

EVERY WEEK

NOV. 23, 1922

Western Story Magazine

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EVERY WEEK

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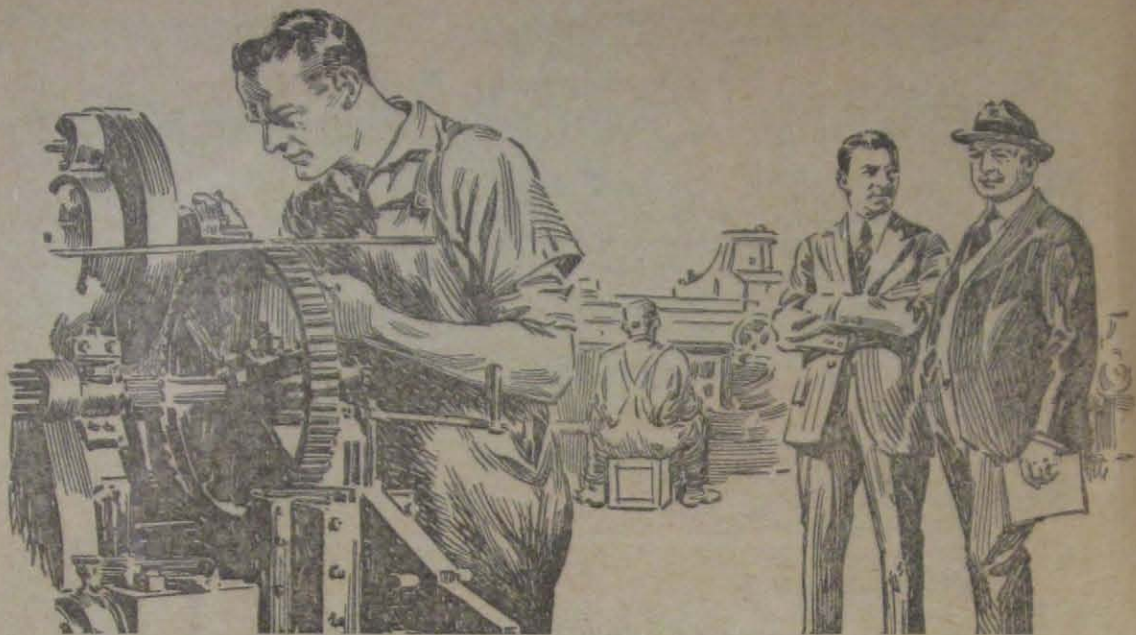
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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. XXX

NOVEMBER 25, 1922

No. 4

Crescent Moon

BY

Robert
Adger
Brown



CHAPTER I.

ON UNPEOPLED PLAINS.

CAPTAIN NORA, riding slowly homeward across the unshaded plain, her horse following the thin, sunken line of a long-disused Indian trail, watched with something of a curious intentness the distant approach of another horseman. She had been on a visit to the nearest neighbor to the Crescent Moon, and had chosen this more direct cut across the plain chiefly that she might escape meeting the very man whom the lessening distance between them now made recognizable to her sharp eyes.

She had little kindly feeling for the owner of the Snake Bar Ranch, and the

recent hour she had spent with his young wife had added nothing to the sentiment. Now that an encounter with Joel Rand was inevitable, however, the girl braced herself physically in her saddle, as her spirit stiffened to a brittle indignation within her.

They drew nearer to each other, and she saw the man bring his scowling glance to bear upon her, under shaggy eyebrows that knit, the short smile lifting his lips over teeth that gleamed vividly in the tanned parchment of his face. It was a keen glance in which the girl fancied she could read suspicion as well as the animosity that all who knew Joel Rand expected from him. When he spoke, however, drawing his horse to a standstill beside hers, it was with the semblance at least of conventional politeness.

"I have just come from the Crescent Moon, Captain Nora. I did not find you there, but I saw your foreman. And you?"

"Yes," said Nora Vane, rightly interpreting his abbreviated question, "I have just come from Snake River. I am going to ask you a question—perhaps you will think it an impertinent one. Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. Rand, that your wife needs companionship sorely?"

For a moment Joel Rand frowned in silence, tapping the handle of the light quirt he carried against the broad pommel of his Mexican saddle. Apparently the abruptness of the inquiry disconcerted him.

"Hasn't Mrs. Rand the companionship of her husband?" he then asked, his eyes meeting the girl's fearless gaze. "Has Mrs. Rand been complaining to you, Captain Nora?"

"She has not, and you know it without asking. But I know the loneliness of this life, Mr. Rand, though I am used to it and love it. She is a stranger to it. Perhaps you do not realize how shut in she is, and how often you are away!"

"Did she expect to find the plains peopled with cities?" the man asked, and again he smiled mirthlessly, and his face grew darker still, when the smile had slipped from his features. "You do not ask me what it was that took me to the Crescent Moon," he added, and his purpose in closing the other avenue of their conversation was evident.

"You told me that you had talked with Blaisdell. Isn't that quite sufficient?"

"He will tell you, then," said Rand, dourly determined, "that I find my fences cut again this morning, Captain Nora."

"And you persist in suspecting some one of the Crescent Moon outfit? Why, Mr. Rand?"

"Not because I in any way blame

its mistress," he returned, "though she seems ready enough to blame me."

"Of course," said the girl, flushing slightly at his rebuke, "I will speak with 'Whitey' Blaisdell, but I have every confidence in our men, and you might well look nearer home for the source of these outrages."

"Confidence in all of them?" he asked, ignoring her concluding suggestion, and she caught a covert meaning in his tones. "You have taken on many new men at times, Captain Nora. What of them? There goes one of them now."

He nodded his head in the direction of a horseman galloping easily across the plain to their left, apparently oblivious of their proximity, his youthful body pliant to the swinging motion of his horse, his attention seemingly fixed on the dim mass in the distance that was one of the Crescent Moon's herds. "What do you know of him, for instance?" asked Joel Rand.

The girl's glance followed the insinuating nod. "I don't know anything that is not good," she replied. Then her eyes lifted with a flash of defiance. "Do you?"

Joel Rand shrugged his lean shoulders. "I have met him riding over the Snake Bar ranges," he said. "I make no accusations, but I have seen him there."

"And must everything seen on the Snake Bar range be a snake, Mr. Rand?"

Though she knew the question was a daring one, even as she framed it, Nora Vane was not prepared for its effect upon her companion. His face whitened with a quiver of speechless emotion, his eyes blazed into hers with a light that puzzled her even in that moment of surprise, and something in his twisted lips struck dismay to her heart. Then, after a moment, Rand laughed, an odd, baffling laugh.

"I've often thought of changing the

name of my ranch," he said. "Indeed, I tried to once, years ago, but the name of that infernal river stuck to it. Did you ever notice, Captain Nora, how hard it is to change an ugly name? I remember, 'way back in New England, a very pious maiden lady bought a place that had always been known as Gallows Hill. She called it Honey-suckle Lodge, but no one else ever did, and her obituary read: 'Died on Gallows Hill.'"

Watching him as he spoke, Nora Vane did not smile, nor did he seem to expect that she would; words and manner alike had been so patently but a cloak for a state of mind he would disguise. She tightened the reins in her fingers.

"I will look into your complaints," she said stiffly, "in justice to my men."

"And I into yours," he returned. "Perhaps I should have thanked you, Captain Nora, for your interest in my wife's happiness. It leaves me your debtor."

In that instant Nora Vane knew that she had done Isabella Rand a dubious service. She regarded the man before her with level, unflinching eyes into which a contempt she did not seek to hide, gradually stole and lingered. But she made him no answer in words, and, with a slight inclination of her head in parting, she put her horse into motion. Rand, too, rode slowly away.

CHAPTER II.

LAMBLIKE IN BEARING.

IT was some years that the big Crescent Moon Ranch had been without a master, in the sense of having a man as its owner; but its young mistress had proved herself such a capable manager that the place was regarded as the model ranch of the neighborhood. The "boys" called her Captain Nora, and not one of them, from Whitey Blaisdell, the big, blond foreman, down

to the latest of the newcomers on the range, who would not have thought it a privilege to risk life and limb in her service—unless, indeed, it was the newest of them all, 'Tub' McKee.

If for no other reason than his attitude to Captain Nora, the owner of the Snake Bar Ranch would have been unpopular with the men of the Crescent Moon; but Joel Rand was, moreover, a man who would have picked quarrels with the sky had he been marooned in mid-air. And he had come, some twenty-five years before, to live on the Snake River range as the chum and close companion of the man whose tragic and mysterious death a few years later had never tended to increase the amount of faith and respect in which Rand, his successor, was held. His wife had died shortly afterward, and Rand had recently married again—a woman much younger than himself. Her unhappy plight in the shadow-haunted house, in which she found herself more prisoner than mistress, had become the subject of gossip and commiseration throughout the sparsely settled community.

Thus, when Nora Vane reached the corrals, where Blaisdell and some of his men were breaking in bronchos, and called the foreman to her, she knew that what she had to say to him would not prove of especial relish.

"I met Joel Rand just now," she told him. "He is complaining again, Whitey. I believe he saw you."

The foreman nodded in grim recollection of the interview. "I told him, beggin' yo' pardon, ma'am, where he could go."

"It was scarcely necessary—or expedient, Whitey," said the girl dryly. "It made him angry, and I made him angrier. He tells me he has seen 'Dandy' Darrow riding about his range. You had better caution him and all the others to give it a wide berth. What a vicious little brute that is!"

She indicated the mustang which had already pitched Larry Sloane three times, and now, with head between its fore legs, back arched, and hind legs drawn under its body, was humped together for another spring, if what it had already done should prove insufficient. Almost at Nora's feet the young cow-puncher fell sprawling.

"Now, ain't that plumb aggravatin'?" he asked of no one in especial. "An' him so lamblike, too, in his bearin's—now he's done it ag'in! But if them jumps of his'n ain't loosened my hair an' teeth, nothin' this side of kingdom come's goin' tuh!"

He limped over to where the passive pony was eying him slantwise, with an air curiously devoid of the elation he might well have felt. "We'll fight it out, ole cayuse, if every tooth in my head hits a separate star," the cowboy confided to him; and the proceedings began again.

Captain Nora turned to look at some of the others. "They're working in all right, Whitey?" she asked; "the new boys?"

"Fine, ma'am! That Dandy Darrow is a dandy, sho. They all are, Cap'n Nora, ma'am. The Crescent Moon keeps up her reputation for 'er fine outfit, an' whoever says anything tuh the contrary says what ain't so."

"Good! But I'm sorry Joel Rand has taken any notions about them into his head. I want to keep out of hot water with him, if I can."

"Oh, him!" cried Whitey Blaisdell, in supreme disgust. "That old buzzard 'd be 'spicious of every shadow, ma'am, a: well he might be, I'm thinkin'. An' I'm sho sorry fur that po' wife of his'n!"

Captain Nora cast her glance once more around the animated scene the corral presented, moving quickly, but unafraid, as one of the new ponies came galloping close to her. She paused with her gloved hand upon the long bar of

the gate. "Why do you say that?" she asked gravely.

"Wouldn't you be sorry, ma'am, fur any one tuh go tuh live in that house where so many's gone through strange unhappiness tuh an untimely end?"

Nora Vane looked her foreman steadily in the eyes. "Be careful, Whitey," she admonished, though even as she spoke the remembrance of Joel Rand's strange emotion when she had talked with him that morning, and the recollection of his wife's apathetic despair, vividly persisted. "It is safer not to lend ear—much better not to lend tongue—to rumor." The foreman's reply was unintelligible.

She went on up the road toward her house, walking with the elastic step of perfect health, her motions unimpeded by the short riding skirt she wore to the tops of her boots; and the capable air of one accustomed to command in no wise lessened the girlish simplicity of her manner.

In the low, heavily beamed hall she found her old nurse and companion awaiting her. "How long you've been, child!" the woman cried. "Do you never get tired of riding about over the country? And here was Joel Rand, fuming and fretting at not finding you, and asking me more questions in a minute than I could answer in an hour—as though I kept tab on all the cowboys on the range, and could tell him who was this one, and who was that! Why did he expect me to know Dandy Darrow? How did he know anything about him himself? How——"

Nora held up a protesting hand. "Wait a minute, Mary; you go so fast," she said. "You say Mr. Rand asked you about Dandy Darrow? What did he ask you?"

"What didn't he ask me, Miss Nora! Who was he? Why was he? Where did he come from? Was his name really Dandy? Was it Darrow? Everything but whether I was the

man's mother, so I asked him that when I could get in a word."

Nora was watching her companion with a detached expression. "I wonder what his game is!" she said at last. "He seems to have taken a dislike to Dandy Darrow. It's rather odd, too. I hope you didn't antagonize him."

Mary Philbin laughed shortly. "He was born antagonized," she said. "Now get your habit off. Dinner's been waiting half an hour."

CHAPTER III.

A LOADED OFFER.

WHEN Joel Rand saw Captain Nora ride away, he followed for a time the trail that had brought her to their meeting place; but when increasing distance and the gentle rolling of the plain had rendered the girl an indistinguishable spot on the horizon, he turned aside, and, pushing his horse across the prairie, made for the grazing herd. Some distance ahead he could see the moving figures of the young cowboy and his horse.

At all times a morose man, Rand's mood at the present moment was one of dangerous vindictiveness. His frank resentment of Nora Vane's somewhat audacious reproof of him in behalf of his wife, but thinly expressed his real anger. He had always been intolerant of what he considered the prying interest of his neighbors, and, with the passing of time, this intolerance had grown to be almost a mania. Though his range was an extensive one, and his herds multiplied, it was seldom that he added to the number of workers on the ranch, and it was well known that the sight of a new face about him was a thing he brooked with ill-concealed suspicion and distrust.

But he had never before, as on this day, carried suspicion and resentment beyond the bounds of the Snake River lands, nor had his opposition to the

intrusion of strangers ever led him to do what he was doing now. For, upon reaching the herd of the Crescent Moon, he rode rapidly along its ranks until he overtook the cow-puncher.

Dandy Darrow had turned in his saddle at the sound of the racking hoofs of Rand's big roan and pulled his pony in. A change came over the face of the young cowboy, as he waited the approach of the older man. The gray eyes beneath the level brows hardened and darkened, the firm jaws set until clefts came in the tanned cheeks, the nostrils of the well-shaped nose dilated tensely. For a moment the whole, slight, graceful figure stiffened, even the booted legs stretching straight in the heavy stirrups; then, just before Joel Rand rode up, it relaxed, and Dandy Darrow threw the right leg easily over the pommel of his saddle, his body settling into a forward poise of expectant ease, his features almost nonchalant in their repose, arms crossed on his bended knee.

Rand looked at him sharply, scowlingly, for all the effort he made to assume some show of courtesy. "Your name is Darrow, I believe—Dandy Darrow they call you. You are new on the Crescent Moon."

"Not so new but that I've grown into a name," responded the cow-puncher.

Rand caught his accent of refinement. "Trying cow-punching for a diversion?" he asked insinuatingly. The question was ignored. "You will tire of it," continued Rand. "Then, I suppose, you will be going back."

The upward glance of Darrow's eyes was almost expressionless. "Tire of what? Going back where?" he inquired lazily. "I've punched cows on slews of ranches for many years. I've never struck any I like better than Captain Nora's. 'Tisn't so wild as some I've known, but I like it. Folks are more law-abiding here, on the whole."

"That's as it may be," rejoined Rand,

sturdy in tone and look, for he resented the very freedom of speech he himself had invited. "Some one's been doing lawless deeds on my place. I've been to the Crescent Moon to speak about it."

The information did not seem to interest the young cow-puncher particularly. He was wondering how he might best end the apparently meaningless interview. "May be your place is the exception that proves the rule," he said indifferently, and there came a silence.

It was Rand who spoke next. "If you should ever want to make a change in your employer, Darrow," he said, "let me know. I do not often take on a new man, but I might consider you. You interest me."

"I believe I should not care to work on the Snake Bar."

The words, coldly repressed, brought Rand erect in his saddle. He looked at the speaker with sharp scrutiny. "What objection have you to working on my ranch?" he demanded.

Darrow threw his leg back into the stirrup, straightening his lithe body. He, too, looked closely at Rand as he answered: "I don't like the name of the place. I don't like rivers that harbor snakes!"

Rand's parchment face whitened. His mouth opened and shut on unspoken words. Darrow already was turning his pony. "At least," called Rand, managing to speak with some cordiality, "my offer stands. For a cowboy, Darrow, you have unusual whims."

He wheeled his horse, his eyes, however, lingering on the younger man. Then he rode off, in an augmented sullenness which was nowise abated when he reached his house and found his wife awaiting him in a listless patience.

At sight of her Rand's mood fused into one of threatening anger. "What do you mean," he demanded, as he threw his hat aside, "by your whimper-

ing complaints of my treatment of you? If I ever hear of it again I'll give you something to complain about."

Isabella Rand, a woman whose eyes looked as though they saw a perpetual regret, picked up the hat which he had dropped upon the floor. "I have made no complaints," she said, in a dulled voice.

"You *are* a complaint! Who could look at you and not read your discontent? I don't know why, when I was free, I ever hung another wife about my neck! And such another!"

The woman gave a gasp. "I'd willingly be where that first one is," she cried, stirred to an unwonted fearlessness, "even if I had to go the way she went."

For a moment Rand stood immovable, his eyes set in a wordless passion upon the accusing eyes of his wife. His face twitched in a short spasm that made the woman, watching it, shrink back, her hand upon her heart. Then he crossed the space between them with a single motion.

"Say a thing like that again," he panted, "and you go the way she went! So you have been listening to the venomous gabble about me, have you?" He seized her by the arm, pushed her toward the open door, and heard her go sobbing across the hall to her room.

CHAPTER IV.

EARMARKS AND OTHERS.

IT was shortly after his coming to the Crescent Moon that Leeds Darrow gave proof that he was not to be treated with an undue levity, and it was at the expense of Tub McKee that he had proved it. At the mess supper, discussion was running rife over the question of wearing a "boiled" collar without a cravat, when Tub, looking up from his flapjacks, saw Darrow, who was late that night, entering the door.

"Ask The Dandy. He oughter

know," he said. "He's great on know-in' how tuh make himself look pretty," and proceeded to fill his mouth with cakes and sirup.

It was not the words alone, but the insolent manner of their utterance, and the general laughter that greeted them that whipped the quick color into Leeds Darrow's cheeks and lit his eyes with fire. It did not take him an instant to act.

"Ask The Dandy's pardon, you bull calf!" he commanded, and with fork in mid-air the big cow-puncher found himself whirled from his chair and sent sprawling upon the mess-room floor. "And when you do it, drop the 'the,'" added Darrow, amid the respectful silence of the others, as he proceeded to his place at the table.

They remembered the incident, and no one had ever called him The Dandy since. Without the article he took the use of the word as an alliterative compliment. It had been meant as one when bestowed by Whitey Blaisdell. Undoubtedly, however, the name stuck because of the personal attributes of the man. No matter what he was doing, he always kept clean. He wore his clothes with a certain debonair grace which some fine quality of masculinity saved from any hint of foppery—for a fop can remain a fop in booted blue-jeans and flannel shirt. His saddle and equipment could have been picked out of a hundred, they were kept so trim. His horse, which had come to him as vicious and wiry a mustang as the Crescent Moon had ever known, had undoubtedly acquired some of the tastes of its master.

Yet it was not alone in little things that his companions felt Darrow's distinction. None among them could equal him in the deftness and precision of throwing a lariat. None of them could carry a bunch of steers along with the vim and dash that were his. Only Whitey Blaisdell himself could

equal him in daring horsemanship. And though they all admired Captain Nora and felt at their deferential ease with her, they yielded Leeds Darrow the palm in a certain further touch of camaraderie of which they fell short. It was significant that they held this not the least of his achievements, and, perhaps, envied it the most sincerely.

It was something of this sentiment that actuated several of the boys one morning, soon after the day upon which Dandy Darrow had been favored by Joel Rand with his notice. They were in the corner of the corral, doctoring some calves, and Captain Nora had come upon them, looking for the foreman.

"Yo' play, Dandy," murmured Larry Sloane. "Cap'n Nora's callin' yuh."

Dandy turned over his lariat to one of the boys and went up to the girl, touching his hat as he neared her. "Have you seen Whitey?" she asked.

"Whitey's gone out over the range," he told her. "Will I do?"

Nora Vane seemed to hesitate. "It was about you that I wished to speak to him," she said at length. "Are you satisfied here, Dandy? Do you like your work and the outfit?"

"First class, Cap'n Nora. Why?"

"I wanted to know, because it seems you are in demand elsewhere, should you care to leave the Crescent Moon."

She held the quick look he gave her, noting the sudden sternness that came into his face. "With Joel Rand," he supplemented.

It was her turn to be surprised now.

"How did you know that?"

"Because he has been after me." His voice held a curious repression.

Her face clouded. "I am surprised that he should do that," she declared. "Try to take my men!" She lifted her eyes with quick change of expression. "You would not care to go, Dandy? He writes me that he would make you his foreman."

"I would starve before I'd touch a cent of his money," the young fellow cried, and something savage rang in his words. "No, Cap'n Nora, with your permission I'll stay here."

"I am glad," she answered simply. "You shall not lose by it."

She had already gone some little distance from him when she paused. "What does it mean?" she asked, "this desire of Joel Rand's to have you in his employ? He almost never takes on a new man."

"That I cannot explain to you," said the cowboy, shaking his head.

She recalled afterward the momentary hesitation in his manner and the ambiguity of his words. At the moment, however, she said no more.

Others than Joel Rand had watched with interest the problem that had suddenly confronted Nora when her father, dying suddenly, left her the sole inheritor of the big Crescent Moon Ranch. Men had drawn long faces and predicted solemnly the ruin of the fine ranch and the business Richard Vane had built up, but they had long since admitted that they had had to eat their own words. The girl proved herself a good manager, with a talent for collecting about her capable workers, and the Crescent Moon not only held its own among the big runs in the county, but had forged ahead to the leading position. Its young mistress was proud of it. She loved her life and shared it pretty evenly with her men, never losing their respect of her dignity.

There were brushes with Joel Rand, her immediate neighbor, on more than one occasion. The man's subtle enmity was always to be felt. He had been a jealous rival of her father; for the daughter, an element of baffled contempt was added, which of late had grown into an acuter distrust because of Nora Vane's attempted friendship for his second wife.

Yet, thinking of him now as she

went back to her house, Nora could not escape a conviction that his latest stroke of interference had been prompted not so much by the desire to annoy her, as to avail himself of her young assistant's services, and though the matter did little else at the moment than serve to focus her attention and interest on Dandy Darrow, it did that to some effect. Then, too, for the first time, it occurred to her that Darrow's manner had been strangely vehement, if repressed; that his words had been curiously forcible, if also reticent. And she wondered, not without keen interest, why.

Her life had been free from any sort of sentimental entanglement. Her father had been her closest companion; she had had few other friends of either sex. She had always been surrounded by men; but no man had ever yet quickened the beating of her heart. Yet she had recognized from the first a different attitude toward Darrow. Insensibly they had drifted into a quality of friendliness she felt for none of the others—a friendliness tinged by a sympathy of tastes and interests. It was not that he had in any way presumed upon the fact of his superior attainment to ingratiate himself with her; it was inevitable that his more cultured personality should appeal to her. When he entered her house it was natural to him to be at ease there. He knew her books. He knew her pictures. The music she liked was the music he knew and liked.

Yet now she felt assured that his refusal to go to Joel Rand had been prompted by some sterner reason than mere disinclination to leave a berth which had certain extrinsic qualities which were pleasant for him. Thoughts of his almost passionate rejection of Rand's offer persisted in her mind, linking themselves inexplicably with Rand's own redoubled effort to acquire his services, with Rand's implied accu-

sations on the day she had talked with him. And she found that the thoughts troubled her and would not be banished.

CHAPTER V.

GETTING STALE.

WHEN Rand received Nora Vane's curt rejection of his proposition to part with Darrow, he was undoubtedly far more angry than the matter in itself justified. He tore the note into many pieces, turned upon its bearer with a brusque dismissal, and strode across the lot to his foreman, calling him away from the men at work with him before the barn door.

"Stalpas," he asked, "what have you heard of this young popinjay at the Crescent Moon they call Dandy Darrow? Anything to his credit?"

"Sour" Stalpas had all his life made it a point to hear as little to any one's credit as he could. "I ain't heard nothin' good, 'ceptin' he seems sort er in with the young lady."

"Ah!" exclaimed Rand, looking under his beetling brows at his man. "Very curious, then, Stalpas, that he should be writing me asking for your place."

"Askin' fur my place!" echoed the foreman, with some incredulity. "The sneakin' buzzard of a coyote!"

Rand did not smile, though his eyes lit, and a contemptuous tremor twisted his lips. "Just so," he assented. "I've seen him sneaking about this range more than once. Don't sleep on your job, Stalpas."

"I ain't slep' on my job in the twenty-five years I've worked for yuh, Joel Rand, an' yuh know it, though I ain't sayin' it mightn't ha' been better if I had onct er twice!"

"That may be," responded Rand gruffly. "The thing is not to do it now. Sometimes we grow stale with usage, Stalpas."

He moved a step away haltingly,

knowing his man. He was not surprised to hear Stalpas following him. "Joel Rand—sir!"

"Yes," said Rand, turning his head, but concealing his satisfaction.

"What is it yuh wish me tuh do?"

"You know I hate prowlers about the Snake River," the other muttered vibrantly in low tones. "Get rid of 'em! Don't ask me how. Do it. And keep your tongue close to the roof of your mouth or—it may fall back in it."

This time he walked away in earnest, and the foreman let him go, watching him, nevertheless, with a narrowed and menacing eye. "An' yuh is capable of tryin' tuh make it do jes' that," he growled to himself, "but afore yuh does, Joel Rand——"

He did not finish the pleasantry, but his big hands clenched until the knuckles gleamed, and his face was more lowering than ever, as he rejoined his men. It had not, however, occurred to his intelligence to doubt the veracity of the statement Rand had made him.

In the meantime Rand himself was slowly making his way toward his house. His mood was ugly. His ready suspicion was lashing the refusal of his offer into a personal affront, both on the part of Nora Vane and her cow-puncher. Why should a man, young and a comparative stranger in the community, refuse so advantageous a proposition, unless he wished to proclaim his enmity? And what reason had this Leeds Darrow—there could be no reason, unless——

Rand clenched his jaws with futile wrath. The very uncertainty of his alarm doubled the sinister poison in his veins. Had he played so desperately all his life only to find that he had sowed dragon's teeth that would devour him? Fear of this had been the haunting shadow on his path for years.

Almost surreptitiously, it might have seemed, he enterèd his house and

slipped into the room he kept for his own use. Years ago, when he had shared that house with his friend Kenneth Desmond, the room had been Desmond's den and office; and though Rand had allowed none of the then familiar objects to remain in it, to-day it was startlingly reminiscent to him of the man who had built the low, rambling house of the Snake River range after the disruption of his life in New York. The purchase and stocking of the ranch and the erection of the house had left Desmond in somewhat straightened circumstances, and Joel Rand, making him a visit just at that time, and attracted by the place and its life, had induced his friend to let him become his financial backer and permanent companion.

It had proved an unfortunate arrangement for Kenneth Desmond. The man who as a friend had been agreeable enough, as a running mate developed traits well-nigh unendurable. The outward seeming of their friendship was not entirely upset, but those who knew told strange stories of the twisted state of affairs on the Snake Bar Ranch, of the harassed look of Kenneth Desmond, the ever-growing dominance of Joel Rand.

It was the year of the great freshet on the Snake River that Kenneth Desmond lost his life. There were men still working on the Snake River range, and Sour Stalpas was one of them, who remembered that day. Rand and Desmond had ridden out together to inspect the swollen river and the damage it had done, and Rand alone had ridden back, his horse in a lather of foam, and reeled from his saddle as he told how his friend had been washed away in the swirling waters when a projecting bluff crumpled and slipped into the stream.

Days later they had found a mangled body floating in the quieted waters of the river some miles below. And Joel

Rand had become the owner of the Snake Bar Ranch.

Rand was thinking of these things now in the obscurity of the shuttered room, and his thoughts were linked with other thoughts that ran back through the years and left him very uncomfortable and ill at ease. Was the ground crumbling and slipping beneath his own feet after all the time he had lulled himself into a sense of security? He had never been able to banish wholly the fear that out of that path from which Kenneth Desmond had broken away in wreck and turmoil there might arise an avenging Nemesis. Had it come in the person of Leeds Darrow? Rand did not know, but he suspected and doubted and feared in turn until the conflicting emotions maddened him.

It was with a guilty start that he stiffened in his chair at the sound of a knock upon the door, and swept into the drawer certain letters, time-stained and worn, which he had been going over—letters, by the way, not his own, but Kenneth Desmond's. Then he rose and opened the door to his wife. "What brings you here?" he asked her sharply.

Isabella Rand's sensitive face lit with a pale flame of resentment. "There is a young man outside from the Crescent Moon who wishes to see you," she told him.

"Who is it?" he asked eagerly. Then: "Why do you stand there looking at me like that? Is it so incomprehensible a thing to you that I might be wanted?"

"He calls himself McKee," she answered. "No, Joel, that would not be at all incomprehensible to me!"

The words arrested him on his way to the door. His eyes, suspicious and crafty, were upon her face; his own face darkened with a swift passion, then fell suddenly into a more ominous calm.

"There are times," he breathed close to her ear, "when I could think you less

dovelike than you seem. You had better take care! Don't dream too wildly!"

The woman shrank, as he brushed past her. Long after he had gone she continued standing there against the closed door, which he had locked after him, almost as if she expected to hear things beyond its barrier.

CHAPTER VI.

BIAS AND FRILLS.

CAPTAIN NORA, with her dogs about her, and her horse following as docile as they, moved about under the shade of the big *bois d'arc* tree that stood as a sentinel in the field, where the men were cutting the millet. The sharp whirring of the blades made music in the August day. Following the broad swathe of the mower, Dandy Darrow, seated high upon the rake, left in his wake wide winnows of the fragrant, heavy-headed grain.

Every time he passed the point where Captain Nora stood, the girl greeted him with a smile; and she was herself unaware that her eyes followed his stalwart young figure with an interest that was different from that which she gave to any of the other boys—not even excepting the blithely-debonair Larry Sloane who drove his heavy mowing machine with the air of a Roman charioteer, while his spanking team of big bays strained at the bits.

There was one in that field, however, not unaware of the interest aroused in the young mistress of the Crescent Moon. Tub McKee had an eye for it, and, after the manner of those gifted with such power of vision, he saw in it a good deal that was not there. He had never forgiven Darrow the summary rebuke administered for the careless use of his nickname. When he heard that Joel Rand was seeking to augment his outfit, he had applied for a job there. Rand had refused it, but

had easily ferreted out the reason for the fellow's dissatisfaction with the Crescent Moon, and made use of it for his own ends. It was with a whetted purpose, therefore, that the big cow-puncher, as he turned the newly raked millet, watched the unconscious interest of Captain Nora in the man who had publicly chastised him.

He saw her, when the noon dinner hour came, summon Darrow by a bright gesture of her head. Darrow left his rake and went to the *bois d'arc* tree, where the girl's horse stood near her. "I can scramble on," said Nora; "but since you are near, help me up. I hate to go in. It is so sweet out here."

She turned to her horse, placing one hand upon the pommel of her saddle. To her surprise, when she looked around, Darrow had not moved. "I'm not going in, Cap'n Nora," he ventured, in answer to her look. "I have brought some lunch along. There's a lot of it, if you would share it, and the horses can make their meal on millet. Shall we stay?"

The girl hesitated. She noticed that the other men had already started back toward the barns. She herself seldom ate much at midday, and, cool as it was under the shade of the tree, the sun lay warm beyond. She was tempted to take him at his word. "Shall I?" she asked and smiled.

For answer Darrow strode over to the rake and from its tool box took out a parcel with which he made his way back to the girl. "You set the table, while I water and feed the horses. Don't think I'm lost if I stop to pick some dewberries. And there's a red haw by the spring, full of fruit. I'll bring some of them."

"And I'll be scolded and put to bed in disgrace by Mary Philbin," said the girl.

Would she have done this with any one else of the outfit? she asked herself as she opened the parcel and

spread it out by the trunk of the tree. A new self-consciousness was quick to appear at the unusual little task. Had she been quite wise? Would any one but Dandy Darrow have made the suggestion?

But it was done now, and she arranged Martha Spence's buttered flat-bread and wild-grape jelly, fried chicken, corn pone, and thick ginger cake, as only a woman could array them, and sat down on the running root of the big tree to await Darrow's return.

"Martha Spence treats you well," she said, when he set down upon the ground the tin pail he had filled with berries and the jug of water. "Do you often eat your midday meal this way?"

"In the open? Yes. Isn't it better then riding miles through the sun to eat in a crowded room? Only, if I had guessed I'd been going to have company, I'd have done better with the lunch."

"I've an appetite," replied Captain Nora. "May I begin, Dandy?"

There are few things that cement a growing intimacy more quickly than eating together—if, indeed, it does not kill it. Before their impromptu luncheon was finished, Nora Vane and Leeds Darrow had insensibly crossed many bridges.

"And the best of it—almost the best," said Nora, "is that there are no dishes to wash!"

"That is what I like about the life out here," replied Darrow. "It's not cut on the bias with a lot of troublesome frills. The city has so many dishes to wash, always."

The girl was silent a moment, her glance following the scythelike sweep of shadow made by a buzzard flying low above the newly mown field. "But do you think you will stick to it?" she asked. "Won't you some day remember you've been through college and

want to go back where colleges are? They say New York never lets her children forget her!"

"No," said Darrow, and she was aware of the quick clouding of his lighter mood, "for I do not belong to the well-ordered life of towns, Cap'n Nora. I was born in Vagabondia!"

He caught the girl's puzzled, almost disturbed regard. He was himself very serious. "We've become pretty good friends, if I may say so," he went on. "Of course, I'm only one of your cowboys—though I'm proud to be one—but I've a purpose in life more serious than driving cows, for all that, Cap'n Nora, and I think I am beginning to fulfill it here. Can a man ask more than to be doing what he wants to do and is proud to do and what he should do?"

"And that purpose, Dandy?" she asked, when his silence seemed almost to invite the inquiry.

To her surprise—a little, too, to her chagrin—he hesitated, evidently reluctant to answer. She had never seen his face so grave. "I find it strangely hard to carry out, after all." He turned to her with a quick change of manner. "What is your opinion, Cap'n Nora, of Shakespeare's Hamlet—the man, I mean? Do you sympathize with him, or despise him?"

"Dear me, what a jolt! Hamlet! Why I sympathize with him, I suppose; but I doubt if he would have been very pleasant to eat lunch with in a millet field, all the same!"

"I fear I am something like him," said Darrow, and she was aware that he still spoke with real earnestness.

"He had a hard job on his hands," observed Nora softly; "but after all he managed it better than Romeo."

"Perhaps," admitted Darrow; and the conversation languished.

Captain Nora's thoughts did not. She was perfectly aware that Darrow had been near taking her into his con-

fidence. In some way she had failed him. It was not curiosity, but interest, and a desire to show it, that prompted her to say: "What has your purpose to do with Hamlet?"

He kept her waiting a little longer. "It has nothing to do with Hamlet, Cap'n Nora, but it has much to do with Joel Rand. I have long felt that I should tell you this much, even if I can tell you no more at present."

"With Joel Rand!" she murmured in astonishment and fell silent, too, as Whitey Blaisdell and his men came near.

CHAPTER VII.

SOUND IS CHEAP.

WHEN Nora reached her house—and she was unwise enough to start home almost immediately after the arrival of the other men—she found that the fangs of Mary Philbin's resentment because of her unappreciated lunch had been drawn by the presence with her of Sour Stalpas' daughter. Nanny Stalpas had come over with some half-finished needlework she had been doing for Captain Nora; and though Mary Philbin strongly disapproved of the younger woman, she could no more resist the tendency to gossip with her than a fly can resist sirup. But if gossip was sirup to Mary, it was salt on the tongue of Nanny.

"Where is the cap'n?" she asked, when she had been told Nora was not in the house. "They say she's gettin' powerful thick with this yere Dandy Darrow. Ranch or no ranch, she knows the handsomest one of the men!"

Mary resented the confidence and led the way to the pantry in silence. "There must have been a mighty poor lot of them around, Nanny," she said, motioning the girl into the room, "when your ma took your father; but now that you've got that off your mind, sit down

and have a bite of the captain's hot bread. How's everything on the Snake River?"

"I ain't carryin' tales, Mis' Philbin," said the girl, buttering her roll and speaking with some show of resentment, "but if I was I might say as they was very bad up tuh the house. If he ain't cruel to her, Mis' Philbin, I've learned tuh dodge pa's bootjack fur nothin'; an' yuh know I've done that ever since I was knee-high tuh er hoppergrass!"

"Sakes alive!" cried the housekeeper, "But then I'm not surprised."

"She's that pale," said Nanny, "white looks black on her."

"Poor soul, and no wonder! I recall how the other one peaked and pined."

"An' went out of that house feet foremost—as she'll do!" Nanny munched comfortably on the thought. The housekeeper sighed. "I never could figger out why she married him, Mis' Philbin. Could you?"

"I'm not very good at figuring," said Mrs. Philbin, who knew such a lukewarm rebuke would in no wise serve to check her visitor's tongue, although it salved her own conscience.

"But what I ain't able tuh see through," the girl went on, "is why this Dandy Darrow tried tuh git pa's job, seein' he seems tuh be settin' such store by Cap'n Nora. That's a hickory nut that beats my p'simmon plumb hollow."

"Your persimmon is hollow, Nanny," declared the older woman, her indignation again waxing; "or it's full of silly notion, which is the same thing. You're dreaming, child."

"Then I dream with both years open," retorted the girl, "fur I heard ole Rand tell pa so, an' pa's had a hornet under his hat ever sincé. I guess I ain't dreamin' that! Or that!"

She held out her arm, bared above the wrist, where an angry red mark, turning bruised and blue, marred its

whiteness. "Lord, child!" exclaimed Mary Philbin. "Did your pa do that?"

Nanny rather nonchalantly went on with her rolls and butter. "He meant it fur my head," she confided, "but I caught it on the fly. 'Tain't nothin', when yuh gits used tuh it, but 'tain't 'xactly dreamin' neither! It's er cheerful place, the Snake River," she added sententiously. "You don't have tuh go tuh no meetin' fur ructions."

The door opened to admit Captain Nora. "Nanny!" she cried. "I forgot all about your coming over to-day. I've had lunch, Mary," she added simply, as the housekeeper rose. "I shared Dandy Darrow's out in the millet fields. Don't hurry, Nanny, but when you are finished, come up to my room."

Nanny turned slowly to her companion, as the door closed upon Captain Nora. "There, Mis' Philbin!" she exclaimed, with triumph. "Would yuh call that dreamin', or air yo' years in workin' order? Him an' her eatin' in the field in broad daylight!"

"You wouldn't have them eat in the fields at midnight, would you?" demanded Mary. "You've eaten quite enough. Hot rolls are indigestible."

But when the girl found herself alone with Captain Nora in the latter's dainty room upstairs, some of the girl's more flippant quality became subdued to a more serious vein. As she fitted Nora in the garments she was making—Nanny was very skillful with her needle—she took occasion to remark: "Things is goin' very strange, Cap'n Nora, over tuh the Snake Bar. I cain't 'xactly make 'em out." Nora was not encouraging. "Yoh'd better watch Dandy Darrow, Cap'n Nora. He's two-faced."

In her glass Nora watched the speaker. "Why do you say that? It doesn't please me. Besides, it is not true."

"Why's he tryin' tuh git pa's job on the Snake Bar fur, then?" asked the

girl. "Not that I'm botherin' tuh take care of pa. He's pernicketty enough tuh look out fur himself, I reckon."

"It is the last thing he is trying to do!" exclaimed Nora.

"I heard Joel Rand tell pa," persisted Nanny. "Pa's mad as hops!"

"You heard——" cried Nora and checked the words abruptly, suddenly aware of the serious meaning underlying the girl's remarks. What had Joel Rand's purpose been in such a misstatement? "Nanny," she asked, "are you very sure of what you say?"

"Dead sho. An' I'm sho, too, that trouble's brewin'. Pa's awful mad. An' I s'pose yuh don't know he seems tuh have took up with Tub McKee!" The older girl looked worried. "Tub's er tub," commented Nanny, her mouth full of pins, as she made certain drawings-in of the garment she was fitting. "An' er tub's good only fur suds, an' that's all he's good fur—good fur nothin'! But that ain't sayin' he ain't bad fur er good deal, an' he's got it in fur Dandy Darrow."

"Nanny, how you chatter! How do you learn all these things—if they are so?"

"List'nin'!" said Nanny. "Sound's cheap!"

Upon this Captain Nora administered a rather sharp rebuke. "Take care," she said, "that you do not invest in a lot of rubbish that has nothing but its cheapness to recommend it. What good have I gained listening to you?"

"That's all'm," said Nanny, a little crossly, as she drew the sleeves from Captain Nora's arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE BLUE MAVERICK.

IT was true, whether Captain Nora cared or not to lend ear to Nanny Stalpas' gossip, that Tub McKee and Stalpas had struck up a sudden and intimate relationship. On the younger

man's side there was merely the desire to get even in some not very desperate way with Dandy Darrow, but to Stalpas this desire afforded possibilities of the consummation of his own more definite ends. Therefore, with some cunning, he fanned Tub McKee's not unnatural resentment into a smoldering, but steadily increasing, enmity which more and more frequently found means to whet its own appetite.

Curiously enough Darrow himself seemed the last one on the Crescent Moon to become aware of the big puncher's state of feeling. He had so completely ceased to think of the initial cause of offense that McKee's innuendoes and ugly little provocations lacked pertinence. It never occurred to him, for instance, when at the mess table he reached out for the dish of flapjacks, only to have the last few disappear on Tub McKee's plate at the psychological moment, that Tub might be doing violence to his stomach in order to gratify his spleen. It never occurred to him, when McKee in his turn went to the distant town and brought back the Crescent Moon's mail, that the reason there was never any letters for him was because McKee sorted them out and left them behind in the lock box.

"If I had yo' chainces," said Stalpas to his henchman upon one occasion, "I'd er had him on his back with his toes turned up long ago. Yuh ain't got the gizzard of er waitin' buzzard!"

"I ain't wishin' him no rale harm, Stalpas," said the other, in some dismay. "Jes' kind er makin' his life miserable, so he'll pull out."

Stalpas glowered sullenly. "Sort er ticklin' him with er straw, ladylike, eh, Tub?" he suggested, with a pleasantry that McKee in some way felt sinister. "See if yuh cain't make him cry, eh? Take care he don't eat yuh some day," he added, with a sudden burst of viciousness, "yuh're that tender!"

The Blue Maverick was doing a rushing business that morning. A band of drovers from beyond the Little Panther had brought in their herd to the stock pens and loaded them on the cars, and were now "hitting up" the resources of the town preparatory to the ride back to their distant range. On the squat porch of the Blue Maverick they loitered over their yarns, and behind its swinging doors before the long bar they hung over their glasses, and about the oilcloth-covered tables they lost themselves and their silver dollars over poker and pinochle. On the low stage at one end of the room the much-bedizened Meadow Lark was expending such voice as was left her singing, to the accompaniment of an ancient piano, some of whose teeth were missing. Now and then the audience rattled their big spurs in applause and encouraged her by such encomiums as: "Wring the neck of another, Kitty, me dear!" or, "Yuh'll hev tuh let yo' cinch out fur er topnotcher like that, Meadow Lark!"—all of which the lady took placidly.

At a corner table Tub McKee had been seated for some time, enjoying the unwonted pleasure of being the guest of a party of strangers who for that day, at least, owned the Blue Maverick. He had, by reason of many drinks, just about reached the stage where most things in life, including Miss Kitty O'Grady, were enveloped in a roseate hue; for which, indeed, there was some warrant in the case of Miss O'Grady, who was crudely rouged to the tips of her ears.

From the window at his elbow Tub could command a view of the town square. About the hitching racks were tied the ponies of the strangers. After the manner of cow ponies when not in motion, they stood in dejected attitudes. The day itself was somnolent, caught in a backwater of summer heat, and the town lay in dusty garishness, al-

most without signs of life, as if beaten in its efforts to reclaim the desert, and so deserted in its turn.

It was upon this scene, for all the world like a stage setting awaiting the advent of the actors, that a solitary horseman rode into view. It was none other than Dandy Darrow, and, seeing the medley of horses about the hitching racks, his gaze as a natural sequence strayed toward the Blue Maverick and lingered somewhat concernedly upon the vision presented by Tub McKee in the open window. Captain Nora did not encourage too promiscuous a conviviality among the boys of her outfit, and Darrow knew that Captain Nora was herself on her way into the town. It was with purely altruistic motives, therefore, that, noting the evidences of Tub's condition, he sauntered slowly over to the door of the Blue Maverick and inside its swinging portals.

His appearance produced a varied assortment of sentiments. Generally unknown as he was, some of the drovers seized upon him with proffers of drinks more exacting than polite. Others seemed disposed to regard him as an interloper. The Meadow Lark nodded and broke into a weird rendering of a song. Tub McKee glared at Darrow.

For a minute or two Darrow stood looking about him, not very successfully disguising his lack of vital interest. Then he made his way over to McKee who happened to be comparatively alone. "The cap'n is on her way in, Tub," said Darrow. "You'd better take in a reef or two."

"I ain't tied tuh the cap'n's petticoat," growled McKee.

"You're crazy," returned Darrow, with some disgust. "Come, beat it with me, Tub."

"Ain't yuh ever been stewed yo'self, Dandy?" asked McKee, his face flushed and lowering. "Or is yuh scairt of it hurtin' yo' complexion?"

He spoke loudly, and the taunting ring of his voice drew the notice of all those near them.

"Who's yo' friend, McKee?" inquired a drover, coming closer. "What's the matter, partner?" he asked Darrow himself, and the question carried rebuke.

"He's our dandy boy," said Tub McKee, with the fatuous daring of his condition.

They laughed. The Meadow Lark coughed warningly, while, after the manner of their own cattle, all the men in the room hushed talking and turned their faces toward the augmented group about McKee and Darrow.

Darrow felt the animosity he had aroused. He looked about him, his mouth rather grim. It was Tub McKee's voice that made him wheel. "He's come tuh town tuh meet the missus," McKee offered, with a laugh. "He wants me fur er witness afore the act. Let's all go, boys!"

And now Dandy Darrow's face was white, and he seemed to cease breathing. He stepped quickly closer to McKee. "Say a thing like that again, Tub McKee," he threatened, "and, weak though you are, I'll wipe up the floor of this room with you." And if words ever slapped a face he made those words do it then.

McKee lurched to his feet, and they crowded around. "Say it ag'in and give him his chance," urged some one behind Darrow's body, and confronting the speaker suddenly, Darrow's eye caught the gleam of a ready revolver in the man's hand. Almost before he knew his own act, Darrow had struck the arm an upward blow which sent the gun flying through the air and across the stage upon which the Meadow Lark had ceased to sing and sat looking on at the scene below her. Promptly she placed her foot upon the revolver and screamed aloud.

At once there was pandemonium.

Darrow found himself the center of a half-intoxicated lot of men in whose nostrils the scent of a fray was sweet. Behind him, his heavy bulk blocking the open window, stood McKee, but Darrow gave no serious thought to the window, though more than one of those around him had a revolver out. He drew his own calmly, somewhat ostentatiously, and he cocked it. Then he started to walk through the throng of those before him to the swinging doors.

It was the Meadow Lark's voice that rang out shrilly above the confused hubbub. She had risen to her feet on the little stage, and in her uplifted hand she held the big revolver of the drover who had drawn first upon Dandy Darrow, and she held it ready for action.

"I'll pot the first man that touches him!" she cried. "I'll let out yo' cinches fur ye, ye whisky-brave mush-rats! Now fire away! There's two of us agin' the crowd of yuh!"

Their mood veered as quickly as it had risen. They nearly burst the low ceiling with their cheers of the Meadow Lark. They might not like her singing, but they took off their hats to her pluck; and they pocketed their guns.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORST DAY'S WORK.

CAPTAIN NORA came and went.

It was due to Dandy Darrow that she steered clear of the neighborhood of the Blue Maverick and so missed any opportunity of seeing Tub McKee in the glory of his cups.

"They're a roistering lot, bent on making a day of it," Darrow said to the girl. "I'd give them a wide berth, cap'n."

She did so, and, transacting the business that had brought her to town, she had left Darrow waiting for the special object that had brought him, and had ridden homeward again.

He was waiting now in the black-

smith's shop for the bolts Whitey Blaisdell needed. Over his forge the blacksmith seized the opportunity for speech. "You got off lucky, Dandy," he declared. "Them boys of the Double-Y is a tough bunch, and Tub McKee is a born fool. They'll fleece him of every dollar he has. There's him an' Sour Stalpas over by the hitchin' racks now. Birds of a feather—though Stalpas is no fool."

"And Tub's only a fool, Fowler," said Darrow.

"Maybe and maybe not. And some sorts of fools are just as dangerous, Dandy, as wiser scoundrels. A fool of a horse can break your neck just as slick as a vicious one. Indeed, they're worse, for you can't tell when an idiot's goin' to have a streak of sense."

He turned to the anvil, and the conversation flagged. "Fowler," asked Darrow, as the blacksmith thrust the iron in the barrel of water and went to his bellows again, "you've lived here about as long as any one, haven't you?"

"Longer, I reckon," said the man. "They ain't many have been here longer. Some of the Snake Bar bunch and a few others."

Darrow lighted his pipe with some deliberation. "You remember Joel Rand's partner, then," he suggested.

"I remember Kenneth Desmond, the man Joel became partner to," amended the blacksmith; "and it was the worst day's work Kenneth Desmond ever did when he let him. If ever a prairie dog took a rattlesnake into his burrow that's what Kenneth Desmond did when he took in Joel Rand, and to my mind he paid for it with his life. The moss has kind of grown over that tombstone, but the feelin' was pretty general hereabouts at the time of Desmond's drownin'."

"There wasn't any doubt of his really being drowned, was there, Fowler?"

It was hardly a question, rather the

quiet assertion of one who knew what answer he might expect. But the blacksmith turned around at his forge and said slowly: "Do you know, Dandy, I've sometimes had my doubts if he really was! That body they took for his might have been any one's. I've sometimes had my feelin' that he might yet come back, though I don't believe Joel Rand has. I think he feels he did his job too well!"

Darrow was silent. There had been a gruesome suggestion in the blacksmith's manner and words.

A shadow darkened the doorway, and Sour Stalpas stood on the threshold. "Talkin' tuh yo'self as usual?" he said to the blacksmith, blind in the dark interior, as he came from the outer glare.

"P'raps," returned Fowler, "an' p'raps not."

Darrow rose from the keg of nails upon which he had been sitting, crossed the dirt floor, and took up the finished bolts. He merely nodded to Stalpas as he passed out.

He walked over to the hitching rack, wound his way among the horses, and strapped the bolts to a ring on his saddle, his mind still intent on the recent words of the blacksmith, his brows drawn in heavy abstraction. Mechanically he disengaged his yellow reins from the several others thrown over the same peg, flung them over the neck of the horse, and got in the saddle, his eyes all the time intent upon the low porch of the Blue Maverick, where a knot of men seemed to be watching him interestedly.

He had gone not more than twice his horse's length when the Blue Maverick began to empty itself as if by internal upheaval, and shouts and commands, apparently leveled at himself, for there was no one else in sight, arrested him abruptly. Running toward him across the empty square came a score or so of the patrons of the bar,

among them the tall form of Tub McKee, lurching heavily.

One of the foremost seized Darrow's bridle. "What yuh doin' on this yere horse, stranger?" he demanded threateningly. "Is yuh bent on gettin' yo hide filled with lead?"

"What am I doing——" cried Darrow and stopped.

At first blush it might have seemed his own horse, but even the quick glance he gave it now showed him it was not. Bewildered, he looked at the reins in his hand, at the saddle beneath him, at the plaited tassels of the headpiece which he had made himself. And then he knew, and the light that came into his eyes was not pleasant to see. With a sudden and heavy hand he jerked the horse to it haunches, away from the clutching fingers at his bridle.

"This is your doing, Tub McKee," he cried and wheeled the horse violently.

But they were thick about him now, and they were in deadly earnest. Many hands seized the reins of the rearing and terrified horse, though he beat them off with his loaded quirt. Suddenly, from the outer edge of the crowd, the noose of a snake lariat circled gracefully, knocked his hat down over his eyes, and slipped about his shoulders down over the muscles of his arms, where it tightened like a vise. Even then, however, the men did not touch him, and he slipped back over the haunches of the horse and stood facing them.

He knew his danger. For lesser things than he had unwittingly done, he knew that ropes had tightened about the necks of living men until they lived no more. He did not for a moment doubt the temper of the men before him. Whoever had done this thing, to most of them—to all of them except one—it was no put-up game, but a cool attempt at horse stealing.

He managed to draw his pistol, and though he could not raise his arms, those nearest him respected its upward-pointing muzzle. What they might have done, however, in that first moment of their rage it would not have been difficult to predict, had there not been a sudden diversion in the forcible advent through their ranks of Fowler, the blacksmith, who was also the sheriff of the town. They fell back before the heavy iron crowbar he swung above his powerful shoulders.

"What's all this?" he demanded of no one in particular and got his answer from many. He looked at Darrow frowningly. Suddenly he strode up to him and seized his gun arm about the wrist. "Do as I tell you!" he muttered quickly, close to Darrow's ear. Then aloud: "Drop that gun!" he cried and bore down firmly upon the young cow-puncher's arm. The pistol fell to the ground. "Now stand back, boys," he called to the eager crowd, pocketing Darrow's weapon as he did so. "This man's mine now—and the law's. He'll get what's comin' to him all right. And you, Tub," he called to McKee, "put this saddle back on the Crescent Moon horse where it belongs. There's tuh be no swappin' saddles an' bridles in this town any more than swappin' horses. Now fall back while I feed this fellow to the calaboose."

To his surprise they stood back, but they followed jealously across the square and up to the steps of the little box of a jail.

Once Darrow, seeing the curious eyes of the townfolk upon him, began to protest. "See here, Fowler——"

The sheriff cut him short, growling. "Shut up!" he muttered. "If you'd save your skin, keep still. There'll be enough for you to think about once I get you inside. Lucky there's no one else in the coop but you."

There Darrow found himself an in-

stant later, and, listening, he heard the crowd gradually melt away from before his barred door, and he turned to look out through the grated windows at the patch of fading sky.

CHAPTER X.

SOME SAVVY.

THE next few hours were perhaps the longest Leeds Darrow had ever known. The mere fact of his incarceration, and for such a charge, stung him. The evidence of his having so malicious an enemy as the man must be who had planned this thing stunned him for the moment. The sense of the danger in which he stood, not from the law, but from the lawlessness of those he had offended, persisted grimly.

As the evening drew on he could hear across the deserted square the sounds of boisterous festivity from the Blue Maverick. The Meadow Lark was again at the piano, and the wheezy scraping of violins, the clatter of dishes, the sound of noisy laughter, hinted of no lull in the thriving business the place was doing this day.

The light went out of the sky, and the sordid room fell into gray, lit only by the pale glimmer from an oil lamp somewhere outside which sifted in through the grated window. Indistinct sounds from the outlying plains seemed to steal in and cover the noises of the town. The far-away scream of a locomotive came to him, lifting and falling through the night.

His thoughts turned toward the Crescent Moon. It was already past the supper hour there. They would be wondering what was keeping him. Captain Nora herself might be aware of his not having returned.

It was not pleasant to him to think of Captain Nora just then. He was innocent, but he was a prisoner—a criminal until proved innocent, was the

way he put it. He shrank from touching even the walls of his jail and stood in the middle of the floor, where it seemed to him he could smell its odors less.

The lock grated—he had not heard the sounds of footsteps on the outer stairs—and the door opened. Before he spoke, Fowler turned the key in the lock from the inside. His face was worried, as he looked up at Darrow by the light of the lamp he carried. "How in the name of jumpin' Jericho did you ever come to do so fool a thing, Dandy?" he asked. "Were you dreamin'? Or lovesick?"

"I was dreaming," replied Darrow. "And they chose a horse just like mine, neck and crop, roach and all. Of course, I'd have found out in another minute, but they didn't give me time."

"Of course," said the other, "I'm afraid of trouble. You know what, Dandy?" Darrow nodded. "And I'm bein' watched," muttered Fowler. "Sour Stalpas is doggin' me like a shadow. What's he got against you, Dandy?"

"Stalpas? Nothing!"

"Then you're still dreamin'," said the sheriff. "Didn't he try to keep me from goin' out to you? Didn't he come to the shop to do it? Didn't I have to dodge him here just now? An' didn't I tell you I saw him and Tub McKee round the horses just before you left my shop?"

"I never thought of it before, Fowler, but Joel Rand wanted to make me his foreman."

"He did, eh?" Under the shock of this intelligence, Fowler stood still a long minute, his brows knitting. "Then you look out for Sour Stalpas—an' for Joel Rand!" he said. "I'd sooner trust a nest of rattlers, Dandy, than those two!"

"Am I not safe from them here?" asked Darrow, a bitter note in his voice.

"You'll not stay here," muttered

Fowler. "Safe here! With them gettin' wilder an' wilder over yonder at the Blue Maverick, and the night long ahead of us! See here!" he said, turning quickly to the covered basket he had brought. "There's no grub here, Dandy, but this sandwich, for you've got no time to be pamperin' your appetite; but here's a file and a sledge hammer, and your horse'll be out yonder behind the kitchen of the Blue Maverick. It's the least likely place they'll think of you goin', and, besides, that Kitty O'Grady's got her eyes peeled for any one goin' that way. That gal's got some savvy under her paint and feathers. She's my actin' deputy to-night."

"She saved my life this morning."

"I know. Why didn't you tell me that? Gals are queer. I'll leave this lantern," he went on. "Hang it in the window you're not workin' at—this one. I'll be beatin' about. If you hear a whip-poor-will callin' rather soft, quit filin'. And don't drop out till you hear the Meadow Lark singin' 'The Sands o' the Desert.' Then drop and light out over the sands and run till they grow cold! And here's your gun!"

"And you, Fowler?" asked Darrow, touched. "What about you if they come looking for me and find me gone?"

"Me! I don't git on the wrong horse in broad daylight, Dandy! Don't yuh fret about me. Only," he added, as an afterthought, "you might chuck the file and the hammer out in the tin heap. I'll find 'em in the mornin' when the devils clear out."

Darrow worked on the iron bar with a will—the sweetest in the world; and it was not very difficult work. He heard no whip-poor-will call, though once he thought he saw a moving shadow and dropped down out of sight till it had gone. Thanks to the slimmness of his body the one bar removed would give him space enough to get

out. One blow from the heavy hammer snapped it like glass, when he had filed it almost through. Then he waited.

It was the hardest part of the program. Hours seemed to him to drag by—hours lost in mere waiting, a waiting that became filled with questioning and doubt and a mad impatience to be gone. What if the Meadow Lark forgot or played him false, or could not work her scheme? What if some one discovered his waiting horse? What if, standing there idly, waiting, the road of escape open before him, he should be trapped, and caught, and—

Clear across the barren square the Meadow Lark's strident voice launched into the song he waited for. He did not know it, but, her face turned toward the open window, she sang with an intensity which she began to fear might defeat its own purpose, so still the room became as its occupants listened to the music.

Almost with the first notes of the song Darrow hurled down the severed bar, drew his body up to the window, threw out upon the ground the file and hammer, and, squeezing through the aperture, let himself drop to the earth outside. But, even as he righted himself, he felt a man's arms close about him and twisted about to find the evil face of Sour Stalpas almost touching his own.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CHORUS.

IT had sometimes been said of Leeds Darrow by those who thought that they knew him, that he was an easy mark. Others, who knew him better, added: until he was pushed beyond it. He was pushed beyond it now.

There was no mercy in the way he fought. It was all, for those first few desperate moments, below the waist. His arms pinioned by the vicious, death-like grip of Stalpas, he had only his legs, but they stood him in good stead.

With a swift upward blow of his bended knee he wrung a groan from the other. Stalpas was a big man and powerful, but Darrow, though light, was lithe and wiry as an eel; and he was killing mad just then. He followed up his disabling blow by a tripping twist that sent Stalpas staggering backward to fall heavily to the ground. And in that fall his hold was loosened.

It was Darrow's dread that the man would cry out and give the alarm, so his freed hands sprang to Stalpas' windpipe. Relentless iron thumbs crushed out the man's wind, his knees pressed the broad chest. Then came the sudden sound of shouts and clapping which for once spontaneously greeted the Meadow Lark upon the conclusion of a song. Darrow got to his feet.

She was singing again, the Meadow Lark, repeating her song. An instant Darrow stood listening, looking down at the quiet body of the man before him. Then he turned and made for the open road, across which, beyond the low building which was the kitchen of the Blue Maverick, Fowler had told him he would find his horse. He observed no caution, though he moved quickly. There was no one in sight, and even had there been Darrow would not have dodged. He was free once more, and it would have fared badly for any one to gainsay him then.

In the shadow of a woodshed he saw his horse. He did not have to make sure it was his, for the animal greeted him with the soft whinny his master knew as intimately as he would have known a human voice. He untied the reins, laid his palm upon the soft nose of the horse, and swung into the saddle.

The Meadow Lark was nearing the end of her song. A little drunk she was with excitement and success, and she sang the better for it.

Darrow rode nearer. There was a wild elation in him, compound of many things. He had gained his freedom. He had fought an unprovoked and dangerous enemy and won. Twice this day he had been helped stanchly by a girl's pluck and daring. Almost to the window he rode, and, as the Meadow Lark reached the culminating bars of her song, he raised his own voice and joined in with full-throated vim: "*Till the sands of the desert grow cold!*"

When he heard the sudden commotion within and the sharp shriek of the Meadow Lark, Leeds Darrow drew his pistol, and, turning his horse's head toward the open road, raked the heavens with six defiant shots. Then, bending in his saddle, his cheek almost against the neck of the flying horse, he followed the blacksmith's injunction and rode like mad.

There was still Tub McKee to be dealt with, and Darrow dealt with him the next morning, in the same spirit of contemptuous mastery. McKee missed his breakfast that morning, and it was not until he came, pale and unsteady, into the corral, where Whitey Blaisdell with several others of the men were gathered, that Darrow had his opportunity. The man who had gone into town for the early mail had already returned, bringing back the full account of yesterday's happenings, of which Darrow himself had not previously spoken.

McKee sauntered up to the group. If he saw Darrow among them, he saw fit to ignore him. His attention, indeed, centered upon the foreman; but at his approach, Darrow slipped off the fence where he had been sitting and went up to him.

He was not angry. Perhaps the force of his anger had expended itself upon Stalpas. Moreover McKee had

not been himself, and it was likely enough was merely the pliant tool in the hands of Sour Stalpas. Still McKee deserved his punishment, and, recalling the fellow's actions in the Blue Maverick, Darrow proceeded to give it to him.

"Are you sober yet?" he asked, planting himself squarely in the path of the big cow-puncher; "not that it matters much, for, sober or not, you're only a tub of a baby—a great, big, evil-minded baby! Babies don't usually have their faces slapped, but I'm going to slap yours, McKee!" and, suiting the action to the words, he applied four stinging blows across McKee's two cheeks in lightning succession.

Then, suddenly, to his own surprise, his anger blazed. "You're a coward, too," he muttered; "and if you are not a plumb fool you'll take care how you mix yourself up with me again."

He waited a moment. McKee made no move. Indeed he seemed dazed and stood looking beyond Darrow at Whitey Blaisdell and the men.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIGHT BREAKS.

IF I'd taken my own way about it, Tub," Whitey Blaisdell was saying that same evening to the disgraced cow-puncher, "I'd ha' gived yuh yo' walkin' papers tuh onct, but the cap'n wants tuh give yuh another chaince. She's tole me tuh tell yuh some things, though, an' here they are."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe and moved about his little sitting room, to which he had summoned McKee. In the kitchen beyond, Betty Blaisdell was singing softly as she washed up the supper dishes.

"Yuh've got tuh cut out Sour Stalpas," began Whitey. "Yuh've got tuh cut out the whole Snake Bar bunch, Tub. An' yuh got tuh treat Dandy Darrow white—not but what he ain't

abundant able tuh make yuh do so, Tub, now he knows yo' spotted complexion, but yuh got tuh do it anyhow. The cap'n won't stand fur no monkey-shines on the Crescent Moon. An' if yuh don't like these stipylations, yuh's free tuh cl'ar out tuh onct."

At the same time, Captain Nora was talking to Leeds Darrow in the hall of her own house. She had learned with amazement of the events of the day before, and she had sent for Darrow, not alone to express her sympathy and congratulations, but to learn, if she might, the meaning of the enmity toward him of the Snake Bar foreman.

"I wish you would do something for the Meadow Lark, Cap'n Nora," Darrow was saying. "I don't know that I ought to ask you, but I do."

"I will," said Nora Vane. "But, Dandy, this whole affair troubles me. What has Joel Rand against you? Of course, he is back of all of this."

She had already told him all she had learned from the gossip of Nanny Stalpas, and Darrow's surprise had been genuine when he heard of Rand's misrepresentations to his foreman. He realized now that much he had put down to coincidence was far otherwise—that while he had been inactive, Rand himself was laying definite plans against him. Yet he hesitated over his answer to Captain Nora's question. The girl was waiting, wondering at his reticence.

"If you don't mind," he said finally, "I'd rather not tell you that—just now—if you can trust me," he added, with more anxiety in his voice than he was aware of.

"You know there is no question of that."

"I want to see him first," he said, after a little silence. "I have been waiting for him to make some move—if he was going to—though I did not expect it to be against me."

"I believe," she murmured, "I always have believed, that he is a dan-

gerous man. And I am very sorry, sometimes very uneasy, for his wife."

In the obscurity of the dimly lighted hall Darrow let his eyes meet those of the girl.

"You mean——"

"I do not know what I mean, but I am afraid of him. Oh, not for myself—he cannot hurt me—but for that poor woman. And now," she added, with a sudden candor he found very sweet, "for you."

The little admission seemed to lift Darrow on billowing air. She had said it very simply, with just enough hesitation to invest the words with a touch of personal feeling that, like a delicate flame, spread through all that there had been between them. In the suffused light of the emotion upon him he spoke:

"Do you know that I worried in that beastly little jail lest you might feel it to my discredit to be there at all?"

"Did you?"

"Of course it was foolish."

"Yes, it was very foolish."

"Foolish of me to think you'd care one way or the other, I mean."

Nora did not answer. Overhead they could hear Mary Philbin moving about in the uncarpeted hall. After a moment Darrow rose to go.

She went with him out upon the low veranda and paused at the topmost step. He seemed loath to say the parting word. The southern night lay very still about them. Over the sweep of prairie a low, soft wind was stirring, and it rustled the bunches of pampas grass and blew sweet in their faces, as they stood. As if disturbed even by their still presence, a tree frog in a near-by elm hushed its plaintive tremolo and fell silent on a few staccato notes.

"I must go," he said, in low tones; yet he didn't.

"It is so quiet," the girl murmured.

"I believe I could not live away from it all, Dandy."

"I know. To me, too, it has become the only life! It seemed very dear to me last night." He saw the slight quiver, heard the little in-catch of her breath that was more than a sigh. His own voice was filled with vibrant tenderness. "I did not know how sweet life was until I thought I might be going to lose it. I think I would have fought for it like a tiger."

"Hush!" she pleaded. "It is horrible to know such things might be!" He turned to her abruptly, holding out his hand. Something made him afraid to speak. "You will be careful, Dandy?"

"I will be careful," he assured her, and, dropping her hand, went down the steps into the darkness.

The girl did not at once go in. Long after Darrow's footsteps had died away, she stood there, glad to be alone under the stars, glad of the darkness that hid the warm color which flooded her face. She had never loved before, but she needed not to be told what was the strange joy that filled her, what it was that made her, after a time, sink down upon the steps, hands clasped about her knees, lips tremulous, as they parted over her unspoken secret.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LIMIT OF ENDURANCE.

IT was a long time before Leeds Darrow sought his bed that night. The even tenor of his life on the Crescent Moon at last had been violently disturbed, and to him, also, there came the certainty that never again would that life resume its accustomed way.

He had said to Captain Nora that he had been waiting for Joel Rand to make a move, and, now the move was made, he was under no delusion as to how disastrously it might have resulted for him. Though the foreman of the Snake Bar was a far more dangerous

enemy than Tub McKee, Darrow knew that Stalpas himself was the agent of the still more dangerous Joel Rand. There was some truth in the statement that Darrow had to reach his limit of endurance before he would strike. Coming to the neighborhood, as he had done, with a definite purpose in mind, he had drifted into the pleasant lines of life on the Crescent Moon. His purpose was not forgotten, but deferred. And while he drifted and waited, Joel Rand had struck. That his envenomed blow had missed, Darrow understood perfectly was due mainly to a happy combination of circumstances, which might not again work so favorably in his own behalf.

But he would wait no longer now. Even had something else not leaped full-panoplied into his heart and life, he knew that further inaction would now be weakness. And Leeds Darrow was not weak. Men learned that to their cost, as Tub McKee in his dull way had come to learn it, as Sour Stalpas had learned it in more than one meaning of the word, as Darrow promised himself Joel Rand was to learn it.

His anger burned hot against Joel Rand. As no one else in the world, he held the secret of the man's evil life, he could interpret the baffling phases of his meanest actions, he knew that he had the soul of a coward and the venom of a snake—a false friend and a treacherous enemy.

But even more on this night than thoughts of Joel Rand, thoughts of another persisted in Leeds Darrow's mind. Until those hours in the jail he had never known how near the precipitous brink of love his feet had strayed. He knew it then by the ache in his heart which came at the thought of Nora Vane. But that knowledge was nothing in comparison with the full light which burst upon him this night. And with this came the first sweet, torturing

doubt of the lover—a doubt which waxed and grew, as he remembered the cloud that lay upon him, the cloud of which Nora Vane knew nothing.

He went to the window and stood there looking out upon the little street of ranch houses, silent and dark as if they, too, slept with their sleeping inmates. The wonder of the limitless plains crept over him, as he watched, the very sound that came to him emphasizing their bigness and freedom. He had known those plains and others like them for many years now, yet sometimes it seemed to Leeds Darrow that not all the clean ozone that swept them could ever blow from his nostrils the smell of towns, the petty meanness of what he had known of men and women there, the ugly lights and shadows of his own early days. For were not the meanness and the lurid passions about him here, too?

He could not banish those searing and distressful thoughts. He dreaded to tell Captain Nora, as tell her he must, if he would tell her of his love. It was the thing which all his life had clouded the natural buoyancy of his nature, and now, as these thoughts lashed and scourged, he forgot his immediate surroundings, and, leaning against the jamb of the window, struck it with clenched and rebellious hand.

Larry Sloane tossed on his mattress, and Darrow, turning remorsefully, puffed out the light he had kept burning dimly, and went back to his place by the open window.

A whip-poor-will, from the roof of one of the cabins near by, set up its quick call. So near it was that the soft purring of its starting notes seemed almost in the room.

"Dog-gone that whip-po'-willer!" muttered Larry, seizing the vicarious opportunity to announce his wakefulness.

Darrow slowly began to undress, his mood veering suddenly.

"Larry," he declared, "I don't feel a bit sleepy. Do you?" Larry did not answer. "I don't know of anything more irritating, Larry, than to see some one else sleepy when you're wide awake yourself."

"Unless," growled Larry unwisely, "it's tuh see some one else wide awake when yuh're plum tuckered out fur sleep yo'self."

Darrow laughed softly, kicking off his boots. "Join me in a smoke, Larry," he invited. "Don't be so unsociable. Suppose that Double Y bunch had sent me to kingdom come last night! You wouldn't be having the pleasure of my company now. And they came near it, Larry!"

He turned toward the irresponsive cowboy, every inch of whose back was a silent protest.

"What point have you arrived at, Larry, in your cheerful and sane philosophy as to where a man finds himself when, whether by his will or no, he shuffles off this mortal coil and steps into the beyond?"

"Ten tuh one he finds himself where he don't expect tuh be," mumbled Larry. "An' I wish tuh goodness you was there!"

"You think so," meditated Darrow, peeling off his garments. "And what is your idea of that place, Larry? Poets and philosophers are not all agreed whether we are 'to lie in cold abstraction and to rot—or to reside in thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice.' Personally, I lean to the convictions that we carry our own purgatory about with us, eh, Larry?"

"Ice!" cried Larry, jerking himself to a sitting posture, as though he had suddenly come in contact with that object. "Air yuh gone plumb loony, Dandy? Fur the love er Mike can't yuh quit yo' kiddin' an' hit the straw? Yuh've busted my entire night!"

Darrow laughed amusedly. "'Q. E. D.—which was to be proved,'" he

quoted with a sapient air, and then he dodged Larry's pillow punctuating the quotation.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RENDING VEIL.

IT was scarcely with surprise that, a few days later, Joel Rand, seated on the veranda of his house, saw a horseman approaching whom he soon recognized as the man of the Crescent Moon to whom he had offered the position of foreman on the Snake Bar Ranch. Rand realized that, thanks to the clumsiness of Sour Stalpas, his own part in the attempt to embroil Darrow with the men of the Double Y outfit must have become evident to its victim. It was possible, however, he reflected, that, after all, the young cowpuncher came to him on some errand from Captain Nora. When Darrow had composedly hitched his horse and was walking toward the steps, Rand rose and went a few feet to meet him. He did not speak first, but scanned Darrow's face in a penetrating silence.

"I regret that I shall have to claim a little of your time, Joel Rand."

Rand nodded. He was not pleased with this manner of address, curt, devoid of respect, brittle with contempt. "Doubtless you come, Leeds Darrow, to inquire as to your handiwork on my foreman—the brutal attack of a fugitive from justice upon a defenseless passer-by."

"Really!" cried Darrow, surprised at the man's audacity. "I had not considered it in that pathetic light. With your permission I shall reserve the privilege to do so at my greater leisure. I have to ask you to consider it in a slightly different aspect. As for your foreman, the condition of his health is a matter of no consequence to me."

"You are bold," said Rand; "too bold. It would be well for you to be careful."

"Why?"

The cool question staggered Rand, and it drove him to a rage which made him abate some of his prudence. "For one thing, you are an escaped horse thief," he cried.

"And for one thing you are a liar to say it," responded Darrow, standing very still before him, "and that is only one of many things that you are besides—worse things. You almost have to be a liar, Joel Rand!"

In that moment the veil was rent between them. Rand doubted no more. His ashen face and twitching mouth rendered the struggle he still made for outward composure a pitiful travesty of dignity.

"I think," continued the cowboy, "that you begin to have some inkling now of what it is that brings me here, why it is I come, who it is I am! There are yet some things you do not know, however, concerning which it becomes my rather satisfactory duty to enlighten you. You have called me a thief, and I have told you that you lie in saying it. I call you now a thief, also, and liar again if you attempt to deny it. Do my words need any explanation?"

The semblance of Rand's composure was shattered now. "I will not listen to your insane words," he cried, in a craven fear. "By what right—by what impertinent presumption—do you dare to come to my house using them to me? I'll have you thrown off my place! I'll have you turned over to the law you have defied. I'll show you what you risk when you pit yourself against me!" He turned toward the house, his main object escape, though he managed to make some show of angry determination.

Darrow's next words, cool and crisp, halted him. "I have not finished with you, Joel Rand," he called. "I have only begun. I have no desire to enter the house you call yours, so long as you are in it, but enter it I must if you do not remain here." He looked

straight into the harassed face the man turned upon him.

"You would not dare!" muttered Rand, but his hands were twitching.

"Do you think, Joel Rand, that I have any reason to fear the ghost of Kenneth Desmond? If you can bear to live in that house, surely I may enter it!"

It was a spring that brought Rand back before the younger man.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded the other. "Why should I fear the ghost of Kenneth Desmond, you chattering thief of a cow-puncher?"

He stood very close to Darrow, and the eyes of the cowboy focused upon those of his questioner whose hand, unseen, stealing to his hip, had drawn from its pocket the revolver and held it behind his back.

There was a curious expression upon his drawn face. Fear was evident, but he had not yet lost the crafty cunning which, rather than any courage or any generous impulse, withheld his impulse to shoot.

Even under the sting of the insult offered him, Darrow noted the odd conflict of passions. He himself had become very white. "Rand——" he began, when he was interrupted.

A woman's voice, lifted in a cry of startled warning, rang out through the day. "Look out!" she screamed. "He'll shoot!"

Rand whirled around. On the veranda, running toward them, was Isabella Rand; but she stopped abruptly at the sight of her husband's face, as he leaped forward to her and seized her arm, his other hand holding the pistol which showed only too clearly his recent desperate inclination. "Haven't you learned your lesson yet?" he cried. "Then come with me!"

She made no struggle, uttered no sound, as Rand drew her roughly after him toward the door. Only over her shoulder she looked toward the aston-

ished Darrow and signaled him to go away.

An instant he stood uncertain. Then, as the house door slammed between them, he obeyed the wild entreaty he had read in the woman's eyes, and went over to his horse.

"A little longer!" he muttered to himself. "Your time is almost up, Joel Rand!"

CHAPTER XV.

HEAVY ON HIS MIND.

HAD he been able to foresee Rand's actions upon his departure, Darrow never would have gone. Alone with his wife in the hall, the man turned upon her. He spoke with a deadly anger in his eyes. "Why did you call out so to that fellow just now?"

"To save you both," she answered, "though I don't know why."

"It is as well," he then said and released his brutal grip and threw her from him. "Perhaps for once you did me a service. There is another and a safer way for me."

"Joel," said the woman, with her recent fearlessness, "is there no fear in you of the day of your reckoning?"

He lifted his head. "The first thing that made me hate you was those accusing eyes of yours," he said between his teeth. "You'd better go before I make you!"

He lost no time, when she had left the room, putting into execution the plan that had come to him. He made some changes in his dress, left the house, and went to the stable for his horse. It was there he met Sour Stalpas, still wearing a bandage about his head.

"I want my horse," said Rand, "and be quick about it, Stalpas. And see here," he called to the retreating foreman, "are you sure that no one saw you and that moon calf of a McKee swap those saddles?"

"I swapped no saddles," replied the

man, "but there warn't no one saw him do it."

Rand smiled with covert sneer. "Excepting you yourself, eh, Stalpas?"

Their eyes met, distrustfully on the part of Stalpas, searchingly on the part of Rand. "Oh, your secret is safe enough with me," said the latter, after a minute, "and I guess you've got all that is coming to you for that particular little play, Stalpas. I'm not so sure, however, of that blabbing Tub McKee. Now hurry up and get my horse. Well, why do you stand there loitering?"

"My secret, yuh call it, Joel Rand! My secret!"

Smoldering rebellion burned in the foreman's eyes. His gruff voice was shaken by an uncontrollable passion. "Wasn't it of your own hatching?" asked Rand. "Would I have been likely to think of such child's play? Now hurry, Stalpas."

But Stalpas did not budge, except to step closer. "Who was it put me up tuh that child's play, Joel Rand? If it had all panned out, as it come nigh doin', whose ends would ha' been gained? Mine? Yuh're mighty slick at steppin' from under, Mister Rand, but there's a secret or two o' yo'n what it might not be rale pleasant fur yuh tuh let the daylight git on. My secret, is it?"

Rand, angry and surprised, strode over to the peg where his saddle and bridle hung. "Your brain must be numb from your beating, Stalpas, for you to talk to me so. Don't you know I could—do you forget what I could do to hush your braying? Shall I have to tell you again that I want my horse?"

Stalpas snatched the bridle from the other's hand. "I ain't furgot nothin'," he muttered. "Nothin'! Jes' yuh remember that!"

"I'll overlook your insolence because of what you have been through," said his employer, "but never speak to me this way again, Stalpas. I warn you."

Muttering beneath his breath, the foreman moved off. As he saddled and bridled the big roan, Rand stood by in an impatient silence.

"Get some one else tuh do yo' dirty work," growled the foreman, as he saw him ride away. "Yuh lyin', thievin', murderin' fox! Yuh slippery copper-head!"

Rand covered the long distance to the town in a few hours and, when he reached there, went straight about his business. Fortunately for his purpose, he found Fowler alone at the forge.

"I have a job for you, Fowler," he announced, dismounting within the door of the smithy. "I'm afraid you must drop what you're doing to attend to it."

"Drop what I'm doin' to attend to what?" demanded the blacksmith, making no pretext of cordiality. "I'm too all-fired busy to drop anythin' to attend to anythin' else this mornin'."

"I'm sorry," persisted Rand, "but this has to be done."

The blacksmith slowly drew the white-hot bar of iron from the fire, carrying it with his tongs to the anvil. All his movements were deliberate and methodical, and the glance he bestowed upon his visitor was unhurried.

He struck several springing blows with his hammer before he replied. "To be perfectly free spoken with you, Joel Rand, I'm not a whole lot eager to work for the Snake Bar Ranch, and what is more, I'm not going to, to-day. And I reckon I know when I drop my work and when I don't without being told by any man."

Under the frank contempt of manner and words the rancher colored darkly, though he curbed his evident resentment. "You go rather fast, Fowler," he answered. "Who said anything about work for the Snake Bar? I seek you in another capacity than as a blacksmith. I demand that you arrest one accused of a criminal offense, a jail-

breaker, and a horse thief. I mean, of course, Dandy Darrow, of the Crescent Moon outfit."

"You do, do you!" exclaimed Fowler, who for some seconds had been not wholly unprepared for the demand. "Who says Dandy Darrow's guilty?"

"That is not the question, and you know it," replied Rand. "You are responsible for this man's detention in your jail, from which he escaped with rather suspicious ease. He is at large. I demand his rearrest."

"The man's not guilty," persisted Fowler stubbornly, though he realized his defenseless position.

"There are ways for him to prove it and get his acquittal."

The blacksmith raised his eyes and looked at his companion with penetrating shrewdness. "You seem powerful eager to see him in jail! Is it because of the beating he gave that wolf of yours?"

Rand did not reply. For a few minutes the blacksmith beat his iron, apparently oblivious of the other's presence, but in reality with mind set upon the problem confronting him. "I'm not so sure," he remarked suddenly, as he took another grip with his tongs, "that, considering your very acute interest in Dandy Darrow, jail isn't the safest place for him," and his eyes lifted squarely to Rand's. "I've half a mind to do as you suggest!"

"You will do as I demand," said Rand and turned his horse.

"Wait a moment!"

Something stern in the command brought the rancher face about instantly. Fowler plunged the iron in the water and let it sizzle there a space before he threw it on the ground. There had come upon his rugged, honest face a look that the other did not like.

"I will do this thing," he said, "not because you order it—for you could order me till the sun in heaven got

frost-bit, and not put it over—but because for once you chance to be on the law's side, and because, as I already said, when you get interested in a man, that man needs the protection of all the law there is. Them's my sentiments about you, Joel Rand, an' they've been heavy on my mind for many years."

He waited until Rand had ridden away, wordless in his anger, through which there ran that ever-recurrent fear that had long since licked his prudence into a slimy craft; and then the blacksmith—now the sheriff—took off his leather apron, locked the door of his shop, and went about getting ready for a duty which, for all his coolness, he was loath to do, and which, for Darrow's sake, he would have evaded had he dared.

CHAPTER XVI.

A POOR RETURN.

NOT knowing just where he might find Darrow at that hour, Fowler, when he had reached the Crescent Moon, rode with his posse to Captain Nora's house, and, dismounting under the surrounding elm trees, made his way alone to the front door. It was Miss Vane herself who, having observed his approach, met him there.

"Why, Mr. Fowler," she demanded, already indignant, "what is the meaning of this?"

"I see you know, ma'am, so I won't try to deceive you. Anyway I come to you to ask where I can find Dandy Darrow."

The girl's eyes were on him, sparkling with resentment. "It is preposterous if you mean you have come to arrest him," she cried. "He is no more guilty than you or I."

The sheriff smiled somewhat uneasily, twisting his hat in his big hands. "You see the trouble is, ma'am, Cap'n Nora, he's already arrested, and I am sworn to carry out the law. I don't know that I'd have done it if I hadn't

been put on to it, but I can't help myself now."

"So some one put you on to do it! Sour Stalpas, I suppose. That is the law you must carry out, is it? Obey the malicious spite of the guilty that the innocent may suffer! I thought better of you."

"Don't scold me, ma'am. In the first place it wasn't Sour Stalpas. It was Joel Rand, and he was bent on havin' his way, and the law, curious critter as it is, is as much for a devil as an angel till they're branded."

Captain Nora's whole body stiffened. "Ah!" she exclaimed, and fell silent, obviously concerned. Fowler stood watching her. Presently she spoke. "Have you any idea at all who it was that did this thing Dandy Darrow is accused of—taking a horse, I mean?"

"Yes'm. I've an idea, and it's a good, strong one at that, but—it's only an idea. The law takes no account of ideas."

"No," said Nora, "it prefers to blunder along without them. I have a good, strong idea, too, Mr. Fowler, and it amounts to certainty. You are not going to rearrest Leeds Darrow, because I am going to show you the man who tricked him into getting on that horse, after putting his own saddle on it."

She called a young fellow who was at that moment engaged in hauling wood for her woodshed. "Bud," she said; "I want you to go at once and tell Whitey Blaisdell, Tub McKee, and Dandy Darrow that I want them here immediately. You know where they are."

She did not speak until he had gone away, then she turned to Fowler. "It was Tub McKee that did it. He and Stalpas. Leeds Darrow has not accused them, but it is as plain as day."

Fowler nodded his sturdy head. "Right you are, ma'am, but I can't arrest Tub on suspicion only."

"No, but you can make him think you are going to. Moreover, I have the assurance of an eyewitness to that plot. I can't tell you—unless I must—who it was. Perhaps you can guess!"

The sheriff's eyes twinkled. He looked at the girl admiringly. "I think I can," he said slowly; "and I think I see your meaning, ma'am. It's a first-rate idea you've put into my head. You're er prime fine gal, Cap'n Nora, pardon the sayin' so! And if the Meadow Lark ain't in just the same list of songbirds with you, she's got her good points, too."

"I know a man, Mr. Fowler, when I see one," responded the girl. "My father was a man. You are. Leeds Darrow is one. I've been disappointed in McKee, I admit."

"There's bound to be some bad nails in a keg, and I myself sometimes make a fairly good one into a bad one. Tub wasn't much of a nail to start with, but he's been drove worse."

"I've given him his chance, and he is acting badly," said Nora sternly. "I am not going to shield him at a better man's expense—at any man's!"

So when, a little later, the men she had sent for arrived, Captain Nora went out to meet them, at her side the blacksmith-sheriff, his posse gathered in evidence a few feet away under one of the trees.

To have observed the three men of the Crescent Moon outfit, no stranger would have surmised that the show of the law's authority so assembled was directed against the one who displayed the least emotion. Whitey Blaisdell's surprise and indignation were clearly to be read in his blue eyes and the flush of his fair skin. Darrow, greeting the sheriff in a manner more than friendly, was unperturbed. It was Tub McKee whose face paled, whose uneasy eyes shifted continually from Fowler's stern gaze to Miss Vane's steady and keenly appraising regard.

"Whitey," said the girl; "I have sent for you three, because since I told you that I wished you to give McKee here another trial after his misconduct at the Blue Maverick the other day, I have learned of a far more serious thing against him. Perhaps I should have borne longer with this man's sullen behavior, except for what you see before you here now."

She paused an instant, glancing toward the group of men under the tree, and nodding toward Fowler.

"Never before," she went on, "in all its history has the Crescent Moon been brought into the hands of the law. It is a poor return, McKee, for the trust I have placed in you."

McKee fidgeted. "I never meant no wrong tuh you, Cap'n Nora," he declared, after a silence, during which Fowler had shown signs of impatience.

"But you meant wrong to this man," said Nora, looking at Darrow, "and you linked yourself with his enemies against him. You are practically a murderer, McKee, and your sin has found you out."

He was trembling now, and his face whitened. It needed only a quick movement of the sheriff to unnerve the big fellow completely. "Yuh ain't goin' tuh lock me up, Fowler, fur what I done?" he cried. "'Twas Sour Stalpas made me do it—him an' Joel Rand. I meant no rale harm tuh Darrow, but they did. 'Tain't me as should be took. It's Stalpas. He'd ha' killed Darrow. He tole me so. He tole me tuh do it, but I wouldn't."

He was almost blubbering, and he stepped backward almost as if he might have turned and fled. Captain Nora caught the look of pitying disgust on the faces of the three other men and herself turned her back on the unpleasant exhibition.

"Stalpas even helped me swap them saddles, Fowler," she heard him pleading. "'Twas he picked out the horse

that looked most like Darrow's. I wouldn't ha' done it nohow had I been sober."

But here the sheriff burst out in righteous wrath. "Shut up, you blubberin' crybaby!" he cried, his voice ringing with contempt. "You've said enough to vindicate Dandy, and the law don't want to touch anythin' like you—yet. Your time ain't quite come, Tub McKee, and I hope when it does I don't have to be the one to handle you. I wouldn't know exactly what to do with you. I haven't had much experience with babies. But don't be scared, Tub. When I comes to arrest you I'll fetch a go-cart and a feeding bottle."

"And it won't be to the Crescent Moon you'll come, either," said Captain Nora, turning about suddenly. "See that he goes, Whitey. And now, Mr. Fowler, bring your men into the dining room, so they won't be able to say they rode all the way out to the Crescent Moon, and got nothing for their pains."

Throughout the scene she had not spoken to Darrow. Now, as she passed near him, she paused. "It was you they came for," she murmured. "Joel Rand demanded it. You have seen him?"

"Yes. I can understand."

"Then be on your guard," she cautioned, and went on alone toward the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

WINGS OF EVIL.

WEEKS went by. Summer waned into early autumn, and still, despite his resolution, Darrow had not again sought Joel Rand. It was Miss Vane's dread of further unpleasantness which deterred him; but he chafed at his inaction.

Rand's attempt to have him arrested had in no way surprised Darrow, for he was aware of the galling hate which the man must bear him since their stormy interview. That Rand's efforts

to remove him had failed did not deceive Darrow into thinking that they would not be resumed. And in Stalpas, too, he realized he had made a personal enemy.

Grave reports drifted over from the Snake Bar. Upon one occasion, Captain Nora, riding over to see Isabella, was met at the door by Rand himself and—albeit with some observance of courtesy—was practically denied admission. Nanny Stalpas later received orders to keep away from the Crescent Moon—orders, however, which only served as an added incentive to her to go there, in order to discuss them with Mary Philbin.

"Nothin' but hobbles is goin' tuh tie my legs," she said to the housekeeper, when she was telling of the commands laid upon her, "an' I'd like tuh see the man as is goin' tuh put them onto me. Sho' pa ain't, an' dead sho' Joel Rand ain't!"

"Or your tongue either, Nanny," said Mary, for she had been cautioned by Captain Nora not to encourage the girl's propensity to carry news.

"No, nor my tongue neither, Mis' Philbin, though what harm I'm doin' in sayin' Joel Rand is slowly drivin' his wife tuh her grave, I ain't sharp-sighted enough tuh see. If it wasn't fur me, the po' critter wouldn't have no one tuh stan' by her."

"How's he doing that, Nanny?" Mary was unable to resist asking.

"How? In every way. That's jus' it, Mis' Philbin. In every way. When she speaks, he shuts her up. When she's quiet, he gets mad at her. If she happens tuh fancy somethin' she's eatin' I've seen him snatch it from her 'cause she was so slow over her food. If she doesn't eat, he curses at her fur sulkin'. Hasn't yuh ever seen a boy pester a tumblebug, Mis' Philbin? He don't kill it outright, but he punches it, an' rolls it over, an' when it gits up he rolls it over ag'in, an' when it

crawls he pokes a stick in front of it till even a tumblebug, what's born tuh do everythin' over an' over ag'in, gives it up an' dies. That's how!"

"Mercy alive!" cried Mary. "The Cap'n really ought to know."

"Sho'," said Nanny. "That's why I come over tuh tell you."

In other ways they heard of Joel Rand's bad temper. When Tub McKee went to him after his dismissal from the Crescent Moon, Rand flew into a storm of abuse, and drove the big cow-puncher from the Snake Bar. He was making the life of Sour Stalpas so unbearable that upon more than one occasion the foreman turned upon him with fangs bared.

These things Darrow knew, and he knew other things besides, which he kept to himself. He knew that he was repeatedly stalked at night when, as was often his habit, he strolled alone across the plains before he turned in. And he knew also that, notwithstanding Captain Nora's wishes, this state of things could not continue.

Therefore, catching sight of Rand upon his big roan as he was returning one afternoon from the town, Darrow put his own horse into a gallop, to overtake the ranchman before he should reach the Snake River fork. At the same instant he saw Rand's horse stretch out into his swinging rack and cover the ground with amazing speed.

Darrow gritted his teeth, a grim determination fusing within him. He was sure than Rand attempted to evade him. To have overtaken him at the distance that lay between, Rand traveling as he was, would have taxed Darrow's horse to the utmost, so he held it down to an even gallop, and when he came to the fork of the road, took that spur of it down which Rand had gone, leading away from the Crescent Moon.

Though he was not unaware that he rode into a zone of actual danger, the knowledge served only to strengthen

Darrow's purpose, as did also the evident fact that Rand's persistent speed meant an effort to avoid detention. The ride had become a definite pursuit upon Darrow's part. Even when they reached the boundaries of the Snake River Range, Rand in no wise decreased his speed. Darrow, with no slackening of his purpose, still followed. Indeed, when Rand's big horse showed signs of flagging, Darrow gave rein to his own, and lessened the distance that separated them. By the time Rand had swung through the depression of the land where the road ran through a woods of scrub oak and elms, and started up the slight ascent beyond, at the top of which stood his house, Darrow was but a few lengths of his horse behind him.

On the plateau, his house within close view, Rand suddenly reined in and swung around. His face was not pleasant to see as he turned upon Leeds Darrow. "Why have you followed me?" he demanded.

Darrow's eyes shot points of brilliance in the subdued light of the October afternoon. "To settle a score of lifelong standing between us, Joel Rand! To avenge the death of Kenneth Desmond! To stop your being a menace to better and cleaner lives! To clip the wings of your evil power!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIS ANSWERING WORD.

IN the weighted silence that fell after Darrow's words only Rand's shortened and labored breathing could be heard as he leaned heavily forward in his saddle, his eyes, in a sort of fascination, bent upon Darrow's grim face. His lips, dry and quivering, parted over his teeth, but they uttered no sound, though his body trembled until even his weight in the stirrups could not prevent the shaking of his legs.

Darrow spoke again. "There are so many things I have to say to you that I hardly know at which end to begin. Perhaps somewhere near the beginning may be best. Is your memory good? Do you recall that day of the big freshet on the Snake River when Kenneth Desmond was—what shall I say?"

"Drowned!" panted Rand. "He was drowned!"

"There are many ways and many names for murder. Drowning is one. You say he was drowned. But he wasn't drowned."

"Drowned!" Rand murmured thickly. "He sank before my eyes."

Darrow leaned forward over the pommel of his saddle, his body quivering with the restraint he put upon himself.

"Oh, you are the murderer that you believe you are," he cried. "You let him beg in vain for help. The dropping of the lariat about your saddle horn would have saved him. Is your memory good, Rand? Do you remember your answering words? 'Swim out, if you want to get out!' you called back to him, and watched him sucked under and swirled away."

The electric shock of surprise stiffened Rand an instant in his saddle.

"How come you to know that?" he cried.

Then, as if a physical support had been suddenly withdrawn, he crumbled on his horse, his mind too dazed to grasp anything but the strange fact of Darrow's utterance of those words. His body reeled limply to and fro, but there was no pity in Darrow's scorn.

"How should I come to know," he demanded, "except that Kenneth Desmond did not drown, but lived to tell me, his son!"

Slowly the circulation returned to Rand's brain cells. Out of a stunned collapse he came back to a dulled life. "Did not drown!" he echoed. "Did

not drown! Then that was not his body? He is alive?"

"No, he is not—but I am." Darrow waited. He could see that the shock of the disclosure had rendered Rand incapable of thought. After some seconds, with Rand's eyes again resting upon him, he went on: "My father looked me up, and told me his story before he died. He never recovered from the shock of that day and night in the water. I was but a boy then, Joel Rand, but my mother had no cause to love you, and she never let me forget that story; nor, since I have been living on the Crescent Moon, have you!"

So far Darrow had spoken as one might recite a well-rehearsed narration, but with his last words, his manner changed. A sudden flame of contempt and disgust and anger swept through him. "There is small satisfaction in calling so mean a thing as you are, Joel Rand, the many names that fit you—thief and tyrant, browbeater of women, would-be murderer—and coward, for that goes with all of these; but there would be a vast satisfaction in making you suffer, and pay up for your long immunity. You have done your best to harm me in many ways, and I am going to chase you, body and bones, off the face of this particular part of the map. This ranch is mine, not yours. Only bear this well in mind: If before you leave here, never to return, I hear of you trying any of your deviltry on any one—unless it's your tool, Stalpas—if I hear of you harming any one—I'll break every bone in your creeping body as part of the vengeance I owe you for what you did and for what you did not do to my father!"

Rand had come back to life—the dangerous life of the snake which feels its coils are broken. His narrowed eyes burned hotly. His laughter was not unlike the deadly whistle of an enraged serpent.

"You talk fluently," he sneered, "but I knew your mother."

Stinging across Rand's face fell the curling lash of Darrow's quirt, and the white welt leaped from eye to chin. The cowboy's own face was livid.

"I will kill you for that, Leeds Darrow," whispered Rand, his teeth set, his eyes aflame, but his trembling hands holding fast to the pommel.

"If you can," said Darrow, "I've no doubt you will; but if you try to do so, and don't succeed, I'll fill you so full of lead that even your ghost will rise no more. Of that I warn you! You have had me shot at, you have set your emissaries upon me in one way and another. If I shot you dead now as you sit there it would be no more than you richly deserve. Fortunately for you, the law protects even such vermin as you. Face about, Rand, and if you turn in your saddle until you are well out of my sight, we'll see if a long-distance bullet won't turn you straight again." As he spoke, Darrow drew his pistol, and cocked it. "Now, move on!" he commanded, "and if you know what's good for you, keep moving!"

Muttering thickly in his throat, Rand put his horse in motion. Until he was lost to view beyond the house Darrow sat watching his receding figure. Then, he, too, turned, and rode off quickly over the darkening plains toward the lands of the Crescent Moon.

CHAPTER XIX.

ACROSS THE YEARS.

SUPPER was over in the cabin of Sour Stalpas, and, when Nanny had cleared the table, and spread over it the red damask cloth, her father proceeded to convert it into an armory with a rifle, a brace of shotguns, several revolvers, and numerous hunting knives. Boxes of cartridges and shells, canisters of shot and powder with all

the paraphernalia of loading he spread over the surface of the table, seated himself, and began to clean the bore of one of the double-barreled shotguns.

"Can yuh help me, Nanny?" he asked the girl who stood in the doorway watching him. "I'll wing yuh a goose er two 'fore they're all passed south."

"I'll crimp yo' ca'tridges," said Nanny. "I won't tech them oily rags."

Stalpas arranged before her the empty cartridges and ammunition, the wads and implements. "Put a couple o' logs on the fire," he said, "'fore yuh sit down, Nanny. A norther's blowed up, an' I ain't as young as I was."

The girl looked at him with a flash of unusual interest as she went about obeying his behest. There had been a difference in him lately. He did not seem to recover from the effect of the beating Darrow had administered. Though his surliness had deepened, he did not so often now give it outward expression in words or acts. Something sinister had come into his moroseness.

"Ain't yuh feelin' well, pa?" Nanny asked, coming back to the table, a hint of affection in her voice.

"I ain't sick," he returned gruffly. "Don't faze yo'self all of a sudden 'bout me, Nanny."

The girl was silent. About the house the rising wind whistled and drew the flames of the wood fire up the chimney. In spite of her propensity to gad about and gossip, Nanny Stalpas did not neglect her home, and the room was cozy in the warm glow.

"I seen Joel Rand talkin' tuh Dandy Darrow this afternoon," she presently confided to her father. "They seemed tuh be goin' it hot an' heavy."

"So's you," growled Stalpas, seizing the cartridge she had loaded with its charge of powder and was about to wad in. "Do yuh want me tuh blow m' head off? Don't do nothin' if yuh

ain't goin' tuh do it right. Has it come tuh havin' tuh watch my own daughter?"

"Law!" cried the girl. "Tuh hear you, a body'd think I'd put in a whole keg. Give it tuh me. Powder ain't nothin' tuh the way you go off, pa!"

"Yuh see too much," muttered Stalpas, emptying some of the powder from the blank; "an' yuh sure say a sight too much more. Where was this, Nanny?"

"Nowhere," answered Nanny—sullenly now. "I didn't see nothin', so I can say less."

"Yuh're a stubborn one!" said Stalpas pleasantly, and sighted down the gleaming barrel of his gun toward the firelight. There was the sound of feet outside, and a knock at the closed door. "Who's that?" he cried.

"Better open it yo'self," suggested Nanny, "or I might see some mo'," and Stalpas got up, moving heavily toward the front door.

It was Joel Rand who entered, shielding his eyes from the light, and shielding the light from the swollen and vivid scar that seamed his dark face. "I want to speak with your father, Nanny," he said, "and my wife wants you at the house. I wish you would go up there to her." Nanny rose. Her sharp eyes had caught the angry welt across Rand's face, and lingered on it, curious and sagacious. "Out with you!" cried Rand in sudden passion, meeting her keen scrutiny. "And stay until I come to send you back! Do you hear me? Go!" And Nanny went.

Rand shot the bolt in the door behind her. Then he turned to Stalpas, took a step forward into the full light, and stood still, pointing to the livid scar. "Do you see my face?" he cried. "Look at it once and for all, so your gloating eyes will keep away. Stalpas, he'll die for this!"

They looked squarely the one at the

other before Rand, turning, sat down heavily in the cowhide chair before the fire.

Something like a gleam of triumph lighted the lowering face of Stalpas. "Yuh cursed me, Joel Rand," he said slowly, "when he beat me an' left me fur dead. Did you let him go after that without a blow?"

"He will die for this!" repeated Rand. "You understand, Stalpas?"

Stalpas took up and broke a revolver, letting the shells roll over the surface of the table. In the dead silence they rattled ominously. "Yes, I understand," he muttered; "die as his father died, no doubt. But I ain't washin' yo' dirty linen fur yuh no longer, Joel Rand. After all, yo' hands is mo' practiced than mine, an' it's you whose precious conscience would sleep sweeter fur his death."

Rand had started violently. "You know, then?" he demanded, giving tongue to his surprise.

"Do yuh take me fur a fool clear through?" asked Stalpas. "Fur what other reason did yuh try tuh put him in my place an' then lie tuh me when he wouldn't come? Yuh wanted him here close under yo' own lovin' hand an' eye! I've knowed that, Joel Rand, fur some time. What I don't understand is how he knows."

"Knows what?" asked Rand. He had shifted his eyes from the other's unflattering gaze.

"Knows you!"

"Because," said Rand, with a strange quietness, "his father lived to tell him."

Stalpas put down the pistol he was greasing, looking straight before him into vacancy, his arm still outstretched across the table. "So that's it!" he murmured, after a long silence. "Yuh ain't a murderer, after all, then, though yuh'd make me one! But yuh ain't goin' tuh do it, Joel Rand," he cried, with rising vehemence. "Not because I don't hate that Leeds Darrow, or

whatever his name may be, but because I hate yuh wuss, hate yuh a sight, wus!"

Rand spun around in the chair he sat in. Astonishment too keen for expression held him dumb. He had thought he had this man bound fast by the fetters of his fear and dependence. It was some time before he found words. "Stalpas!" he cried. "Have you gone crazy? After all these years you tell me that!"

The foreman laughed harshly, turning until his eyes met Rand's.

"Did yuh think I loved yuh, Joel Rand?" he asked, with sarcasm, crude and biting. "Did yuh re'ly think there's been a day in all them years yuh speak of that I didn't know yuh'd ha' potted me quicker'n blazes if yuh'd suspected that I saw yuh the day yuh let Kenneth Desmond go tuh his death beggin' yuh tuh save him? An' now yuh want me tuh kill the son! But I won't do it, not on yo' wicked life I won't, though I may kill you if yuh drive me tuh it—if yo' tongue ain't held tight tuh the roof er yo' mouth, Joel Rand, as yuh told me onct tuh hole mine."

It was the old story of thieves falling out. In the little room the rising gale, whistling shrilly now about the corners of the house, the sharp chill of the norther through all the fire's warmth, the two men sat and glared with challenging eyes across the long years of their guilty knowledge of each other.

"You're a fiend, Stalpas!" breathed Rand.

"Then there's two," said Stalpas, "you bein' the other!" And again they challenged each other in the stormy silence.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT THE FIRELIGHT SAW.

IT was true that Nanny Stalpas had found Rand's wife awaiting her, and with a feverish impatience which at once impressed the girl with a sense of impending trouble. More and more

in her loneliness Isabella Rand had learned to confide in, to rely upon the younger woman who, in spite of her sharp tongue, was not without the gift of sympathy.

"I don't know what has happened, Nanny," cried Isabella, when the girl had explained her presence there, "but my husband is in a terrible mood. I am used to his violence, but to-night there is something more awful in his silence. I am afraid, Nanny, I am afraid!" She wrung her hands, foregoing all pretense of self-restraint.

"I know what has happened," Nanny answered grimly. "Him an' Dandy Darrow has had words, an' if I know anythin' of the mark of a quirt on human flesh, Joel Rand's had tuh eat some of them words back. Him an' pa'll talk it out, Mis' Rand. I wouldn't faze myself about it!"

"It's the talking out that frightens me, Nanny—I'm afraid of what they'll do!"

"Law, Mis' Rand," said Nanny; "they cain't hurt one another. Ain't yuh never see a bull fight a ram, Mis' Rand? They each knows the other's weak spots, an' all their fight 'mounts tuh is lookin' out tuh guard them spots. Same way with a billy goat an' a jack-ass."

"I was thinking of young Darrow," said the woman; "of what they may do to him."

Nanny laughed. She was trying hard to be her usual self. "'Pears tuh me they'd better be thinkin' o' what he'll do tuh them fur the nex' turn!"

But though she tried to comfort Isabella, Nanny Stalpas felt her own concern grow heavier within her. She was remembering the seething passions in Rand's averted face, their leaping in his eyes, as he turned them upon her. She recalled the brooding moroseness of her father's recent mood. She thought of that table, strewn with deadly weapons. And she wished she had refused to

obey Joel Rand's rough order to leave the house.

"If we could only stop that wind!" cried Isabella. "It's as though it were trying to keep us from hearing! Doesn't it frighten you, Nanny?"

"It might," admitted Nanny, "if I was tuh let it, but what's the wind got tuh do with us? Why don't yuh go tuh bed, Mis' Rand, an' let me read tuh yuh? Yuh're that nervous an' unstrung! P'raps yuh're hungry?"

"Hungry! I'd choke if I tried to eat to-night." Isabella paused, listening. A moment more she hesitated. "Nanny," she cried at last, "suppose you go back to your house. I'd feel better if you were there."

"I dassen't," said the girl, a tremor chilling her at last. "He ordered me tuh stay here till he came back. He was awful to-night, Mis' Rand!"

Isabella sank into her chair. "Read to me, Nanny," she begged; "anything—it makes no difference what. Did you ever think about marrying, Nanny?"

"I've thought about not marryin'," answered the girl. "From what I've seen o' men, Mis' Rand, there's powerful few of 'em wuth swearin' tuh love, honor, and obey."

"Ah!" sighed the woman, "it's only one of them that is hard to do, Nanny—the honoring—but it's the keystone of the arch, child. Did you hear a step?"

"It's the shutter," said the girl, listening.

Isabella sat back in her chair. "You don't remember your mother, Nanny?"

Nanny Stalpas shook her head. "I remember the fust Mis' Rand, though," she said after a time. "She used tuh frighten me with her big eyes, but she was good tuh me. It was the fust Mis' Rand who taught me how to sew."

Isabella rose from her chair. In the firelight her face was twisted and drawn. She moved about the room

with quick, nervous steps. "How long he takes," she murmured, as if to herself, but Nanny caught the words. "I wonder if you hadn't better go home, Nanny. Perhaps he'd come away if you did."

She went to the window and raised the glass. As she did so, a gust of wind blew out the lamp and, finding the open fireplace, sent a shower of ashes out upon the rug, where Nanny sat, fear now clutching, undeterred, at her own heart. Isabella leaned far out of the window.

Scurrying clouds obscured the pale half moon, but by its light she could make out the distant ranch houses, stilled by this time in slumber. The steady light of the lamp in Stalpas' cabin gleamed like a beacon across the stretch of treeless land; but, even as she watched it, reassured, its gleam vanished suddenly, as if puffed out.

With a quick cry Isabella drew in and turned to the girl, something sinister gripping her. "Come with me, Nanny," she cried to the trembling girl. "The light went out. We must stop them, whatever they mean to do. Hurry!"

"Wait!" urged Nanny. "He may be comin' home, an' pa jest' gone tuh bed. Wait, Mis' Rand!" Isabella waited, and the minutes passed. And as they passed, her doubt and fear grew, for Joel Rand did not come.

They stole out of the house then, Isabella's unaccustomed feet stumbling on the uneven road. Once outside, Nanny's usual poise reasserted itself in part. "We are fools tuh be scairt so," she said. "If they've gone out, we can't follow. If they's jes' gone intuh the kitchen tuh talk, they'll curse us fur comin'!"

"They've not gone into the kitchen," whispered Isabella, her teeth clicking. "Why should they go into the kitchen? If they've left that room they have gone to get him—Dandy Darrow!"

But it was an even sterner fear that momentarily grew in Nanny Stalpas' heart. She became very quiet, guiding her companion's steps quickly and noiselessly until they stood within the shadow of the foreman's house. There they stopped and strained to catch a sound from within, where all was so strangely silent.

About them the windswept plains stretched in the unearthly glimmer of the wan moonlight that sifted through whirling clouds. Except for the whistling of the wind there was no sound. Nanny crept closer under the window. She fancied she could hear the crackling of the flames inside, but the wind made this uncertain. She tried to peer through the window above her, but it was too high, though on its glass she could see the flickering light on the hearth.

Isabella stood beside her. "We came too late," she moaned. "They have gone." She took hold of Nanny's uplifted hand. It was trembling, and it was as cold as death.

"I'll go in by the kitchen," whispered the girl. "You stay here."

Trembling too, her voice frozen, Isabella followed the girl. In the darkened kitchen, scarcely visible by the thin light of the fire in the other room, which came through the crack under the door, Nanny found the lamp and lighted it with shaking fingers.

"They've gone!" Isabella kept whispering beside her. "They've gone, Nanny! Why do you stay here? Something frightens me in this house!"

Nanny shook her head. She seemed unable to speak. As the flame of the lamp burned brighter, she moved to the door of the adjoining room and started back, as her hand reached out to open it, eyes wide and horrified at the sight of what she saw at her feet, creeping under the crack. Isabella, just behind, kept uttering her protest. The girl pushed open the door, then stood

still, her gaze following the shaking illumination.

It was Isabella who screamed aloud in horror, while from the girl's nerveless fingers the lamp fell, shattered, to the floor, flickering, and went out, leaving the firelight again to play gruesomely over Rand and Stalpas, clutched in each other's arms, dead, but bleeding still from the murderous slashing of the hunting knives still held in their convulsed hands.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE GOLDEN LIGHT.

ONE morning when the hoarfrost lay thick and sparkling over the plains, and the yellow-breasted meadow larks ran before their horses over the frozen ground, and the breath of those horses spurted from their nostrils like steam in the crisp air, Captain Nora and Darrow were riding over the Crescent Moon on their way out to the winter ranges. The frosty wind had whipped a richer color into Captain Nora's cheeks, and her eyes were bright with abounding health and joy of life and the happiness of the present hour.

Yet there was a shadow on the girl's content, which now and then lent a wistfulness to her lips and deepened the blue of her eyes to purple. She had learned of Darrow's parentage, and of the dangers he had run from Joel Rand's suspicious enmity, with a puzzled wonder that he should remain a cowboy on the Crescent Moon.

Isabella, after a long rest at Nora's ranch, had returned to her people, and Nanny Stalpas, saddened and subdued, had joined the Vane household; but Darrow made no move to avail himself of his possession of the Snake Bar. His conduct puzzled Nora. Why, she wondered, did he not resume his proper name, now that there was no longer any cause for his disguise?

She put him an abrupt question:

"When will you be leaving me, Dandy? I feel that I ought to call you Mr. Desmond!"

"Don't," he pleaded. "I've a right to the name of Darrow. It was my father's mother's, and I like it. But why should I be leaving you, Cap'n Nora? Didn't I tell you once that I like my life here?"

"But," said Captain Nora, laughing, though not quite easily, "it seems so absurd for you to be working for wages when you are independent of them!"

His smile was quizzical. "I am not working for wages. I am working for pure love."

Now, strangely enough, her laughter was quite composed. "I am fortunate to have so disinterested a man on my pay roll," she said.

He had by no means forgotten the night they had talked together after his imprisonment. Before he could speak to her of his love, however, there was another thing he must tell her—that which had been his lifelong shame and humiliation, the heritage he should bring to the woman he loved and to his children. And he feared to tell this thing to Captain Nora lest it weigh against him in the balance.

They were alone on the wide stretch of prairie, the tang of the clean, cold day in their faces. They rode with frequent lapses into silence—the silence that fuses and binds into a glowing whole the incomplete mosaic of speech. Yet always there lay between them, felt by each, incomprehensible to the girl, that halting reticence upon Darrow's part.

Then, unconsciously, Nora touched the hidden spring of that invisible, but palpable, barrier. "You have never told me, Dandy, what it was that brought your father first to Snake River."

He shrank perceptibly. "It was on my mind to do so to-day," he said, looking away as he spoke. Suddenly he lifted his head and turned to her. "It

was a wrecked and ruined life, Cap'n Nora. He loved the wrong woman—and she was my mother!"

"Ah!" she cried, swift pity hushing her voice. "I should not have asked you that. Forgive me, Dandy."

But now he wanted to speak, for the moment had come. "Yes," he said, "I had to tell you that, Cap'n Nora. Do you remember that I told you once, that day we had our lunch together in the millet field, that I did not belong to the well-ordered ways of life? I do not know what you think of such things—rather I know what you must think, born as you have been, reared as you have been, living as you have lived. I told you I was born in Vagabondia."

She was very quiet, looking down at the ground before them, her face grave and troubled. It sent a pang of bitterness to Darrow's heart. He could not see that her lowered eyes swam with warm tears, or guess that her heart ached for him with a touch of that universal mother love a woman does not have to be a mother to know.

"And now you understand," he went on, a curious calmness in his tones, "why I have not spoken of this before, knowing all the time that speak of it I must. Do you know why?"

Swift color flooded her face, though she met his gaze clear-eyed and unflinching when he spoke again:

"Because I loved you, though I fought hard to keep from telling you so. Because with every day that has

passed I have loved you more. Because I have dared to hope that some day I might win your love. Do you see why?"

She saw—in spite of the tears that made the golden splendor of the day about them a swimming blur of light in her eyes—saw with a tumultuous leaping of joy in her heart which she would not let him see—yet. So she was silent.

They had reached the spot where their way turned eastward down to the sheltered wooded lands where the Crescent Moon herds picked their winter herbage. In a little while they would reach the men who had ridden out ahead of them. Darrow drew rein, stopping his horse at the verge of the plateau.

"Cap'n Nora," he asked, "can you forgive me the sins of my parents? Can you love me, and be my wife? Not because I love you little, but because I love you much, I will go away out of your life if you tell me no!"

Just an instant she held him waiting while her eyes looked fearlessly into his own.

"Then the light of my own life would go out," she said, "for I have loved you long for what I have known you to be—yourself, and a man!"

"Ah!" he cried, and a glad joy lifted his voice, and he wheeled his horse close beside hers. "How I have tortured myself with doubts, Nora! Captain Nora! My Nora Creina!"



CHEYENNE FRONTIER DAYS

THE Frontier Celebration, held at Cheyenne, Wyoming, during the latter part of July was one of the most notable celebrations in this part of the country. Conspicuous in the premium lists were prizes which had been donated by William S. Hart, famous film delineator of cowboy life. Part of his check was used to purchase 1,000 feet of "whale line," the strongest, lightest material from which lariats are made, surpassing in tensile strength and flexibility even the "yacht line" from which the majority of roping experts manufacture their lariats. This whale line was used to make sixty-four lariats, which were awarded as prizes in the various contests.



The Horse and the "Man"

Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Galoped Into Place,"
"All Arabian," etc.



AMID a swirl of dust "Red" McGraw drew up in front of the adobe shack which temporarily housed Ranger Company A. Dismounting he stalked

stiffly inside.

"What do you think I heard when I come past the customhouse just now?" he demanded.

The several rangers who were loafing about gazed at the youth with unconcealed amusement. Red was one of those unfortunates to whom something is always happening.

"Cool off, son, cool off," "Tip" Lanning soothingly interposed. "You're among friends here; nobody's going to harm a hair of your head."

The diminutive ranger grinned at his sergeant rather sheepishly, then his thoughts reverting to the cause of his exasperation, he broke forth into violet eruption.

"It's that long-legged yellow-backed Rojas," he fumed. "My trigger finger starts itching every time I get within half a mile of him. He may be a captain in the rurales all right, but I'll bet——"

"What's Rojas been doing to rile you this time?" Sergeant Tip asked. "He

hasn't offered to adopt you, or anything like that has he?"

Red flashed a scornful look at the sergeant.

"You make me plumb sick," he stated in deep disgust. "When I tell you what that greaser is shooting around, you'll rear up on both hind legs and claw. That hombre says he has got a hoss that can make your dun look like he is tied down. Says old dun's a false alarm, and that the yellow of his hide extends clean through into his backbone. He wants to match his hoss against your dun."

"Well, I'm open for conviction any time."

"But listen here, Tip," Red hastily added, jarred at the sergeant's calm calling of the Mexican's boast. "Rojas has about got something up his sleeve; he's fixing to gyp you somehow. Claims running for a purse don't interest him none, but will frame a race and bet pony agin' pony."

"If that's the way he feels he's about cooked up a hoss race," Tip dryly declared. "I ain't cravin' to lose old dun, but then again I ain't overlooking a good chance to pick up another hoss, either. Did you by any chance hear any

particulars about this famous racer of Rojas? Last time I seen him he wasn't ridin' no Man-o'-War."

Red shrugged. "Where does a greaser like Rojas get anything?" he questioned. "Mostly he steals it, don't he? All I know about the hoss is that he's a sorrel stallion, branded Circle A, and ain't been broke long. Every amigo I questioned swears he's a whirlwind. They'll all bet their last peso on him, too. To my way of thinking Rojas is trying to frame you. He has always been crazy to own old dun, and you ought to know it. Seeing you wouldn't sell him, he's scared to steal him and he figures to get him this a way."

"Well, he's going to have a chance to try it," Tip declared. "It's agin' my principles to mix up in a hoss race with a greaser, but it's about time somebody took Rojas down a peg. He's carryin' too much dog up and down this border. If somebody don't cut his comb directly, he'll make trouble one of these days. I'll smell around a bit and see what I can do."

II.

Two weeks later a broiling sun beat torridly down into a slight depression which had once been the bed of a river. A half mile to the north a thin shimmering silvery streak marked the course of the Rio Grande. Years past in obedience to some freakish whim the stream had forsaken its course and eaten its way north into the land of the gringo. Two stone monuments, placed some distance apart in the exact center of the ancient river bed, marked the present boundary line between the United States and Mexico.

Within the gentle hollow, where centuries of rushing water had packed the sand as smooth as silk, surged two sweating, cheering lines of race-crazed humanity. As though actuated by the mutual wish to stay, each in their own country, the southern line was com-

posed of dark-skinned Mexicans, the northern by wide-hatted, high-booted Texans. Grouped compactly together on the northern side, close to the finishing line, stood a small knot of men—Texas rangers.

Down the center of the lane formed by the parallel lines thundered two horses, one a dun, one a sorrel.

"*Priesa encarnado nene*,"—"hasten red baby"—the raucous insistent yell, came from yellow throats telling to the world upon which horse the bulk of the Mexican money was wagered.

In truth the red baby was hastening. He was running bravely, courageously, drawing on every last ounce of his reserve strength. Overweighted, poorly ridden, the colt—and he was barely past three—was striving valiantly to hold the slight lead he had gained.

His rider, a swarthy Mexican, whose evil features were distorted with a desire to win, cruelly belabored the colt. Pounding along a scant length behind, came the dun. Crouched low on his back, a diminutive youth held the heady animal under double wraps. Red was content to let his rival make the pace.

As the scudding pair, race-crazed, hurtled into the last quarter, the dun's rider raised in his shortened stirrups. Loosening the wraps from about his wrists he leaned over and spoke sharply into the laid-back yellow ears. Like a golden skyrocket the dun shot forward closing the intervening gap.

When the yellow head forged past him, the Mexican threw one startled look behind, then, in a sudden blind access of fury, withdrew both feet from his stirrups. Thrusting forward his legs, with his long-shanked sharp-roweled Spanish spurs, he raked the colt—raked him from flank. Three times the gouging points tore their way through the sweat-streaked hide, leaving a dripping crimson trail. Three times the sorrel responded to the brutal

stabs, with convulsive lunging jumps, in a vain endeavor to run out from under those piercing, cutting instruments of torture.

For the fourth time his rider thrust forward his spurred heels—then the colt rebelled. Possibly the injustice of the act, registering in his equine brain, unleashed a trait inherent from a line of Spanish forbears. Setting his feet the sorrel slid to a dead stop, hung his head, knotted his back and started to pitch. Straight down the course he jumped, all thoughts of the race abandoned, intent only on ridding himself of that stabbing demon on his back.

Fanned to his work by the wildly waved hats and the cries of pure glee that arose from the northern side of the lane, amid the vile execrations and muttered curses of the dark-skinned men on the southern side, the sorrel unlimbered an exhibition of straight and fancy bucking calculated to jar loose his rider's back teeth.

Encouraged by the shrill cry of "Ride him cowboy! Hang to him hombre!" the Mexican gripped the saddle's horn until his knuckles showed white beneath his yellow skin. There he stuck—stuck for two jumps—then landed in an ignominious heap on the tight-packed sand.

As the colt pitched down the track, the spectators, oblivious of all boundary lines, melted together into an arguing, jumbled crowd. Forcing a way through the throng, headed toward the little knot of rangers who still hung together near the finishing line, came the dun horse and rider.

A broad grin showed itself on the rider's face. "Old dun's rabbit foot is still working," he joyfully announced. "But I'm cured, plumb cured. That sorrel like to give me the heart disease, the way he jumped into the lead. I held the idea for a few seconds that old dun was due to spend the balance of his days packing a certain greaser

around Mexico. He would have to, if the sorrel had a little more age and experience behind him."

Tip nodded slow agreement. "The stallion's the best horse all right," he said. "All he needs is a little more age and experience, as you say. We were lucky Rojas got anxious and overplayed his hand."

"You-all better go on over and collect your hoss," Red advised, as he slid from the dun's back. "Last I seen, the greasers had a rope on the stallion, and if you don't show up soon, they're liable to start some monkey business. That's a sore crowd of *cholas*. Those cowboys have cleaned them of every last peso they possessed. Rojas is the sorest of the lot, barring the man who rode the stallion."

Barely had the words left Red's mouth, when from the opposite edge of the crowd arose a shrill neighing which gradually merged into the shriek of a horse in mortal agony.

Tossing the dun's reins to a bystander the diminutive redhead shoved an elbow into his sergeant's midriff. "Get a move on," he commanded. "Sounds to me like they have started some devil's work already. You can't trust that Rojas as far as you can throw a bull by the tail."

Instantly the piercing screams of the horse, which rose more and more insistent, drew the little group of rangers through the crowd.

Red McGraw had guessed rightly. The sight which met their eyes, as they drew to the opposite edge of the crowd, caused each ranger to reach for his gun in a concentrated swirl of fury. Outstretched, held down by tightly drawn reatas, the red colt lay prone upon the ground, suffering a torment of anguish. Yellow hands entwined in the helpless sorrel's tail, his erstwhile rider was applying with all his strength that exquisite method of torture known as *cola torcedura*—tail twisting.

The red stallion's one-time rider was applying it scientifically and with painstaking care. It appeared that he would wrench loose the backbone, tear the spinal column itself from the helpless animal. Close by his head, gazing unmoved into the suffering eyes of the tortured stallion, Rojas directed operations.

For a moment a red film of wrath obscured Tip Lanning's sight, a passion to kill surged over him; then the mists rolled away, and his voice came forth, cool, deadly, implacable.

"Stop, Rojas," he barked. "Let that hoss up!"

"Come an get heem señor," Rojas taunted, an evil smile twisting his face. "Come and get thees fine red *caballo* you have won. However, if the señor does not care to come, I myself will deliver him—after I have finish thees leetle job wheech I do."

Rojas was familiar with that paragraph in the regulations which forbade a ranger to cross the dividing line of the two countries. And the sorrel lay, his head barely over the line, on the soil of Mexico.

With a furtive glance at the monuments which marked the dividing line Tip noted the fact, and his heart took a little sickening slide downward. But his active brain, searching for a way out of the dilemma, registered a fact which had escaped the Mexican's attention. As Rojas had turned to bait the ranger, he had unwittingly stepped a pace or two forward. He was now across the line on American soil.

Coolly Tip measured the distance, then with a terrific bound gained the Mexican's side. Rojas with a snarl reached toward his gun. "Back, señor," he commanded. "Thees ees the soil of Mexico.

"Mexico—hell!" exclaimed the ranger. Disdaining the use of his own pistol, with a whiplike motion he grasped Rojas' gun arm. With a savage twist

he wrenched the pistol from Rojas' grasp and tossed it contemptuously across the line. "Keep the rest of them quiet," Tip directed. "I'll tend to this hombre."

"Now, greaser, tell your compadres to get that colt on his feet and start him across the line." Tip enforced the command with a bone-crunching twist of the arm. Pain and fear showed in Rojas' face. "Pronto," insisted the ranger, "before I shove your carcass down below where it belongs."

Racked with agony, beset with terror, in a croaking voice Rojas abjectly gave the order. The colt was allowed to regain his feet and was led across the line. With a mighty jerk Tip dragged Rojas upright and faced him toward Mexico.

"Rojas," he said, "I have always harbored the impression you were a dirty crook; now I know it. I am going to send you back home, and I am going to give you a present to remember me by."

Raising a booted foot Tip propelled the Mexican into his native land, where he sprawled in an unsightly heap.

Slowly Rojas regained his feet, picked up his pistol, and with a muttered imprecation hobbled away to seek solace with those of his own ilk.

III.

It was late afternoon. The low-hanging sun bathed the prairie in a flickering red light. Tip Lanning, following a faintly defined trail, was riding slowly into the waning sunset. His clothes, likewise the red coat of his horse, were splotted and coated with white alkali dust. His chaps and short canvas jacket were tied behind the cantle of his saddle. In some manner the thongs which fastened the compactly rolled bundle became unloosened, and, unseen and unheard by the rider, the pack thudded to the ground.

Unconscious of his loss, his head

bowed in contemplative silence, Tip rode steadily forward. His horse, responsive to his mood, plodded onward, never leaving the trail. The horse was nearing feed and water, and he knew it. Lifting his head he gave the faintest of faint nickers and insensibly increased his pace.

His rider roused up and let his eyes wander across the prairie. In the foreground sprawled a small cluster of weather-beaten houses, a typical prairie town. Far beyond, wrapped in a faint luminous haze, but bulking gigantic in their sheer immensity, loomed an enormous range of hills.

Tip, leaning forward, patted the horse's dust-grimed neck lovingly.

"Talk to them, Red Devil," he said. "You ain't the only one that's impatient for something to eat."

From down the trail, where he had but recently passed, came the pound of hoofs, heralding the approach of rapidly advancing riders. True to the etiquette of the plainsman, Tip did not glance around until the riders were abreast. As he half turned in his saddle, a sharp "Hands up!" smote his ears, and he gazed square into an ancient, but formidable-looking .45.

Tip elevated his hands deliberately, never changing his expression by as much as a flicker.

"Kind of sudden, ain't you?" he casually inquired of the individual behind the gun.

"Have to be with gentlemen of your stamp," ironically returned his captor who sported a large and ornate star. "Unlimber him boys," he directed, addressing the other members of the posse.

A rapid search disclosed an automatic of interesting caliber nestled beneath Tip's left arm. That and the Winchester in his saddle sheath comprised his armament.

"You can put your hands down now," the sheriff said. "Ride straight ahead.

We'll tell you when to turn. Don't try to bolt, or don't try any funny work, unless you're aimin' to resemble a first-class sieve. Ready, forward, march!"

Tip began to expostulate, but the sheriff refused to listen.

"You can talk later on. Take a fool's advice and hike it."

The cavalcade, led by Tip, started and eventually wound up at a small one-story jail, near the town's outskirts.

"Make yourself at home," sardonically remarked the sheriff as he escorted his prisoner inside. "She's all yours for a week or so—anyway."

"Say," requested Tip, as the sheriff prepared to leave, "would you mind coming out of your shell long enough to inform me what this is all about?"

"Beats my time how plumb innocent every hoss thief is," plaintively remarked the sheriff and, ignoring Tip's request, clanged the door behind him. Presently he reappeared and thrust a poster through the bars. "Read this," he said. "It may refresh your memory a trifle. This rustling Circle A hosses has got to stop."

Sitting down on the cot Tip scanned the paper:

FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

The above sum will be paid for the apprehension of one known as "Big Blondy." Six feet in height, blond complexion, with blue eyes and of muscular build. Will undoubtedly be riding a red sorrel horse, branded Circle A and stolen from that outfit. He is thought to be making for the Llano Mountains to join the Dave Dillsworth gang, who are hiding in that vicinity. If arrested, notify the undersigned.

F. BIGGARS, Sheriff of Driscoll County.

Tip read the poster, and at the conclusion, an amused smile hovered around his lips. "Describes me all right, but sheriff, your dead-wrong, you've got your wires crossed," he said. Then in a few concise sentences Tip explained who he was, and also the errand which called him in that vicinity.

In impassive silence the sheriff listened to the explanation. Tip reached for his jacket pocket, then suddenly remembering the bundle tied on the back of his saddle, said: "My credentials are in my coat which is tied behind the cantle. Go on out and get them, and we'll both go to supper."

The sheriff gazed at his prisoner doubtfully, then, as if willing to give him the benefit of any doubt, turned away. In a short space he reappeared.

"Son," he said, "between a liar and a hoss thief I'd pick a hoss thief every time. You appear to be both. You'll stay here till they send for you, and in the meantime thank your lucky star that somebody didn't catch you and string you before I got on your trail. I'll bring you somethin' to eat in the mornin'. A little righteous hunger may help that lyin' soul of yours."

IV.

Some time after midnight Tip was awakened by a handful of gravel which, tossed through the window, fell with unerring aim upon the cot. Throwing off the blankets he sat upright.

"That you, Blondy?" The question came in a sibilant whisper from the outside. Tip gazed uncomprehendingly, then went to the window and peered out. Within the shadow of the jail faintly outlined in the dim starlight, stood a roughly dressed individual, and behind him were two horses.

A faint whinny answered Tip's soft whistle. "Yeh, I got your hoss here, Blondy." A hoarse whisper assured him. "I also got a good bar. I reckon in about two jerks we can be headed away from this burg, provided you ain't too big to squeeze through the window."

Tip did some quick thinking, his brain revolving in swift whirls. Here undoubtedly was another case of mistaken identity, but at the same time it was in his favor. He quickly weighed the pos-

sibility of being able to convince the sheriff of his identity against the prospect of an immediate exit. His mission being pressing, and the chances of his release the next day being slight, he decided to embrace the opportunity at hand. At some later date he would right matters. "Let's go," he whispered. In reply came the entrance of the bar between the gratings and the sound of cautious prying. One by one the bars gave, pulling out of the rotted masonry in which they were imbedded.

"Try it now," came the croaked command. In compliance Tip drew himself up and, after tight squeezing and sundry wriggings, dropped lightly to the ground outside.

"We'll be movin' now, Blondy. We ought to be into the hills come daylight." With an assenting nod and a sly stolen pat for the sorrel, Tip followed his rescuer's example silently and swung himself into the saddle.

As they picked their way through town, Tip studied his rescuer with shrewdly appraising eyes. Of medium height, dressed in typical cowboy regalia, several weeks' growth of beard hid a weak, placid mouth. His eyes were furtive and shifty, containing none of the cold, hard glint that marks the killer.

"A weak sister," surmised Tip. "Took for some gang most likely." Aloud he said: "I'm sure in your debt for getting me out of that jug; but howcome, anyway?"

The stranger gave a low, throaty chuckle. "Heard in town they'd caught you, and knowing something about that jail I stuck around to get you out. Dave is short-handed and will be mighty glad to get another hand, especially one like you."

Tip digested this information slowly, then chanced another question. "How is it you dare hang around town? I supposed Dave Dillsworth's outfit had to keep mighty shady."

Again the stranger voiced his throaty

chuckle. "I don't exactly belong—that is, not yet," he said. "I'm working for the Circle A outfit, looking after a bunch of horses they are summering back in the hills. When Dave pulls the big deal off, I figure on leaving with him."

"Just what big deal is Dave planning now?" Tip pressed his whiskered companion.

"There's such a thing as talking too much," the bearded one bluntly informed him, closing his mouth with a sudden snap. "I'll take you to Dave, like I said I would; then it's up to him," and he lapsed into an impenetrable silence.

Several hours afterward the pair approached a small shack cleverly concealed in a cañon among the hills. Around an open fire squatted several hard-bitted figures. "Feel pretty secure," thought Tip. "They must have plenty of guards out, and we just about dodged them."

As they drew near, a man detached himself from the group and came forward. "That's Dave," Tip's guide informed him in an undertone. Then raising his voice he addressed the leader of the band.

"This here's Big Blondy. I picked him up in town."

Dave Dillsworth, burly and broad, brutal of face, pitiless of mouth, with eyes that glowered suspicion, studied Tip, then turned and narrowly observed his horse.

"Where'd you get that sorrel?" he asked. "Looks mighty like one I rustled into Mexico some time back."

"You're plumb mistaken." Tip lied with sublime audacity. "I stole this here hoss when I was making my get-away; the one I was ridin' give down on me." Forewith he plunged into a fictitious tale of his former exploits.

Dave listened to the wordy dissertation in silence. At the finish he grunted again unamiably, as if only half convinced.

"We don't need you," he informed Tip, "but you'll have to stay till the big chief gets here. He may cut you in, but I ain't taking any chances."

For the next few days Tip loafed about, endeavoring to ingratiate himself with the members of the band. A strained intensity hung like a pall over the camp. Without doubt a big coup was to be pulled very soon. Gathering scraps of conversation here, catching a softly dropped word there, Tip was at last able to piece together their plans.

The Circle A, by whom his bearded guide was employed, was a horse outfit, engaged in breeding blooded horses exclusively. They were summering a good-sized bunch in the hills. Dave Dillsworth proposed to steal the entire string. The scheme had been evolved in the fertile brain of the one known as big chief. He, Tip gathered, lived south of the border and had for some time been disposing of stolen horses, small bunches which Dave had rustled and driven down to him. Now, acting in conjunction, they were in for a grand clean-up. Their scheme was subtle, and by its very daring bade fair to prove effective.

Representing himself as a horse buyer who had purchased a big string of Circle A horses, the big chief was to order a train of stock cars set for a certain date at Gopher, a small loading station on the opposite side of the hills. When placing the order he would be accompanied by Tip's bearded guide to give credence to his claim and quiet any suspicion. The train was to be billed to San Antonio. At a junction, some hundred and fifty miles south, the train was to be stopped, and the horses unloaded. From there it was a scant three hours drive across country to the border and safety.

In order to further insure their plans and nullify any chance of discovery while rustling the horses, still further distractions had been contrived. Sev-

eral of the band, heavily armed and well mounted, were to make their way into the small town, where Tip had been held in jail.

Here they were to stage a fake, or if things broke advantageously, a genuine holdup of the bank. It was a foregone conclusion that the news would be carried posthaste to the nearer ranches, with the request of their riders' services for posse work. Thus all the outfits would be drawn into town, and there would be small chance of the rustlers being interrupted.

As Tip cogitated the daring plan, his mind constantly harked back to the chain of circumstances that had pitchforked him into the midst of the band. Thus far luck had ridden at his right hand. On detached duty, his very mission was to investigate the activities of the gang of which now perforce he was a member.

By a strange turn of fortune's wheel he possessed all the requisite information; but how he could make use of it, he could not for his life conjecture. He was still plainly under the suspicion of the leader, Dave, and was unarmed. Even had he been armed it was palpably impossible for any one man to arrest the band single-handed. Reviewing the situation from all angles Tip decided his best chance, providing he could gain the outlaws' full confidence, would be with the party who were to hold up the bank. He was satisfied that in some manner to be determined by circumstances, he could frustrate the attempt and cause the raiders' capture. Then, being conversant with their plans, it would be an easy matter to form a posse and capture the balance of the gang, while they were loading the horses.

What bothered Tip unduly was the identity of the big chief, the unknown head. That he was some desperate character from the lower border Tip was convinced. And therein lay the

danger. The ranger was well known along both sides of the line. Here, better than a hundred miles north, he was a comparative stranger and in little danger of being recognized. But there was hardly a criminal or outlaw along the border but knew and feared the intrepid ranger.

"Well, it was all in the line of duty and a chance one had to take," thought Tip.

Having thus settled things in his own mind, he philosophically awaited the big chief's coming.

V.

Several days passed, and Tip, his nerves attuned to catch the slightest change, subtly sensed an undertone of excitement running through the camp. There was a strained sense of anticipation, the comings and goings increased, and Dave held many low-voiced conversations with different members of the band.

Toward evening Tip, engaged in brushing Red Devil who was staked some little distance away from the balance of the horses, noted a compact bunch of riders coming up the ravine. One was a stranger. At a distance Tip could not distinguish his features, but there was something vaguely familiar in the way the figure dismounted from his horse and stalked into the shack.

Tip knotted his brows in perplexity, searching the corridors of his memory. As he pondered, striving to place the figure, Dave stepped forth from the shack and beckoned. Tip made his way slowly toward the hut.

"This is where the show-down comes," he thought. "If I can only persuade them to let me go with the band into town, the rest will be easy."

In contrast to the glaring sunlight without, the interior of the shack held all the murkiness of a tomb. For a moment Tip failed to recognize the newcomer. Then, as his eyes became ac-

customed to the dimness, he received the full impact of Rojas' sinister smile. The big chief was no less than his ancient enemy—the captain of the rurales.

Involuntarily Tip's muscles tensed and stiffened. The Mexican rose to his feet, with a mock gesture of welcome.

"Eet is the Señor Tip," he said. "Leetle did I dream I would meet so much old friends—*companeros*—in dees countree." He waved a pistol negligently toward the ranger and continued with an evil smirk. "How is the red *caballo*? The señor has instilled some courage into hees dog's heart by thees time, I hope."

Then his sarcastic suaveness changed to the fierce intensity of a caged tiger.

"Eet is now Rojas' turn," he snarled. "Many times will you pay for the vile insult of the keeck. But not now—*mañana*. By that time, maybe, I will have theenk of some good way to repay my friend—my *companero*."

Acting under Rojas' instructions Dave bound the ranger and rolled him outside. Here Tip spent an uncomfortable night. Dave had trussed him cunningly and skillfully. A few vain efforts convinced Tip that it was useless to try and escape from the tightly drawn bonds. He mentally cursed the impulse which caused him to refrain from putting up a fight when he first recognized Rojas—settling matters then and there. That Rojas would mete out nothing less than death to him on the morrow was a certainty. And he shuddered to think of the tortures he would have to undergo before that death came. If Rojas had not meant to play with him catlike, he would have killed him at once without compunction. With the ingrained philosophy that was a part of his nature, Tip accepted the cards which fate had dealt him, attempting not to think of what the morrow would bring forth.

Bright and early the following morning the camp was astir. Under Dave's direction the outlaws split into two parties. Dave had elected to go with the bank robbers, and Rojas was to oversee the loading of the rustled stock.

From where he lay Tip watched both bands depart. A faint spasm of hope surged through his heart. Was it possible that Rojas had given up his cherished thought of revenge? That was almost too much to expect. Tip was not kept long on the anxious seat. Presently Rojas returned, riding alone. Evidently he wished no one to witness his revenge.

Dismounting he strode to where Tip lay helpless and unbound his legs. "Get up, gringo," he said. "Rojas ees about to do you a great honor." Here he prodded Tip with his foot.

Painfully, his legs numbed and bruised, the results of the tightly drawn cords, the ranger struggled to his feet.

Emphasizing the order with a flourished pistol the Mexican commanded, "Forward, march." With vicious prods of the gun he steered Tip toward the mouth of the cañon, while keeping up a running fire of vituperation.

"The señor feels like the fast run thees morning?" Rojas maliciously inquired. "Yes, eet is good. Soon will he have the chance. The señor is doubtless familiar with the law of my land wheech allow the fugitive to eescape—eef he can—by making a run. The señor will now have a chance to test thees law in hees own countree. You are my preesinor, señor. I wish to take you back to Mexico. You do not weesh to go, señor, you weesh to escape. Ees it plain now."

As the full meaning of the Mexican's intent sunk into Tip's brain, he could not repress an involuntary shudder. This was repayment with a vengeance, this invoking of the ancient Spanish fugitive law—*ley fugitivo*. What chance would he have to escape the Mexican's

bullets, while running down a narrow cañon?

And if he did escape, Rojas would mount his horse and hunt him down like a dog. Well, one sure thing—he wouldn't run a lick. Let the greaser shoot him down where he stood.

Rojas' croaking voice broke into his meditations. "And one theeng more, señor. Rojas ees tender-hearted. Rojas weeshes to give you much pleasure before you die. Perhaps the señor would care to bid hees red *caballo* a good-by—adios. Eet has been tole me, señor, you can wheestle, and the red one will come. Rojas in hees great goodness will allow you to call the red horse and bid him a long^g farewell."

The taunting words piercing Tips brain set a train of thought in motion. Here might lay a chance for a desperate attempt to escape. Little did the Mexican realize the depths of the love and obedience rendered the ranger by the red stallion. He would whistle up Red Devil and strive to gain his back. There was a bare chance it might be done, and even a barer chance he might escape. Anyway it would be better than being butchered, or shot down running away like a rabbit.

Tip whistled shrilly.

The sorrel, which was grazing some little distance off, raised his head and located the sound. Once again Tip whistled. With a nicker of delight the red stallion trotted slowly forward.

As he neared the pair, in sheer joyous abandon he started to weave a flirtatious circle about them. When he passed the Mexican, who, pistol trained upon the ranger, was paying slight heed to the horse's antics, the stallion stopped—stopped dead.

Possibly some taint in the air conveyed to his sensitive nostrils the presence of a hated greaser. It may have been that in Rojas he recognized his former tormentor. Then again it may have been a blind wrath, the uncontrol-

lable impulse which causes a stallion at times to attack strangers. When the stallion stopped, he raised one foot cautiously, placed it gently on the ground, raised the other, and took a step forward in the manner of a bird dog roading game.

Then he charged—charged like a red thunderbolt from hell. In two leaping plunging bounds he was on top of the Mexican. Like the snapping of a gigantic trap the jaws closed—closed over the arm that held the gun. Shrieking horrible screams of pain and fear the Mexican with futile efforts fought the rage-crazed beast. As well might he have fought a bolt of lightning. Wheeling, plunging, kicking, snapping, fury incarnate, the red horse beat Rojas to the ground. Only when his victim lay a broken, crumpled, sodden heap, did the stallion desist. Then, raising high his head, he shrilled to the world his clarion call of defiance. As the shrill cry died away he turned, trotted slowly over to his master and rubbed his red muzzle affectionately up and down his shoulder.

Hours afterward Tip rode into the town which a short time before had successfully repelled a foray on its bank. In front of him on his horse he bore the limp body of the Mexican. Sliding stiffly down Tip eased the inert figure to the ground. He was quickly surrounded by a curious crowd. While willing hands came to his assistance, he poured out the plans of the rustlers.

Then one of the crowd spoke. "Once on the border," he said oracularly, "I saw a horse run a brave, game race and lose. After the race I saw his owner compliment him by trying to kill him. This is the horse, and this," prodding the Mexican with his foot, "is the man. Am I not right?" He turned to Tip.

"You are," the ranger gravely acquiesced, "and just this morning Red Devil returned the compliment."

A Running Account

BY
Orville Leonard



Author of "Good Guides but Bad Guessers," "The Same Breed," etc.



HIS here town o' Cinnabar Prospect," said old Bill Simpson, stuffing a large quid carefully inside a lean cheek, "has got two o' the prime belongin's of a real live town—an' them's a 'terrible example' an' a 'model youth.' An' there goes the model youth now, weavin' out o' town, head up an' tail wavin'!"

Old Bill bent a keen eye, charged with concentrated study, on a clean-looking, erect figure, a man who favored him with a brief nod, as his pony shuffled by the hotel, all, except the head and shoulders of both man and horse, hidden in a rolling cloud of dust.

"That there feller, Jarvie Montagne, has lived here five years, off an' on, an' no feller's ever heard him swear or seen him hit the hooch! Keeps his nose an' his clo'es clean, helps Lambert tend store all day, an' don't never, *never* bet on a wicked card. He's 'most too good to be true, an' yet the kid seems right enough. After all, no human hadn't orter be blamed fer passin' up all the joy in life, if he chooses to live that way."

Jarvis, secure in his rectitude, rode smilingly on into the desert. Though he had lived for five years on the edge

of it, Montagne had never been in the desert alone. True, he had crossed a desert valley in a motor car and had skirted the town on foot, but he had always kept Cinnabar in sight. Now, with full canteens, a six-gun in a saddle holster, and very minute directions from Lambert about keepin' to the trails, he was headed for Morse City, thirty miles away.

For Lambert had a debtor in Morse City who answered no letters and never came to Cinnabar Prospect. Lambert could hobble around on crutches, but he couldn't face the hard journey to Morse City. There were others who would gladly have gone to collect that five hundred dollars from Abe Tarte, but Lambert didn't feel sure that any old gun fighter, eager to get his long-quieted forty-five into action, would not claim a large percentage as collection fees and put it back into circulation in Morse City, via Tarte's cash drawer. So Montagne was sent.

While Jarvis had a lively brain, a slant for constructive work, and a powerful frame, yet some perverse quirk in his brain had kept him for five years selling groceries, overalls, saddles, ropes, spurs, and tools to cattlemen and miners.

But now, even as he threw up his head and swung his glance to take in the stark, lofty mountain ranges on either hand and a flat, sandy desert ahead, his spirit felt free, and he talked to himself. "Go back to old Lambert and measure out tea to the miners and fit old sour doughs with overalls! Not any more for Jarvis Montagne!"

For men are smitten as suddenly as that, sometimes. Alone in the great desert emptiness, peopled with its own silent, mysterious life, with a good horse under him and the trail ahead looking as though it were going on and on over the edge of the world, Jarvis wondered how he could ever have spent every day within four walls.

From the top of a sand ridge five miles from Cinnabar Prospect he glanced back. The tiny town clung to a low foothill slope which rose from the level desert floor.

"Two dozen wooden boxes squatting in the sand! And I've been spending all my days in one and nights in another," he grumbled. Then his broncho stepped down the farther slope of the ridge, and his home town was blotted from his sight. "I can take old Ruel back his five hundred dollars, if I get it," he reflected, "and then Mr. Ruel Lambert gets my resignation as manager, office boy, and general factotum of the Cinnabar Emporium." Having come to this revolutionary decision, he brought his quirt down with a swish, and his broncho broke into a run.

Montagne possessed one of those exceptional physiques that remain ever supple and ready to respond to an unusual call; and he had ridden home with the first flight in many a stiff cross-country run back East; so when he rode into Morse City in the late afternoon all he experienced was an added sense of exhilaration.

He left his pony at the livery stable and registered at the hotel which announced itself as The Palace, although

it was but a one-story 'dobe built around a central court, in Spanish fashion. Then he walked along the one street of rock and hard-beaten earth to the Morse City Amusement Company, entered, and asked for Mr. Tarte. It was early supper time, and Montagne found the big room empty, but for a saloon hanger-on, left in charge, while the proprietor dined.

"Tarte's at Jo Hui's, the chink's, fillin' up—be back in an hour," said the watchdog, taking in the clean-cut young stranger curiously.

Montagne left to get his own supper and, being very much on the job, was back within the hour. The barnlike amusement room bore a different air. Several card games were going at tables ranged along the walls, pool balls clicked from a big back room, and the bar was well lined with men, while a phonograph wailed and squeaked from a corner.

Montagne waited at the end of the bar until a large, pale man, having finished serving the thirsty crowd, turned toward him inquiringly. "Where can I find Mr. Tarte?" asked Jarvis.

"You're lookin' right at him," answered the bartender. His features were heavy, his face was very pallid, and his eyes were a dead black, small, and restless.

"I'd like to see you alone for a few minutes, Mr. Tarte, when you can spare the time." Jarvis' eyes were bright, his color was high, and he had somehow shed his careful manner.

"All right," said Tarte, looking at him speculatively. "I'll be through with this bunch in a minute. Have a drink?" And Jarvis, without a moment's hesitation, answered, "Sure."

While Montagne tossed off a stiff drink of raw whisky, a young fellow, leaning negligently against the wall and smoking a cigarette, grinned sardonically at Jarvis Montagne's back. This fellow was the terrible example of Cin-

nabar, and he had recognized the model youth from the same town. "Actin' natural away from home," he said to himself.

In a few minutes Tarte walked to the end of the bar, where his visitor waited, wiped his hands on a bar towel, and nodded toward a narrow door beside the bar.

Montagne followed the saloon keeper through it into a small room, fitted with a flat-topped desk, several chairs, and a smoky hanging lamp.

"Sit down, stranger." Tarte waved his visitor to a chair, seated himself at his desk, and pushed forward a box of cigars. Montagne lighted one, blew smoke at the lamp, and then turned to his host.

"Mr. Tarte, I'm from Ruel Lambert, of Cinnabar."

"Yeh?" asked Tarte.

"You know, we have a bill against you of more than five hundred dollars, and, as Mr. Lambert could get no reply to any of his letters and couldn't make the trip himself, I'm here for him. You know that bill is long overdue, Mr. Tarte."

"Lambert's been sendin' me frantic letters about it for most three years, I reckon," said Tarte.

"Well?" asked Montagne.

"An' since them goods was bought, Cinnabar's went dry, but Morse City's stayed wet, an' so how can old Lambert, bein' dry, figure on livin' off the proceeds of a wet business?" queried Tarte.

Jarvis smiled. "Still, Mr. Tarte, you must admit it's both a moral and a business obligation."

"No, I don't—an' it ain't," growled the saloon man. "Lambert sold me liquor, then he turns round an' works tooth an' nail to make the whole country dry. Tried to dry up Morse City, too—would 'a' ruined me—but he couldn't make it. He's got to pay that much fer his damn dry principles."

Montagne studied the unscrupulous face for a moment. "Isn't there any way I can make you see that this was a business obligation, no matter what came after?"

"No, there ain't, young feller, but I'll tell yer what I will do: I'll put up a thousand agin' your five hundred to see whether I pay that bill or call it off."

Jarvis looked dubious, then laughed recklessly: "All right. I've got five hundred dollars of my own here. I'm trampling on all my good resolutions, but I'll go you, Tarte. Only one condition, though: Put the cash on the table."

Tarte smiled craftily. "Sure, I'll do that."

"Shall we settle it here?" asked Montagne.

"No; come outside to one o' the tables," said Tarte. He was all eagerness now and hustled his visitor out into the noisy saloon and to an unoccupied table. He went to his safe and pulled out a bag of gold from which he counted a thousand dollars. Jarvis pulled a roll of bills from his pocket, counted out five hundred dollars, and put it with the pile of eagles and double eagles. Then Tarte broke a fresh pack of cards, and the play began.

The tall, lean young fellow with the reckless face, who still leaned negligently against the wall, looked on with indifferent interest. His right hand was hooked in his gun belt, his left held a fresh cigarette.

Presently the play ended abruptly, and Tarte looked up, a triumphant gleam in his black eyes. "Can't beat four aces, can yer, young feller?"

"Why—why," stammered Jarvis, "how can that be? I have an ace in my hand!" A flush rose in Tarte's pale cheeks, his black eyes roved about the room, and his hand stole inside his vest.

"Drop it," came from the indolent one against the wall.

Tarte drew out his hand, empty, for

he knew that careless-seeming young man was deadly swift on the draw.

Vance Chester stepped up to the table, deliberately picked up three or four cards lying in front of the saloon keeper, and fingered the backs delicately with his left hand; then he smiled. "You'd orter be careful, Abe, when you mark a deck. Was that other ace up yer sleeve?"

Tarte glared at him without speaking. There was no shame in his look, only malevolence and chagrin. Montagne, an angry glint in his eyes, kicked his chair back and stood up, ranging himself beside Vance Chester, the interfering one. He encountered faces as ugly and unscrupulous as Tarte's in the sweep of his inquiring glance. Some were still and indifferent, and several were good-natured, but all, expecting gun play, had backed away from the line of fire. Ignoring them, Montagne turned again to Tarte.

"Now, Jarvie," drawled Chester, who still held his gun on Tarte, "gather the coin, an' we'll be pullin' our stakes, freight an' all."

"All I'll take is my five hundred and what Tarte owes Lambert," said Montagne, stuffing his own bills and the other five hundred dollars in gold into his pockets. "I don't want any of that skunk's money."

"You're too conscientious, son," said Chester, "but now we'll be goin'. You keep them paws in the air till we're out o' sight, Abe," he commanded softly, and the two backed to the door, whisked out, and slammed it behind them.

"You good for a night ride, Parvie?" asked Chester, as they ran down the dark street, heading for the livery stable.

"You bet I'm good for any action that takes me out of this hole," chuckled Jarvis, running easily beside him. They did not wait to rouse the stableman, but Vance ripped Montagne's saddle off the peg, flung it on a familiar pinto that Jarvis had ridden, jerked the tie rope

off his own saddled broncho, and the two whirled out of the corral yard and down the dusty grade toward the flat desert which lay between them and Cinnabar Prospect.

The steep ore grade wound down the mountain for miles before it dropped gently through the foothills to the flat, sandy plain far below. Where the mountains changed to sandy foothills Vance drew rein in the black shadow of a cañon buttress.

"You wait fer me here, Jarvie. Just below us, a cut-off trail from Morse City joins this road, an' I aim to find out, without announcin' my comin' by a brass band, whether any o' Abe's friends is plannin' to ambush us an' git back that five hundred. Abe Tarte don't usually give up gold without some patent-extraction process like we invented back there. Wait till you hear me, if it's an hour. I'll make a sound like a kyote, if it's all right, an' you come along, an' I'll be waitin' fer you on the grade. If you hear guns, or anything like that, come a-runnin'."

Left alone in the darkness, Montagne felt distinctly nervous. The minutes dragged interminably. He waited so long that the conviction was forcing itself upon him that he had been made a fool of by that reckless, mischievous devil, Chester, when he heard the drumming of hoofs, receding over the hills to his right; then he heard the high, shrill, yapping laugh of a coyote, and he rode on with a sigh of relief. Suddenly he started in the saddle, when a low chuckle sounded from the black shadows through which he was riding.

"Hear them horses, Jarvie? It was easy. I Injuned round an' come up past where I found two bronchos waiting back up the trail. I couldn't help makin' a teeny bit o' noise over the rocks, but they allowed it was their horses, so I got up close, without them smellin' anything. An' there they was—two of 'em peekin' over the rocks at

the side o' the trail, halfway down the cañon slope. They was waitin' fer us. Their backs was to me, so I held 'em both up an' added two to my arsenal. Them hoofs you heard was them beatin' it back to Morse without their six-guns. Abe must 'a' changed his mind about payin' Ruel's bill."

When they had plunged down through the foothills and were out on the flat, they slowed to a steady jog, riding in inky blackness, where the moon, just rising over the mountains looming steeply on their right, cast long black shadows over the level desert floor.

Then Jarvis Montagne chuckled. "This whole business is most unethical."

"Reckon there ain't many ethics in a crooked poker game," stated the other dryly, "but it's always right to take money from a crook—specially if it belongs to you—also, any guns that might drill you, even if they ain't yourn."

They rode in the darkness and silence, while Montagne reviewed the evening; then he broke the silence. "Lucky you happened to be on hand to spot that crooked play and back me up," he said.

"Well, I reckon there's foresight in most luck," drawled Vance. "You see, old Ruel reckoned a real good boy like you might get some sort o' peaceable action on that old bill, where I wouldn't—me bein' Cinnabar's horrible example a' wantin' to collect it with a gun. But Ruel figured it might be a good notion fer me to be handy to back up your play, so I been waitin' fer you to show up since noon."

"Much obliged, Vance, for the help, but my reputation's gone."

A chuckle came from the darkness, then Chester's drawling words: "Don't let that worry you none, Jarvie—mine's gone, too—an' it was a heap sight worse'n yours."

"You boys meet Tarte's skinner?" asked Ruel Lambert next morning,

when they rode up to the Cinnabar Emporium.

"No; we took a short cut."

Lambert was in a complacent humor. "Heard you brought home the bacon."

"Yeh; we did," answered Vance, "but how'd you know it?"

"Why, Abe Tarte phoned over from Morse an' told me he'd paid Jarvis an' you in full. 'Pologized fer keepin' me waitin' an' give me a whackin' order fer soft drinks an' fancy provisions. Said the Cascade Club was goin' ter be entertained in Morse to-morrow, an' he had to have extry grub immediate. He was awful excited an' hurried. Told me to deliver to his skinner, who was here with his mule outfit, an' to tell the skinner to hustle to Morse with 'em."

"Say, old-timer," asked Chester, "what might be the value o' that picnic grub an' harmless refreshment?"

"I ain't figured it up yet, but with the cigars for the State officials an' all, Tarte's bill will run close to six hundred dollars."

"An' you figure to git that money?"

"Why not? Tarte's just squared up, hasn't he?" bristled the old man. "And he promised to remit as soon as the Cascade Club has left."

Vance Chester grinned at the storekeeper. "Say, Ruel, after showin' up Tarte in a crooked poker game, we had to collect that five hundred at the point of a gun." Then he blew smoke rings thoughtfully, gazed dreamily out into the brilliant sunlight, and spoke to the world at large: "My old dad, speakin' for himself, uster allow that 'there warn't no fool like an old fool.' So you an' me, Jarvie, has got to invent a bran'-new scheme fer pryin' six hundred bucks out o' that crook; for there ain't goin' to be no Cascade Club in Morse City, an' he's got old Ruel cinched."

Montagne turned to Lambert. "I figured on resigning when I got back here, but now I think I'll hang on till Chester and I collect that bill."

Wild Freedom

By
George
Owen
Baxter



Author of "Joe White's Brand," "Over the Northern Border," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

WHEN John Parks attempts to cross a perilous mountain trail in a blizzard he dies, a victim of the storm. His little twelve-year-old boy, Tommy, is left alone with Billy, a burro. On the night following his father's death Tommy comes upon a cave. Close by he makes camp. During the night a mountain lion kills the burro. The next day Tommy explores the cave and finds it suitable to his needs as a place of abode. He carries his father's pack into the cave; it consists of tools, a little food and clothing, a tarpaulin, a rifle, a revolver, ammunition, and a few sundries. With these Tommy begins the battle to live.

He frees a bear imprisoned in a cave, and with her and her cubs he spends a fairly comfortable, happy summer. They hunt and forage for food together. But when the bears hibernate, he is again thrown on his own resources. Shortly after the first winter's snowfall Tommy is capturing a partridge when he loses all his matches. He faces a hard winter severely handicapped.

CHAPTER XII.

HEAVEN-SENT HEAT.

THE miserable days dragged on, and he still lived. He managed, by heaping all the blankets and the tarpaulin upon him, to keep warm enough in the cave so long as he was lying down, but when he moved around the cold ate into him venomously. If he had had the proper food, he could have endured well enough, but raw meat was more than his stomach could stand unless he were exercising vigorously, and in that bleak weather he dared not expose himself for long at a stretch. Gradually, his strength diminished. A great drowsiness began to grow in him. It spread through his body first—an aching fever, a false warmth, broken with fierce spells of shivering and utter cold. And then it reached his brain, so that he wanted

to do nothing but lie still all the day in the heap of warmth-giving stuff which he had piled up.

But, even in his drowsy times, there was an anguish of hunger, a craving for food which he could not have. He found himself wasting with a terrible rapidity. His body grew emaciated. His cheeks sunk. His hands, when he raised them, were wasted to such a point that he hardly recognized them. Yet, every day, in spite of that diminishing strength, he forced himself to get up and go into the great outdoors to see if he could sight some animal, some beast of prey, which he might kill with a rifle bullet to clothe himself in the pelt.

Once he sighted a great timber wolf, but his shaking hands could not hold the weapon firm, and the bullet flew wide while the wolf trotted out of sight with the slowness of contempt for this puny hunter. He failed, thus, on the

only occasion when he sighted a pelt worth having. And now the time came when he went out more and more seldom. And finally, for three successive days he did not leave the cave.

It was only a sudden reflex of will that drove him out at length. He awakened one afternoon from a stupor. He hardly felt hunger now. A haze hung before his eyes. The same haze hung over his very mind. But there was a sudden parting of the veil as he saw his hand raised before him, a mere, withered claw rather than a hand!

The horror brought him erect. There he stood, shuddering in the cold, and realizing that when he lay down again it would be to fall into a sleep from which there was no waking. And fear drove him on more strongly than dread of the cold could keep him back. Presently, swathed in blankets, he staggered weakly out of the cave. A side draft of the wind caught him and knocked him flat. He rose again and went on blindly through the forest, the rifle dragging down in his hands as though it were of a ton's weight. He knew that even if he saw a fur worth having he could not shoot the wearer, and yet on he went, driven simply by a horror of the cave and the death to which he would be returning if he went back to it.

He found himself stumbling across a raw, bare patch of earth from which a recent landslide had torn the trees and shrubs. And, tripping on a loose stone, he fell headlong for the tenth time. He was stunned by the fall. When he roused again, he found that he was half frozen, so frozen that when he leaned and picked up the gun the weapon fell from his numbed fingers and, striking a rock, knocked out a bright spark.

Tommy stared with vague agony down at the stone. In the very rock there seemed to be fire. He alone in all creation was without warmth. He was still half dazed, half stupid, but that

spark had fascinated him. Regardless of the harm that might be done the barrel, he dropped the rifle again, and again the spark jumped from the piece of flat, black stone.

Suddenly, he picked it up with a wild hope growing in him. Sparks will light fire. This must be a flint. What had the Indians used for centuries before him? With the stone hugged to his breast, with the rifle trailing behind him, he made on toward the cave as fast as his weak knees would support his strides.

So, muddy from his falls, with a ringing as of bells in his ears, he entered the cave and looked about him for tinder. He found something excellent for his purpose—a pile of dried bark which he had used to start his fires while the matches lasted. Some of this he shredded to a bundle of small fibers, so brittle that they threatened to crumble to a powder. He gathered larger wood near by, and then he took the revolver, as a handier bit of steel, and, the flint dropped at an angle, he began to knock a shower of sparks upon the tinder.

They fell all over the bark. A faint smoke arose, but when he ceased striking the flint the smoke died out. He worked until his weak arms ached. Then, as despair was coming over him, there was a new thought. He hammered again with all his might and main, tossed aside the battered gun as soon as he saw a small spot glowing on the bark, and began to fan this with his breath.

He blew till his lungs threatened to burst, till his head grew dizzy, and behold, the smoldering spot of dark grew in width, ate into the bark. Hastily, he placed more shreds of the crumpled bark upon the spot. Again he blew. And now a thin column of smoke rose. To Tommy it was the most blissful sight he had ever seen. Literally, it meant life!

Again he blew with all his might. The smoldering increased, grew audible. There was a faint sparkling, the smoke cloud increased tenfold. He began to fan the heap with a part of the blanket. And now the smoldering place became a vivid orange which lighted up his hands at work. Suddenly, a little tongue of flame shot up, quivered, while Tommy hung breathless over it, and then steadied into a swiftly growing blaze. He had made fire! He had made it of steel and stone and wood! And a great wave of gratitude flooded through Tommy. He cast up his arms. Tears streamed down his face.

But he dared not wait. Quickly, he threw on the bits of wood. The smoke rose again as the fire worked. Then a new and stronger flame burst out. And, like a madman, he threw on more and more wood. A roaring blaze shook up toward the top of the cave. A soaring flame licked against the roof itself. And Tommy sat down with his blanket thrown away, unneeded, his arms put out to the Heaven-sent heat!

A month later, on a day, there blew up a warm wind. It was a true chinook. It melted the snows in the lower valleys as though a fire had been built upon them. In a fortnight Tommy had dry footing for his hunting trips.

He came out from the winter prison hollow cheeked, still weak in body from the great ordeal, but full of pride, full of invincible confidence in his strength to face any ordeals before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRANGER COMES.

HE made his first trip to the cave of Madame Grizzly. The entrance was still blocked with brush. He exerted no effort to rouse them. He was wise enough to understand that there is no safety in interfering with mother nature when she is at her work.

So he went back down the slopes, finding every trail crossed with rivulets fed from snows that were melting under the trees. It was on this trip that he made his first kill of big game. Something stirred in a thicket before him. He jerked out the revolver and stood eagerly waiting, and in a moment a little, brown-bodied deer stepped into view, and Tommy fired.

He almost regretted what he had done as he stood over the beautiful little body a moment later, but life in the wilderness is a grim thing. It is kill or be killed, and Tommy had lived there long enough to understand it.

Many times he had seen his father cut up deer. And now he set busily to work getting off the hide. There was many a slip of the knife, many a slit in the tender pelt, but eventually, after a weary task of tugging and pulling and cutting, the work was done, after a fashion. Then he cut the deer into quarters, hung three parts as high as he could on a shrub, and carried one ham back to the cave.

To roast a quarter in the Dutch oven was a considerable task. Moreover, it was one which he had never performed before except under the strict supervision of his father. And it was dark in the cave before he peered at his cookery and decided that it was done. And what a fragrance greeted his nostrils as he opened the oven! Surely, that was worth waiting for.

He had just sat back to enjoy the meal in prospect, when a human voice, the first he had heard in almost a year, spoke from the entrance.

"Hello, son!"

He leaped to his feet with a shout of astonishment. And he saw that a big, rough-bearded man had just crawled through the entrance to the cave and had risen to his height—a huge, thick-shouldered man in the later middle of life.

There was one pang of disappoint-

ment, of unbearable sorrow, in Tommy as he saw that it was not John Parks come back to him. In that instant, hope of the return died forever in his breast. And, in another breathing space, he was wild with joy because a human being had at last crossed his trail. The long silence was ended. He went to the big man with a rush.

"Oh," cried Tommy, "how did you come—how did you come? How did you find me?"

Here the big fellow stepped back from him, gathered his bushy brows, and peered down at Tommy with little black, bright eyes.

"Look here, son," he said, "you ain't telling me that you're living here alone, are you? Your pa ain't here with you?"

He said this with an eagerness which Tommy could not understand, and the boy told all his story in ten words. But, the instant he had learned that John Parks was dead, the stranger seemed to lose all interest in the rest of the narrative and the story of Tommy's sufferings. He strode forward, lifted the cover, and inhaled the fragrance of the roasted venison.

"We'll eat now," he said, "and we'll talk things over later on."

And, so saying, his big knife instantly slashed into the vitals of the roast. He began to eat wolfishly, and Tommy, amazed and bewildered by such treatment, stood for a time in the offing. When he approached to take something for himself, the stranger lifted his eyes with a silent glare, and Tommy retreated again. Not until the big man had ended his meal, bolting the meat in great chunks, could Tommy take a portion in what he considered safety.

By this time he was thoroughly frightened, but the black-bearded fellow had reclined against a stone and spread out his legs toward the fire. He began to roll a cigarette.

"Make yourself handy, son," he grunted after a time when the cigarette

was lighted and he had blown a cloud of smoke upwards. "Get some wood on that fire."

Tommy moved as though he had been struck with a whip, half choking on the mouthful he was eating. And, after he had obediently heaped on the wood and the flame was soaring, the fear of the taciturn stranger had increased in him to such an extent that his throat closed and he could not speak. He sat watching and waiting uneasily. And still the stranger did not stir, but seemed to drink up the heat of the fire, while his eyes bored into Tommy.

The boy began to notice the equipment of the big man, now. He was wearing rough clothes which were plastered with mud and torn with a thousand small rents, such as come when one rushes recklessly through dense forest or climbs over rough rocks with many a slip and fall. Also, in spite of the bushy beard of the man and his stalwart frame, Tommy saw that the upper part of his cheeks were sunken and his eyes buried. Plainly, he had made a long and hurried march. He had made it on foot, and he had made it without so much as a blanket. Yet he had chosen to carry a perfect arsenal of guns and ammunition. He was weighed down with a Colt and a heavy cartridge belt crammed full of bullets, and now there rested beside him a repeating rifle of the newest and most expensive model. Tommy could see that it had been scrupulously cared for. There was not so much as a scratch upon the wood of the butt.

From these things he began to make deductions actively. Men did not travel over the mountains hastily in the time of the thaw, equipped with only guns and bullets, unless they were either pursuing or fleeing. And something told Tommy that this was not a case of pursuit. Men who pursue, are fearless, and the keen eyes of this fellow rested upon even a boy like Tommy

with a world of suspicion and cautious reserve.

"Look here, kid," he said suddenly, "how long you been here?"

"Almost a year," said Tommy.

"A year!" said the other. "And nobody ain't been near you all that time?"

"Nobody," said Tommy.

"Not a soul, eh?"

"Not a soul."

The big man drew a great breath, and then, in silence, he stared off into vacancy. Presently, he began to smile. Evidently, what he had learned had pleased him immensely.

"And," said Tommy, "I'd like to know when we start on."

"What?" said the stranger. "When we start on?"

"I—I thought," said Tommy, "that you'd take me with you when you went."

The other laughed with a brutal abruptness.

"Now, why," said he, "are you aching to get back to other folks? What'll they do for you? Nothing! Look at the way I been treated by everybody! Look at the way everybody has treated me!"

He stopped suddenly and eyed Tommy in that keen way he had, until he apparently decided that there was nothing to fear. He shrugged his shoulders. His tongue loosened.

"There ain't no justice down among men," he said in a voice half gruff and half whining. "They don't give a man a chance. Look at me! Is a gent responsible for what he does when he's got some hooch under his belt? No, he ain't. No right-thinking man can say that he is. But I wake up with a headache, not knowing what I've done, and find about a dozen of 'em chasing me with dogs and guns. No questions asked. They just open fire when they sight me. Well, says I to myself, what's all the fuss about? What have I done? But there ain't any use waiting

to get my questions answered with a slug through the head, so I foot it for the hills and give 'em the clean slip and have a dang hard trip—and finally I wind up here! And here's where I'm going to stay, and here's where you're going to stay!" he added fiercely. "I ain't going to have nobody sneaking out and telling where I am. If you've been here a year without nobody finding you, I guess I can stay here a year the same way. And by that time things will have cleared up a little, and I can go down and look around and see how the land lies. Ain't that sense?"

He seemed to be speaking to himself more than to Tommy, and the boy kept a discreet silence. Suddenly, the head of the fugitive jerked around, and the keen little brute eyes glared at Tommy.

"Come here!" he roared.

Tommy came, trembling. The big hand of the stranger shot out and clamped around Tommy's wrist. The pressure seemed to be cracking the bones.

"You're going to stay right on here with me, kid!" he thundered. "Besides, if you can forage for one you can forage for two. So you start in and make me comfortable. And there ain't going to be no getting away. If you try to run for it, I'll start out and trail you, and I'm the out-trailingest man you ever seen. I'd run you down inside a couple of hours, and then I'd tear you to bits!"

His eyes snapped, and his teeth gleamed behind his beard as he spoke. And Tommy's heart turned cold.

"Speak out!" roared the big man. "Tell me how you like me."

"Fine!" stammered poor Tommy. "I—I like you fine."

"You lie!" cried the big man, and with a sweep of his thick arm he knocked Tommy flat on his back.

The sting of the blow on his cheek worked like a strange madness in Tommy. He had been accustomed to

the gentle ways of John Parks. He could not understand a rough voice and a heavy hand. And, unreasoning, he came off the ground like the recoil of a cat and flew at the face of the stranger.

The latter had barely time to erect a guard, and that guard was insufficient. He lurched to his feet while the stinging, small fists were cutting into his face with a rain of blows. Once erect, he pushed Tommy away with a long, extended arm. The wonder left his face. A cruel interest took its place. And he poised his great, right hand.

"I'm going to lesson you," he said savagely, drawing his breath in with joy at the prospect. "I'm going to give you one lesson for the sake of manners and showing you who's the boss. Stand off, you imp!"

The last word was a grunt of rage as Tommy slipped under the extended arm and struck savagely into the body of the big man. And then the blow fell. It came straight and hard, with the overmastering weight of the stranger's shoulder behind it. It struck Tommy on the side of the head and rolled him along the ground.

He lay there stunned with a sting along the side of his face and a warmth which told him that the skin had been broken by that brutal stroke.

"Get up!" roared the big man. And he kicked Tommy with his heavy boot.

That wild anger leaped into the heart of the boy again. He came off the ground, how, he could not say, and sprang into the face of the stranger.

"You little wild cat!" gasped out the big man and recoiled, though driven more by astonishment than by his hurts.

That instant of recoil, however, gave another opportunity to Tommy. He leaped to the pile of dried wood which he had heaped along one side of the cave, and a second later the billet cracked heavily along the scone of the

stranger. Again Tommy struck, and again he shouted with a wild satisfaction as he felt the wood bite soft and heavy into flesh. Then the stick was torn from his hand. He leaped away, and he raced for the entrance to the cave, knowing that now nothing could save him but flight. The big man was not cursing, and his silence meant strangely more than oaths.

He was almost at the entrance when something told him to dodge. Down he dropped in a heap. And barely in time. The scooping arms of the big man swept over him, brushing his clothes. The toes of the stranger's boot lodged with sickening force against his ribs. Then the other crashed against the rocks with a shout of pain and rage. But Tommy, rising hastily to his feet again, knew that his finish had come, for now the big man was between him and the mouth of the cave!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WORK OF MAN.

HE slipped back into the very center of the cave where he would have more room. Yet he knew that even there he was playing a losing game. In speed of foot, in endurance, he could not compare with the grown man. Presently, he would be cornered, and the great, bone-breaking hands would fall upon him. After that—

His horrified mind grew blank. But, having picked up another stick of wood, he waited. He might strike and dodge at the same time and so gain another chance to get at the outlet. But that chance was only one in ten. And he glanced longingly up the side of the cave where he had laid away rifle and revolver on a higher shelf. Oh, fool that he had been to put his weapons in a place where they were not instantly accessible!

The stranger seemed to have the same thought. He had risen slowly

from the ground, drawing out his revolver as he did so. But a second of thought seemed to reassure him. He pushed the Colt back into its holster. And he began to advance slowly with such a face of fiendish rage that Tommy was paralyzed. No, there would be no dodging now! This cold fury would prove inescapable. He saw a tiny trickle of crimson down the face of the man and into the beard. That red mark would be warrant for his own destruction, beyond a doubt.

"Now," gasped out the other, "now—we'll try something!"

And he came with his great arms spread out, moving with long, stealthy strides as though he were stealing up on an unwatchful victim. And in that nightmare horror Tommy could not move.

It was then he saw a dark form emerging out of the spot of black night at the mouth of the cave. With Jack and Jerry crowding behind her, in waddled Madame Bruin with as much assurance as though into her own cave. And a shout of joyous welcome, a cry of wildest relief burst from Tommy's lips.

That shout made the big man whirl on his heel. One instant he stood petrified with astonishment. Then madame reared up and stood immense on her hind legs, with a roar at this unexpected stranger. Another moment, and she would have taken to her heels. But the big man did not wait. He plunged to the side of the fire and snatched up his rifle and pitched the butt into the hollow of his shoulder. It happened all in a twinkling. The gun spoke, and madame pitched heavily forward and died before she struck the ground.

There was a hoarse shout of exultation from the man. The rifle steadied again, spoke again, and Jack, with a squeal of agony, whirled around, doubled up on the ground with the pain, and then stretched out limp. And there

stood Jerry, bewildered, sitting back on his haunches in the most utter amazement and looking to Tommy as though for explanation of this strange catastrophe.

Tommy's fear for himself was forgotten. He saw the gun steady. But he sprang at the big man, and the shock of his body made the other shoot wild.

"Curse you!" cried the murderer, and with a short-arm blow he struck Tommy to the ground. "Your turn comes last!"

"Run, Jerry!" shouted Tommy as he lay in the dirt.

But Jerry did not run. His brain was not what it would be a day hence. It was thick and sleepy from the long hibernation. And calamities had rained down so fast upon those around him that his keen mind was stunned. He sat up there still with his head cocked to one side and innocently faced the rifle.

So much Tommy saw with a side glance, and he saw, too, that the big man was steadying the rifle for another shot, steadying it carefully. Thereafter, he would tell how he slew three grizzlies with three shots in as many seconds.

But fear for Jerry raised Tommy. He stood up with a shrill cry. Only with a gun could this destroyer be stopped. And he reached for the butt of the revolver at the big man's thigh just as the other, with an oath, struck him down again. He fell, but his fingers had gripped the weapon and drawn it forth. There he lay with black night swirling around his brain.

"I'll brain you!" thundered the big man and reached for the weapon which Tommy had stolen.

And Tommy pulled the trigger. He fired blindly. All before him was thick night. And in answer to the bullet a crushing weight fell upon him, and he felt that he had failed. After that the darkness was complete.

When he wakened, Jerry was licking his face.

He sat up with his brain still reeling. There lay the big-bearded man on his face beside him, motionless. And in the entrance to the cave lay madame and Jack, in the same postures of their fall.

That sight was enough to bring Tommy to himself. He stood up and ran to make sure. It was not the human being for whom he felt concern. It was not dread for having taken a human life that stung Tommy. It was overwhelming remorse that the affection which had brought Madame Bruin to him had brought her to her death.

But she was quite dead, and Jack was dead beside her. He took the great, unwieldy head in his lap. Jerry sniffed the cold nose and then looked up with a whine into the face of his young master for explanation. But Tommy could only answer with tears.

Then, in the midst of his grief, he shook his fist toward the inert form of the killer. Here was man at last, man for whose coming he had yearned so bitterly. This was the work of man!

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER YEARS HAVE PASSED.

THE first minute of waiting is always the longest. That first year in the valley of the Turnbull was always the longest to Tommy. It seemed to him that it embraced more than half of his life, for fear and loneliness and weakness and peril had lengthened every day to an infinity. But the time that followed flew on wings. Every minute was crowded. There is no dull moment to the man who tears his living by force of hand and force of cunning out of the wilderness. And when events happen most swiftly, time seems to fly on the strongest wing. To Tom Parks it seemed that there was only one stride through the next few years. So let us step across them in the same manner,

5D—w

with one step, and come to Tom in the spring of his sixteenth year.

A babble of sharp noises wakened him, the daybreak chorus of the forest. And Tom rose from his bed on a bear-skin thrown across soft pine branches. He stood up, now grown to his full height of a shade more than six feet, equipped with nearly a hundred and seventy pounds of iron-hard muscle. He looked four years more than his sixteen, except that the down of manhood was only beginning to darken on his upper lip and on his chin. But that crease of pain and thoughtfulness which had been cleft in the center of his forehead had never departed, and there was a resolution, an independence of a grown man in his face.

He stretched his arms, long and powerful, until the last of the sleep fled tingling out at his finger tips. He yawned and exposed a set of white, perfect teeth. Then with a shake of his head he tore off the shirt in which he had lain down to sleep. It was made of the softest buckskin sewed with sinew—a roughly made garment with mere holes for the head and the arms. His trousers were of the same stuff, ending in a ragged fringe between knee and ankle. He dropped them from him and stood naked in the chill of the morning air—brown as though carved cunningly out of bronze.

Through the cave he sped, into the rosy flush of morning sunlight; then, a flashing form, he was down the slope to where the creek swirled into a deep, long pool. He leaped onto a rock and stood a moment before plunging in. Around him he heard life waking in the woods. He heard birds calling. He heard swift rustlings which were not of the wind among the foliage. Far above him a hawk flew. He marked its flight with interest. No, it was not a hawk. It was a great eagle. A hawk, at that height, would seem far smaller. Yes, it was an eagle; no doubt that old eagle

of Bald Mountain. Tom Parks turned his head to watch until the speeding king of the air was shut from view past the treetops. Then he lowered his head and dived.

The water closed behind his feet without noise, with hardly a ripple. And silently he came to the surface again, turned on his face, and swam with long, strong, silent strokes straight ahead. It seemed that he would surely strike the great trunk which shot out from the bank, with its tangle of drowned branches. But, when he was a foot away, up flashed his legs, down went his head. He was under the trunk, then came, all noiseless as ever, to the surface, trod water until he was exposed to the breast, and stood there laughing silently.

But that water was snow fed, ice cold. And even the leather skin and the tough muscles of Tom's body could not keep out the chill from vital places. Back he turned for the shore. The long arms slipped through the water. And without a splash he came to shore.

The sun turned him to a figure of gleaming, running quicksilver. But that wind blowing on his wet skin was too cold. He slicked the water from his body with his hands. Then he picked a section of clean grass, lay down, and rolled in it. He came up drier—and dirtier. He brushed off the leaves and what dirt would come. For the rest—what did he care? Dirt meant nothing in the life of Tom Parks. He wrung the water out of his long, sun-faded brown hair and then raced up the slope to the cave.

Still he was not dry enough to dress. Many a day of stiff muscles and an aching body had taught him that it is better to have a dry skin before clothes are put on it. So he stepped to the side of the cave where a huge grizzly lay asleep. Into the side of the monster he thrust his toes and jabbed the ribs under their layer of thick pelt and fat.

Jerry awoke with a grunt, blinked, and then straightway stood up. He had grown into a monster even of his monstrous kind. There was well over a thousand pounds of meat and bone and hide in this giant; there would be even more when the autumn nuts had fattened him.

He put out his arms like a man stretching. But, the instant he did so, Tom Parks was at him. The hard shoulder of the youngster struck the breast of the bear. The long, brown arms wrapped around the furry body. With all his might he strove to topple Jerry. Topple half a ton's weight of Heaven-taught wrestler?

Jerry merely grunted. With one bone-crushing hug he squeezed the breath out of Tom's body. Then came a flick of the forepaw, and Tom Parks was sent staggering to a distance. He gasped, but he came in again with a rush. His flying fists struck home on the solid body—one—two—but again came that inescapable stroke of the paw. It was nicely judged—oh, how delicately managed! A little more, and he could have caved in Tom's chest with the stroke, but Jerry was an old hand at this game, and he struck just hard enough to knock Tom flat on his back.

He was up again, like a cat, but that had been enough boxing for one morning. He was in a glow of heat, and the blood was coursing strongly through his arteries. He brushed off the sand, stepped into his buckskin suit, and slipped moccasins onto his feet. He was ready for the day!

Jerry went out to hunt for grubs on the hillside while Tom kindled a fire. Over that fire he fried flat thin cakes of corn meal mixed with water. No meat till night for Tom. He had formed that habit long ago. But when evening came he would eat enough for three.

That quick breakfast done, he went out down the hillside and, with a shrill

whistle, brought Jerry after him. Down they went across the plateau where that year's crop of corn was burgeoning out above the ground.

Jerry roved in the rear. He was an incurable loiterer. There were thousands of food scents blowing to his nostrils every instant. He had to stop a few minutes here and a few minutes there to demolish a colony of ants or to turn a log and get at grubs or to tear a rotten stump to pieces because of the horde of insect life it harbored. Besides, he could overtake the master at will, for on one of these roving expeditions after amusement Tom loitered through the forest, seeing and hearing and learning out of an inexhaustible book.

When there was an expedition to a distant point on hand, that was quite another matter. Then one sharp, shrill whistle apprized Jerry that there was business on hand, and he forgot his appetite until the point was reached. But what he much preferred was one of these leisurely scouting trips. They might be back by night. They might not return for a week, for he had noted that Tom took with him the fishing line as well as his hunting knife. As for a gun, his store of ammunition had been used up long before! But the line and hook were enough, and, if he wanted additional food, he knew a dozen sorts of bird traps which he could make and bait with good results. As for fire, he carried a piece of flint and the barrel of the demolished old Colt revolver. He could raise a flame when he willed.

Jerry did not sight Tom again until noon, and then he came up to the youth lying prone on a bank of grass and peering around a tree trunk to watch beavers busily at work cutting down trees. It was a new dam near the mouth of one of the Turnbull's tributaries. The water had been backed into a little gorge, and the beavers were just beginning to levy their toll on the forest.

A dozen sapling were down and trimmed of branches, and Jerry stretched contentedly beside Tom to watch the work. To be sure, beaver meat was good, very good, and there was always an unfilled corner in that capacious belly of him. But now the little fellows were laboring so close to the edge of their pond that it would be impossible to surprise them. And, next to eating, Jerry loved to satisfy his curiosity.

It was a whole long hour before Tom had gazed his fill. Then he stood up and clapped his hands, and he laughed silently and heartily as the beavers dived for shelter beneath the water. He had learned his noiseless swimming from them, but he could never match their craft in water ways. But here was something worth knowing—this new dam. It was another treasure added to his horde. In the winter he would come down here and get enough fur to clothe him like a prince through the season of the snows.

All the rest of that day Tom headed leisurely westward down the valley of the Turnbull. Jerry followed, though in high discontent, for, by the evening, they had passed the limits of the territory over which Jerry's mother had roamed, and which Jerry and Tom had taken as their natural domain since the death of the wise old grizzly. But, as evening came, a windfall came to Jerry in the shape of a fat buck.

There had been born in Jerry the skill of all grizzlies in slipping silently through a forest, in spite of their bulk. And so it was, gliding through the twilight, that he came suddenly on the rank scent of meat and an instant later—for they had turned directly into the wind—the deer sprang up before him in a thicket. Confusion made the poor creature run into the jaws of destruction. A crushing blow smashed its skull, and both Jerry and Tom dined in state that evening.

With the morning, when Jerry was preparing to turn back, hugely uneasy at this venturing into unknown country, Tom persisted in holding straight on down the valley. What moved him to it, he did not know, but in this wandering down the course of the Turnbull there had awakened in him a sudden and fierce disgust with the cave and everything in it, and all the delightful country which he called his own. There was no temptation to go back over the bleak mountains which he had climbed with his father, but a hunger of curiosity grew up in him to see what undiscovered country lay westward.

Already he had come farther west than ever before, and still the pangs of curiosity increased, and he went on. In spite of the careless mode of travel, they had covered a full thirty miles on the first day. On the second, the distance was a great deal more, for Tom pushed on relentlessly from dawn to midday. Then he rested, and both he and Jerry slept. But in the evening they pushed on once more.

So it was that they came to the first settler's cabin. It was almost dark, but far away Tom heard a faint, ringing sound which he presently recognized as the blows of an ax, clipped home with great force into hard wood. The sound ceased before he came close, but it was easy to continue to the place, with Jerry leading the way with an acute nose.

And so they reached the verge of a man-made clearing. There was an acre of naturally cleared land. And there were ten acres more which had been cleared by cutting down the trees. In the exact center was a small log cabin whose open door was flooded with light and shadow flung in waves from an open fireplace. And a guitar was tinkling and thrumming from the interior.

The heart of Tom leaped within him. The wind blowing through the trees

above him was suddenly as mournful as a human sigh. And big Jerry, as though smitten with a sudden dread, turned about and looked Tom squarely in the face to read his thoughts. Perhaps it was only because the sensitive nose of Jerry was telling him tales of bacon and ham and a score of other delectables, and he was silently wondering why the master did not proceed to investigate.

But now the music ceased, and a great, rough, bass voice spoke. It made the very hair on Tom's head bristle as he recalled that unforgettable voice of the man who had killed Jerry's mother. A man with such a voice could not but be an enemy made terrible by the possession of firearms.

In the gathering night, he turned from the house and made a gesture to the grizzly that sent the latter into retreat. But it was not to be an altogether peaceful journey. A shifting of the wind had blown their scent to the house, and suddenly, behind them, came the yelling of dogs, sweeping closer, then breaking with a confusion of echoes through the forest as they entered the trees. And Jerry stood up with a profound growl to listen, while Tom, realizing that they could not flee from these fleet-footed assailants, planted himself beside the bear with a drawn knife.

Instantly, they came, four huge, wolfish beasts, scarred with many a battle. They recoiled at the sight of the man. But on the bear was the scent of this man, and the bear scent was equally on the man. Their minds were instantly made up, and they flew to the attack. Two leaped at Jerry from in front. But they were wise fighters. They made only a pretense of attack. The real work must come from those in the rear. The other pair, trained fighters that they were, jumped to take the bear at disadvantage, and here it was that they encountered Tom.

His heart was raging with excitement, but he had learned that first great lesson of the wilderness, where all creatures fight to kill, that successful battle can only be waged with a cool head. Half crouched, ready to leap to either side, he poised the long knife. One brute rushed for his legs, and the other drove at his throat. He leaped high to avoid the first and, twisting to miss the second, he slashed it across the gullet as it flew by him.

He himself landed heavily on his side. He twisted to his feet like lightning. The dog he had used the knife on was standing to the side, head down, coughing and bleeding to death. But the first brute, wheeling as it missed its rush, was on him in a twinkling. The eye could barely follow the moves of Tom then. He sprang like a cat to the side, caught the great brute by the scuff of the neck, and, as the animal whirled to sink its teeth in his arm, he drove the knife home between its ribs.

His arm was bloody above the wrist as he turned back to Jerry, just in time to see one of the dogs, half wolf and half mastiff, venture too close. A lightning blow of the forepaw, and a crushed skull for the dog were the result. The fourth dog leaped back, viewed the carnage for an instant, and then fled in dismay, howling.

Jerry made a lunge in pursuit, but Tom called him back, for voices of excited men were sounding not far away, and men meant guns, and guns meant that the only safety lay in flight. A low whistle apprized Jerry that overwhelming odds were now opposed to them, and Tom took to his heels.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MISTREATED DAY.

HE ran like the wind during the first quarter of a mile, weaving deftly through the trees, for he had been trained to such night work by many a

prowl in company with Jerry. He could read the ground underfoot almost as though he saw in the dark. After that first sprint, as the voices died away behind him, he still ran on like a wild thing which cannot measure danger but only knows that it is somewhere in the rear, an indescribable thing. His swift and easy stride did not slacken until ten miles were behind him.

Then, breathing hard, but by no means winded, he went ahead at a brisk walk, with Jerry lumbering and grunting behind him. They encountered a steep hill. He slipped onto Jerry's back, and they went up it handily. Down the farther slope they ran again, and so they hurried on through the night.

Just before dawn, he paused at a creek and spent an hour fishing with great results for Jerry and himself. Then they pushed on until midmorning, reached the forested crest of a hill, and there made their covert.

They slept soundly until midafternoon and wakened as they had fallen asleep—in an instant. They climbed on, then, to a higher range of hills to the westward, and here, from the naked summit, Tom found that he was looking out on more than he had dreamed of.

Far to the east, the Bald Mountains were lost in the pale horizon haze. All that he could see was the procession of rolling, forested hills which climbed up the valley of the Turnbull. North, behind him, rose higher hills, climbing to naked mountain heights. South stretched the wide expanse of the valley, with the broad Turnbull flashing in the midst and sweeping away to the west in lazy curves quite different from the arrowy little stream which he knew near the cave and through his own territory.

Westward, also, lay the things which most amazed him. In this direction the air was free of mist, the hills sloped away to smoother forms, and he saw the

landscape dotted with houses and checked in loose patterns with fences. And yonder, not quite lost to his view, the houses collected in a village, a thick cluster of roofs and trees.

And for years all of this had lain hardly more than a hundred miles from his own cave! He would have welcomed that sight four years before. This prospect would have been better than a promise of Heaven to the lonely boy. But that was before the big stranger came to the cave and engraved in his mind the lesson that men are dangerous, treacherous, cruel, ungrateful. And so it was that Tom, as he stared down on these houses, shivered a little and then cast a glance back over his shoulder as men do when they are in fear.

All his past, before the death of his mother and the day his father left the city and started into the mountains, was lost behind a veil of indistinctness. But he remembered enough to know that his father and mother had both suffered at the hands of other men, that there had been poverty in their household, that there had been hunger, even. So there was ingrained in his mind the belief that men are evil. The first man he had met since the death of his father had repaid food and shelter with brutality. The second voice he had heard had been of one who kept fierce dogs that had attacked him without warning, without justification. In his buckskin trousers there were still spots of blood. Ay, that was the cardinal sign of man—bloodshed!

He shuddered in a strong revulsion.

Yet, that afternoon, in spite of Jerry's earnest endeavors to stop the westward journey and head back toward the home country, he insisted upon skirting along the hills to get a better view of all that the valley might hold. And, before the day was ended, he saw another proof that man is brute, and nothing but brute.

They passed among the trees to the head of a promontory, a low plateau which thrust out into the more level or rolling ground, and from the brow of this eminence Tom found himself in view of men—many men. A ranch house with shambling barns and out-houses around it had been built just beneath the cliff, and now, between the rearmost of the houses and the base of the cliff, a dozen men were gathered with their horses, in or around a large corral. Several of the men were grouped closely around one of their number who lay upon the ground, apparently badly hurt. They were pouring water upon his face and chest. But he was not the main object of interest.

In the center of the corral four men were holding a young bay stallion, saddled and blindfolded. He danced restlessly, his head snubbed to the saddle of another horse. And instantly Tom connected that empty saddle on the bay with the prostrate man outside the fence.

Presently, the latter arose and staggered to the fence, where he leaned feebly. Another rider now advanced, climbed into the saddle, and the others grouped as close as possible around the fence to watch while the ropes were taken from the stallion and his head was freed of the blindfold.

There followed one minute of more condensed action than Tom had ever seen, even when Jack and Jerry were having a mimic combat, for the bay began to leap into the air, tie himself almost literally into a knot, and then land on stiff legs. The rider was jolted and jarred from side to side. Suddenly, the bay reared and flung himself backward. The yell of the watchers came tingling up to Tom on the height. But his fierce heart was all with the horse! Why had they united to torture the poor creature?

The rider had flung himself from the saddle barely in time, but when he rose

he apparently refused to continue the contest. Yet still the struggles of the stallion were not over. A third rider presented himself, distinguished by a blue bandanna and a sombrero whose belt gleamed with pure, burnished gold. He mounted as the other had done. Once more the battle began, and this time it lasted thrice as long. Tom could see that the young stallion had grown black with sweat. But he fought on as though he were muscled with springs. And, in the end, a leap, a jarring landing, and a spring to the side unseated the rider.

He fell in a cloud of dust, while the tormented horse fled to the farther side of the corral and tried to leap to safety beyond the bars. He was roped and brought down heavily on his side, and, while he lay there, the dismounted man of the blue bandanna approached and quirted the helpless body brutally.

This, however, seemed too much for even the other savages. They drew the fellow away, the stallion was allowed to climb to his feet and was led away, and the group dispersed.

But the heart of Tom followed the beautiful bay, for on the morrow, would not the torture begin again? And would they not persist until they had broken his spirit and his heart? Savagely, he shook his fist at the backs of the disappearing men. And Jerry, comprehending the anger, though not its cause, stopped in his digging for a ground squirrel and looked up with a growl among the trees.

But after that Tom turned eastward again, and Jerry went joyously in the lead. They had both had too much of men! A bright-running trout stream a mile away, however, was too great a temptation to them both. There they paused while Tom caught their supper. He risked a fire, carefully made of dead wood so that there would be as little smoke as possible, and broiled a

small part of his catch for himself, while Jerry devoured the remainder.

When that meal was ended, the twilight was descending, and Tom, with a filled stomach, found that the vision of the bay still haunted him. It seemed to fill his mind, that picture of the horse. He began to remember an old mustang which his father had used for mountain work. Even that treacherous brute he had loved, for men are born to love horses or to despise them, and Tom was one of the former.

And it seemed to him that, if he could have that magnificent creature in the mountains, his happiness would be complete. Not to ride, to be sure, for his own legs were good enough to carry him where he wished to go; and, when he was tired, there was the exhaustless power of that matchless mountaineer, Jerry, to carry him on.

But how could he take a wild horse from men who were armed with guns?

That question lay heavily on the mind of Tom as the twilight thickened. He sat brooding beside the fire until Jerry began to growl, so great was his eagerness for the return journey to twice-traveled fields. But Tom shook his head. That very insistence confirmed him in his new desire.

"The point is," he said to the huge bear, "that I've got to have that horse. And if I can't have him, I've got to have one more look at him. Stay here, Jerry. I'm going back!"

It was a command which Jerry understood. He stood still with an almost human groan, and Tom turned, drew tight his belt, and started back at a run.

He never walked when he was bent on business. Walking was the gait for leisure and careful observation. But he had learned to read even a difficult trail while he ran, and now he jogged back through the trees, twisted aside into the head of the cañon to his right, and then let out a link and raced blitely across

the rolling ground until he turned the point of the promontory and the ranch houses were in view.

The instant he saw the first lighted window, he slowed to a walk. He had learned from Jerry's mother a lesson of caution which he never forgot. And Jerry himself was an alert hunter. He could not cross a clearing, no matter how small, without first pausing an instant to take in his surroundings. He seemed to carry in the back of his brain a chamber crowded with memories of dangers which had come upon his ancestors. He suspected every tree, apparently, lest it might turn into a monster.

There was something of the same manner in Tom as he approached the house. He took advantage of every tree. He skulked swiftly down the hollows. He crawled on hands and knees over the knolls.

When he came to the first barn, his caution redoubled. Round it he stole. And then he heard men's voices—many of them. A shudder crept down his spine as he listened, for the memory of the stranger in his cave was still rank. And, never having matched his strength against another man, how could he know that even that giant of a man would have been helpless now against his own lightning speed of hand and foot and that strange strength with which his muscles had been seasoned by those years of exposure and constant exercise? All he knew was that he had been helpless in the hands of a man once before, and he felt that he would be helpless again.

Nevertheless, he went on. He came in view of the house itself, long, low, thrown loosely together, with only three lighted windows in its length. These were open, and from one of them came the tumult of voices.

He stole to it and looked in. What he saw was a group of four men around a table playing cards. Each man was

flanked with a glass, and there were bottles behind the chairs from which, now and again, they poured a trickle of amber liquid into their glasses, drank, and played again. The talk came at intervals. Sometimes, there was a solemn silence while the cards were sent flashing out around the table and the hands were picked up. Then they began to push out money toward the center of the table. Some of the cards were discarded. Others were drawn, and more money was stacked, all in a deadly seriousness. But Tom cast only an idle glance of wonder at their occupation. He gave his more serious attention to the faces of the players.

CHAPTER XVII.

PETER IS TAKEN.

AND, if he traveled round and round the country, he could not have found four more repulsive faces. Greed, ferocity, cruelty, were ingrained in each. It was no practiced eye with which Tom looked upon them, but instinct taught him all he needed to know. How different they were from John Parks! The surety grew in him that his father had been a different breed of man, a single exception. But the rest of the human race were evil, all evil. He felt his detestation grow, for how could all of these be compared in worth with that beautiful horse he had seen them torturing that day?

Here the man of the blue bandanna pushed back his chair. His pile of money was gone.

"I'm busted, boys," he said, "but who'll stake me twenty?"

"On what, Hank?" asked another. "What's your security?"

"On old Peter," said Hank.

"Twenty dollars on that hoss?" murmured the other.

"Well?" asked Hank aggressively.

"I'll tell you," said the other, "Peter is worth something in the thousands—"

or else he ain't worth a cent. And, speaking personal, I say he ain't worth a cent!"

"Hey!" cried Hank. "How come you to talk like that, Bill? D'you ever see a hoss with the looks that Peter has?"

"Sure," responded Bill. "He's got the looks. There ain't no doubt of that. But looks ain't what a gent can sit a saddle on. Matter of fact, the man ain't born that can ride Peter."

"That's fool talk!" cried Hank. "Why, anybody can lead Peter around."

"Who's talking about leading?" answered Bill. "What good does it do a gent to have a hoss that he can lead if he can't ride it? And nobody can ride Peter. Look at Sam Dunbar. Didn't he try his prettiest on Peter today? But after he got throwed he had enough. He wouldn't go back at Peter."

"Dunbar's nerve is gone," said Hank sullenly.

"What about your nerve? Why didn't you tackle him after he threw you?"

Hank sat silent and glared. He was plainly hunting for words but could find no retort.

"You take my advice," said Bill. "Peter has a pile of looks, but that's all. All the good he'll do you will be to run up a feed bill. If I had him, I'd turn him into dog food pronto."

Hank sprang to his feet.

"Boys," he said, "ain't there a one of you that would advance me something on Peter?"

They shook their heads.

"Yet you all wanted him bad enough when he was running loose. When he was roaming through the hills with that gang of mustangs, you all sure enough wanted Peter bad. Every man here rode for him. But, when I creased him and got him, you say he ain't worth nothing. Is that sense?"

"Talk for yourself, Hank," they told

him. "We don't want him. All he'll do for a gent is to bust his neck. He's turning into a killer. That's the worst kind—them that are quiet as lambs till they feel a cinch bite into them. They ain't no use, ever. You got him rope broke easy, but you'll never break him for the saddle. If you want some money, put up your gun. I'll give you something for that!"

Hank sneered.

"Give up my gat with Joe Saunders in town?" he said fiercely. "I ain't that much of a fool!"

"Then use your gun to turn Peter into dog meat, if you want," said Bill, "but don't hold up the game no longer. Your deal, Sam!"

Hank regarded the others with a concentrated malevolence for a moment, but suddenly he jammed his hat upon his head, turned on his heel, and strode from the room.

"Wait a minute——" began Bill.

"Shut up," said Sam. "If he wants to kill the hoss, let him do it before the hoss kills him. And that's what it would come to one of these days."

"But a hoss like Peter——" began Hank.

"I know," said Sam. "A hoss like Peter looks like a picture, but that's all the good he is. He might as well stay on the page of a book. All the good he is is to make a pile of talk."

Tom recoiled from the window.

So that was to be the end of beautiful Peter—a bullet through the head and then the buzzards!

He stole around the house just as the back door of it banged, and Hank stepped out into the night and walked straight for the corrals with the speed and the decision of a man bent on business. Like a moving shadow, Tom drifted behind him.

In the corral, Hank advanced with a rope, and Tom saw him go directly up to Peter. There was no mistaking the horse even in the darkness. That

noble and beautiful outline had a light of its own.

Tom wondered to see the great horse submit so calmly to the rope which was put around its head. Then Peter was led out from the corral and tethered to the fence. A gun gleamed in the hand of Hank.

"Now, dang your soul," growled Hank, "you've got out to the end of your rope, and you're going to be flopped. I've stood a whale of a lot from you. Take it by and large, I put in six months getting in a shot at you. And when that slug knocked you down without killing you, I sure thought I was going to make a pile of money out of you. I figured I had the fastest thing on four feet that was running through the mountains. But you ain't done me no good. You've got me busted. I'm through with you. And here's the end of your trail. I might turn you loose, but I ain't going to let it be said that I had that six months' work for nothing."

The gun raised in a steady hand. And Tom slipped closer. His heart was hammering at the top of his throat. He could hardly breathe, so great was his fear. There was the knife, to be sure. But he could not strike it into a human body—from behind. Something in his heart made that impossible. Yet if he grappled that man hand to hand, how could he match the matured strength of Hank?

Desperately, he set his teeth. There was no time to reflect. He leaped from behind and caught Hank in his arms.

To his amazement, the body of Hank seemed to crumple to water!

Strength? He knew at a touch that he could break the man in two! But the sense of power made him gentle. There was only a strangled gasp from Hank as the revolver was torn from his hand and he was laid upon the ground. Peter snorted and stepped back.

"Now listen," said Tom, while all his blood was in a riot from that easy victory. "Listen to me. If you try to call the others by yelling for them, I'll send a slug into you. That'll make one less to follow me. If you even try to stand up, I'll shoot. And you can be sure that I won't miss!"

There was not a word from Hank. His body merely stiffened. But in the meantime the possession of that loaded gun meant a world of added power to Tom. He took off the heavy cartridge belt from his victim. He buckled it around his own hips. He dropped the revolver into the holster. Then he went to Peter. But there seemed to be no need for his soothing voice. The strength of a rope was a fact which the stallion had learned first of all from his contact with men, and, though he might be in terror for his life, he would not pull back against it. It had burned into his flesh too often before.

He stood patiently while Tom unknotted the rope. And, at the first tug of the rope against his neck, he stepped out to follow the new master. And that act of obedience thrilled Tom with a sudden and strange gratitude, a wealth of tenderness. In his heart of hearts he vowed that Peter should never regret that step. He sent a last word to Hank.

"I'm still watching you!" he called softly, then broke into a jogging run. Peter came readily at his heels. Once around the edge of the corral, he increased the pace to his full speed, and still Peter followed without once drawing back on the rope. But, as Tom rounded the edge of the cliff from the top of which he had first had a view of the horse, he heard a sudden hubbub behind him, and voices shouting, carrying clearly through the mountain night. The alarm had been given, and in another moment the pursuit on horseback would begin!

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

"Flapjack" Meehan Rounds 'Em Up

By
**Frank
Richardson
Pierce**



Author of "The Old Fraud," "The White Mule's Kick," etc.



OLD Man Dunham straightened up, his eyes staring eagerly at the contents of his pan. "Gold!" he whispered almost reverently. "Gold, and lots of it, after all these years!" He walked somewhat unsteadily to a boulder and seated himself, a strange chill, the chill of excitement, surging through his veins. He felt weak, and his old heart increased its beat until it drummed in his ears. For a long time he remained seated, running his gnarled fingers through the gold, spreading it apart, then pushing it together again. There was one big nugget in the pan, and this he lifted and dropped. Suddenly, he no longer saw the precious metal. The gold pan was there, and yet it was not there. Instead, a picture, a beautiful mental picture of an old lady, appeared. "The old lady," he whispered softly, "my old woman. You can have all the things you want. Everything. All that you've waited for all these years. An' you'll have to admit I was right when I went North each year. I knew it would come sooner or later." Suddenly, the pan dropped to the rocks with an unearthly clatter. He buried his face in his hands, then tears trickled be-

tween his fingers, sobs shook his frame. "I thought—thought people cried when they was sad. I'm cryin', and I'm happier than I ever was exceptin' the day my old woman and me got married."

At length he straightened, picked up the pan, gathered the large nugget, and tucked it into his pocket, leaving the remainder of the gold on the wet sand to be panned out on the morrow. The day was early, and he had earned a rest. For perhaps ten minutes he remained idle; then the desire to work overwhelmed him, and he shoveled gravel with a fury that would have done credit to a man many years his junior.

A trick of nature when the country was undergoing the process of formation during a bygone age had left a pocket of gold. For centuries it was undisturbed until Old Man Dunham, in the winter of life, discovered it. As he gathered his gold, he weighed it, not by the ounce, but by the pound, balancing it with a pound can of beans he had improvised as a scales.

At length came a day when he could no longer lift the combined weight of his fortune. "Two hundred pounds in coarse gold," he muttered, as he calculated his fortune. "I'll have to go down to Cold Deck and get me a horse

or something. I can't pack this out on my back."

With blanket and sufficient grub for the trip, Dunham headed for Cold Deck, his step lighter than it had been in years. Once in camp, his first move was to send a letter to the little old lady who waited outside. He concluded with:

And I won't be more'n a month behind this letter, so go right out and buy you a silk dress or something expensive. And have somebody make it for you. Don't do it yourself. You've had to do that all your life, and you've a rest coming from now on.

As he posted the letter, music came to his ears faintly. He followed the sound until he paused before the Blue Moon, the nearest thing that Cold Deck had to a '97 resort. Within, Barr presided, his cold eyes measuring every man in terms of money. There were games of chance—the customer taking the only chance. There was moonshine liquor. Cold Deck's regular United States Marshal was in California for his health, while the man in his place, Grafton, was a close friend of Barr. He blinked his eyes at illegality on Barr's part, but promptly arrested all competitors.

In the offing, a storm was hovering, the storm of indignation of Cold Deck's square citizens. Sooner or later it would break, and when it did it would be a deluge. About him Barr had gathered a choice collection of lieutenants, not to mention a considerable number of hangers on coming under the general classification of the ranks. There were a number of holdups which Grafton had been unable to solve, so he said. An attempt to wreck the bank had been thwarted by "Flapjack" Meehan and "Tubby" Willows. Public opinion had forced Grafton to jail Hall, the cashier, who was now awaiting trial.

Occasionally, a citizen blew up and announced in a loud tone of voice that things had come to a pretty pass when

a gang of toughs could run a respectable community. The answer was that the community, busy with its own affairs, had not been sufficiently aroused.

Without ever dreaming of the part he was to play in Cold Deck's immediate future, Old Man Dunham listened to the music a moment, felt the longing for companionship, and entered the place. Barr gave him one searching glance, then motioned to his man Friday, in this instance called Jamison.

"There's an old fool with money!" he whispered. "Can't you see it in his eyes? He's excited, happy. He's got news he wants to tell, but's afraid to. Find out if he's a friend of Meehan's or Willows'. They're devils for protecting their old friends. If he's no friend of theirs, go the limit. Trim him quick!"

Jamison managed the approach easily enough. Lonely, Dunham responded to Jamison's simple comment on the weather, and the two fell to chatting.

"Eating at the New Deal Cafe, I suppose," he suggested. "Most of Flapjack Meehan's friends eat there when in camp, and most of the old-timers like yourself are his friends."

"I've heard a lot about Meehan and Willows, but never happened to meet 'em," replied Dunham, and the conversation switched to prospecting.

Just how it was managed, Dunham never knew, but the answer is, doubtless, that a tired, but happy, old man, friendless and longing for companionship, responded to the clever moves of a man who knew human nature.

"I ain't tellin' people where it is," whispered Old Man Dunham, "but I've got a right good claim. Brought in two thousand dollars in nuggets with me." He paused, then chuckled. "As Carmack once said when he came into Skagway, 'Cigar money!'"

"You don't say?" replied Jamison with a fine show of astonishment.

"Hey, Barr, come over and meet a lucky man."

Barr's personal appearance, his warmth, was flattering to the simple old fellow. He shook hands. "Two thousand in dust, eh?" he queried. "Say, that's great; that's like the old times! I'm a Cheechako myself and never saw that much in one poke. Bring it over and let's see it." Then, as he saw suspicion come into the faded eyes, he added with an engaging laugh: "It's safe enough. There's the United States Marshal sitting over there."

"Well, I don't want to create a lot of excitement," replied Dunham, "but I'd kinda like to show it to you boys. You've been pretty nice to an old man. You won't say anything to the others?"

"Sure not!"

While Dunham stepped down the street a short distance to where he was stopping, they made their plans. Presently, the old man returned. With a fine show of caution, Barr motioned him into a back room. Jamison, Grafton, and one other fellow. "There she be!" he announced with pride.

"Sure enough!" agreed Barr, hefting the gold. He passed it on to Grafton, who in turn passed it to Jamison. Several others entered, unbidden, apparently, exclaimed over what they saw, and insisted on examining the poke. Suddenly, it vanished.

"Who's got it?" queried Dunham in alarm. "Who's got the poke?"

"What poke?" demanded Barr harshly.

"Why, boys, you don't mean you ain't going to give my poke back? That ain't right, boys!" Old Man Dunham appeared stunned.

"I ain't seen any poke," replied Barr. "Have you, boys?"

"Naw!" growled one roughly. "The old guy's crazy. They get that way when they stay in the hills too long."

With sudden fury, Dunham launched himself at Barr. "It's a skin game,"

he cried, "a game to beat an old man! I'll have the law on you for this."

"Grafton," ordered Barr sharply, "take him away. He's lost his mind, poor devil." The others laughed roughly.

Then, as Dunham gripped Barr, the later thrust him back, measured the blow, and Old Man Dunham lay stretched on the floor, blood from a cut lip staining his gray beard. Two men picked him up and carried him into the card room, administered first aid, then dumped him outside.

"What's wrong?" several queried.

"Oh, nothing," explained Barr easily, "just an old man a little bit off in the head. Imagines he has a poke and thinks we lifted it. It took three of us to hold him, but he's all right now."

"You're a liar!"

The charge brought every man to his feet. "Rough" Rhodes, once a tough citizen, but now a regular fellow in every respect, thanks to Flapjack Meehan's importing a better man to beat him up, stood with clenched fists facing Barr. "I repeat, you're a liar, Barr! I heard your man Jamison working on Dunham, and I saw Dunham bring a poke in under his coat." With that, Rhodes advanced with the expressed intention of working Barr over to suit himself. Despite his own great strength, Barr paled. Grafton stepped quickly across the room.

"Cut it out, Rhodes," he snapped. "The old man's crazy. Cut it out, or I'll run you in."

"You?" sneered Rhodes. "You haven't got a mind of your own." His fist shot out, and the marshal lay stretched on the floor. Then he turned to Barr, and at the same instant the air seemed filled with fists. Slowly, but surely, Rhodes was forced out of the Blue Moon. Barr's heavy duty gang of roughs had responded nobly to his call.

Within his private office, Barr was talking to his trusted men and talking fast. "You, Grafton, get that old fool in here. We've got to get rid of him, even if we bump him off."

"I'm marshal," replied Grafton, "and, so long as I'm in the saddle, Rhodes or any one else can't start trouble—trouble that'll hurt us, I mean."

Still dazed, Old Man Dunham was brought back before Barr. "I'm going to talk to you and talk fast, Dunham. You know where Morningside is? Well, it's the place where they confine Alaskans who go insane. That's where you're going——"

"My old woman!" gasped out Dunham.

"You never will see that old woman you're always raving about if you once get into Morningside," continued Barr, "and that's where you're going. The marshal, here, can put you there in a hurry, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you tell us where you found that gold and get out of Cold Deck."

"Ah, then I did show you a poke!" shouted Dunham.

"Sure you did, but the boys don't know it. They think you're crazy, and, when we're through with you, you'll act like it," threatened Barr. "What's the answer?"

"I'll see you to the devil first!" shouted Dunham. "I ain't never quit before a crook yet, and I ain't going to begin at my time of life."

There was murder in Barr's eyes as he dropped Dunham with a blackjack. "Take him away to jail, Grafton. We're into this business to our necks now. If Dunham's allowed to talk, there's no telling where it'll stop." Old Man Dunham was carried out the back way this time and pitched into a cell. Behind those heavy doors much could take place that the public would never hear of, so long as Grafton was in charge.

Rough Rhodes alone remained at large to make trouble, and he could make trouble enough for a dozen Barrs, once he got his stride. The memory of the horror in Dunham's eyes as Barr told him he was insane, was sufficient to keep Rhodes at the exploding point for many hours thereafter. He was vengeance personified as he charged into the New Deal Cafe next morning.

"We're going to have a round-up within forty-eight hours," he told Flapjack Meehan and Tubby Willows forcefully. "There's a cuss in this camp that's been piling straw on the camel's back for some time."

"And he's put on the last straw?" suggested Tubby.

"Straw? He tossed on a whole bale last night. Stole a poke of dust from a miner, and when he kicked they beat him up and put him in jail. He's there now charged with insanity. Pass the word among the decent crowd of Cold Deck that there's going to be a meeting on the dock to-night to settle this once and for all. Cold Deck was a good camp until Barr and his crowd arrived, and we're not going to turn it over to them. Barr wrecked the bank, and Hall, the cashier, will serve time for it; Barr's been running a crooked place, as you found out, Flapjack. There's a lot of things he's done, including murder, that we can't prove, but we can prove this. Am I right?"

"You are, and I'm with you," agreed Flapjack.

"Same here," rejoined Tubby. "We'll pass the word along to the right people. Most of 'em eat here. Better make it eight o'clock to-night, eh?"

"Fine!" said Rhodes, and he hurried off.

Cold Deck was calm and peaceful on the surface, but throughout the day the opposing sides in camp quietly gathered forces. "A few organized men can run a city with a show of force," Barr told

his men, "and we're organized. Every man a he-man and not a lot of merchants, office men, and half-baked simps with water in their veins. Size up their crowd, then look our own over and see if you don't think we'll be in the saddle when the storm breaks. And the marshal is on our side. Don't forget that. Better sweep out your jail, Grafton. There'll be quite a crowd in for disturbing the peace after to-night—disturbing our peace."

Grafton laughed. "She's ready for anybody, with a special cell for Meehan, Rhodes, and Willows."

It sometimes happens that men sit over a volcano, figuratively speaking, and fail to realize it. While every one was more or less in sympathy with Rhodes' indignation and all were prepared to take drastic action, the majority headed for the meeting prepared for nothing more exciting than some hot speeches. Rhodes poked his head into the New Deal Cafe at quarter to eight. "Comin'?" he queried.

"I'll be right with you in ten minutes, Rhodes," said Flapjack. "Tubby's going to stay and keep shop."

"I'll see you down there, then," replied Rhodes. "I want to look 'em over as they come onto the dock. Don't want any spies at our meeting."

At five minutes to eight Barr looked over the group that had gathered at the Blue Moon and smiled. "Come on, boys, and see the fun. I'm going to attend the meeting on the dock. Wasn't invited, but I'm going." He picked up a Winchester rifle that hung in his office, and stalked out.

Flapjack Meehan left the New Deal Cafe almost at the same instant. "Better take your forty-four!" shouted Tubby.

"Naw," retorted Flapjack, "things like that don't happen. This is an indignation meeting, and I can be indignant without my forty-four. Be

back in about a half hour and tell you what happened."

Flapjack heard the tread of many feet as he stepped onto the dock. Ahead of him was Rough Rhodes half way down the dock, and behind him—

A rifle barrel cracked Flapjack sharply on the arm. "Get out of the way, Meehan!" growled Barr. An instant later he had brushed by, his head lowered with rage, his rifle cocked, ready for action. Behind came his gang, some armed, some without weapons. They paused, uncertain, at the dock.

"Go on back, Barr. This isn't your meeting!" ordered Rhodes. "We'll report the meeting's action to you in due time." The butt of a gun was visible in a holster at Rhodes' side.

Barr's reply was suddenly to swing the rifle about and fire. "That for your interfering in my affairs," he snarled. The roar almost in his ears deafened Rhodes, but his hand caught the rifle and swung it clear as Barr fired again. Rhodes' gun barked, and a bullet tore its way through Barr's arm. With a howl of pain and defiance, Barr jerked the rifle loose and fired again. The crack of the revolver was drowned in the report of the rifle. Barr pitched forward, his rifle beneath him; Rhodes crumpled up at the same instant.

"I'm done, Flapjack, I'm done!" he cried as Flapjack reached his side.

"Quick! Where's your gun?" shouted Flapjack as he cursed himself for leaving his own weapon behind.

"I'm done for, old friend!" groaned Rhodes; then, as he rolled over, Flapjack caught sight of the revolver.

If either side opened up, Flapjack was in the line of fire, and he knew it. With Rhodes' gun in his hand, he faced Barr's crowd. The men were hesitating. A leader at that moment could have brought them forward, but the leader was not forthcoming. It was an old situation for Flapjack. "Clear out

while you're all together!" he shouted, advancing with waving weapon. "Barr's dead, and the men on the dock will open up any moment. Get!" One man broke away and slunk into the crowd as if fearing he would be recognized; then in disorder they fled. Another mob of angry men was pouring from the dock buildings ready for anything. Tender hands picked up Rhodes and carried him on an improvised stretcher to the hospital.

As if by common consent, the men gathered about Flapjack Meehan. "We're taking over the running of this town, Meehan, and the first thing to do is to appoint an unofficial marshal. The next is to organize a posse to round up Barr's gang. And the next is to ship 'em out of town, except Jamison and Grafton. They should be prosecuted." Flapjack recognized the voice as that of "Judge" Tuttle.

"You're right!" shouted a dozen men.

"I move Flapjack Meehan be made marshal!" continued Judge Tuttle.

A hundred voices roared in seconding the motion.

Flapjack was serious as he worked his way from the crowd, then called out twenty or thirty men he knew would make a good posse. "Get your guns and clear out. You know who the men are we want," he told them. Then he detached himself from the crowd, slipped away unobserved, and entered the New Deal Cafe through the back door. He discarded Rhodes' gun and strapped on his old and tried forty-fours, then headed for the jail. When he entered, it was with both guns ready for action.

"What's this?" demanded Grafton. "You're covering the United States Marshal."

"It's about the size of it!" replied Flapjack. "Keep 'em high!"

From a manner born of experience, Flapjack deftly removed the other's

weapons, appropriated his badge and keys, then locked him in one of the cells. "You're going to stand trial for a number of things. Hello, boys, you're working fast!" This last remark was addressed to two members of the posse who came in with the roulette-wheel man and Jamison.

They were put in the large cell with Grafton, and the posse hurried away. From time to time during the night they returned. Flapjack turned an empty building into a temporary jail for the doubtless cases, but the main offenders were crowded into Cold Deck jail, and Tubby Willows was made head jailer with full powers.

Around Cold Deck's hospital, men stepped softly the next day. Few realized just how much they cared for Rough Rhodes—big, good-natured, handsome kid—until the story leaked out, of how he had taken up an old man's battle. Dunham, rather dazed from his experience, had been released at once, but Rhodes was fighting for his life. They gathered around in groups, only to cast baleful glances at the hospital. "If Rhodes dies——" growled one. The other nodded their sympathetic understanding.

Rumors flew thick and fast regarding his condition, until along toward nightfall the word came that saddened the whole camp, then filled the men with a cold, uncontrollable rage. "Rhodes is dead!" In an instant the camp was turned into a mob seeking vengeance.

Somewhere in the hills, Flapjack Meehan was rounding up the remainder of Barr's gang. Before the jail stood Tubby Willows, with drawn forty-fours. "Don't do it, boys!" It was a plea and a threat. "You're seein' red now! Crowds are always that way when they've been tramped on by a bunch of crooks and their ire gets up. To-morrow'll be different."

"Rhodes is dead!" came from a score

of voices. It was like throwing pitch into flames.

The mob surged closer. "Back up, boys!" warned Tubby. "We're going to give these men a trial and a fair one. I'm with you in spirit, but not in action. Back up!"

From above, a rope dropped. A former cowman had cleverly roped Tubby. A half dozen men on the jail roof pulled him clear of the ground with a will. His forty-fours vanished; they searched his pockets and demanded the keys to the jail. "I threw 'em away," he told them angrily. "Figured something like this would happen." Then they trussed him up and carried him to an old building. Tubby was dropped unceremoniously on the floor, and the door locked.

A heavy timber, borne aloft on many shoulders, thundered against the jail while, within, the prisoners' blood chilled at the sound. A fearful clatter arose as the door crashed in. Men pushed, fought, and were crushed from the pressure behind as they sought to get within the building. Inside, the struggling mass attacked the cell doors. They'd have them down in short order, the prisoners knew.

Grafton was shaking with fear, Jamison was ashen. The roulette man alone was calm. He looked Judge Tuttle squarely in the eye. Tuttle had been carried along on the crest of the wave, pleading for law and order. The man thrust a draft into Tuttle's hands a moment before the door gave way. "Give it to Old Man Dunham!" he shouted. "It's for five hundred dollars. Where I'm going, I won't need it."

"Well, bless my soul!" gasped out Tuttle. "You're a cool one."

Many hands reached within and clawed at the trio of wretches.

"A rope! A rope!" screamed some one. "Three of 'em!" yelled another. Like some writhing snake seeking a

victim, a rope came through the crowd, then another and another.

A howl such as few men hear in a lifetime filled the air as the men were dragged into the open. Grafton had to be supported; Jamison held himself together with difficulty; only the roulette man viewed the proceedings calmly. Again came the mad yell.

Flapjack Meehan, returning with more prisoners and a posse, heard the yelling and read its meaning. "They're lynching them!" he cried, aghast. "You men keep these prisoners out of the mob's sight. And remember, boys, you're sworn officers no matter what your personal feelings are."

With this terse command, Flapjack was running toward the tumult. As he fought his way through the outer edge of the mob, an electric light cross-arm took on a new and sinister aspect. A coil of rope shot through the air and over the cross-arm. Men leaped high to be first to catch the dangling end. A hoarse shout came from mad throats, and a figure shot upward, swinging round and round grotesquely. Wise in the way of crowds, Flapjack worked through, using every possible means to keep his unexpected presence secret lest he be held helpless until the work was done. When, panting, he burst through into the open, his forty-four roared, and the squirming figure dropped to the ground, gasping. It was Grafton.

When the significance of the shot dawned upon them, Flapjack's back was to the wall. Grafton lay on the ground beneath his feet; Jamison leaned against the wall like a tired man; the third stood erect. "It don't go, boys!" cried Flapjack. "We don't do things this way nowadays. Back up! Back up! There's innocent men among the prisoners, and in the long days that are to come you don't want to look back on this night and remember that you lynched an innocent man."

"There's no doubt about those three birds!" yelled a hoarse voice, and the crowd echoed its confirmation. "And they're the ones we're lynching."

"I see a lot of good friends among you, but I'll shoot if you rush me, and I can shoot, boys. Eleven shots remainin' in these two forty-fours, and that means eleven good men gone. For the Lord's sake, boys, don't make me do it!"

A wild-eyed man burst through, jerked the rope from Jamison's neck, and advanced on Flapjack. "You did a good job in the round-up, Meehan. Now it's up to the citizens to finish."

"Never!" shouted Flapjack. It was the tightest situation of his long life on the frontier. He determined to save his prisoners, yet to shoot to kill was the last thing he wanted to do or would do.

"Then we'd better string up the marshal first!" yelled the man. As if in approval of this, a light line settled over Flapjack's head and was pulled taut. He switched his tactics, emphasizing each sentence with his forty-fours, however.

"You can't hang me, and you know it! That rope isn't strong enough, and the pole isn't high enough!" he shouted.

Somebody laughed. Was it the beginning of a change in sentiment? Flapjack prayed that it was. "There isn't a half dozen yellow men in the crowd," he went on. "Could you look yourself in the eye every time you shaved in the years to come and remember that you'd help string up a yellow cur like this at my feet? Do men do such things? Could you hang a thing like Jamison, too weak from fear to stand? And could you hang a real man, a bad man it is true, but a real man, nevertheless, who stands looking you fearlessly in the eye with a rope around his neck? Don't it go against the grain to team up on a man like that? He ran a crooked roulette wheel,

but he's not cringing now." Flapjack seemed to forget he had a rope around his own neck. "Think it over, boys!"

Then, as if the crowd no longer existed, was no longer a menace, Flapjack ignored them. "Get up!" he ordered Grafton, poking him with the toe of his boot. "Help him up, Jamison," he said in a low voice. "Two minutes from now it may be too late." They pulled Grafton to his feet, a reeling thing that had faced death fearfully. "Come on!" he ordered and led the way. Men fell back, and marshal and prisoners filed through the silent throng—a throng that followed them back to jail.

In front of the jail door stood six grim men with sawed-off shotguns, Flapjack's deputies who had slipped around to the jail ready to head off any further raid. "Put up your guns, boys," he ordered, "and go home. I've talked it over with the crowd, and they've decided to let the law take its course as fair-minded men should."

Suddenly, the man who had favored hanging Flapjack commenced cheering, nor was he long alone. The same throats that had yelled for a killing a few minutes before now applauded nerve. Each, somehow, felt that he had been put on his honor.

"Don't cheer me, boys!" shouted Flapjack. "It wasn't what I said, it was what your own better judgment told you. A man's better judgment is always right if he'll stop a minute and listen."

"And you made us stop!" yelled some one.

"With a big cannon in each hand!" chimed in another.

"Say," yelled a third, "you'd better go over to that shack and let Tubby Willows out. Some of us trussed him up and stuck him in there, but we're afraid to go back now. He'd kill us."

It was two weeks later. Rough Rhodes, whose close approach to death

had caused various rumors and no little excitement, now stood before an admiring crowd. "Ahem!" began Flapjack Meehan. "Shortly after the near-lynching, when a lot of men in Cold Deck still supposed you were dead and not suffering from a flesh wound and shock, they took up a collection to buy you a swell tombstone. You won't need it for some time, so we took the money and bought the best watch in Cold Deck. We'll give it to you, then you give it back, and we'll send it outside to be engraved."

Rhodes bowed, grinned foolishly, and vanished.

Old Man Dunham motioned him down an alley, where stood an ancient

horse with a heavy load. "Right glad to see you alive, son. Don't tell nobody, but they's a good fortune in dust on that crow bait. I'm hitting for the States and my old woman, Lord love her! To show I didn't forget what you done for me, here is the location notices of a claim I staked for you right below mine. I panned her one day, and here's what I got."

"Holy Smoke!" gasped out Rhodes as he looked at the nuggets. "Well, you old devil!"

With a whoop of joy, Rough Rhodes threw both arms around Old Man Dunham and hugged him, then spoke feelingly as the movement caused a twitch of pain to shoot through his wound.



COLORADO HAS A NEW ADDITION TO HER MOUNTAIN PARKS

THE newest addition to the mountain park system of Denver, Colorado, Daniels' Park, was presented to the city over a year ago by Mr. Charles MacAllister Willcox. It has an area of forty acres and is situated at the top of a ridge on Wildcat Mountain, about eighteen miles south of Denver. In many respects Daniels' Park is the most beautiful of the entire chain of mountain parks in this part of the State. Westward, toward the Rockies, it has an incomparable view which takes in more than one hundred and fifty miles of the front range of the Rockies and gives an amazingly beautiful glimpse of the intervening valleys and plains. To the south, east, and west, the view extends for two hundred miles on days when the atmosphere is most favorable. The park department, under the direction of Superintendent A. K. Vickery, has recently completed a large shelter house, a dozen outdoor ovens, numerous concrete and stone tables, and a replica of cliff dwellers' ruins, and many other improvements for the park are being contemplated for the near future.



FLORA AND FAUNA ON MOUNT RAINIER

MOUNT RAINIER has both a flora and a fauna. Included among the snow flowers is a tiny species of the seaweed family, popularly called "red snow." Each plant is extremely minute and multiplies with great rapidity by splitting up to form new cells. On the northwest side of the mountain one frequently observes red and green "snow." It is said that the greenish tint is produced from a similar plant growth. Insects and worms make up the animal life of the snow fields. In the lower parts of Rainier's glaciers, curious worms, dark brown in color, slender in body, and about an inch in length, are found in great numbers.

A Thousand a Plate



BY
A.M. Chisholm



AND why," said McNicol, the storekeeper at the Portage, eying "Skookum" Bill Hutchins and his partner, old Sam Dobbs, coldly, "why should I give ye a winter's grubstake on credit? What have ye done with the bag of dust ye washed out of yon bar on the Kachika?"

Skookum Bill, standing on the floor scales, slid the weight along the beam until it balanced. "Two hundred and seventeen I weigh," he said with satisfaction, for he was proud of his big, hard body and the tremendous strength which had earned him his sobriquet. "What did we do with that dust, McNicol? Why, we blowed it. How long d'you expect one little poke to last two growed-up men? She wasn't no Bonanza nor Forty Mile, that bar. Come on, McNicol! You know us. We're good for it. We ain't out to do you."

"Ye'll no doubt know the proverb concernin' good intentions and the Pit," said McNicol skeptically. "I'll not grubstake ye to lie in idleness all winter, so that ye may strike me for a spring outfit on the same terrums."

"You got an awful suspicious mind, McNicol," said Skookum Bill in in-

jured tones. "I s'pose, bein' Scotch, you can't help it. But you wrong us."

"I couldn't," snapped McNicol. "I'm under no delusions whatever respectin' the pair of ye."

Which was so true that old Dobbs interposed diplomatically.

"Bill didn't mean nothin', McNicol," said he. "He'd orter told you what we're goin' to do. We don't aim to hole up for the winter. We want to git us an outfit and trap."

"Ye might have said so at first," said the trader. "And where will ye trap?"

Dobbs hesitated and shook his head.

"We'd tell you if we told any one, but we ain't givin' that away," he said with an air of honest regret. "We know a district that's simply crawlin' with fur, and don't look like it's never been trapped. Only she's a long, hard trail; and as there ain't no comin' out in the winter we want a pretty fair outfit, and we want to start right away."

McNicol looked him in the eye, but Dobbs met his gaze squarely. He was a hard old bird was Dobbs, lean and cunning; and though the chickens of a sinful youth and prime were beginning to roost upon his bald head and stooping shoulders—to say nothing of certain internal pains perhaps attributable to their

scratching claws—he was still able to keep the pace which was set by his partner, Bill Hutchins. And Skookum Bill, in a land of hard men, was noted for strength, activity, endurance, and especially “cussedness.” McNicol suddenly shifted his gaze to the face of the latter.

“That’s right,” Bill corroborated. “She’s a long trip, like Sam says.”

“Pick out what ye want,” said McNicol. “But remember if there are no furs to show for it ye’ll never get another dollar of credit from me.”

And so, when Hutchins and Dobbs emerged from the store they were the possessors of sufficient general supplies to last until the next spring; which, considering that they were flat broke and had reputations that would ignite safety matches, was a striking testimony to the elastic credit of the country.

“Easier’n I thought!” grinned Skookum Bill, as he sliced tobacco from a huge new plug.

“What did you want to make that crack about him bein’ Scotch for?” Sam remonstrated.

“Well, he is,” Bill replied.

“That ain’t no reason for remindin’ him of it,” said Dobbs, “’specially when you want credit.”

“Why, Scotchmen is mostly proud of just bein’ Scotch,” said Bill. “But darned if I could ever see why,” he added.

“Nor me,” Dobbs said. “Anyway, you near queered the deal. If I hadn’t jumped in right then he’d have turned us down.”

“You’re a good offhand liar,” his partner conceded frankly. “But what are we goin’ to do with all them traps? Course, we might trade them off for something we want.”

“What’s the matter with usin’ them ourselves?” Dobbs suggested.

“Who? Us?” said Bill in amazement. “Traps?”

“Sure,” said Dobbs. “Why not?”

“No reason why not,” Bill returned, “only I hadn’t thought of it. I ain’t trapped for a good while, and I was thinkin’ we’d put in an easy winter. Fur’s scarce around here, and I ain’t goin’ to kill myself for a few skins.”

“Course not,” Dobbs agreed, “but here’s the proposition, Bill: We’ve made the bluff to McNicol, and you heard what he said. We may need him to stake us again. We’ve sure got to show him some fur in the spring. Now we’ve allus wanted to git up into that country around the headwaters of the Frances early in the year when the water in the creeks was low, so’s we could wash gravel from the bars. We’ve allus figgered they was gold there. We can hit there before freeze-up and winter, all right, and have a look around. Likely there’s as much fur there as they is anywhere. And, anyway, when you ain’t got no money for the winter, it’s just as well to go some place where you won’t need none.”

Now Hutchins and Dobbs were prospectors—or rather gold seekers—first, last, and all the time. The uncertain game held them in the grip of its fascination, and though they cursed and grumbled at the life, they loved it. Occasionally they were forced to turn their versatile hands to other things, and had even, when times were very hard, indeed, descended and condescended to regular employment for wages; which they considered a degradation to be excused only by stern necessity. But their hearts were in the hills and valleys and basins and nameless creeks where a man might chance upon yellow fortune among the sand and gravel; albeit the chance was less than one in ten thousand. No rumor was too will-o’-the-wisp for them to chase; and on the well-known theory that far-away fields are the greenest they were continually making long, hard trips into unknown country, whence they usually returned

cursing bitterly and outrageously, only to try again elsewhere with little better success. And so Skookum Bill found his partner's suggestion alluring.

"That's so," he said. "You're right about them creeks. I'll bet there's bars that'd pay big if they could be got at. And as you say we have to winter somewheres. Might as well do it there, and be in for the spring low water."

Neither mentioned nor, indeed, thought of the circumstance that the district referred to was in the very heart of a frozen wilderness; that it was hard to get into even when the waterways were open and practically impossible to get out of when these were closed by frost; and that in the event of sickness or accident a man must depend principally upon Providence and his own constitution to pull him through. Neither Bill nor Sam leaned very strongly upon Providence—though Sam, when drunk, exhibited religious tendencies, or rather a tendency to mourn his lack of them through life—but each had a well-founded and abiding faith in his own physical powers, and so neither saw anything out of the way in the prospect of a winter of remote loneliness.

A couple of days later they left the Portage in a sixteen-foot Peterboro, loaded to within two inches of the gunwale, and so almost as unstable as a floating log. But since both were used to the vagaries of such craft, they felt as secure as if it had been a York boat, and paddled up the long reaches without undue exertion, camping when it suited them, and living royally on fish, flesh, and fowl, aided by a supply of rum so much overproof that it would almost have floated a horseshoe. But this luxury was also in the nature of medical stores, and in the long winter ahead contingencies might arise in which it would prove very valuable, indeed.

"No more after to-night," said Bill,

at the end of a week, pouring a frugal portion into a tin cup. "No more till Thanksgiving, bar accidents."

"That goes," Dobbs agreed regretfully, duplicating the action. "But, anyhow, Bill, here's to accidents!"

But though at first their rate of progress was slow and its manner indolent, as the days went by a change came upon them, especially noticeable in the younger man, Skookum Bill.

This manifested itself in stiffer thrusts of paddle against the current, in a gradually increasing tension of body and mind against the natural obstacles to their progress, in later goings ashore at night to camp, in earlier uprisings. They were, in fact, in the grip of the long trail, and Bill Hutchins' magnificent muscles seemed to string themselves to meet an added demand.

In the stern of the low-laden canoe his paddle swished steadily and powerfully, with thrust of straight, stiff upper arm backed by a twisting swing of the body from the waist, and with every stroke the little craft leaped as if a giant hand had shoved her forward. In the bow old Dobbs fought the stream cunningly, twisting the nose into eddies and backwaters, taking advantage when he could of set of current, and when he could not, paddling doggedly, not so powerfully, perhaps, as his partner, but with equal steadiness.

And so in due course they approached the destination. The nights were now cold, gemmed with a multitude of bright stars, uncanny with the querulous wail of coyotes and the occasional deep voices of wolves. In the mornings hoarfrost lay thick upon the ground, and thin ice formed in currentless shallows and overlay the muskrat runways. In the sloughs and ponds the rush-and-mud houses of these little workers were bound solidly. Along the river freshly felled and barked trees told of the activity of heaver, and in slow current and in eddies the tops of their winter's

food supply lay like submerged brush fences projecting above the surface. Day by day the trees became barer and the stream was littered with yellow, wind-stripped leaves. Geese passed overhead, and wild fowl from the breeding grounds of the farther North wisped along the lonely waterway. Plainly winter was at hand.

"Just as well we started when we did," said Bill. "No tellin' when she'll tighten up."

"May do it any time," Sam agreed.

They turned up the Frances where the water was shallow and swift. Creeks were numerous and timber was plentiful. On either hands were hills and more hills, in waves of unknown ranges, seamed by swift waterways, notched by passes. And here the adventurers went ashore, unloaded, turned their canoe bottom up in the shelter of thick brush, and cached their supplies temporarily on a pole scaffold, out of reach of prowling depredators.

They had never been in that precise country before, and they had not the least idea of the surrounding topography save that it seemed to have considerable ups and downs, but, nevertheless, they felt quite satisfied and at home.

"For fur," said Dobbs, "we ort to get back in them hills. There's better timber, and if there's pay in the creeks she'll be higher up."

"All right," Bill acquiesced. "We'll take a couple of blankets and some grub and *nanitch* round for a couple of days till we find a place to suit us."

Carrying light packs they left camp at daylight the next morning. Trails there were none; but they followed the general course of a small creek, crossed a divide, and dipped down into a beautifully timbered valley watered by a swift, large creek of almost riverlike dimensions. They were thus between the first range of hills and the second, and much higher up than where they

had landed. Looking to right and left from the summit, before they had begun the descent, the valley had lain as far as they could see in thick timber and open, natural meadows, and they could see, also, gaps in the hills, probably indicating tributary streams.

"Looks good to me," said Bill. "We'll just go up her to-morrow, and see what we can find. There ort to be fur here."

Now, fur-bearing animals are the shyest of living things, and one may very easily wander for days in their natural habitat and see none of them. And yet most of the time one will be under the observation of beady, little eyes and twitching, pointed noses and small, furred ears. It is one thing to be morally certain that one is in an excellent fur district and quite another to prove it, apart from actual results in trapping. Beaver and rats have visible habitations, and their fecundity is their chief guarantee against extinction. But the fox, the marten, the mink, the otter, the lynx, and the weasel do not advertise their abodes. For the most part their habits are nocturnal, and their trails, before the snow, usually invisible. Now and then an odd member of the clans may be seen for an instant; but, as a rule, the would-be trapper, cruising for a good district, draws general conclusions from the lie of the land, the timber, the streams, and its remoteness or otherwise as bearing on the likelihood of its having been trapped before.

But Skookum Bill and old Sam, although they were primarily gold seekers, knew the angles of the trapping game very well, and in a couple of days' cruising up and down the valley they found sufficient sign to render them jubilant.

"Course it's mighty hard to tell till we've put out a few traps," said the former, "but it looks to me like we've struck it lucky."

"You bet," Dobbs agreed. "I don't

believe this here valley ever *was* trapped. We ain't come across no sign of any old camp—not so much as a blazed tree. I wouldn't wonder if we was the only white men that ever was in here—or Injuns, either. I'll bet we'll take out a canoe-load of prime fur. Marten ort to be dark in here among this timber."

"She'll be some chore packin' the outfit in over that summit," Bill observed. "There's snow there now, but there ain't enough for a toboggan. And then she's blame steep. We'll have to pack it on our backs. Two trips ort to do."

"Well"—old Dobbs clawed his beard dubiously—"I'm gettin' a leetle short in the wind, Bill, with a load. They's times when my back don't feel right. I can't pack like I could twenty years ago, or ten—nor even five."

"I can," said Skookum Bill, with the proud confidence of wonderful and undiminished strength. "I ain't never hit my limit yet. I could pack three hundred in over that summit if I could get it to set right. Course, though, I ain't goin' to try for no records. We'll both go over, and you take what you can pack easy, and I'll take a good load, and we'll both come back. Then I'll fetch over the outfit in two or three trips while you're buildin' a cabin. We'll build her right here. This'll be our home camp. If we have to we'll string two or three line camps up or down as we need 'em."

They returned from their canoe heavily laden, and Dobbs set about building a cabin in a sheltered spot near the creek. His tools were an ax and an auger. The sides of the building were of small logs, chinked with grass and moss, and the roof was of shakes split from straight-grained wood. Having no stove, they were forced to depend for heat on a fireplace made of sticks laid in clay. Dobbs added two

bunks, a table, and two stools, and surveyed his work with some pride.

"She'll do," he said.

"Good enough for a millionaire," Skookum Bill agreed. "And now let her snow and be durned!"

But for a time "she" refused to snow. Day after day was bright and breathless, the air dry and clear. Ever the nights grew colder. The ponds were skinned over with new ice, clear and tough, which rang musically to the impact of a blow as a thin goblet rings when tapped gently with the knife blade. The ground was a carpet of leaves, rustling noisily beneath the softest foot. But Bill killed a blacktail, and so they had meat. Fish were plentiful. And so with the larder full they waited for the snow; for until it should come, revealing the telltale trails and runways of the furred peoples, it would be waste of time to set many traps.

This waiting was of a deadly monotony. Skookum Bill, full of restless, tireless energy when on the trail, now passed to the other extreme. He slept like a dog, sixteen hours a day, rising to eat and smoke, and then falling back in his bunk, where he coiled himself very much like a hibernating bear. He was stupid with sleep, drugged with it, and he did absolutely nothing, leaving all the work to his partner.

Dobbs, whose advancing years had diminished his capacity for sleep, did not grumble, even inwardly. He was accustomed to his partner's extremes, of sloth, of action, and of dissipation. And he knew that sooner or later the big man would do much more than his share of work. And so he cooked and cut wood and washed up and played solitaire and lay sleepless for hours in his bunk. It would be very pleasant and strictly conventional to state that in these hours of darkness and sleeplessness his mind reverted to the days of his innocent childhood, and that he sighed bitterly over the years of his

misspent life. In fact, however, he did nothing of the sort. If he had ever had an innocent childhood he had forgotten all about it. Save when drunk, he was unsentimental, unrepentant, and irreligious. And instead of regretting his somewhat lurid past he occupied himself in building air castles which should have been promptly closed by the air police.

At last the snow came, on the wings of a northwest wind which had switched suddenly from southerly gales. Old Dobbs, lying in his bunk, noted the short lull in the whining, straining æolian notes and their recommencement from another quarter. Later he found himself cold, and drew another blanket over him. In the morning it was still blowing great guns, and when he had made up the fire he opened the door on a world of swirling, wind-driven whiteness. Whereat he cackled joyously and informed his comatose partner that it was snowing like perdition; a simile which, though possibly inaccurate, according to accepted authorities, was fairly descriptive of weather conditions.

Skookum Bill opened gummed eyes, and profanely commanded him to shut the door. He stretched, yawned profoundly, heaved himself out of his bunk, and dressed himself, a process which was confined to and completed by the drawing on of trousers and moccasins. After which he ate a huge breakfast of flapjacks and venison, lit his pipe, and had a look at the weather.

"Blizzard," he announced. "Can't do nothin' till she stops." And having stated this obvious fact he lay down, and went to sleep again.

For two days the storm raged; and when it ceased and the sun shone again, they seemed to be in a new world, daz- zlingly white, wiped clean of familiar landmarks. The swift river was frozen across. The cabin itself was no more

than a mound in the snow. Traveling thenceforth must be done on the webs.

But with the snow, trails before invisible would be plain to read. And so they loaded themselves with traps, bait, blankets, and started to lay out their line. They had brought a good supply of steel traps of assorted sizes, but they used also the old-fashioned, primitive deadfall which, though it takes time to construct, is just as effective and much more humane, though the latter consideration did not operate on their minds at all.

As they progressed they found sign in abundance. The trails of the fur bearers, from the huge, muffled pads of the lynx to the dainty, mouselike fleet of the weasel, were everywhere. Never had either of them seen the like.

"Fur!" exclaimed Skookum Bill. "It's here to burn!"

"A reg'lar Garden of Eden!" said old Dobbs, whose scriptural recollections were somewhat misty. "Don't look like it's ever been trapped, and nobody knows of it but us. We'd orter make a clean-up."

"It'll beat prospectin'," said Bill.

And it did. In the weeks that followed they gathered store of fur, not only in quantity, but in quality beyond their wildest dreams. And when one day they took a veritable black fox from a trap, they felt that at last fortune was treating them according to their deserts. The animal was large, his coat perfect, and they skinned him carefully and reverently; and that night they celebrated fittingly in the precious rum.

"That there black dog," said Skookum Bill, nodding at the stretching skin, "don't know his own luck. He's due to wind himself round the neck of an empress or a princess or a dancer or somethin', and have her rub her cheek onto his hide. And that's a darn sight more than you or me will ever have, Sam."

"I don't want none of 'em rubbin'

up to me," said old Dobbs virtuously. "I don't go none on them European she high-rollers, nor noovo rich. I ruther have a klootch that can cook."

"I never had one that could, and I've had sev'ral," Bill stated judicially. "And their ideas of what's grub is a lot too liberal for me, and I ain't got no tender stummick, nuther. I've saw a klootchman build a mulligan out of stuff that would poison a white man's dog."

"Never watch the cook," said Dobbs solemnly, "'specially when it's a mulligan she's makin'. And about them klootchmen of yourn, Bill, you're my partner, and I think a lot of you; but it's my duty to tell you you ain't lived a moral life a-tall."

Bill's comment on this obvious truth was not verbal. He picked up the rum, shot the cork tight with a blow of his fist, and placed it behind his bunk.

"What you doin'?" Dobbs asked. "I want another drink."

"You won't get it," Bill replied, with finality. "You're drunk."

"I ain't!" Dobbs denied indignantly. "Me? Why, I ain't said a word about religion yet. I guess I know my own stages by this time."

"When an old rooster like you gets to talkin' about a moral life it's time he quit drinkin'," Bill observed. "And, anyway, we ain't goin' to mop up all we got. We want to save some for Thanksgiving, and in case of sickness."

"We're both healthy," Dobbs urged.

"That's all right," said Bill. "Some time you come in wet and froze and played out; and the first thing you know you got a shakin' chill and a pain in your chest and the makin's of pneumonia. What you goin' to do if you haven't any liquor?"

"Chrishun Science!" said old Dobbs resourcefully.

"Christian blazes!" snorted Bill. "Don't talk back to me. I got you siwashed right now. Go to bed and sober off!"

II.

It was a week after the taking of the black fox that Skookum Bill, on a short exploring trip a few miles west of their cabin, came across a deadfall which held a dead marten. He took the marten, and, when he returned, said to Dobbs:

"I didn't know you'd built any deadfalls in the timber past the big draw?"

"I haven't," said Dobbs.

"Hey!" Bill exclaimed. "Sure you have. That's where I got this marten."

"Can't help it," Dobbs returned. "I ain't got a trap there. I ain't been in that timber a-tall."

"Somebody has," Bill stated flatly. "There's the marten, and I seen snowshoe tracks. Course I thought they was yours."

"Well, they ain't," Dobbs said positively.

"Then," Bill declared, with an oath, "somebody's trapping on our ground."

The first statement was obviously true, though the partners' proprietary rights might be open to doubt. But custom has arranged a trapper's *modus vivendi* by which a man's right is ordinarily recognized to the territory covered by his traps; and such right is jealously guarded. Seemingly here was an intruder who was violating custom. Moreover, the partners had come to look upon this exceedingly rich district as their exclusive property. And so their indignation was extreme.

"The low-down, ornery cuss!" said Dobbs. "The nerve of him, crowdin' in on us, just as if there wasn't lots of other places for him to go!"

"I sh'd say so!" Bill concurred. "Here we go to all the trouble of findin' a new district where we won't interfere with no one, and this blasted wolverine comes in and sets his traps right on top of us. Well, he's got to roll his blankets, that's all. There's some things I won't stand."

"Sure," said Dobbs, "he ain't actin' right. There's plenty of men been shot for less."

"So there has," Bill agreed. "Only we don't want to shoot him unless we have to. It's got so lately that there's trouble about such things. Same time we ain't goin' to let him keep on stealin' fur from us. To-morrow we'll go and run him to his hole, and find out whether he's a Nitcher or a white man."

Early in the morning they shouldered light packs, took their rifles, crossed the big draw, and entered the timber where was the deadfall.

"It ain't mine," said Dobbs positively. "I never notched a stick that way in my life. And look at them snowshoe tracks. They're longer 'n' narrower than mine, and the webbin's different."

Proof conclusive. And so they took up the stranger's trail. It led west, and when darkness fell they had not reached its end. On the way they found half a dozen traps, which they destroyed. That night they slept out uncomfortably. And he next day about noon they found a cabin very similar to their own, standing in the shelter of thick spruce. There was no smoke, and Bill's hail met with no response. They lifted the wooden latch and peered in. The owner was not at home, though the cabin was evidently occupied.

"One white man," said Bill, after a brief inspection. "Out on his line, I s'pose, and there's no tellin' when he'll be back. So we won't wait. We'll just serve notice on him."

The ultimatum which Bill indited, and which they jointly and severally subscribed, was succinct, lucid, and peremptory, and read:

No trapping allowed east of that washout creek. That is our ground kepe of it. By
Order
W. HUTCHINS
S. DOBBS, Esq.

Leaving this on the table weighted with a stick of firewood they returned to their own camp. Having thus de-

clared themselves, they considered it up to the intruder. And so they were not surprised when he appeared at their camp two days later.

He proved to be a somewhat hard-faced gentleman of about Dobbs' age, with a cold eye and a bent mouth. He carried a rifle of a recent model, and it was noticeable that every loop of his cartridge belt contained a shell. Without preliminaries he introduced himself as Jake Flint.

"I s'pose," said Mr. Flint morosely, "you're the two pelicans that put it up I can't trap east of that washout creek?"

"And you s'pose dead right," said Skookum Bill truculently. "That's our ground."

"Homestead?" queried Mr. Flint, with elaborate irony. "When do you prove up?"

"Right away—for you!" Bill retorted. "That's our ground because we're trappin' that district, and we ain't goin' to stand for no one else there."

"And so," said Mr. Flint, "you go and bust up my traps."

"You bet we do!" Bill replied. "And what you goin' to do about it, hey?"

The older man eyed him for a moment balefully. "I'm goin' to set 'em again," he replied, "and don't you touch 'em. I'm goin' to trap where I durn please. There's two of you, but you don't bluff me out, not any."

"Bluff, hey?" said Skookum Bill. "If you got her sized up for a bluff, go ahead. But don't holler at the showdown. What we said in that notice goes."

"I'm goin' ahead," Flint stated calmly. "I wasn't born in the woods to be scared by no horned owl. You go lookin' for trouble round my *llahee*, and you're durn apt to get it. And that's all I got to say to you."

With which flat declaration he departed. Three days afterward the partners discovered traps which were not theirs east of the washout creek which

was the dead line. These they destroyed, with curses and threats. But to their vast indignation a short time after a like fate befell a dozen of their own traps. Thus it was evident that Flint was not afraid to play even.

"And that settles it," said Bill wrathfully. "He's callin' for a show-down, and he'll sure get it. I'm goin' to *nan-it*ch down around his *illahee*. You keep camp. I may be away some nights."

"What you goin' to do?" Dobbs asked.

"I ain't goin' to shoot him," Bill replied. "I'm just goin' to give him a sorter hint to move out."

Without further explanation he departed, and did not return till the end of the third day.

"Well?" Dobbs asked somewhat anxiously.

"Well—what?" Bill growled.

"What did you do?"

"Burned him out."

"Gosh!" old Dobbs exclaimed in awe, for in that remote wilderness such a deed was little less than murder. "Not—not the whole jing-bang, Bill? You left him something?"

"I was fool enough to," Skookum Bill admitted. "I waited till he was out on his line, 'cause I didn't want to shoot him. I held him out some grub and his bed and all the matches he had. He has part of a deer hung up, so he has lots of meat, and he has a little toboggan with him. With luck he ought to make somewheres if he starts right away. I could."

"You're young and stronger'n a moose," Dobbs pointed out. "Durned if I believe I could make it alone, and he's about as old as me."

"He's got a chance," his partner replied doggedly. "He had fair warning. Lots of men would have shot him. An Injun would, in a holy minute."

"That's so," said Dobbs, "but now he'll go on the prod. He's just the kind to lay for us and shoot us."

"Not him," said Bill. "He'll figger we're watchin' for him. And as there's two of us he'll beat it for the outside."

The next two days brought no sign of Flint; and when a week passed uneventfully they began to relax their watchfulness.

"What'd I tell you?" said Bill. "The old wolverine was tryin' to run a blazer on us. All he needed was to be showed we meant business. And he can't make no trouble for us when he gets out, 'cause our two words are better'n his."

And so they went about their business once more in comfortable security, quite untroubled by thought of the lone refugee toiling through the deep snows toward the abodes of men. As they looked at it he was lucky to have the chance which had been vouchsafed him; for they knew those who would not have given it at all. Their consciences were quite easy, and they enjoyed once more the feeling of sole ownership.

"Only we got to rip the heart out of her this season," Dobbs pointed out, as they sat one night before the fire. "'Cause if Flint makes the raffle, even though he don't raise no war yell on us, next year he gets him a partner, and if we want to trap in here we got to do it in the smoke. And I ain't that fond of trappin'."

"Nor me," Bill admitted. "It ain't our business. We'll just take what we can get and quit. We ought to have enough right now to pay McNicol and live for a year, with some fun throwed in."

"We'll get more and better fur after Thanksgiving," said Dobbs. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike him. He got up, stirred the fire, and inspected a line of cryptic marks upon the wall. "Say," he said, "do you know what day this is?"

"Wednesday or Sunday or s'm' other day," Bill replied indifferently.

"Twenty-fourth of November," said Dobbs.

"Well, what about it?"

"Thanksgiving eve!" Dobbs told him.

"And what about *that*?" Bill asked. "You ain't figgerin on nuts and turkey, are you? 'Cause I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

Dobbs licked his old lips sinfully, and his jaws waggled like those of a cat which sees a bird almost within springing distance.

"Thanksgiving eve," he repeated. "We was to have a leetle celebration Thanksgiving eve." And he added somewhat anxiously: "You ain't forgot about that, Bill? It's an awful long time since we had a drink."

"Last time you had too many," Skookum Bill reminded him.

"What if I had?" Dobbs asked, in injured tones. "I get durn little fun in life, and I'm gettin' old. About the only time I feel good and like I used to is when I'm tanked up. Wait twenty years and you'll know."

"Oh, all right," said his partner, somewhat apprehensively, for he had the horror of the young and absolutely healthy for the dismal forebodings and outlook of age. "I dunno but I feel like a drink or two myself. And as you say we was goin' to celebrate a little. Only we'll go light on the stuff, 'cause as I told you before we want to have a little left in case of sickness."

Dobbs agreed hypocritically. For weeks his whole being had craved liquor. Once he had furtively helped himself to a drink; and had shaken in his shoes lest his partner's nostrils should detect the strong-odored rum. In which event he would have had a severe manhandling, for Skookum Bill brooked no infraction of the camp rules which he laid down.

But as it happened that night Bill was in a more or less free and unbelted mood. Also, but in a lesser degree than his partner, he craved alcohol; not so much physically, for his nerves were as yet quite untouched, but mentally,

as a change from the monotony of their existence.

Now the rum, as has been said, was criminally overproof, and they had had no intoxicants for a long time. And so a couple of stiff drinks produced a beautiful and generous expansion of soul. The mean cabin became larger, the fire warmer and more cheerful, and life generally of a more roseate hue. They began to feel the prodigal Thanksgiving spirit, and to regret their limited opportunities for satisfying it.

"I wisht we was somewheres," said Bill. "Look at all them skins and think of what they'd buy. And what good are they to us here?" Rising, he searched out the pelt of the black fox, held it up, and stroked the glossy coat lovingly. "What's this black dog worth, Sam?"

"Whatever you can get," Dobbs replied bitterly. "We never get nothing like what they're worth. But this here is a beauty. I don't s'pose there's a better pelt in the world, or ever has been. McNicol will get near twenty-five hundred if he holds out. And we ort to hold out for two thousand."

"You bet we will," Bill affirmed. "If I had my share of that to-night down in Vancouver or Seattle, things'd move some."

"They sure would," Dobbs agreed. "I remember once I hit Seattle with a little stake, and——" He embarked on a lurid narrative of his deeds on that historic occasion.

Bill piled wood on the fire with a prodigal hand and took up the tale. Later he essayed song, roaring forth unprintable ballads in a tremendous, harsh bass which drowned his partner's sadly cracked tenor. By this time his determination to "go light" on the rum was quite forgotten, and Dobbs, who had never in all his long and sinful life denied himself anything which was ready to his hand, was not the man to remind him, even if he, Dobbs, had not

reached a composite condition which may be described as the sentimental-philosophical-religious-despondent, in which a corresponding variety of mental kinks became evident.

"'S funny world," he announced solemnly, "when you size her up. Some folks allus has the best of it, 'n' accordingly, others gets the worst. 'S logic, and you can't beat it. Me, I allus got the worst. 'S the Scripture says I ask for bread and I get the laugh, like the Prodigal Son."

"You don't know your own luck," said Bill. "What you kickin' at? Here you got a fire and blankets and booze and eats. You're blame lucky, if you ask me. How'd you like to be mushin' along in the snow, campin' under a tree somewheres like that durn old wolverine, Flint?"

"Proves what I was sayin'," Dobbs argued. "He gets the worst of it. I ain't sure we done right about that, Bill. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. An' we're wicked—we're good 'n' wicked. If it was to do over again I'd say shoot him tenderly. It'd be safer."

"He can't do nothin'." Bill asserted.

"Something might happen to him and he'd die—in the snow," said Dobbs tearfully. "'S 'n' awful death, Bill! I'm 'fraid of it. An' he's old, like me. He won't never make it. He'll freeze 'n' die. Shockin'. But then he won't never tell nobody how he was burnt out, nor get a chance to play even on us. So it's all for th' best, an' we shouldn't doubt 'n' inscrutable Providence. But 's 'n' awful thing to kill a fellow bein', Bill!"

"Not when he needs it," Bill said grimly.

"I killed a fellow bein' once—with an ax," his partner whimpered. "He needed it, too. He knifed me an' I near died. Promise you won't let me die in the snow, Bill!"

Thereafter he became unintelligibly

maudlin, and staggered to his bunk. Skookum Bill sat alone, his head singing with raw rum, the prey of a thousand devils of desire which he could not satisfy. The happy stage had passed. He was morose, sour of temper as an old bull. In any companionship he would have picked a quarrel, fought, and thus worked off his ill temper. But as there was no one to fight with he merely drank and scowled. Being cold he threw more wood on the fire recklessly. As it blazed the heat working on the alcohol made him sleepy. He blinked drunkenly at his bunk, but lacked the energy to rise to get to it. Instead he leaned forward and laid his head on his folded arms which rested on the table beside the skin of the black fox. In a moment he was asleep.

How long he slept thus he never knew. He awoke gasping, choking, in an atmosphere which bit his throat and lungs and stung his eyes. In his ears was an ominous crackling and snapping, and a glare met his sight from which he shrank like a frightened animal. For a moment his sodden senses refused to comprehend, but instinctively he sprang for the door.

With its opening, and the admission of fresh air, the interior of the cabin leaped into flame. Red tongues ran up the heat-dried resinous walls and roof. Smoke billowed out at him through the door.

The break into the air of the winter's night was like a plunge into ice water. He sobered suddenly. He was not overly intelligent, but all his life he had been accustomed to dangers, to emergencies which must be met by instant bodily action. And so he did not hesitate. Drawing his great lungs full of pure air, he plunged back into the smoke, dragged his stupefied partner from his bunk, and flung him out in the snow.

Thereafter his actions were of the

whirlwind variety. He made no useless attempt to fight the fire. Whatever he could lay hands on in the choking smoke he flung through the door and finally emerged with racked lungs, blinded eyes, and scorched hair and flesh. Gasping and cursing he watched the flames burst through the roof, and roar, wind-driven, in a mighty, licking tongue which seemed to reach out toward him hungrily.

But in a moment the frost nipped at him. Immediately he pounced upon his prostrate partner and shook him violently.

"Lemme 'lone!" Dobbs muttered. And Bill cuffed him with the earnestness of a she-bear admonishing a cub.

"Wake up, you old stiff," he shouted, "or you'll wake up somewhere that's not heaven!" And Dobbs, catching the concluding words, opened uncomprehending and dazed eyes upon a red glare and smoke which eddied around him and soaring sparks.

"Not in heaven," he croaked, "jus' 's I've allus expected! An' Bill's along, too, 'n' I ain't s'prised at *that!*"

"You ain't hey!" growled his partner, and shook him again so that his old head snapped to and fro perilously. "Lemme tell you any place is tame to this. We're burnt out—burnt out, d'ye hear! And if you don't wake up and get your blood to movin', you'll freeze so solid you'll never thaw!" And he smote him again.

"Burnt out!" Dobbs repeated stupidly. "Burnt out?"

"You got it!" snapped Skookum Bill, and hauled him to his feet. "Get some more clothes on you. I don't know what I pitched out yet. I hadn't no time to be partic'lar."

Luckily they had been fully clad, even to their moccasins, and Bill had rescued their heavy outer garments which had hung near the door. Dobbs got into his coat, shivering with cold.

"How'd she start?" he queried.

"I dunno," his partner replied sullenly. "Hot coal, I s'pose, or chimbley. I had on a big fire when I dropped asleep."

"This is what we get for burnin' Flint out!" whined Dobbs. "You shouldn't have did that, Bill. It's a judgment!"

"Aw, shut up!" growled his partner. "You make me sick. Judgment my neck! There ain't no such thing!"

"Yes, there is," Dobbs insisted. "This proves it."

"Cut it out!" roared Skookum Bill, in sudden fury. "Another word out of you, and I'll throw you on that fire!"

Dobbs, cowed and shaken, wisely refrained from further observations. They passed the remainder of the night miserably, and with daylight they took stock of their belongings.

These were few. There was a rifle with but three shells in the magazine, and these constituted their entire stock of ammunition. There were two blankets stripped from the bunks, part of a sack of flour, and a box of matches. Their snowshoes and ax and a light toboggan had been outside, and so were uninjured. Unfortunately they were low in venison, part of a quarter only remaining. And last, but of little immediate value, was the skin of the black fox, which had been lying on the table. All the other pelts were gone. It was a very scanty outfit, indeed, and they regarded it gloomily.

"There's only one thing to do," Skookum Bill observed, "and that's to beat it for the outside. Sooner we start the better."

"Ain't there no grub in the line camp?"

"Not a smell. This is the outfit right here, and it ain't much."

"You're right, it ain't," said Dobbs. "I was sayin' I didn't believe I could make the outside, and now I'll have a chance to see."

"Sure you'll make it," said Bill, who knew the importance of a stout heart

on a long, hard trail. "We'll travel along easy, and make good camps."

"We ain't got enough grub to take it easy," Dobbs pointed out. "And just when you need meat is the time you don't see it."

Which was so true that Skookum Bill went to loading the toboggan without reply. This done he adjusted the loops of his snowshoes and dropped the line of the sled over his shoulders.

"All set?" he asked.

"Gimme a rope of the toboggan."

"I will when I get tired," said Bill.

III.

Day after day they plodded steadily in a white wilderness. By day the hard exercise kept them warm. But camping in the snow under even the most favorable conditions is not fun, and when one is short of food and blankets it is miserable. In spite of all they could do in the way of shelters, and no matter how cunningly they arranged their reflecting backlogs and fires, they shivered from dark to dawn. Thus they had little real rest. The very exercise which kept them warm by day burned up the food which they ate and demanded more. Not getting it, it consumed the body tissues. They grew gaunt and haggard and sunken of eye, but there could be no rest.

As Dobbs had feared they found no red meat. At any other time they would have chanced on deer or moose. But now, in their necessity, they saw neither. It seemed an off year for rabbits. They caught two in snares, and had the luck to kill three grouse with sticks, for they were reluctant to waste their precious cartridges on such small game. These eked out the small supply of venison and flour, but the time came when they were forced to cut down their scanty daily rations.

"It's a case," said Bill. "It's twelve days, givin' ourselves the best of it, to the Portage, and it looks like there was

a hoodoo on us for meat. We got to cut right down."

And then a piece of the worst possible luck befell. Dobbs, descending a steep place, caught the toe of his snowshoe in brush, tripped, and fell twenty feet, bringing up among rocks sticking out of the snow. When he tried to rise he sank back, stifling a groan.

"You ain't hurt yourself?" cried Bill.

"Leg," said Dobbs briefly. "She got a bad crack and a twist. I—I can't walk on her, Bill!"

"We'll camp and have a look at her," said Bill quietly. "A little rest will do us good."

He made a fire, and, stripping his partner's leg, examined it. It was already swollen and discoloring, and just above the ankle it was painful to the touch.

"Looks to me like the little bone's bust," said Bill, referring to the fibula. "You sure can't walk on her." He was silent for a moment. "The devil!" he added justifiably.

Into Dobbs' old eyes came the expression of a stricken animal. But he said nothing, waiting. Bill scowled at the fire.

"Hard luck, but it can't be helped," he said, at length. "I'll fix it up the best I can with splints. We won't go no farther to-day."

"If it's broke I won't be able to walk to-morrow," Dobbs ventured.

"You won't be able to walk for weeks," his partner told him. "I'll haul you on the toboggan."

"You can't—not in this soft snow," said Dobbs. "It's white of you, Bill, but it's too much."

"I never quit a partner yet," the big man announced. "I ain't no smear heel. I can do it, all right. I'm skookum, and I ain't never struck my limit yet." He stretched his great body with a sudden, rippling heave of muscle and sinew. "Don't you worry 'bout me, old-timer. We'll pull through somehow."

He cut a thick bough bed, and splints from a straight-grained sapling with which he bound his partner's leg, but not too tightly lest the impeded circulation should cause the foot to freeze. And in the morning he made him as comfortable as possible on the toboggan, looped the line over his shoulders, and started.

Though Dobbs was lean his weight in that soft snow made a heavy load. Bill was forced to pick his way carefully. Now and then on crust the going was good, and he made better time; but on the whole, progress was alarmingly slow. Even on downward slopes it was a pull; up them it was a strain. The exertion wrung the sweat from his hard body. Now and then he was forced to rest.

"I'm too durn heavy," said Dobbs sadly.

"No, you ain't," his partner replied. "You're lighter than I thought. Wait till we get down along the river, where the snow is packed, and we'll just burn up the trail."

Magnificent lying, and Dobbs knew it. He could tell by the sinking of his partner's webs in the snow, by his heavy breathing, by the heave of his chest, and the running sweat when he halted. A good judge of distance and pace, he knew that the miles of a day's march were being cut in less than half. Which meant that instead of being twelve days from the Portage they were, in fact, more than twenty-four. And even on rations reduced to the starvation point they had enough food only for six.

Over these things Dobbs brooded, sitting helpless on the toboggan watching the pistonlike, tireless, driving stride of the magnificent human mechanism in front of him. And one night he looked at his scanty meal with a tolerable imitation of repulsion.

"I don't want no supper," said he.

"You ain't feelin' sick?" asked Bill apprehensively.

"No, not sick," Dobbs assured him. "I just ain't hungry. I guess my stummick's sorter turned against this grub. It'll do me good to go without a meal or two." Which was uttered with the best intentions, but was a distinct overplay of his hand.

"You old liar!" said Bill. "I'm onto you bigger'n a house. You eat that grub!"

And Dobbs, finding his scheme detected, gave up the pretense.

"I won't," he said. "You're doin' all the work, while I'm just settin' still. You need the grub, and I don't. I don't have to keep strong, and you do. You've got to have it to pull me. Besides," he added, with a brave attempt at humor, "the less I eat, the lighter I'll get, and that'll help some."

"And that'll be all from you," said Bill. "Think I'm goin' to see a partner with a busted leg starve himself? Not much. Eat it, or I'll ram it down you."

And so Dobbs ate unwillingly, while his partner predicted a change of luck which should give them meat. Sooner or later, he maintained, they were bound to find deer.

But the only change was one of weather, which had been fine, though cold. Now a blizzard descended on them, driven by a wind from the arctic wastes, which cut the skin like a knife. Skookum Bill battled with it for two hours before he gave up, with frost spots on his face and his lungs aching from the thirty-below air that he had pumped into them, which was yet insufficient for his exertions.

They camped in the thickest spruce they could find, and the blizzard raged two days, which reduced their stock of food to the vanishing point. Also it made new, fresh snow, and harder going than ever.

"But, anyhow," said Bill, "we've had a good rest. Now watch me hit her."

And he did "hit her," tearing along in a knee-high flurry of snow, while

Dobbs watched him with hollow-eyed, bitter longing, and self-reproach. The next day the grub gave out!

"Bill," said the older man, "it's no use. You can't get me to the Portage, and you'll have an awful job gettin' there alone. Still, you got a chance. Right here we split the blankets."

"Guess again," said Bill.

"I don't need to," said Dobbs. "I've seen this comin' from the first, and now it's here. When luck sets against you, you can't change it. You can't make the Portage with me. You've done more than any two men could do already. There ain't no sense in both of us dyin', and I'm elected. I'm an old dog, and my time's mighty nigh up, anyhow, so it don't matter so much."

"I said we'd make the Portage," said Bill, with an oath, "and we'll make it together or not at all. I wouldn't quit a partner while he's alive. I said I hadn't hit my limit, and I ain't hit her yet. When I do I'll tell you." And nothing that Dobbs could say shook his resolution.

But Dobbs was not deceived. He knew that his partner's strength was rapidly running out—that even his splendid muscles and wonderful endurance could not stand up much longer against the double strain of exertion and hunger. Now Dobbs was an old reprobate, hardened in wickedness, without noticeable conscience or principle; but nevertheless he had one soft spot in his heart, and that was for his partner. Also he had his peculiar ideas of honor, and finding argument unavailing he decided that it was up to him.

And so, very gently, he lifted the rifle which lay on the toboggan beside him, levered a cartridge into the chamber with great care lest the crank of the magazine action should betray him, reversed the weapon, rested his forehead upon the muzzle, shut his eyes, and slid his hand down the barrel for the trigger.

But at that moment Skookum Bill chanced to look over his shoulder. He leaped backward, caught the groping hand, and snatched the weapon away.

"No, you don't!" he roared. "Think I've packed you all this way to have you blow the top of your head off now? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Dobbs, after a futile attempt to regain the rifle, sank back, shaking, for at that moment he had fully intended and expected to be dead.

"I couldn't see no other way!" he whimpered, his nerve suddenly deserting him. "You said yourself you wouldn't leave me while we was both alive. I wanted to give you a show, Bill. What did you stop me for? I was all keyed up to it, and now I dunno's I can!"

"I know durn well you won't get the chance," said Skookum Bill, levering the shells from the magazine and putting them in his pocket. "So that was why! You blame' old stiff!" But his tone held a certain admiration and affection. "Don't try no such play again, for I'll pack you along livin' or dead, and so it won't do you no good. I'll copper it from the start."

Dobbs knew that he would do exactly as he had said.

"I won't," he promised, "but it means that we'll both die."

"Not a die!" said Bill doggedly. "We'll pull through, I tell you. Luck's goin' to change. I can feel it comin'."

But for days they had been on starvation rations. Thus Bill in particular had almost exhausted his reserve of strength and vitality. Now, when food was cut off altogether, he weakened rapidly. The first day he held to the work, but he did so on his nerve alone. On the second day, in the afternoon, by a small, frozen stream, he stopped.

"I've hit my limit at last," he said reluctantly. "There ain't another mile in me without grub or rest—but mostly grub. I'd eat my moccasins, only my

feet would freeze, and I'd die, anyhow."

"Take mine!" said Dobbs eagerly. "Take mine, and go ahead alone. It won't make no difference to me, Bill."

"I won't," Bill refused. "I said we'd make the raffle together or not at all. If we only had something to hold us over till we could find meat! Any old chunk of hide would do." Suddenly he started. "Why didn't I think of it before? But maybe it's just as well I didn't. We got the skin of that black fox. We'll eat that!"

"Eat it!" Dobbs exclaimed. "But, Bill, it's worth from a thousand up!"

"Not here it ain't," said Skookum Bill, stating a fundamental economic principle. "Here it ain't worth a tinker's curse. Nothing is that ain't grub. We'll stew her up right here. You take a knife and sorter shave the fur off while I'm rustlin' wood."

And so, while he sought dry wood and split it and got water, old Dobbs cut away the priceless fur with the keen, small blade of his knife; and finally held up a scraped, parchmentlike, hideous hide in place of the glossy black robe which, had all gone well, would have adorned the beauty of some woman who had never known hunger or cold or privation in any form. Old Dobbs, starving as he was, almost wept at the sacrilege.

"Cut her into strips," said Skookum Bill practically. "She'll stew better, and be easier to chew on."

They boiled it for an hour, and then, their hunger driving them, ate, worrying it down to the last morsel. It was tough and springy, and tasted like carrion; but it was food, and their stomachs rejoiced thereat. At any rate, the evil hour was set back, and that was something.

"If we ever get out o' this," said Bill, "we can blow that we've et a meal that cost us a thousand a plate. And that's some high-priced *muckamuck*. I

wonder what old McNicol would say if he knew!"

"He won't never know," said Dobbs despondently, "because we won't never get——"

He broke off, for his partner had bounded to his feet and dived for the rifle. Dobbs turned. Behind him, at a distance of perhaps two hundred yards, ran a buck, laboring in the snow. Evidently the animal had come upon them unaware, for it had turned off at a sharp angle.

"Shoot!" yelled old Dobbs rashly, beside himself at the sight of meat. "Shoot, Bill, shoot quick! He's gettin' away!"

Whereby Dobbs violated both etiquette and common sense. For quick, accurate shooting demands both confidence and concentration, and his frantic yell was destructive of both. Under ordinary circumstances Skookum Bill would have paid little attention. But he was exhausted, his nerves worn raw, and he was practically starving. And so he behaved like a novice instead of the veteran that he was.

Barely waiting to catch his sights he fired, and the bullet threw up a spray of snow ahead and to the left. Instantly he pumped another shell, and fired again, and again he missed; with his last cartridge he drew a fine sight, dwelt on his trigger, and consequently shot behind. From force of habit he pumped again, but the hammer clicked down on an empty chamber.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Dobbs. "You missed him, Bill! He's got away!"

His partner whirled the useless rifle above his head and flung it far in the snow. He turned on him, his face black with rage.

"You made me miss!" he roared in fury. "You yelled in my ear when I was aimin'! Don't you know nothin'? Ain't you got no sense at all? I been haulin' you days and days, pumpin' the heart out of me to save your worthless

old life, and here's what I get for it. All you had to do was to keep your fool mouth shut—and you wouldn't! You ——” The remainder of his speech was fervid blasphemy, which seemed to crackle about Dobbs' miserable ears.

The latter made no attempt to reply or to palliate his offense. Under the torrent of bitter words his lips began to quiver. Suddenly he buried his face in his hands and sobbed, and the sound shocked Skookum Bill into sanity. He eyed the pitiful, old, broken figure for a moment, and the blaze of fury died from his eyes.

“Quit it, for goodness sake, and be a man!” he said. And Dobbs raised a face contorted with abject misery.

“I can't be, because I ain't,” he whimpered. “I ain't a man no more. I'm just a poor, broken-legged old dog, starved and froze and kicked and cussed. An' I'm goin' to die an' be finished, an' it serves me right. Take 'n' hit me on the head with the ax, an' then you won't be bothered with me no more!”

His misery was so abject and his nerve so plainly broken that Skookum Bill repented of his hasty words.

“Brace up, Sam,” he said. “I sorter flew off the handle, but you know how I am. I don't mean all I say.”

“You meant it, and it was comin' to me,” Dobbs mumbled sadly. “It don't matter, Bill. You'd orter let me use one of them ca'tridges on myself when I wanted to.”

Bill, being somewhat of the same opinion, said nothing. For the first time he lost hope. Now it would avail them nothing to find deer. And without the chance of procuring meat vanished also the faint chance of making the Portage, even alone. The grisly vision of death in that frozen wilderness, which had stood half curtained in the back of his mind for days, now stalked boldly into the foreground.

A long silence fell. They sat by the

remnants of the fire, looking at the trodden snow sprinkled with shreds of the fur of the black fox, heedless of the waning afternoon and the increasing cold.

Suddenly from upwind, from the direction in which the buck had vanished, there came a sound, and the heads of both men jerked upright as if actuated by one string sharply pulled. As their eyes met in unspoken query the sound was repeated. This time it was unmistakable, crisp, and clear, though far away—the smacking report of a rifle.

“A gun! Two shots!” Dobbs breathed. “Who d'you s'pose——”

But Skookum Bill was shoving his feet into the loops of his snowshoes hurriedly.

“I'll find him,” he said. “I'll bet he's got that buck. Keep the fire goin'.”

He took the buck's trail at a run, for the prospect of aid in their dire need lent him energy. The trail led straight upwind. For a mile or more he followed it, and suddenly came to its end.

Before him, in an open space, lay the buck's body; and above it, knife in hand, a man was skinning busily.

Bill hailed, a hoarse, joyous shout, for here was both meat and human assistance, and ran toward him. But the stranger picked up a rifle from the snow, and Skookum Bill, as he faced him, recognized the forbidding features of Jake Flint.

“Don't come no nearer,” Flint warned, his finger on the trigger. “I been lookin' for you for some time,” he added.

“I'm here,” said Bill. “And as I ain't got no gun you can calm down your nerves.”

Flint eyed his wasted features for a moment curiously.

“You fellers,” he stated coldly, “burned down my cabin. What have you got to say about it?”

“That was a mistake,” said Bill.

"You'll find it was," Flint returned grimly.

"Sure," said Bill. "The way it's turned out I ought to have shot you."

"You got a cold nerve," Flint commented, not without approval. "I s'pose you savvy I'm goin' to shoot you?"

"Of course," Bill admitted. "I figured you would if you got the chance. I can take my medicine. Only Sam, my partner, he hadn't nothin' to do with it."

"He didn't, hey?" said Flint skeptically.

"Not a thing," Bill asserted. "It was me, and you know durn well there was only one set of tracks."

"I know that," Flint returned. "And there's only one set of tracks on this trail of yourn that I've been follerin', but there's been two men in camp."

"I'm packin' Sam on the toboggan because his leg's busted," Bill explained. "It's a hard deal on him to be shot for what I done, but, of course, he's durn near starved to death, anyway."

"You don't look as if bein' burned out agreed with you, either," said Flint.

"Never mind that," growled Skookum Bill. "Here's the proposition: Sam ain't done nothin' to be shot for, and he can't walk. You shoot me, and there ain't no one to haul him, without you do, and you c'n believe me when I say that pullin' a man in this snow ain't no cinch. Now, if you was to give us a hunk of that meat we could make the Portage, and any shootin' you wanted to do could come off afterward."

"Think you'd beat me to it, hey?" asked Flint.

"Naw!" said Bill, with some contempt. "Can't you get it through your head that I'm tryin' to make a deal with you?"

"You mean you'd let me shoot you afterward?" said Flint incredulously. "Do you think I'd believe that?"

"All right," said Bill, "then you don't have to. I've put up my talk. You'll

find Sam along my back trail. He ain't got no gun nor nothin'. And now you can get this shootin' over any time you're a mind to."

Flint and he looked each other in the eye. The former raised his rifle slowly.

Skookum Bill stared above the black ring down the line of the sights.

"Why don't you shoot?" he demanded. "Tryin' to raise a yellow streak in me? Well, you're wastin' time, for I ain't got one!"

And Flint, with an oath of reluctant admiration, lowered his rifle.

"I ought to, but I can't," he admitted. "If you'd weakened I would. And any time I can't play a thing the limit I don't play it at all. I'm willing to call this off—if you are."

"Am I?" said Bill. "What do you think? Shake on it!"

They shook, each knowing the other for a hard man and respecting him accordingly.

"I can say now," said Bill, "that I'm durn sorry I burnt your shack."

"Of course I should have moved my traps from east of that crick," Flint admitted, "but you come at me so bull-headed, smashin' them and warnin' me off, that it sorter put up my back hair. When I found the shack burnt I struck back a ways and built me a new one, I had some grub cached, and I was goin' to get even. That's how I didn't know you was burnt out for some days. Soon as I found out I loaded up and hit your trail. I sure intended to get both of you. Now I'm glad I didn't. We can trap that valley next winter. There's room for all of us, and we can do it friendly, like we should."

"We could—but we won't," Skookum Bill told him. "We'll make you a present of that valley. Me and Sam won't trap no more. It ain't our business."

McNicol, smoking a blackened clay comfortably beside the huge round stove

in his store at the Portage, stared at two scarecrows who entered to him, at first scarcely recognizing them. One living skeleton hobbled with the aid of a homemade crutch, and the other was merely a giant rack of bones. The black finger marks of the frost were on their faces, and their bearded cheeks were sunken, pasted in flatly against the teeth so that the cheek bones almost protruded through he stretched skin.

"Save us!" McNicol exclaimed. "So it's you!"

"It's us," Skookum Bill replied. And with his customary directness he added: "And we want another grubstake."

"Ye look as if ye did," McNicol commented sourly, recovering his accustomed poise and manner of speech. "I thought," he continued, "ye were goin' to a district that was fair crawlin' wi' fur, from which there was no comin' out in the winter."

"We was burnt out and we had to come," Bill told him. "We had the furs, too, but they was all burnt except one. We saved that."

"Very provident of ye," McNicol commented sardonically. "And that one'll no doubt be a muskrat. In the nature of things ye'd no save anything that would help pay what ye owe."

"It wasn't no muskrat," said Bill. "It was a black fox."

"A black fox!" McNicol exclaimed. "Ye have the skin of a black fox?"

"Not now," Bill admitted sadly.

"What have ye done with it?" the trader demanded.

"We et it," Bill replied calmly.

"Ye—what?" McNicol almost shrieked.

"Et it," Bill repeated. "We was sorter hungry at the time."

"We was starvin'," said Dobbs.

"And so we ain't got no furs nor money nor nothin'," Bill pursued down-rightly, "but, all the same, we got to have grub and things. We'll pay up in the spring, soon as we can wash some dirt we know of."

McNicol shook his head.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," said he. "Also all men are liars—at times. Ye'll admit the relevancy of the quotations, which ye'll scarce recognize, bein' from the Scriptures. Prove to me that ye ate the skin of a black fox, and I'll grubstake ye afresh. But not unless."

Skookum Bill walked over to the floor scales, and stepped upon the platform.

"You saw me weigh myself when I was in here last," he said. "Two hundred and seventeen I weighed. Well, look here!"

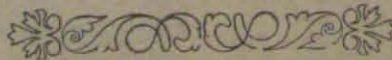
The two-hundred-pound weight was on the drop. Removing it he substituted the one hundred. Back and back he slid the balance weight on the beam. Even his face expressed surprise. The beam tipped, quivered, and balanced.

"Look!" said Skookum Bill.

"Gosh!" said old Dobbs.

"Pick out your grubstake!" said McNicol.

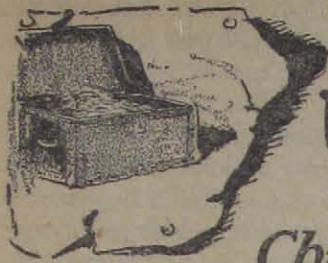
The scales balanced at one hundred and twenty-nine pounds.



TEXAN PECAN CROP A FAILURE

FOR the first time in many years the pecan nut crop in Texas was a failure this past season. Not more than fifteen cars, it is estimated, as compared with a normal product of four hundred cars, were picked and shipped this year.

Of recent years, the pecan has come into great commercial demand in the manufacturer of confections. Beside the thousands of wild, native trees that line all the rivers and streams of Texas, many pecan orchards have been planted in the State.



Into the Unknown

by
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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

CULMINATING a long series of crimes, a robbery and murder are committed in a small town in Colorado. The clues to the outlaws are lost in the vicinity of Yuga Lake. Clarence Burden, a wealthy young lawyer, is camping at the lake with two ex-cow-punchers, Carter Tingsley and Frank Egbert, whom Burden met at his uncle's ranch, and for whom he has formed a strong attachment; with them is Mike Gorgon, a servant of the Burden family, and Louis Forches, fellow in geology and zoölogy. With Sheriff Hanford and a posse, the party surrounds an old dwelling on a deserted ranch, labeled "Dump 23," thought to be the headquarters of the outlaws, but an attack proves fruitless. Later, the old ranch house is found to be the entrance to a vast, underground cave.

The party sets out to explore the cave, and an accidental fire cuts off their avenue of escape. They find half of a map showing the hiding place of a treasure, described by one of the outlaws whom Burden befriended. After days of wandering in the underground chamber, Sam Small, leader of the outlaws, who is hunting for the gold, joins them and turns over the other half of the treasure map. All are cast adrift in a stream in Forches' boat, and are pitched over a waterfall. They are reunited, unharmed, below the falls, and by means of the map they find a number of chests of gold and antique coins.

They are taken captive by a band of strange-looking, white-haired men, descendants of the first Basque explorers of the cave, and are brought for trial before their queen, Yuana Archu. Through the influence of Aizkibel, whose attempt to assassinate the queen is thwarted by Egbert, they are condemned to death. Egbert defies them. In the confusion which follows, Small disappears, and Tingsley, recognizing the language of the people, addresses the queen.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CRISIS.

THE queen, after a moment, drew herself up bravely and acknowledged our salute.

"You are my friends," said she, speaking in French, which, though not modern, was so pure that even I could follow it—but addressing Egbert in particular. "Of whence you come, there is no time to talk. Aizkibel is my enemy. I had hoped to stave my people from war with him and his followers, but to-day he has overstepped intrigue, and war is here. I accept your aid."

The voice was low, determined, and

the tone was so full of sweet sincerity; none could resist it. Egbert stepped from our rank and, like a courtier of old, dropped on one knee before her.

"My—our lives are yuhrs whatever," said he.

He arose at her behest. For a long moment each looked upon the other in silence. There was that in the queen's eyes which made us envy him.

Then upon a whistle, hung about her neck by a gold chain, the queen blew three sharp blasts. At once, without, there arose outcries and a scuffling, and guards, some thirty strong, burst through the doorway. They looked a better lot than those of Aizkibel, and among them were the men who first

had brought us from above. Some were much cut and bruised, as though they had been fighting.

Yuana raised her arm as they halted before her. "The time has come," said she. "We may fight long, and no one knows the outcome; but still these strangers stand with us, which augurs well. Are your thoughts still the same: to live and die for me?"

As in one voice came crashing the responses: "*Oui, ma Reine!*" And, though here and there in the line a look of awed astonishment flickered toward the now vacant recess in the wall of rock, they stood stanch, without wavering.

Then Egbert, as though it were ordered, took the lead, while Tingsley acted as interpreter. "Guard all the doors," he ordered. "Stand ready in threes to defend each one until the next command."

Yuana nodded, echoing his words in the Basque language, and the guards obeyed without delay. That she was loved by her loyal subjects, there was no doubt. It was something of a trial thus at once to fall beneath the lead of such a startling stranger, but discipline prevailed; the queen's will was their own, and was respected.

The way in which Yuana thrust herself in Egbert's hands at first was surprising. But later I found the cause; it was necessity. She was to every purpose but a prisoner within her gates, the victim of intriguing Aizkibel, who planned her downfall. Success for us was hers.

Forches grew busy with the weapons in the boat. The cartridges now left were few, and these he sorted equally among us.

The queen stepped down to a table and, with a sharp, pointed stone, scratched a sketch upon its surface. "Thus lie the ways," said she. "This is the palace, and first it must be cleared."

The outline was simple. The palace,

though extended, held but fifteen rooms, whose doors faced a main hall, which, though it turned, was for the most in front. From this, great gates, close to its center, opened out; and a small door, by which we had approached, was at one end. Beyond the latter lay the gardens, which comprised all that large space reaching from the falls to where the river narrowed and, at last, ran under a low arch, closing the passage but for where it ran except for a small, entering path. The arrangement could not have been better adapted for defense.

Egbert took Gordon and six guards to clear the palace on the garden side, while Forches, I, and others were detailed to take the opposite path and, driving out the foe within the edifice, to hold the gates. Tingsley, with those who were left, was to remain behind to guard the queen.

As we prepared to sally, the old judge, who had stood by the queen, looked on, absorbed and pleased. His horny hands and long, white beard shook with excitement as he gave us counsel and advice. "They will be to you as three to one, oh, men of the Bright Land," said he, "but if they give before you and the magic of your weapons, victory will be ours, for we can hold the place. The people are at heart well with the queen. Would I were young enough to help. I willingly would lose my life to save the house of Archu. Good fortune to you!"

Yuana Archu turned toward us. "Ganis Arteché speaks truth," she proudly said. "He is my minister and friend, as was he my father's friend before me. Heed his counsel, for it is that of fourscore years and ten. Yet fear not; the cowards will not stand before your guns. The cause is ours. So shall the help of Providence and prayers of your queen be with you."

I remember, even in all that excitement, my deep surprise at hearing that

word "guns" used so familiarly. Where had she picked it up? I found out later.

Now, as she finished, Egbert's force marched out, Gordon well toward the front, still calling on the saints and crossing himself. He had at first refused to leave me, consenting only at my firm command. It turned out well that he was with Egbert and not with me. As he moved off, he called: "Well, Misther Clarence, if yez be in throuble, hoot only wance, ond Moike'll join yez."

Though now we had been given some idea of how things lay, we still were partly in a maze. The strength of our strange enemy we guessed; of how they fought, and of that beyond the palace, we knew nothing. And, since we could not speak their tongue, Forches and I were in compulsion bound to trust ourselves to our small force. These noble fellows never paused, but rushed ahead determinedly. Occasionally, was heard the clashing of the long, bone-handled spears as we came on some foe, and there would be a combat to the death.

Some of our men were wounded, though we always won, and carried all before us until we approached the gates. Here we came upon a force so strong that it seemed we must be overwhelmed, if only by numbers; and, seeing reënforcements from without adding to the strength against us, we knew that we must act. Our little group, while battling heroically, was giving ground, forced by the charging body which an ugly, stooping giant now urged forward.

Then Forches shot for the first time, before the fighting had all been with spears. It was enough; the leader fell, stretched dead before his men, and they, not knowing what strange power of death we held, all fled in panic, while we followed.

We reached the entrance, facing on

the side of a long passage, like a street, across which sundry pillars, holes, and byways lay. Among these, a myriad heads dodged back and forth, or, pausing, stared in open-mouthed astonishment while bobbing torches spread vague, bluish light. It was soon evident that these spectators must have an object lesson; and, before the enemy had disappeared, I shot, too, into their ranks, as they fled to the left.

They saw the weapon flashing, heard its crack, and, as a man fell dead as if by magic, the heads shot back, like those of frightened woodchucks, to their holes. The place was cleared; we held the palace gates.

By signs and much bad French, we managed to convey an order to the wondering guards to hold the place, telling them that we would now report back to the queen, and that, at the least untoward incident, they must apprise us.

Yuana and good old Arteché welcomed us. Great was their joy, and trebly great when Egbert next came running in, victorious. His territory was more difficult than ours to cover; there had been more strenuous fighting. His cartridges were gone, and a slight cut above the temple showed that he had had it hand to hand, for once at least.

"Your majesty, the way is clear," he announced. Yuana understood him.

I gleaned the rest from Gordon, who trailed in later. "Sure, Misther Clarence," said he, "Misther Frank, he a-r-r the bhoi. Thim blached gazoos wor all cowards till we sthruck thot nasty divul av an Aizykittle himself. Thot spalpane gets four husky goints av whoite, ond makes f'r Misther Frank ond me alone; ond Misther Frank has not a cartridge left. Phwhat does he do? He doives right in ond wallops thim quare fellys roight ond left; but Moike wor wid him, Misther Clarence. Misther Frank a-r-r sure a won-

der; I sane him kill three av thim by twistin' av their nicks, ond it wor all thot I c'd do t' save mesilf. I stharts a-crossin' av mesilf, whin all thim lunes goes runnin' like scared rabbits down the side of the creek."

"Did you happen to see Small?" I asked, for since his disappearance I had grown suspicious of his good intentions.

"Thot snake?" replied Gordon. "Faith, thin, I did. I sane him at the ind, a-crawlin' down the creek fr'm where he hod been hidin'. He's wid Aizykittle."

"If he has tried to mix with that bunch," I returned, "he likely, before now, has gotten his deserts. If not, he'll turn up later."

But Gordon, with a shrug, said: "A slick pace, thot mon; ond, if he gets wid thim, I'm froightful av phwhat comes."

The queen, addressing Egbert, flushed all pink in utter happiness. "Most noble friend," said she, "I owe thee all. The highest honors at my court are thine. Henceforth shalt thou be stranger nevermore, but counselor. In place of Aizkibel, thou shalt be fourth high judge."

Egbert, who understood but part of what was said, saluted; while I, who thought I saw a way to safety, clinched the thing, and quickly whispering to Tingsley bade him speak. With Egbert on the bench, I felt quite sure no harm could come to us.

And Tingsley, smiling, said, in French: "Your gracious majesty, that such an honor falls to our friend, who worthily will fill it, pleases us; but doubly are we pleased to tell you he will serve."

Yuana inclined her head in acceptance of our thanks. But Egbert, smiling in uncertainty, and puzzled, turned toward us. He did not know what had been offered him, and hence did not refuse; and we said nothing more about the matter at the time.

A hundred questions stood upon our tongues, about the court and people, and especially about that awesome being who had gone. But, so fast did incident lap over incident, there was no chance.

The old judge, no less happy than the queen, now turned to her. "Thou next must show thyself," said he, "before the people, for in six months they have not seen thy face and know not that thou reignest. The rumor that thou dost not live is all that has allowed the revolution's pace. They love thee, as they have all Archus through all time. Without delay, come to the gateway, showing them that the fight we make is for the queen alone."

We reached the gates where the guards still stood faithful. Outside, the loyalists were growing bolder. The men came near and stared, while pale young women, children hanging at their heels, came nearer.

Ganis Arteche now put a strange stone instrument to his lips and blew three feeble blasts. Yuana, at his side, her graceful figure illumined by the light from bobbing torches, stood much in contrast to the crowd around. Her face was radiant, her figure straight, and she alone of all that multitude had some small coloring about her features. Had she lived on the surface, her delightful, gray-white hair might have been black as jet; as it was here, its strange vitality bespoke the life of youth. It fell in waves on half-bared, perfect shoulders as she waited.

I cannot tell just what occurred, but, when the crowd grew dense, Arteche spoke, and then the queen, using their own Basque language. From the people's temper, it was evident they were well pleased. Score upon score passed by, bowed low, and cheered; and the women, with small babies and queer-looking children, filed forward to kiss Yuana's hands, while the old judge and guards were all alert for treachery.

At length it ended, and we now returned, the guards augmented by a force from those without, as loyal, evidently, as they were themselves.

Arteche turned to Tingsley. "Tell your friends," said he, "that all is clear, the situation safe. You shall, of course, be guests within the palace."

CHAPTER XXII.

CHURCH BELLS.

SOON afterward we were placed in charge of a waiting woman, who led us to the dining hall alone; and others came and spread a steaming feast before us, composed of fish, and of a vegetable most startlingly familiar.

Forches examined this last carefully. "It's corn," he said at length and, still bent on unraveling mysteries, went on: "If I'm not mistaken, this explains all that odd basketwork that we have seen. Now that I think of it, some of that substance much resembled corn leaves. Doubtless, these people, driven by their necessities, have discovered ways of treating leaves and husks and even stems, in the centuries they have lived underground. By toughening and strengthening the parts in some manner, they have woven cloth and clothing from the shreds, while, from the coarser parts, their baskets, doors, and bridges, and what not, have been constructed."

"But the corn," I asked. "Where do they get it?"

"Without a doubt," Forches replied, "that group of Basques, originally made captives in the cave, had kernels with them if but in small quantity. The corn was planted and has multiplied, the leaves becoming white for lack of sunlight. On this, and on the fish, these people must have lived since that old time."

Egbert, who had been silent, thinking, turned his head. "Sounds like straight talk, Louis," he said. "At any

rate, the explanation is good. But what have yuh—what have any of yuh—got to say about that occurrence at the trial—about that weird old being called the Heart of Fate, who seems to have haunted us so long?"

"The saints be wid us," Gordon said. "I do belave thot spirut has been ladin' us, ond lades us still."

Egbert shrugged a shoulder. "I got to allow that Mike speaks true. The whole thing palls on me. Until I threw that stone jar, I can swear that for some minutes all my acts were hardly conscious to me! I seemed to be gripped by some fearful force. How did he turn to smoke? This is the twentieth century, and we look for the reasons for all such unusual happenings. A thing like this gets on my nerves."

"While yuh were fighting," Tingsley said, "I asked the queen and judge about this being, but they seemed to be afraid of him and gave me little satisfaction. They say, however, that for all time, since he first came with the old band into the cave, he's guided them; that his will always rules, and always will—he who they say is but the Arm of Providence. Now that the body, at that pitcher throw, has vanished, they are much puzzled, and Frank has great prestige; but not one grain of fear for that strange hombre has left them."

Forches broke in: "He can be nothing but a man. Though we can't explain his acts, they must be natural. The lost arts and sciences of the ancient Egyptians are matters of history. The 'holy men' of India to-day do things which, according to our physical laws, are unbelievable. Lay the things to hypnotism if you must, but let's forget them."

"The wizard is at least well up in drama," I returned, "if not in melodrama; but I confess I can't make it out, and it does give one the creeps."

No more was said, and we fell to our meal; for, though perturbed and tired, we were hungry. The corn proved delicious. It seemed doubly so, as we for so long had been on a fish diet. When two other maidens, clad in white, brought in some mushrooms for dessert—triumphs of the culinary art!—our content waxed great, and we ate like pigs.

"These fungi," Forches said, "one can account for easily. They thrive in caves, if only started properly and cared for. These may be natural to the place."

At last it was finished. The maidens brought us ewers of water, wherein it was evident we were expected to rinse our hands. Then, at their signals, we followed them and were shown to our sleeping rooms. Here we were separated—a matter which I did not much like. Forches, Tingsley, and I were given one apartment; while Egbert was led to another wing of the palace, a chamber having been prepared for his sole use. Gordon was distinguished similarly. Still, we did not object, for Egbert thought it best to show our confidence in our new friends.

Our rooms contained in substance all that modern civilization afforded. A high stone slab served as a dresser, and, above it, a mirror was affixed to the wall—a mirror made of a thin sheet of polished gold. Another stone served as a table, on which stood a basin of the same metal, and ewers of water. The treasure of the Basques was, apparently, the only metal the cave could furnish. Lastly, but best of all, were beds, with comfortable mattresses stuffed with fiber, and bedding of the curious, woven cloth which, though coarse, was smooth to the touch, and white.

"Golly!" said Tingsley, who had at once monopolized the toilet facilities.

We had put out our lights and jumped in bed when, at the door, an-

other shone. Another maid appeared and spoke in French. "The queen has sent me," said she modestly, "to ask your lordships if there is aught more that you desire."

Tingsley sat up and looked out rather bashfully. "May I inquire," he asked, "why we are kept apart from Egbert and Gordon?"

The maid, half understanding, curtsied. "The holy man?" she asked.

"The holy man and Egbert."

"It is but fitting that the holy man should be alone, the better to indulge in meditation, and on the morrow minister unto the people.

"As to the honorable high judge," the girl went on in her soft voice, "it is the queen's own will he be alone and in the palace and she occupies. The queen's will is the people's, and it is her known prerogative to— Well, I speak too much. It is for me to serve, not talk."

"Look here," said Tingsley, "can I have my shirt laundered?"

"Shirt——" The maid looked puzzled.

Tingsley explained at length, and then repeated his explanation. He made his meaning clear, for the girl curtsied again and left us. In a few moments others came, who, with no warning whatsoever, grasped all the clothes in sight—Forches' and mine as well as Tingsley's—and departed. We called to them in French; but they, not understanding, only looked back, puzzled, as they went, while we sat there aghast.

"Carter," I said, "we shall be in a nice mess if they should happen not to bring them back."

"I suppose," said Forches, "that carrying off a chap's clothes is another prerogative of somebody in this country."

"The 'queen's prerogative,'" drawled Tingsley, chuckling drowsily. "Poor Frank. King Egbert the First."

"Do you think it will be as bad as that?" I asked.

But Tingsley had dropped asleep with his last words, and Forches and I soon followed suit.

We slept until awakened by a whistle at the door. We sat up, blinking, half believing ourselves in a dream. The girl stood there again. "Breakfast," she said, in French, "will be all ready shortly. And soon thereafter it is Yuana's will that you all meet her in the hall of records."

Our fears for our clothes were groundless; they had been returned. Each article was cleaned and pressed most creditably.

Then Tingsley, as the maid drew off, smiled beamingly upon his trousers and pulled them on. "This is more like it," he said, and, having first monopolized the washstand, made himself appear like a dude wrangler.

Those freshened clothes felt good to all, and, as we reached the dining hall, we felt like banqueters all ready for a feast.

Gordon was there, and worried. "Oh, Misther Clarence!" said he, much disturbed. "They hov put me in a big rroom all by meself. It's very foine; but thim folks shouldn't be allowed t' think I a-r-r a holy mon whin I a-r-r not. Besoides, I ought t' be wid yez."

"Still, for the present, you must be one," I answered. "Until things are more cleared up, our safety may all depend upon you."

Just then Frank Egbert came, and Tingsley smiled. "It seems the queen," said he, "already has designs upon yuh. Signs of matrimony fill the air."

Egbert laughed and turned dull red, replying: "We must make plans to get away from here." Next, with a weak attempt at joking: "It might be worse. Eh, Clarence?" he added.

They served us with a dish resembling breakfast food of some new patent kind, dressed up with oily stuff

like oleomargarine, and with some other things; but, best of all, with plain corn bread, which we ate ravenously.

As we were finishing, the maid who spoke to us in French before, and who, it seemed, had been delegated to attend us, appeared again. "The queen desires me to say," said she, "that she asks your lordships' presence in an hour, in the hall of records. The first high judge now awaits you in the throne room."

Just as she led us forth, we heard the ringing of a bell, which faintly pierced the palace walls. It was the tolling we had heard before, whose psychic echo had pursued us ever since the time we rescued the gay cat upon the earth above. And, as the sounds fell clearly on our ears, they caused a panorama of all that had occurred since then to roll swiftly past in our memories.

"Those bells forever!" Egbert said as though annoyed. "They always follow us. There seems to be a meaning in every stroke."

He turned to Tingsley. "Ask the maid," said he, "just what they are. We want to clear up this mystery once and for all."

And Tingsley asked the maid, who seemed surprised in answering: "'Tis but the minister, Pettiri Garibay, who, for the last time, calls a congregation to the church. 'Tis well he speaks no more within the pulpit, for no such hypocrite has ever lived before."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MATTER OF PROCEDURE.

WE found the aged judge waiting in the throne room, bending, absorbed, over the boat, and examining its contents in much curiosity.

"Good morning, judge!" called Tingsley, quite familiarly. "How do yuh like our craft?"

Arteche, startled at our sudden ad-

vent, seemed half mortified to think that we had caught him meddling with our property; but he looked up and smiled, on hearing Tingsley's words. "Your pardon," he apologized. "It is so strange that it impels inquisitiveness. In the confusion of the conflict yesterday, it was left here. Is it not of iron?"

"Yes," answered Forches, in surprise. "But how came yuh to know it?"

"I did not know it, but I thought it," said Arteche, satisfied. "It is like the old gun of the first Archu, which now lies in the royal cabinet."

"And is Bizente Archu's gun still here?" asked Tingsley.

The old man started as he heard the words. "You know of Bizente Archu?" he inquired in wonder. "Yes, the gun remains, and many other relics, which you shall see ere long."

I caught the thread of the old judge's words and now broke in: "Of how we chanced to learn of the first Archu would take a day to tell; but you shall have the story later on. Meanwhile, let me, on my part, question you of things that puzzle me, for I have patiently been waiting the opportunity."

Arteche nodded his assent, and I spoke through Tingsley, who was a far better hand than I at French. "Good judge," I said, "I would learn first of your court and of its methods, for in the land from which I came I have made a specialty of law, though still not long in practice."

"Ah, yes! The court," Arteche answered, troubled. "We now lack one, for the third high judge, who stood for prejudice, is dead, having allied himself with Aizkibel and fallen. This leaves but three: the queen, who represents the altruistic love; and your brave leader, here, who now replaces Aizkibel, as conscienceless ambition; while I, the sense of justice, still preside.

"We must have four to judge. And yet, although the seat of prejudice be filled, still are we tied, for now the Heart of Fate, the Arm of Providence, in body, has departed. There is no arbiter. It will be very difficult to give fair trial. Then, also, do I fear the left will prove too weak, for, though we may replace the third high judge, yet does it seem that the new judge, your leader, is far too good a man to fill the seat of conscienceless ambition." He looked respectfully toward Egbert, adding: "Is he adept at juggling lies?"

These words, thus falling from so just looking a man, whose actions had not yet belied his looks, struck me most queerly. And Egbert, as he heard the sentence translated, began to comprehend the situation, which, until then, we had neglected to explain.

He laughed and turned toward me. "I see yuhr hand in this," said he. "Yuhr aim was good; but, if I figure rightly, the old man expects that I shall fill Aizkibel's past seat in Aizkibel's past spirit."

I shrugged a shoulder. "Wait until I get the hang of this," I answered.

I turned to Arteche, puzzled. "Your words," I said, "surprise me. You surely do not mean that you desire that the fourth judge shall lie? That he will not, nor will he support evil."

Arteche looked at me in reproach. "I do not understand," he answered with simple dignity. "Can he who saved the queen, and who in all that he has done has aided and fulfilled the right, take a course that would deny to all the clean, just trial—a course that, in the end, might break the kingdom?"

"Most honorable judge," I said, "I cannot comprehend your words. In our country, prejudice and evil, lies and such, are all held as vilest cancers and kept out of court. Will you explain further?"

The old man, half incredulous, now opened wide his eyes. "Come you

from heaven?" he inquired, half reverently and half in sarcasm. "Listen. Thus do we:

"Four judges sit upon the bench, and each one strives his best to see that what he represents shall triumph. Thus, love and prejudice, the sense of justice and ambition without conscience, lock their arms, and, if the four are balanced and comes deadlock, then fate itself decides. What do you more than this?"

I caught my breath. "Why, in our land," I answered, "every prisoner must have a chance, and those contending hire lawyers, who speak for them. A jury of twelve men must pass the verdict. These twelve, who must be satisfactory to both, must be unanimous in their decision. And over all one judge presides, who gives the sentence. He, who is just, must still be guided by the nation's laws."

The old judge, at these words, looked puzzled. "Can twelve men think alike?" he asked.

I paused at his blunt question, but still I answered: "Unless they do, the trial is held again with twelve others."

Arteche smiled uncertainly. "Then let me ask," said he, "if in your land of so much justice, each of these hirelings whom you call lawyers, is just as skillful—but no more so—as each other one?"

"Naturally, they are not," I answered. "A learned one may be worth a half a hundred others."

"Then," asked Arteche, "is it not a fact that, where they seek for gold, the side of greater property can hire the greater lawyer?"

"It often is the case," I returned, "yet lawyers by themselves can never win, for each must follow what prevails as law."

His old eyes twinkled. "You are young," said he, "yet much above a child. Your eyes are open. The exchange used by your people is gold;

our wealth is figured differently. In either case, there must be some corruption, for all men are weak. Under your system, may not corruption eat the heart of truth? Most men desire wealth, no matter what their vocation may be."

"Most learned judge," I said, "as you yourself pronounce, no men are perfect. We do our best to see that, in all things, justice reigns."

Arteche brightened, but bowed in respect. "Do not be angered," he replied. "I only glean information. Now do I see your courts are much like ours. You, too, have prejudice and lies, corruption, love, and partial justice, that is all; yet these things must all come in with human nature, and perfect fairness comes only when our God is judge. With us, Fate casts the final vote; so are we well assured of justice, for Fate is but the Arm of Providence, who is just. This life is but a little of the whole; if things don't balance rightly here, much time remains hereafter."

What answer I should have given him, I do not know, but I was saved, for now a messenger came in and conversed with him excitedly.

Arteche, somewhat grave, then turned to us again. "Already are the people clamoring for the new holy man," he said. "I have set the service for two hours hence."

Hardly had he finished when a maid arrived. "The queen gives audience within the hall of records," she announced.

CHAPTER XXIV.

YUANA ARCHU, QUEEN OF NEW BISCAY.

THE hall of records proved to be the large room, which we had entered first when led as prisoners into the palace. It now began to dawn on us that those stone slabs, which we had seen before upon the shelves, held the literature of the strange people, for characters, quite evident in those that

lay about, were scratched on either surface. This we noted as we waited for the queen.

As she entered, flanked by two of her ladies in waiting, we bowed, hardly knowing what court custom was expected of us. Our salutation was graciously returned, and the queen seated herself at the head of the large table, her attendants remaining standing behind her chair. A pause fell, following our exchange of formal greetings. Finally, Yuana spoke, and, while she included all of us in her words, her eyes rested on Egbert.

"Friends," she said, "for after your service I know that you are friends—let there be no pretense between us. In the land of brightness, from which you have so singularly come, your station equals mine. This I know from your manner and bearing, and from what my lord Tingsley told me of your customs while he stood on guard in the fighting of yesterday. I beg you, then, regard this not as an audience, but rather as a council. My lord Egbert shall sit on my right, your holy man on my left, my lords Tingsley, Forches, and Burden opposite."

Again we bowed, and Egbert, bending his curly head, answered: "We come, yuhr majesty, at yuhr request, and place ourselves gladly at yuhr disposal."

"Noble Egbert," replied Yuana with simple dignity. "I pray thee, then, sit down beside me."

In fairness to the queen, I cannot record Egbert's reluctance. He met the candor of her preference with a frankness almost, if not quite, as elemental. I say almost, because, as he took his seat, his eyes met mine, and he had the grace to turn a deep red. But Yuana, queen though she was, was still but a girl grown to womanhood, uneducated in emotional concealment, and with all the innocence of a child. Of this we were to have further evidence.

"It would be well," she declared, "before we counsel together, that I should know more of you than your fathers' names. How came you in our kingdom, and whence? Let my lord Tingsley tell me more."

Tingsley, thus called upon, entered into an abridged account of all that has been hereinbefore written. Yuana listened in deepest interest, her eyes shining with excitement. At those parts of the narrative in which Frank Egbert's exploits led, she clapped her hands gleefully. Yet, in some curious way, though it was the action of a child, it was still that of a queen and did not lessen nor break our regard.

"And whence come you?" she asked as he finished.

Tingsley gave our several histories briefly.

For reply, Queen Yuana turned to Egbert and, to his great discomfiture, ran her white fingers through his curly hair. "Frank," she said slowly, "yours is a well-sounding name. My people, Frank, will love and work for you."

I choked, and Egbert shot a furious, burning look at me as now again she turned toward Tingsley. "Of this land of yours," said she, "I know not. Is it a land where there is always light?"

"It is light half the time, at day, and dark the other half, at night."

"Is it a great land, with a ball of fire in the sky?" she queried.

"Yow mean the sun?"

Yuana half arose in interested excitement. "Yes, that is it," she answered. "The—the sun. Is it thus you say it? The word is in our records, but I have never heard it spoken by those accustomed to using it. There is, then, really such a thing? Yes, the sun. And is this land, Colorado, upon the Bay of Biscay?"

Tingsley shook his head. "No," he returned; "in the United States of America."

Yuana settled back in disappoint-

ment. "America," she said. "Yes, it, too, is on the records—the new country above; there must be towns which have grown up in it."

"Hundreds of towns and cities, and one of the most powerful governments in the world," said Tingsley.

The queen looked puzzled. "It must be very wondrous," she said; and, turning to Egbert, she added: "Frank"—pausing upon the word as though to weigh its sound—"live more like thee in Colorado?"

Egbert looked around at us helplessly for aid. We did not give it.

"Oh, yes," he replied in palpable distress, "many much like me, but better."

The queen surveyed him directly for a moment. "Do not tell me untruth," she said calmly. "It is not possible."

"We believe with you, O queen," I said and, for the first time, got my reward in a smile.

"Truly, you are wise," she gave back to me.

"Tell me now," she added, "how it comes that thou, Clarence, hast a holy man as servant. Art thou so holy? Even now the people are clamoring to have Mike Gordon high religious potentate of all the realm, in place of Pettiri Garibay, whom Aizkibel has corrupted, and who, in turn, has misled many of my people, turning them against me by vile lies. So it must be, I fear, that Clarence and Mike Gordon shall part. But how is a holy man a servant?"

My French could not equal the occasion, and Tingsley followed with the explanation that, by command, Gordon had acted holy man to save our lives.

Yuana shook her head. "It seems not right," said she, "that such should be. Holy ruler have my people made him, holy ruler was he doubtless born, and holy ruler he must remain."

"It may be so," I said, for I already had seen the necessity of Gordon continuing in his part. "Your wishes, gra-

rious queen, are ours. And, now that we have told you all, I pray you tell us of yourself, of this place, of its people—of all, for all is new."

Yuana inclined her head in assent. "It is fitting," she said, "nay, more—it is well for you, my lords, to know all of our kingdom of New Biscay, since its fortunes and ours now lie between us all.

"I am the last of the house of Archu. Of the first, Bizente Archu, you already know. Of that great wizard from the East, who came to his brave band from that wrecked galleon, you know, too." She glanced half apprehensively around the hall, hesitated, and went on: "His power you have seen. He, the Heart of Fate, the Arm of Providence, has always guided us, and, though he has now seen fit to go in body, he will still remain. You did face him, Frank. How dared you?"

"There has been handed down through generations of our kings a secret prophecy that, after the going of the last male member bearing Archu's name, a stranger should appear, and that, with his coming, the Heart should go, when all the country should run blood, but afterward that peace unknown should come." Her voice grew low. "The stranger has appeared; the prophecy's fulfillment now begins.

"You learned much from the papers you discovered with the body of poor Astarloa, who tried in vain to reach the surface. Bizente Archu was, as you surmised, the leader of that band which first concealed the gold within the cavern, where hostile Indians and this great wizard held them. And, with escape cut off, the wizard said: 'Now found a model country; be its king.' As the Arm of Providence so willed, Bizente Archu obeyed.

"Until my father died, we were kings—I, alas, am but a woman.

"When the Heart of Fate locked that first band within the earth by causing

huge rocks to fall, he locked the treasure with them. The highest duty of the crown has been to guard the gold you found. It was Bizente Archu's trust, and thus the trust of all his blood. What has been taken was of necessity—for the use of our people, for weapons of defense, and for adornment of the court. For this our holy men absolved us, but the gold remains—even that we are now using—for the children's children of Bizente Archu's king, who never come.

"None save a chosen guard approach the treasure cave. To trespass is to die. The way is watched by night and by day; and, even in the building of this palace, the first Archu placed it between the city and the pathway. For this gold, many traitors to the government have died, since to gain it is to gain the kingdom. It is an article of such utility in manufacture and the arts that nothing in New Biscay can replace it; to lose it is to lose our lives. Such, then, is the value of that which you attempted to despoil."

"We did not know," said Forches.

"True," assented Yuana, "yet will the traitor, Aizkibel, point out your act and so inflame the minds of those who be not loyal."

"We shall be enough," asserted Egbert confidently. And the queen's eyes rested upon him.

"If the Heart of Fate so wills it," she returned.

"Whether he wills it or not," said Egbert, laughing. But his laughing dwindled, and he stopped; and, as he did so, a sudden, strange unrest came over us.

Yuana put her white hands to him in fear. "Frank!" she cried and fell into a silent, shaking terror.

"It shall be as yuh say, yuhr majesty," said Egbert nervously, but gently. "If yuh so wish, we will not speak of it. Tell me now of Aizkibel."

For a further space, the queen kept

silent. When, at last, she gained enough control to speak, her voice still shook, and her glances strayed from side to side. "Lieutenant to Archu the First was Guillen Aizkibel, who proved a great disappointment to my brave forefather in his need. In Bizente Archu's later years, Guillen Aizkibel turned traitor and tried to wrest the kingdom from his hands. There was much fighting, in a little way, for Aizkibel had followers. Besides, his brother, at an early period of the confinement, had left for the surface, which it was supposed that he had reached; and, ere departing, he had sworn that in time he would return with a rescuing party. Hence, though my forefather had sent Astarloa on the same errand, Guillen Aizkibel gained prestige which was difficult to break; also, the fact that his brother's act had been one of insubordination made the situation more difficult. Whether or not this brother was killed by hostile Indians, there is no way of telling; but neither he nor Astarloa ever returned. Later, Bizente Archu discovered that these two Aizkibels had been intriguing to procure the gold for themselves after accomplishing the murder of the loyal ones. The proof was not quite clear enough to warrant Aizkibel's execution; but still there was no doubt of the truth of the report, nevertheless. In consequence, Aizkibel was degraded in his rank and closely watched. This tale is necessary to what comes.

"From that day until this, the Aizkibels have been a source of constant trouble to the throne; and constantly they have been striving to blind our good people, turning them against us by their lies, and by contention that the Aizkibels themselves were rightful rulers, and that the Archus had usurped the throne. They have used all the cunning they could summon to accomplish their purpose; but, till recently, in vain.

"My father, who at all times kept the nation's welfare close to heart, conceived the idea of healing this old breach, and thought he saw a chance when Edrigo Aizkibel's father died, leaving him orphaned at an early age.

"He at once befriended young Aizkibel, making him one of the palace guards as he grew older. At first, the movement seemed a good one, for certain of the people from among the disaffected were appeased and grew more loyal.

"My father died, and I, in my desire to carry out his wishes, later made young Aizkibel fourth judge of New Biscay—one quarter dictator below the Heart, and second in command, by his position, over all the guards.

"I soon saw my mistake; but it was too late. No judge can be removed except for well-proved treason. Edrigo Aizkibel began to force his attentions upon me.

"Of the rest, my friends, there is but little necessary to relate. I detested him, as I do now; and, in his courtship, I perceived only ambition to gain possession of the throne—I was to be a means to an unscrupulous end. So I refused the man, who had no right to make the offer, and who should have awaited the pleasure of the queen.

He was angered and swore that I should live to rue the day. I have not rued the day, thank Heaven! But he has nearly succeeded in gaining the throne. He has done this through intimidation of those over whom his power could be exerted, by lies to those he could not so intimidate, and by most subtle intrigue, through which he has exerted constantly an unseen influence over the court and many of the guards. He has schemed and dabbled in his devilment until he had one half the judges and the large number of the palace force behind him. He corrupted even Garibay, as I have said, and tried to turn the citizens against me. But, in

spite of all his efforts, most of the people, and a minority of my guards, remained loyal.

"Seeing that he no longer could increase his scope of power, and fearing the results of fighting, he came to me again, this time as a bully, demanding marriage. Once more did I refuse him, and, at my words, his rage passed every bound. He said that I was but a puppet in his hands, that I had best make what I could out of the situation, and that it would be far better to become his wife at once, than something far less honorable later.

"His cruel threats, however, were for naught. I scorned him once again and soon thereafter felt that my firm stand was gaining me a few recruits from those upon his side. Doubtless he had held some of these men by telling them that sooner or later, but most inevitably, I would become his wife.

"I confided my agony to Ganis Arteche, the faithful first high judge, who went to Aizkibel in protestation. The only result was that from that time on I was held a close prisoner in the palace; and, to me, Aizkibel threatened my life should I speak of the affair to any one again."

"The low-down coyote!" burst forth Egbert, and the rest of us echoed his rage. The queen had told her story with such brave simplicity that it had held us, and, as her girlish voice broke with a little pathetic quiver as she finished, we felt our wrath rise mightily within us. If Aizkibel had been at hand, it certainly would not have fared well with him.

Even Gordon, to whom Tingsley had translated, rose in his anger. "Faith, I'll wring his neck!" he muttered and brought his fist down on the table. "Sure, Miss Quane," he roared, "Moike Gordon'll prache in inny rocks thot yez say, t' do up thot rascal, Aizykittle."

I felt a thrill at Gordon's words as all turned toward him; and the queen,

when Tingsley had translated them to her, was much affected. She turned in heartfelt gratitude toward Gordon. "Believe me, most high religious potentate," she said, "for you are now appointed, I will make sure that you never shall regret it. It now is ten; the people flock to service at half past eleven."

She turned to one of her attendants. "Take the high potentate to his room," said she, "and let him be invested with his garments."

As Gordon disappeared, I said: "You mention hours. You cannot have clocks?"

"Clocks!" She was puzzled. "You mean how get we the time?"

"Yes."

"We have sand." She laughed as she spoke. "Pure sand falls through a small rock orifice at a set rate, and annually are we fairly well checked by the rising of the waters in the spring."

"This church," I asked, "is it far from the palace? I cannot allow Mike to take too big a risk."

"Fear not," she answered reassuringly. "'Tis but a step, and he shall have my guards continually around him, known or unknown to himself and to the enemy."

I rested more easily on hearing this, but was determined to watch closely.

"Our council is now ended," said the queen, "yet my lord Frank I would detain with me for a space."

And Tingsley, Forches, and I, left in the cold, walked ruefully back toward the throne room, on entering which we found the first high judge, Ganis Arteché, still absorbed in studying the boat.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PREACHER BY REQUISITION.

THE old judge, seeing us, stepped forward. "I am pleased," said he ceremoniously, "to hear that the holy man will be among the people soon. It augurs well."

"We have learned of yuhr situation," Tingsley answered, "and are more than ready to cast in our lots with the queen and to save the kingdom, if we can."

Arteché bowed. "It is well," he said.

"How many people has New Biscay?" Forches asked.

"By the latest count, there were in New Biscay five thousand two hundred and eighty one; in Mau about two hundred more. Those in Mau are transients, comprising some of the queen's best men, sent down to guard the outposts; from time to time they are relieved by others."

Tingsley stood looking at the judge uncertainly. "Five thousand!" he exclaimed as though half doubtful whether he had heard aright.

But Forches made a rapid calculation. "Not so surprising," he observed. "Supposing there were twenty families at first. Since 1608 there must have been a dozen generations; the figures can be passed by simply doubling with each."

Arteché seemed to divine our thoughts. The crabs of Mau have taken many," he said. "You know them not, nor would you wish to. In truth, they are New Biscay's bitterest foe. They run most frequently within the fall."

While we stood mystified over his words, and before he could explain at length, a guard strode through the southern arching doorway and stood at attention before us. Arteché gave him permission to speak.

"O most high judge," said he, "the people demand the new holy man. The hour is passed."

Arteché turned to us. "If it meets your will, my lords, the high potentate shall go lest our people change their temper."

"It shall be so," I answered. "We also will attend."

"Your words are of wisdom," the judge replied. "It will be well for our

people to see you. Twelve of the palace guard shall act as escort, and my lord Egbert shall lead, for it is he to whom the people look."

Why Egbert? To our thoughts, perhaps an answer lay in the fact that he had saved Yuana's life, had dared the wizard, and, for the time at least, had downed intriguing Aizkibel; but was that all?

Tingsley and I turned to go, but Forches now delayed us. While we were talking, he, though listening, had been ransacking a compartment of the boat and had drawn forth an aneroid barometer, at which he gazed, astonished. "By Heaven!" he exclaimed. "This instrument shows scarcely any altitude at all; we must be nearly at sea level. I'll check the reading later by determining the temperature at which water boils."

Diverted by his interesting words, we hesitated.

He made quick readings with the compass and the dipping needle—things he had brought along unknown to us, and which were useful to him in his study of the strata. He entered the few data in a notebook, with the idea, he said, of identifying the spot for future reference, should we at some time reach the surface. "We should have done this before, en route," he said. "I forgot it—worse luck."

Arteche and the guard were waiting, but Forches still begged a moment's delay. "Before we go," said he, "I would like to have this boat taken to our chamber. Can it be done?"

"Of a certainty," returned Arteche after a moment of surprise. And, summoning some men, he had it moved, while we sought Mike Gordon.

He was standing in his sanctum before a mirror as we entered, regarding his new costume with doubtful admiration, while he was made uncomfortable by the presence of a woman servant, who apparently had been delegated to

aid him in the final touches to his toilet. He presented a peculiar sight in his white robe, flowing in folds and belted at the waist.

"Misther Clarence," said he, relieved, "I am glad yez came. They rubbed me hair away with sharpened stones, ond thried t' take me clothes off; but I sez, 'Not by a big soight,' ond pulled this noight gown on mesilf on top av thim; ond all the lingo thot they foired at me made no diff'rence."

"That's right, Mike," I replied, "keep your clothes, your shoes, your temper, and your weapon."

Forches and Tingsley, seeing that Gordon was nearly ready, now left to bring Egbert and Yuana; and I added: "Be as quick as you can, Mike. It is about time for service, and the people are already calling for you."

"Good grief!" he replied. "Must I hov services so quick?"

"You need not worry," I returned. "The people will not understand you. Just keep your nerve with you, and do your best. All will go well, for we and other friends will be near by."

"Sure, Misther Clarence, thot I will," he answered earnestly.

I led him to the throne room, where we found the rest already congregated. There I was made acquainted with the fact that the old functionary had, when asked, refused to abdicate; and, when he had been ejected from the church by loyal guards, had at once located himself in another quarter, where, he announced, he would continue carrying on services.

We wound out through the gates, across the road, and in between a myriad pillars, and finally, surrounded by excited crowds, arrived at our destination.

The house of worship was in every way complete. It was a dome-shaped room of great proportions, all hung at the top and sides with those inevitable, glistening stalactites, which seemed to

be kept scoured white. Out of a great stalagmite at one end was carved a massive pulpit, from which Gordon held forth. Stone benches, fitted with soft, mattinglike, stuffed seats, branched back a hundred feet, half radiating from the preacher's stand.

Our group occupied the seat in front—a matter of gratification to us, as we wished to be near Gordon, and to his congregation, to whom we were strange, awe-inspiring beings, who excited curiosity, and whom they wished to see.

If a congregation's size is a criterion by which to judge a preacher's success, Mike Gordon stood supreme that day. The church, I fancy, had never been so filled before. Some came sincerely, with true thought for worshiping; more, no doubt, were led by an overpowering curiosity; but they all came—as many men as women. Pettiri Garibay, who was endeavoring to hold forth at another spot across the town, had, we were told afterward, only bare walls to speak to, and, at length, seeing that efforts to stem the tide were vain, himself succumbed and stole into Gordon's congregation at the rear.

As to the new holy man, he held his hearers spellbound. He spoke in English and sang in English; but they drank in every sound, though understanding nothing. I could see that many were surprised at the nature of the service, which took its form as Gordon went on, and, of necessity, was more or less irregular. He was not as thoroughly prepared as he might well have been; but he fascinated the people, which was sufficient.

The tears were running from his eyes, striking the corners of his mouth, as he finished. "Oh, Mистер Clarence," he said, sobbing softly, "ond t' think Moike Gordon 'u'd be sich a hypocrite. It's hiven's gates as is shut up before me now."

"Rot, Mike!" I answered, cheering him. "You have as good a right to

preach as Garibay. That you are just as capable, and far more conscientious, we all know. You have succeeded splendidly."

Gordon seemed somewhat comforted. "Well, Mистер Clarence," he returned, "I done it in a good cause, innyhow." And then, with due dignity and respect, we took Mike Gordon to the palace gates again; and, as he passed unwillingly within, we left him, turning back to get our first full glimpse of that strange settlement, called by its stranger people, "New Biscay."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THROUGH THE HIDDEN CITY.

TO go into all details of our trip would cause too much divergence from my story. New Biscay, while even more wonderful than we had expected, we found to be similar in many respects to our own cities on the earth above. Each family was housed in its own chamber in the rocks; each chamber was furnished with its benches, bed, and tables. Some homes were more elaborately equipped than others, and some, inhabited by the most prosperous, almost equaled the palace itself in size. Most, however, were extremely small.

Our whole experience was like a great triumphal march. Crowds flocked up from all around and followed us, bowing and saluting in deep awe, or cheering, and looking for the most part toward Frank Egbert. Twice would we have been swept off our feet but for the efficient service of the guards.

Across the city we came on what we soon found to be the industrial section. Enormous chambers filled with laborers and skilled workmen drew our interest. Many were busily engaged in grinding corn in huge stone mortars, making flour; and others were treating leaves and stems in strange ways.

In a great, hall-like place we saw machines made most ingeniously of bone

and rock and little rods of gold and cords, which hummed and buzzed as women sat before them, weaving odd fabrics, coarse and fine, out of the treated corn shreds. The operatives stopped and wildly gazed at us as we arrived, and were with difficulty induced to work again.

Many other strange things we saw, but passed at length through a stone arch and down a little grade, when, all at once, there burst to view a sheet of nearly stagnant water, like a long lagoon, which seemed to stretch away indefinitely toward the right. On either bank were narrow strips of soil, crowded with vegetation, mostly corn. Here lay the secret of that whole community—the people's staff of life.

We stood upon the rocks and looked. The whitened leaves were visible along the banks so far as we could see, the somewhat dwarfed and stubby plants bending away from us before a breeze which was so uniform that the leaves barely fluttered, and, but for the sighing wind and the sweep of its draft, one would hardly have known that it existed. The effect of this phenomenon was weird, and for a moment it kept us silent.

Forches glanced around, studying the situation. "This air current," said he, "is evidently what keeps the atmosphere so fresh. Ask the guard, Carter, where it comes from above."

Beñat Aranpe, leader of the guards, answered: "From an unknown place across the city, beyond small holes that no one can explore, through which it whistles."

"Another opening to the surface," Forches said, "must lie at some far-distant point." He looked down the lagoon. "How far do these cornfields extend?" he asked.

Aranpe, for some reason, shrugged his shoulders. "To Mau," he answered, as though he were disturbed, "a matter of some fifty miles."

We crossed the water in a well-built boat, of which a number lay near by. The vessel was constructed all of cloth and bones and cord, the sides and bottom undulating with each movement.

"A wapsey boat," said Egbert, "and the kind the gay cat said he saw. I have no doubt that one was being navigated up above as he went down the falls."

The row was short, the opposite shore being only thirty feet away. We went up some distance, stopping at a flight of steps, which we ascended, emerging on a platform well above the level of the water, where we remained while the boat was taken back to bring its second load.

We now could rest; the crowd was left behind. We found the view toward the south most fascinating. I turned and looked upon the scene as Dante looked upon death's mysteries. Occasional blue flames shot up toward the roof from clearings in the cornfields, and their tongues, like those pale corn-stalks, bent away without a movement, forced by the same unchanging, sighing wind in which all sounds were lost save the low conversation of the guards.

I stood as in a dream, almost believing it was death I looked upon. The pale and crooked helmsman, in that whitened world, guiding his final load through the deep, sluggish current, resembled Charon taking lost souls across the river Styx.

I started to hear Tingsley speaking to Aranpe. "For what use is this platform?" he inquired.

The guard saluted. "This is the queen's own booth," he answered, "to which at times she comes to watch the harvesting, or to rest. It also is," he added, half in hesitation, "the position from which operations are directed when the crabs of Mau are running."

Here were "the crabs of Mau" again. Tingsley grew curious. "What are they?" he demanded.

Aranpe shrugged a shoulder. "Forbid it," said he, "that they shall run this year. They nearly always come upon us in the fall."

That was the most we could get from him. The thing, as it had been before, remained a deep enigma; for, when we asked him why they were so feared and whence they came, and tried to lead him on, he either could not, or would not, understand our questions. We left the spot and moved toward the palace, which was not far away, for we had made a circuit in our traveling.

Not far within the gates sat Gordon waiting for us, surrounded by solicitous attendants. He had not moved since we had left him. "I'm glad t' see yez back," said he. "Ond, Mистер Clarence, I do belave we done it. The peopul a-r-r in-thoosiastic, ond I guess thot Garribahy lad a-r-r on the run."

Aranpe led us to the throne room, where the queen was awaiting our return; she had just learned of Gordon's success with the people through Arteché, and they were talking of it eagerly. As she saw Egbert, she broke off her conversation abruptly and ran forward to meet him, seizing his hands in hers—an action Egbert did not hamper, either from desire or circumspection.

"You are safe back, my lord Frank," she cried happily. "Did you see all? What do you think of my possessions? Are they as great as Colorado?"

Egbert smiled down on her. "Not quite so large, O queen," he answered, "yet they are much more interesting."

"Then," she replied in disappointment, "you are a greater prince than I a queen."

If Egbert strove to put her at her ease, his efforts went much further than any he had ever used before to comfort womankind. "Believe me," he returned, "I am no prince; but, if I was, yuh would still be greater, for yuh are by yuhrself so wonderful that

yuhr country is as nothing in comparison."

Yuana's features fairly radiated joy. "You are a courtier, Frank," she said softly, "with a courtier's gift of graceful speech. Yet, as a woman, I surely am not half so wonderful as you are as a man."

Enough exists in New Biscay to fill a book; much, for my present purposes, I must pass by. A restless night or two of dreams of that strange wizard, who for all time seemed to have left the place; a day or two spent in conversations with our hosts and in wandering about our new-found home; and, in a measure, we became adapted to conditions.

But there was no delay at all in Egbert's action, and he began at once assisting Arteché and Queen Yuana in their efforts to put our army of defense in better shape.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DANGER SIGNAL.

UNFORTUNATELY, Aizkibel had not been captured, we having come upon no trace of him throughout the city. The matter was a source of some disturbance to us, for he still had following, and, if alive, we felt that it would not be long before he would show his hand. While waiting for developments, we spent the time improving our acquaintance with our prison, for, despite our comfort, we could regard New Biscay as nothing else.

Our interest was particularly excited by the great use of bone among the people, and we were at an utter loss in our speculations as to the source of supply. The long handles of the spears, the bridge supports, parts of machinery, and many other things, were made from it; in fact, it almost seemed to take the place of wood or iron in the outer world.

But, strangely, all our inquiries regarding it were fruitless. If we were answered at all—and more often we were met by silence—we received no knowledge. Our questions on all other subjects were met with immediate response; but when we asked about the bone, we were given evasions, accompanied in each case by unmistakable fear.

We asked Arteche, but even here we failed, and we did not get a hint of whence it came until we spoke to Yuana herself. Even she seemed almost trembling as she answered us. "Speak not about the crabs of Mau," she begged. "It is the law; the Heart of Fate so wills it. It is enough to know they run."

She was so troubled that Egbert, in his sympathy, indignantly insisted that, until some future time, we let the matter drop.

"Most husky crabs, indeed, the things must be," said Forches when we were again alone. "I sooner would believe that these apparent bones are imitations manufactured by some secret process. But"—growing serious—"we must yet find such a solution."

The guards now having been reorganized, Egbert, without delay, began to turn attention toward the government.

When it came to the court, they called on me; for, as a lawyer, I was supposed to have ability in this direction. Trial by jury being unknown in that land, it was most difficult to get them started right. They looked askance at my suggestions, and said twelve men, nor yet a hundred, never could replace the Heart of Fate. However, after much discussion, backed, as I was, by Egbert, and as I managed to become regarded with signs of good will more and more by Queen Yuana and Arteche, they fell into line, persuaded that this new arrangement was the wizard's will. That awesome picture, where the fire had struck that night upon the table,

still remained and caused strange, wondering thoughts to well up in our minds whenever we looked down on it. It was arranged that at each trial the jurymen should sit around the slab—a thing that satisfied them, for it carried deep, symbolic meaning.

Another snag was struck when we tried to replace the four abstractions by one presiding judge; but Egbert, tactfully insisting that Arteche was the proper person for the seat, smoothed the objections over, and we soon had everything progressing favorably.

Egbert grew busier with new duties and his consultations with Yuana every day. He picked up French more rapidly than any of the rest of us, and in an amazingly short time he mastered sufficient words and phrases of the common tongue to make himself fairly well understood in more important matters—a thing we marveled at until we found that the queen had been conscientiously teaching him. As time went on, he shortened many of his other duties and prolonged his lessons.

Tingsley, for a while, was in his element. He sat in the hall of records, reading the old inscriptions and perking up his bandanna. By day he wandered about the palace and the city streets, making acquaintances, studying historic points and ancient relics, and picking up the language. His peace was short, for force of circumstances, with relentless grip, fell on him as well as Gordon. Shortly after our appearance in the place, he had dressed the wound of the guard whom Small had shot, with such good results that he had gained great reputation as a surgeon and a doctor. Others solicited his services, and he, at first responding in good nature, grew still more famous until conditions molded him a calling, too.

Forches spent nearly all his time, at first, outside the palace, studying rocks and vegetation, making scientific observations, mapping the city, and

sketching great pictures of the strange life and its surroundings on white cloth he had procured. So great a reputation did he shortly gain that many offered him inducements to portray them. The queen heard of his skill and sat for him. Likewise, he had to draw upon the rocks within the throne room a wondrous picture of that Heart of Fate—an undertaking which he did not relish.

Small had not reappeared, nor had we heard of him, dead or alive, beyond the meager information we had obtained after the skirmish. We had then traced him to the outskirts of the city, and some claimed to have seen him wandering into the limitless passages beyond. As time went on, we grew to think him dead.

No word had come of Aizkibel, nor any indication of his presence. Our guards sent out as secret-service men among the people learned no more of him and, coming back, reported that all was well. The citizens appeared contented, quiet, and loyal, and New Biscay seemed to have entered upon an era of peace.

Thus time flew on, and with its passage we helped New Biscay with the knowledge of our outer world. Forches discovered refuse heaps beyond the city—the waste of vegetable remains for generations, which had been piled in distant, unfrequented passages, and was all covered with a white deposit which he identified as saltpeter. Egbert heated it with charcoal made from corn, and thus procured potassium carbonate, the one ingredient of glass which had been lacking—limestone and sand there was in plenty. Soon we were using rough glass plates and tumblers, and window-panes were introduced.

He showed the people how to manufacture caustic potash by treating the same substance with slaked lime; and, with this chemical, they were soon making soap. "If we had sulphur," he re-

marked, "I would feel satisfied; it's all I need to manufacture gunpowder, with which we could project our enemies to kingdom come."

Forches unearthed a bed of shale, and Egbert made cement. We taught its use, and almost before we knew it the Basques were building concrete dams and other structures.

With it all our romance thrived. I don't believe that Egbert realized where he was drifting. He had never cared for women and had never had a great tendresse in his life. But within himself he was primeval, free from false pride and all hypocrisy, and emotionally moving in a straight line, without concealment, wherever his emotions led. In the queen he had met another like himself, untrammled by any of the bonds of our social systems—a woman unspoiled. He, perhaps, could never have met her like elsewhere; at all events, the two drew steadily together. We saw the possibility of complications, yet could not help ourselves.

But we were not destined to use all our time in bettering conditions in New Biscay. The queen, who had so frankly robbed us of Egbert's company, strove earnestly to make our leisure moments pleasurable. I am not sure but that, within her heart, she sought to find us mates.

We soon grew well acquainted with the ladies of the court, of whom Clera Aranpe, sister of the leader of the guards, Margata Barnetche, and Madalon Baratcart, barring the queen, held higher social standing than any other women in the kingdom. We saw much of them, and needed little urging to seek the society of the first two, who were young and beautiful. Madalon Baratcart, however, was unfortunate in that youth was no longer her portion. I should have judged her past forty, and it was certain that she had never been blessed with the most fascinating graces.

Gordon, as a holy man, was naturally not provided for; but, whenever we were with them, and his time allowed, he tagged along in moody, watchful silence. Yuana, by her will and his, appropriated Egbert; and Margata Barnetche and Forches usually were together. By some chance, Clera Aranpe and I gravitated toward each other. This left Madalon Baratcart with Tingsley—a circumstance which pleased her immensely without eliciting a corresponding enthusiasm in him.

It came to pass that, on an evening, we all sat at our supper before a table in the gardens, close to the glistening spray and mounting flame of blue, at that spot where at first we saw the queen. Care was forgotten, in our interesting company, as maidens came and went with appetizing viands and empty dishes.

After the meal was over, we paired as usual and walked among the flowers. For all of us save Tingsley, time passed in content, and for one of us in more than that. It was, perhaps, natural that Tingsley should have first observed the guard who strode up the path.

"Who comes?" he asked.

The guard saluted. "One, my lord, who seeks the queen," he answered. "He waits without the palace gates."

It was not difficult to find Yuana. Tingsley, bowing his excuse to Madalon Baratcart, sought the most sheltered end of the gardens and returned with her and Egbert.

She listened to the message with a puzzled air. "One seeks an audience at such an hour!" she said. "How is he named? And of what appearance is he?"

"I know him not, O queen," the guard replied, "save as a former follower of Aizkibel—a citizen. He states he comes in loyalty and bears important tidings."

"It is not the hour for messages," the queen returned.

But Egbert turned to her. "There may be news in this that we should know," said he. "Shall not Beñat Aranpe bring him in?"

"You think so?" asked Yuana. "Then it shall be thus."

"Bid Aranpe disarm him if he carries weapons," Egbert commanded.

The guard turned, hastening down the path; and Clera Aranpe, speaking to me in an undertone, said: "Trust Beñat."

Soon afterward Aranpe brought his charge before us. As he reached the queen, he knelt, nor would he speak until she bade him.

"I crave forgiveness," he began, "for this disturbance of your majesty; but I bring news. Last night, they say, Aizkibel came to a lonely corner of the city, talking to Pettiri Garibay and others. To-day Garibay spoke softly to me with fair words of Aizkibel, saying that ere long many would rise with him and proclaim him king. Of these things do I hasten to inform thee, O my queen."

"Aizkibel!" cried Egbert.

The queen grew serious and still, and turned to him, but said no word at first. Then she looked back upon the kneeling man.

"Thou hast done well," said she. "Will you be among my guards?"

"I will serve thee with my life, my queen," the newcomer replied humbly.

"Rise, then," Yuana said.

"See to it, Aranpe."

The leader of the guards saluted, and the man bowed low.

Egbert spoke to Aranpe. "Lose no time," said he, "but have the city scoured for Aizkibel. This movement must be nipped before it grows."

"Mike," I half censured Gordon, "what about this? Have you lost any of your congregation?"

Gordon looked up, somewhat ashamed. "Well, Misther Clarence,"

he replied, "there hov been foive or tin gazoos thot—"

"Why did you not tell me?" I broke in.

Gordon was grieved. "How c'd I tell yez, Mither Clarence," he returned, "widout I hod a chance? Whiniver we

a-r-r not in diff'rent phlaces yez a-r-r wid the ladies. Ond I c'd see no use av botherin' thim ond yez, f'r it c'd not be hilped."

A hasty consultation followed. We broke up. The search for Aizkibel was diligently begun.

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

ATTACKED IN CAVE BY A MYRIAD BATS

AN exciting experience was encountered recently by George Bayes, a geologist, who was exploring a cave in the vicinity of Mount Adams, Washington. When he had progressed considerable distance into the cave, he found himself surrounded by a myriad bats. Startled by the presence of Bayes in the cave, the bats became terrified, and in their mad circling back and forth Bayes himself did not know whether he was to be attacked or not. In throwing his hands wildly around his head to ward them off, he clinched one by the neck and carried it out of the cave with him. The specimen was an unusually large one, measuring nearly sixteen inches from tip to tip. This is the first occasion brought to public attention showing bats in an ice-filled cavern.

LARGE NUMBER OF RATTLESNAKES REPORTED IN WASHINGTON

TRAVELERS in the State of Washington during the last few months have reported upon the unusually large number of rattlesnakes they have encountered in sections where previously only very few were noticed. It is thought that the reptiles have been forced to seek shelter in the creek bottoms because of the poison campaigns which have been waged against gophers, mice, and ground squirrels. Field mice, the natural food of the Northwest rattlers, have been destroyed in great numbers by the biological survey demonstrations. The scarcity of natural food is given as the reason why there have been so many attacks upon cows and sheep by rattlers. A single rancher killed ten snakes in the South Touchet valley after one had attacked a horse on the nose. Ranchers have been obliged to protect themselves from sudden attacks by rattlers, while working in their alfalfa fields, by wearing tar-paper leggings.

SNOWBANKS AID LATE STRAWBERRY CROP

A STRAWBERRY patch, refrigerated by nature, and said to be the only one of its kind, is owned by C. E. Arnold, who has a ranch near Ashford, Washington. Part of Arnold's ranch lies close to the summit of Bald Butte, whose altitude is 4,000 feet. In the wintertime the cañons thereabouts are filled deep with snow; being protected from the sun most of the day, it lasts until well into midsummer. The ranch owner conceived the clever idea of planting Marshall strawberries along the edges of the cañon where soil is good, in this way holding back his crop until the early crops are gone. In the late summer months, Arnold is able to ship fine spring varieties to fancy trade which realize higher prices. During the winter months he will protect his vines by a covering of cedar and balsam boughs. When next spring comes, his strawberry crop will again begin to grow, maturing slowly, so that the crop will not be ready until late summer.

“GOOD GRUB”

By Robert V. Carr

OLD Joe prospects—what! Don't you know?
Digs 'round fer gold, but he
Don't slight hisself on grub—not much!
E-e-e yum! Now, let us see.
Last night he makes some biscuits, an'
There's butter from the spring,
An' ven'son fried in onions—wow!
Oh, let us rise an' sing!
With bacon on the side—do hush!
An' spuds baked to a turn,
An' coffee that, to fix, no one
But an old bach kin learn.

I eats an' eats an' eats some more,
I've tramped the hills all day;
An' mountain air don't help a-starve,
I calculates to say.
I'm through an' ready fer a smoke,
When that there dog-goned Joe
Go gits a crockful of—well, now,
You'll smack your lips, I know—
Of wild ras'berries, sugared, creamed!
It's most too much to bear,
As he'pless there I set an' weep,
'Cause I hain't room to spare.

The Element of Chance



BY

Raymond
Ward
Hofflund



HAVING read the morning paper and smoked a cigar in the lobby of a luxurious tourist hotel in Los Angeles, Enos Whittaker proceeded to take his daily stroll down Spring Street. The stroll was a regular event, at any rate, to the extent that Enos had thus found exercise and recreation for five successive days.

The air was balmy, the streets and sidewalks crowded, the shop windows attractive. Enos Whittaker took a deep breath of delight.

"The more I get into this life," he remarked to himself, "the more I can see that I'm a-going to like it." He stood still for a moment, looking down the street. "And now," he added, "it's high time I made a good, careful investment of the money. There's no sense leaving it in the bank."

Enos did not look, at a glance, like a man who was troubled by investments. He was big and full-chested, about forty-five years old, ruddy-faced, with a heavy growth of stubby, untamed black whiskers. He wore a poor-fitting suit of cheap clothes, a soft, black hat, unbrushed during Enos' ownership, heavy shoes, and a shirt with a soft collar. And yet, no Los An-

geles man would have been greatly surprised by the figures written in his bank book; for Enos was in the city to which Scotty brought his Death Valley plunder; the city in which oil derricks sprouted overnight in more than one back yard, creating a new capitalist out of a salaried suburbanite; the city, in fact, in which getting rich quick was too common an event to attract attention.

Having made up his mind, Enos took steps to invest his fortune wisely and carefully. These steps consisted in looking at office windows until he saw one with a gold-lettered sign reading: "James B. Dunkhorn; Stocks, Bonds, Investments."

"I reckon," said Enos, having read this sign several times, "that he's the feller I want to see."

Whereupon he crossed the street and placed himself and his bank account in the hands of the most unscrupulous broker and promoter in the city.

Enos entered an outer office, finding a stenographer of radically blond proclivities, who took his name into an inner sanctum, and shortly ushered him into the presence of James B. Dunkhorn. The broker was a tall, thin, well-dressed young man, with prominent, gold teeth; the kind of man who

can be placed at a glance as a regular reader of the sporting editions. To Enos' simple mind, however, this was no drawback; the mere fact that a man had an office was proof enough to him that he knew his business. He accepted a proffered chair and stated his business without preamble.

"Mr. Dunkhorn," he said, "I've got sixty-three thousand dollars in the Bank of Commerce that I want to invest so it will bring me a steady income. Seeing the sign on your window, I thought I'd drop in and talk it over."

"Very wise, indeed," replied Mr. Dunkhorn modestly. "I have a good list of safe investments—a very good list."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Enos; "because I'm no judge of such things myself. So I have to rely on some one else who has had experience."

Mr. Dunkhorn reached down with his left hand and pinched himself on the leg. He wanted to be perfectly sure that he was wide awake.

"May I ask if this sum represents a sale of securities formerly held, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Whittaker," said Enos. "No, I never held securities, whatever they may be. I got this money in the good, old-fashioned way of digging it out of the ground. I found it—that's the plain fact; there wasn't much digging to do."

"Ah!" said Mr. Dunkhorn. "A mine?"

"Something like that," Enos admitted. "At any rate, I got the gold out of the ground. Now it's turned into cash, and I want to make a good investment."

"Of course," said Mr. Dunkhorn, without apparent excitement. "Have you any choice, Mr. Whittaker?"

"What do you mean?"

"Railroad stocks—bank stocks—industrials—mortgages. I would recom-

mend stocks; bonds pay too low a rate of interest to be attractive."

"I ought to get a pretty fair interest," said Enos doubtfully; "but I don't know that I've got any choice. Bank stocks ought to be good."

"Very good," said Mr. Dunkhorn heartily. "Possibly the very best form of investment." He leaned back in his chair and pressed the tips of his fingers together. "Mr. Whittaker, if you are in no great hurry, let me suggest that you come in and see me to-morrow. I have a very attractive proposition here in the office—an unusually attractive proposition. Our intention was to keep the stock ourselves; but it is just possible that we may decide to let in a few personal friends. I couldn't, on my own responsibility, undertake to sell you any; but I will see the other directors to-night, and bring up the matter. You see, I want to do the best I can for you; and it happens that this company, just formed, will place any stock it may decide to sell in my hands."

"Well, now," said Enos gratefully, "that's awful good of you. What kind of a company is it?"

"Oil," returned Mr. Dunkhorn laconically. "Let me tell you, Mr. Whittaker, oil is the most valuable commodity in the world to-day, not even excepting gold. We have twenty acres of the best oil land in the State. The Lady Martha is on the adjoining property—the heaviest gusher of them all. Have you paid any attention to the price of oil stocks, Mr. Whittaker?"

"Not a bit."

"Last month," said Mr. Dunkhorn, "the stocks of a dozen oil companies were listed at around forty cents. Every one of them is selling on the exchange to-day at one dollar or over. Money more than doubled in a month. Last week the Coyote Oil Company's stock was quoted at one-sixty-five. To-day

it is three-fifteen. And I could tell you of hundreds of just such instances."

Enos was puzzled.

"But how does a man get his interest on the money he puts in?" he inquired.

"Dividends," said Mr. Dunkhorn. "All of these stocks advance as the result of earning huge profits for their holders. The Coyote Company pays eight per cent quarterly. Think of it—thirty-two per cent on your money!"

"Sounds pretty big," said Enos. "But ain't a man liable to lose?"

"To be frank about it," the broker admitted candidly, "there is an element of chance. That is to say, in oil-stock speculation. Of course, this company of ours is different; we own the property—we have the oil. We are in the oil business for legitimate purposes, not for speculation. Therefore, each share of our stock represents not only a full dollar's worth of value, but a little more than that. If we offer any at all it will be at par, one dollar a share, which price we will raise to one-fifty at the end of a month."

But why linger over the details? Enos consented to postpone his investment for one day. He was rewarded by being given permission to buy sixty thousand shares of the Santa Luisa Oil Company, for which he gave Mr. Dunkhorn his check for sixty thousand dollars. The broker showed his teeth for a moment by trying to get the whole sum; but Enos decided to keep three thousand dollars for personal use.

During the following month he called several times at the office, usually finding Mr. Dunkhorn out. At the end of that time he called once more. He had begun to have a vague feeling of uneasiness; he had even found himself wondering more than once if a man in such a position could misrepresent stock in order to sell it. Enos did not like this feeling of doubt. He decided that the moment the stock was advanced he would sell out and put his money into

something a trifle more widely known than the Santa Luisa Oil Company.

Mr. Dunkhorn was in this time, and received him kindly.

"We had a directors' meeting last night, Mr. Whittaker," he said, "and voted not to put up the stock for another week or so. Of course, we are not advertising it or trying to sell, so it makes no difference."

"It makes some to me," said Enos. "I've about made up my mind to sell my stock, Mr. Dunkhorn, and invest in something else. So I hoped you'd decided to advance it."

"I would advise against selling now," said Mr. Dunkhorn. "Wait a few weeks."

The feeling of distrust came over Enos again, and he made a sudden decision.

"I reckon I'll sell," he declared. "I'll sell back to you at the price I paid, and you can make the profit."

Mr. Dunkhorn laughed involuntarily. He tried to make it appear a courteous laugh; and explained that it was not possible for him to accept the kindly offer. It would ruin his professional standing, he said, to take so base an advantage of a client.

When Enos got out on the street again he took a deep breath.

"I reckon I'd better investigate this company," he said to himself. "Probably it's all right, and I'm a fool to be scared; but there's no harm in looking over the ground."

In the course of a few days he found that in return for his sixty thousand dollars he was part owner of twenty acres of bare mesa land, worth probably fifteen dollars an acre. There was not a sign of development on the place; not an oil derrick in sight.

"He said the Lady Martha was on the adjoining property," Enos remembered. "Well, well; so it is. For that matter, so is the State of Ohio. They all join sooner or later."

He went back to his hotel and sat down in the lobby to think it over. He was not the kind of a man to waste time in self-pity; his effort was to adjust himself to the new conditions. At the end of an hour his mind was made up.

"Probably I wouldn't have cared for the life for no great time," he said to himself. "I'll go back to prospecting. But I wish I had him out somewhere in the open, where I know how to work."

The thought was pleasant; moreover, it suggested others. Enos went to sleep that night developing them.

For a few days he avoided Mr. Dunkhorn's office. Then he made another visit.

"Well," he said affably, when he got inside, "how's the oil business getting along?"

"Everything looks good," the broker assured him. To himself he added: "It's time to get out. The old fathead is going to be troublesome." And then again out loud: "Yes, Mr. Whittaker, our prospects are better every day. In a few weeks, now, we will advance the stock. Then, if you wish, I will sell out for you."

"I don't know as I care so much about it any more," said Enos. "I've about made up my mind to keep it till we've been running a year or so. By then, it ought to be worth two dollars."

"Easily," said Mr. Dunkhorn.

"So it was about another matter I came up to-day," Enos continued. "I met an old friend of mine last night, and I got to talking to him about this company. Now, he's never had no luck, and he's only got a little money—about a thousand dollars. When I told him about this stock going to one-fifty in a short time he figured it out that if he owned some he could make five hundred dollars. So he's been begging me to get some for him, and I thought

I'd help him out by letting him have a little of mine."

"Very generous of you," said Mr. Dunkhorn; "but it's not necessary. I can get that amount of treasury stock for him, if you prefer."

"Why, of course," said Enos, "if you can do that, so much the better. You make it out to him. Here's his name—Robert H. Winters. Then I'll pay you, and collect from him."

"An even thousand shares?" Mr. Dunkhorn asked. This was so easy that it actually lacked interest.

"I reckon," said Enos. "But just one word first. You're sure this company is perfectly safe?"

"Safe as the United States treasury."

"Well, that's all right, then," Enos continued. "It's important with him, because this money is all he's got. With me, of course, it wouldn't make so much difference; because I could go out and get more any time."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Dunkhorn sharply.

"Out to the mine, you know," said Enos. "If I should happen to get hard up I could go out there any time, of course, and get more."

Mr. Dunkhorn digested this statement slowly. He reached into a lower drawer of his desk, took out two cigars, and offered one to his visitor.

"How much more?" he asked.

"Oh, Lord!" said Enos; "I don't know. I only took a small part. There's a whole lot left."

"More than you brought in?"

Enos laughed.

"I reckon," he said; "considerable more. What's the difference? I'm not likely to want it. I figured on getting a few thousand a year out of my investment, and living here where life is enjoyable. I worked a good many years before I located that mine, Mr. Dunkhorn, and I'm tired of it. But, of course, it's pleasant to have it there; it makes me feel secure."

"But, man alive!" the broker exploded. "Some one else may stumble on it."

"It ain't at all likely," said Enos. "It's in an out-of-the-way place. There ain't many that go that way."

Mr. Dunkhorn's fingers tingled with excitement.

"My dear sir!" he protested. "You are altogether too trusting, too unused to business methods, if you will permit me to say so. The only sensible thing for you to do is to work your mine; work it to the limit, and put your money where it will be safe."

"Oh, I may do it some day," said Enos. "There's no hurry. Now, you fix up that stock so I can get it to-morrow, and I'll come up for it."

"Sit down," said Mr. Dunkhorn. "I'll do it right now."

He busied himself for a time preparing the certificates. When he had finished, Enos gave him a check for a thousand dollars, which he pocketed in an abstracted manner, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Now, Mr. Whittaker," he said, "in regard to your mine. Let me suggest a plan: Realize all you can on it, and put the money in this oil stock. You and I could control the company, and mark up the price as we wished. There would be a fortune in it."

Enos looked puzzled.

"I thought there was no more for sale?" he said.

"I could manage it," said the broker. "Leave that to me. You go out and get the gold, and I'll take care of the stock proposition."

Enos thought the matter over.

"No," he said at length, "I reckon I don't care to go back to mining just yet. Maybe it will seem odd to you, but I ain't ambitious to get no more money than I need, and I reckon I've got enough for the present, anyhow." He leaned back in his chair and smiled complacently.

"Fathead!" said Mr. Dunkhorn, under his breath. "Serve him right if some one finds his mine and steals it."

"If I decide I want more," Enos went on, "ain't there some way I could get up a company to handle it? Couldn't I sell stock, and have the work done, so I wouldn't have to go out myself?"

"Certainly," said the broker. "That's the only proper way to do it. I could handle the organization for you."

"Well, now," said Enos, "that might be a good idea. I'd be willing to give you a fair share for your work. Suppose you run out there and see the mine, and then let me know what you think would be the best way to handle it?"

Mr. Dunkhorn smiled.

"Utterly unnecessary," he said. "I don't have to see a mine in order to float stock in it. In fact, I couldn't tell a mine from a cistern without expert help."

"Oh, well," said Enos, "in that case we'll say no more about it. I don't want to be bothered myself; and whoever handles it ought to know his business. Maybe I can find some one later."

Mr. Dunkhorn was startled, and plainly grieved. Hitherto his experience with Enos had been of a nature to make him think he had only to suggest a plan, even to the writing of a check, to find it immediately adopted.

"My dear Mr. Whittaker," he protested, "you misunderstood me. When it comes to organizing a company, raising capital for a legitimate purpose like yours, or any such work, I know how to do it. It is not necessary for me to be an engineer in order to finance your mine. Now, let's get down to details: How much do you think we could get out of it?"

"Depends partly on luck, and partly on how much work is done," said Enos. "There ought to be close to half a million."

The broker's eyes glistened; he thought rapidly. Here was the chance for his big killing—the one he had been waiting for. His simple-minded client would be clay in his expert hands; whatever gold came from the mine could be directed into the right channels; the possibilities in the way of heavy capitalization were enormous.

"Mr. Whittaker," he said, "I'll go out with you and look over the property."

"Not with me," said Enos. "I don't care about going; but I can tell you how to get there. You take the train for Yuma, locate the New Palace Hotel, and ask the clerk for Bob. He'll take you out."

"Bob who?" asked the broker.

"There ain't no 'who' to it," said Enos. "His name is Bob; the clerk will know who you mean, and find him for you. I'll write Bob a letter so he'll know what to do."

The prospect of a trip to the desert was not alluring; but Mr. Dunkhorn had more than once accepted the chance of a visit to a much hotter place for a far smaller sum than half a million. It was not the time for hesitation.

"All right," he said. "I'll go in the morning."

II.

In the San Bernardino Mountains, north of Yuma, the sun, always a steady worker, was devoting itself enthusiastically to business. The bleak slopes radiated heat; the rocks that jutted out everywhere were blistering to the touch.

Up one of these slopes there toiled and sweated two patient burros, one patient man, and one maniac. The patient man was Bob; the maniac was James B. Dunkhorn. Never in his life had the broker so regretted an act as he now regretted this move. To a man whose exercise had been confined to poker and three-cushion billiards for ten years, struggling up forty-five-de-

gree mountainsides in a temperature of one hundred and ten in the shade, with no shade in sight, was, to put it mildly, strenuous. It galled him all the more to think that it was utterly useless, undertaken merely to avoid giving offense to Enos Whittaker. As far as inspecting the mine was concerned, his intention was merely to reach it, turn around, and go home, where he would report favorably, and advise immediate capitalization for two million dollars.

On this particular day, the fourth of his travels with Bob and the burros, he was almost beside himself with rage and fatigue. Every hundred yards he stopped for a drink, gasping for breath as he tilted the huge canteen.

At the end of an unusually severe struggle, which made even the burros pant for breath, he staggered over to his guide and held out his hand, too weak to voice his desire.

"Want water?" asked Bob.

The broker's remaining temper cracked suddenly, and broke.

"You crazy fool!" he uttered thickly. "Of course I want water! For God's sake, don't stand there and grin. Unfasten the canteen and give it to me."

"Sorry," said Bob. "There ain't no more water."

For a moment Dunkhorn did not grasp his meaning.

"The canteen, man!" he repeated. "Quick!"

"It's empty," said Bob; "and it's the last one."

The broker's knees weakened. He sat down on the ground.

"You been usin' too much," Bob went on. "I told you so. You can't carry water out here to pour all over yourself whenever you get a little warm. When you got through last time there wasn't more than a pint left."

"Where is it?" demanded Dunkhorn.

"I drank it," said Bob placidly. "I ain't no hog; but I got to have a drop now and then or my throttle shuts up."

I figger a pint out of three gallons ain't no more than my fair share."

Dunkhorn started at him; then broke into hideous curses. He rolled over on the ground and beat it with his fists. He cursed Bob, himself, Enos Whittaker, and the mine, including the burros in a final summary.

Bob watched him curiously.

"That ain't no wise way to behave, partner," he protested mildly. "I recommend that you try to keep cool."

The broker gave one short, hard laugh, and sat up.

"What are we going to do?" he asked.

"Now, that's more like sense," Bob approved. "We ain't so turrrible bad off. The mine is just around that cliff."

"Is there water there?"

Again Bob looked at him curiously.

"Do you reckon I would come out here with only water enough for one way?" he asked. "Sure there's some at the mine. Rest a spell, and we'll make it in half an hour."

"I don't want rest," said Dunkhorn, getting to his feet. "I want water—water—a tub of it! I want to fall into a lake, and drink it dry. Hurry, man—hurry!"

"There ain't no lake at the mine," said Bob; "but there's plenty to drink."

They toiled on; slowly, for in spite of his mad craving, Dunkhorn was too weak to make speed.

At length, after what seemed to the broker an age of agony, they came to a level spot, walled in except on the side by which they had ascended by perpendicular cliffs. In the face of the cliff was an opening shaded like a church door, arched at the top. Bob pointed to it.

"That's Enos' mine," he said.

"The water!" said Dunkhorn piteously. He had lost all thought of gold. "The water—where is it?"

"It's inside," said Bob.

He led the way, lighting a candle, which he held over his head. Dunkhorn followed him along a narrow passage for a hundred feet, then through a wider one branching off at right angles for twice the distance. At the end of the passage the flaring candle showed the figure of a man, seated on a huge boulder.

In spite of his extremity, the broker felt a thrill of superstitious fear. He stood still, while Bob went forward and fastened his candle to the wall.

"Howdy, Enos!" he said. "Here's your young friend, dry as a salt mackerel, accordin' to schedule."

Dunkhorn sprang forward.

"Water!" he begged.

Enos reached back for a canteen, poured water into a tin cup, and handed it to him. The broker swallowed it at a gulp.

"Sit down," said Enos. "I've got a business proposition I want you to figure on, Mr. Dunkhorn."

"First," said the broker, "fill the cup again and give it to me."

Enos did so.

"One more," said Dunkhorn.

"Not now," Enos insisted. "It's bad for you to drink too much at once. Rest a minute, while I talk to Bob."

He turned to the guide, who was drinking copiously from the canteen.

"Bob," he said, handing him an envelope, "here's the stock I bought for you—one thousand shares of the Santa Luisa Oil Company. I paid one dollar a share. As I explained, you ought to sell 'em at one-fifty. Mr. Dunkhorn, here, considers 'em worth that."

"Muck obliged to you, Enos," said Bob. "I'll buy me that blue-skinned jackass I been lookin' at. He's a good animal."

Enos turned to the broker.

"Are you ready to listen to my proposition?" he asked.

"Not now," said Dunkhorn. He had recovered himself to a certain extent.

"I don't like to be annoying, Mr. Whittaker; but I must have another drink."

"That's what I was going to talk about," said Enos. "The way I look at it, Mr. Dunkhorn, water is the most valuable commodity in the world to-day, not even excepting oil. I can't afford to give mine away. I'm going to capitalize it, and sell it."

Out of the terrible heat, and with his thirst at least partly satisfied, Dunkhorn felt his nerve coming back. At the first recognition of Enos he had known instinctively that the miner was out for retribution; but, after all, Enos was hardly the man to plan murder, and there seemed to be little that he could do. The broker had less than a hundred dollars in his pockets.

"I'd like to buy a dollar's worth right now," he said genially.

Enos ignored the pleasantry.

"There's a question I'd like to ask you, Mr. Dunkhorn," he said. "Take the case of a man who's worked hard for his money. When you sell him stock like you sold me, lying about it from start to finish, don't it bother you none to think about what he's going to do?"

"I am not in a position to resent that," said Dunkhorn easily, "so I will merely explain that I don't lie about my business, and have nothing to fear."

Enos laughed gently.

"Did you tell me that the Lady Martha was on the property adjoining ours?" he demanded.

The broker was silent.

"Did you tell me that there was what you called an element of chance in oil stocks?"

"I did," said Dunkhorn. "That's not a lie. I was perfectly frank about it."

"Where was the chance?" Enos asked. "For me, I mean. What chance did I have to get back a cent of my money?"

Again the broker declined to answer.

"Well," said Enos, "we'll drop that. It ain't important now. I just wanted to make it clear why I'm organizing my water company. Mr. Dunkhorn, I own all the water at this place. It comes from a spring; but you could hunt a hundred years without finding it, so, unless you get it from me, I reckon you'll have to go without. I'll sell you a third interest in my water for sixty-one thousand five hundred dollars. That will square me for my oil stock, which I will throw in free on the deal, and give Bob five hundred dollars for helping to promote the company. You see, I've been studying up on this organizing business."

Dunkhorn laughed easily.

"I don't care to buy," he said.

Enos got up.

"Well, Bob, I reckon we'll be going," he said. "Mr. Dunkhorn, I leave you the mine. This don't happen to be the one where I got my gold, by the way; but if you find any here it's yours."

"Just a minute," said Dunkhorn. He turned to his guide. "You are in my employ," he said, "not Whittaker's. My instructions are for you to stay here with me."

"I don't aim to mix in no hostilities," Bob declared frankly. "I wouldn't have guided you around the block if Enos hadn't wrote me a letter. You and him can argue out your troubles; but what Enos says goes with me."

"All right," said Dunkhorn. He had been bluffing, trying to appear anxious to get out of his predicament; but it was hard for him to repress a smile. It was going to be absurdly easy, after all. Payment on a check could be stopped by wire from Yuma, a fact of which the simple-minded miners apparently were not aware. "All right," he said. "You've got me, Whittaker. I'll quit squealing, and admit that I'm beaten."

He took a check book and fountain

pen from his pocket and wrote a check for the amount Enos had named.

"There," he said. "Now, give me another drink."

Enos handed him the canteen and examined the check carefully.

"Have you got that much money in the bank?" he asked.

"Certainly," said the broker.

"I didn't know but what you might have spent some of it," said Enos. "You want to be sure; because if they don't cash this you'll be in kind of a hard place."

"What do you mean?" Dunkhorn demanded.

"Why," said Enos, "of course you'll have to wait here until I get the money. I like a safe business; I don't care about that element of chance, so I ain't planning to run any. If they cash this I'll send word out to Bob, and he'll bring you in. If they don't cash it, he'll go in by himself, and you can do whatever seems best to you."

Dunkhorn was unable to conceal his chagrin. Enos looked at him critically.

"I reckon I'll take a chance with it," he decided. "I'm going to go up to the

office and give my oil stock to that yellow-haired typewriter of yours, and tell her you bought it back. I'm not posted on the law, but if it was all right for you to sell it to me there hadn't ought to be no hitch about me selling it back. Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Dunkhorn. Bob, I'll get word out to you in less than two weeks."

Within the time set by Enos a veteran of the mountains appeared at the mine with a note. Bob read it, and hastened to impart its contents to his guest.

"Enos says he got the money," he announced.

"Well," said Dunkhorn sullenly, "when do we start?"

"Come over here," said Bob. He took him by the arm and led him to a pinnacle from which the surrounding country could be seen. "Do you make out that rocky peak?" asked Bob, pointing to it. "Right around the other side of that is a town. You can go from there by stage to Yuma, and save walking. I recommend that you do it; because I'm aiming to take it easy on the return trip. This man lives there, and he'll show you the way."



SIoux INDIANS ORGANIZE TEMPERANCE SOCIETY

THERE has recently been reported from the Fort Totten Reservation, near Devil's Lake, North Dakota, where the Sioux Indians are stationed, the organization of a temperance society. The Indian Temperance Society, as it is known, was formed by a group of old braves whose purpose it is to induce the younger Indians and those older ones who still think they need "fire water," to get on the Volstead wagon.

One of the first acts of the society was to call upon Police Chief Peter Timboe, of Devil's Lake, and ask his coöperation. It is said that many of the younger Sioux braves, when they drive into Devil's Lake, have been in the habit of buying lemon and vanilla extract, canned heat, and other things containing alcohol. The older Indians requested the police chief to use his influence to prevent the various merchants in the city from selling these products to the other members of their tribe, and they offered to enlist themselves as special officers who would arrest any Indians who were found intoxicated.



PERHAPS we are a little ahead of time with the slogan, "Do your Christmas shopping early," but we are going to make a suggestion to you. Now, honest Injun, we feel real diffidence, real bashfulness, about making this suggestion. It kind of sounds, we feel, as if we were cracking ourselves up. Well, here goes. We'll blurt it out.

If you like WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, is it not very probable that some of your friends would like it? In other words, isn't a subscription to a magazine one of the safest, most sure-fire satisfactory presents that a person can give? Just think. For fifty-two weeks your present will arrive, a constant reminder of yourself and a constant bringer of joy to the recipient of your gift. Of course, we know that hundreds of thousands of you buy the magazine every week on the stands, and for this we are very appreciative and grateful, but we are free to confess to you that a subscription from one of you does give us a real thrill. We guess this is caused by the realization that we have created something which our readers desire so much that they are willing to pay in advance for it so as to be sure it

comes promptly. Any of you who care, then, to subscribe for another, just send us a money order for \$6.00 for a year's subscription, or \$3.00 for six months' subscription, and we will see to it that the recipient of your gift is informed of the donor's name. Be sure to state what issue you wish the subscription to begin with. In most cases, we will assume that it will be the Christmas issue.

While we are on the subject of getting the magazine, we want to tell you that you can always procure back copies. We receive many letters of inquiry about this. All you have to do is to send fifteen cents for any issue of the magazine that has been published within a year, and we will gladly mail you the copy you want at once, postage prepaid. Should you desire copies that are older than one year, you must add five cents more for each additional year. Naturally, new friends are constantly riding in here to The Round-up, and we want to make it very plain to them that if they buy an issue with a serial half completed in it, they can obtain the copies containing the first part of that serial. Many readers, too, are particularly fond of a certain author's stories, and they would like to collect every-

thing that he has written. All you have to do is to drop us a line, and we will send you a list of all the magazines which have contained any author's work in the past. Then you can order any or all of these magazines, as you desire.

Say, can any of you folks tell why it is that a person lost in the woods, desert, or prairie will walk in a circle? It has been suggested to us that the reason for this is that persons step a little bit shorter with one leg than with the other, and that, unless they keep their

eyes fixed on a point of destination, they they are bound to keep turning either to the right or to the left as they go forward. We tried this the other day in a pasture lot: we blindfolded a half dozen persons and told them to walk as straight as they could to a given point, having first let them select this point before putting on the blindfold. Not any of the six were able to come within striking distance of the mark that they had selected, all bearing either to the right or to the left of it to a considerable degree. Have you any suggestions to offer?

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

Rovin' Redden's Trail Ends

A good finish is necessary to justify a spectacular beginning.

By ROBERT J. HORTON

"Brindle" Burke Drops In

Meet "Brindle" Burke! We leave it to you to extend a second invitation.

By HERBERT S. FARRIS

The Secret of Yellow Jacket Spring

Don't quarrel with Fate before you have examined the whole basket of her tricks. Until you have pulled out the last apple you don't know whether she will prove a kind mother or a faultfinding stepmother.

By REGINALD C. BARKER

AND OTHER STORIES ORDER YOUR COPY NOW



The Swapper's Exchange is conducted for our readers. As explained in the Round-up of the March 25th issue we must make a flat-rate charge of one dollar for each ad received after April 1st. While this is the charge for one insertion of an advertisement, we will, if space permits, run it again without extra charge. On account of the necessity for making up a magazine in advance of publication date, it will be about eight weeks before your advertisement will appear. It must be distinctly emphasized that any who take advantage of this service, do so with the complete understanding that the Editor and Publishers of this magazine will not hold themselves responsible in any way for losses sustained by readers, nor can they act as arbiters in disputes. A remittance should be sent with each advertisement, addressed to "Swapper's Exchange," Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

CLARINET, Key of B; two books on how to dig and care for roots. For particulars of swap address Edward Collins, Bridgeville, Pennsylvania.

TRAILER, camping, equipped with two springs, two Ostermoor mattresses; one side tent with waterproof floor, to be attached to side of automobile; Remington 12-gauge pump gun. I will swap these for freak animals. John A. McGinnis, 53 Walnut Avenue, Revere, Massachusetts.

ROADSTER, Chevrolet, "490" all-capital typewriter; American adding machine; twin-cylinder Indian motor cycle; Elgin 15-jewel, O-size watch, with 20-year hunting case; railroader's electric lantern, new. I will swap for cash or anything I need. What have you? G. W. Reeve, Deckerville, Arkansas.

COMPANIONSHIP—to swap with four or five gentlemanly adventurers who would consider a trip into the West Indies and to the headwaters of some Central or South American rivers; I prefer those who are mineralogists; must be thoroughbreds. Address Box 2023, St. Petersburg, Florida.

HAT, cowboy's, new; watch, 7-jewel; cowboy's cuffs, new; shirt, new; knife; belt. Will swap for cowhide vest, size 38, or silk-ropo lariot or field glasses—or what useful articles am I offered? Walter van Breen, 1526 Monroe Avenue, Asbury Park, New Jersey.

SKATES, wooden ball bearing, attached to athletic shoes, size 8½; German-made Dryse automatic revolver in cowhide leather holder, .32. Will swap for a male dog of good stock—or what articles am I offered? Albert Ross, 1580 St. Marks Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

RIFLE, .25-20 c. f., pump-action Marlin Special, has octagon barrel and special sights; 45-40 c. f. Starr, used in the Civil War as cap and ball and remodeled in Belgium into a double-action rifle; typewriter, with double keyboard; Iver-Johnson 12-gauge shotgun; cabinet Sonora phonograph, with 35 double-disk records; 12 White Giant breeding rabbits; 10 New Zealand breeding rabbits; course in training and breaking horses; automobile course; pair of army officer's trousers, broadcloth, new; also coat. Would be interested in a good Ford engine complete; 30x3¼ tires of standard make; tent and tarp; 4 or 6-speed transmission for Ford; saddle and chaps; .25 or .32 automatic; Ford parts; wireless equipment; mechanical tools; field glasses. A. B. Carter, Lock Box D, King Hill, Idaho.

ELECTRIC FAN, 16 inch, with three speeds. What useful articles am I offered in exchange? Also, I have a course in cartooning. For particulars of this swap address C. J. Da Pore, 708 Young Street, Piqua, Ohio.

HOUND, five years old, 17 inches tall, a good rabbit dog; full course in taxidermy; 12-gauge, single-barreled hammer gun; Batavia lever, 12-gauge, double-barreled hammerless gun. For particulars of swap address Box 33, Petersburg, New Jersey.

RIFLE, .38-40 Marlin repeater—to swap for gent's gold watch. G. Johnson, Elstow, Saskatchewan, Canada.

SHIRT, cowboy's, brand-new, size 15; sheep-lined buckskin vest; U. S. army riding hat, size 7; U. S. gas-mask outfit; telegraph receiving and sending instrument, new; small collection of marine shells; foreign and old coins; film-pack camera, takes pictures 2¼x3¼; 7-jeweled gold-filled watch, brand-new; 10-karat gold ring, with pink sapphire setting; solid-gold watch chain and gold-filled watch, et cetera. In exchange I want a good shotgun; fancy Mexican or Indian vest; cash—or what useful articles have you to trade? Henry E. Peiffer, 1 Jay Street, North Side, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

CANOE, 16 feet long; driving harness; buggy and cutter; Pope motor cycle; Indian motor cycle engine; Winchester .22 repeater, and other firearms; motion-picture film, 1,000 feet of comedy, and other articles. In exchange I want bees; bee supplies; .25 or .32 automatic pistol; .25 or .32 repeating rifle; Ford car, 1917 or later. R. D. Alkens, Ormsby, East, Ontario, Canada.

HOUNDS, 3, about 6 months old, 2 females and 1 male, of good fox-hunting stock. What articles am I offered in exchange? Archie Swanson, Box 427, Dalhart, Texas.

VIOLIN, Strad model, with complete outfit. Will swap for German police puppy; Colt revolver, 6 shot, 7½-inch barrel, with holster and belt; or .25-20 rifle. Walter Lenz, Seffner, Florida.

REVOLVER, .32 H. & R., with cartridge belt and holster; box of cartridges. What articles will you swap? Write to Nelson Mathisson, 434 Lowell Street, Methuen, Massachusetts.

HAT, cub bear, Detroit style, size 7¾, made last fall; small electric fan. In exchange I want books—or what have you? Kirk Kinter, Box 604, Grafton, West Virginia.

RADIO SET, complete; .30 Krag; .22 Remington rifle; set of Standard Reference Works in 3 volumes; 20-gauge, single-shot Stevens rifle, with 35 shells; Marble peep sight for .22 Remington 12-A; camera. What useful articles am I offered in exchange? J. F. Wright, 131 Knepper Street, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

RIFLE, Remington repeating, .22; revolver, 5-shot .32, Meriden Arms Co.; other firearms; multigraph machine; typewriter; typewriter stand, roll top, folding; 15-jeweled watch; 7-jeweled watch; other jewelry, and various other articles, including musical instruments. For particulars of swap address H. S. Hart, Box 85, Shreveport, Louisiana.

RADIO OUTFIT, receiving, 500-mile range, in mahogany cabinet; other radio equipment; electric fan; electric vibrator; .25-20 reloading tool. I will swap for an automatic shotgun, among other things. What have you? John P. Kelley, 112 Graham Avenue, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

OUTFIT, for coon hunting: two coon male hounds, 4 and 2 years old, open trailers, rabbit proof; 3-cell flash light; 410-gauge, single-barreled shotgun; .45 Colt automatic; .32 Colt Police Positive, with 6-inch barrel; dog harness; pair of leather leggings. What articles am I offered in exchange? T. K. Stellman, Box 24, Normal, Kentucky.

Where To Go and How To Get There



By

John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

DOUGLAS, WYOMING, AND VICINITY

A GREAT many persons write me asking which part of the West they ought to settle in. As if I could tell them that! In such cases, I tell them to follow up this department and other sources of information about the West until they come across some description that strikes them as offering what they desire. It is for the benefit of such readers, whose ideas are only half formed, or perhaps only quarter formed, that I publish a brief sketch each week of some particular locality or some special phase of Western life. Thus those who think that they have found what they are seeking can write for additional information.

Last week I had something to say about dry farming in Converse County, Wyoming, and suggested certain aspects of this work that might interest an agriculturist of small capital seeking new fields. The country around Douglas, the county seat of Converse County, has

a substantial prosperity based on live stock, wool growing, and oil.

There is nothing to suggest the frontier days about Douglas, except when the State Fair, a big, annual event, is in progress. The public buildings and homes of this city would be considered worthy of a place in any community. The former include several schools and churches, a Federal building, a courthouse, the city hall, and the public library.

The following is a statement given out by the local commercial club as to the opportunities Douglas offers the capitalist; and from this one can get an idea as to the lines along which things are likely to develop for the worker in the next few years:

"Douglas needs woolen mills. Being located in the heart of the best wool-producing territory in the United States, we offer a most excellent location for this industry. A good brick and

tile works could find a very profitable location here, as we have good raw material for both, and a coal mine only one mile away. A good flour mill will find an unusual opportunity here, being located in a section where the finest grade of milling wheat is raised. A canning factory could not find a better location, for no better flavored sweet corn, peas, beans, beets, and cabbage are raised anywhere; we also raise wonderful cucumbers, and a starch factory for the large yields of potatoes would be a good investment."

Of course, as most persons know, it is the tendency of chambers of commerce and commercial clubs to talk in superlatives, and to refer to their own particular corner of the country as "the land of opportunity" for the newcomer. So much depends on the said newcomer himself, on his capability, on his willingness to work, on his health and mentality and staying powers, that it is hard to tell where to place the blame in the event of failure. The one way to form an opinion is to pay a visit to the place in which you contemplate settling, and live there a while, studying conditions for yourself, and forming your own judgment as to how you will make out. This is worth more than all the advice and suggestion that all the chambers of commerce and John Norths can hand out in a million years.

A RANGE RIDER'S REMINISCENCES

MY DEAR NORTH: I am no writer, but, as you kindly suggested in your issue of July 1st that your readers would like to hear from me again, here goes:

No class of men have been so misunderstood as the American cowboys. That they were wild in the extreme goes without argument. Usually lean, wiry, bronzed men they were, legs generally cased in leather chaps and high-heeled boots, sitting a loose, slouchy seat in the saddle, yet the best rough riders the world ever did, or ever will, produce. Their most distinguishing trait was absolute fidelity. Should they like their employer well enough to take his pay and eat

the grub furnished, the employer could, except in rare instances, rely on them; yet if they got the least idea of being misused, the guilty one would, in all probability, be glancing down the muzzle of a .45 Colt, with some rapid explanation. Another characteristic trait was their respect for womanhood. I never knew a real cow-puncher to insult a woman, and I don't believe one ever did. Rain or shine, hot or cold, all was passed as a jest. Perhaps, after riding down three or four horses during the day, the cowboy would take his relief period of two hours with a restless herd of beef, singing to lull them to sleep, and just as ready to spur his plunging mount in the lead of a frenzied stampede, with no thought for his own safety, in his anxiety to save the herd from destruction. It was man's work, this life on the range.

Of course, there were exceptions. Riders with shady records could be found during the period that the writer rode the purple sage. "Butch" Cassidy, Jack Flagg, and Ben Carter were three such characters. I saw the former and rode with the latter two. It was on Sand Creek, a tributary of the Sweetwater, that I witnessed young Jim Jeffreys shot to death, lying on his blankets, by Ben Carter. Jeffreys was a happy, light-hearted boy who never in any way offended any one. Carter made his escape in the excitement on the only horse in camp, but was captured at Devil's Gate the following morning at the Hub and Spoke Ranch. He was tried the following spring, found guilty of murder in the first degree, and his neck was stretched by Sheriff William High. Flagg was shot and killed from ambush during the rustler war in the eighties. Butch Cassidy, leader of the famous "Hole-in-the-Wall" Gang, made his escape, I believe to South America.

We read the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE regularly, from cover to cover. I found through its pages an old rider of the same days as myself, Mr. James Henderson, of New York City, and found him to be acquainted with many of my old partners of the frontier.

FRANK O. FILBEY.

South Haven, Mich.

One point on which I disagree with this correspondent is his opening statement, that he is no writer. I think he is a mighty entertaining writer, and I'm sure my readers will agree with me. Many thanks for this interesting little bit of reminiscence!



Miss Louise Rice, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rice will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

SOME of The Gang continue to wonder why they don't see their letters in The Tree within a week of writing them. Please listen, therefore, and paste this somewhere where you can see it: Write The Tree at least two months before you want to see your letter published, and then allow some time over that in case there has been an extra lot in the old holla just at that time. Remember, this magazine is printed eight weeks ahead of the time that it reaches you, and the postmistress has to have time to sort your letters before she reads 'em out. There, that's that.

Here's just piles and piles of letters from The Gang, as usual, so we will plunge right in and take 'em as they come.

'Member The Texas Kid? Here's a note from him:

HELLO, DEAR FRIEND! When I wrote to you some time ago I did not really believe that you and The Hollow Tree would go to the trouble of recognizing a letter of an old has-been of the ranches, but I am more than surprised—I am pleased—to say that I have received a number of responses. I do appreciate this and want others, also, being

lonely, since I lost my pal and buddy in the big scrap in 1918.

With best wishes to you, Partner, and the rest of The Gang, I am

"THE TEXAS KID."

DEAR MISS RICE: I see that a great many young fellows want a place to work in the West and regret that they have no way of learning the business. Tell them for me that if they want work let them learn how to run tractors and care for them.

CLAYTON E. RICH.

Arapahoe, Col.

This brother gave information of this sort to a young man who wanted a chance to go West and said so, around the old Tree, and it seemed so good a bit that we are herewith reading it out for the benefit of many others of The Gang.

DEAR MISS RICE: I have wanted to write the old Tree for quite a while but hesitated; then, seeing that there were plenty of folks writing in, I thought I would have a try. I am a real Westerner, born and raised on a ranch. I have tried the cities a few times, but was always glad to get back. I have not been riding for some time on account of getting crippled up, but I expect to use the old chaps and spurs again. Just now I am working in a dairy about three miles

from a mining camp, one of the largest in the southwest. I will be glad to send information of this part of the country to any of The Gang. "NEW MEXICO" SAM.

DEAR MISS RICE: Here's hoping that the W. S. M. will always be with us, and that The Gang will spread and spread everywhere. I have lived most of my life in the open, have punched cattle in Argentina, been over nearly all of South America, in Africa for three years, and served in France two years—that's me. RICHARD SNYDER.

Davenport, Fla.



Readers of "Western Story Magazine" can recognize each other by a very attractive button, enameled in colors, with the words, "Hollow Tree Gang, W. S. M."

The buttons are supplied to readers at cost—twenty-five cents, which includes mailing charges.

For men and boys the button has been made so that it can be worn on the coat lapel. For women and girls the design is exactly the same, only it is on a pin. State which you want.

Remittances for the button should be sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

DEAR MISS RICE: May a railroader join The Gang? This one would like to. I have read the W. S. M. for years, but this is the first time I have written The Tree. I hope that it isn't "shunted off into storage." I am a young locomotive fireman on the Illinois Central Railroad, Indiana Division. I have been firing for three years. Would like to hear from any of The Gang. ROBERT LA RUE.

309 Fulton Avenue, Evansville, Ind.

DEAR MISS RICE: I used to lay in my bunk down in a submarine and read the W. S. M., and every time we were where there was a news stand getatable I would see if I could buy all the latest numbers. I was stationed in Panama for fifteen months, and there I never missed an issue. I certainly enjoyed Ronicky Doone.

In The Hollow Tree, quite a while ago, I

noticed that "The Oakland Kid" would send any of The Gang cowboy songs. I am from Oklahoma, and maybe I know a few of them, but I would like to hear from him about those he has. I shall soon be on my way to California, but I suppose mail will reach me. "So long as a man has eyes to see, and a brain that wants to know, I figure they're things he's bound to miss, if he doesn't come and go. There's always a place beyond that place where I happen to hang my hat, and another place beyond that place, and a world beyond all that."

E. GORE, M. M. S.

Machinists' Motor School, Hampton Roads, Va.

Will The Oakland Kid please take notice and write this brother?

Before we go on, here's one of those unusual requests that the old owl thinks is all right to be put in The Tree. A man of good character, who has a good trade and works at it all the time, who is fifty-three, wants to find some family where he will be taken in, not only as a paying guest, which he will be, but also as really part of the family. It is not an ordinary boarding place that he wants, but a home, where he can put in his interests with the family and feel that he is one, as if, for instance, he were an uncle. His name is A. Norton Tobey, and the address is No. 315 Delaware Avenue, Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Anybody who feels that they have a place for this man somewhere near his present address ought to write him and see how close a bond of sympathy of tastes there is.

DEAR MISS RICE: I want something that I am sure I will find in The Gang, and this is it—I want a partner. I want a man to travel with me on a Western trip by way of the Lincoln Highway. He doesn't have to have a lot of money if he is of the right sort. I have a machine, and all I want is a pal who will be a real pal. I want to travel to Washington State and back by some other route home. I was raised out in Oklahoma and know what I am about. Thanking you, Miss Rice, and all The Gang, and hoping to get the boy I am after, I am,

JOHN MCGEE.

Montrose, Catansville, Md.

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

LEBOIOWITZ, BENNIE, and ROBIN C. MORE.—They were last heard of in San Francisco in April last. A buddy, who sailed with them in the Philippine Islands, is anxious to find them, and will greatly appreciate any assistance. William O. Sears, care of this magazine.

COLLINS, EMMA.—Come home, dear. I forgive you and still love you. Will wait for you here. Jack, Holmbeck Hotel, or General Delivery, Los Angeles, California.

MUCKELL, CHARLES, who was with the Fifteenth Cavalry at Camp Harry J. Jones, Douglas, Arizona, in the winter of 1917-18, went overseas, and on his return was at Camp Mills, and was transferred to some other outfit. A buddy from the ranch would like to get in touch with him again. George, 44 June Street, South River, New Jersey.

BINGAMAN, J. F., who lived at Springfield, Missouri, about three years ago. He is thirty-five years old, with brown hair and blue eyes, and of heavy build. Any information as to his present address will be gladly received by a relative, Frank Haywood, Route 1, Blue Island, Illinois.

STEPHENSON, JOHN R.,—He is about fifty-eight or sixty years of age, nearly six feet tall, with dark hair and brown eyes, and rather heavy set. The thumb of his right hand is a little out of shape. He left his home on December 15, 1919, to look for work, and never returned. His wife will be grateful for any information about him. Also **EFFIE GRACE BUTTNER, or DYKES,** twenty-five years old, with dark hair and eyes, and last heard from at Springfield, Missouri, five years ago. Any information about either of these persons will be thankfully received and highly appreciated. Mrs. M. Stephenson, Route 1, Box 71-A, Blue Island, Illinois.

SHORT, GEORGE L.,—He left Haverhill, Massachusetts, in April, 1920, for his ranch in Arizona, and was heard from later at Chattanooga, Tennessee. He has not been heard from for years, and his friends would be glad to know what has become of him. He is six feet tall, with dark-brown hair, gray eyes, and regular features. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be gratefully received by A. B. Barry, 1528 Seventy-sixth Street, Brooklyn, New York.

QUIRK, PATRICK, who left Riverhead Harbor, Newfoundland, about 1882-83, and went gold mining in the Black Hills. He was last heard of in Good Lands, Manitoba, in 1906. Information about him is sought by his niece, the daughter of his sister, Nancy Thompson, who will greatly appreciate any correspondence. Katie McIsaac, care of this magazine.

CUMMINGS, R. A., JR., who left home in Roxbury, August 7, 1920. We agree. Please send address. Ma and Pa.

WRIGHT, GEORGE CUTLER, who left Keene, New Hampshire, some time ago, is asked to write to friends there and in West Swanzey, who understand and are truly loyal. It was reported that he went to some Western State, and it is hoped that he may see this and write.

EVANS, TOMMY.—He is thirty years of age, nearly six feet tall, with dark hair and gray eyes, and the little finger of his right hand is off at the last joint. He has been missing for seven years. He was born at West Austintown, Ohio, lived for some time with his widowed mother in Cleveland, and was last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. It is possible that he may have enlisted in the United States or Canadian army, and may be using an assumed name. His mother is almost distracted over his absence, and begs him to return, or at least to write her a few reassuring lines to ease her mind. She will be deeply grateful for any information that may help her to communicate with him. Mrs. Elizabeth Evans, care of Mrs. Sarah Hute, Box 876, Lisbon, Ohio.

BEALE, EDWARD WALTER.—He was born October 15, 1905, and was last heard of in 1914 when he was in the Michigan State School, Coldwater, Michigan. Any one who knows the whereabouts of this boy will do a great favor to his parents by writing to Peter J. McNeil, Fort Terminal, Charleston, South Carolina.

E. G. F.,—Your children are sadly in need of you. Please send them a message of remembrance and aid me in my struggle to support them. By so doing, the faith and confidence I have taught them to have in you may be justified. You need not tell your whereabouts. Simply address D., care of this magazine.

KIRKPATRICK, LUCULLUS.—He is five feet seven inches tall, thirty-one years of age, with light hair and blue eyes, and was last heard from about twelve years ago, when he was in the navy. He may be known as Ouille McCormick. Any information regarding him would be gratefully received by his only brother and sister. Please write to A. M. Kirkpatrick, 1330 East Admiral Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

PINKERTON, F. A. E., of Alexander Street fame, and swimming and storm hero, 1911, please communicate with B. Z., 920 Hickman Road, Augusta, Georgia.

BACKUS, FRED, formerly of Whiting Indians, and Detroit, Michigan. He is about sixty years old, of dark complexion, partly bald, with high cheek bones and blue eyes. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by L. B. Backus, 508 South Outerline Street, Route 2, Sturgis, Michigan.

C. J. N.,—All happy and in excellent health. Any information desirable. Advise me. Best luck. Bud.

CLAY, HARMON, who was last heard from in Texas, and would be now about seventy-five years of age. Also **S. C. CLAY,** who lived in the northwestern part of Virginia on the Little Toms River, in August, 1887. My father was Charles Quincy Clay, who is believed to have come to northern Texas in the early eighties. Any information about my uncles will be very gratefully received. Scotty Clay, care of this magazine.

HUTCHINSON, HARRY.—He is twenty years of age, with blue eyes, fair hair, and dimples. He left Canas, Wilmington, about July 20th of this year, with a man named Fred Shepherd, in a Ford. He wrote from Marshfield, Oregon, saying he would write from Eureka in a day or so, but has not been heard from since. He had some money with him, and his people are very much worried as to what may have happened. Any information will be gladly received by his sister, Mrs. Eleanor L. Crum, 809 West Walnut Street, Centralia, Washington.

KIRKEY.—I was placed in an orphan's home in Brockville, Ontario, Canada, and about a year later was sent to one in Ottawa, Canada, from which I was adopted by a Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Madraire. I lived with them until 1915, when I joined the Canadian army and went to France the same year. I came back in April, 1919, and was then discharged. Later I found out that the Madraires were not my real parents, and that my name was Charles Kirkey, and that I was born in Brockville, where I was left in care of the Christian Aid Society. I have met a lady who says she is my mother's sister, but I have been unable to prove this. Any information regarding my parents would be very gratefully received. I am now in the United States army. Charles Kirkey, care of this magazine.

JACKSON, FREDERICK Z.—He is a deaf-mute and was last heard from in South Bend, Indiana, in 1920. He formerly lived in San Diego, California. Any information in regard to his whereabouts will be appreciated by J. M. Wilsey, 1432 Farmer Street, Detroit, Michigan.

BROCKMAN, or MENHANNICK, JENNIE.—Want to see you about lot in G. A. R. cemetery. They say Lew is dead. Flora Crawford Eastman, South Bend, Washington.

CAMPBELL, KATY and BESSIE.—They lived in Steele City, Nebraska, in 1905-06. Katy is about twenty-one, and Bessie seventeen. Their mother married a man named Baker. They were in Kansas City a few years ago. Any one who knows their present address will do a favor by writing to James Campbell, Box 45, Leslie, Arkansas.

NOTICE.—Any friends who were inmates of "O. S. H." at Pryor between 1915-19, will do a great favor by writing to Richard A. Linville, care of this magazine.

BILLIE-BABE.—Letters addressed to 1515 bring no reply. Mother does not answer from Huch. Write to same address. Dad.

BOURGEOIS.—Any descendants of **DESIRE BOURGEOIS,** born in Jura, Franche Comte, France, and who emigrated to California in 1848, are asked to write to a relative, who has news of importance for them. A. B., care of this magazine.

ACKERMAN, JAMES, was buried in a slide in December last, and it is desired to communicate with his relatives. He was about five feet ten inches tall, broad-shouldered, with dark-brown eyes, prominent nose, and black hair turning gray. He had brothers somewhere in the East, and it is hoped that they will see this and write to E. Crowder, care of this magazine.

GATRELL, CHARLEY.—Would like to hear from some of his relatives and from his father, Ed. Gattrell, who was last heard of in Youngstown, Ohio. Also his grand-ther, whose name was Bartlett, and who is believed to have settled somewhere in the West, and his uncle, Jim Bartlett, last heard of in Wheeling, West Virginia. Any information regarding these relatives will be gladly received by Charles Gattrell, care of this magazine.

DEAR CARL.—Please write to dad, as he is very anxious to hear from you.

BLAINE, CHARLES J.—He was last heard of in Fairbanks, Alaska, about fifteen years ago. He formerly lived in Benson, Minnesota, and left there after the death of his wife, Carrie. His daughter Anna would be very happy if she could know his present whereabouts. Mrs. Thomas McCambridge, 412 West Avenue South, Arlington, Washington.

RODGERS, PHOEBE or LYDIA.—Her husband and three little girl babies are very anxious to know where she has gone. She left home on July 24th last, and the children are grieving for her. She is twenty-three years old, of fair complexion, and weighs about one hundred pounds. She is supposed to be in Kansas or the Osage part of Oklahoma, near De Noya. Her husband will be deeply grateful for any information that will help to find her and bring her home. R. F. Rodgers, Slick, Oklahoma.

ROSE Y.—Please write to me. I want very much to know the whereabouts of my little pal.—Don, care of this magazine.

ZANONI, HELGA ELLEN WENDLE, born VAN DER HAGEN, and her husband, UNO ZANONI. They left Sweden about twelve years ago and came to the United States, and have not been heard from since. Any information that will help to know what has become of them, or that will give their present whereabouts, will be gladly received by Mrs. Zanoni's brother, Captain B. van der Hagen, 149 Sterling Street, Brooklyn, New York.

HAGERTY, DOROTHY.—She was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1899, the daughter of Daniel and Dora Sullivan Hagerty. Her mother died when she was an infant, and it was supposed that the baby was placed in the care of her father's sister, Mrs. Cameron. Her mother's relatives wish to have her address, as there is an estate to be settled. Any information will be greatly appreciated by B. B. A., care of this magazine.

DAVIS, ARTHUR.—He left Gulfport sixteen years ago to go to San Francisco or Los Angeles for his health, and for a little while corresponded with his brothers and mother, but they lost track of him, and have been unable to find out what has become of him. It is thought that he was in the war, but nothing definite is known. He was of rather heavy build, with brown hair and eyes, and when he left home was engaged in hotel and restaurant work. His mother, who was a widow, married shortly after he went away. She hopes he will see this and write to her, as she is very anxious to get news of him, and will gratefully appreciate any information that will help her to find him. Mrs. B. L. Conn, 1005 Thirty-third Avenue, Gulfport, Mississippi.

JACK.—Please write to this magazine for a letter, and also write to me and give me your address, as I am very sick. Georgina, R. R. 3, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

RICE, KINGSLEY NICHOLS.—He is twenty-three years old, and was last heard from at Tunica, Mississippi, on January 5th of this year. He had a timber contract and was going into Arkansas to finish it, and no word has been received from him since. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by his mother, Mrs. W. A. Greenwood, Bayles, California.

NOTICE.—Any members of the crew of the "ATLANTA OF TEXAS," who sailed on her the last trip before she tied up, **BILL MAXWELL, ALLEN, DICK, SPARKS, KEARNS,** and the skipper's stepson, please write to L. E. P., care of this magazine.

JANASAK.—When I was about eleven years old, my two brothers, my sister, and I were put in the St. Joseph's Orphan Home in St. Paul, Minnesota. Their names are John, Frank, Agnes, and my own name was Mary. Our name was sometimes spelled Janasak. About a year later I was adopted by a family named Heinen, and have lost track of every one belonging to me. My mother's name was Young before she married. Any information that would help me to find my relatives would be most gratefully appreciated. Mrs. George W. Evans, 711½ South Mulberry Street, Muncie, Indiana.

MEADE, ED.—He is five feet ten inches tall, with light hair and blue eyes, and was a cowboy on his father's ranch at Powderville, Montana, before he joined the army at Columbus, Ohio. In 1910 he was stationed at Fort Pickens, Florida, and was still there in 1912. He is asked to write to an old friend, who will be glad to hear from any one who knows his address. A. M. H., care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, MRS. BERTHA.—Her maiden name was Jones. She left home in 1905, and four years ago was in Seattle. Her daughter, who has not seen her since, she was a small child, and needs her very badly, will be grateful for any information that will help to find her. Mrs. Hazel Parker, 4029 South K Street, Tacoma, Washington.

MORRISON, MRS. MARY.—She was last heard of in Huntington, West Virginia, about three years ago. It was heard that she had married a man named Floyd Henderson, but nothing definite is known. If any one who knows her should see this and will tell her that her mother and daughter are seeking her, the favor will be very much appreciated, as she cannot read or write, and so would not be likely to know of it otherwise. Mrs. C. W. B. Cole, Box 583, Burk Burnett, Texas.

O'HARA, JOHN.—He came from Linnithgow, Scotland, about fifty years ago with his father, mother, and two sisters, and lived in Boston, Massachusetts, for a short time. Many years later he was employed on a railroad running out of Detroit, Michigan, and attended a dancing school there conducted by a man named Strassburg, where he and his sister danced together without knowing their relationship. Efforts to trace him have been unsuccessful, and any information will be gratefully received by H. S. Hartley, care of this magazine.

POWELL.—His first name is not known, but he is the brother of Tan Powell, who was killed on December 23, 1905. His niece, Tan Powell's daughter, Rose, would be glad to hear from him or from any one who can give her news of him. Mrs. Rose McLowry, care of this magazine.

BARNES, MIKE EARL.—He is twenty-two years old, of light complexion, and has lost his left eye. He went to Georgia from Texas, and when last heard of was in North Carolina in a lumber camp near Smokement. In November, 1920, he wrote to his mother giving that address, but all letters sent there were returned. His mother and sisters would appreciate any information as to his whereabouts. Mrs. Bessie Barnes, Box 13, La Pryor, Texas.

GUY, W. F.—Any one who knows his whereabouts, or who can give any information whatever about him, will do a great favor by writing to Mrs. W. F. Guy, care of this magazine.

KEYES, BERT, former lightweight pugilist, who a few years back, fought under the name of Jim Buckley. He was last heard of about three years ago, when he lived on Columbus Avenue, New York City. He married a Miss Frances Carroll, and they have a daughter named Dorothy, who is now fourteen years old. His sister is anxious to find him and will appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. Maud Disbrow, care of this magazine.

INFORMATION WANTED as to the present whereabouts of the following persons: **MRS. D. B. KINGAID (SUSIE),** last heard from about three years ago at Springfield, Illinois. **MRS. F. M. HILL (ALMA),** last heard of while visiting her mother at Grand Prairie, Texas, three years ago. **MARY CASEY,** about sixteen years old, and last heard of when she went to live with her grandfather in Oklahoma about ten years ago, and **BERTIE or BIRDIE RIDGEWAY,** last heard of when she left Roll, Oklahoma, about twelve years ago. Information that will lead to communication with these friends will be gladly received by C. V. S., care of this magazine.

BARNES, or HOOPER, FRANCES.—She was last heard of in June, 1921. She has fair hair, blue eyes, and is of small stature. She plays the violin exceedingly well. A friend is very anxious to find her and will greatly appreciate any news of her. She hopes she will see this and write to P. K., care of this magazine.

LANGAN, JOHN and PAT, of Topeka, Kansas. Please get in touch with Mrs. Helen Langan O'Toole, 428 Lee Building, Kansas City, Missouri.

O'HARE, JAMES.—He left Belfast, Ireland, about thirty-three years ago, for Philadelphia. He had three sisters, Mary, Cassie, and Jenny, and one brother, Robin. When last heard of he was married and had a baby boy called William. Any one who can give news of him will do a great favor by writing to his sister, Miss Cassie O'Hare, 189-A Orchard Avenue, Ville Emard, Montreal, Canada.

HUTCHISON, MACEL.—She was nine years old in March of this year, has a fair complexion and dark-brown hair. Her mother took her away from Cleveland, Oklahoma, in August, 1920. Her mother's name is Leona Hutchison, she is thirty years old, and may be employed in a rooming house or hotel. Any information will be gratefully received by the child's father, T. N. Hutchison, Box 178, Cross Plains, Texas.

CLARK, ANNE.—Her maiden name was Shannon, and she was last heard of at Gold Hill, Nevada, in 1882. She was about five feet five inches in height, with sandy hair and blue eyes. Her nephew would be glad to hear from her. Joseph Wood, 1019 Castleton Avenue, West New Brighton, New York.

WATSON, RAY ASHLEY.—He left his home in Mellen on April 20th last. He is seventeen years old, and has dark hair and eyes. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a great kindness by writing to his mother and letting her know where he is and what he is doing. Mrs. W. H. Watson, Mellen, Wisconsin.

ORVILLE.—Come home, or let me know where you are. I want you to forgive and forget. If I don't hear from you soon I shall go to New York. Write to me through this magazine. Your wife, K.

STEUERWALD, HENRY, often called "Dutch Heide." He is of medium height, with blue eyes and light hair, and talks with a pronounced German accent. He was last heard of in the West Washington, Maryland, on the 5th of last February, when he was honorably discharged from the army and intended going to New York. A friend would be glad to hear from him or from any one who can give news of his present whereabouts. E. B., care of this magazine.

FOGARTY, MICHAEL P.—He left his home in East Weymouth, Massachusetts, about 1884, and was last heard from about thirty-eight years ago in Collinsville, Illinois. Any news regarding his whereabouts will be joyfully received by his sister, Mrs. M. J. Branley, 243 Hancock Street, South Braintree, Massachusetts.

HIRSCH.—I was born on September 25, 1891, in New York City, and don't remember ever seeing my parents, who were Henry and Annie Harris Hirsch. Any information that would help me to find them would be gratefully received. Hirsch, care of this magazine.

LONDREY, FRANK A.—He was last heard of in Iowa City, Iowa, in January last. Any one who knows him will do a great favor by asking him to write to J. A. Dey, Chief Clerk, Alta Vista Hotel, Miami, Florida. Everything is O. K.

PUCKETT, WILLIAM HENRY.—He is thirty-seven years old and was last heard of on August 22nd last. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by Leonard Puckett, 547 Walnut Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

O'NEIL, HARRY (BROD).—He was discharged on August 15, 1921, from the U. S. S. "Jacob Jones," at San Diego, California, and later was heard from in Kansas City. He is twenty-three years old, five feet nine inches tall, with light hair and ruddy complexion. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by his friend, H. G., care of this magazine.

SHERWOOD, KANE L.—Please write to Mildred and tell her how to communicate.

DALEY.—Please write to Billy, in care of the "Bill-board."

ZERBINI, LOUIS.—He is about thirty-five years of age. His mother, who lives in France, has not heard from him since 1908. His sister would appreciate any information that would help to find him. Mrs. Harry La Fortune, 2303 Warren Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

ATTENTION.—Troop H, Eighth Cavalry. I would like to hear from any one who was with this outfit between April, 1917, and December, 1918. Please write to Glenn P. Chenes, 1203 Glenwood Avenue, Flint, Michigan.

TYLER, WILLIAM.—When he was about two years old he was left by his mother in an orphanage in Toronto, Canada. He would be now about thirty-seven. His sister has been trying to find him for some time and would gratefully receive any helpful information. Mrs. N. Ash, 45 Cherry Street, Akron, Ohio.

ROWANE, THOMAS P.—He left home on Easter Monday morning, 1910, went to Great Bend, Pennsylvania, and from there to Fort Worth, Texas, in the same year, since which time all trace of him has been lost. His brother would be glad to hear from him, and will greatly appreciate any information that will help him to communicate with him. John M. Rewane, 275 West One Hundred and Forty-fourth Street, New York City.

KELLENBERGER, CLYDE.—He was last heard of in Drumright, Oklahoma. He is about six feet tall, of heavy build, and about forty years of age. A friend, who has been trying to find him for some time, will be grateful for any news of him. Mrs. K. W. Dale, Stone City, Colorado.

HOWE, MARY E., who was last heard from at 611 Ninth Avenue, Seattle, about five years ago. There is important news for her, and any information that will help to find her will be sincerely appreciated. G. G., care of this magazine.

TRACY, JOHN.—He was last heard from in Tell, Wisconsin, in 1913. He is sixty-three years old, and had been following the lumber camps. Any information concerning him, or any of the older woodsmen that might have known him, or names of some of the men who were running lumber camps in Wisconsin and Minnesota in 1910-15, will be gratefully appreciated. Joseph P. Goober, P. O. Box 519, Thomaston, Connecticut.

LARGE, R. L.—He left home on the 28th of May last, and his wife is very anxious about him. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a great favor by writing to her. Everything is O. K. at home. Mrs. A. Large, Sweetwater, Texas.

SPRAGUE, JOSEPH EDWIN, died at a hotel at Virgoza, Wisconsin, about 1870. He had a small black trunk, that, it is believed, was taken care of by a lawyer. Any information in connection with this will be gratefully appreciated. Dora Ewing, Veterans' Home, Waupaca, Wisconsin.

ATTENTION.—Former members of Company H, Sixteenth U. S. Infantry, who were with the outfit from 1908-10, at Fort Crook, Nebraska, especially J. Perkins, William Halle, Arthur Boylde, William Garner, and William Long, of Company K, are asked to write to and former band leader, A. J. Prosmik, 218 Aurifer Street, Duquesne, Pennsylvania.

MOOREHOUSE, CORPORAL HAROLD A.—He was in Company F, 148th Infantry, was wounded at Okene, Belgium, in the back of left arm and upper right arm, also on the left side of his head, causing amnesia. He left Camp Sherman in April, 1919. He was five feet seven inches tall, weighed one hundred and forty pounds, with fair, wavy hair and gray eyes. There is a small mole under his chin, and the eyebrow on left side is crooked. He does not know his real name and thinks the Red Cross wishes to detain him. Any one acquainted with a young man of this description will do a great favor by writing to his father, H. S. Moorehouse, 2481 Arlington Road, Cleveland, Ohio.

CREASON, LUCILLE.—She was last seen in February of this year in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, with her sister. She is twenty years old, about five feet three inches in height, with dark-brown hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Any information that will help to know her present address will be gratefully appreciated by W. F. Gilham, care of this magazine.

KING, JACK, who, when last heard of, was in Troop L, Fifteenth U. S. Cavalry, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be gladly welcomed by a friend, P. A., care of this magazine.

POPP, ARTHUR A., the son of the late John and Elizabeth Popp, is asked to write to his brother John's family, at Berwyn, Illinois.

LOUD, HAROLD LESLIE.—He was last heard from in Brunswick, Georgia, in 1918, where he worked at the Liberty Shipbuilding. His sister is very anxious to hear from him. Mrs. Roy Blanchard, 832 Randolph Street, Abington, Massachusetts.

SNODGRASS, ARCHIE or ARTHUR.—He was last heard of in Denver, Colorado, in 1921. He is twenty-four years old, with red hair and blue eyes. He is asked to write to his only sister, Mrs. Pauline Dyett, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

POLLOCK, HARRY RUSSELL.—He is five feet eleven inches tall, twenty-five years old, with black hair and blue eyes and slightly stooping shoulders. His folks are worrying about him, and he is asked to write or come home. When last heard of he was in Colorado. Any one who can give information about him will do a great favor by writing to W. B. Pollock, care of this magazine.

VAN WART, CAPTAIN HORACE HUME.—He was the officer in charge of signaling instruction of the Canadian Training Division at Shorncliffe, England, in 1915-16. It is thought that his home is in Nova Scotia. Any information that would help to learn his present whereabouts would be sincerely appreciated by a friend, A. S. H., care of this magazine.

HARMON.—When I was five years old my mother, who was unable to support me, gave me to a Mr. and Mrs. Heseckiah Ramey, of Springfield, Missouri, for adoption. I was born about 1867-69. Some time after my adoption my mother came for me, but Mrs. Ramey refused to give me up. I hope that my mother, or some one who knows of my adoption, may see this and write to me. It would make me very happy if I could find her, as all my efforts so far have failed. I shall be glad to hear from any one who can throw any light upon the matter and help me to find my mother. Lillie Harmon, care of this magazine.

RICHMOND, PAUL.—Your letter from Mexico City received and answered. Have sold my home, and will come to Mexico at once if you wish. H. Merritt.

MILLER, WILLIAM.—He was a member of Company D, 347th Machine Gun Battalion, Ninety-first Division, during the war, and left Camp Lewis in 1918 for France. He was last heard of at Kenton, Oregon. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully appreciated by L. M. Craig, 37 Soquel Avenue, Santa Cruz, California.

PORTER, W. M.—He is about forty years old, five feet eight inches tall, bald, and has a deep bass voice. He is a blacksmith and oil-tank builder, and is no doubt in some oil field. He has a brother in Iowa and some relatives in Indiana. A friend would like to hear from him and will greatly appreciate any information that will help to learn his whereabouts. Mrs. A. E., care of this magazine.

E. W. E.—Please write to S. C., Box 31, Hensel, North Dakota.

SCATCHLY, WILLIAM PRESTON, who served in the Forty-second Battalion of the Canadian army during the war. Also **JAMES CAMPBELL**, of the Thirteenth Battalion, C. E. F., please communicate with Patrick L. McCarthy, care of this magazine.

BAKER, CLARENCE, and **RAY P. ARNOLD**, civil engineers, stationed at Fort Harrison, Indiana, in 1918, or any one who knows their whereabouts, please write to J. G. R., care of this magazine.

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Find out more about the wonderful opportunities open to you in this attractive field. Learn more about this easy home-study method of learning cartooning. A handsome booklet has just been prepared which is crammed full of interesting information about cartooning, and describes in detail this remarkable method. It will be sent to you without cost, without

obligation. Mail coupon for it **TODAY!**

Washington School of Cartooning
1096 Marden Bldg., Washington, D. C.

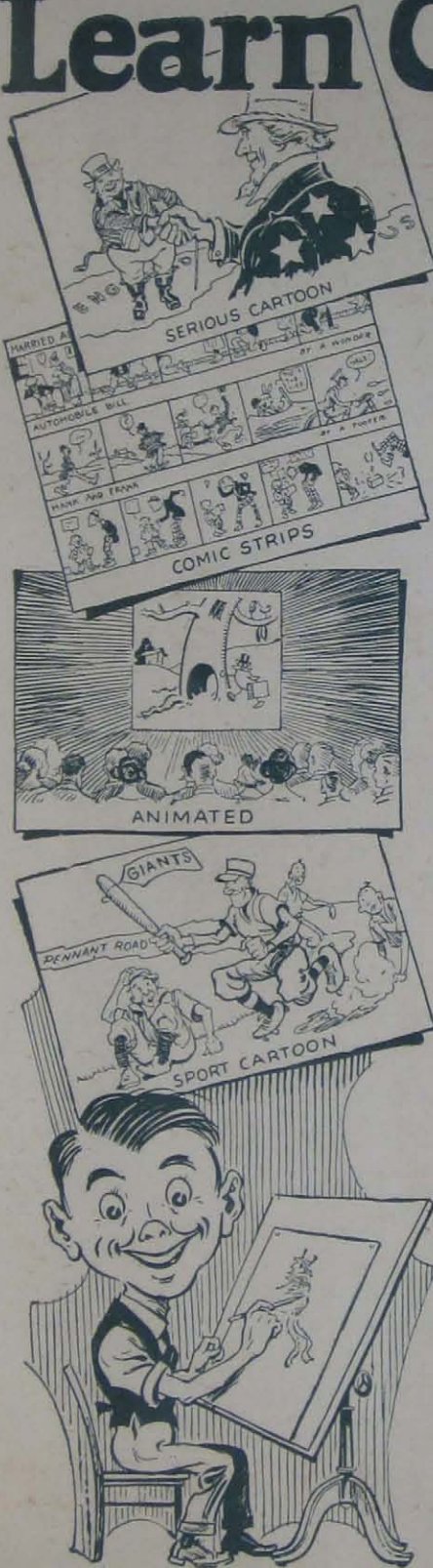
WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF CARTOONING
1096 Marden Bldg., Washington, D. C.
Please send me without obligation your illustrated booklet on cartooning.
(Print Name Plainly)

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

If under 18 years, please give age.....



\$80 Drafting Course FREE

Write to me for this offer I am now making to every one of my students. I do exactly as I tell you—give you an opportunity to get an \$80 drafting course free.

Drawing Outfit Free

I am also offering to each student a complete drawing outfit which I believe cannot be purchased any place for less than \$25.

A Special Ivorine Pocket Rule FREE!

for sending copy of drawing shown at left hand side



Copy this sketch

COPY this drawing today and send it to me, giving me your age. There are no conditions requiring you to buy anything. So, if you are interested in drawing, send in your sketch right away. I will give you free, just for sending a copy of this drawing, a 6-inch Ivorine Pocket rule and a 6x9 book on "Successful Draftsmanship."

Chief Draftsman Dobe, of the Engineers' Equipment Company, is making this offer to interest ambitious men who would like to better themselves at bigger salaries, doing work which brings big pay and at the same time leading to greater advancement. There will be thousands of positions open this year paying from \$3,000 to \$3,600 a year. The great building boom all over the country is causing this great demand, and industrial activity in the mechanical line makes it worth your while to give this opportunity your immediate attention.



\$250 to \$300 a Month

Positions paying \$250 to \$300 per month, which ought to be filled by skilled draftsmen are vacant everywhere. There are in every part of this country ambitious men, who with practical training and personal assistance, will be qualified to fill these positions.

Mr. Dobe is very much interested in finding these men and calling to their attention the great future in draftsmanship—how when a man enters into this profession, he is in an uncrowded field and how with surprisingly little effort he may rise to the salary of from \$3,000 to \$3,600 a year.

Ambitious boys and men, between the ages of 16 and 50, are wanted by great business concerns, and the man who is ready when opportunity calls him, gets the high grade positions and highest pay.

No man can hope to share a part in the great coming prosperity in manufacturing and building, unless he is properly trained and able to do first class, practical work and is ready when he is called.

Mr. Dobe knows now is the time to get ready and he knows that few men realize this so well as he. So in order to interest men everywhere he wants to see if your copy of the drawing shown above indicates you might have drafting ability.

If then, Dobe believes that you do possess this ability he will tell you how he will train you personally. This training is given by mail and he guarantees to train a limited number of students under this agreement to give practical drafting room training UNTIL placed in a permanent position at a salary of \$250 to \$300 per month.

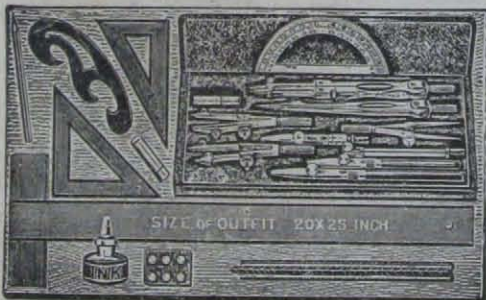
To any student that Mr. Dobe accepts for his personal training, he will furnish a complete draftsman's working outfit absolutely free. This outfit consists of all instruments and tools required by any first class draftsman, and Mr. Dobe believes it cannot be duplicated for less than \$25.

Considering that Mr. Dobe selects and limits the number of students for training, it is very important that you act promptly and send in your reply either with your sketch or without a sketch at once, asking for full particulars.

He will send you at once a free book entitled "Successful Draftsmanship" in addition to all other information, telling you how you may learn drafting at home.

Mail Your Drawing At Once— and Get Ivorine Pocket Ruler Absolutely FREE!

Ambitious men, interested in drafting, hurry! Don't wait! This is your opportunity in this great profession. Accept this offer which Mr. Dobe makes. Send in your sketch or request for FREE Book and Ivorine Pocket Rule.



FREE—this \$25 Draftsman's Working Outfit

These are regular working instruments, the kind I use myself. I give them free to you if you enroll at once. Don't delay. Send for full information TODAY!

Chief Draftsman, Engineers' Equipment Co.
4001 Broadway, Div. 1548, Chicago, Ill.

Without any obligation to me please mail your book "Successful Draftsmanship" and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Direction" offer to a few students. Also full information as to how I can get an \$80 Drafting Course Free.

Name

Address

Age

Send Coupon for Free Book

Send coupon for my free book, "Successful Draftsmanship". Also full information as to how you can get an \$80 Draftsman's Course Free. Even if you don't send in a sketch send the coupon for the free book.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers' Equipment Co.
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