the steps. As Cultus rolled a cigarette, Shif'less came out, stooping a little, as he stepped through the doorway.



"Howdy," he said pleasantly. "I didn't know we had company. Yo're Jones, ain't yuh?"

"Yeah, I'm Jones," Cultus got up and shook hands with Shif'less.

"Somebody—I reckon it was the sheriff—said who yuh was. Yo're with the Lazy A, ain't yuh?"

"I'm over there," smiled Cultus.

"Damned outfit!" snorted the old man. Shif'less smiled.

"Don't like 'em, eh?" queried Cultus.

"No! Why should I like 'em?"

"No reason, I suppose," Cultus smiled over his cigarette. "Seems like a good outfit. What's wrong with 'em?"

"I reckon it's all right since Jud Ault died," said Shif'less, before the old man could speak. "This girl can't be blamed for what Jud Ault done. Mebbe she's mighty fine."

"She's a fine girl," said Cultus. "How's things with you folks?"

"We can't kick," smiled Shif'less.

"As long as the other outfits raise plenty of calves—we're doin' well," said the old man. "At least that's what they say about

us." Shif'less tried to stop him, but the old man shook his head violently. "What's the difference? They all say it."

Shif'less smiled grimly at Cultus, who smoked slowly, looking at the old man.

"It just happens," said Shif'less slowly, "that Mr. Jones is an Association detective, sent here to try and find out who is stealin' Lazy A cattle."

The old man jerked slightly, and looked at Cultus, his eyes blazing. Cultus remarked to himself how much the old man did look like a gray old badger, angry over something.

"So that's what yuh are, eh?" he snarled. "Kinda lookin' over the Cross Arrow, are yuh? Well, go ahead!"

Cultus looked at Shif'less, ignoring the old man. "Who told yuh that?" he asked.

"Miles Lane, the lawyer."

Cultus nodded. He had suspected this. He wondered if all the cattle outfits in the Oreana country didn't know what he was doing.

"Are you a pretty good friend of Lane?" he asked.

Shif'less hesitated for a moment. "Well, I've known him quite a long time, Jones. He didn't lie about yuh, did he?"

Cultus shook his head slowly. "No, he told the truth—as far as he knew it, Hill."

"As far as he knew it?"

"Even a lawyer don't know it all."

"Well, what in hell are yuh doin' here at my ranch?" rasped the old man.

"Tryin' to be friendly."

"Tryin' to be—what?"

"Friendly."

"Oh, yeah. And then see what yuh can find out, eh?"

"If you don't steal cattle, you've got nothin' to fear," said Cultus slowly.

"Well, that's nice of yuh."

Shif'less studied the tall, homely cowboy. There was a world of power in that lean body. He sat, humped over on the steps, and his cotton shirt, drawn tight, showed the ripple of his back and shoulder muscles as he moved the slightest. His wide, lean hands, with the long fingers, the broad bony wrists, bespoke vise-like power.

"I didn't come over here, because of what I've heard," said Cultus slowly, "because I hardly ever believe what I hear. I'm not denyin' that I was sent here by the Association, but it was because Jud Ault wanted me to come."

"But he's been dead quite a while, Jones."

"It took quite a while to locate me, and they didn't know the old man was dead."

"Now, what in hell did that old crook want of a detective?" demanded Badger Hill.

"I don't know," confessed Cultus. "He didn't know either. But he thought things wasn't just right."

"You bet they wasn't right!" said Shif'less hotly. "Jud Ault turned his daughter out of his house, because she married a man he didn't like. And after the man left her without any support, the old man wouldn't help her."

"She's a pretty nice sort of a girl, I hear," said Cultus. He was looking at Shif'less Hill, as he spoke. He saw the jaw of the big, indolent-looking cowboy shut tightly, and his wistful blue eyes stared out across the hills.

"Yeah, she's—nice," said Shif'less slowly. The old man glanced at Shif'less and at Cultus, and Cultus saw an expression of amusement in the old man's eyes.

"They say her husband is still supportin' her," said Cultus.

Shif'less nodded, but did not speak.

"Has he been here since he left his wife?"

"No."

"Yes," said the old man quickly. "I saw him. Yuh don't need to argue with me, Shif'less," said the old man, when Shif'less opened his mouth to speak. He turned to Cultus. "I saw Jack Keene in Oreana City, talkin' to Miles Lane, one night. Shif'less says I was mistaken, but I know what I see."

"How long ago was this?"

"Over a year ago."

"A year ago last June," said Shif'less. "I think it was about the fifteenth of the month. We've argued about it enough, that I remember the date."

They talked for a while about cattle conditions, but rustling was not mentioned again. Old Badger Hill shook hands with Cultus when he left, and asked him to visit them again.

Cultus had been to the prospect shaft, where Idaho Breen found the Lazy A cowhides, but there was no clue in a lot of hides. The animals had all been shot, and the hides showed that the cattle had been killed at intervals for several months.

He rode back to Oreana City, and found the sheriff talking to Mrs. Keene in front of his office. The sheriff introduced them. Mrs. Keene was carrying several packages, which Cultus offered to take. The little boy accepted Cultus at once, when Cultus

miled at him, and the three of them walked to Mrs. Keene's home.

Mrs. Keene was interested in Mary Ault, and asked Cultus about her. Cultus confessed that he could tell little about her. Cultus carried the packages through the little living-room to the kitchen, and on the way back he stopped to glance at a photograph on the center table.

"That is little Jackie's father," said Mrs. Keene. Cultus nodded thoughtfully, as he looked down at the unmistakable features of Loring, the San Francisco lawyer, who had been killed in the café gun battle; the man he had knocked into the muddy street. "Jack Keene?" queried Cultus.

Faith Keene nodded. "Did you know him?" she asked softly.

Cultus shook his head and turned toward the door.

"I'm mighty glad to have seen yuh, na'am," he said, as he held out his hand.

"It was kind of you to carry the packages for me," she replied. He shook hands gravely with the little boy, and went down

to the main street, wearing his sombrero pulled down over his eyes. He was finding out more than he had expected.

Jack Keene was the man who was sending the woman to pose as the niece of Jud Ault, and it was very evi-

dent to Cultus that Keene, or Loring, as he was known in San Francisco, was in the plot to loot the Lazy A. But Keene was dead, and Cultus did not think that either Lane or Breen knew of the shooting. The girl, Janice Lee, was probably dead or in a hospital, and possibly she did not know enough about the details of the plot to ever let Lane and Breen know what happened.

As Cultus sauntered up the crooked street Miles Lane rode in and took his horse to the livery stable. Cultus leaned against a post in front of the Oreana saloon until Lane went to his office, and then crossed the street.

Lane greeted him pleasantly and they sat down together in the office. Lane told him that he had just returned from the Lazy A.

"I was just talkin' to Mrs. Keene," said Cultus.

"A nice girl," said Lane briskly. "Too bad she lost out on the Lazy A. Possibly Jud Ault was too severe. But he hated Jack Keene, and— Oh, well, it was his business, I suppose. What have you found out in regard to the missing cattle?"

"Not very much. What do yuh know about the Cross Arrow?"

"Less than nothing—except hearsay. I know the Hill family to speak to them. They haven't a good reputation."

"And the Star X?"

"You've heard about the feud?"

"Sure. They staged a battle in the street here the night I came. Breen talks about 'em killin' Lazy A stock, and all that, but I can't quite swallow it, Lane. The Star X is as big as the Lazy A, and they don't need to kill Lazy A cattle."

Lane looked up quickly. "Have you been at the Star X?"

"I was out there yesterday and had a talk with the Wheelers."

"And they knew you were from the Lazy A?"

"They knew I was from the Association," corrected Cultus.

Lane smiled crookedly. "That information won't help you any, Jones."

"Mebbe not," smiled Cultus. "Yuh see, I wasn't the one that told 'em."

"No? Who do you suppose——?"

"They say you did, Lane."

"That I told them? Why, that is preposterous, Jones!"

"And old man Hill——"

"Did he say I told him?"

"Shif'less did."

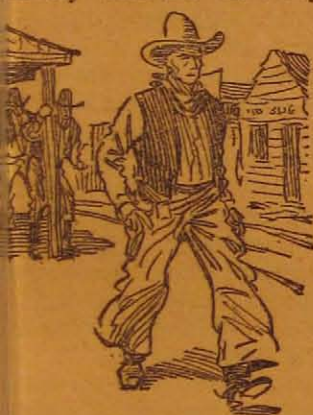
"Pshaw!" Lane colored, tried to swallow, failed. "I don't know why they would say such a thing, Jones."

"Nor you," said Cultus softly. "Unless yo're tryin' to get me killed off."

"Why, the idea is ridiculous, Jones. I haven't any interest in your affairs, except as they affect the Lazy A. I have been attorney for Ault for years, and naturally I am interested in anything affecting the Lazy A ranch. Idaho Breen wants you to clean up this rustling. Why, I'd be the last person on earth to seek to injure you, Jones."

"Well, that's fine of yuh," drawled Cultus. He shook hands with Lane and sauntered out. Dude Wheeler was just going into the post office, and waved a salute to Cultus, who walked up and met him.

"I want to ask yuh somethin', Jones,"



said Dude, a bashful grin on his face. They moved close to the door of the post-office. "Yuh know I met Miss Ault the night she came in," said Dude. "She's sure a nice girl."

Cultus grinned widely. "Go ahead, cowboy."

"I'm glad yuh understand," sighed Dude. "It's thisaway, Jones. I ain't seen her since that night, and yuh see I can't very well go out there to the Lazy A. I wrote her a letter and posted it here this mornin'. I just found out that Miles Lane took the Lazy A mail out to the ranch today."

"And Miles Lane," Dude hesitated. "He's dressin' up to go out there. Yuh see, I don't trust him, and I'm wonderin'—"

"If he delivered the letter, eh?"

"Yuh might put it thataway, Jones. I know him pretty well."

"All right," grinned Cultus. "What can I do for yuh?"

"Will yuh hand her a note from me?"

"Yeah, I'll do it. I ain't seen her to speak to for a long time, but if it's possible, I'll see that she gets it."

Dude secured some paper and an envelope, and when Cultus rode back to the Lazy A he carried the note to Mary. It was almost supper time, and the boys were all at the ranch. Cultus went to the long wash-bench just outside the kitchen door, and began washing, while Hop stood in the kitchen door, dangling a ladle in his hand.

"Hop, do you happen to know a China-boy in Frisco, whose name is Wang Lee?" asked Cultus.

Old Hop smiled widely. "Yessa—my clousin. He lun chop-suey leslant."

Cultus grinned and nodded his head. "That's the feller, Hop. Wang Lee good friend of mine."

This was not true, because Cultus did not know Wang Lee, and only knew of a popular chopsuey restaurant of that name. But old Hop beamed. "Wang Lee velly lich—my clousin."

"That's fine," Cultus mopped his face with a towel, as he moved in closer to the Chinaman. "Wong Lee my friend, Hop. You, his cousin, must be my friend. You sabe?"

"Yessa."

"Good." Cultus took the envelope from his pocket, caught it in a fold of the towel and handed it to Hop.

"That note is for Miss Ault, Hop. Nobody must see."

The old Celestial accepted the towel,

slipped the envelope inside his shirt and turned away without a word. It was evident that Mary received the note, but her reply was to Cultus, which was given to Cultus by old Hop, after they had finished supper. She wrote:

*Am virtually a prisoner. Tell Mr Wheeler I will see him as soon as possible. Would like to talk with you, but Breen says I am to talk with no one. If Hop will carry notes, it will be of some help to us. They are treating me all right.*

The note was unsigned. The fact that she was a prisoner was no news to Cultus, and he knew Dude Wheeler was right in suspecting that Miles Lane had not delivered the letter to Mary. Cultus realized that under the law, it would require nearly a year to probate the will of Jud Ault, advertise for creditors, and to follow out all the legal phases of the instrument, but he also knew that, while hardly ethical, it would be legal for an heir to sell out his or her interests to anyone who was willing to take a chance on the legality of the will in question.

And if Breen and Miles Lane intended doing such a thing, there was nothing he could do to prevent it. Mary, without the advice or assistance of anyone, would be obliged to sign the name of Mary Ault to a bill of sale to the Lazy A. Of course, he could notify the authorities of fraud, possibly defeat the purpose of Breen and Lane; but only serve to throw the will into courts indefinitely—or until it might be proved that no Mary Ault existed.

Cultus decided that there was nothing for him to do, except to wait until something happened that would give him a chance to puzzle out a solution of the case. In the meantime he decided to keep work-



ing on the cattle stealing end of the case. He had a talk with Idaho Breen about the cattle that night, but the Lazy A foreman did not seem interested. He tried to lead Breen into a discussion of Jack Keene, husband of Faith Ault, but Idaho side-stepped the subject; so Cultus dropped it and went to bed, after deciding to visit Welcome Creek the next day.

EARLIER that afternoon Shif'less Hill had ridden to Oreana City, and gone to the depot. He had sent a file to a San Francisco gunmaker for some repairs, and it was due back. He paid the express charges and took the package outside, where he sat down on the edge of the station platform and unwrapped the rifle. It had been encased in a light wooden box and packed tightly with newspapers.

Shif'less tried the action, found it functioning perfectly, and began putting the papers back in the long, narrow box, when his eyes happened to get a flash of a pictured face on one of the wrinkled newspapers. Quickly he spread it out, emitting a grunt of wonderment.

The unmistakable features of Jack Keene stared up at him, along with the face of a pretty girl, beneath whose portrait was the name Janice Lee. But the name beneath Keene's picture was J. Loring. Connecting the pen and ink scroll, which joined the two portraits, was an artist's conception of the gun battle between two men, and behind one of them was a girl, dressed in a traveling suit.

The story told of a gun battle in a San Francisco café, in which J. Loring, an attorney, and Speed Evans, alleged gangster and dope peddler, had killed each other. Janice Lee had been struck twice and had died twelve hours later, without regaining consciousness. It had little to say about Loring, except that he was little known outside the tenderloin.

Shif'less read it through twice, the rifle lying across his lap. There was no question in his mind about this man being Jack Keene. He noted the date of the paper, carefully tore out the article and put it in his pocket.

Picking up the rifle and the box, he walked around the depot, threw the box in a weed patch and went back to his horse. He rode back up the street to Miles Lane's office. It was getting late, but he found Lane there.

"What's on your mind, Shif'less?" asked Lane, when Shif'less placed his rifle on the desk and drew out the clipping. The Oreana City attorney took the clipping and stared at the picture of Jack Keene. And as he read the story he seemed to sway slightly and his eyes blinked painfully.

He lifted a hand and wiped the tears from his eyes; not tears of grief or remorse, but tears like a man might get whose eyes had stared into a bright light. For a long time he did not speak, although Shif'

less knew he had read the article.

"What do yuh know about that?" asked Shif'less softly.

"My God!" breathed Lane hoarsely. "Jack Keene dead!"

"Well, he'd prob'ly finish thataway," said Shif'less.

Lane looked at Shif'less blankly. "What did you say?" he asked.

"I said he'd prob'ly finish thataway."

"Oh—yes," Lane looked at the clipping again. Shif'less had torn it through, leaving the date-line at the top of the page. Lane looked at this and glanced quickly at a calendar on the wall.

"We've got to keep Faith from finding it out, Miles," said Shif'less softly. "We can't let her know."

"Faith? Oh, yes. Yes, we must keep it quiet, Shif'less. You won't tell anyone, will you? I can trust you, can't I?"

"Well, I'd be the last to tell her," drawled Shif'less. "Heck! I wouldn't have her find it out—not now."

"That's fine!" Lane almost pawed for Shif'less' hand. "We'll keep it dark, eh? Don't let anybody know. If one person finds it out, they'll all know it."

"I won't tell," Shif'less shook his head. "Nossir. Say, Miles, Jack must 'a' been pretty tough, eh? I wonder if that was his girl. Prob'ly was. Faith still thinks he's all right," Shif'less looked wistfully out through the window. "Still thinks he's all right, Miles."

"Yes, yes," impatiently. "You never can figure a woman, Shif'less."

"Nor anybody else," softly. "Jack Keene took a different name and left his wife—"

"I know how you feel, Shif'less. You love Faith Keene. No, don't shake your head. Maybe she thinks a lot of you. I'll help you."

"I don't need no help, Miles. I asked her the other day why she didn't get a divorce from Jack, and she said he was still supportin' her; and that she couldn't never marry anybody as long as Jack was alive. Now, Jack's dead—and we can't tell her. Still, what difference does it make? If she'd marry—"

"No, don't tell her!" Lane grasped him by the arm. "Don't do it, Shif'less. Anyway, it isn't for you to do. Don't you see, she'd think you—you were trying to hurry things? Don't you see?"

"Yeah, I see," Shif'less nodded slowly. "I reckon we better keep it dark for a while. Well, I'm headin' home, Miles. Hang onto that piece of paper, won't yuh?"

"Oh, I'll keep it safe, Shif'less. Good night."

Shif'less mounted his horse and rode out of town, carrying the rifle in the crook of his right arm, while Miles Lane locked his front door and flopped in his office chair, trying to gather his scattered senses. He studied the clipping again. Janice Lee! That was the name on the note of identification! It was evident that the girl out at the Lazy A was not Janice Lee. But who was she? Miles Lane's brain whirled. Did this Association detective, Jones of Oklahoma, have anything to do with it, he wondered. Where did this girl come from, and where did she get the identification papers?

Jack Keene, alias J. Loring, was the man who wrote the note—and he was dead. Lane wondered if this girl at the Lazy A had stolen the papers at the time of the gun battle. And if she did, who was behind her masquerade?

Lane drew a big bottle from a desk drawer and took a drink. He left the bottle uncorked, and every few minutes he would lower the contents perceptibly. He decided to go to the Lazy A ranch and show the clipping to Idaho Breen, but the quart bottle was empty when he got his horse at the livery stable—and Mr. Lane was very drunk.

In fact, he was so muddled from drink that he took the wrong road out of Oreana City in the dark, and when he sobered to the extent that he cared to realize anything he found that he was not on any road, had no sense of direction—and nothing to drink. So he just rode on and on, wondering dully if the moon would ever come up and show him some familiar landscape.

After a while he saw the silhouette of an old building, which he recognized as being



the deserted stamp-mill and buildings of the abandoned Suicide mine. It had not been worked for several years. Jim Scott, the original owner, had sunk every cent he owned in it, failed to make it pay, and hung himself in the shaft-house—thus giving it a new name. Others had tried in vain to make it pay, and it was finally abandoned.

Lane did not realize that the night was

nearly over; so he was not going to take any chances on getting lost. As long as he had the buildings of the old mine as landmark, he knew it would not be difficult in daylight to cut across the hills to the Lazy A.

He struck one of the old trails and rode up closer to the old shaft-house, where he intended to dismount. A cold breeze was sweeping across the hills, and Miles Lane, not dressed too warmly, needed shelter.

Suddenly he saw the dull gleam of light, shining through a crack in the old building, and almost at the same instant he realized that he had ridden in beside a saddled horse. He was still a little dazed from the liquor, but instinct told him that something was not just right.

Turning his horse around he rode slowly back down the trail, turned his horse into the shelter of a mesquite clump in a draw wash, and dismounted. Curiosity prompted him to climb back up the trail again, but this time he circled to the opposite side of the building. He took plenty of time and was particular about making unnecessary noises.

He came in against the wall of the building, and worked his way around to where a broken board gave him a fairly good view of the interior. The machinery had all been moved away, but there still remained the old framework of the hoist parts of the old tracks, and the huge timbers where the hoisting engine had stood.

But Miles Lane was not interested in the details of the old building. An old lantern hung from a nail in the old hoist frame, and in its faint illumination Lane could see the huge bulk of a man, his shadow dancing grotesquely on the walls, and he skinned out the carcass of a steer, which was also suspended from the hoist-frame.

Another whole beef, all dressed, hung near him. Lane could recognize him now. It was Shif'less Hill. He was working swiftly, his skinning knife flashing in the yellow light. Lane licked his lips and swallowed heavily. He could see the lantern light flash on the cartridge-heads in his belt, and against the wall near him stood a Winchester rifle. Lane was unarmed, and he suddenly realized that it might not be healthy for him, in case Shif'less suspected his presence. As though fascinated he leaned against the building and watched the big cowboy strip off the hide. He did not realize that daylight was creeping over the hills.

Shif'less finished skinning the animal and threw the hide down the shaft. Lane

ned to himself. He had plenty of evidence to send Shif'less Hill over the road a long time—in case he needed to use

he shoved away from the wall, realizing it was daylight, and crept away in the direction of his horse. He did not want Shif'less Hill to find him there.

THE three Lazy A cowboys were in a snoring trio when Cultus left the bunkhouse and went to the stable, where he saddled his horse. It was still dark, and Cultus knew that Hop would not be ready for breakfast for another hour, at least; he decided to postpone his morning meal until he reached Welcome Creek.

Cultus had never been to Welcome Creek, but he knew it was not over fifteen miles east of the Lazy A, and that by traveling past where Idaho Breen had found the Lazy A hides in the prospect hole, he could strike the wagon road, which led from Oreana City to the Welcome Creek

es. Cultus mounted and rode away from the house. Breen had given him a tall roan horse, which had plenty of speed, and the clear morning gave it plenty of opportunity to go ahead. The going was very good, and Cultus let the roan pick up its own speed.

Cultus had never seen the old Suicide Creek, but had heard the boys speak about it. He rode around the side of a hill and came in view of the old buildings, shortly after daylight. His horse made little noise on the sandy soil, and he was within a hundred yards of the old shaft-house, when he saw Miles Lane sneaking away from the side of the building. Cultus' horse was quickly masked by the brush; so Cultus quickly dismounted. He recognized Lane immediately. Leading his horse to the side of the shaft-house, he was able to watch the lawyer, who had taken down a dry wash, mounted his horse behind a mesquite clump, and rode quickly away, going toward the Lazy A.

"That's kinda queer," observed Cultus. "Now, just what was a lawyer doin' there this time in the mornin'?"

Cultus watched Lane ride across a ridge and disappear, before moving on down to the shaft-house. He dropped his reins and walked boldly to the sagging old door, where he stepped inside and jerked to a halt, when he found himself looking into the muzzle of a rifle in the hands of Shif'less Hill.

It was still half dark in the old building. Shifting his eyes from the menacing

gun muzzle, Cultus could see the two beeves hanging. Neither of the men spoke for several moments. The gun muzzle did not waver.

"Well, what about it?" asked Shif'less Hill in a flat voice.

A smile chased across Cultus' lips and he shook his head.

"I reckon that's up to you, Shif'less."

"Yeah? I'm wonderin' how yuh guessed I'd be here."

"I didn't," grinned Cultus.

"No? Kinda early in the mornin', ain't it?"

Cultus nodded. "Yeah. I was on my way to Welcome Creek."

"And jist stopped to look, eh?"

"Well, no-o-o. Yuh see, I didn't have no idea of stoppin' here until I seen our friend the Oreana City lawyer sneak away from outside there, grab his horse and fog for the Lazy A."

"Miles Lane?"

"That's the feller."

Cultus could see that the big cowboy was puzzled.

"What was Miles Lane doin' here?" he demanded.

"Search me; but he was here. Put down the gun, Shif'less."

"I suppose I might as well, Jones. I'm caught with the goods. If Lane is headed for the Lazy A, he'll prob'ly bring back the whole gang."

Cultus walked past him and looked at the beef. "Threw the hides in the old shaft?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Intendin' to pack the meat to Welcome Creek tonight, eh?"

The big cowboy leaned against one of the uprights and nodded gloomily. "I dunno how yuh guessed it; but yo're right."

"That wasn't hard to guess. You killed those animals that wore all them Lazy A hides——"

"That Breen found," finished Shif'less. "Yeah, I did."

"Welcome Creek was the only possible market, I figured. You couldn't sell all that beef. Breen had an idea that the Star X was the ones that was killin' off his stock; but the Star X don't need to kill beef."

"I've been killin' off Lazy A beef for over a year," said Shif'less slowly. "I couldn't handle much at a time. It's quite a job for one man. Dad wouldn't help me. He said I was a damn' fool; and I sure was. Now, what are yuh goin' to do about it?"

"How deep is this shaft?"

"Two hundred feet. There's big stopes, of course."

"All right. How could the Lazy A find those hides? Is there any way to get down there?"



"Not unless they go down on a rope."

"Which they won't do," said C u l t u s.

"Where'd they ever find a two hundred foot rope? Lane

thinks you

don't know he saw yuh; so we'll just heave them two beeves down the shaft, which will destroy all the evidence. What little blood is scattered around won't convict anybody. C'mon, let's get busy."

"What's yore game?" queried Shif'less. "Helpin' out a damn' fool."

The Lazy A was at breakfast, when Miles Lane rode in. Breen left the table and met him at the front door.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Breen. "You look pretty tough, Miles."

The lawyer took hold of Breen's sleeve and drew him off the porch and around the corner.

"Is Jones and the girl still here?" he asked.

"The girl is; Jones has gone to Welcome Creek. What's the matter?"

Lane drew out the newspaper clipping and showed it to Breen.

"There's what's the matter, Idaho. Jack Keene is dead. Look at the date-line on that paper. That girl's name is Janice Lee, and she's dead."

Idaho lifted his eyes from the paper, staring blankly at the lawyer. "But what does it mean?" he whispered.

"What does it mean? It means that this girl is not Janice Lee; that she is somebody else! This is not the girl Jack Keene sent us. We've been double-crossed, Idaho!"

"You think——?"

"I know! What's behind it—I don't know. But this girl came on the same train with Jones, the detective. Idaho, we've got to work fast. They don't know that I know this; so that helps."

"Does anybody else know it, Miles?"

"Shif'less Hill. He gave me the clipping."

"Then we've got to stop him from meetin' Jones. I'll bet Jones knows that Keene is dead, and he figures we don't. If he

knows that we know——"

"I've got the goods on Shif'less Hill!" exclaimed Lane, and then he told of seeing Shif'less butchering cattle in the old shaft-house of the Suicide mine.

"By God, we'll get him!" snorted Breen. "Here's what we'll do. You beat it for town and get the papers. I'll send the boys over to investigate this butcherin' and we'll make this female sign the papers while they're gone. Jones is headin' for Welcome Creek, and when he comes back we'll settle with him."

"And turn this girl loose to tell all she knows?"

"What you don't know won't hurt yuh. Get yore bronc and go after them papers."

Lane got his horse and rode back toward Oreana City, while Breen went back to the dining-room. The cowboys were rolling their after-breakfast cigarettes when Breen called them outside.

"You fellers saddle up and go to the old Suicide mine," he ordered. "Lane just brought word that somebody has been doin' a job of butcherin' down there in the old shaft-house, and we've got a hunch that Shif'less Hill is the one who has been doin' it. If yuh find Hill around there, yuh better watch him."

"All right," said Pie Ide shortly. "Supposin' we go and get him, Idaho?"

"Yo're runnin' that end of it, Pie," said Idaho grimly. "Better be sure—first Shif'less will fight. He threw the hides in the old shaft, and the devil himself couldn't get down there to find 'em; so we've got to take a chance that he killed Lazy A cattle. You'll find the beef in the shaft-house."

The cowboys hurried after their horses. Not that they disliked Shif'less Hill, but that they desired action. They rode away with their rifles, and Idaho went back to the house, where he found Mary in the living-room.

"I'm goin' to talk turkey to you," he told her. "In an hour or so, Miles Lane will be out here with the papers for you to sign—and you better sign 'em without any argument; sabe?"

"What papers, Mr. Breen?" Mary was frightened at Breen's tone.

"The bill of sale to the Lazy A," growled Breen. "He'll have it all made out, and all you'll have to do is to sign 'em. You turn the whole works over to me."

"I give you a bill of sale to the Lazy A ranch?"

"Yuh sure do, young lady. As soon as that's done I'll take you to Oreana City and



p yuh back where yuh came from. een walked over to a front window and nced out. He was just a little suspius of Jones of Oklahoma. Suddenly turned and glared at Mary, who stood side the center table, looking at him.

"You and yore detective friend thought n was damn' smart, didn't yuh?" he said. happen to know that yo're not the girl o was supposed to come here. What do n think of that?" He came toward her, rin on his hard face. "Yeah, I know all out it. You think yo're goin' to get a ousand dollars for signin' them papers. t, ha, ha, ha, ha! You poor little fool! d you think you was foolin' me?"

"Set down! Scared, eh? You need to Do you think I'm goin' to let you beat out of a million dollars? No, I'm not n' to put my hands on yuh. Yore end has gone to Welcome Creek, and he n't be back until later; so yuh don't need look toward the window. You won't be e when he comes back, and I'll be here to bcome him. I don't like detectives."

Mary sat down in a chair beside the ta- , wondering what to do. She was afraid Breen. From a window she had seen t he cowboys ride away. Hop was in the kitchen, wash- ing dishes, but she knew she could expect no help from him.

"Where are you going to send me?" she asked helplessly.

"Where?" Breen laughed shortly. *Quien sabe*. Understand Spanish? That's anish for 'who knows?' Ha, ha, ha, ha! no knows where we'll send you. Why, a poor little fool, where can we send you where you can't talk? And we can't you talk about this."

"If I promise not to——"  
"Promise! What's a promise of that d? Set still! You act sensible and n those papers, and we'll see about your omises—Mary Ault!" Breen laughed ashly. "Mary Ault! And you tried to l me."

Cultus and Shif'less rode away from the mine, heading toward the Cross Arrow. f'less was still a little mystified as to y Cultus had helped him destroy the dence. They had left nothing for the y A to find as evidence, unless they e willing to search the two hundred foot

level of the crumbling old shaft.

"I reckon Mr. Lane didn't lose any time in tellin' Breen what he saw back there," observed Cultus.

Shif'less nodded gloomily. "Prob'ly not, Jones. I don't sabe what Lane was doin' there at that time in the mornin'."

"I don't know. Shif'less, I've heard that you kinda think a lot of Faith Keene."

Shif'less turned in his saddle. "You heard it, did yuh?"

"That's nothin' ag'in yuh, cowboy. Why don't yuh marry her?"

"Plenty of reasons, I reckon. In the first place, I dunno if she'd marry me if she could, and in the second place—she's still got a husband."

"Well," smiled Cultus, "yuh can easy find out the first part of it, and in the second place, jist between me and you, her husband is dead."

Shif'less stared at Cultus.

"How do yuh know, Jones?"

"I happened to be there when he was killed. I didn't know it at the time, but I seen his picture later, and it was the face of a feller they called Loring, a cheap lawyer in Frisco."

Shif'less nodded quickly. "There was two men killed—and a woman. Her name was Janice Lee."

Cultus leaned closer to him. "How do you know that?"

It did not take Shif'less long to explain about finding it in the paper.

"I took it to Lane," he said. "Lane was Keene's friend, and I thought——"

"You took it to him last night?" Cultus jerked up his horse.

"Yeah."

"Good gosh!" exploded Cultus. "And Lane has gone to meet Idaho Breen. Listen, Shif'less; you go to town. If Breen or Lane show up there with that girl—Mary Ault—stop 'em. No, I can't tell yuh why. Just stop 'em, and then come out to the Lazy A."

Cultus whirled his horse around, drew his hat down over his eyes, and sent the roan on a stiff gallop back toward the Lazy A. He realized that the newspaper clipping would prove to Lane and Breen that Mary Smith was an impostor. It was something unforeseen, and Cultus knew that Breen would stop at nothing now to get control of the Lazy A.

AND about the time that Cultus had found out about the newspaper clipping, Miles Lane was riding back to the Lazy A with the papers for Mary to

sign. He had had them prepared for days. They were snake-tight, and all they needed was the signature of Mary Ault, and his own, as notary public. He had made the imprint of his seal before he left the office.

Her signature would make Idaho Jim Breen owner of the Lazy A estate, and Idaho Breen would take Miles Lane in as a full partner in the holdings. Even the partnership papers were all prepared. Lane was very thorough in his crooked work.

He rode his lathering horse up to the ranch-house and went in. Mary was sitting beside the table, her face very white. On a chair against the wall sat Idaho Breen. He had been drinking from a bottle, and was just drunk enough to be alert.

"Got everythin' ready?" he asked. Lane nodded and spread the papers on the table. "Get the pen and ink, Idaho."

Mary stared at the typewritten sheets.

"Take a good look at 'em, sister," laughed Breen, as he came with the pen and ink and placed them on the table.

Lane dipped the pen in ink and handed it to her, placing his finger on the ruled line. "Put your name right there. Just write Mary Ault."

Mary looked up at them, her hand trembling. "But that isn't my name."

"Nobody knows it better than we do," laughed Breen. "Write it out, and we'll take a chance on it. You wasn't supposed to come here, yuh know."

"Suppose I refuse to sign," Mary shut her lips and looked defiantly at Breen. "You can't make me sign."

"Tryin' a holdup, eh? No good, my dear. Everybody knows you are the owner of the Lazy A, and if yuh refuse to sign, we'll fake a signature."

"And I'll swear it isn't mine—and prove it."

Breen's jaw tightened and he leaned closer to Mary. "No, yuh won't; you won't prove anythin'. If you've got a lick of sense, you'll sign that paper right now."

Mary took the pen and signed the name of Mary Ault. There was nothing else for her to do. Breen laughed softly, as Lane handed him the paper, and reached for the bottle.

"Better go easy on that stuff," advised Lane. "We're not out of the woods yet."

Breen took a big drink and put the bottle on the floor. He turned to Mary, who still held the pen in her hand.

"Git dressed for travelin'," he ordered. "Pack yore suitcase. In ten minutes we're pullin' out. *Poco tiempo!*"

He turned to Lane. "You stay here with her, while I hitch up a team to the buggy."

Mary walked back to her room and packed her clothes. She put a few things in the suitcase, but did not bother to pack the trunk. She had not worn any of Janice Lee's clothes, as she had not been out of the house since her arrival.

She was glad to leave the Lazy A, but down in her heart was a fear that these two men were not through with her yet. She had been living in sort of a daze ever since that night at the restaurant in San Francisco. And when she had asked Breen where he was going to send her, he had said, "*Quien sabe*"—who knows?

She carried the suitcase in to the living-room and sat down in an old rocking-chair. Lane was helping himself to Breen's bottle, and his hand trembled as he looked at Mary.

Breen was hitching up a pair of vicious-looking grays, a half broken team. He was obliged to tie them to the corral fence and drag the buggy around to them. As soon as they were hitched he went to the house and flung open the front door.

"You pull out ahead of us, Miles," he growled. "Hit the grit, hombre, because we'll need an open road."

Lane placed the bottle on the table and walked out, going straight to his horse, which he mounted and rode swiftly away.

"What about my trunk?" asked Mary. Breen turned from watching Lane gallop out of sight.

"You don't need to worry about that."

Mary shivered slightly, as Breen emptied the bottle down his throat and threw the bottle viciously aside. He picked up her suitcase and pointed toward the door.

"Start goin'," he growled. Mary preceded him from the house and they went down to the corral, where the gray team humped angrily under the feel of the harness.

Breen threw her suitcase in the back of the buggy and motioned her to get in. As she sat down and looked at him, he had turned and was staring past the end of the stable. Then he began running toward the front of the stable, which was near the main gate.

He was within twenty yards of the gate when Cultus came in sight, swinging his horse toward the gate. Mary saw Breen jerk to a stop, throwing up his right hand, which held a six-shooter. She tried to cry out to Cultus, who was partly masked from Breen by the huge gate-post, but be-

ore she could utter any sound Cultus turned to come through the gate, and Breen fired.

Cultus jerked sideways from the shock of the heavy bullet, and his tall roan whirled quickly, throwing Cultus heavily just inside the enclosure. The horse trotted a few yards away, whirled in against the fence and stopped, looking back at its rider.

Breen ran up to him and quickly turned him over. Evidently satisfied that Cultus was out of the game for good, he ran back to the buggy and untied the horses, which were still jerking nervously from the sound of the revolver shot.

He climbed in beside Mary, whirled the team around and went out through the gate at racing speed. The lurch of the buggy almost threw Mary out, and she did not get a look at Cultus as they raced past. Breen did not try to check the horses. His jaw was set tightly, and Mary could see that his lips were white. He did not speak or look at her.

Mary had only been over the road once, but she knew it was even more dangerous than the one she had ridden over in the runaway the night she came to Oreana City. About a mile below the Lazy A the road looped around over some dizzy grades above a deep canyon, and she remembered that Cultus had remarked that it was a place where a driver was only allowed one mistake.

She looked at Breen, wondering why he did not make any attempt to check the running team. He was crouched on the edge of the seat, his feet drawn well under him, his eyes shut to mere slits, as the buggy lurched and bounded over the uneven road. They whirled down through a swale, where the mesquite ripped along the wheels and sides, like the sound of tearing silk.

A rock sent them skidding wildly, but the buggy did not upset. It threw Mary to her knees, but Breen, ripping out an oath, yanked her back in the seat, his elbow striking her in the mouth, as he recovered his balance. She threw up both hands to protect her face, and the next instant Breen had flung himself clear of the buggy. Mary whirled around, trying to see him, but he was blotted out in a swirl of dust.

She jerked around in the seat, and saw

just ahead of her the beginning of the grades around the deep canyon. There was nothing she could do now. To attempt a jump from the buggy would mean that she would have to choose between falling into the canyon or being smashed against the rocky side of the grade.

The two horses were running at top speed, their bellies low to the ground, the lines whipping through the air, the buggy and its one occupant bounding along behind them. Mary tried to pray, but she was so dazed, so frightened that she could only hang on.

They whirled around the first turn on two wheels, straightened perilously near the outer edge, and headed for the next sharp curve. It was a sharp turn to the right, and on the left hand side was an old washout, filled with brush.

But the running team turned too late, and the inside wheels of the buggy smashed against the wall. Came a whirl of dust and gravel, a cataclysm of overturned buggy, flying hoofs, the scream of a horse, and the outfit hurtled over the edge, dropping straight down for fifty feet, where it struck the apex of a broken ledge, seemed to hang for a moment, and then went crashing and rolling into the bottom of the gorge a hundred feet below.

CULTUS had seen Idaho Breen just before the shot was fired, and before the shock of the bullet had knocked him unconscious he knew that Breen had shot him. He was shocked back to consciousness by a deluge of cold water, and opened his eyes to see Hop, the Chinese cook, standing over him, bucket in hand.

"You hu't pletty damn' bad?" queried the Chinaman anxiously.

Cultus struggled to a sitting position, clamping his jaws to hold back the exclamation of pain which came to his lips. It seemed that a red-hot iron was searing deeply in his left shoulder. He panted for several moments, while cold perspiration dripped from his face.

But his mind cleared rapidly, and the Chinaman helped him to his feet. He wasn't just sure why Breen had shot him. He felt for his gun and found it still in the holster.

"Why did he shoot me?" asked Cultus hoarsely.

The Chinaman shook his head. "Do' know. I not see; I hea'."

Cultus looked vaguely around, as though trying to see Breen.



"He go 'way," said Hop. "He take li' missie 'way in buggy. Mebbe go town. Go like hell. Team lun 'way. Yo' sabe?"

"Team run away?"

"Plitty bad team; not bloke yet."

"For gosh sake!" Cultus wiped the back of a hand across his eyes. "Hop, was Miles Lane here today?"

"Yessa. He lide 'way jus' befo' you come. Lide damn' fast."

"That's it," muttered Cultus. "A run-away team—and those grades. Oh, Hop, I've been a fool."

Cultus went gropingly out to his horse, which did not try to get away from him. He climbed into the saddle, forgetting to pick up his sombrero, and spurred the animal savagely through the gateway and down the road toward Oreana City. His shoulder was bleeding and he was racked with pain, but he shut his teeth against the hurt and weakness and drove the roan at racing speed, feeling down in his heart that nothing could save Mary Smith now.

The tall roan slowed down the moment they struck the grade, and Cultus, half blinded by pain and weakness, swayed in

the saddle, as he peered over the edge of the grade, knowing that only a miracle could prevent the running team from disaster.

The first curve showed nothing, except that wheels had torn

deeply into the outer edge of the grade. But at the next turn he found the left front wheel of the buggy, which had torn off from the impact against the rocky wall. Here was also plenty of evidence that something had gone off the edge, as the grade was sloughed off.

Cultus dismounted and leaned against his horse, trying to overcome the dizziness which caused his knees to sag. He tried to walk around the horse toward the edge of the grade, but he staggered like a drunken man and fell to his knees.

"Keep a-goin', you quitter!" he muttered bitterly. "Are yuh goin' to let yore own body lay down on yuh?" He stopped talking to himself and his eyes focused sharply on a spot in the brush on the left side of the road.

Then he lurched to his feet, staggered off the road and tore his way into the brush,

where Mary Smith was half lying, half sitting in the brush, her eyes open, a smea of blood across her face. When the buggy struck the rocky wall it had thrown her to the uphill side of the grade, and into the tangle of brush.

Cultus went to his knees beside her, trying to disentangle her from the brush while she looked at him dazedly. Summoning all of his strength he lifted her from the brush and carried her back to the road, where he went to his knees again.

"Mary Smith," he said brokenly. "Mary Smith!"

Her eyes were open and she did not seem badly hurt, but she did not know him.

"I—I wanted to answer your note," she told him. "But they watched me too closely. I wanted to see you again."

She began crying softly, and Cultus pawed clumsily at her hair, trying to soothe her.

"Yean, I know," he whispered. She thought she was talking to Dude Wheeler. And Cultus knew.

"Where's Idaho Breen?" he asked. Mary stared up at him. The question stirred something in her mind.

"He jumped," she said simply.

Cultus nodded. "I thought he did."

Cultus managed to catch his horse. It was a difficult job for him to get into the saddle with Mary Smith, but he did it. The tall roan went slowly, while Cultus reeled in the saddle, his arms locked around Mary Smith. Cultus forgot that he had been shot. It was a nightmare, he thought. Someone was coming down the grade toward him, and he laughed foolishly.

The man came up to him, shoving his horse in close. Now he was trying to take Mary Smith away from him. Cultus tried to prevent this. The man was talking to him, imploring him to let him take the girl. Cultus wanted to draw his gun on the man, but didn't dare let loose of Mary with his right hand. It seemed to Cultus that he had lost his left hand.

The man's voice seemed familiar, and Cultus tried to remember who he was. It suddenly dawned upon him that this man was Dude Wheeler, and he laughed aloud at the queer kinks of a nightmare.

"Let me have her, Jones," begged Dude. "Man, you're hurt!"

This statement seemed to drive the mists from Cultus' brain. He could see Dude Wheeler plainly now, feel the surge of Dude's sorrel against the roan.

"I want her, Jones," said Dude.

"Aw-ri'," Cultus nodded drunkenly.



he wants you, I—I reckon.”  
 He released his hold on Mary and let her have her. He reeled in his saddle and grasped the horn for support.  
 “Got me pullin’ leather,” he grimaced angrily.

“Who shot yuh, Jones?”  
 “Who?” Cultus didn’t seem to remember. “Oh, that was a long time ago.”  
 “I met Idaho Breen. He’s headin’ town for help. The team ran away, and he had Mary was at the bottom of the canyon.”

“Headin’ for town?” Cultus laughed lightly.

“But who shot you, Jones? You’ve been shot, ain’t yuh?”

“I s’pose I have. I don’t remember, but I do remember somethin’ about it.”  
 He stared at Dude. “Yuh say Idaho Breen is headin’ for town? Was that today, Dude?”

“Not ten minutes ago, Jones.”  
 “Well, that’s funny. It seems so long ago.”

“You’ve got to get a doctor, Jones. We’ll go to town, if yuh think you can ride.”

Cultus laughed. “Why not?” He rubbed a hand across his eyes. “There’s Mary Smith to think about,” he said slowly. “Mary Smith?” said Dude. “Not Mary, it?”

“Mary Elizabeth Smith. I’m Jones from Oklahoma. We’re both liars, Dude. But she ain’t a liar—I lied for both. But I’ve got to lie to clean up a crooked man. They were lootin’ the Lazy A; stealin’ from a dead man and a widder. We got to go to town today.”

Dude was staring at him, wondering what he meant. Mary looked up at Dude, puzzled expression in her eyes.

“What was it?” she whispered. Dude looked down at her, his arms tightening instinctively.

“It’s all right, Mary,” he said. “Don’t worry.”

“I’m not worrying,” she said. “I—I never you’d come.”

Cultus swayed weakly, spurred his horse past Dude, who swung around, and they headed for Oreana City.

Miles Lane lost no time in getting back to Oreana City. He had no idea what plans Idaho Breen might have, but Lane was just wise enough to absent himself to town, where he could have a good alibi. He stabled his horse and headed for his office, just as the three cowboys from the Lazy A rode in. He waited for them at

the Oreana hitch-rack, and received a scowl from Pie Ide.

“You and yore derved evidence!” snorted Pie, as he turned from the rack. “We couldn’t find a thing at the old mine.”

“Did you look in the shaft?”  
 “Two hundred feet down?” Pie hooked

his thumbs over his belt and glared at the attorney. “Every time I look at you, Lane, I wonder how much real brains it takes to git admitted to the bar. If yo’re capable of bein’ an attorney, any dang’d one of us punchers is capable of bein’ a supreme court judge.”

“You can’t talk to me like that!” Lane fairly bristled.

Little Mex Leone shoved Pie Ide aside and faced Lane.

“What he jist said goes double for me,” said Mex. “I’m the smallest one of the bunch, and I’m plumb willin’ to hear all the war-talk you can bring up.”

Lane turned on his heel and walked away, while the three cowpunchers guff-



went loudly and went toward the Oreana, their spurs rasping belligerently. Shif’less Hill had ridden into town ahead of the Lazy A bunch, and they

found him in the Oreana saloon.

A reckless spirit prompted Omaha Woods to call Shif’less aside, and he did not mince matters when he told him of the report Miles Lane had brought to Idaho Breen. Shif’less said nothing to affirm or deny Lane’s report.

“Breen sent us down there to investigate,” said Omaha. “But we didn’t find a thing. I’m jist tellin’ yuh this for yore own benefit, Shif’less; not tryin’ to start anythin’ with yuh.”

“Much obliged, Omaha,” drawled Shif’less. “That’s shore kind of yuh.”

Shif’less moved slowly from the saloon and went across the street to the store, where he bought a bag of peanuts. Then he came out, crunching them between his strong teeth, and went to Miles Lane’s office. The attorney started slightly at sight of the big cowboy, but relaxed with a forced smile.

“You don’t look very well,” said Shif’less. “Kinda chalky around the gills.”

Lane swallowed heavily and shifted his position. “No, I’m all right.”

“Physically?”

“Why, yes, certainly. What did you mean, Shif’less?”

"Morally," Shif'less crunched slowly on some peanuts. "You always pretended to be my best friend, and so yuh sneaked out to the old Suicide mine and tried to put the deadwood on me."

"Why—uh—no, no! Shif'less, who told you that? I—I got lost last night, and—listen, I—I—"

Lane stopped to swallow. He didn't like the expression in the eyes of the big cowboy.

"You've got the loop around yore feet," said Shif'less. "You sent the Lazy A gang out to get me, Miles Lane."

"But they didn't find anything. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I knew they wouldn't find—uh—listen, Shif'less; that was—"

"You was tryin' to play a joke on me, eh?" Shif'less dusted his hands on the knees of his chaps. "You thought it would be awful funny to me to git hung. You've shore got a sense of humor."

Lane was speechless, but his brain was working swiftly. He was in a precarious position, and he knew it well.

"I runs across Jones, the detective," said Shif'less. "He knowed that Jack Keene was dead; so I told him about what I found in the paper, and he went whalin' back toward the Lazy A. He's a queer sort of a jigger. He saw you sneak away from the old mine this mornin', Miles."

"He knew about Jack Keene?"

"Shore did. Said he saw Jack git shot."

"My God! Then that girl—" Lane stopped, realizing that he was talking too much. His hand shook, as he reached into a desk drawer, getting to his feet as he did so, to mask the fact that he had taken a gun from the desk.

"What about the girl?" asked Shif'less.

"None of your business!" rasped Lane, and he turned end walked to the doorway, his mind in a whirl. He was afraid of Jones of Oklahoma, who had seen Jack Keene killed. He wanted to see Idaho Breen. If Idaho Breen was bringing that girl to Oreana City, he should be here by this time, he thought. What could be keeping him? Had Jones reached the Lazy A before Idaho and the girl were ready to leave, he wondered?

He saw Cleve Sears, the pudgy sheriff, coming up the street. Lane swung away from the office and hurried down to meet the sheriff, while Shif'less sauntered to the office door and saw them meet farther down the street.

"Hyah, Miles," puffed the sheriff. "How are yuh t'day?"

"Don't look toward my office," cautioned

Lane. "Shif'less Hill is watching us. I saw him butchering cattle at the old Suicide mine early this morning—in the shaft-house. The boys from the Lazy A went there to get him, but he had thrown all the evidence into the shaft. There must be a way to recover it, Cleve; so you better arrest Shif'less and put him in jail. But look out for him. He knows I saw him, and he probably knows I'm telling you about it now."

The sheriff nodded slowly. "Are yuh sure, Miles?"

"Sure? Why, I saw him. He wouldn't be butchering his own cattle up there in that old building. All we've got to do is to get the evidence out of the shaft."

"And it's two hundred feet deep. But I'll arrest him, if yuh say so, Miles; and you can swear out the warrant later."

"That's all right, Cleve; I'll do it."

Lane crossed the street, headed for the livery stable, and Shif'less walked swiftly across to the Oreana saloon. The sheriff hesitated for several moments. He hated to arrest this big cowboy. He had known Shif'less for years, and it was like arresting his brother. Shif'less had disappeared in the saloon, when the sheriff started across the street.

But Shif'less did not stop in the saloon. He surmised that Lane had told the sheriff; so he walked straight through the saloon, went out the rear entrance and circled around to the livery stable, where he went inside.

The stableman had led out Lane's saddle horse, and was assisting Lane in saddling it. Neither of them heard Shif'less come in and Lane did not see him until he turned his head and saw the big cowboy leaning against the side of the stall, six feet away. Lane's eyes hardened and his right hand fumbled at his coat pocket.

"Yuh hadn't ought to do that," warned Shif'less. "Yuh know I seen yuh put a gun in that pocket, and I'm superstitious."

Lane dropped his hand and reached for the reins.

"You ain't goin' nowhere," said Shif'less quietly. He turned to the mystified stableman. "You can yank the hull off that critter and tie him back to the hay-box. Mr. Lane ain't goin' ridin'—not yet."

"What in hell do you mean?" asked Lane angrily. "Since when did you start tellin' me what to do?"

"Well," smiled Shif'less, "Mr. Jones told me to kinda keep an eye on you, Lane; and I'm not goin' to ride herd on yuh, that's a

cinch. You told Cleve Sears to arrest me, didn't yuh? No, yuh don't need to lie about it."

"You poor fool!" panted Lane. "Do you think you can keep me from doing what I please?"

"I dunno, Miles. It might be worth an experiment. Supposin' you jist make a break."

Lane flapped his arms helplessly. Something seemed to tell him that Shifless Hill was dangerous, in spite of his lazy grin, and he knew that he could never get a gun from the side pocket of his coat

as quickly as Shifless could draw from his holster.

"All right; put the horse up," he said hoarsely. "I'll probably be back for him pretty soon; so you don't need

to bother taking the saddle off."

Lane walked out the wide entrance, and Shifless came behind him. There was no sign of the sheriff, but a man was running down the middle of the street—Idaho Green!

"What's the matter with him?" gasped Miles Lane, as Idaho stumbled across the sidewalk and into the Oreana saloon. There was no one to answer Lane; so he started running toward the saloon, followed by Shifless, who ran awkwardly in his high-heeled boots.

Faith Keene and her little boy came down a cross street and stopped to let the two running men pass her. Shifless stopped short beside her.

"What is the matter, Shifless?" she asked anxiously. He shook his head. "I don't know, Faith." It was the first time she had ever called her Faith. "There's somethin' wrong, and it affects the Lazy A ranch. I don't sabe it. But I want to tell you somethin', Faith; Jack Keene is dead. He's been dead quite a while."

She stared at him wonderingly. "Jack Keene dead, Shifless?"

"Yeah. I found it out last night. You better take the boy over to the store. I dunno what this all means, but yuh better get him in a safe place. Here comes the Star X outfit—and the Lazy A boys are already here."

Faith nodded and hurried the little boy across the street, while Shifless went

straight to the Oreana saloon, where an excited crowd of men listened to Idaho Breen's story of how his team had run away, thrown him out, and had gone over the edge of the grade with Mary Ault.

"Aw, she couldn't go over that edge and live," declared Pie Ide. "So whatsa use of gettin' the doctor?"

"The whole works went over," panted Idaho. "I ran all the way to town. Couldn't do anythin' alone. She didn't like it out there; so she sold out to me today." He stopped to get his breath. "I didn't have the money to buy it—not enough to pay it all, because she wanted a big price—but I've got it—got a bill of sale. My God, it's awful! I was bringin' her down early; so she could get a train back to San Francisco."

"Well, you couldn't help it," said someone. "Gosh, that's an awful way to pass out. Yuh can see it comin'."

"Well, let's get out there!" snorted Pie Ide. Lane had already joined the crowd, and a few moments later Shifless walked in, followed by Buck Wing, Heinie, Moriarity, Klondike Evans and Joe Chevrier.

The sheriff backed against the bar, forgetting all about arresting Shifless in his fear that the Lazy A and the Star X outfits might pick up the battle where they had left off the night Mary came to town. The Star X boys halted just inside the place, and the sheriff seemed to think that this was an opportune time to take their mind off any possible continuation of the feud.

"Don't start anythin', boys," he said warningly, speaking to Buck Wing who was in the lead. "This is no time to start trouble. Miss Ault has jist been killed in a runaway, and we're goin' out to get her."

The sheriff stopped. For several moments no one spoke. Lane stepped in close to the sheriff and touched him on the arm.

"Get Shifless Hill," he said. Shifless was only a few feet away, but made no move to get away. The sheriff scowled at Lane, but stepped over to Shifless, who still made no move.

"Shifless, I've got to arrest yuh for butcherin' Lazy A beef," he said slowly. "Miles Lane says he seen yuh doin' it; so there ain't nothin' I can do."

"Thasall right, Cleve."

"The rest of you jiggers get yore horses. Somebody get a rig at the stable, and somebody else rustle the doctor," said the sheriff.

The crowd made a break for the front door, fairly shoving Shifless and the sher-



iff outside. Just across the narrow street a small group had gathered around the figure of a woman. Faith Keene was on her knees beside the figure, talking to Dude Wheeler.

Coming across the street toward the Orena saloon was the man whom they knew as Jones of Oklahoma. His shirt was plastered with blood from the wound in his left shoulder, and he shambled in his walk, as though his knees were jointless. His face was dirty, bloody, but his jaws were tight and there was hardly a line to show where his lips were. Breen had been shoved out at the forefront of the crowd, as was Miles Lane.

"What in thunder happened to you?" gasped the sheriff.

Cultus stopped, bracing his feet far apart, his half shut eyes fixed upon Idaho Breen, who had whirled sideways, as though to try to force his way back through the crowd.

"Breen, don't move!" Cultus' voice croaked like that of a raven. Breen was half turned around, as the men behind him fought to get out of line.

"Don't move, Lane!" It was hardly more than a whisper.

"What is it?" panted the sheriff. He had forgotten that he had a prisoner. "What's wrong with you, Jones?"

"He's been shot!" said someone.

"Plumb loco."

"Blood all over him. Look out for him, boys."

"Don't move, Breen!" It was a weak warning. "You bushwhacker! You dirty murderer, thief! You tried to steal the Lazy A. Oh, I've got the goods on you. I seen Jack Keene killed. I know your game. And you tried to murder that girl to cover your steal—you and Miles Lane!"

Idaho Breen was game. His hand flashed back to his holster; came back so swiftly that few saw him make his draw, but the bloody-faced cowboy, bracing his knees to stay on his feet, only made one move. His right hand, dangling loosely at his side, flipped up and forward, firing the gun almost as it left the holster.

Came the crash of breaking glass in the store-front across the street, when Breen's bullet missed Cultus by several feet, and Breen pitched forward on his face, flinging his gun almost out to Cultus' feet.

For a moment everyone had forgotten Miles Lane. He darted sideways, running swiftly toward the hitch-rack, taking a chance that no one would shoot at him for fear of killing a horse. He had drawn a

gun. The crowd surged toward him, hardly knowing what to do. Cultus was running slowly toward the hitch-rack, cutting across in an angle to try and prevent Lane from going north.

Swiftly Lane untied a wicked-looking gray horse, which bore the Star X brand. The horse whirled madly as Lane caught a foot in the stirrup, and he was forced to drop his gun in order to make the mount.

Again the horse whirled, as Cultus ran toward it, and Lane's right knee was atop the saddle, fighting to keep his balance. He managed to get seated, but before he could swing the horse around Cultus had flung one arm around the frightened animal's head, swinging sideways with his whole weight.

With a scream of rage and fright the Star X gray seemed to fairly pin-wheel on one front leg, and crashed down on its right side, flinging Lane under the feet of several rearing, pulling broncos, which were doing their best to break away.

Quickly the crowd rushed in, cut the horses loose and got Lane, while some of them lifted Cultus out of the dirt and carried him away from the hitch-rack. He sat up and looked around, a half grin on his grimy face.

"By God, that's bull-doggin' 'em!" snorted Pie Ide, propping Cultus' head against his knee. "How are yuh, Jones?"

The sheriff shoved his way to Cultus. "Breen's dead," he said. "We've sent for the doctor for Lane. Hey! Are yuh listenin' to me? That Ault girl ain't dead! She's over there across the street. What's it all about, Jones? Did Breen shoot yuh?"

Cultus looked up at him. "Is Lane badly hurt?"

"He shore is! Kicked and tromped all to pieces."

"Help me up, will yuh?"

They helped Cultus to his feet, and Buck Wing and Pie Ide assisted him over to where Lane was lying. The doctor was just looking him over when they arrived. Lane was conscious, but badly hurt. He scowled at Cultus and groaned under the examination of the doctor.

Cultus looked up to see Mary Smith, Faith Keene, Dude Wheeler and Shif'less Hill. Mary Smith was very pale, weak, but beyond the shock of her fall and a few minor bruises she was all right. The doctor shook his head and got to his feet.

"That means I'm all through, eh?" whispered Lane. "Tell me the truth, Doc."

"I'm sorry, Lane; you're right."



"Breen?" he asked, his eyes fixed on Cultus.

"He's gone," said the sheriff. Lane tried to smile, but the pain was too much. "Did Jack Keene shoot Jud Ault?" asked Cultus. Lane shifted his eyes and looked at Faith, who was looking down at him,

her eyes wide with amazement and fright. Lane slowly shook his head.

"Breen shot him," he said wearily.

"Breen did?" Lane turned his head and looked at Cultus.

"You know he shot Jones. He's gone; so it won't hurt any."

Then Cultus knew that Jack Keene had shot Jud Ault, but that Miles Lane was trying to save a headache for Faith.

"I was sure he did," replied Cultus. "Let's clear it all up this time, Lane. Was Shif'less Hill guilty of what you said?"

"I—I—" Lane shook his head. "No, you can drop it, Sheriff. Shif'less is all right. The Lazy A will was a lie. Breen and I made one to suit us and I had Jud Ault sign it. He thought he was signing what he'd dictated. Idaho Breen and I were going to steal the ranch. I can swear to you all that Faith Keene owns the Lazy A. There is no Mary Ault. We'd have made it all right, if it hadn't been for Jones of Oklahoma. Why don't you light the lamps? I don't know why it gets dark so early. Idaho, what about—that—girl? Book — out — for — Jones — right — on — that — line. Idaho, we're—lost——"

The crowd turned away. Cultus was straying in his tracks, when Shif'less caught him. Mary ran to him, grasping his hands. He tried to smile at her, but it was only a grimace. He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to see Dude Wheeler. "Good boy, Jones," whispered Dude. "You sure cleaned up the crooks. We'll get you to the doctor."

"I'm all right," whispered Cultus. "You look out for Mary."

"I hope to, Jones; all my life." Cultus looked at Mary. Everything was hazy, and her face seemed to stand out from the fog, as it did the night he met her in San Francisco. She was smiling through her tears.

"I wanted you to know it first," she said. "I am going to marry Dude Wheeler. Jones of Oklahoma, you have almost killed yourself bringing me happiness."

"I—I think it was worth it, Mary Elizabeth," he said, trying to smile.

THEY seemed to fade out and he was talking to Shif'less and Faith Keene.

"I've told her the whole story, Jones," said Shif'less. "She had to know that for over a year I've been stealin' Lazy A cattle, sellin' 'em to a butcher in Welcome Creek and givin' her the money; the money Jack Keene was supposed to be sendin' her. But she won't prosecute me, because she owns the Lazy A now."

"We do, Shif'less," corrected Faith. "Or soon will."

Cultus laughed softly. "I'm glad. I'm sorry for Breen and Lane, but there's enough happiness to more than balance it. Is that doctor ever goin' to quit foolin' around and do somethin' for my shoulder? I'm sure gettin' weak in the knees."

"You're all fixed up," said Faith. "This is the first time you've been rational since the shooting, three days ago. You'll be as good as new in a few days. You'll have to be, because you are going to be best man at a double wedding."

Cultus stared up at the ceiling and around the room.

"And both the Star X and the Lazy A gangs are settin' outside the house, waitin' for the doctor to tell 'em you'll get well," said Shif'less.

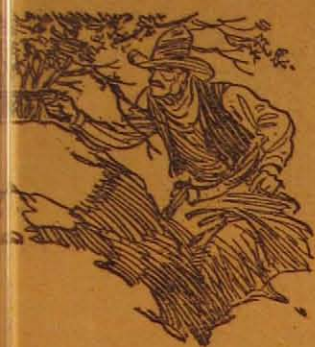
"Settin' together?" queried Cultus.

"Have been for three days. They're workin' the place in relays, like me and Faith and Dude and Mary. They'll be here soon."

"Mary has told us the whole story," said Faith softly. "Personally, I think she should have married you."

Cultus shook his head slowly, averting his eyes. "No-o-o, it's better this way. Yuh see," he turned and smiled bravely. "I'm kind of a nervous disposition, and I'd never be contented with a wife that—that was always ridin' runaways."

Shif'less laughed heartily, and wondered why it didn't sound funny to Faith—who understood. But the looting of the Lazy A was over, the feud ended; so Cultus smiled and went to sleep, realizing that he would need more strength to be best man at a wedding than he would to be best man at a gun-fight.





# IDOLS

By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of "An Aching Affair," "Bush Shadows," etc.

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THE MAJOR AND JIM THE HOTTENTOT FINALLY REACHED THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON AFTER THE LONG TREK ON WHICH THEY HAVE FOLLOWED THE RED IDOL. AND A STRANGER ADVENTURE THAN THEY HAD YET ENCOUNTERED AWAITED THEM THERE IN THE GREAT CAVERNS OF MYSTERY

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THE flames of the campfire died down; only a bed of ashes remained and their glow did little more than pick out in red highlights the features of the solitary watcher by the fire, making him look as if he were wearing a grotesque mask; giving him the appearance of a good natured gargoye.

He sat very close to the fire, his naked feet almost in the embers, and draped about his shoulders he wore several thick, woolen blankets. Even so, he shivered, and his teeth chattered together as the cold wind howled through the tops of the stunted trees. It was sub-tropical Africa, but that wind was born among the snow clad peaks of the Mountains of the Moon.

To the right and left of the watcher, perilously close to the fire, huddling together for warmth, were the figures of men; men who had been overcome by the coma-like sleep of physical exhaustion. They had trekked until they could trek no farther, and then, dropping to the ground, had not moved again—sleeping where they fell. All about them were the loads they had been carrying, loads which had grown lighter with each passing day; loads which had, strangely, seemed heavier with each forward pace. Not one of the packs had been opened, not even the one containing

food. Sleep, for once, had been more ardently desired than food.

With a palpable effort the watcher by the fire rose to his feet, letting the blankets fall from his shoulders. He stood there for a moment, stretching, yawning widely. Reflecting the fire glow, his magnificent torso, his overlong, muscular arms, his brawny thighs and calves looked as if they were hewed out of polished bronze.

Stooping, he put more logs on the fire; a shower of sparks leaped up, appearing like a swarm of fire-flies, and were swept up by the wind and emptied into the blackness of the night.

Dense clouds of smoke poured forth from the wood; clouds which momentarily brightened, breaking at length into a fierce flame which illumined the ground.

With an impatient *click*, the watcher picked up his blankets and spread them wide so that their shadow fell athwart the face of a white man who slept on a bed of cut grass some little distance away. He moaned softly in his sleep like an over tired child.

Presently the flames died down again, giving place to fragrant smoke which drove away the few tenacious mosquitoes the cold had not killed.

The watcher looked up at the black mantle of the sky, noting the location of the

Southern Cross among the myriads of stars which painted the heavens with an eerie, phosphorescent glow.

"It is time—past time," he muttered in the clicking dialect of a Hottentot. "I will go and wake the baas."

He took a few tentative, almost somnambulistic steps toward where the white man was sleeping.

Then he stopped, hesitated and returned to the fire.

He picked up a water bag and drank greedily; the rest of its contents he poured over his head, shivering as the icy stream trickled down his back and his barrel-like chest.

"Now I have no desire for sleep," he said with a soft chuckle. "I will keep both watches—the baas is tired. He has had to carry the burden of the grumbings of these many fools—" his scornful gesture embraced the sleeping carriers—"set before him. *Ai-e!* And he did more than that! The shame of it! One he carried on his back when the fool's legs could no longer support him. My baas should have left that man to die. But, if he had—he would not have been my baas!"

He sat down again beside the fire, pulling his blankets about him, staring fixedly at the flames with eyes half veiled by sleep-heavy lids.

His head dropped lower, rested at last in his up-drawn knees; his mouth sagged wide open, his eyes closed.

Time passed.

Jim, the Hottentot, slept.

There were furtive rustlings in the bush beyond the clearing of the camp; faint whispers mingled with the howling of the wind. There was a metallic clatter, instantly silenced, as of steel dropping upon a rock.

A tree hyrax screamed nearby. It was an ominous note; like the strident wailing of a child in a place where one is sure no child could be. It seemed like a blasphemous outcry against the cathedral hush of the bush.

The Hottentot opened his eyes with a start. He grinned self-consciously as he gazed all about him; at the forms of the sleeping men; at the trees beyond the circle of flickering firelight. He listened for some alien noise, a whisper from the blackness of the bush that would indicate the presence of intruders.

Finally, his eyes had seen nothing; his abnormally keen ears had heard nothing, he sighed with relief. Save for himself and the sleepers, the bush was an empty wil-

derness. There was nothing to fear save—save the blood-congealing cold. He wriggled closer to the fire, pulling his blankets yet closer about him.

There was a noise behind him; first the sharp hissing intake of breath of a man who has plunged his head into cold water, then the soft tread of booted feet.

Jim the Hottentot grinned. He could have distinguished that footfall amongst the tread of a thousand marching men.

The white man, his baas, had risen and was standing now behind him.

"Jim—it is past time, long past. You should have called me."

An unseeing listener would have said a native was speaking, so perfectly did the white man pronounce the vernacular.

"I have no need of sleep, Baas," the Hottentot replied. "I will take both watches. The baas must sleep. He has trekked far today and the way was very hard."

The white man laughed softly.

"And you—you did not trek! Is that what you would say? You rode on the back of your grandsire, a baboon. For you the way was easy. Yet, I think, but for you your baas would have perished in the quicksands; but for you, he——"

"It was nothing," the Hottentot interrupted hastily. "We are men; we do not keep a tally of such things. Even so, the count is in your favor. And, as I have said, what I did today was nothing."

"Truly," the white man murmured. "To risk one's life in order that another may live is always a small thing. But I am a man—not such a man as Jim the Hottentot; there is none like him!—therefore I will keep watch and you will sleep."

He sat down on a pack close to the Hottentot who, knowing that further expostulations were useless, spread his blankets on the ground, rolled himself up in them and prepared for sleep.

"You saw nothing, during your watch, Jim?" the white man asked.

"I saw nothing, I heard nothing, Baas. There is nothing to fear and I—" Then sleep caught him in its overpowering ambush and his words trailed off into a raucous snore.

The white man—he was known throughout South Africa, and points north, east and west, as the Major; known as a man who played all games squarely for the games' sake and not for the rewards to be won—smiled wistfully.

"Poor old Jim," he mused, drawing the words affectedly. "He's absolutely played

out. Never seen him look so beastly fagged before, and we've been together for five, ten, nearly fifteen years. But no wonder the dear old chap's tired. On top of a hard trek at an altitude which makes one's bally old heart pump overtime, he takes it upon himself to keep my watch as well as his own. The dear old fool."

He rubbed his square, clean shaven chin reflectively; his gray eyes held a half mystic, half wondering light in them.

"Yes," he continued slowly, "it's a brute of a country. Even the carriers and they're indigent to the soil, in a manner of speaking, are absolutely tuckered out. My word! The things we've been through! That beastly quagmire—miles of it; the jungle; the lava rocks; the cold, the heat; mosquitoes, flies and all manner of unclean, crawling things. The steady uphill grind. And for what?"

He fumbled in his tunic pocket and from it took a small image cut from some iron-hard wood. It was a hideous thing; carved by a master craftsman, it was a startlingly realistic representation of a bestial negro. There was something elemental about it; it suggested the dark soul of darker Africa. Glowing red in the fire-light, it looked as if it had been but recently dipped in blood.

The face was that of a West Coast native; the facial and body scarifications indicated its connection with the all powerful Egbo society. Its sinewy, clutching hands, clasped about its enormous belly, seemed indicative of its creator's ambition to subject the whole world to the rule of his people.

The Major closed his fingers upon it with a gesture of disgust.

"And I've been following the trail of the bally thing for months," his thoughts ran on. "Simply because a red-haired Johnny of a Yank told me a wild tale concerning it: of a white girl—his sister—and her uncle held prisoners in the Mountains of the Moon by natives who are plotting to end the white rule in Africa. An incredible story! Oh, absolutely! Yet—" he shook his head—"the Yank was killed because of this grinning image and—"

He was overwhelmed by an avalanche of recollections. His mind's eye was filled with visions of the perilous adventures which had befallen him since he had followed the trail of the red idol, the trail which had brought him to this place—the lower slopes of the Mountains of the Moon.

Faced with such evidence, he could not

doubt the existence of a secret society which was insinuating its influence into South African kraals.



"And yet—" his voice once again gave utterance to his thoughts—"as far as I can judge, it's not a malevolent influence. Our troubles—mine and Jim's—apart from the natural difficulties of the trail, have been instigated by men who used the society for their own benefit. And one can't judge a society by the black sheep among its members. Might as well say—for example—that all white men wear—er—monocles because I happen to do so. And I wouldn't if it were not for the fact that a monocle makes me look such an innocent chappy. And I suppose I am innocent, if it comes to that. Oh, rather! However, to resume: I fancy my account with the black sheep is settled in full. Actually, the Johnnies at the head of the bloomin' order owe me a rising vote of thanks. I shall point that out to them, if I ever meet them.

"But will I ever meet them? I have my doubts, grave doubts. I'm beginning to believe it's all a myth, quite. Here we are on the threshold of their reputed stronghold, and absolutely not a sign to show which way to turn. There's nothing here; nothing but a howling wilderness; a barren desolation over which snow-capped mountains stand guard. I don't believe there's a human being within sixty miles of us. But, of course, it may be an invisible society."

He chuckled softly.

"But now what to do? Acknowledge it's all a dream? That what Red Head told me was simply a figment of his very vivid imagination, as Jim insists? Or—"

He rose slowly to his feet and paced slowly up and down, endeavoring to marshal his thoughts in some semblance of order. Even such mild exercise affected him; his lungs strained at the rarefied air; his heart pounded with a force that threatened to release it from the confines of his powerful chest.

"We'll leave it to chance," he muttered presently as, stooping over, he placed the red idol on the ground beside Jim. "When he wakes up and sees that, his first reaction

will be to throw it in the fire—he thinks it is evil witchcraft. And I think he's right. So, if he does that we will start back tomorrow with the carriers. If, on the other hand, he checks his impulse and brings the idol to me—well, then we'll stay and see the thing through. And, somehow, I'm inclined to think we'll start back."

He sighed as a man will who turns his back on a long sought for goal and resumed his restless pacing to and fro.

He was dressed in a suit of white duck and, as he passed in and out of the circle of light thrown by the fire his appearance was ghost-like or, at least, grotesquely alien to his environment.

He halted presently at the edge of the clearing, silhouetted for a fleeting second against the blackness beyond, by a log which suddenly burst into flame.

Then—darkness encompassed him and he vanished.

There were stealthy rustlings in the undergrowth, the heavy breathing of men struggling under a heavy load.

Again silence. A silence intensified by the screaming of a hyrax.

**B**EFORE the sun rose, when the bush was a place of gray, wraith-like shadows and the mountains were shrouded with mist, the carriers awoke as if at a given signal. Silently they rose, took up some of the packs and vanished—heading south.

But Jim, the Hottentot, slept on. What need had he to fear? Was not his baas, this baas who could do no wrong, keeping watch?

His hand moved out instinctively toward the fire and his fingers brushed against the cold idol, closed on it and gripped it tightly.

**T**HE girl and the man shivered together beside the roaring fire which lighted up the deepest recesses of the cave. Occasionally a gust of wind blew in through the cave's opening, fluttering beside the heavy curtain of skins in disdain of man's feeble attempts to block its passage.

It was a cold wind, frost laden, and knocked the heat of the fire. It caused the man and girl to pull their skin coverings still closer about them.

The girl laughed softly.

"If we ever get out of this mess, uncle," she said, "and tell our friends that we nearly froze to death beside a big fire in equatorial Africa, they'll never believe us!"

Her companion nodded. He was a thin,

undersized little man. His gray beard had apparently been clumsily trimmed with blunt tools. But despite that and the greasy skins which were his only clothing, he looked like a man of affairs in the civilized world. His head was well-shaped; the big dome of his forehead suggested that he housed a brain stocked with scientific lore; and the eyeglasses he wore—even if they were cracked and in place of the black silk ribbon which in other days secured them, had a piece of knotted string—gave him the precise, intellectual appearance of a college professor.

"If we ever get out of this mess, Alice," he said slowly, "we will have far more astonishing tales to tell the world than one of being frozen. That is not astonishing when one considers the altitude of our—er—prison. But—" he sighed—"I'm afraid our chances of rescue are hopeless and this plan of yours, sheer folly. I should never have brought you on this trip—"

"Ssh, dear!" She placed her firm, shapely hand over his mouth. "You've said that a hundred and one times, and I've interrupted you a hundred and one times, just as I'm doing now. You've nothing to blame yourself for, and if I died tomorrow—I've had an awful lot of fun. Even this experience has been worth while. We haven't been treated so badly, you know. Plenty of food, plenty to drink, exercise—somewhat restricted, I'll admit—and clothes! Latest fashions from the Mountains of the Moon! What more can a girl want!"

She laughed and rubbed her hands up and down the leopard and monkey skins which—with a woman's knack of such things—she had transformed into a barbaric costume.

John Harding, Ph. D., looked proudly at his niece.

"White blood can't be beaten," he murmured.

"Of course not," the girl echoed swiftly. "Specially not when it is opposed to black. And Mondara's blood is of the blackest. In spite of his college degrees and his show of civilization's culture, he's a savage at heart and is superstitiously afraid of the mysterious men at the head of this movement. And so, I say, my plan will succeed."

Harding moved restlessly.

"I don't altogether approve, Alice. If we fail—we'll only hasten the end. Why not wait; maybe Red managed to win through and is heading a relief expedition. Perhaps this white man, Mondara talks

about, is the advance guard of the expedition—"

The girl shook her head decisively.

"No. Red was killed—poor old Red—at Lourenco Marquez. Yes; I believe Mondara about that. He's a liar, I know, but the vindictive gleam in his eyes when he told us about it was too real to be feigned. No; we've got to make a dash for it this morning. It will be easy if Mondara's afraid of his skin as I think he is. We'll make for the camp of this white man and then—" she shrugged her shoulders—"if they come after us—"

"And of course they will," Harding interposed.



"We'll die as whites should," the girl concluded calmly.

She rose, and wrapping her skins closely about her, went to the opening of the cave, holding back the skin curtain.

Two natives, armed with long-bladed spears, stood on guard. They were almost naked, yet seemed indifferent to the bitter cold.

She answered their scowling looks with a smile and stammered a few words in the vernacular. They made no response save to chuckle softly at her ludicrous pronunciation.

She drew herself erect, and braced herself to meet the furious, spasmodic gusts of wind. She looked up at the fading stars; the blackness of night was fast giving way to the somber gray of early morning. But she could see very little, would have seen less had she not known what to look for, and where.

She knew that the cave was one of the many man-made holes in the walls of a crater-like depression—an extinct volcano, her uncle said. She knew that less than two feet from where the guards were standing, the wall dropped a sheer two hundred feet to the bed of the crater, and that crater was a fertile oasis amidst a chaos of barren, snow-crowned heights.

Lightened by the mystical glow of false dawn, she could see far below, the roofs of numberless huts. The light faded,

rested for a moment on a huge, grotesque idol just to the left of the cave, then vanished. Clouds of white mist rolled down from the heights above.

The girl shivered, but a light of determination shone in her eyes as she returned to the fire.

The man looked up inquiringly.

"Is it time, Alice?"

"Soon, uncle. The false dawn has gone. I—" she laughed nervously—"I can hardly contain myself."

"You think we'd better go through with it, Alice? It's a gambler's chance at the best. If we lose—we lose everything. There'll be no hope for us. We—"

"It's the only way," she said decidedly. "We must make Mondara our prisoner and force him to show us the way out of the crater."

"I know it, Alice. Just the same, I'd like to christen this with the brute's blood."

He flourished a stone-headed club; it was just such a weapon as the first cave dweller might have wielded.

They were silent for a little while.

"Do you think he'll come, Alice?" the man said.

"He always has, uncle. So why shouldn't he this morning, of all mornings? Oh, he'll come, I have no doubt of that, and ask the same beastly question. But—" her eyes glowed—"he won't get quite the same answer."

Her hand opened and closed about the haft of a keen-bladed wooden knife she was holding.

"It will be easy," she continued, talking chiefly to calm her uncle's fears. "He will come in alone, in that insolent way of his. He makes a show of bravery, but he thinks we are unarmed. But this time we'll surprise him. We'll rush him before he has time to draw his revolver or give an alarm. And then, when he's our prisoner, he'll do anything we ask him to once he understands that we'll kill him if he refuses. He's a coward and—"

"And a little mad, I think," her uncle supplemented.

She nodded agreement.

"Yes. That's what makes him so dangerous—and our ultimate success so sure."

Rays of golden light crept into the cave, dulling the fire gleams. The tread of booted feet sounded on the rocks outside. They heard a man's voice singing a ballad of the London music halls.

"He's coming," the girl whispered and moved quickly, taking up a position behind a large boulder near to the cave's entrance.

Professor Harding rose, the stone-headed club gripped tightly in his hand, and tiptoed with exaggerated caution to an angle in the wall of the cave, directly opposite the girl. He was a ludicrous combination of modern savant and prehistoric man.

The footsteps had come to a halt, the song ended. They could hear the newcomer exchanging ribald jokes with the guards. Then sounded the patter of naked feet. The night guards had been dismissed, others had taken their place.

The skin curtain before the opening trembled; a man's voice sounded, forming the English words with precise primness. "Now I go to talk to the pretty lady," it said.

Long, black fingers appeared at the edge of the screen which bulged slightly, showing the outline of a man's form.

Suddenly the curtain screen was pulled on one side and a man entered, the screen falling into place behind him.

With half suppressed cries of triumph, Alice and her uncle swiftly closed on him. The professor aimed a blow at the intruder with the stone club but, so great was his excitement, missed, the weapon descending with a jarring blow on the man's shoulder, making him lose his balance, sending him headlong to the floor.

Transformed for the moment into a blood lustful savage, the little professor raised his weapon again but, before he could strike, the girl pushed him away.

"Don't," she cried. "Quiet! Don't you see? This is not Mondara. This is a white man."

She knelt down beside the fallen man, cutting the bonds which tied his feet loosely together; taking the gag from his mouth; voicing apologies and hasty explanations.

"It's all right, dear miss," the other said, sitting up with an effort, answering the look of deep concern in her eyes. "I'm quite all right. Quite charmed by the very warm reception you gave me. But what is it all about, if I may ask?"

The little professor, very self-conscious and ashamed of his exhibition of beserk fury, knelt down beside the stranger and gently fingered his shoulder with exploring, understanding fingers.

"Nothing broken," he exclaimed in relief. "But you'll have a most painful bruise. I aimed for your head. I'm glad I missed——"

"So am I," the other interrupted.

"You see," the girl explained breath-

lessly, "we thought you were Mondara, and——"

"I see—yes. And who is this Mondara you were prepared to greet so lovingly?"

The girl did not answer; instead, she looked helplessly at her uncle.

"I told you it was no use," that man began and finished with a dismal groan.

It had suddenly occurred to them both that their last chance of escape had vanished; that the new captive must be the



white man at whose camp they had intended to seek safety. And hard on that realization followed the thought that their jailer undoubtedly knew of their plan to escape.

The girl shrugged her shoulders in a gesture of despair; the wonderful courage and confidence which had supported her during the long months of captivity suddenly left her, and she buried her face in her hands.

Her uncle rose and crossing over to her, patted her comfortingly on the back.

Then, with startling suddenness, the other man commenced to laugh hysterically and to babble an incoherent jumble of English and native words. He bowed his head to the ground, patted the girl's feet and called her strange sounding names.

She drew back with a little cry of fear, thinking that the stranger had gone suddenly mad. She looked to her uncle for an explanation and, when that man winked meaningly at her, she understood vaguely the reason for it all.

A high tittering laugh drew her attention to the entrance to the cave and she turned in time to see a man enter.

He was dressed in a loud plaid suit of thick tweed; the trousers were turned up to display his gaudy socks; his long, light brown shoes were very pointed and he moved with mincing steps. A stiff white collar forced him to hold his weak chin high and the color of his skin in contrast to it looked darker than ebony. His coarse, crinkled hair had been plastered with some strong smelling pomade and his black eyes glittered with malicious mirth.

In his right hand he held a revolver and with it menaced the three.

"And how do you like your new friend?" he asked suavely. "You should be most

grateful to me. Knowing how eager you were to seek his company, I caused him to be brought here to you—thus saving you a tiresome journey."

The girl did not answer; her uncle muttered angry curses and the stranger, still babbling foolishly, crept on hands and knees toward the ornately dressed native.

"Back!" that man ordered sharply. "Go back!" His voice ended in a frightened squeak and when the white man still came on, he retreated swiftly and shouted an order to the guards outside.

Two powerful natives immediately entered and, after a short struggle, succeeded in trussing up the white man who was, so evidently, afflicted by the spirits. Because of that they exercised no more force than was absolutely necessary.

Their task done, they again left the cave.

The native laughed affectedly.

"I'm afraid your good uncle hit our friend too hard," he said. "So now—" his eyes glittered—"I must ask you to give to me the club so cleverly manufactured, Professor. Quick! Throw it gently so that it falls at my feet."

Professor Harding hesitated a moment and then threw the weapon with all his force at the man's head.

"That was foolish," the native said icily as he dodged the hurtling weapon. "You will have to pay for that. And now your knife, Alice, dear."

The girl's anger rose at the man's leering familiarity, but she obeyed his order with a pose of meekness.

The native picked it up and examined it with an elaborate show of interest.

"What a foolish waste of time," he said, "to think that you could catch me off my guard! As if I didn't know what you were doing and what your foolish plans were. You must have forgotten, Professor, that walls—even the thick walls of this cave—have ears. And I'm afraid you won't have time to make more weapons. I have at last persuaded the Great Ones to send me out as a missionary. That is funny, is it not? And you will go with me, on my terms, or——"

He passed his finger significantly across his throat.

"We prefer this," Professor Harding said grimly as he imitated the other's gesture.

"It is for you to say," the native looked at Alice.

"I have already given you my answer many times, Mondara. Death is preferable to the shame which——"

"But think," he urged. "Once free of this place I will take you to America, or France or where you will. I have great wealth—diamonds, rubies, gold! I told the Great Ones that wealth—white man's wealth—was necessary if I was to preach the black man's creed. I told them that with wealth I could buy white men, could hasten the day the Great Ones wait for. And that is true. *Au-a!* I know. Have I not lived in the countries of white men? And so the Great Ones have given me freely of their stores. I go from this place the richest man in the world. I——"

"All this is of no interest to us," the girl interrupted coldly. "Talking to you is time wasted. And as for your wealth—we know your end. In a very little while you will be penniless and you will crawl back here—if you dare. But you will not dare confess to the Great Ones that you have been false to their trust."

He was nonplussed for the moment.

"But you underestimate my wealth," he said then. "I do not lie when I say that I will be the richest man in the world—the wealth of Solomon is at my command. Here, in these hills, are the mines——"

He broke off abruptly, looked furtively about him, then repeated, "The wealth of Solomon is at my command."

"But not his wisdom," Professor Harding murmured.

"And what of your mission?" the girl continued, as if she could not grasp the horror of his suggestion. "What of the Great Ones' aim to make all Africa black? What of the part you are to play in order to bring about the fulfillment of their ambition?"

He laughed at that.

"As if I care. The Great Ones are fools. They work and plan for future generations. What are the future generations to me? Nothing—less than nothing. I pretended to side with them in order to gain some of the treasure they have stored up. Possessed of that—I leave Africa and the Great Ones to stew in their own juice."

"Then, besides your other evils, you are a traitor to your people?"

"Have it that way if you please. I shall call myself a prince, as I did at college in England. My royal blood will give me the entrée to houses my wealth alone fails to open. I shall be received everywhere with open arms. White men will fight each other for my friendship and——"

"Yes—you are quite mad," the girl said



slowly. "If I could only see the Great Ones and tell them the truth about you——"



He laughed derisively.

"If you could see them, and could speak to them in a language they understand, and tell them what I

have told you, my life would not be worth that!" He snapped his fingers. "But you can't see them—and, if you did, you couldn't talk to them. They understand a language but their own. And now: will you reconsider your decision?"

He scowled as she turned her back upon him.

"If you do not come freely, I'll take you by force," he threatened, "and your uncle will die slowly."

"And I would live only long enough to kill you," she replied slowly.

A staccato drum-beat sounded in the valley of the crater.

"I go now," Mondara said. "I will give you until tomorrow. And then, if you haven't decided to fulfill my conditions, I——"

With his threat unfinished he quickly left the place.

The girl went to the cave opening and peering out saw the native disappear down the steep, narrow path, cut out of the side of the rock, which led to the bed of the crater.

Returning to the cave she saw her uncle sitting beside the bound man, whispering excitedly.

Joining them she bent over to unfasten the bonds, telling her uncle to help.

"Has Mondara gone?" the professor asked.

She nodded.

Both the men sighed with relief.

"Then that's all right, dear miss," the bound man said in a normal voice. "No; don't loosen the bonds. The Mondara chappy may return and it's just as well that he should continue to think I'm a little—er—mad."

"But what's to be gained," the girl asked, "by pretending that? And why not let us loose you? With your help, we might be able to overpower the guards and——"

"No, that won't do, dear miss. Any false move just now would hasten our

deaths, I think. And whilst there's life there's hope. I played the giddy ass, as it were, because I thought I might get near enough to jump on that poisonous boulder. But he wasn't having any, as you saw. And then I decided to carry on the farce. Don't know why—no doubt there's a good reason waiting to be found."

"At least," the professor said slowly, "you've made yourself a person of some importance in the eyes of the guards. They think you're really mad and, therefore, under the protection of the spirits."

"Ah! That'll no doubt come in useful some time. And now, introductions and what not are in order, I think. You are Professor Harding, and this is your niece, Miss Alice. As for me—I'm Aubrey St. John—generally known as 'the Major.'"

The girl bowed gravely.

"And now," continued the Major, "I think we ought to examine our resources, exchange information, and so forth. And I don't think we ought to waste much time. I am inclined to think that Mr. Mondara will have me transferred to another cell very shortly. Yes; he's much too wise a bird to put all his eggs in one basket, as it were."

The professor nodded agreement.

"Our story is soon told," he said, "and the sum total of our knowledge is very little. With my nephew and niece I came to this district in search of certain scientific data. By accident—actually I fell down the shaft of an ancient mine and broke my leg—I stumbled upon the existence of a secret society which planned to make the black race supreme throughout all Africa; a red idol, a powerful symbol of the society, also came into my possession. Believing at the time that a bloody rebellion was being planned, I sent my nephew down country with the idol and a full report of my discovery.

"The same day he departed my carriers deserted and we were taken prisoners by Mondara and brought to this place. That was months ago. Since then I have discovered—you heard how Mondara talks, a little while ago—that the heads of the society have no thought of overpowering the whites by force, but are concentrating their resources on the educating of their people. I think——"

"May I ask questions?" the Major interrupted. "It will be quicker."

"I'm afraid I'm very vague," the professor apologized, "and your suggestion's a good one."

"Have you seen the heads of the society?"

"No. Except Mondara and the guards, we have seen no one all the time we have been here. No one to talk to, that is. Of course, when we have taken exercise on the narrow ledge outside, we have seen people down in the valley of the crater."

"Have you spoken to the guards?"

"No. They do not speak English, nor do they understand my Swahili."

"They are West Coast natives," the Major explained. "But you have been here months, you say. Surely you have learned their language?"

"No; how could I? They don't talk even to each other in my hearing; they don't attempt to converse with me. I have only spoken to Mondara."

The Major frowned.

"Um! He's a clever blighter. So all you know is what he's seen fit to tell you?"

"Yes," the professor admitted. "But I'm quite sure that he has not lied to us about the society. He lies about his own personal prowess and so forth, of course, but his overweening egotism and his confidence that we cannot give information against him, impels him to speak freely about the society and its endless ramifications. I think, for instance, that we may accept all that he said this morning as substantially true."

"Including the story of Solomon's treasure?"

"Including that."

"That makes my fingers itch," the Major muttered. "And this stone idol Johnny, just outside the cave; do they worship that?"

"I think not," the professor replied slowly. "No; I am sure they do not. It is simply a perpetual reminder of the aims of the society; it personifies the triumph of the black race."

"Um! Funny place to put it. Still, I imagine it can be seen quite plainly from below."



"The little wooden idol I sent down country with my nephew is a facsimile of it," the professor continued.

"And how did that come into your hands?"

"There was a man down at the bottom of the shaft—the one I fell down, you understand. He was on guard there. He tried

to kill me. I shot him. He could speak

English a little—he told me many things before he died. I took the idol from him afterward. It was a funny experience——"

"And under what conditions does Mondara offer you freedom?"

"My promise to marry him," the girl said evenly.

"Phew! He is a little mad, isn't he? He's advanced just that little beyond the savage which makes him very dangerous. But what was your plan of escape which my capture knocked on the head?"

"We were going to attack Mondara, capture him and make him lead us to your camp."

"Then you knew I was in the neighborhood? How?"

"Mondara told us. He has been giving us reports of your progress for the past three weeks. Drum talk, you know. I thought you were the advance guard of a rescue party my nephew, Red, had succeeded in getting together. I had begun to think that Mondara lied to us when he told us that Red had been killed."

"That was no lie," the Major said gravely. "I was with him. He told me about you and I promised him to bring help."

There was silence for a little while.

"But why did you come alone?" the professor asked.

"No one would come with me—the officials laughed at the idea of a secret society and all that. Oh, well! We must put our heads together and think up a way to get out of this."

"Only a miracle can help us," the girl said with a sigh. "Please tell me about my brother."

"He——" the Major began, then began to laugh boisterously as he struggled to free his hands from the ropes which bound them.

The girl started back as if at a blow, but at once Mondara, accompanied by four powerful natives, entered the cave.

"You are clever, very clever, Mister Aubrey St. John Major," he said scoffingly, "but not so clever as Mondara. I left you, thinking you mad. But doubts came and I returned to make sure. So—laugh no more. You are no longer under the protection of the spirits. Instead—you shall be under my protection."

"Splendid!" the Major drawled, but could say no more for in response to Mondara's curt order the four natives came forward and after gagging and blindfolding

him picked the Major up and carried him from the cave.

"I think I am very clever, eh, Professor?" Mondara said complacently. "It is very hard to pull the wool over my eyes. You have found that out, I hope. And, if you're wise, you'll use your influence to persuade Miss Alice to——"

"Get out" snapped the professor and Mondara, first bowing sarcastically, hastened after the men who had taken the Major.

The professor and Alice looked blankly at each other.

"Our last state is worse than the first," the professor said nervously.

"I'm not so sure. I think the Major will find a way."

The professor smiled wearily. "You're putting your trust in a broken reed, Alice. He has courage and colossal strength—you'd never suspect that at a casual glance—but that's all! I don't believe he has a brain in his head. Besides, even if he had, what could he do? He'll be put in a cave like this with men on guard night and day. He has no weapons, he——"

The girl shook her head. "You can't shake my confidence, uncle. I'm relying on the Major. Don't know why—call it a woman's intuition. And, uncle, isn't he frightfully handsome?"

THE sun was hastening upon its westward course; the valley of the crater was a place of purple shadows. As the shadows rose, twilight gloom was everywhere save that one ray of light from the setting sun, shining through a gap in the western wall, focussed on the stone image, accentuating its bestial lines; the red with which it was stained glowed like warm, freshly spilled blood.

The people of the crater were hastening to a clearing directly below the idol. As if at a signal they dropped to their knees, their faces upturned toward the image, and from a thousand throats came their chant of supplication; a prayer that their ambitions might be quickly fulfilled. The rock walls echoed with the mournful cadence, and the volume of sound seemed as if it must fill the whole universe.

The sun sank lower; the shaft of light now only illumined the idol's face. The thick lips seemed to part in an understanding leer.

The chant ended in a wild shout as the light totally vanished, and the people de-

parted to their huts. For them, although the sky above the towering, snow-crowned peaks was still a dazzling blue, night had commenced.

THE Major groaned softly, then, sitting erect with an effort, tore the filthy bandage from his eyes. His clothing hung upon him in shreds, and his back was scored with long, livid weals—the marks of a sjambok's lash.

Presently, when his eyes became accustomed to the flickering light of the fire, he rose to his feet, walked unsteadily to the cave opening and peered out. Two natives, gripping assegais firmly in their right hands, were kneeling there, their faces turned toward the stone idol which was but a few paces to the right. From below came the sound of a vast multitude chanting.

Cautiously the Major stepped out onto the narrow path. He was possessed with the idea of rushing the kneeling men, obtaining their spears and selling his life as dearly as possible. Suddenly the chanting below ceased; the two men jumped to their feet and turned to face him. They menaced him with their spears and with angry gestures indicated that he should return to the cave.

"I intend no harm," he said plaintively in the language of one of the Gold Coast tribes. "Let me stay a while."

But they only scowled and advanced implacably upon him. When the points of their spears were but a few inches from him, he shrugged his shoulders and reëntered the cave.

"This is a deuce of a mess," he muttered as he sat down beside the fire. "I wish



Jim, the bally old blighter, were here; things wouldn't be so bad then. Without him, I'm lost. Absolutely!" He sighed. "I wonder what's happened to the dear old chap? Somehow, I don't think they captured him, or the carriers. Yes I am just as sure that Jim and the carriers are alive. I should say that the people who run this little affair are not exactly bloodthirsty. If we could only eliminate the Mondara chappie, I'd be willing to gamble that I could get us all out of the mess as easy as wink."

He rose to his feet and paced slowly up and down.

"Yes," he continued. "Mondara must be eliminated and there's very little time in which to do it. Of course, if he's telling the truth, he leaves here in two days' time. But first, I think, he will eliminate us—and that's not so good. And he plans to take Miss Alice by force if she won't go willingly. And she won't, of course. So there are two good reasons why Mr. Mondara must not go—or why we should go first. Yes; I think that would be best. But there are a lot of obstacles in the way—a frightful lot. And I want to see this reputed Solomon's treasure and—" his voice sharpened—"I want to teach Mondara that it is not wise to sjambok a white man.

"He's cunning. He had me carried for miles an' miles. Then he sjamboked me, then more traveling—blindfolded all the time. And yet here I am now in a cave not a hundred feet from that which imprisons Miss Alice and the professor. Did I say Mondara was cunning? He's not. He's a fool. Trying to make me think that I was miles away from the others when a moment's thought must have shown him that the idol was a dead give away of my location. Oh, well! Even if the other two dear souls are only just the other side of the idol, they might as well be the other side of the world for all the chance I have of getting in touch with them."

The entrance of two native women, escorted by the guards, put an end to his cogitations. One of the women carried a platter heaped high with food, and a large gourd full of water. The other had a pile of faggots for the fire. They placed their burdens on the ground and retired, grinning sheepishly at the Major's fulsome compliments.

"At least," he mused as he sat down to eat, "they don't intend to starve me. This chicken—"

For a time the business of eating fully occupied him.

"And that," he said at length with a sigh of satisfaction, he had been very hungry, "proves my point. We are not meant to be killed. It is undoubtedly the order of the head Johnnies that we are to be well treated."

He shivered.

"Phew! It's getting cold. The sun must have set."

He put a couple of sticks on the fire. Another he held in his hand, balancing it thoughtfully.

"It looks as if Mondara must be killed," he muttered, "and I've used worse weapons than this." He sat staring morosely at the fire, endeavoring to find a way out of the difficulties which embogged him.

Time passed swiftly, but the Major did not move, did not shift his gaze from the fire. Unshaven, his hair in disorder, his clothing dirty and torn, there was little about him to suggest the monocled, immaculate dude which was his well cultivated pose. Only the well trained observer would have been aware of the colossal strength stored in his relaxed frame, of the fighting spirit indicated by his firm, well shaped chin, and of the keen brain which worked behind the mild, vacuous appearing blue eyes.

He rose suddenly and, taking a lighted brand from the fire, explored the walls of his prison cave.

At one point there was a wide crack in the wall. He passed his improvised torch through it and found that it was wide enough and deep enough to admit the length of his arm. Shielding his eyes from the wood smoke which drifted back from his torch, he squinted through the crack.

The rock wall, he judged, was nearly two feet thick and beyond was another cave, or—or a passageway!

"And if it's a cave," he mused as he returned to the fire, "then its opening must be partly concealed by the idol. And if it's a passageway—it may lead to the treasure Mondara was talking about. Better than that, it may lead straight through the mountain and—"

He closed his eyes, realizing that he was too tired to marshal his thoughts properly; and he was too wise to indulge in vague wonderings.

"Tomorrow," he muttered sleepily, "I'll investigate. But now I must relax; there's nothing I can do. There—"

His voice trailed off into silence. His head dropped lower; his chin rested on his up-drawn knees and he slept as a native sleeps, slept with every sense on guard to warn him of the approach of danger.

Time passed.

Then a voice sounded in the cave, a ghostly whisper of a voice, seeming to emanate from the crack.

"Baas!" it said. "Baas!"

THAT same morning Jim, the Hot-tentot, awakened tardily from sleep. Rising to his feet he gazed vacantly first at the swiftly rising sun, then at the

dying ashes of the fire and the deserted camp.

"Baas!" he cried, and when the empty echo of his own voice was the only answer, he grinned sheepishly. "Because I have slept overlong," he muttered, "the baas plays a game with me." He shook his head doubtfully as he eyed the loads left by the deserting carriers. "I will wait here," he presently decided, "and cook myself food. He will send someone back for these loads."



Then for the first time he was conscious that he was gripping something tightly in his hand. He opened his fingers and looked at the little red idol and his expression of

disgust as he suddenly threw the thing from him was almost comical in its intensity.

A cloud of gray ashes leaped upward as the idol dropped into the midst of the smoldering fire.

With a cry the Hottentot ran forward, raked the idol from the fire with his fingers, carefully brushed the ashes from it and secreted it amongst the tangled mop of his hair.

"The baas would not like it burnt," he muttered as he walked restlessly up and down, listening intently for any sound which would give him a clue as to the whereabouts of his baas and the carriers.

After a while, with a self-condemning grunt of disgust, he examined the ground all about and there read the story of the carriers' departure.

"I am a fool," he grumbled. "I should have known. *Wo-we!* The sleep spirits must have bound me fast. The carriers—Mashona dogs that they are!—have started back on the long trek to their kraals. *Au-a!* May they die on the way. But I should have remembered, I should not have slept. I should have kept watch with the baas. Yesterday they said they would go—and I slept while they departed! But my baas? Where is he?"

"I do not see his spoor here," he continued. "*Wo-we!* And all the time I slept."

He scrutinized the ground even more closely, stooping over almost double. Up and down he went, following the Major's restless pacing of the night, until, finally,

he came to the spot where darkness had suddenly descended upon the Major.

Little more than a casual glance was sufficient to show him all that had happened and, greatly distressed, he returned to the fire and, squatting down on his haunches, gazed blankly before him. At that moment he wished that death might come to him. Now that his baas had gone, his baas who could do no wrong, there was nothing to live for. For many years they had played the game together—hunting, exploring, welded together in that bond of sympathy which nature weaves about men—irrespective of color—who are men.

"*Wo-we!*" Jim moaned.

His baas had been captured by followers of the little red idol. They had crept up close whilst he—Jim, the Hottentot—slept. Worse yet—they had probably crept up close during his watch and had bided their time, not moving, doing nothing to betray their presence to the white man when he commenced his watch.

"*Wo-we!*" Jim said again. "And I told the baas that there was nothing to fear. Yet I must have slept during my watch. They could not have crept up without the baas hearing them. And they were so close that he had no time, even to utter one cry of warning."

Then came a thought which lightened his mood of despair. The little red idol! Probably the baas had left that with him as a sign that he was to follow; probably the baas had gone off willingly with the followers of the idol. At least they had not raided the camp; they had not been responsible for the carriers' desertion; they had not harmed him. Then, it might be, the Major was still alive.

The Hottentot put some more wood onto the fire, blowing on the embers until the new fuel burst into flame. Then, opening certain of the packs, he methodically cooked himself some food which he ate mechanically. He was storing up vitality for the unknown trek before him.

His hunger satisfied, he took two revolvers and a belt of cartridges from one of the packs and strapped them about him. A long coil of rope he carried about his shoulders. The rest of the packs he arranged in an orderly pile and covered them with branches and armfuls of the long grass which had served as his baas' bed, weighting it down with heavy boulders.

Then, from his own little store of things he selected a large hunting knife which he stuck in the cartridge belt, sadly discarded the blankets and set out on the trail.

Picking up the spoor of the unknown abductors, Jim, the Hottentot, followed it at a fast pace. Straight uphill it went, following, as Jim presently perceived, a faintly defined trail. Even so, the trekking was difficult and Jim was frequently forced to call a halt. The trail was so steep in places that he had difficulty in keeping his footing.

It was nearly noon when he came to a large, barren plateau, jutting out from the mountain. There the trail was clearer and he was able to go at a faster pace. An hour later, when he had crossed the plateau, he was faced by a steep, unclimbable wall of rock. In despair he searched the wind polished surface for signs of foothold, but found none; neither could he see any further signs of the trail of the men he followed.

The path—if path it could be called—vanished at a small clump of stunted bushes; at that point his baas and the men who had carried him had apparently dissolved into nothingness.

With unflagging energy, Jim cast about in ever widening circles, endeavoring to pick up the spoor again, cheering himself with the memories of other adventures he and his baas had shared; adventures which had brought them face to face with death—yet they had always won through.

"And we will be too cunning for death this time," Jim shouted challengingly.

The wind, which howled continually about the plateau with an almost gale-like velocity, snatched the words from his mouth, splitting them up into incoherent syllables, casting them into an abyss of silence. Jim shivered, and vaguely compared himself to a morsel of dirt upon the peak of the world.

He had returned now to the place where he had lost the trail; was standing close to the clump of bushes. Suddenly, with a sheepish grin at his own stupidity, he parted the bushes and uttered a soft cry of triumph. Swiftly uncoiling his rope, he fastened one end securely about a large boulder and, tying a good sized stone to the other end, threw it into the gaping hole the bushes concealed.

Before half the length of the rope snaked into the hole, a rocky clatter told him that the stone had reached bottom and, without further hesitation, he slid down the rope.

The bottom reached, he was challenged by a native who loomed up in the twilight gloom of the place like a creature of the nether world.

"What make you here?" he demanded in the language of the Ekoi, and when Jim gurgled an incoherent reply, repeated the question in a halting Zulu.



When Jim, scratching his head in indecision, still made no reply, the other threatened him with a spear. "Speak," he demanded.

Jim grinned. He had formulated a plan of action.

"I come on the business of this one," he said and taking the idol from his hair, held it out on the palm of his hand.

The other swiftly examined it, handed it back, and then lighted a torch in the red embers which glowed fitfully in a small brazier.

"The way is before you," he said as he handed the torch to Jim, and sat down beside the brazier having, apparently, no further interest in the matter.

Jim looked at him uneasily. Something warned him that he was not to win through so easily. He edged closer to the sentry, his hand on the hilt of his hunting knife. His eyes had now become accustomed to the yellow light of the torch and he saw that he was in a circular, highroofed cave; shafts led off from it in all directions.

"Which road do I take?" he asked gruffly, and went still closer to the sentry.

The other laughed mockingly. "If you were sent on That One's business," he said, "the road was made known to you."

"I was not told, or if I was told I have forgotten," Jim said dully. "So show me the road I take. I have the idol."

"Aye, so you have. But that alone is not enough. What is its voice? What word does it give? What word do you give for it? *Au-a!* You have no word. You are a liar. And so—choose your own path. It is all one to me. Only, should you choose the wrong one, death will come very quickly to you. Or, should you by chance choose the right one, the Great Ones will have means of finding whether you are a liar or no."

Jim looked about the place, seeking some clue which would indicate which shaft he should take. But they all looked alike, there were no distinguishing marks. Beads of sweat rolled down the Hottentot's face. He was horribly afraid. Not for himself,

but for the safety of his baas. If he failed now—

"That is the one I will take," he said with a show of confidence, and pointed to an opening. In order to gain access to it, he would have to pass very close to the sentry.

"You choose well," the other grunted, but Jim detected a note of malicious triumph in the man's voice.

Whistling softly, Jim walked toward it; but as he was about to pass the sentry he drew his knife and leaped upon him.

Over and over they rolled, struggling furiously. The sentry was strong, but Jim was stronger.

"If you kill me," the man gasped, Jim's knife pricking at his throat, "what good will that do you? Let me up and I will tell you the proper road."

"Get up then," Jim panted triumphantly, "and see that you make no sound."

Silently the other obeyed, turning his back to Jim as that man directed, holding his hands out behind him.

Jim cut a length off the rope and tied the man's hands together.

"Now," he said, as he lighted another torch, "show me the road."

"It is that one." The man nodded toward a shaft directly opposite the one Jim had selected.

"So-o? Then you shall go ahead of me and lead me to its end. And remember; I shall be very close behind you, holding the rope which binds you, the point of my knife—it is very sharp—pressed between your shoulder blades. Now, lead on—and play no tricks."

He pricked the other with his knife, urging him on.

"Nay, Hottentot," the man gasped. "I lied. That way is strewn with poison thorns. That way is death."

"Au-a!" said Jim. "Then show me the right way."

The other hesitated, then, shrugging his shoulders, "It is that one," he said and walked unhesitatingly toward the shaft directly to the left of the one he had first indicated. "Wait!" Jim said and yanked hard on the rope he held, causing the man to fall over backward.

Quickly Jim tightened his bonds, passing the rope around his feet, so that the sentry was helpless, incapable of moving.

"Now bite on this," he said and thrust a gag between his jaws.

"I will release you when I return—if I return," Jim said as he dragged the man a little distance along one of the shafts.

Then, taking a bundle of torches with him, he went boldly forward.

For what seemed an endless time he followed the winding, tunneled passage, marveling at the ivory smoothness of the walls—as if polished by countless million hands.

"Mostly I'm going toward the direction of the setting sun," Jim muttered. "It may be that this road will take me to the place where the sun buries itself with the coming of night; it may be that this leads to the place of the wicked dead." He shivered at the thought of it. "But at least," he comforted himself, "the man who kept watch was no spirit—but a poor guard."

One by one his stock of torches burned down and out. He had only one left, and that half consumed, when he came to a wide ravine which was spanned by a flimsy rope bridge. The ravine, actually it was a wide crack in the rock caused by some upheaval of nature—extended for an enormous distance.

Far overhead Jim could see a tiny patch of sky.

Dubiously he tested the bridge, then started to cross. It swayed sickeningly to and fro and, when he was but halfway across, he lost hold of his torch.

Almost nauseated by giddiness, he watched the tiny point of flame drop into the darkness below; watched it until it vanished. He listened intently, but no sound came up out of the depths and he visualized it falling for all eternity.

His hold on the ropes stiffened and he clung there, afraid to move. It seemed to him that many seasons came and went before courage returned to him and he moved slowly forward.

When he reached the solid ground again, he crept forward on hands and knees, almost sobbing with relief, yet not daring to stop until he had put several hundred paces between himself and the bottomless horror of the pit. Had he known, there was a store of torches and food hidden in a niche in the wall close by.

Then on again, very slowly, feeling his way cautiously forward, inch by daring inch, endeavoring to make his eyes pierce the darkness.

He lost all thought of time, all awareness of self. He remembered only that his baas—the man he worshipped with an almost idolatrous zeal—was somewhere ahead. He was subconsciously aware that the tunnel was sloping upward. His naked feet could feel the steps which had been cut into the rock.

The tunnel suddenly leveled out again

and Jim, with a feeling of relief, realized that the darkness was not so intense.

A tongue of flame shot out from the wall ahead. It moved mysteriously to and fro, up and down, then as mysteriously disappeared—seemed to have been swallowed up by the rock.

With a groan of fear Jim dropped to his knees and covered his face with his hands. He was sure that he had seen a manifestation of the spirits. Presently, summoning up courage, though he could not silence the chattering of his teeth, he rose and went on. After a while, and never had his pace been so slow, he came to a place where there was a crack in the left hand wall of the tunnel through which straggled a shaft of light.

Greatly daring, Jim crept up to it and peered through. At first he could distinguish nothing; then he saw his baas sitting beside a fire. But his great joy did not destroy his caution.

"Baas!" he called softly. Then, when the Major did not move, called in a little louder tone, "O-he, Baas!"

He chuckled with delight as his baas opened his eyes and stretched himself wearily. He did not call again. He knew that his baas had heard, that his pregnant call had penetrated beyond the outerguard of sleep.

Casually the Major rose, put more wood on the fire, glanced toward the opening of the cave—he could see the sentries outside;



they were sitting with their backs to him—then went to the crack.

"Jim!" he whispered happily. "Is it really you?"

"Aye, Baas. None other. Are you all right, Baas? No harm has come to you?"

"I am all right, Jim, save that a sjambok scored my back."

"There shall be an accounting for that," Jim said fiercely.

"Softly, softly, Jim," the Major cautioned. "You brought guns?"

"Aye, Baas. Two."

Jim passed the revolvers and cartridge belt through the crack with a sigh of relief. Jim did not like firearms. As the Major buckled the weapons about him, under his clothing, he chuckled gleefully. Their possession put escape into his hands.

One of the sentries peered into the cave

then, rejoining his companion, announced, "The white man is mad. He stands by the wall laughing to himself! He will give us no trouble. Let us sleep."

"How do I get into that place where you now are, Baas?" Jim asked. "Or how do you get out?" He strained at the sides of the crack as if he would rend the rock still farther apart.

"It cannot be done that way, Jim," the Major said. "But we will find a way. There is no great need of haste. Now tell me how you come to this place. But first—are you hungry?"

"What is meat to me now that I know you live, Baas?" the Hottentot replied happily. "Yet, nevertheless, I could eat a little."

The Major laughed softly and brought over from the fire the remains of his evening meal which he passed through the crack to Jim. While the Hottentot ate, the Major gave him a full account of his experiences.

"*Au-a!*" exclaimed Jim, the end of the Major's narrative coinciding with the last crumb of food. "And it is all my fault! If I had not slept——"

"There is no fault, Jim. Doubtless if they had not captured me we would now be on our way south again, my mission a failure. As it is— But my voice grows tired. Tell me, then, of your journeyings."

"It is a long trail. And where shall I start?"

"Where is the Red Idol I left beside you?"

Jim grinned.

"I threw it in the fire, Baas."

"Tch!" the Major clicked reprovingly.

"And then I took it out of the fire, unharmed, Baas. And it is well I did. It is a powerful charm. It——"

And for a time Jim's deep voice rumbled on, describing in great detail his manifold adventures.

"That is all, Baas," he finally concluded. "And now we will go back the way I came. Let us start now. I like not this place."

"And think you, Jim, that I can squeeze through this crack?"

"I had forgotten that. Then must we stay here until death comes?"

"The way is open for you to return, Jim."

"The way is closed unless you are with me, Baas. Such talk is folly," the Hottentot growled.

The Major's eyes glowed.

"Did the carriers take all the packs with



them, Jim?" he asked lightly, concealing the emotion he felt at Jim's fresh demonstration of loyalty.

"Nay, Baas. Only the ones containing their food."

The Major nodded and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I'm glad of that," he drawled in English. "I'm beastly dirty and I need a shave. Besides, I feel quite lost without my monocle. That Mondara smashed it to smithereens with his sjambok. Ah! I'm afraid he will have to pay for that. Oh, quite. And so, considering that I need so many things, I think the sooner we get out of this place the better. I think, perhaps, if all things go in our favor, we will go tonight. Not a bit of good waiting about. And it should be quite simple—quite. I imagine the passage Jim's in comes out by the stone idol. So—all I have to do is shoot the sentries outside my cave and the sentries outside the professor's and just amble along. But I don't like that idea very much.

"The sentries are quite good sorts, really, and killing them would be such a messy affair. Besides, the reports would give the alarm, and I couldn't shoot the whole bloomin' population of the crater. No! We've got to get away quietly. And I want to take Mister Bloomin' Mondara along with us. He's our only real danger. He's civilized—probably has rifles and revolvers and what not. So he must come along with us yes, for the good of his soul, he must come along. He must be taught a few things. And that's not all 'pon my soul, no! This expedition has cost me a deuce of a lot of money. I must reimburse myself somehow. Don't you think so, Jim?"

"Golly, no-yes, Baas. If I don't see you, s'long hullo?" Jim stammered, not understanding a word of what the Major had said, answering the interrogative note in his baas' voice.

"I thought you would say that, old top," the Major drawled. Then, in the vernacular, "Now go to the end of the passage and find when it comes out. Also, look for a crack in the wall opposite."

Jim departed returning almost immediately, greatly excited.

"The passage ends less than a spear's throw from here, Baas," he reported. "Between the idol's legs is the opening. The light from the fires of the watchers showed me that. And there is a crack in the wall opposite, but it is not so big as this one. It is only a small crack, I could only just see through it. I looked and saw the

white woman and the old white man. They were sitting by the fire looking as if death was very close to them."

"It was, Jim, until you came. Death was close to all of us. But you have frightened death away. So now there is no cause for fear. And now what?"

His brows knit in puzzled thought.

"I have no paper, no pencil—nothing by which I can write a message," he muttered. "I'll have to trust it to Jim. I hope they'll have the sense to listen to him. I think they will. At least Miss Alice will. She's splendid. She—" Aloud he said, "Listen, Jim. You must go to the other crack and make the girl or the man come to speak with you. Here, take this—" he passed a thin stick through to Jim—"and wave it to and fro until they see it. Then whisper their names: Missy Alice—Professor—over and over again until they come to the crack. Say their names!"

"Missy Alley! P'fessor," Jim said haltingly.

The Major nodded.

"That will do. Then, Jim, when they have come to the crack you will tell them this:"

And slowly, making Jim repeat sentence after sentence, the Major outlined the first steps of the scheme which would, he hoped, end in escape from the crater.

"Now tell me," he said finally, "just as you are going to tell them, all that I have said. And speak slowly, for their knowledge of the vernacular is not good."

Jim nodded and began:

"I am Jim, I am the Major's right hand; I am his mouth. This is what he says to you: before the rising of the morrow's sun we will all leave this place in safety. But first you, Missy Alley, must play a part. Call now for the man Mondara. If you make much noise, shouting his name, the sentry will send for him. Then, when he comes, this is the meat of what you must say to him:

"I have been thinking many things, Mondara. It is better to live, even as your slave, than to die. I am young, I desire to live. I desire much wealth. Much wealth would make me forget, maybe, that your skin is black. So I am almost ready to fulfill your condition and go with you freely. But how can I believe that you are rich? Go, bring me proof, now, that you have all manner of precious stones as you have boasted. If I am satisfied that you do not lie, then, I promise you, I will go forth from this place with you—and that freely."

"That is what my baas says you must say, Missy Alley. And you, P'fessor. My



baas, the Major, says that you must forbid the girl to do as she says; you must be angry with her.

"Then, after Mondara has departed, I will come again with further word from my baas."

Jim looked at the Major.

"Have I the message right?" he asked.

"Quite, Jim. Your words are the echo of mine. Go now and see what you can do."

When Jim had departed on his mission, the Major paced restlessly up and down. Presently he sat down, close to the crack, and endeavored to eject his personality into the other cave, commanding its occupants to listen to the voice of Jim.

Time passed, dragged wearily.

"O-he, Baas!"

He roused himself at Jim's excited whisper.

"Well, Jim?" he asked.

"She will do it, Baas," the Hottentot said. "Even now she makes ready. At first they would have none of my story. The old man said I was a liar; he said I was one of Mondara's men trying to trap them. But the girl said I was a true man. But first she made me repeat the words the baas put into my mouth many times. There, listen, Baas! She calls now."

Faintly, muffled by the walls of the cave, the Major heard the girl calling, "Mondara! Mondara!"

He chuckled with satisfaction.

"Keep a close lookout, Jim," he ordered. "He may come by the passage. If he does— You have a knife?"

"Aye; I have a knife, Baas," Jim answered grimly.

"Then you will know what to do. Do not kill him, unless that can't be avoided. But do not let him call for aid. Watch now. I go to the opening of my cave to see what is to be seen."

As the Major came to his cave's opening, the girl's voice sounded louder, clearer, "Mondara! Mondara!"

The sentries before her cave were apparently trying to silence her with threats, whilst the men who kept guard over him were grumbling loudly because their sleep had been disturbed.

"Go get Mondara," one of them shouted. "He will silence her."

A noisy altercation followed and then the Major saw one of the guards rise and make his way swiftly down the narrow path leading to the crater below.

After a time—the Major judged a half hour had passed—the guard returned, holding aloft a flaming torch, and behind him was Mondara.

Well satisfied, the Major retreated back into his cave and seated himself abjectly before the fire. Nevertheless, it was only by the exercise of magnificent self-control that he was able to refrain from rushing out and fighting his way to the other cave. He was nervous for the girl's safety; half afraid that she would betray, unwittingly, the existence of Jim.

Someone entered his cave and came slowly toward him. He knew it was Mondara and was half determined to bring matters to an issue there and then. His better judgment, however, ruled otherwise. He must wait a little longer.

"And how is the mad Mr. Aubrey St. John Major?" Mondara drawled mockingly.

The Major sprang to his feet as if greatly alarmed.

"When did you come in?" he gasped. "I must have been asleep. I—" Then the drawl came into his voice again. "I take it that you have come to release me from this hole, eh? Frightfully good of you. But, let me tell you, I shall report your beastly behavior to the authorities."

Mondara's eyes gleamed.

"You are a fool," he said in a contemptuous tone. "I just came to tell you that tomorrow I leave this place and the girl goes with me of her own free will. In less than a month I shall be on board ship heading for Paris. After that—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But you'll take me with you," the Major pleaded. "You wouldn't leave me here to die in this hole. Why—"

"No; I won't leave you here to die. I shall kill you before I go."

He turned abruptly on his heel and left the cave.

"Baas!" It was Jim at the crack again. The Major crossed over quickly.

"Well, Jim?"

"Missy Alley, she says that Mondara has gone to get the proof of his wealth. In a little while he will return. She now wants to know what she must do when he comes again."

"Tell her, Jim, that she must make a

show of being well satisfied with what she sees. Tell her to speak soft words to Mondara. Tell her to make him many soft promises, if need be. But she must send him away quickly. Tell her to tell him that she must sleep in order to be ready for the morrow's trek. Say that to her and then come back here to me."

When Jim returned to report that he had delivered the message he saw the Major was daubing his hands and arms and face

with the charred end of a piece of wood.

"Is the baas mad?" he gasped.

"Nay, Jim. Only, for a little while, I desire to pass as one of the sentries."

"Then the baas is indeed mad. As

the black char from a piece of burned wood could make him black. *Au-a!* Does that thicken his lips, change the color of his eyes and hair, break down the bridge of his nose? What folly. And there are other things—"

"What I do is enough, Jim. It is only to fool a man whose eyes are blinded by his own splendor. He will not look at me closely—until it is too late. Why should he? Suspecting nothing, he will see nothing. Now, Jim, I go to take my stand near to the entrance of this my cave, and you will shout—putting your lips to this crack—*Monn-akat-chang-obbaw-chang!*" \*

"What is it, Baas?" Jim asked wonderingly after he had muttered the words to himself. "A charm?"

"A most powerful charm, Jim. I think it will bring the guards running to see what it is all about. But shout the words loudly and let there be fear in your voice."

"I hear, but I do not understand," Jim muttered and he repeated the words softly and himself as he peered anxiously through the crack.

The Major put more wood on the fire, at first dampening it with water from a gourd. The flames died down. Vaguely, through clouds of smoke, Jim saw his baas take up position to the right of the cave's opening. And then he grinned as understanding came to him. His baas was holding a revolver in his hand; he was crouching lightly on the balls of his feet; he was ready to strike.

Jim wailed his charm dolorously and repeated the phrase again and yet again. There was fear, loathing and an appeal for help in his voice. Outside, the two guards held a hasty consultation, then—had not Mondara expressly ordered that no harm was to come to the white man, yet?—they rushed into the hut.

The first passed the Major before he could strike, heading for that part of the dimly lit cave from which came the shout of fear. The second man went down like a pole-axed bullock as the Major brought down the long barrel of his revolver on his head.

"The snake is here, warrior," the Major said quietly as the other turned at the thud of his companion's fall. "Drop your spear."

The man looked at him with a grotesque air of bewilderment. He was convinced that the white man was in league with the spirits. The voice had sounded from over there, nowhere near where the white man was standing. And there was no one else in the cave. Then the voice must have been that of one of the Spirits. Even so, the warrior was of a mind to try conclusions with the Major; for the moment he feared the Spirits less than he feared the wrath of Mondara.

He shortened his hold on his assegai and crept stealthily forward.

"Stand!" the Major ordered sharply and cursed under his breath when the native still came forward.

He knew that the warrior's life was in his hands. He had only to squeeze the trigger of his revolver and the stalwart, menacing form would be lifeless flesh and bone. But, apart from the fact that the Major knew the report would raise an alarm and bring others to the attack—thus ruining his plan of escape—he was averse to killing.

The warrior was very near now, his hand was going slowly back. In a moment, the Major knew, he would rush in to the attack. And then a weird, moaning noise came from the crack. The warrior turned in alarm and at that moment the Major closed in on him.

The struggle that ensued was a very short one. The Major's strength was more than a match for the warrior's—giant of a man though he was—and, besides, the native was defeated already by superstitious fear. In a very little while the Major had him down on the floor of the cave, gagged and bound with the same ropes that, early in the day, had bound



\* *Monn-akat-chang-obbaw-chang*. Literally, Child-feet-not-thing-not; the thing without hands or feet. Name given by certain West Coast tribes to snakes—particularly pythons.

him. Rising from his task, he saw that Jim was performing a like task with the other native who was beginning to show signs of returning consciousness.

"And now what, Baas?" the Hottentot asked happily. Directly after his cry which had taken the warrior off his guard, he had emerged from the passageway and entered the cave at its entrance.

"Now," said the Major, "we will go outside and play that we are the guards."

A few moments later they were squatting on their haunches beside the fire outside the cave. They were enveloped from head to foot in skin blankets.

Presently there was a sound of booted feet coming up the steep path, and a moment later Mondara came into sight. He had no torch, and in his hands he carried a large tin money box. He walked furtively, continually looking over his shoulder as if afraid of being followed. When he came still nearer and full into the circle of light thrown by the fire, the Major saw that his face was strained, the pupils of his eyes dilated, and that beads of sweat stood out on his forehead.

The Major pulled his skin blanket closer about him. Under its cover he held his revolver, ready for use.

"Dogs!" Mondara said angrily as he neared. "Do you dare to sit in my presence? I——"

He turned suddenly and drawing his revolver aimed at some invisible point in the darkness beyond the fire gleam. So he stood for a moment and then shrugging his shoulders as if in derision at vague half formed fears, he hurried on, rounding the angle made by the Stone Image and vanished from sight.

"I wonder what was the matter with the blighter?" the Major mused. "He acted as if he were afraid of being followed. Shouldn't be at all surprised if he hadn't robbed the treasury, as it were, and is afraid that they are on his trail. Perhaps I should have tackled him then—but no, I think not. On his return, though——"

They waited for a while in a silence so profound that Jim was afraid the beating of his heart must be heard by the inhabitants of all the world. Then, from the cave on the other side of the Stone Image, came a confused murmur of voices. A woman's voice, soft, almost caressing and then the voice of Mondara shrill, blatantly triumphant.

"Good night, Miss Alice," they heard him say. "Tomorrow, then, at sunrise."

The Major and Jim arose to their feet

and crept nearer to the Stone Image.

They heard Mondara exchange a crude jest with the guards and then the sound of his footsteps coming toward them.

Suddenly down in the valley of the crater there sounded the deep, menacing boom of drums. Lights flickered about the valley



shrill voices sounded giving orders. The lights massed together, advanced toward the cliff. The next moment Mondara rushed hastily round the Idol directly into the arms of the Major and Jim who were waiting for him.

He was badly frightened and had entirely lost his self-possession.

"Let me go, let me go," he screamed in the vernacular. "They have found me out. Let me go."

He clawed at them with his naked hands. In his terror he had forgotten all about his revolver and the thin veneer of civilization had entirely gone from him. He was now only a puny, badly frightened savage.

"Let me go," he cried again. "They have found it out."

"Found what out?" the Major asked quietly, also in the vernacular, and he shook Mondara much as a terrier shakes a rat.

"I killed the keeper of the treasury," Mondara gasped. "And now the Great Ones have set the avengers on my trail. Let me go before it is too late."

"Hold him, Jim," the Major said tersely and leaving Mondara in the firm grasp of the Hottentot, the Major made his way along the path to the other cave. There he was confronted by the two guards who watched over the cave in which the professor and the girl were imprisoned. They menaced him with their spears but backed at the sight of the revolver in his hands, backed at his order into the cave, their hands held high above their heads. The professor and the girl ran to greet the Major with exclamations of gratitude and wonder. They showered him with questions.

"There is no time for explanations now," he said roughly. "Bind these two Johnnies, Professor, and then we will have to run."

It was quickly done and as quickly they

left the cave, hastening back to where Jim and Mondara awaited them. The shouts of the people sounded nearer, the place was illuminated by the gleam of many torches. "Hurry, hurry," Mondara almost screamed. "In a little while it will be too late."

"Let him go, Jim," the Major ordered, "and see that you keep close to his heels."

As Jim released his hold, Mondara started through the widespread legs of the naga and was immediately lost to sight in the blackness of the passage beyond.

With a cry of, "Follow swiftly, Baas, the path is smooth," the Hottentot hastened after him.

"Follow Jim," the Major said to Alice and the professor. "I will bring up the rear."

The Major was about to follow them when a spear whizzed by his head. The Major fired swiftly at the onrushing warriors, checking them, and then sped hastily through the black depths of the tunnel. Catching up with the professor and Alice, sensing their nearness in the gloom, he urged them to better speed.

Ahead of them was the blackness of the pit, behind them the warriors, yelling fierce threats, their torches stabbing the darkness with points of yellow light. An assegai rattled on the rock just behind the Major.

"You and Alice go on," the professor gasped. "I am all in, let me have a revolver and I'll hold them back."

The Major's answer was to pick up the little man in his arms and with a curt "Carry on," to the girl, they continued their flight. To the professor he gave one of his revolvers and his burden fired at intervals whenever a yelling warrior came to close quarters. Ahead of them they could hear the shrill piping voice of Mondara; the deep booming voice of Jim, the Hottentot, echoed back strangely in the dim lit passage like the roar of a maddened bull. Behind them sounded the fierce cries of the pursuing warriors, the fumes of powder mixing with the smoke from the torches stung their nostrils.

At last they caught up to Jim, the Hottentot.

"Is Mondara with you?" the Major called.

"Ya, Baas," Jim said grimly. "At first he was very fast but once I had caught up with him the rest was easy. Not once has the point of my knife been farther than a hair's breadth from the great vein in his neck."

"Good," the Major said tersely. "Keep it there. And the tin box? Where is that?"

"Mondara carries it," Jim answered.

The pursuers seemed to have slackened their speed and were falling farther behind. Undoubtedly the professor's shooting, erratic though it was, had greatly discouraged them.

"And that is a good thing," said Jim, "for soon we come to the bridge I told you of, and I do not want to hurry over that."

As he spoke Mondara stumbled, and fell to his hands and knees. Jim groped through the darkness after him, but in vain. Crawling several paces on his hands and knees Mondara had evaded him, and then, rising to his feet, ran forward at full speed. His mocking laugh came back to them through the darkness.

"I will get him, Baas," Jim cried and hastened forward. A few minutes later a tiny flame of light appeared ahead of them, and they saw that Mondara, with a lighted torch in his hand, was halfway across the rope bridge. Without any hesitation Jim started to cross, too, making the bridge swing precariously.

"Back," Mondara snarled and aimed his revolver full at the Hottentot, but just as he was about to press the trigger Jim jumped violently up and down. The frantic swaying caused Mondara to drop the tin box in his endeavor to retain his balance. With a cry of rage Mondara fired three shots in rapid succession. Two of the shots went wide, but the third seared Jim's ribs and the shock of it almost caused him to lose his hold. Before Mondara could fire again, the Major's revolver spoke, and Mondara hung limply for a moment to the ropes and then gradually, almost imperceptibly, his stiffened fingers opened and with a wild animal-like scream he dropped into the pit. For a little while they could follow his fall, lightened by the flame of the torch, then it, too, vanished and they were left once again in the darkness.

"Are you all right, Jim?" the Major asked anxiously.

"Ya, Baas," Jim replied mournfully. "Only once again I'm at fault. Mondara has escaped me; and he has taken the stones with him."

The Major laughed happily. The potential wealth the tin box had contained meant nothing, less than nothing, when weighed in the balance with the safety of Jim.

"They are coming, Major," the girl

warned, and the Major with a startled look over his shoulder saw that the pursuers were very near. He fired rapidly, aiming at the ground before them. He had no desire to kill. The tunnel was filled with the whine of bullets.

"Is the bridge safe, Jim?" he asked.

"Ya, Baas, and it is easier to cross it in the dark than with a light. In the dark one cannot see what will happen if a foot goes astray. I'm now on the other side, come quickly."

A few moments later the girl had crossed in safety and the Major, with the professor now on his back, had also made the dangerous crossing.

Almost as soon as the Major's feet had reached the solid ground Jim hacked away at the main ropes supporting the bridge.

"This is quicker, Jim," said the Major and fired point blank at the thick strands. They parted and the bridge dropped uselessly, hanging to its stays on the opposite side.

"Now we can go on at our own pace," the Major announced gaily, and laughed at the infuriated yells of the warriors whose farther progress was halted by the broken bridge.

"Go back to the Great Ones," the Major shouted in the language of the natives. "Tell them their secret is safe with us so long as they refrain from deeds of bloodshed."

"Our quarrel is not with you," a warrior answered, "but with Mondara—the dog! He killed the keeper of the treasure. He——"

"He will work no more evil," the Major answered gravely. "If this pit has a bottom—look for him there. There you will find him and the things he stole."

**I**T WAS sunrise. Jim the Hottentot squatted by the campfire, cooking the morning meal. From the frying-pan came the pleasing odor of bacon. A coffee pot simmered nearby. Wrapped in blankets not far away the girl and her uncle slept peacefully.

Presently a cheerful whistle sounded beyond the bushes which fringed the camp clearing and the Major appeared. He was clean-shaved and dressed immaculately.

"Do they still sleep, Jim?" he asked.

"Ya, Baas, not even the smell of food wakens them. They must be tired indeed."

"Without doubt," the Major said. "But what of you, you old heathen, are you never tired, are you not tired now?"

"Why should I be, I have done nothing."

The Major laughed.

"No," he drawled in English, "you have done nothing. All you have done is to save my life and the life of Miss Alice and the professor."

Then, in the vernacular, "Jim?"

"Ya, Baas?"

"Where is the little red idol?"

Jim fumbled in the tangled mop of his hair and from it took the little wooden image which had first set their feet on the trail which led them to the Mountains of the Moon. He spat in disgust as he held it out to the Major on the palm of his hand.

"I do not want it, Jim," the Major said. "Keep it, it is your reward."

Jim spat again and then threw the idol into the fire.

"So may all evil end, Baas," he said with a happy grin.

The Major nodded.

"When did the carriers leave this place?" he asked Jim.

"Yesterday morning, before sunrise, Baas. But yesterday morning seems like ten thousand years ago."

"Nevertheless, Jim," the Major responded with a chuckle, "it was only yesterday morning, and, if we hurry, traveling light we may catch up with them."

"That was in my thoughts, too, Baas."

"And, once we have caught up with them," the Major continued, "I can persuade some of them to return here for the rest of the packs."

"When the baas persuades, no one can say him nay," Jim said.

"Exactly! After that—the rest will be easy."

"But what is the rest?" Jim asked anxiously.

"We take the Miss Alice and her uncle to a white man's settlement."

"And after that, Baas? After that?"

"Why, after that, Jim, we will wander up and down this land, sleeping where the night finds us, eating whatever may fall to our guns, living——"

"Ya, Baas," Jim interrupted. "That is living. But we will come no more to this place of cold winds and bottomless pits?"

"No, Jim. Where the wind blows, there we will go."

"And we will play the game, Baas? Jim meant the game of I. D. B."

"Maybe, Jim. Who knows? But without doubt, we will play whatever game is set before us."



# THE BLACK SQUALL

By RALPH R. PERRY

Author of "All Set for Halifax," etc.

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THE STORY OF HIGH DAYS ON THE HIGH SEAS, THE DEEP SEA TRADITION AS SHOWN BY THE LITTLE SKIPPER OF A YANKEE CLIPPER AND THE SINGLE-TRACK MIND OF THE FARMER AMONG HIS CREW

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"I AIN'T fitten for a hog ter eat," said Bennett, and looked from man to man around the circle of sailors gathered in the foc'sle of the ship *Winthrop* for the midday meal. Each had a wooden mess kid between his knees and a spoon in his hand, but none, as yet, had made a move to eat the cracker hash slipped from the big mess kid, made of a gutter tub sawed in half, that stood in the center of the deck.

"A hog, no, ner a skunk nuther, couldn't stand ther smell," pronounced Bennett in a nasal New Hampshire drawl when he saw his shipmates agreed with him. Ordinarily the big, slow-moving sailor had little to say. He had left his father's farm eighteen months before, in the spring of 1835, and shipped aboard the *Winthrop* as a greenhorn. A voyage around the Horn to the mouth of the Columbia River for furs, thence to China for silks and tea, and back around the Horn again to twenty degrees north latitude, had made a sailor of him; but not one competent to lead a foc'sle council or decide when hash made of salt beef three years in the cask became unfit for foremast food.

"Tain't no plum duff," corroborated Jethro, the cook of the foc'sle. He was

a Gay Header, and his copper skin and sinewy strength marked him as one of the little colony of Indians on Nantucket who supplied so many prime sailors to Yankee clippers. "When we knocked in the head of the cask and was hoistin' it to the main-top I thought it was pretty strong. Howsomever—" Jethro stabbed his spoon into the mess as much as to say that it was eat this or go empty, but even he made a wry face as the mouthful approached his nose, and grimaced as he swallowed it.

"'N' I ain't a-goin' to eat it, nuther," said Bennett in stubborn determination, getting to his feet. "I'm a-goin' to Cap'n Esten, I be, and I'm a-goin' to tell him 'tain't fitten ter feed a sailor such stuff."

"Hi, belay that," warned Jethro, amid stir and murmur of alarm throughout the foc'sle. "Ye fule, Mr. Decker'll just knock ye down!"

But driven by the anger of a long-suffering man smarting under injustice, the other had run up the foc'sle ladder and was on his way aft before any one of a half dozen outstretched hands could catch and detain him.

From the forecaskle as far aft as the mainmast he walked swiftly, but as he approached nearer and nearer the quarter-

deck his pace slackened. Captain Esten and Mr. Bull Decker, first mate, both were in sight, standing back to back near the wheel fiddling with their quadrants while they prepared to take a meridian altitude of the sun, so nearly overhead they could not be sure whether the angle with the horizon should be measured from the north or the south. Neither was a man to be approached by a seaman for a trivial cause, and to add to Bennett's reluctance to interrupt the officers engaged in the mysterious business of shooting the sun, the weather was threatening.

The *Winthrop* lay in a belt of flat calm, with all sails set and hanging limply from the yards. Here and there a faint cat-paw was ruffling the surface of the sea, and a moment or two before one of these light puffs must have filled the sails, for the ship still kept steerage way. Yet wind was coming. Overhead the sun still shone bright and hot, but to the westward a black mass of thundercloud had climbed up almost to the zenith. In ten minutes or so the sun would be blotted out, there would be a squall of wind and a torrent of rain, not long in duration, but of gale intensity; and even to Bennett's by no means acute perception it was high time for the *Winthrop* to shorten sail. Yet though his fingers tightened about the mess kid, he crossed the quarterdeck and stopped an arm's length from the officers, waiting awkwardly for them to notice him. Simultaneously, as the sun dipped from its zenith, the two lowered their quadrants.

"What are yer doin' aft? Git forward where ye belong," growled Decker.

Bennett's face reddened, largely from embarrassment, for in spite of his size he was shy and speech was not easy to him; but he stood his ground, though he knew it was ever a word and a blow with Decker. The mate had first gone to sea as a foremast hand and fought his way aft to the quarterdeck by the bull strength of his shoulders. He had a surly pride in the scars fifteen years of fighting had left on his face. A broken nose, the front teeth gone from both jaws where a second mate had smashed him in the mouth with a belaying pin, off Java Head long ago. He had spat out the teeth that day, kicked the feet from under his assailant while he lay on the deck, and then jumped up and used his boots so savagely the mate spent the rest of the voyage knitting broken ribs. Decker got his berth.

Bennett was a big man, six feet tall and weighing over two hundred, and though his

broad face expressed good nature rather than the implacability of a fighter, Decker distrusted all big men who might win from motion as he had done, at his expense. It was his habit to manhandle them early in the voyage to ease his mind, but Bennett had gone into the starboard or second mate's watch and there had been no opportunity. Now Decker licked his lips in anticipation, and his big fists closed slowly.

"I want ter speak ter the cap'n, sir," Bennett persisted. Decker gathered himself together, but Captain Esten, by a quick step forward, spoiled his chance for an unexpected rush.

"Go forward," snapped the skipper. "What do you mean by coming aft where we've got to shorten sail!"

Still Bennett stood his ground.

"This hash ain't fitten fer a Christian to eat," he said stubbornly. "Thet salt horse is spoiled, Cap'n, and yer kin smell it fer yerself."

Esten snatched the kid from the sailor's hands, looked, sniffed, tossed its contents over the rail, and thrust the wooden package back into Bennett's fingers.

"Now you don't have to eat it. Get forward," he ordered.

"Cap'n, 'tain't—" Bennett persisted when with a bellow Decker leaped for a neck.

Both the mate's hands reached out from the back of the sailor's head. He intended to catch Bennett by the collar of his checked calico shirt, and by a sudden jerk smash the sailor's face against his own skull, but with both hands Bennett thrust out the mess kid like a battering ram. He struck Decker in the chest, and stopped him, though the force of the rush knocked the kid from the sailor's hands.

"I'm a-goin', sir!" he cried. "I do mean no disrespect, Cap'n—"

"Stop it, Mister," Esten snapped, and tried to catch Decker by the shoulder. The latter tore away and leaped for Bennett again, fists swinging. One the sailor blocked with a hastily raised forearm, the other struck him in the ribs with a thrust like a maul hitting a barrel. Still he kept his feet, and a push of his open right hand against Decker's throat sent the mate staggering back as far as the wheel.

"Doan't ye!" cried Bennett. Memories of fof'sle tales in which sailors had been kicked into insensibility, shot, spraddled by the thumbs and flogged for less than he had done terrified him, but Decker recovered and closed in, Bennett shut both eyes and struck with all



light. His fist crashed solidly against the helm, a body struck the deck, and when a second passed without a further assault upon him, Bennett opened his eyes. The rim of stormcloud had covered the ship and the *Winthrop* was suddenly in shadow. Decker lay sprawled flat on his back, the helmsman's feet, insensible, with only the whites showing between his half opened eyelids. Knocked out completely; and Captain Esten was staring at Bennett in amazement. Only for an instant—then his teeth snapped together and his black eyes flashed.

"Mr. Hayes! Boatswain!" he shouted, calling his officers to his assistance.

Behind Bennett there was a thump as a hatch was clapped on, the slam of the bolt sliding home, and Jethro glided past him to confront the skipper.

"He didn't mean it, sir," said the Gay Bader. His brown face was impassive, only the glitter of his black eyes bore witness to intense excitement. "I clapped the cabin hatch and the officers can't come on deck, Cap'n Esten, 'cause he didn't mean mutiny, sir, he didn't."

The cabin hatch shook as the imprisoned mutineers beat on its under surface with their fists. In the breathless hush over the ship that precedes the breaking of a black squall in thunder and rain their half muffled mutinies were audible. Captain Esten, alone on his quarterdeck, recoiled a pace. He was still holding his quadrant, and he bent over slowly to place it in the binnacle as though its safety were his first consideration.

Although skipper, Esten was only twenty-five. Slender, of medium height, not yet attained to his full strength, once it came to the hands of the two sailors; yet he was master of the ship, whose will was law on the high seas. Given time he might iron these mutineers, shoot them if he wished. Mr. Decker and the petty officers would break their way onto deck soon. The crew had been in the foc'sle, but they stood irresolute by the mainmast, too awed by his authority on the force, afloat and ashore, which he possessed, to take part in Jethro's defiance.

Bennett was white-faced, and Jethro himself stood with his arms folded. The Gay Bader's face was set and determined, but he endeavored to avoid violence. That Esten was not at a glance, temporarily he was helpless, but he would deal with the mutineers later. Now, he must take in sail before the squall blew the ship out of the bolt ropes. He took two quick

strides to the starboard rail so that Bennett and Jethro were no longer between him and the crew.

"Clew royals and t'gallants," he shouted. "All hands take in sail!"

"No! Belay that!" Jethro shouted, wheeling in his turn. "I'll break the head of the first man to touch a rope."

The crew hesitated. A negro pushed out of the crowd and started for the main t'gallant down haul, but a lanky sailor caught him by the collar and pulled him back.

"Lively!" Esten shouted, and started forward to enforce his order only to meet Jethro breast to breast.

"It ain't mutiny," exclaimed the latter, his words tumbling over one another as he talked swiftly to take advantage of the few seconds remaining before the squall broke. "Bennett's my shipmate, Cap'n, and he's a greenhorn that don't hardly know his ropes yet. I won't have him thumped or flogged for somethin' he didn't mean!"

"It weren't fitten fer a Christian ter eat," muttered Bennett.

"D'ye think I'll let a foremast hand come it over me?" whispered Esten. The blood throbbled over his cheekbones in his fierce, dark face till he suggested a red hawk poised to swoop. "D'ye think I can pass open mutiny? By the Lord Harry, no!"

"Then do what you like to me later, but you'll see every stick and rag go off this ship in the next minute!" Jethro cried. "It's your first ship! How'll it feel to be dismasted? What'll old Stony Esten say when his son comes into Salem, caught in a squall? And by cripes, Cap'n, that hash was vile, and Mr. Decker's a nigger slave driver.



Pass your word to let him off, sir! He'll work—I'll work! We c'n still get in royals and t'gallants!"

The head of the squall loomed over them, the whirling clouds of its forefront bespeaking the force of the wind to come. Esten spared it one glance, and then his eye jumped from mast to mast, each clothed in canvas, and settled on the crew, standing at the shrouds ready to go aloft, fearful of the outcome, but nevertheless standing behind Jethro. The first strong puff of wind that heralded the squall

ruffled the sea, the sails filled with a slap of canvas and a creak of the blocks as the running rigging drew taut. There was still time to take in sail, but already it was the last possible moment.

"No!" said Esten. "Talk of my father, will you? He'd rather I'd sink the ship than see his son strike his colors to a damn' copper-colored sand-flea of a foremast hand. Dismast her if you like, but when this squall's over I'll deal with you and Bennett as I see fit."

Jethro shrugged and folded his arms. Esten did the same and faced the sailor; and the two waited, eye meeting eye. Both were pale, both feared what was to happen, but hoped that at the last moment the other would lack nerve and yield.

"I didn't go fer to hit Mr. Decker," Bennett began.

"Be still!" snapped Esten and Jethro, together.

In the heart of the cloud the lightning flashed, a white line of tossing waves, clear against the gloom to windward, became visible and raced toward the ship.

"Here's the wind, sir," Jethro warned.

"Let it come," said Esten.

**T**HEN the squall knocked the *Winthrop* down. It struck her towering canvas with a bellow of wind and a deluge of rain. It tore her main royal from the bolt ropes and sent it kiting off to leeward, the fore royal yard cracked before the sail ripped to tatters. The rest of the rigging held and the force of the squall heeled the ship to starboard, over and down till the sea rose over the starboard rail and foamed half across the deck amidships, and the masts were all but flat upon the water. The ship struggled to rise, but the force of the wind held her prostrate, and during that first tremendous gust of the storm, when it blew a gale without a second's lull, the *Winthrop* was all but on her beam ends. Better for her if her sails had gone, for once down a ship will rarely rise again.

On the poop the man at the wheel kept his footing, but Esten, Jethro, and Bennett were flung in a heap against the lee rail. Decker slid across the deck after them, and as the rail dipped, might have gone over the side had not Jethro caught him by the waistband of his trousers and held him aboard. Pushing the mate, who stirred and muttered as the cold salt water began to revive him, to Bennett's arms, Jethro scrambled along the steep deck and pulled Esten out of the water.

"Hard up—put your helm hard up!" the skipper yelled.

The helmsman heard, and the wheel turned, but with the ship on her beam ends and making no way through the water, she would not answer to her rudder.

"Got to get sail off her," Jethro shouted in the captain's ear.

Esten shook the wet black hair out of his eyes and rose to his knees to peer forward through the rain that half concealed the ship. A few of the crew were clinging to the main shrouds, others lay behind the port bulwarks, holding onto the pin rail with hands and teeth.

"Can't do it," the captain replied, shouting, though Jethro was not a yard away, in order to make himself heard. "Deck's too steep to work the downhauls or braces." He paused, angry that he had answered the seaman at all. "What do you care? You got what you wanted," he yelled.

Jethro shook his head. "Not mutiny," he shouted back. "Had to stand by a shipmate—I can cut away the masts, sir."

"No! Give her a chance to rise—my father built this ship!" Esten yelled. "Can't blow like this long. Sails'll go, but I'd rather lose them than the sticks. What got into you Jethro?"

"I won't eat that hash, but I'll do my duty, sir," bellowed Bennett before his shipmate could answer. "Will ye hold Mr. Decker, sir? He's comin' around."

Thrusting the struggling mate into the skipper's arms, Bennett crawled over to Jethro. The latter shouted something in his ear and the two began to work their way forward off the poop and into the waist. Here they crawled to the crew. Jethro reached the side of the lanky sailor and shouted in his ear. The latter shook his head, evidently refusing to release his grip and move from his place of safety, and the Gay Header struck him in the face. The sailor let go, slid down the deck into the lee rail, and crawled forward, rubbing a bruised jaw. Meanwhile Bennett had pulled two men from the rail by main strength, and drove them before him toward the foc'sle.

Still the wind blew without cessation, and the *Winthrop* was held on her beam ends. Esten dragged Decker as far as the wheel and draped him around the binnacle, and then, to his surprise, saw Bennett and Jethro come crawling back.

"I close hauled the jib and fore staysail," panted the Gay Header in his ear. "They'll bring her head around if she rises and we can scud before it. 'Twon't blow long."

"That's well," said the skipper. "We'll save her yet, lad!" He smiled with stern approval and added. "Sorry you mutinied, and trying to curry favor eh?"

"No," said the sailor. "But I ain't nothing against you or your ship, sir. Only 'tain't right to flog a greenhorn, sir, and Decker had a grudge."

"Decker can kill his own snakes," rejoined the skipper. "But it's irons for you, my lad."

Jethro only shrugged. Then, with sudden excitement he shouted, "She rises, sir!"

Rising she was. The first fury of the squall was slackening, the rain fell harder, but the wind dropped, and the *Winthrop's* trucks slowly lifted from the sea. As she rose the close hauled jib caught the wind, and began to drag her head around, helped by the rudder.

"She's a fine vessel—watch her, sir!" Jethro breathed.

"None better than the Esten ships," boasted the skipper, and gripped the sailor's shoulder in excitement.

Like a tired man the *Winthrop* rose erect and fell off before the squall. Aloft the mizzen t'gallant split in two, yards bucked and slatted, for though Jethro tried to drive the crew to the braces they were shaken by their narrow escape, loath to be plucked from their handholds, and in any case there was no time to trim the yards. But the ship bore the squall's fury, yards whipped, the over-strained backstays hummed and boomed, she gathered way, and went streaking through the water. Once more the squall came down in full force, until the vessel put her lee rail awash and jumped ahead while Jethro threw back his head and yelled in sheer excitement and delight.

His yell was echoed from the poop, where Esten steered, his teeth set and shining white, struggling with a bucking, twisting wheel that was far too much for the skipper's light weight, even aided by the helmsman, until Bennett understood the crisis and threw his great bulk on the lee wheel. Ten minutes of wild sailing, and then, with a final whoop, the wind dropped to a steady breeze, the sun popped out, and the black squall went roaring off to leeward, leaving a troubled sea that slowly smoothed, and a breath of breeze that wafted the ship along at a bare two knots an hour. By the wheel Decker pulled himself erect and felt his jaw.

"Squall's blew over, hey?" he muttered, the words wheezing and hissing through the gap in his front teeth. "An' where's

that Bennett? Ye tamed him, did ye, Cap'n?"

"Yes, squall's over," replied Esten shortly. Between middle-aged mate and young master there was no love lost, for when old Stony Esten put the *Winthrop* in command of his son, because all smart Salem lads captained ships when they reached their majority, he had sent the mate along "to keep an eye on things." Nothing had ever been said of this, either by Stony or the two officers, but the younger man knew and resented it.

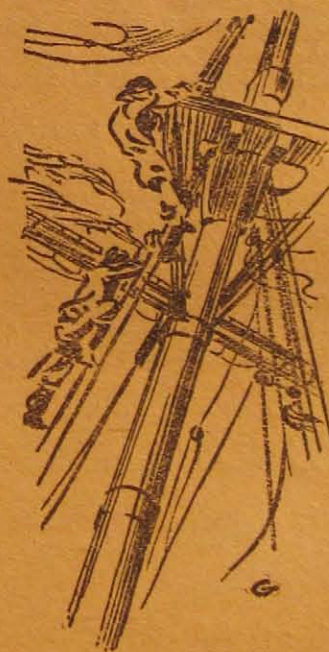
"And a fine hurrah's nest the squall left, didn't it—all your doing, Decker," the captain reproached. "Bennett? He's forward, sending up a new fore royal yard. You've met a better man, Decker," Esten added with relish.

"Not me, sir," growled the mate, but his hand continued to caress his jaw, and he made no move to go forward. "How'd he come to git past ye, and the sail still spread?"

"That's my business," said the skipper sharply. "Like it was when you jumped at a man when he was still talking to me. Lemme tell you, Mister, the Estens can kill their own snakes and don't need help of a mate a foremast hand can knock down. You began it—watch me finish it, now."

With the passing of the squall the crew had turned to with a will and the damage

aloft was already partially cleared. Once the job was in hand Jethro slid down the shrouds and walked aft to the quarter-deck, stopping at the hatch to knock back the bolt and release the imprisoned officers. They rushed out, led by the tall, lanky Hayes, the second mate, and began an angry and excited babble that Esten stilled with an upraised hand,



for Jethro had faced the skipper. The Gay Header's arms were folded, in his level black eyes was neither defiance nor a plea for mercy. He was waiting. The

captain hardened his lips. Fore and aft men stood still, straining their ears for his first word, and over the ship's side the ground swell kicked up by the squall slapped loudly against the hull.

"Who's master aboard this ship?" Esten demanded.

"I don't know—yet," Jethro dared. "Depends what's done—now. There's more'n one idea in the afterguard."

"Get the irons," said Esten. Though his eyes never left the sailor's the command was addressed to the second mate, but it was Decker who hurried below, his tongue licking his bruised lips, and when he reappeared with the handcuffs he also carried a three-foot length of rope, knotted at one end to give it weight and make sure of breaking the skin when it fell across a naked back. Jethro's eyes began to glitter dangerously.

"You refused to obey an order," the captain charged. "You cost me a royal yard, two royals, and a t'g'an'sle. Got anything to say?"

"No!" said Jethro.

"Hold out your hands!"

The sailor's eyes flashed, glanced right and left, then, seeing the hopelessness of resistance, he extended his wrists and Esten slipped the heavy manacles upon them.

"Also you pulled Mr. Decker back over the side and shortened sail," the captain continued as though it were a part of his indictment. The key turned in the cuffs, first left, then right. "Three days in irons in the sail locker. Get below."

"You're master, Captain Esten," he said, with stern approval, and turned on his heel.

"By the bull o' Barney, Cap'n!" shouted the outraged Decker. "Sail locker? He'll just caulk off there all day, snoozin' on his back, warm and snug! You ain't even fastened them irons—he c'n slip 'em off in a jiffy. Here—here's the medicine fer a mutinous dog!" He shook the knotted rope's end.

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it, Mister Decker," said the skipper. "Maybe you know who's master here, hey?"

The little captain stepped forward, his angry eyes looked up into the mate's surly face, and Decker subsided, muttering. "Besides, your turn's coming" Esten promised with saturnine humor. "Send Bennett aft."

More slowly even than at noon, when the black squall still hung over the ship, the big sailor obeyed. On the way he passed Jethro; but the latter's whisper to keep a stiff upper lip fell on deaf ears, for the stubborn, slow thinking farmer expected the worst.

"Sir?" he rumbled when he reached the quarterdeck, pulling his forelock in an awkward sea salute.

"You knocked Mr. Decker down," Esten snapped.

"I didn't go fer ter do it," grumbled the sailor sullenly. "He hit at me, he did, and——"

"Belay that!" interrupted the captain. "There's never been blowing or striking on the Esten ships 'cept when a man talks back or refuses duty. You going to refuse duty?"

"No, sir," the big man shook his head slowly, his blue eyes wide. "I never, sir, only——"

"See you remember," warned the skipper. "That's all I got to say. Now—if you an' Mister Decker got anything to settle, settle it—and by the Lord Harry, the best man comes aft!" Out of the corner of his eye the skipper was watching his mate. Decker was a bully, but for all that he was a quick thinker, as the sailor was not. Fresh in his mind was that open handed shove of Bennett's that had checked his bull rush in mid career, the blow on the jaw that had stretched him senseless for at least ten minutes. Easy to order Bennett about, risky to face the issue fist to fist. In that second the mate decided for discretion.

"Mind what Cap'n Esten says, and go for'ard, you," Decker growled—growled like a big dog that does not dare to bite. But Bennett lingered. All this talk bewildered his slow-witted mind, and he was a man of one idea.

"I ain't had no dinner, sir," he remonstrated, half stubborn, half humble, "and that hash warn't fitten——"

"Oh, go forward, go forward," Esten chuckled. "'Thet hash,' and that beef was spilled when the squall had us on our beam ends—the doctor's cooking new."

"Thankee, sir, thankee," said Bennett, and went forward with a grin on his broad face, the sunlight which followed the squall warm on his back.





## A FRESH RECRUIT

By HERBERT L. McNARY

Author of "Fighting Fishermen," "Tied Races," etc.

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PEP WAS WHAT THE BIG LEAGUE GREEN SOX NEEDED. THEY HAD EVERYTHING ELSE. AND THEN "STATION WOW" CONNORS WAS SIGNED UP, AND—BUT READ FOR YOURSELF

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**M**YER GOTTENBERG, tailor by trade, waited anxiously for the first customer of the morning to walk off and forget his paper. The customer obliged and Myer pounced on the journal and turned eagerly to the sporting page. His eager eyes danced behind thick lenses and in a moment he was rubbing his slim hands in glee as he read where the Green Sox had been walloped to defeat in the ninth inning by the Whales. And such ostentatious joy on the part of Myer was not easily understandable. For, in the first place, far from being a supporter of the victorious Whales or even a resident of the Whales' home town, Myer, as a matter of fact, lived in the big league town represented by the vanquished Green Sox. And anyway, Myer knew less about baseball than he did about the Einstein theory.

To understand Myer's gladsome emotion one would have had to know or have some knowledge of Manager "Sliding Pat" Nulty of the Green Sox.

Pat Nulty used to be a fair base stealer, in the days of his youth, but he never acquired the cognomen of "Sliding" until he became a bench manager. Manager Nulty controlled his team from the dugout. Furthermore he never wore the togs of an active player. Instead he arrayed himself in civilians, usually blue, and sat on the bench. And there he needed considerable room, for when the breaks went against

the Green Sox, Manager Nulty commenced sliding up and down the bench. All of which was very detrimental to the seat of his trousers, which latter misfortune, in turn, was very profitable to his tailor, Myer Gottenberg. So now you know why Myer always prayed for misfortune to frown upon the Green Sox, and rejoiced accordingly when it did.

Business for Myer had been very good lately. And that afternoon the Sox dropped a second game to the Whales. Following its conclusion Manager Nulty staggered into the Green Sox club's executive offices—and kept close to the wall.

"Have all the stenographers gone?" he asked anxiously of the club secretary.

"Yes. Why?"

"I wore out another pair of pants." And with a shadow of relief dispelling some of the clouds that had permanently settled upon his woebegone countenance, Manager Nulty crossed to the owner's office.

Owner Childs ordinarily had the patience of Job, but the limit had been reached.

"Well, are we ever going to win again?" he asked Nulty sourly as that perturbed person dropped into a chair across the desk from him.

Nulty shook his head wearily. "I'm beginning to doubt it. They're driving me cuckoo."

"What's wrong?" complained the owner. "For two years now I've been outbidding

everyone for the best ivory in the country! And as far as plugging holes it's like pouring water into a sieve. Didn't I pay \$30,000 and three players for Betts to plug up third base——"

"And the sap has to go and get married on the strength of it," sighed Manager Nulty, "and half the time he don't know whether he is on third base or the Washington Monument. Then there is Fricker and Corrigan at short and second, always pulling the Alphonse and Gaston act. They stick together like two sheets of fly paper. I tried breaking them up as roommates last road trip."

"Was that when they hit the slump?"

"Yes, and you'd think I'd placed a continent between them. It's like that with the whole team. They got the mechanical ability, but what good is that. It ain't like the good old days when a ball player took the game seriously; when if you were caught speaking anything but profane language to an opponent you were mobbed by your mates, and you had to sneak into the park and leave with a bat in each hand and there were more black eyes in the club than gloves. Maybe the game is more refined now, but just the same it can go too far. Now all the players think about is real estate and automobiles and clothes and manners. You'd think they were actors. Most of them are at that! I got three Irishmen on the team and I'm ashamed of them. Not an argument in the crowd! What good are a bunch of stars if——"

The secretary stuck his head into the room.

"Someone to see you, Pat. Says his name is Dennison."

"Dennison?" A faint glow came into the seamed face of the tired manager. "Send him in."

A moment later Nulty's counterpart entered the room. His eyes were blue where Nulty's were brown and he was three inches taller and pounds lighter than Nulty, but he was just as manifestly a baseball man as the manager of the Green Sox. Nulty jumped to meet him.

"Tom, it's one long time since I've heard from you!" he grinned, as he pumped his hand. Then he turned to Childs. "Here's one of those old time ball players I was just telling you about! He looks as peaceful as a priest now, and that's the way he always was off the field; but stick a plug of tobacco in his gob and get him on the diamond and Billy the Kid was a saint compared to him."

"You were some ructious yourself, Pat,

in the old Brotherhood days," grinned Dennison. "You paid more assault fines than I ever did."

"Yeah," sighed Nulty reflectively, "them were the good old days." He came back to earth. "And what are you doing now, Tom?"

"Still in baseball. Owner and manager of Parkerville team."

There followed a brief hiatus while Nulty sought for some painless method of extracting the location of Parkerville.

"It's in the Tri-County League," supplied Dennison.

"Sure, I know," lied Nulty, fooling only himself. Dennison smiled wistfully.

"I don't wonder you never heard of it. I own the franchise, but it ain't worth a jit. And I'm gettin' along in years now, Pat."

"You want me to help you out?" supplied Nulty while Childs looked on suspiciously.

"Yes, I sure do Pat. You hold the key to my future. I know where I can get a wonderful ranch out in California for \$20,000, and the doctors say Mary, that's my wife, needs the California climate. Then I'm planning to send both Eddie and Mildred to college."

Nulty commenced to squirm uneasily, trying to slide in the chair as he did on the bench.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to buy a player from me; that is I want you to persuade Mr. Childs here to buy him."

"How much?" asked Childs sharply.

"\$100,000, Mr. Childs."

The owner made a sound like a gurgling brook and slumped in his chair. Nulty gasped like a fish.

"What is he, a pitcher?" the manager finally asked.

"No, an infielder."

"What's his batting average?"

"Two-thirty-eight."

"What? Then he's a wonderful fielder is that it?"

"His average for third base was second best in the league," stated Dennison.

"How many games did he play third?"

"Eight."

"Say, Tom," exclaimed Nulty, "what are you doing, kidding me?"

"I never was so serious in my life, Pat. I want that Californian ranch. I'm staking everything on this player. He hasn't got a baseball asset except maybe being a good or a lucky pinch hitter; but we're leading the league, such as it is, and Crab Connors is the reason. And I know he'll

make you lead this league. I've studied the paper accounts of the Green Sox, so that I



know the team almost as well as you do, Pat; and I'm telling you that Connors will take you out of sixth place and win you the pennant, because you got the stuff here."

"But \$100,000 is quite a sum to gamble on a two-thirty-eight minor leaguer," suggested Childs with veiled sarcasm.

"I'm taking the gamble, Mr. Childs. You pay me the \$100,000 if you win the pennant—and the world series will more than make up that amount; or pay me \$50,000 if you come second or third, \$25,000 if you come fourth, and nothing if you fail to make the first division. Will you gamble with me?"

Childs pondered, swinging back and forth in the swivel chair.

"Anyone who can put the Green Sox in the first division is worth \$25,000 to me," he said. "I'll take a chance."

"Thank you, Mr. Childs, and you're going to pay me that hundred grand, too. Just one thing, Pat; no matter what this Connors says, let him get away with it."

"So long as the team climbs," assented Nulty.

**C**RAB CONNORS joined the Green Sox in Chicago. He came into the ornate lobby of the Ritz looking like a small town sheik wearing Podunk Corners' conception of Fifth Avenue's latest in gent's furnishings. He had a bristly thatch the color of brick dust, two aggressive blue eyes and a chin that demanded recognition. The ornateness of the lobby failed to dazzle him as he crossed to the desk and asked for Manager Nulty. The latter had just concluded dinner and was in the lobby. Connors had him pointed out and then advanced upon him.

"Say, you're Manager Nulty, ain'tcha? I'm Connors, your new infielder. When do I eat?"

The manager was a bit taken back but remembered his promise not to scatter vituperation on this new recruit.

"I'll get you a room and have something sent up."

"Whadya mean sent up?" demanded

Connors. "This is my first whack at a big league chow house and I'm not passing it up for an invalid's sandwich. Breakfast in the hay may be the works, but I'm no cow! I want a table once in a while."

"But you can't go in," protested Nulty. "It's past the dinner hour, and you would have to pay a cover charge in the Blue Room."

"Say, are you a manager or an umpire?" snapped the rookie. "Can't you see them eating in there?"

"But they were in there before the closing hour—hey, where are you going?"

"I'm going in an' eat," and Connors strode determinedly for the main dining room. A waiter sought to dissuade him with a polite smile; but smiles weren't stopping Connors.

"Out of my way, Greaseball," he shot out of the corner of his mouth and pushed the astonished waiter aside and tossed himself into a chair at an empty table. The headwaiter came bustling over. He, too, wore an indulgent smile.

"You can't come in here," he explained. "Whadya mean I can't. I'm in here, ain't I?"

"But—it ees after the hour." The headwaiter lost his urbanity and became distressed.

"Can that chatter, Napoleon. This is a hotel, ain't it? It's a public service institution, ain't it? It's got a license to satisfy the public's necessary cravings, ain't it? Well, it's got to do that so long as the hotel is open. That's the law."

The headwaiter stared at him uncomprehendingly through popping eyes. And then, appreciating that the affair was arousing attention, he quickly summoned a waiter and instructed him to take Connors' order.

Connors consulted the elaborate menu. "We'll start with some wheatcakes."

The waiter dropped his pencil.

"M'sieu, we have ze wheatcakes only at breakfast." His resentment would have subdued an ordinary man, but Connors only bristled.

"Whadya mean, breakfast? It's on the menu, ain't it? Get me the headwaiter, get me the manager, an' everybody."

Before he got through Connors had about everyone of the hotel staff gathered around his table. The gist of his incontrovertible argument was this. "If a store makes a mistake and advertises a thousand dollar fur coat for ten bucks, I can go in and get it for ten bucks, can't I? That's the law, ain't it? Well, this is the same,

ain't it? It says wheatcakes on the menu, don't it? You've contracted to feed me what's on the menu, ain't—haven't you? Where do you aliens get off tryin' to tell us Americans what the law is?"

"Shure, an' who the divil do ye be callin' an alien to?" flamed the house detective, only to have the manager restrain him.

"Lissun, I ordered wheatcakes and I'm going to get 'em, ain't I?"

The manager and house detective went into consultation and it was decided that Connors was to get his wheatcakes. He got them. Whatever else he got only the manager, house detective and chef knew.

Manager Nulty had given Connors instructions to report to him at ten in the morning, but it was just about this time that Connors solved the method of sleeping in a hotel bed. Manager Nulty met him in the lobby when he and some of the players came in from dropping another game to Chicago, and the manager felt about as joyful as a radio fan with five blown out tubes.

"Why didn't you report to the park?" he bellowed, while the regulars gathered around to see the rookie suffer.

"Whadya mean report to the park? This is the last day in Chi this trip, ain't it? I gotta have some time to look the burg over, haven't I?"

Nulty purpled and threatened to break a blood vessel or two, but only made a rumbling sound.

"Get packed!" he snapped. "We take the eight o'clock train."

Connors made no effort to fraternize with the Green Sox on the train. Instead he flopped into one of the sections not made up and perused a play by play account of the day's game, one that failed to pay compliments to the men who sat chatting or playing cards around him. About the time the train rumbled across into Indiana, the secretary came and stood over him.

"Connors, you're in the wrong section. You're sleeping in upper seven."

"Whadya mean, *upper*?" snapped Connors. "I'm sleepin' in a lower, ain't I?"

A derisive shout of laughter went up from all the players.

"Listen," said big Steve Polaski, the first sacker, his amusement tempered with good intentions, "only regulars get the lowers."

"Whadya mean, regulars? I've been readin' this account of today's game for an hour tryin' to find a *regular* ball player in the outfit. Six errors, dumb base run-

ning, fannin' in the pinches; why you, you



big squarehead, haven't got a hit since they started making base-balls white."

Now, normally, big Polaski had the disposition of a Dresden doll, but a man

in a slump is not normal, and the manner in which Connors passed his compliments out of the side of his mouth would irritate an alligator. The big player flushed and exclaimed indignantly.

"That's all right, I'm the regular first baseman."

"Regular hookworm, ya mean." He grabbed the paper and read: "'Polaski failed to cover first and Welsh was safe. Barret and Polaski let Smith's pop fly fall between them and Froman scored from second.' Why, you big squarehead, you play first like the pyramids play Egypt."

Polaski opened his mouth to retort, but sensing the futility of engaging in verbal combat with this terrier he drew off like a Saint Bernard. "He'll get that freshness taken out of him," he grumbled to his mates. It was so long since fists had flown on the Green Sox that it never occurred to Polaski to resort to this method.

Dan Horgan, veteran catcher, felt that he owed it to his age, dignity and race to take the young upstart in hand.

"One of the first things every rookie is supposed to learn, young man, is to hold his tongue," he instructed in the compelling tones of a traffic cop.

"Whadya mean, hold my tongue? You're a fine one to tell me not to talk! You're Dumb Dan Horgan, ain'tcha? The guy what talked an umpire into takin' a game away from you?"

Horgan turned the colors of the rainbow. Connors had referred—as succinctly as it ever had been—to the one sore spot in Horgan's life; and ball players need to make but one. Several years ago Horgan had involved an umpire in dispute despite the fact that the Green Sox had a lead of four runs in an important game. In the ninth the umpire called a man out at the plate. The runner protested vigorously that Horgan had not touched him. Horgan, to embarrass the umpire, substantiated the runner; and the umpire in rage reversed his decision, whereupon the team



came to life and put over five runs and Horgan learned where he had talked himself out of a game. Now he had been reminded of it by one of his own team, and a rookie at that.

Joe Kane, centerfielder, came in from another car and was informed of the rookie's intention to occupy a lower his first night traveling.

"Try and get in one," challenged Kane.

"Try and keep me out of one," retorted Connors and dove into the nearest berth, which happened to have been assigned to Glenn, the big right fielder. It was up to the easy-going outer gardener to get him out, and Glenn scratched his head over the problem, for he had no desire to have his pedigree analyzed nor his diamond transgressions caustically reviewed. The Green Sox goaded big Glenn into action and his resentment smoldered not so much against Connors as against his mates.

"I never thought I roomed with a guy that was yellow," declared Homer Cottle who patrolled the left fields in the summer time and the Georgia savannahs in the winter.

"Who's yellow, you big Cracker," and Glenn exchanged the first harsh words with his buddy in three years. "I'll get him out when I'm ready to hit the hay."

Eventually Glenn decided to retire and a squabble ensued in his berth. Assisted by others he plucked out the kicking Connors and tossed him into upper seven. Connors poked his head through the green curtain and for twenty minutes or more proved himself an omnivorous gleaner of statistics by reminding each and everyone of the score, and all the ball players of their numerous weaknesses, misfortunes, delinquencies and transgressions.

In a few sizzling moments he gave a consensus of all the biting opinions of the most vitriolic of sport writers as to why a team with seven three-hundred hitters and three star pitchers languished in sixth place. Shoes, magazines and numerous impedimenta came his way hurled by men with high priced throwing arms, but he avoided all contributions with the dispatch of an African dodger and never paused to dot his "i's" or cross his "t's" in his oratory until he had driven everyone of the players to bed.

But Crab Connors made no attempt to close his eyes in that narrow confinement of upper seven, but merely rested while the train swayed from side to side and the wheels clicked symphoniously beneath him with no other sounds to create discord save

heavy breathing and a faint snore or two. Then Connors lowered himself from his berth to the curtain lined aisle.

Beneath each berth were pairs of shoes. Connors took these and rearranged them so that their makers could not tell them apart, removing or tying lacings when so inclined. Then he proceeded to hunt up his baggage. He found his suitcase and removed what he wanted from it. Near by was a bat bag, and on second thought he removed a bat also and then made his swaying way back to number seven. With a bat in one hand and a ukelele in the other he clambered into his berth.

*"Oh-h-h, it ain't gonna rain no mo', no mo',  
It ain't gonna rain no mo'!  
How in the heck can I wash my neck  
If it ain't gonna rain no mo'?"*

This was the selection rendered by Connors, and he certainly rendered it in a beautiful rheumatic tenor accompanied by some original ukulele discords with numerous verses.

"Sing something new!" growled a voice, smothered by a pillow.

*"Oh-h-h, what I sing is new enough  
For all youse guys I'm thinkin'  
For from the pep youse burglars show  
I think you played with Lincoln.  
Oh-h-h, it ain't gonna rain no mo', no mo',  
It ain't gonna rain no mo'——"*

"Hey, Feeble-minded—bag your head!"

*"Oh-h-h, sticks and stones may break my  
bones,  
Call me wha, you can,  
But all that I will say to you  
Is so is your old man.  
Oh-h-h, it ain't gonna rain no mo', no mo',  
It ain't gonna rain no mo'——"*

A dozen or more of angered athletes tumbled out into the aisle.

"Somebody kill that pest, will ya please!"

*"Oh-h-h, it seems to me that I just heard  
Someone call me a pest.  
Well, until I get a lower berth  
No one will get no rest.  
Oh-h-h, it ain't gonna rain no mo', no mo',  
It ain't gonna——"*

Connors scrambled to his knees and clutched his bat as he sensed assault.

*"The first who tries to climb into this bed  
Gets this bat right over the head!"*

He paused and surveyed the pajama brigade in the aisle.



"Do I get my lower berth?"

"Use the head," growled Joe Kane. "We got to open with a double header, Tuesday."

"What of it? You couldn't

play no worse if you were unconscious. Do I get my lower?"

He got it.

CONNORS slept late the next morning and for all the oaths that pervaded the sleeping car and shriveled the porter when it came time to putting on shoes, none had the temerity to awaken Connors. Ball players are the most conservative people in the world. The Green Sox were spared his interference until he poked his head through the cordon watching an intense game of bridge. Corrigan and Fricker, the Damon and Pythias of baseball, were playing Cottle and Kane and all four seemed to have unusual cases of nerves.

"Why didn't you finesse on hearts?" crabbed Connors, calling attention to an obvious error on the part of Corrigan, one which lost game and rubber and which others had been kind enough not to mention.

"What do you know about bridge?" snapped Corrigan, coloring angrily.

"This much—that there's only supposed to be one dummy at a time."

"You might have known I had the king," cut in Fricker, peeved at losing. "I bid no trumps, you apple head."

"Who's an apple head?" In attempting to rise Corrigan kicked Fricker. The latter thought it deliberate just as Corrigan saw no accident in Fricker's tipping the card table on him. In a moment they were swinging at each other. Cottle jumped in to separate them and stopped a swing on the nose and lashed out blindly. By the time the peace dove hovered over the group again, Crab Connors had disappeared.

Despite the fact that the statistically strong Green Sox threatened to drop into seventh place, a fair throng turned out on their return from a disastrous Western swing. A double header with the Pelicans was always an attraction; and besides, it

is always worth the price of admission to sit safely up in the stands and tell some nationally known husky how rotten he is. The first game wasn't three innings old before the boys in the fresh white suits gathered a bumper crop in raspberries. Big Steve Polaski on first collected the most because he was nearer than most of his mates to the grandstand, was bigger than any of them and still wallowed in a batting slump.

In the eighth the Green Sox unexpectedly produced a batting rally. It was inexplicable as far as the fans were concerned, but in the Green Sox dugout for eight innings Crab Connors had eloquently expounded on his first impressions of a big league game and those who played it until the Sox commenced going to the plate with burning ears. This unlooked for rally fell short of tying the game by one run; which was just about what the fans expected.

Then in the ninth Kane led off with a triple and in the excitement the fans forgot their resentment, but remembered it when Fricker and Cottle popped out. Then the Pelican's pitcher lost control and walked Glenn and Betts, bringing up Polaski who had been dropped in the batting order.

"I think this is where I get out of my slump," exclaimed Polaski, reaching for a bat.

"You got as much chance of getting out of a slump as a murderer has out of the electric chair," snarled Connors. "Say, what's my chances of goin' up? I'm the best pinch hitter in baseball."

Nulty looked at him. One run was needed to tie. A pass would force that in. The Pelican twirler was wild and Connors made a much smaller target than the big Polaski.

"Go in and wait him out," he ordered. Polaski flung his bat away in disgust and Connors carefully selected a stick for himself.

The Pelican pitcher needed no mental telepathy to tell him that this rookie who stood swinging his bat menacingly at the platter had come up with instructions to wait for a walk, and so he made the first ball sweeter than a gallon of ice cream. Connors stepped into it and rapped it on a line over the third baseman's head and two runners raced in before the left fielder got hold of the ball.

Connors got more applause for that single hit than the rest of the team had heard in weeks. But Nulty wore anything but

smiles as Connors came into the bench.

"I told you to wait him out didn't I?"

"For the love of Pete are you kicking when I won you the game?"

"Supposing you knocked that ball into an infielder's hands?"

"Say, lissun, that ain't the way I play ball."

Nulty subsided.

The Green Sox settled the second game early. In the second inning Polaski came to bat with two on. He had been sulking in the dugout between games, peeved at the ignominy of having a rookie pinch hit for him. Still in his sulks at the bat, he swung hard at a fast ball and hoisted it into the centerfield stands for his first hit in three games and his first homer in a month. And that is how Polaski came out of his slump.

With a safe lead, Nulty sent Connors in to play third in the sixth inning, and the fans welcomed him with a salvo of applause. Connors started a line of chatter that could be heard all over the park, but had little to do in the fielding line until Olson of the Pelicans reached second and then stole third on a slow ball. He rode high in the approved fashion of testing a rookie's nerve and tore Connors' new uniform. Connors looked at the rent and then at Olson and the next minute jumped for him. Umpires and coach got them



apart about the time the two teams gathered around them and the police were driving the fans back into the stands. About five minutes later the players got back to their respective positions and during all that time Connors listened to the verbal endorsement of several thousand spectators.

Dan Horgan saw a chance to catch the enraged Olson off third, and snapped the ball down. Too late, Olson made a head-first dive for the sack. At the same time Connors dove for him; and they came together in mid air. Connors rose and shook some fog from his eyes. Olson lay cold.

"Hey, a couple of you stretcher bearers," Connors yelled over to the Pelican's bench, "come over here and drag this stiff to the morgue."

Some of the Pelicans came, and they

paused long enough to tell Connors of some popular methods of doing business with an undertaker.

"Yeah, lissun, I'll take the whole team on three at a time."

"Can that chatter," cut in the umpire. "This isn't Congress."

"What is it—a sewing circle?"

"I don't want none of your wise cracks."

"Whadya mean, wise cracks? Who started this, old Astigmatism!"

"Out of the game!" bellowed his Honor.

"Whadya mean, out of the game. I haven't taken a sock at you yet. Hell, what a league! Ya get put out for talkin'! If that's the case I might as well get my money's worth. I can ask ya questions, can't I? The rule book says I can. Well, was it your uncle or your father that got hung for sheep stealin'?"

"I'll give you two minutes to get off the field——"

"Well, you'd better put your mask on while you're looking at the watch."

"You'll feel that one in the pocket! Off the field, I tell you!"

And now as the banished Connors headed for the dugout, shooting conversation over his shoulder the meanwhile, the fans realized that this rookie had been put out of a game on his first day, and these fans ran the risk of contracting tonsillitis as they alternately encouraged him and condemned the umpire.

Usually somewhere in the final paragraphs of the sporting accounts of the double header as printed the following day there was some mention of the games themselves, but practically all the rest of the paragraphs were devoted to the latest acquisition to the Green Sox. "Fighting Crab Connors," "Broadcasting," and "Station WOW" were some of the agnomens attached to him and he was credited with contributing more color than the northern lights. That day the fans came out in droves to get a look at him. He came through as a pinch hitter in the sixth and then went in at second where he made two assists, a putout and an error and precipitated a dozen arguments.

At no time in the games that followed did Connors play brilliantly, although he was always more or less spectacular. As a fielder he fought the ball, making his plays appear difficult and his misses excusable, and he failed to shine at the bat except in pinches when nearly everyone else in the park was handicapped by a nervous tension. Most of the games found him on the coaching line where his rasping, penetrat-

ing tones informed the universe of the misfortunes and indiscretions of all opposing players, their immediate relatives and remote ancestors with the result that more than one wild pitch went skimming by his head, and he took his life in his hands whenever he went to bat.

Gossip travels rapidly in the big leagues and Connors' distended ears gathered all that was essential and used this for the foundation of elaborate libel. With innate shrewdness he learned just how far he could go with each umpire and clung to the line with the skill of a Blondin. At that, umpires hesitated to banish or suspend him, for then he could sit in the grandstand, and being beyond their jurisdiction, needed to place no restraint upon his invective or his efforts to incite mayhem.

It must not be suspected that he spared his own team; far be it from such. The Green Sox had been known to be as docile as hay munching cows; now they became caged panthers. They sported more black eyes than a leopard has spots. Each slightest difference of opinion was transmuted under Connors' skillful manipulation into a *casus belli* and agreement to meet under the stands. Formerly the wives of the players sat in one happy group in a box or two behind the Sox dugout. Now rows of seats intervened, across which they shot steely glares. And yet Connors himself was never involved in fistic combat. Each player lived in mortal terror of his tongue, and if necessary Connors talked himself out of each impending crisis.

Nor was Nulty himself spared, and the manager wished many times to see the last of his pest. But more than his promise to his old friend Dennison kept him from shooting Connors. A baseball manager will wear a pair of shoes two sizes too small and risk atrophying his feet rather than make a change while his team is winning. And the Green Sox were winning. Even good natured Steve Polaski was arguing over the close ones and mauling the ball as if he bore it some special grudge. The first of August had found the Sox in sixth place, but the teams ahead were pretty well bunched and after the Sox had knocked off the leaders in straight series it became anyone's race. And Myer Gotenberg wrung his hands in despair, for he made no more suits now for Sliding Pat Nulty. Nulty jumped now, instead of sliding along the bench.

September found the Green Sox in third place and without a friend in the league or

two players on the team who dared confide in each other. September fifteenth they slipped into second place, and in the last week of the scheduled season they clinched the pennant when Connors talked the opposing pitcher to throw to second with no one on the bag. Tom Dennison saw the pennant won and went to the office to collect his check for \$100,000.

"That's an awful lot of money for a player who has batted only two-twenty-seven and has made almost as many errors as putouts; but there is no denying he's the means of our winning the pennant, and the question is am I pleased about it. I used to have one happy family, an aggregation of gentlemen. Now I feel like a Fagin."

"Maybe you're right," agreed Dennison as he put the check in his pocket. "Money isn't everything—but it comes in handy at times."

THE town hysterically prepared for the World Series and the Grays of the other league arrived for the first two games. While the World Series brings together the best ball players of the year it does not necessarily produce the best ball. Every man is on a tension, only orthodox plays are followed, and the pitchers use more stuff in each game than they ordinarily would in a month. But the Green Sox began the series with none of the usual caution. Connors flailed them pitilessly, and the photographing and attending ceremonies failed to prove to be soothing antidotes.

They took the field in a fighting mood,



and with Connors broadcasting from the first base coaching line they got the jump on the conservative Grays and busted the game wide open in the first frame. The Grays took the slaughter so keenly that they appeared on the field the second day completely unnerved, and suffered another disgraceful rout. They recovered slightly in their own home town, but failed by a run to save the game.

In the fourth game, the Grays, who were favored before the series opened, showed a return to form and captured the verdict without great effort. The fifth game developed into a scoreless pitching duel until the ninth inning when the pinch hitting

Connors worried the pitcher into a walk and then involved the first sacker in argument as to whether the latter's wife would ask for alimony or start a perennial donation to charity for being rid of the big baloney. Unfortunately in the height of the argument the Grays' pitcher tried to catch Connors napping but only fooled the first baseman. The ball traveled to right field and Connors legged it to third whence he scampered in on a sacrifice fly for game and series.

Following the usual custom the Green Sox's share of the receipts was made out to a single player, Dan Hogan, and deposited in his name. Then the players met to agree on the proper division. Only those players who had been with the team all year were privy to this session, which automatically excluded Connors. Donations were made to the trainer, coaches, secretary, ground keepers and others, and half shares voted for certain of the rookies.

"And now we come to Connors," declared Cottle, brave enough to break the silence.

"Heaven forbid," breathed Hogan, "but it's got to be done. My suggestion is that we vote him a full share, for after all he was the means of our winning the pennant, and he talked himself into the run that won the Series."

"I'll agree on the full share," assented Kane, "because I wouldn't dare do otherwise; but I don't agree that he won us the pennant. After all it is hitting and fielding that wins the games, and of course pitching. We provided that. Connors merely made us recognize that we had it. That's to his credit, but there is a lot that isn't. This money can't compensate for what I have gone through the past couple of months nor restore the friendships that pest has made me lose."

"You're right," grumbled Glenn. "Here I'm going back to San Francisco a block away from Jim Barrett, here, and I'd give a-plenty to be able to bring the wife over and play bridge again."

"And I'd give the same to have you," sighed Barrett.

"I guess we all have a few hatchets to bury," observed Hogan, "so let's do it. Let's call the kid in, give him credit for winning the pennant this year, but persuade him to lay off next season. We know what we can do on the field and we can come through just as well next year and still be one happy gang again."

"Gosh," exclaimed Fricker to Corrigan, "it would be great to be rooming with you again."

"You said it!" agreed Corrigan.

And so when smiles wreathed the countenance of the Green Sox again and they felt accustomed to them, they called in Connors.

"Well," beamed Hogan, "we voted you a full share."

"What the hell else do you think you'd do?" snapped Connors.

"Well, we didn't have to," retorted Barrett. "You weren't with us the whole season."

"I bet you argued on that point until your tongue dropped out. You're the egg that wanted it put in the paper that it was only forty-seven instead of forty-nine cents you owed Glenn for a bridge game."

"It *was* forty-seven."

"You're another," exclaimed Glenn menacingly.

"Hey," cut in Kane, "don't be like Fricker and Corrigan."

"Whadya mean, like us?" demanded Fricker as he and Corrigan leaped for him.

"Don't blame me for what Fricker starts," panted Corrigan between punches and then stopped one on the ear.

"Cut this out," snapped Hogan.

"Who do you think you are—the manager?" demanded Cottle. "I've taken your lip just enough, now you take that—"

The judge of the municipal court ruled only on the charge of disorderly conduct, and fined each of the Green Sox ten dollars. Connors left his money at home and talked the judge into a loan of twenty.

### GAS ATTACKS ON RABBITS

**P**OISON gas has eradicated rabbits from Smith Island, in the Straits of San Juan de Fuca, the entrance to Puget Sound. The rabbits, living on the island with nothing to halt their increase, had become so numerous that the navy appealed to the United States biological survey. Calcium cyanide gas was so effective that the Australian government has asked data in the hope that a similar method may be used to rid that continent of the burrowing rabbits which are such a pest there.—L. R.



# SHEEP LIMIT

*A Story of a Bitter Feud of The Ranges*

By GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

*Author of "The Cow Jerry," "The Cattle Baron," etc.*

CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE SHERIFF COMES

**R**AWLINS walked around the place in a dumb, cold daze. His hat was lost, his clothing was dusty and disheveled as if he had striven for his life hand to hand. It did not come into his thoughts to inquire whether he had passed through the fight unwounded; it was enough that he was not conscious of any pain.

It seemed to him that a profound silence had settled over his lonely homestead; that the three men riding like thieves in all haste down the creek had snatched something away from him, neither the nature nor value of which he was fully conscious of, leaving him altogether unlike what he had been only a little while before.

How long before? How long had that battle lasted? Not a great while, scarcely more than a few minutes, he calculated. It was daylight when they woke him in their efforts to pull his house down; the sun was only making a far-off candle-flare on the horizon now. It would be almost an hour yet until sunrise. And he had killed a man.

It gave him a shocking start to think of it that way; the sun an hour away yet, and he had killed a man. What connection there was in the peculiarly divided thought he did not know, nor trouble to adjust.

There was a great stillness over the grassy valley, a growing fear in his breast. Could he justify the killing of that man to authority when it came to inquire? Could he justify it to himself?

There was a sickening feeling of revulsion for the whole unfortunate adventure. The pitiful things which he had there to defend were not worth the life of any man, were not worth the upbraidings of conscience, the years of regret this morning's hot-headed work would cost. It had taken this tragedy to adjust his sense of values. Before the fight he had believed his position unassailable by the most exacting moralist among mankind. Now it looked as if the whole project had been founded on a wrong conception. What was the homestead worth to him, now he had shed blood to defend it? How far would public opinion in that one-man country support him in his defense?

It was a troublesome thing, an appalling thing to rise up and confront a man. He had reasoned that the United States Government would stand behind him in the defense of his rights. Would it do so? What was the United States Government but an oligarchy of influence?

Rawlins withdrew a distance from the trampled scene of his dooryard, and sat down on a little rise behind the house. He was beginning to sweat and palpitate in the heat of doubt and fear that his disturbed

imagination generated. The raiders had disappeared in the hills, heading for the nearest camp, he believed, to gather reinforcements and come back. It would not be their way to give it up.

In case they came back, what should he do? Would it be wiser to jump his horse when he saw them coming, and leave it to them, or stand and fight as he had begun? There was no answer to it forthcoming at that moment. He thought he'd better look around and find his hat.

As he turned to go about this errand, so trivial in the grim business of that day, Rawlins saw somebody approaching, riding hard. Edith Stone. There was no doubt about it. He knew her manner of riding, and he knew the horse. He went to meet her, running in his desire to stop her before she came in sight of the dead man lying in that stretched, straining posture, his face against the ground.

Edith arrived in a flurry of dust, leaning eagerly as she came on. She was pale and frightened; there was a fearful look in her eyes.

"Oh, they didn't, they didn't!" she

gasped, catching her breath with open mouth, the sound of it like a sob.

"No," said Rawlins stupidly.

He was standing with the rifle under his arm, pale and dazed-looking.

"I saw them up there—saw them through the field-glasses!" she shuddered.

"Yes," he seemed to agree, clogged and heavy in his understanding.

"What happened to you, Ned? Are you hurt?"

She flung out of the saddle, confronting him in fresh concern.

"No, not hurt."

"What happened, Ned? What did they do?"

"They tried to drag my house down, and I shot a man. He's up there; he's dead. I shot him."

"Oh well," she said, looking at him curiously, "what could they expect? They came here huntin' trouble, didn't they?"

"You must not go up there," he said in terrible earnestness. "You must go back home."

"You don't want to let 'em get your nerve that way, Ned," she admonished,

## SHEEP LIMIT

### GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

#### What has happened before

GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN has written several of the most popular serials which SHORT STORIES has ever printed, painting for us pictures varying from those of old-time California of "The Road to Monterey" to the Kansas cowtown doings of "The Cow Jerry." In "Sheep Limit" he draws a picture of a youngster from Kansas, who, knowing nothing of conditions farther west, decided to go in for sheep raising. This young Rawlins had simply put his finger on a portion of a map and decided that there was the place he would take up a homestead and graze his sheep in the best of pastures. Of the prejudices, feuds and no-trespass ideas of the cattlemen of his chosen district he knew nothing—but he was to learn.

First, he ran into a long wire fence around the very district of the Northwest he had so confidently chosen from the map and found that cattle interests had the country closed off, with the various sheepherders of the neighborhood looking longingly across the wires but powerless to claim their rights. Rawlins is taken on as a hand with Mrs. Lila Duke, widow of a sheepman and a huge sheep owner in her own right. Rawlins' idea is to learn the business while with Mrs. Duke, then go in for raising sheep on his own. This plan is upset by Mrs. Duke's suddenly marrying what the people of the country jocularly call a "mail order beau," and this Peck, an ex-tailor out to get as much money from the widow as he can, has no use for Rawlins, who sees through him too well. So Rawlins loses his job and Peck is installed at the Duke sheep ranch, much resented by Tippy, Mrs. Duke's overseer, and Edith, her niece. Rawlins is still determined to buck the cattle interests and enters into a long correspondence with his congressman in an endeavor to find out by what right this large tract of land is being held. The satisfaction in that quarter is none, so he puts the congressman's letter in his pocket and files a homestead claim on that corner of the Dry Wood range, where the guarded fence stretched league upon league, barring the homeless from their inheritance and their rights.

Rawlins tries to enlist the help of other sheepmen of the country in his endeavor to force his rights in the cattle country, but without success. All of three weeks pass quietly after Rawlins takes up his abode inside Sheep Limit and nothing happens, so he prematurely begins to have a carefree feeling. Then Rawlins is summarily ordered off by the foreman of the ranch whose owner has fenced in what is really open range, but still he refuses to leave. Both Mrs. Peck and Edith are pessimistic about what will happen to him if he defies the order to move, but he still maintains that he will stand by his rights. Then he finds that his feeling of safety was a false one and some of the men belonging to the cattle interests ride up and prepare to set fire to his house. Rawlins, determining to fight for it, opens fire on the invaders.

her own composure regained. "Come on down to the creek and wash your face—you'll feel better then."

She took him by the arm and led him down to the water's edge, her horse following. The animal sprawled its forelegs and drank gratefully from the shallow stream, while Edith took the rifle and Rawlins bent down to refresh himself according to her counsel.

"Didn't you meet them?" he asked, with a start as if the thought had frightened him, the water wasting through his cupped hands.

"They turned off into the hills. Go ahead and wash."

He obeyed in a spiritless way, as if nothing mattered now he had killed a man.

"You knew you might have to shoot some of them if you held your own," she said gently, yet with a little hardness of accusation or censure, as if to say he had failed in her expectations of him in not standing up under it like a man.

"It isn't so much a question of right as of values," he said, looking up gravely, water streaming from his face.

This was puzzling to her, and vexing because she did not understand. She flushed, frowning her displeasure.

"Did you know any of them? Was Hewitt there?"

"No, Hewitt wasn't with them, but I thought I recognized the man we had trouble with that day at the fence."

"Yes, he was apt to have a hand in it. Were you in the house when they came?"

"I'd been on the watch for them two nights, outside. I must have dozed off—they were at their devilment when I first saw them."

Rawlins pulled a deep sigh, shaking his head sorrowfully, the weight of his tragedy still pressing him down, making his senses blunt.

"They came huntin' trouble," she repeated, "they got what was comin' to them. You act like you're sorry."

"It's an awful thing to kill a man over an outcast chunk of ground like this!" he said.

"I don't suppose they tried to kill you, I don't suppose they even took a quiet little shot or two at you to scare you off!"

"He was going to burn the house, he'd just struck a match when I—he'd just struck a match."

"What did you want to spoil his innocent little joke for if it's going to make you feel so sick?" she asked out of patience with his shocked and shaken state.

"Didn't they shoot at you?"

"I expect maybe they did, Edith," he replied.

"You expect maybe they did!" she said with scornful reproach. "Look here!"

She took hold of his shirt-sleeve, on the side toward his body, near the arm-pit showing him a bullet hole. Rawlins looked at the place curiously, and tucked it under his arm to hide it, apparently ashamed to have his past peril known. He muttered something that she did not understand, holding his arm tight against his side.

"Two or three inches over and it would have been your heart instead of your sleeve," she said. "And you stand there like you wanted to apologize for them! What are you goin' to do when they come back with Hewitt to wipe you off the earth?"

There was an insolent challenge in her demand.

"Come back with Hewitt?" he repeated, stretching his eyes as if the thing had an astonishing sound. His face darkened with a rush of hot blood; he stood feet wide apart, clenching his fists. "Damn them! I'll fight them to a finish!"

"You're all right now, honey," she said, a tremor in her voice. She looked at him, smiling a twisted little smile.

"It's my property, it's my home, even if it don't amount to much. I'll defend it down to the last kick there is in me!"

He stepped over briskly and picked up his gun, scraping the trickling drops of his late ablution from his cheek with the rim of his hand.

"Yes, I knew you would," she said. "I'd like to stick around and help you, Ned, if you'll let me."

"You can help me more, Edith, if you'll cut across to Lost Cabin and send the sheriff and coroner over here," he said. "They had a double turn of rope around my shack—" indignantly pounding the air in denunciation of the outrage—"with four horses hitched to it, trying to drag it down. It's there yet—the sheriff can see it."

"If you think I'd better go, Ned," she consented.

"Somebody'll have to go, and I can't leave it to them to come back here and finish it off. Have you got anything to cut the wire?"

"I always carry something to cut the wire."

"Bring the sheriff in the short way—if he's got the nerve to come."

She nodded, starting up the bank for her horse. He caught her arm.



"Ride around the house," he said, giving her a straight, meaning look. She nodded again, going on.



Rawlins went up the creek to unsaddle Graball and turn him out in a hobble, seeing no remote exigency that would impel him to desert his homestead now. He was exhilarated by his recovery from his dazed oppression of spirits.

That was a pretty decent sort of sheriff, a sheepman kind of sheriff. Whatever influence Senator Galloway had in politics generally around there, his foot must have slipped in the election of that man. So Rawlins thought that morning, when the sheriff arrived in quick time after Edith's summons, the coroner coming along more deliberately with a proper conveyance for carrying off the wreckage of the fight.

That was about all there was to it, the sheriff said, looking with keen interest at the double rope around the house, with the outrunning lariats lying as they had been cast off. If a gang of cusses came to shoot a man's home up he'd be a damn' fool if he didn't shoot back. Rawlins had done a man's job, and that was about all there was to it, as far as the sheriff could see.

The coroner arrived in due time, bringing with him a jury of sheepmen, being an expedient man and determined to have the case investigated and disposed of on the ground. The inquest was held over the slain man where he lay, with the half-burned match beside his fingers. The whole proceeding did not occupy more than ten minutes, the jury not only finding Rawlins justified, but commending him warmly for his defense of his rights, which was, they said, in no small measure the defense of the public rights, too long defied in the Dry Wood country.

The inquest over, these sheepmen cast their calculative eyes around the country, knowing themselves safe in their official position, taking advantage of the event to do a little locating against some future day when a little extra range would be handy. Edith hung back out of the proceedings until they had lifted the body into the wagon and covered it with a sheep-herder's tent. Then she came over to shake hands with Rawlins, as the rest of the sheepmen

had done, and do the best she could to make it appear that killing a man under the proper circumstances was nothing to worry over or remember with remorse.

The sheepmen all knew Edith, for fifty or sixty miles was a small matter between neighbors in Dry Wood in those times. It is just about the same even today. They talked about the drouth, and kicked the ground judiciously, turning up the soil to note its qualities, and chewed pieces of hay from Rawlins' stacks, making quite a neighborly reunion out of it. The dead man in the wagon was the smallest part of their thoughts.

Not so with Rawlins after the coroner, the jurymen and the sheriff had gone back to Lost Cabin, taking the short cut across Galloway's land for the first time in their lives; and Edith had ridden away to the ranch to relieve whatever anxiety her aunt might feel over her unexplained absence. It would take a long time to wear the hideous accusation from his own conscience, the upbraiding that it might have been avoided.

An unworthy man, an outlawed man, a vicious and murderous villain. Yet he had been human, worth more at his basest evaluation than the little oblong of semi-arid land that a perverse infatuation had urged this sheep-mad stranger from afar to enter upon in peril and attempt to hold in strife.

There would not be much in that life, hiding out of a night that way like a cat, to wake soon or late with the bold challenge of fire in his eyes. This resistance, this first success, would only embitter them, lending vengeance to their other grievances, fancied or contrived.

So Rawlins reasoned as he made his bed in the buffalo wallow that night. Not in the intention of standing sentinel over his possessions again, for he was weary to the bone. Let them come when they would and do what they might if he could not wake in time to stop them. If it came to a battle again he would stick to his hole and give them the best he had. Even the sheepmen, who plainly expected much of him, could not demand more.

## CHAPTER XX

### A FOREHANDED SHEPHERD

IT WAS not the gleam of fire on his eyeballs nor the sound of guns in his ears that woke Rawlins when morning was breaking gray over the sheep-lands. He heaved himself up suddenly

when the sound of it struck through his heavy slumber.

Sheep. The tremulous, pleading, helpless babble of a band of sheep.

Rawlins took a cautious peep through the fringe of his hiding-place, seeing nothing of the complaining creatures which seemed to be near at hand in large numbers. There was a fog in the valley, or a skim of fog, which pressed close to the ground, common to that valley in the early morning. Rawlins often had seen it before, so shallow that the tops of the taller cottonwoods along the creek protruded above it. The sheep were bleating out of it beyond the creek; none of them was to be seen.

He came out of his hole cautiously, relieved to see his house and haystacks still there. He wondered whether this was a new scheme of Galloway's men, running their flocks over to his valley, hoping to drown him in sheep, or whether the herders had acted on orders predicated on the certainty that he would be ousted by that time. It was a trespass, any way they had worked it, for the sheep were on his land. He intended to send them out of there in short order. He wasn't going to have sheep in there ruining his hay crop.

Making a stealthy circuit of his premises, Rawlins encountered the sheep under the creek bank where he had tied his horse the day before. Along there the bank was high on one side of the stream only, the other being a pebbly slope which high water covered. At its present low stage the stream pressed against this high bank, only three or four yards wide, the pebbly shore making a sort of sheltered nook very good for a bedding-ground. Here the shepherds had brought their sheep while he slept, either ignorant of their proximity to his house or assured in their belief that all was safe.

What puzzled Rawlins was that no shepherd was in sight, no smell of his breakfast fire on the air. It is a law among shepherders of the Northwest that flocks must be moved from the bedding-ground at dawn, faced into the wind and spread to graze while the dew is on the herbage. By careful attention to this rule of the craft, a flock is able to subsist for many days without water. It saves the shepherd labor and the sheep flesh in long drives to tanks and streams.

There was no voice of sheep-herder rising in the age-old cry that marshaled the sheep forth from the bedding-ground; there was no shepherd to be seen. Not

even a dog to bristle and give the alarm of the peering stranger's presence. It was mystifying to Rawlins, who did not care to push his investigations too far.

He would wait until the fog cleared, as it would with the first spears of sunlight lancing over the hills. It was lucky the sheep had not come into his uncut grass, which stood knee-high, ready for the scythe. They would have done great damage trampling there, for it was a middling big band, a thousand or more, from what he could see. There was nothing to do but wait, and act according to what should be revealed.

Rawlins went back to the house, which he had not examined for intruders, thinking the herder or herders might have taken possession and be sleeping late on account of the unaccustomed luxury of a bed beneath a roof. There was nobody in the house; it remained just as he had left it yesterday, the hay on the floor where the incendiary had thrown it, the broken glass from the window littering the ground. He had not thought it worth while, in his uncertain state, to right things up around the place. There might be something bigger to come off around there yet which would muss things up even more.

It was assuring, at any rate, to find things undisturbed. Uneasy as he was over the presence of the sheep, he was strongly tempted to make a fire in the stove and get breakfast, but instead returned to the creek, where he sat down overlooking the flock to wait the breaking of the fog.

The sheep were huddling and crying below him, lambs nuzzling their breakfast not much concerned over the delay in the day's proceedings. A wind began to stir, moving the shallow layer of dense fog, making



rifts in it here and there, opening momentary vistas through one of these rifts. Rawlins had a glimpse of a dog, sitting in stolid patience on the farther rim of the flock. It was a big, white-breasted animal, morose in its pose.

Rawlins got up, a creepiness of apprehension crinkling over him. It was not a stray flock, as he had begun to believe; the herder was somewhere near, tired from his labor of the night in bringing the band into

the disputed pasture. As he turned and peered, the quickening wind came with a rush down the creek, dispersing the fog in a breath, revealing what he sought.

The herder was lying beyond the dog, ridiculously covered across the middle part of his body by a blanket and the canvas of his little tent. Rawlins' first amazement gave way to humor. He chuckled as he hastened down the creek bank and struck across the shallow stream. For there was not a double of that long figure in the Dry Wood country. It was the romantic form of Dowell Peck.

The dog backed off, bristling, silent, as Rawlins approached the sleeping keeper of the flock. It retreated within a few yards of its master, where it crouched, ready to repel any intrusion on his weary slumber. Rawlins did not care to test the creature's fidelity any further. He stood where he was and let out a whoop that brought Peck up in a comical tangle of blanket and tent.

Peck had a gun and was making a two-handed effort to haul it out of the scabbard when Rawlins yelled to him.

"It's Rawlins," he called. "Don't you know me?"

Peck's long hair was over his eyes, his long mustache drooped in dejection like a wet rooster's tail. He cleared his countenance of the fog-damp locks, one hand still distrustfully on his gun.

"Oh, all right, Rawlins," he said, his voice hoarse and rough-edged from sleep. "Come on over."

Rawlins went up the gravelly strand, opening a way through the flock, water overflowing his boots. He was carrying his rifle, a pistol buckled on him, for he had crawled out of the buffalo wallow expecting a fight. Peck kicked the encumbering covers aside with a gay leg, capering joyously.

"I was headin' for you, and I hit you," Peck called over the diminishing distance. "Purty dang' good for a greenhorn in the night, I'll say!"

"Darned good, I call it," Rawlins shouted back over the confusion of the sheep. "But what the devil does it mean? How did you get here—where are you going?"

"Right here," Peck replied, sticking out his long arm in greeting. "I started for right where I'm at and I got here."

"You certainly did," Rawlins marveled. "But how did you do it? What's the object?"

"Well, I tell you, Rawlins, them dang

sheep they're more to blame than me, in the first place. If they hadn't started it I never would 'a' thought of it, or if I had thought of it that'd been the end of it, I guess. They run away a couple of days ago, and I couldn't stop 'em. They was wild-eyed for a drink, I guess, they hadn't had one for two or three weeks."

"Oh, they bolted on you, did they?"

"They sure did. I couldn't no more stop 'em than I could a freight train. We struck a hole in that dang fence, where you come in at, I guess, and I shot 'em through. I saw your house from the top of a hill out there, and I said there's where I'd break away from the old woman and take a little stake along with me. We hit that hole about sundown, and I kep' them dang stews on the trot till midnight."

"Peck, you're a wonder!" Rawlins commended him in genuine praise. "But how did you know you'd hit my place? You couldn't see it from this side of the creek."

"I knew you'd be on a crick, all sheepmen's nutty about cricks, and when I struck it I stopped. I was goin' to take a look around for you this morning."

"But what possessed you to bring that band of sheep in here, Peck? Don't you know there's a war going on between me and Galloway's gang?"

"Let 'em come," said Peck, with portentous confidence, slapping his gun. "I'm with you."

"What will your wife say when she hears you've run that band of sheep in here?"

"I'd like to hear," said Peck comfortably.

"She'll raise the roof."

"Let her," said Peck, easy in his mind. "There won't be anybody but her for it to fall back on."

"Things are kind of uncertain in here, Peck, mighty uncertain, to tell you the truth. Darned if I know what you're going to do with that big band of sheep."

"I'm goin' to run 'em around in here and fatten 'em up, then I'll sell 'em and hit the breeze," Peck announced. "I had that all figured out when I was shootin' 'em through that hole in the fence. The old lady she'll not bother me here, she's a scairt to set her leg inside of that wire fence. And I tell you right now, Rawlins, I'd ruther stand up and fight seventeen men a day than live around where that woman can git at me."

"Well, keep the band on this side of the creek," Rawlins directed, "and you'll be all right with me. I've got a nice patch of

hay over on the other side I want to cut."

"Sure," Peck agreed, and sent his dog to turn the sheep away from the creek.

"I want to bum some breakfast off of you, and git you to hold me up a few days till I can put me in some grub," Peck said, putting it up as a proposal between equals, no favor asked and no thought of being denied.

"You're welcome. Right up that bank—you can see the tops of my haystacks over there—when you're ready. I'll go on and get things started."

Peck came to the house in due time, carrying his scanty bedding and scrap of tent. He threw them down with contemptuous air, kicked them into a corner and grunted with disdain.

"That's what a man's wife gives him to lay his bones on and put over his head in the night," he said. "Any hired man of hers has got his wagon or his good tent, and plenty of grub brought to him right along."

"I see she gave you a gun. She must be loosening up a little."

"All the gun she ever give me!" Peck discounted, drawing the weapon from the scabbard, presenting it proudly for inspection. "I bought that off of old man Clemmons—I give him four stews for it. She'll carry a mile."

"It's an old-timer, Peck, but it looks like a good one. Can you hit anything with it?"



"Sometimes," Peck confessed ingeniously. "But I'll bet you the pop I can throw a bluff with it as big as any man around here."

"I don't believe it would pay you to try it inside of Galloway's fence, Peck. When you pull your gun here you want to begin to shoot. They're not much on the bluff. You know, I thought they'd run that band of sheep in on me. I took it so much for granted I never thought to look at the brand."

"You'll see another brand on 'em before long. I'm goin' to cut me a stencil out of a coal oil can and print capital Peck on the sides of them stews a foot high. I'll let that old woman see who's boss of this gang."

"Maybe you've got a right to claim 'em, Peck. I don't know much about the law in such matters."

"Sure I have. What belongs to the

wife belongs to the husband, but what the husband gits his paws on is his. It's goin' to be that way in this case, I don't give a dang what the law says."

They sat at breakfast, Rawlins with one leg in the door, his guns at hand, watchful against a surprise. Over across the creek Peck's sheep could be seen, making a cheerful picture in a landscape that Rawlins had found empty to lonesomeness in the days past.

"You've got a nice band of them there," he said.

"Yeah," Peck agreed, with the easy, off-hand way of a regular sheepman. "It's a good joke on the old woman, the way she loaded me up with that band of sheep, Rawlins. You know Riley, the feller that had the law books in his wagon? Yeah. I was talkin' to Riley one day about gittin' a divorce off of the old woman, but he said I didn't have much of a show. A man had to watch his step not to give his wife an openin' for a knockout, Riley said. He let me have a book on divorces; said if I'd read that and study up and walk a straight line I might be able to flop her one of these days. Tippie come by one day and caught me readin' that book."

"I heard about it."

"Yeah. She was red-headed. She come tearin' over to my camp next day and said she married me for keeps. Then she wen over and fired Riley, right off the bat. She split his sheep up among us other hired hands, comin' out ahead one man on the deal, the way she figgered it. I had about four hundred before that; she loaded me up with six or seven hundred more. She said she'd give me somethin' to think about besides divorces; she was goin' to make a sheepman out of me or kill me a-tryin'. Glad she loaded me up with them extra stews now. I'm just that much ahead."

"Darned if I see how you're going to come out on it, Peck, but I wish you luck. I suppose you've got a right to sell the sheep if you want to, but I doubt if anybody around here would buy them from you."

"I'm goin' to ship 'em to Kansas City when them lambs grows a little more. I think I'll go over to the bank at Lost Cabin and see if I can't raise a little loan on 'em. If I can, I'll hire some feller to do the work. No sheepman that herds his own sheep ever amounts to anything, Rawlins, no more than any other business man that tries to do it all himself."

"You're not far wrong there, Peck," Rawlins agreed.

"What busted your winder, Rawlins?" Peck suddenly inquired, coming alive to his outward surroundings, now that his inner void was filled and his opinions aired. "Looks like you'd clean up this shack a little. What do you want hay throwin' around on the floor that way for? You been feedin' your horse in here?"

"I mentioned to you a while ago that there's a war going on between me and some of Galloway's men. They came here yesterday morning to tear my house down. They kicked in the window and tried to burn it after they'd failed to upset it with ropes. That accounts for the muss. I haven't had time to clean up."

"What the doodle was you doin' to let 'em bust your winder that way?" Peck wanted to know, with an uncharitable challenge.

"I did the best I could, Peck," Rawlins replied, sighing as with a sad regret.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A PROFANE WISH

THAT day passed as peacefully as if no question of a homesteader's rights inside the fence ever had been raised. Rawlins was under a heavy strain, which relaxed in some degree as evening fell and Peck gathered his sheep in a little bowl which seemed to have been ordered by nature to meet this exigency. Peck's bedding-ground was about half a mile beyond the creek, on Rawlins' land, where the new proprietor of the flock spread his canvas over a bush and crawled under it to his repose after smoking an aftersupper pipe with Rawlins.

Peck's attitude toward sheep had undergone a radical transformation. He had now all the zeal of a proprietor, handling the flock as if he had a personal interest in the welfare of the weakest of them, showing a surprising craftiness for his short apprenticeship on the range. He was planning to go to Lost Cabin the next day and see about raising a loan on the flock. Off there to himself inside Galloway's fence, Peck felt that he had put an insurmountable barrier between himself and his wife.

Rawlins did not encourage this proprietary view, nor the flight into finance which Peck proposed to try. He was greatly disturbed by Peck's invasion of his valley with the sheep, and troubled over the prospect of being blamed by Mrs. Peck for harboring her runaway husband, even if she did not charge him with connivance in

the entire plot. It would be difficult to convince the lady, with her present low estimate of Peck's initiative and resourcefulness, that he had brought the flock inside Galloway's fence alone.

The wise thing to do, Rawlins concluded after he had seen Peck stowed away under his bush for the night, was to go and inform Mrs. Peck of her husband's adventure. While this course might appear treasonable to Peck, for whom Rawlins was beginning to feel a little sympathy and kindness, it was only just to himself.

Aside from putting himself in the way of being blamed by Mrs. Peck, the presence of the sheep at his place would add to his own complications. Galloway would come down on him hard for this apparent publication to all sheepland that the limit was off for sheep in Dry Wood. Rawlins' secret hope was that Mrs. Peck would move in the matter at once and take the sheep home.

Rawlins felt that it was safe to leave things unguarded for a while at night. After Galloway's men had been shown his determination to hold his own there, they would not be likely to risk an assault by night, in which all the advantage would be his. Hewitt had not been with them; it was likely they were awaiting him, or at least instructions from him, before making another move.

So concluding, he saddled Graball and rode to the ranch, hoping, as he went along, to find Tippie there. Tippie could return with him; they could take an early start and have the sheep outside the fence by sunrise.

Edith was at the gate, a saddled horse standing by. The house was dark and silent. As Rawlins rode up and dismounted, Edith flung the gate open eagerly, greeting him with relief.

"I was about to start over there and see if I could find out anything," she said. "I didn't get to go up the hill today. I was worried about you, Ned."

"It's been as quiet as Sunday up there today, Edith. I'm beginning to think they're going to let me alone."

The little paring of moon was very bright, cheering the whole sector of the sky where it seemed to hang not much more than the height of a man above the hills. Rawlins could see the anxiety of her face as she shook her head slowly in denial.

"You know they're not going to," she said. Then quickly, as if her words had been waiting, "Give it up, Ned, give it up!

It isn't worth another fight, it isn't worth what you've gone through already. Let them have it—give it up!"

"No, I'm not going to give it up," he replied with argumentative briskness. "I did think of doing it, as you know to my disgrace and——"

"No, no!" she protested, remembering her own scorn.

"But I've got over all that. After the sheriff had been there, after my talk with him and those sheepmen, I felt all right. I was shaken at first—nearly shaken loose from my

grip. There's more at stake for me there than my homestead now, Edith; there's every principle of justice and manhood. I'd be a coward to quit it now."

"I urged you on," she said repentantly. "I was always blowin' about a man that would come along some day with nerve enough to open that country. I was proud of you when you went in, but I didn't think you'd ever have to kill anybody, I didn't think they'd crowd you that far. Now they'll kill you to even it up. They're not the kind to let it drop now."

"It's going to be all right," he assured her, and took her hand, chafing it, consoling it by his caress, as one comforts a child for a hurt.

There never had been any courting between these two, in the sense that homely word is generally understood. Rawlins did not know just what his feeling toward Edith was. At the best a sort of hopeful, perhaps a bit wistful, friendship, very like his feeling toward that country where he had taken up his claim. There was something big to be done before he could call it his own.

Youth has its way of adjusting these things without many words, and in that way the case stood without words between Rawlins and Edith Stone.

"It's going to be all right," Rawlins repeated, rubbing it in her hand like a liniment; "everything's going to be all right. Has your aunt gone to bed?"

"No, she's not here. We've had a sensation of our own here today, Ned. What do you think? Peck's run away again, and not only run away, but taken a band of eleven or twelve hundred sheep along with him. Aunt Lila's out on the range hunting them now—especially the sheep. I

was with her all day, but we didn't find a trace of them."

"That's what I've come over about," Rawlins said, the shake of a laugh in his words.

"Have you seen him?"

"I left him not an hour ago. He's over there with me."

"Peck?"

"Sure enough. Peck, sheep, dog and all."

"Peck, of all men! Taking a band of sheep into that country—Peck!"

"To Peck, and nobody else, the honor belongs. Well, the sheep must be given some credit for initiating the movement, I must admit. Peck says they ran away from him, or with him, and came to the hole in the wire, when he shot 'em through and headed for my place. He'd spotted it from the hills."

"And he's in there?"

"He seems to be very much at home. He says he'd rather fight men every day than face his wife once in a while. He's got a gun a yard long hanging on him."

"Peck?"

"The surest thing you know. He says he can hit things with it sometimes, and I believe him so well I'd want to be back of something thick when he turns it loose."

Edith began to laugh in spite of herself.

"It's no laughing matter, young lady," he said, with pretense of great severity, "to have him on your hands with twelve hundred sheep, more or less. I've got troubles enough of my own without your dear old Uncle Dowell. I don't want him and his sheep around there."

"And he won't leave," Edith gasped with merriment. "The poor man wants to stay there where he can fight his way in peace and not have to study divorce books and have his mustache pulled."

"You unfeeling little rascal!" said Rawlins, hand on her shoulder. Then he went a little farther, and embraced her quivering shoulders, dragging her close as if to compress the laughter out of her.

"Can you imagine Elmer trailing around after Peck? He's in the mountains," the girl said, drawing away but with no trace of resentment.

"I hoped I might get him to go back with me and start that band of sheep out of there at daylight."

"What if Uncle Dowell pulled his gun and said no?"

"He might do it, too. He's got his plans made away ahead for that bunch of sheep. Do you know what he calls them? Stews."



"Aunt Lila told me, but I'm afraid that St. Joe brand of humor failed to make a great big hit with her."

"The question is, will she go after him?"

"I wonder. She's always had a mortal terror of that fence. That's why I had to stop cuttin' it. She used to be in agony every time I went after the mail."

"My worry is that she'll implicate me in Peck's break for liberty, especially as I'm harboring him. But I was as much surprised to see him as she'll be to hear he's there."

"I don't think she'll blame you, Ned. But it certainly will jolt her when she finds out where he's gone. What kind of plans is he making for the sheep, Ned?"

"I'm afraid they're all disloyal to the hand that married him. He says he's going to put a mortgage on them, for one thing, to raise money for hiring somebody to do the work while he does the thinking. I'm afraid Mr. Peck hinted darkly that he intended to drive them out and ship them to Kansas City as soon as the lambs were a little heavier, but I think we'd just as well keep that between us. It wouldn't contribute to harmony between Mr. and Mrs. Peck if she recaptures him, which I feel she's bound to do."

"You wouldn't think that worm had sense enough to plan it all out that way, like a regular man, would you?" Edith said. "I'm beginning to think there's hope for him after all."

"He's developing sheepmanly traits right along. I was surprised to see it, but it's true. Maybe the gun's got something to do with it."

"Of course she'll get him if he ever breaks out of there, and he'll have to come out when you leave, Ned."

But Rawlins had no intention of leaving. With that friendly sheriff only a few miles away, and those eager sheepmen around Lost Cabin waiting the hour to come in, he no longer felt himself unsupported and alone. Those sheepmen were ready to jump the day they felt it a little less than half way safe; Rawlins had seen that sticking out of them like pumpkins in a sack when they sat as jurors in the corner's inquest. A little while, if he could hold on, and there would be neighbors enough to carry everything inside the fence.

"I wish I was a man," Edith sighed.

"I'm glad wishing can't make you one," Rawlins told her.

"Well, I do," she insisted stubbornly. "But maybe I can help you anyway."

Whatever opportunity this offered for saying something gallant, Rawlins allowed to pass untouched, for sincerity has a slow tongue.

"Do you expect Mrs. Peck home to-night?" he asked, after the chance for saying something that he knew should have been said, and was expected to be said, had fallen flat.

"She was headin' for Clemmons' range when I left her. If she don't hear anything of her sheep down there—and of course she'll not—I expect she'll turn back home. It may be morning before she gets here."

They discussed the probability of Mrs. Peck's invasion of the forbidden territory, Edith being of the opinion that the chances were all in Peck's favor. It was impossible for her to see anything tragic shaping up in the situation for Peck, the comedy outweighing everything else.

The moon was touching the hills when Rawlins left her, lighter of heart and stronger of hope than when he came. Danger was drawing away from him, he believed; peace was about to descend on his valley, where the price it had cost him already was marked by the brown splotch in the white earth before his door.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A MAN AT LAST

PECK was up at daylight next morning, whooping in high and exultant voice as he spread his sheep to graze in due and ancient form. He was in high feather when he came to the house for breakfast to find that his industry surpassed Rawlins', if early rising was to be taken as a measure. He found the homesteader sitting on the edge of his cot, yawning away the dregs of sleep.

Rawlins had chanced a surprise by sleeping in the house, going on the argument by which he had convinced himself last night that they were due to leave him alone. The peaceful morning, Peck's cheerful countenance in the door, the feeling of eagerness to be up and at it, all contributed to strengthen the belief that untroubled days were before him. He set Peck to making a fire in the sheet-iron stove while he assembled biscuit materials, designing to begin that felicitous morning with the first good meal in two days.

Peck stood on his knees before the little stove, regulating the damper to control the roaring fire he had made, chuckling to himself in what Rawlins took to be the

excess of spirits in his unaccustomed liberty.

"I was just a-thinkin', Rawlins," Peck said, twisting his long neck to look round. "I fired you one time, didn't I?"

"You bet you did, Peck."

"Yeah. That was one thing I made stick with the old woman. But I was a new rattle to her then. Well, I tell you, Rawlins, I'm goin' to be a feller that can hire 'em and fire 'em as fast as they come in the future days to come. I'm done with that woman. She ain't got money enough stacked up to coax one leg back to that ranch."

It was best not to say anything to Peck about his wife's hot hunt for him on the



range, or the mystery his disappearance had been to everybody outside. Peck would be better off for knowing nothing of the trip to the ranch last night; at least he would be easier in his mind.

"I was just a-thinkin', Rawlins, where I'd 'a' been at if I hadn't fired you that time. And where you'd 'a' been at, too. I give you a start by firin' you, and made a place for myself to light when I come to the jump-off. I'm darned glad I fired you that time, Rawlins."

"It does look like it was for the best, all around, doesn't it? Well, I never held it against you. I wasn't very much stuck on working as a herder for your wife, or anybody else."

"Yes, it was best for me and good for you, as the song says. That bunch ought to clean me up thirty-five hundred, maybe four thousand, freight and everything paid. That'll set me up—"

They both broke for the door, Rawlins dropping his breakfast preparations and Peck his speculations. There was a burst of shooting, an outbreak of yells, across the creek in the direction of Peck's sheep. Peck made it into the open first, where he turned, his face white, his crawfish eyes wild.

"It's them fence fellers—they're killin' my sheep! Git your gun and come on!"

Peck streaked away like a hound with the last word, never looking back to see whether Rawlins was going to support him

in the battle or leave him to the defense of his flock alone. He was out of sight under the creek bank when Rawlins came out with his rifle.

Four men were stirring confusion among the sheep, the witless animals contributing to their own destruction by crowding together in bunches. Rawlins believed these were the four men whom he had repulsed two days ago, come back to adjust the account. He hurried on to overtake Peck, not so much because he counted on him to be of any use, but to keep him from rashly exposing himself.

Peck was across the creek, loping up the gravelly shore where he had bedded his flock the night he arrived. The fence-riders who were clubbing and shooting the sheep had not seen Peck, although he was making no effort at all to conceal himself, tearing toward his abused flock, gun out, his concern for his property so great he had no thought of danger.

Rawlins paused on the high bank, where he had a vantage from which he could have worked great and sudden damage among the slaughterers of the flock, holding his fire on account of Peck. The new flock master, suddenly grown valiant in his liberty and property rights, was at least a hundred yards in the lead, but still far more than a pistol-shot distant from the nearest rider working havoc among the sheep. Rawlins knew the raiders carried rifles; it would be a small matter to knock Peck flat at that distance with one well put shot.

Down the bank, through the shallow stream and after Peck the homesteader charged, heavy with the water that filled his boots, sagged down by the ammunition he had loaded every available pocket with, yelling to Peck to lie down and wait. Peck heard, he didn't even look back. Straight toward his abused flock he went, his long legs straddling sage-clumps or taking them in clean leaps, at least sensible enough in control above his roused and boiling anger to know he couldn't do any damage with his gun that far away.

When Peck came within what he calculated as shooting range, he stopped, braced himself with legs spraddled wide, lifted his gun, gripping it in both hands and cut loose. The roar of that ancient rim-fire forty-five drew the first notice of the fence-riders to the defenders of the flock. If they had seen Peck and Rawlins before that moment they evidently had thought them still too far away to be taken into account. They had been clubbing and



shooting, and riding into the huddling little bunches of sheep as if bound to do as much destruction in the flock as possible before turning their attention to whoever was responsible for this insolent invasion.

They probably had concluded that Rawlins, or whoever was herding the sheep, had cut for safety at their approach. It was likely they had not counted on anybody but Rawlins having the effrontery to bring sheep inside the fence. A homesteader who would shoot a man exercising the feudal prerogative of burning his shanty, might even drive a band of sheep inside the long-respected limit.

At the sound of Peck's gun the man at whom he had fired whirled around from his atrocious slaughter, yelling warning to his friends. He threw down the club he had been mauling the sheep with, jerked his rifle from the scabbard under his leg, pinged a bullet so near Peck's head that Rawlins saw him jerk it, and duck as if a hornet had come at him.

That only appeared to make Peck hotter. On he went, slinging his long legs over brush and gully, waving his gun and yelling.

Rawlins tore along after him, going with more caution and considerably less speed, crouching like an Indian as he dodged from bush to bush, ready to pitch in a shot the moment he saw he could do any good. The others began to peg away at Peck, who stopped again, legs braced wide as before, gun steadied in both hands, head to one side a little as he deliberately squinted and aimed.

To the surprise of Rawlins, and no doubt to the astonishment of the other side—for it was a long pistol-shot—Peck's careful aim was good. The man who was pushing forward in a bearing of contemptuous security, rifle raised to throw down in a one-handed shot, jerked back in the saddle as if he had ridden into a rope stretched across his way. He rode on that way a little distance, rifle and reins dropped, then slumped off to one side, and fell.

Peck's pause had brought Rawlins up within a few yards of him. He made a sprint and came alongside as Peck was throwing his feet for another charge. Rawlins made a grab and caught the back of his jumper.

"Get behind something, Peck! Here, down with you—quick!"

Rawlins was down on elbows and knees behind a clump of sage, with its little wart of earth heaped and held around its deep-striking, wide-spread roots. Old Peck

stood looking down at him curiously, both hands gripping his gun, as if he did not understand the reason for a man whose valor he never had doubted up to that moment being in such a sweat to get something between himself and trouble.

The three sheep-killers were charging up, well spread out, their shots cutting the bushes over Rawlins' head. He pulled Peck's leg, wasting valuable time to get the rascal, brave in a simpleton's ignorance of his danger, down out of that buzzing hot stream of lead.

While Rawlins' hand was still gripping Peck's bony shin, Peck's legs gave way as if he had been hamstrung. He sank down in a dazed, groping way to his knees, still holding to his gun with one hand; settled slowly, without a word or groan, and lay in a huddled bunch close beside Rawlins behind the little knuckle of earth.

Rawlins did not know whether Peck was killed or seriously wounded. There was no blood, but he had heard the bullet strike. There was no time to investigate, or give Peck the assistance upon which his life, if life there was in him, might depend. The sheep-killers were standing off not above fifty yards, their guns quiet since Peck's disaster, spying cautiously around for sight of Rawlins, who had not fired a shot. It was likely they thought they had got him, too.

Now they came ahead, cautiously, to close in and finish it if anything remained to be done. Rawlins flattened down, and fired. They gave it back to him, hot and fast.

There was a confusion of striking bullets around him, dust and smoke from his gun. At the next sight he had, the middle saddle was empty. The horse was charging on straight toward him; it passed in terrified stampede, so near the earth flung up by its hoofs showered him where he lay.



The two remaining of the band had no intention of giving up the fight, for Hewitt was one of them, Rawlins saw. He had come today to close the matter; there would be no running away before a single man of the homesteader breed again.

They separated wider still, to flank him and drive him out. Rawlins shifted as the bullets began to cut in from the side, snaking himself on elbows, reserving something for the rush. He worked himself a few feet away from Peck, hoping the poor fellow might escape any further damage if there was an ember of life in him still.

Hewitt was on the right; he came pushing in with steady determination, holding his restive horse down to a slow walk. Rawlins resented his mean persistence. He slewed around, threw his gun across Peck's body, and fired. With the jump of his gun Hewitt threw in a shot that got Rawlins between elbow and wrist, twirling the rifle out of his hands.

Rawlins scrambled for Peck's pistol, Hewitt shouting to his companion, both of them rushing in for the finish. Rawlins was rising to his feet, Peck's gun in his left hand, to have it out in a whirlwind close, the chances all against him, as he knew too well. He was dazed; his right arm was numb and unresponsive. It was a bad corner for a man to be caught in; it was the end.

Hewitt was not twenty feet away, pistol lifted to throw down for the last shot, when a diversion was set up in the rear. Somebody began to shoot; somebody was riding in headlong charge through tall greasewood and sage, with a wild, high whoop that raised the hair to hear. Rawlins took a left-handed, chance shot at Hewitt as he whirled his horse and galloped away.

Whoever it was that had charged in that desperate moment went on after the sheep-killers, the strident challenge, sharp as a steam siren, cutting over the noise of quick shooting. Rawlins stood on the little hump of earth to see what there was to be seen. The sheep-killers were hitting it up in a panic to get out of there. The one in pursuit pulled up and looked around, as if to see if there were any more.

Rawlins came down from the mound in amazement, which became double amazement on beholding Peck sitting up, looking very pale and sick, but far from a dead man yet. Peck was staring with the biggest eyes Rawlins ever had seen in a human head, hands pressed to his belly, breathing in sharp little puffs.

"It's your wife!" Rawlins said, wildly excited. "Peck, Peck! I tell you it's your wife!"

He shook Peck, as if to wake him. Peck looked up weakly.

"She shot me!" Peck gasped.

"No, no, Peck. She saved us—she saved us, I tell you. It's your wife!"

Peck had no time for comment or question, if he had the capacity or the interest for either. Mrs. Peck came tearing up, flinging herself from the saddle before the horse had answered her hard hand on the rein. She was on her knees beside Peck in a moment, his dazed head gathered against her bosom, groaning over him, tears streaming down her range-chafed face.

"Oh, Doweey darlin', you're all shot to slithers!" she moaned. "Oh, why didn't I git here sooner! Why—didn't—I git here—sooner!"

There was such a note of remorse and accusation in her wail as to verify Rawlins in the belief he had held all the time; that she was fond of Peck, and her harshness was only in effort to reshape him to fit a place of honor in the land of sheep.

"Where are you shot, honey?" she asked, reclining Peck tenderly, his head on her lap.

"Here," said Peck, pressing his stomach, rolling his head from side to side as if the agony of his wound was beginning to make itself felt.

Mrs. Peck began to explore with tender hand, a doleful look of pity in her fat face.

"Why, there ain't no hole in you there," she said gently, greater relief than surprise in her voice.

"Slammed clean through me—right there," Peck insisted, pulling his breath with a rattling sound.

Mrs. Peck began to lay his anatomy bare in her anxious explorations. Rawlins, on account of the blood he was losing, and the pain of his own wound, turned aside. He began making such repairs as a handkerchief would provide, relieved to see no artery was cut, although one bone was broken.

This gave him great concern, involving the possibility, as it did, of losing part of his arm. His anxiety over Peck was subsiding as that notable's strength increased, and Mrs. Peck declared there was no bullet hole in him. Peck resented this, declaring he knew very well he was shot through the place to which his hand returned with solicitous hovering. He closed his eyes and lay with his mouth open, groaning.

Mrs. Peck removed the brooding hand after a gentle struggle, and bent over for a closer inspection of the spot.

"There *is* a bruise there, honey—it's

turnin' purple and blue over a place as big as my hand!" she said. "Wherever in the world could that bullet 'a' went to? What made it flatten out ag'in' you, honey, do you suppose? I never heard of one doin' that before. You've got a charmed life, sure as you're born you've got a charmed life."

"What did you have in the pocket of your jumper, Peck?" Rawlins inquired, managing to grin, although his arm hurt him as if it was under a wagon wheel.

Peck made a remarkable recovery when the investigation turned to the contents of his pocket. He sat up with a jerk, a red rush of resentment coming into his thin-edged face. He put his wife's hand away rudely.

"None of your dang business what I got in that pocket, or any other pocket," he said. "I'm my own man; I'm goin' to carry whatever I dang please in my pockets from now on."

"Why, of course you can, Doweys darlin'," Mrs. Peck said soothingly.

Peck glowered around, red veins in his big glassy eyes, looking savage and mean.

"Where in the hell's my gun, Rawlins?" he asked.

"There—your hat's on it, Peck."

"I'm goin' over to find that feller I shot," Peck announced, grabbing his gun, getting up with as much iron in his legs as he ever had. "If he ain't dead I'll finish him—comin' in here killin' off my sheep!"

Mrs. Peck looked at him with beaming admiration.

"I'll go with you, darlin'," she proposed.

"You'll stay where you're at till you're called for, old lady," Peck put her in her place severely. "I'm goin' to stir my own kittle of mush from now on."

"All right, Doweys," she yielded meekly, happy in his mastery, Rawlins knew.

Peck went on about his vengeful business, Mrs. Peck turning to Rawlins as if to share her admiration, discovering his plight.

"Why Ned, you're bleedin' all over the place!" she said. "Here—let me see your arm."

Rawlins told her there was nothing more to be done for temporary relief than what he had contrived already, but that he would be grateful if she would allow him to ride her horse to Lost Cabin to have the doctor attend his hurt, to which Mrs. Peck heartily agreed.

She brought the animal up, took the holster with her two efficient pistols from the saddle, and urged him to go at once. Raw-

lins paused before mounting to thank her for her assistance in the moment of his extremity.

"It would have been all over with us in a minute more," he said.

"I'm sorry I didn't come sooner," she replied, with the modesty of true valor. "Edith left me a note that Mr. Peck was over here with you, but I didn't find it till after breakfast. I guess she went out lookin' for me. I guess she was worried when I was gone all night. Did he—"

hesitantly, her eyes raised with a timid eagerness he never had seen in them before—"did he shoot one of them fellers, Ned?"

"He certainly did! He went after them like a hornet, left me so far behind I thought I'd never catch him. You've got a man now, Mrs. Peck; a man right down to the backbone."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peck, sighing happily. "I've got a man at last!"



## CHAPTER XXIII

### ANOTHER RUNAWAY

RAWLINS returned from Lost Cabin before noon, attended by the sheriff and coroner, the latter official bringing with him the identical set of sheepmen jurors that had served a few days previously over the first victim of the homesteader's war.

The coroner found a double job cut out for him this time. The raider who fell before Rawlins' rifle in that morning's battle was not dead, although shot through the body. He was a virile scoundrel, with the snake's tenacity of life in him, and if the coroner was disappointed in having the fellow as a subject for his official investigation, he was compensated by getting him as a patient. Peck had made a clean job of it. There was nothing left for the doctor side of the coroner to do in his case.

That was undoubtedly the most enthusiastic verdict ever returned by a coroner's jury in the Dry Wood country. It sounded much like a resolution by a chamber of commerce welcoming some new and important industry. The presence of these two handy men holding their own against great and vicious odds inside Senator Gal-

loway's fence; that big band of sheep grazing peacefully, the morning's terrifying visitation quite forgotten, opened the gate of possibility to a new and prolific range.

As before, the sheriff had nothing but praise for Rawlins, enlarged this time to include Peck, whom he surveyed with a perplexed look of questioning surprise. But he was discreet, with complete control over his tongue, no matter what his thoughts. He cast his eye around the country in sheepmanly appraisal.

Mrs. Peck's pride in her valiant and efficient husband was beyond all measure. Whatever Duke had done to build up the fortunes and consequence of the family before his unromantic end in the creek, it was reduced to a point in comparison with Peck's deeds. Peck had taken sheep beyond sheep limit; he had broken the oppressor's hand and battered down his wall.

That was the way Mrs. Peck saw it, at least. Rawlins' part in the venture was not considered or, if taken into account at all, only as a minor force in the historic event of Peck's sweeping invasion. Even the sheep, which had stampeded Peck into this glorious eminence against his power and intention, were not given the smallest word of credit in her glowing praise.

After the coroner's business was settled and the official party had gone away, Mrs. Peck transferred her saddle to Graball's back and returned to the ranch to fetch up a wagon and supplies. She and Peck appeared to have come to a complete understanding during Rawlins' absence. Neither of them had any intention of taking the sheep out of that refreshing pasture. She was puffed up with the red arrogance of a conqueror; all her fears of the fence and its lawless defenders had dissolved. She had a fighting man in the family now, who had made his place in that land of dusty flocks.

Mrs. Peck had put in the morning skinning the sheep killed in the raid. They had found forty-three, Peck said. Several more were crippled so badly they would have to be killed. Cheap, Peck said, echoing his wife's declaration, Rawlins knew. That was a small price to pay for a pasture that would take care of their sheep shut out of the forest reservation by government restriction.

"I'll order Tippie to bring 'em in," Peck announced, swelling around in the double importance of large proprietor and handy man with a gun.

They were at Rawlins' house, which Peck, from his grand air, appeared to

think he had acquired by right of conquest along with the rest of the territory inside Galloway's fence. Rawlins was lying on his cot, feeling pretty well out of the game on account of the pain in his arm; Peck getting dinner ready.

"How's your arm?" Peck inquired, turning suddenly as if it had just struck him to inquire into the misfortunes of a man whose part in that historic encounter had been so unheroic and small.

"Pretty good, Peck."

"You look kind of white around the gills, Rawlins, you'd better take it kind of easy for a while. Leave 'em to me if they come back."

"I'll nearly have to, old man."

"Yeah, that'll be all right. Doctor say he'll have to take any bones out of you, or anything?"

"No, he says he can save my arm. Did you help skin the sheep?"

"Yeah. Me and the old lady thought we might as well save them hides—they're worth six bits apiece. I'll tell Tippie to bury them dead ones when he comes, and kill off the cripples and skin 'em. Me and the old lady——"

"Did you find that bullet in your pocket, Peck?"

Peck looked around again, leaning on his long bony arms, hands flat in the pan. His face was reproachful, his animated countenance under a cloud of displeasure. But he brightened up in a moment.

"It was there, all right, Rawlins," he confessed. "It was smashed as flat on one end as if'd struck a rock."

"You old iron-bound scoundrel!" said Rawlins, expressive of admiration.

This cheered Peck up.

"You remember the divorce book Riley lent me, Rawlins? Yeah. The old lady tore it up after she banged me around with it a while, and threw the pieces in the fire. It didn't burn, though, not much of it. When she was gone I picked out some of the importantest pieces of it. I doubled 'em up and put 'em in my pocket, savin' 'em to have somethin' to read on more than I ever expected it'd ever do me any good in court. Them leaves made a wad two inches thick, I guess. Sleepin' on 'em, you know, and everythin', pressed 'em tight."

"Darned lucky thing for you, old feller. But if your wife had been a few seconds later you and I'd be gettin' out of the boat on the other side of the river even now. She's a fine woman, Peck. Be good to her, now you've got things coming your way."

"That's where you're off, Rawlins; that's where you show you ain't experienced with 'em. I ain't goin' to ease off on her too quick. I'm goin' to camp right up here with that little bunch of stews till she comes up with all the cash money I want and gives me back my clothes. You can bet your neck I'm goin' to have a check book of my own, too, and a square break on all the profits of this game, if I hang around here. She's promised me."

"That's only reasonable. She can't expect to keep a man like you out on the range with a band of sheep, in the standing of a hired man around the place. You've shown her you can do some thinking. Keep it up."

"Yeah, and I've showed her I can do some shootin', too. That's what put a crimp in the old girl. I guess I'll show Tippie where he gits off at, too, the first time I see him."

"I believe I'd go kind of slow with Tippi, if I were you," Rawlins suggested, with friendly warning. "Tippie's a man of few words, but you might get a surprise if you stepped on his feet. Why not treat him just as if nothing had ever passed between you? Tippie's a valuable man; you'll need him to do the field work if you're going to sit in the office and think."

"I'll handle him in my own way, Rawlins, and I'll forgive my wife fer the way she's banged me around if she'll show me she's reformed enough to hand over a bale of that long-green. If she ain't, my first plan goes through. I'll sell them sheep and hit the breeze back to St. Joe. She's got to show me; she's got to hunt Riley up and give him back his job. If it hadn't been for Riley lendin' me that divorce book where'd I 'a' been right now? She'd 'a' been plantin' toadstools on my grave."

Peck went off to attend his sheep after dinner, his gun against his leg, no more troubled over having killed a man than if he had been doing that sort of thing right along. He seemed to take so much satisfaction out of the event, and enlarge himself to such overspreading importance, that Rawlins wondered whether he was in the way of becoming a killer, as he had heard of trifling and insignificant men turning

out in the old days. He would do to watch.

Mrs. Peck drove in when the sun was low, bringing supplies. She reported everything quiet at the fence, nobody in sight, no interference with her passage, which she had been ready to contest with any force, her courage had mounted so high. But she wore a worried look, in spite of her day's triumphs.

Peck was still afield with the sheep as Mrs. Peck got down from the high seat of the wagon, her eyebrows pulled together in a black knot. She looked at Rawlins, who had come to the door to greet her, as if she had something to say that concerned him; seemed to reconsider, going about her unloading silently.

"Ned, what do you think?" she said presently, turning to him abruptly. "Edith's run off!"

"Run off?" he repeated in amazement, his heart seeming to fall like a bucket in a well. "What in the world would she want to run off for?"

"You can search me! Unless it's a man. I think maybe she's been writin' to one of them mail-order fellers herself, and he's coaxed her to run off and meet him."

"I don't think she'd do a thing like that."

"She left early this morning. Elmer come in, he said Al Clemmons saw her pass, headin' toward Jasper. She can't git there before tomorrow afternoon—I'll have plenty of time to go over to Albin Jacobsen's in the morning and telephone the sheriff to stop her. I wanted to ask you if you think I ought to, or just let her go her way."

"Let her go her way," Rawlins replied, resentful of Edith's desertion. "If she wants to cut out and leave us that way, let her go. But why would she run away? She wouldn't have to do it, would she?"

"No, she's her own man now. I was only her guardian till she was of age. But it looks mighty queer to me."

"It certainly does look queer."

"She didn't leave me no letter nor nothing, only that little note tellin' me Mr. Peck was up here."

"I'm pretty sure she's got something in view we don't understand, and I can't believe it's a man," Rawlins said, his generosity rising up to the girl's defense. "She'll probably be back in three or four days."

"I don't know what to do—I don't want to see her go wrong—but she's her own man."

"I don't believe I'd interfere in her plans, whatever they are," he advised. "If



she's running off with—if she's running off, that's her own business; you couldn't stop her if you wanted to. If she's just gone to Jasper to get some pretty clothes or a little hat, or something, she'd resent your interference, don't you think?"

Mrs. Peck looked off across the valley, on the farther rim of which Peck was beginning to raise his voice in the evening roundup of the sheep. She drew a big breath, as of inspirational relief, the perplexity of her brows relaxing, calm settling over her face.

"I'll ask Mr. Peck about it," she said.

#### CHAPTER XXIV

##### A FOOL AND HIS GUN

THE seriousness of Rawlins' wound made a daily trip to the doctor necessary. Mrs. Peck had gone back to the ranch the same evening she came with the wagon and the startling news of Edith's desertion, leaving the two men to hold what they had won. Peck's great interest in the welfare of his sheep took him abroad early and kept him away all day, except for a dash in at noon for dinner.

This threw Rawlins on his own one-armed resources very largely, and he found little that he could do. He had not been able to devise any scheme by which a one-armed man could wash dishes, for one thing. Owing to that, things had a distressing way of accumulating about the place, Peck being content to scrape the plates of the last meal for the next. Peck had not even thought to volunteer any help in saddling Graball for the daily trip to Lost Cabin. By using his teeth Rawlins had managed the cinch in a hazardous fashion that held until he got to town, where the doctor tightened the girth to carry him home.

Several days passed that way, with no further interference by the forces which had dominated that illegally occupied territory so long. While Mrs. Peck had visited them daily, news of Edith was still lacking. The sheepwoman appeared to have recovered from her first flurry, but Rawlins was beginning to feel the strain of anxiety. He believed there was something between Mrs. Peck and Edith which the sheepwoman had concealed, responsible for the girl's sudden desertion of the ranch.

A feeling of resentment toward Edith for her precipitate action, her cold expression therein of complete aloofness from his affairs and all interest in them, had hardened Rawlins to her welfare for a while.

Now this feeling was clearing out of his mind, giving place to fear that Edith had not gone entirely of her own free will. The girl was not so heartless as to pull out like that after the understanding that had grown up between them. She would have come to him with her troubles, he believed, unless she had been goaded beyond forbearance or driven away outright.

Rawlins had returned from Lost Cabin shortly before noon on the fifth day since the fight, a cloud of anxiety concerning Edith darkening the outlook, even obscuring everything beyond that hour.

He unsaddled Graball and turned him out to graze, the horse having become so entirely domesticated and affectionate that he would come running at a called or whistled summons, and turned his one-handed efforts to preparing the midday meal. He had brought potatoes and onions, unusual luxuries, from town that trip, with anticipation of an old-time Kansas dish of the two vegetables sliced and boiled together for supper that evening. If he could get Peck to prepare the vegetables when he came in for dinner, the rest could be managed with one hand.

Rawlins was not quite certain that his own gloomy state of mind was responsible or whether Peck had been sulky the past two days. He had appeared to be somewhat less communicative and voluble than usual. Fancied or real, Peck's attitude had not given much concern. Now when Peck came in for dinner, there was no mistaking his ill humor. Rawlins wondered if he had stepped on the new flockmaster's toes.

"Taters, huh?" said Peck, taking a peep into the sack. "It's about time you was chippin' in somethin' on the grub, Rawlins. You've been eatin' off of me ever since the old lady brought up that grub."

"All right, Peck," Rawlins returned good-naturedly, although he felt a desire for a hot retort to the inhospitable charge. "There's some onions in the sack, too. I thought maybe I could get you to clean some of both of them for supper. I could manage to cook them, all right."

"It don't look like you've managed to cook very much dinner," Peck said contemptuously. "I tell you right now, Rawlins, I'm gittin' tired of doin' all the work around this joint. And you've got the gall to ask me to clean onions on the side. I wouldn't clean the dang things for a dollar apiece, and I wouldn't eat 'em for five. You can't put all the dirty work off on me around here, I tell you, Rawlins."

"I'm sorry, old feller, but you'll have to

take it as it comes," Rawlins said in friendly, dispassionate way.

"I've been doin' it ever since I landed here," Peck sneered, his glassy goggle eyes seeming to advance and recede in their shallow sockets as he leered at Rawlins. "Look at them dishes, look at this messy joint! It looks to me like you'd clean things up, Rawlins. You can afford to, me furnishin' the grub."

"The door's open, Peck, if you don't like the kind of hospitality I'm able to offer," Rawlins said.

"Is zat so?" Peck chattered. "You wait till I go, then, will you? You ain't got nothin' on me because you killed a man.

The m coroner fellers said the one I killed was twice as big as yours. You kind of want to watch your step when you talk about firin' me out of any door, Rawlins."

"Peck, you're talkin' like a fool," Rawlins said calmly.

He was not afraid of Peck, although his pistol was hanging on the wall behind the door, where he had relieved himself of it on his return from town, nor was it surprising to see this villainous streak of egotism and overbearing selfishness in the man. Rawlins had seen it growing from the day when Peck's lucky shot knocked a man over in the fight, but it had developed faster than expected.

"I've got as much right here as you have," Peck declared, scowling and glowering as he slammed a slab of bacon down to haggle off some for the pan in his bungling way. "Where'd you 'a' been at if I hadn't run them sheep of mine in here and stood them fellers off? Who done the fightin' that time? That's what I want to know. I'll bet you money if you found the bullet that went through that other feller you'd see it come out of my gun. And that ain't no dream."

"You're welcome to all the glory, Peck."

"You and Tippie tried to git me shot up over there when I was green and didn't know the ropes. You thought you was pulin' somethin' smart on a dude from St. Joe; you thought you'd either git me killed off or run out of here. I was green, all right, but I wasn't so green I couldn't see your game."

Rawlins sat still, keeping his mouth

shut. But he was considering, with gravity that amounted to a great peril for Peck, whether he ought not grab the hammer that lay on a cross-studding and knock the slanderous scoundrel cold. His muscles were setting for a quick reach and a quicker blow, when his more generous nature restrained him. Peck was not without justification in his rancorous recollection of that plot against his safety and dignity. There was not much that he could say in self defense.

"You ain't got nothing on me," Peck insisted meanly. "This is as much my place as yours. You couldn't 'a' held it down if I hadn't been here to stand 'em off."

Peck allowed the argument to rest there, concentrating his talents on frying the bacon, which he always managed to put a black border around, with curled-up ends almost raw. He slashed and speared his food vindictively all through the meal, looking up from his operations occasionally with his round glassy eyes more bulging and expressionless than usual, as if to begin the one-sided quarrel again. But he evidently thought better or worse of it, and held his peace until he was through.

When Peck pushed back, everything cleared up, he seemed to be in a better humor.

"I'm goin' to be square with you, Rawlins," he said, producing a wallet as suddenly as it was astonishing. "I'm goin' to pay you, cash money, for your shack and so-called improvements on this place, and take your receipt for it. Then you're goin' to hit the breeze."

Rawlins was so amazed by this sudden discovery of Peck's hand that he sat across the table from him, staring. He was uncertain whether Peck was trying to pull off some kind of a joke of his own, to even past scores, or whether he had some fool notion in his head for getting possession of the homestead, the choicest site for sheep headquarters in that locality, as the sheepmen on the coroner's jury had said.

"What the devil are you drivin' at, Peck?" he asked at length, as Peck began to put money down on the table beside a folded piece of paper he had taken from the greasy leather wallet that never could have been his own.

Up came Peck's gun, which he steadied in his peculiar fashion with both hands, the left clasping the wrist of the right.

"I mean you're goin' to hit the breeze out of here," Peck announced, trying to look mean, succeeding fairly well. "There's five hundred dollars, and there's a bill of



sale for you to sign. If you make a break for a gun I'll bust you wide open!"

"Peck, you're a bigger fool than I thought you were," Rawlins told him, apparently without any deeper feeling than a man would have in stating an obvious fact.

"I'll show you how big a fool I am if you keep on talkin', Rawlins. I'm just big enough fool, maybe, to shoot you like I did that other feller. Who's here to swear you didn't pull your gun first?"

"Well, anyhow," said Rawlins, apparently undisturbed, "I decline your offer for my improvements and possession of this place. It wouldn't do you any good even if you could make your bluff go."

Rawlins, calm as he seemed, was boiling with inward rage. He was picking up and casting away the fugacious schemes which came rushing into his mind for getting the upper hand of Peck. The man was cunning enough to know he had a long chance, in that none too particular community, of getting away with his plea.

"You'll have to pull your freight, money or no money. You can take it or leave it—that's up to you."

Cupidity had made a tyrant out of a fool, thought Rawlins, as had happened before in history. The best thing to do was try to play him on a little while for an opening, and grab his chance when it came.

"I'll send your things over to the hotel at Lost Cabin in a day or two," Peck said. "You can go and claim 'em or you can leave 'em, but if you ever show your face around here ag'in I'll bust you wide open!"

"All right, Peck; you're the boss right now," Rawlins seemed to yield. "Shove that paper over here—I'll sign it."

"No you don't! You don't git me to put this old gun down till you're saddled up and gone out of here. Come around here and sign it, and watch your step!"

Peck got up, backing away from the chair, keeping his gun held on Rawlins, his bony shoulders hunched up, head to one side, one eye squinting along the barrel. Rawlins pushed his chair away from the table, trying to assume a dejected and conquered mien. He went slowly around the end of the table where Peck's old Mexican hat lay on the slab of bacon from which their dinner had been cut. The handle of the butcher knife presented in a hopeful invitation to Rawlins' eye as he passed, unseen before that moment, unthought of until that breath.

Rawlins snatched the knife and made a lunge at Peck, who backed off trying to

cock his pistol, a precaution which he had overlooked, one to which Rawlins perhaps owed his life. Rawlins jabbed the knife against Peck's ribs, disconcerting his business of raising the hammer—it was a single-action, old-time weapon—which slipped from under his thumb and came down with a roar. The bullet went somewhere; Rawlins was not concerned where just then, knowing it had not gone through him.

"Drop it!" he yelled, making Peck jump with the threat of sudden death he put into the command.

Peck let it go. There was a look of ter-



ror in his bulging eyes as he lifted his long arms and begged for his life. He backed off, his legs striking the cot drawn against the wall, bloodless agony in his face.

"Don't kill me, Rawlins!"

Peck begged. "I wasn't goin' to hurt you—it was only a bluff."

"Yes, I'm going to kill you!" Rawlins said savagely, pushing the knife till it bit. "You're not fit to live."

Peck begged in broken ejaculations as Rawlins faced him to the wall and stood him there with upraised hands. Then Rawlins dropped the knife, and snatched his gun from the holster hanging in its accustomed place behind the door.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE PENITENT

RAWLINS began to cool down in a little while, seeing the ridiculousness of the situation. Peck was only a comedian, take him at his worst.

"Peck, I'm going to let you live—just now," Rawlins told him, after holding him against the wall, hands up between the low joists, until he was stiff with fright. "But if I ever catch you with a gun on you again, anywhere, any time, I'll kill you on sight. Take off that belt!"

Peck fumbled at it, weak in the knees, trembling in every joint. Rawlins motioned for him to throw it under the cot, which he did, and Rawlins kicked it and the gun back out of sight. Peck's eye was on the greasy wallet and pile of greasy, sheepland money on the table.



"Rawlins," he appealed, turning in the supplication of abject cowardice, "let me take that money and hit it to hell out o' here before the old woman comes!"

"Not on your life!" said Rawlins. "Get the dishpan."

Peck moved limply about the order, rolling his unquiet eyes on Rawlins' gun, which followed him in every movement, not more than two feet from a vital part.

"Fill it up with onions," Rawlins commanded, as Peck stood with the pan, a dumb appeal in his glassy eyes.

"For God's sake, Rawlins!" Peck pleaded. "I never could stand 'em—they'll kill me!"

"You'd just as well die one way as another," Rawlins told him, the gun inexorably approaching his ribs.

Peck filled the pan, fishing the last onion out of the sack, and sat on the floor under Rawlins' directions, the receptacle between his long legs, where he went to work on his bitter penance. Rawlins sat in the chair that Peck had occupied lately, his gun close to the back of Peck's long neck.

"I've got myself in a hell of a fix follerin' that old woman's lead," said Peck, his fright beginning to turn from cold to hot. He sweated as he worked and wept, his burning eyes on the door.

"You have," Rawlins agreed coldly.

Peck shook his head and wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

"Let me go without the money, Rawlins," he begged. "Let me git out of that door and I'll travel so fast it'd take two men to count me."

"When you're through with that job we'll talk about the next," Rawlins replied, and touched Peck's sweating neck with the gun.

"I'll give you them sheep—you can take 'em—if you'll let me git out of here," Peck proposed.

"If I took all your interest in them I wouldn't even own a bleat," Rawlins said. "You've done a lot of talkin' about showin' people where they get off, Peck. You're pretty close to the edge right now yourself. Get busy!"

Peck peeled along in the lacrimal vapor that even his long back and neck could not hoist his eyes above, sniffing, snorting, tears dropping on his dejected mustache. Presently he began to talk, trying to make a case against his wife.

"She was behind that dang fool move of mine, Rawlins," Peck said, information which Rawlins scarcely needed, after seeing the wallet and greasy bills.

"She said if I'd take my old gun and bluff you out of here she'd give me that check-book she promised and I could go the limit. She was stuck on this place for sheep; she wanted it worse than she ever wanted to marry a man in her life. You was a cripple, she said; you couldn't do nothing with it, and some sheepmen'd come along here some day before long and boot you off. But I wasn't goin' to hurt you, Rawlins. That gunplay of mine was all a bluff."

"I told you once that was a dangerous thing to try inside of this fence, Peck."

"I believe you, Rawlins. But I wouldn't 'a' hurt you. If you'd 'a' said you wasn't goin' to take that money and stood up for your rights, I'd 'a' backed down. That's what I had it lined up to do. I figgered you'd let me have that money if you didn't want it."

Rawlins said nothing; only put the creepy gun-barrel to Peck's sunburned neck.

Peck worked on in desperate expedition for a while, keeping his mouth shut except when he released a groan of agony or sigh of hopelessness.

"She's comin' up here this afternoon," Peck said after a long silence. "By thunder! I believe that's her now!"

"Keep your seat," Rawlins said.

Peck thought better of his attempt to scramble up out of his disgraceful posture, the pan of onions between his thighs. But he looked round at Rawlins with one last plea in his red eyes.

"Let me tell her I'm just a peelin' onions for supper," he begged. "Put your gun up, Rawlins, and let me tell her that. If she knows you made me do it she'll set on me the rest of my life."

"You were my guest," Rawlins reproached him, "and you pulled your gun on me and tried to rob me. I believe you'd 'a' killed me if you'd got a chance at my back. Go on with that job."

Peck's imagination was at work through his ears. It wasn't his wife; it wasn't anybody at all. He went on with his melancholy task, working silently except for his sniffing and snorting and peculiar little squeaks of torture when he dropped the knife now and then to drag the sleeve of his jumper across his eyes. He came to the last onion in time, his eyes swollen and red.

"Rawlins," he begged contritely, "let me have one bill of money off of that pile and turn me loose. I'll leave this country so fast it'll singe my hair. You can see how

it'll be with me, Rawlins, if that woman comes here and ketches me. I'll be sentenced to jail all the rest of my life."

Rawlins knew Peck was right about that, for Mrs. Peck's respect would vanish like the plating on base jewelry the minute she saw her husband's failure. He was not moved by any pity at the prospect for Peck. Whatever he might get out of that marital adventure in future would be no more than he deserved. But there was another side of it to consider, which Peck's proposal suggested.

That was the punishment and humiliation of Mrs. Peck by aiding her disaffected spouse to quit her in that cold and summary style. That would hit her about as hard as a divorce, for the story would go over the sheep country, from the railroad on the north to the railroad on the south, and sheepmen and their red ladies would laugh over it in greasy delight, for Mrs. Peck was not a universal favorite, Rawlins had learned lately. Her reputation was bad in and around Lost Cabin, where she had the name of hard and tricky dealing, of hogging water and range to which she had no right under the apportionment such as other sheepmen respected.

There would be no sympathy for her on the range; the story of her comical mail-order husband's desertion would be spread around with chuckles and grins. About the surest way for him to play even with Mrs. Peck was to speed her anxious husband in his unfaithful design. Peck went on with his argument, as if he had read Rawlins' thoughts and hoped to bring him around.

"If you'll let me take a bill of that money—just one bill, I don't care how little it is—I'll hit it up so fast away from here I'll set the grass afire. She'll never ketch me this time if you'll let me go, Rawlins. You can't prove nothing on her, you've only got my word for it she was at the bottom of this steal, but if you'll let me hit it up for St. Joe right now you'll put a crimp in her. You can take the rest of that dang money and stick it in your jeans for damages and trouble and hurt feelin's and let me hop out of here before she shows up. She'll think I took it all."

"And you'll hop off somewhere and get a gun and come back and shoot me in the neck," Rawlins said with recriminatory bitterness. "You're so crooked I wouldn't

trust you around the corner of the house."

"If I ever pick up a gun again," said Peck, lifting his hand as if taking his oath on it, "you can shoot me with a bootjack on sight. I've had enough of that dang gun, I wish to crimony I never saw it. I tell you, Rawlins, I'm done with guns; I'm through."

"If I thought you were tellin' the truth, Peck, I'd let you go. But how am I to know?"

"Well, I tell you, Rawlins; you come with me to Lost Cabin and hold that gun of yours ag'in' my ribs till you see me on the stage hittin' it up for the railroad, if you doubt my word. I tell you I'm cured. I wouldn't no more touch another gun than I'd pick up a redhot horseshoe. Give me a bill off of that pile to pay my way to the railroad and I'll ride the bumpers to St. Joe. You can keep the rest; you can tell her I took it all."

"I don't want any of it, Peck. Leave me the wallet and this paper you had drawn up for me to sign. I can use them. Take the rest and go."

Peck jumped at the word as if he had heard thunder. He stiffened eagerly, his red eyes shining.

"Say, you ain't stringin' me, are you, Rawlins?" he asked doubtfully.

"Take it and go—before I change my mind."

Peck grabbed the money and put it in the side pocket of his notable bullet-proof jumper, snatched his big hat off the side of bacon and broke for the door. He stuck his head out for a look around, tooling it in his peculiar way as if testing the wind before hoisting his sail. Then he set out one foot, cautiously, with a long, striding movement.

The heel of the other foot was the last sight Rawlins had of anything belonging to Dowell Peck. Which way he went, or how fast, Rawlins never knew. When he went out in a little while, Peck had disappeared as completely as if he had taken one hop that was to land him in St. Joe.

Rawlins was not troubled about the possibility of Peck's vengeful return. Heeled with that much money, urged on by the desire to be free of his matrimonial entanglement and back among the sartorial charms of St. Joe, Peck would go right on. If he should miss the stage at Lost Cabin he very likely would beat it to the railroad. Rawlins believed, and correctly, as time proved, that the sheeplands would know Peck no more.

Rawlins picked up the unsigned bill of



sale and read it, not having seen the contents before. It carried out what Peck had said, for, while the writing doubtless was Peck's, with many capitals for common words, many flourishes and some short cuts in spelling, there was a cunning about the composition beyond the capacity of that romantic cavalier. It was the hand of Peck, but the mind of his wife.

Together with the greasy wallet, now empty to the leather, Rawlins put the bill of sale in the drawer of the kitchen table that served him for all purposes, left the pan of onions where it was, but got Peck's gun and belt from under the cot and hung them behind the door. Then he went outside to watch around for the next act in that day's eventful doings.

It was at least two hours after Peck's going, the sun standing at midafternoon, when he saw Mrs. Peck approaching from the direction of the sheep, which Peck had ranged out that morning some distance farther up the creek than ever before. She stopped at the top of every slight rise as she came along, to search the valley in the vicinity of the sheep, which were spread wide. She was looking for Peck, Rawlins knew. Very likely she had appointed to meet him there to get the news of his success, being too crafty to compromise herself by appearing at the house before the thing was settled.

Watching her wary progress toward the house, Rawlins decided to conceal himself in the buffalo wallow and see how she would take it when she arrived. He left the door standing open, the butcher knife on the floor where he had dropped it, the pan of onions beside the table as Peck had released it from the embrace of his romantic legs. But Peck's pistol he belted around himself, and his own rifle he took down from the wall and hid.

Mrs. Peck rode up from the creek in the same hesitant way. Every little while she stopped, looking around anxiously. When she reached the house she hesitated off a distance, as if debating whether to dismount or ride to the door. Finally she rode on, slowly, drew up in front of the door some twenty or thirty feet away from it, leaned and looked into the house. Then she dismounted, leaving her horse standing, and went in.

She came out almost at once, so quickly that Rawlins, who had left his concealment to go to the house and have it out with her, had to dodge behind a bush, for he was not ready to be seen as long as she was piling up evidence of her guilt by her

baffled and anxious search of the premises for signs of something that would account for the apparent desertion of the place. When she had disappeared around the house, Rawlins went forward. He met her as she reappeared, bursting around the corner fairly panting with impatience.

"Oh, there you are, Ned," she said, startled, turning as white as her tough harsh skin could become without a long bleaching. "I've been lookin' all over for you."

"Without expecting to find me," he said, with such a cold, hard manner as to cause her to glance at him quickly, feigning she did not understand.

"I thought I'd either find you or Mr. Peck around the place," she said.

"Sure. Especially Mr. Peck. Well, Mr. Peck isn't here."

She was looking at the two guns swinging on Rawlins, one of which she recognized with a start that seemed to make her eyes jump. She read the suggestion of what had happened to Peck in the display of his gun, as Rawlins had intended.

She stood looking at Rawlins, the blood gone out of her face, her mouth open without a word to fill it. She was a squat, broad, coarse figure in her man's coat and upturned overalls, with greasy sombrero pulled down on the back of her head to the ears.

"He did the best he could to put through what you started him out to do, madam," Rawlins said with stern arraignment, "but you went too heavy on a chance shot that made a weak bad man out of a fool. Peck was a crow down in his gizzard. He isn't here any longer."

She stood there swallowing dry lumps, gulping, staring, wetting her lips with her tongue.

"You didn't—you didn't—kill him, did you, Ned?"

"He was too damned onery to kill!" said Rawlins vehemently. "But he's dead to you from this day on."

Mrs. Peck appeared entirely overwhelmed, whether by guilt, remorse, a sense of her treachery, Rawlins could not tell. Only that she was crushed, smashed flat, her boisterous assurance gone, her



loud authority silenced in her vulgar mouth. She did not attempt any denial, nor utter one weak word of defense. She was caught and convicted, and she realized it. Whatever her accomplishments in a business way, effrontery she had not learned.

"Come in; I've got something of yours I want to give you," Rawlins ordered, rather than invited.

Perhaps Mrs. Peck thought it was the money. At any rate she did not hesitate, but entered as Rawlins stepped aside at the door to let her pass. She stopped short a little way within the door, looking around with renewed fear on the sight of disorder that had urged her out a few minutes before in search of the answer. She was about to get the answer now, and she was afraid.

Rawlins took the empty wallet from the drawer, handed it to her, silently. She took it, opened it, turned it with hopeless blankness, a stricken, sick look in her eyes. Rawlins unfolded the paper with Peck's writing on it which, if he had signed under the threat of Peck's gun, would have made him homeless, displaying it at arm's length before her eyes.

"You see it isn't signed" he said, and folded it again and put it in his pocket. "Here," he offered, pushing the pan of onions toward her with his foot, "take these away with you if you want them—they're seasoned with Peck's tears. You'll never see him again. He took the money you gave him to force on me at the point of his gun, and left. He was glad to go. I let him leave because he said, and I believed him, it would hurt you more to have him desert you than to have him killed."

Mrs. Peck turned to the door, went out, stood a little while looking around as if she expected to see Peck's vanishing figure at the top of the hills somewhere.

"You're to blame," she said, sorrowfully rather than vindictively; "you drove him away."

"No, you're the one that did it," he corrected her. "He's been waiting for his chance ever since you started to make a sheepman out of him, and you know it."

Somebody was coming in a wagon from the direction of Lost Cabin, along the old trail that used to run across the creek at that place in the days before Galloway's fence was built. The mark of the old road was to be seen yet between Rawlins' stack-yard and house, and this wagon, the sudden sound of its clucking as it lurched over the long-disused road startling their attention,

was heading down that way. It was no more than a quarter of a mile off when they saw it first, two people on the seat, led horse following behind.

Mrs. Peck turned to Rawlins with a little color in her face, a little glint of vindictive fire in her eyes.

"That's Edith and Tipple," she said. "He follered her to Jasper the day she led. They run off there and got married."

She said this with cruel malevolence, glad in this moment of her great humiliation, to put her tongue to something that would give him pain.

"Give me an invellup and some paper—I want to leave her a note."

Whatever the writing, it was soon done. Mrs. Peck handed the message to Rawlins requesting him to deliver it to Edith when she arrived. She was mounting to ride out about her business when Rawlins hurried to her, the unsigned bill of sale in his hand.

"You may have this—it's no use to me," he said, putting the paper in her hand. "Nobody knows anything about it but you and me and Peck. If you keep it under your hat nobody will ever know."

Mrs. Peck crumpled the paper and stuffed it in her pocket, swung to the saddle with agility surprising for her weight and years. She looked down at Rawlins with something unsaid in her open mouth, and looked at the wagon which was drawing near, some indication of emotion in her hard features which Rawlins interpreted as sorrowful contrition. She thrust her hand toward him suddenly, without a word, as if asking him to forget and forgive while making farewell.

Rawlins let her hand hang there untried for a little while, the hardness of his wrong, the resentment of her cunning treachery, holding back all friendly concession. Then his redundant generosity rose and leveled everything. He took her rough hand for a quick clasp, and waved her away, secretly wishing her better fortune with her next man, although he knew she deserved no more than she was suffering that minute.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### TO SAVE THE SHEEP

EDITH jumped out of the wagon as soon as she drove into Rawlins' yard and came running to him, concern in her face, breathless in her inquiry about his wound.

"The sheriff told me about it, that wa

the first I'd heard of the fight you and Peck were in," she explained. "I was down at Jasper—I only got back today. I passed by here this morning and knocked on your door, but there wasn't anybody around."

Rawlins was not very successful in his attempt at unreserved cordiality, although he greeted Tippie warmly when he came over in his deliberate fashion, which neither mischance to other men nor good fortune to himself seemed sufficient to accelerate. The wound was troublesome, but not serious, Rawlins told them. The doctor said he would be all right in six weeks or two months. It was unlucky to happen to a man who had hay to cut, but he had to take the bad with the good.

"Wasn't that Aunt Lila lopin' off as we came up?" Edith asked.

Yes, it was Aunt Lila, and she had left a note. Rawlins produced it as he spoke, and delivered it, glad of the diversion it caused, thankful that the congratulations he felt bound to offer in keeping with convention, although so contrary to his honest desire, could be staved off for a little while. Let them spring it, he told himself. He was not supposed to know anything about their business, although on the face of appearances it was plain enough for anybody to conclude.

"That's funny," said Edith, her face a study in emotions as she stood looking at the brief writing Mrs. Peck had left. "That's darned funny," she amended, a little more forcefully, passing the note on to Tippie.

"Um-m-m," said Tippie, glum as glue, seeming to study the note. "Not as funny as some things I've read."

He handed it to Rawlins, who asked Edith's permission in a questioning glance. Edith flushed, laughed queerly, nodded.

Rawlins read the hastily written line or two; read again, grinned a feeble, knocked-out sort of grin, looking from one to the other. The writing ran:

*Edith I give you them sheep for a wedding present from your old aunt.*

*Lila Duke.*

"Wedding present!" said Edith, red as a geranium. "Well, I like——"

"Sure," said Tippie. "Weddin' present."

"I con——" Rawlins began, to be stopped by Edith with interdictory hand.

"Sh-h-h! You might say something," she said, a laugh in her eyes.

"Sure; weddin' present," Tippie re-

peated. "The old lady thinks you're goin' to get married."

"No she don't, Elmer," Edith corrected him, laughter growing in her bright, happy eyes. "She thinks we're married already!"

"You and Ned? How in the thunder could she think——"

"No, you and I."

"She don't think you're that big a fool," Tippie said sarcastically.

Rawlins felt as if he had gone through some dreaded initiation. The relief of having it over with, and knowing that the worst fears were unfounded, gave him such a feeling of lightness he could have flapped his wings and crowed. He saw now how impossible it was. Tippie would



have been the last man to think of such a thing, good old Tippie, honest old Tippie. Rawlins felt like embracing him.

"That's what she thinks,"

Edith insisted. "And look how she signs her name: '*Lila Duke*.' What do you think she means by that?" Edith appealed to them with baffled eyes.

"Habit," said Tippie.

"She's a widow again," Rawlins explained.

"Did they kill him?" Tippie asked, eagerly hopeful.

"No; he's run off again. This time he'll make it stick."

"She'll be the feller to get the divorce, then," said Tippie. "That's what she means by signin' the old name. She considers it settled already."

Edith seemed indecisive between laughter and tears. The thought of Peck persisting in his efforts to get a free leg once more moved the deep appreciation of humor in her soul; but reflection on her aunt's bitter humiliation and misery checked the outburst.

"Yes, it's off for good this time," she said. "Aunt Lila won't send the sheriff after him any more. Poor old soul! she deserves it, but I'm sorry for her, just the same."

"How long's he been gone?" Tippie inquired.

"I don't know just when he left—he was around here this morning," Rawlins said vaguely, determined that Edith never should know of her aunt's greedy plotting to oust him from his homestead if it de-

pended on him to tell her of it.

"I think I'd better go over there and keep my eye on your sheep a while then, Edith," Tippie proposed. "I'm afraid the old lady might experience a change of heart and drive 'em out of here."

Tippie took the saddled horse hitched at the tail of the wagon and rode off, Edith and Rawlins watching him go, the silence of embarrassment between them. Edith was the first to recover.

"She had her nerve to think I'd marry Elmer," she said.

"Didn't she?"

"She knew all the time I was going to Jasper to file on a homestead in here. I told her I was going to, I asked her to tell you."

"File on a homestead! Edith! You don't tell me? Why, she never——"

"I've got the papers, I can prove it," Edith laughed. "That's mine, joining you on the east."

"Well, I never thought I'd have you for a neighbor," he said, his delight dampened not a little by the thought that she never intended to be anything more. "And she never said a word."

"We had a little fuss," Edith said.

"I thought as much."

"We'd had plenty of them before. About my money, you know. She said I'd used it all up in board, and education and care, and that kind of stuff, when I've worked my way ever since I've been with her. She never was my legal guardian, you know, Ned. She wasn't under bond, or anything. Father asked her to look after me when he was dying; he turned over his insurance and all he had to her to keep for me."

"So that was the way of it?"

"There wasn't much. We compromised on fifteen hundred dollars, she paid me, and I struck out for Jasper to file on that land while the filin' was good."

"You took a long chance, I'm afraid, Edith. Hewitt was here with the last bunch that raided us, when Peck killed one of them. He isn't the kind of man to let it drop, even though we've got the sheriff behind us now. I've been looking for them every day."

Edith heard him out with a queer look of incredulity and surprise.

"Why, is it possible you haven't heard the news, Ned? Sheep limit's off; you've won your fight."

"Nobody's been around here to tell me about it," he replied, a little sarcastically, as if to say if that was her notion of a joke he couldn't see it.

"But you've been over in town today and that's all they're talking about there," she said.

"I didn't see anybody but the doctor, and he failed to mention it. What's the big news, Edith?"

"What I told you, Ned; sheep limit's off. Galloway was in town himself this morning trying to square it and explain as to this shootin'-up his gang's been doing to you."

"You don't tell me?"

"He was; the sheriff told us about it. The sheepmen are already hittin' the road to Jasper in droves to file on land in here. The sheriff says there'll be a hundred thousand sheep on this new range inside of a week."

"Well, I wish Galloway'd done his talk in a little sooner," Rawlins said. "How does he explain it? What's behind his change of heart?"

"The Wool Growers' Association is behind it," Edith explained. "They're gettin' to be a power in politics in this country, and Galloway's uneasy about his job. He says his lease is just about out on the land, anyhow, and he intended to take his fence away. He's been passin' out the word that the limit's off, tellin' the sheepmen to go to it. He says the shootin' his men did tryin' to drive you out wasn't authorized by him. He sidesteps all responsibility, the sheriff says."

Rawlins was not highly elated over the news that Galloway had declared sheep limit off. It seemed to him, somehow, that he had failed, that Galloway had forestalled his triumph and taken every mar of credit from his hand. It would appear to the public that his fight had been useless, untimely, ill-advised. If he had waited a little while, the general impression would be that he might have taken possession in peace, as the rest of them would do.

Still, there would be some who would understand Galloway's hand had been forced by his assertion of rights inside the fence. Those sheepmen who had been there twice as a coroner's jury knew the effort to oust him had been a viciously earnest one. It would be hard to make them believe Galloway had any intention of giving up the land until he saw this persistent homesteader was there to stay, and his staying would be the rift in the fence that would admit so many more that senatorial prerogative must give way before the rush.

Let the credit go where it might, sheep limit was off, the big white spot, like a des-

ert in a geography map, would be blank and mysterious no more. He had won what he had put his foot inside the fence to win, and much sooner, even though at greater cost, than he had expected.

"It's all right," he said, drawing a deep breath. "But I wish Galloway had begun to talk a little sooner. You've got your homestead, anyhow. You were lucky to get down ahead of the rush, and I appreciate your courage and—and your—nerve, much more than I can tell you. Are you going on to the ranch?"

"No, it's all off down there for me. I've got my tent and all I need in the wagon—that's what I went on to Lost Cabin for this morning. I traded in my saddle-horse to Smith Phogenphole on that team and wagon."

"It looks like a good team, and I guess the wagon's all right. You know more about that sort of thing than I do, Edith. Are you going to camp on your homestead?"

"Sure. I'm here to stay. And I suppose—" seriously, face averted—"I'll have to marry *somebody* now, or lose the sheep. No wedding, no present. That's the way Aunt Lila'll figure it."

"I wish there wasn't a sheep in the world!" he said, with such bitterness it seemed he must have taken a sudden and deep dislike for the woolly genus.

"That's no kind of talk for a sheepman," she corrected him gently.

"I couldn't ask you to marry me just to save a band of dirty sheep," he said, ridiculously, as he realized when he saw her put her hand over her mouth to stifle a laugh. "I always intended to," he drove on. "I've planned toward it ever since I first saw you, Edith. And now—Darn it, Edith, you'd think I wanted to marry you just to save the sheep!"

"Foolish!" said Edith, facing round with an encouraging grin. "It would be just the same with me if there wasn't any sheep. What do you suppose I took up that homestead for?"

"Why," pleadingly, hopefully, "you didn't take it up just because you wanted to be my *neighbor*, did you, Edith?"

"I took it up because I had to do it while I was single, and I wanted that land in the family."

"Edith," earnestly, firmly, "when Elmer comes back I'll ask him to stay around here till we go over to town and—and——"

"Get it over with?" she laughed. "No, there's not going to be any grand rush

about this thing, Ned. I'm going to camp over on my claim, but I'm going to look after you till your arm gets well. It'll be all right—Elmer's going to be here with us. He's taken up the half-section on the west of you."

"The old rascal, not to say a word to me about it!"

"Yes, he's quit Aunt Lila. He's going to stock up with a fine breed of sheep and go into it on a big scale. I expect Aunt Lila'll sell out now; she's talked of it a good while."

Tippie was coming back from his survey of the sheep, evidently satisfied that Mrs. Peck was not hovering around them in the indecision of a changing heart.

"You're a hospitable and neighborly man, I must say," Edith pretended to accuse Rawlins, with the freedom of a lady whose claims on a man have been adjusted



to her entire satisfaction. "I've seen the outside of your house from the hills a hundred times, and now when I'm up to it you don't even invite me to look inside."

"It's all kicked up and thrown around in there," he tried to justify himself. "I've been one-sided for a week, and Peck wasn't much good for housework. You must excuse appearances, Edith, and not judge my habits by what you see."

Edith laughed at the disorder, at the crude housekeeping attempts, and unwashed dishes which were spread around, some of them even on Rawlins' cot. But it was the pan of peeled onions under the table that caused her special merriment.

"What on earth did you clean them all at once for, Ned?" she wanted to know. "Or did you do it? Of course not, with one hand. It must have been Peck. But why? Were you expecting company?"

Rawlins stood by grinning, feeling himself cornered for a reasonable explanation. He wished he had put the pan under the bed when he had come in for a minute after Mrs. Peck's departure to take off Peck's gun.

"It was done on a little bet this morning between Peck and me," he said. "Peck bet me his gun he could clean all the onions without shedding a tear, and he lost."



## KEEP GOING

By J. D. NEWSOM

*Author of "Boots," "Three Days' Leave," etc.*

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FOR COUNTLESS MILES OF MARCHING IN "SUNNY" FRANCE PRIVATE COOPER HAD BEEN NAGGED AND JEERED AT BY THE BULLYING CORPORAL WALTHON. WHEN A MAN WAS FOOTSORE, READY TO DROP, THERE WOULD ALWAYS COME THAT SNARLING "KEEP GOING." BUT WHEN THEY GOT INTO ACTION AMONG SHELLS AND MACHINE-GUNS, "KEEP GOING" CAME TO MEAN SOMETHING ELSE

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**T**HE battalion had been on the move ever since dawn, going at a snail's pace along congested roads where an unending stream of motor traffic raised clouds of gray-white dust. The air was full of gasoline fumes, dust and profanity. Truck drivers and ambulance drivers, all of them in a great hurry, cursed the battalion, and the battalion, its collective mouth full of grit, cursed back as best it could.

It was a baking hot, cloudless day. The tall poplars lining the road offered no protection against the glaring sun, and the men crawled along, sweating, limping, blasphemously disgusted with the war, with France, with themselves. It was rolling, open country through which they were marching; on either side of the road there were fields of yellow wheat aswin in the dancing heat haze; clumps of trees crowned the low ridges closing the horizon.

Most of the time the battalion was forced to keep to the grassy bank by the roadside, dodging along between the trees and the ditch. The bank was cut by drainage gulleys so that the men walked for a few yards and then had to jump across a ditch. This method of marching made them look like merry school children out on a picnic, skipping and frisking out of sheer joy, but the things they said would have singed

the hair off the average schoolboy's head. Skipping ditches with a full pack on one's back, full cartridge pouches, a box respirator, a rifle, not to speak of entrenching tools, bayonet and a steel helmet—skipping ditches when thus encumbered does not improve a battalion's temper.

Moreover, they had lost their brigade and the colonel was riding up and down the line, trying to inspire his men to still greater exertion when he was not dodging motor trucks. Something was happening over the edge of the horizon, something great and portentous, to the accompaniment of heavy shelling which reached the marching men like an overtone to the rumbling wheels of the traffic.

Wounded men limped by on the other side of the road, and a flock of very dirty German prisoners stood about with their hands in their pockets—to hold up their pants, for all the buttons had been cut off to make their escape too foolish to be contemplated.

The battalion's officers and senior non-coms were even more short-tempered than their men. Not because they had strayed far from the fold and knew not where to find it, but because with every passing kilometer they were losing men who could not keep up with the procession.

A reinforcement draft of two hundred



and fifty men had joined up two days before; their feet were soft, their lungs were weak, their backs were broken and their legs were so much mush. The old hands, the veterans of the Argonne woods, tramped through the dusty grass without too much trouble, but the newcomers found life very hard indeed, and dumbly wondered what it was all about.

Corporals, sergeants and some officers goaded them along, but every so often a man sat down, collapsed or rolled into the ditch, and stayed there, refusing to be moved either by threats or appeals to his better nature. And his superiors had to leave him there because the battalion went ever onward, like time and tide, waiting for no man.

One man, however, try as he might, could not drop out and go peacefully to sleep by the roadside. He was a short, spare young man by the name of Randolph Cooper, whose head bobbed drunkenly on his shoulders as he walked, for he was very tired. In addition to his other equipment he was bent beneath the weight of an automatic rifle. He shambled along at a jog-trot, his knees giving way at each step, and he skipped no ditches. He stepped down into each gully and climbed painfully up the other side. Dust was caked on his face, where sweat had grooved little channels, giving his countenance a frightful appearance which unfortunately did not terrify Corporal Walthon.

Walthon was large, beefy and muscular. Where other men had to trot he strode along, taking long easy steps. Most of the time he was stepping on Cooper's heels; deliberately stepping on Cooper's heels. He, too, was hot and sweaty, and his prominent blue eyes were rimmed with eyelashes heavy with clotted dust. His tunic was unhooked, exposing his bull neck and his chest, which was indeed hairy.

He was not losing any men. Every few seconds his large voice boomed lustily "Keep moving, youse guys! Keep moving. First man drops out I'll bat him one w' the butt end of my rifle. Gwan! Keep moving! There's a war on."

But Cooper was his pet aversion. Cooper had joined with the last draft and was too gentlemanly to suit Walthon. He didn't eat his beans off his knife and he didn't seem to know how to swear. Moreover, he was very quiet and had a great respect for Walthon's stripes. When Walthon called him names he smiled sadly. That smile got Walthon's goat in something less

than fifteen seconds flat, so he loudly declared.

He gave Cooper no peace or rest. "Gwan, you poor broken blossom," he boomed. "This ain't no time for any of your kid-glove stuff. Keep moving. Snap into it!"

Cooper kept moving, looking over his shoulder from time to time with a despairing look in his eyes. The smile was quite gone.

The battalion came to a hill which the road climbed without a twist or a turn. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and growing hotter and hotter. Cooper got halfway up and stopped, leaning against a tree-trunk, his mouth hanging open, gurgling for air.

"Well, what d'you think you're doing?" barked Walthon. "Posing for your picture? Gwan, git going!"

"But, Corporal," pleaded Cooper. "I can't. I'm worn out, I swear I am, Corporal. I can't go on; my head's spinning."

"I'll spin it off for you. Here, gimme that li'l machine-gun; I'll tote it for a while. Hop along, now. Hop!"

"Can't I rest for a second? I'll catch up—"

"Over my dead body you'll fall out," jeered Walthon, catching his victim by the coat collar and pushing him along. "Gwan, git going. Keep moving."

This undignified treatment, which aroused the whole section's primitive sense of humor, made Cooper very mad indeed.

"Corporal," he said between set teeth, "if you step on my feet again—"

"Spit it out," urged Walthon. "What's on your mind?"

"I—why, I'll report you!" Cooper said wildly. "I've had all I can stand, and if you don't stop I swear I'll report you!"

"Ain't he cute?" bellowed Walthon. "Sergeant, here's a guy wants to report me."

Sergeant Gorton was too hot and preoccupied to argue. "What's trouble?" he inquired.

"This bird Cooper claims I been climbing up his heels," Walthon answered boisterously. "He's been trying to fall out all morning."

"Walk on 'em some more," urged Gorton. "Damn it, if any more men drop behind we won't muster a full company by the time we get where we're going."

"Where is it we are going, Sergeant?" called out a little East-side New Yorker by the name of Goldringer. "Ve going to the war this time?"

"You know as much as I do," grunted

Gorton. "Just keep going."

Walthon winked at Cooper and jeered, "There y'are, old kid. I'm reported. What d'you know about that? Gwan!" he added savagely as Cooper stumbled. "Keep going, or I'll walk all over you."

"Oy!" laughed Goldringer. "Vat a life, vat a life, eh, Cooper? Ain't ve got fun?"

There was murder in Cooper's eyes as the whole section shouted loud inquiries after the health of its "poor broken blossom." His good manners seemed to be deserting him rapidly.

"You think you're damn' funny," he snapped at Walthon. "Well, I guess you are, but I'm going to get you for this, and get you good and plenty."

Walthon looked at him curiously, wondering whether the worm really was about to turn. But he dismissed the incident with a grunt.

"All right, kid," he agreed. "But you better save your breath just now—and keep going. C'mon, snap into it."

They tramped on, up hill and down dale, over roads blocked by traffic and lanes that were deserted save for stragglers and wounded men, and as they drew nearer to the sound of the guns they came upon dead men and dead horses, lying stiffly by the roadside.

They passed through a village, wrecked, burned out and smoking, and went on up a long slope into a belt of trees where the dead lay thick. In the wood they found the rest of the brigade all snarled up with horse transport and trucks and artillery limbers. As they passed close to a ravine a howitzer battery opened fire with a roar. Cooper, who was not used to the sound of guns going off at close range, leaped sideways, dropped the automatic rifle on one man's toes and collided with another before he could be stopped.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Walthon, catching him by the belt and dragging him back into place. "Ain't we the nervous one! Gwan, you saphead, pick up that gun and git going."

The whole section said rude things about Cooper's morale, and he hobbled along after that one spasm, without paying any attention either to his mates' abuse or to the roar of the howitzers. But he thought a lot.

The wood was full of guns, tucked away in odd corners, and all of them came into action at the same time, so that the noise became deafening and the vibration shook the leaves off the trees.

At last after long delays, while guides

lost their way in the green-lit depths of the wood, the battalion reached its a



pointed position on the eastern fringe of the wood. Beyond the land lay away toward a blazing village which was surrounded by broad fields of wheat. A tree-lined road passed close to the village, cutting

diagonally across the battalion's front, and a line of telegraph poles marked the track of a railway hidden in a cutting, which crossed the highroad at right angles. Somewhere within the triangle formed by the wood, the road and the railway there were Germans, many of them. Two attacks, it seemed, had failed to dislodge the enemy who was hanging on desperately to the railroad cutting and the wreckage of the village.

Peering through the underbrush Cooper could see the black vomit cast up by heavy shells that were battering the line and the white and black smoke puffs of shrapnel making strange patterns against the sky.

At that distance, however, it did not seem very terrible, even though the sound of the bombardment rolled back like ceaseless thunder. By degrees his eyes adapted themselves to the distance and he realized dimly what was happening. Over by the highway a strong, thick tree was all at once torn in two and flung away. When the smoke of the explosion cleared nothing but a splintered stump remained. A roofed barn on the outskirts of the village crumbled in a great shroud of pink and bright yellow smoke. The wreckage caught fire.

Away off to the left several lines of men were moving through the wheat. Cooper saw the shrapnel puffs appear in the sky above them. The lines seemed to be blown to pieces. The wheat was full of shadowy troughs. Here and there men still moved forward. Machine-guns clattered angrily. No more men were moving through the wheat and the guns closed down again, hunting out the machine-guns.

Horror-struck, Cooper stared at the leaping fountains of earth and smoke, watching for those midgets to reappear.

"Vell, vat you looking at?" inquired

Goldringer, lying close beside him in the underbrush. "Seen a ghost or something?"

"Did you see what happened over there?" choked Cooper. "They were blown to bits, to bloody bits!"

"Aw, that's all the bunk," declared Walthon, whose face was pasty white, for he had been watching the attack also. "They're lying down, waiting for the guns to finish the job. Quit belly-aching, you poor mutt, you're enough to give the whole regiment conniption fits. Pipe down, for God's sake, pipe down!"

Other men with the same savage emphasis urged Cooper to shut 'up and lie still. They needed no reminder of the job that lay ahead of them. But Cooper could not lie still. Here he was face to face with something new and frightful. It scared him half to death, while the other half of him wanted comfort and sympathy. He certainly got neither from that gang. Along the fringe of the wood too many men were getting ready to answer their Maker's call, and none of them had any pity to spare.

Cooper buried his head in his arms and wept salt tears of misery and disgust. He was tired beyond the limit of endurance, he was hungry, he was hot, ants were crawling down the back of his coat collar, and he didn't care if it snowed ink.

"Oy!" cackled Goldringer, finding this display of emotion highly contagious. "Must ve all be killed by those great shells! Vat a vaste of life it is. Ve vas told the Germans vas running away. Look at 'em running away, for God, look at them then! Ve are losing the war!"

Walthon, who had no nerves, caught Cooper by the shoulder and jerked him to his feet.

"You lousy bum," he snarled. "You're a soldier now, and if you don't quit boohooing I'll lay you over my knee, so help me God, and pound the life outen youse. C'mon, my fragrant blossom, smarten up a bit!"

He gave Cooper a friendly kick for the good of his soul, and that last indignity put fresh courage into Cooper.

"I'll get you for that!" he said savagely. "You big stiff, you can't get away with that sort of thing. D'you hear? I'm going to get you good and plenty."

Walthon noting the look of fury in his victim's eyes, nodded his approval.

"That's dandy," he declared. "Just hold it until we get in among the Krauts and you'll be jake. You're coming on, kid, you're coming along."

Then the Germans turned their guns onto the wood, hunting for concealed batteries, and for the next half hour the battalion suffered most terribly. Men were crushed and buried beneath falling tree-trunks and whole platoons were blown to pieces and scattered among the high branches. It lasted no more than thirty minutes, but they were eighteen hundred seconds of living hell, while the air was full of screaming things and the ground opened up and belched hot gases upon the men. Sweating inside their masks they lay close to the ground with nothing to do but wait, wait, wait, for the rush of the shell that would bring death to them.

At last the guns switched off, concentrating on the batteries farther back in the wood and the battalion came out of its trance. It was late afternoon, the sun was slowly going down into a haze of purple dust, and the trees were full of thickening shadows. Down below in the golden plain the fight still raged, neither side gaining or losing. Thick clouds of smoke hung above the smashed village, casting a long, weird shadow upon the wheat.

Then came the order to move out of the wood.

Sergeant Gorton gave orders in a clear voice which rang among



the trees. "You see that village? Fine. Left of that there's a road and a level crossing. Got that? Right! Our folks are held up just this side of the village and they're getting cut to hell by machine-guns in the railway cutting. You can't see the cutting, but it's there right enough. We're going to clean it up before nightfall and hold it, so's everything'll be jake for tomorrow's show. The next division is away forward on the right, waiting for us—get that? We're holding up the works."

Another regiment was already moving forward, bearing off toward the highway, where the wink-wink-wink of rifle and machine-gun fire was plainly visible in the fading light. Cooper found himself moving also, gripping his bayoneted rifle so hard that his fingers grew cold and numb. The wheat was full of concealed shell holes; dead men were everywhere underfoot, so that the battalion tripped and stumbled through all kinds of half seen horrors,

and the officers were busy keeping the long line steady as if it were on parade, instead of marching to its many deaths across a charnel house.

Cooper kept one eye on Walthon, firmly resolved to carry out his threat, but he noticed with cooling ardor that Walthon was watching him also. Soon he had other things to think about, for stray bullets were beginning to whine past his head. Here and there, almost unnoticed in the breast-high wheat, men were beginning to drop, and the battalion left in its wake a dreadful trail of broken men, whose voices cried out for a little while and then were lost in the growing din.

The long line pressed on, tramping, tramping, tramping through the rich ripe wheat where there were already so many dead. They went down into a shallow fold in the ground, and there the German shrapnel caught them. Like the steady hiss of hail on water, the bullets beat down upon the crops. The battalion went on at a jog-trot, moving quickly out of that whistling inferno. Up on the crest of the ridge lay the advance posts—the survivors of other attacking waves who had reached that high point and could go no farther. They were strange, powder-blackened creatures, unlovely to behold, but they raised a weary cheer as the battalion swung on its way, erect, unblinking, grimly splendid, and heartbreakingly proud as they paraded past the shell holes where the outposts lay.

The long twilight was ending and the sun was a disk of copper, gleaming behind violet and saffron streamers, but it was light enough yet for men to see the dark mass of the village and their objective to the left of it, marked by the tops of telegraph poles, standing out black and gaunt against the sky.

Then all along the front dropped the creeping barrage, timed to the second, a living, leaping, flashing wall of steel and earth. Deafening and overwhelming, it seemed to blow the earth itself out of being, to pulverize and scatter it and turn it upside-down.

"Keep up with it! Keep close!" yelled Gorton. "You're bearing off too much to the left——"

Cooper swayed away, shielding his face with his arm as he heard the rising shriek of an onrushing shell. It struck the ground at Gorton's feet, the blast of the explosion flung Cooper to the ground. Gorton was gone, blotted out. Lumps of earth, fragments of hot metal rained down on Cooper's back and legs. He lay still,

wrenched by an uncontrollable fit of nausea, for he had seen his first man most hideously killed. He shut his eyes to try to keep out the picture: an arm suddenly detached, sailing through the air, and Gorton's head——

"Up wit' you, me broken blossom!"

It was Walthon's raucous voice, braying in his ear, and Walthon's gun butt was hammering against the small of his back.

"C'mon! Git going; there's nothing wrong wit' you. Git up, keep going!"

His words were blown away by the hurricane of sound, for the German counter-barrage had come down, and the craziest nightmare conjured up by the craziest brain was as nothing compared to the immensity of that flashing clamor.

Into it, into the twilight of smoke and noise went the battalion. The colonel was down and the senior captain was gone, and companies were commanded by sergeants, and not a German yet had been sighted. In small groups the survivors drifted along, like phantoms stumbling through a red-shot darkness full of wild shrieks, dust and the spreading black spouts of bursting shells.

Cooper went on, because to go back was senseless. Sometimes there were men beside him, and sometimes he went on all alone. Dead men lay everywhere: curled up in shell holes, flat on their backs, staring up slack-jawed at the flaming summer sky; caught in grotesque poses.

Walthon loomed out of the flying dust. He trudged along beside Cooper, head bent down on his short neck, seemingly preoccupied by the important business of stepping carefully over the dead. His long strides carried him past Cooper. He half turned with a quick, threatening gesture.

"Keep going!" he yelled. "C'mon!"

"Going's fast as I can," Cooper shouted back angrily.

"Git on faster," ordered Walthon. He grabbed at Cooper's shoulder and tried to drag him along, for company's sake. But Cooper tripped and went sprawling into a shell hole where there was a puddle of cold blood.

He started to scramble out, sickened by the sight of the soft things' spattered in that hole, but he flattened out again as a slithering shriek, rising clear above the uproar, warned him of onrushing doom. The shell burst a few yards ahead. One great hunk of steel ripped the pack off his back and the dark sky rained dirt clods upon him.

He struggled to his feet, and went on. In a daze he tripped upon something that

lay in front of him. The "something" was Corporal Walthon, half buried by the explosion but unhurt. Cooper's boot caught him full in the face.

Walthon bellowed. "You mutt, you done it a-purpose, just as you said you would! I'll skin ye alive. You been laying for me, ye lousy skunk!"

"You're a liar," yelled Cooper. "I didn't do it on purpose. I didn't even see you. Hurt?"

"You did do it a-purpose!" brayed Walthon. "Dig me out, you hunk of tripe. Dig! I'm caught all down one side."

"All right, I'll dig you out," Cooper retorted savagely, carried away by the brilliancy of the thought which had just flashed through his mind. "But, by God, I'll take one real kick at you first! You got it coming your way."

And clumsily he aimed a kick at a portion of Walthon's anatomy rising slightly higher than the rest of him. Then he dug while the corporal raved and swore he would kill him and squirmed his way out of the heavy shroud.

All at once the inevitable consequences of his rashness dawned upon Cooper. He had deliberately struck a non-com on the field of battle. Appalled by what he had done, all his fine courage oozing out of him, he took to his heels. Glancing back over his shoulder he saw the dark bulk that was Walthon come lumbering after him.

Abruptly he passed out of the heart of the barrage. It was almost dark, all color had drained out of the sky, and the plain was dull gray. Ahead the trees lining the highway were black fingers raised against the sky.

He was all alone in the wheat, going straight toward the German line. Apparently the attack had fizzled out. He decided to lie down and wait for orders, but he caught sight of Walthon hurrying along close behind him. He was much more afraid now of Walthon than he was of a whole army corps of Germans. He bounded ahead, diving into the wheat. He was startled to the verge of nervous prostration to find himself lying next to little Goldringer.

"For God, where is everybody?" chattered the East-sider. "What a terrible business this is! Not another step vill I make till I am given orders. It ain't sensible!"

"We got to reach the embankment," snapped Cooper, goaded on by fear of the corporal. "Come on, buddy, let's get there. I don't see any Germans; I guess

our barrage did the trick."

But other men had struggled through the curtain of fire and were moving forward.



A machine-gun began to clatter, another joined in and yet another. A stream of bullets sang above Cooper and Goldringer as they hugged the ground. Wheat stalks cut by the terrible reapers fell upon their backs.

"I guess we might as well quit—" began Cooper.

Then he felt a hand close on his ankle. He wrenched himself away and crawled on, exhibiting an astonishing turn of speed on his hands and knees. Goldringer stayed close beside him.

"Vell, vy don't you quit?" gasped the East-sider. "This is craziness, or did you want the Medal of Congress or something?"

"Medals, hell!" Cooper said simply. "Keep going, you poor simp or we'll both get killed."

They came to a broad lane in the wheat. At the end of the lane there was a machine-gun. They could see the spurt of flame winking in the growing darkness, and they flattened out as the bullets whipped by less than a foot above their heads. The artillery fire was dying down, though shrapnel was still being sprayed over the German positions at the intersection of the highway and the railroad cutting.

"Enough!" whispered Goldringer. "This is a great foolishness, I am telling you. Suppose ve find a good, deep hole—"

But the wheat crackled and swayed close behind them and Cooper shied like a skittish colt.

"Keep moving," he rasped. "We're nearly there. They can't see us; it's almost dark. Come on, don't be scared. I'm with you!"

They had lost all contact with their company, with their battalion, and it seemed to them that they alone were lying up close to the German line. With set teeth and eyes bulging out of their heads they crawled along on their bellies, gaining a foot, a yard at a time, levering themselves forward on their elbows.

Rifle fire and the sharp crack of hand grenades broke out over on their left. It was quite dark, and the flash of the explosions made bright splashes of light. Look-

ing behind him Cooper saw Walthon on his knees in the wheat, peering cautiously from side to side. There was a look of cold fury on the corporal's face which sent Cooper floundering along as if devils were behind him.

The whole sector was alive with little fights which flared up, died away and flared up again to the tune of banging rifles and the rap-rap-rap of machine-guns. Flares soared up along the line of elm trees, where the heavy smoke of bursting shells billowed like low-hanging clouds. Apparently the attack had failed to reach its objective, the shallow railway cutting, and had turned off too much to the left.

Side by side Cooper and Goldringer crawled on among the shell holes, keeping well away from that broad lane in the wheat, until abruptly they were confronted by a rusty iron fence. Almost on top of them a machine-gun opened fire, crashing and spitting for a full half minute. And in that half minute they worked their way beneath the wire and fell in on top of the gun-crew. They killed them, fighting like wild men with all the pent up misery and terror they had experienced to give them fresh strength.

When it was over they were purged of their terror for they had battled against great odds and won. The dead lay beneath their feet; three shadowy corpses tumbled in the bottom of the dark, black hole. Fear of Walthon was blotted out of Cooper's mind. Instead he felt immensely elated. He slapped Goldringer on the back and exclaimed, "We've done it, buddy! We got here after all!"

"Aw, say it mit flowers," urged Goldringer in a sibilant whisper. "We ain't safe yet. This place is crawling mit Heinies."

"And to hell with Walthon!" added Cooper, pursuing his own train of thought. "I'll break his neck if ever I see him again."

"Keep quiet," snarled Goldringer. "Full of Heinies here, I am telling you."

The cutting seemed to be lightly held, for they were left alone for a long while and had time to remember how tired and thirsty they were before anyone disturbed them. Somewhere along the way Cooper had lost his automatic rifle, but they found three Lugers on the dead men, and to keep awake they tried to experiment with the German machine-gun. It jarred off with a rattle, almost kicking the grips out of Cooper's hands.

Working quickly they swung the gun around on its tripod so that it commanded

the railroad embankment and the cutting, then they sat down to wait for what might befall. The feeling of elation gradually wore off, and they were so weary that they would fall asleep for short, terrible seconds, awaking with a convulsive start as their jaded bodies sagged down and down.

The night dragged along. The stars were beginning to pale when a German suddenly appeared on the brink of the hole. He gave a grunt of dismay when Goldringer cried, "Hit him once, Cooper! It is a Heinie!"

There was a revolver in the German's hand. He drew back and fired twice. Both bullets thudded into Goldringer's shoulder. Cooper brought the man down with a single shot through the throat. He toppled sideways down the embankment. It was all over in a flash, but Goldringer was dying and several men were running along the cutting toward the fallen German.

"Get the gun going," choked Goldringer. "I feed it yet."

So, instead of lying quietly in the post where they might have escaped detection for a while longer, they brought the machine-gun to bear on the men in the cutting



and opened fire. It was rank bad shooting, but some of the bullets struck home and the group dispersed. Up and down the embankment the fight flared up. Taken off their guard the Germans fired wildly. A party advanced boldly along the wire fence on the embankment, and Cooper blew them off their feet. After that no more men tried to reach the post in so bold and direct a fashion.

Cooper's wrists were almost broken, but he kept the gun going, cursing himself whenever the jerking weapon almost leaped out of his hands. Beside him Goldringer was dying, lying propped up against the side of the hole, his head thrown back, blood trickling out of his mouth.

The light was growing fast, the east was striped with silver. Hugging the edge of the cutting, running fast, a compact group of Germans bore down upon the captured post. Warily Cooper trained the gun upon them. He no longer cared what happened if only he could sleep for just a little while. The gun clattered deafeningly, a few Germans fell; the rest pressed on. One

man flung a grenade. It burst just short of the pit and lashed Cooper's face with gravel.

He pressed hard against the thumb pieces, but the gun was silent. The belt was empty. He tugged at the Luger in his pocket.

Someone leaped into the hole almost on top of him.

"Keep going, kid! Hold it!"

It was Walthon, with the automatic rifle pressed close to his shoulder. The Germans went down in a stragglng heap, strung out along the side of the cutting.

"Great stuff, buddy!" croaked Walthon. "I been hunting for you all night. How're you tooting?"

"Not so bad," answered Cooper, grinning through the blood streaming down his face. "You see—I kept going after I left you."

"I'll say you did," agreed Walthon. "God, how you can sprint!"

"Yep, and I sprinted myself into this mess by keeping going. I guess we're just about through."

"That's about right. Still, we kept going and got here, by heck! Shake, kid, you're jake."

Half a dozen machine-guns sprayed the pit with lead, forcing them down while up the cutting came a fresh party of Germans.

"Let's give 'em hell!" shouted Cooper, suddenly bossing his corporal. "We got to pass out sometime."

But before they could move the combined American and French barrage struck all along the line, and they lay in the bottom of the hole while howitzer shells and then 75's transformed the cutting into a seething caldron of smoke and wailing death.

The sides of the pit caved in. They crawled out into another shell hole, taking the automatic rifle with them. Eventually, after long hours it seemed, the hurricane moved on and their deafened ears caught the sound of machine-guns. They saw

coal-scuttle helmets bobbing up. Mechanically they brought the automatic rifle to bear and emptied it all along the crest of the embankment.

A dozen men appeared, marching steadily through the gray dust-fog, just as they had marched the day before—their own people. Lying side by side they watched them go forward, tumbling down the embankment and up the other side. More doughboys and yet more went by. Some of them waved to the two scarecrows and jerked their thumbs over their shoulders.

One man called out, "Gwan back, you two. This ain't your show."

"I guess he's right at that," agreed Walthon. "How about it, kid? Had enough?"

"I'll say I have," cried Cooper.

"Fine. Listen, buddy, help me up. I got a lump of lead in my leg somewhere. Feels kind of numb."

They helped each other to their feet and went forlornly back across the broken land, hobbling through the lines of advancing men, unknown and unsung—the first Yanks to reach that cutting and to stay there.

Walthon was sagging at the knees so badly that Cooper had to half carry, half drag him along, until they stumbled upon a party of stretcher-bearers, hunting through the much trampled wheat for wounded men.

"I can walk O. K.," Cooper said roughly, "but you better give this corporal a ride. He's all in."

"You're dead right I am," whispered Walthon. "Say, kid, you kep' going fine."

Cooper said nothing until Walthon lay full length on a stretcher. Then he looked down, scowling.

"Poor broken blossom?" he muttered thickly. "Poor broken hell! I can keep going ten times longer than any of these big guys!"

Then he pitched forward into the wheat and had to be carried back also.

BEGINNING IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

*A Great Mystery Serial*

**The Missing Chancellor**

By J. S. Fletcher



## HIS OWN LOGS

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Author of "Hell and High Water," "Calked Shoes," etc.

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GIANT FORESTS NO LONGER WERE LOGGED IN THE OLD FASHION KNOWN TO "HELL AND HIGH WATER" JACK MEAD AND HIS SON JERRY. WHEN IT CAME TO THE DAY WHEN JACK'S GRANDSON HAD TO PROVE HIS MANHOOD, HOWEVER, AND HIS RIGHT TO THE FIGHTING NAME OF MEAD, YOUNG "J. J." BUCKED A HARD GAME IN A NEW WAY, A ONE-MAN BATTLE AGAINST ODDS, AND BUCKED HIS COURSE THROUGH A DESPERATE HAZARD TO GLORIOUS AND WORTHY VICTORY

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### CHAPTER I

#### A JOLT FOR "HELL AND HIGH WATER"

**C**ARL JENSEN, logging operator, waylaid Captain Mackaye as he was about to return to the *Okisollo's* bridge. "B' jiminy, Skipper, she ban pretty thick!" he exclaimed. "Funny thing this time of year."

"Nothing's funny about the weather on this coast," Captain Mackaye growled.

He leaned over the rail, staring ahead. "What would you do now if you were aboard that yacht you are always talking of buying?" he asked at last.

"B' jiminy, I never worry," Jensen answered. "I hire a skipper to worry for me."

Captain Mackaye had often amused himself with the lumberman's yachting ambitions; but just now the fog was thick and getting thicker and, like all mariners, the skipper hated fog. His present run, up the British Columbia coast from Vancouver, was particularly difficult, with strong tidal currents, narrow channels and landing

floats in out of the way coves and arms of the sea.

He was about to return to the bridge when, following the hoarse roar of the *Okisollo's* whistle, he heard the shrill air signal of a small craft directly ahead. Captain Mackaye stiffened at the rail and stared into the gray curtain.

The *Okisollo's* whistle roared again, and then out of the fog on the port bow came a dim shape that quickly took form as a small motor yacht.

Especially from the height of the steamer's deck, she created an impression of doughtiness. Except for a pilot-house, and trunk cabin aft, her decks were clean and flush. Yet in line she was unmistakably a yacht, and her bright work was rubbed, her brass shining. The royal ensign floated from the signal mast and the stars and stripes at the stern.

A laughing, boyish face was thrust out of a pilot-house window and there came a piping, friendly note from the whistle. The mate on the bridge answered, and then the yacht's skipper spied Captain Mackaye and shouted a greeting.



"B' jiminy!" Jensen began admiringly as the white craft melted into the fog astern.

"Wait!" Mackaye commanded as he listened intently. "I thought so. You don't often see one without the other."

There was another shrill whistle ahead, a cocky, assertive and wholly fearless blast, and then out of the fog, slightly on the starboard bow, came a gray blur. Captain Mackaye and Jensen hurried across the deck and leaned over the other rail.

At first glimpse it appeared to be a work or fish boat, with black hull, gray pilot-house, full bows, broad beam and wide stern. But the last third of her fifty feet showed a trunk cabin and, like the white yacht, she flew the royal ensign on her signal mast and the stars and stripes astern.

An old man stood in the pilot-house door and the head of another patriarch was thrust out a pilot-house window. They waved casually to Captain Mackaye, stared critically at the *Okisollo*, and then their craft slipped astern and was lost in the fog.

"You on a yacht!" Captain Mackaye exclaimed scornfully. "That old fellow standing in the pilothouse door, he could buy you and your lumber camp a hundred times and never miss the money. But you don't see any white pants and gold lace on him or any tea table on his after deck."

"Who is he?" asked Jensen, a trifle taken aback by the skipper's vehemence.

"Jack Mead of Seattle. He and his son, Jerry, are the Mead Lumber Company. Hell and High Water Jack, they used to call the old fellow, and still do. And the lad in the *Viking*, that we passed first, is the old man's grandson, J. J. I've sighted 'em many a time, most always in convoy, all sorts of weather. They're what I call yachtsmen!"

"B' jiminy, I have me a yacht yet!" Carl Jensen exclaimed enviously.

"And a skipper and a regular crew, eh?"

"You bet you. And a steward. Every day he ban going to wear clean white suit. Me, I never touch a thing on the yacht."

There were men aboard the *Okisollo*, loggers on their way to camps up the coast, with whom Jensen once had worked, but he had put those days behind him, never forgot that now he was an operator, that he owned donkey engines and camp equipment, that he possessed quite a bit of real estate in Seattle—in his wife's name—and that he must talk only in a large way, and of large things, must associate only with men of affairs.

Even with steamship captains there was a certain amount of condescension, though it was mingled with a shrewd desire to maintain pleasant relations with a man who might, some snowy winter night, pass up the Jensen camp and thereby cause bitter complaints among loggers deprived of their weekly consignment of fresh California fruits and vegetables.

With Captain Mackaye he was particularly affable, for it happened that the *Okisollo* had the Loughborough Inlet run and made weekly stops at the Jensen camp in Cordero Channel. And it never occurred to Jensen that the skipper might be amused by his yachting ambitions.

"And those white pants and blue coat and a cap and all the ribbons and gold braid, you'll have them, too?" the captain asked.

"And a tea table on the back end like I seen 'em do," was the complacent answer. "And when I get me a yacht I won't travel on your old steamers any more, b' jiminy. I ban going go forth and back to my camp when I ban ready and good."

Perhaps the fog had gotten on the captain's nerves, and perhaps the logger's gold lace ideas rasped the old seaman. "That lad we passed in the *Viking*, young Mead!" he exclaimed hotly. "He's one of the few yachtsmen that deserve a boat. He could have a Diesel yacht as big as the *Okisollo* and carry a crew of twenty, but he goes out alone in that sixty-footer, except for an old Chinaman to cook his meals and keep things clean. And nothing holds him in, either. I've passed him when the Gulf of Georgia was standing on her ear. You! You'd better set your tea table on a float!"

"B' jiminy, I have me a yacht yet!" Jensen persisted; but Captain Mackaye had already climbed the steps to the bridge.

**A**STERN of the *Okisollo*, driving on through the fog across the mouth of Howe Sound, her huge motor turning over an even three hundred revolutions per minute, the *Viking* held as true a compass course as is possible for a small craft in a ground swell.

John Jeremiah Mead, her skipper, listening intently for the fog signals of other vessels, his eyes always ahead or on the compass, swayed easily at the wheel. There was a trace of a smile about his mouth and his eyes were alight. Fog might disturb the master of a passenger or cargo boat. For him it furnished a game.

Sing John, his Chinese cook, came forward from the after companionway and stood shivering at his side. He looked out

the windows, then studied the chart.

"This too damn' thick!" he exclaimed at last. "You bettel go in Gibson Landing, J. J."

J. J. grinned, picked up a pencil, wrote some figures. "It's ten seventeen," he said. "I'll bet you that at eleven twenty-three the Point Atkinson foghorn is fair abeam."

The Chinaman's love of gambling showed in his dark little eyes, and then he looked suspiciously at his employer. "You go chaseum self!" he retorted. "You catchum echo some island."

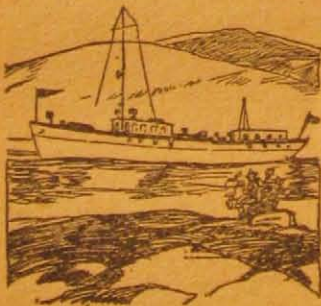
"Then I'll bet you we're tied up at the yacht club at twelve-thirty."

"You readum tide in Nallows. You allum time wana bet sule t'ing." He shuffled away down the wet deck, leaving J. J. to handle his yacht alone.

The *Viking* made good her time and course at Point Atkinson and, a half hour later, was in the thick traffic and heavy currents of First Narrows. But once inside Vancouver harbor, J. J. found the sun was burning up the fog; he had no difficulty in the dredged channel to the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club.

There a number of owners and a few paid hands on the larger craft paused in their work to watch him slip into a visitor's berth. Perhaps some hoped for a miscalculation, a bungle, but most of them knew and liked J. J. and had only admiration for the manner in which he handled his yacht.

Sixty feet is a bit larger than a "one-man boat," and the yachtsman who cruises alone



in one, and does so successfully, has the respect of his fellows. Now J. J. worked his way in as smoothly and as surely as if he had been handling a small launch.

His lines were laid out, his fenders ready, and the moment the *Viking* lay alongside the float he was overboard. In thirty seconds she was fast fore and aft, the fenders dropped, and in twenty seconds more a spring line held her tightly.

J. J. sprang aboard and into the engine-room, where he released the compression, threw the ignition switch and closed the gas line. A quick wash and change to yachting uniform, and he was on deck again.

"You could fire half your crew and still

get along, J. J.," called the owner of a converted subchaser, and there was envy in his voice. "Thick outside?"

"Never saw a thing from Welcome Pass to the Narrows. Come aboard, you fellows."

Four Canadians had gathered on the float and accepted the invitation. Not only were they always interested in the *Viking*, for she was a craft ideally constructed and arranged for real cruising, but they liked J. J., ungrudgingly admired his seamanship, and were eager for news of the intricate coastal waters from which he just had come.

Down in the big, comfortable main cabin, J. J. pressed a button and Sing John shuffled in. "No gin, no Scotch, no nothing," he began at once. "Those hand loggels they dlink you dly last week."

J. J. was only twenty-three and, both as a yachtsman and a host, he was deeply chagrined. "I'm awfully sorry," he began. "I never know—"

The slow, steady bark of a big heavy duty motor came from nearby and J. J.'s face brightened. "Hop over to the *Cleopatra*, Sing, and get a bottle from granddad."

"Huh!" the Chinaman exclaimed, and he made no movement. "Who evel see Jack Mead 'n' Black Livel Ben make polt with bottle? Bet you five dollas Ben he telephone, then tie his boat."

The Canadians laughed uproariously. They had heard these discussions between J. J. and Sing John before. When J. J. was about to speak again there came a light rap on the companionway hatch.

"Telephone message for Captain Mead," came a caretaker's voice. "His father and mother are at the hotel and wish to see him as soon as he arrives."

"Thanks, Sliver," J. J. called. "Please call dad and tell him I'll be there in half an hour. I'm awfully sorry," and he turned to his guests. "I was going to have you chaps stay for luncheon—"

"Lunch!" Sing John cried shrilly. "You say you go one week, you go thlee! Lat he stalve on this packet. No dlink. No glub. Allsame Jap boat," and he retired in disgust to the galley.

J. J.'s guests laughed their way ashore and J. J. crossed over to the *Cleopatra*, now tied up in the next berth. He found Jack Mead, his grandfather, alone in the galley.

"Where's Ben?" J. J. asked.

"Telephoning. Say, what were you turning over this morning?"

"An even three hundred."

"Sure? Never heard your whistle this side of White Rock. Wonder if our wheel's been jimmed."

THERE was a note of concern, almost of apology, in his voice. He was inordinately proud of his grandson's ability as a sailor and he tried desperately to conform with what he knew to be J. J.'s standards.

Jack Mead was seventy-three, and still Jack Mead. There was no stoop in his broad shoulders, no increase in his waistline. Except for his gray hair, he appeared much the same as the Hell and High Water Jack Mead who had been king of the Swift River lumberjacks in Wisconsin back in the 'nineties. And, except when talking to his grandson, he was still the rough, gruff, dominant personality that had earned a name and a reputation in the last days of American river driving.

In no way had the millions, forced by him and his son Jerry from the great forests of Oregon and Wisconsin, brought a change. Plain, almost uncouth, yet sturdy and efficient, the *Cleopatra* served as an adequate expression of the man, and she was his most beloved possession.

"Mother and dad are in Vancouver," J. J. said.

"Flunky just told me," Jack answered. "Want me for lunch. Said I couldn't come."

The old man's voice had stiffened curiously and his grandson looked at him in surprise.

"Got to get that wheel fixed," Jack added. "Don't like hotels anyhow."

But at three o'clock that afternoon he entered his son's suite. J. J. had gone back to the yacht club. Jerry Mead and his wife, Gloria, were alone.

"Hello, Dad," Jerry greeted his father. "Sit down. Been waiting two days for you."

If Hell and High Water Jack had not changed since his river pig days on the Swift, Jerry Mead had. Physically he was much the same, tall, finely built, moving with the ease and grace acquired by those whose feet have spent much time in calked shoes.

But his face was lined, his hair was gray, his speech was rapid, sometimes brusque. He had the air of a man driven, of one strung too tightly.

Gloria Mead greeted her father-in-law warmly, and the old man's eyes lighted at sight of her. For a few minutes they

talked, exchanging bits of news, making inquiries. It was scarcely a month since they had seen each other, and there could be no clearer expression of the strong bonds which united these three than the quiet but unmistakably genuine manner toward one another.

"Well, what's eatin' you, lad?" Jack Mead burst forth at last. "Thought you were fixed up to do anything with those powers of attorney I signed."

"They hardly cover what I have in mind," Jerry answered. "Moreover, it is a step in which I need your approval. I want to close out the Mead Lumber Company, consolidate with Pacific Lumber Products, get out of the business."

"Close out the Mead Lumber Company!" Jack Mead repeated in a voice cracked by incredulity. "You crazy?"

"I'm doing it because I'm sane," Jerry retorted. "We've more money than we need, and I'm tired. If J. J.——"

"What about J. J.?" Jack demanded when Jerry broke off.

There was a quick defense in the old man's tone that brought a smile to Gloria Mead's eyes, but Jerry did not seem to have caught it.

"J. J. doesn't care about the business," he said dully. "He's tried it a couple of times, gets restless and pulls out. Far as I have been able to learn, he hasn't room in his mind for anything except boats."

"And there ain't a man on the coast can handle one any better!" the grandfather interrupted hotly.

"I'm not blaming him," Jerry said wearily. "It's his affair, what he does in life. Only—I'd always counted on it. I'd figured it out. I'd be fifty-seven when he was thirty, and I could step out, leave it all to him. Now there's no kick in it for me. It's not logging; it's business, finance. Everything's systematized, run by rule. I might as well be head of a bank, or a shoe factory."

"And you trying to make the same thing of him!" Jack snorted.

"It's ten years since you've done a stroke of work of any sort," Jerry reminded his father.

"And why? Back on the Swift, or when we first come to the coast, we were loggers. We wore staggad pants and corked shoes and had hard hands, and our men called us by our first names and told us to go to hell if they felt like it.

"Now what's it like?" and Jack arose and towered over his son. "You made the thing so big it ain't human. You don't

know the names of six lumberjacks that's working for you. You've got a whole floor of a skyscraper for an office, and build railroads to haul logs on, and buy machines to handle the logs, which means

the men who handle the machines ain't men any longer. They're machines, too.

"Quit work! Of course I quit, but I tell you now, young fellow, you show me a river to be drove, and a bunch of old-time river pigs to drive it, and I'll show you what a job of work is."

Jack Mead's anger brought only a tender smile to Jerry's face. "I know, Dad," he said gently. "I've always understood why you dropped out, and I never blamed you. Me, I had to hang on, and the harder I hung the bigger and more machine-like the whole thing got. I don't even feel like a logger any more and I'm not surprised that J. J. doesn't."

"How do you know J. J. doesn't?" Jack demanded. "You've tried him out in the Seattle office and in one of the mills. He's smelled ink and adding machine oil and, being a Mead, they both scared him out."

"Oh, he's been around camps, in the woods, since he could walk," Jerry said. "There was no use starting him at the bottom. There isn't a detail of the actual logging he doesn't know backward. But he never showed any real interest. He doesn't care about logging."

"My father and your father and his father was lumberjacks, and he's a Mead," Jack stated with finality.

Jerry was silent for a moment.

"The point is," he said at last, "that J. J. hasn't taken hold and won't. The Mead Company is a going, growing concern, and it requires an active head. In ten years it will be more than I will want to tackle, and I won't be working when I'm sixty. I've promised Glory that.

"Pacific Lumber Products will be glad to take us in. They're anxious to. I can make excellent terms, and I have confidence in the men behind it. If we go into it, I'm free, free to be Glory's husband for a while. And J. J.—sailor or poet, he'll never have to worry."

Jack Mead paced across the room, kicked at chairs, turned back and confronted his

son. "You got me," he said. "You let me pull out and never said a word. So can't holler now. How long will this combination take?"

"There'll be a lot of negotiations. Three to six months."

"All right. My share of the business goes with yours. Only let me tell you something. You ain't giving J. J. a square deal, nor yourself. Of course J. J. don't take any interest in your business. It's yours, not his, and he's a Mead. It's his own logs he wants to cut."

He marched stiffly to the door, opened and went out. Then he thrust his head in. "And let me tell you something else," he shouted. "You're robbing the Mead Lumber Company of something I ain't got and you ain't, and what that company need go on and negotiate all you want and see the papers to me to sign. I'm going up the Yucluetaws and fish salmon."

"What does the company need?" Jerry demanded.

"J. J.," Jack Mead answered, and in tone and manner he expressed an admiration and a faith in his grandson that brought quick, glad tears to Gloria Mead's eyes.

But Jerry was too greatly disturbed to get impressions. "I don't want either one of you to mistake my attitude toward J. J.," he said slowly. "He's a clean, fit, healthy minded boy, and in this day at age a father should be content. I am, at more. I'm proud of him, and I think as much of him I haven't tried to influence him in any way as to what he will do with himself."

"He's a Mead, and a logger!" Jack declared hotly as he came back into the room.

"I haven't seen any evidence of the logging end of it, and I've tried him out and talked to him. All I've learned is that he has something on his mind. Maybe in boats. I can't learn what it is, and I don't care, just so he does it well. And, if he won't come into the company, I'm going to get out."

He had spoken calmly enough until the last sentence. Gloria made an instinctive protective gesture toward her husband. Jack Mead snorted and went out.

## CHAPTER II

### EVEN UP

**B**EN BLACK, who had complained ever since driving the Black River in Wisconsin, that his name had become twisted, was not quite as old as Jack Mead. Many years before, in a logging

town saloon, he had told Jerry Mead he would like to work for a man who could whip him. Jerry promptly knocked him cold, and for more than a quarter of a century, Black River Ben had been uninterruptedly in the Mead employ.

Shrewd, whimsical, loyal as only men of his time and class could be, he was one of the last of the old river pigs of the Middle West. Even when Jerry and his father joined forces on the Swift, after a winter of bitter warfare, Black River had acknowledged only one employer. But later, out in Oregon and Washington, when the Mead Company had expanded to a point where the personal relations of the old Wisconsin days were no longer possible, when Jack Mead lost interest in an industry dependent upon machinery and operating on an eight-hour day, the old-time Wisconsin lumberjacks were drawn together by bonds of a common past,



and by J. J.

These two, rough and grizzled, whose entire lives had been devoted to three things only—hard working, hard drinking and hard fighting—became completely subservient to the wishes of a small boy. And when this boy, sniffing the salt air of Puget Sound, developed an interest in the sea and boats, two old men from the middle of a great continent acquired a forced and often bitterly earned knowledge of tides and tidal currents, of internal combustion engines and the rules of the salty road.

Nor did they ever quite catch up with J. J., just as the *Cleopatra* could never quite keep pace with the *Viking*. Their interest became genuine, the *Cleopatra* became their home most of the year, they were members of a yacht club and conformed more or less to yachting customs, but they carried to the sea their lumberjack viewpoint, though this was compensated for in large part by their river pig courage and resourcefulness.

Theoretically, Black River Ben was still in the employ of the Mead Lumber Company, still drew a monthly pay check and sat on his board, and—also theoretically—Black River was the crew of the *Cleopatra*. But, while there may have been something feudal in the banding of lumberjacks under a leader in the days long past, there

never had been a trace of the master and man relationship. The bonds that held foreman and crew together were those of mutual respect. A road monkey called his wealthy employer by his first name.

And now, while Black River was still an employe and Jack Mead a millionaire several times over, all was essentially equal between them. They shared each other's lives and problems as completely as they shared the task of combating wind and current; and Black River Ben knew instantly when old Jack stormed down the companionway that something cataclysmic had happened. Yet he waited patiently when they were seated in the comfortable main cabin of the *Cleopatra*, and when the air was dense with pipe smoke and a half empty bottle of Scotch stood on the table between them, Jack began to speak.

"First time I talked to Jerry I didn't say much. I got in a taxi to come out here and then right at the yacht club I told the fellow to turn back. Jiggling around in that thing had sort of shook up my brains and when I got to the hotel I was able to say what I'd wanted to say the first time. I'd be saying 'em yet, only Glory—I never saw her cry before, and—"

Jack poured another drink and Ben stared incredulously.

"You don't mean you and the lad went to the floor together?" he demanded.

"If you call speakin' my mind that, we did."

"But—not since that spring on the Swift—why, you two been like a foot in an old driving shoe!"

Jack Mead growled and sputtered the more because it was the first difference of opinion between himself and his son in twenty-five years.

"But when he says J. J. isn't a logger he might just as well say he isn't a Mead!" he declared.

"There's other things J. J. cares more about than logging," Black River remarked.

"Why shouldn't he? Who wants to go logging the way they do it nowadays, with machines in summer, hotter'n the hinges of hell, dust so thick you can't breathe, and—show J. J. a wet log. That's all he needs.

"It would have to be wet in salt water. There ain't no more river driven'."

"There's lots of salt water, and a good many billion feet of timber, along this coast."

"The Mead Company owns quite a bit. Why don't you turn J. J. loose on it?"

Jack Mead did not reply. He had blus-

tered and cursed, he had gone back to the hotel and called down his son, and yet, way down at the bottom of his rough and loyal old heart, there was a cold sensation of dread, for, like many another doting grandparent, he had worshipped J. J. blindly.

**P**ERHAPS only Gloria Mead understood that this devotion was something deeper, however. Denied the companionship of his own son until Jerry had attained dominant manhood, all the suppressed warmth and tenderness of the rough old battler had been expended on J. J. The boy was perfection, and it was this rather than the wiping out of the Mead name in the lumber industry that had aroused Jack Mead.

No one understood Jack's deep affection any better than Black River Ben and yet, such was the relationship between the owner and the crew of the *Cleopatra*, Ben did not hesitate to speak. "Every man, sometime or other, has got to take a licking," he remarked. "J. J. has never had his. Matter of fact, he has never had a fight."

For the first time in ten years Hell and High Water Jack Mead clenched a fist to deliver a blow. But Black River Ben did not appear to see it.

"And why?" he demanded. "Because of you. Any time he ever wanted anything you gave it to him. From that first canoe right on up through the *Skipjack* and the *Claribel* and the *Frou Frou* and the *Swan*—those was two in one year—and the *Bella Bella* and the *Baranof* right up to the *Viking*, you gave 'em to him soon's he knew he wanted 'em. And there ain't a lad of his age on the coast has as fine a boat as the *Viking*, all teak, built in China, costing forty-five thousand laid down in Seattle.

"Fight!" Black River poured himself a drink and downed it with a gesture of disgust. "All he's ever had to do is wish!"

Jack Mead was too angry to recognize Ben's purpose. They knew each other too well for him not to understand, under normal circumstances, and there never had been cause to doubt Ben's devotion to J. J. But now Jack only blundered blindly on. "He's a Mead and he can lick his weight in anything that walks, swims, flies or crawls!" he shouted. "He's a Mead, and there ain't been a Mead licked since the first log was cut in Wisconsin. How you know he can't fight?"

"I don't know it. Only I never saw him." Black River paused an instant as

if gauging Jack's temper, very much as a blacksmith judges the color of a piece of heated steel, and then he added, "And the way things is going I don't think I ever will."

He had judged correctly, had struck at the right moment. Jack swore violently stamped about the cabin, but he made no direct reply. Above all else, it was essential, from Jack Mead's viewpoint, for a man to be ready at an instant's notice to battle with his body or his brain, to compel victory by sheer might and courage. Fifty years before he had been named Hell



and High Water because neither had ever daunted or stopped him, and he had taken it for granted that his grandson possessed these qualities in abundance.

"I never even seen him hit a man," Ben added when Jack subsided.

Ben was a wise old man. He let it go at that. And he himself was deeply troubled. So far

as he was concerned, there were only three people in the world, each a Mead, and, like all gods, they must retain perfection. And despite all he had said, he had perfect faith that J. J. was everything he had suggested he might not be.

J. J. himself appeared when the discussion finally ended that night. He had had dinner with his father and mother and then had seen them aboard the night boat for Seattle.

"Dad's getting frisky," he commented as he sat down beside his grandfather. "Taking a few days off just for a pleasure jaunt."

Jack looked searchingly at his grandson's smiling face. "Is that all Jerry came for?" he asked.

"Far as I know. Unless he talked business with you."

"Nothing he said to me sounded like business. What you figurin' on doing to-morrow?"

J. J. thrust out his legs and stared at his shoes. There was just a suggestion of a

frown on his face, a look of puzzlement in his eyes. "I think I'll drift back up the coast," he said.

"Ain't you going to the regatta over at Cowichan Bay?" Black River Ben demanded. "Thought that was what we come down for."

"And that reliability run from Seattle to Victoria," Jack added in amazement. "You only got to win once more to get the cup or keeps."

"They don't make those races hard enough!" J. J. exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "Eighty miles—you do it in a tide. Boats are finishing so close to the estimated time it's practically a perfect performance. If they'd run a few hundred miles——"

The young man's eyes lighted at the prospect of such a contest, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

"I was sort o' hoping we would get into that," Black River said plaintively.

"Go on, you two!" J. J. urged. "You were only fifty-seven seconds off last year. You got a good chance to win."

"Our wheel's been jimmed," Jack objected.

"Haul out tomorrow, get it trued up, take on all the gas you can so you'll be using the same quality right through, run to Seattle in daylight and check absolutely on your time, work out what you think you'll do it in, and you can win that race."

J. J. was interested now, and enthused. He slapped his grandfather on the back. "I'd give 'most anything to have you clean up!" he cried. "There's a couple of fellows with big boats, and crews, who think they've got things down pretty fine."

"But where you going?" Jack insisted.

"Back up the coast," and again J. J. slumped down in his seat. "Come up after the regatta. I'll leave word with Henry where I am."

AT NOON the next day the *Cleopatra* had been hauled out, and twenty-four hours later she was headed south in the Gulf of Georgia. Two old men drove her, checking off distances, studying tide tables, always watching the tachometer. The first of the next week they made the run from Seattle to Victoria within fifteen seconds of their estimated time, while no other yacht was within half an hour of the performance expected.

"No need for us to get so swelled up," Ben remarked late that night when the last white-flanneled visitor had left the *Cleopatra's* main cabin. "If it hadn't been for

J. J. telling us how to figure that tide——"

"It's still a Mead cup," Jack growled. And then, after a moment, he added, "I wonder what the lad's doing."

"He had something on his mind," Ben declared, "and if I didn't know J. J. I'd think it was a girl."

But girls were as scarce as orchids among the intricate channels the *Viking* and her skipper were traversing, and as far from J. J.'s mind. Moreover, not even he could have explained why he suddenly decided to abandon his intention of entering the race. He was hardly conscious of a growing restlessness since the opening of the cruising season, and that last night in Vancouver he only knew that he wanted to get back among the high mountains and swift waters beyond the Gulf of Georgia.

Alone except for Sing John, he had left the city behind him about the time the *Cleopatra* was being hauled out. That night he anchored in a delightful little cove on Nelson Island, a spot doubly delightful because it was not on the charts, and before noon the next day he had reached the Ragged Islands.

There, venturing out into the Gulf and the long, dreary pull to Vancouver, came a tug with a tow of logs. A mile away J. J.'s glasses had told him it was the *Grizzly* and when it was abreast he had already turned, ready to come alongside.

The *Viking* and the *Grizzly* had once ridden out a gale together in Smugglers' Cove and Captain Billy Joyce himself came down to the deck to take the *Viking's* bow line. In a moment the two were fast.

"Trying to break your record?" J. J. asked as Captain Joyce came aboard. "You'll lose some logs."

"Not between here and Powell River," Joyce grinned. "Where's the *Cleopatra*?" "Regatta at Cowichan. The glass is dropping fast."

"I know, but the wind won't come before dark."

"How do you figure that?"

Captain Joyce smiled. He understood J. J. and his methods of getting information, and there are no better judges of weather on the Pacific than the towboat skippers who take logs down the hundred miles of boisterous and, in places, shelterless reaches of the Gulf of Georgia.



"What's the matter with the paper company's tugs?" J. J. demanded when he had tucked away an added bit of weather wisdom.

"Between one being overhauled and another towing a camp outfit, they got caught, I suppose. This is just a short job for us, from Squirrel Cove down."

"Then where you going?"

"Cordero Channel. Taking out a small boom for Carl Jensen."

"I know his camp," J. J. said. "Heard he's a bit slow at the logging game. How many sections?"

"Only ten. I'll make up a tow in Frederick Arm. And say! Come up to Jensen's camp with me. It's better than a show to hear him talk. He's yacht crazy, always talking about the boat he's going to own and what he's going to do with it. Wait for me at the Yucluetaws until I come along tomorrow. You'll get the best laugh you've had in a month."

"Sure," J. J. agreed. "When your owners going to scrap this steam plant and put in a Diesel?"

"Why don't you build a towing fleet and get into the game?" Captain Joyce countered.

"I would, if I had the money."

"Money!"

"I mean my own money. That's the only kind there is."

"Start in with the *Viking*."

J. J. laughed. "I could build a good tug for what she cost," he said.

"When you get started, let me know. I'd like to work for you."

"I'd already counted on that."

**A**T NOON the next day the yacht and the tug drew in to Carl Jensen's camp.

For two days Jensen had been fuming because of the nonappearance of the tug, but he forgot it the moment he saw the pleasure boat. He stood on his float watching her slide toward him, white, clean, bright work shining, brass gleaming, sixty feet of nautical perfection and beauty.

"B'jimini, Captain, that's the kind of boat I'm going to have, only bigger," he called to Joyce.

"When your boom gets in, eh?" Joyce laughed.

But the logger's exuberance could not be dulled by any such practical considerations.

"I ban hearing about you," he said after the boats had been made fast and he

was shaking J. J.'s hand effusively. "I'll pass you in the fog when I come up on the *Okisollo*. Some day I get me a yacht and then the steamship company can just haul my freight and not me."

"Come aboard," J. J. invited.

The *Viking* had never been given a more thorough, or more admiring, or possibly less intelligent inspection than she received from Jensen. The most ordinary detail of pleasure craft equipment awakened an almost childish interest.

"She ban all teak, eh?" he demanded. "B' jimini, this main cabin she pretty. Never see a sleeping car look so nice and ban go forth and back on 'em quite a bit down in Washington."

J. J. pressed a button and Sing Jol appeared with a bottle of Scotch and three glasses. Jensen stared with admiration at the white jacketed servant.

"B' jimini, I have me a yacht yet!" exclaimed.

"If you had a tug you could trade it for this one," Captain Joyce suggested.

"I ban got no tug but, b' jimini, I tra this logging outfit for it."

Joyce laughed, until he saw J. J. leaning forward and staring at the logger.

"What you got here?" the young man asked sharply.

"Three donkeys and a contract to cut a million feet," Jensen said. "It's a fine show. All the timber right on the side of this mountain. I put in less than half a million. This boom, it the first. Ten sections altogether."

J. J. asked innumerable questions about the donkeys and equipment, the owner of the timber, the nature of the contract. Captain Joyce stared at him curiously.

"You come ashore," Jensen said. "I'll show you."

Together they went over the operation while Joyce fastened on to his tow. The men stared curiously at the yachtsman, white flannels, as he scrambled about watching, asking questions. At the end of two hours he had seen everything connected with the outfit.

Back at the float J. J. was about to board the *Viking* when he saw a man with a pickpole working on the logs that had come down the long slide into salt water. He stared for an instant, then turned to Jensen.

"Go below," he said. "Make yourself at home. If you want a drink, call Sing John."

He walked down the shore and out on



## CHAPTER III

## "GO CHASEUM SELF"

the boom. The man working there was past sixty, small, apparently clumsy in his caked shoes. But there were no waste motions. Every act spoke efficiency and certitude. His work was a beautiful thing to watch.

"Where did you drive?" J. J. demanded.

The logger looked at him curiously.

"The Chippewa, North and South Forks of the Flambeau, the Black and——"

"And the Swift," J. J. cut in. "How often you been drunk in Kettle Falls?"

The old-timer grinned. "You from Wisconsin?" he asked.

"Born in Minnesota. When did you leave there?"

They were off. Sam Creer, who had logged straight across a continent, from Maine to Washington, was in an alien land and engaged in an occupation that bore little resemblance to the lumbering methods of his youth. He could not make out this white clad stranger, and he had a natural suspicion of anyone from a yacht. But J. J. had aroused old and pleasant memories, and he knew the language of the river driving days that were gone forever.



So Sam bloomed like an old dog, long neglected, that suddenly receives attention. He became garrulous, compared the old days with the present, and answered

J. J.'s questions with profane and enlightening comments. After half an hour the young man went back to the yacht.

There he found Carl Jensen pacing forth and back on the after deck. There was a suggestion of the possessive in his attitude and stride.

"B' jiminy, I trade you my whole outfit for this boat and ten thousand dollars!" he exclaimed.

J. J. stared at him coldly. "You will not," he answered curtly. "You'll trade straight, one for the other."

Jensen protested, became violent, but nothing could shake the young man, and late that afternoon the logger capitulated.

In ten minutes the *Viking* was under way, headed through the Yucluetaws for Vancouver and Seattle.

THE presentation of cups at Cowichan did not come until the last night of the regatta, and early the next morning the *Cleopatra* was heading north through Sansum Narrows. Her skipper and crew would have telegraphed or radioed J. J. of their victory had he been within reach of such communication. Now they made all speed to find him.

That night, after crossing the gulf with a stiff northwest wind on the port bow that shook them up a bit, they anchored in the little Nelson Island cove where the *Viking* had stopped more than a week before. The next afternoon, just south of Grief Point, Black River Ben came up the after companionway to see the *Viking* a mile behind them.

Immediately the *Cleopatra* was hove to.

"Been down to Vancouver again," Jack Mead commented as they waited. "He probably figured we'd be along here today."

Ben stared, then picked up the glasses.

"What's he carrying all those flags for?" he demanded. "Looks like a circus boat."

The *Cleopatra* and the *Viking* had their own private signals, a code of long and short blasts of the whistle, and Jack grasped the cord. But there was no response from the white craft astern in answer to his tooting.

Ben had dived below and now appeared with the big silver cup they had won. He waved it high over his head as he stood on the after deck. Still they received no recognition from the *Viking*.

The yacht was close enough now for them to see several figures on her decks. The two old men stood and stared, mumbling their astonishment, when the *Viking* swerved toward them and slackened speed.

For a moment the flags drew the attention of Jack and Ben. There was a big American ensign at the peak and one at the taffrail, and from each end of the spreader arm hung a royal ensign. From the mast head streamed a vice-commodore's pennant and on each stay the burgee of the Seattle Yacht Club.

"He's gone crazy!" exclaimed Jack, whose own knowledge of flags and their use had been acquired with much effort and perplexity.

A resplendent figure stepped out of the *Viking's* pilothouse door and stared at them. The sun glinted from quantities of gold braid on his blue coat and white cap.

"It's a circus." And Ben swore.

A white clad steward came to the after deck, a blue cap and jumper appeared at the engine-room hatch, and through the pilothouse windows Jack saw a stranger at the *Viking's* wheel.

"What ban the matter?" came a voice. "You want a tow?"

"Where's J. J.?" demanded Jack Mead, ignoring the other's question.

"I don't know him."

"You'd better know him. He owns that boat!" Jack roared.

"I ban Carl Jensen and this ban my yacht. If you mean that young feller Mead, he sold it to me."

"Sold it! You stole it!" And Jack reached for the clutch lever, intending to run alongside.

"Well, I trade my lumber camp for it, which is the same thing," Jensen said complacently. "She ban one fine boat, this yacht."

"Where's J. J.?" Ben asked.

"He ban running the camp, I guess. He tell me he going right up."

"Where is this camp?"

"Cordero Channel."

"Never mind that," Jack cut in. "You get your papers, fella. I'm coming aboard and see 'em."

He brought the *Cleopatra* alongside the now motionless *Viking* and Jensen went below.

Five minutes later both boats were on their way north, the *Viking* still beautiful despite her flag strung rigging, the *Cleopatra*, sturdy and efficient, slowly dropping astern.

In her pilothouse were two astounded old men.

"That's why he wouldn't go to Cowichan Bay!" Ben said.

Jack Mead said nothing, and after a while Ben Black made one of the few psychological mistakes of his life. "And you give him that boat," he lamented. "Forty-five thousand laid down in Seattle."

"And when I gave it to him it was his," Jack snapped. "You'd better take a look around in the engine-room."

THEY were compelled to tie up at Henry's boom because of the tide in the Yucluetaws, and for the first time in their numerous visits they did not fish for salmon that evening. Furthermore, the genial Henry found that they did not even wish to talk. The next morning they were gone.

J. J. was in the little building on a float

which served both as office and living quarters when he heard the familiar exhaust of the *Cleopatra*. He went out and signaled that she could tie up beside him, then took the bow line when Ben threw it.

Methodically but smartly, and in silence, the two old river drivers made their craft secure, shut off the engine, took down and furled ensigns and pennant. Then, after a last glance to see that everything was shipshape, they turned and inspected what was to be seen on shore.

"We won that cup," Jack said at last.

J. J. let out a whoop, sprang aboard the *Cleopatra* and pounded them on the back until they winced.

"I knew you could!" he cried. "How far off were you?"

"Fifteen seconds."

"Better than I did last year."

"The next nearest was a half hour fast, Ben offered.

J. J.'s exultant shout followed, and there was nothing perfunctory in that applause. The two old men knew that for their strangers to salt water until they were nearly sixty, to have taken the cup from the crack yachts of Seattle, Vancouver and Victoria, had brought a keener joy than J. J. had ever derived from his own victories.

The excitement died down after a time. Ben and Jack stared toward shore, waiting. J. J. watched their puzzled faces in silence.

"Guess I'll go down and clean up the engine," Ben said after a few moments.

J. J. walked toward the accommodation ladder.

"Might as well wash those breakfast dishes," Jack observed as he started below.

Yet, whatever may have been their intentions, neither could have kept away from shore. While J. J. was busy in the office they looked over the operations.

It was an inspection conducted entirely in silence. Though most of their own logging days had been spent in the Middle West, they knew the machinery methods of the Pacific Coast. They had not been on shore fifteen minutes before they realized just how inefficiently operated was the camp J. J. had purchased. Even the slow and indifferent manner of the crew did not escape them.

"And he's still wearing his white pants and yacht cap," Jack said moodily when they were again aboard the *Cleopatra*.

Ben let it go at that. He had not seen anything that would permit a comforting

reassurance, and they stared at each other a moment in silence. They were bewildered, and a bit afraid, and the situation was entirely beyond their comprehension.

"If he'd only said he wanted to 'do anything like this,'" Jack began at last.

"You'd 'a' given him a

couple of camps, I suppose, like you've given him everything else he ever asked for," Ben growled. He went out, not waiting for a comment, leaving a dejected, lonely figure in the cabin.

During the remainder of the morning J. J., in his brief encounters with them, failed to take them into his confidence. So far as that young man gave evidence in speech or manner, trading a yacht for a logging camp was of no more importance or interest than the purchase of a new scrubbing brush for use on the *Viking's* spotless decks. He was busy in his little office while Jack and Ben wandered along the mountainside, and when they were back aboard the *Cleopatra* he himself went from one donkey to another in the half hour before lunch.

In one respect, Carl Jensen's outfit had been well equipped. From a larger operator who had gone broke he had purchased a complete floating camp—bunkhouses, cookhouse, blacksmith shop and office. All these buildings, well constructed, comfortable, rested on rafts of great cedar logs. There was a large scow, too, for the donkeys, and it was a simple matter, with the assistance of a tug, to move the entire camp and working equipment anywhere along the coast. Once moored in a quiet bay, work could begin almost immediately, while a few lengths of pipe would connect a spring with the float and provide running water for cookhouse and shower baths.

AT NOON Sing John went aboard the *Cleopatra* and asked Jack and Ben to have their midday meal with J. J. They had been waiting for the invitation, for they knew it meant an opportunity to learn what was being done in that most important department of logging in British Columbia, the commissary.

The crew trooped down the mountainside and across the boomsticks to the float. Jack and Ben, wise in the ways of men who work in the woods, were quick to read the story. Not only indifference to the job but insolence was displayed in carriage and facial expression. Such a camp lost money every day.

J. J., flanked by his grandfather and Black River Ben, sat at the head of the long table, the crew down the sides. As in all logging camps, there was complete silence, except for the clatter of knives, forks and dishes and low, whispered requests to pass the meat.

Into this funereal assemblage burst Sing John, his eyes ablaze. "That cook he tellum me get hell out!" he cried shrilly. "He say boss no boss; he runum kitchen. No want China boy."

Several men snickered. J. J. looked up inquiringly. The cook appeared in the door. "I don't want this dirty Chink around," he declared. "He thinks he knows too much. All the time buttin' in and telling me what to do."

There was something very boyish in J. J.'s expression. His eyes were always questioning and his smooth face placid. Even his voice was mild. There was about him the air of one who had always found life very delightful and interesting, and easy.

"I think," he said slowly and quietly, "that Sing John knows more about cooking than you do. He'll take charge after this meal."

Whatever was the cook's reaction to this calm statement, no one except the cook knew. Sing John, with a shrill squeal, drew all attention.

"You go chaseum self, J. J.!" he cried. "Me no lummel camp cook. Me nevel hile out cook lummel camp. You go chaseum self lound block."

Only J. J. seemed undisturbed by the onslaught, which quickly developed into shrill Chinese. J. J. had a healthy appetite, and he kept on eating. After a moment Sing John calmed down and went into the kitchen.

One of the crew tittered. Another guffawed. They all laughed. "Go chaseum self!" one exclaimed, and they roared.

J. J. remained undisturbed, and continued to eat, but to Jack Mead and Black River Ben there had come an overpowering perturbation. Never had they seen J. J. in a similar situation, but never had there been doubt in their loyal hearts of his ability to meet it.



Back there in Vancouver, when they had sat long over a bottle in the *Cleopatra's* main cabin, there had been only a purpose in Ben's statement that he had never seen J. J. fight. It had hurt him to say it. Like Jack, he looked upon the young man as completely and thoroughly Mead, and no Mead ever had stood for open insolence on the part of an employe.

Now for the first time in many years they found food distasteful. They quickly finished, went out and climbed aboard the *Cleopatra*. From her main cabin they heard the men stamping out of the cook-house.

"Go chaseum self," someone snickered. "Go chaseum self lound block."

There was raucous laughter.

"If little white pants will take that from a Chink, what would he take from a white man?" another asked, and snorts of disgust followed.

Jack and Ben did not dare look at each other. They were two sick and miserable old men. Life had suddenly ceased. The gloom of a British Columbia coast winter was as bright sunshine compared with the dejection that filled the main cabin.

FOR a long time they sat there, staring with sightless eyes, and then as one man they arose. Ben went into the engine-room and started the motor, Jack on deck to cast off the lines. And as they gathered headway and stood out toward the channel, neither turned to look at the camp they were leaving.

J. J. heard them, waved an unheeded farewell and then turned back to his office. He was his own timekeeper, and each afternoon he had spent several hours trying to get the books in shape and determine just where he stood. The blackness of his discoveries left little time or energy for the emotional problems of others.

At the conclusion of his work he made out seven time checks, signed them and took them with him when he went out.

It was only a few minutes before five, quitting time, and J. J. slowly walked ashore. There, at the end of the boom-stick, was a small, level space, and in the center of it he waited.

The men came, saw him there, and grinned as they approached. The third, a rigging slinger, a little taller and heavier than J. J., was the one who had exclaimed, "Go chaseum self!" at the table that noon.

"Here's your time," J. J. said quietly as the man passed. "I'll take you over to

Johnstone Strait so you can catch a boat for town tonight."

All the men stopped. The rigging slinger looked at his check in amazement, and then he laughed. "I go chaseum myself, eh?" he asked.



"If you're able," J. J. said.

He had stepped back and laid the six remaining time checks on a stump, weighting them with a piece of granite. Then he whirled and slapped the rigging slinger in the face.

The man staggered away, too amazed to do more than catch his balance, and then with a roar he charged.

It was not a short fight. The rigging slinger was confident, and he was mad, and he was bigger than J. J. For a time he rushed his late employer off his feet, sent him spinning with a wild swing. J. J.'s white trousers were smeared with black soil and his white shirt was stained with his own blood.

And then J. J. began to fight. Craft and a certain deliberateness and determination rather than any skill were the factors that began to make themselves felt. After three minutes the rigging slinger found himself on the defensive. Two minutes later he knew he was licked.

It was then that a hook tender thrust out a foot as J. J. charged past. Immediately the man found himself facing two gleaming butcher knives in the hands of an infuriated Chinaman.

Wild with excitement, Sing John chased the hook tender into the water and then whirled, ready to repel any other interference.

"Clackum head, J. J.!" he shrieked as he brandished the knives. "Clackum head! Big stiff no good. Clackum head and throwum in salt chuck!"

Breathless but cool and steady, J. J. swung heavily and the rigging slinger spun half around and sat down. He did not get up.

J. J. shook his head, wiped the blood from his face with a sleeve and stepped back to the stump, where he selected another time check.

"Here's yours," he called to the hook tender, who had climbed onto the boom-stick. "Come and get it."

"What do I get with it?" the fellow demanded.

"That depends on how much you can take."

It wasn't much. The men watched in disappointment. Sing John danced with glee and shouted strange words. Before it was over the men were laughing. When the hook tender rolled out of harm's way J. J. turned back to the stump.

"Five more of you get your time," he said. "I don't think we would get along well together. Take you to Rock Bay to-night."

**H**E PASSED out the checks and then walked down to the water, across the boomstick and into the office.

A half hour later, bathed, in clean shirt and fresh white flannels, his face bruised and scratched, he came out at sound of the gong and entered the cook camp, where he took his place at the head of the table.

The men looked at him covertly, and not without admiration. There was something very youthful in his expression and actions, something charmingly boyish that would have aroused only their scorn had it not been for that scene on the shore.

And when they began to eat! For a time there was the usual silence, and then someone, in a stage whisper, asked for "another hunk of that Yorkshire pudding."

The men laughed.

"Boss," said a bucker, an old man known the length of the B. C. coast for his comments, "I'll wear white pants myself to hold down a job in a place where they feed like this. Ain't had nothing like it since the Duke and I went hunting grizzlies."

"Go chaseum self!" Sing John called from the kitchen door, and turned away with apparent disgust. But Sing John knew how well he could cook.

The next morning J. J. appeared in wool trousers, work shirt and caked shoes. There were only enough men to operate two donkeys but there was an entirely different atmosphere on that mountainside.

Down at the bottom, damp from the spray thrown high into the air by the huge fir sticks striking the salt chuck with all the force of speeding tons, was J. J. poling logs into place, ready for the booming.

There was a smile on his smooth face that grew the harder he worked. Sometimes he was swamped, and he grinned the more, for never had logs come down that slide in such numbers.

Far up the hillside there was even a dif-

ferent note in the shrill tooting of the whistle punks, in the whine of the winches, in the stuttering exhaust of the donkeys.

Into this scene of cheery industry the *Cleopatra* nosed her way a week after her departure. She drew up at the float beside the office in as smart a landing as any born sailor ever made. For several minutes there was the meticulous, almost ceremonial, business of making fast the lines at bow and stern, a spring line, the dropping of fenders, the shutting off of the motor, the furling of ensigns. At last two old men stepped ashore.

Their wise eyes had taken in the fir sticks shooting down the skidway, the clouds of vapor from the donkeys, the boomsticks shoved far out from shore by the accumulated logs, their ears had caught the frequent tooting of whistles and the sound of saws, and their sore old hearts were soothed by undreamed of joy.



Sing John appeared in the cookhouse door and stared without apparent recognition.

"Where's J. J.?" Jack Mead asked as they approached.

"Gone town. Back tomorrow."

And then the Celestial dispassion vanished. "You two damn' fools go way that day. J. J. he fightin' wildcat. He lickum hell outa hook tindle 'n' ligging sling. I bet you ten dollas, Black Livel, J. J. he lickum Jack Dempsey."

#### CHAPTER IV

#### SWINDLED!

**A** HALF hour after their arrival at J. J.'s camp, Jack Mead and Black River Ben repaired to the main cabin of the *Cleopatra*, and as Ben tore the tissue wrapper, then the cap, off a bottle of Scotch there was something reverent in the attitude of the two men.

"The first drink that's tasted natural to me in more'n a week," Ben said when he had set down his glass.

"I been off it, too," Jack added, and that was as far as they let sentiment carry them.

They turned, instead, to practical things. "I mind that Sam Creer," Ben said, referring to the old river driver whom J. J. had left in charge of the work. "Just a

young lad, drivin' the Black one spring."

"Says he worked for me," Jack contributed. "He knows the Swift anyhow. But you notice he's got a bunch of old-timers with him, Minnesota and Wisconsin lads?"

"J. J. sent Creer out to round 'em up first thing when he took over the camp. That's one reason there's so much git up and go to the crew."

"Seventy thousand feet in the chuck yesterday. That's going some. He'll be making money at that rate."

There was silence, and another drink. At last Ben, after rubbing his chin a long time, ventured a question. "What you suppose J. J. is going to do when he stubs a toe good and hard?"

Jack did not answer this at once. He considered it for a time and then, in tribute to Ben's keener mind, he asked, "What if he don't?"

"One of the finest things that ever happened to any man is to get both toes bunged up," Ben declared.

"And his knuckles, too," Jack added.

There was another drink, and more silence. A huge fir log slithered down the slide, five hundred feet at a forty-five degree angle, and hit the salt chuck with geyser effect. Whistles tooted. There was the roar of falling forest monarchs.

"Anyhow," Ben said, "you were right. The lad's a logger. He's making this run down outfit pay."

"Of course," and Jack was merely accepting an axiomatic truth. "He's a Mead, and he's putting in his own logs."

They waited with some impatience for the arrival of the *Okisollo* the next day, and when J. J. stepped onto the float they were there to meet him.

There were no traces of the battle of the previous week, nor of worry or responsibility. His expression was untroubled. Jack slapped him on the back in an awkward, shamefaced way. "You're getting in some logs," he said.

"Need to," J. J. replied shortly. "How's the *Cleopatra*?"

"Frisky as ever. Ben caught a fifty-six pound tye the other night at Henry's."

"Pretty close to your record, eh? I thought you two probably were down there."

There was an absent note in J. J.'s voice that only Ben caught. And the young man's eyes were on the freight that was being unloaded, on the white plumes of vapor up the mountainside, on the logs inside the boom. Then he caught sight of Sam Creer and hurried toward him.

After a few minutes Ben slipped away and halted just out of hearing of J. J. and his foreman. The young man looked up and saw him standing there.

"Anything the matter?" J. J. asked.

"Not with us," and Ben accented the last word a bit unnecessarily. "Only——"

"That's good," J. J. said with apparent relief as he joined Ben, "because I won't have a chance for a chat with you two. Just came up to see how things are going and I'm taking the *Okisollo* back to Vancouver."

"If you had the *Viking* you wouldn't have to worry about steamships," Ben growled.

"But then I wouldn't have this," and J. J.'s eyes were laughing when he added, "And all that goes with it."

"That's just what I was thinking, lad. But now you got it and——and——" He hesitated, and J. J. stared at him.

"I ain't saying you haven't done fine," Ben hurried on. "But two heads are better than one and no one's ever said yet that old Jack Mead wasn't a logger. Besides, he don't understand the kind of a lone game you're playing."

J. J. looked away. Even Ben could not know how keenly that appeal had touched him, for J. J. had only two idols, Hell and High Water Jack Mead and his own father. But the youth's mouth straightened slightly. "Granddad ought to understand," he said gently. "He played it once himself. Did you ever see either dad or granddad ask another man to put in his logs for him?"

"No," Ben agreed. "Only——"

"That's the answer!" And J. J. was his old cheerful, unruffled self. "I've got to run for it. You two hang around until I get back from Vancouver."

He called the last over his shoulder and ran up the gangplank just as the *Okisollo's* lines were cast off.

"So long," he called to his grandfather.

Jack and Ben watched the steamship draw away and then wandered back to the *Cleopatra*. But when they sat down in the main cabin neither opened the convenient locker door, behind which there was always a bottle. There was something rather comical—and rather pitiful—in these two old men, suddenly grown very old and forlorn.

After a long time Black River Ben laughed. "A man grows up and then he grows down," he said. "You and me—we're all through, and we get it into our heads we could spend the rest of our time

playing around with J. J. We talked, but way down at the bottom we was wishin' he'd stick around with us. And now—" He stopped and chuckled.

Jack glared at him. "Now what?" he demanded.

"J. J.'s growed up and gone off and left us to play around alone. And, being young, he's sort of forgot we're on earth."

Ben was philosopher enough to touch the hurt, and to laugh. But he had to philosophize alone. All his life Jack Mead had been swayed purely by emotions. He could not analyze. He merely reacted, and he was reacting now to J. J.'s failure to take him into his confidence, to tell anything about his plans, his hopes, his troubles.

"I ain't so old!" he exclaimed rebelliously at last. "I may have quit but it wasn't because I had to."

"What you thinking of doing?" Ben asked.

"I'm going to put some wrinkles in that lad's face."

He got up and went on deck. Far up the mountainside he saw Sam Creer at the edge of the slash and climbed until he found him.

Hundreds of men like Sam Creer had worked for Jack Mead back on the Swift River in Wisconsin, and there was nothing about them Jack did not know. But Sam, Jack soon discovered, possessed very little of the information he wanted. He was talkative, and merely to be working for a man who knew something of the old Swift River days had been enough to arouse his enthusiasm and loyalty. Moreover, he had not been slow to impart to the crew much of the Mead history, so that something more had been added to the prestige J. J. had gained by whipping the hook tender and the rigging slinger.

In the end Jack had to be content with one thing, tossed in as he was about to leave. "He's a hustler," Sam chuckled, "and, though you might not think it to look

at him, he ain't afraid to take a chance. 'Get the logs into the chuck as fast as steam and gravity can get 'em there,' was the last thing he said to me. 'And,' he says, 'don't get mad and fire a man, 'cause there ain't enough money in the bank to pay him.'"

Of this Jack reported one thing to Ben, "The lad's a hustler. What you say we go back to Henry's?"

Ben studied him a moment and then assented.

And so the *Cleopatra* was sailing eastward as the *Okisollo* came down from Frederick Arm. They saw J. J. waving to them on the bridge. They waved in reply and gave the old signal with their whistle, but when they went on, bucking through the last ebb in the Yucluetaws, neither looked back. They could not, any more than they could have put their appalling loneliness into words.

AND there were times in the week that followed when J. J. wished he were back aboard the *Viking*, glancing out of an after window of the pilothouse and seeing the sturdy old *Cleopatra* shoving the salt chuck out of her way. He recalled times when they had anchored together in remote inlets or coves, when they had tramped up mountain valleys in search of hidden trout streams, and, of course, the long evenings aboard when Jack and Ben had redriven the Swift and retold Jerry Mead's exploits as a budding lumberman.

It was from Ben, at various times when Jack was absent, that J. J. had learned of the memorable struggle between the father and son, separated since Jerry's babyhood, and how they had met, after a bitter winter, each with a crew of sixty men at his back and each determined to take possession of the South Lake Dam and the precious water behind it.

"You'll live a long, long time, lad, before you see any man show more nerve than your dad did," Ben would tell the eager



youngster. "Hell and High Water Jack Mead was your granddad, a man who'd never been licked. King of the Swift River lumberjacks, he was, if ever there was a king in America.

"And Jerry! Worshipping his dad and doing his best to ruin him, because he knew it was the only way they could get together—by his licking his own father.

"He could fight some himself, Jerry could. I know. I've seen him and I've felt him. Just one-eighth of a second was all he needed to settle me. Like a mule.

"But old Jack! Every time I see a fir log coming down into the chuck I think of his fist. Jerry knew it. Saw Jack fight once or twice. And boys, oh boys! If they ever mixed it!"

Ben would stare back over the years, his old eyes shining.

"But they didn't fight," the boy had always insisted at this point.

"They fought for logs, and for the first time in his life Hell and High Water had it put over on him. That's how it come they got together man to man, just after dawn that spring morning at the South Lake dam.

"I guess, sonny, I was the only man of the hundred and twenty there that knew just what was going on in those two Mead minds. I don't think even they knew. They only felt.

"You see, Jerry had to beat Jack, and Jerry knew that. But he couldn't bring himself to humble the old man. He just couldn't.

"See what a ticklish point that was, what your dad was up against? And that's where he showed his nerve. Here was Jack coming for him, blood in both eyes and a sledge hammer head at the end of each arm. Jerry couldn't run, he wouldn't fight. He just stood there, smiling, never batting a lash, looking straight into old Jack's eyes, and took it!

"Boys, oh, boys! I've had a good time livin' but I'd been satisfied to die right there. When one of Jack's men laughed and said Jerry was yellow you should have seen old Hell and High Water. He nearly killed the fellow and then he says, 'He's a better man than any ten of you, damn your souls, and he's your boss because he's a better man than I am!'"

J. J. HAD grown up with that story ringing in his ears; for to Black River Ben it was an epic of all time and of all people. More than once Jerry Mead

had caught his young son looking at him with wide eyes, and had wondered; and into young manhood J. J. had carried visions of those grand old days back among the snow enshrouded forests and along rushing spring freshets, while Lexington and Gettysburg had always been second to that battle on the Swift.

J. J. thought of those things when, from the *Okisollo's* bridge, he saw the *Cleopatra* plowing on into the Yucluetaws, and for the first time there was a suggestion of a crease in his forehead as he turned and looked south.

Down there, he knew, he must stage a little battle of his own, not with fists, not facing bodily punishment, but with wits and—he was beginning to understand—with a courage that must be greater because he was not bolstered by onlookers, by any of the stimulating elements of drama.

So far, J. J. had accomplished two things. He had welded a good crew behind him, and he was getting in logs fast enough to know he could make money.

But he was well aware that this is less than half the battle for the British Columbia logging contractor. Capital to meet the payroll, credit to feed the men and buy new equipment—these were necessary to keep going. And J. J. had neither.

Nor was there hope of getting any from his logging operations. The owner of the timber, needing quick money and relying on the fact that he had an exceptional "show," a limit easily logged, had driven a hard bargain. Because contractors were eager to get the work, he had been able to stipulate that no money would be paid until three million feet were in Vancouver. So far Jensen had sent out less than half a million.

That left two and a half millions to go before any money would be forthcoming. J. J. had ascertained the accuracy of that simple sum in arithmetic over and over while sitting in his little office. Six weeks of work at top speed and then the long, dreary delay while a tug captain jockeyed with the weather all the length of the Gulf of Georgia. To wait that long was impossible. Somewhere, and at once, he had to get money.

From Vancouver he went directly to Seattle where he sold his motor car and turned his "R" class sloop over to a boat broker, who gave him no encouragement for a sale until the following season. Luckily, Jerry and Gloria Mead were out of the city and the son escaped any explanations.



Back in Vancouver he visited a wholesale grocer and, after much argument, got a small amount of credit. With wire cable he was not successful, and then, the day before the *Okisollo* was to make her weekly trip, he went to the bank in which he had already opened an account with the savings from his allowance.

The cashier was startled by the frank, almost ingenuous, explanation of the situation, and then his wits began to work. "Jensen," he said. "Carl Jensen. That name—"

He called a clerk, asked for a certain file, ran through some papers. When he looked up it was with hard, cold eyes. "When did you purchase this logging outfit?" he asked.

"Two weeks ago."

"It was unencumbered?"

"Of course."

More questions were asked. J. J. could not understand their significance or the strange sharpness in the cashier's tone.

"I would advise you to see a solicitor," the banker said at last. "For a moment I believed—"

"But I did have a lawyer arrange the transfer," J. J. interrupted. "He's a friend of mine, over at the Yacht Club. He owns the *Chio*."

"I suggest that you get an attorney who spends more time ashore," was the dry comment. "This man Jensen is from the States. He operated through the formation of a company here, of which he was president. May twentieth he borrowed ten thousand dollars, giving the company's camp equipment as security. The mortgage was not filed until ten days ago. We discounted the note. It will be due on August twentieth."

Bankers often break hard news, and they are accustomed to see men react in various ways when a shock comes or hope is gone, but the cashier could not associate this case with anything he had ever encountered. The clear young eyes still stared into his, the youthful face remained untroubled.

"Perhaps I have not made myself clear," the banker began kindly.

"Oh, I got you," J. J. answered readily. "I've been gypped. I was just figuring how—thanks for your time. I'll be

in to see you again some day," and he was gone.

J. J. CALLED up his yachtsman lawyer and made an appointment, then telephoned to the Yacht Club and asked for one of the caretakers.

"Who's been up the coast lately, Sliver?" he asked.

Several boats were named.

"Any of them speak of sighting me?"

"Well, Captain Mead," Sliver began in an embarrassed voice, and J. J. laughed.

"Wondered what had happened to the *Viking*, or to me, eh?" he asked. "I sold her, Sliver, so I'm not responsible for all the glad rags she is wearing."

He asked more questions, discovered that the *Viking* had been sighted the day previous, headed north in Lewis Channel, and five minutes later he was in his lawyer's office.

"Talbert," he began at once, "you're going to loan me one thousand dollars."

"On what security?" the lawyer asked with a grin, for he specialized in lumber and there was little about the Meads that he did not know.

"Your own reputation."

"Mine! What do you mean?"

J. J. told about Jensen's note for ten thousand dollars.

"You let me in for that," he concluded. "I hired you to look after this for me, and that's the way you did it. It'll make bad advertising for you."

Talbert drew out a checkbook and began to write. "Now," he said when he had blotted the slip of paper and handed it across the desk to J. J., "here's what we—"

"I'll tell you something about law, maritime law," J. J. interrupted. "But first, when are you going to take your annual cruise?"

"Next week."

"You are not. You stay in Vancouver, and here's what I want you to do."

He drew his chair closer, leaned across the desk, and for several minutes he talked rapidly. When he had finished he jumped to his feet.

"I've just time to get to my bank," he said, and was gone.

J. J. was on the bridge of the *Okisollo* all the way up the gulf the next day, and there wasn't a craft on the water that he didn't watch anxiously through the glasses.

It is irritating travel, taking a coasting steamer, when one is in a hurry. Stops are made at every logging camp, isolated



post office and fishing hamlet. There are long detours up inlets and through narrow, twisting channels, and it seems the ship is hardly clear of one float and the lines are coiled before she is sliding in to another.

J. J. found the twenty-four hours before reaching his camp particularly trying, for much depended on what he would find when he reached it. Yet it was Captain Mackaye who discovered what he wanted most to know.

"There's your old packet," he said as they rounded a point. "Jensen had to come back and let his old crew know that he owned a yacht."

It was that very trait in the Scandinavian's character upon which J. J. had counted. From the stories of Captain Mackaye and towboat skippers, from his own observations on their trip to Seattle together, he had believed that Jensen could not resist the temptation to return to the scenes of his logging operations and exhibit his proud possession.

The *Viking* was as resplendent as ever, and half a mile away J. J. could see the new owner sitting on the after deck. Beyond her, dull and drab in comparison, lay the black and gray *Cleopatra*.

J. J. was grinning like a small boy when he stepped onto the float. Jack Mead and Black River watched him curiously from their after deck, nodded when he waved enthusiastically.

"I don't see any wrinkles in his face yet," Ben remarked, and Jack strode off.

When the *Okisollo* had pulled away a white jacketed steward came onto the float from the *Viking*.

"Captain Jensen would appreciate the honor of your presence at tea, sir," he said formally to J. J.

"B' jiminy, yes, come aboard," Jensen called expansively from the *Viking* before J. J. could reply. "And bring your grandfather and his friend, too."

He flourished a cigar as he strode to the rail. There seemed to be more gold braid than ever on his coat and his ornate yachtman's cap was set at a rakish angle.

"I'll be glad to come," J. J. called genially. "A few things to attend to and I'll be aboard."

From his foreman he learned that, while the *Viking* had been there since morning, Jensen had neither come ashore nor seemed aware that he was tied up at the float of his former camp. At noon, when the men had come down for dinner, he had paced and posed the length of the *Viking*. Occasionally he bellowed an order, but never

once did he look toward shore.

"Most of the morning," Sam Creer reported, "he set out at the back end there, under the tent business, drinking tea. Anyhow, I guessed it was tea. Twice I heard him holler for the flunky to bring him some."

On board the *Cleopatra* J. J. received a more detailed, and also more inflammatory, report of the activities aboard the *Viking*. While they practiced only the essentials, there was nothing in yachting etiquette Jack and Ben did not know. It was a condition they had set for themselves when they had started out to keep pace with J. J. and their flat refusal to be seen on such a ship reached heights of lumberjack oratory. J. J.'s eyes twinkled.

"There isn't anyone we know in the Seattle or Vancouver Yacht clubs who wouldn't pay a price for a chance to watch this fellow at close range," he said. "I never saw Weber and Fields but I know they couldn't put on a show like this."

He won them over despite their grief over the degeneration of the *Viking* and a few minutes later the three walked out onto the float.

"B' jiminy, come aboard, gentlemen!"



Jensen cried effusively as he met them. "Grand day for yachting, isn't it?"

Jack Mead glared, Ben's eyes twinkled, and J. J., in his

best manner, introduced the *Viking's* owner.

"Glad to meet you," Jensen said when he shook old Jack's limp hand. "I heard about you down in Washington. I live in the States myself. Logged down there, too. That your yacht?"

"It's my boat," Jack answered.

"Tidy little thing. I ban looking at her. But I not see any crew."

"And you won't—aboard the *Cleopatra*."

"Well, I like a good crew myself. When a man goes out yachting he goes for a rest and how can you rest when you do all the work? Me, I just say something, and it ban done. Steward!"

The last was a bellow, and the white jacketed figure appeared almost immediately.

"Tea! On the back end! And get a wiggie on!"

He led the way aft, Ben punching J. J.

in the ribs, Jack still glowering. Jensen seated them with a flourish, passed a box of cigars.

A tray appeared, and a plate of small biscuits. The steward poured tea, in J. J.'s after dinner coffee cups, bearing the monogram of the Seattle Yacht Club. Ben and J. J. accepted theirs. Jack only shrugged his shoulders and grunted.

"I've drunk a good many things aboard the *Viking* but never tea between meals!" he burst forth at last when Jensen's talk ceased for a moment.

"B' jiminy, I hate that slop myself!" Jensen exclaimed. "But when youse ban in Rome you got to do it. Steward!"

They drank Scotch, three of them, a bottle of it as the afternoon slipped by. J. J. had his customary charged water after the first glass and, after steering the conversation for Ben's delectation for a time, he lapsed into silence. They were well into the second bottle and Jensen's speech was becoming a little uncertain when the young man took advantage of a lull.

"Jensen," he said quietly, "did you forget all about that ten thousand dollar mortgage when we made our trade?"

The *Viking's* owner stared with open mouth, and then he laughed.

"B' jiminy, forget it!" he cried. "That ban a gute one. Nobody ever see me forget ten thousand dollars."

"Then you must have forgotten to speak about it."

Despite his liquor, Jensen's mind was in fair working order. He examined the smooth, untroubled and unangered face across the table and found it very innocent and very boyish.

"That ban another gute one!" he laughed. "That ban yust what I ban going to say. I yust forget to tell you. And afterward, when I think about it, I say, 'Oh, what ban ten thousand dollars to Mr. Mead?' And I forget it again."

"I knew it must be something like that," J. J. said brightly, and without looking toward the amazed faces of Jack and Ben. "And so long as you forgot to mention it, suppose we drink a toast to the departed, for I guess that's what the ten thousand is now. It's about time for me to have another."

Craft had dulled the effects of the whisky and Jensen had been watching J. J. closely as he spoke. But with the last words, and the guilelessness of the boyish face, he was reassured.

"B' jiminy, that ban another gute one!" he cried. "We drink to the departed."

A little later Jack and Ben went back to the *Cleopatra*. J. J. remained, took the chair next to Jensen, talked boats, cruising, motors. Jensen beamed, became more expansive, ordered another bottle.

"Of course you stopped at the Vancouver Yacht Club on your way up," J. J. said.

"Well, you see, I not have time to join a yacht club down in Seattle and my skipper he tell me I got to belong if I go visiting other clubs."

"Oh, that's too bad. There are a lot of good fellows down there and they would have been more than glad to have you take a visitor's berth."

"Then I ban don't have to be a member of a yacht club?" Jensen asked eagerly.

"It's the thing to do, but if I were there—I'd be glad to introduce you—" and J. J. frowned speculatively.

"Ven you ban going to Vancouver?"

"I ought to be there now but the *Okis-ollo*—"

"B' jiminy, don't you worry. I take you there right now. Hey, Captain! Get unhooked and pull out. We ban going to Vancouver, me and Mr. Mead."

## CHAPTER V

### THE FIGHTER

AT MIDNIGHT the *Viking* tied up at the float in Pender Harbor, and was away again at seven, but not before J. J. had left a message for transmission over the government telegraph. At noon she passed beneath the Prospect Point signal tower in First Narrows and J. J., from the pilothouse door, saw the lookout read the yacht's name with his glasses and then disappear. A hundred yards beyond, he knew, their arrival would be known in the city.

Carl Jensen, in fresh white flannels, his gold lace shining, stood in state on the after deck as they passed up Coal Harbor and through the dredged channel to the yacht club. J. J. was in the pilothouse, giving the skipper the course, but when they approached the moorings he could not resist the temptation to take the wheel, and the *Viking* made her usual smart arrival.

Two men were standing on the float, and no sooner had bow and stern lines been made fast than they climbed aboard. One was in uniform and as he approached Jensen the yacht owner arose with an expansive smile. This could be no less than

the commodore of the club come to extend an official welcome.

"B' jiminy, gentlemen, I ban glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "Won't you sit down and have a cup of tea or a glass of Scotch?"

"Are you Carl Jensen?" the man in uniform asked sharply.

"That's me."

"Owner of this yacht, the *Viking*?"

"Yes, and she ban one fine boat. Let me show—"

"I represent his Majesty the King and I hereby serve notice on you that your



craft is libeled in the sum of fifteen thousand dollars. I will give you ten minutes in which to remove your crew, yourself and your personal belongings, after

which no one is allowed aboard."

Jensen gaped and blinked. J. J. was coming along the deck. One hand reached out and he gave the rail what was nothing less than an affectionate pat.

"B' jiminy, Mr. Mead, you tell these fallers they ban make mistake!" Jensen cried. "They say I can't stay on my own boat. This an American boat!" and he turned furiously on the man in uniform. "Your king got nothing to say about it."

"Your craft has been libeled by due process of law," was the even reply. "I advise you to get a solicitor. Meanwhile, it will be necessary for you to remove yourself, your personal belongings and your crew."

"But what you mean libeled? Can't a man run his own yacht where he wants to without having a king getting fresh? Mr. Mead, you tell 'em. I buy the boat from you."

"The gentleman is entirely right, Jensen," J. J. answered. "You see, libeled is the marine term for attached. If you put up the fifteen thousand dollars you can have your boat."

"You think I'm crazy? I ain't got it. And why should I pay anybody fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Because your memory is poor and you forgot to tell about a little matter of a ten thousand dollar mortgage when you traded your logging outfit for the *Viking*. As soon as that is settled you will have no dif-

ficulty in getting your boat back again."

It was some time before Jensen calmed down enough to leave the *Viking*, but he was no sooner on the float than his crew demanded their wages. J. J. and Talbert, his lawyer, departed for the city while the Seattle man was listening to the threats of libel.

"Can you rush things through?" J. J. asked as soon as the lawyer started his car.

"As fast as the court will act. We've got a good case. Didn't the darned fellow know he shouldn't have brought that boat back into British Columbia waters?"

"All he knows about a yacht is having tea table on the after deck. And he can raise that money, can he?"

"My report from Seattle is that he has much cash but considerable real estate in his wife's name."

"The way I've sized him up, he won't touch that," J. J. said. "Got somebody to buy in the *Viking*?"

"I know half a dozen men who'll take that chance to make a couple of thousand and play square with you. Boy," and Talbert glanced at the youthful face beside him with admiration tinged by awe, "I hand to you. If, at your age, you can eat yo cake and have it, too, I want to see you work ten years from now."

"It's sort of rough on Jensen," J. J. said quietly, "but maybe it'll be a lesson him. Anyhow, he was a yachtsman for week."

"You're a grand little moralist!" Talbert scoffed.

"I can't afford to have anyone think I'm easy. Besides, I haven't had a nibble of this cake yet. A lot of that three million feet is still standing on a mountain, and it's got to be in Vancouver before I get any cash."

"It seems to me you're justified in going to your father or your grandfather for a loan. You're sound, can pull out with good profit."

"I've never asked for a tow yet. I make port."

"Oh, I know how you feel about it. You just jumped into a bad situation, but with the Mead Lumber Company behind you—" And he waved his hand.

"They weren't behind me when I jumped in, and I'm not playing the game that way," J. J. answered in a tone that dismissed the subject. "You can drop me off anywhere along here. I want to scout around for a tug going up the coast."

He found one, and forty-eight hours at

ter he had left his camp he was back again.

The *Cleopatra* was not there, and Creer could not tell him where it had gone.

"They just pulled out that night," he reported. "Never said a word."

"Probably after salmon," J. J. said, and immediately he was immersed in reports of what had been done in his absence.

The crew, he found, was keeping up its pace. A rivalry had developed between two donkeys. The fallers and buckers were comfortably in advance of the engines, and the big machine at the head of the skidway was handling the logs as fast as they came within reach of its long cable.

But J. J. was well aware that such efficiency in the camp did not spell success. It was essential, but other things could wreck him.

Jensen's note for \$10,000, secured by the machinery and equipment, was due August 20. After his talk with the cashier of the bank, he knew there could be no hope of an extension. That must be paid or he would be foreclosed. The *Viking* was libeled but the case might not come to trial in time. He could not depend on it.

Jensen had delivered 450,000 feet of logs and 600,000 had been put in the water since J. J. took over the camp. With no serious breakdowns and the crew maintaining its present rate, he could get the remaining two million feet into the water and

his sections made up, ready for towing, in six weeks.

A glance at the calendar showed that this left less than a week in which to tow the logs to Vancouver, collect



his money and go to the bank.

J. J. whistled and his smooth face puckered in a frown. The Yucluetaws Rapids, and then 110 sea miles in the Gulf of Georgia! He knew every inch of that waterway, had seen log booms held up for days at the Ragged Islands, behind Grief Point, in Pender Harbor.

Very often it offered marvelous cruising, that long, narrow Gulf of Georgia, and very frequently, with a big tide and a stiff breeze, it could kick up a sea that would pop logs out of a boom as one would shake matches out of a box. Once J. J., in the *Viking*, had welcomed a gale as a

test of seamanship. Now he saw only disaster in a freshening wind.

It could not be risked, so short a time, even in August, and he could not afford any more risks than he had. For J. J. knew it wasn't this one job, this one lot of three million feet, the existence of his small outfit. He read everything, each day's progress, each contingency, in terms of the future, in strides toward an ultimate goal, and in that light he could not fail.

For several days he took no action, nor did he go to work again on the logs in the boom, as he had the first week. Instead he spent all his time on the mountainside, watching the operation, looking over the uncut timber and planning how best to get it to water. At the end of the fourth day he went to Rock Bay, across Johnstone Strait, and sent a telegram to his lawyer:

RENT A DONKEY ON SKIDS AND HIRE A CREW, FALLERS AND BUCKERS. SEND THEM QUICK BY TUG.

On his way back in the gas boat, which had been part of the camp equipment, J. J. grinned at the thought of the load he was laying on Talbert's shoulders. He had put the anxiety of terms and payment up to the lawyer, and once the donkey was on the job it couldn't be taken away until it had served its purpose.

But he had little time or energy to give to Talbert's problem. His back was to the wall and he had to have that donkey. Those three million feet must reach Vancouver if he were to meet his obligations and continue operations. Talbert had let him in for this present difficulty and could help stand the burden.

A WEEK later the *Cleopatra* appeared. As she approached the float Jack Mead, in the pilothouse, saw the steam plumes of four donkeys on the mountainside. Black River Ben, from the engine-room hatch, also saw, and came forward.

"J. J.'s growing," he commented.

"He'll be outgrowing his pants first thing he knows," the old lumberman growled.

They tied up and stepped onto the float. J. J. was not in sight and Sing John in answer to a question, merely waved toward the mountain.

Ben walked ashore and for a time stood watching the logs as they shot down into the sea. After a while he climbed to the skyline donkey, where he found a seat on a stump. In a few minutes J. J. appeared.

"Things is moving fairly fast," Black River commented at last.

"They've got to," J. J. answered. His tone was sharp, and a little hard and a little strained.

Ben glanced at him quickly, then away. "That note Jensen hung on you?" he asked.

"In a way, but it would have been just the same without it. This thing—it's got to go over big, Ben."

The old man started. He had never heard that note in J. J.'s voice before. It managed to convey the idea of strong but repressed emotions, the yearnings and eagerness and insistence of youth.

"It's queer about logging," Ben said. "Mention a logger and most people think of a millionaire. They don't know that for every one that makes good there's twenty that goes broke. It's a hard game, and a funny game. It ain't just a business proposition. The best business man in the world couldn't make a logging outfit pay, just because he was a business man. There's something about it—well, like being a fiddle player, I guess. A logger's born, just like they say a poet is."

"But just being born a logger doesn't make one," J. J. objected.

"No, and being born a poet don't make a man one unless he learns to read and write and how long or how short a line's got to be."

"How's he going to find out?" and there was a sudden insistence in J. J.'s question.

"Just tryin', I guess."

Ben Black had always occupied a place of his own in J. J.'s heart. Both Jack Mead and Ben had been his playmates. The mountains, the forest, the sea, all had been shared, explored and adventured upon together.

From this experience rough old Jack, strangely softened by contact with the boy's fresh, eager mind, had emerged in the rôle of a conquering hero of the past, a man to be respected and worshipped.

But age had mellowed the quick wits and the lightness of Ben Black, river driver, into a rich philosophy and a keen perspective quality which J. J. had instinctively recognized as a boy, and had learned to depend upon in his youth. Ben had been the recipient of confidences which J. J. would never have dreamed of sharing with his father or grandfather.

"That's what I'm doing—trying," J. J. said at last. "There wasn't any chance, down there in Washington and Oregon. It was like going swimming all bundled up in life preservers."

"Or hunting bears in a zoo."

It was not necessary for J. J. to explain more. He knew Ben understood perfectly, but there was one thing that Ben did not know, J. J. believed.

"Besides," the young man said at last, "there's more than that to this business. The Mead Lumber Company is established. It runs in grooves, and I'd be just a kid learning to do business its way."

"You mean about shipping your lumber in your own ships?" Ben asked.

J. J. glanced up sharply, for he was unprepared for this understanding of his dream. "If the Mead Lumber Company is going on it's got to carry its own products to the consumer!" he exclaimed. "Other big companies do. Look what happened during the boom in Southern California. We lost out on a lot of business because we couldn't get the carriers. I've talked to dad about it. He's not afraid of salt water. He just doesn't know it, has a distrust of something new. But we've got to come to it."

Ben considered this in silence.

"Look at our markets in the East!" J. J. continued. "Dad's built up a faith in the Mead Lumber and Mead grading. With



our own ships we could get that product there regular dependably, and at the minimum cost."

"And you figure that you couldn't go there now and make your ideas stick

Ben suggested.

"Not now, but later," and there was the triumphant conviction of youth in J. J.'s tone. "Don't you see, Ben? I've got to put this over to make good with myself and then with him."

There was a passion in his voice Ben had never heard before, and the old man's mind turned back to that winter camp on the Swift, when Jerry had battled so fiercely to prove himself in his father's eyes. For a long time neither spoke.

Ben finally broke the silence with a question, "How long you figurin' on?"

"Five years," was the prompt answer.

"In B. C.?"

"Of course. I'm incorporated now, the Mead Logging and Towing Company."

"Towing!" Ben repeated in surprise.

"You bet. Before I'm through I'm going to tow my own logs to my own mill in Vancouver. I'm going to tow other men's logs, and I'm going to tow them differently than they were ever towed before, and from places where they haven't been able to tow successfully. I'm going over to the west coast of Vancouver Island, and up above Cape Caution. I'm going to get logs from places where there isn't an ax mark now because no one thinks it's possible to get logs out."

J. J. had risen and was standing before Ben, his hands clenched, his smooth face suddenly and strangely lined and creased, his eyes burning. "I've got to do all that!" he cried tensely. "I've got to make my dad come to me."

Ben shook his head, not from doubt but to whip away the drops of moisture that had appeared so quickly on his lashes. And then he grinned.

"What's the matter?" J. J. demanded.

"My mind's wanderin', I guess," Ben explained lamely. "I was just thinkin' of something that happened back in Wisconsin one winter before you were born."

## CHAPTER VI

### A STAB IN THE BACK

**T**HERE is no business like logging, and the manner in which it has been conducted at various times and in various places raises a justifiable doubt as to whether it always remains strictly a business.

On a big scale, with great companies and extensive holdings, it is, of course, a sound, established industry. Yet, as in any enterprise which depends upon the natural resources of a land, there is always the opportunity for the small man of small means, for the daring individual.

In many places gold mining has been reduced to a business undertaking. Companies have big investments, huge plants, all the benefits of modern science. And yet the prospector continues his lonely wanderings, the pocket miner grubs with pick and shovel, and small companies with two-stamp mills struggle through to success or failure. Always there must be faith and optimism.

Logs and gold have much the same effect upon men. The solitary cruiser searches for new timber lands, the hand logger works alone, the small operator goes in with one or two donkeys and a crew, and always there is bright faith in

success. Great fortunes have been pyramided, and every man with a few dollars and a donkey believes he can do the same, though he sees wrecks piled high on either side of his path.

It is much like raising chickens or finding ore that runs so many ounces to the ton. On paper it works out beautifully. A tract of timber has cruised so many million feet, the cost of operation will be so and so, the rest is profit. It has been done a thousand times, is still being done, and we get boards with which to build our houses today because the logger is a first cousin to the gold miner, because he has faith in himself and an ultimate fortune.

John Jeremiah Mead was born with the entrancing odor of newly sawed lumber in his nostrils, grew up sniffing the sweet aroma of a tree crashing before the ax. He knew logs and loggers. In the few years he had spent cruising along the delightfully broken British Columbia coast he had visited countless hand loggers and camps great and small. He knew their woes and their opportunities, saw them fail and rise to success.

His own undertaking had not been an impulsive affair. For two years the idea had been simmering in his mind and he had been constantly on the lookout for an opportunity.

His logger blood was richly charged with the loggers' faith and optimism, but the two generations of success behind him had laid a solid deposit of shrewd, cool wisdom, and he had used it. It was Carl Jensen's trickery alone that brought him face to face with a crisis.

And as he sat in his office a few days after his talk with Black River Ben he saw that he faced defeat. He knew that a word to his father or grandfather, and he could pull through, but complete failure was far sweeter than any plea to them. If he won, he was going to win alone.

He had been saving his allowance for many months, he had sold his motor car, had borrowed from his lawyer, and with this cash he had kept going, meeting his payroll and paying enough on his supply bills to satisfy his creditors.

He had counted on meeting the present crisis by borrowing, using his equipment as collateral. Jensen's mortgage prevented that. It was true that, by catching Jensen in British Columbia waters and libeling the *Viking* he was in a position not only to regain the lost \$10,000 but the yacht as well, but he had just received a letter from Talbert that Jensen had employed an at-

torney, had obtained a delay, and that the case could not be brought to trial before the note fell due.

IT WAS a bitter pill for youth, for high hopes and a most commendable intention, and for a Mead. From early childhood J. J. had been nourished on the saga of the Meads. The Meads had always won, had fought until success had been compelled. Now he turned and twisted in his chair at the thought of his own ignominy, yet always his mind turned back to the weekly payroll that must be met on Saturday night, and the meager balance that would be left.

As J. J. sat there he suddenly became very still and tense. The payroll! Always his thoughts had brought him to that. In the remaining three weeks he could hold off his creditors in Vancouver. But the men! Less than a million feet to go. Nine



working days and the logs would be in the water. There was a margin of ten days in which to get them to Vancouver. Five thousand dollars and he could win.

He had to borrow it, and there was no security. A banker would laugh at him. He had no collateral, and the men must be paid. The men! Nothing on which to borrow.

For a long time J. J. did not move. It was Saturday afternoon. The hours were slipping. Monday morning there would be no white plumes on the mountainside, no tooting of whistles, no geysers at the skidway. But when at last he totaled up the time book and began to make out checks it was with sudden impetuosity, with a certain elation.

Supper was eaten in the usual silence, but when the first man finished and started to leave J. J. looked up. "Just a moment, please," he said. "I want to talk to you fellows a minute when we're all through."

The man sat down. There were glances of inquiry. The silence now seemed oppressive.

At last J. J. arose. He had dreaded that moment, for never in his life had he made a speech, or talked to a group half so large. But now that it had come he found himself

curiously unimpressed by the stares nearly fifty men and by the frank challenge he read in so many eyes. Something else some force, had complete possession of him.

He laid a bundle of time checks on the table and then, one foot on his chair, elbow on his knee, he began to talk.

He told them first how he had purchased the camp and the contract to cut the timber, gave the terms of the contract and then explained how, with what little capital he had and what he could borrow on the equipment, he had been assured of carrying through successfully until the first three million feet were in Vancouver.

J. J. grinned when he told how both he and his lawyer had been deceived by Jensen, how the mortgage prevented his borrowing as he had expected, and some of the men grinned back at him.

"Here," J. J. said as he picked up a bundle of paper from the table, "are time checks for each one of you, paying for all work done to this moment. The checks are perfectly good at my bank; this is money there to meet them.

"But," and the easy manner and tone vanished and his voice became hard, "have a balance of less than two hundred dollars when these checks are cashed, not enough to pay you for Monday's work.

"I can't borrow a cent. This camp equipment is covered by a mortgage that falls due August twentieth. No banker would listen to me for a minute. No business man would take a chance on letting me have five thousand dollars, because it wouldn't be business."

Someone down the table laughed. J. J. waited and then he said quietly, "Because I know I can't get anywhere with a banker or a business man, I'm coming to you fellows. I'm going to ask you to loan me the five thousand dollars I need until these logs are delivered."

There was a note of incredulity in the laughter which greeted this. A few stared curiously.

"I don't mean to put up the cash," J. J. continued with a confidential grin. "What I'm asking is that you let the pay days slip until those logs are in Vancouver. I told you exactly where I stand, I can show my contract, you can look over my books. The money's there in the salt chuck now in those logs, but I can't turn it into cash to pay you fellows until the logs reach Vancouver.

"At the present rate the sections will be made up a week from next Thursday night



That gives ten days in which to get the boom to town, and unless we have worse weather than any August known on the coast they'll be there. Three weeks from tonight the money will be in the bank and you can be paid."

"What security do we get?" a hook tender called.

"My word and nothing more," J. J. answered quickly.

"What interest?" another demanded with a laugh.

"I'm willing to pay through the nose," was the reply. "I've got to. You're my last chance. I'll pay you fellows ten per cent. for the use of your money for three weeks."

He waited a moment and when no one spoke he continued, "I don't want you to think of that as a bonus. I'm not offering you one. If you fellows turn me down the camp's closed. I'm through."

**P**ERHAPS it was because he had uttered the words aloud for the first time. It may have been that he suddenly realized a Mead was making a last despairing plea to a bunch of loggers. Whatever it was, the effect upon J. J. was startling.

His foot came down to the floor with a thump, the intent, conversational manner vanished. Both hands gripped the back of the chair and he leaned forward, eyes a-fire, his boyish face strangely hard. "I'm not asking a favor of you!" he cried hoarsely. "I don't come in here begging for your money. I've made a straight proposition to you and you can take it or leave it.

"And I'm not threatening you. The camp's closed now, unless you say otherwise. That's a fact, not a threat. Nor am I promising you anything except the interest on your money. If I keep on doing business you don't get any lifelong jobs or soft snaps because of what you may do now.

"All I can tell you is this. If you do as I ask, you can bet your last cent that there's nothing I won't do to protect you. I've taken over a rotten camp and made it pay so far. I can keep on making it pay if I have a chance."

J. J. stopped abruptly and turned to the door at his back. He opened it, then halted. "I'll be in the office," he said. "Decide what you'll do and send someone over to tell me, or ask any questions."

They heard him walking away, heard his office door open and close, and no one

spoke. At last a thick set, gray haired bucker laughed outright. "In the panic of '93, back in Wisconsin, I was glad to work for my board and tobacco," he said. "But I never yet had a chance to work for wages and interest."

He was an old-timer, one of those Sam Creer had rounded up, but there were only eight of them. The others were of another school of lumberjacks, the coast school, men who earned twice as much in a week as the old Middle Western lumberjack had earned in a month. They were fed as no workingmen in the world were fed. Their dress in town gave no indication of their occupation. Even in their reading they encountered philosophies and beliefs which were unknown to their predecessors.

And if they had missed the hardships of the earlier days of the industry, so too, they had missed the old-time attitude toward their work, the earlier loyalty to individual employers, the earlier pride in a calling. To them a job is a job, judged dispassionately on the merits of the working conditions and the recompense. Calloused or cynical, justifiably or otherwise, no sentimental plea, no magnetized touch of leadership, could touch them easily.

It was such a group to which J. J. had talked, and he knew it. The old days when Hell and High Water Jack had taken a drive down Swift River with sixty loyal, yelling, fighting men behind him were gone.

"Fine chance to work for nothing for three weeks," one of them remarked.

"Ten per cent. of nothing is what?"

"Why don't he pawn his white pants?"

"Willie's off the yacht and now he's off the logs."

"Aw, give the kid a chance," a bucker growled. "He never asked anything of you. He made a proposition and told you to take it or leave it."

"And he got in some logs," another added. "He'd have won through."



"If the square-head hadn't slipped one over on him."

There was a laugh, and Sam Creer stood up.

"There's one thing he didn't tell you," the old driver explained. "He trapped Jensen into going to Vancouver and he tied up his yacht, so

now he stands a good chance to get the logging outfit and the yacht, too."

"He can have my three weeks' pay!" a young fellow cried. "Jensen came up here just to show off in front of us fellows that worked for him, and if he's been gypped I'm with the kid."

"There's something else he didn't tell," another remarked. "He said the only security we had was his word. We can put a lien on those logs, no matter who owns them, and he knows it."

"Yes, you got to admit he's a square shooter. He didn't come no baby act."

"I worked for the Mead Lumber Company down in Washington and you can't tell me his dad and his granddad are going to let him go under," a donkey engine-man said. "There's millions back of him."

"Only he didn't tell us so," one of the old-timers remarked significantly.

They got the point, and were silent. There had been an appeal in J. J.'s talk, an appeal they had not wished to admit. Any man likes a game fighter and here, they knew, was one.

In the moments of silence that followed J. J.'s fate hung in the balance. The scoffing had not killed entirely the impression his speech had made. The Mead name was powerful. The idea of working for nothing was disturbing, and yet—

"Aw, let him have it!" a young fellow, scarcely older than J. J., exclaimed as he arose and stretched his arms. "Who wants some poker tonight?"

They were on their feet, half of them talking.

"Sure! Let him play a while longer."

"Anyhow, he leaves us Sundays off."

"You be Santa Claus, Sam, and go climb down his chimney."

Jestingly, disparagingly, they hid their real emotions, the fact that they had been touched by a game kid with his back to the wall, and trooped out to the bunkhouses.

Sam Creer knocked at the office door and was told to enter. J. J. sat at his rough desk, a little white but his eyes steady.

"They'll go you," Sam said, and went out.

He was a wise old man and he knew that moment was the youth's alone. He had turned before he could see the quick blur that came to J. J.'s eyes.

**T**HE only indication of an emotional reaction on the part of the crew came Monday morning, when the logs seemed to shoot into the salt chuck with more rapidity and frequency, the whistles

to toot more cheerfully and insistently, the great fir trees to crash with an added impetus from the fallers. A camp was telling J. J. it was behind him.

Three days later he was assured that the logs would be ready on the date set and had one of the men take him over to Johnson Strait in the gas boat. There he caught a steamer for Vancouver.

He had already made arrangements for a tug. There was one that he wanted, the largest in the harbor, not only because it needed a powerful towboat to take out sixty sections but because the company had the reputation of seldom losing a log.

He could have telegraphed but he could not afford to take chances. Those logs had to go out.

Two days after he departed the *Clapatra* came around the point and slid up to the camp. There was the usual meticulous mooring and then, when J. J. did not appear, Jack and Ben sought Sing John.

"He go town get tug," the cook announced. "He come back *Okisollo*."

"That's day after tomorrow," Ben said. "He's sure got some logs in that boom."

"Pletty close sixty section next Wednesday," Sing John announced proudly.

Jack Mead looked sharply at the Chinaman and then up the mountainside. Coming in he had been quick to sense the activity. There was even more snap in the work than when he had last visited the camp.

He walked away, up the slope, and after a little while he found Sam Creer. The old Wisconsin lumberjack's eyes were bright and his movements quick. Jack saw it, and talked of a big salmon he had caught. Then, skilfully, slowly, he worked around to the matter he had in mind.

"Some git up and go to this crew," Sam remarked.

"The logs are moving," Sam conceded, and then he added with sudden enthusiasm: "First time I ever heard of such a thing. He talked to 'em like he was doing 'em a favor, and they took it. That lad, Mead—well, he's a Mead if ever there was one."

"What you talking about?" Jack growled.

Sam told the story, and told it well, the drama of it had moved him perhaps more than the others.

Jack listened in silence, and without a change of expression. "Huh!" he grunted at the end. "He must have hypnotized 'em. Bunch of damned fools."

He strode away, down to the water, and

climbed aboard the *Cleopatra*, where he poured himself a large drink. He grinned while he downed it, and he continued to grin until he heard the men come down to dinner. A little later he went out onto the float.

Singly and in groups, the members of the crew were leaving the cookhouse, rolling cigarettes, filling pipes, talking. Jack watched them, measured them, and when, a few minutes later, he spoke to one on shore he felt certain he had chosen well.

"My name's Mead, Jack Mead," he began abruptly. "I understand you lads have got the idea the Mead Lumber Company is backing this outfit. I don't want you to make any mistakes or come to us for any money, so I'm telling you right now that the Mead Company and nobody connected with it is putting a cent into this camp or will stand any losses."

The fellow mumbled something in surprise, stared, and Jack walked away. Aboard the *Cleopatra* he aroused Ben from a nap.

"Let's get out of here," he suggested. "We're most out of liquor and we'd better be heading Vancouver way."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STRIKE BREAKER

**I**N CONTRAST with his worries at the camp, J. J. had encouraging news in Vancouver.

"Jensen was going to delay things so that we might be fighting that case all winter," Talbert told him. "He was mad, and he got a good lawyer. I saw things were going to be tied up, so I took another tack."

"Criminal prosecution?" J. J. asked.

"No, though there was grounds for it, and we're charging fraudulent intent in libeling the *Viking*. But there are other means of winning a suit. I just tipped things off to the newspaper boys."

"What do you mean?" J. J. asked.

"You know yourself it was a good story. Son of millionaire lumberman trades yacht for logging outfit because he wants to go to work. Logger has always had ambition to own a yacht, sit on the after deck and drink tea. They trade. Yachtsman goes to work. Logger goes yachting."

"Why, boy, we even got pictures of the *Viking* all decked out the way he had it, and a description of his triumphal cruise up the coast, visiting all his old logging friends."

"You can imagine what the papers did.

They ate it up. First page. Jensen was interviewed, told all about the joys of cruising. And then, when it came out! You should have heard him. He left town in disgust.

"Of course, both you and Jensen being Seattle men, the Seattle papers hopped right to it. Their camera men met him—he still wore his yachting clothes—and they guyed him unmercifully.



"That was three days ago. Yesterday Jensen's attorney

told me he is through, through with the *Viking*, with yachting and with British Columbia. He never wants to see any of the three again, or hear anything of them. When the case comes up there'll be no opposition; the *Viking* will be sold to satisfy your claim. Somebody buys it in for you, and there you are, eating your cake and having it, too."

"Before August twentieth?" J. J. demanded quickly.

"Sorry, boy. That's the one place where I fall down. The judge of that court is away on his vacation and won't be back. I've tried every way but there is no chance."

"Well," J. J. grinned, "I'm going to get my logs down here in time anyhow. Now I'm going over to see the man who owns them and make sure he has the money ready."

The owner of the timber which J. J. was cutting had driven a hard bargain with Jensen because he wanted to insure quick work. He needed money, and that money depended on getting the logs to Vancouver as quickly as possible.

J. J. received a cordial welcome. The timber owner had read the papers. J. J.'s own success meant that the logs would be delivered a month earlier than he had expected.

"We won't wait for a scale," he said. "Jensen delivered 468,000 feet. You bring down fifty-five sections and the minute the tug puts them inside the mill boom I'll pay you for three million."

"That's fine," J. J. grinned. "You see, I may have to hustle to get to the bank."

"That note, eh?" the lumberman laughed. "From what I've read in the papers I guess you'll make it. And say, young fellow, I've got ten million more

up there I'm going to cut this fall. Want it?"

"I'll need money," J. J. answered promptly. "No more of this three million before the pay starts."

"Sure. I'll be in better shape by then and we can fix that. I'll have a contract ready next time you're down."

In the office of the towing company J. J. went at once to the owner. "Where's the *Neptune*?" he asked.

"Passed Powell River this morning with a tow."

"That's fine. She'll just be able to make it next Thursday. Who's on her, Star-rat?"

"Yes. How much you going to have?"

"Between fifty-five and sixty sections," J. J. answered. "And they've got to be here quick as steam can bring them."

"Don't worry. I've been ready for you. The *Neptune's* got to take fifty-five or sixty sections to make money and we're glad to have 'em all in one place. I'll shoot her out of here as soon as she gets in."

Never, even in a regatta, had J. J. known the elation of that day in Vancouver. He was winning, winning all along the line. He had overcome one obstacle after another. Only victory could result.

There is nothing in the world quite like it, youth feeling its strength, reaching out, clutching life's prizes, testing and proving itself. As J. J. walked down the street he wondered how he had ever found any zest in racing for a silver cup when there were so many worth while things to struggle for.

His elation was not lessened even when he went to the bank and discovered that his note had been disposed of.

"Quite naturally, we did so when we had a good offer," the cashier told him. "We don't care to take over any more logging outfits than we can help."

"You would have been paid," J. J. retorted angrily. "My boom will be here."

The banker smiled good naturedly. "My boy," he said, "it is a daily occurrence in this city, men waiting for a boom. I hear it so often I sometimes wonder how their faith can persist."

"My boom will get here."

"I hope so."

THE *Okisollo* sailed the next morning. J. J. was so confident he would be able to meet the note he gave little thought to the fact the bank no longer held it. But later in the day he began to wonder why anyone should wish to have it

in his possession. At last he went to the attorneys who, he had been told, now held the note. When he sent in his card he was received by the head of the firm.

"I want to know for whom you purchased a note for ten thousand dollars secured by the property of the Mead Logging and Towing Company?" he demanded abruptly.

The lawyer was a suave old gentleman with sideburns. "My dear young man," he said, "that is a question I cannot answer. We hold the note in the interests of a client."

"I know that, but who is he?" J. J. persisted.

"We have instructions not to divulge his name."

"But that's hardly fair. What if I want an extension?"

"All negotiations are to be conducted through us."

J. J. did not want an extension. It had become a matter of pride to meet that note when it was due, a goal in this new and entrancing game he was playing, and he intended to stand or fall on doing so. But he was suspicious of the lawyer, felt an instinctive distrust of what lay back of the purchase of the note.

"Very well," he said. "How about my getting thirty days more time?"

"I am afraid that is an impossibility," was the answer. "Our instructions are to foreclose immediately if the money is not paid."

In a flash J. J. saw the answer. Jensen had announced that he was through, but here he was striking back.

"All I've got to say is that you're in a pretty business!" he exclaimed. "I've libeled your client's yacht because of fraud on his part in connection with this note. He withheld knowledge of it when he sold his logging outfit, by which it is secured."

"My dear young man!" the lawyer protested. "I am sure you err!"

"I don't err, and I won't. You'll find me at the Vancouver Hotel on August twentieth. See that you're there with the note."

Later, going back on the *Okisollo*, J. J. laughed when he thought of the shocked expression on the old gentleman's face, but he did not laugh when he thought of Jensen. As never before he determined that he was going to win through. For the first time the personal element entered the situation. There was someone he wanted to humble.

As the *Okisollo* approached his camp J. J. went below to get his bag, and it was

not until they were warping in to the float that he saw there were no logs shooting down the skidway, no exhaust steam from the donkey engines on the mountain-side, that a number of the crew were waiting, their baggage at their feet, to take the steamship.



The *Okisollo* was still ten feet from the float when J. J. took a running leap from the lower decl. cargo doors and landed squarely in front of his departing workmen.

"Where are you going?" he demanded. None answered. They had not expected his volcanic landing.

"Why aren't you at work?" J. J. insisted. "We're quitting," one of them said sullenly.

The *Okisollo* was tied up now. The remainder of the crew had come from the bunkhouses. J. J. looked at them. He was beside himself with rage. He took a step forward and his fists were clenched. "What's the matter with you fellows?" he asked hoarsely.

Again no one spoke.

"Afraid to speak, eh? You're a bunch of quitters! A bunch of welchers! Your word's not worth the breath it's spoken with. You told me you'd stick, and I believed you. You work a week and now, when we might have won out, you bunch it."

"Don't get too fresh, young fellow," a big faller grumbled. "I won't stand for those names."

"You'll stand for that and more, because any man who'll break his word, go back on someone who's in a hole, hasn't guts enough to resent being told exactly what he is."

"You'd 'a' got a square deal if you'd been square with us," someone called from the back of the crowd.

J. J. leaped forward, pushed his way through to the speaker, whose voice he had recognized. It was the man to whom old Jack Mead had spoken, a wood bucker named Glover.

"You're a liar, Glover!" he cried. "I have been square with you."

"You were not," and Glover, while truculent in voice, retreated a step. "There ain't no Mead money back of you. If you're broke you're broke, and your father nor your grandfather won't step in and help

you out, pay us what we've earned. And that's so. I know it. Old Jack Mead told me so himself."

It was the thing needed to break J. J.'s rage. He had lost control of himself, saw only defeat, and in that moment he did not care what happened, would gladly have attacked the entire crew. Now it was his turn to step back.

"He told you!" J. J. repeated in astonishment.

He whirled, saw Sing John in the cookhouse door. "Was the *Cleopatra* here while I was gone?" he asked.

"Old Jack 'n' Black Livel they come, stay hour, go away," the Chinaman answered impassively.

J. J. whirled to face the crew. The mystery of his grandfather's act must wait. With a clear head he faced the crisis.

"Is there one of you fellows who ever heard me say there was Mead money behind me; that in case I went under it would help me out?" he demanded hotly.

A few shook their heads. None answered aloud. But at the back of the crowd several were walking away, picking up their baggage.

"Captain Mackaye!" J. J. called to the blue clad figure on the bridge above him. "Don't let one of these men aboard your vessel for ten minutes. And, as a favor, will you hold your boat here that long?"

The skipper had been watching, and listening, and he was not entirely ignorant of the situation. Moreover, the nerve of the youth had won his admiration.

"Keep those fellows ashore!" the captain bellowed down to his crew. "And leave those lines alone. I'll tell you when to cast off."

"Thanks, Captain," J. J. said, and again he faced his men.

"Now," he resumed, "that night I talked to you, when I asked you to let your wages slide for three weeks, did I say anything about Mead money being back of me, about it being used to help me out?"

No one spoke and J. J. looked around. "How about it, Matheson?" he demanded, pointing at a man. "And you, Fraser? Campbell? Tarr? Murray? Did I give you the impression I had anything back of me?"

Purposely he had picked out the older, steadier men, and he insisted that each answer before going on to the next. All shook their heads emphatically, though with a bit of shame.

"You gave us a square talk and didn't claim anything," Murray answered.

"All right," J. J. retorted. "Then why the quitting?"

"Because your grandfather let us know it was the right thing for us to do," answered Glover.

"What did he say?"

"That he and your father and the Mead Lumber Company wouldn't stand any losses and didn't have a cent in this camp."

"And nobody ever claimed they did," J. J. retorted. "I told you I was going under unless you fellows came through and I would have won out if you hadn't been a bunch of quitters and welchers."

"That's enough of this talk!" the big fellow cried.

"I'll say it again!" J. J. shouted. "And I'll tell you something else. There isn't any Mead money back of this camp but there's a Mead running it. And you'll find that out before you're through."

"How about it?" someone called from the crowd. "They say that back East nobody worked for a Mead unless a Mead had licked him. Does that go here, too?"

He was one of the crew who had come in with the new donkey, a loud talking hook tender who voiced an opinion on every subject.

"Step out where I can see you when you talk like that," J. J. commanded, and when the crowd parted he walked up to the man.

"Now," he said, "you know and I know that conditions are not the same here on the coast as they were back in Wisconsin. Maybe my grandfather had to lick every man on his crew, and maybe he only wanted to. I wouldn't have a man in my crew I had to lick."

"So you're fired. I've got a hundred and eleven dollars left in the bank. You get your pay. Now take off your coat."

"That's talking!" cried Captain Mack-aye from the bridge, and the score of passengers hanging over the rail, most of them loggers on their way to various camps, let out a cheer.

The man sensed that the crowd was not with him and drew back, but J. J. had an excess of emotion that needed working off.

"Come on and see what a Mead is like!" he shouted, and sprang forward.

It wasn't much of a fight. The fellow didn't get started, or didn't try. When he fell down J. J. turned away in disgust. He went into the office, wrote out a check and gave it to the man.

"All right, Captain!" he called. "Take

this fellow along. And thanks for waiting."



The skipper gave the word, lines were thrown off and the *Okisello* drew slowly away.

"Now," J. J. said as he faced his waiting crew, "it's eight

hours before dark. You can get in a day's work."

The men laughed and turned away. Before noon logs were sliding into the chuck.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A HEART INVINCIBLE

JERRY MEAD gathered, from an occasional letter postmarked in some unknown office up the British Columbia coast, that J. J. was still cruising. Jerry was very busy, not only with the Mead Lumber Company itself but with plans for the consolidation, and he was away from Seattle much of the summer.

Negotiations for the merger were progressing more rapidly than he had anticipated, his entire attention was occupied by it, and it was with something of a jolt that he read in a Seattle paper that his son had traded his yacht for a logging camp and stood in a fair way not only to keep the camp but to get his yacht back as well.

Jerry's inclination was to believe that it was only a newspaper feature with no more foundation than a joke on the part of some of J. J.'s friends. He forgot it, until a few days later when he received a telegram from his father asking him to come to Vancouver. Jerry caught a night boat and was registering at his hotel when Jack Mead came up.

"No need of writing your name there," Jack said. "Bring your bags along."

"What's up?" Jerry asked when they were in a taxi.

"I don't know exactly. How's the merger coming?"

"Better than I had hoped. We're about to draw up the final agreement."

"Huh! Pretty fast work. When's it go into effect?"

"Immediately."

Jack said nothing.

"Where are you taking me?" Jerry insisted. "I want to return tonight."

"I'm taking you up the coast a ways."

"But I can't!" Jerry protested. "I've got to get back. This thing can't be put off."

Old Jack was silent for a while, and Jerry saw that he was disturbed. "Look here, lad," the father blurted out at last. "I've never asked much of you. You and I've always understood each other pretty well. We've hitched fine. We never had any doubts, did we?"

"No."

"Then don't have any now. I haven't changed a bit."

Jerry's instinctive protest died before the realization of the unusual nature of this request. No ordinary circumstances could have dictated it.

And there had been something in the old man's manner and voice that was entirely new. It was a passionate insistence, almost a plea, was as close to an expression of deep emotion as he had ever known old Hell and High Water to come.

Jerry was silent. He did not wish to go. He ought not spare the time, cut himself off from all communication with Seattle, and yet he knew that here was something in which he could not fail his father.

"All right," he said at last. "But make it as quick as you can."

Characteristically, Jack made no comment. Instead he began telling his son of the cup the *Cleopatra* had won, and of his and Ben's satisfaction in beating the crack yachts of the Northwest.

"You mean that old tub of yours is the fastest boat in Seattle?" Jerry demanded.

"The surest," Jack answered. "It ain't a speed race. They call it a reliability contest. This year we run from Seattle to Victoria. Just the finishing time is set, and every skipper figures out the speed of his boat, and tides, and maybe wind, and he decides how long it will take him. Then he starts so as to finish right on the dot—if he can."

"Didn't J. J. win something like that?"

"Two years running. He's a wizard at it, and he knows his boat better'n most commercial skippers. But this year he wouldn't enter. He went dangling off up the coast and left Ben and me to uphold the honor of the family."

"And you and Ben won, eh?"

"Just fifteen seconds off our estimated time. No other boat was within half an hour. It's 'most eighty miles."

"That's steady running."

"It's more than that!" Jack exclaimed with some heat. "It's being absolutely sure and mighty longheaded. That's the

reason J. J. won twice, and would have won this year if he had entered."

AND that is all Jack would tell about J. J. until they were sailing north in the Calm Channel the next afternoon. Ben was below, washing the luncheon dishes. Jerry and his father were alone in the pilothouse.

"J. J.'s bought a logging camp and been running it all summer," Jack announced without any preliminary.

"So that's what I'm up here for! I saw something in the papers but didn't believe it."

"It's only a small part of the reason," Jack said. "He traded the *Viking* for three donkeys, a fine float camp, complete equipment and contract to cut six million feet, with half a million already delivered."

"I understand," Jerry said coldly. "You put him up to this. It happened just after I saw you in Vancouver and you think that—"

"Stop right there," Jack growled. "I never knew it myself. Didn't know where he was until I run into the *Viking* with this squarehead aboard. So get that idea out of your head. Ever since he started he hasn't told me a thing about his business. What I'm going to tell you I learned myself."

"But you influenced him. You told him I was planning this merger, intended to get out of the business," Jerry insisted.

"I did not and I'll give you any odds he doesn't know yet what you're up to. He's been—" Jack stopped and chuckled. "He's been too busy to know there's any other logging outfit in the world except his own."

"And you brought me up here to watch him cut a little jag of logs like that! Six million's nothing, if his contract's all right. That doesn't alter my opinion. J. J.'s not a logger and he doesn't care about the business. That's what I didn't want to do, force him into any—"

"Force him!" Jack interrupted. "I guess the lad's done all the forcing. I told you in Vancouver what he needed—his own logs and his own game. And he found it! Don't think anything you ever tackled at his age was like this."

"The fellow he made the trade with slipped one over on the lad and his lawyer. Hid out a mortgage. Had it filed after the trade. Ten thousand dollars. That spoiled J. J.'s plan to borrow on the outfit."

"Worse than that, he had a poor crew.

No git up and go. And it didn't make it any better when he wore his white yacht pants on the job."

Jack seemed to be concentrating on holding the *Cleopatra* to her course down a perfectly clear and wide channel.

"He fired half a dozen, gave two of them a good licking and in a week those three donkeys were putting more logs into the water than any three I ever saw before. He sold his car and then, when he found how Jensen had tricked him, he turned round and libeled the *Viking*. He knew maritime law, and he didn't let that square-head put anything over on him. Now it looks like he's going to have his camp and boat too."

Jerry's eyes had brightened but he couldn't quite place the J. J. he knew in the picture.

"That was a clever trick," he admitted, and then, after a quick glance at his father, he added, "He's smart, all right. I never said he wasn't. But can he stand the gaff?"

Jack walked to the rail and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Well, he went flat broke and then he got his crew to let wages slide until he had delivered the logs," he said when he returned to the wheel. "How he did it, I don't know. They're a different breed than the lumberjacks I knew back in Wisconsin. But he did it! I guess that ought to show you he's a Mead. We



always had our men behind us, but this took something different from just leading a bunch of hell raising river pigs down fast water."

Jerry made no effort to conceal his pleasure, for he knew the value of that quality of leadership which he and his father shared. Black River Ben came up from below and stood in the pilothouse door. Jerry looked thoughtfully over the water for a while and then turned to his father.

"The lad's got stuff. I never said he hadn't. Only he's playing a short game like that reliability run you won. How do you know the thing will hold him?"

"Well, I've given him a chance to quit," Jack answered. "I bought up that note and told the lawyers to foreclose if the money wasn't paid. And last week I dropped in at the camp and dropped a hint that the men couldn't count on any Mead money being behind J. J. and paying any wages he couldn't."

"You did *what*?" Jerry demanded.

"That's the rottenest trick I ever heard of!" Ben exploded furiously. "You're getting too old to live if you're that mean! J. J. was havin' tough enough sleddin', and he was getting by. Now with that! Why, he can't win out! You'll break the lad's heart, that's what you will, you—" And there followed a scorching flow of expletives that only an old river pig could achieve.

"It won't break his heart if he's a Mead," Jack said coldly when the furious Ben had subsided.

It was brutal, and it was heroic. Jerry glanced down and saw his father's knuckles were white where they gripped the wheel. He had always known how Jack worshipped his grandson, how the boy had so strangely softened the rough river driver of a past generation, and suddenly he comprehended how the old man had put his faith to the test, not because of any past performance but because of pride in name and blood.

THE *Cleopatra* went steadily on, and there was silence in her pilothouse. They were abreast Church House, with the Yucluetaws opening ahead, when at last Jerry spoke. "How's the boy stand now?" he asked.

"If he held his crew, the logs are in the water and the sections made up. The *Neptune* comes tomorrow to take 'em to town. The note's due the twentieth."

"But this is the ninth!" Jerry exclaimed. "Taking a boom of two and a half million the length of the Gulf of Georgia! He hasn't a chance."

"It can be done," Jack said, and then, with a slight break in the voice that had never faltered before, "if he's a Mead."

They tied up at Henry's that night to wait for the high water slack in the morning, but they did not fish for salmon in the rapids. Instead three silent men sat in the *Cleopatra's* main cabin and waited.

A dozen miles to the northwest J. J. sat in his office, also waiting. But there was no tension, no expectancy. His job was done. Fifty-six sections of fir and cedar logs were in the water, sections of be-



tween forty-five and fifty thousand feet each.

That afternoon the last hole had been bored in a boomstick, the last boom chain dropped through. The booming winch had drawn the logs tightly together, the swifters were in place. Before noon the *Neptune* would come, and she would have ten days in which to get the logs to Vancouver, one hundred and twenty-five sea miles to the southeast.

J. J. was not tired. Youth derives stimulation, not exhaustion, from a struggle. Now, as he sat there, he was already busy with the next job, the ten million feet he was to cut. There was a pad of paper before him, a pencil in his hand, and he was dreaming the lumberman's dream, that is so curiously like the city man's dream of a chicken ranch—so many hens, so many eggs per day, so many chickens at the end of the first year.

Only J. J. had raised every chick, and he knew it. Everything except a forest fire had risen up to balk him, and he had gone on.

"Five years," he said to himself over and over. "Five years and dad will come to me."

He sat back. For the first time that summer he found himself wishing for a sight of the blunt bows of the *Cleopatra*. It was a moment he would have liked to share with his grandfather and with Ben. He wanted them to know that some of the fire and force that had made Jack Mead a legendary hero had come down to him.

And he wanted, too, to hear his grandfather's reassurance that whatever remark had caused the mutiny, it had been due wholly to a misconception of an innocent statement. There could be no other explanation, he had concluded, of Glover's story.

The next day the *Neptune* arrived just before noon. J. J. was apprised of her approach by a prolonged tooting from all four donkeys, but when he went out onto the float he saw that the big tug was approaching slowly. Behind her was a boom of logs.

To J. J. it meant only one thing, that Captain Starrat had picked up a hand logger's boom and would leave it while he took J. J.'s logs to town. The men came down the mountain for dinner and the tug maneuvered the boom into the bay and made it fast.

J. J. was the first to leave the table and as he went outside the tug was drawing up to the float.

"How about it?" Starrat called from the pilothouse. "Your boom ready?"

"Every log," J. J. answered with a grin. "Fifty-six sections."

"Fifty-six, eh? That's too much. I can't take more than forty-five of them."

"What?" J. J. demanded incredulously. "You've got to take 'em!"

Anything else was unthinkable. Fifty-five sections had to be in Vancouver or he did not get his money.

"I take what I have orders to take," Starrat answered gruffly. "I've got fifteen sections now, and forty-five just make a tow."

The men had been trooping out of the cookhouse and heard, and they were sufficiently aware of the situation to catch the full import. But J. J. still could not believe.

"Look here, Starrat," he said. "I was in your office a few days ago and Reed promised me the *Neptune* would take out my entire boom."

"Well, I been there since and he told me to bring this other stuff and take what I could of yours."

"But my logs have got to be there!" J. J. protested. "Reed knows that."

"See here, young fellow," and Starrat leaned over the rail and looked down at J. J. "If I was to listen to the troubles of every logger I tow booms for I'd feel as if I was ninety years old all the time."

"My logs are going," J. J. stated emphatically.

"Sure! I'll take out forty-five sections and in a week or so Reed will send up a small tug for the rest."

"You'll take them now."

There was a new note in J. J.'s voice and the tug captain stared down at him curiously. There had been command in it, not a mere statement but the expression of a will, a purpose. Yet Starrat only grinned.

"Tell you what, son," he said. "You fight this thing out with Reed. He's the man to talk to. I'm just doing what I'm told by the man who pays me my wages. When you get your own towing company you can give orders to tug captains, but not before."

It was said patronizingly and with an insolence which, J. J. sensed, had a purpose



behind it. Even the contemptuous reference to his own towing company was but a reminder of the high dreams which had been his only an hour before.

J. J. looked back where his own men were grouped on the float. Victory had been achieved. The logs were ready, not only through his own efforts but by their faith and trust. They stood there, watching, waiting to see what he would do. They had kept their part of the compact. It remained for him to see that the logs reached Vancouver. Whether he was being thwarted by Reed's duplicity or by the boorishness of the tug captain, it didn't matter. Those logs, all fifty-six sections, must start.

At once all the energy and determination, the high purpose and ambition of the summer, were concentrated in the moment and in the issue, and in the person of Captain Starrat.

"You're going to take my logs, all of them," he said, "and you're going to leave that other boom here. Those are your orders, and I'm giving them."

The captain laughed, and spat significantly over the rail. "Grow some whiskers, kid," he answered, "before you talk to grown men."

The tug had been made fast to the float while they were talking and J. J. leaped aboard and started along the port side toward the bow. Starrat saw him coming and ran down the steps. There they met.

"Whiskers, eh?" J. J. cried in a choked voice. "Any whiskers on this?" and he let fly with his right.

Starrat was nearly forty, and heavier and taller than J. J., and he had no mean reputation on the Vancouver waterfront as a rough and ready fighter. He laughed and struck back when J. J.'s fist caught him on the side of the head, and J. J. went spinning away.

"Come on, kid, and get another one," the captain taunted.

J. J. came with a rush, his head down, both arms working, and again he was sent reeling against the bulwarks. For an instant he hung there, a little dazed, and then charged forward again as furiously as before.

Only this time he suddenly stopped short, let Starrat swing, then leaped in. When they broke away after a furious exchange of wild blows the tug captain was breathing hard and there was a smear of blood on his face.

With J. J.'s first rush his entire crew had sprung to the side of the *Neptune* and

climbed over the rail to points of vantage. The tug boatmen, too, had run forward. The mate started to interfere, only to find a big logger in front of him.

"The kid gets a show," he was told.

Sing John was there, brandishing two butcher knives and yelling strange, shrill words, and when J. J. charged that second time the *Cleopatra* drew up to the tug's side and Jack and Jerry Mead and Black River Ben stood on her deck and watched.

His face smeared with blood, his clothes torn, his lungs heaving, J. J. swept in to a fresh assault. For a time Starrat's skill kept him away. It was brutal. The loggers cheered at the first few rushes but when they saw their employer hurled back time after time they became silent, except for muttered exclamations and an occasional word of advice.

But J. J. did not hear nor did he see his father and grandfather and Black River Ben. He was unaware even of the crowd that had gathered, that lined the bulwarks of the *Neptune*. He knew only that he faced defeat and that he could not lose, only that in the tug captain were personified all the deceit and opposition, all the troubles and woes of the summer, and that he must go down, lie prostrate on the deck.

It was brutal, and it was magnificent. Bloody, bruised, staggered by heavy blows, without skill, the youth continued to be the aggressor. There were times when it seemed he could not go on, when Jerry and Jack Mead gripped the *Cleopatra's* rail with pressure whitened fingers, when some of J. J.'s crew began to mutter, "Stop it!"

But, though bruised in body and dazed in brain, one clear, undimmed light shone before J. J.'s half closed eyes. He must win.

It was brutal, and it was beautiful. Pure courage kept him on his feet. Pure courage sent him charging in. Pure courage furnished the power behind the blows he struck.

And not once had Starrat been shaken from his position. He still stood, waiting, timing his blows, confident. He was rather fat, his occupation gave him slight opportunity for exercise, and his wind was bad, but J. J. had not shown anything to disturb him. He knew he had only to wait, keep cool, pick his chances.

But J. J. had something Starrat had never before encountered. It was a fighting heart, come down from the two men who stood side by side on the *Cleopatra's* deck, a will and a purpose that never admits defeat; and as J. J. charged again and

again and yet again, as he was hurled back against the bulwarks only to leap forward, Starrat began to be troubled. He was breathing heavily, and this youngster, who should have been prostrate on the deck five minutes before, was always coming back.

With the captain's wonderment an idea penetrated J. J.'s rage enshrouded mind. He must use his head' not waste himself so. His lungs were

bursting now, his arms were becoming leaden.

He charged twice more, less furiously. Starrat grinned. The end was coming. And then J. J. advanced slowly, arms still. He fainted, ducked the heavy swing and, with all the fury of a terrier, he charged in, head down, both arms shooting straight and hard into Starrat's mid-section.

The tug captain grunted and winced. He beat down at the head pressed against his chest but was driven back. A heel caught a ring bolt in the deck and he tripped.

Instantly J. J. became a thing possessed, of unleashed fury, a raging, battering burst of passion. Not for an instant did he relinquish his advantage. He did not know Starrat had tripped, only believed he had retreated, and he kept him going backward.

The loggers burst into a wild cheer. Black River Ben reached inside the pilothouse and held down the *Cleopatra's* whistle cord.

And in that din, amid the shouts of men who had reverted thousands of years, J. J. kept battling on, crowding, striking, boring ceaselessly. Something told his white-hot brain that body blows were effective and he no longer reached for Starrat's face. And he knew a wild, sweet exultation as a fist sank into soft flesh.

The very fury of the struggle threw them apart. Starrat, gasping, hands down, stared at his adversary.

"You're a good kid," he said. "I admit it."

Swaying, battered, dazed, still clinging to the one thought, J. J. charged again. The very ferocity of it toppled Starrat over, and he went down, J. J. on top of him.

The young man was in a frenzy now. He grasped the captain by the throat, beat his head on the deck.

"Do all my logs go out?" he demanded. "Today?"

It was not the sobbing wail of a frenzied youth but the hoarse insistence of a man. He relaxed his grip for an instant.

"They do!" Starrat squeaked.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE HOUSE OF MEAD

IT WAS Sing John who was first to J. J.'s side when the young man arose to his feet and staggered away from Starrat.

"You come by kitchen," he said as he put an arm around his employer's waist. "I washum up."

But others were there. The loggers crowded around, shouting hoarsely now. Jack, Jerry and Ben leaped at once to the deck of the *Neptune* and were struggling to get through the crowd.

The mate of the tug ran up the steps to the pilothouse and looked down from there at the mob.

"Hey, you loggers!" he cried. "It's one o'clock. Get off this boat so we can get busy. We got to make slack at the Yucuetaws this afternoon."

Old Jack reached J. J.'s side. There were tears in his eyes, and he was swearing steadily and indiscriminately. One of the old mid-western lumberjacks saw him and grinned.

"Say, old-timer!" he cried. "I've heard what they used to call you on the Swift but you lost your name now. It's passed on. There's Hell and High Water Mead!" and he pointed to J. J.

"That's the boy! Hell and High Water! Neither can stop him!" the loggers cried. "You're a has-been, old fellow."

"Maybe," Jack retorted, "but I want to tell you men that every dollar a Mead owns is behind this camp from now on. Get to work."

The loggers whooped as they leaped onto the float and streamed away. Captain Starrat was on his feet, shaking off the deckhands who supported him. He strode forward and confronted Jack. "What you let me in for?" he demanded angrily. "You never said anything about this kid being a cross between a wildcat and a bulldog. I didn't know I'd have a fight like this on my hands."

"I did," Jack retorted. "And I knew he could lick you."

"Well, don't come around to me with any



more of your funny schemes. Play your own game after this."

"What's he mean?" Jerry demanded.

"I mean that this old fossil came around to me with a plan to tie a knot in this kid's logging," Starrat replied. "He said he had it fixed up with Reed, my boss, but if he didn't——"

"There's nothing to fix up," Jack said. "Go on and get these logs out."

He turned and found J. J. confronting him. The boy's eyes were nearly closed, blood smeared his face, and his shirt was in tatters.

"And what you told my crew!" he cried. "They nearly quit because of your meddling. Why are you bucking me?"

"And that ain't all," Black River Ben interjected angrily. "He bought up that note on you, lad, and he was going to fore-close."

They faced each other, grandfather and grandson, staring straight into each other's eyes, the younger searchingly, wonderingly, the older with undisguised pride.

"Why?" J. J. began, and then he started.

"I see!" he said. "You wanted to find out——"

"Find out nothing!" Jack interrupted with a growl. "I knew all the time. You never had to prove anything to me. But, I didn't know—there was——"

He broke off uncertainly and turned to Jerry. J. J. looked around and saw his father for the first time.

"How did you get here?" he demanded in surprise.

"On the *Cleopatra*."

"I see!" And J. J. looked understandingly from his father to his grandfather. "You had to have proof, eh? I knew it. Well, I'm not ready to give it yet. Come back in five years."

"Five years!" Jerry repeated in bewilderment.

"In five years I'll show you. Now I'm going ashore and wash up."

Sing John led him away, and when they were gone Ben turned to the two Meads and laughed.

"Now you two bright boys!" he jeered. "How you going to get out of that? Put up a game on him, will you? Test him out, eh? Hell! Why didn't you come and ask me?"

THAT afternoon the *Cleopatra* went south. J. J., ignoring his torturing body, was at the wheel through the Yucluetaws an hour and a half before high water slack. Jerry stood beside him in the pilothouse and watched in silence until they were through.

"You can handle a boat, boy," he said then.

"I can handle ships!" J. J. retorted quickly.

"Ships!"

"I don't mean to navigate them. I mean

to use them hauling lumber. Before I get through I'm going to be running every end of the game myself, from tree to retail lumber yard."

All the way through Calm Channel Jerry

was silent. At last he aroused himself.

"Where can I send some telegrams?" he asked.

"Powell River is the nearest. Office will be closed before we can get there but they will go off in the morning."

"I wish you would stop. There's a little deal I want to head off as soon as I can."

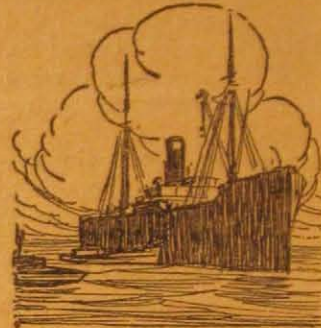
He looked up to see his father standing in the pilothouse door. The old man was grinning broadly.

"And another thing," Jerry continued. "When you get things cleaned up next week I wish you'd run down to Seattle for a day or two."

There was just a trace of deference in the father's voice that did not escape J. J., and his heart leaped. But he had determined to do certain things, and J. J. was not easily shaken in his purpose. "Sorry," he said, "but I'd rather wait."

Again Jack looked at Jerry and grinned. "I think," Jerry said slowly, "that anything you say will have just as much weight today as five years from now."

Which is how a yacht grew into a fleet of lumber carriers that have the same house flag the *Viking* once flew.





## SAM'S MA

By BARRY SCOBEE

*Author of "Black Sheep," "Heavy Money," etc.*

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THE DEANS WERE OLD-TIMERS IN THE CATTLE COUNTRY AND BORE AN HONORED NAME THERE. SO THAT WAS WHY YOUNG SAM DEAN'S MA WAS DETERMINED THAT THE NAME WOULD NEVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH RUSTLERS IF SHE HAD TO RIDE FOR AN ENDLESS NIGHT TO ACCOMPLISH HER PURPOSE

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**T**HE roly-poly detective knocked imperatively on the siding of the little unpainted shanty-house, about mid-afternoon, and mopped his nearly bald head while he waited. Steps sounded on the bare floor within, the door was opened, and a big bony woman of a pioneer type, stern and unresponsive, stood there.

"Mornin'," grunted the caller, replacing his hat. "Miz' Nancy Dean?"

"Yes."

"Sam home?"

"Sam?" Her grim face relaxed and brightened as if at a magic word. "No, suh, my son ain't in right now."

"Where is he?"

The query was brittle. It wiped the brightness from her face and set her hard on guard. Her eyes lifted above the man's big hat and searched out across the dusty Southwestern land toward the treeless town beside the railroad track, wishing that she might see Sam coming. Then her masked glance dropped back to the round red face that in a way was as stern as her own.

"Who are you?" she asked, brittle as he.

"Name's Pink." He turned back the lapel of his vest, oddly suggestive of pulling his lip wrong side out in an impudent grimace, and displayed a bright star.

"Railroad detective," he added.

"Come in," she invited succinctly.

She closed the door behind to keep out the blowing dust. Pink selected the rocking chair and sat down with his hat on his knees. She sat down in a straight-back and faced him.

"Now what you got to say for yourself?" she demanded.

"Nothing," said Pink. "Sam. Where is he?"

"I don't know. He's been in no cussedness, if that's what's itchin' ye."

"How do you know, ma'am, without the evidence? Didja hear about that half mile o' stock train going into the ditch up heah day before yesterday afternoon?"

"Got ears, ain't I?" she whipped scornfully, instinctively opposed to this intruder who was somehow against Sam. "Heard the thunder when it piled up, didn't I? Heard the bellerin' cows. Got eyes, ain't I? Seen the cattle and the riders going back and forth, didn't I? And Sam has been working day and night at the wreck, ain't he?"

"No," said Pink softly, and smiled.

Nancy Dean whitened under her sallow tan at this inadvertent giving away of Sam, but she pushed out in a quick attempt to cover.

"Hoooo, Mister, you think I actually

meant working day and night, don't you? Do you think I don't know all about my boy?"

Pink declined to enter that discussion and kept on.

"Two cars of that train load had unbranded yearlings, ma'am. A few have been rounded up, some were killed and crippled and their beef and hides have been handled by the crew of salvagers the railroad company sent out. But some fifty or so are still missing."

"Well?"

"It's been recalled, ma'am—to speak plain—that when Sam was helping round 'em up that first evening and get them to the stockyards he kept cutting those unbranded yearlings farther and farther toward the fringe all the time, till about dark he had 'em worked out and throwed to-wa'ds the north——"

"You saying Sam stole them?" Nancy Dean broke in harshly. "He didn't! Why, Mister, what on airth would he do with them?"

"Can't imagine, ma'am." Again Pink smiled with significance. "They say Sam has got a hard head and a strong back."

She did not fail to receive this by the handle—that Sam was all muscle and no wit. Red spots appeared on her high cheek bones, and Pink took warning and spoke with more deference.

"Over in town, Miz' Dean, they said you was as honest as the day is long and was striving to make a man outa Sam. I expected you to cooperate at once in getting the yearlings back, before a warrant of arrest was issued. Because the hoofprints of the horse that followed those yearlings, zigzagging in behind and pushing them along to the road, where all tracks was lost, had the right fore shoe bent."

"Hoooo!" Mrs. Dean derided in a long-drawn shrillness. "What did he do with them? Tell me that. Hid 'em maybe under a rock, or in a shadder of a cloud, or maybe behind his horse out there on the flat."

She cackled in unbelievable scorn. Pink flushed. They got up, moving toward the door.

"A dozen men are ready to swear that Sam's right fore shoe was bent," said Pink. "I'll swear out the warrant."

Mrs. Dean swung open the door for him and he waddled through.

"You go to the stock pens," she advised witheringly, "and like as not you'll find them yearlings in some pen there where they've been overlooked by you tenderfeet."

Pink faced about and tried to fix her with his glare.

"Madam," he demanded, "you tell me where that cow thief son o' yours is!"

"I don't know where he is!" she flung back, this time without hesitation. "You mis'able snooping wretch, you'll prove your words or I'll sue that railroad o' yours skyhigh for slander! Sam's done no wrong."

She slammed the door in his face. She leaned her arms and head against the panels and sobbed with the dry racking of a woman whose tears have all but dried up in the grinding mill of human life. But not for long. In a moment she was peering from the window, hardly seeing the angry waddling figure of the detective in scanning the dusty scape for her son.

Sam had come home in the wee small hours of the morning, slept the forenoon away and after dinner had gone to the village—all of which Nancy Dean would have told Pink had he not become so brusque there at first.

The sleuth had scarcely disappeared in the maze when Sam came cantering along. Mrs. Dean went out to meet him at the wire gate of the horse lot, her skirts blowing, her face bleak and merciless.

"Where are they, Sam?" she sang out without preliminary.

Sam jerked around startled. He was big, uncouth, strong backed, with a sandy complexion and stiff hair showing under his big Western hat. In contrast to the sombrero he wore shoes instead of the cow country boots. Sam wasn't nothin', as his neighbors said.

"Where are they?" she repeated grimly.

"What, Ma?"

She did not weaken her position by explanations. She drilled at him with wintery eyes and waited. Sam's face went white under his round, weathered cheek—a family trait in high moments—and he wavered at last, and turned to unsaddling his horse. Nancy Dean stooped and picked up the bay's right fore foot. One prong of the shoe was bent, nearly broken. She faced Sam again with one dry aching sob.

"Where are they?" It was like the beat of a fist.

Sam strode to the house, she on his heels. Inside she unlocked a drawer in an old chest and pulled out a quirt.

"I've tanned your hide with this before now," she said. "I'll do it again even if you are above votin' age."

"Ma——"

She lashed out before he could evade.

The pliable leather hooked around his head and left a streak on his right cheek.

"Ouch! Damn!" he cried. "Don't, Ma."

"Where are they?"

He tried to seize the whip with sprawling hands. She succeeded in lashing him twice more across the shoulders and neck with all her might. Then he caught her wrists. Hell was in his little slate eyes. He choked on his words. He could not strike or twist his mother—not quite. He walked her backward and sat her down on the bed. Then he fled.

"Sam," she shouted after him from the threshold, "they're getting out a warrant for a cattle thief."

Sam stopped. He came back with reluctant, dragging steps, looking shriveled and meek.

"Where are they?" she panted, unrelenting.

Sam looked at her, his great wrestler's shoulders against the door that he had closed behind him. He moistened his lips and swallowed.

"Hid," he whispered. "In the hills four miles south of here."

She studied him, then slowly returned the quirt, pushing the drawer shut with the side of her hip.

"What was you aiming to do with them?" she asked.

"Turn them to Tonky Jones—I wanted money."

"That cattle thief!"

Sam twirled his hat to a corner and sulked to his cot in the little lean-to.

"Come night," said his mother, "we'll go get them." And added, "If Sheriff Tweed hasn't got you in jail by then."

She told Sam about the detective. They

discussed the subject at length, Sam realizing more and more the sore predicament he had got himself into. It came to Nancy Dean with a growing conviction that for the sake of wiping



nothing less than getting the yearlings back to the stockyards—they must succeed in this to save Sam and keep the Dean name clear.

She could not keep away from the window, away from watching for the coming of an officer with a warrant. She arranged

ingeniously to hide Sam behind a curtain against the wall where clothing was hung out of the dust.

"I'll fool 'em!" she declared.

Sometimes as she watched at the window she sat with arms folded, a grim and sorrowing figure. Sometimes she sewed absently on a colored shirt for Sam, while her expression clouded and cleared, clouded and cleared, as she thought now of Sam as a toddler at her skirts and again as her grown son in trouble. She was afraid. Afraid of the sheriff, afraid because he was of a newer generation and a comparative newcomer in the cattle country. He did not know the Deans, their honorable record, as an old-time sheriff would know them. Probably didn't care. Just a newer generation. Nancy Dean shuddered once, and once she wiped away a starting tear. But never once did her stern old pioneer soul weaken in Sam's behalf.

She prepared supper and when they had eaten, it was lamp lighting time. But she did not light a lamp. Sam went out to remedy the bent shoe and saddle the horses while she washed the dishes. Then she donned old overalls and boots, relics along with the saddle that she would ride, of the days when she rode with her husband handling the herds that he eventually lost.

It was just when she was ready to start that the headlights of a car suddenly approached the house and stopped. As a rapping came on the front door she slipped out by the back door and stole around to where she could observe.

Two men were between the headlights and the house—Sheriff Tweed and Frank Long, his deputy.

Nancy Dean flitted across the horse lot through the thick dusk to hurry Sam at the shed. But the shed was empty. Sam and the horses were gone. From behind the rickety door she watched the movements at the house. A flashlight was darting about inside—the officers making a search. The light went out, and then before she knew it the men were almost to the shed.

Chance of escape cut off, Mrs. Dean jammed herself down in a corner of the rear stall, and in a moment the pocket light was flashing from the doorway, and Tweed spoke harshly.

"Horses gone."

"Just got away—cookstove still hot," complained Frank Long. "If we'd of got back to town an hour sooner we'd of clipped this warrant on Sam and saved us a lot of trouble, like as not."

"They've gone to handle those yearlings." Tweed was put out. "Scatter them to destroy the evidence against Sam. Or if the old woman's in on the deal—"

"She ain't. Few minutes we was in town a half dozen of the ol'-timers collared me, said Mis' Dean would be more likely to make Sam trot those yearlings back than to be in on the deal with him, poverty poor as she is."

"Yeah. The old-timers give me an ache, always trying to run things. Chief Pink told me they'd been feeding him that soup all day. He laughed at the idee. Said Old Lady Dean would do anything under God's sun to protect that Loafing Sam of hers. They'll hide those yearlings deeper in the hills, or scatter 'em to the four winds. Scatter them, we'll put in a week rounding them up, and we'd never get them all, seeing they're unbranded. They'd mix in with other herds."

A moment of silence, then Tweed spoke more incisively.

"Frank, I'm a mind to make a big try tonight, before the stuff can be moved far or scattered. Deputize some of our good friends with cars—the boys'd call it a lark—and go out and scrape the landscape with the headlights and spotlights—every road and back trail and hill and flat where cars will travel. We'd be almost certain to find that old woman and Sam transferring the bunch somewhere, or else just going to it. Catch Sam red-handed, or make him show us the stuff. Make a case out of him. Two three years inside would do that loafer good anyhow. Few hours' work tonight might save us a week of hard labor."

"You're right," the deputy agreed. "In case we should find them bringing the stuff back to town, what'll we do?"

"Pinch Sam, if it's in two hundred yards of the stockpens! He's got it coming, the bum. These old-time families call me an upstart and try to run things. We'll just show 'em they can't monkey with the buzz saw. Let's go!"

Tweed got away from the door and let it swing to. In six strides Nancy Dean was there peering and listening. When the two men got half way to their car she eased out into the night and went searching beyond the shed. What had become of Sam? Surely he was just out here waiting for her. And he was, a short way off.

"Tweed's turning out the town against us!" she panted as she stumbled up to him. "We've got to get the yearlings in before he finds us."

"Tweed—did he have a warrant?"

"A warrant—and contempt in his heart for us old-timers, and you."

"Let's ride!"

They galloped east across the unfenced alkali flat with the March wind against their backs, the woman astride her old warped saddle that she had not been in for ten years. When they reached the north-south road that came out from town Sam turned along it toward the town.

"They couldn't track me after I got the ca'ves to this hard road," he told his mother, riding close. "I'll show you how I took them."

He presently turned off to the left obliquely toward the stockyards. The ground was cut up by hundreds of cattle being shipped in the last two or three weeks and no particular herd could be traced anywhere within a quarter of a mile of the yards.

"I drifted them past the pens and across the track 'way in the night when ever'body was gone," Sam went on. "The stuff in the pens was bawling. Nobody could of told what I was doing."

"You didn't gather them up and drive them by yourself," said Mrs. Dean, cattle-wise.

"Had a hobo from the wreck. Give him two dollars. He thought the stuff was mine. After we got back from hiding them he went on his way. Slick idee," Sam continued with a touch of pride, "to cross them over the track and to the south hills. Tweed'll be more likely to think I took them to the north hills."

"Slick idee," replied Mrs. Dean crushingly, "ain't good sense when it's criminal."

"Reckon you're right, Ma."

On ahead at the stockyards they could hear cattle bawling, showing that not all had been shipped. No lights were to be seen.

"We better turn in and water the horses," said Sam. "They had no water since morning."

"Sam," she warned, "somebody might be there in the dark to see us."

"Well, horses got to drink, ain't they?"

They reined around the end of the pens moving cautiously to the circular meta-trough beside the creaking windmill. The night was as dark as a clear moonless night could be. Sam's horse finished drinking first and moved off. Mrs. Dean's had just lifted its head and was mouthing water when without warning a light flashed in her face.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Dean." It was the station agent. The light snapped off.



"You—looking for somebody?"

"Not exactly," she answered from a throat constricted with alarm, and she blurted out the first words that came, to give Sam time to get away. "They're kind of accusing my son of driving off some yearlings, and I told that detective feller this afternoon that like as not a lot o' tenderfeet had overlooked the stuff heah in the pens."

"Not a chance, Mrs. Dean. It looks like Sam, ma'am. Right sorry to hear it. They might make it purty hard for a—ahm, you know how it is, Mrs. Dean, about cattle stealing."

Why was this man prowling around under foot, she suddenly asked herself. Was somebody going to ship tonight and spoil her plans of bringing the stolen goods back?

"Shipping tonight?" she asked, at the same time making her horse step about to cover sounds Sam might make.

"No," the agent answered. "No mo' cars till tomorrow." And he added complainingly, "I came down here to shut off this windmill 'fore it strips its gears. Got no helper now." Then, "Mrs. Dean, where is Sam?"

As when the detective had first put the question, Nancy Dean hesitated perceptibly, then answered positively.

"I don't know."

She did not know, she assured herself—he might be forty feet away or a hundred yards.

She rode off toward the town until she was out of the agent's hearing, when she turned south and presently found Sam out on the flat. They kept on south to ascending ground and a wire fence, which they followed to the road. A gate let them through into a great ranch, and they headed south-



west on their journey.

"Four miles, nearly," said Sam.

The west wind was high and cold. It bit at their faces, pushed the breath down their throats. Ice would form this night. For the first time Sam showed compassion for his mother.

"You'll freeze, Ma," he said. "You better go home. I'll do this."

"No goin' home till the yearlings are back," she retorted stubbornly, though her heart warmed at Sam's interest.

She wore an old knitted hood, a sheep-skin jacket that her husband had left, and yarn mittens. But the glassy wind penetrated to her very marrow.

As they mounted the gently rising ground and rose higher than the town they watched back over their shoulders, and after a time they saw the lights that began to crawl over the country beyond the town toward the north hills. Once Nancy Dean brought up, and while the horses humped their rumps to the bitter gale she and Sam stared at the spectacle—seven or eight glinting headlights scattered over the country, hurrying, turning here and there, on little used back roads, up the sides of slopes. There was something threatening, implacable, about the widespread movement, and Nancy Dean turned to her son with a new question born of her fears.

"You sure them yearlings will be there—couldn't get away or nothing?"

"They're there," answered Sam in his positive way. "Nobody riding up in those rocks to find them."

"Did Honky Jones know they were there?"

"Yep, I told him."

"They'll have to be there," she said, "or that upstart of a sheriff will send you up."

They rode on. Mrs. Dean experienced a bit of pride that Sam had been shrewd enough to cross the railroad and come to the south hills. Otherwise they might now be cornered over there by the cars.

They had made three of the four miles when they were given a start by the snorts and noises of stirring animals, and they saw they had come upon a handful of horses sheltering in the lee of a rocky upthrust on the open slope. They stopped to get a few breaths out of the wind and view the moving lights against the opposite slope. Only three or four were visible, the others no doubt having penetrated the hills. Nancy Dean thrust out her mittened hand in an abrupt gesture.

"The town jumps at ye the first chance it gets," she said. "It's what comes of your idling and never working."

"I've toldja and toldja I'd go to work," Sam retorted hotly, "when I could find a job where theah's a chance o' pummotion."

"Them yearlings better be up there or yo' chances of pummotion will be mighty slim. Come on."

They struck out again. In a short time a high rimrock began to take black shape ahead. Sam kept straight on as if he meant to ride into it. The grade was stiffly uphill now.

"Ca'ves are right at the foot of the rim," Sam explained in snatches over the wind. "In a bowl dug out by the water that pours over from the mesa in the rainy season."

A shallow, rocky canyon began to close in on them, until they were riding single file. Then Sam stopped.

"I laid a rock wall across this neck to keep the yearlings in," he said as he got down.

Then he grunted queerly. Nancy Dean slid from her saddle.

"What, Sam?"

"They're gone!" Sam cried hoarsely.

"Gone?"

"The rocks all knocked down. Somebody's done it. Calves couldn't."

They led their mounts over the loose rocks and through the narrow gap into the bowl. There was no shifting of startled yearlings. They made their way to the back side. The place was empty. Sam struck a match, and Mrs. Dean saw that he was squatting at the edge of a pool.

"Little seep," Sam explained. "Skim of ice. Broke through at this edge where a calf stepped, and not frozen again. Hasn't had time. Calves haven't been gone long. See where they trailed water with their feet? Plumb fresh yet."

"That cattle thief's beat you to them." Her jaws snapped.

"Tonky wasn't to be here till midnight, like I told you." Sam struck another match and looked at his big tin watch. "Ten," he said.

"He's taking them to his strip," declared Mrs. Dean with conviction.

Tonky Jones had inherited from his father a ranch of twenty sections or so—a small area in this land of great ranches. It extended in a long narrow strip from the other side of this rimrock to the Mexico border. The senior Jones had so chosen it in the early days for a trap. When cattle drifted on to it he would drift them casually down to the Mexico line and sell them to unscrupulous buyers. It was more than suspected that Tonky was emulating the example that had proven fatal to his father. He had come twice from the grand jury unscathed, but the cowmen's hearts were hardening and Tonky's days were numbered.

"If he's double-crossed me—!" began Sam savagely and stopped. It was a hard

moment for him. - Prison seemed terribly close. He went on in a different, quieter tone. "I've been a fool, Mother. But don't you worry now. I'll get those yearlings back or know the reason why—back to the stockyards, too, where they ought to be."

Nancy Dean's old heart thumped with joy at this excellent coming out of her boy.

"If Tonky's doing this," Sam went on "he'll have to take them down to the road. He can't get them over the rim any other way. And he's just got started. We can overtake him."

They remounted and set out. At the mouth of the little canyon they turned off to the right parallel with the rimrock. But rocks and huge boulders that through the ages had rolled down from the rim and lay on the upper reaches of the slope drove them down hill some, just as the boulder undoubtedly had done the yearling herd. But as soon as they were past the boulder field they kept straight along the slope.

In a surprisingly short time they made out a moving black blotch ahead. They pressed forward steadily. Sharp little noises reached their ears—a rider slapping his leather chaps to urge the calves along. Pushing forward they made out two riders driving the herd of yearlings—dim figure against the dim sky and quite unrecognizable.

The Deans halted for a consultation. There was something sinister about those silent riders handling stolen cattle. Who were they? How might they be armed. And how determined were they? Sam seized his mother's saddle horn and pulled the horses together in low talking distance.

"I've got my old revolver," he said significantly.

"No shooting!" she warned. "We ain't killers."

"We could ride in on them, shooting and hollering. Thieves is purty easy scared off."

"Two can't make much noise to scare with," Nancy Dean said.

Sam pondered this. After a few seconds he burst out with inspiration.

"Say! The horses back by the rocks. Come on. We'll give them fellers with the ca'ves the scare o' their lives!"

He reined down the slope and she performed followed. They trotted, then galloped. Nancy Dean was an old hand in the saddle. She had helped her husband through entire roundups. She saw something now that she wanted to call to Sam's attention. She pushed ahead and soon caught up with him.

"See that?" she called.

"Yeah."

She meant the headlights that Sheriff Tweed had out combing the hills, only now at least six of them were on the main road coming toward town.

"Quittin'!" said Sam jubilantly.

But Nancy Dean doubted it.

They found the horses still sheltering in the lee of the rocks and headed them out diagonally up the slope, Sam slapping his thigh with his old hat to hustle them into a trot. There were six or seven of the animals. They were used to being rounded up and driven, the same as cow stock, and they kept pretty well bunched, with Sam and Mrs. Dean riding on the rear flanks.



The two kept watching the string of lights on the road. It required but a few minutes for the bright glares to enter town and be hidden behind the buildings.

The little bunch of horses, becoming limbered, broke into a gallop. This was what the Deans wished, but it appeared that the loose stuff was going to outdistance the ridden animals and get away.

Sam bellowed something and Nancy Dean saw what was meant—the parade of man hunting headlights and spotlights coming out on the south side of town and making for these south hills.

Sam began to whoop and slap his hat at the horses, to set them cantering again, and he yelled at his mother in wind-blown snatches.

"We gotta hurry—ride them thieves down—git them ca'ves—"

"—hurry—" went the echo of his mother.

Even at that moment the headlights were coming through the road gate into the ranch. This was evident because alternate cars were turning right and left to go across the pasture land.

The range horses were galloping again. Mother and son had to drive their mounts with the quirt to keep up. Human eyes could not make out a great deal, hardly more than the black bulk of the rimrock, but this was sufficient for their well developed sense of location. When she

judged they had climbed far enough Mrs. Dean bent in on the bunch's right flank and turned it straight along the slope at about where she thought the calves would have gone.

Four cars at long-spaced intervals were mounting up the hill-slope diagonally. First one then another swung in zigzag style, raking the thin dry grass for two or three hundred yards with their beams.

All at once it seemed hopeless that the Deans could accomplish their purpose, and the woman slacked her horse with the thought of calling Sam and seeking concealment while there was yet time. But Sam's voice came calling with the wild daring of youth.

"Shove 'em ahead, push 'em hard! Make them cattle thieves think we're a troop o' cavalry!"

Mrs. Dean urged her mount again. The range horses, no longer climbing, were willing to run, and she and Sam soon had them pounding along.

The unriden horses were now thundering along pell mell, heads high, hoofs occasionally cracking on loose rocks.

Then all at once the dark blotch of the calf bunch loomed ahead. It was galloping too. The riders with it were vaguely visible. Occupied with their own affairs they evidently had not discovered what was coming behind them.

Nancy Dean and Sam together loosed their warwhoops, a shrill ki-yi-ing, and Sam's pistol began to bark. The surprise was complete. One of the mysterious riders let out a yell of consternation, one fired belatedly twice, and both abandoned the calves and disappeared down hill. This maneuver turned the range horses down hill also, preventing them from running down the calves.

This allowed Sam and his mother to come in on the rear of the yearlings. Sam rode hard along one side and turned them up the slope. The climbing soon wore out their panicky speed, and they slowed down.

The bunch was spreading out however, and both Sam and Mrs. Dean had to overwork their jaded mounts to keep the calves together. At the same time, back over their shoulders they could see the zigzagging, oncoming automobiles.

They got the yearlings bunched again, still forcing them up hill, and Sam made a hasty scout back to see if there were any stragglers.

"We've got 'em all!" he bellowed triumphantly when he regained the herd.

They were now at the very foot of the rimrock, but there was no hiding place. On the contrary they were standing out on the slope for every eye to behold. The stock was white-faced Herefords, easy to see in a light.

"Hoo-ay, ca'ves!" shouted Sam in his driving urge. "Git along!" And to his mother, "We're caught if we stay here. 'Nother bowl up here toward the road. Got to make it."

They crowded the yearlings into galloping again, Mrs. Dean behind, Sam at one side. They could not have held the bunch together under such circumstances without the rimrock on one side.

The headlights and spotlights came nearer. All the cars were coming straight on now up hill and toward the Deans, as if their fiery eyes had caught a glimpse of the calves and the riders and meant to run them down.

"They see us!" shrilled Nancy Dean. "Hide, Sam, hide and I'll talk to 'em'!"

"No lights touching us yet," Sam denied. "We can make it maybe. Once to that hole—Hoo-ay, ca'ves!"

They 'rove their jaded horses at the rear-most yearling to rush them on. The cars were gaining rapidly, and bunching as if they were centering on their quarry like a pack of hounds.

Then the head calves began to disappear. Sam realized they were clambering down into the shallow pot against the wall. He sped around to the other side to hold them in.

The calves were no sooner in the bowl than it was plain that the depression was not deep enough to hide them adequately.

For the first time Nancy Dean and Sam stood hopeless. The cars were near. When they swerved a little more everything would be lost. The woman awaited the moment bleakly, though the heart within her was near to turning to water. And then an unexpected thing took place, that caused her to whisper an incredulous question into the night.

"What—what they doing?"

For the cars were speeding on past. No doubt of it. She watched breathlessly. They began to turn, there not two hundred yards away. She thought they were coming back. Then she realized that they were on the road, and that they were disappearing in the pass that led through the hills and around to the other side. And she understood—they were going to Tonky

Jones' strip, leaving a clear field for the Deans!

NANCY DEAN and Sam had just finished the dishes from a late breakfast when a car drove up in front of the little shanty-house and Detective Pink and a strange city-looking man alighted. Pink introduced the stranger as the railway's attorney.

"We found the yearlings in the stock-yards this morning, ma'am," smiled the roly-poly detective to Mrs. Dean when they were all seated.

"Right where I told you," snapped Nancy Dean, as unrelenting as ever. "You ain't got a speck of evidence on airth to defend yourself with in a slander suit."

"Yes'm," said Pink agreeably. "Reckon Santa Claus brought them back. We thought maybe debts would be settled nicely all the way around, ma'am, if we'd come over and offer Sam a good job."

"Job!" Sam and his mother exclaimed together.

"The station agent," Pink explained, with an insinuating glance at Sam, "needs a young buck with a hard head and a strong back for a helper."

Sam's slate colored eyes glittered at Pink.

"Any chance o' pummotion?" he demanded sharply.

"Chance of being 'pummoted' up to be the president of the road," Pink drawled, "if you can make the grade."

"Or maybe even clear up to be a railroad detecative," Sam sneered.

"He'll take the job," said Nancy Dean—and there was no doubt about it.

"Sure," agreed Sam meekly "and keep it, too."

He flung out of the house and struck off toward town.

The two visitors arose and moved to the door. Mrs. Dean was beaming with suppressed satisfaction over the happy outcome.

"You know," said Pink ruminatively, "I sort o' thought yesterday that maybe you were—uh, shielding Sam."

"Me lying about Sam!" protested Nancy Dean. "Why, I wouldn't tell a lie about him. Sam's my son. I wouldn't lie about my own son."





# THE WINNING TICKET

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

*Author of "The Squaw Man's Mother," "Rough Going," etc.*

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A STORY OF THE HEART THROBS AND ROMANCE FOLLOWING IN THE WAKE OF A TICKET FOR THAT GREATEST ANNUAL EVENT IN ALASKA—THE ICE BREAK-UP

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**W**HEN Carmack struck the gold that started the great stampede through Skagway, over the Chilkoot Pass, down the river to the Klondyke, Sam Winslow was working in a broker's office in Boston. He talked gold until the entire office force became restless and the boss lost his temper and fired Sam. Sam had worked for that boss ten years and had proven faithful. The boss had expected Sam to show up the next day in a meek and lowly mood and beg for his old job back. But Sam had sworn he wouldn't sit at his old desk again until he had dug a sock full of gold out of Alaskan or Yukon gravel. Like many others he believed it could be picked up in the streets and that the creek water was so thick with gold a man had to let it settle before he could take a drink.

Sam arrived in due time and helped a lot of others celebrate the first Fourth of July in Dawson; when it rained bullets from American gats and so frightened the thousands of dogs that some are running yet. That winter Sam came in with enough gold not only to fill his sock, but several tin cans as well. Boston was rather distant at that moment. Sam spent the winter enjoying the high pressure amusements and making a watch chain of nuggets. A picture

of Sam and his heap of gold, published in Boston, brought letters from all of Sam's old friends. It seemed that a wave of hard luck swept them shortly after his departure and all of them needed money, loans of course, "at the usual interest," to tide them over to a better day. Some offered good security; others' securities were indefinite. Sam, having a good time, with the world before him, shook his head.

"Poor devils," he muttered, "humped over books, watching the clock, breathing second hand air, scared of their jobs. I haven't forgotten those days. Instead of going back there and lording it over 'em with my money, I'll just give 'em a hand."

You'll see what the North had done to Sam. He had come from a crowded city where it was every man for himself with little thought of the other fellow. And a season where men depend a lot on each other had changed him. And that was the end of Sam, financially. He sent many thousands of dollars over the trail on Jake Kline's sled and he got back pieces of paper saying "I promise to pay—"

The gold in the tins was gone in the spring. Some of it had gone for pleasure, but most of it had gone Outside. That remaining in the sock went to a grubstake and Sam moved on.

The years passed swiftly and Sam was

forgotten by many, and the first to forget were those to whom Sam had loaned money. Some of the letters he sent Outside—and he did not send them until he was broke himself—pleaded for more time. Others were unanswered and some were returned unclaimed. The northern postmark was sufficient of itself to hint at the contents. One letter had been steamed open and resealed again. Sam smiled with a trace of bitterness at that—not because of the loss of money, but because people slipped down the social scale until they did such things.

Camps that were on a million tongues knew Sam. He struck the good camps and the bad, but he never again struck real pay. His limbs grew a bit stiff in time. This was because he had waded so many icy streams and permitted his clothes to dry from the heat of his labor. Heat that goes into the drying of icy clothing never returns to warm the blood. One season he could not prospect at all—the year he had rheumatism. Sam was in a native village when the influenza struck the world. He felt sorry for the poor devils of Indians and nursed them through, then when he caught it himself there was no one able to care for him. By this time Sam was used to that sort of thing. He crawled into his cabin and burned for days, but lived, emerging a shaking skeleton of a man. Of course he was in no shape that year to prospect, until too late to more than scratch the ground.

But he managed to find three square meals a day most of the time. Once he did chew his moccasins and he laughed as he did it because it reminded him of a story he had read. He had laughed when he read the story—in the comfortable snugness of his bunk. Then he had said, "Thinks like that never happen except in books." A lot of things had happened to Sam that would never be published in books, because they were beyond belief—an insult to a reader's intelligence.

Now he moved stiffly about his cabin, thinking not of past glories or disappointments, but of the immediate future. Having cooked a meal, washed the dishes and swept the cabin—most miners are very neat—he examined the contents of his sock. It was a well worn sock—worn from holding small pokes of gold and not from contact with his foot. A moose hide poke rolled out, along with an old pocket book containing slips of paper which read, "I promise to pay." The paper was yellow with age and had worn through at the folds

in many places. But the poke contained nearly two ounces of gold. He hefted it in his hands, expertly weighing it. "For twenty-five dollars I can get in the ice pool," he reflected, "and I might be lucky."

The ice pool was an annual event in various parts of the North—as much a part of the community life as the ice itself, the salmon, the gold and the winter trail.

When the ice went out that signaled the ending of winter, the opening of navigation. Then supplies came in, prospectors went forth to search bars and gulches for gold. The day the ice went out was greater than New Year's or Christmas to communities on ice-bound rivers. For a consideration a man could guess the day, hour and minute the ice would go and the man coming nearest the actual time won the pot. Often it amounted to thousands of dollars. This year it cost more to get into the big pool, but first prize was twenty thousand dollars. Of course Sam knew he would not win it, but he had always taken a chance—with purse and life. That was the second thing the North had done for him—taught him to take a chance. The first thing he had learned was lending a hand to another human being—not necessarily a friend.

"I've got grub enough," he mused, "and there's no reason why I shouldn't put twenty-five dollars into the pool. If I don't do what I've always done these many years it'll be because I'm afraid; that's a sure sign a man is slipping—when he's afraid. Yes, when the boys come around I'll put in my ounce and a half." They would be around in a day or two, for this was a sporting event and every man was entitled to a chance.

He fried some bacon and stirred up the pot of sourdough—this pot was never emptied, but added to from time to time, insuring a steady supply of batter. Hot tea seemed to warm up his joints, he seemed less stiff in his movements. Then the gambler within asserted itself. "Heck! I might win that twenty-thousand after all. No luck in twenty-five years, it's time I had a change." That was what he thought each year. Whenever he was fed and warm he voiced the thought—luck was due for a change. "Heck," he repeated, "I'm feeling lucky this spring. And if I win—"

What would he do if he won? Well there was a new generation about him. They lacked less of the spirit of the old generation when the hardships were more severe, money more plentiful than now. And that reminded him. He hadn't called

on old Howard Perry in several days. Howdy, as they called him, was about all in. Sam pulled on a parka and stepped outside. Spring was in the air, right enough. He sniffed it and as he followed the river down to Perry's cabin his mind estimated when the ice would go out. Several dates were settled only to be changed. At length, satisfied, he grinned. "This year I'm going to write the winning ticket!"

THE smoke was trailing lazily from Perry's cabin. Sam knocked and entered.

"Howdy, Howdy!" he said.

"Hello, Sam! I'm feeling all shot to pieces."

Perry looked pretty bad, but Sam wisely told the ailing sourdough he looked great.

"Blew the last of my dust for some medicine," the other went on, "dust I'd figured to put in the pool, too. You see, living here this long I've worked out a system—"

Perry always had a system. In the old days he devised systems of beating faro and other games. His systems never worked except in favor of the house. But Sam did not smile as he remembered this. Perry was too far along the trail to make sport of. "System, eh?" Sam queried.

"Yes! I've been here ten years now. I watch the willow buds, and that patch of snow on the side hill." He pointed to a rock three thousand feet above them and called it a side hill. That was what it was compared with the surrounding peaks. "I've got it down fine now. I can write the winning ticket."

"Sure you can," Sam agreed.

"But I haven't any dust," Perry continued, "not even enough to buy medicine. Didn't need medicine the last year or two, but now— Well, Sam, it eases the pain, it seems like. It don't do a fellow no good to live out of tin cans years on end. There's something about canned grub—"

Sam had been thinking he, too, could write the winning ticket if he played his lucky hunch, but now he forgot the ticket with a sigh. "Needing dust for medicine to ease the pain, eh?" he said.

"Yep!"

"Here's a couple of ounces if that'll help, Howdy," Sam offered.

"Now, Sam—" Perry began to protest but his words lacked conviction. "Sam, you haven't any too much dust yourself."

"Plenty enough to loan you a couple of ounces," Sam interrupted. He knew it was a gift, but preferred to call it a loan. He gave it all, to the last grain, his dust.

That was the way Sam did things. Then he whistled because he felt like whistling. Of course he was pretty stiff from rheumatism and all that, but he was better off than Howdy who was in pain always. Sam reasoned the only time he was in pain was when he moved. If he didn't move he wasn't in pain. Obviously he did not move more than necessary. So he limped back to his cabin. When the weather was warmer and the heat had loosened up his joints, he would work his way to a gulch he knew and pan a few ounces. Maybe he would take out one hundred dollars in two months—not even wages—but it would buy some flour, rice and tobacco. He would dry salmon, raise vegetables and kill a caribou or two for meat. He'd manage, but it was tough to miss the pool. First time he



had missed the pool since he came into the country, too. Still the dust he had saved, yes, denied himself for, was going for a noble purpose.

The following morning he visited the gulch, hoping maybe that the snow was not as deep as usual, or that perhaps a stream beneath had washed out a small quantity of dust—it had once happened. But no, the snow was twenty feet deep in that gulch. It would be midsummer before he could shovel gravel into the sluice box.

Dejectedly he returned home. A dog team and several men had made themselves at home. "Thought you were never coming, Sam?" one of the men shouted. "Where you been—prospecting?"

"A little!"

"Any pay?"

"Nope!"

"Well, Sam, you're going to get in on the pool this year, of course!" Sam had been expecting that query, he knew the purpose of their visit—to give some of the old-timers who couldn't travel much a chance to get in on the pool.

Sam shook his head. "Can't make it this year, boys!"

"Huh?"

"Poke's empty!"

"Hmmm." The other considered. "Tell you what I'll do. There's no stampede on, dogs are not worth much with spring and summer ahead. Give me your Sandy dog and I'll pay for two chances. How about it?"

Sell Sandy? Sell that old boy who had

starved with him. Well Sam guessed not.

"No!" he answered quickly.

"I'll loan you the money, Sam. Sandy'll be security enough."

Sam hesitated. He sure had a lucky hunch this time. Something told him May 2d at two o'clock A. M. the ice would go out. Twenty thousand dollars! On the other hand—

"No!" he said almost furiously, "I won't! Don't tempt me!" Then, lest he weaken, he ordered them away.

THE days dragged for Sam. This was the first year he had not written a ticket for the pool. He was done! The greatest sporting event in Alaska and he not a part of it. Of course, if he hadn't given two ounces to Howdy! Almost fiercely he drove that thought from his mind.

"The ice will go out two o'clock in the morning on May second!" he repeated. And this was April 28th, or would be in five hours for it was seven o'clock in the evening.

At eight o'clock a sourdough entered the cabin. "Just thought I'd drop in and pass the news along seeing as how you're not getting around much, Sam!" He related incidents both local and national in importance, then their conversation turned to the pool. "What time will the ice go out, Sam?"

"Two A. M., May second," Sam answered quickly.

"I don't think so. I wrote my ticket for the sixth. A lot of others done the same. One fellow, don't know who, wrote his time down as April twenty-eighth, four o'clock in the morning. That's the earliest. The next is April 30th. Two fellows on that date, and hundreds from then on. Greatest pool in years. Well, Sam, I must be musing—"

The door opened and a breed stood framed in the entrance. "Perry says come dam' quick!" he panted. "I get doctor!" Then he was gone, running swiftly.

"We'd better go, Jonas," Sam suggested to his visitor. "Howdy has been ailing for quite a spell now. Looks bad."

"Poor devil," Jonas reflected, "he's had a system for winning all his life and he never won. Wonder if he's a system for dying?"

"Hope so," Sam replied. "I sure hope so if it'll make it easier. He even had a system this year for figuring the time of the break-up. Claimed he could tell by the snow on the hillside, the buds on the wil-

lows and the like of that. Poor Howdy! He ate out of tin cans too long and it got him. Poor Howdy!"

Sam dressed for the trail and with Jonas stepped outside. Just before they descended to the frozen surface of the river, Sam glanced down stream. He could look for miles from this point. There was a bend at the spot on which he stood. Far in the distance a red light gleamed; a lantern supported on a tripod. From the tripod there ran a line ashore attached to a bell. When the break-up came, when the ice moved, then the bell rang and the time was recorded and hell broke loose. Bells rang, whistles shrieked and every dog broke into mournful howling. That was winter's release of her grip on an empire. But now it was quiet; deathly quiet. Abruptly, as if in warning, the ice cracked. The men started nervously, then laughed. Ice often cracked that way. This was too early for the break-up. Even the reckless sourdough who had written April 28th knew the twenty-seventh was too early.

They made their way up river to Perry's cabin and entered. Sam and Jonas exchanged quick glances. Long on the frontier each had seen men die in violence and peace; die in bed, die with their boots on and six-guns flashing.

As they entered, old Perry gasped, "Sam, I'm hitting the long trail, but I'm not afraid. Worked out a system, long ago. I'm following it. Write this down!"

Perry dictated and Sam wrote:

*"I, Howard Perry, in my right mind, give everything I possess to Sam Winslow in return for his looking out for me when he was too sick to look out for himself. Everything I leave is Sam's. I have no heirs."*

With an effort he signed the paper, and Jonas and Sam added their names at witnesses. "Not much," Perry muttered, "a good rifle, gold pan, sled and dog harness. Yes, and the ticket."

Sam started at this. He had given up his big chance in order that Perry might have dust for medicine and Perry had spent it on an ice pool ticket; denied him his chance to play the hunch. Yes, his one sure hunch, May 2d and two A. M. But a man can't quarrel with a dying man and besides Perry was speaking again.

"Sam!"

"Yes, Howdy!"

"Didn't find out until yesterday you gave me your last dust, for medicine. That's



like you Sam. That's why you're in Alaska instead of the warmth and sunshine where you belong." Perry peered at Sam with sunken eyes. "I didn't know when I wrote my ticket, Sam, or I'd sent the dust back. I did need it for medicine, but my system is sure this time, it's—"

He stopped. Strength suddenly left him, his words trailed off for the effort to tell all on his mind had cost him much. "Sam!" he whispered, "Turn on the light! Turn on the light!"

The light was on, burning as brightly as possible. Sam looked at Jonas. "I wish the doctor would hurry," he whispered, "I wish—"

"Turn the light a little higher, Sam," Perry whispered.

Sam turned up the wick until it smoked, but to the dying man the room was dark.

Outside the ice cracked again! Again! Then again! It was too early for the break-up just yet. May 2d Sam had guessed, and his hunch told him he was right. Someone had been foolish enough to guess April 30th, and then there was the reckless sourdough who had written April 28th on his ticket.

"Sam!"

"Yes, Howdy!"

"Mighty dark, Sam!" His breath was coming in gasps, though when he spoke, he managed to articulate the phrases in one breath.

"Kinda dark, Howdy!" Where was that infernal doctor? Of course the trail was long and he might have been on another case. Lots of flu, so they said.

"Ain't getting no brighter—Sam!"

"Not much," Sam admitted. Perry's eyes were wide open, too.

And then the dying man sighed. "It's lighter, now, Sam!"

"Yes, it's lighter, Howdy!" Sam saw that Perry had stopped breathing. The room was still, in death! The ice cracked in a series of reports. Was it moving? They listened. It sounded as if slab was crunching against slab, moving slightly. Then it was quiet.

Then, through the night came another sound, the blending of whistles, bells, howls of dogs, cheers of humans, pistol shots, until hushed by distance the sound seemed almost musical. "Crack! Crack! Crack!" This was clear enough. Old Joe Hook was

cutting loose with his thirty-thirty rifle a mile up the stream. The ice in front of Perry's cabin moved a few feet, then stopped, then moved again. The break-up had come! A sleeping monster had stirred as the cold blood of his being moved through his veins.

On and on the ice would go. Piling up, damming the flood until lowlands were flooded, then giving way with a roar, crashing, grinding, always restless until it



reached the sea and the streams were clear and man and his steamers brought goods for gold and pelts.

Sam opened the door and the musical note from the

camp two miles away came loud, strong, then soft, almost dying at times as a lull came. People were mad with joy.

"The break-up?"

The words came from Perry's lips, slowly, softly, yet clear enough. And they had thought him dead!

"Yes, the break-up!"

"What's the—time?"

"Quarter after one on the morning of—"

The man in the bunk lifted himself up to hear the final words, then fell back and died without hearing them.

"—of April twenty-eighth," Sam finished.

And the next morning they buried Perry on a little knoll above his cabin. Poor old Perry who always had a system, that never won. Then Sam Winslow examined his legacy. Rifle, well oiled and cared for; dog harness well greased; pots and pans, some grub and the ticket Perry had written. As Sam looked up he could see the snow on the side of the hill and the buds on the willows. The roar of the break-up was in his ears, the ice flowed by in ceaseless legions, like troops rushing toward the battlefield to fill a breach. He tore open the envelope and read the ticket old Howard Perry had devised from his system. It read:

"Four A. M., April 28th."





## THE CHEATER

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

*Author of "Sweet Harmony," etc.*

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ON THIS WILD AND STORMY NIGHT THE SHEEPHERDERS WERE TO SEE PROVED ONCE MORE THE ADAGE THAT A CHEATER HAS TO PLAY A LONE HAND IF HE'S CAUGHT

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AS BORTON opened the door of the sheep shearer's shack, a gust of rain-laden wind caught the door from his hand and flung it wide open. Borton stepped up on the low threshold and stood blinking against the light from the oil lamp which was suspended from the ceiling. Outside the night was bleak. Rain had been falling since before dusk, falling with a steady monotony except when the wind king puffed his cheeks and blew an occasional swift breath.

Borton's eyes quickly became accustomed to the light, and the eyes swept the room and its occupants. There were four of these, two small men, one of medium height, and one of six feet or more with an amazing breadth of shoulder. Borton's gaze hung upon this man for a fraction of a second longer than upon the other men. In that fraction of a second Borton saw that the man was eyeing him closely, sizing him up, trying to judge by his garb where he was from.

Borton would have smiled at that if he had not known that a smile would mean betrayal. His dress was what a man might have worn anywhere, a dark blue suit, high-heeled boots, Stetson, and black slicker. The big man, he knew, could gather nothing from that.

"Well, close the door, stranger," the man said. "Doors was made to keep the weather out, an' there is plenty weather tonight."

"It's not bad," Borton returned. "I've seen worse weather."

"Where?"

The big man spat out the word. There was a kind of challenge in it. He might as well have asked where Borton hailed from.

Borton did not answer. He advanced into the room and closed the door behind him. Taking off his hat, he shook the water from it and dropped it on a stool. He shrugged out of the slicker with a quick, easy movement and hung it on a peg in the wall. He stood revealed as a man of perhaps thirty. He was two or three inches shorter than the big man and would weigh thirty pounds less. A good deal of his bulk was in his chest and shoulders; he tapered down to a lean waist and slender legs.

The marks of sun and wind were on his face, except where his forehead had been protected. A clean, white band was there from above his eyebrows to his short, straight brown hair. His eyes were blue, very clear. The face was lean, too, but there was the color of good health in his cheeks. Good health Borton had abun-

dantly; he was merely trained down to a sharp fineness.

"Draw up to the fire," one of the small men invited.

Borton walked over to the battered stove and stood with his back to it, his hands behind him. He stood very straight, very still. His chin was lifted so that his eyes were on the top of the far wall. He believed he had come to journey's end, but he had to make sure. For three months he had been making a patient search. Minutes, hours, a night would make no difference.

Though he did not look at the big man, he was aware, subconsciously, that the man's eyes were on him. He knew that there was a look of suspicion in those eyes. They were small eyes, set back beneath jutting brows of coarse, sandy hair. Thin, straggling, sandy hair was on the man's head. The beginning of a beard of like quality and color was on his face.

For perhaps two minutes there was silence in the room, the while Borton kept his attitude and the big man stared at him. Then the big man moved on his stool. The legs of it made a slight sound on the rough floor. The man cleared his throat.

Immediately there was something in the air. Hostility, definite, with infinite possibilities, lay between Borton and the big man.

There was another sound, footfalls on the rough boards. Borton turned his head then, turned it slowly with an effect of vagueness in his manner. Two of the men had walked over beyond the big man and had grouped themselves behind him. The other man, who had invited Borton up to the fire, had stepped behind the stove so that it was between him and Borton. As Borton withdrew his gaze from the trio, his eyes encountered the eyes of this man, and a brief glance of understanding passed between them.

Borton's eyes went back to the three other men. The big man drew in his thick legs and hooked them about the legs of the stool. His mouth was indeed so clamped that his heavy lower lip was thrust out.

"Where was it you seen all this bad weather?" he demanded.

Borton produced papers and tobacco and rolled a cigarette.

"Why," he said, "I was in a cyclone in the Oklahoma panhandle one time."

"Oregon is a long ways from Oklahoma," the big man offered.

"Not as far as Schenectady," Borton said. "I've never been in Schenectady."

There was no hint of a smile on his lips, no glint of humor in his eyes.

"Wise cracker, huh?" the big man sneered. "You ridin' a hawse?"

"A buckin' bronc," said Borton. "Can't you see him tradin' ends right this minute?"

The man beyond the stove snickered. Above the big man's beard the strong flush of anger rose. But he held himself in.

There was a lull, like the lull in a storm. Borton took advantage of it. With his left hand—curious how he always used his left hand—he dug into the top pocket of his coat and produced a crumpled bunch of bills. He straightened them out and removed a one. Possibly he was clumsy, possibly not. In any event the three men beyond him could easily see that several of the bills had yellow backs. With the dollar bill in his hand he crumpled up the others and restored them to the pocket. The dollar bill he tossed on the bare table before him.

"I know I am welcome to anything you gents have got," he said, "but I am a fella that pays as he goes. How about a dollar's worth of food? I haven't had a bite since before noon."

"Traveled far, have you?" the big man asked.

"Some distance."

"Must be a good walker."

Borton now fixed him with a level glance. There was a steely quality in the blue eyes and just the touch of a hard smile on the firm lips.

"Fella," he said, "when I go afoot I will be poorer than I am now. My horse is up in a draw yonder, sheltered from the rain. He is a long horse and a strong horse. Me and him never tire."

The big man's eyes sought the floor. Borton thought he knew what he was thinking of. Borton was surer than ever that this was the man he sought. He believed that the big man's mind had begun to glow at sight of those yellow-backed bills and that it was still glowing. The yellow of the bills had struck a yellow light into his brain, the light of cupidity.

He looked up. He made a little moist clicking sound with his lips. He was trying hard to summon a pleasant look to his face, but his success was not great. The stamp of low passions was too strongly on it.

"Put up your dollar, fella," he said. "You are welcome to what food we can offer you. My name is Emerson. I am runnin' this sheep camp. These here men is helpin' me. Steve, git him some food."

The man opposite Borton moved from behind the stove and in fifteen minutes he had bacon and warmed potatoes, bread and coffee, on the table. Borton ate in silence. When he had finished, he pushed back and rolled another cigarette, again with his right hand pressed against his hip.

Emerson put his heavy arms above his head, stretched and yawned.

"A sheep camp on a rainy night," he complained. "Dull, gosh!"

He got slowly to his feet, passed Borton, and stood beyond him at the other side of the table. From his pocket he took two dice and cast them on the table. A five and a two came up.

"Son of a gun," he ejaculated. "Comes a seven and everybody listenin' to the rain."

Borton eyed the dice without a flicker of interest.

"Shoot you for your shirt, Steve," Emerson offered.

"Not me," Steve retorted. "Only shirt I got."

Emerson looked down at Borton. There was flame in Emerson's eyes now.

"Roll 'em, stranger?" he asked. "I'll fade you for a nickel or ten dollars."

"You hinted," said Borton, "that I was a good walker. I'm not. Those dice might take my horse away from me."

"You hintin'—?"

"Fella," Borton broke in coldly, "I never hint. Those are your dice. I never saw them before."

Again there was a snicker from the little man and again that flush of fury beneath Emerson's eyes. But he held himself in check. He wanted to smooth out that crumpled roll in the stranger's pocket, smooth out those bills caressingly with his heavy, blunt fingers.

"How about a little game of stud?" he insinuated. "Just you and me. These boys is temp'rarily short."

"You cleaned them, did you?"

"Not me! Ain't had a play since I got here."

"Oh, you haven't been here long. Haven't been here for one pay day yet, eh?"

He had lifted his head and now his eyes bored into Emerson's. Emerson paled. His hand went up along his stomach, inside his coat, to his chest. Borton's right hand was on his knee, below the table. Emerson's eyes wavered. His hand came from beneath his coat.

"How about a little stud?" he repeated. "I can match your roll."

For answer Borton drew the money from

his pocket again. He smoothed out the bills and put them at his elbow as he squared himself before the table.

"Hundred and sixty dollars there," he said.

Emerson dug into an inside pocket and produced a bill fold. From this he extracted a dozen bills. He counted them.

"One fifty's all I got," he said. "Drag down ten and I'll play you table stakes."

Borton withdrew a ten. Emerson pulled out a drawer in the table and took from it a greasy pack of cards. Borton glanced at them and gathered up his money.

"Matter?" Emerson frowned.

"I don't doubt that has been a good deck of cards in its day," Borton said, "but it's day is long gone by. If there ain't a new deck of cards in this shack, all bets is off."

"Why, gosh—"

"I got a new deck," Steve said. "I'll get it."

He went to a bunk at the far end of the room and fumbled out an unopened deck of cards. He handed it to Borton. Borton looked at it and found the seals unbroken. He tossed it to Emerson. Emerson broke it open.

"Wanna run the joker wild?" he asked.

"You'll find a joker, an advertising card, and a card givin' instructions on how to play auction bridge in that deck," Borton said. "Let's call all three of them jokers and let 'em run as wild as a locoed steer."

Emerson seemed to be taken a little aback. He turned the deck face up and spread the cards along the table with the palm of his hand.

"Three of 'em is runnin' wild," he murmured. "Seven aces in the deck for instance."

"Seven aces—for instance," Borton agreed.

"Me deal?"

"Shoot, but let me cut 'em."

While Emerson dealt Borton rolled another cigarette. He kept his eyes on the paper. He did not look at Emerson. Emerson seemed to be a clumsy dealer. He riffled the cards slowly. For his second card he showed an ace against Borton's king. Borton breathed and Emerson bet five dollars.

"I always play 'em when I got 'em," he said.

"It's a good system," Borton said, as he



pushed a five dollar bill to the center of the table.

Borton got a second king for his fourth card, showing a pair of kings against Emerson's lone ace.

"Good for ten more," Borton said.

Emerson raised him ten and Borton stayed. The last cards did not improve either hand.

Borton hesitated or appeared to do so. His eyes were on those two kings. He seemed absorbed in the contemplation of them. In fact he was waiting; he was listening. He wanted to see whether Emerson would tell him it was his bet. Emerson didn't.

"You're as good a gambler as I thought you were," Borton said to himself. "Got patience, haven't you? Tip nothing off."

He hesitated a moment longer. Then he suddenly lifted his face and eyed Emerson. Again there was that steely look in his eyes.

"S'pose you bet that pair of aces you got," he said.

Emerson could relax now. He could jest. The game was in his own hands, unless Borton had a buried king or a card to make an added pair.

"Mebbe you think I ain't got a little joker lyin' on its stummick," he jeered.

"I'm waitin' for you," Borton retorted. "Mebbe I got somethin' in the hole myself."

"I'll feel you out for ten," said Emerson.

"You might as well make thirty as ten," Borton said, and he covered Emerson's bet and shoved a twenty in on top of it.

No change of expression came to Emerson's face. He flipped over his hole card and disclosed a joker. Borton gathered up his four cards, put them on top of his hole card and reached for the deck.

"Haw," said Steve, "he run a blazer on you."

"There's a lot more blazers where that un come from, Steve," Emerson declared.

"Mebbe," said Steve.

Borton looked up at the little man, blandly.

"Steve," he said, "I'm a mite to the good. S'pose you sit in. I'll stake you to forty bones."

"Me, I will," said Steve, and drew up a stool.

"Stakin' a man queers the game," Emerson grumbled. "Puts the kibosh on it. Man starts with a shoe string and comes out with boots to stock a store."

"I've seen that happen," Borton agreed cheerfully as he dealt the cards.

There was little play on his deal and not

much more on Steve's. Emerson's deal came again. Both Steve and Borton drew their stools up so close to the table that their stomachs were pressed against the edge. They leaned a little forward. Their eyes were fixed on the cards in Emerson's hands. They watched him closely, very closely. He gave no sign that he was aware of their scrutiny, except that that hot flush came up under his eyes again.

He lost twenty dollars to Steve on his own deal. On Borton's he lost twenty more. On Steve's deal he stayed out, though he had a small pair showing against no visible pair in front of either of the other men. Once more the two men fixed their eyes on the cards in his hands.

"Whatcha lookin' at so close?" he snarled.

"Watchin' a good man deal," Borton smiled.

When the deal came around to him again, Emerson had only thirty dollars in front of him. He had lost on his own deal and again on Borton's when Borton turned up a joker to match a pair of fives.

A sullen look had come into Emerson's eyes, but as he felt the cards in his hands he essayed a smile.

"Got to pull somethin' on my own deal," he said.

He shuffled clumsily. The cards fluttered in his hands. The entire middle of the deck hopped out, some cards falling on the table, some on the floor.

He cursed mildly, and stooped and gathered the cards from the floor, keeping his eyes above the edge of the table so that he could watch the two other men. When he found them both busy rolling cigarettes, he dropped his head. When he came up, he had half a dozen cards in his hand. Both Borton and Steve had been slow with their cigarettes. Their eyes were occupied with them. Emerson found that he was at last not watched. His face was impassive as he dealt the first two cards around. He had an ace showing and Borton had a king and Steve a queen. When three cards were lying face up before each man, Emerson still had his lone ace and Borton a pair of kings and Steve a pair of queens. Borton bet twenty dollars and Steve stayed. Emerson raised for all he had.

Borton's eyes went to the deck. The first two cards had slipped from the top of it, so that the back of the third card—Emerson's card—showed. Borton put out his hand as if he were going to consider his hole card again. The hand barely touched the card. It shot from that card

to the deck, snatched up the deck, and drew it to him.



Emerson thrust himself back from the table. His hand went inside his coat. Borton did not rise. He had seized the deck with his left hand. Now he shook his right hand and it came above the table. There was a small gun in it.

"Don't try it, Macklin," he said icily. "You can't get it out. This is a small gun. A man has to have a small gun to carry it in his sleeve, but it will pump you full of lead before you can get that gun out of your shoulder holster. Hoist your hands, Macklin, so Steve can get your gun."

Macklin lifted his hands. There was nothing else he could do. His fingers only were inside his coat. They were several inches from his gun.

For an instant he seemed more concerned about Steve's touching him—little Steve, who had worked for him and whom he therefore despised—than he seemed concerned about Borton's having held him up.

"Runt," he said hoarsely, "if you lay a finger on me, I will kill you."

"You kill me?" said little Steve. "Why, fella, if you give me any of your lip, I will blow you apart. I got a forty-five in my bag, an' it shoots as true as any gun you ever see. I kin handle that gun, too. I could tear you wide or I could crease that thick scull of yours, whichever took my fancy. You make one move an' see what I will do to you."

The big man stared. Steve had come here two days after he himself had come. Steve had been the meekest guy. Why, he had cooked for Emerson and had washed his share of the dishes.

So Steve took Emerson's gun and made sure he had no other weapon of any kind. He stood back and Borton put his own gun into his pocket.

"Have a seat, Macklin," he said.

"Emerson's my name," the man declared.

"I'm givin' you the name o' Macklin. Suits me." Borton glanced at the three other men beyond the table. "You fellas armed?"

"On'y me and Emerson had guns," Steve said. "I made sure of that last night."

"Who are you?" Emerson demanded.

"I'm the cook," Steve grinned. "If you want somethin' out of my wagon, come and

get it. Otherwise talk to Mr. Borton."

"Mister—" Emerson began.

"Shut up," said Borton. He took up the deck of cards. "Macklin," he went on, "there are three card tricks you know, all of them clumsy. You mark the aces with your finger nails, lightly, so the marks will show just a little. You can deal cards from the bottom and from the deck. You specialize in aces when there ain't no joker. That was why I suggested we play with three jokers. I wanted you to have a chance to get acquainted with them. Look here!"

He put in the center of the table the third card in the deck, the card which would have gone to Macklin on the last deal.

"There's the mark of your nail on that card. Let's have a look at the aces and the other jokers. All marked, you see. You shoved those two cards off the top of the deck to make sure you had a joker comin' to you on that last deal. You were going to put the cleaner on me and my friend Steve."

"Your friend Steve? How come—?"

"I never met Steve before tonight," Borton interrupted, "but I had a letter from him. It was a man's letter. It was signed Stephen Brown. Good, plain name that."

"Well, get down to cases," the man snarled. "What's this all about? I deny I marked them cards or that I can deal from the bottom or the middle. Even if I did do it, it ain't no penitentiary offense."

"No penitentiary offense," Barton agreed. "The pen would be too good for you. Now, a rope—"

Instead of the red flush a sallow look came beneath the man's eyes.

"You talk a lot," he said.

Borton turned about to Steve.

"Steve," he said, "I expect you got as much curiosity as the next healthy man. That circular you got from the sheriff of my county didn't tell much. The murder this fella Macklin is wanted for was committed in my town. Macklin—"

"You accuse me of murder?" Macklin ground out.

"Lemme have one more word from you, fella, an' see what happens," Borton said coldly. He turned again to Steve.

"This fella thinks he is a gambler. He has been gettin' by for a long time with his little tricks. Shabby little tricks, ain't they, Steve? He come into my town, my shippin' point, and got into a game with some of my boys, young fellas, no gamblers, kinda green about cards. Why, Steve, his work was so raw that one of them boys got wise

to him and accused him of dealin' from the bottom. Macklin called him a liar. The boy reached for him, big as Macklin was, and Macklin just pushed back from the table, pulled his gun, and let the boy have it in the chest. He kept the other boys back till he made the door. Then he was gone in the night.

"The boy was dead when they got word to me and before I reached him, and the other boys had only a fair description of this fella. I flooded the country with circulars, some of them at last reachin' this neck o' the woods. You did a good piece of work, Steve, in locatin' this fella and suspectin' him so prompt, considerin' what you had to go on. You got a thousand bucks comin' to you. You will get a check for it as soon as I get back home. Soon as I got your letter I come right on here. I brought a roll with me. I thought we had the right man soon as I laid eyes on him, but I wanted to make sure. I knew as soon as he saw a roll of bills, his gamblin' fever would hit him hard. This man is Macklin, Steve. He gambles just the way the boys said Macklin gambled. They will identify him. He is wanted for murder and I will see that he gets back to Oklahoma. Yes, come to me, Macklin. I been watchin' you."

Macklin had launched himself at Borton across the table, trying to grapple with him. Borton came to his feet as he spoke and his right fist crashed against Macklin's jaw. Macklin started to sprawl on the table. Before he went down Borton's left fist came up and caught him on the under side of the jaw. He sprawled then and lay still.

"Be ready for him when he wakes up, Steve," Borton said.

Steve went to his bag and came back with a folded paper. Emerson lay still for ten minutes or more. Then he opened his eyes, lifted his head, and pushed himself back to his stool. He looked at Borton vacantly for a space, and then fury burned in his eyes.

"You're overplayin' your hand, fella," he said. "You ain't got no law back of you. You can't take me out of this State."

"Read it to him, Steve," said Borton quietly.

Steve read. He read a warrant for the arrest of Macklin on a charge of murder.

"I didn't need the warrant," Borton said. "Gettin' it was foresight on Steve's part. Member how willin' he was to go to town the other day when you run out of tobacco? Good little errand boy, good little cook

and dishwasher, this fella Steve. Yeah, good man all around. Good little deputy sheriff, in point of fact."

"Deputy sheriff?" Macklin gasped. "That guy—timid—"

"Yeah," said Borton. "Soon as he got one of those circulars he began ridin' this neck of the woods on the off chance he would find you. It wasn't the thousand dollars he was after neither. Steve has got a reputation for gettin' his man if his man is anywhere around. He even got himself a job here to be near you till I could come, in answer to his summons. I wired him to have a new deck of cards on hand. He got the wire when he was in



town after your tobacco. You helped us a lot, Macklin. I knew I'd need a new deck that your playful little marks would show on."

He took up the cards and put them into his pocket.

"They will probably be an exhibit in your case, Macklin," he went on. "Well, where's your horse? We will be ridin'."

Macklin got slowly to his feet.

"Kin I speak to these two boys for a minute?" he asked.

"Make it snappy."

Macklin edged over to the two men.

"I got seven-eight hundred dollars in my bag," Macklin whispered. "We are three to two. I'll pretend I'm goin' with them peaceful. You two hop 'em from behind. The minute you make a move I will hop the big guy. All I got will be yours."

"Nothin' doin'."

"S-sh. Not so loud. Seven-eight hundred. I ain't done nothin' to you fellas. I ain't took nothin' from you."

"Because we didn't have nothin' to take," the man retorted, still in that clear voice.

Macklin turned slowly to Benton and Steve. His eyes were bleak.

"Eight hundrd dollars to lemme ride, boys," he whined. "Just one hour's start."

"I'm still seein' that youngster as he lay on the floor with your bullet in him," Borton said. "Come on, Macklin."

A shudder ran through the cheater's big frame as he started toward the door. His head was on his chest. He walked unsteadily.



# The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

THERE are very few of us who, one time or another, have not felt that clutch at our throats, that feeling of hopeless despair that comes when we fear for the safety of someone who is dear to us and who is missing at an expected moment. We may reassure ourselves in a thousand ways that things are all right, that such and such an innocuous happening may account for the disappearance, yet our minds go flying voluntarily to tales of accidents and holdups and sudden death in countless ways. Perhaps some of us have even been sobered by the chill police news that "the missing persons bureau does not act until 24 hours of non-appearance have elapsed," but there are none of us but have felt a surge of relief at sound of a long expected step on the stair or voice calling on the telephone.

Because of all this, every normal person gets a thrill from reading a clever mystery story in which the plot centers around the disappearance of someone. Now, J. S. Fletcher is perhaps today the leading writer of clever mystery stories and our new serial starting in the next issue of *SHORT STORIES* is by him and called "The Missing Chancellor."

Fascinating as are stories of mysterious disappearances this one presents an unusual complication—the man who disappeared was of dual personality; had been leading a double life. In which of his characters was he to be sought? Who knew of his double existence and was he in danger on that account? The situation offers endless possibilities for development—and Mr. Fletcher has made the most of them.

And speaking of "The Missing Chancellor," there are also many fascinating things to be said of the author. J. S. Fletcher is an Englishman, and perhaps the most interesting item about him in connection with the United States is the fact that during a very troublesome season of President Wilson's career a newspaper correspondent undertook to ascertain the title of the mystery story the president was reading. It

turned out to be "The Middle Temple Murder" by J. S. Fletcher. Whereupon Fletcher acquired a great many new readers, who were amazed at how prolific this author had been.

Mr. Fletcher has been a journalist for forty years, is a member of the Royal Historical Society, an archaeologist and antiquarian, author of such books as "A Short Life of Cardinal Newman," a longer life of Lord Roberts, and volumes of poems, but it is as an author of mystery stories that he is best known to the fiction loving public. We learn that "The Missing Chancellor" is No. 94 in the list of his novels and stories written for diversion. Well, we can promise you'll find it diverting enough.

## TUTTLE AGAIN!

W. C. TUTTLE'S complete novel in this number is in itself the best answer we can make to the letter printed below.

Editor, *SHORT STORIES*,  
Dear Sir:

"I am about to drop you a few lines concerning a certain writer whose stories you publish in *SHORT STORIES*—one W. C. Tuttle.

"I picked up an issue of *SHORT STORIES* at a small bookshop and as was always my habit, thumbed the pages over to see if any particular story should strike my fancy, but at last I turned back to the first story, namely 'The Web of Deception,' written by none other than W. C. Tuttle. 'The Web of Deception' is the best story I have ever read in the past or will read in the future, of the Western story species. The characters in it were somewhat humorous, but as to the story itself I never before read a more spectacular and mysterious a story of Western life that I can remember. It surely keeps you guessing as to just what is going to happen next; you are so enthralled you cannot stop reading, you must go on and finish it. The ending is such a surprise that you almost feel like reading it



over again to define the climax aright in your mind.

"I congratulate the writer of 'The Web of Deception' and hope to read a good many more of his stories.

"Sincerely yours,  
PRIVATE W. S. STREETER  
Co. B., 51st Signal Bn.  
Fort Monmouth, N. J."

Incidentally, in his complete novel in this number Tuttle describes some of the activities of Cultus Collins tracking outlaws near the Mexican border, and the following letter describes some of Mr. Tuttle's own adventures in that vicinity:

"Went on a little hunting trip into Mexico last week. We had one devil of a time getting our guns across the border at Tiajuana. We had permits from the Mexican secretary of state, but it seemed that a new order had gone into effect, cancelling all these. Well, we were up against it. But it seems that there is always a way; so we ditched the guns on the American side, went to Tiajuana (Old Town) and woke up the Mayor. Actually got him out of bed and told him what we were up against.

"So he wrote out a lengthy document, plastering it officially, and when we showed it to the Mexican Custom gang they were so darned servile that they even forgot to stamp our automobile passes. We sure went through a-whoopin'. And just outside of Ensenada the custom gang objected to our unstamped passes, until they read that letter, and then it didn't matter whether we had any passes or not.

"But the hunting was the bunk. We rode ancient Mexican broncs over the rim of the world, and shot quail, listened to a chorus of possibly a million coyotes, and fell back down the mountain in the dark. No ducks nor geese. It is a beautiful country—for Mexicans. Of course their law will not allow an American to own land within 65 miles of the border, nor within 53 miles of the coast—and that just about queers it, as far as Americanos are concerned.

"W. C. TUTTLE,  
Hollywood, Calif."

#### CUSTER'S PISTOL

WE ARE indebted to a reader, Mr. Robert Corathers, of Weston, W. Va. who sends us an item which is timely in view of the fact that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Gen. George A. Custer at the battle of the

Little Big Horn is still fresh in the public mind. The item concerns the possession of General Custer's pistol and reads as follows:

*Eureka, Calif.* "An old cap and ball pistol with the name 'G. A. Custer' stamped on its barrel, is a treasured possession of Emil Santsche, an old Swiss gunsmith of this city.

"He says the gun was carried by General Custer at the battle of Little Big Horn.

"It was traded to him for a sixteen gauge shot gun at Butte City, Mont., during the winter of 1881, by an Indian, who said he and his brother were scouts with General Custer's troops and had directed Custer to the Indian village in the valley of the Little Big Horn prior to the fatal day of June 25, 1876."

#### THE ICE SWEEPSTAKES

JUST about the time that Frank Richardson Pierce sent in his story "The Winning Ticket" in this number of *SHORT STORIES*, newspaper stories began to appear of the ice break-up in Alaska. One dispatch from Nenana, Alaska read:

"Preparations are under way to observe the annual departure of the ice in Tanana River here and the greatest sweepstakes in the history of the famous classic is expected. It will exceed last year's \$16,000.

"Tickets have been printed and numbered and requests are coming in from many points outside of Alaska. As formerly, each guess on the ice break up will cost \$1. Each person can buy as many guesses as he has dollars.

"A red, white and blue stake has been fastened in the solid ice in midstream of the Tanana. Across the river is a taut wire so stretched that it lacks but one inch of touching the upright stake. At the end of the wire at the City Hall is an electrical device with an alarm system. The moment the ice starts to go out the stake will bulge the tight wire and start the alarm. The person or persons guessing the exact time of the break up wins all or a share of the stakes.

"Last year the ice went out May 11, but this spring, due to a mild winter, the break up is expected a week or ten days sooner, but old-timers are guessing around the May date, which has been the winner for several years. Last spring the money was divided into six shares, that number of persons picking the correct time."

It is a unique form of betting which does make for thrills in both fact and fiction.

#### NEXT TIME

BESIDES the first of the J. S. Fletcher serial in the next number there are many outstanding features. The complete novel is a Thomson Burtis story of the dare-devil flyers of the Border Patrol—

DON'T FORGET THE COUPON! CUT IT OUT TODAY AND LET US KNOW YOUR  
OPINION OF THE STORIES IN THIS NUMBER

### READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:

Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
5 \_\_\_\_\_

I do not like:

\_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

"Dumpy Does His Stuff." There will be a Bertrand W. Sinclair story of the Bear Paw range country with the significant title, "With Their Boots On," and a story by an author whose vivid South Sea islands tales always bring commendation—"The Killers of the Islands" by Frederick Moore. Also there will be a Charles Tenney Jackson story of the Argo film shooters—wherein Scamp Franey becomes involved in grim drama instead of the New Orleans carnival hilarity he expected.

#### CLEM YORE WRITES US

**M**ANY SHORT STORIES readers who have witnessed with enthusiasm the rodeos staged not only in the United States but also abroad by that inveterate bringer of the West to the East, Tex Austin, will be interested in reading the following letter which reached us the other day from Clem Yore:

Santa Fé, New Mexico

"Just arrived from Vegas where we put Tex Austin asleep after a joust with ether to set his whole upper works.

"Too much hole for a whole cowboy. His bronc stepped both front feet in a badger hole and spilled Tex terrific. And the saddle-seat bored into the old hand's side right wicked. So far, he's jake with two fractures of a collar bone but a lotta

bruises around the back that time must decipher. Damn this falling with a pony. 'Tis better to slide off when he wants you to or makes you—the earth is ever casual—but when you fall with him, there's always something hurt.

"As soon as I can get down to production you shall peep at a yarn. So far I've done nothing but push the landscape aside and talk."

"CLEM YORE"

**W**E WANT to print this letter in this issue of SHORT STORIES because we can't help feeling that the Robert E. Pinkerton novelette, "His Own Logs" is just about as complete an answer to it as we could make.

Editor, SHORT STORIES,

Dear Sir:

"I have been reading SHORT STORIES for the past three years and I am very fond of them, but my choice is timber stories like 'Hell and High Water' and 'Cuff 'Er Riverhog.'

"I notice that some of the readers don't like serials, but I like one once in a while, especially when it is just as good as 'Bar 20 Rides Again'

"Hoping that you keep on going as you have been, I am

"PETER DOISON,  
Amesbury, Mass."

**W**hen you've taken a plunge  
in the cool, bracing surf—and battered  
and wet with spray, you climb out  
on the welcoming sand  
—have a Camel!



Camels contain the very choicest tobaccos grown in all the world. Camels are blended by the world's most expert blenders. In the making of this one brand we concentrate the tobacco knowledge and skill of the largest organization of tobacco experts in the world. No other cigarette made is like Camels. They are the overwhelming choice of experienced smokers.



Our highest wish, if you do not yet know and enjoy Camel quality, is that you may try them. We invite you to compare Camels with any other cigarette made at any price.

R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.  
Winston-Salem, N. C.



*Take along a case!*

THE lure of the open road on a lazy summer afternoon. A shady nook, a tempting lunch on the grass—and then, sparkling bottles of the family's favorite carbonated beverage . . . it's the touch that makes the day perfect, banishes memory of heat, dust and quickened temper . . . it's good for all the family. Perfect carbonation, possible only in bottles, aids digestion, refreshes the body and clears the brain.

*This advertisement sponsored by American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages*

**YOUR FAVORITE CARBONATED DRINK**  
*is best BOTTLED*



LEFT

"I AM A SAILOR in the United States Navy. All my life I have been bothered with a bad complexion and stomach trouble. I never found anything to clear my skin. While home on thirty days leave, I got in the habit of eating Fleischmann's Yeast. Now my skin is clear of pimples. I feel like a new man. I perform my duties with much more 'pep.' I owe it all to Fleischmann's Yeast." STANLEY H. STRAINGE, U.S.N., Hampton Roads, Va.

## The supreme gift— Perfect Health

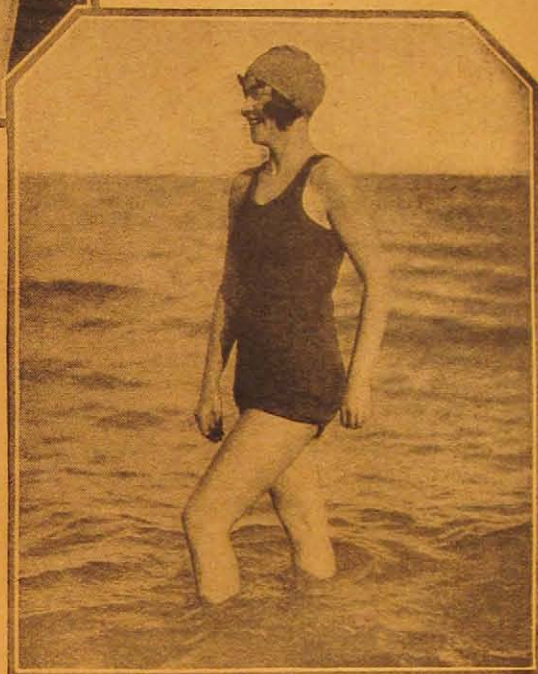
*Freed from constipation, skin and stomach troubles—vitality regained—  
—with one food*

**N**OT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices, water or milk—or just plain, nibbled from the cake. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. z-31, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



"I AM A DANCER. Three years ago I had so much indigestion and constipation that I got terribly run down. I was very skinny and was too tired and nervous to take my lessons. A lady recommended yeast. The constipation was relieved and I had much less trouble with gas. In about four months I began my lessons again. Now I am strong in every way."

IDABELLE BARLOW, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.



**THIS FAMOUS FOOD** tones up the entire system—  
aids digestion—clears the skin—banishes constipation.

ASK . . ANY . . RADIO . . ENGINEER



Burgess Batteries operate the  
fastest sets of  
radio-equipped mail planes

## An every night adventure of Burgess Radio Batteries

ONE of the reasons why you should always buy Burgess Radio Batteries is that the batteries used by air-mail pilots—battleships—explorers—and the majority of recognized radio engineers—are evolved in the Burgess Laboratories and manufactured in the Burgess factory.

These batteries are identical with the batteries sold by your dealer and thousands of other good dealers everywhere.

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**BURGESS RADIO BATTERIES**



## Bring vacation back with you —take pictures

Out in the open—peace of the hills and the water—fun-filled days of play and rest—labor and strife forgotten—save your joy for next winter! Share it with others in pictures.

Have your vacation for keeps with an Ansco Ready-Set. This inexpensive camera requires no setting for light, speed or distance. It is Ready-Set for pictures. Just open—aim—shoot—as easy as that. There's a model waiting to make records of *your* good times!

*Ansco Speedex Film  
—in the red box with  
the yellow band—fits  
all roll film cameras  
and is made for in-  
experienced picture  
takers to get just the  
pictures they want.*



**ANSCO**  
CAMERAS & SPEEDEX FILM

*Pioneer Camera Makers of America*  
ANSKO—Binghamton, N. Y.

# FAMOUS FEET

..how they're kept  
free from corns..



GENE SARAZEN'S *Golfing Feet*



"Thirty-six holes of golf a day certainly doesn't drive corns away," writes Gene Sarazen.

"But Blue-jay does. A sensitive toe gets a lot of friction in a day's going on the links. But when a corn appears, I put on a Blue-jay."

In every walk of life, where feet are essential to fame and fortune, Blue-jay is the preferred method for vanquishing corns. A cool and velvety pad fits over the corn and relieves the pressure and pain at once. Then the corn goes—unless unusually stubborn. But even the most obstinate corn seldom needs more than a second plaster . . . . . At all drug stores.

## Blue-jay

THE SAFE AND GENTLE WAY TO END A CORN

## *Ample argument*

THE OLD CHINESE proverb says, "One picture is worth ten thousand words." By much the same reasoning... and it is sound reasoning, too... the best argument for Fatima is Fatima. Taste one... for just one taste is worth a bookful of description

F A T I M A



*"What a whale of a difference  
just a few cents make"*





# *Kodak as you go*

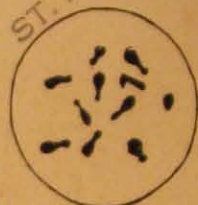
*Autographic Kodaks, \$5 up*

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*

# DANDRUFF?



FROM  
ST. MARIE CIGAR & NEWS CO.  
Cigars, Newspapers, Magazines, etc.  
NEWSPAPERS FROM OVER 90 CITIES  
96 East 5th St.  
ST. PAUL, MINN.



Bottle Bacilli, the cause of Dandruff. Illustration reproduced from Hazen's "Diseases of the Skin." C. V. Mosby, Publisher.

Dandruff is a disease difficult to cure, but easy to check. Read below about the best way to combat it.

## It's a danger signal!

**D**ANDRUFF is a danger signal. If you have it you should do something about it.

Perhaps you never knew it before, but dandruff is a germ disease. It spreads by infection from personal contact, as with the common use of combs and brushes. Children, for instance, are never troubled with dandruff until actually infected by some contact.

Dandruff is a disease difficult to cure but easy to check. It has a tendency to reappear, unless properly treated and often brings with it the possible loss of hair or actual baldness.

The ideal treatment to combat dandruff conditions is the systematic use of Listerine, the safe antiseptic.

We have received hundreds of unsolicited letters from Listerine users, who are most enthusiastic in their

claims for what Listerine will do in this way. If you are troubled with dandruff you owe it to yourself to try it.

Using Listerine for dandruff is not complicated. You simply douse it on your scalp, full strength, and massage thoroughly. The effect is antiseptic, cleansing and healing. And you will be amazed to see how this treatment, followed systematically, combats dandruff.

Moreover, Listerine will not discolor the hair nor will it stain fabrics.

Not only men but women have become devoted users of Listerine for this purpose—women, particularly, since bobbed hair has been in vogue and has made them more conscious of dandruff if it happened to be present.

Try Listerine this way. Used systematically, the results are almost miraculous!—Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, U. S. A.

# LISTERINE

—and dandruff simply do not get along together