

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Hay-Wire

Author: Bower, B. M. [Bower, Bertha Muzzy] (1871-1940)

Date of first publication: 1928

Edition used as base for this ebook: Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1928

Date first posted: 15 June 2010

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20100610

This ebook was produced by: David T. Jones, Al Haines & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

By B. M. Bower

GOOD INDIAN
LONESOME LAND
THE RANCH AT THE WOLVERINE
THE FLYING US LAST STAND
THE HERITAGE OF THE SIOUX
STARR, OF THE DESERT
CABIN FEVER
SKYRIDER
RIM O' THE WORLD
THE QUIRT
COW-COUNTRY
CASEY RYAN
THE TRAIL OF THE WHITE MULE
THE VOICE AT JOHNNYWATER
THE PAROWAN BONANZA
THE EAGLE'S WING
THE BELLEHELEN MINE
DESERT BREW
MEADOWLARK BASIN
BLACK THUNDER
VAN PATTEN
WHITE WOLVES
THE ADAM CHASERS
POINTS WEST
HAY-WIRE

HAY-WIRE

By

B. M. BOWER

TORONTO

McCLELLAND AND STEWART

1928

Copyright, 1928,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

All rights reserved
Published July, 1928

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I <u>LYNN REBELS</u>	3
II <u>"HE CALLED ME HAY-WIRE"</u>	10
III <u>THE FAMILY DIPLOMAT</u>	21
IV <u>LYNN LOOKS UPON WEALTH</u>	37
V <u>HEINIE'S DEAD!</u>	48
VI <u>"DO YOU THINK I KILLED HIM?"</u>	62
VII <u>"WHAT'S THIS ABOUT MONEY?"</u>	80
VIII <u>LYNN COUNTS NOSES</u>	100
IX <u>"IT'S MINE BY RIGHTS"</u>	107
X <u>LITTLE BROWN JUG</u>	121
XI <u>A FACE AT THE WINDOW</u>	131
XII <u>THERE'S MONEY IN SHEEP</u>	144
XIII <u>A RIDING LESSON</u>	155
XIV <u>THE MONEY TRACK</u>	167
XV <u>IT'S WHAT YOU'VE GOT THAT COUNTS</u>	180
XVI <u>MONEY GOSSIP AGAIN</u>	193
XVII <u>LYNN BUYS SHEEP</u>	209
XVIII <u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>	222
XIX <u>HELL HALVORSEN GETS ACTION</u>	236
XX <u>CUPID TAKES A HAND</u>	245
XXI <u>OLD JOEL SMELLS SHEEP</u>	256
XXII <u>"IN THE WELL"</u>	269
XXIII <u>DOLLAR CONCHOS</u>	280
XXIV <u>"DAD, YOU WALKED!"</u>	294

HAY-WIRE



CHAPTER ONE

LYNN REBELS

Lynn Hayward spun a silver dollar on the counter and wished it were as many as it looked while revolving swiftly on its edge. The new school-teacher, turning from the ribbon counter at the moment, glanced at his moody profile and wished she had his eyelashes and that intriguing curve of upper lip. Both wishes slid away into the eternal ether where such thoughts drift in endless journeyings, for the dollar suddenly wobbled and fell clinking on its side and lay, just one dingy silver dollar and no more; and the fascinating profile turned full face to the new school-teacher as Lynn eyed her curiously and with the quickened interest of a normal young man of twenty-two when he sees a young and pretty face that is strange to him.

The new school-teacher's eyes immediately froze to that wordless barrier with which nice young women wall themselves invisibly away from the questing male of their species, and she walked with dignity past him and out into the hazy sunshine of a late summer day in Wyoming. Lynn's eyes followed her, the desirable curve of his upper lip now straightened a bit in a half smile of complete understanding. He liked her the better for the snub, and he decided that he would ride in to the next dance, even if he had to borrow a dollar for the ticket. He hoped she wasn't a Methodist; she couldn't be, with that wavy shine in her hair where it showed under her straight-brimmed white sailor hat. She sure looked human, anyway. He certainly would ride in to the dance and take a chance on her not being too religious to enjoy herself.

Then the storekeeper, one Jackson by name, set a yellow-wrapped bottle of Hubble's Blood Purifier on the counter and picked up the dollar with greedy fingers. Lynn pulled his eyes and his thoughts away from the new school-teacher.

"How *is* the old man?" asked Jackson in his commercial tone of eager interest in his customers. "This stuff seem to help him any? He's been taking it regular for over a year now; do him any good, you think?"

"No, it don't. But he thinks it does." Lynn slid the bottle into his right-hand pocket and jerked his hat brim a little lower over his eyes with the unconscious motion of a man who expects to ride against the wind. His errand in town was ended, since he had no other dollar to spin or to spend.

"Well, 's long as he *thinks* it does—" Jackson gave a mirthless chuckle. "Too bad, a fine, strapping big man like your dad—must be eight years he's laid on his back helpless."

"He doesn't lie on his back, except to sleep, same as any other man," Lynn corrected, with a frown which the thought of his father usually brought to his face.

"Oh. I didn't know he was able to be up and around. How long—?"

"He's up, but he isn't around. He sits in a Morris chair most of the time and plays solitaire—and bosses the ranch." The frown deepened with the vague resentment conjured by the words and the thought behind them.

"Well, that's something. But I guess there ain't much to boss, these days, eh? Don't even run a wagon any more, do you, Lynn? I heard the Quarter-Circle Bar brand is wiped—"

"Say, do you want to buy us out?"

"Who, me? Me buy out the Hayward holdings?" Jackson's laugh had the hint of a sneer which Lynn's tone had bred. "I ain't buying up ghost ranches; not to-day, I ain't. Why? Your dad want to sell?"

"No. But you're so keen on getting all the details I kinda thought you wanted to buy us out." Lynn turned and walked stiff-necked to the door, glanced up and down the street and went on to where his horse, a springy-muscle roan with a coat like satin in the sun, had trod a dusty path around the end of the hitch rack. The Haywards did have fine horses, even if they had no cattle. Lynn's gloomy eyes lightened a shade when they rested upon the impatient Loney, but there remained a resentfulness that showed in the vicious yanks he gave to the tie-rope. The roan swung as Lynn thrust a toe in the stirrup, and they went off down the street in the easy gallop that was a part of the Hayward horses' training.

With a quarter still in his pocket, Lynn had decided to extend his shopping a bit, and buy a sack or two of Durham down

at the new little store beyond the Elkhorn Bar; a rather squalid place of refreshment much frequented by men of a certain type. As he approached the place a man—Hank Miller by name—came out and walked uncertainly down toward the hitch rail where his horse waited dispiritedly, lean-flanked and sweaty from hard riding that day.

Hank had a pint of whisky in his pocket and three or four drinks under his belt, and he was feeling frisky. Two hilarious cow-punchers followed him, and as Hank turned with a remark over his shoulder, the three burst into laughter. Lynn, just riding abreast of them, read a jeer in their mirth and in the glances they cast his way. He pulled the roan to a restive stand before them.

"Say, you fellows see anything funny about me?" he challenged sharply.

"Well, if it ain't Lynn Hay-wire!" chortled Hank, and swept his hat to the ground in a derisive bow. "Just in from his vast domain, the Hay-wire ranch! How's the cattle business, Lynn? Goin' to ship a trainload er two of beef this fall?"

Lynn went white around the mouth at the jibe. He reined closer to Hank, giving back the taunt with an old and unforgivable insult that stung Hank to quick, drunken fury.

"Say! Damn your soul, no man living can call me that and get away with it!" bawled Hank, reaching for his gun with awkward haste, too drunk to draw quickly and no expert at any time.

Lynn's hand likewise dropped to his pocket for the only weapon he possessed. He leaned and struck with savage force.

"Purify your dirty soul—you need it!" he shouted above the pop of breaking glass. As Hubble's Blood Purifier and a pungent aroma of brandy mixed with strong herbs filled the air, Lynn added a sentence which may not be repeated. The roan, rearing at the crash of glass, wheeled on its hind feet and bolted for the open prairie; and Lynn, turning for a parting jibe back at the group, with Hank weaving blindly about in their midst, felt that he had acquitted himself with honor, after all.

But that backward look nearly cost him dear. The galloping horse averted disaster by swerving sharply to one side as he went up the street and Lynn, abruptly facing to the front, saw that he had all but run down the new school-teacher who was crossing the street at that moment. He had a swift vision of wide, indignant eyes under her white straw sailor hat as he thundered on past, but that did not deter him from another backward look. He wanted to see if she were going into the house of the Methodist preacher who lived across the street. If she did, she was religious, and if she was religious she would not attend the dances. But it was the milliner's shop she entered, and Lynn faced forward and permitted his thoughts to dwell again upon Hank Miller's insult.

"They stole us outa cattle, and now they got nothing but sneers!" He gritted in futile rage, and let the roan out in a run.

"Hay-wire! We're a hay-wire outfit!" He clenched his teeth as the words bit deeper and deeper into his pride. For in the range land, as you all probably know, there is a certain contemptuous reproach in the term. Springing from the habit of using the wire from broken bales of hay to patch harness and machinery in a makeshift kind of mending, "hay-wire" grew to mean a poverty born of shiftlessness. To go hay-wire meant to go to the dogs generally; to be broke, or its equivalent, and through laziness and mismanagement.

One cannot wonder then if Lynn's blood boiled with futile rage as he rode homeward.

CHAPTER TWO

"HE CALLED ME HAY-WIRE"

In the range land, homes love to snuggle deep within the arms of some little valley facing the south or the east; never west or north if they can help it, because of the bitter sweep of the winds in winter. Groves are a godsend for the shelter they give in cold weather and for the shade they offer from the fierce heat of midsummer. So the Hayward homestead sat well back in a high-walled coulee facing Elk Basin to the southward, with a wooded creek running down to the lower prairies and tall cottonwoods throwing long leafy branches over the scattered buildings. The big corrals lay farther out in the open beyond the fence that guarded the grove from loose cattle and horses.

The ranch did not look "hay-wire" from a distance, Lynn thought, when he rode over the hill and pulled the roan to a walk down the steep road that led to the creek crossing. But his eyes were bitter as he gazed up the creek and saw the deceptive prosperity of those long, low stables, those great wide-winged corrals; at the big ranch house just beyond and the sprawling, homey house just visible within the depths of the grove. Lynn knew only too well what a closer view would reveal: stables, corrals, sheds, bunk house all empty and decaying with disuse. Chuck wagons—three of them—standing in a forlorn group, tires rusty and with long grass growing between the wheel spokes. Mowers, rakes, farm wagons, harness, fragments of chains broken and left lying where they were dropped. A ghost ranch, Jackson had tactlessly dubbed it. Well, it looked the part. All it lacked was the ghost—and that, he thought with a sardonic twist of humor, might be furnished later when his father finally fled his hulking, helpless body; if such things could be, which Lynn strongly doubted.

Sometimes he almost hated the place for its run-down look and the atmosphere of failure that seemed almost a visible miasma of discouragement and gloom, when one stopped to gaze with seeing eyes upon its slatternly disorder. And yet he loved it somehow, with a yearning love not to be put into words; perhaps he loved what it could be—what it once was and would still have been if disaster had not struck down the man who had built the ranch log by log, acre by acre—and refused to see how it had slipped into ruin. The hatred was dominant in Lynn's thoughts now; hatred and a great disgust with life as he had found it.

He unsaddled Loney and turned him into the horse corral where another black pony nickered greeting, and went on up to the house. His sister Rose, a slim young thing with fine hazel eyes and such lashes and mouth as the new school-teacher had envied Lynn, was sitting on the kitchen doorstep stringing green beans—she called it that—for supper. As Lynn approached she looked up studiously, snapping a bean pod in two with her thumb and dropping the pieces negligently into a large yellow bowl while she watched him.

"What's the matter?" she demanded bluntly as he came up. "You're black as a thunder cloud, Lynn. And Pa's on the rampage because you're late—"

"If he wants me to fly, he'll have to furnish the wings," Lynn sullenly retorted, coming to a halt because Rose with her basin of beans and her yellow bowl and herself was using the full width of the step with no room to set his foot. "Move over, can't you?"

"What are you so cranky about? My goodness, this is a sweet family!" But she gathered up her bowl and let him up the steps. "Any mail, Brudder?"

"Not a thing," Lynn said in a gentler tone, perhaps because of the childish nickname she still used upon occasion; chiefly to express sympathy without going into details. "I ran my horse half the way home—I don't see why Dad thinks I'm late," he said by way of explanation.

"I know—but he hasn't had his Purifier to-day. He ought to buy it by the barrel so he wouldn't run out so often. It always makes him unlivable to be out of that stuff. Don't keep him waiting, Lynn."

Until that moment he had not thought much of the smashed bottle or the effect its loss would have at home, but her words sent him into the house with his underlip between his teeth. No dodging the interview; postponement would only make matters worse. His mother (Hat Hayward, the neighbors had called her for more years than Lynn was old) came into the kitchen when she heard his step, but his glance slid away from her expectant look.

"Your father's waiting for his medicine," she said briskly. "I wish you'd hurried a little more; he's been real bad all day."

"I did hurry."

"Well, I guess maybe you did. Where is it?"

"I haven't got it."

"Lynn!"

"What's that you say?" came booming through the living-room doorway. "You ain't *got* it?"

"No."

"Spent the money for whisky, I'll bet! And your father sufferin' the tortures of the damned at home—"

Lynn walked to the door and looked in, impelled by the injustice of the charge. What he saw was a big man sitting in a heavy chair before a little table, mechanically shuffling a deck of cards while his hard, bulging eyes glared at him in angry accusation.

"I didn't do anything of the kind. I broke the bottle on the way out of town."

"Broke it! Pity you didn't break your damn' fool neck!"

"Lynn!" cried his mother behind him. "That horse didn't buck you off, did he? Was you hurt?"

"Hurt!" put in the old man. "You couldn't hurt him with an ax! Didn't you know any better'n to come home without my blood purifier? Why didn't yuh go back and get another one? Want me to die, ay?" He flung down the cards like a pettish child. "I'd be a damn' sight better off dead and outa the way; that's what yuh want, all of yuh—"

"Why didn't yuh get another bottle, Lynn?" his mother hurried to divert the stream of invective.

"Dad knows darn well why I didn't; because I didn't have another dollar, that's why. He's too darn stingy to give me a dime more'n he has to—"

"Now, Lynn! Don't you speak of your father that way. How did it happen? Did your horse fall with you?"

Lynn suddenly flung off the restraint that had irked him from the moment he looked at the dour face of his father. He took a step farther into the room, trembling a little and with that white line around his mouth which meant that his temper was raging.

"I'll tell you how it happened—maybe it will take Dad's mind off that patent dope for a minute. I smashed the bottle over Hank Miller's head, because he called me Hay-wire! I'd do it again too. But he's right—we are a hay-wire outfit. Look at us! Ten thousand acres of deeded land, and not a hoof of cattle on it that belongs to us! Pasturing other men's stock for a living, and our own wagons rusting in the weeds.

"Look at us! Here I am with my hands tied—can't do a damn' thing to put the ranch on its feet again—can't even get out and work for wages—got to wear run-over boots and hand-me-downs for want of the price to buy clothes fit for a white man. There's Rose ought to be in school, and the boys growing up as worthless as two Injun kids, and I—here I am, able to take charge and make something of the outfit, tied hand and foot just because Dad won't trust me with a dollar—"

"Can't trust yuh with a dollar, that's why! Can't even trust yuh to ride in and buy me a bottle of medicine!" snarled the old man. "And that ain't all. I ain't *goin'* to trust yuh, neither; I don't trust nobody. You want me to plaster the ranch with a mortgage so's you can buy cattle. I know your argument. Cattle's up now, and so forth. They can go up and be damned to 'em—and you along with 'em! I ain't going to buy no more cattle for these damn' rustlers to steal. I've got the ranch—and they can't walk off with that! I've got the deeds on record, and there ain't an acre that ain't paid for or that I ain't holding according to law. And there ain't goin' to be; not while I'm alive."

"Other men borrow money to buy cattle," Lynn retorted. "They get rich at it. Or sheep. I could get a bunch of sheep on shares and not put out a cent—"

"Not by a damn' sight!" Joel Hayward almost lifted himself out of his chair so that he could thump the table harder. "There ain't ever been a sheep on Hayward land, and there ain't going to be! Not while I'm alive, there ain't. Mebby," he added with heavy irony, "you better kill me off so's you can run things to suit yourself. Put a bullet through me—anything, so's you can get things into your own hands. That's all yuh want, anyway."

"Now, Joel, that's not so and you know it!" his wife remonstrated sharply, sending a quick, somewhat apprehensive glance at her eldest son. "You say that just to be talking, and it ain't right or just. Lynn's going to do the best he can, and as you think best, Joel. He don't really mean to bring sheep on to the ranch; he hates 'em just as bad as you do. He just said it same as you say things you don't mean when you're mad." She drew a breath of relief when he grunted and picked up the cards again, tapping their edges on the table to even the deck for shuffling. Lynn had walked out of the room into the kitchen, and by these signs Mrs. Hayward knew that the worst of the storm was over.

"Why don't you give the boy a chance to do something for himself and us?" she pleaded, laying a hand on old Joel's shoulder "He's a man grown, and a good steady one with a level head like his father. All he needs is a little money to get a start, and he'll pull us all outa the hole in a few years."

"Money! What's went with all that pasture money?"

"You know well enough where it went, Joel! To pay taxes on all the land you've got, and to feed us. There ain't anything left to run the ranch on like it should be run. Lynn couldn't even buy enough seed to put in more'n ten acres of oats. We rake and scrape to keep clothes on our backs and food in our mouths. Lynn can't even put up any hay, except what him and the boys can do with that toggled up mower. If you'd let him buy a couple of new mowers and a stacker, we could have hay to sell and winter stock. But no, you won't give him an inch of leeway!

"There's the Dollar outfit, been after you to sell the upper ranch. They don't want to pay as much as it's worth, of course. Trust the Dollar outfit to scheme and connive to get something for nothing! But it'd put us on our feet once more, and you could go where you'd get help—"

"Help! Damned little help I'd get anywhere! Only thing that ever did help me I can't have, because that damned idiot of a half-witted pet son of yours had to bust the bottle—"

"What's one bottle of medicine when you've got it in your power to be cured, maybe? You could run the ranch to suit yourself then. You won't sell the horses, even after Lynn worked like a dog breaking a bunch you'd promised to let go. That boy rode himself ragged gentling the lot so they'd bring more money—and then you balked on signing the bill of sale! Seems like you want to see your family go hungry and naked, Joel—and keep yourself helpless the rest of your life. We could have things and be somebody if you'd just sell the upper ranch—"

"Sell! Sell! That's all I can hear, day or night. You'd sell the roof over my head if I'd let you. If it ain't horses it's land you harp on. All you want is money for that damned lazy hound to blow in. Always something you're whining to *sell*! There ain't goin' to be a hoof sold or a foot of land while I live, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. Sell! You and that damned—"

The screen door slammed as Lynn left the kitchen.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FAMILY DIPLOMAT

"Lynn!"

Lynn, walking fast down the path to the corral where he kept his saddle horses, neither answered nor looked back.

"Where you going, Brudder?" Rose waited, then set the string beans inside the screen door out of the way of an investigative old hen with a brood of half-feathered chicks, and went running down the trail after him.

"Lynn, you aren't going anywhere before supper, are you?"

"The sooner I get off the ranch the sooner there'll be peace in the family," Lynn said between shut teeth as he yanked his saddle off the fence and whistled for the black horse.

"But Lynn, you surely aren't going to blow up and leave just because Dad's on the rampage? My land, that's about all the fun he has! It isn't the first time—"

"No, but it's liable to be the last. I've heard that subject mauled in that room ever since I was a kid. Now he's taken a notion to make *me* a cussing post for everything that goes wrong. If I clear out, maybe the rest of you—"

"Oh, that's just because he wants his Purifier," laughed Rose, though she blinked back her tears. "I've got a dollar, and I'll donate that to the cause. If you feel you must ride or bust, chase yourself in after another bottle of soothing syrup, Brudder, and forget—"

"Forget! Yeah, that's dead easy for some." Lynn had bridled the black horse and now settled the saddle on its back, pulling the blanket straight underneath with practised fingers that received no thought whatever from his seething brain.

"It's all right for you, Rose," he said, between yanks on the latigo. "You aren't expected to keep things running smooth with both hands tied behind your back. What's the use of my trying to hold the damned ranch together? I can't make a turn but what he goes straight in the air and calls me everything he can lay his tongue to. I've got about as much authority here as old Heinie up the creek; not as much, because he does listen to Heinie, and I can't open my mouth about anything, but what he cusses me to a fare-ye-well. And yet I'm the one that has the work and the worry and the scheming to make ends meet." He dropped the stirrup from the saddle horn and turned upon her with a despairing look of utter defeat.

"Rose, it's enough to drive a man crazy! All this land, and no stock! Dad doesn't realize what it takes to pinch along and pay taxes out of the pasturage. Look at all that hayland, if I only had the machinery and could hire a crew to put up hay! Look at those corrals! Rotting, full of weeds—and we could have a bunch of cattle and be shipping beef every fall and have money to do things with, if he'd only let me go ahead. It takes money to make money—any fool knows that much. He roars at me because the ranch is going to the dogs, but don't he know I can't hold it up with my bare hands? Hay-wire! They're calling me Lynn Hay-wire now, Rose! They—"

"It's a pity," flashed Rose, "that you didn't have two bottles of Purifier to smash over that idiot's head! I'll bet he was drunk or he couldn't have had such a bright thought. You don't care what they say, do you, Brudder? Hayward or Hay-wire—what's the difference?"

"A damned lot of difference! You aren't a man; you don't know how a man feels about making good in the world. And I *could* make good—if I just had something to start on! That's what grinds me, Rose. Dad could give me a start if he wanted to. We don't need all this land; we can't eat it, and we can't wear it. And that bunch of horses—what good are they to us? We can't sell them—he won't stick to any deal he lets me make. We might eat them," he added darkly. "We might have to or starve, the way things are going."

Rose stood close beside him, one hand on Lynn's shoulder while with the other she stroked the satiny neck of the black horse. She would never dare put her sympathy and love into words, but she must have known it was some comfort for Lynn to open his heart to her. He never did to any one else.

"Don't you suppose you could—" Lynn's laugh stopped her.

"No. You can't suppose a thing that I haven't thought of a thousand times. But I'm hog-tied, I tell you. I can't make a move that Dad wouldn't balk me in. He acts as if he sits there just studying out ways to keep me from making a living for the bunch of us.

"No, Rose, there's no use talking—I've got to get out. I—I couldn't stand much more and keep my hands off him, even if he is a cripple and my own father! He's trying to edge me up to the point where he'll have an excuse for ordering me off the ranch, so I'll just beat him to it. I wouldn't give him that satisfaction to save his life. I'm no use here anyway, the way things stand."

"Well," said Rose with an artful alacrity, "I don't blame you one bit for leaving, if that's the way you feel. But I'd wait till after supper; there's an errand Mom wanted you to do. She baked to-day and she promised Heinie she'd send him up a loaf of bread when you got home. He's back from Cheyenne. Now there," she said, with a laugh that sounded almost natural, "is a shining example of how to be happy though poor! There's old Heinie with his eight dollars a month pension and the dollar he gets every day he washes gold—though he did say he made a little more the last three months—and he's happy as a king. He says he had a 'hell of a time' in Cheyenne this trip. He says he ate peanuts and drank lemonade till he was sick as a dog. You ought to hear him tell how riotously he squandered his gold dust! He says he'll have to go without sugar in his coffee for the next three months, but he saw the sights and lived like a king (on peanuts!) and he's satisfied." A side glance at Lynn's face told her that the small diversion was doing what she had hoped. His eyes had lost a little of their black rage. So she gave his shoulder a final pat of complete understanding and stood back so that he could mount if he chose.

"I know just exactly how you feel, Lynn, and I'd go too if it wasn't for leaving Mom in the lurch. I expect to marry the first man that asks me—and there are a few that are liable to!—just to get away from pop's eternal yowl about money and the roof over his head. But it would seem kind of low-down to sneak out on the old girl, so—" Another sly glance from under her thick curtain of brown lashes seemed to give her intense though secret satisfaction. Lynn was squirming mentally, just as she intended.

"You let me catch you marrying any of these boneheads around here! I'll shoot him, just as sure as God made little apples! There ain't a man in the country fit for you to wipe your shoes on, Rose, and you know it. You needn't—"

"Well, I haven't been asked, yet. You won't let any of them get close enough to see the whites of my eyes, so how do you expect—"

"That's only half of it," snorted Lynn, pulling Blackie's foretop straight;—to kill time, Rose knew well enough.

"Well, good-bye and good luck, and I hope,—Oh, would you mind waiting long enough to chop us some wood? Mom used the last identical stick to finish her baking, and I've scraped the chip pile down to the bone. Would you do that for the onliest sister you've got, please? If it was the kind of wood I could chop—"

"You've no business chopping wood. Where's Sid and Joe? I thought that was their job."

"It is, and that's why they beat it the minute any one mentions the woodpile. Boys are awful when they get too big to spank. I asked them to water the garden; my flowers, anyway. My four o'clocks are just perishing for a drink, and it gives me a pain in the side to pump—"

"I've told you a thousand times to leave that old pump alone! Sid and Joe ought to do that much, anyway."

"Yes, but they've found a cave up under the cliffs somewhere, and they're too busy playing Injun. They dug up five hills of those best potatoes so they can camp out. Mom was mad enough to kill them both, but what's the use?" Rose sighed, keeping an eye on Lynn's revealing face. "The things they're supposed to do around the place would fill a book; but what they really do could be written on a postage stamp, and you wouldn't need a magnifying glass to read it, either!"

Lynn had tied Blackie to the fence, yielding that much to the girl's artful undermining of his determination to leave.

"All right, good nice Brudder, I'll hurry supper along, just as soon as there's wood to start a fire. You needn't cut much; just enough for supper and breakfast—maybe we can corral those darned kids by that time and get them to work. And you needn't bother about the garden, Lynn. If the boys are too lazy to pump, let the flowers die. You have enough on your shoulders without breaking your back over that pump."

Lynn stooped and picked up a dead twig from the cottonwood near by.

"Get into the house!" he ordered sternly. "You've done your Delilah—now git!"

But before she went the girl flung her arms around his neck and gave him a shy sisterly kiss on one tanned cheek. Then without a word she fled up the path, leaving Lynn to make his way to the shiftlessly bare woodpile where a jag of dead cottonwood limbs and a crooked, knotty log lay scattered beside the sawbuck. Uncomfortably the thought smote him that it didn't take money to haul in decent wood from the hills and keep a pile cut for the women so they would not be put to the sorry shift of counting sticks before they started to cook a meal. A little time, a little effort—but what was the use? All they could do was live from hand to mouth anyway, and the woodpile but matched the rest of the ranch. It was all hay-wire, the best you could say of it.

That thought extended to the primitive method of watering Rose's flower garden and the few vegetables that had been planted convenient to the house. To bring water down from the spring would take more pipe than lay loose around the place, and there was no money to buy new. More than that, it would take several days of hard digging, and no one took kindly to labor; not even Lynn, who was rider to the bone and felt lost and unhappy if he must get down on his own feet and do hard work. The two boys, Sid and Joe—but you know how much of pick and shovel work could be had from these two.

So the old well out beyond the corner of the house had to serve. The pump was an ancient wooden one with the green paint long weathered away, scale by scale. It gasped and sighed over the task of lifting water up from its cold mossy depths, but the stream came gushing spout full and crystal clear. It came spout full when a husky pair of shoulders bent over the handle; the women were content with a trickle into the bucket.

Lynn had dug ditches down the rows of the garden and had made a long slim trough that could be shifted from ditch to ditch, and the rest depended upon a strong back and a willing mind. The two leggy, irresponsible boys were sometimes caught napping and made to stand reluctant shifts at the pump, but they were growing wary of the house now that the hot drying winds had come and the ground drank thirstily the water they sent trickling along the ditches. Rose had told the plain truth, the garden really was suffering, and Lynn could not dismiss its need with a shrug, knowing Rose had resorted to it as a subterfuge for keeping him at work until his anger cooled. Instead of that, he pumped and irrigated the whole patch, and sat down at last to supper conscious only of stiff shoulders and a prodigious appetite.

Within the house the storm had blown over, as such storms always had. Mrs. Hayward ate as usual in a momentary expectation of a call from old Joel, who could bellow "Hat!" in a tone to make the whole family jump. Lynn and Rose ate in almost complete silence, chiefly because sharp ears in the living room could catch stray phrases and a sharp tongue twist the meaning with a venom scarcely to be borne. One kept one's thoughts hidden from old Joel's malicious prying mind. The boys, withstanding a terrible though imaginary siege from Indians at their cave, had not come home and probably would not until their horses had to be fed. And in his heart Lynn could not blame them much.

It was nearing dusk when Lynn rode off on Blackie, the two loaves of bread and a dozen cookies carefully wrapped in a clean flour sack and tied to the horn of the saddle. Six miles up the creek old Heinie had staked out a placer claim and built a rock cabin, when Lynn was still wearing pink dresses. Lynn could no more recall his first acquaintance with old Heinie than he could remember when he first became aware that the huge, dark, swearing man with the loud voice was his father.

Riding up to Heinie's with bread and cakes and mended clothes was the first errand he had ever been sent upon on a horse all by himself. His toes could not reach the stirrups then, and he had to be boosted to the saddle by his mother, and was warned of this and of that venturesome thing that he must not do. High adventure had lain along the trail in those days, and to be caught out after dark set him to gazing often over his shoulder in fearful expectation of bears and Indians—and as a matter of fact, the Indians *were* something of a risk, and Lynn was used to seeing the look of relief in his mother's face when he rode back into the yard.

But there was no thrill in making the ride to-night. Instead of Indians and bears that might be just behind him, lurking among the rocks and trees, black gloom rode with him; and a blacker future stretched before him in the dusky bends of the trail. He knew he must stay—he had known it all along—and watch the old ranch sink deeper and deeper into ruin. He had no hope that the two boys would ever lend a hand, or that the three of them working day and night could accomplish anything save a makeshift existence, where should have been a stabilized prosperity steadily growing toward

wealth. With his father's warped mentality that would not consent to anything that even hinted at a business venture, what could he look forward to but the irksome futility of choring around among those empty buildings and corrals, or harvesting tiny crops of hay and grain? His father would not even let the hay be cut on shares by the neighbors. He would not tolerate the presence of any stranger on the ranch, now that he was chained to the house by his paralysis and could not watch what went on. If a neighbor rode up to make a call, Joel said he came to see how soon the old man might be expected to die and get out of the way. If strangers came, they were thieves and cut-throats who would steal everything they could carry off. The grazing land he would rent, and it was the money from this that fed his family and clothed them after a fashion—after the taxes had taken their lion's share. But no man nor woman might come to the house; Joel would order them off with curses ringing in their ears.

These things rode with Lynn, and the bitter acknowledgment that his brief revolt had been only a gesture, and that his sullen acceptance of conditions must continue so long as his father lived. Even the wind that had risen with the setting of the sun seemed to know his mood and to tune its souging through the treetops to a dismal refrain for his gloomy thoughts. "No hope for Lynn," it seemed to sigh. All that land, all those buildings, all those horses—and yet no hope from a starvation poverty. Always the noxious atmosphere of bickerings, complainings, nagging in the house, always the desolation without its walls. So long as old Joel was alive there—

Lynn caught himself up sharply, afraid the thought would beget an ugly wish that his father might die. It had been growing, edging closer and closer to his foreconsciousness. He pulled himself away from the subject and turned his thoughts to old Heinie, who had just spent every dollar he owned and yet was proud and happy over his capacity for enjoyment. Heinie wouldn't whine and grumble and make every one miserable, if he were crippled and helpless; Heinie would have a joke for every ache and pain. Heinie was one of the world's rare optimists, with his lean little gold diggings and his lean little pension and his bare little cabin under the cliff. Lynn's mouth relaxed so that he was smiling to himself when he tied Blackie to a swaying sapling up on the bank and went down the steep trail to the cabin.

The old man was sitting beside the table under the window. Lynn could see the bald spot on his head glistening in the lamplight as it oscillated up and down with Heinie's chuckling laugh. Something tickled the old man hugely to-night; thoughts of his peanut-and-lemonade spree in Cheyenne, perhaps. He had not heard Lynn coming—the wind would account for that, of course. Lynn drew closer to the window. He would see what Heinie was up to, and then he would holler at him and give him a scare—the old coot, laughing at nothing!

Lynn looked in—his eyes focused upon the table in an incredulous stare.

Heinie's spread arms inclosed, almost with an embracing closeness, a neat square of small packages that held Lynn's breath sucked into his lungs while he gazed. Rubber-banded packages of bank notes—a stack of them as large almost as the old man could encircle! Heinie was chuckling over them, gloating over them with shining slits of eyes, nodding his bald head and laughing as a mother laughs and looks upon her baby in its bath.



CHAPTER FOUR

LYNN LOOKS UPON WEALTH

Heinie reached out with the leisurely, silky-steel motion of a cat reaching to stir up a half-dead mouse, and picked up one of the packages; licked his thumb and riffled the ends of the bill, counting just above a whisper.

"One thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand—ten thousand dollars in *you*. I golly, you shore's good fer sore eyes!" He lifted other packages and set them beside the first, his fingers lingering over the feel of the money. "Eight bundles—'s eighty thousand dollars. I golly, that'd buy a carload of peanuts, I betcha! *He-he-he*—peanuts b' the carload if I wanted 'em. But I don't want 'em. Buy me a place in the old country some day, you will. Soon as I get a hundred thousand, poor ole Heinie'll go back to the old country and buy himself a home. Here's some more to go with yuh—kinda keep yuh from gittin' lonesome!"

While Lynn watched unbelievably, the old man opened his coat, reached into and through the bottom of a pocket, squirmed and contorted his features for a minute and drew out four other bank notes of the same thousand-dollar denomination. Lynn had never in his life seen such a display. He had not known there were such things as thousand-dollar bills. Pulling the safety pin out of them Heinie held it between his white-bearded lips while he straightened the bank notes, placed the rubber band to his liking and laid them gently down upon the pile.

"Purty good clean-up—but I'll have to hunt me another town next time. Lar'mee, mebbby—only that's a damn' nosey burg too. Ask any of them banks in there for thousand-dollar bills and the hull town 'd know it. Have t' make it Denver. Yep—buy m' peanuts in Denver next time. Cheyenne's gittin' too damn' nosey last time 'er two. Got t' cut it out.

"Now, you go t' bed. *He-he-he!* Pore ole Heinie, scratchin' around to make a livin'—" His speech trailed off into a meaningless muttering as he rolled the packs into a flour sack, made that into a compact bundle and went to his bunk. Leaning across it he laid the bundle on the bed, took a certain rock in the wall between his two hands and gave it a sharp twist to the left and pulled it out. A sizable hole, seemingly lined with tin, was revealed and into this Heinie crowded the bundle and replaced the rock at a certain angle, giving it another sharp twist, this time to the right.

Lynn's underlip came sharply between his teeth as he turned away and went blindly back up the steep bank to his horse, mounted and rode off up the creek through a thicket of willows that whipped his shoulders unheeded as he passed.

Eighty-four thousand dollars back there in old Heinie's cabin? Lynn could not seem to grasp the stupendous fact even yet. He would have been very much astonished to discover that Heinie had eighty-four dollars in his possession. He would have felt slightly resentful, because Heinie was always making it plain that he was broke most of the time; that he spent his pension and his quarterly clean-up of a little gold dust when he went in to Cheyenne to see the sights, and that, knowing he would come home without a dime in his pocket, he always bought his three months' supply of food before he bought his ticket, and he was wise enough to buy a round-trip ticket to insure his getting home. This was Heinie's stock joke which he would tell over and over with much chuckling and wagging of his bald head. Always broke between trips—but always happy as a king. That was Heinie, and he was proud of it.

In all his life Lynn had never once doubted the truth of anything Heinie told him. Good old fellow—give you the shirt off his back if he thought you needed it; always ready to cheer you up, always saying money isn't everything. Preaching the gospel of cheerfulness in the face of his poverty.

Lynn drew his fingers across his eyes, half tempted to believe he had been imagining things. Old Heinie with eighty-four thousand dollars, all in one-thousand-dollar bills! All wrapped up in a flour sack and stuffed into a hole in the wall over his bunk! Four thousand dollars he had had pinned in his coat with a safety pin, when he stopped at the house and hinted, maybe, for a loaf of bread! Lynn's fist came down on the horn of his saddle so suddenly that Blackie jumped.

"The damned old miser!" he grunted disgustedly, as the full import of the amazing discovery thrust home at last. "Putting up a poor mouth all these years, and him rolling in money! Let Rose and Mom drop everything to mend up his rags for him—let me pack stuff up for him to eat—oh, hell!"

"Awful sorry we're playing such hard luck—to hear him tell it! Telling Dad, every time he sees him, what a darn shame it is he can't go East to some hospital where they can cure him! The dirty, lyin' hypocrite! He could of sent Dad—lent

him the money to go when Dad was first taken down! He could stake me to a bunch of cattle on shares, and make more money for himself while he was helping me get a start. With eighty-four thousand dollars he could—why, hell! If I had that much money to work with I'd be a millionaire in ten years—yes, in five!"

The mystery of the money began to nibble at his attention. How had he got it? Found some rich pay dirt, of course; and yet that was as surprising as the money itself. Snow Creek had never shown gold in any quantity; a lean placer was all any one would expect to find along its bed. Heinie must have fooled them there. They had taken it for granted he could not wash out decent wages, and he had encouraged the idea. A dollar a day when he worked—that was what he averaged, according to his talk and the appearance of the claim. And yet, all these years he must have been taking out quantities of gold. His quarterly pension check had given him the excuse for going to town often enough to cash in his gold. Simple—so simple that no one would ever suspect the truth.

"I suppose that's the first time the old skunk ever forgot to hang a dish towel or something over the window while he goggled over that money," Lynn mused exasperatedly as he rode. "Damned lucky thing for him it wasn't some others I could name, that happened along just then. A thousand dollars in one bill, and a stack of 'em higher than that bald-headed old pelican could see over! My God, I didn't suppose there was that much money in the whole State of Wyoming!"

Memory of how the money had looked, all neatly stacked on the table, returned to thrill his imagination. The things a man could do with that much money! If it belonged to him, just for instance ...

Lynn began to dream a bit. He'd buy a nice little bunch of good-grade heifers and a couple of pure-bred Hereford bulls, to begin with. Not too many, because Dad would have to go East, and that cost like the devil; and he'd send Rose to college, and put Sid and Joe into some good military school where they'd have to buckle down and study or get the stuffin' lammed out of them. And he'd buy Mom a silk dress and a sealskin coat and let her go back to Indiana and see her folks, and hire a good cook—Chinks are all right, some of them—but maybe some broken-down old round-up cook that would be glad of a steady place. If he could get hold of old Tanglefoot, he'd be a dandy. And for himself—

"Betcha that little schoolma'am wouldn't look at me with that can't-see-yuh expression," he speculated further, and curled his lip in wistful mockery of the thought. "Betcha if I was to drive up to her boarding place some Sunday afternoon with the bay colts hitched to a shiny new top buggy and ask her if she'd like to go riding with me,—I betcha the ice would thaw out of her eyes in about two minutes! I'd take her up along Echo Gorge and show her the view from the cliff, and we'd walk over to Lover's Leap and I'd tell her about the Indian girl that jumped off there. Then I'd take her up the trail through those big trees, and we could eat our lunch up on Lookout while we waited for the moon to come up over the peaks—"

Lynn forgot old Heinie, forgot the money, even, while he dreamed of what he would say to the little schoolma'am on that Sunday afternoon, and what the little schoolma'am would say to him. If she liked to ride horseback he'd break that little gelding and give that to her, maybe, and they could take long rides every Sunday—

Blackie heard a rustling in the bushes and jumped sidewise, slamming Lynn's right stirrup against a rock. The jolt brought Lynn back with a jar to reality. He was not riding the sunlit high slopes with the little schoolma'am, whose name he did not know; he was jogging along up the creek, headed for no place in particular. It was dark down here among the rocks and willows, but overhead were the clear stars, and the tilt of the Big Dipper told him that the evening was edging into night that would slide over the hill to midnight before so very long. He must have killed a lot of time watching old Heinie—

The lying old whelp, no wonder he could make a joke of his pretended poverty! No wonder he laughed when he showed the holes in his coat and said he guessed he'd have to cut armholes in a gunny sack pretty soon and wear that. With a fortune cached away in the wall of his cabin, he could afford to laugh. Who couldn't? Instead of laughing because he was game over his loneliness and his hard lot in life, he had been laughing all these years at the joke he was playing on the Haywards and the rest of the world.

Lynn thought of the many, many times when Mom had told Heinie to take off his coat and she would sew up the rip in his sleeve. Heinie always laughed and pulled off the torn garment and went in to sit in his shirt sleeves and play cribbage with old Joel, while Mom strained her eyes by the window of the kitchen, threading her needle and sewing by the fading light. Heinie always came late in the day, Lynn now remembered; perhaps he chose late afternoon and wore his raggedest coat with deliberate cunning, because Mom usually had a little time to herself then and would offer to mend for

him and would ask him to stay for supper.

Lynn's teeth came together with a click. Mom never would sew another patch on that stingy, lying old devil's clothes if he could help it. Nor would Heinie have the laugh on Lynn for carrying good bread and cookies up to his place. He could buy his own cookies, damn his stingy hide!

Right there Lynn stopped and untied the flour sack, set it open-mouthed in the saddle in front of him and ate cookies as he rode. Not that he was hungry; he was getting even with that bald-headed old reprobate down the creek. With a spiteful gusto he forced down the last crumb and tied the sack, regretting that he could not swallow the two loaves of bread as well.

"Sponged off us ever since I can remember," he harked back to the great imposition. "And he knows damn' well we can't feed ourselves, hardly, since Dad's crippled and half crazy. He knows we haven't got eighty-four dollars, even—let alone thousands. No, nor eight dollars and forty cents! Not unless Dad's a lying old miser too, and has got a bunch of money hid out on us." For another half mile that possibility was considered with gloomy suspicion and finally discarded. Dad might be capable of such perfidy, but Mom would know of anything like that. Mom was the kind of woman who always did know where every cent came from and where it went, just as she always managed to know everything else that concerned the family in any way. No, Lynn was absolutely certain that the Hayward family was just as hard up as they seemed to be. The thought carried a certain oblique sense of pride; at least, they weren't hypocrites. They might be dirt poor, but they didn't lie and they didn't whine for favors.

"The way he's let us fetch and carry for him,—why, his darn placer claim is on our land, by rights! And he's riding a horse we gave him, when he knows we're just about on the rocks! And him with money enough to buy every hoof we own, and the land thrown in!" Lynn drew a deep breath and let it out in a snort of contempt. "He's worse than those Jew pawnbrokers Mom reads about in the Bible. Jesus Christ took after them with a quirt and hazed them outa the church—I wonder what He'd do to a man that's been double-crossing his best friends all these years?"

CHAPTER FIVE

"HEINIE'S DEAD!"

"You must have stayed up pretty late with Heinie," Mom broke the moody silence of breakfast time. "How'd he like the cookies? I tried out a new recipe—did he say anything about them, Lynn?"

"No," said Lynn shortly, "he didn't."

"Didn't he eat any? Heinie's the greatest hand for fresh cookies I ever saw in my life. Didn't he so much as taste 'em?"

"No, he didn't." Lynn reached with his fork for another hot cake.

"Well, my land! He must be sick or something, then. Wasn't he feeling well, Lynn? I thought he looked kinda petered out when he was by here. How'd he look, Lynn? Was he complaining any?"

"No," said Lynn, giving her a strange look from under his straight dark brows, "he wasn't complaining, so far as I heard."

"Lynn Hayward," his mother said sharply, pausing with the pancake turner thrust aslant from the hand on her hip, "you didn't go and make Heinie mad, did you? He'll stand joshing, but if he thinks you don't believe him, it hurts his feelings. Poor old fellow, he's got a hard enough row to hoe—you didn't say anything mean, just because you rode off mad, did you, Lynn?"

"Poor old fellow, like hell!"

"What's got into you, Lynn? You surely didn't go and pick a fight with old Heinie?"

Lynn's lips pressed together in the stubborn line his mother used to kiss away when he was a baby. But immediately he pulled them apart and laughed up at her, though a cloud still shadowed his eyes.

"No. I didn't take the stuff to him at all. I went on to the Upper Ranch and stayed there all night, and rode home at daylight to do the milking and feed the horses. So—I ate the cookies myself. They—you sure are an artist when it comes to cooking, Mom."

Rose looked up from her breakfast, her eyes keenly studying Lynn's face. But she didn't say anything. Her mother was speaking, querulously upbraiding Lynn for not doing as he was told.

"And what did you do with them two loaves of bread, for conscience' sake? You didn't eat 'em both during the night, I hope?"

"They're at the Upper Ranch, in the bread box. I'll go get them if you want them so bad."

"You could take them to Heinie, I should think. I don't see what's got into you lately. If it isn't one thing, it's another—"

"Needs his back warmed with a quirt, that's what!" shouted old Joel from the next room. "Gittin' too damn' smart, that's what! You let that lazy hound run over you roughshod. If I could git around I'd mighty quick take the kinks out of him! He wouldn't talk back to *me*, the way you let him. I'd take the hide off'm with a blacksnake whip—"

The scrape of Lynn's chair as he pushed back from the table halted the senseless tirade while old Joel listened for the step that would tell him what was taking place in the kitchen.

"If you want to feed Heinie, one of the boys can pack stuff to him, Mom," Lynn said as quietly as he could, while a futile rage against his father surged within him. "I've got other things to do. Anyway, I shouldn't think it would hurt him to come after what he wants. He's got a horse, and he isn't—" He was going to say paralyzed, but the thought of that inert figure in the next room checked the word.

"*Hat!* You goin' to let that worthless whelp give you lip like that?"

"Ah, give us a rest!" Lynn muttered under his breath as he walked out. On her toes and with a warning shake of the head toward her mother, Rose got up silently and followed him, while Mrs. Hayward clattered the stove lids to cover the

sound of her going.

"Sid and Joe, you go saddle your horses and take some bread up to Heinie like I promised," their mother directed, when Joel's anathema against Lynn had somewhat subsided and she had carried him his third cup of strong black coffee, well sweetened and scalding hot. "Then you ride on to the Upper Ranch and get that bread and bring it home. It'll mold, and there ain't any sense in wasting good bread."

"Can't we have it for our camp, Maw?" Sid teased. "It's all the same, ain't it, whether we eat it all cut up on the table, or whether we gnaw it up there and pretend it's pemmican. Come on, Maw—let us have it to camp out with! Gee, we can have a reg'lar ole Injun battle if we don't have to come home to get something to eat!"

"Just save washin' dishes for us," little Joe argued with a whimsical grin.

"Well-l, you boys chop some wood before you go, and I don't know but what you can have it," she yielded. "Only, I want you to promise you'll go right straight up to Heinie's first, and take him the stuff I promised he should have. Do you think you can do that, for once in your lives, and not go larruping off after a coyote or whatever comes along?"

"Sure! You bet, Maw. Gee, two loaves of bread! Can we have butter too, Mom? Gee, We'll give them Injuns fits!"

"You git out there at that woodpile!" came the offstage growl that ran like a discordant undercurrent through every bit of dialogue that took place in the house. "Your mother'll give *you* fits if you don't do as you're told!"

"Can we, Maw?"

"I'll see how much wood you chop before you go."

With that half promise to add a little zest to the task, the boys went off to make a showing at the woodpile. Experience had made them cunning in the art of piling a half dozen sticks so that they would look like twice as many, and so escape with as little time wasted on work as was possible. They set off in a high lope and higher spirits, having wheedled their mother into adding a jar of currant jam to the butter she indulgently wrapped in a wet cloth for them. Heinie's bundle flopped behind Sid's saddle and a banner of dust settled over the garden as they passed by the fence.

But in an amazingly short time they came tearing back down the trail, their faces pasty white and their mouths loose-lipped and trembling. They stopped with a jerk of their bodies as the horses slid stiffened forefeet in the dust before the kitchen step and they almost fell off their mounts in their hurry to get inside.

"For the land's sake!" cried Rose, wiping dishes at the sink. "Those imaginary Indians go on the warpath for sure?"

"Heinie's dead!" blurted Sid, who always took the lead by virtue of his two extra years.

"His head's all mashed in the back of it!" stuttered little Joe, big-eyed with horror.

"And—and everything's all upset and throwed around every which way!"

"You boys behave yourselves!" Rose admonished them frowningly. "Don't bring your blood-and-thunder stuff in here—shame on you!"

"What's that about Heinie!" Mrs. Hayward came hurrying from Joel's room, a pillow in one hand, its slip in the other.

"He's dead! He is too, Rose! You shut up. If you don't believe it you can go and see. Somebody killed him, Mom. They had a fight, I guess. The table's upset and everything."

Mrs. Hayward sat down on the nearest chair, looking white. She stared vaguely around the room as the pillow slid to the floor beside her.

"Why, I—I don't see—are you sure?"

"Course I'm sure!" Sid's wits and his courage took heart from the familiar surroundings. He could add gruesome details. He could even feel a pleasurable glow of importance in his knowledge of the tragedy. He was made to go in and repeat the story to old Joel, who listened with the king of diamonds in his fingers, just as he had suspended his fifth spread of solitarie that morning.

"Looks like robbery," he said grimly. "Where's Lynn?"

"He—he just started for town after another bottle of your blood purifier, Dad," Rose told him hesitantly. "I had a dollar and I gave it to him to buy—"

"Nobody but a damn' fool would give a plugged nickel to that pinhead. Never here when he's wanted—"

"Sid, you ride just as fast as you can go and see if you can't catch him," Mrs. Hayward cut in breathlessly. "Tell him what's happened. Tell him he must get the sheriff—some one must telegraph to Lander. Lynn will know what to do, soon as you tell him what happened."

"Just's if he didn't know!" sneered old Joel. "He was up there las' night, wasn't he? Looks mighty damn' funny to me—"

His wife whirled on him in one of her rare furies.

"Joel Hayward, you let me hear another whisper like that and you can starve and rot before I'll ever do a hand's turn for you again! For shame on you! Your own flesh and blood!"

"I never said anything," Joel mumbled in an abashed tone. "I only said—"

"Never mind what you said. You shut your mouth and keep it shut. Sidney, you go overtake Lynn—"

"He can't, Mom. Lynn rode Loney and he was going to hurry back and hoe potatoes." Rose stood with her back to the wall, looking from one to the other. "Let me go, Mommie. This is nothing for a kid to handle."

A long look passed between the two. Mrs. Hayward's eyes wavered to the window. Little Joe was crying with a snuffling whimper. Sid looked plain scared. Old Joel laid down the king of diamonds on the ace, and licked his thumb absent-mindedly, one eyebrow canted upward as he stole a glance at his wife.

"Yes, go! And hurry, Rose. Be careful, won't you? Poor Heinie! Whoever in the world would want to do a thing like that! A poor man like him—it couldn't have been robbery. Heinie didn't have anything." She stopped with a gasp of suspicion, Joel's words recalled like a blow in the face. Lynn's unaccountable attitude that morning toward Heinie—oh, no, it was unthinkable! With a muttered sentence about Rose, and something she must tell her, Mrs. Hayward left the room, the two boys clattering at her heels. No one ever remained in Joel's room by choice; the boys least of all.

"You boys go to work at that woodpile!" Their mother commanded them sharply. "And you cord the wood too, so I can see just how much you've done. Don't you let me catch you loafing—Lynn will have enough on his hands without getting in and doing your chores for you."

"Oh, Maw-w!" whined little Joe. "Can't we go and see the sheriff when he comes? We're the ones that found—"

His mother gave him a distracted slap and a push toward the woodpile, and there was that in her face which stifled Joe's perfunctory howl and sent the two boys to do her bidding.

Rose had already saddled her own little gray horse with the strain of Arabian that gave wings to his feet and an almost human intelligence to his equine brain. Mercury, she had named him in a spasm of romantic fervor, when Lynn first led him to the door on her twentieth birthday not so long ago. But that mood had passed as such moods do, so now the horse was plain Merk and a devil slept under his sleek hide. But he was keen and sure footed with a gait like velvet, and even his devilment was a joy to Rose.

She looked up now when Merk's eloquent ears told her some one was coming, and led the horse out of the corral and up the path to meet her mother.

"You *will* be careful, Rose! You know what your father said—what he thinks—and the way the boy acted this morning, I don't know—Lynn's got an awful temper when he's roused, and he was all wrought up over that Hay-wire slur. If Heinie heard it in town and started to josh him about it, I don't know—I'm 'most afraid to think!"

"I wouldn't think, if I were you, Mommie. I'll get hold of Lynn and tell him first—don't you worry, Mom. Lynn's got a lot to him besides his temper. He—he *couldn't* do a thing like that. Or even if he had, don't you suppose he's got brains enough not to say what he did at breakfast? Anyway, I'll find out the truth, and—and Mommie, no matter what comes up,

we stand pat for Lynn!" She gathered the reins up short, spoke admonishingly to the tensed and waiting Mercury, and swung to the saddle as easily as Lynn would have done.

"Keep everybody away from Dad," she leaned to warn her mother fiercely. "Don't let any one in the house if you can help it—or if you must, keep him quiet if you have to gag him!" Something of Lynn's dumb rage gleamed in her eyes that were usually so clear and so softly whimsical. "He hates Lynn, Mother. I honestly believe he's insane on the subject. He'd accuse him to any one he dared say it to. He looks at Lynn sometimes as if he'd like to kill him, and would if he could get his hands on him. I never said it before. But after this—we can't let Dad see *anybody*. Thank God," she added under her breath, "he can't walk!"

"Rose! That's a terrible thing to say!"

"It's a terrible thing to have to *think* of one's own father—but he's made us all think it more or less. You too. That room reeks of venom, and it's mostly for Lynn. Thank God we can protect Lynn now. Keep your word, Mom. If he so much as yelps, shut down on the grub. He just sits there and stuffs himself, anyway. It'd do him good to skip a meal or two".

"You and Lynn—you're so hard, sometimes!"

"Lynn and I need to be. Keep the boys away from there, too. Let them camp out if they want to, when this excitement is over, so they won't be scared. And watch Dad. It isn't Heinie we have to think of now, Mom; it's Lynn."

"Oh, my God! To think that my boy—"

"Cut that right out, Mom! Even your thoughts. Lynn didn't. I know he didn't. Good-by, Mommie dear. Don't you worry a minute."

She faced forward, leaned a little and slackened the reins a fraction of an inch. Mercury leaped like a panther and was off down the trail at a run. Rose's mother watched the gray pony whip around the bends in the creek bottom and go streaking up the hill beyond. Most horses would have slowed to a walk on that steep climb, but Mercury had the lungs of a mountain goat.

"My, how that girl does ride!" Mrs. Hayward heaved a deep sigh as she turned back to the house. "She and Lynn are no more like the rest of us than light is like night. I wonder if Lynn meant to come back? Rose seemed to think—"

It was an ugly thought to plague that harassed woman, and it was not made easier to bear because she must hide it deep within her soul and give no sign.

CHAPTER SIX

"DO YOU THINK I KILLED HIM?"

Men called it twelve miles from the Hayward ranch to Elk Basin; twelve miles, that is, if you rode a fast horse and the weather was good, but fifteen in bad weather. Which goes to show that range folk treat their miles lightly and are not too exact in the measuring. The Hayward holdings stretched far into the valley; but still, after the last gate had been closed across the trail there were yet eight long and somewhat hilly miles to cover (though the valley looked flat from a distance) before the little town came in sight, squatting down beside the Big Sandy, with Green River and the railroad lying more miles to the south, the stage road stretching between like a loosely flung rope snaking through the yellowed grassland.

Mercury was sweating to his ears when Rose finally pulled him to a walk where the road wound through a wooded hollow, shade being too precious a thing to waste even when one was in a great hurry. Her first strained eagerness to see Lynn at once and tell him what the boys had discovered and protect him somehow from the thing she vaguely feared, even while she denied the implication fiercely to herself, had abated now, after the headlong rush of the first few miles. Common sense bade her take her time and look at the matter from all sides, since it was plain she could not overtake Lynn before he reached town. If she took her time now, she might meet him coming back, and that would be better than having to blurt out the horrible story in town where every one would be asking questions at once and making their own guesses at the murderer. Of course it wasn't Lynn. That was absolutely impossible, for various reasons. But if it were known that Lynn had that morning spoken the first disparaging words he had ever in all his life uttered against Heinie, there were some who might put a wrong construction on his changed attitude. As old Joel had, for instance.

Certainly it was better to hold back a little and meet Lynn outside of town. If he had quarreled with Heinie last night he would tell her, she knew. There had been something. She had seen that much in his face at the breakfast table. He had not been telling the truth when he said he didn't go to Heinie's. Lynn was the dearest and most important factor in Rose's life, after her mother; closer to her heart than her mother, even, because of the bond of youth and mutual sympathy and understanding. So Lynn couldn't lie to her with any convincingness. She'd get the truth from him; his face would reveal it if his lips were stubborn.

Beyond the hollow, after one climbed the gentle slope to open prairie, the road stretched level as a floor for a mile or two of grassy expanse before it dipped into another depression. It was midway along this level stretch that Rose saw Lynn, as she believed at first. At any rate a horseman, walking and leading the horse toward town. That, in the range country, would mean an accident of some kind, and Rose sent Mercury forward at a run. If it were Lynn, he was hurt too badly to mount and ride. Lynn never walked when there was a horse within reach.

But it wasn't Lynn; it was the new school-teacher walking and leading a tall, bony sorrel with a Roman nose and rolling eyes that showed a margin of muddy white when he glanced around. Rose's relief merged into puzzlement as she rode up and slowed when the sorrel shied and reared back on the bridle reins.

"Oh, are you in trouble?" she asked, not in the least knowing who the girl was.

"I don't think so. This horse jumped sidewise so suddenly he threw me, and now I can't get on. He refuses to stand while I mount."

"Why, the old reprobate! But that's what you can expect from a horse with a face like his. Shall I hold him while you mount?"

"If you would, please!" The new school-teacher smiled, saw in Rose's face a startling resemblance to another face she had seen, and stopped as if puzzled. "I'm sure I ought to know you," she added uncertainly. "Your face is perfectly familiar to me, but—"

"I'm Rose Hayward. I'm sure we haven't met before, because I'd remember you. I don't meet people often—strangers, I mean. Perhaps it's my brother Lynn you're thinking of. Every one says we look alike."

From the sudden flare of red in her cheeks the new school-teacher must have remembered, but she only said it didn't matter in the least and it was probably some one she had known in Denver. She added that her name was Janet MacIvor

and she was boarding with Mrs. Ben Moore and teaching the Elk Basin school.

"I'm just learning to ride," she confessed, with a funny little twist of the lips which betrayed a sense of humor so fine she could laugh at herself as easily as at another. "I rented this horse at the livery stable, and they said he was gentle as a kitten. I didn't remember at the time that kittens have a habit of bounding into the air at every little thing. He has even tried to chase his tail," she added soberly. "When I was trying to get on he began it, and he kept it up until I started to walk back. I think I am getting a dislike of these kittenish traits in horses."

In spite of her trouble Rose laughed at that as she dismounted and approached the kittenish one. At first she had thought it would be a trifling assistance she could render; a simple act of holding the sorrel by the head while Miss MacIvor mounted. But complications arose. The sorrel had a mean habit of circling away from his intended rider. Rose could have mounted him easily enough, but Janet MacIvor was too slow and too timid. Three or four attempts proved to Rose that the horse was spoiled and that the girl would tire herself out to no purpose.

"I'll tell you what," she said finally, impatience to be on her way growing within her. "I'll let you ride my horse. He's trained. Wait till I anchor this animal and I'll show you." And she proceeded to tie the sorrel's reins around a forefoot. "All he can do now is throw himself and break his neck, and it will be small loss to any one if I'm any judge."

But the sorrel knew better than fight that form of restraint and began grazing philosophically beside the road. Rose went to where Mercury stood pawing restively with his reins dropped to the ground.

"Prepare to step on," she called briskly to the school-teacher. "Apologize, Mercury—you know you always have plenty on your conscience!"

Mercury thereupon knelt with a dainty pride in his humility which seemed to make a joke of it all, and Miss MacIvor rather nervously mounted. Rose handed her the reins with some misgivings—for Mercury was full of tricks when the notion seized him.

"You'll have to keep a fairly tight rein on him, Miss MacIvor, or he'll run away. But if he should, all you need do is keep your nerve and stay with him until he settles down. He isn't a bit mean; just full of the devil, is all."

"You—you're sure he isn't kittenish?" The school-teacher looked rather scared, in spite of Rose's hand on the bridle.

"Not like this old pelter they wished off on to you," said Rose. "Hold him in, now, till I'm on."

She had untied the sorrel and gathered up the reins, reaching for the stirrup to thrust in her toe, when she heard a frightened squeal and a quick drumming of hoofs. And as she turned her head to look, the wall-eyed sorrel gave an unexpected lunge, broke loose her hold and went tearing down the road after the fleeing Mercury, leaving Rose to stare after the two in utter helplessness and dismay. No use running to overtake them; so long as he thought he was being chased, Mercury would run and glory in prolonging the race by every wile he knew, and there was no hope of the sorrel catching up with him.

"Well," she said with a desperate kind of calm, as she trudged down the road after the dust cloud that marked their passing, "if that schoolma'am can ride a rocking chair without falling off, she ought to be able to stick till Merk gets enough of it. I do wish Lynn would come!"

Though she did not know it, Lynn was coming down the road a mile farther along where it dipped into a hollow. As he rode over the brow of the hill and began the descent, riding at an easy lope, he saw a strange young woman racing toward him on Rose's horse and his heart came into his mouth in one great surge of fear. But when he saw the strange sorrel with an empty saddle galloping with high-flung knees some little distance behind the gray, even his first fear that something had happened to Rose was swallowed in complete mystification. Strange women did not ride Hayward horses; and it wasn't Rose—there was no mistaking her easy carriage in the saddle, whereas this woman rode (as he would put it) like a sack of meal. The strange horse he could not account for at all. It all looked rather impossible and nightmarish to him.

He raked Loney with the spurs and went hurtling down upon them just as Mercury recognized the roan and whipped out of the trail and made off down the gully like a wild horse. The sorrel hesitated, then wheeled and followed the gray. Uncoiling his rope as he rode, Lynn took after them. He did not know what it was all about, but he did know that gully and he knew what Mercury was likely to do when he reached the point, half a mile further down, where the slope of the

gulch bottom dropped down with the abruptness of a rock wall for ten or twelve feet. Mercury would like nothing better than trying his nimble legs on that jump-off, and if he knew anything about riding, that strange girl would fall off and maybe break her neck. Who she was or how she came to be riding Rose's horse Lynn could not even hazard a guess.

As he raced after them, Mercury looked back, saw the circling loop above Lynn's head and wheeled to the left. Lynn made a hasty throw and missed as the horse ducked, the loop striking the new school-teacher on one shoulder with a stinging slap as it slid off. Mercury made three rabbit leaps up the steep side of the gully and was over the top and gone again, back whence he had come, while Lynn was taking in his rope with hasty coils and swearing over the mischance.

But now Loney was on his mettle and went up the bank like a cat, his ears laid flat along his head and his teeth showing as he fought the bit. Too often had he raced around the pasture with Mercury to let him beat him on the open prairie. The girl was a handicap too for the gray, because she did not keep his stride but rode soggily, both hands gripping the saddle horn and all the hairpins lost out of her hair so that it whipped out behind her like a pennant as she went. How long she would stick, Lynn did not know, but if she went she would fall hard and she might not escape the swift heels of the gray.

Mercury struck back into the road for smooth going and raced along it, belly to the ground, Lynn and the roan coming close behind. The tall sorrel had refused to take the steep bank but had turned back toward town, nipping grass along the roadside as stablefed horses love to do, but keeping one eye on the trail behind him, ready for instant flight.

Mercury was having a lovely time when he spied his mistress coming down the road; that spoiled everything, especially when she shouted at him to whoa. He did not want to whoa. He had half a mind to swing wide and go pelting on toward the hills. But while he ran with slackened pace, trying to make up his mind, the rope whirled and settled over his head and it was all over. The mask of docility settled once more upon him and he was Rose's gentle little gray saddle pony with the wings of speed clipped and the devil again sleeping just under his skin.

The new school-teacher did a very feminine thing. She let herself slide to the ground and then toppled over in a faint born of reaction, just when Lynn was busy with the two horses and could not go to her assistance. Rose came panting up to them while he stared in dismay at the crumpled figure, and he turned upon her fiercely for relief.

"What the devil did you let her ride Merk for?" he demanded with brotherly bluntness. "Now look at what you've done!"

"She's only fainted," Rose retorted jerkily, for lack of breath. "Just—scared. She'll come out of it."

"What made you put her on Merk? *She* can't ride." Lynn had dismounted and was standing helplessly, wondering vaguely where was the nearest water, and whether the girl would need it by the time he had ridden three or four miles after it and back again, and how much he could carry that far in his hat.

"Well, she was afoot out here," Rose responded tartly. "What else could I do? She couldn't ride the other horse—"

"That old skate following Merk? If she couldn't ride him, how 'n hell did you expect her to ride this devil?"

"He's supposed to be gentle," Rose pointed out maliciously. "You broke him yourself, remember. She must have leaned forward or something," she added in explanation. "I was going to ride her horse in, but Merk beat it while I was getting on, and that old pelter broke away." Then, as memory of her errand returned with the impact of a blow, she looked at Lynn with trouble in her eyes.

"What is it, Rose? What started you out? Is Dad—"

"No. You might know Dad's all right!" a repressed fierceness in her tone. "But Lynn, the boys found Heinie—"

"Found Heinie?" Lynn's face was blank. "Why, was he lost?"

"Lynn!" Rose's voice broke on the word, but she steadied it and went on. "He was dead. Murdered. They saw where—where his head was battered—and the cabin was all torn up and the table upset—Lynn," she added desperately with a hurried glance at the girl lying on the grass, "you did go there last night! What happened? *Something* did. This morning you were different. You seemed to have a grudge against him. And you told us you hadn't been there—"

"Do you think, for God's sake, that *I* killed him?" Lynn's eyes were terribly sharp as he towered over her.

"No—oh, no! I know you didn't. I—Lynn, it *kills* me to have you look at me like that!" She clung to his arm as he took a

backward step toward his horse as if he meant to ride away. "But Lynn, I've got to know what made you change toward Heinie the way you did. If you saw some one there—or if he was—if he was dead when you got there—Can't you see I've got to know? You did go to Heinie's! What hap—"

"If you must know," Lynn said carefully after a sharp look at the girl's face pillowed on Rose's hat on the grass, "yes, I went there. But I didn't go in. I happened to see Heinie through the window counting a handful of bills. He told you folks he was dead broke and would have to go without sugar, but he had plenty of money—"

"Why—why, how much?" Rose's eyes widened incredulously. "He showed us a nickel and a dime, and he said that was all he had till next pension day. How much was it, Lynn?"

Lynn drew his lip between his teeth and let it go again. Could he—dared he—but no, he couldn't tell even Rose. The sum was so astounding that he scarcely believed it himself, and Rose would think he was crazy or a liar.

"I didn't ask him how much it was," he said drily. "It made me so sore to think how he lied to you folks I got on my horse and rode off. I hate any one as two-faced as that."

"But why didn't you tell us?" Rose's eyes were filling with tears of bewilderment and hurt.

"That would be a nice, sneaking thing to do, wouldn't it! Just because I accidentally saw him with it was no excuse for shooting off my mouth about it. I said I didn't go there. Well, I didn't go in, far as that was concerned, and I didn't leave the bread. Does that satisfy you?" His tone was harsh, accusing her of doubt.

"Yes, Brudder. I guess we'd better not tell any one else you were there, though."

"Hardly!" Lynn smiled bitterly at the thought. "I better fog along and send some one out to Heinie's. But—do you suppose she's hurt? She's a long time—"

"No," said the school-teacher calmly, opening her eyes and looking up at the two. "I merely disliked to interrupt your conversation."

"Oh, you—you listened!" cried Rose, staring at her with shocked eyes.

"Why—yes, I could scarcely avoid listening. Furthermore, when I heard you say some one had been killed I felt that it would be silly to intrude my own affairs and feelings. And I wanted to hear the details before they were garbled by gossip. You shouldn't object to that. You ought to be glad." She turned her eyes upon Lynn as if he were a bad boy who must stay after school. "I should most certainly advise you not to mention to any one else what you have just been telling your sister, and I should advise her to go on in with you and explain how the—the murder was discovered. I dislike tattling, but I feel justified in telling you that I have heard certain remarks made about you that—well, you made an enemy or two yesterday in town. They'd like to get something of this sort against you." She got rather stiffly to her feet, tardily assisted by the two. "Thank you very much for the ride, Miss Hayward," she said, with the whimsical twist of the lips that had attracted Rose to her at first. "Your horse certainly can go! I can't say I admire so much his *coming*. Now you'd better hurry on in and notify the authorities—if there are any in Elk Basin, which I have begun to doubt!"

"But what about you?" Rose glanced perplexedly at Lynn and back to the girl. "Your horse is gone. Probably he's in town by this time."

"I hope so," Miss MacIvor retorted. "I much prefer to walk, thank you."

"But it's miles!"

"I have all day and all night and to-morrow for myself. Mr. Hayward, would you mind calling at the livery stable and saying that I refuse to be held responsible for that horse? He was grossly misrepresented to me and threw me off, and if they lose him it is their own fault."

"They'll send out a horse and buggy," Lynn promised, "and they won't charge you anything for it, either."

"I wonder!" sighed Miss MacIvor with some skepticism. "At any rate, I've had all the riding I want for to-day, I think. You really mustn't wait on my account. I shall not mind the walk."

Lynn looked frowningly toward the distant town, then at Rose.

"I guess we'd better go," he conceded. "It's nearly noon. We can't leave Heinie lying in that cabin all day, and we can't do any good here I guess. These cayuses won't carry double."

"They certainly won't with *me!*" Miss MacIvor attested, reaching with both hands to grope for hairpins in the tangled mop of her hair.

As they galloped off Lynn turned and looked back. The new school-teacher's slim figure stood in clear outline against the far hills, watching them go. She lifted a hand and waved it in undaunted farewell, and Lynn answered with a wave of his hat. Then facing forward, he spurred after the fleeing Mercury and a queer, lonesome ache was in his heart as he rode.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"WHAT'S THIS ABOUT MONEY?"

Eight horsemen riding hard came galloping out of the dust cloud that rolled up the road toward the first foothills of the Wind River Mountains. They swooped down into the hollow where Mercury had dodged back on his trail, the cluppety-clup of their horses' feet drumming the gravelly dry creek bed like a stampeding herd. Not one of the eight saw the new school-teacher sitting in the shade of an overhanging rock but went pounding past unheeding, their high-pitched voices raised in futile conversation. And as they went by one voice was earnestly declaring some profane opinion of "—that damn' Hay-wire outfit—" Just a phrase and no more, but it brought the new school-teacher to her feet, craning to hear the rest. As the little cavalcade swept on up the hill and out of sight, she sat down again looking worried.

The hoofbeats grew fainter and were heard no more, and a meadowlark began to sing as he teetered on a wispy bush too light to bear his plump weight. His brief, sweet ripple of song was scarcely finished when out of the still distance came the swift *clupet-clupet-cluppety-clupet* of other galloping hoofs, and the ninth horseman came riding hard down the slope and into the hollow. The school-teacher sat still as a rabbit under the overhanging rock, but the rider saw her and swung that way. For the ninth horseman was Lynn.

"Rose is coming along behind with a rig," he announced without preface, swinging off his horse and dropping down wearily in the shade beside her. "I've got to go on and overtake the bunch. They started out ahead of me, while I was telling that fellow at the livery stable where he got off at. Your horse made it to town all right."

"Tell me," said the school-teacher, "was there any—anything said or hinted, when you told about—what had happened?"

Lynn frowned and bit his lip, as he always did when troubled.

"Not to amount to anything. Only Hank Miller tried to start something. But he didn't get very far with it. We had a run-in yesterday, and he's still pecky over it. One of the fellows told me on the side that he heard Heinie was some relation to Hank. I never knew that. But it might account for Hank's acting so funny."

"Funny? How do you mean?"

"Oh, excited and wanting to find the guilty party and string him up. That kinda talk."

"Hank is the one you hit with a bottle, isn't he? I saw that. Did he say this old Heinie was any relation to him?"

"No, he didn't." Lynn looked at her curiously. "Say, you're keen as a razor! You'd think a fellow would say something about it, if he just heard a relative was killed, wouldn't you? But old Heinie never mentioned Hank, either. I guess they weren't very friendly—if it's true they're related."

"I heard something about the Hay-wire outfit," said Miss MacIvor, "as they all rode past."

"That," said Lynn biting his lip again, "was us. What did they say?"

"I didn't hear," she told him regretfully. "I wish I had. Just something about that d something Hay-wire outfit. It may have been this same Hank Miller. He was with them, riding on this side in the lead. I can always tell him because he wears those silver dollars on his chaps. What is it you call them?"

"Conchos," said Lynn. "Yes, and if the government ever got wise to that, they'd make him sweat for it too. A fellow told me it's against the law to punch holes in money like that."

"It certainly is against the law of good taste, at least. And that reminds me. Last night I had the toothache and I was up looking for my oil of cloves. It was away late—two o'clock at least; and I saw Hank Miller come into town from out this way. He was walking his horse which struck me as unusual, because you fellows always ride like mad through town."

"You sure?" Lynn gave her a startled, inquiring look.

"About Hank? Yes, very sure. I noticed his chaps with that row of dollar conchos. Of course I couldn't see that they were dollars, but the moon was up and I saw them shine and—well, I'm very sure it was he." She stopped, as if considering

something. "You know how you will watch anything that passes at that time of night; my window looks right out on the street. I even noticed that he'd lost a dollar. There was an empty space where one of them ought to be. That's just to show you that I did notice things."

"That's more than I did," Lynn admitted. "I was talking to him—almost had another scrap with him; and I never could tell you whether his conchos were all on or all off."

"Well, I'll have to be going or I won't be able to overhaul them on the road. I want to be along when they get there—just so I'll know Hank isn't framing something." He looked at her wistfully, with a shyness that brought the color to his face. "If you like to ride, Miss MacIvor, why—we've got more horses on the ranch than we know what to do with. I could bring you in a real gentle one—"

"Oh, thanks. But my enthusiasm for riding is not so keen as it was. I think I shall trust to my feet from now on."

She may not have meant to snub him, but Lynn felt a rebuff in her tone and her manner and rode off with a perfunctory tilt of his big hat for good-by. And this time he refrained from looking back.

But presently he forgot the fancied slight as another matter pressed upon his thoughts. It was the money; the eighty-four thousand dollars which he could not forget. Had the murderer known about it, and was that why he killed Heinie? It must have been so. Some one else must have seen the old man gloating over his fortune; but had he seen Lynn there at the window? If it were Hank Miller (and the school-teacher certainly had hinted that it might have been Hank) then he must have seen the money.

But then Lynn remembered how he had watched Heinie put it away in its hiding-place in the wall. No one else could have seen Heinie put it there, unless he had stood beside Lynn or directly behind him, for Heinie's cabin had only the one window. Lynn shivered a little at the thought of being watched in the dark, but he dismissed the possibility. Blackie would have given some sign if a stranger had been prowling around. You can't fool a horse, he told himself reassuringly.

No, the murderer must have come later, after Lynn had left. Maybe Heinie had taken the money out again before he went to bed. A miser like him might not be satisfied with one handling. He might have wanted to count it again. Or perhaps some one knew that he had it and tried to force Heinie to tell where it was. That was reasonable, if the secret had leaked out. Maybe some one in the bank where he got the bills had told. But banks and the men working there were supposed to keep secrets, and Lynn thought it would be pretty dangerous to talk about Heinie and his thousand-dollar bills. It would expose the old man to the very thing that had happened, and Lynn did not believe any one in a bank would do that. He had a great respect for those institutions, and the men who worked there seemed different from other people somehow; not given to human faults, such as gossiping about their patrons.

Yet the man who killed Heinie must have known about the money. Apparently no one else did, for not a man in Elk Basin had mentioned even a rumor that Heinie was rich. One or two had openly wondered what the object was in killing him—an inoffensive old man who never had a cent.

"Well, they sure won't find out from me," Lynn mentally declared. "I guess there's only two men in the country that know about it, and I'm the other one. Heinie was too foxy to give himself away—except last night when he forgot to hang a blanket over the window; and that musta been what they call fate, I guess."

Then his thoughts swung to his father. Rose had told him what old Joel had said about him, and had warned Lynn to keep his temper and avoid his dad as much as possible, because he might blurt out something again before the kids. They were so scared that morning, she said, that they hadn't seemed to realize what their father was hinting at, but another time his malicious meaning might sink into their minds and take root there; especially if the murderer was not discovered.

Lynn felt that he hated his father for his vile insinuations and his mean prejudices. If his own father could jump at such a conclusion, what could he expect from the rest of the neighborhood if they knew he had started for Heinie's last evening? If his dad could say that now, what would he think if he knew about the money?

"He don't know it, though!" he muttered with a sardonic smile. "That's once when I've got the best of the old man. I'd like to see his eyes pop out of his head if he saw that much money in one pile! I bet he never saw a thousand-dollar bill in his life!" It was a boyish thought but it brought him some satisfaction for the moment and won him away from his first bitter resentment against his father.

The eight riders ahead of him came into view on a ridge half a mile away, and Lynn tucked his secret into the back of his mind where it must remain lest some one glimpse it in his eyes or read it in his voice, and spurred Loney into a faster pace. Hank and his cronies would not welcome him of course, but Lynn did not hesitate on that account. He wanted to be there and see just what they saw in Heinie's cabin. He had to see if a certain rock behind Heinie's bunk was in its place or whether a gaping hole would be revealed there.

Though he had not given much thought to the actual death of the old man, the sight of the twisted, stiffened figure on the floor with the ghastly wound in the bald spot on his head and the rigid fingers clawed out toward a stick of wood they had evidently dropped, was utterly appalling. He forgot for the moment his secret knowledge. He remembered only that Heinie was the friend of his boyhood, who had always been ready to tell him hair-raising Indian tales or the weird stories he knew of haunted mines and lost leads and great deeds of daring upon the plains. Then Heinie's wide-open staring eyes reminded him of something, and without giving a thought to the others, he went down on one knee beside the red pool that had dried around the edges like spilled red paint forgotten where it fell.

"He used to tell me when I was a kid, that if you look into a murdered man's eyes you can see a picture of the one that did it," he said soberly, and turned with a quick movement of his body. "You look, Hank."

"What the hell!" blurted Hank Miller, starting backward with an involuntary motion, as if he were making for the door. "I ain't that damn' supe'stitious!"

"No call to get scared," Lynn said mildly. "There's nothing there, anyway. I guess Heinie was just kidding when he told that."

"You folks was thicker with him than anybody else in the country, Lynn," Jack Peterson who was a deputy sheriff with jurisdiction in and around Elk Basin spoke up. "What all do you know about it?"

"Meaning this?" Lynn stood up with his hat in his hand, indicating the dead man with a slight gesture. "Not a thing. He got home yesterday and stopped at the ranch, same as he always does. He was telling the folks what a time he'd had in Cheyenne—he was there on a trip when he drew his pension—and he said he'd spent all his money. My mother was baking, and she told him she'd send up a loaf or two of bread, so this morning she sent the kids up here with it. That was after I'd started for town, so I didn't know about it till my sister rode in and met me on my way out. We turned around and went back, and I hunted you up and told you." Lynn had related all this before to Peterson, but he did not remind the deputy of that fact.

"You say he come home broke?"

"That's what he told the folks."

"There's been a fight here. You don't know anything about any trouble he had with anyone?"

"Not a thing, Jack. Heinie was always joking and laughing—he was the greatest joshier I ever saw. I've known him all my life, and I never saw him mad. I don't see how he could have any enemies. He never said or did anything to make one." He glanced at Hank Miller. "Why don't you ask Hank about that? I hear they were related somehow."

"And that's a—damn' lie!" cried Hank. "I never knew him at all except to see him around town once in awhile. Whoever says that lies."

"It ain't anything to be ashamed of," Lynn said with a certain diffidence. "Heinie was a fine old man. Everybody liked him." But even as he spoke, he felt a certain revulsion of sentiment against the dead, remembering those long years of hypocrisy and greed. His eyes strayed around the room, flicking the wall over the bunk with a glance he was careful to make as casual as possible. The rock was undisturbed, just as it had looked when Heinie's hands had dropped away from it satisfied last night. Had the killer taken the time to replace the rock? It would seem so.

His eyes went to Hank Miller, traveling up and down the chap leg facing him. Every concho was in its place there—and swiftly the thought came to him that this was the leg the school-teacher must have seen if Hank had ridden in from the west. She must have been mistaken about that missing concho. But to make sure of that he maneuvered so that he could see the other leg. No, there was no missing dollar there, either. The school-teacher didn't know what she was talking about.

"We've got to have an inquest," Jack Peterson announced then. "Lynn, you better ride home and get the kids to come up here and tell their story. And bring a pen and bottle of ink, will you? I brought paper, but I forgot the pen and ink and I don't suppose there's any here. Hank and Lefty, you might be digging the grave while we're waiting; or I guess we can all take a hand, seeing we've got to wait anyhow. Wait, Lynn, till we see about shovels. I suppose the old man must of had some around the place, but we might as well make sure."

"There ought to be a shovel or two at his diggings," Lynn said, as he led the way outside. "I let him have one a couple of weeks ago. But I'll bring up a shovel anyway, if you say so."

"You might ride down to his diggings and see," Peterson suggested. "It ain't far, is it?"

"No, but it's up the creek, not down. And it's a mean trail for a horse." Lynn was preparing to mount, but instead he turned and walked over to the creek that flowed close to a high bank beyond the cabin, and followed a path which wound in and out among the huge boulders. Peterson, following him, saw that Lynn was right; there were places where a horse could not pass between the rocks.

"Say, Lynn, what's the trouble between you and Hank Miller?" he asked, when they were out of earshot of the others. "Has he any particular reason for having it in for you?"

"Nothing except that I busted a bottle over his head. Why?"

"No reason why this would be your work, is there?" Peterson tilted his head backward toward the cabin.

"Hell, no! What reason *could* there be?" Lynn stopped and leaned against a boulder, facing the deputy. "We may be hay-wire, Jack, but that doesn't make us killers, does it?"

"No—no, of course not. Hank's always shooting off his mouth about something—"

"Did Hank say I killed Heinie?" Lynn's eyes bored into Peterson's, trying to read his mind.

"No, he didn't come out and say it, and I don't want you to go boning him about it, either. But—what's this about Heinie having quite a lot of money cached away?"

"Money? Heinie?" Lynn's face was honestly blank with astonishment—though its cause was not what Peterson supposed.

"Yeah. Didn't you ever hear that he had money hid out somewhere around the place?"

"No," said Lynn, shaking his head. "No, I never heard a word of it. Far as any of us folks know, Heinie just had enough to scrape along on. He got a little pension; eight dollars a month. And he always took a little gold when he went to town—most always he'd stop and show us how much he'd cleaned up. It averaged around two or three ounces; about an ounce a month, usually it was. I used to hang around and help him pan, when I was a kid." He looked at Peterson, his underlip drawn between his teeth. "Who said he had any money?" he asked skeptically.

"I heard it in town, just before I left," the deputy evaded. "Just guesswork, probably. Any old fellow living out like this is sure to be called a miser, and if he happens to get murdered, the story goes around that he had a fortune cached under the floor. I didn't say anything about it back there, and I wish you wouldn't mention it. Story like that get started, it's liable to spread and make trouble. If Heinie had any money, you folks would be pretty apt to know it, I guess."

"Yes, I guess we would, all right. We knew him better than any one. I've packed grub and mended clothes up to him ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper."

Lynn had been leading the way and now he turned aside to where a round-pointed shovel and a pick stood leaning against a rock, a gold-pan beside them, mutely reminding him of the knuckly old hands that had placed them there so short a time ago. A pang of pity stirred him. Poor old Heinie, twisted and dead on the floor of his cabin! Miser though Lynn knew him to be, he nevertheless had toiled for every dollar he had hoarded so jealously through the years. The polished pick and shovel handles proved that. And he was an old man to be working so hard; seventy at least, probably a few years over that.

Peterson was covertly studying Lynn's face, and now he drew in his breath slowly, shaking his head with an unconscious movement as he discarded what was perhaps a half-formed suspicion.

"You thought a lot of the old man, didn't you, Lynn?"

When Lynn looked up at him, Peterson saw that his eyes were blurred with unshed tears.

"Heinie was good to me when I was a kid—always, as far back as I can remember," he said simply. "It's an awful thing to happen to an old man like him, all alone in the world."

"Yeah, I guess he was alone in the world, all right," Peterson agreed. "Hank ain't really related to him at all. Old Pat McGill, that died last winter, used to know Heinie back in Omaha. He was married then, but his wife died. Then Heinie married Hank's mother—or thought he did. I guess she wasn't much good. It come out that she had a husband living somewhere—Hank's father, that was—and Heinie quit her cold. Hank was about growed up when that happened. So you can't say they was really related, but I know he lied when he said he never knew Heinie, because he sure must have. Old Pat McGill could tell you if he was alive.

"Well, now, Lynn, don't you pay any attention to what folks may say. I know you never done it, or ever thought of doing it. Your old man's bedfast and couldn't if he wanted to, and the kids sure wouldn't. So I guess that lets out the—your family."

"Why don't you go ahead and say it?" Lynn said scornfully. "That lets out the Hay-wire outfit. That's what you were going to say."

"Oh, well, there ain't anything in a nickname, Lynn. You don't want to pay any attention to that." Peterson picked up the shovel, Lynn took the pick, and they started back to the cabin. "I don't know as folks mean anything by it. Just a play on your name. Most natural thing in the world." Now that he had made up his mind, Jack Peterson seemed anxious to show his friendliness.

"How natural would it be if we owned, say, fifty thousand head of cattle?" Lynn demanded with a tense undernote of resentment in his tone.

"Oh, well—of course—"

"Sure. Don't you think I know? Soon as Hank Miller started it going, seems as though—"

"Hank? You mean yesterday? He never done a thing but blurt out to your face what folks has been calling you for years behind your back! I s'posed you knew that, Lynn."

Lynn did not answer. The hot blood was pounding through his body, into his head, at his temples, behind his eyes. Like the wash of a tidal wave it slowly subsided, leaving him cold inside. It wasn't Hank Miller, then. It was the whole country—everybody. Behind his back they had been saying it and grinning because he didn't know. The riders he met and talked with on the range, the folks in town; and at the dances—the girls he had danced with had been laughed at afterwards, probably, for dancing with Lynn *Hay-wire*! He hadn't known—they had been afraid to say it to his face until—well, at any rate it took Hank Miller, drunk, to dare the insult! And it was just because he was one of the Hay-wire outfit that men had found it easy to hint that he would be capable of murder.

"Give a dog a bad name, Jack—you know the rest," he said with a hard little laugh as they neared the cabin.

"Aw, forget it, Lynn. The name ain't hurt you none that I can see; not till you found out about it, anyway." Peterson had stopped and was casting glances here and there, looking for a likely location for the grave.

Lynn laughed again, went over and picked up Loney's reins, thrust a toe in the stirrup and was off down the trail at a gallop before he had swung a leg over the cantle.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LYNN COUNTS NOSES

Rose had returned when he reached the ranch, and she went out and stripped her garden of flowers for Heinie. Mrs. Hayward forbade her attending the funeral among all those men, or she would have carried the flowers herself and placed them on the grave. She was a loyal little soul and it seemed to her infinitely sad that Heinie should not have so much as a hymn sung over him, or a prayer said. One could be certain that none of the eight Elk Basin men would attempt anything of the kind; they would "plant" Heinie and let it go at that. Rose wept at the thought and would not eat any dinner.

Nor did Lynn, whose pride still quivered under the lash of suspicion and what was worse, as he saw it, contempt. He did not come into the house at all. He did not want to hear his father's voice or subject himself to the old man's caustic temper. So Sid and Little Joe bolted what food their excitement permitted them to eat, and rushed off to saddle their horses before Lynn, who had made a change of mounts and was riding Blackie, was ready to start back. At the last minute he remembered the pen and ink that Peterson wanted, and it stung his pride deeper when it developed that the ink bottle was down to a muddy sediment and the only pen at hand looked as if mice had gnawed the holder.

"More hay-wire!" he gritted, and would have thrown them into a clump of thistles if Rose had not caught him by the arm. "Can't even scare up a respectable looking pen for the sheriff to record his belief that I'm not a dirty murderer! There ain't a cussed thing on this ranch that ain't run over at the heel! Do you think I'll show up with an outfit like that? I'll tell him I forgot it."

"No, wait, Brudder! I'll go see if Dad's asleep. He was, and maybe he didn't wake up. If he is, I'll swipe his ink bottle and pen. But you be sure and bring it back—" She had snatched the shabby things from his hand and was running up the path before Lynn could stop her. Scowling to himself he waited, and when she came flying back to him with a very good pen in one hand and a full bottle of ink in the other, he took them and did a rather unusual thing. He leaned from the saddle and kissed Rose on the mouth.

"You're one thing on the ranch that ain't hay-wire, anyway," he said gruffly. "Come on, kids. And when you get there, be darn sure you speak up and answer the sheriff's questions, and don't talk too much. He just wants you to tell about this morning. If you go blabbing all you think and all you don't think, he'll likely take you to jail." He glanced at them and hesitated, biting his lip thoughtfully, wondering whether he had better warn them against mentioning his trip last night. It was risky not to do so, but it might be riskier to remind them of it. Like many another elder brother, Lynn seemed to have no mental contact with these two, who resented his authority and lived their lives apart. He felt that there was no telling what they would say, but he let the warning go and trusted to luck.

He need not have worried. Two youngsters more subdued and uncommunicative he never had seen. Eyes rounded by mingled curiosity and fear of the deputy sheriff, vocabularies narrowed down to "yessir" and "nosir" with a gulp before and after, it took little ink to record their evidence.

It was only a matter of form, anyway, and Peterson wasted little time. He very shortly wrote down the findings of his jury, dismissed the inquest with a wave of his hand and proceeded with little more ceremony to conduct the funeral.

The whole thing rather shocked Lynn who was not yet accustomed to death and regarded it with more solemnity than did the others. It seemed to him that Heinie should have had a coffin and maybe the preacher from town. He did not like the casual way they rolled him in his blankets and carried him to the grave with their hats on. Miser or not, he was human, and he was somehow woven into the pattern of Lynn's life. And all at once he was glad that Rose had sent the flowers, which he had left tied behind the saddle because he was ashamed to be seen carrying them in his hand. With his lips pressed firmly together and his head held high, he left the straggling little procession and went over and got them, and waited with his hat off (commanding the boys with a tilt of the head and a stern look in his eyes to remove their ragged old Stetsons) until the grave was filled. Then he somewhat defiantly placed the bouquet of old-fashioned flowers at the head and did not care who grinned at him. It was the last little kindness the Hay-wire outfit would ever do for Heinie, he told himself grimly; and he was glad, with a vague remorse for his anger last night, that it was his hand which performed the slight service.

"You kids do the chores when you get home, and tell Mom I'm going to the Upper Ranch," he said gruffly, when the deputy and his men were preparing to leave. "Here, take this pen and ink back with you. I might not be back to-night. I'm going to ride the west fence this afternoon, and it'll take me till dark. I guess I'll stay up there and ride the north fence tomorrow. Dad's been beefing about those fences long enough."

"All right." Sid, still subdued, answered meekly enough, and rode off with Little Joe, eyeing the sheriff's party askance as they went.

Lynn nodded a moody farewell to Peterson, ignored the others entirely and turned Blackie into the trail up the creek, riding at a brisk trot in and out among the rocks and willows, until he was well out of earshot, when he put the horse to a sharp gallop for a mile or more. There, where a bare ridge thrust its toe into the canyon, Lynn dismounted, tied Blackie well back in a cleft of rocks and began to climb.

At the top he walked along just under the crest until he reached a thicket of pines that stood there, whispering together their eternal secrets which no man may know, and made his way through them swiftly, ducking low branches and thrusting others from before his face as he strode along. When he came out upon the farther side he could look far down across the rolling prairie, to where the Big Sandy wound through the brown hills to join Green River to the south. Elk Basin was a scattered cluster of dots in the distance and the mountains beyond seemed painted upon the sky line in shades of dull blue and purple.

But it was not the distant view that held his gaze. He stood watching the road where it lay beneath him, looking more than ever like a rope flung out carelessly across the hills. Five minutes, ten minutes, and the line deepened between his searching eyes. Then out of a hollow rode a group of horsemen so small they might have been stamped out of tin and sold among other toys at Christmas time, but clear-cut and distinct. Lynn watched them go trooping up over a hill, counting as they came into view. Eight. They were all there, heading back to town hungry as wolves he supposed; for none of them had suggested eating any of Heinie's food.

He watched until they rode into sight on the next hill, so far away now that they were only black dots against the brown of the prairie. Eight! He counted the dots twice this time to make sure. Then, exhaling a long breath that carried with it some of the tenseness that had held him there, he turned and made his way back down the ridge to his horse and mounted.

But the way he took was not up the creek to the Upper Ranch but back down the trail along which he had ridden an hour before.

CHAPTER NINE

"IT'S MINE BY RIGHTS"

Perhaps the thing had been lying in the back of his mind all day, the decision formulated and waiting discreetly for the right moment before presenting itself to Lynn. The surprising ease with which we turn from other matters to follow what appears on the surface to be a stray impulse seems to betray an underground workshop where the brain carries on certain reasoning processes unknown to us, ready for our foreconsciousness to act upon the conclusion when the time comes. An observer would have called Lynn a liar if he said that he really had meant to ride to the Upper Ranch and look after the fences, but that is exactly what he had thought he was going to do. The impulse to make sure those eight Elk Basin men were really on their way to town and not cunningly waiting to double back and prowl around the cabin had come suddenly, just when he approached the ridge.

So in the beginning he had really followed an impulse. But now he rode in the full knowledge of where he was going and why. And his reasoning went something like this:

"If it was Hank Miller, he wouldn't dare pull out from the bunch while Jack Peterson was along. Jack knows in his own mind that Hank might have had a grudge against Heinie. It may date back to when Heinie pulled out and left Hank's mother. You can't tell what trouble there was between them. Maybe the little schoolma'am was right; maybe Hank did ride in late from out this way—and maybe he had lost a concho off his chaps. He could make another one. He would, too, if he'd lost one in the fight out there. If I could find that dollar concho I'd have something to go on—and I guess it's up to me, kinda. I'm the only man on the place, and Heinie was kind of close to us in more ways than one.—Once you start doing things for somebody it gets to be a habit, I guess. You get so you feel mean if you don't go right on doing favors. If I could find that concho—she's smart as they make 'em; if she says one was missing, I'll bet there was, all right. He'd be a fool not to make another one.

"Maybe he heard about that money, too. Maybe Jack was playing straight and wasn't just trying to pump me. Maybe the story did leak out. If Hank heard about it, he'd come out and jump Heinie for it. Take the stand, maybe, that he was entitled to a chunk of it—him being kind of a stepson for awhile. Heinie wouldn't tell—he'd die before he'd give up that money, the way he acted with it. Might as well ask a woman to give up her baby! No, sir, he'd fight to the last breath—and I guess he did, all right. Looks of that cabin—sure was a rough house there!" And then, edging forward from where it lay in the back of his mind, came the question, "I wonder if he found it?"

That thought went straight to his heels and tilted them in toward Blackie's flanks. The horse lunged forward and broke into a run, and Lynn let him go. If Hank—supposing it was Hank—*hadn't* found the money, he would be back; at night, probably, just as he had come before. The time to search for the concho was now, before the daylight was gone. He wouldn't want to strike a light in that cabin, not even a match. No, daylight was the time; now, while all the horse tracks and footprints were fresh and his own later ones wouldn't be noticed; now, before the fellow would have time to get back. Now—now he would take out the rock and look—

Lynn's heart gave a great thump at the thought. What if it was there yet? What if it were gone? Eighty-four thousand dollars—eighty-four *thousand!*

"I sure would hate to think of a fellow like Hank Miller getting his clutches on it," he muttered nervously. "Or anybody else that would go and kill a man to get it. There'd be a curse on it. There sure would."

He knew there would not be a soul near the place—or it was extremely unlikely that there would be at this time; yet Lynn could not bring himself to ride to the door as he would otherwise have done before the murder, or even if he had no secret riding with him. So he tied Blackie back among the bushes and went down carefully, stepping on rocks until he reached the path beaten day by day by Heinie going to his diggings, and filled now with the footprints of men going to Heinie's grave and away again. It was safe enough, he kept thinking, as he drew closer. There wasn't a soul there; or if there were, he had as good a right there as any one else. Hadn't Heinie been his neighbor for twenty years? Wasn't this claim on their ranch, by rights? Joel Hayward owned the land all around it. He had just let Heinie live there and wash gold because he wasn't doing any harm, and old Joel could be kind enough to any one outside the family. He had always been good to Heinie; gave him a horse—There was Lynn's excuse, if he needed any! He'd say he came back after old Blaze, and to put the grub where the rats wouldn't carry it off. Sure, that was reason enough for coming. Just what he

ought to do, anyway.

The flowers were wilting on Heinie's grave. Lynn walked a little faster as he went by. Was it true, what Heinie always claimed, that the ghosts of murdered men always haunt the spot? Lynn shrugged his shoulders at that thought. True or not, old Heinie wouldn't have anything against *him*. It was the murderer he'd be laying for.

For all that, Lynn slowed as he reached the cabin door. He pretended to himself that he was looking for the concho which Hank might have dropped there, supposing Hank was the guilty man. But then, his remorseless reason reminded him, in that event Hank or some of the others would have picked it up. So he bit his lip to steady his nerves and pushed open the door. Peterson hadn't locked it; probably he never even thought of it, or if he had he did not think Heinie's belongings of any importance. They were not, on the face of them; a few dollars' worth of bacon and beans and flour and dried fruit—Lynn could not vision any one in that country wanting Heinie's grub—a few old clothes, a few pots and pans. The blankets, Lynn remembered with a little shudder, had gone to the grave with Heinie.

Already, when he opened the door, a heavy atmosphere of desolation filled the room; not as if its owner were absent—Lynn had come to the cabin more than once when Heinie was away, and it had never felt like this. Some one had thrown a piece of canvas over the great bloodstain on the floor, but Lynn walked wide of the spot for all that, and would not turn his eyes that way; though he would profanely have denied any such sensitive aversion had you accused him of it.

For two or three minutes he searched the floor for a silver dollar with two holes punched through the center, making a button of the coin. He looked under the bunk, he poked in the ashes of the fireplace, he moved boxes. But all the while his mind clung to a certain rock just over the bunk in the back wall. Was it gone, the money? Was it there? He hated to look, somehow. It had pulled him back—he knew it now—but when he was here in the room and could look at the rock which hid so skilfully the opening behind it, he could not bring himself at once to the point of taking that rock in his hands and seeing once and for all whether or not a fortune lay behind it.

And then, as abruptly as he had started to climb the ridge, he walked to the door and looked out; saw no living thing move, and closed the door and went straight to the bunk, leaned across it and took the rock in his two hands as Heinie had done. It turned hard. At first he thought it was not going to move at all, that he had made a mistake. But he gave a harder twist to the left and it came loose in his hands. He pulled it out and reached in hurriedly, pulled out the rolled-up flour sack, felt it, pinched it. The white line that meant intense feeling came around his mouth. From the look of it, from the feel of it, the money was there.

Lynn's hands moved like machines, inserting the rock and giving that peculiar twist toward the right which keyed it solidly into the wall. The sack he had under his knee, as if it were something alive and wild, that would scuttle out of sight if he let it go for an instant. Then, walking around the piece of canvas on the floor, he went out and took long steps up the creek to where he had left his horse.

Not until he had reached the Upper Ranch and had locked himself into the house and gone up into the attic with the one little window under the eaves, did he dare to open that sack. The westering sun struck golden beams in through the dusty glass and showed his face dead white and strained, with drops of moisture standing on his forehead where he had pushed back his hat. His hands shook when he unrolled the sack and reached in.

"It's there, all right," he said to himself, moving his lips stiffly as he drew out the money. Eighty-four thousand dollars in neat packages—and one of them had two five-thousand dollar bank notes. Lynn stared at them unbelievably, stared and blinked and looked again. He had been mistaken, then, when he looked in at Heinie. He had thought they were all in one-thousand-dollar denomination. But here they were, plain in the mellow sunlight, lying almost in the middle of one of the packages. It was seemingly a mere chance that the ends of the notes had shown the figures as he riffled the package. He drew them out and looked them over with awe. Five thousand dollars compressed figuratively into just one slip of paper. With the picture of James Madison, whom Lynn hazily remembered as one of the presidents whose names his mother had made him learn when he had his lessons in the kitchen during the long cold winters when he was the age of Little Joe. George Clinton's picture was on the thousand-dollar notes—a meaningless name to Lynn, but scarcely more remote from his mental world than the wealth it represented. He scanned all the packages closely again and again, but there were no more of the Madison notes. Two—ten thousand dollars.

"Heinie never counted these," he told himself wonderingly. "I guess he must have forgot he had 'em. He counted them both as ones. Well, that makes—how much does it make, for gosh sake?" He laughed nervously at himself. He must be

pretty darned excited if he couldn't add, any more!

Funny a man would forget that he had two five-thousand-dollar bills! He must have got them a long time ago; started in saving with them, probably, and then found they were too hard to get hold of and so dropped down to the one-thousand kind. And after awhile he forgot about the others.

"My God, I wish *I* had so much money I couldn't keep track of it," whispered Lynn, while he fingered the money as Heinie had done, except that he was filled not with a sense of gloating ownership, but a great wonder and a vague longing.

"I wish it belonged to me," he said wistfully, and stopped. To whom did it belong? The question caught his throat like two hands shutting off his breath. To whom did the money belong, now that Heinie was dead and beyond caring for money? Not Hank Miller; even if Hank were not the murderer, he had no right to this money. No court in the country would give it to him. Why, his mother had not even been legally married to Heinie! She was a bigamist, according to old Pat McGill who had known them when it happened. And Heinie's first wife had died years and years ago; that let out any relatives she might have, unless there had been children, and apparently Heinie never had any.

If Lynn turned the money over to Jack Peterson, Jack, being honest, would turn it over to the county. The State would get it, there being no legal heirs. Lynn was young, but he was no dullard; he read a good deal and he remembered what he read. He knew the rudiments at least of the laws that governed his land.

Well, what moral right had the State to this money that Heinie had accumulated year by year as he worked? Without a doubt he had dug the gold out of these hills somewhere—

"And that's on our land," Lynn continued his reasoning. "It came off our land, and we pay taxes to the State—Lord knows we keep ourselves broke paying those damned taxes! I guess the State has got its share. What comes out of the land—goes—back—"

Again his throat constricted at the logical conclusion. He had not taken the money to steal it. He had felt at the time that it was Heinie's money and he must save it from the man who had killed to get it. But that, he now saw with pitiless clarity, was merely what the front of his mind had thought. Behind had lain the knowledge of what the final decision must be.

Putting it up to Heinie—if Heinie could speak from the grave and say who should have this money—Lynn knew in his heart just what the old man would say. He would say, "Sure! Take it and use it for Mis' Hayward; for your ma and the kids. You been good to me, Lynn—you take and keep the money; it's no good to me any more." It almost seemed to Lynn as though Heinie were there in the attic, whispering to him that the money was his to use as he would, a final settling of the score of kindnesses which the Haywards had cheerfully performed these twenty years. It seemed as though, if he turned his head quickly enough, he would see Heinie nodding and smiling behind him.

"I sure wish I hadn't put up such a holler about it to myself last night," Lynn muttered, and absently fingered the bank notes in his lap. "That's the only thing I hate about it. I howled like a whipped pup at the thought of Heinie having it. I guess he earned it, all right, and if I could call him back and give it to him I would; you bet your sweet life I would!"

But there was no calling Heinie back, though Lynn was sincere enough at that moment in the wish. Heinie was gone. But the money was not gone with him; it was here, filling his lap as he sat cross-legged on the attic floor, his hat pushed to the back of his head and the sun shining warm and golden on his face and on his lashes which the school-teacher privately thought it a sin for any man to own, and his mouth with the soft curve of youth in the upper lip. A sober face, weighted with the first great problem of his life. And at last he stirred and sighed, looking out of the window into the top branches of a cottonwood that stood not far from the house.

"If I thought it was going to make a thief of me I'd burn the damned stuff!" he said aloud. "But I can't see as it *is* stealing. If Heinie had died natural, he'd probably have told me to take it. I know he would!"

"But if any one suspicioned me of having it they'd *call* me a thief. They'd string me up in a holy minute for killing Heinie and robbing him. Peterson himself would take it for granted I did it. I couldn't blame him, as I know of. It sure would look like I was guilty as hell, and I couldn't prove in a million years I wasn't. Mom and Rose both know I wasn't home last night, and they know I showed up at breakfast with a grouch on. So do the boys, and they heard me slang Heinie." He picked up a package, flipped the edges impatiently and threw it down again. "Close to a hundred thousand dollars—and I

dassen't tell a soul! Not even Rose. I've got to keep it to myself till I get a chance to use it."

And then like a sunbeam piercing a thundercloud, his lips parted suddenly in a smile that lighted his eyes and made his whole face radiant.

"But I've *got* it!" The thought thrilled him with exultation. "It's mine by rights—I've got it and I'm going to keep it. No matter what happens. I've got over ninety thousand dollars to fall back on!"

CHAPTER TEN

LITTLE BROWN JUG

Power! The power which lay pent within those green and dull orange slips under his hands that thrilled faintly and unmistakably to the touch. The power of money. It was his. Ninety-two thousand dollars—almost a hundred thousand, one tenth of a million. Two hours ago he had owned exactly twenty-five cents. Twenty-five cents and the clothes he wore, since even old Joel would scarcely claim the shirt on Lynn's back, and the two-bit piece was the last of a reward of five dollars he had collected more than a month ago for the return of a stray saddle horse to a man over by Atlantic Peak. Blackie and Loney were not his; not legally, since he could not sell them and keep the money for himself. They bore the Quarter-Circle-Bar brand and old Joel owned that just as he owned everything else used by his family. Didn't he remind them of it often enough? There was no forgetting that iron grasp of ownership.

But here, right where he could gather them up in his two hands, was the world's symbol of wealth; here were ninety-two thousand dollars in hard cash. Old Joel had no claim on this, thank God! Or if he had a remote moral claim it was one he never would press, because he did not know of it. He never would get this money to hide under his pillow and dole out, whining and swearing over the necessity, as he doled out the money he took in for pasturage. He never would hold this money in his greedy old hands, never feel the thrill of it as Lynn felt it now.

Power—the power that lies in the world's symbol of wealth! Lynn had that power, here and now; sitting on the dusty floor of the attic of an old house tucked back in the hills, he had the power which men sweated and struggled and stole and killed to get. In swift mental pictures, vivid as if seen by lightning flashes, he saw his dad sitting in the old Morris chair with the little table in front of him, playing solitaire and brooding over his self-imposed poverty, cursing his family for spendthrifts all, clutching at the thought of his land as old Heinie had clutched this money, never dreaming that Lynn had ninety-two thousand dollars—his to claim and to keep because no one had a better right; the killer (a vague form in the darkness of the cabin but still bearing a persistent likeness to Hank Miller) prowling uneasily, wolfishly hunting this money, never dreaming that Lynn Hayward had it in his lap up in the attic of the house at the Upper Ranch; the deputy sheriff and his men, riding in to Elk Basin from the sordid scene of the murder, perhaps gossiping together about the crime and the unfounded rumor that Heinie had money secreted away somewhere, never suspecting that Lynn Hayward was rich because he had found the hoard and knew he had as good a right as any to keep it for his own; the town, idly wondering whether the Hay-wire outfit had anything to do with the murder. Not one of them—not a soul in the country—even remotely guessing at the truth!

Lynn laughed, a low chuckle of merriment that welled up suddenly from the first really happy thought he had felt for a long time thrilling through his being.

"Let Dad keep his ten thousand acres of land!" he exulted. "I could buy him out at a good price and never feel it! I could buy the Dollar outfit, even, if I wanted it! I could buy out the whole damn' town of Elk Basin and run it myself! There ain't a man in the country, unless maybe it's old John Trueman at Green River, that could dig up as much cold cash as I've got. Why, darn it, I'm rich! Lynn Hay-wire—*me!*—the fellow they've been lookin' down on and slurring behind his back—I'm worth ninety-two thousand dollars and twenty-five cents, just as I am!"

Fateful words, these. They struck off the shackles from the chained soul of him so that he stood erect before his world and looked at it level-eyed, serene in the consciousness of his own power.

"Let 'em call me Hay-wire if they want to," he said, smiling to himself. "What do I care what they call me? I guess I can afford to give 'em that privilege. I know what I *am*, all right. The richest fellow of my age in this whole damn' country! That's what."

He slid the packages of bank notes back into the flour sack, still smiling to himself; wrapped an old jumper around the bundle and went downstairs, contentedly turning over in his mind the various hiding places he might use, selecting the best and the safest without hurry or fear, and never stopping to think that it is the guilty conscience or the timid, weak soul that fears dangers which have not yet appeared.

Caution, yes. He would have to be cautious. Until the money was safely put away in the place he had chosen for it, he must take it for granted that the murderer of old Heinie was hidden somewhere among the rocks, watching his every

move. That was common sense. To go carelessly about hiding the money would be as senseless as to ride into enemy country with an empty gun. This was going to be a game, and he would play it with the whole country—only they wouldn't know it. And in that one fact Lynn suddenly saw what a huge joke he had on his world. While men were calling him Hay-wire, he would be thinking to himself how he had almost a hundred thousand dollars right where he could put his hand on them if he wanted to. Men who worked for forty or fifty dollars a month and blew that in as fast as they earned it would be calling him Lynn Hay-wire. *Him!* The possessor of a fortune in cash!

"Gosh! I can get the point of the joke now as Heinie saw it!" he told himself, while he rummaged in the cellar with a smoky, evil-smelling lantern. "I couldn't see it before, and it made me sore as a goat—him sitting there at the table, laughing the way he did. But I see it now, you bet. Everybody thinking he was on the rocks between pension checks—of course he'd laugh! Any man would. He'd hate it like hell if I botched this job of hiding it, and let the fellow that murdered him get hold of it. I guess he'd want to haunt me then for fair. Wouldn't blame him, either."

Then he saw what he wanted and pounced upon it with huge relief in his eyes. A brown two-gallon jug with a wide mouth—he remembered when his mother had sent that very jug to the Upper Ranch with tomato preserves for the men who bached and worked here; that was years ago, when his dad still had hopes of being able to get around in a month or two. The jug was cobwebby and dusty inside, but otherwise clean, and Lynn found the cork that fitted it. So once more he emptied the flour sack, used it to wipe out the jug and then packed the bank notes inside.

"This is what Mom might call preserving with cold pack," he grinned, recalling one of his mother's housewifely terms. "Gosh! Pretty near two gallons of money! Never s'posed I'd count it by gallons—though I have heard of bushels and barrels of it." He fitted in the cork and pounded it tight with his fist. So far, so good. A man might look at the jug, but he never would guess what was inside of it. Furthermore, he must be prevented from investigating.

Next he found a trowel up in the woodshed that adjoined the kitchen. He set the jug into a five-gallon can which was used for a water bucket, slid the trowel inside his shirt front and started for the well with the can. Any one watching the place would have taken it for granted that Lynn was going after a bucket of water and that he probably was going to start supper.

Had he continued to watch, he would have seen Lynn tie the well rope to the twisted hay-wire handle on the can and lower it down through the hole in the plank covering—because the pulley had long since been carried off for some other use and the water must be hauled up laboriously hand over hand. He would have seen Lynn lean farther over the hole and shake the rope, evidently in an effort to tilt the can upon its side in the water so that it would fill. He would have seen him rise and make a violent gesture of disgust, and then proceed to crawl down through the square hole—and he would have felt absolutely certain that Lynn had dropped the rope and was swearing over the necessity of climbing down into the well after it; a mischance that might easily happen.

He would have been right so far as appearances went, but Lynn did not go down very far; not more than a third of the way, in fact. When the well was dug, years before when Lynn was just a little fellow, the men who did the work curbed the well with rocks up to within approximately twelve feet of the top, and from there on up they had used split cedar poles six or eight inches in diameter. The water would not rise high enough at any time to contact the wood and absorb the flavor of cedar, and they saved considerable time since they had the pile of poles—posts they were really—and had only to split them and lower them into place, bracing them at top and bottom with crosspieces.

This left a stone ledge jutting out from the base of the cedar curbing, and it was to this that Lynn had lowered the can with the jug inside. He did drop the rope—carefully, so that it hung looped over a crosspiece where he could get it when he wanted it. So all he had to do was pry a rock or two out of the top of the ledge, which was not difficult, gouge out a nest in the moist clay for the jug, set it in and replace the rocks. He did not mark the spot, but he saw that the pole above it had a knotty stub protruding at an upward angle over the place. He would remember that stub as the distinguishing mark. The ledge itself looked just as it had before he moved the rocks. Certainly old Heinie, if he knew, must approve this new hiding place for his treasure; and certainly no one would ever suspect or find it.

He thrust the trowel out of sight under the end of the nearest crosspiece, reached over and got the rope and climbed up out of the well, never troubling to glance around in fear of watchers. No one was near, he felt sure of that. He had played his little game of losing the rope in the well for sake of the one chance in a hundred that he was observed. So with a great load off his mind, he hauled up a can of water and went away to the house, his lips pursed and whistling softly as he walked. The tune was one still sung on the ranges and sometimes played at dances, and the words of the chorus went:

"Ha-ha-ha! You and me,
Little brown jug, don't I love thee!"

But presently he thought again of Heinie lying in his gravelly grave a few miles down the creek, and the twinkle died out of his eyes.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

A FACE AT THE WINDOW

Suspended just above a peak behind which it would presently slide, the sun drew a wisp of purple cloud across the upper half of its face. Lynn, standing in the doorway watching it disappear, thought it looked like a masked head peering over the mountain to see what he was about. And that reminded him again of the thing which had been sticking in the background of his mind like a burr, ready to work forward into his active thoughts. The man who had killed Heinie; would he come back to-night to search for the money? And if he did come—

"I sure would like to be there!" gritted Lynn, and scowled at the sun without even seeing it.

While he cooked his supper from the odds and ends of food left in the cupboard he meditated upon the probable movements of the murderer. That bread which he had left in the bread box; if he had taken it into the cabin and stayed talking with Heinie, the old man might be alive at this moment. The fellow must have come soon after Lynn rode away, because Heinie was fully dressed. He hadn't started to go to bed. And some other time maybe Heinie would have been able to defend himself a little better; he might even have killed his assailant. For an old man, Heinie was no weakling.

But to return to what did actually happen and what would probably follow, surely the man would come back to search for the money. Lynn was certain in his own mind that it had been the money he was after. He hadn't got it—Lynn couldn't help grinning when that thought passed through his mind. He must have been pretty sure though that Heinie had it. So he would come back; but when?

"I wouldn't want to go prowling around there with a light," Lynn reasoned. "If it was me, I'd make it just about break of day. No one's liable to be around then, and a fellow could see what he was doing. You can't find anything in the dark, especially if you've got to hunt for it. And if you're a thief and a murderer you wouldn't want to take a chance of somebody seeing a light there and coming to see what it is.

"No, sir, I'd make it about daylight, if it was me. He got scared off last night when he saw what he'd done, I guess. Didn't look like he'd stayed to hunt much after it happened. Must have beat it pronto, and figured on getting back there later on."

He pondered the advisability of riding down there and hiding somewhere close where he could watch the cabin, but he discarded the notion. He did not want his horse to stand tied all night unless it was absolutely necessary, for one thing; furthermore, he was sure that no man would dare go searching the place except by daylight, when he could see what he was doing. If it were Hank Miller, he would make himself conspicuously present in town until everyone was in bed. That would be long after midnight. He would be cautious about leaving—no clattering away like an honest man who fears no questions; he would ride slowly at first, probably avoiding the road and taking a circuitous route.

"If I was as guilty as the skunk that's after that money, I'd make mighty darn sure I wasn't seen. I'd start off in the opposite direction and work back this way through the hills. That'd take time, but I'd consider it well spent. It's damn' touchy business, coming back to the spot where you've killed a man. I'd match an Injun or a coyote for cunning."

Reasoning so, he got the old alarm clock out of the one bedroom still fitted up for sleeping quarters, set it by the sun and wound it with the alarm set for one o'clock. He wanted to be in plenty of time. He would have to leave his horse hidden far up the creek in a place he had already fixed in his mind, and creep down upon the cabin just as stealthily as if he himself were the criminal. He would need at least half an hour for that part of the trip—one o'clock would be none too early for the start.

For a wonder the alarm worked properly and he rose up out of a deep and dreamless sleep, drank a cup of cold coffee, hacked off an end of a loaf and went out and saddled his horse, choosing to water the animal at the well instead of at the creek which he must ford. But it gave him an excuse to peer down in the darkness toward the spot which had become the nucleus of all his hopes and plans, and it sent him off with a glow in his heart. Heinie's money—his money now!—was safe, no matter how persistently the murderer might prowl and search. He couldn't read Lynn's mind where the secret was hidden. Let him hunt! He could do no harm and he could only betray his own secret, the secret of his identity.

It was eerie business creeping down in the dark upon that desolate spot where an old man had been sent crashing into eternity, fighting valiantly to keep the soul within its body. Old Blaze in the little pasture above the diggings had

whinnied lonesomely after him, his shrill trumpeting sending a shiver along Lynn's spine. It was as if Blaze knew that Heinie was dead. He followed along the fence to the rough bars in the corner, looking and nickering plaintively; and it was not from hunger or thirst, for the creek ran alongside the pasture fence with plenty of places where Blaze could drink, and the feed was good in the little natural meadow. Heinie had come to the ranch and begged timothy seed to scatter amongst the native grass and Blaze was always sleek and fat with good living. No, the horse was lonesome.

Lynn hurried a little, after that, conscious of the vast difference which death makes in a place. He had never before noticed the complete isolation of Heinie's cabin, though he had come this way before on darker nights than this and thought nothing of it.

At the grave he paused and felt his way to the tree where Heinie's pick and shovel had been left leaning against the trunk. In the dark he might easily be mistaken in the tree, but it seemed to him that the tools were not where they had been left. A vague apprehension seized him. Early though he was, had he waited too long before coming?

Until daylight he could not be sure, and he put the fear away from him and went stealthily down the path toward the cabin. That, he thought, would be the scene of the search, at least at first; somewhere in or near the cabin is where he would look if he were forced to guess where Heinie hid his money, and he was acting on the assumption that other men would reason the same way.

He had almost reached the door. He was passing a square boulder beside a great cottonwood whose branches shaded the cabin, when someone launched himself upon Lynn from behind and bore him to earth with a thud.

That he was not felled with a blow on the head surprised Lynn, even while he clawed breathlessly for a hold upon his assailant. The man was big and muscular with a grip like steel; that much Lynn discovered in the first half minute. But he was no weakling himself, with his six-foot-two and the wiry agility of a youth who spends most of his waking hours in the saddle. He fought with set teeth and a rising wrath, and he knew that he was holding his own at least. Then, with a prodigious effort, he squirmed and gave a flop that rolled the other beneath him, and as he slid one hand downward looking for weapons, his fingers contacted a dangling steel thing which at first he could not identify. When he did he gave a short laugh, reached up a palm and drew it across the face of his antagonist. He gave another laugh and sat up astraddle the man's body.

"I oughta hog-tie yuh by rights," he panted. "What the devil did you want to jump *me* for, Jack?"

"That you, Lynn? Lemme up. You're right, I hadn't ought to of jumped you as you went by—I'd ought a shot your fool head off, that's all! What you doing here this time of day?"

"Same to you, and more of it. How long yuh been here?"

"Since midnight or a little after. Why?" Peterson got up, brushing off the dirt from sleeves and trousers, and the two peered at each other in the faintly graying light. "What you prowling around here for? I oughta take you in, by rights."

"Me? Fly at it, if you feel lucky! I rode down to see if the fellow that killed Heinie wouldn't be back about now to get what he came after the first time. I guess you got the same idea, from the looks of things. Didn't see anything of him, did you, Jack?"

"Not a thing. I was just aiming to start back when you came sneaking past; so I nabbed you."

"You mean you tried. Well, I guess the hunting's spoiled for this time—we must have sounded like a couple of bull buffalo on the prod." Imperceptibly the grayness lightened and he could see Peterson's face, glum from his vigil and with a red line down his cheek where Lynn had raked a finger. "Did you take the tools away from back there where Jordan and Mose Welden left them?" he asked suddenly. "I looked for them and couldn't find them. Let's go back and see, now it's breaking day."

"What you want 'em for?" Peterson demanded suspiciously, but he followed Lynn back up the path.

Look as they might, the pick and shovel were gone. The shovel they found thrust into the bushes at one end of the cabin, but the pick was nowhere in sight, though they looked everywhere. Peterson swore and sat down on a rock to roll a cigarette.

"Looks to me like we both guessed wrong," Lynn observed ruefully. "He must have come last evening, just before dark."

"How do you make that out?" Peterson eyed him while he searched for a match. "Was you here before then?"

"Yes—when you and the bunch were here," Lynn retorted equably. "Snap out of it, Jack. You know damn' well I didn't have anything to do with it. I'd like to catch the guy, that's all. I could just as well have rode down here last evening, but I figured if the fellow was coming back he'd come about daylight. So did you, evidently. We missed him. He was here ahead of you."

Peterson snorted and busied himself with his smoke. Lynn, closing his mind against a certain distaste for the place, entered the cabin. In a moment he looked out and beckoned, and Peterson got up and followed him in. Lynn was standing before the fireplace.

"I know this cabin almost as well as I know our kitchen at home," he said in a suppressed tone. "Heinie never let out a hint that he had any money cached here anywhere, and I'd have staked my life he was broke half the time. But somebody sure seems to think he had a bunch of dough hid out around here—look at that! That whole hearth has been dug up and put back again."

"Looks about as it did yesterday, far as I can see," Peterson declared after a scrutiny.

"Maybe, to you. But look here, Jack." He took one three-cornered flat rock in his hands, pulled it loose and turned it over. "How come this under side has got ashes sifted into the seams? Yes, and that's tobacco juice, if I'm any judge. And look how the dirt underneath has been dug loose and put back again. Good job—if he'd only kept his rocks right side up. But I know this hearth. The top side of this rock is veined different; see? And it's a different color, you notice."

"By gosh, you're right!" Peterson knelt and examined the hearth with new interest. "I'll have to hand it to you, Lynn. You oughta be a detective."

"No—but I know this cabin pretty well." Just how well, he did not think it wise to explain. "I'll bet the pick's in here somewhere. And say! If it wasn't getting pretty dusky here when he put those rocks back, I miss my guess a mile. He was too foxy for us, Jack. He beat us by several hours."

They stood up, looking at each other thoughtfully. Peterson shook his head.

"Hank Miller was in town all afternoon and evening," he said. "I was kinda keeping an eye on him, so I know. I had him spotted till about eleven o'clock, when he went off somewhere and I lost track of him, so I pulled out and sifted over this way. If he beat me out here he sure had to go some! I know he didn't. I *rode*, coming out." He threw up a hand in a gesture of defeat. "This has sure got me," he confessed. "I was cached by that rock from the time I got there till you came along. Nothing could get by without my knowing it."

"Which proves he came early and left before you got here. I thought myself maybe it was Hank Miller, but if you kept tabs on him till you started for here, that puts me up a tree. I don't know who it could be."

Peterson had gone down on his knees again and was peering under the bunk. He gave an oath and reached a long arm, pulling out the pick by the handle. Lynn crossed the room to him and stood watching while the deputy examined the points for ashes—and then suddenly Lynn whirled and stood staring at the window.

"Some one was looking in, Jack," he said with suppressed excitement. "I caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye. When I turned he slid out of sight. Come on!"

He rushed to the door and out of it, tearing around the corner of the cabin with Peterson at his heels. No one was there, and he took the steep trail up the bank at a run. Still no one. The sky had already been painted for the rising of the sun and he could see to the bend of the upper trail, but not a soul was in sight. Birds were a-wing, twittering over their affairs of the morning, not at all concerned over the worries of man. Lynn took a look at the trail and turned back, almost bumping Peterson.

"He must have slipped around the cabin and gone up the other way," he said. "We ought to have separated at the door, but I thought he'd take out up the trail."

"Who was it, do you know?"

"Not to swear to it," Lynn replied hesitatingly. "I just got a glimpse of him, remember. It could have been Hank, but darn it, I'm only guessing. We'll know when we find him."

But although they spent an hour searching all up and down the creek, they failed to discover so much as a trace. So, not being an officer with full power and responsibility in the matter, Lynn rode on home and left Peterson to his own devices.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THERE'S MONEY IN SHEEP

With three horses necked together and trailing along at the end of his rope, Lynn rode whistling into Elk Basin and straight to the door of Mrs. Ben Moore, who lived opposite the milliner's shop and the Methodist preacher. With a studied air of careless composure he knocked at the screen door—twice, because the lady of the house was busy in the kitchen; and between raps he still whistled under his breath.

"Good morning, Mrs. Moore," he greeted blithely, when that more than plump person appeared finally, wiping her hands on a starched gingham apron. "Is Miss MacIvor in? Tell her when she comes, then, that I've brought in the gentle horse she's been wanting. His name is Blaze, and you tell her I say he hasn't got a mean trick in him, and he'll stand by a fence or a rock or the high side of a bank while she mounts, and he won't move till she asks him to. He wouldn't run away on a bet, and he'll follow her forty miles without a halter or bridle if she'll feed him a little sugar once in a while."

"Merciful goodness! You want I should remember all that rigmarole? You better wait and tell her yourself, Mr.—"

"Hayward," Lynn blandly supplied. "Better known as Lynn Hay-wire. You've no doubt heard of the Hay-wire outfit."

The woman just looked at him dumbly, her lips parted.

"Shall I tie him in the shed behind the house? Tell Miss MacIvor Blaze is trained to a picket rope and she can picket him out if she doesn't want to buy hay. He's more used to grass, anyway. She'll find a picket rope tied to the saddle, and I shortened the stirrups about right for her, I think. My sister tried them and thought they would do. Tell her I'll arrange with her about the rent of him when I come back from Green River this evening."

"She never told me she was going to get a horse of her own," Mrs. Ben Moore managed to articulate, when Lynn was turning away.

"At the time we talked of it I wasn't certain just when I could let her have one," Lynn told her glibly, and led Blaze around to the shed he had seen on the back of the lot. It chanced to be the shelter of Mrs. Ben Moore's cow, but empty for the moment and he tied Blaze inside and went back to his own horse. He was aware that half a dozen men lounging in various doorways were eyeing him curiously, but that did not seem to bother him at all. He rode away, whistling the same little tune, the chorus of which went:

"Ha-ha-ha! You and me,
Little brown jug, don't I love thee!"

It was as close as he dared come to flinging the news of his fortune into the ears of his unloved world, and it heartened him immensely.

In Green River he again tied his horses to a hitch rail and went into the store of old John Trueman who owned half that part of the country and kept two full crews of riders the year round, looking after his cattle. The burr of Lynn's spur rowels on the floor had an authoritative sound as he walked, and he was pulling a folded Green River weekly paper out of his hip pocket before he reached the man he was looking for.

"Howdy, Mr. Trueman! You advertised a couple of stray saddle horses, offering a reward of ten dollars each for their return. Here's their description, if you've forgotten. I found the horses over on our range, and I've brought them in."

"Yes? Lemme see. You're—"

"Lynn Hayward, of the Hay-wire outfit up above Elk Basin. We aren't running any cattle now, but you've heard of us, I guess."

"Ye-es, I've heard of you. How's your father? Getting any better?" Trueman was eyeing him curiously, just as the men in Elk Basin had done.

"No, he's just the same, Mr. Trueman. Able to sit in a chair and lift himself over onto the bed, and that's all. Things have

kind of gone to rack—gone hay-wire, as they say—over to our ranch since Dad's laid on the shelf. But I'm of age now, and I'll be able to whip things into shape before long."

"Good! Glad to hear you've taken hold of things—" he almost said, "at last." He studied Lynn with his shrewd eyes that could appraise men or cattle at a glance and come very close to their actual value. "Hate to see a good ranch go to the dogs. In as good a range country as this is, there isn't much excuse for it—if a man's able-bodied, I mean. Not running any cattle at all? How's that? You've got plenty of land, haven't you? Or did your father sell off a lot? Plenty of open range yet, anyway. You could lease—"

"We don't need to. Dad owns as much land as ever he did. But when he had his stroke, things got balled up pretty bad. He had a mortgage on some of the stock—borrowed money on the cattle to buy more land and get the deeds to it. I think he lost them, or borrowed more to pay doctors and so on. And what he didn't lose some of our fine neighbors rustled. Ours is too easy a brand to work, seems to me. I was just a kid when all this happened and Dad never talked much before us kids. But it won't take long to pull up the hill again. As I say, I'm of age. One thing I have hung on to is the horses we own. I've always kept an eagle eye on them, and we haven't lost many." He grinned cheerfully. "We've got quite a bunch of horses, Mr. Trueman."

"Want to sell any? Broke horses bring a pretty good price now. That's why I try and get a line on all my strays."

"No, Dad doesn't want to sell the horses. About these two strays—will you look them over and then give me a receipt for them? Twenty dollars isn't much, of course, but I'm keeping track of everything and I'd like to have a paper to file against the item on my books."

Trueman gave him a sharp glance and nodded his head approvingly.

"That's the way to do, Boy. Have some system to your business! If every ranch was run on a system, the cattlemen of Wyoming would bank more money than they do. Another thing; you oughta pay everything with checks. I do. Gives you another tally on the money you spend." He put on his glasses to write a check, and his eyes looked bigger and wiser through the lenses.

Lynn laughed, a boyish, straight-from-the-heart laugh which was new to his throat and his soul, and thrilled both with a sense of warmth and well-being.

"Not so fast with the advice, Mr. Trueman! I haven't attained a bank account yet. But you bet when I do, I'll handle it the way you do yours. I guess I couldn't follow a better example."

"We-ell, I'm making both ends meet—by stretchin'," Trueman grinned, blotting the check so carefully that Lynn knew he must be conscious of the example he was setting. He laid it aside until he had written the memorandum of the transaction. Watching him, Lynn chuckled.

"Would you advise me to write checks sight-unseen?" he drawled. "Maybe you'd better take a look at the horses!"

"You haven't got the check yet, young man," Trueman retorted grinning. "You'll do! Sharp as your dad, by the signs. He sure could get more feathers out the eagle on a dollar than any man I ever saw! Couldn't understand it when I heard he was flat broke." He started with Lynn for the front door, taking the check and the receipt with him.

"There's such a thing as picking the old bird too close," Lynn sagely observed, when they were outside and going down the steps to the horses. "I'd leave feathers enough to keep the eagle pecky and able to scream and call more. You don't make anything in the long run by being too much on the grab; do you think so?"

"No, you don't. I guess I make about as much money as any one in the course of a year, and I never did it pinching pennies, either. It's judgment, my boy, that wins. Judgment and not being afraid to go against the collar and pull with the rest of the team. Them's the kind of horses you have for your leaders—steady, horse sense and ready to throw their weight against the collar at the first crack of the whip. Same with men. Them that lead keep a cool head and are willing to *work*.

"Yes, these are the horses, all right. Glad to get them back. You going to get back into cattle, or what?"

"It's mostly *what*, so far," Lynn laughed, as he took the check and folded it carefully, putting it into one pocket while the

receipt went into another inner one. "I haven't just decided yet. Of course, cattle are up now—"

"Yes, but the range is shrinking faster'n a flannel shirt in boiling water. You folks have got plenty of land—why don't you go into sheep? There's quicker money in sheep, and it's going to be safer money. I know a cowman hates sheep worse'n poison, but they'll have to come to it sooner or later, in my opinion."

"Well, I have thought of sheep," Lynn admitted diffidently. "But Dad hates sheep and he wouldn't back me in anything like that, Mr. Trueman. I could take a bunch of sheep on shares, but I wasn't just sure whether my judgment was the best. I know he's got the old fashioned rangeman's prejudice—"

"Bullheadedness, that's all. I'm an old rangeman, and I tell you there's money in sheep; big money. You get your wool crop that you can turn into money every summer, and there's the increase, and that gives you a bunch of wethers to sell in the fall. A sheep will get fat where a cow brute would starve to death—you know that. And if a man ain't afraid to get down off his horse and do some real work, he can run a big bunch of sheep without hiring a great crew of men—"

It was a new hobby with John Trueman, who had made his money in cattle but had not narrowed his vision to the width of a cow track. For the next hour he leaned against the hitch rail and sucked at his pipe and talked sheep with Lynn, who was itching to be on his way, and yet pleased and flattered that the richest cattleman in that part of Wyoming should find him worth an hour's talk during business hours.

"Well, come in and see me again," he invited heartily at last. "I've got two or three more horses over that way somewhere; pick 'em up for me, if you happen to run across them, will you? I'd pay fifteen dollars apiece for them if you brought them home in as good condition as these two. Dandy roping horses; a rep I sent out with a string got drunk and let the bunch get plumb away from him. Good horses too. Well, you think over what I've told you about sheep, my boy. And if I can be any help to you any time, let me know."

"I sure will, Mr. Trueman. Thanks for the advice and everything. When I'm rich as you are, I'll pass along your advice to the next fellow I see who wants to get a start in life." He smiled and lifted his hat to the town magnate and clattered away down the street to cash his check and buy a meal for himself and Loney before he undertook certain other important ventures of a more exacting nature.

Trueman watched him go, and the smile Lynn's farewell had called to his lips lingered pleasantly.

"Old Joel Hayward's boy, eh? He'll get there! He's got the right stuff in him. Must take after his mother a lot. Heard she was a pretty nice woman. Hay-wire, eh? Nothing hay-wire about *that* boy—never saw a cleaner, more up-and-a-coming young man. Brought these horses home without turning a hair on 'em, hardly. That shows the kinda stuff a man's got. By George, I like that boy!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A RIDING LESSON

With twenty dollars in his pocket and ninety-two thousand dollars in his consciousness, Lynn ordered porterhouse steak and French fried potatoes—your true rangeman's idea of food for a king. He ate smilingly, calling smiles to the faces of other diners in the restaurant and a blush to the cheeks of the waitress. He added lemon pie to the meal as an afterthought, and later went out full-fed into the street to window-shop along until he came to a store that pleased him. Three clerks converged upon him from different directions, called to serve him by the light in his eye and the smile on his lips. He chose the oldish, faded woman and without being in the least degree aware of it, he put a glow in her heart that lasted through the day.

Advice was what he wanted, and he made certain purchases with the help of her shrewd judgment and went out jauntily, a well-wrapped bundle tucked under one arm and with only eight dollars left in his pocket. But what did that matter? He had a fortune tucked safely away at home, hadn't he? And there were lots of stray horses on the range. Plenty of other ways to make money, too, if he wanted to give them a try. Sheep, for instance; he believed John Trueman knew what he was talking about. Of course, Dad wouldn't listen to such a thing, though. But still—Oh, well, he hadn't come to that bridge yet. This was to-day, with the soft haze of coming autumn in the air. Sure, here it was September already! Indian summer was about the finest season of the year, and this was it. He was riding just about the finest little horse in the world, and—

"Ha-ha-ha! You and me—
Little brown jug, don't I love thee!"

sang Lynn, as he rode up the trail to Elk Basin in the hazy sunshine.

He was still singing as he galloped along, ten miles out of town and thinking of the little school-teacher. Would she keep old Blaze and use him? Sure she would! Dad had no claim on the horse, any more. He had given him away once, to old Heinie, and he had probably forgotten about it. Dad did forget things; everything but his troubles. But the brand had never been vented on Blaze, and Peterson told Lynn he might as well take the horse back. Heinie's few possessions weren't worth listing as an estate, Peterson had said. He'd rather not have the horse to ball things up. But old Joel didn't know that, of course, so Blaze could be passed along to where he would be the most appreciated. Rose had approved of taking Blaze in for Miss MacIvor to ride, and his mother too, when he called her outside and told her what he meant to do. Mom was always good about agreeing with his plans—when he had any—but she always had to know, or she would worry and imagine all sorts of unlikely things. He hoped Mom would approve of his judgment in the purchases he had just made.

As he loped around a bend in the trail he came full upon Miss MacIvor, jogging along on Blaze, her elbows held close to her ribs and her slim shoulders moving jerkily with every step Blaze took; a sedate, carefully erect little person, who brought a new kind of twinkle into Lynn's eyes. Blaze slowed and came to a full stop, prepared to doze while his rider "passed the time of day," as Heinie always had described his habit of loitering for inconsequential gossip when he met any one on the road to town.

"Howdy, Miss MacIvor! How do you like him?" Lynn greeted her.

"The horse is all right—he's fine, really. But Mr. Hayward, you know I must not accept him from you," she said worriedly. "I rode out to meet you so that I could explain without having all the busybodies in town watching us. I appreciate your kindness, but I cannot keep him, really."

But that could not dampen Lynn's spirits to-day. He only smiled, studied the horse a moment and then dismounted.

"That saddle's set too far back," he criticized. "If Blaze wasn't the best-natured horse on earth he'd have bucked it off. Who saddled up for you?"

"Mrs. Moore," she told him stiffly, "showed me how it was done and said that was the correct position. I saddled the horse myself."

"Oh. Well, there'll never be a better time or a better place to learn it right. Get off and I'll show you." Lynn offered his arms and she slid into them and so to the ground, looking very doubtful about the propriety of the action.

But Lynn's manner was impersonal and above reproach as he removed the saddle, explained just how and why it must be placed as he placed it, not too far forward nor too far back; why there must be no wrinkles in the blanket beneath—there had been a deep one which he shook out—and just how to place the cinch and tighten it.

"You see how I tie the latigo? Now I'm going to unsaddle him and let you do it. And when you take off the saddle, if you haven't any place to hang it up or set it over a rail somehow—if you've got to lay it down, lay it this way. Don't just dump it any old way because it's made of steel and wood and leather and won't break; put it on its side, like this. Then you won't kink the skirts up. Of all things, I hate to see a saddle with the skirts all curled up at the corners. Now. There's your outfit—wait a minute; better start right at the beginning, and learn how to put the bridle on." He thereupon slipped the head-stall off Blaze and handed it gravely to the school-teacher. "Go ahead," he directed in a businesslike tone. "I'm the teacher now and you're the scholar. See you do it right, or you might have to stay after school. Begin at the bottom. What do you do first?"

Janet MacIvor looked at him dubiously for a moment, bit her finger nail while she studied the horse and the riding gear, then raised her hand high, snapping thumb and finger to attract his attention.

"I know, Teacher! First you—you raise him from a colt!" I

Whereupon Lynn laughed until he spilled all the tobacco out of the cigarette he was making.

"All right, consider him raised, halter broke and bridle wise. Now what do you do?"

The school-teacher picked up the bridle, took the bit in her fingers as if it were a worm, and held it before Blaze's nose. What Blaze did was turn his nose away from it with a bored manner. Miss MacIvor tried him again. The third attempt Lynn halted with a word of instruction spoken in a strangled tone because he did not want to laugh.

"You can't expect a horse to get down on its knees and beg for the bit, you know. Put it between his teeth."

"And let him gnaw me?"

"He won't. Who bridled him this afternoon?"

"My landlady. Please, Teacher, must I pry his mouth open?"

"No, you simply part his lips gently, with your fingers if necessary, and hold the bit firmly against his teeth until he recovers from lockjaw and accepts the badge of submission." Lynn's eyes were dancing with mirth.

"I will not! I'll go right home and tell my mother on you! Take your old horse—I told you in the first place I wouldn't keep him!" Miss MacIvor stamped her foot at him, but her eyes were laughing too.

Lynn looked at her standing there, smiling with her eyes at him, and suddenly a great wonder seized upon him. How had he ever dared to treat her with such nonchalance, just as if he had known her for years? And why did she respond so understandingly to his mood? She didn't know how his fortune had changed since he saw her on the road that day; for all she knew to the contrary he was still poverty-stricken, his name a byword in the country. What if he had not found Heinie's hoard? Would he have dared take this attitude toward her, and was it his attitude alone that made her so responsive? This was something, he saw, that would bear thinking about.

But not now. She was looking at him strangely, almost with trepidation.

"Now what have I done, Mr. Hayward? I didn't mean to be rude, of course. But you—"

"I just got to wondering at my nerve, that's all. You must think I'm crazy to stop you on a main-traveled road and give you lessons in saddling a horse. Here. I'll bridle him for you. I guess it is kinda hard for a lady to do, especially if she isn't used to it." He took the bridle from her and slipped it on old Blaze while she watched him.

"I really shouldn't keep him," she said, "though he's a dear, of course. But I wouldn't want the town to start talking about it."

Lynn turned toward her, looking down into her eyes that were clouded now with indecision.

"I might say it's none of the town's business, but that isn't the point. Look at it this way. Everybody knows the Hay-wire rents out its land for pasture, and they know I pick up strays for the reward there is in it. Why shouldn't their school-teacher rent a saddle horse from us? There's nothing in that to start a scandal, is there?"

"Oh, if you meant that I'm to—"

"I don't. I wouldn't take a cent, and you know it. We've got plenty of horses just running the range, doing no good to *anybody*. But that needn't matter. I can charge you rent for Blaze—five dollars a month, say. I'll never collect it, though."

"But I really feel—that's very cheap, you know. I paid the livery stable a dollar for a horse just for one forenoon!"

"That's all right. They have to feed him and take care of him, and they're in the business. This horse—well, somebody will tell you if I don't—he's the one we let Heinie have; the old man that was killed the other night. He used him for three or four years. Everybody in town knows the horse, and they won't think anything at all of my letting you use him. Five dollars a *month*, remember, if anybody asks you. But if they don't, just kindly forget it."

She pursed her lips, studying the matter.

"I wish," she said finally, "you'd sell him to me."

Lynn hesitated, then shook his head.

"I can't," he said finally. "He belongs to Dad and Dad won't sell any horses. No, you just keep him and use him as long as you like."

"We-ell—"

So then he knew that he would have his way about it, and his spirits rose again with a bound. He compelled her to saddle Blaze, lead him to a flat rock and mount without any assistance, though he longed to kneel and have her stand on his knee or some such romantic thing.

"My goodness, Mr. Hayward, I'd give worlds if I could just take the saddle horn between my thumb and finger and float up onto a horse's back the way you do!" she sighed, and Lynn laughed.

"Maybe you could if you were six-foot-two and built like a snake, all length and no width," he bantered. "I'll bet you dance like a feather."

Miss MacIvor blushed a little, and said she didn't quite know how feathers danced.

"I want you to go to the dance, Friday night. Will you? I can't ask you to go with me, because that would shock the natives; but if you'll go I'll be there, and I'll monopolize as much of your time as I dare."

"You dare a good deal, it seems to me," she evaded, as they jogged up the road together.

"Not so much. I don't dare let folks see me riding into town with you, for one thing, and I don't dare take you to the dance. You've heard of poor white trash? Well, I'm supposed to be it, in this country. It would start all the tongues wagging if —"

"But you're not—"

"You have to go by what the town thinks," he told her. "I'll show them some day that they've got another think coming, but right now you mustn't be seen riding with Lynn Hay-wire. No," he answered a look from her, "I mean it! And here comes a team, so I guess I'd better drift."

He cast a glance ahead, saw that the team was already dipping into a hollow and would be out of sight for two or three minutes, and leaned toward Miss MacIvor, holding her gaze with his own dark eyes in which still glowed the light that somehow made him a compelling sort of person whom one could not snub if one would.

"You have to let the town think you take its word for things or you won't get along very well," he said. "It don't make any

difference to me what they say. But if we don't get to be friends it sure won't be my fault. Good-by, little school-teacher—I'll see you at the dance."

He reached out and laid his hand over hers where it rested on the saddle horn, pressed it ever so gently and smiled into her eyes with a deep, searching glance that haunted her for days. Then he was gone, galloping swiftly along the trail. And after he had passed the team with a flurry of dust he began to whistle as he rode.

For the day, as Lynn judged days, had been well spent.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MONEY TRACK

Old Joel was having what his wife called one of his spells; nothing painful or distressing—old Joel seemed to extract a great deal of pleasure out of his spells. But they always drove his family to sign language in the kitchen and to the woodshed for more extensive conversation than lifted eyebrows and pointing fingers could compass. Lynn, hurrying up from the corral with his Green River bundle under his arm, heard the trumpeting of old Joel's wrath from afar. In the voice developed to carry commands across a bellowing herd, old Joel was declaiming to all and sundry his opinion that the this-and-that-and-the-other lazy hound was probably drunk or in jail, and if he ever came on to the ranch again he ought to be kicked off it and would be if Joel could lift one of his everything-but-what-they-should-be feet to do the kicking. So Lynn knew by this that his father had noticed his absence that day and, not knowing where he had gone or why, was having a wonderful time believing the worst about him.

"Old man's feeling his oats to-night," he made ironic mental comment, and lifted up his voice in song—and Lynn's lungs were not weak, either! He sang about how some people love coffee and some people loved tea, but he loved the stuff he had in his little brown jug! There was a wicked little twinkle in his eyes as he approached the house singing at the top of his voice:

"If I had a cow that gave such milk,
I'd dress her in the finest silk!
I'd feed her on the choicest hay
And milk her forty times a day!

"Ha-ha-ha! You and me,
Little brown jug, don't I love thee!"

"Drunk!" old Joel diagnosed with savage triumph, as Lynn pushed open the kitchen door, still singing. "What'd I tell yuh? I knew he was off carousin' around, makin' a damn' fool of himself, instead of stayin' at home, mindin' his own business. And that's the thing on two legs yuh want me to mortgage the roof over my head to give money to!" he finished bitterly when he heard the door slam shut. "Lazy, drunken fool—"

"Hello, folks, supper ready? Hello, Dad, I heard your gentle voice away down past the gate! You sure have got wonderful lungs, anyway. There isn't a man on the range can beller as loud as you."

Rose, setting the table for supper, turned with the knives and forks in her two hands and stared at him open-mouthed. His mother, stirring the gravy, turned a little paler. The two boys nudged each other on the bench behind the table and leaned forward, determined to miss none of the fireworks.

"Beller! I'd make *you* beller if I could get my hands on you! You'd feel my gentle foot, you drunken whelp—"

Under cover of his ravings Lynn pointed to his bundle, then at Rose, and beckoned her mysteriously to the woodshed. He threw a mirthful kiss toward his mother, who let the spoon handle slip into the gravy, he upset her so. A mocking gesture went toward the unseen but not unheard Joel, and he backed out, imperiously commanding Rose with his eyes to follow. He was undoing the bundle by the direct method of breaking the string wherever there was a knot, when Rose came in wide-eyed and apprehensive.

"Lynn Hayward!" She went close and sniffed, staring at him in the light of the lantern he had hung on a nail.

"Rose Hayward!" he mimicked, and blew a great breath upon her. "Don't even smell any cloves or any sen-sen, do you? You oughta be spanked. You know darn well I never take a drink. Look at this cloth. Think there's enough for a dress—enough for one with ruffles that'll go swoosh when you grand-right-and-left?"

"Lynn, what on earth do you mean?"

"Nothing at all. Only you'll have to get a move on and make this dress before next Friday, because you're going to the dance with me. They're going to have an orchestra up from Rawlins and there'll be a big doings, I guess. Labor Day

dance. Going to be a crowd."

"Why—why, Brudder! Why—"

"Try these slippers on, Sis; I had to guess at the size. And here's the ribbon for the dress—I was going to get more, but the woman that waited on me said this would be ample. Never heard of ample ribbon before in my life, but she oughta know. She's clerked in that store for the last ten years, she told me."

"Lynn Hayward, did you go and run your face just to buy me a new dress?" Rose was fingering the crisp lawn wistfully but she had a scared look in her eyes. Lynn thrust a jaw forward, leaning over her until she had to back away.

"Does my face look as if it had been run?"

"It looks as if—yes, it does! It looks as if something had happened to it," she retorted, giving him a slap. "Oh, it's beautiful, Brudder, but we can't afford it. Where did you get the money?"

"I didn't steal it, anyway," Lynn told her severely. "Just because I knew you'd all jump on me for having a nickel that hadn't been chased down like a chicken in the brush with the whole darn family standing around watching, and the old man preaching the sermon, I got this to show. Read it, and then I'll show it to Mom so she can sleep to-night. But don't let a yep outa you, Rose, where Dad can hear. He'd—"

"Twenty dollars!" Rose clasped her hands as though it had been twenty thousand. "Oh, Lynn!" And forthwith she sat down on a block of wood and began to unlace her shoes. "But you ought—it's wicked to have a dress and shoes like this, when the flour's most gone, and we need sugar too—and Dad's on the rampage because Mom gave him warmed-over coffee for his dinner and it wasn't strong enough, because she added more water and boiled the grounds and it didn't work—"

Lynn was not listening.

"Think Mom'll like this for aprons?" he anxiously inquired, showing a pretty calico, white with sprigs of forget-me-not scattered over it. "I didn't know what else to get her. She never goes anywhere—but I thought she could wear one of these aprons in the afternoon, maybe, when she sits in with Dad and sews. Do you suppose he'd notice it, and raise a holler?"

"I don't know, Lynn. Oh, isn't it pretty! Look, Brudder, they just fit perfectly!" She stood up in the new slippers, her skirts held above her ankles for him to see. "Oh, I've been crazy for a pair of slippers like these—not to wear because they're useful, but just to feel like a lady in. And that lawn! With ruffles—little weeny ones—around the bottom of the skirt, and ribbon bows—o-oh!" She hugged Lynn's neck until something cracked.

"Here's the thread for it—and I didn't know how you were fixed for needles, so I got a package; and pins." Lynn's face looked flushed and happy, and his eyes shone. "Look what I got for the kids, Rose! A mouth harp apiece; both in the same key, so their horses won't have to suffer. Good tone too." He drew one softly across his lips. "I didn't dare get anything for Dad," he said hesitantly. "He'd raise the devil because he wouldn't know where the money came from to buy it. Think you can manage to keep him from finding out you're making a new dress, Rose?"

Rose looked up from admiring the barred lawn with the green leaf pattern, and gave a little, impatient laugh.

"Oh, I'll just call it carpet rags!" she assured him. "Dad never says a word if I sew carpet rags all day long. I'll have to try it on out here, but I can lay down a piece of canvas to stand on. I'll go in and send Mother out to see hers. Gee, the boys will be tickled to death with their mouth harps, Brudder. What did you get for yourself? Anything at all? I'll bet you didn't!"

Lynn fished a small package out of a pocket and showed her his new necktie, anxious for her opinion of it. He jingled dollars in front of her, making them seem as many as possible, pleased at the impression they made upon her. It wasn't so much, but it was money he dared show, dared talk about, dared spend. Somehow those eight dollars symbolized the fortune hidden away in the brown jug, and he sensed his riches in the feel of them.

Lynn had never heard of the prosperity consciousness, but he had it and he seemed bent upon passing it along to the family. Sealed behind his lips though it was, his secret vibrated in his voice, danced in his eyes, rested in his ready

smile. It amused him to know that Mom and Rose and the boys thought he was jubilant over the twenty dollars he had earned, and that he was making the most of the joke they had on old Joel, who grumbled and swore in the next room, resenting the sound of their laughter, sending the barb of his bitter comments stabbing through their supper talk. But no one paid much attention to Joel that evening. The boys, ecstatically fingering their new harmonicas while they ate, took big bites and bolted their food like hungry pups, eager to be off down in the old bunk house where they could play the skin off their lips. Rose was all in a twitter to look over her patterns and cut out the new dress on the kitchen table, so that she could baste the seams and try it on before she went to bed. Mrs. Hayward was wondering whether she dared wear her aprons after she had them made. And Lynn, reading their thoughts in their eyes, smiled to himself and wondered how they would feel if they knew what he had packed away in the brown jug. Would they be any happier, really, than they were now over their small gifts? Wouldn't the very magnitude of the fortune—in cold cash it seemed so much more than if it were tied up in land or cattle—wouldn't so much money, seen all at once, dull their emotions to a dazed incomprehension?

In time they would come to realize what it meant, just as he had done; but it seemed to him that perhaps it was better that they did not know. It would be some time, probably, before he would dare spend any of the money. He would have to accustom people to the idea of his having cash in his pocket, first. He would have to make quite a lot of money somehow, so that he could slip in a little of the other gradually, until the whole amount was absorbed in his affairs. He didn't want to hoard it, as Heinie had done. Money was made to be useful, he told himself. It ought to be kept at work, same as a man. Money, he frequently thought, is worth just what happiness it will put into the world, and no more.

It dazzled him now to reflect upon the happiness a few dollars had brought into this house where laughter was less often heard than curses. If they were so lifted out of their workaday moods with these small things, how would they feel when real affluence was theirs? He wanted to try them out with real luxuries; to take some of his daydreams and materialize them as facts.

Down in the bunk house where he and the boys slept lately, he listened long to the labored strains of "Home, Sweet Home" and wondered if they really knew what meaning lay in the song. If he could make it home, sweet home for them in reality—and he could. He had the power within his grasp. All he needed now was the opportunity to bring it forth and use it. He could turn this old ranch into a paradise with ninety-two thousand dollars; couldn't he, though! And when he had it looking the way it ought to look, then he'd like to have the little school-teacher ride out some day and see it. He wanted her to meet Mom—and it never occurred to him that he had never before felt that way toward a girl.

Well, at any rate he could start in getting ready to make some improvements, he thought, as he lay awake in the cool dusk. He'd have the boys gather up all the trash that was lying around, and haul it down back of the stables and burn what wasn't any good. It would give the young monkeys something to do. Maybe he could make a game of it, or promise them something they wanted real badly. A pair of spurs or something—or money. For a dollar apiece they'd work like troopers; he didn't remember that either of the kids had ever owned a dollar.

Yes, he'd start them at it first thing in the morning. You never could tell—Miss MacIvor *might* take a notion to ride out, most any Saturday. She knew Rose, and she'd probably want to come and call on her, anyway; it would be no more than polite, after the way Rose had put herself out for the school-teacher. He sure would hate to have her see the place looking the way it did now—and darn it all, a fellow worth almost a hundred thousand dollars had no business living in a ramshackle place like this. It wasn't—well, it wasn't fitting; it didn't match up with his real standing in the world; no matter whether folks knew it yet or not, he was rich; richer, he guessed, than any one in the country.

He was glad Rose liked her new dress; she'd look as pretty as any girl at the dance. Folks would open their eyes, he bet, when they walked in looking as good as the rest of them. Rose sure deserved a little pleasure, anyway. She didn't get much; he'd manage somehow to take her in to every dance, from now on. Do them both good to mix a little; get them out of the hay-wire class, seeing they didn't belong there, anyhow. Yes, he was glad he had bought Rose something nice to wear.

And just as he was going to sleep, one of his innermost thoughts peered out at him so shyly that he did not thrust it away but let it go in and mingle with his dreams. It was this: When you like a girl and want to see her real often, it's mighty lucky to have a sister along to get kind of chummy with the girl. It gives you chances of being friendly without making yourself so darned conspicuous every one starts talking about it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT'S WHAT YOU'VE GOT THAT COUNTS

As the days passed, so passed Lynn's new consciousness of wealth. He reasoned with himself, argued down his growing depression again and again, and found it cropping up at unexpected times just when he most needed that buoyancy of spirits which had carried him into pleasant acquaintance with John Trueman and the good graces of Janet MacIvor. He couldn't understand it. He fought it with all the weapons he knew, but it was of no use. He was in for a severe attack of the blues and he could not account for them.

Rose sewed early and late and her new dress grew ruffly and wholly entrancing. Lynn's dread of the dance increased. Jangling his eight dollars in his pocket did no good—they were simply eight dollars and no more; not even eight dollars when he paid the boys the two dollars he had promised them for cleaning up the yards. It *was* a hay-wire outfit, no matter what you did to it—and what was the good of having ninety-two thousand dollars hidden away if you couldn't use the money? It was just so much paper, in that case. He might as well not have it.

He did not know anything about nervous reaction; he had never heard of such a thing; but he did know the blues when he had them, and although he had sense enough to realize that the mood would pass, just like toothache, that did not help to lift him out of the slough of despond into which he had fallen; and get out of it he must if he were to regain the self-assurance necessary to carry him through the dance. As he felt on Labor Day morning he would be able to do nothing but skulk outside in the shadows and watch the dancers through the windows. He would rather not go if he had to feel hay-wire. Yet he would have to go through with it somehow, for Rose would be heartbroken if she couldn't go and wear her new dress and slippers, now that she had the dress finished, and it was even prettier than any of them had anticipated. The little school-teacher, too—after his talk to her about going, he simply couldn't back down.

But he felt all hay-wire, with the full stigma that was couched in the name. He was conscious of his old suit, bought three years ago and kept presentable only because he scarcely ever put it on. He told himself miserably that his new tie would look like hell, and he could polish his shoes till he was blue in the face and they would still look exactly what they were—a pair of old shoes that had been half-soled twice and needed that service again by rights. He couldn't even whistle "Little Brown Jug" without feeling like a great big chump; which shows the depths to which he had fallen.

Something had to be done. Rose's eyes were growing big and anxious, though she told him that if he didn't feel like going he mustn't mind her at all, because she didn't want to go if he had a headache. Mom had watched her chance when Joel took his afternoon nap and turned the clock an hour ahead, so that supper could be early and he would think Rose had gone to bed when the dishes were washed. Lynn, with his quarters in the bunk house, had more freedom as a matter of course; though he had taken the precaution of dragging the buggy down past the gate so that old Joel even with his ears sharpened by suspicion could not hear the wheels when they drove off and badger Mom with questions and condemnation. Rose was going to dress in the bunk house—they had it all planned, because she was afraid to climb out of her window in the lawn dress. She might tear it or something.

Truly, something must be done about this hay-wire mood of his. Maybe it was because he didn't quite believe he had all that money hidden in the well. For three nights now he had dreamed of finding two-gallon jugs in all sorts of ungodly places, and they were all empty. Maybe that was what ailed him. He had lost the comfortable assurance that his fortune was safe. Had the term been invented then, he would have realized that he had a poverty complex; as it was he told himself (with profane trimmings) that he felt like a whipped dog trying to find a barn to crawl under.

This being his condition, he saddled his horse after dinner and galloped off to the Upper Ranch—and he did not sing as he rode. He hated himself for being so weak-minded that he must go and feel that money again and make sure that it was there, but since he was a damned fool he decided that he might as well act like one and be done with it.

It was not until he was down in the well, sitting astraddle a crosspiece with the cork out of the jug that the revulsion of feeling came and almost made him dizzy. It was the feel of the money that did it. When he drew out the top package and saw that they were actually one-thousand-dollar notes, ten of them right there in his hand, a tingle went down to his toes and he could feel a beating in his throat. He was rich—rich—*rich!* He did not take out the other packages; there was no need. The money was there, safe as in a bank. Safer, because banks did sometimes fail, and fortunes were swept away with the stroke of a pen. But this was here where nothing like that could happen. Real, tangible wealth that he could hold

in his hands; wealth that he could use, some day. It wasn't drawing interest, to be sure, but then it was enough without that and it was safer. As long as no one knew it was there—

"And they can't read my mind," he whispered exultantly. "They'd have to, if they were going to find out anything. I guess I'm about the biggest chump in the State of Wyoming, all right. Me going around with my jaw hanging down, when I've got all this money of my own! Why, I—I *can't* be hay-wire with all this where I can lay my hands on it. Why, damn it, a man doesn't have to *spend* a million dollars to be a millionaire; if he's got it, he's one whether he ever spends a dime or not.

"I've got to remember this from now on. It ain't what a man spends that makes him rich, it's what he owns. It ain't the clothes on his back nor the size of his hat that makes a man; it's something inside of him. Napoleon was a little runt of a fellow and there wasn't a man in his army, I don't suppose, that couldn't have licked the tar out of him if they'd tried. But they never *tried*, yuh notice! They licked his boots instead. And he wasn't born in a palace, either. I expect folks thought Napoleon was pretty much hay-wire himself, when he lived on a farm. But did that stop him? Not on your life! He walked all over a lot of men that thought they were some 'punkins.' He didn't have any ninety-two thousand dollars to carry him along, either. He started out with just what he packed on the inside of his head. He made the raffle—just a little runt like him had kings and emperors jumping sideways.

"Well—hell! I don't *have* to spend this money right off the bat. I've got it. I guess," he added sardonically, "it ain't going to go outa style; not these thousand-dollar bills; not this year, anyway. They'll be just as spendable a year from now, or five years from now, as they are this week.

"I guess the thing for me to do is wake up and use what's on the inside of my head, and never mind what's inside the jug. This'll keep. But your brains and that something else that works your brains—they can go to seed pretty damn' fast if you don't use 'em. Look at Dad; used to be one of the leading stockmen of the county—and now look at him! Whining like a baby if he ain't fed on time; belling like a kid over a stick of candy if you pry a dollar or two away from him to buy grub to feed him with! I guess Dad's to be pitied, all right, instead of blamed. He's just set there and gone hay-wire.

"Why, gosh! I've been letting an old man that can't stir a foot put the hay-wire sign on the whole damn' ranch! I could have kept things going, I guess, if I'd had the guts of Napoleon. No, by gosh, if I'd just used what I've got myself! It's Dad that's hay-wire—not me. I've just let him run a whizzer on me and the whole family. We been singin' everything to his tune, and we didn't have to if we didn't want to." His eyes, staring down at the money without actually seeing it, grew deep with introspection. "We didn't—have to. We could have helped him hold himself together, maybe; or anyway, we could have dominated him, paid no attention to his belling any more than I would to a cross old bull penned into a corral. Same thing exactly. I've been letting Dad's beller run the ranch—but no more! No more a-tall! From now on I use what *I've* got. Money, you go back in your jug and stay put till I get a place to use you. Sorry, Mr. George Clinton and Mr. James Madison, but I'm afraid I haven't got a job for you just yet. Soon as I put on a full crew, though, I'll be glad to put you on the payroll. You can work for me—but don't ever get the idea you'll work up to be boss! Not a chance in the world. There's only one boss of this outfit, and that's George Lynnhurst Hayward."

He got out of the well with one leg numbed from sitting so long on the crosspiece, but aside from its intolerable prickling which sent him hobbling like a crippled chicken to his horse, Lynn was once more happy. Man the Thinker was sitting at center again, ordering his thoughts and his actions in perfect harmony with his desires. But he did not sing in the exuberance that had marked his earlier realization of his wealth. He rode rather slowly, since there was plenty of time, and his head was bent in deep, thoughtful planning. The want of what he now called "loose" money, money which he could use in any way he saw fit, was going to be something of a handicap; but not too great a one if he used his brains. He must consider ways and means.

Preoccupied with his plans, he paid no attention to the trail, since all were alike familiar and there was little to choose between the road that kept to the higher, less rocky ground and the one that followed the creek down past Heinie's claim and cabin—for if one were shorter the other was shadier with a pleasant gurgle of running water. It was not until he neared the abandoned placer claim with the grave just beyond that he awoke to the fact that Blackie, having come this way twice in the last week or so, had chosen the creek path again. Had he thought of it when they left the Upper Ranch he would probably have chosen the other way. But it didn't greatly matter. Even though he had given up trying his hand at detective work, there was no reason why he should not drop by occasionally and take a look. Peterson had said he was going to keep an eye on the cabin, which relieved Lynn of any sense of obligation in the matter, and he had been busy hunting stray horses on the range for sake of the reward money. Other men did it occasionally; legitimate enough, though

too precarious to be looked upon seriously as a job for any man with ambition to get on in the world. Even to Lynn, hunting advertised strays was no more than a stop-gap until he could think of some other way to earn money.

So thinking, he reached Heinie's grave and rode on down the path to the cabin. The sudden *pow-w* of a shot and the whine of a bullet that fanned his cheek in passing woke him with a jolt from his cogitations. Blackie squatted, ducked and whirled backwards on the trail, and so a second bullet missed Lynn completely, though it tore the leather on his saddle horn. He heard where it struck a rock behind him and went whining over the grave.

In all his life Lynn had never been shot at before. He had often wondered how it would feel, and now he found out in one flash of emotion. It made him mad, just as though a man had walked up and slapped him on the jaw, and it brought the same identical reaction. He wanted to hit back at the fellow. But he did not want his horse to get shot, so he rode pounding up the path to where he could tie Blackie behind sheltering rocks, and dismounted. Then, with his six-shooter in his hand, he hurried back toward the cabin, slipping from rock to tree and from tree to bush exactly as he used to do when he and Rose played Injun; just as Sid and Little Joe played nowadays.

The shots had come from the end of the cabin toward the creek, where the willows grew thick among the rocks. Before he was near the spot where he had been riding he turned off and made his way stealthily down to the creek, crept down over the bank and so approached the cabin from the side. Almost at once he saw boot tracks in the sandy spaces between rocks; tracks going and coming, as if some one had been searching along the creek. But he had no time then to stop and try to identify them. The shooter up there in the thicket could probably move as swiftly and as stealthily as he, and there was no telling in which direction he would go.

With the thought, Lynn straightened his bent back and peered cautiously over the bank just in time to see a pair of legs moving directly away from him beyond the bushes, the leafy branches of which hid his body. Without waiting to see more and with no compunction whatever, Lynn shoved forward his gun and fired at the legs. He saw them leap as though a hornet had stung the owner of them, and a crashing and a swaying were in the thicket. Lynn fired again toward the sound and began looking for a place to climb the bank.

Just where he had stopped, the water had gouged under in time of spring freshets until there was a distinct overhang for several rods. Lynn tried to pull himself up and found himself merely clawing dirt down, so he ran back to where Heinie had made a path to get water. And by that time the fellow was gone. The clatter of hoofbeats was all that remained to tell of the encounter. Lynn ran back to where he had left his horse, but although he mounted and rode hard for a half mile or more, he knew the chase was hopeless.

"I'll bet I stung him good, anyway," he comforted himself as he went on home. "I wonder if it wasn't Hank? Or maybe it was that other fellow, that dug up the hearth while Hank was in town. Seems to me there must be several of them after Heinie's stake." And then he grinned. "They can hunt and be darned to 'em, for all me," he added. "If Heinie could know what's going on around here, it would sure tickle him to see 'em smellin' around here after that money!"

He rode very happily homeward after that and told Rose to hurry up and get ready so they could start early, because he had business in town before the dance. He wanted to see Peterson.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MONEY GOSSIP AGAIN

Peterson was out of town, having ridden over toward New Fork to see about the killing of a sheep herder, and there was no one else in town to whom Lynn cared to go with his story. He did ask one man if Hank Miller was around anywhere, but the man began to preach to Lynn about forgetting his grudges and keeping himself out of trouble, so Lynn let it go at that. The town was filled with strangers waiting for the dance to begin, and they were celebrating Labor Day to the full extent of their capacity, some of them. There were those who came to dance but would remain sprawled in some frowsy back room to sober up, and until they reached the sprawling stage they were likely to become boisterous just where and when they shouldn't. Lynn therefore returned to where Rose sat in the parlor of the hotel looking very sweet and very shy, and he remained with her just as a good brother should when his sister doesn't know any of the women chattering around her.

"We might go and buy the groceries while we have time, Lynn," she suggested, after a dragging quarter of an hour. "The store's all lit up yet, so they must be open. I'll go with you. I hate sitting here to be stared at."

Since she couldn't possibly hate it more than Lynn, in spite of his new-found dignity, he blessed her under his breath and they went out into the soft starlight of early evening; for after all, it seemed that they needn't have left home so soon, save for Lynn's errand. The dance would not be under full swing before nine, and the two were secretly resolved not to be the lonesome first ones in the hall. Anything but that.

"Miss MacIvor said she lives with Mrs. Ben Moore," Rose said, when they were outside. "Which is her house, Lynn?"

"That little green one up the street. We'll have to pass by it. Maybe," he added artfully, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to drop in and see her, Rose. You could stay there while I went on and got the stuff."

"Pretty time to make calls, when every one's getting ready for the dance!" Rose reproved him pertly. "I may be a hayseed, but I know better than that!"

But as it turned out, the little school-teacher was looking out upon the street when they came by, and she tapped on the window, nodded and beckoned with a crooked finger, and met them at the door.

"Don't tell me you were going right by without looking this way!" she reproached. "I saw you drive into town and I've been calling you everything I could think of for not stopping. I want to walk over to the hall with you, Miss Hayward, when it's time. I suppose your brother has some one in mind he'd like to take—"

"I sure have," Lynn assented, showing his teeth in a smile that was two thirds in his eyes. "You guessed it first time. But I wouldn't have the nerve to ask her, so I might as well walk over with you girls. Maybe I'll see her at the dance."

"Lynn Hayward, you never told *me* you were sweet on a girl," cried Rose, looking up at him with round, shocked eyes.

"Well, I never told the girl yet, either. I'd better go on to the store. I can come back here and get you." His face was turned toward Rose as he spoke, but his eyes went to the one he had in his mind.

"No, let's all go to the store," Miss MacIvor suggested. "I walk alone in this town so much that I'd like to see how it would seem to be sandwiched in between the two of you. Come on. I don't want a hat on such a night as this."

Lynn turned and looked down at her, silently reminding her of his warning on the road that day. But she only laughed and shook her head at him, as she took Rose by the arm and started on.

"I don't see why you need to walk alone," Rose remarked, her face brightened with the friendliness of this town girl. "Goodness knows there's plenty of escorts scattered around."

"Not for me. A schoolma'am can't be too careful, or she will shock the natives and start tongues wagging." And though she did not glance at Lynn he recognized his own words and bit his lip. She was calmly letting him know that she remembered and was challenging the town and him also. He wanted to ask her what she meant by it, but with Rose along he didn't dare. It would be cruel to spoil Rose's pleasure that night by calling to her attention the town's supercilious

attitude toward the Haywards. Perhaps, he thought, Miss MacIvor was merely being kind to Rose, who had served her so generously. He was glad of that, and he decided that after all it was Miss MacIvor's affair.

Men looked at them as they passed, watched them as they went on. Presumably they also expressed themselves in speech, but they kept their voices down and gave no offence. The crowd around the door of the store parted to let them through, and several men lifted their hats to the girls and nodded casually to Lynn. If their eyes betrayed curiosity, who can blame them? The uppish new school-teacher throwing in with the Hay-wire outfit after turning down the Elk Basin eligibles was enough to jar the onlookers.

But Lynn did not mind, now that his first qualms had passed. He might not—he would have said he could not—be good enough for the little school-teacher, but at least he was as good as any one in town, and a good deal better than some he might name. Then he was diverted from that train of thought by the abrupt awakening of memory. He had stood just here by the counter not two weeks ago, and the school-teacher had stood over by the ribbon counter where she and Rose were twittering together now, and he had wished suddenly and rather poignantly that he might get acquainted with her, be friends with her. The wish had seemed an impossible one then; but already it was fulfilled.

If Lynn had not already been quite convinced of the magic that lay within his fortunes, his faith would have flowered at that moment into full knowledge of it.

But that thought passed swiftly, for here came Hank Miller from the back of the store, scowling under his hat brim as he recognized Lynn. The package he carried in his hand and now slid unobtrusively into his pocket looked to Lynn like a bottle of medicine—and did he walk with a limp? Lynn almost imagined that he did. The legs he had seen in the thicket had not been encased in chaps, conchoed or otherwise, but—

"I don't suppose those dollar chaps are grown fast to his legs," Lynn thought dissatisfiedly. "I guess he *could* go without 'em if he wanted to. And that off leg of his sure has got a kind of a hitch to it." But when he turned to watch Hank walk to the door he was not so sure. Hank was swaggering a little—almost a stagger, it could be called. Lynn shook his head in doubt. He had to be fair. Hank's peculiar gait might be caused by whisky instead of a bullet scratch. It wouldn't do to jump to conclusions just on the strength of his dislike of the man.

A thinning of the group in the store and the movement of the crowd outside warned him to hurry his purchasing even before the girls came over to where he stood. Some one had said the musicians had gone over to the hall, Rose told him; and presently they were going down the street with their arms full of packages that must be stowed safely in Miss MacIvor's room until after the dance, because the store would be locked then and some one might steal them from the buggy if they were left there.

Lynn was a busy and a happy young man for the next hour or two. Like a good brother, he danced twice with Rose and introduced a few of the decenter fellows he could find in the crowd, but he managed for all that to have the dances he craved with the little school-teacher, and to extract the promise of more. It thrilled him to catch the glances of the men standing around the door, and to guess at what they were thinking as he whirled by in a waltz with the prettiest girl and the nicest girl (Rose excepted) in the room dancing within his embrace, her brown head just reaching the top button on his coat. Let 'em look and be darned. They'd look a lot harder if they knew what secret he had locked away behind his cool, appraising glances. Looking was cheap—let 'em look! Only, they'd better be careful of the expression in their eyes when they looked at the little school-teacher.

It was nearly midnight when he thought he saw Jack Peterson just outside the door and, both girls being busy dancing with worthy and estimable young men, he went out to find him and draw him away from the crowd for a few minutes' talk. He wanted to know whether Peterson had been out to Heinie's place within the last few days, and if so, whether he had seen any signs of prowlers. He meant to go back to-morrow and look around, but it might be well to let Peterson know some one was still sneaking out there, and to tell him about the shooting.

But when he was outside he did not see Peterson. Instead, one Bill Witherspoon took him by the arm and swung him over toward the fence, where a line of teams and saddle horses stood tied. By the aroma of his breath, Bill had been imbibing rather freely of the popular drink that night, and by his mysterious manner and silence he had things of importance to discuss. Lynn did not know what it was all about, but he humored Bill to the extent of walking out of earshot of the crowd.

"They'll think we snuck out here to have a little drink," Bill said heavily, when finally they brought up alongside the

fence. "But me, I've had about enough for to-night. Couldn't dance if I took another drink. What I wanted to say was, I just wanta ask you about old Heinie Deitrich. Did he leave any money laying around—no, that ain't what I wanted to say. It's this: Did you ever hear of him being lousy rich?"

Having been warned by Bill's beginning, Lynn laughed with real amusement.

"Neither one, Bill. Heinie took a bath in a tub or in the creek every Sunday, and I never heard of his being anything but broke. Why? What put that into your head?"

"Well," said Bill with the mumbling tone of a man who has just taken a chew of tobacco, "it's got around that he had a gob of money cached somewhere. Fellow that was in Cheyenne told me and some others that he seen old Heinie with a thousand dollars all in one bill! A one-thousand-dollar bill, mind yuh! He said—"

"Is there such a thing in the world, for gosh sake?"

"Oh, yes!" Bill solemnly assured him. "Banks have 'em. Ain't no biggern' five dollars, either. Fold it up and stick it in your vest pocket if yuh want to—but it's worth a thousand dollars. Oh, yes! They make 'em, all right."

"Jimminy Christmas!" marveled Lynn. And then he laughed. "Did you swallow that yarn?" he challenged. "Heinie with a one-thousand-dollar bill! Wouldn't that jar yuh?"

"Well, he swears he seen it. He said there was more, but he couldn't see how big the figures was on 'em; he kinda thought they was the same as the one on top. How he come to see it, he says he was in a roomin' house and he heard somebuddy laughin' in the next room, and it sounded kinda like somebuddy he knowed. So there was a door, but it was locked. And he peeked through the keyhole and it was Heinie Deitrich, setting on the side of the bed right close by the door, countin' this money and lookin' at it."

"Sounds like a pipe dream to me," scoffed Lynn, though his nerves had a flurry up and down his spinal column.

"Well, yes, it did at the time he told it," Bill admitted. "But right after Heinie got back he was killed, and the way things was throwed around, there'd been a big fight over something. So it kinda looks—"

"Yeah, it kinda looks as though the fellow that saw all that—"

"No, it wasn't him. He was sick in bed. He come on up ahead of Heinie, and he'd et something that give him ptomaine. No, it wasn't him."

"Some one he told that yarn to, then. Look here, Bill. I knew Heinie all my life. Us folks all liked him and kinda made him like one of the family when he come to the ranch. I'd give a good deal to find the dirty rat that killed him. Who all heard that story?"

Mentally if not actually Bill Witherspoon backed away from Lynn.

"Well, I dunno as I remember who all," he evaded. "Quite a bunch of us. It was over in the Elkhorn. A bunch of us was standin' by the bar talkin'—"

"Was Hank Miller one of them?"

"Hank? He might of been. He hangs out there a good deal. Why? You think Hank done it?"

"I wouldn't put it past him," Lynn hinted darkly. And then a sudden idea struck him. "Say, Bill, who was it went out there and hunted around—"

Bill laid a trembling hand on Lynn's arm and leaned forward so that the stench of stale whisky nearly asphyxiated Lynn.

"I never meant no harm in the world. I was asleep when word come in of the murder—I'd been setting up all night with the ptomaine feller. So I got to thinkin' if Heinie *did* have all that money, somebuddy was sure to find it and keep it; see. Him not havin' no heirs, the money'd belong to the feller that found it, see. It kinda preyed on m' mind, Lynn. Mebby I done wrong, but I did go out and take a look—"

"Was it you that dug up the hearth?"

"We-ell—yes, I did pry up a few stones in the hearth, but I put 'em back again just as I found 'em. I never found a thing, I'll swear to that on a stack of Bibles a mile high!"

"Well, I'll take your word for it, Bill." Lynn smiled to himself in the darkness. "When was it you went out?"

"Same afternoon. I started out, thinkin' mebby I could git there in time for the funeral, mebby. I always liked old Heinie. But I wasn't outside of town, hardly—I was passin' by the school-house—when I met the posse comin' back. I didn't hunt a great deal. I felt kinda meechin' lookin' around a dead man's place. Uh course, it's finders keepers, in a case like that. No use handin' it over to the State, seein' it wasn't property that had to be sold and looked after. But I felt meechin' just the same. I didn't stay long. Place didn't feel right to me."

"Did you go back, Bill? About daylight, for instance?"

"No, I ain't ever been back sence then." Bill's voice was urgent for belief.

"I wouldn't go, either, if I were you. If anybody caught you there they might think you had something to do with the murder. I would have, myself, if you hadn't come right out and told me the truth. I'm riding up and down the creek past there pretty often, Bill. We've got a ranch up above, you know. If I'd seen you digging around there, I'd sure as the world have waltzed you in to Jack Peterson."

"You won't ketch *me* around there again," Bill solemnly assured him. "I heard groanin' just outside the cabin that evenin'. You can laugh if you want to, but I heard it sure as hell. No, sir, I ain't lost anything around old Heinie Deitrich's place and I ain't lookin' fer anything. I wouldn't go there at night, not for *five* one-thousand-dollar bills!"

"Do you know of any one else that's been out there, snooping around?"

Bill considered a moment, shook his head and spat tobacco juice.

"Nope, nary a soul. They'd keep mum about it if they did go. It ain't a thing a feller's goin' to blabber about, do yuh think?"

"Well, no. But it seems funny to me," said Lynn, "that any one would swallow a yarn that sounds as fishy as that one about Heinie. I'd have to see the money myself before I'd believe it, Bill." And he added after a pause. "But it cost Heinie his life, I guess. Did you tell Peterson? You ought to. One of the men that heard the story in the saloon must have gone out there and jumped Heinie for the money he was supposed to have. Probably he wouldn't take Heinie's word that he was broke, but started in on him pretty rough. Heinie'd fight back, naturally, and the fellow hit him on the head with a club. A stick of wood, most likely. That friend of yours," he finished harshly, "may not have meant any harm by shooting off his mouth the way he did, but he sure as hell sent out Heinie's death warrant. There's men in this crowd here to-night that would murder a man for a whole lot less than a thousand dollars, Bill."

"Yeah, you're damn' right," Bill hastily assented. "Well, I just thought I'd ask yuh what yuh thought about the yarn. Ain't anything in it, you say. Fishy. Mebby you're right. Mebby it was a ten he seen and thought it was a thousand. He was drinkin' some, I guess."

"Well, you tell him to keep his mouth shut. He's the cause of Heinie's death, and he's liable to send somebody to jail for the murder that was caught snooping around looking for money that ain't there. It's useless to hunt for a fortune at Heinie's place, Bill. I'd take a bet on that if I could."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Bill sighed. "You wouldn't catch *me* there again, Lynn. Them groans—no, I don't want no thousand dollars that bad!"

"Well, let me know if you hear anything more, will you, Bill? And thanks for telling me."

As he hurried back to take Rose and the little school-teacher over to the hotel for refreshments before the crowd surged that way Lynn pondered the story Bill had told him. The man who had dug up Heinie's hearth stones was accounted for, but whose was the face that looked in at the window at dawn? And who owned the legs in the bushes by the creek, and the gun that sent bullets humming up the path at Lynn?

"Well, anyway, I side-stepped the money question without coming right out and telling a lie," Lynn remembered with satisfaction and went elbowing into the hall, feeling at peace with his conscience.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LYNN BUYS SHEEP

There is a saying in the ancient writings that, when Opportunity knocks at the door, the card he leaves reads Responsibility. Lynn had probably never heard the wisdom of the Ancients put in just that form, but he was beginning to prove within himself the truth of it.

This was mid-September and he had been rich in his own consciousness for a month. For thirty days, almost, the brown jug had remained in the well, the repository of such wealth as he had never dreamed of possessing; and for just that number of days the thought of its actuality had been germinating within his soul, and like Jack and his beanstalk in the old nursery tale, the seed had taken root and was sending up a strong plant to flower in the sun. The name of the plant was ambition, and it was growing apace and crowding out the little fears, the little discouragements that had filled his mind a month ago.

Now, he was not content with knowing what he knew and with waiting until such time as he might safely use that knowledge and the fortune it concerned. He wanted to get out and do something, make something of the ranch and himself without waiting for another turn of the wheel called fortune. And his impatience held him silent on the trail to Green River; silent and thoughtful without being exactly moody. Hunting strays was pretty small business for him now, even though he had found them after two weeks of riding and could justly count the results as the equivalent of earning sixty dollars a month while he lived at home and looked after the family as usual. But what was sixty dollars a month to a man worth ninety-two thousand, even supposing he were lucky enough to keep up that average in reward money? A month ago it would have been good enough—now it didn't amount to anything at all.

Sheep—that was John Trueman's idea, and it was a good one. But there were difficulties, of course. If he used part of their land for pasturing sheep he could not take cattle to winter; at least not so many. And that would cut down the pasture money and his father would want to know why, and accuse Lynn of holding out a part of it—of stealing it, in so many words. And every dollar of the pasture money was needed to feed them and pay the taxes. Old Joel would never, so long as he lived, consent to having sheep on the ranch—

"There'd be hell to pay all around," Lynn sighed, as he gave up the notion for perhaps the fiftieth time in the past two weeks. "I guess I can't do it. I might just as well forget it and do something else. But *what?*"

Have you ever had the experience of wanting very much to do a certain thing, casting about for ways of doing it, finding too many obstacles and giving up all hope, and then having the thing almost thrust itself upon your notice again and demand attention once and for all? It was so with Lynn.

A mile farther down the road and just before he came within sight of Green River, he met a harassed looking man on a livery horse. Lynn nodded, range fashion, and would have ridden on. But the man signaled him to stop a minute.

"Say, do you know where I can buy feed for a bunch of sheep for a couple of days?" he asked, reining alongside Lynn.

"No," said Lynn, while his nerves tightened and relaxed again at the way in which the subject came at him, "I can't say I do. You mean hay, or grass?"

"I mean anything a sheep can eat. I've got a trainload of sheep—fifteen carloads—back here in the stockyards, and not a damn' spear of hay or grass in sight to feed 'em. And feed 'em I've got to, before I can go on. I don't know what in thunder to do!"

"Tough luck," Lynn observed, and he did not limit his sympathy to the man or to the hungry sheep, but included himself. "If you had 'em out closer to our ranch—but that's a forty-mile drive and it wouldn't do, of course."

"No," the man gloomily agreed, "that wouldn't do. Time they trailed back they'd be hungry and have to be fed again before we loaded out. It sure is the devil's own luck. These cowmen around here would be tickled to death to see the whole band starve to death, I s'pose. Damn' shame, too. Three thousand head of as fine a bunch of merino ewes as you ever laid eyes on. I'm taking 'em back into Nebraska to winter. Found myself over-stocked and the range is pretty short in Idaho this year. Don't yuh know of any ranch around here that would sell me four or five ton of hay?"

"No, I don't," said Lynn. "Not unless it was John Trueman. Did you ask him?"

"I guess it was his foreman I talked to. Nothin' doin'. Said they didn't have any hay to spare."

"I know Trueman, and I'm going there now with these horses. I can see him about it myself, if you like. I don't believe he'd let a band of sheep starve, no matter how short he is of hay."

"He's a cowman, ain't he?" The man's tone was skeptical, but he started back with Lynn just as they saw a drowning man will clutch at a straw.

Since the road passed by the stockyards, they stopped and rode over close to the pens that contained the sheep; plaintive, blating little animals that huddled together and stared up at the horsemen with anxious amber eyes. Their voices mingled in a strident "*Ba-a-a, ba-a-a—ba-a-a*" which at a little distance had sounded one sustained, singsong refrain, not unpleasant but terribly monotonous. The wordless hymn of hunger followed them as they rode away.

"That's my herder over there with the dogs," the man volunteered, pointing to a man sauntering aimlessly out across the prairie with two black-and-white shepherds at heel. "I brought 'em along, in case I could buy grazing, but it looks like I won't have much use for 'em."

"Three thousand head of merinos, did you say?"

"Three thousand head of as fine merino ewes as you ever saw. You seen 'em at their worst."

"Unh-hunh." Lynn stared off to the farther hills, twisted his body in the saddle and looked back toward the yards, where a low dust cloud told of the restless milling of the sheep. He rolled and lighted a cigarette, glanced back at the led horses and forward again. Poverty complex was having one last and losing argument with prosperity consciousness, though the man beside him guessed nothing of that. It came to the climax of speech, however, when they reached the first scattering shacks of the town.

"Say, Mr.—"

"Brown's my name; James M. Brown."

"Mr. Brown, if I can't get you any hay, what'll you do?"

"Damfino," said Mr. Brown with gloomy brevity. "Run 'em into the river, I guess." Which of course he didn't mean.

"What'll you take for the herd—I mean the band?"

"Hunh? Well, they're worth two dollars a head if they're worth a cent. That is, they'd be worth that back home. If I could get thirty-five hundred dollars spot cash, I'd sell 'em and hit the next train going west!"

"Three thousand head, you say?"

"Three thousand head and maybe two or three over. Two got down and smothered—but I left a little margin for loss. Yes, they'd tally all of three thousand."

"Unh-hunh." Lynn sent one more glance back toward the stockyards. "Cheap enough, I guess."

"Cheap? They're a give-away at that price! But what's a man goin' to do?"

They had reached the Trueman store and Lynn did not answer save with a sympathetic headshake which signified his understanding of the dilemma. That understanding must have been complete, for he went straight back to the railed-in office, burring his spur rowels on the floor as he walked. And by good luck—or perhaps a higher destiny so ordered—John Trueman was sitting with his feet cocked up on his desk and a cigar in his mouth. Your oldtime cowman calls that luxurious idleness, and perhaps it is.

"Howdy, Mr. Trueman," Lynn greeted with his best smile, and pushed his hat to the back of his head. "There's a man out here wants to buy four or five tons of hay to feed a train of sheep."

"Tell him my foreman takes care of all that. But I've sold myself short on hay and I gave Pete orders not to let any more

go. Better tell him no and be done with it."

"Well, in that case there's a band of merino ewes going dirt cheap. If you can see your way clear to lending me the money, Mr. Trueman, I'll take your advice and go into the sheep business."

John Trueman's feet came down off his desk and he lifted the cigar from the corner of his mouth and laid it very carefully down with the burning end extending just far enough to save the wood from scorching. For a minute Lynn was scared, but in the next breath he pulled his courage forward to stand beside his ambition. He need not have worried, however. John Trueman would have explained that he was merely getting set to talk business.

"How much you going to need, Lynn?" he asked matter-of-factly.

"I'll want five thousand," Lynn said in what appeared to be a perfectly calm and businesslike tone; but then John Trueman didn't have a finger on Lynn's pulse to see how it jumped. "The sheep won't cost that much. I can get them for thirty-five hundred. But I'll have to carry them along to shearing time, and that will take a little money, of course. As I told you, Dad won't back me on sheep. He hates the smell of 'em."

Trueman grunted at that, and Lynn's pulse slowed alarmingly. But it raced again when Trueman said dryly.

"Sheep ain't the sweetest-smellin' flower that grows, I admit. But they mean money, and Joel Hayward never used to hate that so very bad. Seemed as though he could smell a dollar ten miles off and in the next coulee. Well, how'd yuh want it? Notes secured by the sheep, I s'pose. How'd you want it split up?"

"Well, I hadn't thought that far yet," Lynn confessed, with a boyish flush that won the old man completely. "The chance just came to me. How'd you think it ought to be arranged, Mr. Trueman? I'd want to pay it off as fast as possible, to save interest and get the sheep clear. What do you think would be about right?"

"We-ell—" Trueman pulled a sheet of paper toward him and took up a pencil, "let's do a little figgerin' here. Three thousand merinos, eh? I'd advise you to get about sixty head of good Cotswold rams—that'd stand you, say, another three hundred. Your wool next spring ought to net you somewhere in the neighborhood of six thousand dollars—but you'll want to keep a working capital, of course. Then you ought to have, say, close to fifteen hundred wethers next fall to sell, and you ought to clear three thousand off them. Then the next spring you've got your yearlin's to shear—we-ell, say we make one note of two thousand, due one year from date, and another for three thousand, due two years from date. You shouldn't have any trouble meeting them, do you think?"

"I sure wouldn't, Mr. Trueman. That's away better than I ever expected to do. I think I could pay them both off by a year from next spring; or after shearing time, anyway."

"Pay 'em off any time you want to and have the money," Trueman gruffly told him. "You've got to leave a margin for bad luck, remember. Storms—you might lose half your band next winter, for all you know—"

"Not much danger of that, I guess. I'm going to winter them at the Upper Ranch. There's plenty of shelter and good sheds there. I'll have to buy hay this winter, I expect. I didn't put up as much as I might. Didn't think I'd need it, and there's no use having a lot of old stacks standing around molding."

"Got any dogs?" Trueman looked up from the scattered figures.

"I'm going to try and buy the two with the sheep."

"That's all right, then. How soon do you want the money?"

"Well," said Lynn slowly, "I'll have to pay this man his thirty-five hundred and let him go on home. That's what he wants to do. And seeing you're going to take a mortgage on the sheep, Mr. Trueman, I guess you'd better look over his papers and see that everything's all straight. The sooner we get the deal closed, the sooner those poor little devils can be turned out where they can get a bite of grass once in awhile. I can graze 'em out toward the ranch. I don't know where he fed 'em last time, but they're hollering their heads off for something to eat."

"All right, go bring your man here and we'll fix it up right now," said Trueman, picking up his cigar again. And he chuckled to himself at the long steps Lynn took out of the store.

Range men ride fast when they know just where they are going and are in a hurry to get there. They transact their business in the same way. Wherefore, in less than an hour, Lynn found himself the sole owner of three thousand hungry sheep, two trained dogs and a sizable bank account; incidentally, he found himself in debt to the tune of five thousand dollars, but that did not impress him at all—for hadn't he a year in which to meet the first note? And a year is a long, long time when one is twenty-two.

With the herder, a phlegmatic Swede whom he hired for a month, Lynn stood by the stockyard wing fence while the dogs went in and harried the sheep out of the corral. His heart rose in his throat and stuck there, held by some emotion he did not try to name, as the woolly band came streaming past him, their sharp little hoofs cutting the baked soil and sending up dust that stung the nostrils. Loney snorted and fought the bit, wanting to cut and run for it, but Lynn held him with a firm hand.

"You've got to get used to 'em," he admonished the horse, in a voice too husky to sound as careless as he wished. "They're ours, and you might as well make the best of it. Time you've trailed 'em forty miles, you'll get used to the smell!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

RESPONSIBILITY

Slowly across the prairie that lay between Green River and the Wind River Range, a small gray cloud drifted, the pattering as of rain upon the earth coming from the sharp-pointed little hoofs of the band. The Swede walked stolidly along behind them, now and then lifting his tough staff of peeled willow to point toward the wayward ones of the flock that sought sweeter morsels of grass away from the rest; then a dog would go scurrying that way, his shrill staccato bark sounding faintly above the blating of the band. And the stragglers would halt and stand at gaze, their vacant amber eyes fixed upon the black ball rolling swiftly down upon them; then leap into sudden flight, in fear of those nipping teeth at their heels. The square cloud would bend inward as the dog passed, the hindmost sheep rushing forward upon those before. Then, with the wanderers once more walking with the rest, the dog would jog back to his master, red tongue lapped down over his teeth, as he panted after the run.

Riding slowly behind, with Loney fretting at the cricket in his bit, impatient of the pace they must keep, and itching for the long, free lope at which his master usually rode, Lynn felt himself at last a man of substance in the land. Money hidden away in a well was stuff of dreams, but this was something the world could look upon and perhaps envy him its possession. Three thousand sheep—something to watch over, to care for, to see grow into many bands. Next spring, when the lambs came, he should have—well, John Trueman and the herder agreed that he should count on ninety-five per cent increase, if the flock had proper care. But with more modest expectations he would have five thousand sheep, all told, next fall. Two bands to carry over to spring, another lamb crop, another wool crop—Lynn grew dizzy as he looked into the future and saw himself the owner of many flocks.

And then a sudden thought pierced the dream in a blinding flash of perception. Why hadn't he done this before? He could have, just as easily as he had done it now. Last fall and the fall before there had been trainloads of sheep unloaded in Green River to feed, that could have been bought for a song because hay was scarce and grazing scarcer, and the sheep men, disgusted with conditions, went hunting some one to take their sheep off their hands at almost any price.

Why hadn't he borrowed money and bought sheep last fall? He'd be independent of any secret hoard of wealth now, if he had done it. John Trueman would have lent him the money just as cheerfully. He didn't know Lynn had a two-gallon jug full of one-thousand-dollar notes—

"Far as he knows, I haven't got a dime," Lynn mused; "so it isn't the money that made my credit good with him. I guess—" he stared out over the flock, trying to formulate the thought in words—"I guess the money helped, though. He didn't know I've got it, but *I* know it, and it gave me the nerve to ask him for a loan. That's all the difference it makes, far as I can see—but that's a whole heap, if anybody should ask you!"

That night they bedded the sheep down beside a little stream that emptied into the Big Sandy a few miles farther on. At the rate they were traveling, they would be six more days getting home, and Lynn knew his mother and Rose would be worried about him, but he didn't see what he could do about it unless he made a night ride home and told them—

But there he stuck. He couldn't tell his mother he had bought a bunch of sheep. It would shock her and worry her, and the thought of his debt would haunt her waking and sleeping. So far had she come under the influence of old Joel that she feared debt even more than she feared his frequent rages, and a nickel looked like dollars to her. She had fretted over the improvidence he had shown with his twenty dollars and had quizzed and counted, in fear that he had gone into debt for some of the things and was afraid to tell her. No, he certainly could not let his mother know about the sheep. Even if she approved—which she certainly would not—she might let slip a word to rouse old Joel's suspicions, and if that ever happened, life would be hell for the whole family.

He might ride home and tell them he had a short job of riding, and come back with a roll of blankets—with a pack outfit, even; six days and nights in the open without so much as an extra coat wasn't going to be any joke, for the nights were growing nippy with the hint of coming frost. He hated to lie to his mother, but it wouldn't really be a false statement. He did have a job of riding, he assured himself.

That night Lynn watched the sun go down upon the tired flock and the dogs wolfing the meat scraps he had begged from the butcher in town for them, and the herder working his way steadily through a huge ham-and-egg sandwich, while a can

of coffee boiled over the little fire they had made, and decided that he would rather ride all night than sit there on the prairie. So he watered Loney and struck out.

Such was his riding that he reached the ranch a little after midnight and got his outfit together before he slept, prowling here and there with a lantern to find what he wanted. At the break of day he went tiptoeing around the kitchen, getting his own breakfast, and he was eating it, when Rose came in yawning and rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Good land!" she whispered, with a glance toward the living-room door which Lynn had softly closed. "What's the matter, Lynn? What kept you? I stayed awake till almost midnight—"

With a cup of coffee in one hand and a large slice of bread and butter in the other, Lynn tilted his head toward the door, beckoning her outside. They went stealthily, and Lynn told his story. Could she look after things for a week or so? The boys could be made to stay home and do the chores. He'd see to that. He'd offer them another dollar apiece to look after the ranch, but he simply had to go; he had a chance to make some money.

"Yes, that's all right to tell Mom," Rose said, while she eyed him. "But you've got something up your sleeve, Brudder. Why don't you tell me?"

"Maybe, when I come back, Sis. It's all right—I really have got a job. John Trueman staked me to it. But I'll only be gone a few days—a week at most. I'm taking a pack outfit. Have to camp out."

"Well, there's *something*. You can't fool me."

But Lynn only laughed and hurried off, and presently she saw him leave the corral, leading old Patrick with a full-sized pack on him, and from the pace he took down the road, she judged that his job, whatever it might be, was urgent. It was; more urgent than Lynn knew.

He arrived at the grazing band a little before noon, and the herder greeted him with something akin to relief.

"Some faller comes this morning and makes mean talk for me," he drawled. "She tal me I shall not stay on this country with sheep. I tal him he shall go for hell and my boss is come pretty quick. So I points my gun and them faller go away."

"Who was it, I wonder? Did you tell them where you were headed for?"

"Val," said the Swede, looking mildly reproachful, "I don't tal. I don't know." Then with his stick he drew a symbol in the dust of a bare spot between grass tufts. "Brand like that is on the horse," he said.

"The Dollar outfit, eh? We've got to trail across a corner of their range, too, in order to get water. But we've done favors enough for them, and I guess we can cross, all right. They thought you were some strange outfit. When I tell them the sheep are mine—"

"Val, I tal them it's Hay-wire is owner, and they give soch a look, and they laugh."

"Hay-wire?" Lynn bit his lip. "Where'd you get that?"

"Val, in town I go for one gude big drink of beer and some mans is talking by the bar, and saying Hay-wire is turn sheep herder already. They say Hay-wire is bought sheep from Idaho man and the fun is begin now. I tank this fun is maybe shooting, and I buy shells to go in my gun." The herder dropped a hand into his sagging coat pocket and drew up two boxes of cartridges. "Nobody is goin' to lay me out on prairie with bullet holes in my skin," he added grimly.

Lynn laughed, but his eyes had a hard glitter that had not been there when he rode up to the flock.

"Say, what's your name?" he bethought him to inquire.

"Helge Halvorsen, and in Idaho cattlemens call me Hell Halvorsen, because they don't monkey with my sheeps or I kill somebody." For the first time since Lynn first met him, the herder smiled.

"So the fun begins now, does it?" and Lynn smiled back at Helge, appraising him now as a man and a comrade, rather than just a sheep herder and no more. Now he saw that Helge's drooping shoulders were very broad and muscular, and that his slouching walk belied the long, sturdy legs. Helge's eyes were very blue and as clear as a lake unfretted by any breeze. Some spirit within Lynn responded to the placid, straightforward look as it had not done before. What he had

mistaken for stupidity he now read as that strength of purpose which nothing can daunt.

"I don't suppose you know whether it was a Dollar man said that or not," he said thoughtfully. "It doesn't matter, though. I brought my rifle and shotgun along to shoot game for us and the dogs, and pick off any wolves that might come prowling around the band. But if anybody tries to stop us from getting those sheep home—"

"You betcha my life! I tank ve don't worry ourselves," Helge grinned and nodded, then suddenly lifted his stick and pointed toward a ragged fringe of the gray patch moving slowly down into a shallow basin. "You, Shep! 'Vay round 'em!"

Shep, the dog with white collar and the tuft of white on his tail, went streaking off around the flock, and Helge, the other dog at his heels, turned and walked loiteringly in the other direction, leaving Lynn to his own reflections. Helge at least was not worrying, and his calm attitude served to steady Lynn's nerves and mood. He did not want to have trouble with the Dollar outfit, whose range adjoined the Hayward fences and whose cattle fed on Hayward grass during the winter. It was not that he liked or trusted Saunders, who owned the Dollar brand; he did neither. But quarreling with his neighbors held no place in Lynn's plans. All he wanted of them was to be let alone.

All day he watched the prairie behind him and saw no riders bob into sight over a hill, as he half expected. That night they bedded the sheep in a hollow around Willow Spring, where the feed was good and the water abundant—and where their camp would not be seen from a distance. But although he and Helge divided the night into two-hour watches, they were not molested, and the sheep, full-fed and satisfied to follow their leader, the goat which Helge called Hans, started off briskly in the cool of sunrise, pattering toward the hills and their new home.

Step by step, rod by rod, they drew closer in to the hills; farther in upon the Dollar range, too, but Lynn could not help that very well. Those ewes were precious now in his sight, and he would not risk the life and well-being of one of them by forcing them across the high, dry upland where there was no water. One sheep lost now meant one lamb the less next spring, one clipping the less of wool, and he would not even consider taking the risk. For a young man who had heretofore counted all his money in the palm of one hand, so to speak, Lynn was developing a canny regard for future profits worthy the respect even of his father—had old Joel known of it.

The warm hours loitered through the day, and still no horsemen bore down upon them from any direction to question their right of passage. The Swede plodded here and there behind the grazing flock, the coat he had worn in the chill morning tied round his middle, a generous pinch of snuff tucked inside his lip. Not a glance did he cast behind him, so far as Lynn could discover. Either he did not care whether the two riders ever returned, or he placed implicit confidence in his new boss and gave no thought to anything beyond his sheep, and his stolid aloofness threw Lynn back upon himself in a way that began to rasp his nerves. And all at once, in early afternoon, he made up his mind what he must do.

They were on high ground, the land sloping gently away for miles behind them, where the smoke of a train, lying like a droopy black feather against the sky in the south, showed where Green River lay drowsing under the lazy September sun. For some minutes Lynn studied the country over which they had traveled, then turned and rode over to Helge, holding out the lead rope of the pack horse as he approached.

"I'm going to ride over to the Dollar ranch and see the old man," he announced curtly. "If any one comes while I'm gone, just kid 'em along till I get back. I won't be more than a couple of hours. And hang onto Patrick—he'll want to follow and he might jerk loose if you don't watch out."

"He don't yerk loose by me," Helge promised, and let it go at that. And when Lynn returned well within the stipulated time and with Loney wet to the ears to show how fast he had traveled, Helge returned Patrick's lead rope and went on about his business without so much as a question in his eyes.

A lone juniper standing out where it apparently had no business to be, but nevertheless making a valiant, bushy growth there on the prairie, tempted Lynn after his ride. He rode over to it, saw that the sheep had not grazed that far up the hill, unbridled the two horses and hobbled them. Then, crawling under the lower branches where the sun could not find him, he lay down with his head pillowed upon his folded arms. As he closed his eyes, immediately an endless river of gray woolly backs seemed to flow away and away to the sky line, and upon that wavering current his thoughts drifted into dreaming and then into deep, untroubled slumber.

Loney's loud, challenging whinny woke him suddenly. By the length of the tree shadow on the grass he knew that he had slept two hours or more, and he crawled out, looking first to see how far the sheep had gone during his little siesta.

Loney's head was up and he was staring off in the direction the band had taken, and as Lynn got upon his feet he saw what had attracted the horse's attention. With an oath he snatched the bridle from where it hung over the saddle horn, slipped the bit between Loney's teeth and with the next motion slid the head-stall in place and stooped to the hobbles. In ten more seconds he was tearing down the slope, the pack horse whimmying after him and making little awkward jumps forward with his hobbled forefeet, trying his best to keep up.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HELL HALVORSEN GETS ACTION

As he raced along the trampled zone where the sheep had passed, Lynn's fingers were busy with the saddle strings. He pulled his rifle from beneath his thigh and pumped a shell into the chamber as he went, but his eyes were focused upon what was taking place down below.

Three horsemen, having very evidently circled the band while keeping themselves well out of sight, had ridden up in front of the sheep and roped Hans, the goat. Now they were half leading, half dragging him straight away from the course, toward a point half a mile distant, where Pacific Creek cut through high banks. The sheep were following hesitatingly, half inclined to doubt the wisdom of following their old leader when he acted so queer; half afraid too of the horsemen, though these were wise enough in their deviltry to go quietly about their plan of destruction. For you simply cannot stampede a band of sheep as cattle are stampeded. You must get the leader to start in a certain direction, and where the leader goes the sheep will follow—and once started they will follow blindly, even to their own certain death.

Around the worried band Helge Halvorsen was running with great strides, his dogs racing silently before, and where they passed the sheep rushed in upon the middle of the flock. But still they were swinging to follow Hans, even though they might doubt the propriety of his behavior, skating along with braced feet at the end of a rope. He was their leader. You may equal—and men do—but you cannot surpass the unquestioning loyalty of a sheep. If Hans went over the high bank, then his sheep would go over the high bank and pile up below and die there, and it would take sharp work to prevent it.

Lynn saw it all; saw the whole devilish plan, saw how he might in the next half hour lose half his band if the fiends were not stopped. His rifle went to his shoulder, but at that distance he couldn't be sure of his aim with Loney at a run; so he waited to come close, and in the moment of hesitation the Swede stopped still in his tracks, took careful aim across his bent left arm and fired.

The man dragging the goat jerked, clawed for the horn, and toppled sidewise from his horse which stopped. That stopped the goat, naturally, and the sheep stopped also and huddled close, heads up and staring. Helge fired again, but the other two horsemen had veered off, and were out of six-shooter range before the herder could do further damage. Lynn threw dust at their heels with a bullet or two, but Loney was not much used to gunfire and Lynn had all he could do to hold him. So he came charging down upon the scene just as Helge reached the wounded man, who was now struggling to get upon his feet.

"Come on back here, you yellow dogs, and help your pardner!" Lynn shouted after the other two. He would have added more to his command, but his glance had fallen upon the injured man and astonishment held him dumb for a minute. The man was Hank Miller.

"Since when did *you* get to be a Dollar man?" he demanded contemptuously, dismounting beside Hank.

"Same time you turned sheep herder, I guess!" Hank snarled back, his right palm pressed hard against his left collar bone. "Git your sheep to hell outa here! This is Dollar land. I'll have you in the pen for this—"

"Oh, no, you won't!" Lynn retorted, with the same contempt in his tone. "I could have you in the pen if I wanted to, for trying to kill my sheep."

"*Your* sheep!" Venom seemed almost to seep visibly between Hank Miller's clenched teeth.

"Yes, *my* sheep. Bought and paid for, if that's any business of yours. And since you're riding a Dollar horse, I'll just kindly inform you that I've got a right to drive my sheep across Dollar land."

"You're a damn' liar!" Hank charged viciously, adding more to the statement.

"And you've got a busted shoulder or I'd lick seven kinds of tar outa you for that remark." He turned to the two others who were riding up slowly, under the watchful eyes of the herder, whose gun silently warned them against any offensive word or action. "Here, you two! Put your friend on his horse and get to hell outa here!"

"You're pretty damn' sure of yourself, seems to me," the older of the two—Pete Wilder by name—growled uneasily. Pete had been wagon boss for the Dollar outfit for the last four or five years and Lynn knew him well, since it was usually Pete who had charge of the cattle pastured on Hayward land.

"Yes, I am pretty sure of myself. I've got a perfect right to be sure." Lynn gave him a hard smile.

"Where's your authority for grazing sheep on our land? Or shooting our man? That's carrying things with a damn' high hand—for one of the Hay-wire bunch!"

"All right, get used to it, Pete. You'll have to sometime. Of course, when it comes to authority for crossing my sheep here, you might ride up and take a look at this. You know old Saunders' writing, I guess; you ought to anyway."

Under Helge's unyielding blue eyes, Wilder edged close and bent to read the paper Lynn held open before him, its corners flapping with a faint slapping sound in the breeze. In Saunders' bold, straggling hand it undoubtedly was written, and it said:

To whom it may concern, Lin Hayward has got my permission to take his sheep acrost my land on to his own ranch.

J. L. SAUNDERS.

"*Your* sheep! Seems to me you're comin' up in the world all of a sudden! You must of fell heir to a fortune, to be buyin' a bunch of sheep the size of this one. Took 'em on shares, I guess yuh mean, don't yuh?"

"No," said Lynn evenly. "I mean just exactly what I say, as a rule. If it's any interest to you, here's the bill of sale, with the Two-link brand which I sent in to have recorded in my name. I own every hoof of them; every blat you hear around you comes from *my* sheep. Let that soak in, will you? Because there's going to be more of 'em some day, and you might as well get used to the idea."

"Where'd *you* git the money to buy sheep? You never had two dimes to rub together in your pants pocket—not since I've knowed yuh," Pete blurted.

"I got it, all right. Where, is none of your damned business. Now, take Hank and hit the breeze, you two." Lynn folded his precious document of ownership—that is, the copy which he had asked for, since the original was being recorded—and stowed it safely in an inside pocket of his coat.

"Don't need to ask where he got it," Hank Miller sneered, an evil glance going to Lynn. "I guess if old Heinie could talk ___"

"You don't wish he could, do you?" Lynn flashed back. "So you're another one that thought Heinie had money! Glad you let that particular cat outa the bag, Hank. I've been wondering a good deal about you!"

"You'll wonder once too many if you ain't careful!" Hank snarled. He sent a look toward the big herder, whose gun still covered the three of them, and whose eyes never wavered in their calm, cold stare that never missed the move of a finger. Now the Swede spoke to Lynn.

"I tank you should take away the guns," he said. "It be yust like some faller for laying behind rocks for shooting in the back."

"I guess you're right," Lynn agreed, and forthwith relieved them of their guns. "You'll find them at the Dollar ranch," he said, "about next Sunday. Guess you can do without them till then. Here, Hank, is your rope. Don't be so free piling it on other folk's property or you might lose it. So long—and if I never see you again, that'll be soon enough!"

"You wait!" cried Hank through set teeth, almost beside himself with pain and anger. "Soon as I can handle myself again, I'll sure fix you for this!"

"You shod opp!" Helge advised him dispassionately. "For one half-penny I fix you gude right now!"

"Aw, come on!" Mose Weldon, the other rider, now spoke up. "We got off wrong, that's all. If Saunders says they can cross, that's no skin off my nose—let 'em alone!"

"Saunders is crazy with the heat, that's all," Pete Wilder grumbled, while he helped Hank up on his horse. "Now we've

got to take this bird back to Green River, to a doctor." He turned to Lynn with a smile that betokened neither friendliness nor mirth.

"All right, Hay-wire, if you think you're going to have any luck raisin' sheep, fly at it!" he sneered. "You got my permission to try!"

"Thanks!" Lynn retorted dryly, and waved them a mocking adieu as they rode away.

When they were gone and the herder was somewhat regretfully putting away his gun before he turned his expert attention upon the sheep, Lynn turned and eyed him thoughtfully for a moment.

"Helge, I guess you've let yourself in for a permanent job if you want to stay," he said. "How about it?"

"I just vas going to ask for yob," Helge grinned up at him. "Hey, Shep! 'Vay round 'em! Hans! Git a viggie on you! Ve lose some time already. Hey-y!"

The dogs sprang into their work, the goat shook his horns to see, perhaps, if they were on solid, and started the nipping walk forward that, slow as it was, yet left the creeping miles behind them.

By the time Lynn had old Patrick free of his hobbles and was riding to overtake his woolly treasure, the band was grazing along after Hans as serenely as if no little drama had been played that day before their foolish amber eyes. But Lynn's blood was slow to cool and he rode thoughtfully, his eyes fixed frowningly upon the hills before him.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CUPID TAKES A HAND

A six-horse team, dragging two great loads of baled hay along a road which converged upon the Elk Basin road at the mouth of the coulee which marked the beginning of the Hayward ranch, pulled to a stand at the forks while the driver climbed down and walked to the side of the leader farthest from the adjoining road. Standing so and fussing with the hames—though beyond shaking them now and then there was nothing he really did to them—he could watch the lone rider approach from Elk Basin way and yet remain fairly well concealed from view.

Two or three minutes he stood so; then as the rider came up to the fork in the trail, riding slowly and in evident doubt, Lynn left his ambush and walked boldly out in full sight. Almost instantly the rider drummed heels on the horse's ribs and came forward at a trot.

"Well, of all things! I certainly will believe from now on that prayers are answered and Providence has a real and vital interest in the lives of men!" The little school-teacher leaned and offered her gloved hand, which Lynn took in both of his.

"Providence is sure doing all right far as I'm concerned," he replied with smiling earnestness, and let his long-lashed eyes make his meaning as plain as they liked. "Long time I no see you! How'd you know I'd be at this point at this particular minute of this particular day? You a mind reader? If you are, I'll knock off work and start in going to school. How long would it take to teach me—"

"Longer than you have years to devote to the study," she told him, with just enough sharpness in her voice to check the wooing note he had let creep into his. "If you had any talent in that line at all, you'd have saved me this long ride."

"I did want most awfully to come in and see you, little schoolma'am! But the fact is—"

"Oh, it wasn't that I wanted you to come and see me—how ridiculous men can be! But if you knew how important it was that I should see you, I think it would have been worth your while to make a trip to town."

"I did," said Lynn ruefully. "But you were in school and I was in a hurry and couldn't wait."

"You're always in a hurry these days, it seems to me," she retorted. "Are you going to let your horses stand there? If you are, I'll get off and sit in the shade of the wagon for a few minutes. There's something I'd like to tell you."

"There's a whole heap I'd like to tell you," Lynn hinted, but since she gave him no attention he did not follow it up, but led old Blaze around into the shade of the first load, yanked his coat off the hay where it had been serving him as a cushion, and spread it on the ground for her. She sat down cross-legged and fanned her flushed face with her hat, and Lynn thought how sweet she looked with the loose tendrils of hair waving gently in the breeze she made. The worried look in her eyes puzzled him, but he would not spoil the picture by asking her why she had come. And in a minute she looked full at him, studying his face as she might that of a bad boy in school.

"You don't look a bit like a murderer," she said, so abruptly that Lynn started.

"That's nice," he countered dryly. "Did you expect me to?"

"No-o—but there are some who might try to argue that you did." She paused. "Was it you who shot Hank Miller?"

"No," Lynn regretfully denied, "Helge beat me to it. Why? Hank didn't die, did he?"

"He's back in town," she said soberly, "and I hear he's doing a good deal of talking. How she does it I can't imagine, but there isn't a whisper in that town that Mrs. Moore doesn't hear. I could give you the history of every man, woman and child in the county, I do believe—and most of it is derogatory. She regales me with all the gossip there is going, and while I don't usually pay much attention to what she says, there are times when I actually pump her to find out all I can. There's a lot of surmising," she added naïvely, "about your sudden prosperity—"

"Because I've got a bunch of sheep?"

"That and your new air of—well, of prosperity; of being a man of affairs. You *are* changed, you know. It's difficult to explain in so many words, but I myself have noticed it. People just wondered, until Hank came back from Green River. Now he goes so far as to say he knows where you got your money—"

"Well, maybe he does," Lynn conceded.

"He says it belonged to old Heinie. He—well, last night a lot of them were talking on the street, and I heard them myself. He called you a dirty killer and a thief, and he said you ought to be strung up by the heels and filled full of lead." Miss MacIvor shivered slightly as she repeated the ugly words, but her eyes were direct in their gaze.

"They're still harping on that old yarn about Heinie having money, are they?" Lynn forced himself to look straight into her eyes, though he felt the color rising in his cheeks.

"But, Lynn, you said you saw him with money in his hands! They don't know anything about that, of course, but—"

"I didn't say he had enough in his hands to buy three thousand head of sheep, did I?" Lynn's smile was tinged with bitterness. "I told Rose—"

"Yes, I know what you told Rose. I understood at the time that it was some small amount the old man had, and of course I don't for a minute believe that you would be capable of robbing him—to say nothing of taking his life. But the mystery of the sheep every one knows you bought, and the supplies you have bought—"

"I'll tell you all about that," Lynn said quickly, relieved that the opportunity had come. "I borrowed five thousand in Green River. John Trueman holds a mortgage on the sheep. You might tell that to Mrs. Moore and let her go peddle it. You might say, too, that the bunch cost me thirty-five hundred, and I have a note to meet a year from now and another one two years from now—or when I made the deal, to be exact. I didn't have hay enough to carry them through the winter, so I bought all I could afford from Murray, over west of here. That doesn't sound much as if I was using stolen money, does it?" The words brought a frown between his eyes. Stolen money! It didn't sound pleasant in his ears, even though he knew he had done no wrong.

"You speak as if I had presumed to pry into your affairs," said Miss MacIvor in a hurt tone. "Do you expect me to gossip to Mrs. Moore about you? I'm very sorry if that is the opinion you have formed of me."

That, of course, took some explaining and apologizing, with further explanations from the little school-teacher and finally, after some sparring and pretended misunderstandings, a good deal of discussion followed which concerned no one save themselves. The surprising feature of their conversation is that before it was over their two heads drew very close together. Lynn kissed her lingeringly on the mouth, and after that there must be more explanations and discussion, naturally. So the sun hung low and very red in the sky when at last he helped her on her horse and stood there with his arms clasped around her waist.

"I don't see how I'm going to let you go, little Jan," he said softly, gazing up into her flushed and smiling face. "It's going to be a long hard pull before I reach the point where I'll dare ask you to share my—my fortunes." He laughed a little, a sense of almost guilty concealment surging over him. To tell her, little Jan, as he had learned in the last hour to call her, was a temptation almost too great to be borne. But his Scotch caution prevailed. It might be hard to make her understand his moral right to that money; he would have to prove himself, prove her, before he dared let her share his secret.

"But a long hard pull is the best thing in the world for a man," she told him brightly. "And we have been so terribly sudden that I think we'd better take plenty of time to think it over—"

"You mean you aren't sure you care?" Apprehension sharpened his voice.

"I mean we scarcely know each other. And I have my work too, you know. I want to teach for at least a year—longer, maybe. We—we may be too impulsive, Lynn. We may not—"

"That first day when I saw you in the store—I knew then I wanted you," Lynn's eyes held her breathless. "It looked pretty hopeless, though—but now I'll have something to work for. I—I know I can take care of you, all right. A year's too long, little schoolma'am! Some dark night I'll ride in and carry you off—I know a preacher—"

"And you five thousand dollars in debt!" She laughed tremulously as she half-heartedly attempted to pull his arms from

their embrace. "No, we'll have to wait a long, long while, even if we do find that we really care. We can't start with a load of debt hanging over us, Lynn."

"We won't have to. I can pay that—" But there he stopped, biting his lip.

"With good luck, yes, of course. But we'd better wait until it's wiped out. And we *have* been very hasty! I never dreamed I'd let a man propose the fourth time I've met him. I—"

"The fifth," Lynn corrected her. "I ought to have done it long ago. I would, if I'd had the nerve."

"Lynn, you're perfectly incorrigible!" Then her face grew worried. "I must go, really. And you will be careful, won't you, dear? I don't know as their talk amounts to anything, but Hank Miller will stir up something if he possibly can. He's a snake. I do believe he killed that old man himself and is just trying to load the crime off on some one else."

"So do I, but that don't help to prove it, and it don't make it so. I guess maybe I hate him too much to be any judge. But you needn't worry, little Jan. He may shoot off his mouth a lot, but when it comes to really doing, why, Hank isn't there. Not unless he could plug a man in the back."

"But it worries me to have every one talking and guessing and wondering whether you really did kill Heinie and take his money. The story is going around now that he had ten thousand dollars hidden away somewhere. It may be silly, but there are always people who are ready to swallow anything they hear."

Lynn laughed and pulled her close to him, laying his face against her slim neck.

"Why don't they make it a hundred thousand while they're about it?" he dared to jeer. "I guess they'd hit the truth about as close. I love you, little Jan. Tell me once more what you did awhile ago."

"I love you," said the little school-teacher softly, her eyes shining into his. "But I won't if you don't let me go this minute! Do you want me to go home in the dark?"

"No." Lynn stepped back, eyes clouded at the thought. "I wish I could go with you. But nobody'd hurt you—nobody'd dare! Hurry, won't you, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she said, and leaned and kissed him of her own accord before she reined old Blaze into the trail and loped away, looking back every rod or so to wave her hand.

Lynn watched her out of sight, then climbed back on the load and unwound the lines from the high brake lever.

"Ninety-two thousand dollars—and now—this!" he breathed, as he started the six horses on the homeward trail. "I—I just can't realize it, somehow. To think—just to *think*—she cares!"

So, in that dazzled mood, he arrived at the Upper Ranch with his hay, and the warning she had ridden out to give him passed completely from his mind.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

OLD JOEL SMELLS SHEEP

"I smell sheep! By the great immortal horn spoon I smell *sheep* in this house!" Old Joel gripped the arms of his big chair, the upholstery of which was worn down to the warp with former angry grippings, and drew great breaths in through his nostrils with audible sniffings.

"Why, Joel! What in the world ails you to-night? You don't any such a thing, smell sheep!" Fork in hand from turning elk steak in the frying pan, his wife hurried to the door and looked rebukingly in upon the old man who, you must understand, did not actually say "great immortal horn spoon," but something more pungent and effective. "How could a sheep get into the house, when there isn't one within forty miles of here that I know of? That's the second time you've raised a howl about smelling sheep. If it's got so you have to imagine things to keep you mad, I must say you've come to a sorry pass!" She turned back to the stove and stabbed peevishly at the sputtering red meat.

"I wish one of you boys would go bring in some dry wood," she said fretfully. "Seems to me you save all the sappy elder till it rains! Go on, now—dig under the pile and get me something dry, or else scratch around in the woodshed for some chips or something."

"*I smell sheep*, I tell yuh!" came bellowing out from Joel's room, as the two boys bolted from the kitchen with their hands clapped over their mouths. Outside in the drizzle they slapped thighs in contortions of mirth.

"Oh, Lynn, wait a minute!" Sid called guardedly, as Lynn, in his yellow slicker and hat pulled down to his ears, went striding past them. "Hold on, I wanta tell yuh something! Hoo-hoo-hooee! Paw—hoo-hoo-hoo—"

"What's eating yuh?" Lynn impatiently demanded, stopping nevertheless, though he was cold and hungry.

"Paw—oh-ho-ho—Paw—smells shee-*eep*!" Sid was fourteen and his trickily changing voice slid uncontrollably up into shrill falsetto.

"An'—an' Maw can't smell a thing to save her life, an' she thinks Pa's goin' crazy!" Little Joe giggled, showing where two teeth were just beginning to grow into the gap in his broad smile.

"Rose almost snorted right out," Sid further embellished the tale; "only she dassn't for fear Mom'd get wise. Gosh, he'll smell sheep to beat the band when *you* get in there!"

"It's the wet weather," Lynn explained frowningly. "You sure Mom didn't smell it?"

"Course she never. She couldn't smell it when that skunk got in the woodshed, and I guess that's worse 'n sheepy clothes."

"Well, you boys be mighty careful or you'll both lose your job. You didn't say anything, did you?"

"No, we never," they said in duet. "We never said a word. You can ask Rose."

"Because if you so much as let one yeeep outa you, the stuff's all off, far as you're concerned. It would worry Mom to death, and you know—"

"Aw, what d' yuh think we are! Mom wants some dry wood, Lynn, to fry the steak."

"Well, get into the house, both of you. I'll find something."

This was the new Lynn, who had somehow softened toward his world, including the boys he had not so long ago looked upon as plain pests and nothing more. They grabbed a few sticks from the bottom of the pile and scurried in out of the cold mist of a fall storm, leaving Lynn to attack the big pitch-pine log that made hard chopping but could be counted on for a hot, resinous blaze when Mom especially needed it.

Lynn pondered the problem of scent while he drove the axe into the log. He supposed they did smell a bit "sheepy," as Sid had expressed it, but he did not see how they could help that. They had been fussing with the sheep, dividing the band to house them all in two sheds at the Upper Ranch, and the boys had taken delight in getting in amongst them and

wrestling with some of the more stubborn ones in the little shed, forcing them back inside. It had of course not been possible to hide from the boys or from Rose all knowledge of his venture into the sheep business, so Lynn had made Sid and Little Joe accomplices in the undertaking and was letting Helge teach them how to handle the band. Some day, as the flock increased, their services would be needed to help with the herding, and he was shrewd enough to start the training now.

So, when Helge brought the band in from the farther range to their winter pasture, and the storm made the matter of housing an immediate problem, Sid and Joe had been put on Lynn's payroll to the tune of five dollars a month for running errands and helping Helge. Rose, of course, was taken into the secret and shared Lynn's worries and his pride as a good sister should. But because of old Joel's eagle eyes and ears and his terrific bursts of rage, they had thought it wise not to let their mother know what was going on. In her presence, when it was necessary to speak of the activities at the Upper Ranch, they called the sheep cattle, and their constant trips up there were explained as fence mending. It had all been simple enough, once the boys threw themselves into the spirit of the game; but now came the problem of smell to torment Lynn.

In a vague inattentive way he had been conscious of the fact that you cannot work around sheep without acquiring that peculiar, woolly odor which clings to the clothing and is like no other smell on earth, perhaps. It had not been very noticeable before, though Helge reeked of it. Lynn doubted whether his mother's deadened olfactory nerves would not betray Helge's calling to her if he ever came into her presence. And now he was forced to recognize the fact that he and the boys were scented with the emanations from the damp, woolly bodies they had contacted that day. It might be a small matter, but it did not seem so to Lynn just then. He dreaded to enter the kitchen, but the hot meaty odor of frying elk steak floated out to him to remind him how hungry he was. He lifted the pine splinters one by one into the crook of his arm and went in out of the drizzling dusk to the warmth and glow of the kitchen.

Rose lifted her eyebrows expressively and wrinkled her nose at him as he crossed to the woodbox, and the boys looked at each other and ducked their heads, stifling laughter, but his mother only gave him a casual glance as she lifted a brown slice of meat on her fork and transferred it expertly to the hot platter sitting on top of a kettle.

"Drain the potatoes, Rose, and dish up while I fix your father's supper," she said in her brisk, anxious tone. And she set a finger upon her lips and shook her head toward the living room while her glance held Lynn's. In the family sign language that meant he must guard his speech, for the invalid was in a tantrum.

"I smell sheep! You can't fool *me*—there's a sheep in this house and if you don't put 'im out, I'll tear the damn place down!" boomed from the next room. "Just because I can't walk or help myself, you think it's smart to bring sheep into the house to devil me with! Where is it? You can't lie to *me*—I can tell a sheep ten mile off!"

Lynn gave his mother a quick, questioning look, but she only pressed her lips together and shook her head. Half afraid that she might detect his secret, he lifted the big coffeepot from the back of the stove and filled the great china mustache cup with FATHER printed fancifully in gilt around its middle in a wreath of pink roses with green leaves. The gilt and the green were wearing away, and well they might, since three times each day for the past six years that cup had been meticulously washed and wiped after serving old Joel his strong black coffee sweetened to a sirupy consistency. Mom stood for a long breath, the heaped plate in one hand, the cup with its mismatched saucer—Joel had thrown the one belonging with the cup two years before, trying to brain Lynn as he left the room—trembling in the other hand. Then, with a look in her eyes which she always wore when Joel was on the rampage, she went in where he was.

Rose and Lynn exchanged glances, but no word was spoken in the kitchen.

Between mouthfuls, Joel raved of sheep. He wanted his gun, so he could shoot the damned thing or the damned person that offended him. He accused his family again and again of harboring sheep to spite him, and even the boys ceased to find anything funny at last in his revilings. A pallor was creeping into Mrs. Hayward's face. She waited until Lynn was nearly through with his supper and then took down her shawl from its nail and pulled it over her head, gestured to Lynn and went outside. In a minute or two Lynn followed her. She had lighted the lantern in the woodshed, and she held it up to scan his face.

"Lynn, you aren't going off to-night again, are you?" she asked worriedly. "I don't know—I'm afraid your father is losing his mind! All this talk about a sheep in the house—it ain't like him, Lynn. I wish you'd stay home to-night."

Lynn avoided her eyes, pretending to busy himself with the making of a cigarette. He wanted to laugh—and yet he didn't,

somehow. He wanted to put his arms around his mother and tell her the truth. But she hated sheep too—

"It's just general cussedness," he told her gruffly. "I guess he run out of subjects to devil you about, and he thought up this. I—there's a fellow staying at the Upper Ranch, Mom—he ain't fit to be alone, and I promised I'd come back—"

"Why, for mercy sake! Who is it?"

"Nobody you ever saw in your life," Lynn parried. "He came over to look after the—cattle. I feel I ought to stick around nights till he gets better. You can't tell—"

"What's the matter with him? If he's sick, why don't you have Saunders come over and get him? I'm worried about your father, Lynn. There's nothing to put such an idea into his head. If he wanted to act up, there's the tax bill just come the other day; that ought to keep him busy swearing for a month, it's so big. No, this idea of a sheep in the house—that ain't natural. I don't know what possesses him to act so!"

Lynn had a sudden thought, and the brilliance of it made him laugh.

"Say, look here! I'll bet anything you like he's just trying to get a rise out of us about his darned sheep! I'll bet he never started in on it till the kids and I came home and he knew he had an audience. Did he, now?"

"Well, no—he began to smell sheep just before you came." Mom tucked her hair back under the shawl and her eyes took on an introspective look.

"Setting the stage for a big row," Lynn declared with artful scorn. "If I'd swallowed the bait and gone in to argue with him, he'd have called me a sheep herder—I'd bet money on that. I see through him, Mom, like a book! He gets tired sitting there playing 'sol', and he wants some excitement, that is all. You notice," he went on speciously, "I've been keeping away pretty much of the time lately—and I guess he misses having me around to cuss at. I've got plenty to do without playing Daniel to his lions, Mom. I'm building a new storm shed up at the ranch—fixing things up so we can take care of more cattle. I'm not going to wait for Dad to do something. I'm going to lift myself by my bootstraps, Mom. I—well, I wasn't going to tell you, but I've taken a little bunch of she stock, and I'm going to get a start that way."

"You've taken cows on shares? Why in the world didn't you say something, Lynn? Why make so much of a mystery about it?" A look of relief stole into Mom's eyes. "I don't know but what that's a real good idea, Lynn."

"Well, you know Dad. I don't want him to get hold of it, Mom. He'd just beller about it every time I came near the house. There'll be enough pasture money; as much as he ever gets, so he needn't know anything about it. You just forget what I told you, Mommie." He stopped, drew in his breath and suddenly laid a hand across her shoulder.

"If you can keep a secret, Mom, I'll tell you something not even Rose dreams of. Cross your heart, Mom?" In the lantern light his eyes shone down at her as she looked up inquiringly into his face.

It was the old demand he used to make of her when he was just a little fellow. Her lips softened, trembled a little as she took the old boyish pledge.

"Cross my heart and hope to die, Lymmie. What is it?"

"Well, I—don't you dare breathe this, Mom—to Rose or anybody! I want to get a start and make a stake, because—well, —aw, shucks! Some day I'm going to marry the little school-teacher in Elk Basin. So I'm fixing the Upper Ranch up—"

"Lynn!" His mother paused, choked a little. "How—"

"Not for quite awhile, Mom. But the kids are taking hold real well, lately. They'll be able to look after things here in a year or two—and of course I'd be on the job too, just the same as I am now, almost. In a couple of years—"

"Oh!" Mom's breath escaped in a sigh of relief. "You—you scared me, Lynn, for a minute! I thought you meant right away, and we're in no shape to have a wedding in the family, goodness knows!"

"It's a long time to wait, but—well, you see now that I've got to hustle and get things moving around here. I expect to be at the Upper Ranch most of the time, from now on. I thought it would keep Dad smoothed down some too, if I kept away from here as much as possible. So don't you worry about a thing. I've got a mark to work to now, and I'll bring the old

ranch back a-whooping! You'll see."

"So that's what has changed you so, lately!" His mother smiled, which she didn't do very often. "I've been most crazy, trying to make you out! You haven't been like the same boy. But I'm glad, Lynn, if it makes you happy. I know she must be real nice. Rose likes her. We'd invite her out here if it wasn't for your father. But you know how he is!"

"Yes," said Lynn, with a grim little nod, "I know how he is, all right! I wouldn't want her to come here, so you can just put that out of your mind. I'm going back up to the Ranch. I told the fellow I would. You needn't worry about Dad—I'll bet seventeen cents he'll forget all about his sheep soon as I clear out."

Ten minutes after that, Lynn was riding smilingly through the darkness and the rain while a cold wind rustled the bare treetops along the trail. He had given Mom something to think about, he reflected; something to keep her mind from scouting out the truth about that sheep in the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"IN THE WELL!"

The storm passed and the days turned warm and sunny again, that enchanting season called Indian Summer laying its soft, bright veil over the land. Lynn hoped the fine weather would last until Thanksgiving or beyond, and Helge once more grazed the sheep out on the farther confines of the Hayward holdings, with the boys riding importantly between his camp and the Upper Ranch. Their cave up in the cliffs was forgotten now, for they had found a new and fascinating game; they were going to save their money and buy lambs from Lynn, and start into the sheep business for themselves. They spent hours wrangling over the brand they would have and just where they would build their corral, and they felt like millionaires and talked as they felt. Whether Lynn knew it or not, the changed current of his thoughts was sweeping the boys into the consciousness of prosperity. They were maturing fast, like plants growing in dew and sun. They never would be hay-wire now; a new manliness, a growing pride in their responsibilities would take care of that.

And for Lynn himself, the days seemed on the wing. Taking a ramshackle lot of sheds and pasture fences and turning them into a snug sheep ranch in the short time left to him before winter was a job to daunt many a more seasoned worker than he. But Lynn went whistling about his labors that lasted from dawn to dark and sometimes after; for there was the lower ranch to look after, errands to do for Rose and his mother, tobacco and blood purifier to supply for his dad—which last he did most effectually by sending in an order to Sears Roebuck for a dozen bottles which he doled out to the old man as they were demanded. Then there were hurried and more or less stealthy trips in to see his little school-teacher, and more hay to haul over from Murray's ranch—Lynn would have had the sun stand still to lengthen his days, as did Joshua, had he known how to go about it.

But the sheep grew fat and frisky and he had not lost one from wolves or sickness. The boys were trapping the marauders now, and more than once they came in to the ranch, proudly dragging a "loafer" wolf at the end of their rope; and since there was a bounty on wolves the sheep might feel fairly secure and Helge enjoy unbroken slumber at night—if the prophecies of Sid and Little Joe were only half fulfilled.

In the press of work and the glamour of love Lynn's ponderings over the mystery of Heinie's murder grew less and less frequent. To be sure, whenever he knelt and looked down the well at that place behind the ledge where his fortune lay safely hidden, thoughts of Heinie and Hank Miller and Bill Witherspoon would come to nag him with the tragedy that had placed that money in his hands, but he did not gaze into the well now as often as he had at first. He had too many other things to think of, and he did not need to look. He knew the money was there—it couldn't get away, for not another soul knew of it. Where first he had tingled with the thrill of knowing it was there, a quiet, inner glow of satisfaction and of economic security filled the back of his mind, waking or sleeping. He could plan and work with steady hands and brain, for he knew that he had wealth. That knowledge spread a beneficent warmth of mood over all that he planned or did. Things thrived under it. Yet the actual thought of the jug and its contents did not claim his attention so much of the time; he could actually forget it now and then.

He was forgetting it now, when he went whistling down the path to the well, one day in early November. He was alone on the place, the boys having gone home to see if their mother and Rose needed anything, and Helge was off with the sheep. He was thinking that if he hurried supper he might ride in to Elk Basin to see little Jan, as he now called her in his ardent thoughts. He had not seen the little school-teacher for nearly a week, and a week is eternity to an engaged young man who is as deeply in love as Lynn was.

As he knotted the well rope in the twisted wire bail of the coal-oil can and lowered it into the well, a swishing sound behind him made him turn his body just as a rope loop settled over it. He was yanked backward as Hank Miller rushed up, shortening the distance between them and keeping the rope tight with nervous, hand-over-hand motions. For a minute Lynn lay half stunned, his head bleeding a little where the sharp corner of a rock had violently contacted it, and in that minute Hank was upon him, winding the rope round and round Lynn's arms and body. Lynn had sense enough to brace his arms slightly away from his ribs, but that was all he could do for himself. Hank dragged him to his feet and wound the rope with a half hitch or two around one pole leg of the gallows that had supported the well pulley in former times.

"Now, damn yuh, I gotcha where I wantcha!" Hank muttered viciously, and slapped Lynn painfully, first on one cheek, then on the other. "Now you'll come clean, you—!"

His eyes were bloodshot and the fumes of whisky as he thrust his face forward almost sickened Lynn. Evidently he was crazy drunk—he must have been to have found the nerve for the bold attack—but that did not make him less dangerous. Lynn did not for a minute belittle the malignant intent of the man.

"Where's Heinie's money?" Hank demanded, drawing back to watch Lynn's eyes, as a cat watches a mouse it has just pounced upon and pawed. "Come clean, damn yuh, or I'll tear yuh limb from limb!"

"Last I heard, he'd spent it for peanuts and lemonade in Cheyenne," Lynn forced himself to reply. "That's what he told the folks."

"Where's the money he had hid out somewheres? You know, damn yuh! You'll tell, too, before I'm through with yuh! Where is it?" Again he lifted his hand and slapped Lynn's reddened cheek. "Come on—spit 'er out, 'fore I do worse to yuh!"

"You go to hell!" cried Lynn valiantly between blows. "You dirty murderer, if Heinie had any money why didn't you get it outa him before you killed him?" And he cursed Hank with all the vituperative phrases he had ever heard in his life.

"I'll kill yuh for that," panted Hank, looking about him for a club. "I'll beat yuh to death, you damned nosey thief, you! But you'll *tell*, damn yuh! You can't fool me—you *got it*! What did yuh do with it? Hurry up—I ain't goin' to fool with you very long—you got it hid somewhere—where is it?—I'll kill yuh by inches, if yuh don't come through!"

To Lynn in those nightmare minutes, it seemed as though Hank would do it. But even as the savage blows rained upon him he was thinking—thinking—And when in sheer exhaustion Hank stopped, Lynn turned his bloody face toward him in abject surrender.

"Well, yuh ready to talk now?" Hank leered at him. "*Where is it?*"

"In the well," Lynn mumbled, for his mouth was swelling noticeably.

"Ha-ah! I thought you'd come clean if I ever got m' hands on yuh!" Hank gloated, and turned and stooped, looking down into the dusky depths with the shine of water twenty-five feet or more below. And as he stood so, goggling down, Lynn gathered himself together, strained forward against the ropes and kicked with the sudden intensity of a mule.

Six inches farther away and he couldn't have made it. As it was he thanked the good Lord for his long legs and that Hank had concentrated his brutal fury upon his head and body and left his legs free. He listened, expecting to hear the impact of Hank's body with the stout braces just above the ledge, but by some chance Hank made a clean dive and there was a terrific and hollow splash when he landed.

Lynn waited, heard the roar of Hank's voice shouting oaths and threats, and tried to grin. The water, if Hank stood on the rocky bottom, was no more than chin deep. Hank would not drown, but neither could he climb out without help, for the rocks of the curbing were too smooth and slippery for a handhold, as Lynn knew from experience. Too often had he gone down there fishing for the bucket dropped in, or to clean the well, not to be very sure of what he was doing when he kicked Hank. He had seen the rope he used for climbing up out of the well coiled there on the platform—where it would stay for some time, so far as he was concerned.

Hank would play frog-in-the-well, but Lynn, after the first few minutes of struggling against the rope, found that he must stay tied until some one released him—and if the boys decided to stay down at the other ranch all night, he was not so very much better off than Hank. He had tried to hold himself so that the rope could not be pulled tight and he would have some chance of getting free, but Hank had taken a turn or two that baffled all Lynn's painful twistings and turnings.

"Yuh want me to *die* down here, damn yuh?" bawled Hank.

"No!" shouted Lynn. "You're like a poisoned rat—I don't want you to die on the ranch. You'd putrefy the whole place!"

Hank replied to that, and Lynn retorted with another statement which was neither complimentary nor refined.

"You lied when you said the money was down here!" bellowed Hank, just as if Lynn had sinned grievously against him with the falsehood. "I'll fix yuh for that!"

"I never said there was any money in the well!" Lynn contemptuously explained. "You damn' fool, I just said 'In the well,'

and in yuh went! What the devil do you think I'd be doing with money down in a well?"

Hank's answer to that lasted for some minutes, but Lynn did not listen to all of it. He was trying to wriggle an arm loose and he was beginning to see with a finality of hopelessness that it couldn't be done. He hadn't a knife in his pocket; Sid had borrowed it for something and had failed to return it. Perhaps he couldn't have got his knife out if it had been in his pocket, but he mentally cursed the carelessness of Sid just the same.

An hour crawled by. The blood dried on his face and hands, where it had been oozing from the cuts and bruises Hank had made with the stick. In the well, the splashing and scraping grew fainter, more mechanical in their sound, as if there was less directed effort down there, and only a vain threshing about.

"I'm dyin'!" wailed Hank's sepulchral voice with a whine in it now. "I'm chillin' t' death down here! Lemme out, Lynn! I won't touch yuh ag'in, honest!"

"Go to the devil!" Lynn shouted back. "You tied me up—if you die it's your own doing!"

"You can keep the money, Lynn, if yuh let me up! You can keep the money—I'll never say another word!"

"Thanks!" cried Lynn. "I sure would keep it, if I had it!"

Then Sid and Joe came trotting up the trail, arguing over something as usual, their young voices the most welcome sound Lynn could have imagined at that moment. They did not see him at the well until he shouted to them, but then they kicked their horses into a gallop and came up in a flurry of dust.

With Hank's own rope they hauled him up, Lynn's bruised muscles protesting against the load and his head spinning from the pain of effort. Hank was like a snake made torpid with the cold; helpless, unable to coil and strike but spitting venom still.

"I oughta kill you, you dirty rat, but I won't. You'll get all that's coming to you, I guess. But don't you ever cross my trail again—where's your horse?"

Tied back around a point of the ridge a quarter of a mile away, Hank indicated, with a gesture made sodden and slow with the long immersion, and Lynn took his gun from him and drove him that way with the club Hank had used on him, while the boys followed silently, their eyes burning with hate for the man. They watched him crawl stiffly and soppily on his horse and ride shivering away, defeat and fear in every line and every motion. And when he was out of sight, Lynn turned and staggered back to the house, Sid and Little Joe clinging anxiously to either arm, supporting him as well as they could and pouring out upon him all the intensity of their young loyalty and pity for his hurts.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DOLLAR CONCHOS

"Gee!" cried Sid, setting down the coffeepot after solicitously filling Lynn's cup, "I most forgot what we come back for. But you couldn't do it anyway, I guess. You sure are bunged up, all right, and I don't s'pose you'd want her to see yuh lookin' that way—"

"Who? What you talkin' about?" Lynn turned his one good eye toward the boy, the other being closed with a gash that narrowly escaped destroying that eye.

"Well, Maw sent us back to have you come home. We got company down there. Rose was in town to-day, and the school-teacher come back with her and is goin' to stay all night and to-morrow and all day Sunday. Maw killed two chickens and made punkin pie, and she wanted you to come down for supper. And say, Lynn! Pa's just as nice as pie to 'er! Never cussed once while we was there—did he, Joe? That's 'cause Maw got to askin' her things about her folks, and they found out she musta been old Heinie's gran'daughter, 'cause her mother's name was Deitrich 'fore she was married, and she was born in Omaha, and Maw got all excited and said that was Heinie's name, only nobody ever called him by it. So Pa thinks she's the goods, bein' related to somebuddy he liked. He told her stories about him and Heinie gittin' a bunch of horses back from the Injuns when they first come here, and all kinda things that I never heard 'im say a word about! An' say, Lynn! She talked and laughed with Dad, just as if she *liked* him! And Pa—he *joshed* her about things! What's the matter, Lynn? Yuh sick? Coffee too strong or something?"

Lynn had turned a sallow white and sagged back against the wall as if he were going to faint. Little Joe ran for a dipper of water, but it was not needed. Lynn pulled himself together and went staggering in like a drunken man to lie on his bed and think, while the boys went tiptoeing around the place with scared eyes. Sid would have saddled and ridden post-haste for a doctor, only there wasn't any short of Rock Springs or Green River, and he was afraid Lynn might die before he got back.

"You s'prised 'im too much tellin' him about Paw joshin' anybody," Little Joe diagnosed rebukingly to Sid in the kitchen. "He's too sick to be s'prised that way. I guess we can't go on back—we better stay here and tend to Lynn, don't yuh think?"

Sid did think so; and the two sat by the kitchen stove and whispered anathemas against Hank Miller until their heads began to nod. Then, as Lynn seemed to be asleep and there was nothing more they could do for him, they went to bed.

But Lynn was not asleep. He lay there thinking, thinking,—planning, too, just what he must do, now that Heinie apparently had left an heir! an heiress, to be exact. Dreaming, too, as lovers will, of the look in little Jan's eyes when he told her the truth—when he poured into her lap those precious packages of bank notes. But at last he slept, and in waking felt the need of action. He was stiff and sore from the beating Hank had given him and ordinarily he would have felt that he was unable to ride; but with little Jan down at the other ranch—wondering no doubt what had kept him—he could not content himself away. He would ride down there, sick or well. He knew that.

But while he was sitting by the kitchen table letting Sid dress the cut on his head and the terrible bruises on his face and shoulders and arms, in an effort to make him look halfway human, here came the two girls, storming in to know what in the world was the matter that he hadn't come to supper last night.

Lynn told them, naturally, with the boys adding frills when they thought Lynn was not doing justice to the affair.

"I know in my soul he's the one that killed Heinie—your grandfather, Jan, the boys tell me. If that's true—"

"Oh, it is—I'm sure of it! And to think I didn't know, and he met that awful death—I just *know* Hank Miller did it! If he hadn't, why would he be so very certain there was money left that he didn't get? Hanging's too good, Lynn, for a man like that."

Little Joe, his eyes round and filled with tears, suddenly reached into his overalls pocket, drew out something and dashed it to the floor.

"He oughta be killed!" he cried, with childish vehemence. "I—I *hate* dollar conchos! I was going to save dollars enough

to go on my bridle and get some chaps with dollar conchos on, like that man had—but I hate 'em! I wouldn't wear one! You couldn't *make* me!"

Wide-eyed, Lynn and little Jan faced each other in mute questioning. Then Lynn stooped painfully and picked up the object which Little Joe had thrown down. A silver dollar with two holes punched through the center; a dollar coined in the year 1886.

"Where'd you get this, kid?" Lynn asked huskily, turning the thing over in his hand. Little Joe's lip quivered.

"I—I—I never stole it, honest! I—"

"He picked it up at Heinie's that morning when we went and found him," Sid explained agitatedly, the significance of it beginning to dawn upon him. "Joe opened the door, and it was laying right there on the floor and it had a buckskin string on it. Joe thought it was a real dollar at first and he picked it up, and then we both seen Heinie laying on the floor and we beat it. I guess Joe put it in his pocket without knowin' it, we was so scared—and then he kept it and was going to get some more and make him a set of conchos to match. If it come off Hank's chaps, he musta been the one fightin' with Heinie, wasn't he?" In his excitement Sid's voice broke and finished on a shrill high note, but no one laughed, as was usually the case when Sid's voice played tricks with him.

"Peterson's got to know about this," Lynn said, after a pause. "You kids run and saddle up; you'll have to go in and tell about this concho—"

"I never stole it!" wailed Little Joe, backing off. "I found it, I tell yuh!"

"Why, of course you didn't steal it!" cried the little school-teacher, drawing him to her and holding him close. "We're so glad you found it, Joey, because if you hadn't, when Hank Miller came back, he'd have sneaked it out of sight and we never would have known anything about his losing it. Lynn looked for something to show Hank was there—why, he thought maybe Hank lost one, you see. We looked all over for this very concho! We didn't know you were keeping it safe. Now, when you tell Peterson, don't you see—"

"Hank'll get his, won't he?" Little Joe drew an arm swiftly across his eyes, in hope that she would not see how he almost had cried, and grinned up into her face. "It'll be gettin' even with him for beating up Lynn!"

"No!" The little school-teacher backed to a bench and sat down, still keeping her arm around him. "No! We mustn't even think of getting even, Honey. That isn't the way to think, because that's building out a hate track with your thoughts; and if you build a hate track, you can be sure something *you'll* hate to have will come traveling right back to you on that track. I can't explain just *all* about thought tracks now, Joey, but remember this, always. *You get just exactly what you give yourself!* Nothing more, and nothing less. We mustn't—we can't afford to hate Hank Miller, though we can't help hating the thing he did—or that it seems to us he did. If it's true that he wanted what he thought somebody else had—there's a story that Heinie—that grandfather had some money hidden away—if Hank wanted that so badly that he went out there to steal it, and even killed grandfather in order to get it, don't you see what a terrible track he built out from himself into the ethers, and don't you see what a terrible thing is coming back to him? It isn't getting even, Joey; it's just that we may be the tools the Law will use to bring Hank's evil load back to him. He sent for it, you know, when he did the terrible thing. Do you see, Joey? Do you understand what I mean by thought tracks? Build out good tracks, and good will hurry back over them. Build—"

"Did Lynn build a bad track that made Hank come and tie him up and most kill him?" The pitiless logic of a child spoke there, and it brought a startled glance from the little school-teacher. But she did not flinch or dodge the issue.

"Yes," she said gently, "I expect—yes, of course, Lynn built a track for it. The Law *works*, regardless of who sets it in motion. Lynn has been hating Hank Miller, ever since Hank met him in town and called him—Hay-wire." She hesitated to say the word, but only for a second; though the color flamed in her cheeks afterwards. "Lynn was angry and thought bitter things—and since the murder he has hated Hank more and more. It's—it's heartbreaking to see what terrible things we do give ourselves sometimes, but it must be so until we learn to build only good thought tracks. Do you see?"

"Uh-huh. Did Paw build out a bad track to get his legs paralyzed? I guess," Little Joe added shrewdly, "he just cussed 'em that way. Does his cussing everybody—"

"We'll have to go now, Joey," the little school-teacher hastily interrupted. "Lynn's in a hurry, dear, and I'll have other

chances to tell you all about track-building. Just remember not to hate any one yourself, even if you do have to serve justice by telling what you know. Hank is really to be pitied, Joey, for if he's guilty of what we suspect, just think what a terrible price he's going to have to pay!"

"Uh-huh—but did Paw—"

"School's dismissed!" cried Jan firmly, getting up and pinning on her hat. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting, Lynn. But I always think that what a child learns before he's twelve will go with him through life—and I simply couldn't let that revenge idea take root in little Joe's mind. The time to pull it up and plant a new thought there was right now, while he's all excited over things."

"I guess we all needed it," Lynn said soberly. "You sure have given me something to think about, Lady!"

"Well," said Jan smilingly, "for your especial benefit I'll just add one very important truth. In the ancient times there was a saying: 'As a man thinketh about himself, his self becomes.' Nowadays we've changed that to 'As a man thinketh so is he', but the original is much better and truer, I think. 'As a man thinketh about himself, his self becomes.' Think it over when you have time, Lynn. It will bear a good deal of study."

"You're darn' right!" Lynn agreed, his thoughts flashing to his brown jug. "I thought *hay-wire* for six or eight years, and —"

"Oh, come on!" Rose cried impatiently. "You seem to forget what all we have to do to-day. And Jan, if you don't mind, I think I'll go back home. This is Saturday, remember, and there's the kitchen to scrub and all the baking to do—the things I'd have to thinketh about myself if I went off and left it all for Mom to do would bring me the tribulations of Job;—boils and all!"

"Rose, you're the limit!" The little school-teacher laughed just as if she never had and never would be able to expound the Ancient Wisdom in its quaint phrasing, and they went out to meet the boys who came riding up from the corral, leading Loney all saddled and bridled and ready for Lynn.

Peterson stood in the middle of his little office and turned the dollar concho meditatively in his fingers while Lynn, Sid and Little Joe watched him intently.

"It sure looks as if it might be so," he said cautiously at last. "But I've seen stronger evidence than this here turn out to be just a happenstance and no more. For one thing, it ain't any cinch that this dollar was ever used for a concho. It prob'ly was made for one—the holes are right and all. But whether it was ever used—"

"It was a concho, all righty," Sid declared in a deep bass voice. "Joe's got the string that was on it—ain't yuh, Joe?"

Little Joe stepped forward and began emptying his pockets on to the deputy's table. Being a perfectly normal boy, he had string and a good many other things beside; and with eager fingers he began sorting the pile until out of the mess he pulled a short piece of buckskin thong worn shiny and round in the center. Peterson carefully strung the concho on it and stood eying the result.

"Well, that pulls the cinch up another yank," he admitted. "Is Hank in town, do you know?"

"I'll mighty quick find out," Lynn said, and pulling his hat down tighter on his head, he went out and down toward the Elkhorn saloon where Hank was most likely to be found. As he passed by a little harness shop alongside the saloon, Hank stepped out from between the two buildings. He stopped short when he saw Lynn, but that young man never hesitated an instant. Almost automatically his fist shot out and caught Hank under the ear. He went down so hard he bounced, and Lynn landed astraddle his body and began unbuckling his chaps.

Men came running from all directions, though the street had looked empty when Lynn walked out of Peterson's office. As Lynn got up and began pulling the chaps off the limp legs of Hank, Jack Peterson himself arrived on the scene, the two boys at his heels. But Lynn gave no one a glance; he had discovered something, and he knelt again and began examining each concho in turn, even flopping Hank's legs over so that he could get at the row underneath.

"All 1886!" he cried, looking up into Peterson's face. "No—here's one, 1899. Right here, just about halfway up. What do you make of that, Jack? All the same year except one!"

"That there's the year of the big winter," Lefty Jordan spoke up. "Time all the cattle died and skinners went out in the spring and cleaned up big money skinnin' dead cattle. Hank was one of a bunch over in Buffalo Medders that had a contest to see who skun the most critters in the season. Hank won; made quite a big stake. He put them 1886 dollar conchos on to remember his skinnin' prize."

"In memoriam!" Lynn said dryly. "Well, Jack, you can cinch this thing right now, if you're a mind to. Just send up to Mrs. Moore's and get Miss MacIvor, and bring her down here and let her tell you about what she saw the night Heinie was killed. Go on—she don't know about these dates—"

"Now you're talkin'!" Peterson approved. "One of you kids—" But he found the request superfluous, for both Sid and Joe were already halfway to Mrs. Moore's. And it was Little Joe who made the announcement.

"Come on, quick! Hank Miller's track's comin' home and they want you down there!" was the way Joe put it, but the little school-teacher understood and hurried as fast as she could without actually running, which would have been undignified for a schoolma'am, I suppose.

Little Jan, telling what she had seen that night when she had toothache and the moon was shining and she stood looking out into the street at two o'clock in the morning, pointed toward one of Hank's legs.

"I noticed a dollar was missing just about there," she said. "They all showed very plainly in the moonlight, and I noticed the space where one was gone. It was on that leg—it would have to be, of course, since he rode in from that direction." She pointed.

"And that," Lynn cried triumphantly, "is the 1899 dollar, Jack! Is that enough?"

"Plenty!" Peterson laconically replied, as he took a firm grip on Hank's collar.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"DAD, YOU WALKED!"

Lynn rode down the trail from Upper Ranch the evening of that same day, and though he did not sing or whistle as he rode—his bruised mouth was too sore for that—his thoughts came smiling from his inner soul that sang of things to come. To prove that this was a day of feasting and festivity in the Hayward family, all the leggy young chickens on the place ran squawking to the brush when he appeared at the gate, and there were some with tail feathers missing to tell of the narrow escapes they had had from the frying pan. But Lynn had no eyes or thoughts for the perturbed fowls that fled from him as he strode up the path to the house, for he was thinking of something quite different, even though his nostrils did dilate pleasurably at certain odors floating out from the kitchen. For Lynn was about to play Santa Claus two months ahead of time.

He even forgot old Joel altogether, as he opened the door and walked into the kitchen, setting a certain important brown jug down upon the table, where Rose and Jan together were just smoothing a clean white cloth for supper.

"Come here, Jan. Mom, Rose—yes, you two kids may as well take a front seat too—set down while I show you something that's a sight for sore eyes!" He watched them gather and seat themselves expectantly around the table, empty of everything save the brown jug. "But first I want to explain something.

"That night when I rode up to Heinie's with the bread and cookies—the night he was killed—oh, say, wait a minute, though! Jannie, can you prove you're his granddaughter? In court, I mean. Have you got any papers or anything to show for it?"

"Why, yes," said the little school-teacher, watching him, big-eyed. "I have all mother's pictures and papers; pictures of my grandfather and grandmother, and letters and her birth certificate and everything. Mother went to live with Aunt Jessie when grandmother died, and for awhile grandfather used to write to Aunt Jessie and send money for the baby—that was mother—and he always signed his full name that seemed so funny to me when I read the letters after Aunt Jessie died. 'Your obedient servant, Heinrich Deitrich'; every letter he ever wrote to her is signed that way. I always thought of him as Heinrich Deitrich, after I grew up and got the letters, and I never heard any one speak of him as Heinie; so that's why it never once occurred to me that this old man was my grandfather. I supposed grandfather had died long ago. Aunt Jessie hadn't heard from him for years. She was an old lady when I was just a little girl and mother took me to see her. It was just a few months before she died. When she was gone, mother got all of Aunt Jessie's things, and that's how I happen to have the letters." She paused, looking from Lynn to his mother and back. "Yes, I'm sure I have plenty of proof, if it's necessary to prove it," she said. "A friend in Denver who's cashier in a bank has all my papers and everything in safe keeping for me. Why? What is it, Lynn?"

Lynn heaved a great sigh and laid his hand on the jug.

"That's all I wanted to be sure of," he said. "Now I'll shoot the works. It'll be a big relief to get the thing off my chest, let me tell you. Well, you girls remember I told you I saw old Heinie through the window that night, and he was counting money; but I didn't tell you how much it was. I didn't dare, to tell the truth. When I heard he'd been murdered, I knew if I told all I saw that night I'd probably be lynched for the murderer. But now it's pinned on Hank Miller—"

"He got his track back!" Little Joe put in promptly. "He got what he sent for—only he didn't know it was that big a package, I bet!"

"Be still, Joey." Mom gave him a mild slap on the shoulder. "Lynn's talking!"

"Well, yes, I guess that's right—he got what he sent for when he killed Heinie. Well, where he got it I don't know, but Heinie had more money spread out on the table than I ever saw in my life or expected to see. I just stood there like a stump and watched him count it and put it in a sack and go hide it behind a rock in the wall, and then I got on my horse and rode off. It made me so darned sore to think of him being such a miser, and letting us do things for him while he pretended to be poor, that—well, I wouldn't have given him that bread if it was the last thing on earth I could do for him. It was, all right, but I didn't know that, of course. So I went to the Upper Ranch and stayed there all night and came on home next morning.

"Then when Rose met me on the trail and told me what had happened, I was pretty near rattled for awhile. I knew somebody must have got wind of that money, and I didn't know but what he got away with it. The thing bothered me. I couldn't rest till I knew for sure. So I went back, after the funeral, and looked. It was there, all right—and so I took it out of the hole and put the rock back like it was, and took the money to the Upper Ranch.

"And after awhile it seemed to me that I had as much right to it as anybody; more right than anybody else, because we'd done so much for Heinie, and I didn't think he had any relatives. He never talked about anybody that belonged to him, you remember, Mom."

"He did to me, once," Mom said. "I don't know what got him started, but he told me about his wife dying and he said he had a girl somewhere, he didn't know where. He thought maybe she was dead. It was the only time he ever mentioned it, though, so far as I know."

"Well, I didn't know that, so I made up my mind I'd just hang on to the money and say nothing about it. I thought it'd go to the State, if I turned it in to Peterson—and I guess it would have, too. But I couldn't spend it, of course. That would be too raw, when everybody was wondering who killed him. So I hid it where nobody would ever find it and went on about my business.

"But here's a funny thing, little Jan. I got to thinking about it after what you said this morning up at the ranch. You've got the right dope on life, all right. I couldn't spend a dime of this money—I'll show you why in a minute—but I knew I had it. It made me feel rich. I *was* rich. I didn't realize just what it was doing to me till you said what you did. Now I know you're right—"

"'As a man thinketh in his heart about himself, so does his self become?' Of course I'm right. Before, you felt poor and you *were* poor. You thought poverty thoughts and you lived a life of poverty. When you changed your thoughts—but it took money to change you, in this case, because you didn't know the Law—when you began to think rich thoughts, you felt rich and you *were* rich. You began to enrich your life by putting your thoughts into action. You thought of yourself as rich—and so did your self—your thought self, your human self—become. It always is so, because it must be so. It is the Law of Life. Go on. We want to hear more."

"Well, that's all, I guess. Only I bucked up and put my right foot forward, as they say, just thinking I had a fortune behind me. I don't know whether I'd ever have spent any of it or not. I know I wouldn't have, till I got rich—and then I wouldn't need to. And then I found out it belongs to you, so—here it is, schoolma'am! Now *you* can sing, 'Little brown jug, don't I love thee!' Where's a fork or something? I've got the cork in pretty tight." He looked at Rose, who flew to get what he wanted. She came back with a long-tined meat fork, but no one remarked upon the remarkable use to which it was being put.

"But how much is it, Lynn?" Jan asked impatiently.

"Merely the small sum of ninety-two thousand dollars, Jan."

"Nine-ty-two—thousand—*dollars*?" Sid's voice squealed the last word.

"In that jug?" Jan seemed to think he was joking her.

"You wait till I get this cork out and I'll show yuh! All in thousand-dollar bills—except two that are five thousand apiece. Good reason why I never spent any of your money, Jan!"

"For the land's sake!" cried Rose. "How did Heinie ever get hold of that much?"

"Found richer diggings than he let on, I guess. It's the only way he could have. Soon as I get around to it, I'm going to hunt around for the place where he dug it out."

The cork came out with a plop. There was silence, then a gasp, then more gasps. With the fork Lynn was bringing up packages of bank notes to make their eyes bulge.

"Oo-ooh!" This from Little Joe. "Is all that *money*? Real money to buy things with?"

"You bet! There's your supper, Jannie. Beats fried chicken, don't it? Feel of that one. That's a nice silky five-thousand dollar bill! See?"

"Oh, Lynn! You keep that one to pay off the notes for your sheep! Go on—You must! And here's this one—That's yours to buy another band of sheep. Go on—take it! Lynn Hayward, if you don't take these two five-thousanddoses, I'll never marry you in the world!"

"Oh, golly, what a track!" gasped little Joe. "That'll make you an old maid, I bet!"

"I take it up right away," the little school-teacher laughed excitedly. "But I'll put out another one: Lynn, take these two five-thousanddoses, for your sheep business, and I'll marry you to-morrow if you want me to!"

"*Sheep?* What's this about *sheep?*" The voice of old Joel fairly lifted them from their seats. But it sounded close. So close that Lynn, standing with his back to the living-room door, could feel the hot breath that ejected the words. And that was strange—He turned and looked uncomprehendingly into the face of his father, towering there in the doorway on a level with his own. Had the ghost of the old man invaded the kitchen, the Hayward family would not have sat more stricken with amazement.

Then Lynn threw the fork unheedingly from him and reached out, grasping the old man by the shoulders.

"You walked! Dad, you *walked!*"

Lynn choked. He stared with blurred eyes into the startled, half-ashamed face of his father.

"Joel! Why—why, Joel dear!" Mom came tottering to clasp her arms about him, where he stood clinging to the door frame, his unaccustomed legs shaking with the strain. "Oh, thank God, thank God!"

"Good land!" cried Rose's high, bright voice, fighting to keep sanity in the family. "They say curiosity killed the cat, but I never heard it would bring dead legs to life! Had to get right up and come see what the excitement's about, didn't you, Dad?"

"Yeah!" Lynn took the cue from Rose and pushed a chair forward. "Now you're here, sit down, Dad, and feast your eyes on all the money in the world, just about!"

"Wha-what's this I heard about you goin' into sheep?" old Joel repeated, but with all the bellow knocked out of his voice.

"Oh," said Lynn airily, "John Trueman at Green River advised me to get a bunch of sheep and get rich. There's big money in sheep, he says. So he staked me to enough to buy a band. Finest lot of merino ewes you ever laid eyes on, Dad—"

"I don't want to lay eyes on 'em!" Joel said stubbornly, and clamped his mouth shut so tight his beard stood straight out.

"You won't object to laying eyes on the money when I sell the wool next summer," Lynn retorted, but the little school-teacher shook her head at him and leaned forward, placing one soft hand over the big fist of Joel where it lay doubled on the table.

"We'd like to buy the Upper Ranch—here, as much as you want!" she said, and laughed and pushed packages of money toward him. "Lynn and I are going to get married and raise sheep, and I love that place up there in the hills."

"The Dollar outfit told me I couldn't make a go of it," Lynn craftily observed. "They tried to drive the sheep over a cut bank into Pacific Creek when I was bringing 'em home. Pete Wilder said I'd never—"

"Don't tell me what Pete Wilder says!" snapped Joel. "Who's runnin' this ranch, anyway? You tell Saunders an' Pete Wilder to mind their own da—pesky business!"

"Well, that's about what I said to Pete."

"How much, Father-in-law?" With red cheeks and eyes that shone, the little school-teacher held up handfuls of packages before him. "After some short legal details, this is all ours. How much for the Upper Ranch? Lynn and I want to be neighbors of yours, and we *don't* want to pay this over to the Dollar outfit—"

"Oh—I guess I'm able to make you a weddin' present of the place, if you want it," Joel said gruffly, to hide his embarrassment.

Rose began to sniff, then she gave a great cry and rushed across the room. "The chicken's almost burnt to a crisp!" she

cried in tragic tones. "Bring Dad's chair out here, Brudder; and Mommie, come out of your trance and make the gravy! I'm half starved and I guess everybody else is!"

The tension relaxed. Old Joel, settled in his big chair at the head of the table, where Rose was scurrying knives and forks into place, stared around at the room he had not seen for eight years, and a great peace seemed to settle upon his lined face that did not look so harsh, somehow.

"Them tendons just snapped back into place," he muttered in an explanatory tone to every one in general. "I was like a hamstrung horse. Felt 'em slip back where they belong. Be all right now, I guess. Where's my blood purifier? I need a dose right now."

"Hay-wire!" Lynn suddenly exclaimed, and sent a sweeping glance from face to face. "Who says hay-wire?" His eyes went to the face of his little school-teacher and clung there adoringly.

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

Spelling and grammar have been preserved as in the original. Obvious printer's errors and typos have been corrected without comment.

[End of *Hay-Wire* by B. M. Bower]