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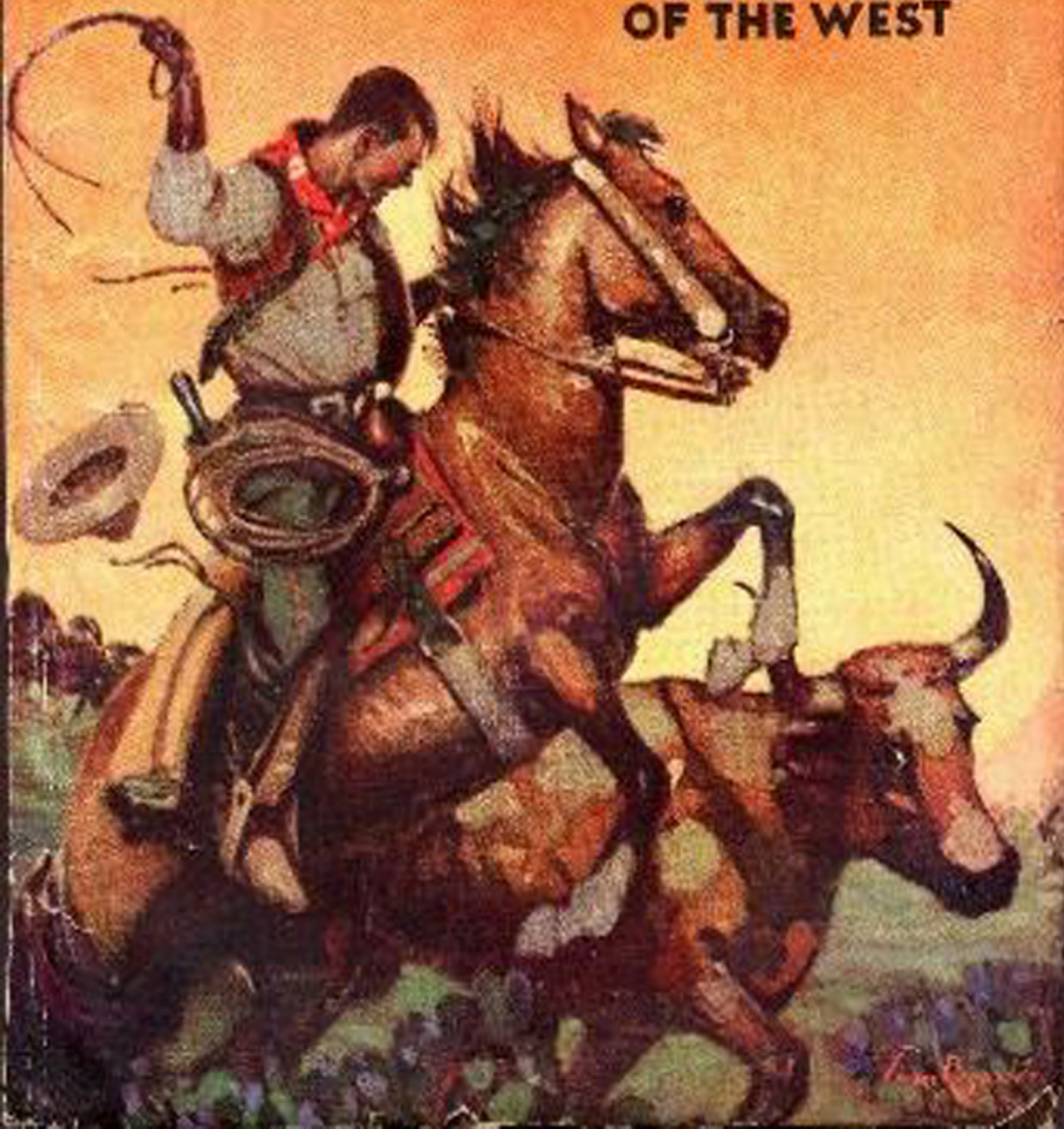
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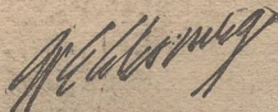
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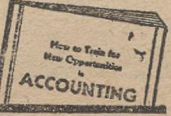
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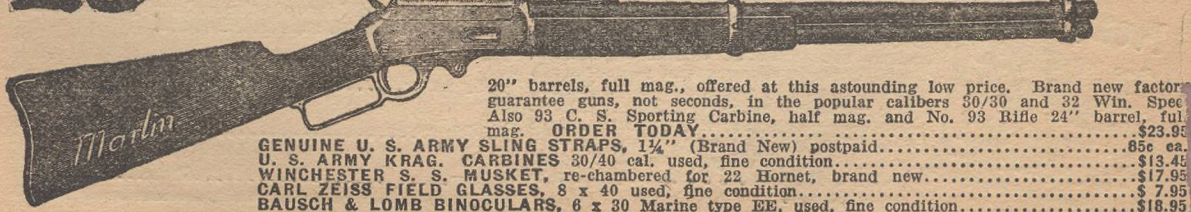
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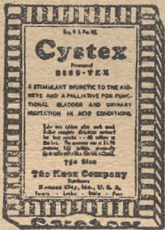
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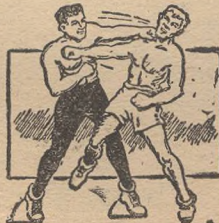
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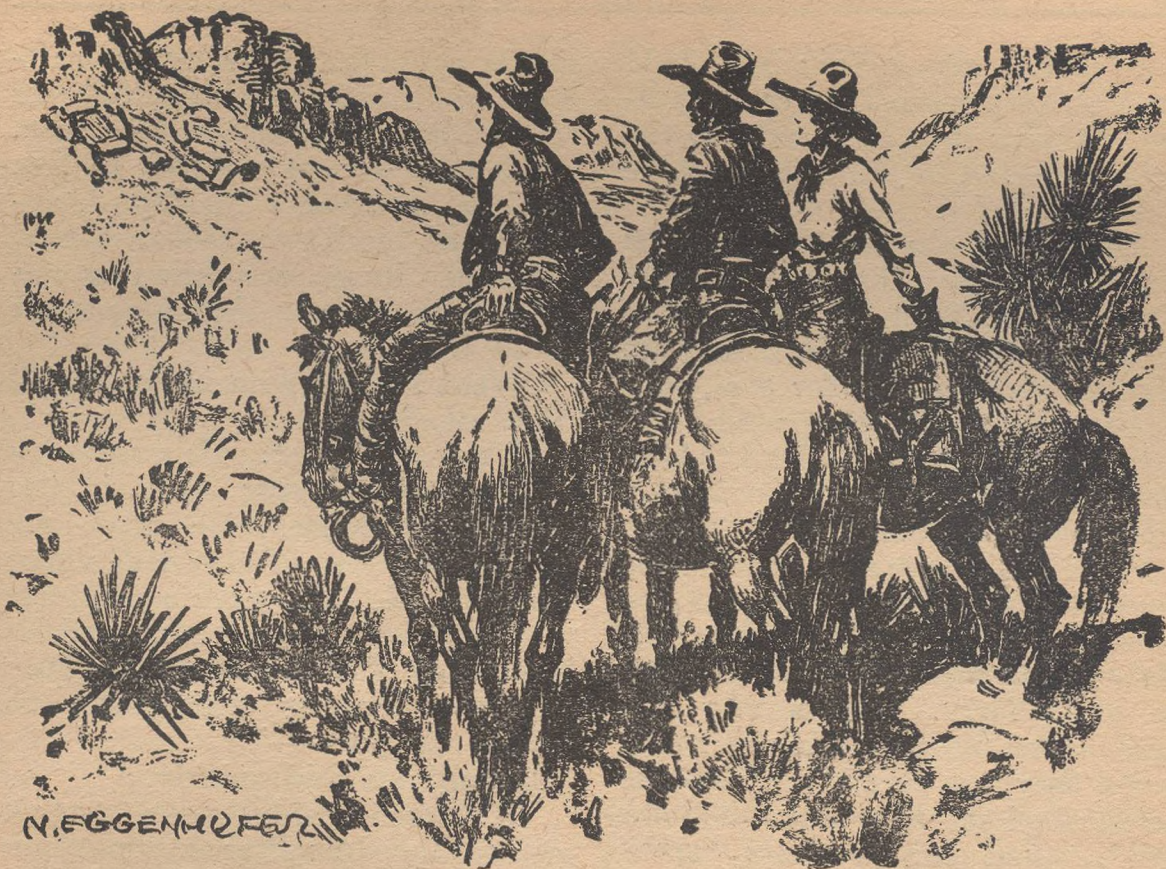
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OUTLAWS OF CALICO HOLE

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Patriarch of the Peaks," etc.

CHAPTER I. OVER THE WALL.

A GHOST of a man whose wasted face was the color of old cheese dismounted at Calico Springs, drank briefly from the cool water, then trudged up the path to the Ford ranch house.

"Hello!" he called. "Hey! Alice! Alice Ford!" His shouting ended in a violent fit of coughing.

A slim girl with blond hair and

tragic eyes under startling dark brows came hurriedly to the door and stared briefly. Her expression indicated she was prepared for almost anything. Living near Calico Hole, the hang-out of the Sanchez outlaws, had taught her to expect wounded and often dying men, but this creature whose face was the color of old cheese dismayed her.

"Come in," she invited. "Why, it's Bud Coe!"

"What's left of him," Coe said hoarsely. "A year in Beasley's jail's

done this to me—a year bein' held for trial for a crime I never committed. A year in a cell so damp the walls sweat. Did you ever see stone walls sweat?"

Alice Ford shuddered. Perhaps her twin brother Al now looked like Coe. Al had been held for months in Beasley's jail. Again and again his case had been set for trial, only to be mysteriously postponed.

"Tell me the truth, Bud," Alice suddenly insisted. "How is Al? Have you seen him?"

"You Fords have always faced the music, Alice, so I'm giving it to you straight. Al's a pretty sick boy. He's twenty years old, and they say he looks forty. That's why I'm here. Dan Stuart, Al's cell mate, heard they was turnin' me loose, so he sneaked me this note. Beasley won't stand for prisoners talkin' among theirselves."

Alice Ford unfolded a small square of soiled paper and read:

DEAR MISS FORD:

Please be a quarter of a mile north of the jail farm Friday night, nine o'clock. Bring another girl with you; also one span of fast horses hitched to a buckboard; also two good saddle horses. Hide in that willow thicket and no matter what happens, don't leave the thicket until I tell you to.

THE note was unsigned, as naturally a man contemplating a jail break was not likely to identify himself if it could be avoided. The girl studied the handwriting with interest. Something in the bold strokes suggested the note had been written by a man accustomed to planning as well as complete obedience. It was not difficult to imagine him smashing through all opposition, regardless of cost until he had attained the goal—a good friend and a good enemy, too. And he was asking her to as-

sist in a jail break—a crime in itself. He must know something of her and have reached the conclusion she would stop at nothing to free Al. The need of a buckboard, another girl, and two saddle horses, indicated Stuart was bringing another with him, so that man must be her brother.

"What sort of man is he, Bud?" Alice asked.

"I saw him a lot. He was never still, always moving when in the yard for exercise. He made me think of a tiger—always restraining his fury. He's got more self-control than any man I ever saw, and he had plenty of chance to use it. He's one man Beasley can't seem to break, and yet——"

"Yes?" she said quickly.

"It seemed as if he began to crack around the edges after they put him in Al's cell," answered "Bud" Coe.

"What's he in jail for?" Alice asked.

"He tried to rob the bank at Wagon Gap." An odd expression appeared on Coe's face as he spoke.

"The fool!" Alice exclaimed. "That's never been done. Even Sanchez won't try *that*."

"Dan Stuart tackled it. He's tackling a jail break, too." Coe jerked his head toward the lower country where Beasley's jail stood. "And that's never been done, either. Well, I'll mosey along."

"Were you acquitted of that cattle-rustling charge?" Alice asked.

He bowed his head, the gesture of a beaten man. "I never rustled them cows," he said, "and I never had a chance to prove it in court. They'd keep postponin' the trial. I've got a wife and kids to think of, so when they said they'd drop charges if I'd get out of the country, I said I'd light out."

"And leave behind a ranch you've worked years on," Alice said.

"Yes," he said, "leave it to whoever is tryin' to grab the finest range in Texas. But a man can stand seein' hisself in a damp cell, slowly changin' to a mummy, for just about so long."

"I don't blame you, Bud," Alice replied; "life is sweet. If I can get Al away from that jail, and keep him from returning to the Sanchez crowd, then I'll gladly ride away and leave Calico Springs to whoever it is that is trying to grab the country. Yes, I'll go, much as I detest quitting this range. Quitting is hateful to me, but twins are closer than many brothers and sisters. Al is all I have in the world. He comes first." She smiled sympathetically at the other. "Good luck, Bud!"

"Thanks, and plenty of the same to you," Coe replied. He was thinking she would need luck if Al escaped not only the jail, but returning to Sanchez's gang. And, above all, escaped the price Dan Stuart would ask for aiding him in the jail break. Gradually the conviction had grown on Coe that Stuart was not one who did things for nothing. Perhaps it was this feeling which prompted him to turn and say, "This Stuart claims to have fallen in love with your picture, Alice."

The girl's smooth cheeks flushed with resentment; there was a definite tightening around her jaw.

"He talked about me among those prisoners?" she gasped.

"Nothing as bad as that—he just mooned a lot over your picture, accordin' to Al," Coe answered.

ALICE FORD studied the note again, thinking she might read between the lines. "Two horses hitched to a buckboard," she reflected, "two saddles horses, and

an extra girl. Well, there's only one girl I could, or should ask to take the risk—Sally Geary. She loves Al enough to go through with it and not back down if we run into a streak of bad luck."

Thursday morning Alice selected the finest horses on the ranch for her purpose, hitched two to the buckboard, tied the others behind, then loaded canteens and saddles onto the buckboard. She arrived at Chris Geary's little ranch at noon.

A girl as slim and graceful as Alice hurried from the house. The sunlight flashed from her dark-red hair, and her full lips curved in a happy smile. There was a gleam of even, white teeth.

"She's beautiful," Alice thought, "and she'll make Al a grand little wife—putting on the brakes when he's in a reckless mood, patting him on the back when he needs it." She sighed. "If we can only get them out of the country."

The two girls kissed and stood looking at each other with sympathetic understanding.

"It's been so long since we've seen him," Sally said wistfully.

"Yes, but read this," Alice answered, extending the note. "It's from Dan Stuart, who wants to help Al escape."

"Why?" Sally demanded. "Why does he want to help Al? I'm suspicious. Strangers who do favors often have an ax to grind." She read the note through twice. "Of course, I'm the other girl." She glanced at a pasture where a bulky man was working. "Dad'll give me a hiding if he ever hears I helped Al or anybody to break jail, but I'm eighteen, and I know my own mind." Eighteen seems to be very old to any one who is eighteen or younger.

"I'll explain I'm taking two horses to town," Alice suggested, "and in-

vite you to go along. Your father won't object to that?"

"No," Sally answered. "He'll do anything for me except consent to me marrying Al. Al's got to mend his ways and settle down, he says. He's never forgotten he threw in with Sanchez."

"He's through with Sanchez and all the rest," Alice said grimly. "He lives for us from now on. You'll go with us anywhere and help make a new start, Sally?"

"Anywhere," the red-haired girl answered quietly.

Chris Geary, genial and hard-working, climbed a fence and hailed them, thus preventing further discussion of jail breaks and future plans. Alice smiled and said:

"I want Sally to go to town with me. We'll leave to-morrow morning and be back Saturday. How about it?"

"Sure," Chris agreed good-humoredly, "providin' she'll bring me back some tobacco. Sally's got dinner rassed up, and we can find an extra plate somewheres, Alice, so you'd better light and sit."

The two girls found time to go into details that afternoon and evening. Everything was settled—Alice and Al would leave Calico Springs and notify Sally when they located. The latter would ship their belongings, arrange for trusted men to drive their horses and cattle from the valley, and later join them.

They left the extra horses outside of town, shopped about, and departed at dusk. Shortly after darkness fell, they picked up the two horses and quietly made their way to the appointed place. In front of them lay the broad acres of the jail farm. Behind them lay a stretch of hard ground, then a dusty road. The railway track lay just beyond

the road. The station and town proper were a mile east of the jail.

A cricket sang in the thicket where the two girls watched, and from somewhere came the musical murmur of a creek flowing over stones. Overhead the stars, with gleaming spearheads at their points, hung low. An eternity passed while the girls strained their eyes at the dark mass which marked the jail. Here and there a faint light gleamed from the dismal structure, but even the lights suggested musty cells.

SALLY'S voice broke the silence. "Alice, I'm afraid," she whispered. "Not for myself, but for Al! Dad once told me those guards are armed with sawed-off shotguns and .30-30 rifles."

"Sh-h!" Alice placed a comforting hand on the other girl's shoulder—a shoulder that was trembling. "Death in action is better than death by inches in that hell of Beasley's."

"Why don't they kick him out?" Sally demanded.

"He is too strong politically," Alice answered. Whispers were better than the horrible silence and their thoughts as they waited.

"Why doesn't Jud Tremper or some of the Texas Rangers go after Beasley?" Sally suggested. "They've rounded up and branded a number of crooked politicians in the past."

"Jud Tremper!" Alice Ford's voice was freighted with scorn. "Jud Tremper! Rated the greatest Ranger in our time, and what does he do? I'll tell you! When somebody suggested he arrest Sanchez, he lost his health overnight and went to Cuba or some place to rest. And Sanchez killed Tremper's own brother. Bah!"

The shriek of a locomotive whis-

tle rasped the girl's tense nerves. Sally jumped and cried out.

"Easy!" Alice warned.

Silence fell again. They heard the train stop, then the clank and rattle of empty cattle cars as it started up again. But no sound came from the grim walls.

"When will we know?" Sally asked.

"When two stealthy figures come out of the darkness, I hope," Alice replied. "An uproar will mean——"

Orange flame stabbed the darkness, and the heavy report of a shotgun sounded above the noise of the train. Flame stabbed twice on the right, then on the left in the approximate vicinity of the jail. A man's scream, sudden and sharp, made the night hideous.

Sally leaped to her feet.

"I'm going out there," she cried.

"So am I!" Alice answered, then checked the impulse. "No, Dan Stuart's orders were to leave this place under no circumstances."

"Darn Dan Stuart," Sally snapped as Alice pulled her down. "Maybe Al's hit and needs us."

Alice was almost crying, and her calmness was willed. The jail siren began to moan, "*Woo-oo! Woo-oo! Woo-oo!*" The signal of an escape! Rifle fire swept the darkness; bullets droned through the thicket, clipping off twigs and leaves.

"Down," Alice warned. "Those bullets are——"

"I see something!" Sally cried. "Look! A big man carrying—Al!"

The big man staggered to the thicket. He had raced all the way from the jail wall, carrying a heavy burden.

"Miss Ford!" he panted. "Drive—buckboard—onto road. Al's not hurt! I screamed to make 'em think one of us—hit."

"Come, Sally!" Alice directed as

she ran to the buckboard. Dan Stuart's voice was deep, even thrilling, but something in it made her jump. The quickening of her pulse was due more to some strange response to his presence than to excitement.

She drove the buckboard to the road and stopped the horses. The big man placed Al on the seat, then pulled off his shoes.

"Put them on over your shoes," he ordered Sally. He jumped to the buckboard, then pulled off his own shoes. These he gave to Alice. "Put them on, please, then cross the road *after* we drive by. Be sure to step in our wheel tracks. I want Beasley's posse to conclude the buckboard has nothing to do with our escape."

"I understand," Alice replied.

"Then the two of you climb the fence and scramble up the roadbed, leaving plenty of shoe tracks. Once you're up there, one of you take off a shoe and thrust it under a rail, as if it had been caught. Throw the others into an empty car as that freight passes. Walk along the right of way, keeping to the ties for some distance, then cross back to the road and to your horses." As Dan Stuart finished his concise instructions, he cracked the whip, and the buckboard vanished.

"He had everything planned," Alice said, "even to timing the break to the passing of this freight train. Beasley's posse will follow the tracks, find the shoe caught under the rail, and conclude Dan and Al are on the train. In the meantime they'll be driving like all possessed for Calico Springs. Come!"

The two girls obeyed instructions to the letter, crouched several hundred yards down the track from the point they had left the shoe; then, as the freight thundered past, threw

the three remaining shoes into an empty car. They made their way to the horses, mounted, and rode off in the opposite direction, skirting the town to avoid possible questioning, then doubling back and taking the Calico Springs road.

CHAPTER II.

AT CALICO SPRINGS.

WHEN Alice and Sally arrived at the Geary ranch, the latter looked briefly at her home, then shook her head. "I haven't seen Al, except a glimpse in the dark," she said; "I'm going on with you, Alice. There'll be plans to make, of course."

"And very little time to make them," Alice suggested. "The posse will search the freight train, find nothing, then start for Calico Springs. What is done must be finished before the posse shows up."

The girls rode on, and day was breaking over the Calico Ridge as they reached the springs. The ridge with its sheer walls was a riot of yellows, blues, tans, and greens. The ranch nestled snugly against the ridge.

"It's so beautiful here," Sally exclaimed, "and it just makes me sick to think you must leave it all."

"Yes," Alice answered. "But what can we do? Our cattle are taken. To get them back, Al threw in with Sanchez, and now the law claims he's a rustler. If we stay, it's a return to jail for Al, and that means his death. And yet"—she looked at the rolling country with its rich range land—"and yet, five generations of Fords have lived here. When I leave, something will be torn from my heart by the roots."

They dismounted at the ranch, and a shy Indian boy ran to take the horses.

"Has anybody been here, José?" Alice asked. "Al and a stranger?"

The boy looked startled at the mention of Al's name, but shook his head.

"Nobody," he said.

The day dragged, a day of watching for dust movements in the lower country.

"Where *can* they be?" Sally asked in a desperate voice.

"Following back roads so they'll not be seen," Alice suggested. "Al's experience with Sanchez taught him to be elusive."

José's mother was preparing the evening meal when they heard the clatter of hoofs, then the horses, gray with lather and dust, dragged the battered buckboard into the yard. Again Alice Ford was conscious of Dan Stuart's instinctive leadership. The bank robber dominated the scene as his big figure leaped to the ground, but nevertheless, she could not take her eyes from her twin brother.

Normally he weighed around a hundred and seventy pounds. Now he was under a hundred and thirty. His cheek bones were covered with skin the color of parchment, so tightly drawn it seemed as if the bones must burst through. His eyes were deeply sunken, and his hands were like claws.

"Sis!" he whispered. "And Sally!"

He threw his arms about them, and their loving arms lifted him to the ground.

Then it was the girls burst into tears.

"Poor boy! Poor boy!" Sally sobbed. "They've crucified you. Why?"

"If I'd died, I wouldn't have been the first—and all because somebody wants the country," Al answered. "I thought a lot, but couldn't figure the answer, though Beasley's part

of it. We haven't got long here." He glanced about apprehensively, then his wasted lips bared in a smile. It was like the grin of a skull. "The old place looks good. And you look good."

"Where're you going?" Alice asked.

"The only place I'm safe," Al replied, "to Pedro Sanchez, in Calico Hole."

Alice Ford caught her breath as though in distress at that, but she could not bring herself to argue just yet with her brother.

"We're forgetting Dan," Al said. He introduced the big fellow. "The best friend a man ever had, Alice, and I want you to like him."

DAN STUART'S blue eyes were smiling, and there was warmth on his rugged features, and something more—an interest in Alice the girl found disturbing. But behind it all she sensed this man was driving himself, or being driven over a well-blazed trail, and nothing could turn him aside.

"Beasley said they had a special hell for cattle rustlers and bank robbers," Al said, "and proved it, didn't he, Dan?"

"He tried to," Dan answered. His black, curly hair needed trimming, and there was heavy, black stubble on his cheeks. His jaw fell just short of being downright stubborn. Much of the tan remained on his skin, but already there was a touch of Al's horrible yellow on the tan.

"Supper is ready," the Indian woman said. "I take care of horses. José run down road and watch if anybody come."

"Come on," Alice invited.

"Just a second," Al pleaded; "the air feels so good to my lungs, and I like to see good range country in-

stead of sweating walls. Queer, but the light hurts my eyes. Queer——"

"Come on, Al," Sally pleaded. She could not stand the expression on his face. It made her want to kill Beasley and his ilk.

The girls ate more than the men. Prison-fed stomachs had shrunk, and Al had difficulty in retaining good food. Nothing was said until they had finished the meal, then Alice said:

"Every minute counts, so let's plan for the future. We'll have to give up the ranch."

"Like hell we will," Al Ford said. "That'd be playing into their hands. Like—hell." A fit of coughing ended his protest.

Alice turned to Dan Stuart, whose eyes had not left her during the meal.

"What are your plans, Mr. Stuart?" she asked.

"My plans?" Dan Stuart said. "I'll throw in with Sanchez, if he'll let me. I need ten thousand dollars to develop a ranch I have in mind, and that's the quickest way to get it." He smiled, a warm, pulse-quickenning smile a girl would have found attractive under different conditions.

"Why not go with Al and me and make a new start?" Alice suggested. "You can't beat this game."

"Sanchez seems to be beating the game——" Dan began.

Al cut in. "Has Sanchez been bothering you, Alice?" he asked. "Has he been wanting to marry you?" The deeply sunken eyes were probing, and held something of pain.

"He hasn't been annoying me—much," the girl answered.

"Sanchez seems to be beating the game," Dan repeated.

"You've got to admit that," Al said. "Jud Tremper got One-eyed

Dravus, Spike Fortune, and Apache Grimm, but when they mentioned Sanchez, Tremper went away on a vacation."

"And that's hard to believe," Stuart observed.

"Oh, I don't know," Al said. "The man enjoys life as well as the next one. Have you heard the story of Sanchez's initials?"

"Let's have it," Stuart suggested, glancing out of the window at the watchful José.

"His initials are P and S," Al explained, "and the P is formed by the graves of five deputy sheriffs. There had to be a period after the initial, and so a sixth deputy was buried standing up. The S is formed by the graves of three Texas Rangers who tried to sneak into Calico Hole and take him alive, and two sheriffs."

"How about the period?" Dan asked.

"He's got the grave dug," Al informed him, "and he's going to bury Jud Tremper in the grave. Can you blame Tremper for taking a vacation?"

All eyes were on Stuart, interested in his reactions to this gruesome arrangement of initials.

"Yes, I blame Tremper," Stuart said. "I've heard one of the Rangers was his brother. A brave man would never let up until he squared accounts. But what's that got to do with me?"

"Sanchez owes his safety to his caution in picking members of his band," Al explained. "If he's suspicious of anybody who comes into Calico Hole, he plays safe and kills the man. If you did get by Sanchez, then you'd have to quiet El Mudo's suspicions. El Mudo means 'The Dumb,' in the Mexican language. This deaf-and-dumb man has a sixth

sense which seems to warn him of danger."

"And he exercises a strange influence over Sanchez," Alice said. "The creature gives me the creeps."

"I think I'll take a chance," Stuart announced; "there's an outfit that interests me."

"And that being the case, Dan," Al said, "I string with you."

"Al!" Both girls spoke in unison. "Not that again—not Sanchez, an outlaw's life and the end—the rope or jail."

The intense loyalty Alice Ford had feared might control her brother was now evident.

"Look at me," he said. "I'm nearly dead. I'd have died but for Dan. I owe my life to him, and it's his for the asking. It's a debt I'll never forget to repay."

Alice was to remember his simply declared promise in tragic days to come.

"Forget it, Al," Stuart urged. "You owe me nothing. You'd better take your sister's advice and pull out—make a new start somewhere."

"No, Dan, I'm stringing with you," Al insisted. "Nobody can stop me. When you're in the clear, then I'll pick up where I've left off."

"Al," Sally pleaded, "don't I mean a thing to you?"

"Everything in the world, Sally," Al quickly assured her, "but I'm stringing with Dan."

ALICE, knowing her brother had resolved to go through with it, turned to Dan Stuart. If, as she had heard, this man had fallen in love with her photograph during his lonely hours, perhaps she might influence him. It was a pretty and rather convincing picture she painted of the four of them making a new start, and she

saw his eyes light at the prospect, but invariably the inexorable something which dominated the man returned.

"I'll need ten thousand to develop the place I have in mind," he said, "and I've decided to string with Sanchez, if he'll let me."

As Dan Stuart finished speaking, he suddenly jumped to his feet.

"José is coming on the dead run," he cried.

They met the native boy at the door, and from his mixture of Mexican, Indian, and English, understood a large number of men were closing in on them. He had seen them in the half light of fading day in the lower country.

José, followed by his mother, disappeared toward the barn, and in an amazingly brief time returned with fresh horses saddled. Alice aided her brother in mounting, and as he galloped away, pressed a rifle into Dan's ready hand.

"It's loaded," she called, "and more ammunition in the saddlebags. Let the horse have its head—it knows the way to Calico Hole."

At the turn in the road, Dan looked back. She was standing dejectedly on the porch, lighted by the lamp held in the Indian woman's hand.

Dan cradled the rifle in the crook of his arm and let the horse have its head. They raised good horses on the Ford ranch, he thought. His own animal was sure-footed and filled with fire. In ten minutes' time the west wall of the valley vaulted to the very stars. He looked back and saw sparks fly a quarter of a mile below, where a horse's shoe had struck flint. It was just a flash, but as it was repeated several times, he knew the posse was riding direct to the portals of Calico Hole.

"They're heading us off," Al called back.

"Keep going, and I'll open up with the rifle," Dan answered. He dismounted, moved several yards from his horse, and hastily fired, then jumped back to the animal again. A withering blast centered on the point where his rifle had flashed, then he heard the thud of boots striking rocks. The posse was dismounting and taking to cover.

Again mounting, Dan closed in behind Al, who had pulled up. Several minutes later they rode, unchallenged, through a canyon less than a hundred feet in width. The walls on either side reared at least a thousand feet, before falling back to even higher walls.

"We camp here for to-night," Al said, pulling up his horse.

In the starlight, Dan could make out the dim outlines of a cleared area, two hundred feet long and a hundred feet wide. A trickle of falling water came faintly, and he heard the hiss of a breeze running through dry grass.

"We'll picket the nags," Al said, "then turn in. There's a shack against the wall, and it has several bunks."

"How about the posse?"

"There isn't a man among them that'd come in here for a thousand dollars," Al said. "They don't know what they're up against, and won't take chances."

"What are we up against?"

"Plenty of barbed-wire fence strung across the gap a hundred rods up the trail," Al explained. "Behind the barbed wire is a man or two with a Winchester rifle. It's been a long day, and I've managed to pull through, thanks to you, Dan." He dragged the saddle from his horse and staggered into the cabin, where he fell into a bunk

filled with straw, and was soon snoring.

Sleep did not come so readily to Dan Stuart. What sort of a reception awaited him? And what of "El Mudo"? Could he really read character, or did he accept or condemn a man according to the mood of the moment? "Well," he concluded, "there's more chance inside the Hole than out."

The next thing Dan knew, it was daylight, and the bright sun was bringing out the details of each colored rock and ledge. He followed the sun line as it worked down into the Hole, and presently the golden flood spilled over a slope, and there, sharply defined, lay the curiously placed graves of eleven sheriffs and Rangers. Even at this distance it was possible to recognize the gruesome letters of Pedro Sanchez's initials. There was the P, composed of six graves, the S of five graves, and the round, empty grave awaiting Jud Tremper, which would serve as a period.

CHAPTER III.

"BURY HIM ALIVE."

DAN STUART walked about the barbed wire, which was strung across the entrance to the main part of Calico Hole, and eyed it curiously. No horse could make its way through there after dark, though a twisting lane was available for use by day. A rifle, commanding both the barbed wire and the split in the walls, lay on a ledge two hundred yards away. Above the rifle Dan saw a dark head. Outlaws were on guard.

"That fellow won't come down," Al explained, nodding at the guard; "it's his business to stay up there. We can drift through, but returning would be something else. I'm

worried about you. I had hoped to later talk you out of your plan, but the posse forced things."

"How're you feeling, Al?"

"Fine! Why shouldn't I? I'm free," he answered, but Dan knew that he was trying to deceive him. Al was a sick youth, and it would require more than freedom to cure him, though that would help. Al required good food, rest, and care. "There's no turning back now," he went on, "so we might as well get it over with."

Dan saddled the horses, and Al led the way through the barbed wire. The guard, recognizing the younger man, shouted something, and Al waved back.

Near the slope bearing Sanchez's initials, Dan pulled up. The graves, dug at curious angles to form the letters, were whitewashed. Around the mounds the grass was permitted to grow, and the contrast between white and green was marked.

The beat of hoofs came suddenly, and Al Ford whirled in the saddle. His sallow face turned gray with fear, and he groaned.

"It's Alice!"

Fresh and vivid, and perhaps a little excited, Alice Ford rode up on a mare that stepped daintily and held its head high.

"Don't scold me, Al," the girl pleaded before her brother could speak.

"You shouldn't have come into the Hole," he groaned, "you shouldn't! You know it means you can never leave! Pedro Sanchez will always be around with his unwelcome attentions."

"I thought of that, but it's not important," the girl insisted. "You're all I've got, Al, and you need nursing. You are sick. You've been going on your nerve for hours now, and when you're really back

with Sanchez's band, there'll be a reaction."

"I'm not worth it," he muttered. "If I'd have thought you'd come into this place, I'd have stayed in Beasley's jail."

Dan saw that the younger man was desperately worried. He seemed about to go to pieces.

The girl looked up at the graves.

"So that's the slope with Sanchez's initials," she said, and a shudder ran through her slender body. "Oh! The beast!"

"Just a minute, Alice," her brother admonished. "Outside of Calico Hole it was all well enough to say what you thought, but inside it's well to keep your opinions to yourself, 'specially about Sanchez."

"I suppose so," the girl murmured, her eyes on the initials. "But I'm thinking I'd rather be Jud Tremper, dead and buried standing in that grave, than Jud Tremper on a vacation, with every outlaw knowing Sanchez had sent him a challenge."

"Tremper's no fool. He knows it's suicide to stick his nose into the Hole unless he has a hundred Texas Rangers with him," Al answered. "Come on, Dan; you've got to face the music!"

THEY rode around a shoulder of rock, and the outlaw hang-out lay a quarter of a mile ahead of them. Thirty or forty of the finest horses Dan had ever seen grazed in a pasture, through which ran a small stream bordered by trees. The stream began high in the Calico ridges, dropped two thousand feet down a red wall, and spread over the canyon.

Several acres of rich, black bottom land were under cultivation, and Dan observed both beef and

dairy stock in fenced-off grass areas. Sanchez's outlaws lived well.

"Those horses are the pick of every raid he's ever made on the finest stock in the Southwest," Al said. "Nothing any posse has can match them for speed. Even the Twin F, which is what we call our ranch, can't match them."

They turned toward a group of cabins set on a low ridge, which commanded the Hole. An adobe building housed several men, while adjoining cabins were undoubtedly used for storing supplies. The largest building was a two-story log cabin of recent construction. It contained large windows and a broad piazza. It had been built among several shade trees, and was, therefore, cool the year around.

"Sanchez's place," Al said briefly, "and that's where we report."

As they dismounted, several men came from the adobe and welcomed Al as an old friend. At the same time they looked on Alice with approval and Dan Stuart with suspicion.

"Where's Sanchez?" Al asked.

"Ah, my friend," cried a voice, "and my friend's sister!"

"Hello, Sanchez," Al Ford cried. "We got here by the skin of our teeth! Beasley's men were right on our heels. This is Dan Stuart. He got me out of jail."

"Dan Stuart? I'm disappointed," Sanchez said, with an eloquent gesture. "I had hoped it might be Jud Tremper, come to accept my poor hospitality. But Tremper is an older man. You, Stuart, are how old?"

"Twenty-five," Dan answered, aware that the outlaw's genial manner was a pose, and that he was suspicious of the whole business. A dozen men had congregated about them, and at some time or other

Dan had seen every face on notices offering rewards for wanted men.

To a man they were a lean, hard lot, with hands amazingly swift and graceful in the handling of ropes and guns, with eyes which betrayed nothing but suspicion and caution, and with legs slightly bowed from a lifetime, brief as some of their spans might be, in the saddle.

"You are young," Sanchez observed, "yet old for one who follows a dangerous life. Or has your life been dangerous?" As the outlaw leader put the query, a stocky man came from the cabin, walked to a position behind Sanchez, and stopped. Sanchez turned so that the man might watch his lips, then he said, "You are just in time, El Mudo."

El Mudo's arrival quickened the interest of those gathered about. It looked as if they might have an entertaining morning should the dumb one decide Dan Stuart was either dangerous to their well-being, or lacked sufficient courage to be included as one of their number.

ALICE FORD was watching El Mudo as a bird might watch a snake. Al, sick and exhausted from the previous day's hardships, sank into the nearest chair.

Here were gathered two of the most desperate characters in the Southwest, and they were working together, the girl was thinking. And Dan Stuart was thinking Al had not found words to convey the terrible, penetrating force behind El Mudo's mental probings. The dumb one's eyes never left Dan's face. Dan's eyes were blue, and sometimes there was frost in their depths, but El Mudo's were something colder than ice. They were hard, glittering, and did not blink or waver.

The lids appeared to be glued to the skull.

His shoulders were thick and bowed across the back; his chest was deep. El Mudo's short, powerful arms could literally have torn a man apart. He was unarmed, save for a belt containing seven knives. His breed relied on knives and darkness, rather than guns, for offense and defense. The man's hair was the color of rotting straw, which in itself was unpleasant, but it was his finger nails which caused Alice to recoil. The fingers were short, thick, and filthy, the nails deeply embedded half moons.

Suddenly El Mudo's interest switched from Dan Stuart to Alice Ford. He advanced a step and laid his hand on her arm. The fingers dug into her firm flesh and were withdrawn, leaving round, pink craters on her skin. She started to draw away contemptuously, then remembered this creature might prevent her from aiding Al's recovery. She remained passive, her calmness willed.

El Mudo bared his teeth in a grin. They were yellow, broken teeth, protruding from a thick jaw. His lips moved, but no sound came except a faint hiss and sometimes a whisper.

"Say that again," Sanchez ordered. "I didn't quite get it!"

It was then Dan realized both men were lip readers, and though no words came from El Mudo's lips, nevertheless words were formed and understood by Sanchez. El Mudo repeated his curious movements, and the outlaw leader smiled.

"He says that you'll do, Alice, and you can stay with us." Sanchez swept off his hat and bowed low. "Calico Hole has the most beautiful outlaw in the Southwest."

"I'm here to care for Al," the girl answered.

El Mudo watched her lips and saw the rapid pulsations on her throat, and he knew she was frightened, yet such was the love she bore her brother, she would never falter.

Dan had been watching Sanchez until El Mudo appeared. After that the dumb one dominated the scene by sheer force of personality. Now Dan observed details in the outlaw leader's dress and bearing.

Sanchez was half white, half Indian, and was said to carry the Apache strain. His cruelty lent this legend a degree of truth. His wolfish body moved without effort; his black eyes roved incessantly, as if he constantly expected danger from every source. This was in marked contrast to El Mudo's unblinking gaze and solid figure. Sanchez's coloring was like milk, mixed with ink. The man had been educated in a government school, and now he was mixing white man's education with Apache cunning, and applying it to cattle raids, bank and train robberies.

SANCHEZ called Al Ford to his side with a brief nod of his head. "Take your sister to the second cabin. El Mudo doesn't like your friend. What happens may not be pleasing to a girl's eyes," he said.

"He got me out of jail," Al answered in a low tone, "and risked his neck to do it." He shot a glance at Dan Stuart, erect and unafraid. "You don't need to worry, Sanchez; he'll never show the white feather. I've seen him under fire."

"True. Some never show the white feather. Texas Rangers. I've watched three die." He inclined his head toward the slope. "But we would not want them in our outfit." His face hardened. "Take your sister and get out."

"All right," Al agreed. He walked over to Alice. "Sanchez has given us the second cabin. I think I'll go to bed; I'm sick."

As the girl disappeared, El Mudo came within two feet of Dan. His face twisted into a sudden snarl, and his lips formed the unmistakable words, "Texas Ranger!"

"Don't be too sure of that, El Mudo," Dan retorted; "time might prove you were wrong, then you'd lose face. And you can't afford to lose face with Sanchez."

He did not speak aloud, merely forming the words on his lips, hoping El Mudo would understand. The dumb one understood, and the scowl between his eyes deepened. He turned to Sanchez, and his lips moved so rapidly Dan could not catch what was being said. Sanchez nodded.

"Come on, Jud Tremper," the outlaw cried sharply, "and die!"

"Don't try to scare me, Sanchez," Dan retorted. "I want to throw in with your outfit, or I wouldn't be here. Do you think if I was afraid of threats or death I'd come here?"

"Sanchez never bluffs, Tremper," the outlaw snarled.

Dan shrugged his shoulders with fine indifference.

"I figured you might think I was 'most anybody but Tremper," he said. "You've never seen Tremper, or you wouldn't make a crack of that kind. I've seen the Ranger." He scowled into Sanchez's face. "I've robbed a bank under his nose and got away with it. Now let's get down to business. Do I string with you, or don't I?"

El Mudo's eyes had never left Dan's lips. As he finished speaking, the man clawed at Sanchez's arm. He was conveying his belief the new arrival was a Ranger in dis-

guise, and he was insisting that Dan die at once.

"That settles it, Tremper," Sanchez said; "you die. All right, boys."

The band surrounded Dan in a threatening ring. One of the men caught his arm.

"We take our prisoners to the grave on the hoof," he jeered; "we ain't got dead wagons, white horses, and such."

Alice Ford, hearing the change in tone, came from the cabin.

"What is wrong?" she cried. "Don't they believe you, Mr. Stuart?" Before Dan could reply, she turned to Sanchez. "You must believe him. He isn't a Ranger, he's an—a wanted man." She had almost used the word "outlaw."

"Don't worry," Dan interrupted; "the boys got a little excited. We're just talking things over. Tell Al it's a little matter of proving I'm Dan Stuart—er—ah—gentleman adventurer, and not Jud Tremper."

THE girl eyed him briefly. No man, going to his death, could be so casual, and she returned to the cabin, convinced. Sanchez's eyes almost ceased their incessant roving and centered on Dan's face as he spoke. If Dan was afraid, he did not betray it.

"Take him down to the cemetery," Sanchez ordered.

They plodded down the trail, which was partly concealed from the cabins by a natural growth of brush and trees. They walked stiffly in their high-heeled boots, and few words were spoken. This man, every member of the band sensed, was different. His coldness was the deadly coldness of Sanchez himself. But he lacked Sanchez's high, nervous tension. Some thought he might be Jud Tremper, but others were of the opinion Tremper would not walk

into Calico Hole. It was unfortunate indeed, they decided, that the Ranger's name had come up, otherwise this calm young man might even now be numbered among them.

"Crunch! Crunch!" The gravel under their boots slipped and settled, only to be disturbed by the next man. "Crunch! Crunch!" Dan thought. "Death! Death!" The sound took on a new meaning. It suddenly occurred to him the men about him believed he was to die. Their exultation was deadened partly by their curiosity toward his careless manner. He had faced death before, but it usually involved gun play, and when a man is hitting back with fists or bullets, he hasn't time to think of himself and death.

"Death! Death!" They turned into a narrow path and walked in single file to the slope. He was going to die without a chance to hit back. The instant he raised his hands, other smooth and swift hands would go for weapons, and dust would spurt from his clothing as their bullets struck.

A tremor passed through his nervous system, and his face changed. He knew some of the color drained, as if the heart had stopped beating. El Mudo informed Sanchez:

"He's afraid! He's yellow. Soon he'll talk."

Sanchez nodded in satisfaction. He never wanted to appear to be in doubt before his men, or in El Mudo's presence. He must always be right. El Mudo held to the same theory. As long as he was right in his conclusions, men would fear and obey him. Even Sanchez. The man who gained the upper hand in a conflict with the pair would have to outfox them in a clash of wits rather than bullets.

On the brink of the hole that was

to serve as a period for the letter S, the party stopped. The round grave was four feet across and ten feet deep, with rocks and sand covering the bottom.

"Get in," Sanchez ordered; then, as Dan leaped to the bottom, he tossed down a shovel. "Shovel out that loose stuff."

The men peered down, grinning and wondering, as the man in the grave tossed sand and small rocks clear of the grave. Presently he was down to hard dirt, and the job was done.

"Come out now," Sanchez ordered, "and make your dying statement."

Two men held a short length of rope, and, grasping it, Dan hauled himself out.

"Go ahead," Sanchez directed, "and talk!"

"Never mind how I got started on my present trail," Dan said. "Nor is Dan Stuart my right name. Who here is going under his right name, for that matter? Now get this; I put in some time in the prison at Yuma; drifted across into New Mexico with some others after a jail break, and was in on the bank robbery at Madra."

"Four men shot by the cashier," Sanchez said sharply.

"One got away," Dan answered, then continued: "There's always plenty of money in the bank at Wagon Gap, so I started to figure a way of cleaning out that bank. I thought I'd give it a whirl, single-handed, then, if I couldn't turn the trick, I'd throw in with you."

"Nobody's ever robbed that bank," Sanchez briefly observed.

"There's always a first time," Dan insisted, "and I had a couple of plans. I picked the wrong one—I didn't figure on the mob that would take up the trail. I got fifty thou-

sand dollars, but couldn't get away with it. They threw me into jail, and you know the rest—I sawed my way out and brought Al Ford with me. He's a good man, and he was dying."

"You're a liar!" Sanchez panted. "You can look a man in the eyes and lie! You're Tremper, and you're going to die." He signaled El Mudo, and the latter knocked Dan to his knees. Sanchez whipped out a .45. The trigger was secured to the guard, and the weapon could be discharged by merely drawing the hammer back and letting it go.

Sanchez's thumb crooked over the trigger, and the thumb nail grew red from the pressure. Slowly the hammer was drawn back, and the men almost stopped breathing.

"Go ahead." Dan did not speak aloud, but moved his lips, knowing the outlaw would understand. "Go ahead and get it over with, then let time prove you never made good your boast to bury Jud Tremper in that grave." His lips twisted into a sneer. "And I thought you and El Mudo were smart."

The thumb trembled, and slowly the hammer was released. Dan did not move, but a sigh swept through the group.

"If I was only sure! If I was only sure!" the outlaw whispered. "What do you think, El Mudo?"

This, too, was a whisper, but Dan heard, and said:

"He's told you I'm Jud Tremper. That settles it."

"It does settle it," Sanchez snapped.

His foot shot out and knocked Dan into the grave. He got to his feet, awaiting the next turn in this desperate game.

"This one dies different," the outlaw ordered. "Bury him alive!"

And El Mudo nodded.

CHAPTER IV.

A PACT.

THE men about the grave picked up shovels and began throwing in the dirt. It came down in a steady stream from all sides, the dust nearly suffocating him. He threw his arm across his face and cursed the outlaw for being a fool, until the dust started him to coughing.

The dirt climbed higher and higher, to his knees, then his thighs, and finally to his waist.

"Stop," Sanchez ordered. He peered curiously down, while the dust settled. "Ready to talk?" he asked.

"Not with you, Sanchez," Dan retorted. "I'd heard stories about you and El Mudo. I thought you were above the average. I figured you were smart enough to tell the difference between a Ranger and some poor devil trying to make an honest living off the banks. Well, I'm paying for my mistake in judgment with my life."

As Sanchez's face hardened, Dan heard Al's voice. He was coughing from the effort of running, and he almost hurled himself on the outlaw.

"You can't do it, Sanchez!" he panted. "He saved my life."

Sanchez's fingers clenched, and his arms half lifted, as if to throttle Al for his impudence. Perhaps the outlaw leader was looking for a way out; possibly he was convinced Dan was not a Ranger, but a courageous chap, handy with a gun, and skilled in the art of helping himself to a bank's funds. A change passed over Sanchez's face as he saw in Al Ford an opportunity to work this problem out along a different line.

"You'd like to live, eh, Stuart?"

he queried. "You'd like to join my band, eh?"

"I'd like to live," Dan snapped, "but I'm not so sure about throwing in with your outfit after what's just happened."

Sanchez's face flushed darkly. He felt himself on the defensive. "The bank at Wagon Gap has never been robbed. You and the others have picked up a few dollars and been caught. Bring me fifty thousand dollars from Wagon Gap and you can throw in with us."

"And you'll go along, too?" Dan countered.

The outlaw shook his head. "You play a lone-hand game and show Pedro Sanchez how good you are, my friend. And if you don't come back, then—I'll kill Al Ford. Eh, Al?"

"He'll come back, with the loot," Al declared confidently. "Or——" He hesitated. "Or he'll die in his tracks. Yes, I hadn't thought of that—there'll be a hundred men ready to take the trail. They'll cover the country."

"Ah, but your friend is smart." Sanchez sneered. "He has plans that will be successful."

"Sure, but I've got to have time, and do it in my own way," Dan declared. "This means life or death to me."

"And to your friend, Al Ford," Sanchez softly suggested.

Dan glanced at El Mudo. That worthy had played a hunch and made a bid for fame by declaring this man was Jud Tremper, come to accept the outlaw's challenge. Dan's sneers had changed his mind, and he was glad to take Sanchez's way out, also.

Two men dropped into the grave and aided Dan in freeing himself. He shook the dirt from his clothing and wiped his face.

"Now let's get this straight," he said. "We're making a pact? I'm to rob the Wagon Gap Bank of at least fifty thousand dollars and bring it here. If I double-cross you, then Al dies?"

"Yes," Sanchez said. "And if Al should go out and not come back, then—ah, we have a beautiful—What is the word? Ah, yes, I have it now. We have a beautiful hostage who came here of her own accord."

Dan set his teeth to check an explosion. Sanchez was driving an almost impossible bargain. He could at least have taken Dan's word in the matter and left Al and Alice Ford out of it. Was there no honor among thieves? Apparently not. Sanchez's smooth, oily voice broke in on his thoughts.

"To-night you shall tell me your plan of accomplishing what has never been done—taking fifty thousand dollars from the Wagon Gap Bank."

ALICE FORD came for her brother. "You shouldn't have left your bed, Al," she scolded. "I'm trying to get you back on the road to good health. You must not worry, and you must have good food and plenty of rest."

"There was plenty to worry about," he grumbled, "and there's still plenty of the same."

"No"—Dan smiled at the girl—"everything has been settled."

The outlaws were separating and returning to their cabins, and the three were alone.

Alice shook her head. "No, nothing is settled until the slate is clean, Al, and we two are on a ranch somewhere." Her eyes flashed accusingly at Dan Stuart. "He'd have gone, too, if you'd led the way," she charged.

"The posse was too close on our heels," Al protested.

"Nonsense," retorted the girl; "he had already refused to go away and make a new start, and you had agreed to string with him. He *would* join Sanchez. Now see what we are facing."

The glitter in her eyes remained, then suddenly left. She smiled wistfully. "I'm forgetting you saved his life by helping him to escape from Beasley's cell," she said. "I *do* appreciate that. But can't you see Al is only a kid after all, and that his priceless sense of loyalty and appreciation is leading him to stick to you? Why, he's giving up the ranch we've worked so hard to build up; he's giving up Sally Geary—everything."

"I'm sorry," Dan muttered, "but I'm following my own inclinations. Al, I wish you'd forget me."

"Not in a thousand years," Al said quietly. He could not erase the memory of the damp cell where he was dying by inches. He was now in the free air that had come to him over the prison wall every night, and Dan Stuart was responsible for all this.

Silence fell between them. Al was staring at the half-filled grave and shuddering; Dan had put the dramatic episode behind him and was looking ahead, but Alice could not take her eyes from Dan. Her woman's intuition was trying to tell her something, but she could not tell whether it offered consolation and a promise, or was shouting a warning.

She was thinking that this man's courage was greater than she had ever seen. The outlaws had left, talking of it; Sanchez and El Mudo had gone up the trail, scowling and uncertain. They acted like men on the defensive, even if the outlaw had driven an impossible bargain.

"I wish I understood you, Dan Stuart," she said presently. "Perhaps if I knew the measure of your courage——"

"That wouldn't help you," he said gently. "Courage has neither weight nor bulk. It can't be measured, so—what is it? I don't know, but you have more than I ever hope to possess," he went on. "All women have. You came, unafraid, into Calico Hole, knowing you could never leave without Sanchez's permission. You came because you love your brother. If you're thinking I showed courage because I snapped back at Sanchez—well, forget it. I had nothing to lose, so why not convince him I came to join his band? A coyote will fight if cornered."

"You're not changing my opinion, Mr. Stuart," she calmly informed him. "Something about you has eluded me from the first, but I've got it now. You're being driven on by some tremendous purpose, and nothing can stop you. You may not succeed, but it won't be because you haven't risked everything to gain your ends. If you'll risk your life, then you'll risk Al's and mine—every one's."

"Aw, come now," he protested; "you're making me a sort of *he-angel* one moment, and a devil the next. We seem to have the run of the Hole as long as we don't attempt to leave; let's have a look about."

"Dan Stuart," she said sharply, "you are trying to drag a red herring across the trail. Well, it won't succeed. I won't be thrown off the scent in any such casual manner."

And he saw that she was downright angry.

He walked slowly toward the graves, mentally trying to decide which was the worse—an outlaw

with suspicions, or a girl with suspicions.

"I'm going to have the last word," he said over his shoulder, and grinned. "Innocent men have been hanged because somebody jumped at conclusions or was loose with words."

"And that, Dan Stuart, is the red herring again," she answered. "But we'll let it go for the present."

AL, tired, started for his cabin, but Alice, after a moment's doubt, decided to remain with Dan and examined him further. She did not want to make a fool of herself, nor did she care to miss anything which might point to danger for her brother.

Dan walked along, reading the names on the headboards Sanchez had erected. They stood, however, as monuments of his personal achievement rather than marks of respect to the dead. "Dred Morton," Dan read, "sheriff; Mike Sanders, sheriff; Don Remp, Texas Ranger; Slim Tremper, Texas Ranger." He paused, stared, and turned to the girl.

"So Jud Tremper's kid brother Slim was killed by Sanchez, eh?" he cried. "That was the rumor, but hardly anybody believed it."

"Jud Tremper knew it," Alice Ford answered; "Sanchez sent Tremper Slim's last letter and a sketch of the grave. And Jud went on a vacation. All the Tremper courage is buried in that grave, I guess. Come, let's get out of here and forget strife, murder, and graves. Let's, please, find something beautiful and sweet in life, if only for an hour."

"You're right," he agreed; "let's walk around the Hole. I see some mighty fine saddle stock in that east pasture."

Away from the slope and its graves; away, too, from Sanchez and the sinister El Mudo, the Hole lost much of its menace. It took on its real purpose in the scheme of things—an area several miles square protected from violent storms and offering a rock fence a thousand or more feet high to inclose cattle.

The soil was black loam, several feet in depth, and it was almost possible to hear the grass and vegetables growing when the sun was shining.

"In the wintertime," the girl was saying, "those crests are covered with snow. I know, because I've seen them from the other side. And when a blizzard strikes, the cattle can't run miles and miles, to fall exhausted and freeze to death. What a grand place for a ranch. It's nicer, even, than our place at Calico Springs."

"I could do a lot with this," he said half to himself, but she heard him.

"Then you've not been an outlaw all of your life," she cried in triumph. His past life and his present purpose kept intruding.

"No," he answered. "I could make a ranch of this, and—I'd like to do it. This would be the home ranch, and the cattle could be driven in off the range and fattened here." His face softened when he saw the horses galloping across the field with tails and manes flying, and whites of eyes showing in pretended fear.

In an instant he had changed from a hard-featured individual planning bank robbery under desperate conditions to a rancher who dreamed of building instead of destroying. The mood lingered and deepened as they walked on to the crystal stream and followed it to the falls. The drop broke up the water,

and it fluttered to a rocky basin in billows like wind-blown lace.

Everything within a hundred yards of the spot was moist. Ferns grew from the rocks where roots had lodged in the cracks, and trout lay in rows where the stream left the basin.

The spell could not last, as Calico Hole was given to violence, not beauty. Sanchez, followed as usual by El Mudo, came from a near-by thicket and joined them. He bowed with exaggerated politeness at Alice, and said:

"You will pardon me, but—business first."

"Of course," she responded, and walked away.

Dan decided he was in for another difficult period, reasoning the two had had an opportunity to think over the situation and discuss it from various angles. "You've got a nice set-up here, Sanchez," he said.

"Perfect. An army could not take Calico Hole," Sanchez answered, swelling with pride.

"I was looking over the graves," Dan said. "I didn't know you'd killed Slim Tremper."

"Yes, with my own hands, hoping his brother would come to avenge his death." He shrugged his shoulders and rolled his eyes back. "Alas for the plans and hopes of man," he said. Then his mood changed with the swiftness of a striking snake. "I can't wait. I must hear of your plan to rob the Wagon Gap Bank now."

Dan Stuart was thinking that this man could shake your hand, then knife you while he smiled into your eyes. As long as he was a part of Sanchez's outfit, he would never know what to expect. Aloud, he said:

"This is the only way it can be done, Sanchez. We've got to con-

sider, first, the bank. Next, getting rid of the hundred or more man hunters that'll hunt me down. Now what do you think of this?"

Unconsciously he lowered his voice. He talked eagerly for perhaps five minutes while first surprise, then something approaching admiration, came into the outlaw's black eyes. Even El Mudo nodded.

"And I'll need some gold nuggets," Dan concluded.

CHAPTER V.

GOLD NUGGETS.

SANCHEZ and El Mudo, having trailed Dan and Alice and studied their faces as they talked, and having listened to Dan's plans, now seemed willing to forget the man's presence, at least. They walked down to the fence and looked at the horses, then returned to the big log cabin which was reserved for them exclusively.

Dan followed the stream, wishing he had a hook and line, and at the same time telling himself a water wheel could be harnessed and made to churn milk and cut fodder. He stopped at the fence and began studying the horses. They watched him in mock alarm, then suddenly one whinnied joyously and galloped up to the fence.

She was a pert little black mare with a star on her forehead. Her legs were slender, and there was a pleasing arrogance in the way she picked up her hoofs. Eagerness filled her eyes, and as she curved her glistening neck and looked at the man, it was a sight to stir the blood of any horse lover.

"Ah!" Dan cried softly, then, as she thrust her nose toward his pocket, his manner changed. Some one was watching. He smashed his elbow against the mare's delicate

nose, and she reared back in surprise and pain.

"Get out," the man hissed; "I haven't anything for you."

The brush crackled, but Dan did not look around, though there was a definite nervousness in his eyes.

"I saw that," Alice cried. "I was coming through this little thicket to join you as the mare came up. She recognized you, then, hearing me come, you struck her. Why?" The girl answered her own query. "It is because if Sanchez discovers the mare knows you, through her he may be able to trace some of your past relations."

"Miss Ford," Dan answered, "if you don't stop imagining things, and what is worse, talking about them, you are liable to get me into trouble."

She flushed angrily.

"I don't talk, but I'm going to ask some questions about that mare," she announced. It sounded like a declaration of war. "I don't give a darn about a mob of wanted men, who should be strung up to the nearest cottonwood, you included, but I'm going to stop at nothing to protect my brother. You helped him escape, and we are thankful. I've said that before, and it comes right from the heart. But he's not going to get into this any deeper. And if, in keeping him out of trouble, some wanted man is hurt, I'm not going to shed any tears over it."

"That's the attitude to take," he answered. "I won't quarrel with you. Stick close to your brother, and don't do anything that'll bring any grief down on my head, and we can be good friends."

"We'll leave it that way," she agreed in a less truculent tone. "For the second time, suppose we try to enjoy the beauty of this spot."

"Good!" he agreed, grinning. "What a sweet friend you'd make, and what a remorseless enemy." She was a little spitfire, and he knew he could enjoy her companionship.

THE day passed swiftly, with Dan and Alice becoming acquainted with their surroundings, and Al sleeping in the sunshine while the sun began the rebuilding of his abused body. The members of the outlaw band cast admiring glances at the girl, but none made an effort to become acquainted, and Dan concluded Sanchez had laid down definite rules for the regular members of his gang. One girl in an outlaw camp could cause plenty of trouble; several girls might start a civil war.

They ate together at a long table set on the piazza. Sanchez sat at the head of the table, with El Mudo on his right. Dan and Alice found places at the lower end, while Al occupied his old seat. Little was said during the meal hour. Food was heaped on large dishes which were passed from hand to hand, and when hands were too busy to pass a dish, darting forks stabbed meat or potatoes and carried the food safely to the owner's plate.

Coffee was gulped down hurriedly, food was wolfed. They ate and drank as if momentarily expecting to be interrupted by a sheriff's posse—and this was the stamp of the wanted man. Alice, watching Dan out of the corner of her eye, observed that he ate as hurriedly as the others.

After the evening meal, the men rolled cigarettes, talked and smoked slowly, but with eyes alert—watching their surroundings from force of habit.

Al went to bed at eight o'clock, and at nine Alice followed. She

slept in the bunk below him, ready to attend his wants. Dan was given a bunk in the adobe house with the other men.

Dan was the first man out the following morning, with the exception of the cook. Others appeared, yawning and grumbling, as the sunlight came down the calico walls.

Al did not appear for breakfast, but Alice hurried in, gathered up a soft-boiled egg, some toast, and a glass of milk, for him.

"I don't know what the poor boy went through in that jail," she said, "but he woke up yelling a dozen times last night."

"I've got an idea," Dan said. "A few hours was enough for me."

"I heard tell they's something queer with Beasley's set-up down there in Wagon Gap," a man observed. "They's talk the Texas Rangers are lookin' into it, but I don't know. Prob'ly just talk."

"A yaller dog gets better'n what Beasley gives some white men down there," another said.

Alice left, but presently returned. She ate without enthusiasm. The others left the table to begin card games that lasted throughout the day.

Noon brought an excited man just before the cook sounded the dinner call.

"Thet black mare with the white star in her forehead is gone," he shouted.

"What's that?" Sanchez cried, scowling at Dan Stuart.

Alice's eyes were on him, also.

Dan squirmed impatiently.

"Well, don't look at me," he complained; "I wasn't out of bed all night, and there're plenty of the boys to prove it."

Several men confirmed this statement.

Sanchez stared at each in turn, then turned to Dan again.

"No horses took a notion to leave before you came," the outlaw leader said. "It looks bad for you."

"Your men are light sleepers," Dan retorted. "Every time I turned over, somebody woke up and looked at me. A fine chance I'd have had to sneak out and get away with a horse without somebody hearing me."

"She couldn't get through the barbed wire down at the entrance," Sanchez said thoughtfully, "so she must have had some help."

"That mare could," a man argued. "She's the smartest little trick we ever put a rope on."

There the subject dropped.

DAN, you look like a sheep-herder," Alice said, when the third day found him with a heavy black stubble covering his face. "Can't you borrow a razor?"

"I'm afraid not," Dan explained; "I'm growing a beard for important reasons. I've got two months to do it."

"Part of your plan to rob the Wagon Gap Bank, I suppose?" she asked.

"Yes, but only part. The plan is rather complicated, but it must succeed," he said.

"I think you'd risk life and fortune on the turn of a card," she informed him bluntly.

"I've done so," he answered. "I'll do so again. It's not hard, if you draw the card."

From that moment Alice Ford's tactics changed. She no longer argued with Dan, or tried to trick him into an admission of the plan she intuitively felt he was following, but made an effort to win his confidence. She moved slowly, drifting into friendship in the days that followed,

but listening attentively to everything he said, then trying to piece things together, yet with rather poor success.

There were times during that first week when it looked as if the girl's brother might steadily sink. The reaction to his escape was tremendous, and his condition took a critical turn. Al talked of death constantly, and expressed his thanks again and again to Dan. He regretted he could not go along when Dan raided the bank.

"I'd like to show you what you mean to me," he whispered. "I'd like to stand behind you and back your play."

And Dan, who watched at Al's side while Alice cried softly into her handkerchief, laughed and told the sick man the account between them was squared.

"If you do owe me anything, Al," he said, "if you really feel that way about it, shake off this morbid streak and get well. You're an eagle, you know, and you're back among the peaks, and that should answer everything."

"You're not lying to me?" Al asked eagerly. "I've got a chance?"

"If I didn't think you were going to get well, Al," Dan lied, "I'd be running around trying to do something about it. I didn't get you out of jail just to attend your funeral, you know. Now, confound you, turn over and go to sleep!" He grinned and walked away.

Alice followed Dan outside.

"He's breathing so hard, and can't seem to rest," she sobbed. "You deceived him, bless you, but you didn't deceive me. I saw the muscles in your face work as you talked to him."

"I guess you did, Alice," he admitted. "One of my kid brothers is dead, and I'm pretty soft where

youngsters are concerned. My father died when I was twelve, and the children, two boys and two girls younger than I, looked to me for food, and later advice. They looked on me, at times, as a very old man."

He threw his arm across her shoulder, and she pressed her eyes against his shirt for several wretched seconds.

"I'm better now. By morning we should know, one way or the other."

"Yes, one way or the other," he told her.

At five o'clock she came to the adobe and called him, though he had remained at Al's side until three o'clock.

"He's hardly breathing," she explained. "And I don't want to be there alone."

Dan dressed and hurried over. He looked down briefly, then whispered:

"Go to bed and sleep yourself; he's enjoying the first normal rest he has known in months."

IMPROVEMENT from that hour was gradual. Al's appetite had to be checked to prevent a setback. He walked about the buildings, gradually increasing the distance, then he rode, grinning boyishly from a saddle that had carried more than one outlaw through a successful raid.

The fourth week the three awakened to find the cabins strangely silent. The cook had set but seven places at the long table, and four of these were occupied by members of the band. They were on edge this morning, and it was obvious they were also on guard against Dan Stuart.

"The others are away on business," one of the men said gruffly, "and Sanchez said nobody's to leave

camp. No ridin' around lookin' at the scenery."

When they were alone, Al explained: "Nobody but Sanchez knows when they're going raiding. You'll be asleep, and somebody wakes you up and says, 'Get up, we're ridin' to-night!' We dress, go out, saddle, and Sanchez leads off with El Mudo bringing up the rear."

"El Mudo rides behind, eh?"

"Sure! Just in case somebody takes a notion to pot Sanchez from behind. There's ten thousand dollars reward on his head, you know. El Mudo is the only one Sanchez really trusts," Al said.

"When'll they be back?" Dan asked.

"It's hard to tell," Al replied.

"What's to prevent the Rangers from waiting for them at the entrance?" Dan inquired. "I hope to be a part of this outfit some day, and I'd like to know where I'll meet danger and what measures are taken for a man's protection."

"Sanchez has plenty of friends who'll let him know when strange faces appear," Al replied.

"Friends?" Dan's eyes narrowed.

"Well, maybe not friends, but people who have a healthy respect for the peculiar forms Sanchez's revenge takes when some one informs on him," Alice said.

The day and night passed without incident, save for an increasing nervousness on the part of the outlaws remaining in the Hole. The next afternoon the band returned, Sanchez in the lead, El Mudo bringing up the rear, and a wounded man swaying in the saddle.

Those who stayed behind sprang into action, taking first the wounded man to a bunk, then caring for the horses. The animals, ridden until they were ready to drop, were caked with dust and dried lather. One

bore a nasty crease where a bullet had struck its shoulder. Flies were already buzzing around the wound.

"I'll fix up this nag," Dan volunteered.

"Go ahead," an outlaw agreed; "we've got to dig a slug out of Joe's back."

THE horse winced under Dan's ministrations, and Joe bel- lowed with pain as his companions applied rough surgery. Through it all, Sanchez paced the piazza with tigerish strides, striving to relax from the long, tense hours. El Mudo, of different stuff, sat calmly in a chair and smoked.

Peace of a sort settled down on the group by evening. The meal was late, the cook wisely waiting until the men had relaxed. Good wine before the meal mellowed their hardness slightly, and conversation grew brisk.

One laughed suddenly. "I'll never forget the look on that cashier's face when I told him we was the Sanchez band. Sweat came out on his face, and he shook all over. I let him have it. He knew he was goin' to die, and he looked like somebody whose feelin's was hurt." He roared with laughter. "His hands was clawin' at the ceilin', and he was yellin' his head off."

"But the funniest was that deputy sheriff," a second man said. "He had a bead on me, and was just about to pull the trigger when Sanchez stuck his gun over the wall and let him have it. Smack! The bullet got him in the stomach, and he grabbed hisself and danced a jig, then fell head-first into the dirt, head buttin' round on the ground, and feet still dancin' up and down. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Laughter ran around the table.

"That was his wife that come yellin' out of the house," the first said. "Never knowed a woman could yell like that."

Alice dropped her knife and fork and left the table. Again laughter spread.

"Too much for the gal," some one cried.

Al finished his meal and followed Alice.

"There'll be a big drunk to-night," he explained. "They got ten thousand dollars and are feelin' good."

"Al, *how* can you throw in with such a crowd?" the girl asked in a wretched voice. "And you, Dan—you laughed with them."

"I threw in with them to get some of our cattle Two-spot Delaney had branded, and now I'm in with them up to my ears," Al answered. "We'd better hide out," he went on in a low voice, "until this celebration is ended. If Dan's underfoot, somebody's liable to call him Jud Tremper or Beasley in disguise. And if they see you, Alice, somebody'll want to start a dance, and that'll start a fight."

The three withdrew to the brush and spent the night listening to the brawling. Of those involved, only El Mudo remained sober. Sanchez drank alone in his room, brooding, building up wrongs real and fancied, and promising revenge that would take diabolical forms.

It was dawn before the men fell asleep, when the three returned to get a little rest on their own account.

THERE were no more raids, Sanchez deciding to appear to let things quiet down and give Dan his chance at the Wagon Gap Bank. Two months from the day Dan entered the Hole, Sanchez

sent for him. On the table lay placer gold to the value of two thousand dollars.

"The time's come for you to get that fifty thousand dollars in the bank," he explained; "your beard has grown out, and here's the gold you needed. You know what'll happen to Al Ford if you don't come back."

Dan nodded. "I think Al will try to string along with me. He thinks I'm tackling an impossible job. He's got the idea he owes me something."

"Yes. You are tackling an impossible job," Sanchez said unpleasantly. "It was your bluff, and I called it. I hold the cards, as usual. The men are betting ten to one you don't get away with it." He smiled "They are betting fifty to one you will be glad to get out and leave Al holding the sack. I hope you do, my friend. I am about ready to settle down and enjoy the profits of my labors. I know of a place across the Mexican border where a man could spend his days."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And the Bible says it is not good for man to live alone. I have done Alice Ford the honor of asking her to become my wife. She refused." His face grew wolfish. "Refused because of my Indian blood. Well, if you don't come back and Al faces death at my hands, the lady might listen to reason. She might be persuaded to change her mind."

"You've done a little figuring ahead, Sanchez," Dan answered. "Well, so have I. The lady doesn't figure in the plan, nor Al. You've laid up a snug fortune against your old age. I won't last forever in this life, so I'm robbing Wagon Gap, as agreed, and throwing in with you. I'll leave to-morrow night."

WS-3B

"Good! To-morrow night!" Sanchez smacked his lips with satisfaction. Again he was figuring ahead. "I've done everything possible to help you, my friend," he added softly. "I and my men have stayed at home, so that the people will not be watchful."

"Thanks for being fair about it," Dan replied.

He sauntered away, and Sanchez sent for Miguel, one of his followers, who, like himself, possessed an Apache strain.

Miguel entered the room and seated himself. Sanchez poured him a drink, and Miguel knew what was coming.

"You will go down and tell our friend—our good friend in Wagon Gap—a prospector will come with gold nuggets. And he plans to leave with gold coin from the bank. Our good friend will know what to do when he hears this prospector is Dan Stuart."

Miguel smiled, finished his drink, and left the room. Sanchez knew the job was as good as done.

The outlaw leader drew deeply on his cigarette. "Dan's plan is good—so good I shall try it myself sometime." Again he drew deeply on the cigarette and watched the smoke drift away. Things were going along in a highly satisfactory manner.

CHAPTER VI.

BEASLEY MOVES IN.

DAN STUART was ready to start at daybreak. The outlaws slumbered, but he saw a light in Alice's cabin, and presently the girl came through the gray shadows of dawn.

"I want to talk to you," she said, "alone—over here, where the walls haven't ears."

She led the way to a thicket. Something in her face caused his pulse to quicken. They had grown close the last few weeks. Al could not forget Dan freed him from Beasley's cell, then took care of him when the pursuit got hot. Alice could not forget Dan had stood over her brother when he was at Death's crossroads and laughed at the thought of his dying and so filled the youth with confidence that he renewed the fight and was now well.

"Dan, must you go?" she asked.

"Does it mean so much to you, Alice?" he countered, looking down into her serious face. "I mean my angle, not Al's," he explained.

"You know it does, Dan," she said quietly.

He drew a deep breath, as if the problems that lay ahead were difficult. "I think the time has come," he said slowly, "to tell you that I love you." He turned her chin up and smiled into her eyes. "Alice, you are loyal, sweet, and courageous. I like you here in Calico Hole, with the mighty walls, the falls, the rich bottom land, and the cattle. It is a picture—this." He swept his hand over a land awakening. "And you complete it."

"I love you, Dan. If you could only remain the Dan I love, and not be a predatory, wolfish creature lusting for blood some of the time, we could be happy." She looked gravely about. "But I can see nothing ahead but heartache."

"Things have a way of working themselves out," he answered. "You've something else on your mind." It was a statement, not a query.

"Yes, Dan, I have. I can't shake off the conviction you are hewing to a line and that you don't care much where the chips fall," she went

on hurriedly. "To gain your ends, you'll sacrifice your own life."

"Why shouldn't a man sacrifice everything to gain an end?" he argued.

"But it's not fair, not just for you to sacrifice my brother. Oh, Dan! He's all I've got. He's determined to string with you. It all goes back to the living death he endured under Beasley. You saved him, and now he feels he should give up everything in return. It means he will trail you to Wagon Gap and that he will follow you on future raids with Sanchez's band if you succeed and become a member. It means hanging or violent death in the long run. Now, Dan, I put it squarely up to you, does anything justify that?"

"No, from your standpoint; yes, from mine. I'm going ahead. Al's got to use some sense," he grimly declared. "And I want him to keep out of it. I'll tell Sanchez to stop him from following me."

Dan started to go, but the girl, in a frenzy of fear, flung herself into his arms.

"I can't let you go, Dan," she sobbed. "Oh, I love you so much! You can be so gentle and fine. Let's develop that and fight off the wolf streak together. I'll go anywhere with you, shoot our way out of this place with you, if you'll only let me help you, Dan."

Her outburst shook him. She felt him tremble from head to foot, and his arms tightened, then relaxed.

"No," he answered, "it's too late for me to turn back now. I'm going ahead."

"Then if you're going to the devil, Dan Stuart, I'll go along with you. I don't care what becomes of me now. A day's happiness, or a week's, it doesn't matter, just so I get it. I'm going."

EL MUDO came from a tangle of boulders forty feet away. His instincts had warned him to watch the pair; his eyes had read the girl's lips. He came over and caught her arm, and with a jerk of his huge head, ordered Dan to go. She struggled desperately, but El Mudo held her helpless. Dan walked over to the three burros he had saddled for his expedition. He mounted one and drove the other two ahead of him. He did not look back, but swung toward the big cabin. Sanchez was standing before an open window.

"Don't let Al follow," Dan requested.

"No, I won't let him follow," Sanchez replied. "Adios!"

"S'long," Dan answered.

Slowly he rode down the trail, past the slope with its gruesome letters, then through the barbed wire and on to Calico Springs.

The sun was up when he stopped at the Twin F Ranch. The Indian woman who had served Alice so long was sitting on the steps, silent, dejected. He wondered if she would recognize him, so said:

"Hello! Where's everybody?"

She pointed toward the entrance to Calico Hole, then back to a notice on the front door. Dan read the copy of a lengthy legal document tacked to the panel. The import was plain. The man holding the mortgage had declared the ranch abandoned, and, to protect his interest, had foreclosed. Beasley had bought the place at a forced sale.

"And you can bet he got it for a song," Dan reflected. "That poor squaw don't know what to do, either. I suppose she figured this would be her home as long as she lived."

He prodded the burros into action

and continued on toward Wagon Gap, some thirty miles away.

Dan stopped near the Geary ranch that afternoon and watered the burros. Sally came down to the fence and watched him. She was thin and dispirited, and said nothing. A burly man, hard at work, Dan concluded was Chris Geary, her father.

Dan made one camp and arrived on the outskirts of Wagon Gap late the next afternoon. Dusk was falling when he entered the town, and this suited his purpose. He put the burros up in an empty barn back of the bank, then spread his blankets on the bunk of an abandoned cabin. The throb of life came faintly from the main street. He opened the stove and brought out a quantity of gray wood ashes, which he rubbed thoroughly in his hair and beard. Unless one examined him too closely, he could pass in the dusk for a gray-headed man. "Not so bad," he mused, examining his features in a cracked mirror.

He was building a fire in the stove when the door opened suddenly. Sanchez had equipped him with a pair of old .45s, and instinctively his hands dropped to the butts of these untried guns.

"Don't shoot, Dan; it's Al!" The door closed, and Al Ford stood there, smiling and confident. "Sanchez let me come after I talked him into it," he hastily explained. "Don't get mad, now. This is too big for any one man to tackle alone."

"All right," Dan answered briefly. "But suppose you're recognized?"

"I've got to take that chance. Now here's what's happened. Beasley, for no reason I can figure out, is headed this way. It's no chance stroll," Al went on hurriedly; "I've seen him walk too many times not to know when he means business. What do you want me to do?"

"I'll meet him," Dan answered. He hastily examined his weapons. The cartridges were new, and the guns appeared to work smoothly.

HE stepped outside. It was light enough to see a hundred yards away, but beyond that it was indistinct. A deadly calm possessed Dan as he walked up the alley, and his mind groped for an answer to Beasley's sudden decision to come directly to him. "It's no hunch he's following," he told himself; "it's a hot tip from somebody. If I can't shut him up without a gun fight, I won't have much chance to clean out the bank. There he is!"

Beasley carried a .45 in his right hand; his left was resting lightly on the butt of a second weapon. Dan walked stiffly, with head slightly bent, hoping to carry out his rôle of an old prospector. A hundred feet separated them, then Beasley's hand came up.

"Stick 'em up," he snarled. "I know you. You're——"

Dan's gun leaped, and flame stabbed into the dusk. The roar of the weapon silenced Beasley's words; dust spurted from the front and back of his shirt, then he pitched forward. Though the man had had Dan covered, yet the latter had drawn and fired before Beasley's brain could catch the movement and telegraph the order to pull the trigger. His gun remained silent.

"You got him, Dan," Al cried. "Better light out; the whole town will be here in a minute."

"Listen, Al; I came here to rob a bank." Dan's fingers grasped Al's arm. "You've made a lot of cracks about what you'd do for me. You said you'd die, if need be, and that's the right spirit. You've a chance to prove it. Take my gun!" He

pressed the warm weapon into Al Ford's hands, then yanked one of Ford's guns from the holster and thrust it into his own holster. "Stand up to it, tell any yarn you want to, Al, and leave it to me to get you out of this. Savvy?"

"Yes," Al Ford answered in bewilderment.

People were running, and before he could offer further comment, Dan had slunk into the shadows and was making his way to the cabin.

A ring of guns hemmed Al in a moment later; unfriendly eyes peered into his face.

"Say," a man shouted, "this is Al Ford, one of Sanchez's gang. By gosh, he came here to get Beasley, and he got him."

"I—I—came here for—for medicine," Al said uncertainly; "my sister's sick. Beasley got the drop on me. I told him I'd quit, but he said he'd fix me so I couldn't get away again. I knew he was going to shoot. He could call it self-defense and get himself in the clear. Nobody would believe me, so I beat him to it."

"Nobody believes you now!" a voice bellowed. "String him up, boys. Up with him!"

"Just a minute," a shaky voice objected. "It won't look so good, boys, for us to take the law into our own hands." Dan Stuart, bent and apparently feeble, was trying to make himself heard.

"Who are you?" some one demanded.

"Just old Hi Manning, but I know how things like this turn out," Dan said. His words had no influence, except to delay matters, but the delay proved sufficient.

A brisk individual, wearing a deputy sheriff's shield, pushed his way through.

"So you killed Beasley, eh?" The

deputy peered closer. "Al Ford! I wouldn't have known you."

"I look different," Al said; "I've been out in the fresh air and sun."

"It looks like a case of revenge. You'll swing sure for this." The deputy snapped handcuffs about Al's wrists. "Come on."

"Back to the damp cell again, eh?" Al said bitterly.

"No, not this time. The Texas Rangers have that business under fire. We're expecting a man any time to show up and ask questions about prisoners who died awaiting trial." He hurried Al along. "I never favored such treatment for an outlaw, anyway. Arrest 'em; try 'em; hang 'em—that's my motto. But Beasley and his crowd run the country, and I had nothing to say about it."

Al recognized him as a deputy who was kept on the fringe of the county most of the time. He appeared to have plenty of the stuff a Western peace officer needs. Al was hurried into an upper cell, where there was plenty of fresh air and a fine view of the wall and guards. An hour later the prosecuting attorney appeared to ask questions and briefly discuss the matter with the deputy.

"We'll make a record for speed in this case," the prosecutor said tersely. "We should have him in the penitentiary, ready to be hanged, within thirty days."

The deputy nodded as the two walked away.

CHAPTER VII.

STAMPEDE.

DAN STUART, as Hi Manning, returned to the cabin unnoticed in the excitement. A grim smile played around his lips. "I'll say this much for Al—when he

said he was willing to die for me, he wasn't talking through his hat. The loyalty of a young fellow is an amazing and beautiful thing."

Having made this observation, Dan prepared and ate a good meal, then made his way to Dick Mitchell's general store. He turned his coat up about his ears and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

"I want some grub," he explained. "I've made a little strike, so I'll pay you for it in gold."

"Gold, eh?" Mitchell's interest quickened. "I haven't used my gold scales in years. Where's the strike?"

"Didn't say," Dan answered briefly. "It'll be mostly bacon, flour, sugar, coffee, and—you know what I need."

Several men gathered about and began to ask questions. Dan put them off with evasive answers and walked about the store, peering into show cases. When he opened the poke and displayed the nuggets, the men were six deep about him.

Mitchell weighed out the gold, and his fingers seemed to caress each nugget.

"As pretty gold as I've ever seen," he said. "Where'd you say it came from?"

"Didn't say," Dan replied again.

A friendly hand fell on Dan's shoulder. "Say, old-timer, have a little drink."

"Nope," Dan snapped. "Still, it's been a long time since I had a good snort of whisky." He accepted the bottle and eyed it with approval. "Well, one little drink never hurt nobody." He swallowed an ounce or two. "Ah! That hit the spot."

"Take a swig of mine," urged a second man. "You'll never be the same man again. It'll knock ten years off your life."

"If it don't knock my teeth out," Dan retorted. He drank again.

After that he refused. "Nope," he told them, "if I drink too much, I'll be talking, and I can't afford to do that."

"Well, just one more won't hurt," a persuasive voice insisted.

"All right, this is the last," Dan declared.

He drank frequently, and presently began to sing. They joined in, calling him good old Hi Manning. He mellowed.

"Say, you're all nice boys," he said thickly. "I can see you're men of dis—discretion. I'm goin' to tell you a li'le secret. They's gold up on Sundown Creek. I took out two thousand dollars in nuggets inside ——" He looked around in bewilderment. "Where'd everybody go?"

"I'm afraid you've started a stampede," Mitchell said. "You mentioned Sundown Creek, and by tomorrow noon there will not be an able-bodied man left in town." He slapped Dan's shoulder. "You'd better go home and sleep it off. Come around in the morning, and I'll have the grub ready to throw on your burros."

"Thanks," Dan Stuart muttered, "thanks." In the darkness, he grinned broadly.

ALL night there were sounds of hasty departure, but Dan slept peacefully. Things were moving along so smoothly that luck appeared to be with him. Al had conveniently appeared to shoulder the responsibility of Beasley's well-deserved death, and Dan had tricked the town's famous man hunters into stampeding.

At ten o'clock Dan dusted himself with ashes once more and started for Mitchell's with one burro. He passed through a narrow space between the bank and a building, then turned into the main

street. Mitchell was sleepy but cheerful.

"They just about cleaned off my shelves," he said. "This town was sure ripe for a stampede."

"Some day I'll learn to either quit drinkin' or keep my mouth shut when I do drink," Dan answered. He carried several packs to the burro, divided the load, and threw a diamond hitch over it. "I'll be back in about fifteen minutes," he said.

He turned back between the bank and building again, stopped the burro, and pulled a black shirt over his head. A moment later he drew on a pair of worn overalls, jerked a battered black hat from a cache in the brush, and pulled it down over his eyes. He covered his face and neck with a handkerchief, leaving slits for the eyes.

His hands were perspiring from nervousness that did not otherwise show outwardly. He was about to do something he had failed to do once, and which no man had successfully accomplished. He watched, saw a man enter the bank, then leave it. The street was now deserted. Those occupied were indoors, the unoccupied portion of the town's population was hurrying to Sundown Creek.

Dan cut around the corner, and in three strides was in the bank. With gun drawn, he leaped over the counter and was behind the cage before the teller realized it. The president was sitting in his office. He reached for a gun and changed his mind.

"Keep your hands up," Dan barked, "both of you! That's fine. Now back into that little room." He indicated a wash room back of the vault. "You are getting better every minute," he drawled, closing and locking the door on them.

He leaped into the teller's cage

and scooped up all the currency in sight, then walked into the vault. Gold was too heavy to carry, so he searched for currency, stuffing the neat bundles into a small bag. Five minutes after he entered, the job was done. He slipped out unobserved, cut around the corner to the burro, and shed the clothing he had used in the raid.

At the barn, Dan hid the currency in his packs, then, taking the second burro, plodded up to the store. The banker and his teller had not escaped yet. Dan was loading the second burro, with Mitchell's help, when the banker emerged.

"Holdup! Holdup!" he bellowed.

"That can't be," Dan muttered, "I ain't seen nor heard a thing."

"Nor I," Mitchell agreed. He ran toward the banker. "When did it happen, Ned?"

"Right now, you crazy fool," Ned roared. "Where's everybody? Get a posse, throw it around the town. He can't be far."

"What sort of a feller was it?" Dan yelled.

"Big man, black shirt, overalls, and black hat. Had his face covered, but I saw his eyes. Blacker'n night. He was a young man, straight as an arrow. Where's the deputy sheriff?"

"Gone on the stampede!" Mitchell answered. "I sold him grub last night."

Several old men hurried up and asked questions. They ran stiffly for guns, and mounted the horses the stampeders had left behind. Mitchell closed his store and joined them, while Dan Stuart and his burros moved slowly toward Sundown Creek.

Two miles from town he changed his direction toward Calico Springs. Five miles beyond that he peered intently into a thicket. A beautiful

bay horse snorted defiantly, then calmed down under the understanding touch of his hand.

"Easy, Jerry! Easy, now! You're sure full of ginger, aren't you?"

Dan picked up a saddle cached in the brush and threw it onto Jerry's back. He transferred the currency to the saddlebags, cached the grub in the brush, and released the burros. Leaping into the saddle, he grinned defiantly back at Wagon Gap. "Well, it was done—and done right." He chuckled. His spurs touched Jerry's flanks, and the horse thundered away, nose toward Calico Hole.

DAN approached Calico Hole cautiously, half expecting some one might be lying in the brush with the hope of intercepting him. Evidently those back at Wagon Gap were still trying to pick up the bank robber's trail. As nobody was visible, Sanchez's band accordingly was cleared, and the crime credited to a lone wolf. Dan rode into the Hole unchallenged, but the guard called down:

"What luck?"

"Plenty!" Dan shouted up to him.

"Good. I took some of the twenty-to-one money you wouldn't put it over—not bad, though I could have got longer odds if I'd waited. Where's Al Ford?"

Briefly Dan explained, and rode on, remembering he must face Alice before the night was over. This came sooner than he expected. The girl stepped into the trail and waved him down near the graveyard. It was growing dark, and they were not visible from the cabins.

"I've been here ever since Al left," she cried. "Where is he? What happened?"

"He's not hurt, Alice, but he's in a jam," Dan assured her, dismount-

ing. "Beasley forced a sale and took over your place. Al met him and killed him. He had it coming a thousand times over. They're holding Al for trial."

"Is he charged with murder?" she asked in a dull voice.

"Yes, that's what I heard."

"You'll see him through?" she pleaded. "You'll promise me that, won't you, Dan?"

"I promise. I'll see him through. They'll never hang him," Dan insisted.

"Oh, my darling," she cried brokenly, "you're a good friend. And I've been a friend to you. Listen, do you remember the little black mare with the star in her forehead? You couldn't forget her, because she knew you, and in some way linked you with the past. Well, I tried to find out where she came from, but no one would tell me. She was dangerous to you, and so, that night it was I who turned her loose. I was sure she went home."

"Horses do that," he said.

"Would it be to your home, Dan?" she asked.

"Likely," he answered.

"And you? Did you succeed?" His arm was about her slim waist, her tragic eyes searching his face.

"You are priceless," he whispered. "Yes, I got away with it. I followed my plan and had some luck—not a shot fired. Now I'd better report to Sanchez." He kissed her, and she clung tightly to him, then walked along beside him until they were in the shadows of Sanchez's cabin.

In parting, she noticed the horse for the first time.

"He's beautiful. Where did you get him?" she asked.

"I roped him on my way to Wagon Gap, had him tied and waiting for me. I call him Jerry," Dan said.

"He looks like a horse that'd be called Jerry," Alice observed.

She patted his neck and was gone. Dan dismounted and knocked. Sanchez's voice answered.

The outlaw leader was not happy over Dan's return. He had expected failure; had hoped and planned for it. He expected both Dan and Al to be either killed or arrested, or perhaps Dan would not return, and he could drive a bargain with Alice. He had played the game from several angles, yet Dan stood before him, and that meant he, Sanchez, had been denied the chance to rob the bank and add to his infamy. His face betrayed nothing but pleasure, however.

"Ah, my friend, you came back. That means——"

"Exactly," Dan interrupted. "And here's the money. Count it!" He carried the currency on his arm, as he might have carried wood for a fire. It thudded softly to the table, and El Mudo's eyes lighted greedily.

Sanchez estimated the total roughly at thirty thousand dollars. "I expected fifty thousand, maybe more," he said. "But you did a good piece of work. Where's Al?"

"In jail for killing Beasley in a gun fight," Dan said bluntly.

"Hm-m-m!" Sanchez betrayed nothing at first, then his face lighted as he saw possibilities in the situation. "Hm-m-m!" he repeated. "It will cost a lot of money to clear him."

"I know where to get it," Dan said. "It's a tough job, but it can be done if you've got a dozen men who aren't afraid of a fight."

"Where?"

"The bank at El Rio," Dan replied, tossing a sheet of paper on the table. "I saw this on the presi-

dent's desk. There were several copies, so I took one."

Sanchez glanced at the paper and read:

—relative to the sum of one hundred thousand dollars' indebtedness of the El Rio State Bank to the Wagon Gap State Bank, please be advised we have informed the various ranchers to whom the money was advanced, the loan must be paid.

We have assurance the entire sum will be available on the twentieth of next month and will be forwarded as you instruct—

"You want to ease up, and so do I, Sanchez, and that looks like our chance. If I'm now a member of your band, I'll take your orders. If I'm an outsider, then I'd like to pull out, pick up a few good men, and go after that money myself. What is the answer?"

Sanchez drummed on the table with long, artistic fingers. The cigarette in his lips drooped, glowed, then grayed across the burning end; smoke came from his lips slowly.

"You are a member of the band, my friend," the outlaw answered. "Join the others and await orders."

"All right, but first I think I'll wash off the dirt and enjoy a good shave," Dan replied. As he left the room, El Mudo, who as usual had been watching, came over and joined his chief.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BARGAIN.

SANCHEZ slept soundly after his discussion with El Mudo, and awakened feeling well pleased with himself. True, Dan Stuart had done the unexpected, looted the bank and returned safely. But he had brought thirty thousand dollars and information of a hundred thousand dollars at El Rio.

True, also, Dan had not run away

and forfeited Al Ford's life, which would have enabled the outlaw to drive a good bargain with Alice. On the other hand, Al would require considerable money for defense, so it followed he could still drive a bargain. He was bright and cheerful at the breakfast table, and his men, who feared him, warmed under his geniality.

After breakfast he motioned to Alice. "My pretty friend, I have something to tell you in private. Won't you come in?"

"Yes," Alice answered without hesitation. "I want to talk to you, too."

She seated herself and looked about the room. El Mudo appeared, but Sanchez waved him aside. After a moment's hesitation, the dumb one departed.

The girl began the conversation. "Al is a member of your band, Mr. Sanchez," she said, "and is to be placed on trial."

"He was not engaged in my work. Rather, he insisted on joining Dan Stuart in a private enterprise," Sanchez interrupted.

"You got the loot," she bluntly stated. "Al's in jail. Are you going to leave him there?"

"His defense can be arranged. I shall speak plainly." A shade of apprehension crossed her face, then it returned to its normal calmness. "You have been here in my hands for two months, my friend. My rule here is absolute. I hold the life or death of every living thing in Calico Hole in my hands. Even so, toward you I have not been—let us say, offensive."

"You've been a gentleman, for reasons of your own," she answered. "Go ahead and let's hear the rest of it."

He bowed. "I am almost ready to marry and settle down. My wife

will wear beautiful clothes, and will never soil her hands with work. I could marry you by force, but you are a fury when aroused. Sometime there would be a reckoning, and I'd be killed by your knife or bullet."

"Yes, there would be a reckoning," she assured him.

"But you would keep your word and make good on a bargain," he went on, "so I'll make a bargain. If you will marry me, I'll stop at nothing to free your brother."

"If he's convicted, will you go down and rescue him by force?" she countered.

"Yes!" he replied. "You don't like me now. You hate me," he went on, "but in time you would change, and we would be happy. After all, I'm no ordinary man. I'm the greatest of the wanted men in the Southwest. Even the pride of the Rangers, Jud Tremper, won't risk his reputation against me. When I'm about, he looks the other way and leaves Texas for a rest."

"I'll think it over, Sanchez," the girl said in a toneless voice.

He stood up and bowed as Alice left the room. The door closed, and Sanchez was alone with his thoughts, which were decidedly pleasing. He ruled by fear and power. He knew, too, Dan Stuart and Alice Ford were drawn toward each other. He wasn't so sure about Dan, but in a hundred ways the girl had betrayed an attachment for the man. He enjoyed blasting this possible romance by sheer force, and he was not perturbed that evening when he saw the two meet and walk toward the falls.

ALICE did not beat around the bush, but got to the point at once. "What would you say, Dan, if I married Sanchez in return for Al's freedom?" She saw him

wince, and some of the color left his bronzed cheeks.

"If I didn't understand what Al means to you," he said at last, "I'd say you were a fool. But if he means that much and there's no other way, then it looks as if you would have to accept Sanchez's offer."

"The reason I came to you, Dan," she said, "is because I thought you might figure the way out of this. A man who can successfully plan and carry through the robbery of the Wagon Gap Bank should see a way out of my problem. I've so much faith in you, Dan." It was a gracious tribute to his ability.

Dan caught his breath sharply, and his arm swept her to him with crushing force.

"Alice!" he cried. "I love you!"

"Then I shall refuse Sanchez's offer?" she asked. "You know time is limited, and we must move fast."

"Yes, that's the tough part of it, time is limited." He scowled at his feet as they walked. "Sanchez knows it. Who would have thought, when I decided to throw in with Sanchez, a situation like this would pop up?"

"If you'd just give up your original plan," she urged, "we would get out of here some way, then see Al through——"

"That is impossible," he crisply informed her. "I'm going ahead, hoping for the best."

"Then," she snapped, turning on her heel, "I don't mean a darned thing to you, and you've failed me. There's only one thing left for me—Sanchez's offer. I'm going to accept."

"Alice!"

"Oh, be still!" she cried angrily. "A man who really cared for a girl would—— Oh, what's the use of talking? You don't understand any—"

thing, nor care for anybody but yourself."

"I'm going to get in one word," he growled. "Be sure you don't marry Sanchez until Al is in the clear. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes," she flung over her shoulder as she hurried away. Her fists were clenched, and tears were running down her cheeks. At first they were angry tears, then they changed to the tears of a girl who was grievously disappointed in the man she loved.

Sanchez was smoking and walking the piazza, and as she neared her cabin, he saw her. His eyes narrowed, and he smiled. He knew when a girl was angry with her lover, and experience had taught him when a girl is blinded by anger, she is inclined to do foolish things. There is a very human desire to want to "show" somebody a thing or two.

"Alice!" he called softly. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes," she answered desperately, "I'm going to accept your bargain."

"Ah! You make me happy. One minute, please." He moved with his tigerish stride into the cabin, and returned in a moment with a diamond ring. "Stolen," he said proudly, "five years ago and treasured until this hour." He slipped the ring onto Alice's finger, conscious her hand was like clay. He bowed and kissed the hand, mockery in his eyes, while she stood rigid until he had released her hand. The first link in the chain he was forging to hold her was gold.

"Now what are you going to do about Al?" she asked.

"In the morning you shall leave for Wagon Gap, provided with money," he promised.

"Then it had better not be money Dan Stuart stole from the bank,"

she suggested, "or they'll arrest me, too."

"It shall be money I received in an honest transaction, my sweetheart—the sale of rustled cattle. Good night and—pleasant dreams," he said softly, as she ran up the steps and entered her cabin.

ALICE left Calico Hole the following morning, carrying five thousand dollars, and on her arrival at Wagon Gap, she put up at the best hotel, a two-story brick building next to the bank. The deputy sheriff in charge of the district, having returned from a wild-goose chase to Sundown Creek, promptly called. He did not bow nor kiss her hand, but he was polite and smiling, though firm.

"I've got to ask you some questions, Miss Ford. Where have you been the last two months?"

"I haven't been robbing any banks, nor aiding any one in a jail break," she answered evenly. "Al broke jail, with Dan Stuart's help. They called at our ranch and rode on to Calico Hole. Al was sick, and I did what any sister would do—followed him into the Hole and cared for him. If that's a crime in Texas, you're going to have a sweet time getting a jury of Texans to convict any girl for doing as I have done." And she smiled right back at him. "I'm here to see Al is given justice, something he did not get before. I have been provided with money—not stolen money, either—and I'm going to send for Judge Ritchie to act as Al's attorney."

"I've no quarrel with you, miss," the deputy answered. "Al did get a wrong deal from Beasley in jail. Beasley controlled politics, and things happened some of us liked none too well. Your brother is in

a good cell, and you may visit him. However, you must remember Al has been with Sanchez, also that he did kill Beasley, an officer who was trying to arrest him."

"I'm not forgetting that for a moment," she told him; "that is why I'm hiring Judge Ritchie."

The deputy took his departure, confident he had not been talking to a woman outlaw, something he thought possible when he first called. Alice remained in her room that evening, but an open window brought voices from the street, and she listened attentively, trying to gauge the townfolks' temper. To a man they were in an angry mood, but it was the anger of smart people who had been cleverly outwitted. They had found no gold at Sundown Creek; the bank had been robbed during their absence, and a genial old prospector had vanished. It looked like a Sanchez job. How much longer, they asked each other, would the Texas Rangers let the outlaw get away with his raids?

"How many of you want to walk into the Hole and get him?" some one asked. "There's ten thousand dollars reward on his head, and you don't see me trying to collect; nor you, nor you. There ain't men enough in this part of Texas to take that Hole. I used to be a Ranger myself. Jud Tremper may have drifted when Sanchez's name was mentioned, but the rest of the outfit hasn't quit. Now that Beasley's dead, we've got a chance to do a little house cleaning hereabouts, and I'm in favor of it, so let's quit belly-achin' because Sanchez, or whoever it was, got us out of town and robbed the bank."

After that the tone of the men on the street changed, and Alice felt Al would at least receive justice.

A TELEGRAM from Judge Ritchie stated he would arrive within a week. Alice was reading this when Sally Geary called. She was followed by her father, who twisted his hat in his hand and unburdened his conscience.

"Alice," he growled, "I told Sally if she had anything to do with Al, I'd horsewhip her. And—I would've. I was wrong. The way Beasley swooped down on the Twin F told me there was something queer about it. I snooped a bit and found Delaney, a friend of Beasley's, did brand Twin F calves. Al complained, and they just laughed at him. Being hot-tempered and young, he threw in with Sanchez, and that's just what was wanted. Al got caught, and Beasley tried to murder him by degrees in that cussed cell."

"So far, it looks as if you were right," Alice said.

"Darned right I'm right!" Chris Geary roared. "Come to think about it, two, three small ranchers died in jail, and later Beasley picked up their ranches for a song. Well, I said to myself, 'Chris Geary, Sally's the finest gal in the world, and she's in love with Al. Al's gettin' a raw deal, so, by gosh, Chris, back them young kids to the limit.' So I'm here. Alice, we'll mortgage that ranch and throw the money into the pot for Al's defense."

"Chris, you're grand," Alice exclaimed, wiping her eyes, "but the money's been provided. Shall we go over and see Al, Sally?"

"Oh, can we?" Sally cried.

Alice, with the Gearys, walked to the jail on the edge of town. A new jailer greeted them and answered Alice's request:

"Sure, you can see him. We don't stand for any nonsense, but we give a prisoner a square deal. There's

a change, you see, and Al brought it about. If he'd been an honest citizen, I'd bet even money a jury would call it self-defense, but being one of Sanchez's men, makes a difference. Here he is. You can talk to him through the bars."

Alice started to run forward, then checked the impulse.

"Go ahead, Sally," she whispered.

Al drew Sally's slender arms through the bars, and she slipped them around his neck. Their lips met, and low words passed between them. Chris came over after a while and shook hands. Al caught his breath; Chris's presence was almost too much for him.

"With you backing my hand; Alice and Dan Stuart in the play, I can't lose," Al said with confidence.

"Did Dan say he'd get you out of this?" Alice cried sharply.

"That's the impression he gave: I'd never—hang—for Beasley's death. What Dan says, goes with me," he added.

"Now tell us what happened?" Alice insisted.

"Beasley saw me, I offered to surrender, then I saw by his eyes he was going to kill me and call it self-defense, so I let him have it. I had to," Al concluded.

"That's the way it must have happened," the jailer observed; "it's his story, and he's sticking to it."

AL FORD stuck to the story when Judge Ritchie arrived and went into the case. The judge proved to be a mild little man with silver hair and keen gray eyes. He had a habit of peering over the top of his glasses at witnesses, and another habit of trapping those who lied on the witness stand.

"We will go over and look at the exhibits in this case," he informed Alice and Sally the second day after

his arrival. "It is going to take more than a mere statement that Al killed in self-defense. We've got to prove it."

The exhibits consisted of the weapons taken from Al, and the bullet removed from Beasley's body.

"This is the bullet?" Ritchie asked. "And this is the gun it came from?"

"Yes, judge," the prosecutor answered.

"And this is Al's gun?" the judge inquired, turning to Alice.

"Yes, of course," the girl replied, then she looked closely, and a protest burst from her lips. "This is not Al's gun at all! It's a gun I've never seen before. I swear it. See the notch on the walnut butt plate?" She pressed her hand to her mouth and concentrated her thoughts. "Wait! I have seen that gun before. It is one Sanchez gave Dan Stuart when——"

"When—what?" the prosecuting attorney asked sharply.

Alice had come within an ace of saying, "When Dan set out to rob the Wagon Gap Bank." She choked back the words and said calmly: "When Dan explained he needed a gun."

"Ah, yes!" the prosecutor murmured.

Judge Ritchie said: "This is important, Miss Ford. It suggests that perhaps Al did not kill Beasley after all. This Dan Stuart may have made it appear the boy did the killing. Let's talk it over with him. I'll do the querying, if you please."

The judge hurried to the jail, and his movements were like a hound's on a fresh scent.

"Al," he said, peering over the tops of his glasses, "that wasn't your gun that killed Beasley."

Surprise flashed over Al's face, then his emotions were neatly

masked as he sensed some one, his sister probably, had identified the weapon.

"No, that's not my gun," he admitted; "it's Dan Stuart's. He didn't like the balance, and I did, so we traded several days before I left the Hole."

"Very interesting," Judge Ritchie drawled.

They left the jail, and, when a safe distance from possible listeners, the judge said to Alice:

"Your brother is lying. He is shielding somebody. Can it be this Dan Stuart?" Again his eyes peered over the glasses. "Are you keeping anything from me?"

"Dan robbed Wagon Gap Bank," Alice said. "He was disguised as an old prospector, and tricked the man hunters into going out of town." She saw a glint of admiration come into the judge's eyes. "Al went along against my wishes to give Dan help if he needed it."

"Hm-m-m! It is well you told me, but we'll not mention the robbery at the trial, otherwise if we are given an acquittal on the self-defense issue, the State will hold Al on the grounds he aided in the bank robbery. This, my dear girl, is a complicated case. I'd like to talk to Stuart."

"Huh!" Alice sniffed. "You won't get anywhere with him. He's a queer person, stubborn as a mule. I can't do a thing with him. But I'm not forgetting one thing Al once said. He was telling me about Dan breaking jail and taking him along. Dan risked his life again and again that time, and Al said: 'I owe him my life. It's a debt I'll never forget to pay.'"

Judge Ritchie pulled thoughtfully at his jaw. Many years as a trial judge in Western courts had taught

him a keen insight into men and their motives.

"And your Al has decided to pay the debt," he said softly. "The boy has set his jaw on the matter, nor dare we bring up the bank-robbing affair. I guess we'll have to fight it along the lines he's insisting—he killed Beasley in self-defense."

The two girls exchanged helpless glances, but Alice did not give up hope. She was all for law and order, and she hated violence, preferring to build rather than tear down. But she had Sanchez's promise that he would release her brother by force if need be. On this she pinned her hopes. There was, however, the disturbing possibility the prisoner, if found guilty, might be immediately removed to State's prison and beyond Sanchez's reach.

"Now what'll we do?" Sally cried.

"We'll just have to wait," Alice answered. "And you must be prepared to go wherever Al goes—and go in a hurry. Don't ask me any more questions, because I can't answer them. Let's try and keep up our courage until after the trial."

COURAGE ebbed and flowed in the days that followed. Judge Ritchie worked on Al Ford from various angles, but he could not induce him either by pleas or threats to change his mind.

"You're protecting an outlaw, and I know it," the judge stormed the day before the trial. "Your courage should be directed toward a worthier object. Hang it, boy, don't you realize the best I'm hoping for is a life sentence?"

"That's the best I'm hoping for," Al answered. He could not tell him of Dan's promise to see him through his trouble, but his faith never wavered.

The trial was brief. A jury of

grim Texans listened attentively to the evidence, heard Ritchie's dramatic plea, then prepared to retire to the jury room.

"How long will they be here?" Sally asked.

"I can't tell you, my girl," Ritchie answered.

The men disappeared into a room, and the door was locked. Hours passed, and the judge and court officials disappeared. The girls waited endlessly, refusing Ritchie's invitation to have something to eat.

Night fell, and they returned to the hotel. At two o'clock a knock came at the door.

"It's the clerk. Are you awake?"

"How can we sleep?" Sally cried in anguish. "What's happened?"

"The jury's reached a verdict," the clerk said, "and messengers have been sent for the judge and the others. I thought you'd like to know."

"Thanks," Alice answered.

They leaped from bed and dressed hurriedly. On the street, it was cold. Their footsteps broke the silence of night. The stars hung bright and low. Here and there a cat slunk from view. The lights were on in some houses. Others, having heard the news, were dressing.

The courtroom was filled when they arrived, with sleepy people grouped along the walls. The judge stepped to the bench, and the jury was brought in. Alice searched each face and learned nothing, except the men appeared tired, as if they had hotly argued.

The judge asked the foreman if a verdict had been reached, and the latter said:

"Yes, your honor."

He passed a slip of paper to the clerk, who gave it to the judge. The judge glanced briefly at it and said:

"Read it, Mr. Clerk."

The clerk droned: "We, the un-

dersigned jury, do find Albert Ford guilty of murder in the first degree."

The room was silent, except for the ticking of a big clock and the soft rustle of clothing, then there was a convulsive sob. Sally Geary crumpled to the floor, and Alice thought of a hen quail hit by a charge of shot. She leaned down and patted the girl's shoulder, but kept her eyes on the judge.

"Albert Ford, stand up!"

Al got to his feet and faced the judge. He was tall and straight, but still underweight. His eyes were clear, and his chin was up.

"Sally, look!" Alice whispered. "You must get up!"

"Yes," the girl said. She got to her feet. Her face was like chalk, and she grasped Alice's arm for support.

"Look! He's our man, Sally, and he's brave. Yes, that's it. He's brave. I must find something to cling to or I'll go crazy."

Now Sally was the stronger, and it was her arm that supported Alice.

"Have you anything to say?" the judge asked. "Is there any reason why sentence should not be passed on you now?"

"None, your honor!" Al said evenly.

"But there is something for you to say, Al!" Alice clawed her way through others and grasped Al's arm. "This is your last chance, Al! Speak up and tell everything."

The judge leaned slightly forward, his eyes intent. Ritchie removed his glasses and said:

"Speak, Al. You've shielded him long enough."

"Albert Ford, is there any reason why sentence should not be passed on you now?" the judge repeated.

"None, your honor," Al said again, then he faltered, moistened his lips, and repeated: "None!"

"It is the judgment of this court that you be taken to the State penitentiary, and there, on the thirtieth day of this month, be hanged by the neck until dead—dead—dead!" His voice echoed against the walls. Al stared beyond the judge to the stars. He seemed like one in a trance. "And may God have mercy on your soul!"

The deputy sheriff gently pushed Alice and Sally aside as the prosecutor said:

"Your honor, in view of Sanchez's outlaws, and the fact the defendant is a member of the band, I suggest he be taken immediately to the penitentiary. I fear there may be some attempt to rescue him."

The judge frowned. "This court yields to Sanchez or no one else. The usual procedure will follow," he thundered, angered at the mere suggestion of danger from Sanchez. "Court is adjourned." The gavel banged.

Outside, it was dark and cold. The two girls walked slowly toward the hotel, arm in arm, and after a while Alice spoke.

"Be ready to go anywhere with Al, Sally," she said. "Anywhere—any time." They entered the lobby. "Run upstairs and go to bed—I'm going to write a letter." She seated herself at a desk and wrote a note to Pedro Sanchez, and one to Dan Stuart.

CHAPTER IX.

TEXAS RANGERS.

AN Indian boy brought the two notes to the barbed wire in Calico Hole, where the guard held him and sent for Sanchez. The outlaw, El Mudo, and Dan came down to the wire. The former accepted the notes, glanced briefly at

the envelope addressed to Dan, and said:

"This is yours. It's from Alice, and there'll be no answer. Go back to your cabin."

The outlaw leader opened his own message and read:

PEDRO SANCHEZ:

Al sentenced to hang the thirtieth. He will be taken away sometime after the twenty-second. Come and get us before then.

ALICE.

Sanchez smiled softly, then his eyes narrowed. "I shall borrow from Stuart's plan and arrange to divert a few man hunters." He sent back to his cabin for paper and envelopes. He wrote the first note to Alice. It read:

MY DARLING:

I shall not fail you and will strike when the time is ripe. YOUR PEDRO.

"See that the lady gets this," he directed the Indian boy. He then wrote a second note:

MY DARLING ALICE:

I shall attack the Wagon Gap jail in force some time on the twentieth and rescue Al. Please be ready to leave with me at that time.

PEDRO SANCHEZ.

He gave this, also, to the native boy. "Tell the deputy sheriff at Wagon Gap a strange man gave you this, and the man looked like he might be one of the Sanchez band. Ask him what to do about it. I am sure he will read it." Sanchez smiled and gave the boy a twenty-dollar bill. "Go! And don't mix up the letters."

Dan Stuart's letter was brief, and carried a sting:

DEAR DAN:

They are going to hang Al on the thirtieth. Throughout the trial his

courage was perfect, and his lips remained closed, when by opening them, he could have found freedom and happiness with as brave a girl as ever breathed. Even though he would not talk, I can read between the lines. Your gun, in evidence, helped. I want you to know he is discharging his debt to you in full.

ALICE FORD.

Dan read the letter over several times, and found no comfort between the lines. He saddled Jerry and rode around the Hole, staring with unseeing eyes at the falls, the rich pasture land, and the orderly fences dividing cattle and horses. A debate raged within his breast, but in the end he shook his head negatively. "No, it's too late to turn back now. Happiness for me, if any, is ahead. If I come through the raid on El Rio's bank alive, the trail will be easier. I should drag ten thousand out of the affair—maybe more. I can do a lot on ten thousand."

As the twentieth drew near, Sanchez said nothing of the proposed ride to El Rio, which lay forty miles over the mountains. On the morning of the nineteenth, Dan awakened to find only a handful of outlaws at breakfast. The others had disappeared during the night. He asked no questions, but he walked out to the corral after dark and eyed Jerry speculatively. "You're a good horse, Jerry, and sometimes I think you know it and take pride in it." He fed the horse some sugar. "I think we'll be in action soon."

Sanchez's cabin was dark when he returned, and Dan crawled into his own bunk to sleep, or, if he could not sleep, to review the exciting events of the past few weeks. At three o'clock Sanchez awakened him.

"Get up," he ordered; "we're riding!"

Together they went down to the corral. Some of the horses were

standing close together, others were down in the pasture. Sanchez roped two, one for himself, and the other for El Mudo.

"What's the matter? Why aren't you saddling?" the outlaw leader asked sharply.

"Can't find Jerry!"

"Take another horse then." Sanchez shot a glance at the rim of the Hole. "First thing we know it'll be daylight."

Dan roped a strong horse and saddled it. El Mudo was waiting for them at the big cabin. He vaulted into the saddle and jerked and spurred his spirited animal into submission. Sanchez seemed to be undergoing a change each moment, as the tiger in the man, always close to the surface, revealed itself.

"We're riding to El Rio," he told Dan; "you lead the way."

"With your guns on my back," Dan thought. "You don't trust me yet. Well, it's mutual—I don't trust you, either."

THEY were over the mountains by daybreak, and could see the twinkling lights of El Rio in the valley. By ten o'clock they had approached the outskirts of the town over a seldom-used road.

Sanchez halted. "My men sifted into the town yesterday, one at a time. They're cowboys, in town for a good time, and are stopping at the different rooming places. We swing into action at eleven o'clock. Anybody on the street who gets in the way will be killed, understand?"

"Yes!"

Sanchez was the complete tiger now, tense, alert, and snarling. "When a Texas Ranger attacks a man in a gun fight, he kills him in his mind the instant he lays eyes on him. His natural shooting instincts do the rest. That's what

you're to do, Stuart," Sanchez explained.

"Sure!"

"This is your test. If you run out, we'll drop you in your tracks."

"The only thing I ever run out of was the Wagon Gap jail," Dan retorted. "I figure to cut in to the tune of ten thousand on this deal. Watch me, Sanchez; I'll be around."

"You drift across the street from the bank," Sanchez went on. "Drill anybody who comes around either corner of the building. The rest of the boys know what to do without orders—they've been through this before."

"So have I," Dan retorted.

El Mudo's glittering eyes were studying Dan, searching for something on which he could lay the finger of suspicion. The man was invariably nervous inwardly at such times. Outwardly he was nerveless, and followed his companion's code—kill when in the slightest doubt.

"There'll be a deputy sheriff loafing around somewhere," Sanchez concluded. "I'll take care of him."

Dan rode ahead, and he noticed Sanchez and El Mudo remained together, the former again leaning on the dumb one's sensitive instincts to the slightest danger. A deer, stalked by a mountain lion, could not have been more alert.

El Rio was like a hundred other Southwestern communities—a main street on which stood the more substantial buildings, with humble structures sandwiched in between. Several intersecting streets made a brave effort to carry on the town's growth, but trailed into dust and were lost on the brush pressing in on all sides.

Dan followed one of the intersecting streets and turned the corner into the main thoroughfare.

"Quite a few strangers in town

t'-day," an old fellow remarked to a companion. "You might think the Texas Rangers was sneakin' into camp—that's the way they trickle in."

The other chuckled. "Any Rangers in these parts are over to Wagon Gap, fixin' to surprise Sanchez. Seems like an Injun boy give a note that he was supposed to pack to Al Ford's sister to the deputy. Danged if it didn't tell about a rescue. Sanchez has rid to his last fight," the old man concluded.

"You don't say!" the other exclaimed. "That's where our boys must be—over there lendin' a hand."

Dan grinned. So Sanchez had borrowed his trick of ridding a community of man hunters? "He's beginning to appreciate my real worth," he mused. "Well, here's the bank. And there're a couple of the band." One was examining his horse's hoof, the other searching his pocket for a match to light a cigarette. A clock in the bank showed five minutes to eleven. "Five long minutes to wait," Dan said, "then men will die!"

HE looked into a store window briefly, then walked down to the corner and lighted a cigarette. It was eleven o'clock when he returned to his place opposite the bank. Sanchez was sauntering toward it. El Mudo was coming from the other direction, and suddenly the air was charged. El Mudo slowed up sufficiently to permit Sanchez to enter the bank ahead of him. No recognition passed between them, but the dumb one was five feet behind his chief when they reached the teller's cage.

"How about cashing this?" Sanchez softly suggested, and Dan saw him hand the teller the sheet of paper which stated on the twentieth

there would be a hundred thousand dollars available in the El Rio bank.

"Why," faltered the teller, "we never wrote Wagon Gap any such letter. We don't owe them a dime." His hands were in the air, and he began to talk fast.

El Mudo's instincts warned him, and a horrible cry came from his throat. It was the first sound Dan had heard him utter, and it was wrenched from him by a sudden realization of dire peril, coupled with a madness to kill everything in his path.

"Kill Stuart!" Sanchez snarled, then he leaped through a side window. He was running when his boots touched the ground, and El Mudo came behind him. El Mudo's hand flashed, and Dan saw the flame spurt from the muzzle of his .45, and a bullet creased his shoulder.

"So it's one of us," Dan cried, and he ran toward the dumb one, whose gun was spurting lead. Sanchez was cutting in at one side, trying to save himself from gunfire and at the same time reach his horse. His deadly eyes roved, his lips snapped orders to his men, who were pouring from near-by structures, ready to shoot their way clear.

El Mudo dropped a gun and drew a second from his holster. His rage was disturbing his aim, and as yet Dan had not fired. He was running toward the dumb one, further to shatter his nerve. Retreat would have meant instant death, for he had seen El Mudo shoot on occasion.

A hundred feet from the man, Dan's gun cracked, and El Mudo's arms went back, as if he were stretching. He shuddered from head to foot, then, his face twisting into a snarl, he tried to bring the gun to bear once more—to kill one more man, and that one the man he believed had tricked him into a trap.

Dan did not fire again. He knew a second shot would not be necessary, and there was still Sanchez to reckon with, and he did not know how many others. Three of the outlaws ran down an alley, only to return, running low and yelling: "Texas Rangers!"

A voice shouted: "Surrender, or we'll wipe you out!"

It was a voice that filled half the town, and only one man in the Southwest had one like it—"Tex" Crawford, who had been in the Rangers since he was a youngster. One of the outlaws dropped his gun and thrust his hands into the air. Tex turned, and the man went for a second gun like a flash. Tex whirled and fired. The outlaw pitched onto his face in the street.

Dan slunk along a wall, raced across an open spot, and leaped into the saddle. A gun cracked, and he almost fell to the ground, but, setting his teeth and grasping the saddle horn, he managed to stay up. His heels went into his horse's flanks.

"Light out, boy!" he shouted, and the animal responded.

A half block away, Sanchez was running beside his frightened horse, trying to mount and make his escape.

"Get back," he snarled at Dan; "Don't draw their fire this way!"

"Sanchez! You can't get away! You haven't a chance. The Rangers have surrounded El Rio, and Jud Tremper is here to accept your invitation for a show-down. He's here to settle with you for killing his brother."

Sanchez's horse reared and went down as a bullet struck it. The raider got clear with a tigerish spring and dived into the brush. Dan jumped from his horse as a six-gun

just ahead spurted lead, and followed Sanchez.

"I know you now," the outlaw snarled. "I——"

"Yes, you know me now, Sanchez," Dan retorted. His eyes were flaming—matching the killing light reflected in Sanchez's eyes. Each was following the Ranger's creed—to kill the enemy in your mind as you attack.

Sanchez was never more deadly than at that moment. His gun roared, and the bullet went true—dust puffed from the front and back of Dan's shirt. He almost went down, but his gun steadied, he checked the sagging knees, and fired. Sanchez's face turned gray, then a horrible red. He set his teeth and went down.

"What's next?" Dan said thickly. "What's——"

Darkness rushed on him like a thundercloud, his ears roared, then he was lost in the blackness. Far away a voice whispered:

"Dangedest fight I ever seed—each got the other."

WHEN Dan Stuart opened his eyes, a doctor was bending over him and shaking his head as he ordered:

"Don't try to talk."

"Telegraph governor and tell him to pardon—Al Ford," Dan gasped. "I killed—Beasley. He was one of Sanchez's men. I'm Dan—Stuart."

The doctor said to several others in the room: "You heard that? This man confesses to killing Beasley." He looked back at Dan. "Don't worry, we'll telegraph the governor at once."

Blackness came to Dan again, but far away he heard voices, and one said:

"Biggest clean-up the Rangers

ever made—got every member of the Sanchez gang, including this fellow. Thieves fell out, I guess, and they settled it with six-guns less'n a hundred feet apart!"

Another voice came fainter: "We'll operate, but it won't do any good."

The darkness did not last forever, and finally Dan saw sunlight. He looked at two wasted hands and saw that they were his. He tried to lift one, but it was too heavy.

"I've been sick," he whispered.

"You've been dead for a week," Tex Crawford boomed. "They had to do some work on you, boy, and doc must've done a good job, because he's all puffed up over the fact you've pulled through."

"And still enough of a doctor to worry over my patient," the doctor cut in. "Go to sleep."

Dan slept, and when he awakened, lips lightly touched his forehead. A small hand was lifting his, giving it warmth and strength from the contact.

"Alice," he whispered, without opening his eyes.

"Yes, Alice," the girl said in a low, shaky tone. "You didn't fail Al, did you, my darling? You confessed to killing Beasley and saved him."

"Yes. I'd have done it sooner, but I had to take part in this raid—ten thousand dollars is a lot of money." He spoke slowly and with an effort. "Besides, I knew if he was in jail, he couldn't ride with Sanchez and get killed."

"And he would have been killed, Dan," Alice cried. "The Rangers gave the band a chance to surrender, but it meant hanging to be caught, so they tried to shoot their way out. That's twice you've saved Al's life. The governor says Al's slate is wiped

clean, so he is going to marry Sally on the fifteenth of next month. They're going to get the Twin F back again and run it as four generations of Fords have done."

"And you?" he asked.

"I'll wait until you've served your term, whatever it is, Dan, then we'll be married. There couldn't be anybody but you—ever, my darling," she said.

"Serve what term?" Tex Crawford bellowed. "My gosh, girl, do you think he's an outlaw? Dog my cats, but I don't know what the younger generation is coming to—a girl marrying a man without knowing who he is!"

"Why should that make a difference?"

"It makes a whale of a difference this time. This cuss tried to rob Wagon Gap Bank, and here's why. He wanted to be arrested, thrown in jail with Al Ford, so Al could get him into the Sanchez gang as a reward for pulling off the jail break," Crawford explained.

"Yes, that's clear enough," Alice said.

"Dan needed ten thousand bucks to develop a ranch he's had in mind a long time," Crawford continued, "and Sanchez offered one way of getting it. Everything went along fine, except he had to actually rob the bank in order to win Sanchez's confidence, so that later he might be tricked into leaving Calico Hole and thus give the Rangers a fair chance at him."

"That's clear now," Alice answered.

"And so, this here chump writes another glorious page in Ranger history, then ups and quits the outfit so he can marry a girl and invest ten thousand reward money in developing Calico Hole into Calico Ranch," Crawford boomed.

"Dan!" she cried. "You are a Texas Ranger. Then——" Many things were clear now, chiefly that this man had guarded her brother throughout at the risk of his own life. "But, if I'm not going to be Mrs. Dan Stuart, who am I to be?"

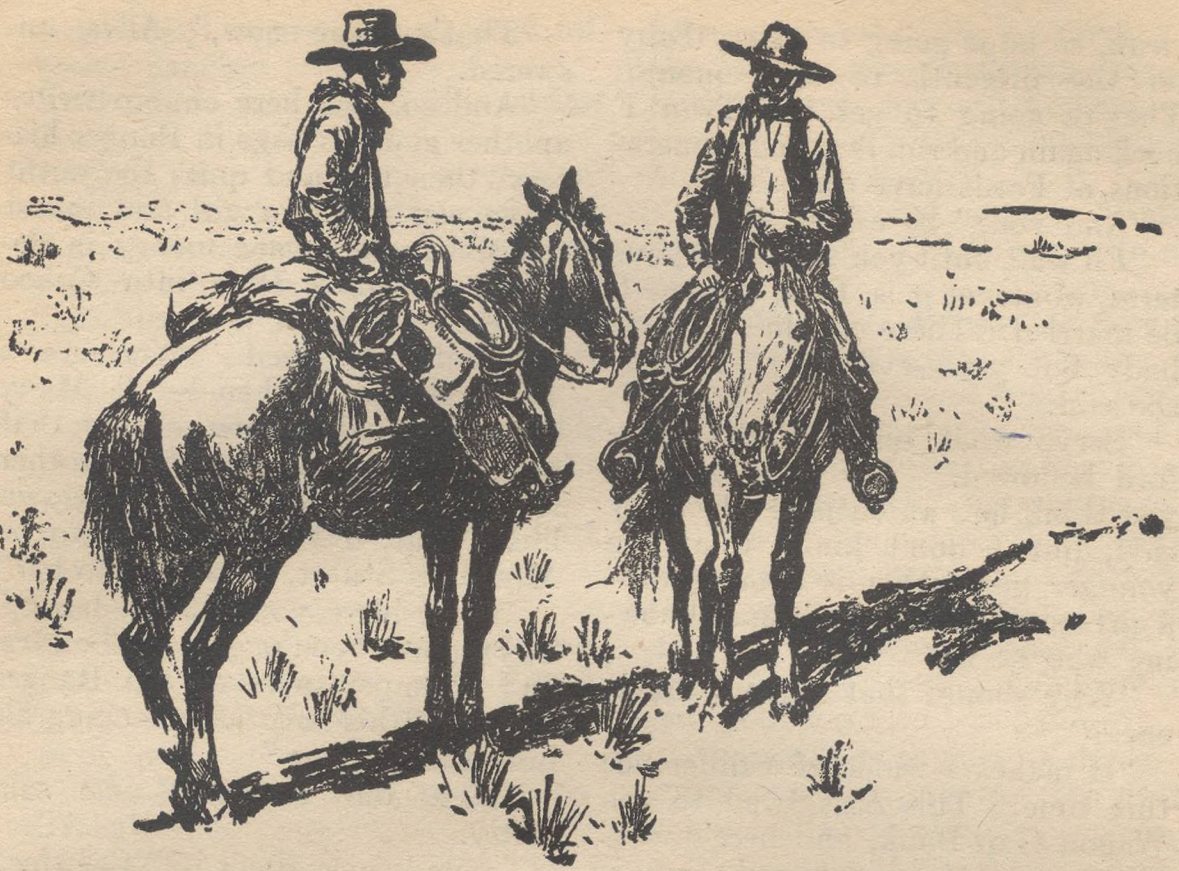
"Why, bless you're little heart," Tex replied, "you're going to be Mrs. Jud Tremper, wife of the Ranger who spent his *vacation* avenging his brother's murder."

"Mrs. Jud Tremper," she said softly.

"Sounds nice, don't it?" Crawford suggested. "Here's the check for ten thousand dollars for Sanchez, dead or alive. What'll I do with it?"

"Give it to Alice," Mr. Jud Tremper said; "she'll get it as soon as we're married, anyway. Besides, she earned it a long while back. It was one night in Calico Hole. My brother's mare recognized me and came up to the fence. I slapped her, and Alice saw the whole affair. She knew that mare connected me with my real identity, but she not only let me play my hand through, she turned the mare loose and relieved me of a menace that might have betrayed me to Sanchez."

"MAN TRAP," a Complete Novel by GLENN H. WICHMAN,
in Next Week's Issue.



COWBOY SAMSON

By GUTHRIE BROWN

Author of "Turn in the Trail," etc.

AND you expect me to put up with such a thumb-handed mountain while you're gone? Well, boss, if you think I'm goin' to take the responsibility of this here ranch for a month and be pestered to death with that dim-wit steam shovel of a Bascom Parr, you got another think comin'. You fire him or I ride down the road. It's bad enough when you're at home here to pick up the pieces, but with you gone, I'd go nuts in three days."

Thus did Lafe Hunt deliver himself, standing in chaps and a red-and-yellow plaid shirt before Lew Schraber. The old rancher, wizened, dyspeptic, irascible, took two turns across the living-room floor with his bony hands gripped behind his back.

"Call him in! Call him in!" Schraber barked. "What's got you so blamed sensitive to Bascom all of a sudden? The boy's been here six months, and this is the first I've heard about his ruinin' the peace of the Crosstree so complete."

"Have you ever," Lafe Hunt asked with great emphasis, "counted up the ropes he's spoiled, and the broncs he's wore to the bone, and the pitchfork handles you've had to buy since he came here? I bet it'd tote up to a right smart sum. And the bunk-house door is hangin' by one hinge because he opened it quick the other day. And three of the bunks has got busted slats because he sat on 'em."

"And what's so new about that? Hasn't it been going on ever since he hit this place? He's not a bad kid. He just hasn't learned yet to handle all that muscle and size he's got."

"Well, it sure gets your goat when you have to live with it right along," was Hunt's reply. "Besides—well, I don't hardly like to say this."

Old Schraber looked sharply around at him. "What in the world do you mean by that?"

"Well—well, boss, I just some way can't quite trust that feller."

The small, dried-up rancher planted himself before the tall cow-puncher.

"Spit it out!" he commanded.

"We-ell," Lafe Hunt still hesitated, "I ain't really got anything definite to go on, but you know that it is queer about the way you been losin' your stuff this year. Your herd has been kinda thinned all over, slow and easylike; and who but some man on this ranch, or ridin' the range for you, could get away with that? And those weaners that was lifted right out of the foothill pasture, with us boys sleepin' only half a mile away. No thief that come in from outside could figure things so close. Well, you can see what I mean. Somebody on the Crosstree is playin' double."

"Don't you suppose," snapped Schraber, "I've known that all

along? And you're suggesting that Bascom Parr is the man? Stuff and nonsense! Balderdash! Tommyrot!"

"But it's since he came here that things begun goin' real bad——"

"Call him in, I told you!"

Lafe Hunt stepped to the door, the broad wings of his chaps flopping as he walked, giving an added swagger to his gait.

"Hey, there, Parr!" he yelled. "Come in here! The boss wants you."

A BROAD shadow moved across the doorsill in the August sunlight. Then the opening was filled, both as to height and width, and a gentle voice asked:

"You wanta see me, boss?"

Six feet above the floor, mild blue eyes looked down at the rancher. The face of Bascom Parr was fair and round. Curly, straw-colored hair rioted above a smooth forehead, and a sensitive mouth and square chin completed the face.

He looked, thought old Schraber to himself, about as much like a villain as a cherub on a pink cloud. But the rancher was troubled, and this small irritation, piled upon all the rest, was just that much too much. Yes, and Hunt seemed to mean what he said, and he was the only man on the place capable of carrying on in the owner's absence. Still, Schraber wanted to dodge the issue if possible, so he inquired tartly:

"What's this I hear about your breaking up the bunk house?"

Bascom looked reproachfully at Hunt, and stubbed his boot toe on the threshold as he moved into the room.

"I didn't go to do it, boss. The slats on them bunks ain't much

force, anyhow. They're plumb full o' knots."

"Well," growled Schraber, still dodging a show-down, "get back out there and fix up that door you tore off the hinges. And—— Wait a minute, Bascom! I—damn it, I don't like to tell you, kid! But I guess we won't need you any more. You see," the rancher explained hastily, avoiding the young fellow's eyes, "I've just got to cut down on expenses. I'll give you a coupla weeks' extra wages, and you can easy land you another job this time of year."

The enormous bulk of Bascom Parr turned blindly toward the door. He stumbled into a small table that was loaded with books and papers. The cowboy clutched at the table to keep it from going over, and blundered against an old-fashioned coat-and-hat rack standing near the door. The resulting crash shook the house.

Bascom dazedly arose and freed himself of débris, and Schraber, hands clenched, yelled:

"Get out! Get out, you club-footed elephant you! Don't stop to pick those things up! Get out!"

The face of the rancher was white with wrath—and shame. The youth's stricken look! But Schraber was a badly worried man. Things had been piling up pretty fast on him lately. He was not one bit sure that he would be able to get the extension on his paper, which he was going down to the county seat to ask for, to-morrow. And this mysterious stealing that was sapping his herds—he had been baffled in every effort to solve it. And the money he had expected from Natchez County—that had not come. He knew very well that Charley Elden, who owned the general store at Natchez Junction, would have sent the money if he had been able to collect it. Charley had taken sev-

eral small herds of horses and one large herd of cattle, which belonged to Schraber, to sell on commission in Natchez County. But collections were always tough in that sparsely settled region. When a man had a muddle like that on his mind, what was one overgrown cowboy more or less?

Bascom didn't bother about the bunk-house door. He didn't bother about his check. He rolled together his meager possessions, caught and saddled his one horse—a big bay with enough bottom to carry his master's avoirdupois—and took the southward road away from the Crosstree Ranch, his heart a hard, choking lump that had stuck square in the middle of his throat.

For the Crosstree wasn't just another ranch to Bascom Parr. It wasn't merely a place to put his feet under the table and draw his pay slip every month. It was a shrine at which Bascom had worshiped from afar, long before circumstance had permitted him to visit it. To the gigantic, gentle-hearted cowboy, the short-tempered, shriveled, snapping Schraber was not an unjust and an ungenerous boss.

WHEN Bascom looked at the little rancher, he did not see a cranky and worried old man. What he really saw was the hero of Shawnee Creek, remembering a page out of Western history that the stockman himself and most of the rest of the world had forgotten. How Lew Schraber, young and flashing and gay, had saved the settlers along Shawnee Creek from a furious Indian attack. How, with four six-shooters and twenty pounds of ammunition, and a daring that was little short of madness, he had made a flank attack

upon the stalking redmen, had decoyed them out of the creek bottom, making them think, in the blackness of a windy spring night, that he was a small but effective fighting force. How he had led them over ridge and gulch and down timber, until his hat was shot from his head and his horse shot from under him. How, with two bullets in him and his last four rounds of shells, he had crawled around to their rear, while they were hunting him, and demoralized them completely by a new and ferocious attack. And how Shawnee Creek had lived in peace thereafter.

It was a wild story; and people living in safe, snug homes didn't believe it, and remarked what impossible tales came out of the West, and where would anybody get all that ammunition, anyhow? But Bascom had an uncle, very old now, who had been one of the Shawnee Creek settlers, and he knew that every word of the tale was true. Young Lew Schraber had been bringing in a freight load of supplies when he saw the Indians coming in the dusk. He had broken open a crate of small arms, then flung upon a lead horse the saddle which most freighters carried for rounding up their grazing stock.

Yes, Bascom knew the truth of it all. He slumped dejectedly in his saddle as his broncho plodded across the alkali flats that stretched south to the rolling grass lands of Indio County. Ever since he could remember, he had dreamed of the day when he would get him a job with the heroic Lew Schraber. And now, because of Lafe Hunt, he had lost it.

Bascom wondered miserably why Hunt had it in for him. The cowboy had long realized that his size and strength were a handicap in the only work he liked to do. He could

not seem to learn how to handle his unwelcome endowments. He threw his rope too far, and drove his spurs too deep, and burned a brand too long. He always sat back on a lariat too hard and fast—he'd lost track of the number of bovine necks he'd broken—and he could not join in the rough-house play of the ranch hands for fear of crippling somebody.

Bascom cursed his superhuman strength, and watched with lack-luster eyes a rider coming across the flats at a steady jog. A voice came through the white heat, rousing him.

"Hello, there, Bascom! You asleep in your saddle?"

The gaze of the cowboy cleared. "Well, Duke Jones, if it ain't you! Where'd you drop from?"

"Natchez County," replied the other with laconic brevity. "Duke" Jones had not been so named because of any pretensions to titled rank, but from the fact that he had a pair of very efficient fists. He was a dark man, rather under medium height, with a seamed, weather-bitten face, a pair of inscrutable eyes, and an enviable reputation. He was a dead shot; he was entirely fearless and utterly honest. The hero-worshipping Bascom admired him intensely.

Duke asked bluntly: "What you headed in this direction for, lookin' like the day after the big wind?"

"I just got fired," Bascom explained, picking at the brads on his saddle horn to hide his eyes.

"Schraber fire you?"

"Yep."

"What for?" Duke pursued, getting out a battered slab of very black plug cut. "Have a chew?"

"No, thanks. Makes me sick. Because my feet are all clubs and my fingers are all thumbs."

"Aw, don't feel bad about it, kid. The Old Man's just got a mad on. He'll get over it. You go back in four, five days and he'll never know he fired you."

Bascom shook his head and asked absently: "What you packin' all that hardware for?"

The eyes of Duke Jones narrowed. "How do you know what I'm packin' in?"

"See it," was the reply. "You got a gun under your arm and one in your belt, besides that cannon on your hip."

Duke swore softly. "You're an observin' cuss. A lotta fellers has seen me since I started for here, and I'd gamble that none of 'em suspicioned that I was wearin' more'n one pistol. You see, I'm also wearin' close to four thousand in gold and paper."

Bascom's face lighted. "Say! You ain't bringin' up Schrabber's money from Charley Elden, are you?"

"None but," Duke returned. "Charley has had the deuce's own time collectin' for that stuff o' Schrabber's he sold down there. It come in in driblets, mostly coin; and since their bank went bust, he had to send it as was. So I hustled me an arsenal and told Charley I'd see it through."

"I'm sure glad it's come," said Bascom. "The Old Man's been gettin' a darn tough break lately. He was startin' down-country to-morrow to see about an extension on his loan."

Duke Jones rubbed a stubbled chin thoughtfully. "You're a rum bird. A guy up and busts you, and you're tickled pink when you hear he's had a little luck."

Bascom answered simply: "I couldn't be sore at Lew Schrabber."

Duke looked at him, then turned

away his eyes, thinking it was good to know that there were still clean things in the world. Presently he said:

"I kinda wish you was back on that ranch, kid."

"Why?"

"Well, I can't stop there to-night. I gotta go right on. Got a hurry-up message to deliver at the Hastings place. I'd feel easier if somebody good and husky was left with Schrabber and these spondulics."

"You're afraid somebody'll lift that money? Gosh, Duke, no danger of that in this neck o' the woods."

"No? Well, some jasper has been scoutin' my trail all the way up here. I got two glimpses of him, and I doubled back and found some tracks. He don't seem to wanta tackle me, but he's follerin' this money, or I'm a blame poor guesser."

"No need to worry," said Bascom. "The Old Man's got a good safe."

"Maybe," was the dubious answer, "but I don't like the look of things, just the same. I got a hunch that this guy that's been trailin' me is in cahoots with some one on the ranch. Oh, sure, it's all guess, but my guesses has been bull's-eyes too many times for me to sniff at 'em. And I don't hardly like to mention it to the Old Man, because he's jumpy enough as it is. You wouldn't consider goin' back?"

"I can't," said Bascom, thinking of Lafe Hunt. "It'll be all right, Duke, if you see it into the safe."

"Well, then, so long, and good luck." Duke rode on.

FOR another hour Bascom jogged stolidly across the monotonous plain, aiming for a spring in a draw where he could camp that night. He had unsad-

dled and turned his horse loose to graze when, stooping to drink at the spring, his eye was caught by something bright lying on the bushes above.

Bascom forgot the drink. He stared a moment, then reached up and plucked the bright object from the bush where it had caught. It was a torn piece of a red-and-yellow bandanna, and the cowboy was ready to swear that he knew where it had come from. The ranch wag at the Crosstree had brought a red-and-yellow bandanna from town one day and presented it with great solemnity to Lafe Hunt, to match his plaid shirt.

Hunt was sensitive about that shirt, but he was stubborn about wearing it. He also wore the bandanna, just to show everybody how little he cared for their opinion of his taste. A few days ago the donor of the handkerchief had demanded to know what had become of his gift. Hunt had replied, to the vast hilarity of the other cowboys, that he had lost it.

Bascom sat cross-legged on the ground, looking at the thing. The sight of it seemed to have turned a switch in his brain. Numerous, remote items flashed across his memory. Scattered and fragmentary items they were, and yet they had a curious order, now that his mind had struck their track. A man had been following Duke Jones, maybe a man who had met Lafe Hunt here at this spring. Hunt had made a trip over into Indio County a few days ago, "to look at some yearlings." Indio County lay next to Natchez County. There had been other times when Hunt was absent from the ranch, all plausibly explained. And all those hints of his about the stealing being an inside

job, that there was some snake on the Crosstree.

"By golly," thought Bascom, "I wonder who that snake is? I'm beginning to think that Hunt has likely got the answer behind his vest. Wonder why I never thought of these things before? I never did cotton much to Hunt, but the Old Man seemed to think he was all right, and I guess I don't look very close at what the Old Man approves. Hunt's a crackin' good cowhand, and he has a way with him, when he wants to use it. Then, too, I may be all wrong. But I wish Duke was goin' to stay there with that money to-night. Maybe I'd oughta go back, like he said. I could be there, just in case."

Bascom pondered the question while he consumed two hard biscuits and a can of beans by the flickering light of a sagebrush fire. He didn't want to go back. And this was all just guesswork, and likely a mile off the right track, anyway. Still, he could lie up on the hillside above the bunk house and not show himself, unless something happened.

Bascom, because of the size and strength which kept him out of fights, had never been suspected of a deep aversion to battle in any form. He didn't think it was fear—he hoped that it wasn't fear—but the cowboy had a strong distaste for contention and angry words. His was a peace-loving soul. He liked to be friendly with people, and when he could not be, he wanted to get clear out of their vicinity.

PRONE on the ground, half dozing, Bascom suddenly lifted his head. A door had creaked. The lights in both bunk house and ranch house had been out for an hour. For a few minutes he heard

nothing more, then there came to his ears the muffled sound of horses' hoofs. A figure moved out from the bunk house toward the corrals. Bascom slid quietly down the slope behind the building, and crouched at one corner to listen. He could hear the snores of two or three of the sleeping cowboys inside. Near the big corral there was the creak of leather and the sound of men shifting their weight from saddle to ground.

"By golly!" thought Bascom. "Sounds like an army. I might let a yell outta me and nip the whole thing in the bud right here. But if I did, we'd never know who it was come outta that bunk house."

Four shapes materialized from the shadows, and a blurred whisper was giving orders. One of the shapes took position by the bunk-house door. The other three moved silently toward the ranch house. When they were out of sight, Bascom took up his station beneath Schraber's bedroom window. The safe was in the living room, one end of which served as ranch office. Bascom reasoned that Schraber would be wakened and made to open it. Maybe the Old Man could bluff them out somehow. The plain fact was that the cowboy was casting about in his mind for some way to stop this thing without a fight.

Schraber's window lighted, and his voice sounded, sudden and querulous:

"What's this? What's this? What—the—devil——"

A hoarse voice said: "Gag him quick 'fore he can yell! There! Now, old man, get your slippers on and come and open up that safe for us. And you might's well come quiet and easy. You won't get hurt if you show pretty manners. Oh, want your dressin' gown, huh? My,

what a lotta style you rich guys do put on! There you are. Come along, now."

Bascom quickly changed his position to the front door, keeping well out of sight of the guard at the bunk house. Through a window near the door he could see the group enter the living room, one of three masked men carrying a lamp, the other two leading Schraber, firmly gripped by the arms, his mouth gagged with a blue handkerchief.

The eyes of the old rancher were blazing, his glance shooting about him, canvassing every possibility of escape. But for once in his fire-eating life, Lew Schraber was helpless. Still, thought the watching Bascom, he might figure something out yet. He might fool with the combination of the safe, act as if he couldn't work it.

That, apparently, was just what Schraber was doing. Squatted on the floor, his bony, bare ankles showing above his slippers, he worked at the combination for two, three, four minutes. One of the masked figures growled:

"The old four-flusher is stallin' on us, boys!"

A booted toe shot out and planted itself in the old man's short ribs. He toppled over with an involuntary moan.

Bascom had wrenched the door open and was halfway across the room before his first conscious thought came to him. The group before the safe had whirled, dragging at their guns. They fired, but their aim was poor. He was already on top of them. He picked up the first man he encountered and hurled him across the room. The fellow had some difficulty separating himself from a demolished chair.

Bascom put out a foot and tripped the second man, and met the third

head on. This one dived under his arms and clung like a leech, yelling: "Get him! Get him!"

ONE of Bascom's hamlike fists inserted itself under the chin that was digging into his ribs, opened, and then closed long fingers around the scrawny neck. The next second the man was clawing for freedom and yelling for help.

Help was coming. The other two swarmed over the cowboy, not daring to shoot except at close range, for fear of getting their comrade. Bascom wouldn't stay put long enough. He set his boot heel on a toe, and there was a shriek of pain. As the leech at last tore himself loose, the cowboy grabbed off the mask. Schrabber's voice yelled:

"I can identify that one, kid! Uncover the others!"

There was an instant stampede for the door. The unmasked man got away, but Bascom threw one of the others with his foot, and hooked a hand in the collar of the third. As he tore this mask away, he heard the sound of shooting at the bunk house. The guard there was evidently trying to hold the aroused men inside.

"Get the other one, kid!" croaked Schrabber, his voice crackling with excitement. He had torn off the gag at once, and was now looking for an opening to run in, but Bascom was moving much too fast for any chance of help.

As the man he had tripped rolled across the floor, the cowboy snatched the gun of the fellow he had just unmasked. He tossed the weapon to Schrabber and tossed the owner after it.

The rancher chuckled dryly and said: "Seems to me I fired you for drinkin' two years ago, Smitty."

Smitty sat very quiet under his own gun muzzle.

The last man had made a desperate break for the door. Bascom knew who he was by the way he moved. The cowboy got one finger in the belt of the flying form. It was hard on the finger, but it did the work. The next moment, unmasked and cursing like a madman, Lafe Hunt was struggling furiously in the grasp of the cowboy he had had fired only a few hours before. Bascom took him by the scruff of the neck and the belt, and faced him around toward Schrabber.

"Ever see this before?" he asked joyfully.

Grim and astonished, the rancher stared. "What a lame-brain I turned out to be!" he said bitterly.

"And I think," added Bascom, "that this hunk o' coyote bait was plannin' to lay the robbery onto me, is the reason he had you fire me today."

A voice spoke from the doorway. "I come back as quick as I could, but I can't see's I'm much needed."

Duke Jones came into the room, methodically poking before him the robber that Bascom had first unmasked.

"The rest o' the boys," Duke Jones said, "has got another guy out there they said was shooting holes in their door, and they're askin' him some kinda personal questions about it. Schrabber," he said, eying the sullen-faced Lafe Hunt, "don't you reckon that this about explains your mysterious cattle rustlin'?"

The Old Man nodded slowly. He looked around the wrecked room. Not one piece of furniture in it, excepting the safe, had escaped the hurricane. Then he looked at the wrecker, a smile in his deep eyes.

"Some man!" was his only comment.

Bascom spoke quickly: "Look, boss! I wanta show you. Stand up there, Hunt. Boss, I just found out how to do it. Look!"

He let go a terrific haymaker at Hunt's jaw. The man dodged with a yell of fright. But at that he would not have moved quickly enough, if Bascom's giant fist hadn't stopped within a half inch of the bristled chin. Arm still in the air, the cowboy looked around at Schrabber and grinned.

"See that? D'you get it? Look."

He snatched up Lafe Hunt as if the man had been a rag doll, and swung him, arm length, overhead. Hunt, completely demoralized, screamed with terror. The body hurled downward, and the spectators gasped. But it stopped within a foot of the floor, checked smoothly by perfectly timed muscles. Bascom released it gently, and Hunt

rolled out of reach, eyes distended, jaw slack.

Duke Jones was watching with narrowed, glittering gaze. He was a man who could appreciate such a performance. Bascom laughed happily.

"See, boss? I can handle myself now. I've always hated fights, when all the time the only thing I needed was a fight, to learn how to use my strength. I bet I don't bust up any more bunks or pitchfork handles. And"—Bascom hesitated and blushed—"about the—the rest of it, boss. If I'm ever half the man the guy was who saved Shawnee Creek from a scalpin', I'll be more'n satisfied."

The old eyes of Lew Schrabber stared into the young ones a minute, and understanding flooded over him. His gun hand dropped limply.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" said Lew Schrabber.

A New Serial, "STONE STIRRUPS," by KENNETH PERKINS,

Begins in Next Week's Issue.

AMBERGRIS FIND FAILS

THE great ambergris boom that drew thousands of treasure hunters to Bolinas Beach, California, collapsed recently when chemists declared the lumps were not ambergris at all but a sea-hardened chemical that had been used in clearing sewers in San Francisco.

The excitement began when Captain H. Halvardsen, after gathering one hundred and fifty pounds of it, said the material was the purest ambergris he had ever seen. The school board declared a holiday and with children and teachers hurried to the beach.

Ambergris, cast up by sick whales, is used in the making of perfumes and is very valuable. Bolinas dwellers figured that a whole school of whales had been indisposed five hundred thousand dollars' worth. University of California experts said nay, and the excitement died.



TRAIL PARDNERS

By **SETH RANGER**

Author of "Gold Guard," etc.

THE fringe of red whiskers around "Hard-rock" Shipley's jaw suddenly bristled; his eyes glared, and abruptly he set down his cup of coffee and shook a gnarled fist at his partner, "Poke" Tupper.

"Stop siphonin' your coffee," he roared. "Every time you take a mouthful, it sounds like a sump pump in a mine. Sl-l-l-u-u-u-up! Sl-l-l-u-u-u-up! All winter I've heard it. I hear it in my sleep."

"Yeah," Poke flared, thrusting a small head supported on a long turkey neck halfway across the table. "And I'm sick of hearin' you com-

plain mornin', noon, and night. If it wasn't you was such a helpless little runt and needed a big strong man like me, I'd have pulled my freight long ago."

"Me helpless?" screamed Hard-rock. "Me? Why, you long drink of water! I'm comin' around the table and take you apart." He jumped up. "No, on second thought it'd take me too long to reach you. I'm comin' direct!" He hurled the table aside, and dishes, moose steak, sour-dough bread, along with knives, forks, and spoons, clattered to the floor.

Hard-rock's fist started for Poke's jaw, but as the lanky sourdough was

a foot taller than his red-headed partner, a flip of the head carried the jaw beyond reach.

"Yah!" Poke jeered. "Missed me a mile!"

"I'll cut you down to my size," Hard-rock shrilled, driving his fist into Poke's stomach. As Poke doubled up, Hard-rock nailed him on the jaw. Poke's eyes glazed, his knees sagged, then his long arms grasped Hard-rock's solid figure and held on. Together they crashed to the floor.

Slugging, kneeling, and occasionally indulging in a little mild thumb gouging, they rolled the length of the room.

"Look out for the stove!" Poke warned.

"The devil with the stove," Hard-rock snarled.

They crashed into the stove, knocked it off its legs, and brought the pipe down with it. Two years' accumulation of soot filled the room. Hard-rock's hair turned black; his face became an inky smear, and when he sneezed, soot eddied violently. By mutual agreement, they broke apart and opened the door to let the smoke and soot out.

MORT SEELEY, hearing the uproar, arrived as they renewed the battle. Seeley liked beer and comfort. He was built accordingly, with a moon face and a stomach as round as a globe.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he admonished, holding up a fat hand. "I urge you to be calm. This matter can be adjusted."

"There's nothin' to adjust," Hard-rock panted. "I want to tear this pelican to shreds, and nothin' less will suit me."

"And just try and keep me from murderin' this red-whiskered mon-

key," Poke stormed, burying his knee in Hard-rock's stomach.

This was the signal for Seeley to hop into the fight. "I'm going to have peace in these parts if I have to fight for it," he roared. "Now cut it out!" He hurled himself between them, and something had to give under the impact of his great weight.

"This is a private fight," Hard-rock shouted. "Come on, Poke; let's have at him."

They swarmed over Seeley, mauled him, and hurried the well-intentioned fat man from the cabin. As they renewed the fight, Seeley broke into a trot which carried him to Big Nugget in fifteen minutes. He went straight to the United States marshal's office and asked for "Dad" Morton, marshal of the district.

"He's out," a clerk informed him. "Will Bud Tuttle do?"

"You mean the Chechahco Kid?" Seeley asked.

"Yeah. What's wrong, a riot?"

"Hard-rock Shipley and Poke Tupper are having a knock-down-and-drag-'em-out battle. Cabin fever is what you call it," Seeley panted.

"I'll send Bud Tuttle then," the clerk answered. He raised his voice. "Bud! Cabin fever over at the Shipley-Tupper place!"

The "Chechahco Kid's" two hundred pounds bounced down the wooden stairs leading to the second floor. In moccasins and parka, he suggested some swift-moving furbearing animal. There was not a better rough-and-tumble fighter in the North, and he could hold his own with a six-gun. He was yet to grasp, fully, that there are methods other than brute force to gain an end, but he was learning this rapidly.

"When you're smart enough to trick people into behaving them-

selves," Dad Morton always told him, "you're in a fair way of becoming a good deputy." And "Bud" never gave up trying.

He broke into a run which carried him to the fight within five minutes. He got a leg, which happened to belong to Poke Tupper, and pulled. As Hard-rock's fist was buried in Poke's hair, the little sourdough came along, too.

"Let go, dang it," Poke groaned; "my hair's comin' out by the roots."

Bud dragged them through the door and heaved them into a snow bank.

"Now cool off," he admonished. "As fast as you start fighting, I'll throw you back."

The two circled and considered their chances against the best man either had ever seen in action.

"It'll be fightin' the Law, anyway," Poke muttered, seeing a way out.

"Don't let that stop you," Bud countered, removing his deputy marshal's shield.

There was a silence—a silence Bud did not spoil by grinning. Presently he said:

"You've been partners too long to break up this way. You need each other."

"Need hell!" Hard-rock exploded. "Any time I can't get alone without Poke, I'll go back to a bottle and teethin' ring."

"Why, you shrimp," Poke snarled. "You've been a handicap as long as I've known you. Every time I come to a deep stream, I have to pack you across or fall a tree for a bridge, else you'll drown."

"Who keeps the camp in meat?" Hard-rock demanded. "Who can pack the biggest load up a mountain? The answer is, Hard-rock Shipley."

"Now just a minute," Bud inter-

rupted. "You need each other. You're an ideal combination and can accomplish more, working together, than any two men I know. We've been hoping you'd tackle the Iron Mountain country as soon as the ice went out. If there's gold up there, you two will find it. You'll move slowly and blaze a safe trail for others, too. If you don't go, a lot of chechahcos will get lost, fall into glaciers, or be swept away by white water. The country needs you. Now shake, and make up."

The two glared and neither made a move.

"You'd be helpless without each other," Bud insisted.

"I'm goin' to show this monkey just how much he needs me and how little I need him by goin' it alone." Poke sneered. "It's no use, Bud. You're just wastin' your breath. We know your intentions are good, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Bud knew men and he knew this stubborn pair was determined to split. "I've done my best," he said. "You're crazy, both of you. And when you hear of some poor cuss being drowned or lost in a glacier crevasse in the Iron Mountain country, just remember if you'd have stuck together, blazed a good trail——"

"I'll blaze the trail myself," Poke grated. "Divide the stuff up."

"I'll do the dividin' up," Hard-rock shouted. "You don't cheat me, you string bean!"

"You and who else?" Poke countered. "I've got just as much right to do the dividin' as you have."

"Keep your shirts on, both of you," Bud said sharply. "I've never seen men to be so consistently wrong. I'll do the dividing. Get your stuff together."

THEY heaped their belongings on the table in the center of the cabin and stacked several bales of fur—their winter's catch—against the wall.

"Silver fox, eh?" Bud observed. "Worth about eighty dollars a skin at the fur exchange in Seattle. How many have you got?"

"Fifty!" Hard-rock answered.

"Four thousand dollars," Bud mused. "And with that much money the two of you could prospect the Iron Mountain country, blaze a trail, and make the way easy for a lot of old fellows who haven't had the luck you've had."

No answer!

He divided their belongings, to the last knife and fork, each getting twenty-five pelts. "Now how about the table? Shall you cut cards for it?"

"Naw, cut it in two," Poke answered. "I'll put a couple more legs on my half." He produced a saw and cut the table in half.

"How about Tabasco, the mashing mule—going to cut him up?" Bud inquired.

Neither partner looked at the other.

"I'll take the upper half of Tabasco," Hard-rock snapped. "That's the part that carries the load," he added softly.

"Give me the legs," Poke said, with a curious gleam in his eyes, "and I'll be satisfied."

"That leaves this cabin," Bud went on. "Now——"

"Cut it in two!" Hard-rock directed. "I'll take the end with the stovepipe, and he can have the end with the door—or other way around. We've got an extra stove so there'll be no trouble about stoves."

Without a word Poke stalked over to Seeley's cabin and said:

"I'd like to borrow that long cross-cut saw."

"Fools!" Seeley snorted. "Go help yourself—you're cutting up the cabin, I suppose." The saw was eight feet long, and used only on very thick logs and timbers.

"Yeah," Poke answered. "It's a real split-up this time. Everything divided."

"How about Iron Mountain?"

"I'll blaze a trail. My gosh," he added truculently, "you'd think I can't get along without Hard-rock."

"You're a great team, the best I know," Seeley answered. "And Iron Mountain country is a two-man job any time."

"Not for me, it isn't!" Poke cried. "Anything Hard-rock and I can do together, I can do single-handed." Poke was ordinarily modest, but the present situation had aroused him to recklessness. He balanced the saw on his shoulder and trudged back to the cabin, the free end of the saw swaying up and down with each step.

Hard-rock was waiting for him on the roof. He had drawn a line in the exact middle of the structure. They began at the peak of the roof and worked through the shingles until the cut was too wide for the length of the saw. Then Hard-rock removed his handle, thrust the saw blade through the cut, climbed down, went inside, attached the handle, and thereafter worked his end from the interior.

In about two hours they had completed the cut from ridge pole to foundation. Each moved his share of their belongings into his half.

"I'm goin' to hang blankets over the open end so I can't see you," Poke Tupper declared.

"Yeah? Well, I'm goin' to put up a log wall so I won't hear you siphonin' your coffee," Hard-rock

retorted. He caught up an ax and headed for the nearest trees which would supply logs of the desired size.

BUD TUTTLE loafed around, speculating on a means of bringing the cantankerous old fellows together. Knowing neither would budge an inch from the stand he had taken, Bud appreciated he was attempting next to the impossible.

Hard-rock cut his logs, then walked over to Tabasco with a view to harnessing him to a sled and drawing the logs to the cabin. The mule regarded him with interest.

"Whoa, you long-eared skate!" he admonished. "Stand still, or I'll lam you."

"Hey, What're you doin' with that mule?" Poke advanced in a threatening manner.

"I own the upper half of him," Hard-rock answered, standing his ground and glaring. "I aim to harness that half and work it." He grinned contemptuously. "Put one over on you, didn't I?"

"Hah—hah! That's funny," Poke jeered. "You just thought you did! I own the legs. Well, you can't use the upper half without payin' me plenty for using my half—the legs."

Hard-rock's jaw fell. "Why, you double-crossin' black-hearted—" he began. At that moment he backed into Tabasco's heels, and the next instant was flying through the air. He struck the packed snow with a thud and struggled to his feet. "So you own the legs, eh? Well, the legs damaged me just now, and I'll sue you. I'll sue you for assault and battery, mental anguish, and—anticipating profits," he concluded lamely.

Poke threw back his head and roared with laughter. "That's the funniest thing I ever saw—you in

the air." He slapped his leg and doubled up.

Tabasco, realizing he could not kick Poke, stretched his neck and nipped the seat of his pants. Poke's laughter ended so abruptly it might have been severed with a knife.

"Your mule's head done that," he roared. "I'll have you in court——"

"Just a minute, boys," Bud Tuttle interrupted. "Can't you see you're getting nowhere? Now suppose you shake——"

A glare from the two sourdoughs silenced him. Poke returned to his half of the cabin, while Hard-rock rigged up a harness, attached it to a light sled, and prepared to haul the logs by hand.

Bud returned to the marshal's office to find Dad Morton and half of the mining camp awaiting him.

"What luck, Bud?" they chorused.

"None at all," Bud grumbled. "Each is packing a chip on his shoulder, and no matter what a man says, it is the wrong thing."

"It's your big chance to figure something out," said Dad Morton.

"I'll do my best," Bud glumly promised.

"You'd better do it quick, then," Dad urged. "The break-up will be here in a week or so. I want to see them blazing a safe trail into the Iron Mountain country before the chechahcos show up. Otherwise, my office will spend all of its time trying to find lost people."

"Bud Tuttle or nobody else can get 'em together," a voice remarked as Bud entered the office. "It's one of the things we'll have to say is too bad."

BUD'S reflections were broken by a demanding voice. "Hey, you, Tuttle, when am I goin' to get my trial? I don't want to stay in your jail forever."

Bud peered into one of the largest cells and recognized Jim Listman who had been charged with running another man's trap line.

"All you've got is Pete Sather's word that I stole fur from his traps, and I say I didn't. My word is as good as his. A man ain't guilty until it's proved, so I'm innocent. Why're you keepin' an innocent man locked up?"

"Developing into something of a lawyer, eh?" Bud drawled, annoyed because Listman had interrupted the trend of his thoughts.

"I don't know anything about that," Listman snarled, "but I know I ought to be out of this place. Sometimes I feel like tearing the place apart."

Bud thought he looked capable of it as he stood with his massive hands clutching the bars.

"You're said to have a weakness for fur," Bud ventured.

"Sure, I have—it's pretty and brings good money," Listman answered, "but I'm law-abidin' and I don't have to rob traps. I know where there's the finest silver fox country in the North."

"You do?" Bud walked over to the prisoner. "When you talk silver fox, you speak my language. Say, I'll go your bail and give you a chance to work until your trial comes up if you'll give me your word of honor to return when you're notified, and——"

"I knew there'd be a string to it," Listman growled.

"And tell me where I can trap a couple of prime pelts for my mother—and do another little job for me at the same time," Bud said.

"Sure," Listman hastily agreed. "Let's have the details."

"Wait," Bud suggested, "I'll get the marshal so he'll know what's go-

ing on. It might look queer for a deputy to go a prisoner's bail."

Dad Morton responded to Bud's call, and for several minutes, the trio talked, then the marshal drew his deputy aside.

"I guess it's all right if you feel Listman won't double-cross you. I won't advise either way, though—the only way a young feller learns is by experience. It's up to you, now that I've had my little say."

"I'll take a chance," Bud replied. "Turn him loose to-night. I've got enough gold dust in the bank to cover his bail, and my word that I'll deposit with the commissioner ought to be good."

"Good as gold, Bud," the marshal answered.

Bud was awakened the following morning by an uproar under his window. He looked out and was greeted by Seeley who was pacing back and forth shouting:

"Bud! Bud! They're at it again!"

"Who's at it again?"

"Hard-rock and Poke! You'd better come!" Seeley advised.

BUD hastily dressed and ran to the scene of hostilities. The partners were facing each other, and only sheer exhaustion kept them apart.

"What's the trouble?" the deputy marshal demanded.

"Poke sneaked in last night and swiped my half of the fur!" Hard-rock panted.

"That's a lie!" Poke snarled. "It was you that took my half; now you're accusin' me of takin' yours. It's a backfire to cover your own crookedness, that's what it is."

"This has gone far enough," Bud interrupted. "You may not pull together any longer, but at least each

is honest, and you both know it. Now what happened?"

All either man could tell was that they had slept soundly after their hard day, and when they awakened, the fur was gone.

"Silver fox, too," Hard-rock said. "If I didn't know Listman was in jail, I'd swear he swiped 'em."

Bud said, "Listman was released last night on bail."

"Then he done it!" the two chorused.

"Circumstantial evidence——" began Bud.

"Circumstantial evidence, your grandmother!" Hard-rock jeered. "I'm goin' after that cuss."

"You said it," Poke added. "Hard-rock, if you want the legs of the mule to go with your upper half, you can have 'em."

"Thanks; we'll settle our private fight after this is over with. You're comin' along, ain't you?" Hard-rock asked.

"I'd like to see anybody stop me," Poke replied.

A half hour later the partners were on the trail. Bud promised to follow as soon as he could get organized. It looked as if the chase would be a long one.

The footprints of a big man led straight north toward the Iron Mountain country. The depths which his moccasins had sunk into the snow indicated he was carrying a heavy pack.

"Fur," Hard-rock said after a brief inspection; "our fur, most likely. And he's mushin' fast."

"And is takin' the shortest and hardest way to Iron Mountain," Poke added three hours later. "Look—headin' straight for Icy Pass."

That night they made a sapling fence, turned Tabasco loose in the hastily constructed inclosure, cached what they could not carry, and

made plans to continue the chase afoot. The fur robber had evidently sighted them, noted the mule, and promptly taken a trail the heavy animal could not follow.

At daybreak they broke camp. Wind was howling through Icy Pass, and loose snow was blowing. In the shelter of an ice-coated boulder they found tracks.

"He went straight across Blue Glacier last night!" Hard-rock gasped. "It's a wonder he didn't go through one of those snow bridges."

"Maybe he did!" Poke suggested. "And if that happened, it's good-by fur."

"Do you know, Poke," Hard-rock observed, "him riskin' his neck that way is a sort of a compliment to us. He knew danged well we'd overhaul him if he weren't careful. Come on!"

They climbed to the surface of the glacier and advanced slowly, stopping often to discuss the safest course to follow. From their combined knowledge they worked out a trail which carried them a mile without danger. Then they stopped. Ahead a crevasse yawned. It was several yards in width, and the rim on either side curved back, leaving a glassy surface, sharply pitched.

HARD-ROCK located a fifty-pound rock which the glacier was carrying with other debris gouged from some ridge, and rolled it to the rim, then gave a mighty heave. It bounced twice, then disappeared into the blue-black depths of the great ice crack. They listened, but there was no sound of its striking.

"Man! Man!" the little Irishman cried in an awed tone. "She's a long ways down there!"

Poke pointed at a snow bridge.

"Our man went across last night when it was frozen tight and safe. She's thawed some since morning. What do you think?" he asked.

Hard-rock rubbed the fringe of red whiskers across his jaw, and shook his head.

"It looks like it's a problem for the old Shipley-Tupper team," he ventured.

Without further words, each took a long line from his pack, tied them, then with one end lashed around his waist, Hard-rock crawled onto the snow bridge. Slowly Poke paid out the line.

A chunk of snow dropped from the center of the bridge, and Hard-rock froze, while Poke's big hands clutched the line. The danger passed, and Hard-rock crawled to the other side.

"It's a wonder the whole works didn't go last night under his weight. Do you think you'd better risk it, Poke?" he anxiously inquired. "After all, it's only fur and a fur-rober we're after."

"With you on the other end of the rope," Poke answered, and a trace of affection crept into his voice, "I'd risk hell."

Hard-rock shed his pack, then with a hand ax cut holes for his heels in the ice. He set his heels, took in the slack of the line, and said, "All right!"

Poke began crawling over the bridge, and Hard-rock kept the line tight.

"Take it easy!" he suddenly shouted. "That snow's beginnin' to drop from the arch."

Movement might make matters worse, and Poke froze, as Hard-rock had done. But he was heavier. Blocks of snow dropped, and the long sourdough waited, knowing any moment the section beneath him might fall.

"That takes nerve, boy!" Hard-rock cried. Then he swore as another mass fell. The arch across the crevasse was dangerously thin. Then suddenly the fall stopped, and a tense silence settled over the ice field, as if even nature were awaiting the outcome.

Poke removed his pack and pushed it ahead of him, to lighten the strain on his partner should the bridge break, then he squirmed ahead. Five, ten feet he moved, then suddenly he saw the snow ahead sag.

"She's going!" he roared as an irregular section dropped.

He dropped amid a shifting mass of ice and snow, but the rope held, and his body was drawn against the wall of the crevasse. Only a snow cushion saved broken bones. It was all over in a matter of seconds.

"How are you, Poke?" Hard-rock shouted.

"I'm all right. Can you hang onto the line?"

"Say, are you hintin' I ain't man enough?" Hard-rock gasped. "You long drink of water, for two cents I'd——" He saved his breath and began to haul in the line, hand over hand, inches at a time, while Poke dug his moccasins into every niche and helped to lighten the load. Slowly he was drawn to his partner. Hard-rock's hand pulled him the last foot, and for several minutes, they lay gasping on the brink of destruction.

"Lost my pack," Poke said finally.

"I've got enough for both of us," Hard-rock answered. "Well, let's get that cuss."

AS the shadows fell that night, Hard-rock saw the blow of a fire in the trees bordering the glacier. "We're pretty tired," he growled, "but—there's our man."

Poke swung in behind his partner. They approached the camp with caution and took observations.

"It's Listman," Poke whispered. "And they're our furs."

"Yeah, our furs!" Hard-rock agreed.

It wasn't *my* furs and *your* furs, but *our* furs. They exchanged glances, nodded, then hurled themselves on the man by the camp fire.

Listman was half onto his feet when Poke hit him. He went down, but was up instantly, shedding the clawing partners as a duck sheds water. His right elbow smashed into Hard-rock's stomach as the little sourdough was renewing the attack. He went down with a grunt, but bounced to his feet again.

Poke's fist nailed the giant over the right eye. He went back onto his heels, recovered his balance, and rocked Poke with a punch to the jaw. Poke instead of retreating, clinched. Listman grinned and got Poke's long neck in the crook of his arm and began to shut off the wind.

"How do you like that?" the giant jeered.

Hard-rock, seeing his partner clawing for air and his eyes beginning to protrude, hunched his head deep between the shoulders and charged. Six feet from Listman he left the ground and struck the big fellow in the stomach with his head.

Listman's knees buckled, his eyes glazed, then his arms dropped. Poke eased him to the ground and grinned at his partner.

"That punch with your head always sinks 'em," he said.

Hard-rock gently rubbed the back of his neck, which seemed dislocated from the impact.

"Let's tie him up," he suggested.

Five minutes later Listman regained consciousness.

"Were you boys caught in that earthquake?" he asked. "What fell on me, the glacier?"

"Nope!" Hard-rock answered. "My head, you danged fur thief. You're goin' back to jail, brother, and you're goin' to be out of circulation for a long time. There may have been some doubt about you're stealin' fur out of Pete Sather's traps, but it's a cinch you've swiped ours. We've caught you red-handed."

"I'd like to bet I don't serve a day," Listman retorted. "I'm too smart for you."

Hard-rock and Poke took turns guarding their prisoner that night. The return trip began at daybreak. They avoided the glacier with its snow bridges and blazed a longer trail. When they reached Tabasco's corral late that night, Hard-rock drew his partner aside.

"Do you know, Poke," he said, "the Chechahco Kid was right. We can't get along without each other. I've been thinkin' maybe we should open up a good trail to the Iron Mountain country."

"So have I. And if Listman hadn't swiped our fur and brought us together, we might have split for good," Poke replied. "Now suppose I take Tabasco and the prisoner back to Big Nugget. I'll sell our fur and get some trail grub."

"And in the meantime," Hard-rock interrupted, "I'll relay what we've got here over the bad country."

"That's my idear exactly," Poke agreed.

HARD-ROCK stood guard all that night, knowing he could rest the next day while Poke would be alone with the prisoner the remainder of the

journey. Poke awakened at day-break, refreshed and ready to start. The fur was loaded on Tabasco's back, and after an early breakfast the trek to Big Nugget resumed.

Poke Tupper found his prisoner meek enough, except for an occasional protest over the long marches without rest.

"Tryin' to kill me off?" he would complain. "Me hoofin' it and you ridin' the mule some of the time."

"I'm trying to tire you out so you won't start nothin' you can't finish," Poke explained.

They arrived at Dad Morton's office after Big Nugget was in bed. Dad Morton and Bud Tuttle were playing cards when Poke herded Listman into the room.

"Here's the fur stealer," Poke cried. "We want him to get the limit, too. I'll sign a paper tellin' what he's done. Me and Hard-rock won't be here for the trial, as we're headin' for the Iron Mountain country."

"Well, you didn't get far, did you?" Bud jeered at the prisoner. "You just couldn't keep your fingers off other men's furs, could you?"

"Aw, shut up," Listman snarled as Bud locked him up.

Poke Tupper shook hands with the old marshal and his deputy.

"I'm leavin' first thing in the morning," Poke said, "so I won't see you until next fall. Good luck and

be sure Listman gets what's coming to him."

"I sure will," Bud promised.

Poke departed, and for several minutes there was silence, then Listman spoke.

"That was a fine idea you had, Tuttle," he bitterly observed, "turning me loose to steal their fur, so they'd forget their differences while running me to earth. They liked to have killed me. Shipley, the old goat, butted me in the stomach with his head, and I thought sure Blue Glacier had fallen on me."

"Maybe this will help some, Listman," Bud answered as he released the other. "It's a hundred dollars, your pay as special deputy in this case. It's money well spent because it'll save this office hundreds of dollars looking for stampedeers who might get lost if Hard-rock and Poke weren't blazing a trail."

"Thanks," Listman answered. "I'll put it into trail grub. I'm goin' on that stampede myself. How about the charge Pete Sather brought?"

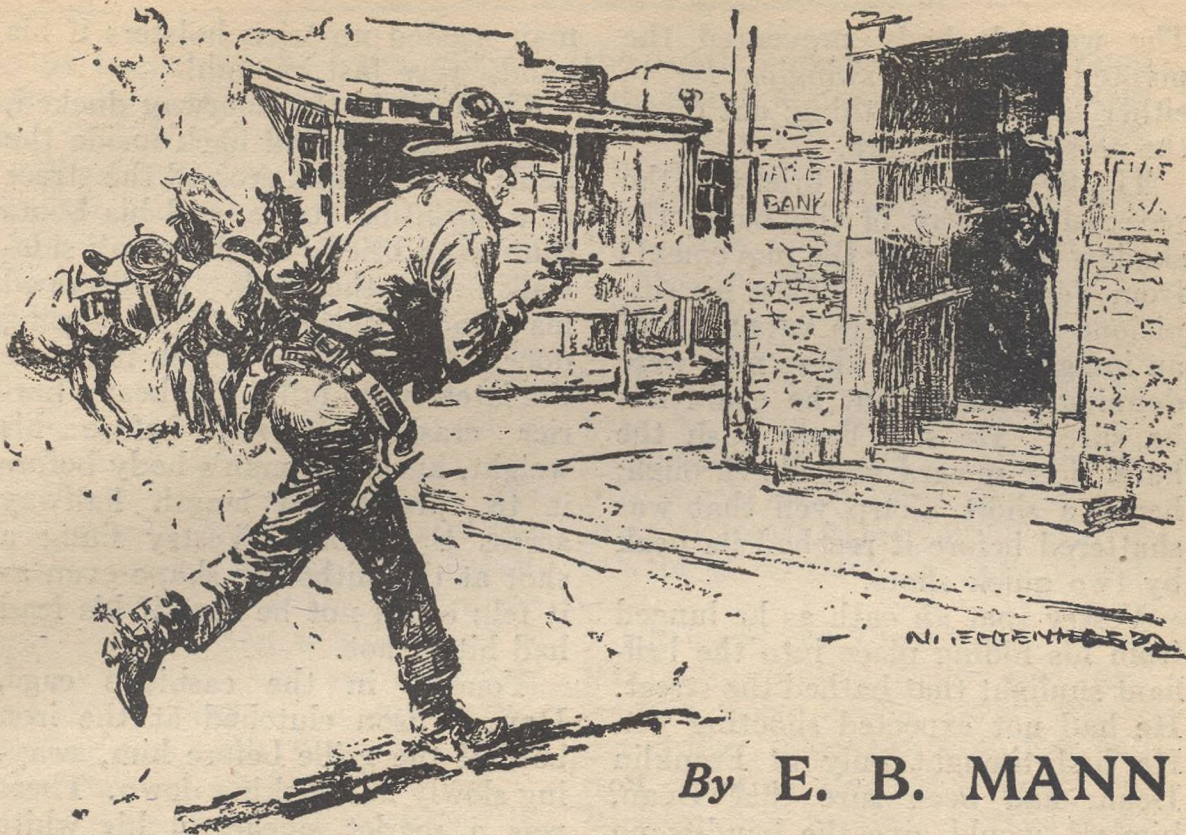
"I talked with Pete," Bud informed him. "He said if you didn't double-cross me and skip the country with Hard-rock and Poke's fur, you weren't the one who stole from him. And so, I guess you're not."

"Which is something I knew right along," Listman growled, eying the hundred-dollar check.

Coming Next Week

THE VENDETTA KID

by *STANLEY HOFFLUND*



By E. B. MANN

QUICK SIXES

THE dinner bell jangled brazenly in the open doorway of the Tascosa Hotel, and the main street emptied swiftly, taking on its usual noontime hush. In the shadow between two buildings, Jim Vestry stood motionless and unseen, staring at the front of the Tascosa Bank across the street. This was the time. Either he was a fool, reading crazy meanings into unimportant things, or the few minutes just to come would see swift drama played upon that peaceful stage out there.

Five men walked into Vestry's range of sight, coming from somewhere to his left and angling out toward the bank. Vestry stiffened to sudden attention. The leader was a tall, stoop-shouldered man with a

coarse, unpleasant face, darkly masked by a stubbly, week-old beard. Vestry had seen that face a while ago through the glass partition that closed off the office of Franklin Dean, president of the Tascosa Bank, from the bank's main lobby. He saw now that the stranger wore two guns in holsters from which the bottom half had been cut away.

"Half-breed holsters." Vestry had never seen them used before, but he knew the trick. With a holster like that, a man need not draw his weapon at all. A hand dropped to the jutting butt would tilt the gun on the pivot of its thong support—save a precious part of a second in time of need. That was the theory of it, at least. The method had its drawbacks in actual practice.

The wearer's body prevented the pivoted gun from swinging far to either side, for one thing; cut down the possible arc of fire.

The five men halted briefly in the recessed doorway of the bank, the shadow there veiling the movements from Vestry's gaze. Unless his suspicions were the mere vaporings of an imagiantive fool, these men were donning masks! But he could not be sure. He saw them push the bank door inward and file through; heard a short, sharp yell that was shattered before it reached its peak by two quick shots.

Vestry spat an oath as he lunged from his hiding place into the brilliant sunlight that bathed the street. He had not expected shooting yet. He had thought only of Franklin Dean; had been sure that Dean, himself, would give the bandits no excuse to shoot. But he had forgotten Dean's cashier! Dave Wilson would fight. He realized, now, why the cashier had never entered into his calculations. Wilson always went to dinner just at noon, leaving Dean to watch the bank alone. Something must have delayed him to-day—of all days!

THERE was a man in the doorway of the bank. Vestry saw him, crouched in the corner of the deep recess; saw a red tongue of flame reach out as a bullet droned past Vestry's ear. Vestry's answering guns blasted chalky dust from the stone wall a foot above the marksman's head, the crack of the reports blending with the echoes of that first shot. Vestry had drawn both guns in mid-stride; the Vestry draw—that amazing whip of agile hands that had written the Vestry name, father and son, among the famous gun-fighting men who had built the West. A

man needed no trick holsters if his hands were fast enough!

The man in the doorway ducked, whirled, and darted back inside the bank. Vestry had crossed the street at a sprinting stride, and his boots thundered briefly on the plank sidewalk before the bank. He dropped his head, charging at the closing door. His shoulder struck it before the latch could fall. The heavy barrier crashed inward before his weight, hurling a man's body before it to sprawl full length halfway across the room. Vestry flung a shot at the slithering shape even as it fell; could not be sure if his lead had hit or not.

Yonder, in the cashier's cage, Dave Wilson clutched at the iron bars of the grille before him, swaying slowly and sinking down. There was a scarlet smear on his white shirt front—like a rose. Another man stood just outside the cage, his back toward the door. There was a smoking gun in that man's hand; the gun that had pinned the scarlet rose on Wilson's shirt!

The man outside the cage spun swiftly to face the door, and Vestry fired once, hastily, carried forward by the momentum of his charge. The man yelled, and Vestry saw the smoking weapon leap from the bandit's hand and fall, spinning. A bloody shower sprayed from mangled fingers as the bandit threw up his hand and yelled again. Vestry ended his charge close in beside the cage; whirled, slashing his left-hand gun across the bandit's head. There were four others somewhere near; no shots to waste!

A gun spat thunderously from behind the front door, and Vestry poured two slugs at the licking flames. It seemed dark in here, coming from the sunlight outside. Another gun barked at Vestry's left,

and he leaped to the right, gliding down along the wall toward the rear. But it was treacherous wall: a wall of iron bars with four-inch openings between.

A whisper of movement at his back warned Vestry, but not in time. He flung up his arm as he turned; took the smashing impact of the blow on arm and head. As he fell, he heard the deafening roar of a point-blank shot; knew that the very blow had saved his life! He rolled, flinging his body clear of the wall and back. A door opened just ahead—the door to Dean's private office. Vestry had a glimpse of a man in a trim gray suit standing there. He lurched to his knees, stabbing two swift shots at a man inside the cage, before the vault.

This time there was no sound to warn him; nothing to deflect the blow that slashed down across his skull. He saw a mighty pinwheel of exploding stars. Through the muffling blanket of unconsciousness he heard dimly the sound of voices; of hurrying feet. He fought back the smothering blackness, matching his will against the dead inertia of his legs. Somewhere, a man's hoarse voice yelled a curt command:

"Come on, you fools! The whole town'll be on us in a minute! *Drift!*"

VESTRY struggled up. A tall man with broad, stooped shoulders slid through the bright rectangle of the front door, and Vestry saw that he bore a weighty sack. Vestry yelled; swung his gun up; saw it waver uncertainly in the light. He held his fire, surging forward in pursuit. He staggered crazily as he ran toward the street; heard the sudden thunder of departing hoofs.

His own big sorrel stood at the rack outside, and Vestry clutched at

the saddle horn as the horse swung out—found a stirrup—felt his body jerked into the saddle as the sorrel lunged away. The dust from the preceding riders boiled up in Vestry's face, choking him. Guns barked in scattered volleys from either side, and Vestry knew that the townsmen were up in arms. A bullet sang too close for comfort past his head, and he swore mechanically. He raked his mount with steel-fanged heels, and took a grateful breath of cleaner air as they left the dusty street for open prairie sod.

He could see the men ahead of him now; grinned as he saw their lead cut down by the sorrel's reaching stride. They saw him, too, and he saw the red tongues of flame stab back at him as they worked their guns.

It ended with startling suddenness. The big sorrel stumbled heavily, and Vestry knew that a slug had found its mark. He kicked his feet clear of the stirrups as the big horse dived nose-on in a smashing fall. He landed clear, striking on his head and shoulders with force. He rolled, bringing himself to a stop in a sitting posture, heels braced. The sorrel struggled briefly and lay still. Vestry laid his one remaining gun across his knee and thumbed the hammer back until it fell on empty brass. Even as he fired, he knew the hopelessness of it. He was half sobbing as he turned at last to stare at his fallen mount; cursing in a strange, tight voice. "The murder-in' sons!"

Horsemen clattered toward him from the town in a little while, and Vestry stood up. "Long Tom" Travis rode in the lead, his sheriff's star agleam in the sun. The riders drew in, forming a tight circle, hemming Vestry in. He stared at them.

"What are you stoppin' for?" he growled. "Go get 'em, why don't you?"

Travis frowned. "You're under arrest, Vestry," he said distinctly. "Mac, you and Shorty take him back t' town!"

Vestry's jaw dropped. Travis and the bulk of his posse swept forward again, leaving two men staring down at Vestry.

"Arrest?" Vestry spoke slowly, not quick to understand. "I reckon that's supposed t' be funny; but I ain't laughin', am I? Travis must be gettin' childish in his old age, eh?" He smiled at the nearest deputy. Mac was his friend; Mac would explain things to him, certainly.

The man cleared his throat. "Sorry, Deef," he said, speaking very loud. "Franklin Dean recognized you. Said you was in t' see him this morning', askin' for a loan. He refused you, and he claims you threatened him; talked real wild, he says. Surprisin' what a scrap he put up against the six o' you, wasn't it? Never'd expect it of a little button like him."

"Scrap?" Vestry's tone was one of bewilderment. "So—Dean put up a scrap, did he? Says I helped to rob his bank, eh?" Vestry's eyes had tightened to beady slits. He shrugged. "All right, boys," he said. "Let's go to town!"

The two deputies turned their mounts, waiting for Vestry to lead off. One of them leaned down as he passed, shouting:

"Reckon we'll have t' make you walk, Deef," he called. "You might make a break for it if we give you a hoss!"

Vestry glanced at him.

"Don't need to yell, Shorty," he said. "I had an operation on my ears while I was back East. I can hear

as good as any man, now. That's how-come I was askin' Dean for a loan, this mornin'. Them city doctors sure come high!"

IT was long past dark that night when Jim Vestry walked into the office at the front of the Tascosa jail where Sheriff Long Tom Travis awaited him. Franklin Dean, president of the Tascosa Bank, was there, too, and Vestry's eyes rested for a moment on the dapper little man. There were other men in the room, but Vestry ignored them for the moment, turning at once to Travis. The sheriff's long face seemed unusually mournful.

"I sure never expected to have a Vestry for a boarder, Jim," he said. "I'm right sorry."

Vestry grinned. "Needn't yell, Jim," he said. "I had my ears fixed up. I'm some surprised to be here, too."

Travis's mind handled one thing at a time, methodically. "Not deaf any more, eh? That good! Folks been callin' you Deef Vestry so long it'll take some time t' cure 'em o' yellin' at you, though. You want t' tell your side o' this business, Jim? I got t' warn you, 'fore you start, that anything you say can be used against you."

Vestry's gaze traveled about the little circle of faces. Travis, gloomy and ill at ease; two deputies, here as witnesses, both curious and a little puzzled by it all; Franklin Dean, white-faced but defiantly triumphant. Vestry grinned at Dean, and the banker frowned. There was another man, too; a stranger to Vestry, dressed in a carefully tailored business suit. Vestry wondered about him, vaguely.

"Nothin' much to tell, sheriff," he said. "I called at the bank this mornin' to ask Dean for a loan.

Reckon he's told you that. He was talkin' to a man in his private office, at the rear of the lobby, so I had to wait. Man he was talkin' to was a big jasper; hadn't shaved for a week, looked like. I noticed when he finally came out that he was wearin' two guns in half-breed holsters. Sort o' made me wonder. It was that same hombre that led the holdup outfit into the bank!"

Long Tom Travis leaned across his desk suddenly.

"Cut-down holsters, you say? Dark-complected man, sort o' stooped?" he asked.

Vestry nodded. "That's him."

Travis struck the desk with a hamlike fist.

"Blacky Weston!" he exclaimed. "Couldn't be anybody else! Big reward out for him, too! Wanted for half a dozen bank robberies and a train holdup down south o' here." Travis shot a curious look at Dean. "Funny he'd come in t' see you, sir, just before he pulled off the job."

Dean shrugged. "It would have been funny, sheriff, if he had done that. But—he didn't! Vestry is making his story up out of whole cloth as he goes along!"

Vestry took a step forward; caught himself.

"Dave Wilson can tell you whether it's the truth or not." He stopped, remembering. "Wilson's dead! I was forgettin' that."

Franklin Dean chuckled derisively. "Go on with your—fairy tale, Vestry," he said. "It's interesting!"

It was a moment before Vestry spoke again. This business was more serious than he had believed, seemingly. His voice was low and carefully modulated when he spoke at last:

"I asked Dean for two thousand bucks. He refused; said he wasn't

loanin' money on cattle any more. That made me sore. Cattlemen—my dad, and men like him—have supported Dean, you see? My account, even since dad died, has averaged five times the amount I was askin' for these past four years. I called Dean a double-crossin' skunk; accused him of throwin' in with these crooked land-development companies to make a few filthy dollars by cuttin' the throats of the men who have been his friends! Dean refused to talk to me; said there was a bank examiner in town and he had t' get things in shape so the books could be examined this afternoon. I told him I figgered I'd make out to get the cash I needed in spite of him, one way or another."

"And you held up the bank to do it!" Dean shot the accusation at him triumphantly.

Vestry's lips tightened; relaxed again. "Somethin' I'd seen through that glass partition of Dean's office while he was talkin' to that stranger had made me sort of curious," he went on slowly. "I stuck around! Right after noon, I saw this same man and four others go moseyin' into the bank, and right after that I heard somebody yell, and there was two shots."

The stranger sitting next to Dean interrupted then. "What was it you saw that made you suspicious, Vestry?" he asked.

Vestry glanced at Travis. The sheriff nodded.

"Answer him, Jim," he said. "This is Mr. Mathews, the bank examiner Dean was tellin' you about."

Vestry started to speak; caught himself after a glance at Dean.

"Why, nothin' much—really," he said. "Nothin' I can—explain, exactly. I just—thought it was funny that a hard-lookin' hombre

like that would have business with Dean."

Dean's expression had been tense at first, but he sneered now.

"Inasmuch as the man wasn't in my office—or in the bank, so far as I know—while Vestry was there," he said, "it would naturally be hard for Vestry to say what it was that—aroused his suspicions! It's asking too much of his—imagination!"

Travis frowned. "What happened then, Jim?" he asked.

"I made a run for the bank as soon as I heard those two shots. A man in the doorway took a shot at me and ducked. I bulged into the bank after him; saw Wilson, in the cashier's cage, just slippin' down with a red spot showin' on his shirt. I unlimbered my guns at the man standin' in front of the cage, knocked the gun out of his hand. There was a lot of crazy shootin' for a minute. Then somebody caught me over the head with somethin', and I dropped. I rolled back toward Dean's office and was just gettin' on my feet again when the office door opened and I saw Dean. I was drawin' a bead on a jasper over by the vault and I sort of overlooked Dean. I reckon it was *him* that bent a gun over my head that time!

"I must've been out for a minute or two. They were just leavin' when I come to, and I follered 'em out. You know the rest of it. I'm on their tail as they leave town, and they shoot my horse out from under me." He paused for a moment; shrugged. "Take a look at me, Tom. Do I *look* like a successful bank robber? Or do I look like I've been dragged through a sack o' cats? Or maybe you think I marked *myself* like this!"

Travis frowned. "You're bunged up considerable, Jim," he admitted.

"But I've seen a man just as bad hurt as you are before now, after a hoss had dropped out from under him! And Dean, here, already told us he batted you over the head with a gun. I reckon your hurts won't serve you as an alibi, exactly."

"Supposin' I did get all these scratches when my horse went down." Vestry spoke earnestly now, almost pleadingly. "Don't that prove I wasn't one of the gang—the fact that they shot back at me? If I was one of 'em, why would they do that?"

Travis shook his head. "I ain't got no proof that they *did*, Jim," he said. "Except your word! Maybe your hoss was hit as you rode through town, Jim. There was a lot o' lead flyin', about that time. He might've run as far as he did before he dropped. And there's another thing: You're a gun fighter, Jim. One o' the best. Yet, accordin' t' your yarn, you practically emptied both your guns in that bank lobby, with five targets t' shoot at, and never downed a man! It ain't natural! Dean's story fits a whole lot better. *He* might've shot that many times without scorin' a hit, because he ain't a gun-fightin' man. But *you*——"

Vestry's answer was apologetic. "I was half blind, Tom," he said. "Comin' in out of the bright sunlight that way, all I could make out was movin' shadows, sort of." He paused as he caught the look of unbelief in Travis's eyes. "Your mind's made up, I see," he said bitterly. "There's no use my talkin' any more!"

HE turned, walking slowly back to the door of the cell from which they had brought him. One of the deputies accompanied him, and as they

neared the door, Vestry caught the man's arm.

"Mac, tell Travis I want to see him after Dean has gone! It's important!" The deputy nodded, swung the barred door shut, and walked away.

It was some time later when Travis opened the door of Vestry's cell.

"You wanted t' talk t' me, Jim? What's on your mind?"

"This, Tom!" Vestry's voice was low but it was filled with an eager intensity. "That Weston jasper *was* in Dean's office, like I said! Dean was lyin'! I didn't dare talk any more while Dean was listenin', but here's the truth: Weston and Dean was fixin' it up between 'em to stage that holdup! I didn't see enough to be sure just what it meant, at the time, but I knew somethin' was in the wind, so I stuck around! Dean planned it himself, sabe? He must be short on his books and doped out the robbery to clear himself! How much does he claim he lost?"

"Close t' sixty thousand——"

"Wait, Jim! Dean's goin' to meet the holdup men to-night to get his split of the loot! You let me out o' here and ride with me where I tell you, and I'll prove I'm tellin' you the truth!"

Travis stood up.

"Son," he said, "I was hopin' I was wrong about your bein' mixed up in this thing, but this cinches it with me! Accusin' Dean because he's accusin' you is about the weakest sort o' tale you could figger out, Jim! I'd 'a' expected better of you! And if you think I'm goin' off on a wild-goose chase with you, and give you a tailor-made chance t' get away from me, you're crazy, that's all!"

"You think I'm lyin'!"

Travis shrugged. "I ain't blamin'

you for lyin', Jim. Only you might've done a better job of it!" He turned toward the door. "So long, feller. I wouldn't tell that story in court, if I was you. It's too durn thin."

A hurtling weight struck Travis squarely between the shoulder blades, and he went down heavily beneath an avalanche of arms and legs. Vestry had leaped straight forward from his crouching posture on the cot as Travis reached the door, and the two straining bodies flung the door wide open as they fell. There was a moment or two of straining effort. Vestry's right fist came free at last and whipped up to land with a thud on Travis's jaw. The sheriff relaxed instantly, his head rolling back.

Vestry sat on his heels, panting a little. Two heavy Colts lay in the holsters at the sheriff's hips, and Vestry lifted the weapons, sliding them into the empty leathers where his own guns had been. Travis opened his eyes and stared at him.

"You'll never get away with it, Vestry!" he said. "You ought t' know that!"

Vestry grinned. "Don't bet on it, Tom!" he said. "I always liked you, but you're a bull-headed old coot, and I aim to handle you accordin'! If you got any ideas about lettin' out a yell for help, think again! Next time I hit you, I'll wrap a gun barrel around your ivory dome, sabe?"

They slid out into the pitch darkness behind the jail, followed the alley for a little way until a narrow space between two buildings gave access to the street. There were horses there, and Vestry chose two; forced his prisoner to mount. They rode out of town together—two vague figures in the darkness, heading north.

IT was nearing midnight when they stopped at last in the shadow of close-growing trees. They were on the southern flank of Bay Horse Mountain, Travis knew. There was a clearing ahead, and a darker hulk that must be a shack. Thin strips of light outlined a window there. Travis spoke for the first time since they began their ride.

"That's the old Bar 11 line shack, ain't it? What are we doin' here?"

Vestry's fingers sank deep into the sheriff's arm. A thin trickle of sound came up the mountain, breaking finally into the beat of hoofs. A man rode out of the shade on the opposite side of the clearing, and a yellow mouth opened in the cabin as a door swung inward, silhouetting another man against the inner light. The newcomer spoke softly as he dismounted. He went inside.

Vestry hitched his belt up a little, lifting the two strange guns to test their weight. His tongue licked out, moistening his lips.

"You wait here, Tom," he said. "I won't be long."

He walked, light-footed as a cat, toward the shack. The moon slid out from behind a cloud, and Vestry looked up.

"Pretty!" he said.

A murmur of voices drifted through the cracks between unchinked logs in the cabin wall, and Vestry stooped a little, peeping through. He straightened finally and walked toward the door. It gave inward slowly, noiselessly.

A man with a stubby, week-old beard pushed a packet of crisp bills across a table underneath a swinging light. Franklin Dean, president of the Tascosa Bank, laid that packet atop the neat stack of currency in front of him.

"Twenty-eight thousand," he said.

"Ten to me, and you split the rest of it."

Vestry spoke softly from the open door. "Must've miscounted, Dean," he said. "They was tellin' me in town the bank lost twice that much!"

The group around the table split suddenly like an exploding bomb. Quick sixes ripped the silence with their raucous thunder, and there was a jangling crash as something smashed the window into shreds. Vestry's hands whipped up, rocking behind his spouting guns. The vicious crack of a rifle cut the deeper echoes of the Colts, and Vestry saw Long Tom Travis's face framed in the broken window opposite him. Vestry's lips twitched back in a wolfish grin. Good old Tom!

A chair hurtled straight at Vestry's head, and he ducked, going down to his knees. The guns still chopped in deadly arcs as his thumbs rolled their hammers back. Hot smoke billowed up from the belching muzzles, stinging Vestry's eyes.

A little man in a business suit cowered against one wall, whimpering. Three bodies lay sprawled awkwardly across the wreckage of the table. Another man lay in a twisted heap beside the bed, groaning dimly. A tall, black-bearded man with two guns still sheathed in cut-down holsters stood a little to the left, rocking on his heels. His knees gave suddenly, and he fell, striking shoulder first, heavily. It was over!

Long Tom Travis chopped the jagged glass from the window ledge and came through like a lumbering bear. He glared at Vestry as he found his feet.

"Walkin' off like that!" he growled. "Leavin' me t' suck my

thumbs! I ought t' break your neck! Never noticed there was a rifle in my saddle boot, did you? Neither did I till after you'd gone, or I might've shot you into the middle o' next week!" He chuckled suddenly, the sound making strange contrast with his gloomy face. "Tellin' me the truth, after all, wasn't you, Jim? I thought you was just makin' it up when you claimed you heard Dean and Weston make this date!"

Dean turned slowly from his place against the wall.

"You *couldn't* have heard!" he said hoarsely. "Voices don't carry through that glass partition! I know because I've tested it! And anyway we were speaking very low!"

Vestry grinned. "That's right," he said. "But just as Weston stood up to leave, you was talkin' to him. 'Wait till I get rid of Vestry,' you said. 'Just after twelve will be best, I think. I'll meet you to-night at the shack on Bay Horse.' That's what you told him, ain't it?"

Dean's eyes widened.

"No use denying it now," he said. "But you couldn't have heard, I tell you!"

Vestry nodded. "I couldn't hear, Dean," he said. "But a man that's been half deaf as long as I was learns to listen with his eyes, sabe? I *saw* you talkin', understand? *I read your lips!*"

There was silence for a moment. Long Tom Travis broke it with an explosive oath.

"That's rich!" he said. "And Dean reports a loss big enough t' cover the shortage on his books, besides gettin' a split out of the robbery! That reminds me! How much was that loan you was askin' for this mornin', Jim? Two thousand, wasn't it?"

Vestry nodded.

Travis grinned. "The rewards offered for Weston total double that," he said, "and more! Not t' mention the chance of there bein' rewards out for some o' them other jaspers! Mind shakin' hands with me, son? I sort o' like your style!"

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FUGITIVE'S RETURN

By CARLOS ST. CLAIR

Author of "Two-fisted Pard," etc.

WELL, I'm a horny toad, a centipede, and a scorpion!" Jade Holloway, leaning along the sweated and dust-streaked neck of his trail-weary cayuse, stared down, wide-eyed, at the roughly lettered board which, in lieu of a headstone, marked the narrow mound of sun-dried clods which had attracted his startled attention.

Next to it, a more decorous-appearing mound was headed by a

granite slab which bore the name of Abigail Jane Holloway, and a date of four years previous. That was Jade's mother, and it had been with some vague, half-furtive thought of telling her that he was home again, come back to Windy Basin and the Circle Dot, that Jade had reined his winded nag under the familiar elk-horn portals which marked the Spruce Hill burying ground.

He'd told her, before she died, that he would always stay in Windy Basin and hang onto the Circle Dot,

the place that she had come to as a bride, and held to through the long and bitter years. It had seemed an easy thing to promise her, for Jade inherited her own obsessing love of soil. But with his mother dead a year, he'd started sitting in on the faro games Ab Ferris ran in the town of Little Pine, and got hopelessly bogged down in debt. Ab had let things run a while, and then he'd threatened Jade to take away his property. In foolish desperation, Jade had robbed the bank at Little Pine, and in a shooting fracas, afterward, shot a man. He'd been a fugitive from the law for three long years. Yet even so, he'd managed to hang on, as he had said he would. When the Circle Dot went up for taxes, he'd hired a saddle bum he'd met with on the trail to bid it in, under the name of Freed—Jim Freed—the name he meant to claim it by.

Jade had had to wait a long time, though, before he'd dared to come back home. The self-inflicted wounds, that he'd made to change once-handsome features into the strangely puckered mask he wore, had taken time to heal, and he had let a stubby mustache grow among the scars. And it had taken time to learn the new half-halting gait, so different from the easy swinging stride that once had been familiar to all this countryside. Not easy, either, to change, beyond all chance of recognition, the deeply pleasant rumble of his voice, and all the little mannerisms and tricks of speech that might identify a man.

But because he wanted, more than anything in all the world, to come back here to Windy Basin, and spend out his days on the soil where he was raised, and where his mother's bones lay buried, he had accomplished it; and he was back,

at last—to find this grave confronting him.

He read the words from the wooden slab aloud, slowly, sibilantly: "Jade Holloway. Died August 6th, 1930. May he rest in peace."

A sudden clammy sweat broke out along Jade's brow. It gave a man a funny feeling to read his own obituary. And August 6th—that was the very night he'd robbed the bank, and made his get-away. The thing was spooky. There must be some one planted here—some one who'd been identified as him.

Jade sat a long time, slouched across his saddle horn, staring at the wooden slab. At last he muttered: "Ugh—I wonder—could that be Lonnie Davis who helped me rustle what few cows the Circle Dot was runnin', time I went away? I remember, now, that when I bought that outfit of new duds, figurin' my old clothes would be a give-away, if anybody spied me openin' up that safe, I gave Lonnie all my old ones. He must have met some accident that sort of messed his features up; the clothes was recognized, and his carcass planted here for mine."

"Jade Holloway. Died August 6th." Jade read again and shivered. "Mebbe it's an omen," he told the pricked ears of his tired cayuse. "Mebbe we better back-track out of here the way we come."

But then Jade had a sudden thought, and laughed. If there was any omen in it, it was luck, sheer luck. To all intents and purposes, Jade Holloway was dead—and that was just exactly what he'd wanted folks to think. Here was the proof. No one would ever look in the live Jim Freed for a resemblance to a man they'd buried.

Jade's mind was easier than it

had been in months, as he left the burying ground and headed for the Circle Dot.

HE spent two happy days, there, wandering up and down the old familiar trails, and would have been content never to set his foot outside its boundaries again, had not the pangs of hunger forced him to the town of Little Pine to buy supplies.

In spite of repeated self-assurance that all was well—that that grave, up yonder, had lent the finishing touch to his disguise—Jade was nervous as he reined his nag up the dusty main street of the town. He thought that people stared at him unduly, and expected every moment that some familiar face would light with the sudden gleam of recognition. He rode the town's whole length, sweat pouring underneath his collar, before he realized the stares were for the stranger that he seemed to be. He tied his mount at the familiar rack in front of Andy Allen's Mercantile, and went in with his halting gait, to dicker for supplies.

It seemed to Jade as if three years ago were yesterday—that same old smell of kerosene and vinegar and harness leather, and the three old codgers, Spreckles, and Cave, and Remis, squatted behind the stove, and Andy Allen coming up, red-nosed as ever, rubbing his hands and saying:

"Howdy, stranger! Anythin' I can do for you to-day?"

Jade said: "I'm Jim Freed. Bought in the Holloway Circle Dot, a couple years ago when it went up for taxes. Never figured I'd move out this way, myself, but times is tough up north, and I thought I'd try my hand at ranchin'."

"Why, now, Freed, that's fine,"

Andy replied. "We're mighty glad to have you with us. Step up, gents," he called to the loungers in the rear, "and meet Jim Freed."

The men slouched up and shook hands, looking the stranger over, level-eyed and unabashed, as was the custom in these parts. Jade couldn't help but squirm a little, though he knew that he was getting by all right. It was uncannily queer—all these familiar faces grouped about him, and himself unrecognized.

Old Remis said, in his customary croak: "Welcome to Windy Basin, Freed. Wishin' you better luck, though, than them Holloways had—them whose place you bought."

"So?" Jade asked, eager to hear what Remis had to say, but struggling to keep a level voice, and the look of calm disinterest on his twisted face.

"Yep," Remis said. "Mebbe you never heard. Old Holloway, he died, first year that they was out here—that was twenty year ago. The woman did the work of half a dozen men, coddlin' and tendin' that place of theirs like it was somethin' human, and she raised the kid besides. She worked her heart out. Died four year ago, and the next year after that, young Jade is shot and killed up on the Knife Edge Trail. His horse came in, but they didn't find the feller's body till six months after, where he'd took a header off the cliff into the canyon bottom. The wolves had had their way with him, by then, but his clothes was easy to identify."

"Uh-huh," Jade muttered to himself, "just like I thought." He forced himself to light a quirly, before he said aloud:

"Sho', now, that was hard luck. Reckon that's why the place went up for taxes, though, so, I'm the

gainer. You say this fellow, Jade, was shot?"

Old Remis nodded. "They found the bullet hole clean through the coat and vest. Some say—though it's Ab Ferris mostly that makes the claim—that it was Jade who pulled the robbery of the bank in Little Pine that night; that he got a bullet wound and later, ridin' up that narrow trail, fell off his horse. Ab couldn't prove it, though. They couldn't find no loot, there was Jade's bones, and there was plenty circumstantial evidence that indicated murder."

SWIFT rage rose in Jade's breast. Ab Ferris, eh, trying to lay suspicion on him, even after he was dead. Ab, who had been responsible for all Jade's trouble. Jade cursed Ab, now, beneath his breath. And yet Jade tried to curb the swift hot surge of blood within him that, turning his scars to fiery hue, might well betray him.

No one, however, seemed to notice, and the other men were bidding Jim Freed welcome, as Remis turned away. Jade bought supplies and wandered, presently, along the street. Fate, he meditated, had played another gruesome trick—though in his favor, now, at last. There was no doubt but what old Lonnie Davis, flush with the money Jade had paid him, that August night, three years ago, had gotten drunk, and, riding home, had fallen off his horse on the narrow trail. That bullet hole through Jade's old coat and vest was but a mere coincidence, Jade knew.

He'd put it there himself, one night when he was shooting at a rat, and coat and vest were hanging on a nail. But anyway, Jade told himself, murdered or not, Jade Hollo-

way was dead and buried, and he was well content to let him rest there, undisturbed.

There was one final test, however, which Jade must make before he'd feel dead certain that he never would be recognized. He'd noticed as he rode through town that Mel Wiggins was still sheriff, as he had been three years ago, when Mel and his deputy, young Hal Olmstead, had discovered Jade making his get-away from the rifled bank. It had been a pitch-black night, but in the gun play which had followed, with Olmstead down and groaning, Mel, with a bullet in him, too, had blurted: "Looks like you'd make your get-away, you dirty thief; but one thing certain, if ever I lay an eye on you, if it be in hell, I'll know you, and I'll get you yet."

Jade had thought of that a lot, tried to imagine what thing about him Mel might recognize, if he came back. Now, if there were something he had overlooked in those three long years of preparation? And yet, Jade told himself, he had to chance it, and the sooner it was over with, the better he would feel. He wished he hadn't killed Olmstead, but he guessed he knew a dying look in a man's eyes.

He sauntered up the street in the direction of the old brick building which a flapping sign announced as jail and sheriff's office.

When Jade went in, he found Mel Wiggins sitting with his heels cocked on his desk, as Jade had seen him sit a hundred times before.

Mel said: "Howdy, stranger," and touched one stubby finger to his hat. "Complaint to make, confession, or just pass the time of day?"

Jade said, heart hammering: "I'm Jim Freed, sheriff, up at Holloway's old place. Newcomer here; just thought I'd ask if I had to get a

permit to pack a gun. There's a coyote, up there, keepin' me awake o' nights."

There was no doubt but that Mel Wiggins was the sharpest man in Windy Basin. He studied Jade a long, long time in silence. At last he said: "About the gun—why, shore, just help yourself. No permit needed. Just watch that you don't shoot yourself no humans, that's all we ask." He said then, tapping stubby fingers on his scarred old desk: "Tell me some about yourself. An officer of the peace," he added with a half-apologetic shrug, "has got to be a little nosey, when it comes to strangers in our midst."

"Why, sure," Jade said, although he turned cold, inside, beneath the sheriff's hard black gaze. He told the story he had rigged up when lying, all those feverish, suffering days and nights, alone in his mountain hide-out, while the cruel self-inflicted wounds that were to make another man of him—a man who could come back to Windy Basin—were healing.

When he had finished, Mel Wiggins said: "Burn?" and indicated with a gesture Jade's scarred face.

Jade shook his head. "Nope. Bear—she clawed me 'most to death up in the Never Summer, two year ago."

The sheriff nodded. "I seen another man that happened to. Changed his looks complete. Take you, now; you might have been a likely-lookin' fellow, before the accident."

JADE'S heart was a slug of lead. Mel Wiggins knew, had recognized him. There was something, after all, that Jade, in those careful, painstaking months had overlooked. He felt the overwhelm-

ing bitterness of defeat, and then Mel Wiggins said:

"Well, good luck to you, Freed. Drop in again."

Jade's eyes went wide. He stood there for a moment quite incapable of action. He had been wrong. Mel hadn't recognized him, after all. He'd passed the acid test, and he was safe. He could stay here, now, in Windy Basin, as long as he lived. He'd work, too, work his head off, make the old Circle Dot the finest place in all that country, the way his mother had always dreamed, sort of making up to her for the way he'd slipped. And that money he had stolen from the bank he would pay back anonymously, as soon as he could.

The sheriff had forgotten him already. Jade turned to go, then halted, as he heard the sheriff call to some one, evidently his deputy:

"Hey, kid, drift on down to Mike's and get Ab Ferris's supper."

If he had known he would be shot for asking, Jade could not have held the question back that he blurted now. "Ferris—Ab Ferris, here in stony lonesome?"

The sheriff turned that hard black gaze of his around.

"Oh, you here yet? You know this fella, Ferris, eh?"

Jade said: "Why, yes—that is, some jasper that I met up north told me to look him up. Figured that he might help me round up a little stock."

Mel shook his head. "Sorry. I guess you'll have to get along without him. Ab's been in State corral for better than two year. Just fetched him down last week, here, for another trial—the second time that he's appealed his case. Fool way to spend his money. There ain't no livin' doubt but it was Ab who shot Jade Holloway and

pushed him off the Knife Edge Trail. There'd been bad blood between the two of 'em for months, threats had passed both ways, and Ab was up on the Knife Edge Trail that night, and there was a bullet missing from his gun.

"Not but what this Jade," the sheriff added, "got his deserts, for I'd bet my last red cent that it was him who helped, at least, to rob the bank, that night. Still, all in all, a life's a life. Ab's got to pay, and all these trials he keeps insistin' on won't help him any. He'll swing, I reckon, after this jury sits. The only thing could save him now would be Jade Holloway come back from hell and say Ab never done it. And even if Jade could, and if Ab hadn't, I'm bettin' that Jade wouldn't do it. As I was sayin', there was plenty hate between them two."

Then Mel broke off to look at Jade and say: "Why, Freed—why, man, what's up? You're white as paper. Are you sick?"

Jade shook his head, fighting for control. "No, not a bit of it. Just struck me queer, that's all—me bein' sent out here to him, and him locked up. Mebbe I'm superstitious." Jade held his breath. Had he betrayed himself?

It seemed he hadn't. The sheriff said: "Lupe Smith might help you with your cattle. See him at the Palmer House. Tell him I sent you. Well, guess I'll run along now to my supper. Be seein' you again."

Jade gained the street, his thoughts awhirl. Ab Ferris, here in jail, because he'd killed a man who wasn't dead at all! And Ab might swing! For just a moment, the thought struck horror to Jade's soul, and then he saw poetic justice in it, after all. Ab was a crook; he

should have been in stony lonesome long ago. Ab was responsible, too, for what Jade had done, responsible for all the suffering of these last three years. Or so, at least, Jade told himself. He even laughed, a dry and mirthless chuckle, to think that he was home here sound and safe to spend his whole remaining years, while Ab, who for so long had held the upper hand, was going to swing.

IT had been a full, exciting day, and Jade was weary as he reined his mount into the last short stretch of trail which led him home. And yet for all his joy at being back again; the fine elation that he felt at having passed the acid test for which he had prepared so long, knowing that he was safe in Windy Basin, there was still a little clutch of loneliness at Jade's heart. It was not compunction, he made sure of that, for in his heart Jade felt that of the two of them, Ab Ferris was the man to die. But somehow, suddenly, Jade longed to hear his mother's voice, to feel the soft touch of her hand.

The notion came that another woman's voice and touch might serve instead, and interwoven with the thought was the recollection of a girl. Ellen, her name was, daughter of Seams, the old squatter who had taken up a patch of land not far from the Circle Dot. The trail that led to Seams's mean shack lay near at hand—perhaps the very thing which had fostered Jade's whole thought of loneliness. At any rate, on sudden resolution, Jade swung his nag into the narrow track.

Dark had already come, when he rounded the shoulder of a ridge and, looking down on the small green valley where Seams had filed his claim, saw the distant, steady gleam

of lamplight through a windowpane. Seams, Jade told himself, was old and sick. At best, he couldn't have much longer, now, to live. The girl would be alone—and Jade, while these scars of his made him no pretty sight to offer any woman, could make her a good home, if she could be persuaded. No harm, at least, to just drop in, neighborly like, and set the ball to rolling.

He struck a casual heel into his pony's flank and started down the slope—started, then pulled up short. That sound he'd heard, distant but faint, was unmistakably a woman's scream. Instant as a gun's report follows the fingers pressure on the trigger, Jade's mount was leaping down the trail, little rills and rivulets of rock and dirt racing its flashing hoofs, while Jade, leaned forward on the creature's neck, urged yet more speed.

Again the woman's terror-stricken cry shredded the dark—and then again. At first, though his headlong haste and the grim peril of the going left little time for speculation, Jade had the notion that old Seams had had some sort of stroke, and the girl, alone with him, had cried for help. But there was something much more poignant in those cries, he realized, as he drew nearer—something that made him urge every last ounce of speed from the flying mount beneath him.

As Jade pounded up before the lighted cabin and flung in running dismount from his saddle, another horse called shrilly from the darkness of the dooryard. Yet Jade was unprepared, as he flung the shack door open, for the sight of a man's form, black and burly against the lamplight, while clasped tight in his arms, a girl's tense figure struggled. As she pulled back from the kiss the

burly ruffian would force upon her, she screamed again, a wild, a panicked note of sheerest terror.

Jade was through the door in one long leap.

"All right, Miss Ellen, ma'am," he called; "I got him. This skunk won't trouble you no more."

The girl's eyes, black with fear, flashed toward him, as suddenly released from her assailant's hold, she staggered backward. The man, himself, black-visaged, snarling-mouthed, flung right about. Jade heard the hiss of a gun on holster leather, and ducked just in the nick of time to miss the bullet that bored the air a scant half inch above his shoulder. And then Jade, crouching, was across the room in two great strides and grappling with the fellow before his finger could squeeze the trigger a second time.

The man snarled like some half-mad beast, and brought down his gun. The impact of it on Jade's head was stunning, and yet he managed to complete the hard pile-driving thrust of his own right fist which took the fellow square beneath the chin. The two went down together, rolling as one man, fighting for breath.

THE burly scoundrel with whom Jade grappled was the first to get his wind. Snarling, spitting like a coyote in a trap, he forced the gun up again to a place where he could bring it into action on Jade's head. Jade, senses still reeling, tried to twist it from the fellow's grip, and failed. He grasped the hairy wrist, however, and held it while the two of them rolled back and forth, first one on top and then the other, crashing against the wall, upturning chairs and tables, setting the stove lids

rattling as their hurtling bodies flung about the floor.

Jade's grip still held, but he was weakening fast. This brute with whom he grappled outmatched him in both size and strength, and a red-streaked darkness was whirling in Jade's brain from that first terrific blow the man had struck. It would be minutes, only, Jade realized, till he was overpowered. There was one chance, however, that he might take. If he released his hold upon the gun, and could take the punishment from its flailing barrel for long enough to grasp the fellow's hairy throat and squeeze the fight out of his gullet, he still might win.

Jade did not stop to weigh the pros and cons. He suddenly released his grip upon the fellow's wrist, and his own brown fingers flashed for the fellow's throat. Taken unaware, the burly creature choked and spluttered, wrenched and writhed. He could not free himself. But now he raised the gun. It rose and fell, and rose and fell. With each succeeding blow, Jade thought his very brains must scatter out upon the floor, but still by sheer grim will he clung, as a fine breed of hunting dog will keep its fangs deep-buried in its adversary's throat, long after the dog, itself, is done.

Quite subconsciously, Jade knew when the man, whose throat his fingers pressed, was finished. He didn't really see the big hulk jerk spasmodically and fall back limp, or hear the gun, arrested in mid-swing, fall clattering to the floor.

He knew though, presently, that the girl was bending over him, stroking his brow with cool, soft fingers. He told her thickly:

"Get that gun before the feller comes to life, and——"

She smiled at him. "I have,

though there's not much chance that he'll come to for hours. I thought for a moment he was dead. He isn't though, but most completely out."

Then Jade smiled back at her. "That's fine," he whispered huskily. "I'm glad I happened by here when I did."

The girl's smile vanished and left her blue eyes dark.

"Thank you," she told him simply, "thank you a million times." And then she sighed and looked sadder, so Jade thought, than any woman he had ever seen—even than his mother, when she would speak, sometimes, about his dad.

"I'm afraid," the girl went on, "that it won't help a lot. Alf—that's this beast you just knocked out—isn't so easy whipped, and there's Sam Hugis, too. They're both insisting that I marry them—when they know—know all the time—I can't."

A hot tear splashed on Jade's scarred face. A sudden wave of tenderness welled in him.

"Ellen," he said, forgetting for just a moment that he was Jim Freed, forgetting he was a stranger, "they'll never bother you again, now that I'm back."

Bent on the inner terror of her own thoughts, the girl paid small attention to Jade's words.

Jade asked her gently: "Your pappy dead?"

Her eyes went wide with some faint flicker of surprise, then dulled to lifelessness again.

"Two years," she told him.

Jade sat up, pushing away the girl's restraining hands. He spoke his thoughts aloud. "Seems funny—though I reckon things have changed, these last three years—but I never knew a lone girl to be bothered hereabouts. Well, there's

one good way, I reckon, to put a stop to that. A married woman is——”

The girl said quickly: “That’s just the trouble—it’s—it’s Ab. You see, both Alf and Sam were courting me before I married Ab. They say I’m good as widowed now, already; that Ab will lose his trial and swing. They—they forced themselves in on me, when I try to keep them out.”

Jade got up groggily to his feet. Something inside his chest had seemed to shrink and leave him strangely empty.

“You mean,” he asked, “that you ain’t Ellen Seams no more, but Ab—Ab Ferris’s wife?”

The girl’s eyes flashed; her head raised proudly.

“I’m not ashamed,” she cried. “I love him, love him dearly, even if he killed a man, the way they claim. If—if Ab was here, I’d not need any stranger to defend me.” And then the proud head fell, the hot blue eyes dissolved in tears.

Jade stood and looked at her what seemed a long, long time—stood motionless, his two hands hanging limply by his side. And yet he was not seeing her so much as looking back along three lonely, bitter years, seeing a young man, scared and heartsick, crouched in a mountain hide-out, longing with every fiber in him to get back home; seeing that same young fellow tossing and feverish on his bed of boughs, during the long, long months when the infected wounds across his face refused to heal; seeing him, well at last, practicing with infinite patience to change his stride, his voice, the very motions of his hands; seeing him riding home at last, joy in his heart.

Ab Ferris was a cur and scoundrel, no doubt of that. Whether

he’d killed a man or not, Ab deserved to hang. But this girl had loved him, married him. And because she was a jailbird’s wife, and soon to be his widow, she was being persecuted. And he had said to her, a little while ago: “They’ll never bother you again, now that I’m back.”

Again Jade’s blue eyes stared—looking ahead, this time, into the long years that stretched out endlessly behind steel bars. Just two days, now, he’d been at home on his own beloved soil. Two days, and he had promised her who lay up yonder in the Spruce Hill burying ground that he would stay here all his life. Yet, after all, it was the thought of Abigail Holloway decided him.

“Ma’am,” Jade said, “just help me lift this carrion crow and pack him outside there where I can tie him on his horse. I’ll take him back to town and turn him loose. I don’t believe, if what you say of Ab is true, and he’ll look out for you, that this skunk here or any other’ll ever bother you again.”

The girl said dully: “Why, yes, why, yes, of course. And thank you—thank you just the same, for what you did to-night.”

There was such dull surrender, so little hope in her quiet voice, Jade almost told her what he meant to do. Instead he smiled a little.

“Come on,” he said. “Buck up. Have faith. That’s what my mother used to say.”

And Jade repeated it, a little later, to himself this time, when with the still unconscious Alf across the horse he led, Jade reined his own nag up, and paused a moment where two trails met, one leading to the Circle Dot, the other to the town of Little Pine.

SOME two weeks later, when the circuit court was held in Little Pine, a curious situation faced the judge, for he must try for robbery the very man whose murderer he had come to judge—a legal tangle which made that worthy jurist knit his brow. But finally, with the problem solved, Ab Ferris free and in the weeping Ellen's arms, Jade Holloway stood up to hear his sentence.

The judge, lips pursed, and fingers tented, said in sonorous tones:

"Jade Holloway, since it's your purpose to repay the stolen moneys

to the bank of Little Pine, and since the deputy you wounded in the gun fight did not die, and since—well since, dog-gone it, Jade, you have proved yourself a man in every true sense of the word—this court suspends pronouncement of a sentence at this time, and puts you on probation."

What emotions played behind the mask of Jade's scarred features, none could tell. He didn't speak for quite a while, but when he did, Jade simply said:

"Thank you, judge. If you'll excuse me, then, I'll be ridin' home."



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By LLOYD ERIC REEVE

Author of "The Calgary Kid," etc.

DUSTY and weary with eight hours of steady riding, weary with four years of patient waiting, the lean young stranger rode slowly out of the blackening prairie, into the barren trail town. Along the single narrow thoroughfare he rode, past bleak false-fronted structures, through the dim yellow blooms of street lamps, and came finally to a drifting halt, before the settled bulk of the town livery stable.

A gaunt man with a hatchet face, holding a smoky lantern shoulder-high, shuffled from murky depths and squinted up at the impassive mask of the stranger.

"Howdy," he said. "Leaving your horse?"

"Howdy," said the stranger, swinging stiffly to ground. "Leaving my horse. Grain him an' rub him. I might be riding again to-night."

"Come far?" wondered the lank proprietor.

"All the way from Texas."

"Going far?"

"No," the stranger said, "this is the end."

The gaunt man stared. "Thought you said you might be leaving yet to-night."

"Might," said the stranger. "And still—this is the end."

"Maybe you got business here?"

"I'm here"—the other smiled—"to meet a man."

"Friend, eh?"

"No," said the stranger, "not a friend."



"Oh." The lank man looked flustered. "No offense, partner. I didn't go to pry."

"That's all right," said the stranger. His body revolved sharply, swinging forward, and he moved on down the wooden sidewalk.

WALKING with his head reared slightly, he kept his sinewy arms motionless at his sides. His boots thumped deliberately with the funeral beat of a muffled drum, and as he passed through alternate pools of light, he seemed to appear and vanish like a stalking presence not yet fully materialized.

Light broke dismally from the dusty windows of the Longhorn Saloon, as dismally perished before the smothering pounce of malignant dark. Pausing at the bat-wing doors, facing them squarely, the stranger broke them wide with a weaving twist of his shoulders. As he stepped inside, curving to the left, he slapped his shoulders against the wall and for a moment waited, tempering his half-lidded eyes to that smoky yellow gloom.

A roulette wheel clicked with ironic cheer; oil lamps sputtered and hissed like snakes against the cavernous ceiling; the motley crowd—weathered trail drivers, gamblers in beaver hats, buffalo hunters in fringed buckskin, soldiers with sabers, several long-haired scouts—swarmed through the glimmering murk, drank at the bar, played coldly at cards, or sat with their chairs tipped back, half asleep against the shadow-thick walls.

The stranger's gaze swept the room. He poised there, now suddenly defined in a splash of saffron light, his hips flat and his chest arched, tall and lean, that battered sombrero crouched on the back of his head and his sandy hair tangling around his ears like tufts of ripened hay. Finally his glance found the massive bulk of "Roaring Bill" Hyde, and his eyes blazed and then went cold.

Roaring Bill Hyde sat at a table in the center of the room, his bulging body a mammoth mound of flesh, playing draw poker with five buckskin-clad trappers. Sizable men by themselves, these trappers, but in the awesome shadow of Roaring Bill they seemed dwarfed to insignificance. For that black-bearded man was a giant—he had enormous hands, the shoulders of an ox, and

the lowering, shaggy head of a great boar.

The stranger smiled. It was a slow, contented smile. He crossed now to the bar, downing a drink and then casually rolling a cigarette. He lighted the cigarette. Then, swinging around, his elbows hooked on the bar, he loafed in lazy contemplation of the sullen play at Roaring Bill's table.

It was half an hour later that one of Roaring Bill's companions pushed back his chair and left the game. The stranger stepped quickly forward, pausing behind that empty chair. He looked at Roaring Bill.

"Can I sit in?" he asked.

Roaring Bill glanced up from beneath shaggy brows. "Huh? Don't believe I know you."

"No," said the stranger, "you don't know me. Can I sit in?"

Roaring Bill narrowed his eyes slightly, then he shrugged and nodded. "If you want."

"I want," said the stranger and sat down.

For another half hour, the play indifferently continued. The stranger lost a little, won a little. But finally there came a hand with every one but the stranger and Roaring Bill laying down their cards. Now the lean youth looked at his hand with a sudden interest. Then, jerking a roll of bills from his pocket, he counted out five hundred dollars.

"Covering that?" he asked Roaring Bill.

The huge man pursed his thick lips, scowled at his hand, finally nodded.

"Covered," he agreed, counting the money, "five hundred."

The stranger picked up the deck and looked at Roaring Bill.

"How many?"

"Two," said Roaring Bill.

LEANING forward, the tall youth flipped two cards at Roaring Bill, and swayed back. His hands dropped quickly below the edge of the table, fumbled, came up, and he gave himself four cards. Roaring Bill and the four trappers stared at the stranger blankly. So clumsy had been that dipping of hands below the table, that it hardly seemed possible that he could have deliberately changed decks. Roaring Bill half opened his mouth to speak, looked at his own cards, and then said nothing.

The stranger glanced at his hand, smiled, and tossed another five hundred on the table.

"Still in?" he asked.

With an impassive nod Roaring Bill fingered out the additional money and said, "I'm calling."

The stranger spread four aces and a king face-up on the table.

Roaring Bill stared at the revealed cards, at his own hand, and then his face turned brick-red. Slowly he spread his own hand—a pair of jacks and three aces.

"Seven aces," said Roaring Bill, "that's a hell of a lot for one deck!"

Instantly the tall youth's chair crashed over backward and his lean body whipped erect. All over the saloon heads reared, staring, voices cursed, and the crowd broke in a dozen directions, out of line, flattening their bodies against the parallel walls. The stranger leaned forward, his narrowed gaze striking Roaring Bill's flushed face.

"An' what do you mean by that?"

"That you're a skunk!" thundered Roaring Bill, lunging to his feet. "That you're a liar an' a cheat! That you're a low-down, double-dealing polecat!"

A quick, satisfied smile brushed the young stranger's lips. His voice was ominously quiet:

"That's a lot to call a man, Roaring Bill. Figure you can back it with your gun?"

Roaring Bill stood motionless, his heavy-jowled face flushed, staring at the smiling youth. But gradually then, strangely, an inscrutable calm washed across his massive features. Slowly he held out his right hand.

"Shake, stranger," he asked. "I talked out of turn. Shake, and we'll call it quits."

The stranger nodded, still smiling, and held out his right hand, seeming to brace himself as though expecting a shock. Roaring Bill's great hand closed over that of the stranger. The muscles of Roaring Bill's jaw ridged out with effort as he clamped that massive paw around the slender hand of the youth, crushing, breaking. The stranger's face went dead-white with pain. Roaring Bill gave a guttural laugh, released the hand, and stepped swiftly backward. The hand of the other dropped limply at his side, bloody, the bones broken.

"Pilgrim," snapped Roaring Bill, "I've changed my mind. You're still a liar an' a cheat. Now go for your gun!"

"I can't go for my gun," said the stranger; "you've broken my hand."

"Go for your gun!" thundered Roaring Bill.

The youth's face was white, but still his lips were faintly smiling.

"My name," he said, "is Johnny Dartin."

Roaring Bill's eyes leaped with a sudden start. He leaned forward, staring, licking his lips.

"Why, you fool!" he blurted.

"You'll never know it," said the stranger, "but you've killed yourself."

A sudden panic swept the massive face of Roaring Bill. His booming voice came raggedly: "Dang you!"

Go for that gun!" And even as he spoke, his own right hand leaped to hip, grabbed his weapon, brought it violently forward.

AT the same instant the young stranger curved slightly forward, over the table, and his left hand streaked upward across his chest to his right armpit. His left hand whipped that gun from shoulder holster, and the gun burst with a crashing flame that shook the tense saloon. The red flame leaped, and the echo broke, and Roaring Bill, his gun only half drawn, spun around, sagged in the middle, and then, with a heavy sigh, crumpled against the floor.

The stranger turned slowly, and faced the gaping crowd.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you all saw it. A game of draw. He went for his gun, an' I killed him in self-defense."

The crowd pushed away from the walls, shuffling forward, and a bearded cowman stepped out, staring fascinated at Jimmy Dartin's broken hand.

"Son," he marvelled, his gaze

flicking up, "that shoulder draw was lightning!"

"When a man practices steady for four years," said Johnny Dartin, "he gets to be tolerably fast on a left-hand shoulder draw."

The rancher cursed softly. "So you did it on purpose? Jus' stood there an' let him break your hand!"

"To make a hombre like him draw," Johnny said, "you got to give him the advantage."

"An' cold-deck him first jus' to make him call you?" The rancher's eyes narrowed suddenly. "Son," he recalled, "once I heard that Roaring Bill tried almost that same play down in Texas. Only that time he did the cold-decking himself. Switched decks on a man, an' when he got called, offered to shake hands an' call it quits. Then he broke the fellow's hand an' shot him down."

Johnny Dartin smiled thinly. "Friend," he agreed, "I've heard that same story."

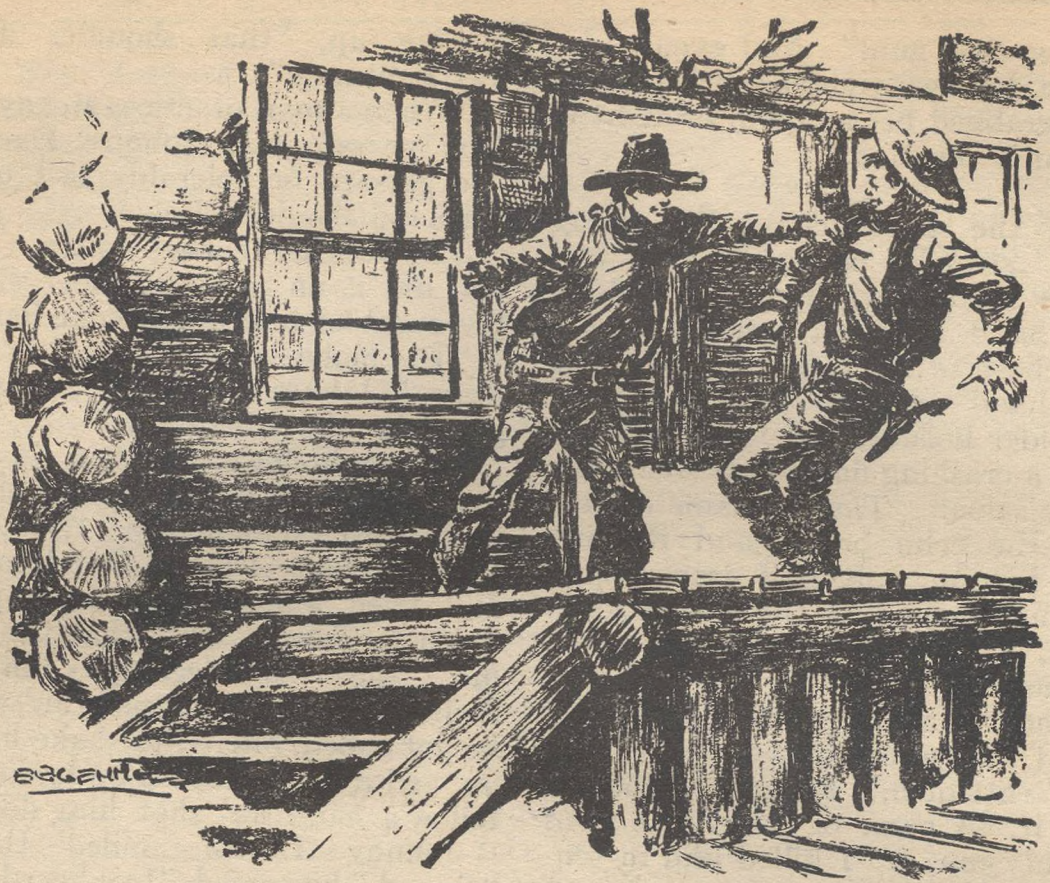
"Huh!" grunted the rancher. "Yeah? Maybe you even knew the man he killed?"

"Yes," Johnny said, "I knew him. He was my father."

NATURE AT WORK IN KANSAS

ON the David Yoder farm, southeast of Hutchinson, Kansas, there is a bottomless hole. Everything that could be trucked to it has been poured in, but the material simply drops down and keeps going. The hole was made for an oil test, and men have been trying to plug it for weeks.

In Haskell County, two hundred miles southwest of Hutchinson, a crack in the earth, two hundred feet long, twenty feet deep, and fifteen feet wide, has appeared. The fissure is slowly widening, and the owner of the land is afraid he will arise some morning to find his farm has dropped out of sight. This farm is not far from the natural-gas area, and gas pressure may account for the phenomenon.



The BARKING DOG

A Serial

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

THE stagecoach en route from The Dalles to Nugget City is held up by six masked riders, in order to murder one of the passengers, a man named Treece, who with a partner, Virlee, has a saloon in Nugget City. The other two passengers are a young woman, Elizabeth King, and Jerry Hawley. Both are on their way to the Bar K Ranch, known as the Barking Dog. Elizabeth is the owner of the ranch, since the recent murder of her father by parties unknown. Parks, the ranch foreman, has asked aid of Jerry's father to stop the depredations of a band of cow thieves who

have been rustling Barking Dog stock, and Jerry has responded to this appeal.

At Nugget City, Jerry confers with Tyson, the acting postmaster, whose father also has been mysteriously murdered. Tyson says that Virlee runs the town, controls the sheriff and county judge, and has riders over in the cow country, and that he wants to be a kind of a king. Jerry has a run-in with Virlee, whom he suspects is back of the cattle raids.

Tyson and his wife, and Elizabeth and Jerry then leave for the Barking Dog. While they are on the way to

WS-6B

the ranch, a gun battle takes place between rustlers and riders sent into the country by Jerry's father. In this encounter, Shorty Flynn, a friend of Jerry's, is killed.

That night Jerry and Parks, leading their combined forces, capture a number of rustlers who are about to run off a herd. These men say that the cow thefts have been directed by a man named Red Blackman. Dick Bloom, one of the rustlers, admits killing Shorty Flynn. Bloom asks Jerry to face him in a gun duel, and Jerry agrees.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRICKERY.

ASHIVER went through Bloom. He did have a yellow streak, Jerry saw. Bloom had made his demand wildly. Now he was suddenly still, though not calm. Even the heat was dying out of his eyes as he looked into Jerry's.

"Well," Parks drawled, "you're gettin' what you asked for. Why'n't you start?"

"Gimme my horse," Bloom said.

"Hop up," said Parks.

Bloom mounted. Jerry mounted. Parks pushed up to them.

"You can't go along," Bloom declared in a tense voice. "It's jus' me an' this fella."

"I'm goin' along," Parks declared. "I'll be a witness to what takes place. I don't want you accused of murderin' Jerry Hawley."

"You think I can't get him?" Bloom asked uneasily.

"Course you can! He's clumsy with a gun. He's a fool to go up against you. Anybody with half an eye can see that you're fast an' sure."

"You're lyin'," Bloom said.

"About him, I mean. You know he's fast an' sure."

The man's uneasiness grew. What he had demanded, while rage was running through him, he now seemed doubtful about. But he seemed to realize that he could not back down.

"Well," he snarled, "arrange it. Tell me how it's to be done. I ride when I get him, don't I?"

"A while ago my mind was made up that not a man o' you would ride," said Parks cheerfully, "but jus' the minute you sink a bullet into Jerry Hawley, you ride. You ride free. I'll go further'n that. I'll go along with you two with no gun on me. When you get through with Jerry, you can sink a second bullet into me. I can see you don't like me." The old man turned to the others. "If this yella pup gets Jerry an' me, he's to ride. Hear me?"

One man said, "Huh, huh," in derision of the possibility of Bloom's killing Jerry. The others joined with murmurs equally derisive.

"I'm s'prised at you," Parks said. "Jerry's as good as dead now." He returned to Bloom. "We three'll ride out on the flat. You an' Jerry'll face each other. When I say 'Fire,' you fire. Then, fella, you ride."

"An' say 'Fire' loud enough for us to hear," said a puncher. "You fella, if you pull your trigger afore he says 'Fire,' we'll string you up."

Most of this, Jerry knew, was intended to break Bloom down. In a way it was unfair, but it grew out of the contempt in which these hard men held such as Bloom.

"Let's start," Jerry said. "You'll have an equal chance, Bloom. I think you're good with a gun. I see you got the hand an' the eye. But you killed my friend, an' you gotta

answer for that. You can understand that, I guess."

"Scared, ain't you?" Bloom sneered, in an effort to play on Jerry as those men had played on him.

Jerry heard a rising note of confidence and resolution in Bloom's tone. He was glad it was there. He and Bloom were on equal terms now. He asked no more. If he could not make this thief and murderer pay for the killing of Shorty Flynn, he would be satisfied to drift out into the beyond, to be blasted out, for that matter. The hand which would presently drag his gun was steady and dry.

"I ain't scared, Bloom," he said quietly.

"Well, gimme a gun."

"Not one of my guns. We'll pick up yours out on the flat."

JERRY started his horse. Bloom followed him, and Parks followed Bloom. When they came to the spot at which Jerry had dropped Bloom's gun, he told Bloom to dismount, pick it up, and put it into his holster. Bloom dismounted and slowly stooped. He picked up the gun, his back to Jerry. He stood with the gun in his hands. Then Jerry saw his elbows move.

"I got a gun on you, Bloom," Jerry said. "Don't try anything."

Bloom scowled over his shoulder.

"I gotta make sure there ain't no sand in it, ain't I?" he asked.

Though he spoke low, Jerry heard a fine tremor in his voice, and he saw that he was sweating. He had no fat. That sweat had been wrung out of fairly dry tissues. Wrung out by fear, Jerry believed.

"Bloom," Jerry said, "I'm sorry for you. I'm sorry I gotta do this to you. But it's the way of the land, you know."

Bloom merely cursed him vio-

lently. Jerry was no longer unsure of the outcome. His heart was a little heavy as Bloom holstered the gun and remounted. Then he remembered folding Shorty Flynn's hands on Shorty's breast, and he grew grim. It was a necessary job, a job to be got over as quickly as possible.

They rode for a little way farther. Jerry was watching Bloom closely. He saw that Bloom was bent in his saddle, his feet pushed hard into his stirrups. Jerry felt something strange in the man, a kind of expectancy. He dropped his hand to the butt of one of his guns.

A moment later Parks called a halt. The old man's voice, Jerry heard, was somewhat uncertain. Then it dawned upon Jerry that this was a pretty difficult job for Parks. There was always a chance that either man would die in an encounter like this. If Parks had to inform Jerry's father that Jerry had been killed right at the outset, it'd be pretty tough.

While Jerry let these thoughts flit through his brain without permitting them to disturb him, he had continued to keep his eyes on Bloom. He saw Bloom suddenly drop his hand to his gun butt. The gun was drawn as swiftly as Jerry had ever seen a gun drawn. In the same instant Bloom came about in his saddle, expecting, Jerry supposed, to find Jerry off his guard. At Bloom's turning movement Jerry cried out.

"Bloom, no! I got you covered. Bloom——"

The explosion of Bloom's gun was his answer. His own gun was leveled at Bloom. Bloom did not immediately fire again. Jerry could see his twisted features, shining from sweat, could see his hot, wild eyes. And he could see the muzzle of

Bloom's gun, with wisps of smoke drifting away from it.

"Fire!" old Parks shouted.

That first bullet of Bloom's had sped past Jerry because Bloom had fired without aiming, merely discharging the gun as soon as his eyes fell on Jerry's body.

Jerry did not want to fire. He wanted Bloom to be facing him when he did that. But he had to fire. Bloom had made a mistake, but he was going to fire again. As Parks shouted, he leaned five inches. He was going to press his trigger. Jerry pressed his own.

The men back yonder must have seen that Bloom had fired ahead of time. Half a dozen of them broke away from the others and sent their spurred horses toward the trio. They whirled in on them, then held their horses still. Bloom had straightened up with the last ounce of his strength. He was swaying in his saddle. Then he fell along the horse and dropped to the ground, his feet coming free. One of the punchers took up the horse.

Jerry dismounted and knelt beside Bloom. There was nothing to do for Bloom except to bury him.

"Let him lie," Parks said. "Let him be buzzard's meat. He tried to murder you. Yella pup."

"I can't do that," Jerry protested. "I killed him. I gotta bury him." He turned to the punchers. "Hand him up to me."

But they were implacable men. Not one moved out of his saddle. They wouldn't touch Bloom. Let him lie! Let him be buzzard's meat! That's how Bloom would have done if he had killed Jerry.

So, lifting Bloom's body, Jerry dragged himself to his saddle and laid the body in front of him. He slowly followed the other men back to the grouped riders.

"Get their guns," Parks ordered.

Punchers went among the prisoners and took their guns. With groans those men lowered their aching arms and rubbed them.

"Ahead of us," Parks ordered.

"Whatcha goin' to do with us?" a man asked, his voice timid.

PARKS gave him a look of surprise and did not reply. With drooping heads the prisoners placed themselves in front of all the others, and the ride to the ranch began. When, about midnight, they rode in, they did so as quietly as possible, so that they should not rouse Elizabeth and Mrs. Tyson if they had fallen asleep. They had not fallen asleep. They at once came out to the riders.

Elizabeth's seeking eyes at once found Jerry. She had been walking toward the men, but when she saw the burden which Jerry's horse bore, she stopped. Jerry looked at her with regret in his eyes. He didn't know which she would be—the girl who had spent her early years on this ranch or the girl who had lived away from it for several years.

Elizabeth came on and stood beside his horse. She looked at Bloom.

"You killed him?" she asked.

"In a fair fight," Jerry answered, giving Bloom credit that was not his due.

It was not in him to explain that Bloom had killed Shorty Flynn. Elizabeth would have to judge by his simple statement. She judged at once. She put up a hand and laid it briefly on one of Jerry's.

"I'm glad it was he, not you," she said.

"He killed Shorty Flynn," Jerry said, then.

"I see." She nodded, and stepped back, came up again. "You've

brought him here so that you might give him burial, Jerry."

"Yes."

"Parks," Elizabeth called, "will you have a horse brought up for me?"

Parks had a horse brought up. Elizabeth mounted.

"A spade, Parks," she said.

A puncher brought a spade. Jerry took it. He and Elizabeth started their horses. After a moment of hesitation several punchers moved to follow them. Elizabeth turned in her saddle.

"No, boys," she said. "This is something special between Jerry Hawley and me—and Shorty Flynn."

The punchers remained where they were. Elizabeth and Jerry rode on. When they were well out on the flat, they dismounted and Jerry laid Bloom's body on the ground. He dug a four-foot grave in the yielding sand, put Bloom's body into it, and covered it up. Then he stood erect and looked at Elizabeth.

Once more Elizabeth's eyes were on the stars. If she was sending something up to them, Jerry knew, it was again something for Shorty Flynn and not for Bloom. Her eyes were moist as she dropped them to Jerry's.

"Shorty Flynn was so very young, Jerry," she whispered.

Jerry's own throat was a little thick. It was a borrowed emotion. Damn it, he couldn't stand it to see tears in Elizabeth's eyes.

"That," he growled, "is the devil of it. He was a gay kind of a fella."

"Always joyous," said Elizabeth.

"Yeah. Full o' joy up to the top of his head. Friendly to everybody. Well, we got this job done."

Remounting, they rode back to the house. They came upon a ring of men who inclosed all those

prisoners and Parks. As Jerry and Elizabeth stopped, Parks spoke.

"Well, whatcha say?"

"Guilty o' cow stealin'. Guilty as hell."

"Cer'nly. O' course. You betcha."

"They've tried those men," said Elizabeth to Jerry.

"An' found them guilty," Jerry said indifferently.

"Well——" Elizabeth hesitated.

Parks had been running his eyes around the big circle. They came to rest on Jerry and Elizabeth.

"Ho, Jerry, I wanta talk to you," Parks said. "Come into the house."

JERRY and Elizabeth dismounted and went into the house. Parks followed them. Tyson and his wife came in and went on to the other room.

"Elizabeth, you better get some rest," Parks said. "You ain't doin' yourself no good stayin' up all night."

"Are you going to hang all those men, Parks?" Elizabeth quietly asked.

"Now, now," Parks cried, "don't you go messin' in this thing. Me an' Jerry'll handle it."

"How many men are there?"

"Fifteen left."

"Are you going to hang them?" Elizabeth asked again.

"I am," Parks stoutly answered. "I'm goin' to make an example of them. I gotta! Good heavens, we been losin' our cows wholesale. We'll lose more 'less we make an example of somebody. I re'lize that it'll bring the rest of all this outfit down on us. Mebbe here at the house, but we gotta strike an' keep on strikin'. I wanta talk to Jerry now. Go to bed, Elizabeth."

"You couldn't turn those men over to the sheriff," said Elizabeth.

"Turn them over to the sheriff?"

Parks exploded. "Far as I know, we ain't got no sheriff. In town they's a clerk or a bartender or some hombre that wears a star, but I don't know him an' don't wanta know him. Elizabeth, the law is right here on this ranch. I'm glad we ain't got no other law yet. I s'pose the law will come. This ol' big country is bein' cut up now. Wish she'd stayed like she was. Well, till the real law gets here, we're the law. Cow stealin' is punishable by death."

"I didn't ask you whether you could turn them over to the sheriff," Elizabeth said, rather tartly. "I stated that you could not. I've seen that sheriff."

"You're talkin' like your father now, girl," old Parks growled.

Elizabeth rose and walked to the door of the other room. There she turned and regarded Jerry.

"You?" she asked.

"I gotta."

"And Tyson?"

"Oh, we'll have to keep Tyson outta it, Parks," Jerry said. "Account his wife. A man that has a wife like her can't be in on a thing like that."

"Yeah," Parks agreed, "we'll get away from him somehow."

Elizabeth gave Jerry a long, slow look and went into the other room.

"See how she looked at you, Jerry?" Parks asked.

"Lissen, Parks," Jerry said earnestly, "if you don't stop talkin' about that matter, you an' me'll tangle. I mean it!"

"I gotta get the girl married off to a puncher or a cowman," Parks said, as earnestly. "It's been sev'ral years sence I had her where I could get at her. I don't mean to let her get away." He laughed lightly. "Course, it's ridic'lous for me to be playin' the part o' that little, nakid

guy that wears a harp or wings or whatever 'stead of a gun, but I gotta do the best I can."

"I guess Elizabeth will pick her own husband," Jerry said, somewhat sulkily. "My gosh, you couldn't make her marry the man you picked."

"I wouldn't try to *make* her do nothin'," Parks snorted. "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink, but you stand a damn sight better chance o' gettin' him to drink if you do lead him to water 'stead o' hazin' him up to it."

"I think you're full o' uncooked dough," Jerry declared.

"Way I feel ezac'ly," Parks declared, "but I think a lot o' Elizabeth."

"You better not go singin' my praises to her."

"I had it in my mind," Parks confessed, "but the way she's been lookin' at you has caused me to hold my tongue. I'm sadsified with the situation just as it is. Aw, keep your seat, Jerry. I wanta talk business with you."

"I don't think it's in you to talk business," Jerry flared.

"Whatcha think of the layout now?" Parks asked serenely. "Whatcha think o' this talk of Black Redman or whatever his name is? Think Virlee is in it?"

"I cer'nly think Virlee is in it. I think Blackman does the cow work for him. I think Blackman was responsible for the killin' of Treece."

"You see a red-headed man that time?"

"I wasn't so lucky. I don't think this Red Blackman appears except as he rides about the country alone. I don't think he mixes in anything any more than Virlee does."

"Yeah. That sounds good. Well, we got two diff'runt kinds of men to deal with. I on'y get a kind of a

sickish feelin' when I think of that big hellion Virlee. I guess he's more dangerous than I think he is, but I can't help how I feel about him. This here Red Blackman is prob'ly a hellbender. I've gone up agin' his kind afore. The man that faces him final will hafta be fast an' sure." The old man stared at Jerry. "If it's you, Jerry, you'll hafta deliver as you never delivered afore."

"Parks," said Jerry seriously, "when the show-down comes, leave him to me. It may be that he killed Mr. King himself. If he did——" Jerry, too, stopped and stared, his eyes hard and bright. "Parks," he went on, "if he killed Mr. King or had him killed, what could stop me from killing him?"

"Nothing," said old Parks simply.

The two men continued to stare at each other as if some mystic thing were in the room. At last Parks nodded.

"Yeah, you'd kill him, Jerry," he said. "You'd blast his heart right out. Easy!" Parks took a deep breath. "Well," he went on, "I'm goin' to write a letter to Virlee. I'm goin' to tell him we hung fifteen of his men. I'm goin' to drag him out in the open."

"All right," Jerry agreed.

Jerry sat staring at the table. Parks gave him a sly look, then patted his pants pockets.

"Where did I leave my pipe?" he asked. "I gotta smoke whilst I'm writin' a letter." He rose. "Be back in a minute, Jerry."

Jerry only nodded. Parks went outside. He was back in a short time and set about writing his letter. When he had finished, he read the letter to Jerry.

"It's all right," Jerry said. "It lets him know that we're sure he's guilty of everything that's happened and that Red Blackman is his right-

hand man. You call him a good many names, Parks."

"I don't call him the names he should be called," Parks asserted, "because them names ain't. Well, I'll take this letter to a boy outside. He's goin' to get it to Virlee tomorrow somehow. I dunno jus' how. He volunteered. I ast him to volunteer."

Jerry smiled as Parks again went outside. The old man had his own way of doing things, Jerry thought. And, indeed, Parks was to prove that he had his own way of doing things.

He came in presently and sat down and refilled and lighted his pipe. Jerry smoked a cigarette. Time slipped away while the two men sat in silence.

"Must be one o'clock," Jerry said.

Parks produced a big silver watch.

"Two," he said.

"So late. What time you goin' to start that bee, Parks?"

"Lemme rest a bit, Jerry. I don't stand these rackets like I usta. Time was I could set my saddle seventy-two hours at a stretch an' never turn a hair. Can't do it no more. Reason prob'ly is I ain't got many hairs left to turn. Ho, hum."

A fit of abstraction came to Jerry. He idled the minutes away, while dim thoughts of Elizabeth went through his mind. He began to nod. Sleepily he looked at Parks. Parks was steadily smoking, his eyes lidded. Jerry put his arms on the table and went at once into a sound sleep.

Parks opened his eyes and looked at Jerry. Tamping out his pipe, he softly rose and went to the living-room door and opened it. Elizabeth sprang up and hastened to him.

"It ain't nothin' important, Elizabeth," he said. "On'y, by now, that unforchinit matter o' them hellions

has been attended to. I sent a bunch o' the boys up in the hills with them. I didn't want Jerry to mix in that matter."

"Thanks, Parks," Elizabeth said, and closed the door quickly.

CHAPTER IX.

ACT OF MERCY.

JERRY awoke in one of the bunk houses at noon. He remembered that Parks had roused him in the kitchen and that he had gone to the bunk house. Up for more than thirty hours and used to regular sleep, he had not remembered that a "bee" was in prospect. It was his first thought now. He went outside and hunted up Parks. The punchers, heretofore, had been a little offish, but his encounter with the man who had killed Shorty Flynn had banished whatever doubts they had had, and they grinned at him as he yawned his way past them.

He found Parks sitting on the kitchen steps, smoking his pipe. Jerry sank down beside him.

"You let me sleep while you took care of them fellas," Jerry said.

"I didn't take care of them. Some o' the boys did. They took care o' them good, too. You an' me wasn't needed. You hadda have your rest. You gotta be strong an' ready at all times, Jerry."

"Yeah."

"Elizabeth is fine this mornin'," said Parks. "She got some rest, too."

"It was on her account you let them boys slip away 'thout me," Jerry declared.

"Might be."

Jerry sat looking ahead of him for a moment. His thoughts reverted to the scene at the bottom of the mountain slope. He remembered that sick man.

"Parks," he exclaimed, "did you take care o' that sick young fella, too?"

"You might not think so, but I got a human streak in me," Parks answered. "That young fella is lyin' in that shed over yonder. I couldn't put him in the bunk house or take him into the house. He was coughin' his head off when I went out to the boys las' night. I dunno if what he's got is ketchin', but I couldn't take no chances."

"How's he this mornin'?"

"Not so good. He looks like a ghost. I reckon he'll be a ghost afore long. I guess he must 'a' swallowed a bucket o' live coals sometime, an' them coals burned him out inside o' him. He's shore burned out."

"Nothin' we can do for him?"

"Naw. I've seen two, three fellas in the fix he's in. At the end they jus' give a gasp an' was gone. I got a puncher in there with him, settin' back f'm him."

That puncher had been in the shed but now he came out of it, hastily. He was an excited young man. Catching sight of Jerry and Parks, he called to them loudly. They hastened over to him.

"That fella is in a bad way," the puncher said. "I dunno what's happened him. You better have a look at him, Parks."

Jerry and Parks went into the shed. The man lay on a cot which Parks had had carried in there. He was leaning over the edge of it. There was a stain on the floor, a wet, rusty stain. As the two men entered, the sick man pushed himself from the edge of the cot and lay on his back, his eyes closed, his lips dropped apart. He seemed exhausted. Parks looked at Jerry and shook his head.

"Soon?" Jerry asked.

"Pretty quick."

They walked up to the cot and stood looking down at the man. His face was bloodless. His eyes were sunken and dark-ringed. He lifted a feeble hand and ran it over his lips. Then he seemed to become aware that some one was near him. He slowly opened his eyes.

"Water," he whispered.

JERRY got a dipper of water from a pail which stood on the floor. He raised the man's head, and the man took two mouthfuls. He had difficulty in swallowing. As Jerry let him back, he caught one of Jerry's hands. His eyes were feverish as he looked up at Jerry.

"Am I goin' to pass out?" he asked.

"It comes to all of us," Jerry said.

"I mean, am I goin' to pass out right now? I got consumption. Had it for a year."

"Son," said Parks solemnly, "I kinda think you're close to the end o' your rope. We all gotta meet it some time or other."

"I ain't afraid o' death," the man declared. "It's stoppin' livin' that gets me."

There was, Jerry declared, nothing contradictory in that. The man appeared to have a feverish love of life. It was clear that he had loved life—living—too well.

"I allus have lived," the man confirmed that. "I've had ev'rything—whisky, gamblin', and so forth. I guess I laid myself open to this here sickness. But I thought I could last till I was thirty, forty. If I was forty, I wouldn't mind. I never did wanta live after I got old. Fella, you sure I'm slippin' out?"

"I dunno what happens after an attack like this," Jerry said. "I

don't know nothin' about this business. But it looks——"

"All right." A false briskness came to the man. His cheeks were suddenly bright; they had a transparent appearance. "I gotta tell you somethin'. I better get about it." He raised his head slightly, immediately let it fall back. Jerry cautioned him not to move. "Yeah, I gotta save my stren'th. Well, I killed that postmaster in town. That's the on'y killin' I been in."

Jerry had a moment of gratitude. He was glad that this man, now dying, was the slayer of Tyson's father. His gratitude was on Mrs. Tyson's account. Her husband would have to hunt no longer for that murderer. Unless——

"Who was with you?" Jerry asked.

Even with the hand of death reaching out to touch him, the man still was proud.

"Nobody! I wouldn't let nobody help me in a job like that. Fact is, I never worked with an outfit before—till Red sent me to join up with them fools you caught. Workin' with other men is dangerous in more ways than one. Always a chance somebody will lose his nerve an' squeal. I didn't go to the post office to kill that fella, though. He jus' stumbled in there when I was workin' on the safe. He tol' me to throw up my hands, an' I let him have it."

"Rest a minute," Jerry said.

He sped from the shed to the house and threw open the door without knocking. He found Elizabeth and Mrs. Tyson at work in the kitchen.

"Where's Tyson?" he asked.

Instead of answering, Mrs. Tyson went to the door of the other room and called her husband. When Tyson came out, he had a gun in one hand and an oiled rag in the

other. He had, Jerry saw, been cleaning his gun. Very likely he had been thinking of the murder of his father. He would associate the cleaning of a gun with that murder. His hope would be that he would be able to use the gun for the one special purpose before long. Jerry had another moment of gratitude. He saw Mrs. Tyson's eyes grow sad as she looked at the gun. She was worried because her husband was constantly dwelling upon his expected use of it, looking about for the exact man to use it on.

"Tyson, come outside with me," Jerry said.

HE spoke to Tyson, but he was looking at Mrs. Tyson. He saw Mrs. Tyson take hold of herself. She might worry about her husband's longing to meet his father's slayer, but she would interpose no objection to whatever he decided to do. However, Jerry saw that she was constantly afraid that the next moment would be the dire one. She seemed to be so afraid now.

"Just a minute," Tyson said.

Jerry knew that he was going into the next room to slip cartridges into that cleaned gun. Jerry had tried to be wholly calm, but, with recollection of that young man in his mind, he had not succeeded. A note a little higher than the rest had humped itself up in the middle of a sentence meant to be even.

"You won't need your gun," Jerry said.

Mrs. Tyson gave Jerry a wide-eyed, glad look. Jerry wanted to take Tyson to the dying man and let him, afterwards, tell his wife what had happened. As Tyson started for the door, however, Elizabeth walked swiftly up to Jerry and laid a hand on his arm.

"What is it, Jerry?" she asked. "Tell me."

She was the girl she had been in the draw, not the girl she had been in town. Jerry looked down into her soft eyes. She was asking a favor of him.

"Why," he said, "there's a dyin' man outside." He hesitated. "He's the man that killed Tyson's father. No, Tyson, you won't need a gun. This fella has gone beyond you. He's that sick man that we caught up at the mountains. When you take one look at him, you'll see that you can't use a gun on him."

For a moment, Tyson stood with bent head, a frown between his eyes, those eyes on the floor. Then he slowly walked over to the table and placed his gun on it.

"Come on," he said in a thick voice.

He moved quickly toward the door, opened it, and stood there, waiting for Jerry. Elizabeth and Mrs. Tyson also went to the door.

"No!" Jerry said sharply. "You two women stay here. That man's terrible sick. He may die any minute. It may be a terrible death. Parks is out there. Us three can handle the matter."

"A man dying on my ranch and I mustn't go to him, Jerry?" Elizabeth asked. "That isn't reasonable. Also Mrs. Tyson wants to go with her husband."

Jerry argued no further. The four went to the shed and entered it. The man's too-bright eyes were on the ceiling. Parks had been standing beside him, but as the others came in, he stood aside. Tyson immediately walked up to the cot. His hands were clasped in front of him. He was pulling at his fingers, and in the sudden silence the sound his knuckles made was loud.

"Well?" he whispered to the sick man.

"This is Tyson, son of the man you killed," Jerry put in.

The habit of defiance was firmly fixed on that man. It maintained itself even in this moment. He turned his too-bright eyes on Tyson and kept them there.

"It was all fair enough," he declared in a light voice. "Your father tol' he to stick up my hands. Nobody but a—a— Well, he made a mistake in tellin' me to do that when he didn't have no gun. Long ago I promised myself I wouldn't be took alive, red-handed. I turned an' plugged him."

For a space, Tyson seemed unable to find words. The dying man's proud, cruel assertions angered Jerry a little.

"You was took red-handed up at the mountains," Jerry said.

"Oh, I didn't think that mattered. Cow stealin' ain't nothin'."

"Little you know about it," said Parks bitterly. "Them fellas that you was with found it was somethin'."

"Did you string them fellas up, jus' for the sake of a few cows?" the man asked.

"Ain't you a puncher?" Parks inquired.

"Naw. I ain't never worked since I can remember. I'm a rider. I've rode in ev'ry State where a man can ride free an' easy."

"Why did you go to the post office?" Tyson demanded.

"I was lookin' for a letter. Virlee wanted me to get it for him."

"Then you know Virlee."

"Fella, I was short o' money an' sick, so I joined up with this outfit. I had knowed Red Horner——"

"Fella that calls hisself Blackman here?"

"Yeah. That was Horner's little

joke, account his black horse an' his black clo'es. Horner was the name I knowed him by in Montana. Well, Horner said I couldn't work alone, 'cept as an odd job come up. When the post-office job come up, he tol' me to do it. I said I would when I met the man I was workin' for. Red's a pretty good fella, an' he sent me right in to see Virlee. I guess he wanted to show Virlee that he could be independent, if he hadda.

"Virlee tol' me that he was expectin' a letter to come to the post office for Parks. He wanted to get the letter. I went to the post office five times in the night but found no letter. Las' time Virlee said mebbe it was in the safe. He said no Barking Dog rider had been reported to him as bein' in town for a long time."

"I see how that was," Parks said. "Somebody seen me mail my letter to your father, Jerry. Then Virlee wanted to get the answer, to find out what I was up to."

"Virlee gen'ally had a man hangin' around the post office, especially when the mail come in," said Tyson. "You remember, Hawley, a watcher was on the job first time I met you."

"What else do you know?" Jerry put in. "Do you know who killed Treece or King?"

"Don't know a thing about the King business. I s'pose Virlee had King killed. They was pardners. Virlee ain't the kind of man that likes to split profits. His profits was growin' but so was his expenses. I guess he figgered there wasn't enough comin' in for two."

"What else?" Jerry asked.

A SUDDEN change came over the man. His strength seemed to increase. He raised himself on an elbow and stared at Jerry with eyes that now

burned. They were hotly alive in a face that was now gray.

"There's a fella round here some place that you might look up," he said. "When he ain't workin', he hangs around Virlee's saloon. He calls hisself a trailer. Me, I'm a trailer. If I couldn't play the game that fella tries to play better'n he plays it, I'd quit."

"What game?" Jerry asked.

"Trailin' an outfit for a ways an' then losin' the trail. It's an ol' game. I've played it myself. Y' see how it worked for Virlee? A posse'd get together. Virlee wouldn't pick it. There wouldn't be a real trailer in the outfit, though. They'd set out with this here fella callin' hisself a trailer at their head. He'd folla the trail for a while all right. Then he'd lead the posse to rock. Fella, I can trail on rock. I've done it. But any half-baked trailer could convince that kind of a posse that the trail was lost. You see how it works. It's an ol' trick."

"You say Virlee wouldn't pick the posse," said Jerry. "Who would?"

"The president of the bank in town. He swore he would clean up the outfits that was ruinin' the country. Virlee bent hisself double before that banker. He tol' him to get a trailer. That was Horner's su'jestion. The banker sent to Idaho for a man. He wanted a stranger. He got a stranger all right, but he wasn't a stranger more'n an hour. Virlee offered him more money than he'd ever seen afore. The money got the fella. 'Sides he knew that he wouldn't live six hours if he didn't play Virlee's game.

"You fellas go in an' get that trailer. I was goin' to get him myself, on'y I guess I'm too sick. That Virlee paid him more money than he paid

me, an' I'm a better trailer than he ever dreamed o' bein'."

"What does he look like?" Jerry asked.

"Built like a lath. Got a pair of these here muddy-blue eyes. Black hair, though. Hook nose. You can't miss him."

"You're sure there's nothin' else?" Jerry asked.

"Can't think o' nothin'."

He was still up on his elbow. Suddenly there was a catch in his throat. His eyes protruded. He began to cough. The coughing tore his lungs, shook his whole body.

Jerry placed an arm about the man's shoulders. He was afraid there would be another hemorrhage. There was none. The coughing grew less violent. Elizabeth wet her handkerchief and handed it to Jerry. Jerry wiped the man's now hot face.

"Anybody you wanta send word to?" Jerry asked.

The man smiled very slightly, then made a little sound of disgust in his throat. Jerry let him back. Immediately the man was seized with a terrible air hunger. His slight smile had still been on his lips when Jerry had let him down. It died now, and a look of fear came into his eyes. Jerry moved to lift him.

"Let me," said Tyson at Jerry's side.

Jerry moved swiftly away. Tyson, leaning, lifted the sick man. The sick man was sucking in air between parted lips. Jerry saw a shudder go through Tyson, and then Jerry knew that Tyson was doing this for his wife's sake. She knew it, too. She moved up to her husband's side, Elizabeth moving back to Jerry.

Elizabeth stood erect. The sick man was slipping out. Jerry knew that Elizabeth, quick as she was to any emotion, was sorry for the man,

but she did not seek sympathy for herself or support. She did not reach for Jerry's hand.

"Trailer," said the man, quite clearly, scornfully.

Then he died—gaspd and died.

TYSON let him back and stood up, wiping sweat from his face. He did not look at the dead man. He turned and got uncertainly into the open air. His wife followed him. Elizabeth approached the cot and drew the blanket over the man's face. She stood up.

"Trailer," she said. "He's on a longer trail than he's ever been on before. I hope the sign leads him to some safe place."

She, too, went outside.

"If that fella follas any sign, he'll folla it to hell," said Parks hardily. "He knowed he was dyin'. He died proud. He died tellin' us how to get to a man he hated. That's what I despise in these men—their hate an' their pride. I guess this fella was a trailer all right. He couldn't bear to see another trailer brought in. Jealous. Died jealous. What's the use o' hopin' anything for him? Shucks."

Jerry hardly listened to the old man's philippic. When Parks turned to him, he found him staring at the floor. The old man was really sorry for the trailer; he was sorry for any one who died young. Death was for the old, he held. He was growing old; presently death would be welcome; but he would leave behind him a pretty good life.

"What you chewin' on now, Jerry?" he asked testily.

"I've got to go to town to find that trailer. He may know a lot."

"You're goin' to walk right in under Virlee's nose?"

"I'll keep away from Virlee for

the present. I only want that trailer."

"Goin' to take anybody with you?"

"Better go alone. Can't take an outfit. One or two men would be no help. Now, Parks, I'm goin' to slide out. I want you to keep your mouth shut to Elizabeth."

"You better go tell her. On'y square thing to do. She'll know, in fi' minutes, that you're gone."

"Hell!" Jerry breathed. Again he regarded the floor. "Go get her," he said. "Tyson's prob'ly in the house. Don't want him to know I'm leavin'."

Parks brought Elizabeth out. Jerry informed her of what he intended to do.

"All right, Jerry," she said, and returned into the house.

"You got a good long horse that's fast, too?" Jerry asked Parks.

"I shore have. It's a hammer-headed roan, o' course. Not much for looks but he'll die on his feet, walkin' or beatin' the wind."

They went down to the corral and got the roan. Parks had not had him ready. He seemed to have been saving him for an emergency. A little time was lost in getting saddle and bridle on him. Then, as Jerry rode down toward the house, there was another delay. The man whom Parks had sent to Virlee rode in.

"I give your letter to Virlee his own self," the man reported. "I took it inta his saloon. I walked right up to him an' stuck the letter in his paw. I says to him: 'There's a letter for you.' Then I left an' come home. Am I tired!"

"You ain't half as tired as your horse," said Parks. "My gosh, did you let him get his breath at all?"

"Not much," the puncher admitted. "I didn't know what minute I might hafta kill fifty,

sixty men, an' I was tired an' hungry. What is a horse for any-way?"

"Go get somethin' to eat," Parks ordered. "Why, Jerry, you ain't had no breakfas'."

Jerry was suddenly hungry. He went with the puncher. As he was about to remount, Mrs. Tyson appeared in the kitchen door.

"Where's my husband?" she called.

"Ain't he in the house?" Jerry asked.

"I thought he was in the other room. He isn't. He must have gone round the house and got a horse. Oh, he's gone to town!"

"To get Virlee!" Parks exclaimed, the words popping from his lips before he could check them.

CHAPTER X.

IN TOWN.

JERRY reached Nugget City just after nightfall. He had ridden the roan horse hard and fast. For the most part he had kept out in the flat, for he had supposed that Tyson would keep to it. Then, not overtaking Tyson, he had concluded that Tyson had ridden in toward the hills. That would delay him somewhat, and Jerry hoped to reach town ahead of him.

Jerry encountered no riders in the street. When riders came in, the saloons soon took them. That diversified flow of humanity was again moving along the sidewalk. As he rode down to Virlee's place, Jerry scanned the men. However, he looked in vain for such a person as the dying man had described.

When he reached Virlee's place, Jerry did not hesitate. He knew that the big man would have him killed if he could, but he would probably not do it here. He was

not forthright enough for that. Of course, some hanger-on might pick a quarrel, but Jerry was confident he could take care of such a customer. Virlee would not permit any one to shoot him in the back. Virlee could not get away with a witnessed murder. There were many decent men among the miners.

Jerry pushed open the doors and walked into the barroom. At the side of one end there was a long bar. Customers, two deep, stood in front of it. They were all gay. Virlee's whisky was already beginning to take effect.

At the other end of the big room was the dance hall and, in between, the gambling paraphernalia. Crowds of men and women were about the tables, the men hazarding whatever stakes they could afford, the women awaiting a winning play.

Jerry went about among the tables. No one seemed to pay any attention to him. If Virlee had made a marked man of him, the men for whom he had been marked were not here or they were sly. He went on to the dance floor. A square dance was on. Jerry could not pick out the trailer from among those bowing, scraping figures, and of course Tyson was not there.

Jerry went outside to await Tyson's arrival. He leaned back against the logs of the building and rolled and lighted a cigarette. The light of the match still dimmed his eyes when he saw the saloon door opened. A man emerged. He was a young man with a springy step, short but lean. He looked carelessly past Jerry and then leaned up against the logs, on the other side of the door. Jerry stared out into the street. Out of the corner of an eye he could see the man give him a quick glance. Jerry quickly turned his head. Before the man

could turn his own head, which he did as quickly as Jerry had done, the two men's eyes met. Jerry was convinced that the fellow was one of Virlee's killers and that he knew who Jerry was. He was spying on him.

Jerry's ready anger boiled up. This might be the man who had killed Treece. He might even be the man who had killed King. And yet he stood here insolently. He lived a life of ease, while that old cowman lay in his grave. This fellow had food, shelter, whisky—everything that his black heart desired. Elizabeth was fatherless. Jerry's anger flooded up. He found his mouth dry. He cast the cigarette from him with a violent motion. He slightly turned toward the man.

He was stayed by the arrival of half a dozen miners. They had apparently visited several saloons. Their faces were almost as red as their shirts. They spoke to the man beyond the door, having reached him first, and then they spoke to Jerry, with waves of their hands.

A little behind them five punchers arrived. They seemed just to have reached town. They spoke neither to Jerry nor to the other man. They were in what to them was a big town, and they were cautious, on their guard. Jerry guessed that they had come from ranches on the other side of town. If they had come from the Barking Dog country, it was unlikely that they would have gone to Virlee's. Jerry was sure that something of Virlee's reputation must have gone all over that land.

JERRY looked down the street. No one was within a hundred feet of this place. Jerry's anger had not cooled. It could not cool when that killer stood so insolently there. And of the anger one of those

impulses which Jerry was forever feeling was born. He walked up to the man and stood in front of him.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Well, what, cowboy?"

The man said that with a curl of his thin lips. A man having his quarrel just was thrice armed. This killer seemed to think himself thrice armed because he was on his own ground, with Heaven only knew how many of his own kind near by. Jerry became lost in his rage. He gathered up a handful of the man's shirt with his left hand, whirled him about to the edge of the platform, and struck him on the point of the jaw, loosing his hold at the same time. The man was knocked out into the street.

Jerry cooled a little. Damn it, he had acted too hastily. He had done the very thing against which his father had warned him. He must do something with this fellow. What? Below him there was a sound on the board sidewalk. Glancing there, he found three cowboys approaching. They must have been in town for some time, for they walked three abreast, their arms locked.

One of them caught sight of the still body on the ground. He walked unsteadily up to it and stirred it with a toe of his boot. Then he glanced up at Jerry. He said, "Whuz masser, cowboy?" The two other punchers approached the first and they looked up at Jerry owlshly.

"I've got myself into a kind of a jam," Jerry said quickly. "Do me a favor?"

They sobered slightly and asserted that they would go through hell and high water for Jerry.

"Take that fella back to the stable an' tie him up an' gag him," Jerry said. "I can't leave this door."

"'Spleasur,'" the first puncher said.

Among them the three managed to lift the man and they disappeared around the corner of the building. Jerry returned to his former position, promising himself not to lose his temper again to-night.

He stood there for ten minutes. In that time another dozen punchers arrived. Jerry guessed that a bunch of them had come in from the other country.

And then Tyson arrived. He came swiftly along the board walk. Jerry caught sight of him when he was a hundred feet away. He was coming forward with bent head, elbowing those who got in his way. Some regarded him angrily; others spoke to him, probably angrily asking him who he thought he was. Tyson paid no attention. Jerry knew that he was lost in himself.

When Tyson came up on the platform, he did not see Jerry. Jerry guessed that he was seeing only with his mind's eye—and Virlee was occupying that mind's eye to the exclusion of everything else. Tyson did not hesitate. He pushed open the doors and fairly plunged into the room.

Jerry followed him. Tyson did not look along the big room, at the gamblers, at the dancers. He walked swiftly up to the bar. With Jerry close behind him, he reached that double row of drinkers. He pushed in between four of them. The bartender was serving drinks just at that spot. Tyson leaned over the bar, his clenched right fist lying on it. Jerry could see the cords in his neck stand out.

"Where's Virlee?" Tyson asked in a low voice.

The bartender stared at him. Because Tyson had been the postmaster, the bartender knew him.

"He ain't here, Tyson," the bartender said.

TYSON'S hand was swiftly removed from the bar; it shot down and when it came up, it held one of his guns. The gun was aimed at the bartender's chest. The bartender retreated to the back bar, a glass in one hand and a bottle in the other. He looked sick. Tyson kept his gun on him.

A sound behind Jerry caused him to turn. Six punchers had come up behind him. Five more at once arrived. The men on either side of Tyson stepped out and back. There was about him a cleared space. The eleven punchers said nothing. They merely stood there, staring stonily at that bartender. They only knew that a man in puncher's garb was pullin' somethin' off.

"Honest, Virlee ain't here, Tyson," the bartender said. "He ain't been here all day."

"Where's his sleepin' room?"

"Why, he don't live here. He lives down the street. You oughta know that. You oughta know where his house is."

Jerry saw Tyson draw his left hand over his eyes and down his face. He was like a man coming out of a dream.

"That's right," he said. "I know."

That something was happening in the barroom must have been communicated to the gamblers and the dancers. The fiddles were abruptly silent. A hush went all through the room. Three men moved out from a table. They were, Jerry saw, the same kind of men as he whom Jerry had struck. Jerry pushed his way among the grouped punchers. They turned so that they were once more behind him, their faces toward him. Jerry stood looking at those three men,

his hands on his hips. The punchers divided and lined up on each side of him. Very slowly those three men returned to the table, but they continued to look at Jerry and the punchers.

Tyson turned away from the bar and started for the door. Jerry spoke to him rather loudly, for he wanted every one here to know that he was backing Tyson. To prove that they were, too, the eleven punchers moved toward Tyson. Jerry's eyes swept the length of the room. None of the armed men that Virlee must have had there seemed prepared to act.

"Come on, Tyson," Jerry said. "We'll go with you."

"Leave me alone," Tyson ground out. "I hadda slip away from my wife. I'm lookin' for Virlee. You know why. Virlee sent that fella to the post office."

He went on toward the door. Before he gained it, the door was opened, and three more punchers came in. They were grinning. Their grins were at once explained. The door was thrown wide, and that man whom Jerry had struck, a gun in each hand, stood in the doorway. Tyson was between him and Jerry. The man leaned to one side, caught sight of Jerry. Jerry went for one of his guns. The man lifted his right hand. Jerry saw a dark face blazing with his rage.

Then there was a shot. It was not fired by that killer. His gun clattered on the floor. He pitched forward on his face. Jerry glanced in the direction from which the shot had been fired. Two punchers stood there; one was just returning his gun to its holster. The two then, each glancing from side to side, advanced on Jerry.

"He was goin' to get you, fella," the man who had fired said gruffly.

"I dunno what your jam is, but we all better get outta here."

The punchers who had entered grinning approached Jerry, also.

"We found that fella bound in the stable," one said. "I reckon we made a mistake in freein' him. We'll back you up."

THOSE eleven punchers had drawn their guns when the man had fired. They formed themselves into a half circle so that they could cover the bar and the gambling space. Tyson still had his gun in his hand. The other punchers drew their guns. All the men began a slow retreat to the door. When they all reached it, Jerry stepped out.

"Nobody better leave this place in the next hour," he called. "We'll have men front an' rear. A bunch of you can't come out. We'll put bullets inta any that try to come. We won't stop to warn anybody."

Two punchers went through the doorway. They held the doors open. The others passed swiftly through. Jerry, the last, jumped through.

"We gotta get our horses from the stable," one of the punchers who had grinned said.

They ran around the corner of the building, and several other men followed them. Jerry opened the door three times and looked inside, before those punchers returned. Then others said their horses were down the street. Jerry told them to get the animals, mount, and wait for him and the others. The remaining horses were at the rack where Jerry's was.

"Up with me, Tyson," Jerry said.

Tyson mounted behind him, and he and the punchers rode to the far side of the street and went along it. They were quickly joined by the riders who had left. In front of the

dark store Tyson mounted his own horse.

"You're goin' to Virlee's house, Tyson?" Jerry asked.

"If you don't stop me."

"I ain't stoppin' you. I guess Virlee belongs to you. I'd like to see him live a little longer account o' King, but it don't much matter. Other men know who killed King."

"I can't let Virlee go on livin'."
"Virlee had his father killed—well, in a way," Jerry told the punchers.

"Nobody's comin' outta that place yet," a puncher, who had been looking down the street, said, "but you can't tell how long they'll believe we're outside. We better work fast."

Tyson sent his spurred horse out into the street. The riders were sufficiently distant from Virlee's place so that the horses would not be heard. The men rode rapidly till Tyson turned in at a house. He and the others flung themselves down and went up to the front door.

"Better go kinda easy now, fella," a puncher advised.

They stood and listened. The sound of a woman singing in a low voice came to them. Tyson put out a hand and pressed the latch. The singing continued and grew louder when Tyson began slowly to push the door ajar. When it was sufficiently ajar so that the men could see into the room, they caught sight of a woman's light, bright hair as it rose above the top of a rocking-chair. With Jerry behind him, Tyson stepped up on the threshold. No one else was in the room.

The woman must have felt a stir of air about her head, for she looked around and then sprang swiftly to her feet. Her bright hair was her only claim to beauty. She was stout and sallow. Her fright was great.

As she stood there staring, a door behind her was opened, and another woman appeared in the doorway. As some such women were, she was pretty. In fact, she had a kind of dark, wild beauty. Her eyes were big and brown, and an abundance of brown hair was wound around her head in braids.

"What do you want?" she asked sharply.

"Didn't mean to disturb you, ma'am," Tyson said.

This was only an imitation of a home, but to Tyson any kind of home was some kind of home.

"We're lookin' for Virlee," he added.

"Virlee isn't here," the dark woman said. "On'y me an' the housekeeper is here."

"Ma'am, excuse me," said Tyson. "I gotta look."

"You ain't goin' to prowl through my house!"

"You're Mrs. Virlee, ain't you?"

"I'm Mrs. Virlee, yes. Why, you blockhead, you delivered a letter to me under that name once."

"I remember now," Tyson said. "Well, ma'am, I'm lookin' for your husband. I gotta go through your house. Take me on'y a minute."

"Don't you lift a foot!"

"Yes, ma'am, I gotta."

HE advanced into the room. Jerry followed him. This was rotten business, but Jerry knew that Tyson had to find Virlee to-night if he could. Tomorrow he might think too hard of his wife and be turned aside. Even in Virlee's place, he had spoken of his wife. His rage had been compounded partly of hatred of Virlee and partly of regret that he had had to run away from his wife.

Several of the punchers stepped into the room. Glancing through

the open door, Jerry saw several others start for the corner of the house. He knew they were going to the rear of the house, to make sure that Virlee did not slide through the rear door.

The dark woman let Tyson and the others take three steps toward her. Then she stepped back and slammed the door. They could hear her running away from it. Jerry and Tyson ran and threw open the door. Down a hall another door was slammed. When they reached it, it was locked.

"Ma'am," said Tyson in a wrung voice, "please open the door. I wouldn't hurt you for anything. I gotta see if Virlee is in there. Ma'am, I just gotta get Virlee tonight. I'm goin' to kill him, ma'am. I gotta do it."

"Get away from that door!" the woman cried. "This is my room. You can't come in here."

"I gotta, ma'am. I gotta see if Virlee is there."

"You can't come in! I got a gun. I'll shoot you. I got a right to shoot you."

Tyson stepped back to the far wall. As he was about to throw himself against the door, the key clicked. Tyson held himself, crouching against the wall. The door was opened, and a man stood in the doorway.

"Why don't you do somethin'?" the woman, in the room, demanded.

"I can't fight a dozen men," this man said. "Whatcha want, boys?"

"Stand aside an' lemmer go in," Tyson said.

The man stood aside. His gun in his hand, Tyson advanced into the room. He searched it but failed to find Virlee. Jerry thought that dark woman must have attacks of hysteria. As Tyson searched, she continued to assert that he could

not prowl through her house, that he could not search her room.

"My sister is kinda disturbed because Virlee has left town," the man explained.

Jerry, leaning back against the wall, had been studying him. He was very tall, very thin. In his darkness he somewhat resembled the woman. And he was capable of fawning. He looked at Jerry and smiled, showing those white teeth which very dark persons usually have.

"It's a fac' that Virlee is outta town," he said. "He come home in a hurry before daylight an' said he hadda go away. He didn't explain. He——"

"No, he didn't explain," the woman broke in. "He never explains nothin' to me no more. Time was when he tol' me everything. He's left me. That's what he's done, an' now you fellas come bustin' into my house."

Jerry saw that her excitement, her opposition, had been caused by anger and grief. A hot-headed woman, she had to vent her anger on some one.

"You a puncher?" Jerry asked the man.

"No, I'm a trailer."

"You can trail along with us," Jerry said coldly.

CHAPTER XI.

PERSUASION.

MRS. VIRLEE darted past the men into the hall. Screaming, she ran down it. Jerry did not know what to do. The trailer did. He had seemed little worried by Jerry's statement.

"Lemme get her," he said. "I'll quiet her."

He pursued the woman and caught her in the front room. He

seized her shoulders and pushed her into a chair.

"Want me to slap your face?" he demanded. "Stop your noise an' listen to me."

He was brutal. His dark face was twisted as he leaned down to the woman. Jerry registered that against him. A man who would treat a woman so deserved to be treated even more sternly. Jerry declared he would break the fellow's neck if he didn't come fast and clean.

"But Virlee's gone," the woman whimpered. "Now they're goin' to take you away. I'll be all alone."

That organ note in Virlee's voice would be music in the ears of such a woman, Jerry knew. Probably everything about him appealed to her, his size, his wet eyes, his flashing diamonds, the power he had displayed. Jerry was sorry for her.

"They can't take me away," the trailer declared.

"We better be gettin' outta here, Jerry," Tyson said. "Virlee's men ain't goin' to keep holed up all night."

The men went into the front room.

"Come outside, fella," Jerry said. "Let your sister get quiet. You're on'y fussin' her up."

The woman stared at Jerry with stricken eyes. He wished he did not have to take the trailer along, but he could not relent. The man was one of Virlee's hirelings; he was related to Virlee by marriage. If any one was in the big man's confidence, he should be.

"Set right where you are, sis," the trailer said. "I'll be back in a minute. These fellas can't take me away. They can't do nothin' to me."

The woman relaxed in her chair. She seemed to have great confidence in her brother all of a sudden.

Jerry thought she had remembered something about him. They took the trailer outside.

"Not a sound from you," Jerry said. "Where's your horse? Don't speak. Point."

The trailer walked to the corner of the house and pointed to a small stable in the rear. He seemed to feel so secure that he was ready to do anything he was told to do. A puncher ran back to the stable and brought out a horse with its gear already on it. Jerry ordered the trailer to mount.

"But——" the trailer began.

"Shut up! We've wasted too much time already."

They were all presently in the road, mounted. Mrs. Virlee came to the door. When she saw that her brother was about to be taken away, she began to scream again. Jerry felt shamed. Damn it, this was no way to treat a woman. Then he thought of Elizabeth's dead father. He had to take what he could get. The woman would survive. To his relief, she proved that she was thinking more of Virlee than of her brother. Suddenly she stopped screaming.

"You keep your mouth shut, you hear me?" she called to the trailer.

The trailer was silent, but he seemed to have lost none of his confidence. Jerry opened his lips to tell the men to ride. He did not speak. There was a pounding behind him. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that a big body of riders was bearing down on him and these men. Virlee's hirelings had at last found courage to leave the saloon and get horses. As those riders came on, Jerry saw red-shirted men among them. Those were worn by miners. He could not kill a miner.

"Ride!" he called.

HE struck the trailer's horse, and as it leaped forward, he swung in behind it. Most of the men followed him. Then behind Jerry there were three shots. A trio of punchers had refused flight till they had shown their defiance. Again glancing back, Jerry saw them start their horses. All these riders, except the trailer, ducked low in their saddles. Bullets passed over their heads. One went so close to the trailer that he ducked.

The chase was brief. These riders all rode hard horses, under the saddle every day. Those men back there rode town horses, which not infrequently were in stables long hour after long hour. They developed soft kidneys. They had no stamina. Jerry saw the gap widen. Then the pursuers were dim figures, and at last they were gone altogether. For a while, Jerry kept to the fast pace. When the party was well out in the flat, he slowed down, then stopped.

"Well," he said, "we're much obliged to you boys. What're you goin' to do? You can't go back to Nugget City."

"Some of us turn off here," a puncher said. "We live in the back country. We'll go on with you if you can use us."

"Not necessary. We'll be all right. S'long!"

"So long!"

All but three of the men turned off the road and departed in a direction opposite that which led to the Bar K.

"What you three goin' to do?" Jerry asked.

"We rode in here lookin' for jobs," a man said.

"I could use you," said Jerry, "but you can see we got a war on. We might even have a fight before we get home."

"We ain't give much of an account of ourselves so far," the man drawled, "but we might. 'Twas me shot that hombre in the saloon. I want that known if anything should come of it. I s'pose they's a sheriff in that town."

"Never mind about him," Jerry said. "He works for Virlee."

"Well, we can go on with you or leave. Suit yourself."

"Come along."

At daylight they reached Lone Butte. Jerry called a halt and turned to the trailer.

"You can loosen up your tongue now," Jerry said. "It was right here that King was killed—murdered."

"That," said the trailer, "was before I come."

Jerry pressed in on the man.

"Lissen," Jerry said, "we hadda take you away from a screamin' woman. That wasn't no nice, easy job. I ain't feelin' none too good yet. You better not get sassy. I got an idea that you know about everything that's taken place around here, before you come an' after."

"I don't know nothin'. I was brought in here by a banker."

"The banker sent to Idaho for a trailer, an' Virlee's brother-in-law showed up?" Jerry snapped.

"The man that killed my father, the postmaster, is dead," Tyson put in. "He talked."

"Huh, that fella. Called hisself a trailer. Didn't know nothin'. Too sick to trail for a mile."

"You could trail for a mile," said Jerry. "Then you could lose the trail."

A STARTLED look came into the man's eyes. Jerry thought he believed himself too cute to have been caught. He was taken aback when he found that Jerry knew what he had done.

"That fella that called hisself a trailer tol' you that," he said. "He even lied when he was dyin'."

"Who killed Treece?" Jerry shot out.

The man veiled his eyes.

"Aw, don't monkey with him," one of the punchers said. "Slap him out o' his saddle. Then jump on him an' tromp him. He ain't got no nerve."

"Just a minute," Jerry said.

"I'll tell you all I know," the trailer suddenly said. "The banker sent to Idaho where I was for a trailer. Course Virlee had tol' him they was good trailers over there. Then Virlee sent word to a friend o' his to have me ready. I circulated around an' was picked up for the job. I got a reperatation over there. I can trail. Fella, I can!

"Now Virlee has gone. I don't think he's comin' back. He——"

"Don't be silly," Jerry said. "Virlee got a letter. He's hidin' out."

"You think so? Well, I'll be glad to meet him once more. He may come back, but he won't come back to my sister. I seen he was through with her the minute I met her an' him in their house. He's been married to her on'y six months. I guess that's a long time for him. Virlee hisself killed Treece. He couldn't get nobody else to do it. He held up the stage, so't it would look like Treece was killed in a holdup."

"I saw the man who killed Treece," Jerry said. "You're tryin' to get even with Virlee."

"Virlee tol' me all about it," the trailer declared. "He was hidin' behind a hill. When the stage went up the slope, he stepped out an' shot Treece. He tol' me he wanted the sadisfaction of killin' Treece hisself. He hated him, for one thing an'

another. An' then there was the matter o' profits. That's all I know. About the murder o' King I don't know nothin'."

"Did you ever hear of Virlee's ridin' in to kill a man before?" Jerry asked.

"No! Virlee don't tell much, an' I ain't asked no questions about him. I never met him till I come here. My sister tol' him about me."

"You're lyin'," Jerry said. "I think we can cure you of that habit. Come on."

They rode to the ranch, and Jerry got hold of Parks. When these men had been fed, Parks ordered a score of men up. Taking the trailer along, they rode toward the mountains. They went up the slope at the foot of which the battle had been fought. The punchers who had taken the fourteen Virlee men into the mountains and had not brought them back had disposed of the bodies of the men who had been killed here.

Parks and Jerry stopped. The other riders circled those two and the trailer. In a low, even voice Parks told the trailer what had happened here. The trailer wet his lips, stared around.

"But all that ain't nothin' to you," Parks said. "Up the slope with you."

All that proved to be something to the trailer. As he went up the slope ahead of Jerry and Parks, the other men following, he cast uneasy glances from side to side. However, he seemed to think he was in no immediate danger, and he did not speak.

WHEN the party reached the top of the slope, they passed among conifers and entered a mountain clearing. Parks led the men across the clearing and stopped. Before them was a canyon.

It was three hundred feet across and it had steep, rocky sides.

The sun was now well up, and its light beat down into the clearing. Parks looked down into the canyon. All the men followed his example, as if the canyon held whatever old Parks had brought them here to see. The far wall was illuminated by the light from the mounting sun. The wall below the men was shadow-painted. Those shadows extended a little way out from the wall.

"Take a good look," Parks told the trailer.

The trailer was apparently not afraid of height. He leaned over his horn and stared into the depths. He saw nothing unusual. Only silence greeted his ears. However, he was still uneasy. He seemed convinced that a man like Parks would not play with him.

"I don't see nothin'," he said.

"No?" Parks asked as if in surprise. "Well, well, ain't it a sight in the world how a man will forget what he's doin'? I reckon I must be growin' old. I didn't mean for you to look into the canyon, fella. But jus' keep your eyes down there for a minute. Jerry, gimme your rope."

Jerry took up his rope but held it in his hand.

"With you a rope is like a saddle, huh?" Parks said. "It's a personal thing. All right! Now, trailer, take a good look at Jerry Hawley's rope. Keep your eyes on it till I tell you to take them away."

The trailer looked at the rope.

"You can't hang me," he said sullenly.

"You're gettin' worried, huh?" Parks asked. "Go right ahead. Well, below the far wall of the canyon, they's a slope like the one we jus' come up. Recent a bunch

of men rode up that other slope. Fourteen of 'em didn't come back. Virlee's men! Fella, if you think they come back, jus' take a look over there."

The trailer looked first at Parks. The old man was staring across the canyon. His face was stony. The trailer dropped his eyes to the canyon. Then, very slowly, he let them climb the wall. When those eyes reached the top of the wall, the man's face was at once ghastly from fear and shock. His body trembled. He put a hand over his eyes to shut out the horror of decorated trees. When he took the hand away, he turned fully to Parks.

"Ol' man," he whispered, "I'll tell you all I know."

"Why should you?" Parks asked.

"I'll tell you. I wanta tell you."

"Tell us what?"

"Everything! On'y let's get away from here."

"I like this canyon," Parks said. "I can come here an' still feel myself young. Many a time in days gone by, I've sat my horse here an' thought of a lotta things. I won't leave till I start for home."

"All right, all right! Well, Virlee had Treece killed. You all know why. He spoke the names of two of the men that was in the outfit. One's Jim Smylie; other's Tom Poole."

"Nice simple names." Parks sneered.

"Names Virlee gimme. He gimme them names—tol' me the story—one daybreak when he was full o' his privut stock. Boastin', the pup! An', ol' man, the fella that fired the bullet inta Treece was Smylie. Gunman. Faster'n light. Could shoot a fly's eye out."

"An' who," Parks whispered, "killed King?"

"I don't know. I swear I don't know. Virlee didn't tell me."

Jerry lifted his rope a little higher. The trailer gave it an agonized glance.

"If I knowed, I'd tell you," he cried. "I wanta get even with Virlee. He's gone an' he ain't paid me. He's left my sister with nothin'. She went to his saloon to get some money, an' they tol' her she'd hafta wait till Virlee got back. Why, she ain't hardly got money for food. Think I'd pertect Virlee when things stack up like that? The banker has been payin' me on'y trailer's wages. I could on'y have a little fun around Virlee's place with that."

"Where does this Smylie hang out?" Jerry asked.

"He don't come to town. He's out here some place. He's been helpin' with the cow business."

"Ev'rybody that's been on the warpath works for Virlee, then?"

"Cer'nly. Men in town. Men out here. A whole lot o' men out here. Hunderd, mebbe, here an' there."

"Do you think Virlee might be hidin' in the mountains?" Jerry asked.

"Hadn't thought of it. Might easy be. I reckon he wouldn't leave what he's got here. But if he's hid, he's hid deep. He ain't a fightin' man. He ain't used to hardship. Hell, he ain't nothin' but a big bag o' wind."

"I guess that's all for this fella, Jerry," Parks said.

"Guess so," Jerry agreed.

"Lemme go, will you?" the trailer pleaded. "I'll ride to town, get my sister, and go back to Idaho. Nobody'll ever see us again."

"I'll get some money to your sister to-night," Jerry promised.

"I'll look after her. We ain't makin' no war on women."

"But lemme ride. I can't stay here now. Virlee will have me killed."

"Don't be silly," Parks said. "Well, Jerry, we better be gettin' back home."

JERRY nodded. Parks, the trailer, and all the other men turned their horses. Jerry gave the other side of the canyon one look. He went rigid in his saddle. A rider had come upon that scene. He was gazing up at those decorated trees. As Jerry watched him, he took off his hat. It was no gesture of regret. The man merely scratched his head.

In the sunlight his hair was almost the color of blood!

Jerry sat staring. The man stopped his horse. As he did so, he looked across the canyon and saw Jerry and the others. For only an instant, he gazed, a motionless figure. A man of steady nerves, Jerry said.

Jerry did not want Parks or any of those others to see that red-haired man. He was second only to Virlee in all this business. Out here, where cows were being driven away by the hundreds, he was second to no one. Jerry was afraid Parks would immediately fire at him. That would mean a volley from the other men. That red-haired man might be riddled. Then his lips would be forever silenced. Report of him must have gone among these men. These punchers, as incensed by the cow thefts as Parks himself was, would want to blast him out of the picture.

As Jerry slowly brought his horse about, keeping his eyes on the man, the man spurred his horse. There

was a faint rattle of hoofs. All the men turned in their seats.

"Who's that?" Parks cried, dragging his gun.

He did not wait for an answer. He sent a bullet after the fleeing man. The punchers fired. But the red-haired man was gone among the trees. In a moment the sound of his horse's hoofs died away.

"That bloody-headed fella," Parks snarled. "Got away from us. No use to try to folla him. Like huntin' a rattler in tall grass."

Jerry was glad that that red-headed man had escaped. He wanted to keep him for himself, for Jerry knew his kind. He would not work in the dark. He would make Virlee tell him everything. Once he was made to talk, the whole story would be told. Old Parks was so violently angry and disappointed that Jerry communicated that to him.

"I guess that's right," Parks agreed, and was mollified.

Just as they were about to pass among the conifers to gain the head of the slope, Jerry once more looked back. Again he went rigid in his seat, but this time he spoke to Parks. Parks and the other men stopped. Jerry pointed across the canyon.

A dozen men had come to those trees and halted. They were staring up at the trees. Presently they moved on. Jerry saw that, true to his habit, the red-haired one had been riding alone. These men had followed after.

"Don't shoot!" Jerry breathed.

"No," Parks agreed. "Don't make a sound. I think them fellas is on their way to the gen'ral hide-out."

"We'll go after them," Jerry said.

"Right now?"

"Right now."

"Good enough," Parks said.

When those riders had passed from view, these men moved on. They passed down this slope and rode around to the slope up which those men must recently have come.

Climbing this, they arrived in front of the decorated trees. Jerry, the other men with him, stopped his horse.

"Le's ride on." The trailer shivered.

"Fella," Jerry said earnestly, "you're goin' to do some trailin' now, an' it better be good trailin'."

"It will be! It will be!" The trailer's shiver became a shudder. "I don't wanta hafta join the men on them trees!"

CHAPTER XII.

CORRALLED.

FOR a while, no trailing was necessary. There was only one place where the men could have ridden, an, so, only one place where these men could ride. That was ten feet away from the canyon's edge. Opposite the sheer drop there was a slight rise, conifer-studded.

At last the canyon broke away to the right. Before these riders, there was a descent, running away from the canyon as far as Jerry could see. On that descent the trees were so few that he could stare among them to the bottom. Down there lay a narrow valley into which the canyon flowed diagonally. Beyond the valley the mountains again lifted themselves.

With all the riders behind him, Jerry sat looking beyond the valley's floor. There were several draws, into any one of which the other riders might have disappeared. At length Jerry turned to the trailer. He did not speak. His eyes merely

coldly ordered the trailer to get busy.

The trailer dismounted. The formation was lightly covered with clinging soil. The trailer had no difficulty in following the riders down the descent for a hundred feet. Then he climbed back to Jerry.

"They went straight down that far," he said. "Just ahead of where I stopped, rock begins. It's goin' to be harder to folla them. You ain't goin' to send me all the way down there alone, are you? If them fellas kept on, they went into the draw you can see down there."

"I'll go with you," Jerry said.

"You an' him ain't goin' down there alone, Jerry," Parks declared.

"We gotta locate them fellas," said Jerry. "We don't know what any of them draws is. They may run through; they may be blind. Them fellas might be in one of them. Cer'nly they ain't above us. If we keep away from the mouths of the draws, we'll be all right. You men can stay here. If anything happens, I'll throw myself flat. You can pick them off from here."

"Well, mebbe that's all right," Parks conceded. "Look out for yourself. Look out for this trailer. He'll outfox you if he can."

"An' where would I go from there?" the trailer demanded. "If them fellas caught me, they wouldn't lemme explain. They'd smash bullets into me. They'd say I brought you men here, an' that'd be all there'd be to it. I know 'em!"

Jerry slipped from his horse and led it to one side, so that it should not be between the punchers and the bottom of the descent. He examined his two guns.

"Go on," he told the trailer. "Tend to your business. If you make a break of any kind, I'll blast

you, even if my shot brings that whole outfit out on me."

"I'm in as much danger as you are," the trailer said sullenly.

They went, as rapidly as possible, down to the spot to which the trailer had previously gone. The trailer stood looking farther down. Fifty feet from him and Jerry there was a clump of half a dozen trees. The space between each two was sufficiently wide to permit a rider to pass between them. Jerry and the trailer went down there, Jerry keeping his eyes on the bottom and the trailer staring at the trees.

When they reached the trees, the trailer began to examine them. Jerry now watched the mouth of the draw below him.

"Some riders went through these trees recent, some around them," the trailer presently announced. "Horses dragged the branches of the trees. A few dry branches is broke. They come away clean an' are layin' on the ground. One green branch broke, too. The green branch is the thing. The break is fresh as a new cut."

"Let's see it," Jerry ordered.

THE trailer pushed a limb toward Jerry. Jerry saw that one of the branching ends was broken and hung down. The break was indeed fresh. It had been made very recently. He was convinced that it had been made by those descending riders. Coming up the descent, they would probably ride cautiously; going down, they would be in haste to get to security and food.

"Go on," Jerry said.

"She's clear from here down," the trailer said nervously. "What happens to us if them fellas has got a guard out?"

"No more will happen to you than

to me," Jerry informed him. "Go on."

The trailer went on for fifty feet more. Jerry felt the rock, the foundation of the higher land, become harder under his feet. The descent was at once steeper, though not too steep to permit a horse to negotiate it.

Stopping, the trailer knelt. Jerry saw that he was expert in his business. He knew that there might be a slight sign when the horses were handled by their riders as the animals started down the steeper way.

"Still goin' down," the trailer said.

Jerry stared down at what the trailer was looking at. He was gently running a forefinger through rock dust.

"Horse slipped an' slid here, I think," he said. "Recent, too. A little breeze would blow this dust away. Ain't been no breeze for a while."

"Go on," Jerry said once more.

The trailer was unable to pick up the sign again till they reached the floor of the valley. Here it was plain enough and it led straight into a narrow draw. Jerry had sent the trailer to one side of the mouth, and he briefly stood and listened. There was no sound from within the draw. Telling the trailer to remain where he was without stirring, Jerry crept to the mouth of the draw. It ran away from him for twenty-five feet and then turned abruptly. Jerry beckoned to the trailer.

"Follow the sign in there," he ordered. "If you can pick it up for ten feet, that'll do."

"But——"

"Hurry up!"

"If there's a guard beyond that bend, he'll hear me."

"He won't hear a trailer like you. Well, I'll go in right behind you. I

don't want you to do what I wouldn't do."

"No, you stay here! You'll make a noise. If I'd knowed what I was goin' up against, I'd have brought moccasins. I better take off my boots."

"You're wastin' time, an' there ain't no time to waste. Slide in!"

The trailer slid in, pushing his feet along soundlessly. In a few seconds he was back at Jerry's side.

"They went in there," he said.

"Go back to the men," Jerry ordered. "I'll have a gun on you. If you make a noise——"

The trailer did not stop to argue. He seemed only to want to get out of there. Soundlessly he left Jerry and went up the descent as soundlessly. Jerry saw him rejoin Parks and the punchers. For a moment, Jerry looked up at all those men. He had no feeling of farewell. He was merely matter-of-factly estimating how good a chance those men up there would have of getting attackers of himself down here. The chance, he decided, was excellent. Bullets from six-guns would still have a lethal quality when they reached the bottom of the descent.

STEPPING away from the mouth of the draw, Jerry drew off his boots. Then he returned to the mouth of the draw and stood listening. No whisper of sound reached him. He believed that if there were slight sounds beyond him somewhere, they would have died before he heard them—due to the draw's breaking off.

He went slowly into the draw.

He knew that he had not made the slightest sound when he was just this side of the turn. If those men had any one on guard, he was aware that the guard would probably be just beyond the turn, since he had

not been outside or within the first of the draw. He listened for a whisper, the sound of breathing, anything. At last he was convinced that no one was immediately beyond him. Nevertheless he remained cautious. Kneeling and removing his hat, he poked out his head. His eyes fell upon a wall. He was at an angle in the draw. It ran for no more than four feet and then turned in the direction in which it had first run.

He crept along those four feet and again poked out his head. The draw ran straight to his left. At the end of it was a spreading space and beyond the spreading space a sloping mountain wall. Neither horse nor man was in sight. That, however, did not lead Jerry to believe that no one was in that spreading space. If those men had ridden in here, they would remove their horses and themselves to one side, so that any one entering the draw could not see them.

Jerry decided to go along the rest of the draw. He knew that his danger would be increased, but he could not turn back now. He had to learn what was beyond him.

He thought a long time passed before he came to the end of the draw. Five feet this side of that end he again stopped to listen. At first there was no sound. Then a horse shook itself. Jerry believed that this was a regular retreat for this part of Virlee's outfit, for when the horse shook itself, there was no rattle of gear. Bridle and saddle had been removed from that horse and probably from the others.

Jerry knew that common sense urged that he withdraw. A horse was within that space. That meant that a rider was probably there. One rider would not be there alone. Unless——

Jerry's heart almost stopped beating. Perhaps that red-headed fellow was in there alone!

That was only an added incentive for having a look. Jerry went prone and rolling his arms under him noiselessly went up to the end of the draw. Slowly he pushed out his head, quickly withdrew it. That one, quick glance had been sufficient. He saw that the draw and the space beyond it made a "frying pan" with a crooked handle. The space was round with no entrance save this. In a way that was favorable to these men. They had only one entrance to watch, but, also, they had only one exit. With the one entrance blocked, they would be securely corralled.

Jerry had arrived at a time set for his success. A score of men were within that inclosure. They were eating a cold meal, without coffee. They were so cautious that they had not built a fire. They must have been ravenously eating, their eyes on their food.

So far as Jerry had been able to see, the red-haired man, that lone rider, was not among them. Apparently he never hunted with the pack. Proud probably, Jerry scorned, of being a lone wolf.

Jerry slowly retraced his steps. As he went along the draw toward the angle, he looked up. He saw that mountains broke down to a shelf. If he and the other men could gain that shelf, they could hold up the men in the pan.

Gaining the outside, Jerry drew on his boots and looked up. The mounted men up there had been so concerned about him that they had sent their horses to the very beginning of the descent. If anything had happened to him within their sight or if he had not soon re-

appeared, they would have sent their horses sliding down that descent.

JERRY stood up, lifted a hand, and made a circular downward motion with it. The men slipped from their horses. In another circular movement he swept his hand in to his chest and then held it up, palm outward.

All the men began a slow, careful movement down toward where he waited. When they reached him, he explained what the situation was. Placing three men on each side of the draw, he took the others along the wall to a second draw. This ran straight in and stopped—a blind. The men walked along it. When they came to the end of it, they found that a man could not climb to the shelf unaided.

Jerry studied the shelf. As it ran out over the pan, it was flat and would accommodate a large number of men. Also it ran back in the shelter of the wall. There was room on the run-back, however, for no more than six men.

"Boost me up there," Jerry told two punchers.

They heaved him up. They they heaved up four other men. Parks stepped forward. Jerry could not forbid him. He had a right to be in on everything. In a moment more the six men stood precariously on the shelf. It was too narrow here to permit more than one man to step along at one time. Jerry, being nearest the broadening, moved out. He found himself in no immediate danger. The shelf was greater in area than he had thought. He could not see the men below, and thus he could not be seen. The other five men joined him.

They spread out till they made a line. The men below outnumbered

these more than three to one, but the odds were not so bad since these were ready to attack and those were not ready to defend.

Slowly the six men advanced to the edge of the shelf. In a moment they were looking down into the pan. All of the men except two were sprawled on the ground at the foot of the far wall. Those two were moving toward the end of the draw. Jerry saw that all of the men had stopped to eat before a guard had been placed. Jerry had been lucky.

Jerry studied the men. None had blood-red hair.

"All right," Jerry said softly. "Go ahead, Parks."

"It's your party," Parks said genially. "Go ahead, yourself."

All the men raised their guns. Jerry leaned a little.

"Stop, you two," he called. "The rest of you, don't move."

All eyes were lifted to the shelf. The two stopped, shot up their hands. Most of the sprawled men reached toward the wall. Three rose to sitting positions, clawing awkwardly at their guns. Six bullets sped toward them from the shelf, and they changed their minds and followed the examples of their companions.

"Up," Jerry called.

The men seemed afraid to assist themselves with their hands. They performed the feat of coming erect without such assistance. They backed to the wall and stood against it.

"Tell the boys below to go round an' come in," Jerry instructed a puncher. "Have 'em take the boys at the mouth of the draw with them."

When that had been attended to, Jerry ordered all the men below to approach the shelf. As they arrived this side of the mouth of the draw,

he stopped them. They were a sullen, bitter lot. Their eyes were bleak with anger as they stared up at the men on the shelf.

Jerry thought they were remembering those decorated trees.

THE men who had gone round and those who had waited at the mouth of the draw presently came into the pan. They at once began to move along the line of men and take their guns. All but one man were soon disarmed. That man must have been thinking particularly hard about those decorated trees. As one of Parks's men reached for his gun, he turned and seized him about the waist. He was a burly fellow in a world made up mostly of lean men, like the man he attacked. With a mighty heave he threw the puncher over his head. As the puncher struck the ground, he threw himself on him and sought to get his gun. He seemed to believe that if he could push that gun against the puncher's body, he would be able to threaten the other men away from him, rise with the gun in his hand, and so escape.

The hope and the act were born of desperation. Like many acts so born it failed. Three punchers moved in on him. One brought the barrel of his gun smartly down on the man's head. He rolled away from the puncher and went soundly to sleep.

"All right," Jerry called. "Keep 'em there till we come."

He and the five others soon joined those below. Jerry wanted to know where that red-haired man was. The man who might give that information was he who lay unconscious on the ground. A taste of such medicine was bitter in a man's mouth for a long time. He would want to escape a full dose of it.

"Don't none of you hombres begin to talk about squealin' an' ridin'," Parks advised. "'Twon't do you a bit o' good. I wouldn't dicker with none of you."

"You goin' to hang us?" a man asked.

"I dunno what I'll do with you. An easy way would be to put bullets in you where you stand."

The man who had been struck presently opened his eyes and then pushed himself to a sitting position. He rubbed his broken scalp.

"Get up," Parks ordered.

The man rose and stood swaying.

"Tie into him, Jerry," Parks said.

"Where's Red Blackman, fella?" Jerry demanded.

"Don't know. He keeps to himself, rides alone. He's a mos' careful man."

"He was ahead of you when you came here."

"He waited for us, spoke to us for a minute. Then he rode off. He'll go into the first crick he comes to."

"Where's Virlee?"

The blankness with which these men greeted that name, generally, came to this man.

"Don't know no such person."

"He runs a saloon in town. He's your boss."

"Ain't never been to town. Wouldn't work for no town man. Workin' for Red Blackman."

"Where have all the stolen cows been taken to?"

"Dunno. They was on'y drove south a ways an' then turned over to other riders."

"Where's Red Blackman's hide-out?"

"Fella," the man said earnestly, "don't ask me that. I reckon he hides out wherever he happens to be."

Jerry ran his eyes over the other

men. Their sullen anger had been displaced by fear. Jerry was convinced that if they knew anything about the missing cows or about Blackman, they would tell him. He was equally convinced that they didn't know anything. Probably Blackman alone ever saw Virlee—except, of course, that trailer.

Jerry idly glanced at the trailer. He was grinning. Jerry's swift anger rose.

"Wipe that grin off your face," he said.

The trailer turned fully toward him. He did not wipe the grin from his face. Jerry beat his anger back. The fellow had something on his mind.

"I got somethin' for you," the trailer declared.

"Well, what is it?"

"This here ol' man said it wouldn't do nobody no good to talk about squealin' an' ridin'," said the trailer. "What's the use o' my squealin' if I don't ride?"

"Oh, gosh," a puncher exclaimed, "do we hafta stand for this?"

He seemed to decide that he didn't have to stand for it. Walking up behind the trailer, he placed both hands under the trailer's chin and snapped back his head as if he would break it from his neck. The

trailer cried out. The puncher released him and put his gun into the small of his back.

"Speak your piece," the puncher ordered. "I'm doin' this on my own hook. I'm sick an' tired o' you. I'll drill you in about another minute."

"Smylie's here," the trailer whimpered.

"Which one?" Jerry asked.

"Do I ride?"

"No!" the puncher cried.

"Let him go," Jerry said. "Fella, come up here."

All of Parks's men had been in a semicircle, the trailer near the end. To reach Jerry, the trailer had to move between those men and the prisoners.

When the prisoners had been disarmed, their guns had been laid in a pile on the ground. A man near the pile suddenly leaped and snatched up a gun.

He sent the trailer out on the long, long trail.

Some punchers seized the slayer; others covered him.

"Is he Smylie?" Jerry asked, generally.

"Yeah," one of the prisoners answered. "He killed Treece."

"Close to Red Blackman, is he?" Jerry inquired.

"Closest."

To be continued in next week's issue.

THIS GIRL LOVES THIS MOUSE

BECAUSE she won a beauty contest, held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, an admirer sent Miss Ann Sallek a white mouse. Miss Sallek has good reason for feeling thankful to both admirer and mouse. The mouse saved her life.

Awakened by the squeals of her pet, the girl found the family home full of smoke.

She aroused her parents and sister, saving all from possible fatal suffocation when a coal-fire damper closed, causing the smoke to fill the house. The girl's mother was rescued in semiconscious condition.

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AT ALL NEWS STANDS EVERY MONTH

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MYSTERY · GUNS · GOLD

STORIES
THAT RACE
ALONG TO
HAIR RAISING
FINISHES

COWBOY LINGO

By RAMON F. ADAMS

(Continued from last week's issue)

Trying to accomplish the impossible is "like tryin' to scratch yo' ear with yo' elbow," "barkin' at a knot," "like an elephant tryin' to use a typewriter," or "easy as trimmin' the whiskers off the man in the moon." When the cowboy believes he has little chance of finding a hunted object, he will perhaps say that he "might as well try to find hair on a frog," or "might as well hunt for a hoss thief in heaven." If it is a contest, be it a fight or a frolic, where he has small chance of winning, he is said to "have as much chance as a wax cat in hell," or "about as much chance winning as a grasshopper that hops into an ant hill." We have also heard the expression "he couldn't get as far as I could throw a post hole" in speaking of the impossibility of an escape. On the other hand something easily accomplished is said to be "as easy as eatin' striped candy."

A useless object is said to be "as useless as a .22 cartridge in an eight-gauge shotgun." If it is impossible to convince another of your side of an argument, you "might as well argue with the shadow of death," and your argument has "no more effect than pourin' water on a drowned rat."

It is said of a worthless person that "he ain't worth a barrel o' shucks," "his family tree was a scrub," or he "ain't fit to shoot at when y'u want to unload an' clean yo' gun."

When a person grows wiser and older in experience, he is said to

have gotten "more wrinkles on his horns." A sagacious person is also said to be as "wise as a tree full of owls," or "a pet fox is foolish alongside of him," or "he ain't needin' advice more'n a steer needs a saddle blanket."

On the other hand an ignorant person "don't know 'Sic 'em,'" "couldn't drive nails in a snow bank," "don't know as much about it as a hog does a side saddle," or "knowed about as much about it as a hog does a hip pocket in a bathin' suit."

A mentally weak person is said to be "feather-headed," and his condition may be expressed by any of such terms as: "His thinker is puny." "He didn't have nuthin' under his hat but hair." "His brain cavity wouldn't make a drinkin' cup for a canary bird." "He's as shy of brains as a terrapin is of feathers." "All he knows about brains is that y'u can buy 'em with scrambled eggs." "His memory's pulled its picket pin an' gone astray." If the one spoken of is childishly foolish, "he ought to be playin' with a string of spools."

The cowboy's idea of the superlatively beautiful is "pretty as a painted wagon," "pretty as a heart flush," or "soft an' pretty as a young calf's ear." Naturally in speaking of his sweetheart she is "so sweet bee trees is gall beside her."

Ugliness is not without such expressions as "ugly as galvanized sin," "uglier than a Mexican sheep," or "uglier than a new-sheared

sheep." One puncher said of another that the latter was "so ugly the flies wouldn't light on him"; another likewise described a cook as being "so narrow between the eyes he could look through a keyhole with both eyes at once."

Anything large is "bigger'n an eight-mule baggage wagon," "bigger than a load of hay," or "y'u couldn't crowd it into a wagon box." An extra large covering for an object "covers it like a carpet," and an unusually large man is "big enough to hunt bears with a switch."

A fat person "shore has tallow" or is "so fat you'd have to throw a diamond hitch to keep him in the saddle." Losing flesh is "gettin' rid of yo' leaf lard," "fallin' off like persimmons after a frost," and if one loses much weight, he is said to be "gettin' as thin as a cow in April," or as "poor as a whip'o'will."

A very thin person is said to be "so thin y'u can't hit him with a handful of corn." Often we've heard the expressions: "He has to stand twice to make a shadow." "He's so narrow he could take a bath in a shotgun barrel." "If he'd close one eye, he'd look like a needle." On a Texas ranch we once heard a puncher say of a certain thin comrade that "he's so long he has to shorten his stirrups to keep from wearin' his boot soles out." Of a very short person it is said that "he has to borrow a ladder to kick a gnat on the ankle," or "he drags the ground when he walks." A short object is often expressed as being "as short as the tail hold on a bear."

We once heard a cowboy who was feeling badly declare that he "felt like the frazzled end of a misspent life." In speaking of others who looked or felt badly, he was apt to say: "he looks like a motherless

calf," "he's off his feed," or "he looks so bad his ears flop."

A weak person is said to be "paper-backed." It is also said of a puny person that "he can't lick his upper lip," "he's so puny he couldn't pull off my hat," or "he's so weak a kitten is robust beside him." "Bud" Cowan once told us of a "lunger" visiting his ranch in search of health and he ended his description of the invalid by saying: "His lungs wasn't stronger than a hummin' bird's, an' he didn't have wind enough to blow out a lamp."

In speaking of people who get along harmoniously, the cowboy is apt to use such expressions as: "They get along like two shoats in the same pigpen." "They have no more trouble than between a kitten an' a warm brick." "They get along like two pups in a basket."

His idea of any objects or persons being thick is "as thick as cloves on a Christmas ham," "as thick as feathers in a pillow," or "thick as hossflies in May." Of a certain spurred and chapped Damon and Pythias they were said to be "thicker'n splatter."

People who are looked upon as meddlers and "horn in" on things that do not concern them are said to be "feedin' off their range" and are called "wedgers in," "Paul Prys" or "eyeballers."

The cowboy may speak of an unhappy person as being as "sad as a bloodhound's eye," "happy as a hog bein' dragged away from a feed trough," or speak of that individual as "his luck was runnin' kinda muddy" or that some one or something had "swiped the silver linin' off his cloud." We heard a weather-beaten cow-puncher, in telling of an incident that touched his heart, say, "I didn't shed no tears but I damned near choked to death." At another

time when some one told a touching story, a tender-hearted cowboy, brushing away a tear that he was trying hard to conceal, said, "The smoke of yo' camp fire got into my eyes." Still another one, in relating a touching incident, finished by saying that it "squeezed me together inside till it hurt."

Slowness in action is pictured as

"slow as a snail climbin' a slick log," or a slow person is "too slow to grow fast." A man or horse that is not up to his expectations in running is classed as "he runs like he's got hobbles on." A lazy person is held in contempt by the cowboy and is said to be "lazy enough to make a good fiddler," or "molasses wouldn't run down his legs."

To be continued in next week's issue.

In Next Week's Issue of Street & Smith's

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

STONE STIRRUPS

By KENNETH PERKINS

The stirring saga of Jim Bucknell, his daughter Maverick Jen, and his dog Crossbones—a desert drama of love and hate, of a great wrong and a righteous revenge.

MAN TRAP

By GLENN H. WICHMAN

Terry Sullivan, young foreman of the Box B, and Janice Volmer, of the Slash A, were sweethearts—but there was a snake in Paradise Valley that sought to destroy their chances for happiness.

Also Features by

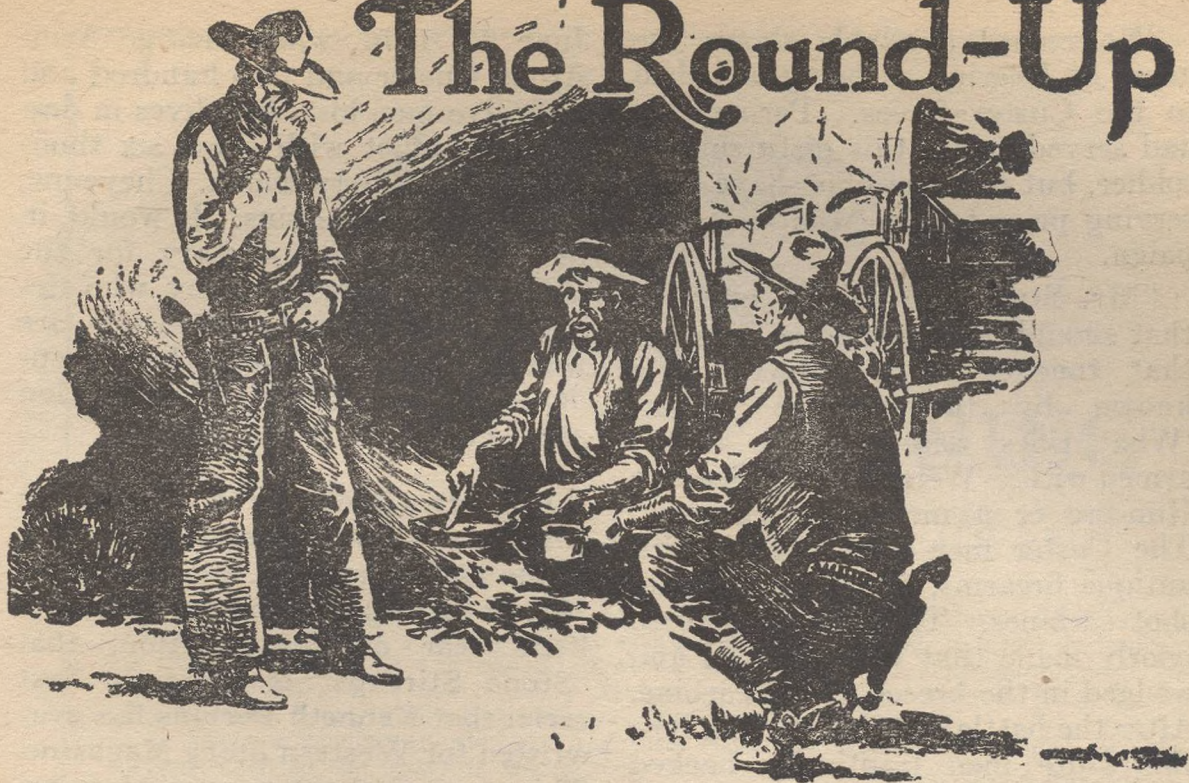
Charles Wesley Sanders Stanley Hofflund

And Others

15c A COPY

AT ALL NEWS STANDS

The Round-Up



FOLKS, a couple of weeks ago, E. L. Carson gave us some information about Scout Dick Deering. Comes now to the meetin' here tonight, L. M. Prill, author and editor, of Billings, Montana. Friend Prill is a distant relative of Custer. He lectures on the Custer Massacre. Surely he should be well up on the subject. All right then, Brother Bill, if you will get goin', you may be sure that we will all listen attentively.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: In your issue of March 3, 1934, I noticed a query from Wellington Stutt, of Saskatchewan, Canada. In it he asks if Scout Dick Deering, who served in the Boer War, was not a scout with General Custer in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

"It is very doubtful if this man was a scout with the Seventh Cavalry, as Indians, of the Crow tribe, were used entirely for this duty. These Indians knew the

country well as it was their hunting grounds and they were friendly to the whites. Their trust was great in the cavalymen as they wanted the hated enemy driven out of what they asserted was their country. White scouts were not used for the reason that this was an unknown country and many of the soldiers comprising the Seventh Cavalry were new recruits and totally ignorant of Indian fighting.

"Despite the fact that ever so often publications come out with stories about this or that survivor of the so-called Custer Massacre, one should remember at all times, there were no survivors of this terrible slaughter. Of course, Major Reno, who retreated in the face of danger, and Colonel Benteen, both survived, as they did not go to Custer's aid. Many men under their command, of course, were survivors of the Custer expedition, but not of the battle. It is, therefore, very evident that many such survivors were men that were attached to Reno or Benteen.

"No record available shows the name of Deering as being attached to the Custer forces. Perhaps he had served under this distinguished soldier, but if so, he must have been serving prior to the Montana campaign.

"Mr. Stutt also asks a question that should be answered as it is one that touches on a subject little known by the average reader. 'What rifles were Custer's troops armed with? Were they the Spencer Rim-fire or a more modern gun?' The Custer men were armed with antique firearms, they being single-shot carbines. Their shells were so poorly made that they cracked and wedged in the breech of the carbine. After the battle the Indians told how the white men frantically hacked away at shells that the extractors had torn through after one shot had been made.

"The Indians in this battle were found to be armed with Winchester and Remington rifles of the very latest make. They also had plenty of ammunition for these rifles, all of which had been secured from the post traders.

"Mr. Stutt also asks where he can get a book on the Custer battle. Several books worth reading are: 'Custer's Last Battle,' by Godfrey; 'Indian Fights and Fighters,' by Brady, and many interesting books have been written by the late Mrs. George Armstrong Custer, which are well worth reading by students of the history of the West.

"I should like very much to tell you the story of the Custer battle in detail, but what I have said would be only the start of the entire events that happened within only a few minutes on the bloody Sunday of

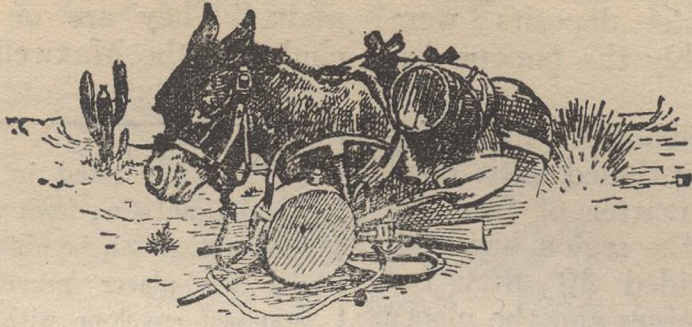
June 25, 1876, when George Armstrong Custer and two hundred and sixty-five men lost their lives in desperate conflict with some six thousand bloodthirsty Sioux, Cheyenne, and Blackfoot Indians. It would, in fact, be too long a story for the Round-up. However, any who desire to write me as to this battle, are welcome to do so, and I will endeavor to correctly give information as asked."

An extra-good serial begins in next week's issue. Kenneth Perkins is the author and he calls his story "Stone Stirrups." Now we say, with little fear of contradiction, that "Stone Stirrups" is the very best serial that Kenneth Perkins has ever written for Western Story Magazine. This we feel about as sure of as we can be sure of anything. Now for another statement as to that story: We consider it one of the best we've run in the magazine for a long, long time. "Stone Stirrups" is in three parts, so you won't have very long to wait before you reach the climax of its accumulative interest, and believe us, the story certainly does accumulate in interest until the end.

Speaking of the next issue, the complete novel is "Man Trap," a good one, by Glenn H. Wichman. Then there are the shorts, "Wild-cat Breed," by Hugh B. Cave; "The Vendetta Kid," by Stanley Hofflund; "Rattler Canyon Rustlers," by Joseph F. Hook. Beside these stories there's a fine installment of that very interesting article of Western slang, "Cowboy Lingo," by Ramon F. Adams.

And don't fail to use any of the five departments. What they offer is yours for the asking, free, gratis, for nothing.

DUCKS, geese, flamingos, and herons often sleep standing on one leg.



MINES AND MINING

By J. A. THOMPSON

This department is intended to be of real help to readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be answered in this department in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

UP in northern New Mexico there's a good gold-mining district credited with a six-million-dollar production in lode and placer that offers a mighty interesting stamping ground to the present-day prospector. Walter J. Burden and his partner, of Binghamton, New York, already have this particular section in mind. And Walter has written in for a little information.

"My partner and I are planning a trip out West sometime soon to take our chances gold prospecting. We have in mind the section around Elizabethtown near Eagles Nest Lake, north and east of Taos. Anything you can tell us about the Elizabethtown district will be deeply appreciated, especially if you can give us the actual names of the more-promising smaller creeks and stream beds in that area."

Well, Walter, you're picking a mighty likely section of New Mexico to go gold hunting in.

Incidentally, you can reach Elizabethtown quite readily by car. If you enter New Mexico from Trinidad, Colorado, via the famous Raton Pass, stay with the paved highway about fifteen miles south of Raton.

Then at the fifteen-mile point, instead of continuing on the highway which would take you down past Wagon Mound to Las Vegas, take the right fork, a graded road marked U. S. 64, through Colfax, Cimarron, and Ute Park to Therma. At Therma you swing up to Elizabethtown.

Gold was first located near what is now Elizabethtown in Colfax County back in '66. The initial discovery was followed by a stampede of considerable proportions. The

earliest work was nearly all placer. Then some lode deposits were opened up, notably the famous Aztec Mine.

Yet in spite of the hard-rock mining, placering continued with good success. As a matter of fact the total output of the region has been pretty well divided fifty-fifty between the lode mines and the placer operations.

The best gold gravels, and hence the best placer opportunities, most probably are to be found on Moreno, Ute, and Ponil creeks. Now for a few more details. You'll find a wide variation in the thickness of the gold-bearing gravel beds. Anything from a few feet up to three hundred. For the small operator, however, the best bets are confined to the narrow valleys where the steep gradient has not permitted the building up of thick deposits. Hand methods of placer operation—sluice box and rocker—hydraulicking, and even dredging have all been carried on with more or less success in this area.

Lack of sufficient water for the larger-scale operations has been a handicap to such work so that considerable potential good gold-bearing gravel still remains in several places. At one time placer work was carried on with water brought forty-one miles from the headwaters of the Red River, though the "Big Ditch" was not kept in repair.

Lately placer miners have been using shorter ditches carrying water derived from sources much closer to to the gravels they are working. Occasionally small reservoirs are built which will accumulate enough water for a few days' "run" at a time.

Incidentally, Walter, these gold gravels are neither on State land,

nor are they part of the public domain. They are on territory included in the Maxwell Land Grant.

Those interested in the Maxwell Land Grant Co., from whom detailed information can be obtained concerning gold-placer gravels, inclose a stamped envelope with your request and send it to Mines And Mining Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Meantime, George Alexander writes us from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and wants to know what cinnabar is. Cinnabar, George, is the commercial ore of mercury, the ore from which virtually the world's supply of quicksilver is obtained. In appearance it is a brickish red. It is heavy for its bulk. Cinnabar fragments can be saved in a gold pan. And it is fairly soft. A knife will cut it, and the scratch mark made by a knife on a sample of the mineral shows a scarlet streak. Chemically it is a mercury sulphide consisting of 86 per cent mercury and 14 per cent sulphur. There are important mercury mines in this country in Texas in the Big Bend section south of Alpine and in southern California.

"Shaft collar" is the mining term that puzzles F. S., of Larchmont, New York. "An explanation of the term 'shaft collar' would be much appreciated," writes F. S., "not only by me, but perhaps by other tenderfeet as well. Won't you kindly oblige?"

The shaft collar is simply the general name given to the stout timbering around the top, or head of a mine shaft.

The HOLLOW TREE



Conducted by
HELEN RIVERS

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers 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.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y.

THE Cassiar and Stikine River country, in the north of British Columbia, is a great gold field and game stomping ground. The "Cassiar Sourdough" will tell you folks about this wild and beautiful Northland.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

The Cassiar and Stikine River country in British Columbia is a gold and game country so wild that bear, goat, moose, caribou, and deer may be seen from the decks of the boats. It is a district that is renowned for the greatest variety of game for its area in the world. It is a country

of mountains, canyons, glaciers, and forests. It is approximately one hundred and fifty miles from Wrangell, Alaska, up the Stikine River to Telegraph Creek, in British Columbia.

In the Cassiar country gold colors are found on almost any creek or river. Yes, there is gold there, and plenty of it. But one must stay at least two years in that district to develop and prospect a mine. Now, folks, I am a sourdough with fifteen years' experience in Alaska and the Klondike. And I am looking for four men—four straight-shooting pards from forty-five to fifty-five years of age. I am looking for men with sense, who know a wonderful country and opportunity when they see it, to go in there with me. I will show them how to prospect, or if they know how, all

the better. I want pards who will stay "put" with me in the Cassiar for two years. And if they do, they will get big returns!

Let me hear from you hunters, trappers, miners, and prospectors. But remember, pards, that it will take a fair-sized grubstake to go into that country equipped to stay for two years. I estimate that we should have a few hundred apiece before we start. CASSIAR SOURDOUGH.

Care of The Tree.

A rodeo boy has ridden in to hitch his hoss at the ol' Holla.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a rodeo boy—coming to see if I can corral a few friends in every State. I've followed rodeos ever since I was thirteen years old, first starting out as a steer rider. Now I'm riding broncs, and bulldogging. I have been in thirty-two different States, so you see if I could corral a few friends, maybe we would meet this summer. For the last eight years, I've been to every show at Cheyenne, Monte Vista, Burwell, Los Angeles, Pendleton, and in Calgary, Canada. I was at the World's Fair at Chicago. Almost every winter I have gone East—to Boston and New York and made the shows back there, but last winter I was breaking horses, and stayed on in Texas.

Well, I reckon I've said about enough, so let's hear from you folks. TEXAS SLIM.

Care of The Tree.

Here is a girl who can yarn with you folks about ranch life.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I was born in Wisconsin, was raised in Oregon, and at present I am living in California. My father had a ranch in Oregon. I started riding when I was six years old. I liked to ride bareback or with a surcingle and blanket. My brother was a horse trader and would bring in most anything. I liked the wild ones best. I would always try to do him one better, and when he would turn the horses into the pasture, he would hide and watch me ride. I will admit that sometimes I hit the dust, but I had lots of fun.

I would like to hear from any one who likes ranch life, and I hope I get back there some day, as that was the happiest time of my life. RANCH MISS.

Care of The Tree.

Pards, you might give this letter your attention.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am Scotch-Irish, forty years of age, and I am thinking of going on a home-



You folks who are interested in the gold and game country of the Cassiar and Stikine River mining district, just speak up to Cassiar Sourdough, who can tell you-all about this British Columbia Northland. Wear your friend-maker membership badges, folks, when you speak up to this old sourdough.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

stead in Washington or Oregon. I am going where wild grouse is plentiful, and where there is good trapping. And, folks, although a real pard is very hard to find, nevertheless I am looking for one. I am not afraid of hard work myself, and I prefer a pard who wants to get ahead in life—one who would do his part. We could also prospect for gold a wee bit at odd times when we did not have anything else to do.

Now is the time to get started, folks.

JACK LACHEUR.

953 So. Menlo Avenue,
Los Angeles, California.

You ranch women are invited to speak right up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a woman thirty-nine years of age who was born and raised on a cattle ranch near Great Falls, Montana. I have traveled a lot—rode in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Montana. I love to ride, and I love all outdoor sports. I don't meet people here who are interested or understand that life, and I would love to hear from some ranch or rodeo folks.

MRS. F. W.

Care of The Tree.

This hombre sure has corralled all of our sympathy, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a lunger, twenty-two years old, and I have been nearly five years on the sick list after a motor-cycle smash-up. I spent nearly four years in Arizona, trying to make a come-back. I did everything from goat herding to dude wrangling at a guest ranch.

I let friends talk me into going to a sanitarium, but it hasn't worked out, and has left me broke. Now I want to get out, as I only have a few years to live at best, and I want to *live* them. My doctor says that there is little or no chance of recovery—that is, complete recovery. Therefore my life, as it is, isn't worth a plugged nickel to me, and I am more than willing to gamble with it. My friends say I have plenty of nerve, and a cool, level head. I'm willing to trade myself for any cause, any time, for what I am worth. That is—if it's on the level. I should like a berth on some ranch, construction camp, or even scientific expedition. I am a crack motor rider and know machines from a to z, and also good at electrical work.

I have no ties, as most of my friends passed me up long ago. Those few that are left would like to see me fighting again. I feel that to get out and fight might make or break me—and the sooner one way or the other, the less pain and worries. Any one reading this and interested, just drop a line to "Kid Curtis."

LOUIS CURTIS.
Box 98, Lancaster, California.

Folks, here's your opportunity to exchange some snaps.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a regular camera fiend and I would like to exchange snapshots of the Chicago World's Fair, the Panama Canal, Europe, and the Orient for other snapshots—national parks, round-ups, rodeos, army and navy life, and foreign views.

GEORGE E. NICKERSON.

U. S. E. D. Dredge W. L. Marshall,
U. S. Engineers Department,
New Haven, Connecticut.

Here's a pard for some one.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a letter carrier. I have a little grubstake and I would like to get in touch with some one from the West, Southwest,

or Northwest, who could use a pardner in some kind of a deal in a small farm or ranch. I should also like to have some good Pen Pals from all over the country, and I will tell them all I can about New York, and exchange card views with one and all. I am about twenty-five miles from New York City.

CLIFFORD L. TURNER.

8 Merton Avenue,
Rockville Center, New York.

Arizonans, Texans, and Coloradoans, just you speak right up.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

To any one in Arizona, Texas, or Colorado who likes to exchange letters in a sincerely sensible and friendly way, all I ask is that you put me on trial. I want your own experiences and personal opinions of your part of the world where "friends are truer and skies are bluer." Naturally, I'll do all I can toward making my end interesting to you.

GARY MISS.

Care of The Tree.

An Oregon miss is here to corral pals.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am coming to the old Holla for some Pen Pals. I am from the Far West and can tell you all about the Pacific slope and the region bordering it. I am eighteen years old and am particularly interested in finding some Pen Pals from Canada, Alaska, and the Southern States. However, I promise to answer all letters. I'm also interested in exchanging snaps of other sections for snaps of this part of the country.

DELIA ANDREWS.

Junction City, Oregon.

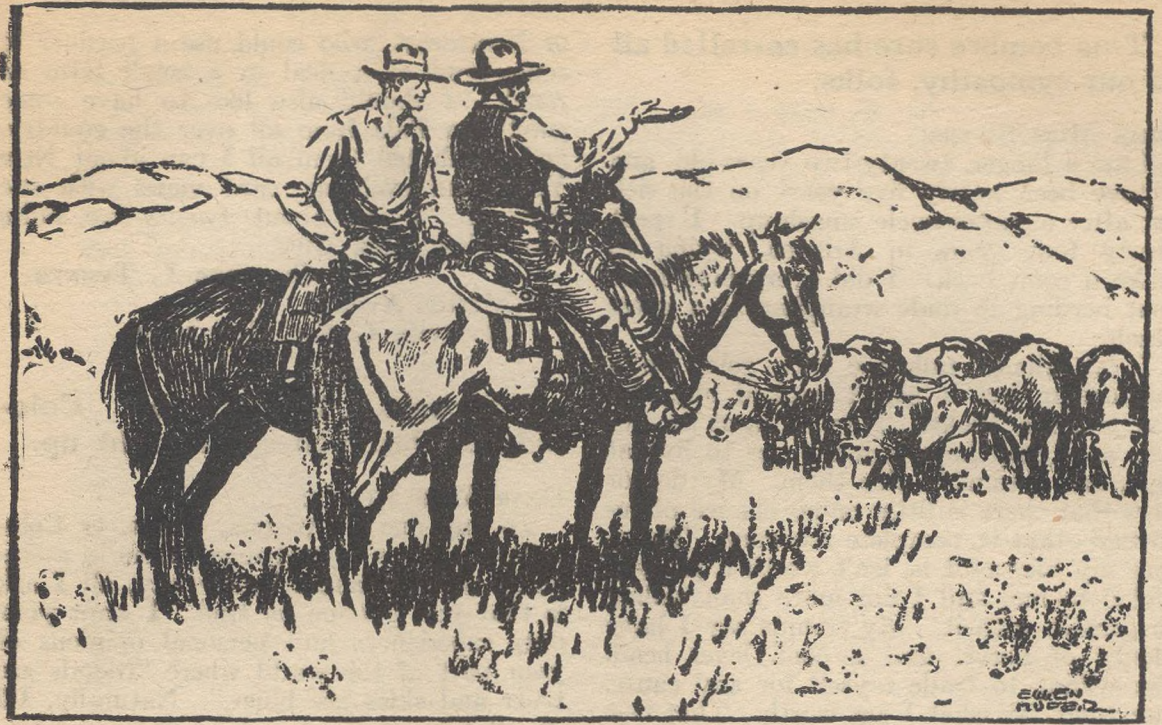
Iowan is trekking farther West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a widow, a business woman, thirty-eight, and alone. I would like very much to find a pardner who would be interested in spending a year in the mountains of the West. I like to hunt and fish. I have a new straight-eight coupé and want some one who can pay her own expenses. I am a square-shooter and am looking for the same thing in a pardner. Let me hear from you folks, pronto.

IOWAN.

Care of The Tree.



WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MOST Westerners have heard of the famous "Horse Heaven" country of Washington, and perhaps some of our readers have wondered, along with Bert T., of Portland, Oregon, just what has happened to this region.

"Can you tell me the fate of the old Horse Heaven country, Mr. North? Is that section now given over to farming? It has always interested me, and I'm keen to know what it is like to-day. I'd also ap-

preciate some facts about Klickitat County, which lies, I believe, west of Horse Heaven."

When the Horse Heaven country, formerly one of the great grazing regions of the Evergreen State, was opened to settlement, it developed into a productive wheat-raising district. There are approximately two hundred thousand acres in this area that can be irrigated, and when this is done, the country will become an intensively farmed community similar to the Yakima Valley. At pres-

ent the farms in this section are large, and cultivation methods are on an extensive scale.

Klickitat County, which Bert is correct in assuming lies west of Horse Heaven, boasts a number of small valleys, chief of which are the White Salmon and Klickitat. The latter, nearly fifty miles long and eight miles wide, includes the fertile farming country around Goldendale on a branch of the Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway. Alfalfa, fruit, and grain are grown in these valleys without irrigation, and considerable live stock — sheep, cattle, hogs, horses — are raised. Dairying is developing and promises to increase. Commercial apple growing is an important industry, and peaches, apricots, nuts, and vegetables do well.

That folks do well, also, in these fertile valleys of the Northwest seems to be an established fact. At any rate, these regions come in for a lot of attention from our readers. Just to prove the truth of that statement, here is a plea for information about a certain valley of the Beaver State.

"I'm out for some facts about the Willamette Valley of Oregon, Mr. North," writes Whitney P., of St. Louis, Missouri, "and I figure you are the man to supply them. The back-to-the-farm idea has gripped me hard, and I've been told that for the man who wants to confine his efforts to a few well-cultivated acres

with maximum results, this region is hard to beat. Now, that is the present plan of myself and the missis, but first we'd like to have a sort of brief survey of that section."

We're mighty glad to oblige Whitney and his missis. The Willamette Valley, lying between the Coastal Range and the main range of the Cascades, is one of the oldest settled sections of Oregon. It extends south from Portland for about one hundred and fifty miles and is from twenty to sixty miles wide. The cli-

mate is warm and moist, and the winters are mild with snow rarely seen. Rainfall averages about forty-two inches, the largest per cent of which comes during the winter months.

This is a region of well-developed farms, although there is considerable timberland that still awaits development. Whitney

will find, as he has been told, that the Willamette Valley offers splendid opportunities to the man who wants to go in for general farming on a few well-cultivated acres. Fruit growing, dairying, poultry raising, or stock farming all offer good returns for effort expended.

Peaches, pears, plums, apples, cherries, and many other fruits are grown extensively. Market vegetables include asparagus, celery, onions, beets, rhubarb, and many others that are precooled or canned, and shipped to distant markets. Kale stands green the year round, and the even, mild climate, abundance

SPECIAL NOTICE

MONTANA RANCHES

Scattered over the mountain country of northwest Montana are many old-time cattle ranches. Here in the company of sturdy cowboys one may ride the range as in pioneer days, follow the beckoning mountain trails, eat over a roaring camp fire, and sleep beneath a blanket and the stars. Here freedom and adventure are found in the great outdoor West. For a list of the ranches of Montana write John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

of rich feed, ample supplies on fresh mountain water running through the pastures, and plenty of shade make dairy conditions ideal. Prunes are an important fruit crop, and nuts are grown generally.

This valley includes the larger cities: Portland, the Rose City, with its quarter of a million people; Salem, the State capital, with its large university; and Corvallis, with the State agricultural college. This is also a manufacturing center, with woolen, lumber, flour, and paper mills, canneries, condenseries, packing plants, and factories of almost every kind.

Before, however, Whitney makes up his mind to settle in the Willamette Valley, we would suggest that he look the map of Oregon over.

Any reader of this department may receive the address of a man who knows Oregon and will be glad to recommend suitable farm sites by writing to John North, care of this magazine.

Bound also for the Beaver State is Troy W., of Indianapolis, Indiana.

"Can you tell me how to reach the Metolius River country in the Deschutes National Forest, Mr. North? My partner and I are planning to spend our vacation in that part of the West and would greatly appreciate tips from you about the country, its camps, lakes, rivers, and trails. We expect to rough it, and as we'll be eating over a camp fire, we'd like your recipes for such dishes as beans-in-the-hole, sour-dough bread, and barbecue."

Troy and his partner have surely picked a grand section for their va-

cation, and we prophesy a whale of a good time for them. The Metolius River country is a clean, open, parklike region, with a growth of Western yellow pine, a wealth of fine camp grounds, and many mountain lakes stocked with fish. It is located fourteen miles from Sisters and forty miles from Bend and may be reached over excellent automobile roads.

The Metolius River, which comes forth a full-fledged stream from the base of Black Butte, above Camp Sherman, is a fisherman's paradise. Some of its springs are hardly five degrees above freezing. If Troy and his pal want to climb to the summit of Black Butte, which is a forest-fire lookout point, they may reach it over a four-mile trail.

Suttles Lake, another point we would advise them to visit, is four miles from the Metolius River and is accessible by automobile. Here good fishing and excellent bathing are to be enjoyed. In fact, with a store, cabins, tent houses, and a good camping ground, this makes a delightful place to tarry. Nor should the partners fail to see Blue Lake, a water-filled crater of weird beauty, which lies one and a half miles farther on and is reached by automobile road.

A free forest camp on the national forest along the Metolius River provides delightful spots for tents and cheerful camp fires.

Recipes for sour-dough bread, beans-in-the-hole, barbecue, and other dishes dear to the heart of the experienced woodsman, as well as additional information and a map of the Metolius River country will be sent to readers upon request.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are coöperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer any letters regarding firearms if accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THERE are four centers of the gun-making industry in Austria. Innsbruck, the capital of Tyrol, has the largest sporting-gun factory, named for Johann Peterlongo. The Tyrol region, as most people remember, is a mountainous region where every male is an excellent marksman, and usually a gunsmith in addition.

Ferlach, a village in the Carinthian Mountains, has a number of small "cottage factories" where every kind of gun can be produced to order or duplicated from models. Joseph Just and Martin Ogris are the leading names there.

Steyr is the home of the "Oesterr-Waffenfabriks-Ges," which makes the Mannlicher-Schoenauer rifles,

automatic pistols, and double-barreled shotguns. This company compares very favorably with the Mauser plant in Oberndorf, Germany.

Vienna, the capital of Austria, is probably most famous for Johann Springer, who fills orders for great London gun dealers like W. W. Greener, Purdey & Sons, and Westley Richards. Springer is famous for refusing to make a gun he doesn't think practical for its intended purpose, no matter how much he is offered.

Compensators on shotguns.

F. E. GRAHAM, Wellsville, Ohio: When you place a compensator on your gun, you will need a high front sight; in turn, you must have a high

back sight, but this carries your eye away from the stock, so you must have a butt with its comb about one quarter inch higher than before. All of this means that the shotgun ought to be especially designed if it is to be used with a compensator efficiently. This does not mean that a compensator will not improve any gun for which it is designed, but it does mean that one hundred per cent success with firearms requires harmony in design.

Reloading .45 cartridges.

H. F. HENDERSON, Shreveport, Louisiana: The Modern Bond C-454 has a hollow base, cuts a "wad-cutter hole" in the target paper, and was designed for all-around .45 Colt use. As you know, these can be cast at home with simple, inexpensive tools, and loaded into empty cases, using a maximum load

of 13.7 grains weight No. 80 powder, which develops 1,116 feet per second velocity.

Go Chicago!

In one year, according to the Chicago *Tribune*, sixty-three criminals were slain by police and citizens. Police knocked off thirty-seven, and citizens or private watchmen polished off twenty-six. Nine police officers were beaten to the draw by criminals who killed the policemen, but the police were still ahead when the whistles blew for the New Year.

Tennessee tea trap.

J. W. POGUE, who owns a tea room in Chattanooga, Tennessee, was held up on December 23, 1932, by an armed bandit. When the robber left, Pogue grabbed a gun and shot him three times before he took him prisoner and called in the police.

Peters's and Colt's have resumed sending free booklets to our readers. If you have not received these interesting pamphlets, write us now, and we will put your name on the mailing list.

The government supply of Krag and Russian rifles is exhausted, but the U. S. Rifle (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, is sold to *citizens of the United States* for \$8.85, under certain restrictions which will be explained to readers who send us a stamped and addressed envelope.

AN ARMS ALPHABET

H.

HAND GUN: A pistol or revolver.
HANG-FIRE: Delayed discharge.
HEEL: The rear, upper edge of the butt.

I.

IGNITION: The starting of combustion of the powder charge.
IMPACT: The act of striking.
I. V.: Instrumental velocity, the actual, recorded velocity of a bullet, as contrasted with the theoretical velocity.

J.

JACKET: A whole or partial covering for the bullet.

K.

KEYHOLING: The act of the bullet striking the target sideways as the result of not traveling on its axis.
KEEPER: A leather loop used to adjust the gun sling.

MISSING

This department 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 "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you.

We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it. If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these 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.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WHIPPLE, DAVID and DEVINE.—Who left Cattaraugus County, New York, about 1864, for the West. As far as is known they never came back East. Any information regarding them or their descendants will be much appreciated by B. Whipple, 138 East Nineteenth Street, Erie, Pennsylvania.

SLATON, J. L.—Usually called Luther. Left his home in August, 1930. Was last heard from about two weeks before Christmas in 1930. At that time he was in Shelbyville, Indiana. Any news of him would be gratefully received by his brother, George Slaton, Waurika, Oklahoma.

SLATON, KATHERINE.—Was last heard from in July, 1933. She was then in Memphis, Tennessee. As the result of a car wreck she is crippled. Any one having any information concerning her, please communicate with her brother, George Slaton, Waurika, Oklahoma.

McGETTRICK, ELIZABETH.—Her birthplace is believed to be Lisburn, Ireland. She was born in October, 1912. Her father died in 1912 or 1913. In 1915 her mother died in Lisburn, and Elizabeth and her sister Sally moved to Magheragal. While there Elizabeth had a teacher named Miss Mary Quinn. When last heard of, in 1920, Elizabeth was living in Stoneford, Antrim, Ireland. Is believed to have some brothers living, also relatives in the United States. Any one able to furnish any information concerning her, please write to William J. Sherlock, 223 James Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

HYER, PALMER T.—He is my father, and for many years he resided in Cortland, New York. In March of 1916, he took a position with the Carnegie Steel Co., at Clairton, Pennsylvania. The latter place is near Pittsburgh. In October, 1917, he gave up the job and left town. Since that time he has only been heard from once when a post card came, mailed in Oswego, New York. He is a carpenter and builder by trade. Would be about sixty-eight years of age. He is six feet two inches tall and well built. Any news of him would be much appreciated by his son, Charley T. Hyer, 904 East Tenth Street, Pueblo, Colorado.

ARMSTRONG, STANLEY and FLEEDA.—They are my children, and I have not been able to locate them for a year, though I know that they are somewhere in Texas. Stanley is twelve years old and Fleeda is eight. Stanley, if you should happen to see this, please write to your mother. Any help in locating the children would be deeply appreciated by Mrs. Gladys Armstrong, Drawer G, Crane, Texas.

CASEY, EDWARD.—When last heard from, in the latter part of July, 1933, he was in Chicago, Illinois, en route to New York City via Cincinnati, Ohio. Is five feet seven inches tall and slender. Has brown eyes and hair. Is twenty-three years of age. Edward, please write. Your mother is frantic. Any one able to offer any information as to this young man's whereabouts, kindly get in touch with Mrs. E. Mims, 758 Hubbard Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

PEARCE, CONWAY.—When last heard from he was aboard the U. S. S. "Rochester." He sailed from the Brooklyn navy yard the last of 1930 or the early part of 1931. At that time I was a pharmacist, third class, stationed at the naval hospital in Brooklyn. If you happen to see this, Pearce, write to an old shipmate. Remember Vi and Dottie? Vi wants to hear from you especially. Write to me or to her address. Please mention some particular that we both understand so that I shall know that it is really you. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, kindly write to Kenneth F. Barrett, care of Mrs. Emma Muir, Aberdeen, Idaho.

MOON, J.—Generally called Jack. Was last heard of in Indiana in July, 1933. He had gone there from Kahoka, Missouri, in June of that year. He is about seventy years of age and is a pure Cherokee Indian. He and his wife—she is half Indian—are both herb doctors. They have six children: Bob, nineteen; Mary, seventeen; Jack or Bones, thirteen; Carl, eleven; Stanley, ten; Archie, five or six. The father and the two older boys often played for dances. Most of the children have curly hair. The family name is Silvermoon, but they have shortened it to Moon. Other married children may be living with them. Any one having seen any of them, or knowing anything concerning their present whereabouts, please write at once to Annabel Moore, R. F. D. 1, Gregory Landing, Missouri.

BAKUL, JOHN F.—Who left Omaha, Nebraska, in 1889. Any one able to furnish any information concerning him, please write to his sister, Mrs. Charles White, 3600 South Corona Avenue, Englewood, Colorado.

HUSSY, PATRICK J.—Who came from Kilmallock, County Limerick, Ireland, to New Orleans, Louisiana, where he inherited his uncle's estate. His mother was Catherine Lynch Dillon. His father was Patrick Hussy. He had three sisters, Mary, Catherine, and Ellen. Any news of him will be much appreciated by his niece, Mrs. T. Murphy, 1502 Kings Highway, Brooklyn, New York.

HARRIS, ROBERT.—He is somewhere around thirty-eight years of age and is believed to be living in Virginia. Mother died twenty years ago in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and I have never been able to locate him since. Most of the children were adopted. They would all like to get in touch with him if possible. Eva and Dessie are both dead, but the others are all scattered over North Carolina. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please communicate with Grady Beeson, Co. A, Fourth U. S. Engineers, Fort Benning, Georgia.

MARSTON, RICHARD.—Brother of Florrie, Agnes, Ollie, and Ethel Marston, of New York. He was last heard of about twenty years ago. At that time he was in Yuma, Arizona. According to his last letter, sent from there, he had been unemployed for some time; had met with an accident and apparently was being cared for by some kind of religious order. He would be about forty-eight years of age. Any news of him would be deeply appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Frank Meisse, care of Western Story Magazine.

EDDIE.—Please write to me. I wrote to you, but you did not answer me. Address Babe, care of Western Story Magazine.

HIGGINBOTHAM, WAYNE COOK, and EZIAS H.—Any one having any information regarding them kindly communicate with Charles P. Higginbotham, 1019 Lincoln Avenue, Sapulpa, Oklahoma.

PERRON, MAY and EDITH.—Won't you please write to me? No one else need know unless you wish them to. I will always love you both dearly. Aloha. I have the same address. Your loving brother.

FAILER, HARRY.—Of Akron, Ohio. I used to live next door to you when I was three years old. Perhaps you do not remember me. Is your mother still living? I should love to hear from all of you. Please write to Marie Rhodes Lucas, Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania.

O'NEIL, RAE MURNEY.—His mother has not heard from him since April, 1926, when he spoke of going on a sailing ship. His cousin "Peggy" O'Neill is at present a member of the Boston Bruins Hockey Team. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly notify W. E. O'Neil, care of Western Story Magazine.

OGHSE, DONALD.—He is my father. When last heard from he was in St. Joseph, Michigan. Any one knowing anything regarding him, or any of the family, kindly get in touch with Robert Oghse, U. S. S. "Pennsylvania," Box 2, San Pedro, California.

BURNS, ELON LE CLAIRE.—Usually known as Bob Burns. Was captain of the Third Cavalry at Nogales, Arizona, before the World War. In 1920 he was employed at Roos Brothers' department store in San Francisco, California. He is about five feet seven inches tall and weighed between one hundred and sixty and one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Has blond hair, blue eyes, and round face. Would be around forty-three years of age. Is well educated and very good-natured. I am his daughter. I have not seen my father since I was seven years old and I am now nineteen. It would make me very happy if I could hear from him. I am married and have a little boy who greatly resembles his grandpa. Any news would be welcomed by Mrs. Royal Barfell, 736 B Street, Brawley, California.

RYAN, JOHN.—An ex-soldier. Was in the Q. M. C. and was stationed at Fort Bliss, in May, 1929. Edna died in February, 1933. Have important news for you. Any one knowing his present address, please write to Nell, care of Western Story Magazine.

MAIER, ALBIN CARL.—Formerly lived at Tuckahoe, New York. Was discharged from the navy on May 17, 1922. When last heard from was living in the Bronx, New York. A sister of his lived in Rochester, New York. Al, if you see this, please write. I am alone with my father. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please write to Inga Kroon Hopton, care of Western Story Magazine.

CAMERON, JAMES C.—Everything is forgiven. Have protected you. Please write to me, care of this magazine, Madge.

ATTENTION.—My name is Royal E. Edwards. In 1882 I was taken in adoption by Wesley World, of Oxford, Iowa. Somewhere I have a sister, Amelia Edwards, who married William Slattery. She was last heard of in, or near, Denver, Colorado. My brother, John L. Edwards, at one time lived at Cumbly, Texas, but I have not heard from him for many years. Any one able to give any information concerning either of these persons, kindly communicate with Royal E. Edwards, Linwood Cement Co., R. R., Davenport, Iowa.

ROBINSON, HILLERY LEE.—Would be about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age. His father was a chiropractor. He died in Durant, Oklahoma, about eighteen years ago, and Hillery was adopted by S. J. Watson, of Durant. Later Mr. Watson sent him to the orphans' home or boys' training school. The superintendent wrote to me stating that the boy had run away and joined the navy. Hillery, if you see this, write to me at once. I have good news for you. J. W. Crawford, Box 46, Durant, Oklahoma.

JOHNSON, JAMES TURNER.—Son of Lydia Jeanette and William Cannon Johnson. Would be between forty and forty-five years of age. Is over six feet tall and rather heavy. Has light hair and blue eyes. Was last heard from in Denver, Colorado, at Christmas, 1931. Uncle Turner, Granny has been pretty sick this winter, but is mending slowly. She wants to hear from you so much. You are still her boy. Jackie wants to hear, too. Please write to your niece, Maggie Etta. Any one knowing his whereabouts, kindly communicate with Mrs. C. C. Collins, P. O. Box 362, Aztec, New Mexico.

HUEY or ARNETTE, CLAUDE SPRAY.—Who left his home in Mannington, West Virginia, twenty years ago and has not been heard from since. He left home with a friend, Harry Michael, who returned a few months later. He either could not or would not give any information concerning Claude other than to say that he was somewhere in California. If living he would be forty-five years of age. He was over six feet tall and weighed between one hundred and eighty and one hundred and ninety pounds. His hair was dark but would perhaps be gray by now. He was capable of following almost any kind of work and is a hustler. May be engaged in art work or aviation as he had a decided bent toward both. His mother is in ill health and prays that she may see her boy before she dies. Any one having any information of any kind, please communicate with Frank J. Huey, Box 247, Mannington, West Virginia.

PHILLIPS, JAMES RICHARD.—Was in the army at one time and may be still. He is light-complexioned with brown eyes and hair. Is of medium height and weighed one hundred and fifty pounds. Has very regular features. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please write to D. J., care of this magazine.

BIGBIE, JAMES ALEXANDER.—Who left Kosciusko, Mississippi, about twenty-seven years ago. He is the son of J. T. and Annie Bigbie and was born near Ethel, Mississippi. His brothers and sisters were Tom, Theodosia, and Callie. James was married at the age of twenty-one to Eulalia Neighbors. They had one child, a little girl born after he left. She would like so much to know her father. Any one able to assist in locating him, please write to Everett Standrod, General Delivery, Bastrop, Louisiana.

FRYER, BENJAMIN.—Will the aforementioned, or any of his relatives, please communicate with his daughter Elizabeth. He was last heard of in 1924 at Manchester, England. His daughter is now eighteen years of age. Please address Elizabeth Fryer, 13 Dalston Drive, Didsbury Park, Manchester.

NOTICE, CO. B., EIGHTEENTH ENGINEERS.—Want to get in touch with all the boys of the Eighteenth, especially Cornelius A. Morgan, California, 1917; Arthur Ferguson, Idaho, 1917; Thomas M. Edmunds, California, 1931. Address Elin R. Hamilton, U. S. V. Hospital, Ward 3-J, Indianapolis, Indiana.

REED, WILL, BURT, and NORA.—Will is my father. I have heard nothing from him since I was a small boy. Burt is my father's brother. Nora is my sister. She married Will Bryant. They had three children, Ella and Pearl and a boy, J. W., who went by the name of Dub. When last heard from they were in Waco, Texas, where Nora later married Will Wofford. Any one knowing the whereabouts of any of these persons, please write to Gordon J. Reed, care of Callahan, R. R. 1, Rochester, Haskell County, Texas.

CANAWAY, MRS. EVA, and daughter JANIE.—When last heard from they were in Round Mountain, Oklahoma. That was five years ago. Any one knowing where they are now located, please notify Gordon J. Reed, care of Callahan, R. R. 1, Rochester, Haskell County, Texas.

CUMBERLAND, A. R.—Who used to live in California, and it is very possible that he still does. When he lived in Woodland he was a chum of my husband, Floyd L. Walling. Have some news for him that will be a great surprise. Address Mrs. F. Walling, General Delivery, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

ATTENTION, SOLDIERS.—Want to get in touch with the boys of Troop L, Sixteenth Cavalry, at San Benito, Texas, from July, 1917, to September, 1919. Also members of Troop C, Fifteenth Cavalry, from November, 1920, to July, 1921, and also Troop C, Thirteenth Cavalry, from July, 1921, to November, 1923. Patsy Bonadia, Box 41, Vanderbilt, Pennsylvania.

McCLISH, CLINTON L., and JUNIOR ROYCE.—In 1932, when they were five and three years of age, they were placed in homes by the Texas Children's Welfare Association. Any one able to furnish any further information concerning them, kindly get in touch with Mrs. J. Lackey, Box 127, Tuscola, Texas.

KAUFMAN, RUTH.—Whose last known address was Box 424, Battle Creek, Michigan. Any one knowing her present whereabouts, please write to Irene Clothier, 259 Boulevard E. So., Pontiac, Michigan.

BARNEY, HARRY.—Sometimes known as Norman Henderson. He left Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for Deer Trail, Colorado, about eight years ago. Information concerning his present whereabouts would be gratefully received by Irene Clothier, 259 Boulevard E. So., Pontiac, Michigan.

LILLEY, GEORGE JOSEPH.—Has been missing since February 14, 1926. Was twelve years old when he left home. He has fair complexion and blond hair. If you see this, won't you please come home and make your family happy once more? Think of our once happy home which is now a place of sorrow and gloom. Your father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Anatole Millet, Lions, Louisiana.

ROGERS, PHYLLIS.—Frequently known as Pete. Is about five feet six inches tall and very slender. Has dark-brown hair and blue eyes. When I first met him he was traveling with the Kid Richard's Show, but I know that he is no longer connected with it. His parents live in San Antonio, Texas, and his father is employed in a cafe. Any information regarding him would be greatly appreciated by Inez Morrow, Box 38, R. F. D. 3, Lovelady, Texas.

THURMAN, GUY W.—Was last seen and heard of in 1923 or 1924, when he was in Chicago, Illinois. His last address was 1209 Cicero Avenue, near Sixteenth Street. He was tall and very thin. Cheeks and chin were marked by small scars. About twenty years ago he lived in Terre Haute, Indiana, where he worked for the United States Express Co. Also worked for the American Express Co. in Indianapolis, Indiana. Moved from Indianapolis to Chicago; moved from there to Westmont, Illinois, and then back to Chicago. Later he worked on the railroad for the American Express Co. from Chicago to St. Paul, Minnesota. As a side line he sold Fyr-fighters for the Fyr-fighters Co., Dayton, Ohio. He was a member of Constellation Masonic Order, Chicago, Illinois. I am a relative of his, and any word as to his present address will be thankfully received. Kindly address Hattie B. Gott, 920 Douglas Street, Los Angeles, California.

WIEZEK, ADAM C.—Please write to this magazine for letter. Tell me everything. Address Brown Eyes. Remember?

BORISENKO, ALEX.—When last heard from he was working in the tunnel in San Francisco, California. That was in 1923 or 1924. He is about twenty-eight years of age and six feet tall. Any information as to his whereabouts will be much appreciated by his brother, Paul J. Borisenko, Mullingar, Saskatchewan, Canada.

STUTH, WILLIAM H.—Formerly of Louisville, Kentucky, and also Madison, Wisconsin. Was last heard from in 1926. At that time he was working at the Ford plant in Louisville, Kentucky. Any one knowing his present location, please notify Herbert W. Brown, 33 Fairfax Road, Rochester, New York.

WRECK, CLAUDE S.—In 1929 his address was Queen's Street, Auckland, New Zealand, care of G. P. O. Has not been heard from since that time. Why didn't you answer my last letter? I was then living at Royal Oak, Michigan. Any one knowing this man's present whereabouts, kindly communicate with Dorothy Moore, R. 3, Bellaire, Michigan.

TWENTY-GRAND PETE.—He is about twenty-eight years old. Was last seen at Great Falls, Montana. Remember Jimmy, your stepbrother? Write to him at J. L. Perlmutter, 2127 Pierce Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

JENKINS, MARGARET.—Who at one time lived at Gregg, Manitoba. Was last heard of in 1926. At that date she was in St. Catharines, Ontario. Would be about thirty-one years of age. I have very important news for her. Any one knowing how she may be reached, please get in touch with W. F. Henderson, 233 Edmonton Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

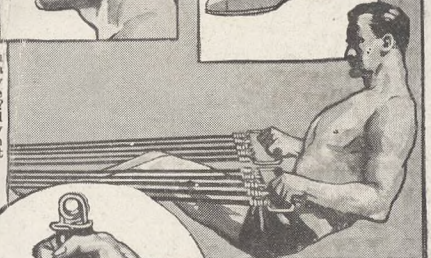
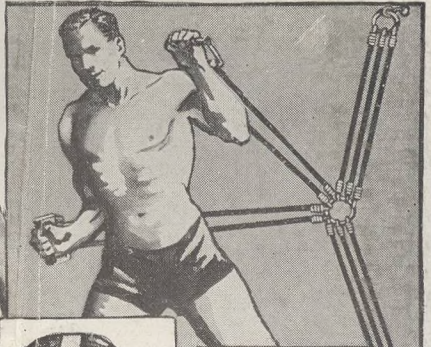
VAN WARNER or MacGREGOR, ROSCOE.—He left home twenty-five years ago, and his family lost all track of him. His father and mother are now both dead. His sister is anxious to hear from him. She is Pearl M. Heath, Apartment 226, 1609 Sheridan Road, North Chicago, Illinois.

WHEELER, ROBERT.—Was last seen in Grafton, West Virginia, in September, 1921. Was thought to have come from North Carolina. Any news of him would be greatly appreciated by Jack, care of this magazine.

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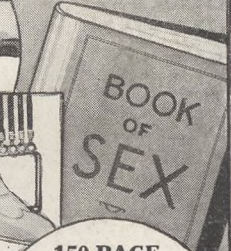
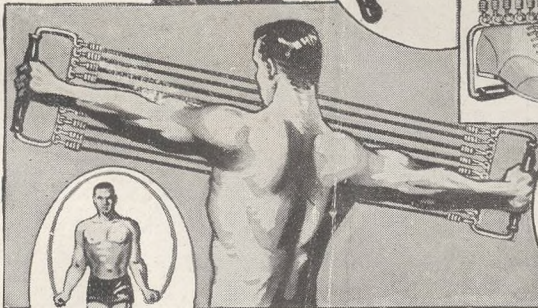
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