The Untamed

GEORGE PATTULLO

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"*So much had three days with the wild linked up the slack chain of her blood tie.*"—*Shiela*

The Untamed

Range Life in the Southwest

By

George Pattullo

Toronto
McLeod & Allen
1911

TO
FRANK B. MOSON
and the boys of the O R, R O, and Turkey Track

My coffee I boil without being ground.
The fire I kindle with chips gathered round.
My books are the brooks, my sermons the stones;
My parson's a wolf on pulpit of bones.
The sky is my ceiling; my carpet's the grass;
My music's the lowing of herds as they pass.

—*Ballad of The Trail Boss.*

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I
OL' SAM

"Git your nose out'n that pot. Hi, you flop-eared—I swan, that ol' mule makes me mad sometimes. He'd jist as leave snake your whole batch right from under your nose as look at you. Git, you long-legged rascal! Whoopee!"

The cook dashed at the offender, swinging a bit of firewood. It struck the hybrid upon the hindquarter and he countered instantaneously by lashing out with his heels. Then he turned to smell of the projectile, but finding it unfit for consumption, trotted off up a neighboring rise and presently disappeared from view.

Certain coarse men of the Lazy L outfit called him Hell-on-Wheels, among other things, but his real name was Sam, and he made one of the four-mule team that hauled the chuck-wagon during round-up. Between him and Dave was a personal feud; they were most loving enemies. In the beginning the cook had pampered him by feeding bread to the big creature, taking no heed, and now this artificial appetite he had created made of Dave's waking hours a perpetual vigil and conjured up nightmares in place of refreshing sleep.

For whenever Sam wasn't doing the major share of hauling some four thousand odd pounds of wagon, bedding and provisions from one round-up ground to another, he was loafing on the confines of camp, awaiting a favorable opportunity to go in surreptitiously and nose among the pots or at the back of the wagon for the buns Dave made so cunningly. What time he lost this way from grazing he made up easily by his pillage; bread is very fattening, and then, of course, the chuck-wagon team received regular rations of corn.

Yet Dave was a watchful scoundrel, and day by day it was being borne in upon Sam that in these attempts at pilfering he received blows and abuse more often than huns. But at night, when the punchers lay asleep on the ground and he could hear the cook slumbering stertorously beneath the wagon-fly, it was different: then Sam would wander into camp and make his way on soundless feet to the dead fire. Beside its ashes he knew there would be scraps of bread, perhaps some of them sweetened with molasses, and for these his whole being craved. On one such excursion, as he munched happily on a wet crust, he inadvertently put his foot into Dave's face, and, because Hell-on-Wheels weighed about thirteen hundred pounds, the cook awoke very peevish.

"If it wasn't," he remarked next morning as he hitched up—"if it wasn't that you could haul more'n them other three put together, I'd skin you alive. Oh, you needn't go for to pretend you didn't do it a-purpose. You seen me there, all right. Look at that lip! Don't it look as if I'd fell off'n a mountain?"

The cook always knew what to expect of Sam. When putting the mules in the wagon he was cognizant of the precise moment that Sam would kick, and could judge to a hair's breadth at what angle the smashing blow would be delivered. On his part, Sam knew that the cook was prepared; otherwise it is doubtful whether he would have let go some of the vicious side-sweeps of his left leg that he did. On occasions when the attacks were especially wicked, or when Dave calculated the margin of safety with too fine nicety, he would possess himself of a stout club and hammer Hell-on-Wheels until he was weak. In this way were bred mutual respect and a thorough understanding.

It was when the wagon was miring down, or when they were climbing a rocky trail in the mountains, that Sam and the cook gloried one in the other. Once Dave's judgment went wrong by three inches in fording a stream—he may have been careless with a splendid contempt, as was his habit—and one hind wheel sank oozily into quicksand. The cook stood up and whirled his long whip and adjured his team by all that was holy to pull, pull, pull.

"Now, you, Hell-on-Wheels! Good ol' boy! You, Sam! You!"

He lashed three of the team with stinging force, but Sam he did not touch. The great mule laid his shoulders into the collar and heaved,—heaved again—and with a wrench and a sucking sound they floundered out to hard sand, to safety. Whenever Sam came to a realization that the job required something extra, and stretched himself out accordingly, either the wagon followed where he wanted to go or the mule went through his harness.

The wagon boss esteemed Sam and valued him at his worth, but it cannot be said that he was fond of the beast. There was much in his personality Uncle Henry did not like. Nor did the horse-wrangler. Had anybody requested Maclovio for a frank opinion of Sam, the Mexican would have spat with contempt and exhausted the resources of his patois. That nerveless limb of the devil? Don't try to tell him the mule stampeded the staked horses by accident; Maclovio knew better; Sam had planned the whole turmoil from the start of the round-up. The wrangler had to herd the mules with the remuda, and the uncanny sagacity the drag-mule displayed in following out his own plans of grazing and enjoyment filled the Mexican with superstitious dread.

The ropers hated him with an active, abiding hatred they made no effort to conceal. He was the only member of the wagon team that would not submit to be caught without roping. The other mules would trot in with the horses from pasture and walk quietly to the wagon to be bridled, under the lure of grain; but not so with the big fellow. Sam never crowded away among the horses in foolish panic when a roper walked through the remuda toward him: that was the way the cow-ponies did, struggling blindly to get beyond range, and so the noose fell about their necks with ridiculous ease. That was not Sam's method, he being temperamentally opposed to panic. He waited until the roper approached, waited until the coil sped toward him; and then only did he dodge. As a result, he eluded

the noose time after time. In fact, it always took longer to rope Sam than any five of the hundred horses.

One day the hawk-eyed autocrat of the Lazy L range spurred into camp in hot haste while the outfit was partaking of dinner. Heatedly he urged: "Watch your horses Uncle Henry." Then he went to the fire, filled a tin plate with beef and beans, and a cup with coffee, and speared a bun.

"Shore. But what for special? They're doing well and we ain't lost one," replied the wagon boss, making room for his chief on the shady spot where he squatted.

"Then you're in luck. That band of mustangs has roamed down here from the Flying W. They passed within two miles of the ranch yesterday and, by Jupiter, if ol' Pete didn't join 'em. The ol' fool! Eleven years that horse has been a cowhorse and now he runs off from the home pasture with a bunch of wild ones."

"Where're they heading?"

"You know as much as I do. I reckon the pasture is poor on the Flying W, don't you? They ain't had much rain and probably this bunch'll make for the mountains. Better watch out," the manager admonished.

Dave toiled with his team next afternoon through a waste of sand and mesquite. It was very hot—had there been such a thing as a thermometer on the wagon it would have registered better than 112—and he sat hunched on the seat, occasionally throwing an encouraging word to the straining mules. Behind came Al with the hoodlum wagon, which, being much lighter, made easy work for a pair of stout horses, so that Al dozed with his hat well down over his eyes and dreamed of a dress-maker in Doghole. It was growing towards sunset and they would pitch camp in the foothills and have supper ready for the boys before darkness fell.

Without warning the mule team stopped and stood at gaze, rousing Dave abruptly. A dense cloud of dust was bearing down on them from the right and out of that swirl came the muffled pounding of many hoofs.

"The remuda's stompeded," yelled Al.

"No, they ain't. No, they ain't. It's them wild horses. Git your gun, Al, quick!"

By the time Al had reached behind him with one hand to fumble for the rifle, the band had swept by and was disappearing. Probably there were thirty horses in it, but that was only a guess, because Dave obtained nothing more than a glimpse of streaming manes and tails. They ran compactly, a noble buckskin in the lead, and tailing the band was a white horse; it was evident that he held the furious pace only by a supreme effort.

"There goes ol' Pete. Blast him, if he ain't hitting only the high spots," Dave bawled.

At this moment his attention was called to Sam. The mule's head was thrown high, the usually slouching ears were rigid and pricked forward, and he was sniffing the air restlessly. Once he made an abrupt lurch sideways as though to

follow the free rovers, but the bit sawed his mouth, the collar and traces bound him and he could only champ impatiently. If a mule really knows how to tremble, Sam was trembling then—it was more a twitching of the muscles. The band was lost to sight and sound. Dave called a raucous command and once more they settled to work. Again Sam became listless and applied himself lethargically to pulling.

A cool breeze whipped among the scrub-cedar of the foothills and went whining down the valley. Above the black rim of El Toro rose a rich, golden disc. Its pale light softened the outlines of the forms asleep upon the ground; in that kindly radiance the chuck-wagon and the unsightly confusion of camp merged into blurs that harmonized with the giant shadow of the mountain. The night was full of murmurings, tense with the suggestion of strange other worlds. Surely the plaintive wailing the breeze bore to Sam from El Toro's pines was a message.

He stood with his nose up wind and drew in the scents of the wilds. His forelegs were hobbled, the rope twisted about them so tightly that he could barely shuffle when he grazed, and near at hand twelve horses were staked out. One of them, hopelessly entangled in his rope, was fighting it in terror; already he was on his knees unable to do aught but cut himself. In a draw a half-mile away the remuda cropped the grass under the eyes of a triple guard, for Uncle Henry was mindful of the manager's warning, and upon Dave's report he took no chances.

Out from the shadow cast by a mesquite bush a coyote skulked, and Sam snorted and shook his head in anger. The beast's scent offended him, but he was not afraid. Somewhere in the dark a wildcat cried and the mule cocked his ears to listen. Next moment he jumped awkwardly aside as a polecat scurried by on a hunt for food.

The mule was growing restive. It was not nervousness—a mule is rarely nervous or frightened. When he runs away or pitches or balks, it is seldom because something has put fear into him; it is refined cussedness. Anyone who ever succeeded in owning a mule longer than a month will tell you that.

Of a sudden Sam sank his head and his powerful teeth met and rasped on the rope that chafed his legs. One of the strands parted and he strained to break the hobble, but too impatient to direct his gnawing to one spot, he was unsuccessful and finally desisted.

Was that the call of a horse? It did not come from the direction in which the remuda had been driven off, and his ears tingled for a repetition of the sound. Twice he humped himself and struck out with his heels in the fury of impotence, and paused breathlessly with his eyes fixed on the yellow ball above El Toro's summit. He took one step forward and became immovable as his glance fell to the wide lane of light it cast.

Down this silver-shimmering path a horse came proudly. None but a free rover ever trod earth as he did. Sam could see the fiery eyes flashing suspicion, the regal head thrown back, the nostrils a-quiver to divine danger. He came like a phantom, lightly as one, silently as one, and a dozen yards away he halted, and

there in the light of the moon surveyed the camp, the staked mounts, the sleeping men. It was the king of the wild horses. Far back of him a blotch on a hillside shifted with gleam of color.

A madness was come upon Sam. From out the night countless voices called to him appealingly; away out there in the illusive sheen must be liberty and delight. His sluggish blood was racing wildly, his body and limbs were a-quake with eagerness to respond to that appeal, to be gone into that alluring gloom. One of the staked animals whinnied and tugged fiercely on his rope.

At once the buckskin stallion blared a challenge, and he was away. The shadows swallowed him up. From over the hill came a rolling thunder, the noise of scores of flying hoofs, and Sam got the hobble between his teeth a second time, gave one ferocious upward rend, and the strands parted and dropped from him. He was free, and the wilderness was calling, calling.

"Ol' Hell-on-Wheels has done gone," observed Dave.

"Done gone?" the wagon boss echoed. "Gone where? He must be round somewheres. He cain't git through the day without bread, Sam cain't."

"He done run off with them mustangs!" In Dave's tone was depressed conviction. "You hearn 'em last night the same as me. Nobody seen him go, but look here. I jist found his hobble all bit in two."

"And we've got to move camp this morning," the wagon boss raved.

"P'raps he'll come back. I shouldn't think they'd want Sam with 'em, Uncle Henery. He'd smash 'em all up, that bunch, he would!"

"He shore would." Uncle Henry could not suppress a snigger of satisfaction.

He dispatched two of the boys to scour the country for the fugitive, and Dave hitched a two-mule team, falling a prey to melancholy as he moved about them in absolute security. How he missed that ol' son-of-a-gun with his sly nibbles and his kicking and sublime obstinacy. These creatures pull? The cook grew hot with disdain and had two men told off to help haul the wagon with ropes in bad spots. In the days that followed he would often stop in his work and wonder what sense there was in going through life, anyway.

Meanwhile, Sam flourished like unto the green bay tree. When the band sped away into the hills the night of his temptation and fall, the mule summoned up unguessed reserves of speed and trailed behind. The tumultuous joy of liberty fired him; his muscles responded to this new throbbing life like steel springs, so that Sam not only caught up with the mustangs, but ran well within himself in holding with them. The renegade Pete galloped in rear and, knowing Sam these many years, nickered him breathless welcome.

A recruit to the ranks was not a novelty, and though Sam was a mule, they accepted him readily enough, and for several days they roamed the cañons of El Toro. Rains had been frequent in this region and they obtained their fill of grass. As is the way of horses, the band paid scant attention to the mule; he grazed with them, and when any alarm or mere exuberance of spirits prompted a run, he could

show his heels to all but the buckskin leader and a bay mare which seemed to carry wings on her feet.

And on the fifth day occasion arose for him to prove his prowess. In the band were a dozen mares, seven colts of various ages and fifteen horses, all under the leadership of the buckskin. Now, Sam was a mule of considerable common-sense; he never disputed the sovereignty of the stallion, but at the same time he was fully sensible of his own strength and fighting ability, having had occasion to test the same frequently, and he had not the remotest intention of allowing any horse on the range or other quadruped, to take undue liberties.

As they came up from watering at a mountain spring at high noon, the mustangs were compelled to thread a narrow defile, and much crowding resulted. A colt ricochetted from the mule and lost his feet, whereupon the mother made at Sam with her teeth. This attack he ignored dexterously by bursting through the press and imposing the bodies of several horses between him and the indignant mare; but when a youthful black took it into his head that Sam was a recreant and could be bullied with impunity, various things happened. By now, they were out in the open. Trumpeting defiance, the black ran at him.

The combat did not last three minutes. It is probable that the mule would have killed his assailant when he lay prone after the third onslaught, had not the leader trotted up in royal wrath to quell the disorder in his following. Should he go for him too, and reduce him to pulp? Sam's eyes were glittering evilly, and the mulish, enduring rage was alive, but his habitual discretion cooled the impulse and he gave ground, his ears laid back, his retreat reluctant. The stallion wisely let him go.

Soon he attained to a species of leadership, a vice-royalty under the reigning buckskin. For one thing, his caution was tempered by almost human powers of discrimination; for another, he was never subject to the nervous tremors to which even the stallion fell victim and which were the inspiration of many stampedes. Sam could sense peril as far as any and was dubious, in a calm way, of everything he saw until he had investigated; but sudden noises, or a strange scent brought abruptly to his nostrils, did not send him flying over the country, shrilling warnings. He made reasonably sure of the possibility of danger before giving the alarm. Of his old masters, he was peculiarly wary, and twice at night, when they passed within a mile of the round-up camp, the mule's nose acquainted him of its proximity, and he led them far to the west.

When the outfit had almost completed the round-up, Sam wandered off from the band on a morning's jaunt and came unexpectedly upon the remuda in a draw. The wrangler espied that unmistakable gait from afar and spurred desperately to catch him, but the mule was fleet as a greyhound and could not be headed. Two of the horses followed the fallen one. They knew Sam and respected him, and what was good enough for him would suit them admirably. Maclovio did not see their departure; madly scurrying from point to point to herd the restless horses, he failed to perceive the flight toward the gap, and it was only when the roping

began after dinner that the loss was discovered. The Mexican prayed inwardly that Sam would break a leg and die by inches; if he would only break his neck, he would buy a dozen candles for the altar at Tucalari.

Old Pete McVey, the manager, sat on the stoop of the bunkhouse at headquarters and made a solemn vow to the skies.

"I'll hunt down every last one of that bunch and hang Sam's hide to the saddle-shed. We've had two breakdowns with the wagon since he left—that ol' mule we got from Doghole ain't no good, Mit—and now two horses have run off."

"I done told Uncle Henery and Dave that I felt shore it was Sam or some of them mustangs that stompeded those steers last week."

"When I get him, the ol' fool!" burst out the manager.

He organized a hunt, and with three men and four staghounds set out cheerily to wipe the wild horses from the face of the earth. The band winded them two miles away and carried the hunt to another range, but at last they crept within striking distance, and the chase was on.

Sam knew the dogs and had seen them run in sport about headquarters. Therefore, he let himself out and led the band beside the buckskin stallion, and for mile after mile they raced. A laggard was pulled down, the ancient sinner Pete —a hound leaped for his nose and Pete turned a somersault. McVey himself shot the injured animal, and they camped in the neighborhood and took up the pursuit next morning.

It was a famous hunt. The dogs brought down four animals, and the Lazy L men, tiring in the chase, fired after the fugitives, killing three; but Sam remained ever in the van, unhurt. McVey led his men back, satisfied that the mustangs would seek new haunts, swearing vengefully at Sam and rejoicing in his heart that the giant mule had won to safety.

The band wintered in the mountains, and more than once during those terrible months the emaciated Hell-on-Wheels had to paw down through three inches of snow to get at the grass, and he obtained little more than enough to sustain life. Several of the colts succumbed to a three-days' storm, and when spring was ushered in, with a soft wind that whispered tender promises to a stricken land, at least a dozen of the horses and mares were sickly. As for Sam, he was only hungry. A mule seems immune from disease, and hunger and thirst cannot wreak the havoc on his iron constitution that they create among the more sensitive horses. The mustangs ranged widely in a quest for good pasture and at last worked down to the Lazy L.

Dave had put in the cold months in dispirited fashion, there being little to do. He moped around headquarters, and whenever the wagon boss ventured to consult him on preparations for the spring round-up, the cook maintained a glum silence. It would be a bad year, he was sure of that; they needn't expect much of the calf crop. Far be it from him to discourage any man, least of all McVey and Uncle Henery, but he felt in his bones that ill luck would attend them. What could

be expected of a wagon team that would let him mire down in Coyote Creek? The round-up would be a farce.

"Them mustangs is back," Reb announced, riding in from a winter camp. "I seen 'em topping a mesa over near Lone Pine Spring."

"I'll give twenty dollars a head for 'em," declared the manager, slowly removing the pipe from his lips.

Nearly a score of punchers equipped themselves to earn the reward. Some failed even to get trace of the band; others trailed them for days, but never came in sight; Dick, Bob Saunders and Maclovio got within half a mile and with relays of horses applied themselves to capture in a scientific way. They would run those mustangs off their legs. In four days they were back, with their mounts used up and McVey to welcome them.

"That ol' mule kin smell us a mile," Dick reported. "He always gives the alarm first. And run? Jim-in-ee, the way that rascal kin run!"

Dave listened and gloomed and finally took a great resolution. He might just as well be honest with himself—the round-up would never be the same without Sam. The cook had been a cowhand in his time and he hadn't trailed cattle up through the Panhandle for nothing. Therefore he would not match his speed against the wild horses.

"Say, Mister McVey, I want to git a month off."

"Where're you going now? This isn't another trip to Doghole?"

"I hoped you'd done forgot that," Dave answered severely. "No, sir, I want to go and git Hell-on-Wheels."

"How could you catch him? I've tried; all the boys have tried. And you haven't ridden in ten years."

"You let me try and you'll see." Dave tried to draw in his waist and appear athletic as the manager ran his eye over his two hundred and fourteen pounds.

"You couldn't get that mule in a thousand years. Unless"—as an afterthought —"you spread breadpans all over the range and set traps."

"There's where you're wrong, Mister McVey, sir. I ain't rode much since I took to cookin', but I'm pretty active. You gimme that month and you'll see."

"Go ahead. I'd just as soon pay the reward to you as to anybody else—sooner."

Sam was the first of the band to sight the enemy trudging through the sand of the plain toward them. Far behind a burro followed, led by another man on foot. This truly was interesting. The mule advanced for a closer inspection and the others awaited his verdict, having implicit confidence in him as a sentinel. Thus it happened that Dave gained to within three hundred yards before Sam flagged his tail and departed. The horses massed swiftly into a compact body and followed, but they did not run as they would have run from mounted men. Instinctively they knew that this thing on two legs could not catch them, so it was at a swinging trot that they breasted a hill.

On its crest the mustangs slowed down; they dropped to a walk and turned to look back at what pursued. There plodded old Dave, apparently paying them no special attention, but nevertheless coming in their direction. Once more Sam waited until the cook came within shouting distance, then, the buckskin raising the alarm, they cantered off.

So it went all the afternoon. Dave made no attempt to get close up with them; he did not conceal his approach; he did not stalk them; and he was especially cautious not to alarm to an extent that would send them fleeing for miles. Instead, he was satisfied merely to keep them in sight. Sometimes he paused to wipe the sweat from his face and neck, but he betrayed no impatience. Far behind a burro followed, led by another man on foot, and when the cook changed his course so did the burro, still maintaining its distance.

Sam was sorely puzzled. That stout figure possessed a peculiar attraction for him. When he had put a considerable tract between himself and it, he could not forbear to stop and watch what it would do. Still it came on—yet it was not threatening. The mule's sense of danger was lulled. And he was not the only perplexed member of the band: curiosity had the stallion in its grip, too. There was not a horse among the free rovers but would slacken gait to ascertain where the foolish pursuer walked now.

By the time the sun died behind a fringe of hills, Sam and the others were horribly thirsty. They swung around in a wide semicircle and struck for a lake six miles distant. Dave followed. Hardly had they drunk half their fill, standing waist-deep in the cooling water, when the expectant mule warned them of the approach of that shadowing figure. They waded out and made off reluctantly.

The cook arrived two minutes later and stretched out on his back on the edge of the lake and thought with sweet sorrow of the days when he weighed one hundred and sixty. Presently the man with the burro joined him, and they took down their bedding, staked out the tireless pack-animal, built a fire of dried broomweed, and ate.

"They won't go far from here to-night. It jist happens there ain't any water nearer than twenty miles. No-oo, I reckon they'll hang round somewheres near," Dave observed, rolling a cigarette.

He divined correctly. Sam and his companions discovered that they were hungry, very hungry. While they did not realize it, they had eaten little that afternoon, for no sooner would they shake off the pursuer and fall to nibbling nervously at the dried grass than he would reappear, persistent as their own shadows, and they would continue their flight. Now he followed no more, and they must eat. Eat they did to some extent, but a burning curiosity and a vague uneasiness had seized upon them. They felt irresistibly attracted by the campfire that sparkled in the darkness down by the water they craved; time after time they would near it fearfully. Without turning his head Dave knew that dozens of wondering eyes surveyed him from the outer rim of dark fifty yards away.

Before dawn the cook and his assistant had made fast the burro's burden with the "diamond hitch," and hard upon the coming of light Dave started out alone. In an hour he was in sight of the mustangs. Sam shook his head in irritation and the band moved off slowly. Dave followed. Far behind came a burro, led by a man on foot.

He camped at noon in a stretch of alkali, and because there was no water near they partook sparingly of some the cook carried in tins slung over the burro's load. As for the beast, he must wait till nightfall, which did not worry the burro in the least. Well Dave knew that the mustangs must make for water.

A dozen times in a day the cook would be out of view of the fugitives and a dozen times he would catch up with them, disturbing their intermittent grazing. It is doubtful if he averaged more than twenty miles in twenty-four hours; it is certain that the wild horses covered nearly three times that distance in their outbursts of panic and their doublings back on the pursuer. The chase led in a triangle that took in all the water-holes within a radius of ninety miles, and almost always Dave contrived to arrive before the band had got quite their fill.

Sam had lost at least a hundred pounds by the end of a week and was become gaunt and savage. Several of the colts, only a few months old, gave up the flight and their mothers forsook the band in safety, the pursuers ignoring them. The others kept on. Sam's contempt for the slow crawling thing behind them was changing to a haunting dread, and he became subject to petty fits of irritation. Why couldn't the enemy come on boldly? Why couldn't he match his speed with theirs in one grand rush? But no, there he was, patiently legging it through the sand, through grass, over foothills, up mountain trails, through gorges, down into valleys. A horrible fascination took possession of the mule. Had Dave turned about to retrace his steps, it is probable that Sam would have followed out of curiosity to see where he was going; but Dave still came on.

About this time, too, they got a taste of real summer. From an empty sky the sun smote the land, browning the hills, crisping the grass in the valleys until it crackled into dust. First one mountain stream ceased to run, then another; a creek that used to sweep down in a torrent after the spring rains now dribbled among scorching boulders. Thus came about the beginning of the end.

"They cain't stand more'n another week of this, Charlie," Dave remarked, as they camped beside a hatful of water in the foothills.

"I reckon not. Did you notice some of them mares? They's all in. You got within fifty yards of 'em once to-day, Dave. The burro here has kep' up well. Ain't you, you greedy devil? She's looking fine. I'm giving her corn."

Never did the mustangs get enough to eat. Another sort of madness than the madness for liberty was laying hold of Sam. His days consisted of timid attempts at grazing, from which he would start at the lightest sound; of enforced pilgrimages from one pasture to another; and it must have been four hundred hours since he had had his fill of water. More than once, in a frenzy of revolt, he put five miles between him and his clinging disturber; but after two hours of

uneasy nibbling he would be interrupted once again—and again must move on. What food he got failed to nourish as it should, and the rest he snatched was not rest. In the night, when he might have lost his foe, the mule knew well that he was near, for there in the blackness his fire sent up its sparks and it drew him and his companions like a magnet. No matter where they roamed, the cook managed to spend the dark hours near water, and the band could not tear themselves from the vicinity.

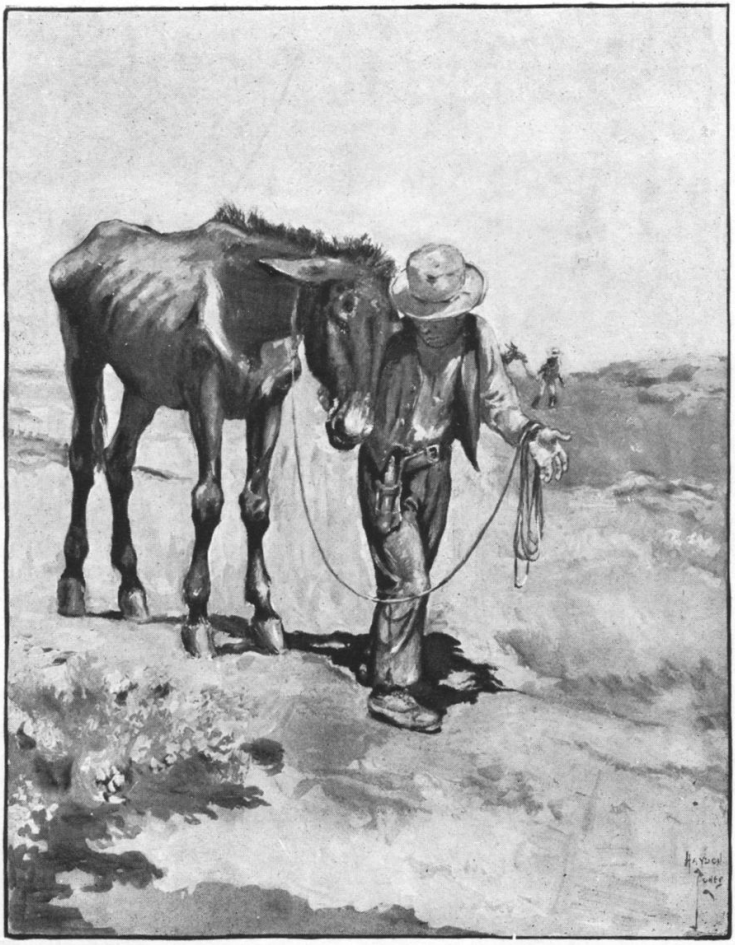
There came a day when Sam's ribs showed pitifully through his rough coat and he shuffled along in desperate dejection, his ears flopping. A heavy fatigue numbed his limbs, made cruel weights of them, and he was thirsty, deliriously thirsty; but if his plight was bad, that of the mustangs was worse. They stumbled coughing through the dust, too tired to lift their feet. Occasionally one broke into a half-hearted trot which survived only a few steps. The race was run.

Within six hours the band began to break up. First the mares and colts dropped out, careless of what might befall. The mothers went weakly to feeding on the burnt grass, their offspring hovering near in the last stages of exhaustion; but to these Dave paid no attention. He was after Hell-on-Wheels, and he did not intend to inject new life into the jaded survivors by the slaughter of their beaten companions. By his orders Charlie, too, ignored them, though his fingers itched as his mind dwelt on the reward.

Four of the horses lagged, staggered forward a few paces and fell behind, spent, swaying dizzily as they moved aside to let Dave pass. They were oblivious to everything now, insensible to peril, scarcely able to discern objects through their glazed eyes; but Sam and the stallion and some few kept on. Dave followed.

Hot rebellion surged up in the mule more than once, sapping his last ounce of spirit. Up would go his head in defiance and he would increase his lead; but the strength was ebbing from the wonderful muscles of him; he was sick at heart and wanted to lie down. Ahead, perhaps an hour's walk, he knew there was water. He must reach that. Would this thing that hung to their rear never give them respite?

Dave trudged now only twenty yards back. He was footsore, a fearful weariness was upon him and the heat was awful. Yet no thought of giving up occurred to his mind; his patience was unfailing. Not once did he do a hurried thing to alarm the quarry.



"*What you mean by running off this a-way?*"

It was the twenty-fourth day. All around them stretched a desert of alkali broken by patches of tree-cactus and clumps of bear-grass, and through the white, chalky dust Sam toiled dispiritedly a dozen yards in front of the stallion. Behind the faltering buckskin limped five skeletons of horses, and ten yards behind the hindermost walked Dave. There was no need that Charlie remain far in rear. The mustangs did not notice him, and he followed close with the burro.

The rovers had drunk deep that morning at a spring on the edge of the desert —this being as Dave would have it—and now all vigor of body and spirit had departed. Sam's head swung low to the ground, his knees were shaking and he saw nothing of what he passed. To his bloodshot eyes these scorched wastes were a wavering mist, and he knew only that he must go on.

Suddenly, as though by telepathic agreement, the weird procession halted. Sam turned. He faced the cook as he came up without hesitation, rope in hand.

Dave slipped the noose about his neck and rubbed the dusty muzzle sunk against his hip.

"You ol' fool, you!" he mouthed at him. "What you mean by running off this a-way? Didn't you know that team weren't no good without you? What did you reckon I was going to do, you pore ol' son-of-a-gun?"

He ran his eye over the emaciated body; then his glance fell to his own shrunken outline.

"I reckon we're both some thinner, Sam. And my feet's awful sore. What you need is corn. Here, Charlie, gimme that 'morale'!"

Staked out with the nosebag over his head, the mule munched dully on the life-giving grain, while Dave prepared dinner and Charlie moved from point to point on the plain with a rifle, earning half a month's pay every time he got near a horse. Charlie began to figure he would be a rich cowman some day.

Two hours later the men were smoking in the peace and content of hard work well done, when Sam walked stiffly to the end of his rope. By straining on it he could just reach the edge of the campfire. Dave rose up on his elbow.

"Hi, there! Git your nose out'n that pan, you rascal! I swan, he's hunting for bread."

II
THE MARAUDER

Six frowsy buzzards sat on a tree and made mock of his hunger. With his bushy tail drooping dismally between his legs, he zigzagged his way up the wide, dry bed of Red River, flitting from cover to cover like an uneasy ghost. Up one steep bank he sidled, to squat on his haunches, whence he surveyed the camp hungrily.

"There's a big ol' ki-yote," said the hoodlum driver. "Git your gun, Dave."

The cook abandoned the washpan with alacrity and ransacked the chuck-wagon for his weapon. When he rejoined Mac the coyote was still in view, but he seemed farther away.

"He done moved. I cain't hit him from here," said the cook.

"I been watching him and he ain't budged. Yes, he has, too. I'll swan, I never seen him do it."

The prairie wolf now sat a good three hundred yards away, his back to the camp, as though indifferent and contemptuous of it. Dave knelt on one heel, took slow, careful aim, and fired. A spurt of sand five yards short of the coyote was the result. The animal half turned his head, the sensitive upper lip quivered and curled over the wicked fangs, for all the world like a sneer, and then he resumed his placid scrutiny of nothing. Mac forcibly removed the rifle from Dave's grasp, deaf to his picturesque explanation of the miss, adjusted the sight and lay down.

"You had it sighted for a hunderd yards," he rebuked. "I put her up a few notches."

"Whee-ee-ee," whined a snub-nosed leaden pellet. A spurt of sand five yards beyond the coyote was the result. It aroused the animal to instant activity. If he was not beyond range, then the wagon had a better gun than he had ever met with, so he glided away like a shadow.

"There goes two dollars bounty," sighed the cook regretfully. "That's just what I done lost to Jack, shootin' craps last night."

"Where's that nester's ol' dog that was smelling round the pots this morning?" Mac demanded. "There he goes now. Hi-yi, ol' feller! Go git him, boy! Go to him!"

A yellow mongrel, half shepherd and a mixture of other breeds, abandoned his slinking tour of the camp and became at once a respectable, alert dog, with a job. He sighted the fleeing coyote, and, giving tongue, followed after.

"He won't never catch him. Those lil' ol' ki-yotes kin outrun a streak of lightning, and stop to sleep a-doing it," said Mac.

It was evident that the pursuit did not worry the fugitive greatly. He loped along easily, with the dog gaining at every frantic leap until a scant yard separated

them, when, still maintaining his careless gait, the coyote veered to the south; and yet the distance between them did not diminish. The dog was blowing and puffing throaty threats, while the wolf watched him out of the corner of one eye. With a mad burst of speed the cur gained a yard, whereupon something happened. Without appearing to strain himself at all, the coyote simply disappeared from view over the next rise. The dog had seen a pepper-and-salt, gray streak flash over the crest, but that was all. He stopped in a dazed sort of way to figure the matter out.

While he was figuring, a foxlike head poked itself over a clump of bear-grass and the coyote yawned in his face. Once more the chase was on, with redoubled fury.

This was an old game to Scartoe. He had raced all sorts of dogs, from collie to fox terrier, and only once, when a greyhound ran him, had he stood in danger. Greatly to his chagrin and alarm on that occasion, he had been forced to switch the lithe pursuer unexpectedly into a barb-wire division-fence, to save his hide. As he ran now he was studying this loud-voiced antagonist of the yellow hair. Whatever he saw, the result was wholly surprising. He increased his lead by ten yards, then whirled about and sat down, at which the dog plowed up the ground for five feet in a panic-stricken effort to put on the brakes, and promptly changed his course. Still growling, he trotted away toward a cactus far to the left, as though suddenly made aware of something extremely interesting to be found there.

The coyote's lip flickered, and he walked to the sandy sides of a ravine. With a final look back from its top, he descended leisurely; then, once in the creek bed, glided at top speed in an opposite direction. He was bound homeward.

All of which goes to show the delicacy of coyote judgment and the depths of his knowledge of human and canine nature. For there are dogs which will close on a coyote and kill him at the first opportunity and with no hesitation. Pluck does not run exclusively in breeds, and individual dogs of all kinds have been known to go for the prairie thief at sight, and even for the redoubtable lobo; but others there are which will shirk a tussle with this scorned of the wolf tribe, this scavenger and outcast of the wild. And a coyote, being lowest in the ranks of those obsessed of fear, is the readiest to detect cowardice in others; moreover, he has the cunning to profit by it.

Enjoyable as this little breather had been, it had not provided the meal for which he was searching. Rather it had whetted the gnawing demand for it and the prospect of obtaining anything seemed more remote than ever, because he had builded some hopes on scraps from the camp. Scartoe eased to a walk—not the brisk, firm patter of the dog, but a sneaking, apologetic, tortuous gait, that was yet swift and wonderfully noiseless.

Prairie dogs there were none, though he scour the length and breadth of six hundred square miles. Poison had done its work thoroughly and only the empty holes remained, half grown over with grass and weeds, a constant menace to

horsemen. Of ground squirrel there were a few, and at certain seasons the sage grouse furnished him succulent meals; but these were trifles, after all, and it took infinite patience and stealth to secure them.

Scartoe crept slantwise up a ridge and took a look around. The sun beat down on a land it had desolated. Where creeks had been were now gorges of baked clay; a long stretch of sage-grass was white with dust and crackling; large fissures dumbly voiced the parched ground's protests; the bear-grass and cactus showed scrawny and dried; and above this scorched land rose a canopy of jumbled white clouds, magnificent, matchless. A score or two of lean cattle were browsing on the slopes, nibbling the long, yellow bean pods from mesquite trees, but of other signs of life there were none, save the scurrying green and blue and golden-brown lizards, which darted from stone to stone at amazing speed.

And this had been the style of his hunting for weeks, so that he was gaunt and desperate. Nothing in all the world in the shape of meat, except creatures so large and strong he dare not attack. Nothing—his restless eyes became riveted on a bush not fifty yards to his right. Surely something had stirred there. His nose was thrust forward to give his extraordinarily strong sense of smell a chance, and it told him what his eyes were unable wholly to define. There was a calf behind that bush.

His famished stomach drove him forward, while his natural cowardice whispered caution. It was plain to him that the calf was very young. Otherwise he would have wanted the assistance of a brother marauder. Even now, however, those cattle grazing on the slopes haunted him, but a fleeting glance over the immediate vicinity assured him the prey was unguarded. So he stole forward. His advance was a miracle of furtive effort, and such was the beast's inherited cunning that, quite unconsciously, he took advantage of spots where his color blended so harmoniously with the rough ground that wolf and rock and shrub were indistinguishable.

The gods of little calves must have been wide-awake that day; else what could have prompted the youngster to stir and lift his head? He had heard no sound; no scent had reached his nostrils. The coyote was too old a hand at stalking for that. A pair of round, fear-distended eyes were turned toward the terrible thing that shot through space straight for his neck, and a plaintive bawl was cut short in the middle. That was because the calf got into action—action quicker than any in his life of three weeks. He lurched upward and departed, minus the left ear. The beast snarled and turned to pursue, but a noise diverted him. Like a man waking from a dream, the coyote caught, too late, the rush of hoofs. He shrank aside, but not far enough. The mother's horns caught him above the shoulder and ripped him to the flank, tossing him five feet into the air. When he came down he tarried not, but, bloody, torn and mad with fear, sought the safety of his cañon retreat.

His wife and five babies were awaiting him. He had been out all night on his prowl for food, and it was now three hours after sunup, the hour when, ordinarily,

he would be stretched out on a sunny knoll, taking a nap in the content of a full stomach. A score of yards from the den his nose told him that the family had fed, so he came trotting down the rocky creek-bed, stiffly expectant. The tiny, furry, broad-headed pups were snarling and tugging at the remnants of a meal and, hungry though he was, he paused to watch them with a certain fatherly pride. Then, at a growl from his mate, he slunk forth again on his quest. His wound smarted, but did not cripple him, and hunger was a spur.

"*The wolf drove away a couple of buzzards and fell upon this savagely*"

He found what his wife had said he would find, the remains of the offal of a heifer which the outfit had killed the previous day for food. Luckier in her search, the mother coyote had come upon the abandoned camp late the previous night, though it was ten miles from home and she disliked such distant hunting; and, having fed, she had carried a huge strip of the entrails to her babies. The wolf drove away a couple of buzzards and fell upon this savagely; and, having gorged, sat down to lick his cut. In a few minutes he moved painfully on the back trail, for his hurts were stiffening.

The family home was a simple affair, such as the original families of human kind might have begun life with. Anything provided with an olfactor could ascertain its propinquity at a distance of forty yards, for it gave off the stinging, musty odor of the wolf tribe. There were also numerous faint trails hard by, some of them blind trails, contrived cunningly to draw the stupid hunter astray. The genuine paths led into a broader, clearly-defined one which ended in a hole about two feet square in the wall of an arroyo, and this entrance was concealed from the casual observer by a scrub-cedar that clung to a precarious foothold and subsisted on nothing. No water had come down this channel in generations and they felt safe on that score.

The hallway of the home was little more than a yard long. It led into a den whereto no light penetrated—a hollowed space perhaps two and a half feet high, and large enough for the head of the house to turn around in. There were also some ramifications to it, four smaller cells dug out in the same fashion, and out of one of these another passage led upward. It came out on top of the embankment, twenty feet away; for Scartoe was a cautious rascal and had no intention of letting his domicile become a trap. He desired it to be a haven and, therefore, he had selected a residence with a back door, though most of his tribe contented themselves with an entrance.

This caution was habitual with him and was the child of experience. Experience had taught him some bitter lessons and had given him his name. For, in the spring of the year when he reached his full height and was filled with conceit of his strength, a famine threatened. The wolf ranged far and got nothing. Hitherto suspicious of the haunts of men, he overcame his fears at last and raided the ranch headquarters and came away with a lusty young rooster. Next night he attempted to repeat this feat, and while nosing the skeleton of a cow lying close to the home pasture fence, something snapped over his foot. A numbing pain shot through him. When he bounded high and backward to clear, he was jerked to the ground.

Clasped like a vise about his toes was a steel trap, a mercilessly powerful contraption of chains, weighted with two hundred pounds. It had him, but fortunately his leg was not caught. In his frenzy of terror, freedom was worth any sacrifice or pain. He sank his teeth into his own flesh and gnawed his toes off, and holding the bleeding stump up in front of him, fled on three legs. Not a sound did he make during his agony. It was not pluck, but a stoicism begot of fear. Had

he whined, a charge of buckshot would have ended his days; for the cook dozed fitfully behind a woodpile fifty yards away.

When the foot grew well he was a trifle short in the left foreleg; but it made scarcely any difference in his gait. The only difference was in the trail he made, and from that he was known as Scartoe.

The hurt the cow gave him healed with astonishing rapidity, for sunlight and dry air are Nature's magicians. While taking a siesta in front of his den next afternoon and tenderly licking the ragged wound, he was witness of a strange encounter. His pups were frisking about, tumbling and growling and snapping in youthful enjoyment of life, while the mother lay beside him, encouraging these evidences of prospective adult ferocity.

At the foot of the knoll whereon they reposed, something rose, wavering, with a fear-thrilling rattle, and the pups scattered. At the same moment a sharp hiss answered this first challenge. With eyes glowing and ears cocked, husband and wife waited for the battle between these enemies.

A dark green reptile with cream-colored bands, about forty inches in length, was circling a rattler. The latter lay coiled, ready to strike, his folds curling and uncurling in long ripples as his head turned to follow the movements of his enemy. Fully six feet in length he was and of a prodigious thickness; but fear had already entered the heart of him. The king-snake sped around him with the speed of light; once, twice, thrice the rattler launched a blow, but there was no foe there. Then the malignant killer was on him.

A king-snake is immune from the rattler's poison and wages constant warfare on all reptiles. Such is the steel-wire strength of his coils that the size of an adversary never daunts him for an instant. He will tackle a snake twice his size and weight, and he will kill him, too. It was all over in a few minutes. Round and round his victim he folded himself; each second the pressure increased. There was some desperate flaying of the ground as the combatants struggled, for the enemy of all brute creation was fighting for his life. When he lay dead, the king-snake let go and tried to swallow him. He did, in fact, get him half down, but the practical difficulty in the way of surrounding an object larger than one's self triumphed over his appetite. So he gave up the attempt and the reptile.

"Bow-wow! Ki-yi, yeow-eow-eow-eow-eow."

Scartoe stood on a butte, with his nose pointing to the moon, his tail between his legs, and weirdly gave vent to his feelings in song. It began with two short barks and trailed into a succession of piercing, reverberating yelps, that melted into one another and rolled and echoed, as by the ventriloquist's art, until the night grew hideous with the clamor. One would have sworn that a hundred coyotes held the hill, and were indulging in some funereal close-harmony.

This was his evensong. It came welling from his throat in a flood, in spite of him, and the coyote could no more control the impulse, the inheritance of ages,

than a man can choke back the hiccoughs. His stomach would retch and his neck muscles work in the throes of it until the song was released. Once again, in the course of twenty-four hours, did the impulse seize him. Just before the sun crept over the edge of the world his nose would be tilted toward the gray vault of heaven.

"Bow-wow! Ki-yi, yeow-eow-eow-eow-eow!"

He desisted at last and, considerably uplifted, departed on his hunt for food. A score of his fellows he met in his prowling, some hunting in couples; but Scartoe was a family man and a lone marauder, and would have none of them. In the half million acres composing the ranch were fully four hundred of his brethren. This in spite of a once vigorous warfare, in which poison and trap and gun and dog had been the weapons. In the last three years the campaign against the coyotes had waned, though each head would bring the taker a bounty at the county-seat and another at headquarters.

It is not to be wondered at that the thieves became arrogant and venturesome. They reveled in their depredations and pitted their keen wits against man's intelligence with increasing boldness. What if twenty thousand of their brethren had been killed in the previous twelvemonth, in the national forest preserves alone? Many times twenty thousand survived in the cattle country; and official estimate gives it that each coyote does damage to stock to the amount of one hundred dollars annually. Scartoe must have passed, on the silent trails in his night hunt, the destroyers of ten thousand dollars' worth of stock in a year.

Once he paused in a patch of broomweed to send his doleful cry to the stars. It gurgled from his throat like water from a bottle. He gave tongue no more that night. From the mouth of a cañon, far to his right, sounded a long-drawn howl, plaintive, threatening. Hardly had it ceased than a piercing scream broke from a hackberry tree within a hundred yards of where Scartoe crouched. Truly the lords of the wilds were abroad to-night; but it was not the panther's cry which drove Scartoe from the trail. What he was giving right-of-way to was the lobo.

The coyote drew off a short distance and sank humbly to earth as a loafer wolf came running out of the shadows. He was a huge fellow, almost red along the back, gray as to his underbody, and he loped purposefully, bent on slaughter. Scartoe sank lower and groveled. In imagination he was fawning upon this mighty creature that inspired him with dread and respect; for, though of the same race, they were far apart as the poles. He knew the magnificent courage of the loafer and, when the King hunted, to him belonged the trail.

He watched him go by, and once more wended his devious way across country. A nice little scheme had hatched in his brain as he lay there, born of a long-time feud. Forty turkeys, eighty chickens and nineteen cocks were now to his credit; to the credit of the ranch-house cook stood the toes of his left foreleg. One turkey-gobbler remained—that he knew with accuracy, and Scartoe speculated pleasurably thereon.

Had he been a human being, he would have laughed as he slid under the outer barb-wire fence at headquarters. Ten paces away he had scented the handiwork of man. Sprinkle and smooth the sand as he might, set bait and lay trap ever so cunningly, the cook could not foil that marvelous instinct. There were but two holes by which Scartoe could enter the pen; before he started he was well aware that a trap lay in each. Approaching one, three feet from it, he scratched loose stones and earth behind him in a shower on a spot which looked too smooth and inviting to his eye and where his nose told him a man had fussed with his hands.

At last he was rewarded. A stick he rolled over touched the spring, and the steel jaws leaped together with a clash. He proceeded to dig all around the trap until it was wholly exposed, after which he gave a disdainful sniff and jumped over it. Thirty seconds later he emerged from the pen bearing a fine, fat gobbler, and away he went, careless of the trail of feathers his dragging prey made.

"You-all kin see for yourself what he done," cried the cook, gloriously profane, next morning. "He knowed that was there all the time and simply sprung it. Got that lil' ol' gobbler, too; last one I had."

"Ki-yotes is shore smart," the straw boss agreed. "Smart as humans, I reckon."

"Smart as humans?" the cook retorted contemptuously. "Why, ol' Dick is a human."

"That's so," said the straw boss thoughtfully. "Well, they's smarter, then; smart as a good hoss."

"That ol' ki-yote and me's been fighting for three years. I near had him once; but he done chawed his foot off—they's that treacherous. Only last week I done set a rooster in that mesquite tree there, and put traps all around. He had to step in one to git that bird. Know what he done?" The cook's voice rose to a howl. "I'll eat my shirt if he didn't go off and git a friend, who sprung the trap and got caught. Yes, sir. Then ol' Scartoe, he done jump in and got the rooster."

"Ever try poison?"

"Won't touch it. He kin smell strych-nine farther'n he kin see. Ate some once and near died, I reckon, for I seen the place where he was took sick. Every trap I set, he just scratches stones or sticks on to it until he springs the thing."

The straw boss, riding to a division camp the next day, came upon Scartoe trying to imitate a rock as he slept on the brow of a hill. The rider had no gun, but got down his rope and rode toward the sleeper carelessly, so as not to alarm him. The coyote let him approach within thirty yards, then awoke to yawn; but he was wrong in his estimate of the straw boss, because that worthy gentleman, hot with the memory of the recent indignity, let out a whoop and gave chase. Before he could warm up into anything like his usual form, a rope sped through the air and encircled Scartoe's neck.

Now, there are three rules to observe in roping coyotes. The first is not to rope them, and the other two do not matter. A noose was nothing new to Scartoe and he knew the parry. Before it could tighten and jerk him into eternity, he took one

slashing bite at it and the rope parted, cut clean. Next moment the coyote had mingled with the scenery.

He was a serious-minded animal, yet he permitted himself some diversions. When his wife found the remains of the beef, Scartoe realized that there was a round-up in progress, which meant food in plenty, and he took to following the outfit from camp to camp, singing to them about nine o'clock every night and again before the dawn. They showed their appreciation by taking pot shots at him with a .30-30; but he bore a charmed life. He managed to pick up much good meat by this association, too, for the outfit killed a heifer every other day and left enough to feed half a dozen coyotes. Sometimes he had to scare away foolish cows or steers, which, attracted by the smell of blood, would be holding moaning wakes over the remains; and always he had to be on the watch for the buzzards or they would forestall him.

Lightly footing it about camp one night, he startled a work-horse, himself a night prowler, bent on stealing buns from the chuck-wagon which he helped to haul during the day. A coyote would never attack a horse, placing too much value on his life, but this beast was a young, inexperienced creature and did not know that. With a snort of dismay, he dashed off. Pleased with himself, Scartoe gave chase in pure sport, precisely as a playful dog might have done. Twice around the camp they ran, then through it, stampeding eleven staked horses and smashing the guy-ropes of the fly, which fell on the cook, who never claimed to be a Christian and had no fears of an after-life.

The punchers awoke, cursing volubly, and one of them, sleeping remote from the others on the edge of camp, shied a boot at the wolf. He stopped in his run, smelled of it, then bore it homeward. It would make a fine plaything for the babies. The puncher rode twenty-seven miles to headquarters next day, in his socks, to get a new pair of boots.

Four months passed thus pleasurably. Sometimes the family nearly starved, at others the puppies sagged in the middle from overeating. Always there were bones and odds and ends of hides old Scartoe had hidden away to gnaw on in moments of leisure, but they made poor stays to hunger.

When winter shut down on the land Scartoe got rid of wife and children. He simply wandered off when the puppies grew big enough to care for themselves; and he found another home in an isolated ravine. In the cold nights that followed he took to consorting with other bachelors, roving spirits all. Very often they hunted in bands. They were few in number, because it is not coyote nature to run in packs, but this union gave them strength and made them infinitely more dangerous. Two score times they stalked and killed lonely, unprotected calves.

Later, they were so hard put to it for food that courage was born in them. One night four surrounded an eight-months'-old steer one of them would never have tackled singly, and slew him. It was Scartoe who devised the plan that the three should run him by a bush, behind which he crouched. It was Scartoe who leapt

swiftly, unerringly, for the nose and brought him down. And it was he who got the lion's share of the spoils.

Yet they were cowards for all that. A coyote is always a coward, even when driven frantic by hunger.

With the storm kings holding sway, their foraging became less and less fruitful. Several of his race departed for new hunting grounds, but Scartoe stayed in his own domain and weathered the gales.

Twice had he to eat of his own kind. Toward break of a wintry day he and one companion slunk homeward from an unsuccessful scout, their empty stomachs crying aloud for flesh. They watched each other in suspicion, for in each one the same desire was uppermost. Ahead of them, crossing their trail, a wounded coyote dragged himself—spent, done almost to death in a grapple with a nester's dog. They fell upon and slew and ate him. Later, a full month, or perhaps two, when the same companion grew wasted and weak from hunger, and in all the forsaken country they could not kill, when not even a field mouse rewarded long hours of hunting, Scartoe ran at him and, with one shrewd stroke upward, slit his throat and let out the life blood. He ate his fill and came once more into his strength.

Only once during that time of stress did he pit his cunning against man's guile. That was when the snow was off the ground and a party of visitors at the ranch-house hunted him with imported dogs. Scartoe made the most glorious mess of his trail. He went back on it, crossed, recrossed, waded up-stream, returned to the starting point, and employed all the tricks his long years had taught him. Then he lay down behind a dead prickly pear and watched the hunt; watched the chagrin of the men; watched every movement of the dogs, nosing and worrying. Tiring of this in half an hour, he went to his den and slept. They never untangled the web of his weaving.

When spring came Scartoe was looking shabby. He was morose, too, and had a longing for companionship. A week of fine weather improved him so that he was almost the Scartoe of old; but the longing for companionship was tenfold greater.

On a February morn he lifted up his voice to herald the dawn.

"Bow-wow! Ki-yi, yeow-eow-eow-eow-eow."

A joyous bark answered. It was not the call of his kind, yet it thrilled him, for in it there was a note he knew. He stiffened and trembled with expectation. A young collie came bounding toward him. She paused doubtfully a dozen yards away and growled. Scartoe threw up his head, thrust out his tail from its usual abject droop and went toward her blithely. Then his hair bristled, his muscles tightened and he was ready for combat.

Behind her came another coyote. He was big. Even the veteran, large as he was, appeared small in comparison. Where the newcomer had picked up the living that had given him such weight was a puzzle; but certain it was he had ten pounds the better of it. Not a thought gave Scartoe to that handicap.

The big wolf wasted no time in preliminaries. His strength and skill had been tried in mêlées innumerable, and foes had been swept before him like chaff. But Scartoe was a general. Like lightning he dodged the swift rush; like lightning he ripped even as he swerved, tearing a piece from his enemy's neck. Coyotes will not grapple and cling with locked jaws, as do the brave among dogs; they depend on the swift cutting powers of their dexterous jaws. Three times they came together; three times old Scartoe gashed his antagonist so that the blood spurted. Still he could not quite reach the throat for the death stroke.

And then the end came. Too eager in his desire to finish the battle, he left himself open for the merest flick of time, as he wheeled for a fourth onslaught. With one hurtling, upward dive, the big brute gained the jugular, and Scartoe was thrown back, his throat torn, the life ebbing from him.

The collie frisked about the victor, playfully showing her teeth, and they trotted away together.

An hour after sunup, the ranch-house cook, on a quest for his infant son's collie pet, came upon the torn, lifeless body.

"Jumping Jupiter!" he exclaimed, prayerfully. "It's ol' Scartoe."

III
CORAZÓN

A man is as good as his nerves
—Cowboy maxim.

With manes streaming in the wind, a band of bronchos fled across the grama flats, splashed through the San Pedro, and whirled sharply to the right, heading for sanctuary in the Dragoons. In the lead raced a big sorrel, his coat shimmering like polished gold where the sun touched it.

"That's Corazón," exclaimed Reb. "Head him or we'll lose the bunch."

The pursuers spread out and swept round in a wide semicircle. Corazón held to his course, a dozen yards in advance of the others, his head high. The chase slackened, died away. With a blaring neigh, the sorrel eased his furious pace and the entire band came to a trot. Before them were the mountains, and Corazón knew their fastnesses as the street urchin knows the alleys that give him refuge; in the cañons the bronchos would be safe from man. Behind was no sign of the enemy. His nose in the wind, he sniffed long, but it bore him no taint. Instead, he nickered with delight, for he smelled water. They swung to the south, and in less than five minutes their hot muzzles were washed by the bubbling waters of Eternity Spring.

Corazón drew in a long breath, expanding his well-ribbed sides, and looked up from drinking. There in front of him, fifty paces away, was a horseman. He snorted the alarm and they plunged into a tangle of sagebrush. Another rider bore down and turned them back. To right and left they darted, then wheeled and sought desperately to break through the cordon at a weak spot, and failed. Wherever they turned, a cowboy appeared as by magic. At last Corazón detected an unguarded area and flew through it with the speed of light.

"Now we've got 'em," howled Reb. "Don't drive too close, but keep 'em headed for the corral."

Within a hundred yards of the gate, the sorrel halted, his ears cocked in doubt. The cowboys closed in to force the band through. Three times the bronchos broke and scattered, for to their wild instincts the fences and that narrow aperture cried treachery and danger. They were gathered, with whoops and many imprecations, and once more approached the entrance.

"Drive the saddle bunch out," commanded the range boss.

Forth came the remuda of a hundred horses. The bronchos shrilled greeting and mingled with them, and when the cow-ponies trotted meekly into the corral, Corazón and his band went too, though they shook and were afraid.

For five years Corazón had roamed the range—ever since he had discovered that grass was good to eat, and so had left the care of his tender-eyed mother.

Because he dreaded the master of created things and fled him afar, only once during that time had he seen man at close quarters. That was when, as a youngster, he was caught and branded on the left hip. He had quickly forgotten that; until now it had ceased to be even a memory.

But now he and his companion rovers were prisoners, cooped in a corral by a contemptible trick. They crowded around and around the stout enclosure, sometimes dropping to their knees in efforts to discover an exit beneath the boards. And not twenty feet away, the dreaded axis of their circlings, sat a man on a horse, and he studied them calmly. Other men, astride the fence, were uncoiling ropes, and their manner was placid and businesslike. One opined dispassionately that "the sorrel is shore some horse."

"You're damn whistlin'," cried the buster over his shoulder, in hearty affirmation.

Corazón was the most distracted of all the band. He was in a frenzy of nervous fear, his glossy coat wet and foam-flecked. He would not stand still for a second, but prowled about the wooden barrier like a jungle creature newly prisoned in a cage. Twice he nosed the ground and crooked his forelegs in an endeavor to slide through the six inches of clear space beneath the gate, and the outfit laughed derisively.

"Here goes," announced the buster in his expressionless tones. "You-all watch out, now. Hell'll be poppin'."

At that moment Corazón took it into his head to dash at top speed through his friends, huddled in a bunch in a corner. A rope whined and coiled, and, when he burst out of the jam, the noose was around his neck, tightening so as to strangle him. Madly he ran against it, superb in the sureness of his might. Then he squalled with rage and pain and an awful terror. His legs flew from under him, and poor Corazón was jerked three feet into the air, coming down on his side with smashing force. The fall shook a grunt out of him, and he was stunned and breathless, but unhurt. He staggered to his feet, his breath straining like a bellows, for the noose cut into his neck and he would not yield to its pressure.

Facing him was the man on the bay. His mount stood with feet braced, sitting back on the rope, and he and his rider were quite collected and cool and prepared. The sorrel's eyes were starting from his head; his nostrils flared wide, gaping for the air that was denied him, and the breath sucked in his throat. It seemed as if he must drop. Suddenly the buster touched his horse lightly with the spur and slackened the rope. With a long sob, Corazón drew in a life-giving draught, his gaze fixed in frightened appeal on his captor.

"Open the gate," said Mullins, without raising his voice.

He flicked the rope over Corazón's hind quarters, and essayed to drive him into the next corral, to cut him off from his fellows. The sorrel gave a gasp of dismay and lunged forward. Again he was lifted from the ground, and came down with a thud that left him shivering.

"His laig's done bust!" exclaimed the boss.

"No; he's shook up, that's all. Wait awhile."

A moment later Corazón raised his head painfully; then, life and courage coming back with a rush, he lurched to his feet. Mullins waited with unabated patience. The sorrel was beginning to respect that which encircled his neck and made naught of his strength, and when the buster flipped the rope again, he ran through the small gate, and brought up before he had reached the end of his tether.

Two of the cowboys stepped down languidly from the fence, and took position in the center of the corral.

"Hi, Corazón! Go it, boy!" they yelled, and spurred by their cries, the horse started off at a trot. Reb tossed his loop,—flung it carelessly, with a sinuous movement of the wrist,—and when Corazón had gone a few yards, he found his forefeet ensnared. Enraged at being thus cramped, he bucked and bawled; but, before Reb could settle on the rope, he came to a standstill and sank his teeth into the strands. Once, twice, thrice he tugged, but could make no impression. Then he pitched high in air, and—

"NOW!" shrieked Reb.

They heaved with might and main, and Corazón flopped in the dust. Quick as a cat, he sprang upright and bolted; but again they downed him, and, while Reb held the head by straddling the neck, his confederate twined dexterously with a stake-rope. There lay Corazón, helpless and almost spent, trussed up like a sheep for market: they had hog-tied him.

It was the buster who put the hackamore on his head. Very deliberately he moved. Corazón sensed confidence in the touch of his fingers; they spoke a language to him, and he was soothed by the sureness of superiority they conveyed. He lay quiet. Then Reb incautiously shifted his position, and the horse heaved and raised his head, banging Mullins across the ear. The buster's senses swam, but instead of flying into a rage, he became quieter, more deliberate; in his cold eyes was a vengeful gleam, and dangerous stealth lurked in his delicate manipulation of the strands. An excruciating pain shot through the sorrel's eye: Mullins had gouged him.

"Let him up." It was the buster again, atop the bay, making the rope fast with a double half-hitch over the horn of the saddle.

Corazón arose, dazed and very sick. But his spirit was unbreakable. Again and again he strove to tear loose, rearing, falling back, plunging to the end of the rope until he was hurled off his legs to the ground. When he began to weary, Mullins encouraged him to fight, that he might toss him.

"I'll learn you what this rope means," he remarked, as the broncho scattered the dust for the ninth time, and remained there, completely done up.

In deadly fear of his slender tether, yet alert to match his strength against it once more, should opportunity offer, Corazón followed the buster quietly enough when he rode out into the open. Beside a sturdy mesquite bush that grew apart from its brethren, Mullins dismounted and tied the sorrel. As a farewell he waved

his arms and whooped. Of course Corazón gathered himself and leaped—leaped to the utmost that was in him, so that the bush vibrated to its farthest root; and of course he hit the earth with a jarring thump that temporarily paralyzed him. Mullins departed to put the thrall of human will on others.

Throughout the afternoon, and time after time during the interminable night, the sorrel tried to break away, but with each sickening failure he grew more cautious. When he ran against the rope now, he did not run blindly to its limit, but half wheeled, so that when it jerked him back he invariably landed on his feet. Corazón was learning hard, but he was learning. And what agonies of pain and suspense he went through!—for years a free rover, and now to be bound thus, by what looked to be a mere thread, for he knew not what further tortures! He sweated and shivered, seeing peril in every shadow. When a coyote slunk by with tongue lapping hungrily over his teeth, the prisoner almost broke his neck in a despairing struggle to win freedom.

In the chill of the dawn they led him into a circular corral. His sleekness had departed; the barrel-like body did not look so well nourished, and there was red in the blazing eyes.

"I reckon he'll be mean," observed the buster, as though it concerned him but little.

"No-o-o. Go easy with him, Carl, and I think he'll make a good hoss," the boss cautioned.

While two men held the rope, Mullins advanced along it foot by foot, inch by inch, one hand outstretched, and talked to Corazón in a low, careless tone of affectionate banter. "So you'd like for to kill me, would you?" he inquired, grinning. All the while he held the sorrel's gaze.

Corazón stood still, legs planted wide apart, and permitted him to approach. He trembled when the fingers touched his nose; but they were firm, confident digits, the voice was reassuring, and the gentle rubbing up, up between the eyes and ears lulled his forebodings.

"Hand me the blanket," said Mullins.

He drew it softly over Corazón's back, and the broncho swerved, pawed, and kicked with beautiful precision. Whereupon they placed a rope around his neck, dropped it behind his right hind leg, then pulled that member up close to his belly; there it was held fast. On three legs now, the sorrel was impotent for harm. Mullins once more took up the blanket but this time the gentleness had flown. He slapped it over Corazón's backbone from side to side a dozen times. At each impact the horse humped awkwardly, but, finding that he came to no hurt, he suffered it in resignation.

That much of the second lesson learned, they saddled him. Strangely enough, Corazón submitted to the operation without fuss, the only untoward symptoms being a decided upward slant to the back of the saddle and the tucking of his tail. Reb waggled his head over this exhibition.

"I don't like his standing quiet that away; it ain't natural," he vouchsafed. "Look at the crick in his back. Jim-in-ee! he'll shore pitch."

Which he did. The cinches were tightened until Corazón's eyes almost popped from his head; then they released the bound leg and turned him loose. What was that galling his spine? Corazón took a startled peep at it, lowered his head between his knees, and began to bawl. Into the air he rocketed, his head and forelegs swinging to the left, his hind quarters weaving to the right. The jar of his contact with the ground was appalling. Into the air again, his head and forelegs to the right, his rump twisted to the left. Round and round the corral he went, blatting like an angry calf; but the thing on his back stayed where it was, gripping his body cruelly. At last he was fain to stop for breath.

"Now," said Mullins, "I reckon I'll take it out of him."

There has always been for me an overwhelming fascination in watching busters at work. They have underlying traits in common when it comes to handling the horses—the garrulous one becomes coldly watchful, the Stoic moves with stern patience, the boaster soothes with soft-crooned words and confident caress. Mullins left Corazón standing in the middle of the corral, the hackamore rope strung loose on the ground, while he saw to it that his spurs were fast. We mounted the fence, not wishing to be mixed in the glorious turmoil to follow.

"I wouldn't top ol' Corazón for fifty," confessed the man on the adjoining post.

"Mullins has certainly got nerve," I conceded.

"A buster has got to have nerve." The range boss delivered himself laconically. "All nerve and no brains makes the best. But they get stove up and then—"

"And then? What then?"

"Why, don't you know?" he asked in surprise. "Every buster loses his nerve at last, and then they can't ride a pack-hoss. It must be because it's one fool man with one set of nerves up ag'in a new hoss with a new devil in him every time. They wear him down. Don't you reckon?"

The explanation sounded plausible. Mullins was listening with a faintly amused smile to Reb's account of what a lady mule had done to him; he rolled a cigarette and lighted it painstakingly. The hands that held the match were steady as eternal rock. It was maddening to see him stand there so coolly while the big sorrel, a dozen feet distant, was a-quake with dread, blowing harshly through his crimson nostrils whenever a cowboy stirred—and each of us knowing that the man was taking his life in his hands. An unlooked-for twist, a trifling disturbance of poise, and, with a horse like Corazón, it meant maiming or death. At last he threw the cigarette from him and walked slowly to the rope.

"So you're calling for me?" he inquired, gathering it up.

Corazón was snorting. By patient craft Reb acquired a grip on the sorrel's ears, and, while he hung there, bringing the head down so that the horse could not

move, Mullins tested the stirrups and raised himself cautiously into the saddle.

"Let him go."

While one could count ten, Corazón stood expectant, his back bowed, his tail between his legs. The ears were laid flat on the head and the forefeet well advanced. The buster waited, the quirt hanging from two fingers of his right hand. Suddenly the sorrel ducked his head and emitted a harsh scream, leaping, with legs stiff, straight off the ground. He came down with the massive hips at an angle to the shoulders, thereby imparting a double shock; bounded high again, turned back with bewildering speed as he touched the earth; and then, in a circle perhaps twenty feet in diameter, sprang time after time, his heels lashing the air. Never had such pitching been seen on the Anvil Range.

"I swan, he just misses his tail a' inch when he turns back!" roared a puncher.

Mullins sat composedly in the saddle, but he was riding as never before. He whipped the sorrel at every jump and raked him down the body from shoulder to loins with the ripping spurs. The brute gave no signs of letting up. Through Mullins' tan of copper hue showed a slight pallor. He was exhausted. If Corazón did not give in soon, the man would be beaten. Just then the horse stopped, feet a-sprawl.

"Mullins,"—the range boss got down from the fence,—"you'll kill that hoss. Between the cinches belongs to you; the head and hind quarters is the company's."

For a long minute Mullins stared at the beast's ears without replying.

"I reckon that's the rule," he acquiesced heavily. "Do you want that somebody else should ride him?"

"No-o-o. Go ahead. But, remember, between the cinches you go at him as you like—nowhere else."

"*Leaping, with legs stiff, straight off the ground*"

The buster slapped the quirt down on Corazón's shoulder, but the broncho did not budge; then harder. With the first oath he had used, he jabbed in the spurs and lay back on the hackamore rope. Instead of bucking, Corazón reared straight up, his feet pawing like the hands of a drowning man. Before Mullins could move to step off, the sorrel flung his head round and toppled backward.

"No, he's not dead." The range boss leaned over the buster and his hands fumbled inside the shirt. "The horn got him here, but he ain't dead. Claude, saddle Streak and hit for Agua Prieta for the doctor."

When we had carried the injured man to the bunk-house, Reb spoke from troubled meditation:

"Pete, I don't believe Corazón is as bad as he acts with Mullins. I've been watching him. Mullins, he didn't—"

"You take him, then; he's yours," snapped the boss, his conscience pricking because of the reproof he had administered. If the buster had ridden him his own

way, this might not have happened.

That is how the sorrel came into Reb's possession. Only one man of the outfit witnessed the taming, and he would not talk; but when Reb came to dinner from the first saddle on Corazón, his hands were torn and the nail of one finger hung loose.

"I had to take to the horn and hang on some," he admitted.

Ay, he had clung there desperately while the broncho pitched about the riverbed, whither Reb had retired for safety and to escape spectators. But at the next saddle Corazón was less violent; at the third, recovering from the stunning shocks and bruisings of the first day, he was a fiend; and then, on the following morning, he did not pitch at all. Reb rode him every day to sap the superfluous vigor in Corazón's iron frame and he taught him as well as he could the first duties of a cowhorse. Finding that his new master never punished him unless he undertook to dispute his authority, the sorrel grew tractable and began to take an interest in his tasks.

"He's done broke," announced Reb; "I'll have him bridle-wise in a week. He'll make some roping horse. Did you see him this evening? I swan—"

They scoffed good-naturedly; but Reb proceeded on the assumption that Corazón was meant to be a roping horse, and schooled him accordingly. As for the sorrel, he took to the new pastime with delight. Within a month nothing gave him keener joy than to swerve and crouch at the climax of a sprint and see a cow thrown heels over head at the end of the rope that was wrapped about his saddle-horn.

The necessity of contriving to get three meals a day took me elsewhere, and I did not see Corazón again for three years. Then, one Sunday afternoon, Big John drew me from El Paso to Juarez on the pretense of seeing a grand, an extraordinary, a most noble bull-fight, in which the dauntless Favorita would slay three fierce bulls from the renowned El Carmen ranch, in "competency" with the fearless Morenito Chico de San Bernardo; and a youth with a megaphone drew us both to a steer-roping contest instead. We agreed that bull-fighting was brutal on the Sabbath.

"I'll bet it's rotten," remarked Big John pessimistically, as we took our seats. "I could beat 'em myself."

As he scanned the list, his face brightened. Among the seventeen ropers thereon were two champions and a possible new one in Raphael Fraustro, the redoubtable vaquero from the domain of Terrazas.

"And here's Reb!" roared John—he is accustomed to converse in the tumult of the branding-pen—"I swan, he's entered from Monument."

Shortly afterwards the contestants paraded, wonderfully arrayed in silk shirts and new handkerchiefs.

"Some of them ain't been clean before in a year," was John's caustic comment. "There's Slim; I KNOW he hasn't."

They were a fine-looking body of men, and two of my neighbors complained that I trampled on their feet. The horses caught the infection of excitement from the packed stands and champed on their bits and caracoled and waltzed sideways in a manner highly unbecoming a staid cow-pony.

There was one that did not. So sluggish was his gait and general bearing, in contrast to the others, that the crowd burst into laughter. He plodded at the tail-end of the procession, his hoofs kicking up the dust in listless spurts, his nose on a level with his knees. I rubbed my eyes and John said, "No, it ain't—it can't be —"; but it was. Into that arena slouched Corazón, entered against the pick of the horses of the Southwest; and Reb was astride him.

We watched the ropers catch and tie the steers in rapid succession, but the much-heralded ones missed altogether, and to John and me the performance lagged. We were waiting for Reb and Corazón.

They came at last, at the end of the list. When Corazón ambled up the arena to enter behind the barrier, the grandstand roared a facetious welcome; the spectacle of this sad-gaited nag preparing to capture a steer touched its risibilities.

"Listen to me," bawled a fat gentleman in a wide-brimmed hat, close to my ear. "You listen to me! They're all fools. That's a cowhorse. No blasted nonsense. Knows his business, huh? You're damn whistlin'!"

Assuredly, Corazón knew his business. The instant he stepped behind the line he was a changed horse. The flopping ears pricked forward, his neck arched, and the great muscles of his shoulders and thighs rippled to his dainty prancing. He pulled and fretted on the bit, his eyes roving about in search of the quarry; he whinnied an appeal to be gone. Reb made ready his coil, curbing him with light pressure.

Out from the chute sprang a steer, heading straight down the arena. Corazón was frantic. With the flash of the gun he breasted the barrier-rope and swept down on him in twenty strides. Reb stood high in the stirrups; the loop whirled and sped; and, without waiting to see how it fell, but accepting a catch in blind faith, the sorrel started off at a tangent.

Big John was standing up in his place, clawing insanely at the hats of his neighbors and banging them on the head with his programme.

"Look at him—just look at him!" he shrieked.

The steer was tossed clear of the ground and came down on his left side. Almost before he landed, Reb was out of the saddle and speeding toward him.

"He's getting up. HE'S GETTING UP. Go to him, Reb!" howled John and I.

The steer managed to lift his head; he was struggling to his knees. I looked away, for Reb must lose. Then a hoarse shout from the multitude turned back my gaze. Corazón had felt the slack on the rope and knew what it meant. He dug his feet into the dirt and began to walk slowly forward—very slowly and carefully, for Reb's task must not be spoiled. The steer collapsed, falling prone again, but the sorrel did not stop. Once he cocked his eye, and seeing that the animal still squirmed, pulled with all his strength. The stands were rocking; they were a sea

of tossing hats and gesticulating arms and flushed faces; the roar of their plaudits echoed back from the hills. And it was all for Corazón, gallant Corazón.

"Dam' his eyes—dam' his ol' eyes!" Big John babbled over and over, absolutely oblivious.

Reb stooped beside the steer, his hands looping and tying with deft darting twists even as he kept pace with his dragged victim.

"I guess it's—about—a—hour," he panted.

Then he sprang clear and tossed his hands upward, facing the judges' stand. After that he walked aimlessly about, mopping his face with a handkerchief; for to him the shoutings and the shifting colors were all a foolish dream, and he was rather sick.

Right on the cry with which his master announced his task done, Corazón eased up on the rope and waited.

"Mr. Pee-ler's time," bellowed the man with the megaphone presently, "is twenty-one seconds, ty-ing the world's re-cord."

So weak that his knees trembled, Reb walked over to his horse. "Corazón," he said huskily, and slapped him once on the flank.

Nothing would do the joyous crowd then but that Reb should ride forth to be acclaimed the victor. We sat back and yelled ourselves weak with laughter, for Corazón, having done his work, refused resolutely to squander time in vain parade. The steer captured and tied, he had no further interest in the proceedings. The rascal dog-trotted reluctantly to the center of the arena in obedience to Reb, then faced the audience; but, all the time Reb was bowing his acknowledgments, Corazón sulked and slouched, and he was sulking and shuffling the dust when they went through the gate.

"Now," said John, who is very human, "we'll go help Reb spend that money."

As we jostled amid the outgoing crowd, several cowboys came alongside the grandstand rail, and Big John drew me aside to have speech with them. One rider led a spare horse and when he passed a man on foot, the latter hailed him:

"Say, Ed, give me a lift to the hotel?"

"Sure," answered Ed, proffering the reins.

The man gathered them up, his hands fluttering as if with palsy, and paused with his foot raised toward the stirrup.

"He won't pitch nor nothing, Ed?" came the quavered inquiry. "You're shore he's gentle?"

"Gentler'n a dog," returned Ed, greatly surprised.

"You ain't fooling me, now, are you, Ed?" continued the man on the ground. "He looks kind of mean."

"Give him to me!" Ed exploded. "You kin walk."

From where we stood, only the man's back was visible. "Who is that fellow?" I asked.

"Who? Him?" answered my neighbor. "Oh, his name's Mullins. They say he used to be able to ride anything with hair on it, and throw off the bridle at that. I

expect that’s just talk. Don’t you reckon?”

IV
THE OUTLAW

Steve was recounting an episode of Hell's Acre.

"And jist as I was fighting my horse to make him go through that scrub-oak, he done stubbed his toe in the sand. Up she come with a whoof—one of them ol' long-horns. That cow had hid herself there. Yes, sir; but she didn't quite git her horns covered."

Reb said he could well believe it. No longer ago than last Tuesday, while chasing some stubborn cattle, he had chanced upon a cow lying flat behind a bush. A jackrabbit was burying her under leaves, for better concealment.

Whereupon the two got to horse and rode away, leaving behind them a thoughtful silence.

There was a water-gap to be repaired and they headed for the Salt Fork of the Brazos.

"Wait a minute," said Steve. "Look there."

A cow stood on the crest of a rise—a lean, dun creature, with distended eyes. When they approached, she trotted off to the right, mumbling anxiously. They did not follow. Then she stopped, her head erect and nostrils dilated, to watch them. The two ambled forward and she kept near, very, very anxious.

"She's got a calf hid out somewheres," Reb remarked.

He surveyed the immediate country leisurely, confident of what he would discover. Two hundred yards in front was a patch of mesquite, and they made for it. Behind a bush they found the calf—a sturdy, red-and-white baby with a specially black, moist nose. It flattened out when Steve stood over it.

"Git up," he commanded, "I want to see more of you. I bet them hoofs of yours is soft."

The calf hugged the ground. He raised the sagging body by the brisket and tail, none too gently. When he let go, the little fellow collapsed, spread out like a jellyfish. He must have marveled as he lay there, rolling his wide, questioning eyes upward, what strange beings these were, for he was just one day old and had never seen a man.

"Come a li'l' seven," Steve cried joyously. "Look a-here, Reb. See his face."

Between the youngster's eyes was a crimson splash which made a perfect 7. Reb examined the peculiar marking with interest and suggested that Come-a-Seven might bring the little devil luck as a name.

The calf resented all this handling and raised his voice in a plaintive bawl. As they loped away on their errand, the cow crashed through the bushes to her offspring's side. She nosed him solicitously, rumbling caresses.

Come-a-Seven inherited all the hardiness of his race—indeed, in later years, Reb vowed that he was tougher'n the oldest man in the world. Half an hour after his advent into this vale of tears he could walk. It was not a gait to justify boasting, because his forelegs showed a tendency to give at unexpected places, but he saved himself from a fall by leaning against his mother's shoulder. He next made the circuit of the cow twice in a clumsy hunt for the fount of his food supply and finally reached it in an extremely awkward position. Nevertheless, she watched him pridefully, her sight blurred with happiness; and braced against her hind leg, he fed like a glutton. Feeling full and reckless therefrom, he humped his back in abandon and tried to cavort, but came down with a jarring thump.

The young mother did her duty by him like a Scotch washerwoman with nine children. He breakfasted at dawn—drank until he could drink no more. Afterwards she went off to graze, leaving the calf behind some screening hush. It was seldom she strayed so far that she was not within sight or call: there is danger to toddling calves that lie out on the range unprotected.

How fast his strength grew! At five days of age he could have butted into a wooden fence at half-speed without any especially ill effects, save to the fence. Yet his mother's care never abated. She would go over him every night with eager tenderness and was ever aggressively on the alert to defend. For she would have fought anything on four legs for the life of that loose-jointed, red-and-white blatherskite she held to be prince of his race.

The cattle grazed in scattered bunches over some hundred thousand acres of the east range—they are not so companionable as horses and do not herd so closely in their feeding. Nor will the bulls take such responsibilities upon their shoulders as do stallions with the mares and colts. Come-a-Seven, in fact, never saw his father, to his knowledge. That ponderous, morose scion of Hereford stock lived his own life in his own way, spending half the day sleeping in the shade of a cottonwood; and he did not worry about family matters. His scores of children might fare as best they could. In the meantime he had his amusements. Besides, what on earth were their mothers for?

On his eighth day Come-a-Seven started out to see something of the world. No great variety offered within his ken—a rolling expanse, green-gray, gashed by numerous brick-red gullies; hundreds of scraggy mesquite bushes and some prickly-pear; two or three regal cottonwoods on the bank of a creek, whose sandy bed was a third of a mile wide; beyond, a butte lifting from the earth like a monstrous mushroom. That was what he saw—that, and big blue blotches of shadows moving over the country like an army of specters. Piles of tumbled white clouds gave promise of rain at a later date.

Upon this the red-and-white gazed, his head moving from side to side in jerks, ears twitching, tail straight out as when he fed. He was trying to get up nerve to sally farther afield. As a starter and a spur to courage he curveted clumsily, but was brought up short by the sight of another calf of about his own age, standing not a dozen yards away, surveying him with the liveliest interest.

Come-a-Seven tried to look hostile, even threatening, but his curiosity got the better of him, because the calf into whose face he glared had the merest stump of a tail.

Advancing a step, he intimated in his own peculiar, gruff calf-manner that the abbreviated member puzzled him. If Come-a-Seven had ever dodged a coyote, he would not have been so ignorant. The other evinced no resentment and they approached in amicable fashion, made a playful butt at each other and became fast friends. After that they would loaf about together in the hot summer days, making trouble for the other calves and stirring up bickerings and feuds.

None of them was of a serious nature. The nearest approach to a tragic ending happened when the red-and-white smashed, full tilt, into a six-months'-old half-brother, of whose relationship he was ignorant—not that this would have made any difference—and knocked him off the steep wall of a tank into the water. He had to run at that, for the other was a husky, ardent calf, and he was angry all through. When he scrambled out, he went hunting for the red-and-white, but by that time the offender was safely under his mother's eye, which fact he flaunted brazenly.

Who ever saw a braver pair? Who so bold as the tailless one and Come-a-Seven when there was no possibility of danger? Then, at the first hint of trouble, up would go their tails and they would run to their mothers at their very best pace.

They were learning, too, for many things they saw carried lessons to their youthful perceptions. They were witnesses of the finish of a wild-cat, which a puncher roped out of a tree under which they had been taking a nap. They saw a companion die slowly from blackleg, and another practically eaten alive by the fearful screw-worm. For days, too, they avoided an old cow whose head was swelled to twice its natural size. The poor creature was the victim of a snake bite, but she survived.

"Ow-oo-yah! Ow-oo-yah! Ow-oo-yah! Ki-yi! Git up, cattle."

A shrill whistle brought the red-and-white to his feet with a jerk just as the sun tinted the eastern sky to gray and gold and rose. He bellowed an inquiry to his mother, and for a second stood irresolute. A horseman came riding at top speed straight for them, hallooing with all his might and waving his hat. Whereupon the calf waited for no instructions. He let himself out for all he was worth.

The puncher rode at a hand-gallop behind and he did not drive too hard. Instead, he gave them a shove in the direction he desired they should travel, and, with a final shout, swung away to the right, where a bunch of six rose up with a snort and gave him a chase. He calculated that the cow would keep going and she did. Her slow march was marked by protests from her hopeful offspring. Observing that the rider was busy stirring up cattle in many directions, his baby

mind could conceive of no good reason for plugging along in a line dead ahead because this individual had furnished the impetus for the start. So he grumbled much, but trotted along obediently, notwithstanding; and presently his own grievances were dissipated by the contemplation of what was happening around him. Every patch of brush in the country appeared to be turning out cows, calves and young steers, as a magician's bag scatters paper roses. In several bunches he recognized acquaintances, but they were too concerned about the future to do more than give a hurried squall of recognition. An enormous procession was under way and they were marching in it, a part of it. Whither would it lead them?

Apparently this speculation was likewise a source of worry to the cows and steers, though they all had been through much the same before. Yet, for the most part, they went soberly, falling into the semblance of a trail-herd as their ranks were swelled by others which the cowboys roused up; but there were some that did not. Occasionally a heifer would make a break to one side, only to be headed off; and once a cow, driven too impetuously, jerked her head sideways and bowed her tail. She was "on the prod," and they let her go. Time after time, when the red-and-white would turn about to gaze, a rider would come at him, slapping his boot with his quirt and whistling. This constant surveillance irritated Come-a-Seven.

Their ranks were swelling so fast, too, that his identity, and hence his sense of security, was lost. Another influx of cattle caused him to carom off his mother's side and in puerile anger he butted at those nearest, until he observed he was making no impression, when, discouraged, he gave it up and moved along. His tiny troubles were submerged in that great army. Two thousand cattle were converging upon a plain, from nine points in an area five miles wide.

Come-a-Seven was almost too interested to be scared.

Clouds of dust welling up; a babel of sound; mighty roarings of irate bulls, petty monarchs now on a common footing they resented; the lowing of cows and the frightened bawling of the calves; and always a bewildering churning and shifting like a maelstrom. Every few minutes a stream of dirt would shoot skyward like a geyser, where a bull was spoiling for a fight and sent his thundering challenge over the ranks. Occasionally there was a clash and some desperate attempts at goring. Holding this host on the round-up ground was a cordon of eight punchers, sitting apathetically on their horses. They had little to do while their companions worked the herd, cutting out the cows and calves to one side, the strays and beef cattle to another. Sometimes an animal would wander to the edge, stand staring uncertainly, then saunter forth to attain the open; but most were driven back without trouble. One persisted and gave a herder a furious dash to head him off; but that was all part of the day's work.

When the cutters penetrated the dust and came threading their way through the noisy, restless horde, the calf became doubly uneasy. A man on a blazed-face bay was particularly insistent. Come-a-Seven watched him work deviously through the entire herd after a cow and her young, and drive them forth to the

open; so he tried to keep out of sight. But it was no use. Soon the horse was close to them, and mother and son felt, rather than saw, that they were the objects of the quiet maneuvering that followed. Wherever they dodged and doubled the blazed-face was sure to be there, close behind, patient, untiring. A wave of resentment against this steady pressure broke them into a run, and, before they knew it, the outer rim of cattle split wide open and they were beyond the herd. In a panic they endeavored to dart back, but the big bay interposed. Seeing this, the cow sped toward a draw where the scrub-cedar appeared to offer chances of escape. With the speed of light the puncher was after them, twisting, wheeling, heading her off toward the cut-bunch. And the calf found the same indefatigable foe between him and freedom when he emulated his mother.

"Git in, you low-lived whelp," howled the cutter, and he spurred furiously.

They finally gave up the contest as hopeless and trotted meekly to join the bunch of cattle they perceived ahead of them.

There were cows which shot from the herd at a gallop and then would break to a hesitating trot, their heads nodding loosely close to the ground. Their gait had an odd uncertainty about it. The animals would shrink from a weed and draw back. One stopped at perceiving a shadow and went around it fearfully.

"Locoed," a puncher commented. For these had eaten of the strange loco weed and were afflicted.

By ten o'clock, the herd was worked. Fires were lighted and the branding irons thrust into them.

The roper and flankers got into action, two sets of them, and every minute calves emitted protesting wails as the hot irons seared their sides. He worked like an automaton, that roper. He seemed removed from human passions, remote from the ordinary human impulses. His loop dropped unerringly, and back the horse would go at a trot or a lope, with a panic-stricken, crying calf plunging, bumping along in rear, sometimes turning somersaults—for life is too short to carry calves to the flankers with solicitous care, though possibly the flankers would prefer them that way.

The red-and-white edged away from the field of this gentleman's labors and ran straight in front of a sorrel horse.

Baw-aw-aw-aw-aw-aw! he cried, as something settled about his neck and a resistless force commenced to drag him into the open.

Another roper had snared him. He humped his back and began to buck, his legs rigid. At every leap into the air he blatted and protested. His mother shrank back in confusion at the first outcry and lost sight of him in the dust raised by his unwilling progress. For fully thirty yards he was dragged in a series of hurtling leaps, with the rope cutting into his neck so that he could scarcely breathe; and then, before he had time to recover his faculties, a man seized the rope, ran along it until he reached the red-and-white, and reaching over his body, flopped him in the air. But the calf was not flanked so easily—not Come-a-Seven. Twice he

rebounded like a rubber ball, finding his feet before his antagonist could fall on him.

"Stay-ay-ay with him, Steve! Go to him, boy!" shrieked the delighted flankers.

"Durn his hide. He's stout as a weaner," Steve snorted; and he gave a tremendous heave. At the same time he made a short spring forward with knees crooked, which carried him under the calf as that strenuous combatant tried to make his hoofs hit the ground first. The red-and-white came down with a bump that sounded like the unloading of a trunk marked, "Handle with care." It would have broken the ribs of anything aged three months except a calf.

"Holy cats, it's Come-a-Seven," Steve panted. He sat back of his head, with a knee on the neck, and twisted one foreleg in a jiu-jitsu grip that paralyzed all effort. Another puncher at his other extremity got a vise-like hold of the left leg and put the other out of commission by thrusting it far forward with his foot.

Oh-oh-oh-uh-uh-uh-ah!

The cry was almost human, and the eyes bulged and rolled with terror until the whites showed. The iron had touched him, biting through his coat into the flesh, while the smoke curled up with smell of burning hair. His fright needed just that pang to get proper vocal expression, and he used all his available breath in a frantic appeal to the mother that bore him. It was not in vain.

"Look out! Here she comes!" yelled a flanker.

The three working over the calf looked up to see the cow trotting toward them. There was no time to dodge. When she was within ten feet of the group an idle flanker kicked a jet of sand into her face and she swerved irresolutely, coming to a walk. The roper drove her back and work was resumed on her son.

"I mind once, when I was with the Spur, a cow jumped clean over us that-a-way," remarked Bill Kennedy, rising from the ground. As a parting salute he rolled the red-and-white over his hip, as a wrestler throws a man to the mat. "Say, Jake, heel them big fellers."

The calf was scared, and sore all over. A swallow-fork in the right ear and a crop in the left worried him. He stood glowering in all directions, in an effort to get his bearings; then he executed some shuddering, half-hearted jumps, as though trying to shed the two burning letters on his left flank, and sought his mother. He was sick, and all the fight gone from him.

The herd was driven off and released, and the red-and-white went with them. He tarried in a draw, enduring great pain. A fever burned him, too, and he was low in spirits. Half of his enormous appetite was gone, but only half. Alas, he had lost the source of supply for even the remnant that remained. In the general confusion he had become separated from his mother, and, as it was meal-time, the loss was doubly distressing.

He lifted up his voice in a song of sorrow, but naught availed. Perceiving this, he started to find her. The cow was hunting for him, too, hunting frenziedly. And she was not alone in her grief, for at least a dozen cows had lost their young in

the turmoil of branding, and they wandered up and down and across without cessation, lowing pathetically, a world of distress in their tones and in their eyes. From time to time one would sight a stray calf and make a bee line for it, but only to give a moan of disappointment and resume her hunt.

Come-a-Seven tried to establish filial relations with every cow he met. As a result, he got some rebuffs that would have discouraged a less hungry youngster. For hours he searched; for hours cows wandered about crying for their young. Twice the red-and-white essayed to feed where he had no blood-rights and nearly had his ribs stove in for his pains. Finally, made crafty by hunger, he softly shouldered another calf away from her place at the mother's side and tried to substitute. The old cow properly kicked him for that trick.

But his hunger was short-lived; a familiar voice smote upon his ear, his answering cry came with a glad quiver in it, and mother and son were reunited. How she smelled of him and licked his dusty sides and neck! And the way he went for his meal! She gave a deep rumble of content. Even when Come-a-Seven butted cruelly with his head, in his consuming hunger, and hurt her, she lowed in proud satisfaction.

Pain and trouble cannot last forever. In a week his wounds had healed; he was sound and strong again. Once more began the long, idle days of good feeding and play with his young companions. His life was a full one. Compared with that of the barnyard variety of the genus calf, it was as checkered as a drummer's appears to a hot-blooded resident of a country town.

In the winter his mother grew gaunt. The cold was intense at times, and the snowfall was greater than the oldest bull could recall. At rare intervals men came riding to inspect and on one visit drove some of the weaker cattle to the home pasture, there to be fed daily. For the others little could be done, and the red-and-white was one of them. There were many good windbreaks on the range and the calf was tough, so he won through somehow, though once when the snow drifted deep and the cow could not find grass in her wanderings, grim death stared them in the face. The calf himself went three days without a meal, yet lived. A cow will not paw down through the snow like a horse, and mother and son saw some of their friends perish.

Spring came at last—suddenly, like a mountain sunrise—and the earth was exceeding glad. Worried and emaciated, they greeted the season of hope with a sudden access of energy. In later months the red-and-white was weaned. He learned to eat grass, of which accomplishment he was at first inordinately proud, and he throve on it; and he had but one worry in the world—heel flies.

It has been said that Come-a-Seven was lusty. He was an amazing big fellow for his age. When round-up time arrived again and he was herded with about fourteen hundred cattle, he grew chesty over the fact that he sized up well with most of the two-year-olds. His strength and restless energy were proportionate.

Indeed, Come-a-Seven bade fair to be a rounder. While the other cattle would be sleeping peacefully on the bed-ground, the young red-and-white would go up

and down through the herd, trying to start some excitement. He always chose to walk straight through the center of the recumbent host, and where he passed all got to their feet uneasily. The tired old cows would grumble at him and tell him to go to bed, but he was proof against all reproaches and conscience he had none.

"Damn him," grumbled a puncher on guard as he watched his wanderings for the twentieth time, and for the twentieth time turned and drove back some who tried to walk out at his prompting. "He's playing for a stompede."

"I swan if it ain't Come-a-Seven!" remarked Steve, when the red-and-white passed very near him. "Git to bed, Come-a-Seven. I reckon you're a rake."

When tired of his solitary roaming, the red-and-white would select some young steer weaker than himself, butt him off the bed he had warmed, and compose himself to slumber. Whereat a great sigh of satisfaction would be heard mingled with the blowing of the cattle.

Another year passed. When the cowboys came whooping up the cattle in the following August, the red-and-white heard the loud shoutings and saw, with contemptuous resentment, his fellow-creatures being propelled toward the round-up ground. Their meekness awoke hot rebellion in him. Big he was now and of the strength of two. He decided he would not go.

A rider caught him unawares and the surprise of his first rush started the steer in the right direction, but it failed to keep him there; for as soon as the man departed to drive another bunch, the red-and-white went off at a tangent. Far had he wandered in his day, and he knew some brakes—miles, miles away—where the foot of horse seldom trod. Toward these he headed. Two hundred, three hundred yards, and behind him he heard the familiar scramble of the pursuer. The red-and-white flagged his tail and let out another notch.

"Quit it, you Come-a-Seven!" Steve bawled. "Blast you, git in there."

The two-year-old only ran the harder, but the pony gained. Then he lost his temper and made up his mind that whether or not the cowboy overtook him he would reach those brakes; if necessary he would turn about and attack. His head swayed from side to side, his gait became uncertain and he seemed worried—symptoms which were not lost on Steve. When the steer stopped and faced about, the horse turned like a flash, and as he did so a loud, querulous voice, raised in helpless anger, broke up Steve's programme. That voice changed the red-and-white's destiny. Indirectly it saved him from the stockyards; but, then, he would probably have saved himself.

"Let him go, Steve! You'll lose that other bunch," the wagon boss cried. "We'll get him again."

Steve waved his hat at the steer with a good-natured grin and shook up his horse, departing like a rocket to his work. The red-and-white continued on toward the brakes.

That is how he became an outlaw.

In the vast Croton brakes were scores such as he. Some of them were grown old and hoary, and they bore many brands. A few had no brands. All had run wild

for years, and round-ups were things of the long ago. So shy were they that it was as difficult for a man to approach them as to stalk a herd of antelope. They kept in bands of five and six, and did anything come near which one did not understand, they were off like deer.

The red-and-white took to the life as his birth-right. Somewhere in him ran a strain that drove resistlessly to solitude and the wilds; and he was happy. More than once he had to fight, but he possessed an unbeatable temper and had a world of craft to direct his agility and colossal strength, so that he came from his battles with blood-dripping horns held high and proudly.

Rough and torn and forbidding were the brakes—miles on miles of red-walled cañons, of scrub cedar and sand-rock—but the feeding was good for so few when one knew the best places, and the outlaw waxed ever stronger. His horns spread, too.

Five years sped by and the outlaw fought his way to kingship.

On a December day he was startled by the noise of firing. Such sounds he had never heard. It was not the snappy, sharp report of the six-shooter, but louder and of heavier metal. Suddenly fear took hold of him. There was a hunt on—a hunt of outlaws. The horns of the free steers would bring high prices, and once in a generation a party of punchers came thus with rifles to gather them. Come-a-Seven let out a bellow and tore away at the head of his followers.

It was a terrible day for the outlaws of the Croton brakes. When the bunch that trailed behind the red-and-white split and scattered, the chase developed into mad, individual contests of speed. The outlaw could run; the way Come-a-Seven traveled would have made an ordinary range steer look like a muley cow. Up and down sheer bluffs that appeared too steep to climb, he ran; and cliffs seemed to be highways to him. But, behind, a rider spurred tenaciously, steadily diminishing the distance that separated them, holding his fire until he could be sure of this glorious prize. Up came the rifle—but it never sent forth its leaden messenger.

"Gee whiz, if it ain't ol' Come-a-Seven!" cried Steve. "Git a-going, boy, and keep her up! Whoopee!"

With a final spurt and shout the veteran puncher wheeled and came to a standstill, regarding the smashing run of the big steer with a smile of admiration. The red-and-white was already disappearing in the distance, far, far away from all further danger of pursuit, his tail held high, his head swaying. Steve watched him until he topped a rise and disappeared. He had lost a goodly prize; but he was content. He chuckled as he recalled the steer's past misdeeds on the bed-ground.

The outlaw went back to his remotest fastnesses. He may be there yet, boss of the Croton brakes.

V
SHIELA

A panther's scream split the whine of the wind and Shiela reared herself in front of the fire, her body retched by an answering challenge.

"Shee-la," her master rebuked. "Lie down, girl."

The wolfhound sank to the floor with a reluctant flop, but the hairs on her neck and along her spine bristled still. She continued to rumble.

There were four men playing at cards in the bunkhouse. Cold weather had set in and the Tumbling H outfit were eating out their hearts in winter camps. Here at headquarters, the range boss, wagon boss, blacksmith and cook played half the day at seven-up and pitch; and listened to Mit's varying accounts of high life in the East, as he had plumbed it in Fort Worth; and raved at the climate and cursed petty annoyances with the savage irritability of full-blooded men lacking enough to do.

"Hark to that ol' wind," mourned the wagon boss—he was fifty and considered fourteen hours a day in the saddle mere child's play—"It was sixty-six above this morning, and now it's zero. No wonder a man cain't be healthy."

The others nodded gravely and the cook shuffled the cards.

"It's a wonder, Steve," he observed, "that you don't—my deal?—you don't try that dog in wolf huntin'. Not by herself, but with a bunch of 'em."

"Wait till she's used to the country and has got her growth. Then you'll see."

Mit remarked that he referred, of course, to the hunting of coyotes, which prompted a passionate declaration from the wagon boss that the range ought to be cleared of these pests. They killed too many calves in bad years: poison 'em, he urged. Nobody opposed objection and they went on with the game. Then from the mouth of the cañon came to the ears of the players the vibrant cry of the lobo. Right upon it broke Shiela's roar of defiance, and the beast was at the door in a bound, whimpering frenziedly, her terrible teeth bared. Beside her, his head three inches short of Shiela's breast, Friday stiffened in sympathetic rage, his stubby tail wagging. He raised a shrill treble bark.

"Down, Shee-la! Down, girl." Running from the table, O'Donnell led her back to the fire.

"Friday, you come here," the blacksmith cried. "Lay down under the table, and don't you go for to move!"

Not to cattle-browsed stretches of prairie land had Shiela been reared, nor to vast sweep of hills and mesquite-flecked valleys, and of torn, brick-red sandstone and tortuous, dry river-beds. She was a stranger in a strange land, and her new kingdom struck to the roots of her nature. Far as she could wander in a frivolous all-day rabbit hunt with Friday was no sign of human habitation; and beyond that,

away to the pale-blue line that must surely be the rim of all things,—full sixty miles,—no handiwork of man was visible. Here was an unspoiled empire, and her master was the autocrat. For the first time in her life the wolfhound drew the breath of unrestrained liberty, chafed hotly to the tang of the air, cast about and trailed wild creatures whose taint stirred her to mad longings for the chase and a fight.

How can one tell of Shiela's beauty? A great animal and a wonderful—light fawn in color, with a shaggy coat. Her eyes were in general gentle and melting. But it must be confessed that her proportions did not fit Shiela to be a comfort about the home, for she weighed a hundred and eighteen pounds and could not go under the tallest table without stooping. As she always forgot to stoop, her progress was fraught with excitement.

On the day following her arrival, the cook scrambled out of bed long before sunup to ascertain what manner of idiot could be knocking on the door in this deserted region. Man alive, why couldn't they walk in? Shiela leaped on him to be fondled—the wolfhound had been wagging her tail against the door as she lay across the threshold.

"Ef I was you," Mit suggested civilly, "I'd lay out on the range where you'd have room to move round. Git a nice big butte all to yourself."

Her heart and her courage were big as her body. Following O'Donnell on a day when he fared to Stinking Water, quite by accident she roused up a loafer in the cañon. Shiela flew in pursuit, deaf to O'Donnell's frantic commands to come back. And when the wolf turned fiercely at bay to pit her might against this daring hunter, a hundred and eighteen pounds of dauntless pluck launched itself at her neck like a bolt from a storm-cloud.

"She's a dead one now," O'Donnell groaned, circling for a shot. "She's a goner, sure."

Had the wolfhound been more wary, she would have fared better. She could not have slain her foe; the dog does not breathe that can go to the death-grapple with a loafer wolf in the flush of his strength; and Shiela knew neither the amazing quickness of the wild, nor how to guard against those slashing counter-attacks. The lobo could dodge and rip simultaneously, using her jaws from any direction. Even when bowled over by the hound's unreckoning rush, she tore Shiela's throat with a backward thrust of her muzzle and was free in a twinkling. Badly cut in several places, dazed by the speed of the combat, the wolfhound was soon forced to let her go.

Shiela and Friday were fast friends, albeit the diversity of dimensions was productive of intermittent rancor. It was Friday's wont to rush at her fiercely, to seize one powerful leg in his mouth and worry it, whereat Shiela would hit him a playful pat that sent him reeling ten yards. But Friday came of a staunch breed, and he returned to the sport again and again. Often the wolfhound would stretch herself out on the ground, and thus recumbent, the fox-terrier could almost reach her head. Over Shiela would roll, lying on her back with legs in the air, while

Friday snorted and grunted valorously as he shook her by the throat or the ear. But the fun always ended in the same way: a clumsy blow would catch Friday full on the head and he would dash off to his master with cries of pain.

"Steve oughtn't for to keep her round headquarters," the blacksmith remonstrated to Dick. "She's shore too big. Pore li'l Friday! When she gits into my shop, Dick, I swan her ol' tail is like to send my tools flying which-ways."

"Where'd he keep her, then? He cain't turn her out on the range to eat grass," sneered Dick.

The blacksmith was silenced, but there was born in him a dislike of the hound. It happened that, when next the terrier came yelping from play, O'Donnell had ridden off to a tank. The blacksmith issued from the shop and hurled a bolt at Shiela. She dodged, but did not run, and the bristles on her neck stiffened in warning.

Aside from the manager, who spent much of the year with his family in Denver, the blacksmith was the only married man with the Tumbling H outfit. He had a son three years of age. Oscar was the child's name,—a sturdy, ruddy-cheeked youngster he was—and from the outset he was the apple of Shiela's eye. The boy could pull her ears or tail with absolute impunity, and into the yawning cavity she would open to his teasing, he would thrust a chubby fist.

"Oscar! Oscar! My baby, don't," his mother would cry. But Shiela was infinitely tender with him, and the two would roll on the ground in a tight embrace, while the child thumped a tattoo on the wolfhound's ribs.

It befell on a morning that they indulged in this frolic until both were in a state of unbridled excitement. Crowing with delight, the baby staggered to his feet and tried to butt Shiela with his head. Forgetting for a fraction of time how fragile was this cherished morsel of humanity, the wolfhound struck out joyously with her paw, bowling him over like a ninepin. As he went backward, the boy essayed to break his fall on the ground by thrusting out his left arm; it doubled under him and snapped at the elbow.

A single wailing cry brought his father running from the smithy. Oscar lay white-faced, the wolfhound nosing him eagerly in an endeavor to stir the baby to a resumption of play. Flinging a curse at the dog, the blacksmith picked up his son and carried him to his mother. Ten minutes passed, which Shiela spent in vain efforts to ascertain what kept her playmate from her, and Peck emerged from the bunkhouse with a shotgun. The quick-sensing Shiela disappeared without further ado around a corner of the saddle-shed; but, as the blacksmith followed on a run, O'Donnell's voice stayed him.

"What're you doing with that gun, Peck?"

"Shiela done broke Oscar's arm, and I aim to git even—that's what."

"Don't be a fool!" the boss cried sharply.

Peck faced him, his lips twitching.

"I may do more'n shoot a bitch, Steve," he said, and his voice was calm now.

"You don't mean that, Peck." The range boss continued to advance, his eyes on the troubled eyes of the blacksmith. "Shee-la and little Oscar have always been friends. Didn't she pull him out of the creek only last week? She couldn't have smashed his arm on purpose. You can't blame a dog for an accident."

The blacksmith cursed Shiela to the eightieth generation; but O'Donnell smiled and tapped the barrel of the gun with his forefinger. There would be no shooting of man or dog now, he knew.

"Put it away, Peck. We'll forget all about it. I'll ride over to Deadeye and bring the doctor myself."

The blacksmith wavered and obeyed.

Little Oscar was soon able to toddle about, with his arm in a cast and a sling. But Peck's dislike for the hound grew to hate. In the short winter days and long winter nights he watched and brooded, waiting for an opportunity to make her suffer. His hostility to the soft-eyed, affectionate Shiela took the form of an intense nervous sensibility to her every movement—one sees precisely the same symptoms in persons who are unhappily cooped up for any length of time. Soon the bigness of the animal grated on his nerves, so that whatever she did excited in him childish spleen. Even when Shiela ate, Peck could not look at her magnificent satisfaction without falling into a paroxysm of loathing.

Once he spread pieces of meat cunningly about the saddle-shed where she was wont to loll while the child slept in the afternoons. Shiela espied and swallowed these tidbits with much relish, and stalked away to get a drink, feeling unaccountably thirsty. There was no water in the trough; and that saved her life. Soon a tremor came upon the wolfhound, so that she swayed uncertainly, her nose close to the ground, froth slathering her muzzle.

At this moment Oscar rocketed from the bunkhouse at his usual ungainly gallop. The boy knew exactly what to do. Had he not endured agony, too? There was only one sure remedy for belly-pains, and it stood on a shelf in the kitchen—he never passed the shelf without a certain creeping of the flesh. How he forced castor oil upon the dog is one of those modern miracles that are wrought for babes and the inebriated. At any rate, with only one arm free, he administered a glorious dose, and, feeling full of pity for the tortures of which she mumbled so weakly, he followed it with generous hunks of greasy bacon purloined from the big brown crockery jar in the pantry. Shiela became violently ill and Oscar feared for her life.

"Dick! Dick! She sick. Hurry, oh hurry!" Oscar ran to summon help.

Shiela survived, and O'Donnell devoted the better part of a day to impassioned dissertations on the folly of leaving strychnine baits for coyotes round the saddle-shed.

One evening in midwinter, the range boss, Dick, the cook, and Peck sat in the bunkhouse, as usual, trifling with a pile of dominos. Shiela lay dozing in front of the fire. The wolfhound had shown considerable restlessness of late and Dick had cautioned O'Donnell to chain her up. It came Mit's turn to play and, as he was

ponderously miring himself, the night silence was rent by the hunting cry of the loafer. So near was it, so savagely compelling, that the men sent the benches back in amaze. The effect on Shiela was extraordinary. She was at the door, scratching for her liberty, whining, turning appealing eyes to O'Donnell that he should open.

Dick gazed at the range boss and waggled his wise bald head. "You better lock her up, Steve, or you'll shore lose that ol' dog."

She was locked in the smithy the next evening, and in the morning the shed was empty. O'Donnell was positive that the staple and chain on the door had been secure when he left her the night before; yet now the staple dangled free, with a splinter attached. Reflecting that the hound's weight made this feat possible, he ceased to speculate; and in the blacksmith's soul entered peace. Shiela had fled.

The Wednesday following fell blustery, with a bullying wind, and the range boss sat late at his table, working over a cattle tally by the light of a lantern. A timid scratching on the door-sill disturbed him, and he listened curiously. There it was again, this time accompanied by a plaintive whine. He reached the handle in a stride.

"Shee-la! Shee-la, old girl!" His glad cry brought Mit running. Shiela slunk into the room and crossed to the fire, which she sniffed doubtfully and then lay down in front of it. Down her throat and across her left shoulder burned cherry-colored slashes. She touched her tongue to them and began to clean her soiled coat, while O'Donnell stood watching, lost in wonder. The wolfhound growled as he moved, but he laughed affectionately and stooped to the fearfully lowered head.

"So you've come back—like the prodigal," he whispered. "Poor, poor Shee-la!"

"Mit," he bawled the next instant, "kill the spotted calf, or the fatted heifer, or whatever else will do. She's hungry."

Not being conversant with the tale of the erring son, the cook roared back a request to Steve to have sense—didn't he know there wasn't a calf in the pen?

"Bring some beef, then," laughed the boss.

The animal's eyes followed her master furtively. He noted that flickering gleam with a pang—the fear and suspicion of the hunted in it. So much had three days with the wild linked up the slack chain of her blood tie. Then presently she licked his hand, and the look that answered his was soft and appealing as of old.

"Here's enough to choke her," announced Mit cheerily, entering with a slab of beef.

The hound sprang at him and the cook, taking no chances, hurled the raw meat into the air. She caught it as it touched the floor and tore into it with the desperate zest of the famished.

The days drifted one into another, and the Tumbling H men rose and ate and slept, and rose again, which is the sum of many lives. Of work there could be little until the spring rains fell. Would the good days of the roundup never come?

Oh, the sweltering hours in the saddle, and the bellowings of mighty herds, and the choking dust of the corrals in branding!

Shiela was carefully guarded. In the first of the mild weather she contributed to the bustling cheer of the bunkhouse a litter of four lusty pups. It was as much as a man's life was worth to go nearer than six feet to the tugging little rascals; but the boy Oscar, who did not know this, proceeded calmly to inspect and caress them. The mother flared in a sudden, quaping rage, but instantly sank back and became reconciled to the extent of permitting the baby, quite undaunted by his first reception, to stroke her progeny with his pudgy hands. She watched him jealously.

Summer rushed upon the land, and the Tumbling H outfit got to horse and rode forth. In November O'Donnell shipped seven thousand head of steers to help stay the world's maw, and in December there were four men playing at cards again in the bunkhouse.

"Steve,"—the cook cleared his throat as he riffled the cards,—"is it my deal? Shore. Say, Steve, one of Shiela's pups is killing chickens. He'd 'a got a turkey too, only I done seen him."

"You ought for to have killed 'em all when they were teeny pups, Steve," broke in the blacksmith. "What was the use of keeping two? Anyone kin see they're more wolf than dog."

"It's your play," the boss said evenly.

Shiela had the run of quarters, but her broad-jowled, heavy-shouldered pups were chained in the smithy. Just what to do with them was a problem. Shiela had exhibited no special affection since they were weaned, and it needed only the merest glance to detect the bar sinister. Had only the eyes been visible, there was that in their glint which betrayed the wolf. Yet, in the tawny coats and a certain lithe spring in gathering for a stride, the youngsters favored their mother.

A loafer wolf made a foray from the cañon on a Sunday night, when the range boss and Mit played seven-up and the blacksmith poisoned life with a concertina. He killed a milch-pen calf close to headquarters; yet so silent was the raid that the men heard nothing of it, though Shiela cried protests to be gone and growled at intervals. In the smithy the pups bayed deep-voiced greetings. They leaped and snapped their teeth, and gnawed and raved to be free. Forgetting that O'Donnell had unchained them, Dick went to the door to still the brutes. They hurled themselves over him.

"Here's where the trouble starts, Shee-la," observed her master dubiously. She wagged her tail and looked up at him in curiosity, for she had practically forgotten the pups.

It was a bitter winter, and the cattle sickened and died in hundreds. The men rode range in all weathers, setting out oil-cake and salt; but what help could be given to thirty thousand head? Carrion waxed fat. And then, one day in Deadeye, whither he had journeyed for supplies at the first hint of spring, the range boss stumbled on a strange tale. The wolves were out, bolder and stronger than they

had been in a generation. They were making no stealthy, lone hunts,—a swift leap from the dark upon a helpless thing, and then the gorge,—but waged an almost systematic war of pillage. The leader was a shaggy veteran of speckled gray that ran with a limp; and with him—the men of Deadeye hoped they might perish horribly were this not so—with him there ran two fawn-colored wolves like no lobo of the west country. They were, perhaps, slightly shorter than a cowhorse; that is, of course, a strong roping horse, not a stunted pony.

"Shee-la, you've surely done it now," O'Donnell told her with a sigh. She thrust her moist muzzle into his hand to be petted.

In less than seven days' time Padden reported from a division camp that he had come on the carcass of a freshly killed heifer near a salt trough. The wolves had hamstrung the poor brute and had fallen to their grim feast before life was extinct, he thought; which is not unusual. O'Donnell vowed a war of extermination.

The mail-carrier came upon the pack casting about beside the trail, at fault in running an antelope. They let him approach within two hundred yards, gazing insolently, then flitted swiftly through a jungle of mesquite trees. His story was that beside the wily gray scoundrel that led, raced two tall creatures, half wolf, half dog, which ran with a long, springy stride foreign to lobo locomotion.

"It's Shiela's pups," the blacksmith exclaimed venomously, when the mail-carrier related this experience at dinner.

"Yes, they're Shee-la's pups," O'Donnell admitted; and, "Poor Shee-la!" he said. Then raising his voice with decision:

"Johnson, you tell them in Deadeye that I'll give fifty dollars each for those pups, and fifty for the old gray fellow. Put up a notice in the post-office. Or—wait, I'll write one for you."

The result of this placard was an egress from Deadeye of eight ambitious hunters, who went their several ways, wishful to earn two months' pay by a lucky shot. They straggled back empty-handed at the end of a week. While they were thus engaged, the pack ranged wide. They killed at Cedar Creek, but were compelled to abandon their prey, and slew again before daylight on a nester's place on the outskirts of Deadeye. Here, too, they let the life out of an interfering collie. Long immunity had made them contemptuous—or was it that they gave ear to the counsels of man-raised mates? They raided the Tumbling H headquarters in quest of certain turkeys that were Mit's solace in dark days, and from ambuscade the cook slew his finest gobbler with buckshot, in a berserker effort to shoot one lissome marauder.

Shiela and Friday led uneventful lives amid all this harrying and turmoil of pursuit. They frisked and wrestled on the baked, cracked ground, or basked in the sun until it grew too hot and the flies became unbearable in attack, when they would slouch to the cool of the long bunk-room. Shiela had forgotten all about her degenerate offspring, and held herself fearlessly and with pride as an honest dog.

More than once she and the terrier took jaunts over the low hills toward the cañon, in spite of the watch on her goings-out. It might be a rabbit they pursued, or the zigzagging trail of a coyote; or it might be that rare scent, the antelope's. One afternoon they disported themselves, chasing some half-wild hogs that roamed the range.

A long-snouted porker of tender years was rooting about a patch of bear-grass, when suddenly he cocked his impudent nose and appeared to listen intently. Shiela and Friday stopped short in a game of tag, to watch. The pig did not turn his head, but continued to stand at attention, his ears twitching. What could it mean? Shiela crept closer. With a speed that left her dumbfounded, the pig sprang sidewise on to a spot his glance had certainly not been regarding, and simultaneously tore with his jaws at a writhing, earth-colored coil. Shiela drew off respectfully and in trepidation, while he devoured his victim with beautiful hog voracity. It was the dreaded rattler, which he had killed with two lightning strokes of forefeet and jaws.

So the days passed.

In the meantime, O'Donnell had other things than Shiela or wolves to think about. The manager had resigned, and the boss added to the superintendence of the active work of the range, the conduct of the business of the Tumbling H company, the sale and the shipping of Tumbling H cattle. He was an enthusiast on improving the breed of his cattle and horses; and his anger was deep, therefore, when late in the autumn his men found the remains of a young stallion. He was a splendid beast, but newly come from Kentucky, and ignorant of perils and the necessity for perpetual vigilance. Apparently he had been cut out from the band he lorded it over,—sheer foolhardiness, this—and, alone in the battle against heavy odds, had been pulled down. That he died full of fight was sufficiently evident: the battered body of an exceptionally large young wolf lay on the ground beside his own.

Shiela sniffed at the carcass of this creature, then moved away unconcernedly, circling for another scent; but the hide caught O'Donnell's gaze and held it. The coat was of a peculiar tawny hue, running in spots to red. There was something in the lines of the body and legs that struck a reminiscent chord in his memory. He glanced from it to Shiela, turning the body over with his foot.

"If that isn't one of your litter, old girl, I'm much mistaken," he said.

Shiela, then, must atone. With all the dogs of Deadeye to help, she should hunt these bold ravagers. Hers was the crime; hers must be the expiation, even at the cost of life.

"Well, old girl," he said, as he ambled away from headquarters three days later, with Shiela beside him, "here's your one chance to wipe out your little slip. A lot of us humans don't get that, my lady. So go to it and clear your name, Shee-la."

There were twenty-five dogs on hand at the rendezvous, about thirteen more than were needed, and they ranged from bloodhounds and greyhounds to a

wheezy water-spaniel, which thought he knew a scent when he struck it, and whose master fondled the same delusion of him. His presence led to a dispute at the outset, because the spaniel persisted in messing about and mugging a trail, and his owner pig-headedly abetted him. The owner was set in argument, and carried a long, smooth-bore rifle. However, both were persuaded to go home, quite convinced that spiteful jealousy was at the bottom of this attitude.

"So that's Shiela?" queried a Gourd puncher. "I reckon you ought to kill her, O'Donnell. It's her pup and his father what's raising all the hell. She might run away ag'in and—"

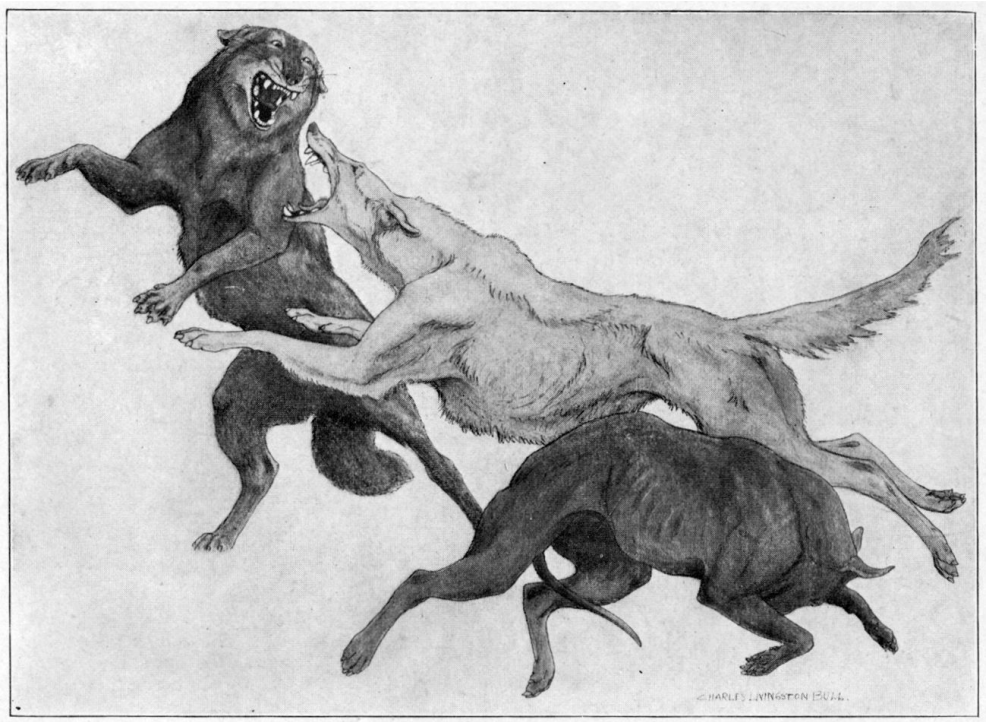
"She's my dog, Joe," the boss cut in.

Hard upon his words, old Rags gave tongue and went away on a warm scent. Luck was with the hunters. Within two miles the dogs were running free, their noses in the air, making the ridges ring to their eager yelping; and a wolf, a tawny, limber-limbed wolf, smashed through a tangle of weeds and briars at the head of a gulch and streaked across the open country. The pack laid themselves out in pursuit, Shiela and the greyhounds running silently.

The wolfhound was well up with the leaders. A dozen strides would have brought the quarry to bay, when a speckled gray shape burst into view beneath her feet and departed at a tangent to her line of running, heading for a shallow draw. Shiela and one greyhound swerved and dashed after him. The others of the pack kept on behind the flagging fugitive.

Everything was against the gray. He was old, and the combats and the hunts of years had stiffened his muscles. He was full fed and heavy; slumbering, he had blundered into the chase when he could have lain low. The two silent things behind carried in their sinewy bodies the speed and stamina of generations of dogs whose special business in life it had been to run. A wall of earth faced them, the bank of a dried stream, and he must scale it in his flight. Well he knew that the race was over. He must fight, and as well here as elsewhere. When it comes to the last test of courage, the king of wolves is indeed a king.

A rapid glance over his shoulder showed him the greyhound almost at his flank. He reached the bank by a desperate spurt, whirled, and with one rending stroke, cast back the first pursuer, coughing in the throes of death. But the shock of the charge shook him for an instant and in that fraction of time he was unprepared to withstand the crushing velocity of Shiela's onslaught. On his hind legs, his worn fangs gleaming, he received her. She went straight for his throat, and the grip being an eminently satisfactory one, she did not release it.



"*On his hind legs, his worn fangs gleaming, he received her*"

To and fro the big gray dragged her, over and over, tearing with his forefeet to pry her off, snapping his wide jaws in futile efforts to seize his enemy. His hind claws ripped unavailingly along the wolfhound's sides; he writhed and twisted to gain an inch of freedom for his head—only an inch, and he could reach her shoulder. Once only Shiela growled, a deep, rumbling note of content. She knew what she had to do, and she felt this to be the right way. Slowly her jaws tightened and she hung to him soundlessly. The rasping snarls grew fainter; the tremendous heavings and lurchings slackened. The old lord of the cañon had made his last fight.

It was O'Donnell who drove her off. Blown but triumphant, he raced from the slaughter of the first quarry, and gave a long whistle of incredulity at sight of the slain.

"Father and son—father and son in one day," he exclaimed. Then, "Poor Shee-la."

As they trotted cheerily homeward, the wolfhound kept close to O'Donnell's horse, and whenever she glanced up at him, frisking clumsily the while, he grinned down at her.

"You've wiped out your fault, Shee-la. You've done more than most," he observed seriously, as they neared the ranch. "I thought once I'd have to send you away. Or—or send you out on the long trail." Shiela leaped playfully at his

horse's bridle. "But we'll stick together. Only," he drew a deep breath, "we'll take a holiday. We'll go back—back home to County Mayo, old girl."

VI
MOLLY

It may be there are persons who will scoff at the assertion that there is more of sentiment in a cow than in any creature of four legs that walks the earth. Cavilers, these—hard-shelled individuals who look at the gentle bovine through the eye of commercialism, not gifted to see beyond her barnyard activities toward the nourishment of mankind. It is reasonably established that one may approach a horse in comradely security, confident of fair play. The rules as to hybrids are these: you walk up to a mule in a spirit of veneration and religious preparedness, wearing a sickly aspect of confidence. And you quaver soothing words and carry a club behind your back.

But toward a cow—ah, that is different. Here is a mainstay of life, a pillar and prop of civilization. Here is—well, a cow is a cow. Why, there was the time when three hundred furiously anxious, bawling mothers smashed out of a stout wooden corral on the Turkey Track range and laid a straight course across seven leagues of territory, in quest of their helpless progeny, mercilessly cooped in cars at a railroad siding, awaiting shipment to an Arizona butcher. They kept two well-grown men atop a water-tank for five hours, and—but to attempt a citation of cases would be idle. This is the simple tale of Molly.

She was not an especially pretty animal, Molly—just plain cow, dun in color, with a Jersey strain somewhere among her remote forebears. Yet, one could not gaze on Molly for long without a feeling of profound respect pervading his soul. It was not because one could see with half an eye that she gave large quantities of milk; that was merely the performance of her natural functions. Nor was it that her wistful regard suggested all the sorrows of her sex. Molly in some way made a subtle appeal to sympathy that cannot be voiced.

As a matter of fact, she ought to have been the pampered occupant of a clover field by day and of a stall by night. Instead, she was roaming the zacaton flats of the Tumbling K and losing herself among the blackbrush ridges, in vague wonder that the world was grown so large. Designed to be a respectable milch-cow on a dairy farm, here she was in the heart of a wilderness, and all because of a boy.

He came among us, pink and white and fearfully clean; and he was the owner's son. There were eleven thousand cows in our domain, but milk had been a thing of rumor to the outfit, perhaps because it is inconvenient to milk on horseback. Now, however, Vance shoved his legs under the boards at the bunk-house and objected to clear, biting coffee. So, when he departed blacker than a Mexican, with a two months' beard and overalls sustained by a strand of rope,—babbling wild things of a bath he would take, a bath that would endure for a day and a night,—we still had Molly.

"That cow's got a mind, I tell you," Uncle Henry assured the outfit at supper. "She's got a mind jist like you or me, Dave, only better than yourn. Pass them frijoles."

Perhaps Molly did have a mind. At any rate, she was humanly lonesome. To be the only one of her kind in a tract of five thousand acres—they kept her in the horse pasture—was depressing to a companionable disposition. The bronchos on the river flats and mesquite-clothed hills were shy, wild creatures, subject to alarms and foolish panic. With mild wonder she would watch them break into a run at a sound or a strange scent. They were masterful, too, always driving her away from the water-holes and the salt until they had had their fill. Instinctively she was afraid when one of them approached with careless confidence that she would give place. Yet, though unhappy, Molly never overlooked her duty, and each morning and each evening she stood quiet while Uncle Henry milked her, occasionally rumbling a note of satisfaction or sweeping at a fly with cautious backward swings of her head. Uncle Henry was becoming too stiff for hard riding, and now spent most of his time trying to persuade himself and others that the odd jobs he applied himself to were of his own choosing.

One morning Molly awoke to turmoil. Wondrous noises came to her on the west wind, and she arose and walked to the imprisoning fence. Truly the Tumbling K was become a Babel. In the wide, browned valleys, on the mesas, and far into the fastnesses of the Mules, bulls and cows and clumsy calves were on the march, with riders hanging in rear. Molly could hear the churning of the hosts on the round-up ground, and to her nostrils was wafted the taint of the dust belching heavenward in clouds. For the Tumbling K range was to be divided, and eight thousand head must be turned over to the retiring partner.

Where did all the cattle come from? Molly had never dreamed there were such hordes of her kind in the world. Armies of them filed by in long lines, the cowboys on flank and in rear shouting, whistling, spurring into the press in their efforts to urge the herds forward. Molly stood at the barb-wire fence most of the day, staring at this rally of her species. Sometimes she bawled a troubled greeting.

And the little calves! Many a toddling new-born, strayed from its mother and solicitous of protection, staggered out to sniff at the kindly disposed creature that nosed it so tenderly from the other side of a four-strand barrier. All night the trampling of sleepless thousands and the bawling of steers and worried cows came to disturb Molly's slumbers. The bed-ground for the herds was not four hundred yards distant from the pasture fence. She could see tiny intermittent lights move slowly about them in a wide circle, where the men on guard smoked as they rode their rounds.

Next day her heart was filled with forebodings and uneasiness. Hundreds of cattle were driven into an extensive corral within the confines of her pasture, and thence, in small groups, they went into a chute, propelled by the whoops and outcries of sundry reckless horsemen who crowded their rear. Molly watched and wondered. She saw these cattle forced singly into a narrow runway; she saw them

caught fast in a squeezer, heard their bellows of consternation and fright; and then there reached her the stinging odor of burned hair, when the branding irons seared the flesh. Upon which Molly would flip her tail in the air and lope away. But she always returned; much as she feared it, she could not leave this anguished assemblage.

It was Uncle Henry who discovered that the arrival of the herds was demoralizing our faithful benefactor. She no longer grazed sedately; even the succulent grama-grass of the creek-bottom failed to hold her, and she walked the barb-wire ceaselessly day and night. Her weight fell off in alarming fashion, and when, on the third evening, Uncle Henry approached with outstretched hand and honeyed speech, and the milk-pail cunningly concealed, she shook her big, patient head and moved off. He followed, and she quickened her pace.

"Consarn your fat haid!" roared Uncle Henry, never a patient man. "Hold still or I'll take the hide off'n you."

He tore after Molly, threatening dire visitations. Now, it takes an extremely clever person to circumvent a determined cow, when he is on foot and she has five thousand acres in which to manœuver, and Uncle Henry returned to headquarters, howling for somebody to lend him a horse and he would drag that old fool clear to Texas. We went without milk that night, and grumbled and swore precisely as if we had had nothing else all our lives.

"Hi-yi! Bear down on him, cowboys. More frijoles here!"

With a yell, Big John sprang to the lever of the squeezer and threw all his strength on it, gripping a plunging steer about the middle as he strove to win through the chute.

"Hot iron! Hot iron!" the wagon boss shrieked. "Somebody build that fire up. All right. That's got him, Cas."

Molly hung about near the corral, gazing on these frenzied activities in consternation. It was early morning and low-hanging mists were shredding before the sun.

Some calves passed through the chute by inadvertence. Being too small for the squeezer to hold, they were noosed as they came out, and branded on the ground. One was so tiny that the men at work beside the runway, idly rolling cigarettes during a halt in the operations, failed altogether to perceive him above the heavy lower boarding. As a result, he sauntered into the open, and there was no noose ready to snare. His ears were twitching with curiosity, and he moved his legs as if they were stiff and his feet hurt, as indeed they did, because he had come many weary miles and he was not three days old.

"Hi-yi! There goes a calf!" yelled the punchers. "Go to him, John. He's just your size."

Big John grinned, spat on his hands, and made a dive for the fugitive. "The li'l' rascal," he chuckled, grabbing for its tail. Instead of taking to the open and

falling a prey to a roper, the calf lunged sideways and went under the horse-pasture fence. He was so short that he easily bowed his back and slid beneath the wire. The outfit sent up a shout of laughter, and exhorted John to stay with him; but the giant remained where he was, gazing fixedly at the fugitive. Molly was on the other side of the fence.

To her side the white-face bolted, confident of sanctuary. For a cow, Molly was terribly agitated. She turned about and about, trying to obtain a really good look at this forward baby who greeted her as his mother. The calf, on his part, kept close in an endeavor to secure his supper, being very hungry and properly careless as to where he got it. Molly smelled and sniffed at him, and edged off in intense nervousness. Evidently quite positive in his own mind that he had found what he had been seeking, the calf gave over all useless fuss and set himself resolutely to obtain a meal.

"Let him go, John," the boss called. "We lost his mother over on the Magayan. Molly'll look after him. Look out! Bear down on him, cowboys! It's that big ol' bull."

Molly was thrilling to long-pent yearnings, and the vapors of self-delusion welled up to befog her instincts. After five minutes of nosing, the Jersey came to the conclusion that this must be her son, and yielded to his hungry importunities. With a deep murmur of content, she walked away, followed by her adopted baby. And behind a sage-brush, safe from interference, she fed him. The outfit watched them go in amazement, prophesying many things.

One of the few things they did not foretell came to pass next morning. Molly had hidden the calf behind some soapweed while she went to graze a few rods off, and, the dawn being still gray and the air stinging cold, we picked that particular bunch of weed for a bonfire to provide warmth while the wrangler was bringing up the horses. When the match flared, the calf on the other side of the shooting sparks staggered to his feet.

Ba-a-a-a-aw!

"It's the little 'un," John whooped.

He said no more, because at that moment came the dull pounding of hoofs on grass, and there was Molly, her head held high, turning her gaze jerkily from one to another, after the manner of cows when preparing to charge. We forgot about the fire for the moment and headed for the corral fence, streaming across country twenty strong, with Molly in hot pursuit. Big John eluded her by dodging dexterously behind a bush, leaving a portion of his overalls with the cow, and she abandoned the chase at once, returning to her charge. Him she licked and caressed with many mumbled endearments, making sure that he was unhurt. The calf took all this stoically and as a matter of course, considering it his due, and fell to breakfast. Molly gazed across at her late friends sitting spectrally astride the fence, and all the anger was gone from her eyes. They were large and melting with tenderness.

A crippled horse was shot that day,—the broncho-buster threw him too hard, breaking a leg,—and to the carcass a coyote skulked when night shut down. About eleven o'clock Molly got to her knees, in which position she remained a few seconds, meditating; then rose to walk about, nibbling at the grass. All cattle get up in this manner between eleven o'clock and midnight to graze for a few minutes and then lie down on the other side. This may be the basis of an old superstition that "good cows say their prayers."

Molly, with the warmth of the snuggling calf still on her side, wandered farther than she intended. Abruptly she thrust her nose into the wind and sniffed. It was a stale, penetrating stench, and inherited knowledge warned her there was danger. Back ran Molly in a tremor of anxiety, her head wagging from side to side in her efforts to glimpse the marauder. Behind a clump of bear-grass crouched a coyote, his foxlike nose pointed toward the spot where snoozed her unprotected son. Inch by inch he slunk forward; now his muscles grew taut for the leap.

Whoo-oo-oo-huh! snorted Molly, smashing down upon him.

The wolf straightened and wheeled with a flash of gray, and sprang, all in one movement. So marvelously quick was he that escape would have been certain ninety-nine times in a hundred. A bull would have borne down on him with lowered head and eyes shut, like a runaway freight train; a cow charges with eyes open, and Molly, consumed with mother-wrath, ripped sideways with her sharp horns as the hunter swerved. A shapeless bundle of brown-gray fur was tossed into the air, and when it struck the ground and rebounded, Molly went at it again. This time she caught him full with her horns, and, quite by chance, followed stumblingly on his ribs with her forefeet. The coyote squirmed away from this terrible avenger, snapping futilely at her muzzle, and a cry from the calf distracted the Jersey from a burning desire to complete the good work. When she abandoned him to run to her adopted son, the wolf made as if to flee; but he was hurt unto death, and sank down miserably under a mesquite, his glinting eyes searching the brush for foes. And through the long night he panted out his life, until at dawn the last spark flickered.

"It's a big ol' ki-yote"—John stirred the carcass with his boot—"A bull done ripped him."

"There aren't any bulls in the horse pasture," the boss retorted. "Only Molly."

By one impulse the outfit turned in their saddles to look for her. There stood the Jersey a hundred paces off, feeding tranquilly on mesquite pods. Toddling at her heels was a red, white-faced calf of sturdy frame and curly coat. Molly was behaving as if she had never done anything more exciting in her life than eat bran mash.

"Good ol' Molly," they called back, as they rode to the bunk-house for dinner. Molly, hearing the familiar name, lifted her head to regard the cavalcade soberly.

We went without milk cheerfully enough now and speculated at every meal as to the probable course Molly would pursue as the calf grew. There was little else

to talk about. Some vowed she would get over her hallucination quickly and abandon the youngster. Uncle Henry thought differently.

"She's a better mother to him than his own would have been. I never done saw a range cow look after her calf like Molly does that rascal. And ain't he fat!" he exclaimed.

The wagon boss conceived it to be in the line of his duty to brand the calf. A man was despatched to rope him. He returned presently to say that Molly would not permit him to get near. "She went on the peck and gored my horse." He exhibited a red wale along his mount's flank.

"You can't rope a calf away from its mother?" the boss exclaimed, dumbfounded. "Pshaw! You'd better go back to cotton-pickin', Cas."

He spurred away to bring in the culprit himself. What were cowboys coming to nowadays? He would show them! We mounted the corral fence the better to view proceedings, and waxed merry of spirit when Molly chased the boss six separate times. Molly would not be frightened or enticed away from her son, but turned to confront this unexpected enemy when he galloped at her. As for the calf, he glued himself to Molly's side and would not budge therefrom.

"Will we stretch her out, Pink?" we shouted.

"No," the boss roared.

He made another try and almost got his rope over the calf; but the Jersey went at him just then and gave him something else to do. So the boss ambled back, grinning sheepishly behind his sandy mustache.

"I reckon"—he cleared his throat—"I reckon that's one on me, boys. Let him go just now. We'll get him in the spring."

Uncle Henry was the only human being that the Jersey would permit within five yards of her baby. He entertained a sort of proprietary affection for the cow, and she reciprocated save when such cordial relationship clashed with her love for the adopted one. At such moments Uncle Henry was not to be considered, of course, and she was as ready to put him on the fence or speed him round a bush as any other member of the Tumbling K outfit.

Upon a day in September, he was on his way back from patching the line fence, when he espied Molly trotting distractedly about a narrow draw. She stopped to stare as he approached, then resumed her agitated run. From time to time she dashed to the brink of an arroyo to gaze down. Uncle Henry watched her, surmising from the stores of his experience what had happened.

"She'll jist about go on the prod and rip me if I try to git him out."

Molly took a few steps toward him, lowed pitifully, and returned to look down at the unfortunate calf. He advanced with caution, anticipating a rush; but Molly only lowed again and made way for him.

"I swan, she wants me to pull him out," said Uncle Henry in a reverent tone. "If that don't beat every—"

He alighted and walked to the arroyo's rim. Ten feet below, on the sandy bottom of a hole whose precipitous sides prevented him climbing out, lay the

white-face. Uncle Henry deftly dropped a noose over its head, and dragged the kicking youngster to safety. When he went to remove the rope, Molly suffered him to handle her son, though she glared in swift suspicion when Uncle Henry threw him to the ground and knelt on his body to free the loop from his neck.

"Boys," said the boss at supper one night, "Molly has got to go."

"Oh-ho! Ho, indeed!" Uncle Henry retorted with fine sarcasm. "Oh, yes," he added, unable to think of anything better to say.

The boss shook his head sadly over the clamor that ensued. He spoke of the matter as a man of feeling would acquaint a wife of her husband's taking-off; but it had to be. An order had come to deliver Molly to Bockus, the butcher at Blackwater.

What! Lose Molly? The boss was locoed, or worse. Had he by any chance secured a bottle, of whose whereabouts we were in ignorance? We would buy the cow ourselves first.

It was an off-day. The branding was done, and the Tumbling K outfit was awaiting the arrival of a purchase of four thousand steers from the South. Thus it came about that twelve of us rode into Blackwater, and Big John was spokesman. John was not much of a speaker, being given to profanity when a congestion of language threatened, but he had a grand theme, and talked about Molly in a way that made us cough.

"Bless my heart," cried the owner of the Tumbling K, when the nub of the matter was revealed. "Bless my heart!"

He gaped, then squeezed the mighty muscles of Big John's shoulder and laughed. All this fuss about a cow—one forlorn dun cow. The puncher grinned in his turn, shuffling his feet; for they knew and understood each other, these two, having been associated for eighteen years. That is why Bockus received the strange explanation he did when he called to protest against the delay in delivering Molly.

"It's just this way," the cattleman observed, slipping an elastic band about his tally-book. "If I let you have that cow for thirty, I lose precisely nine hundred and thirty-seven dollars. No; Molly stays."

"Nine hundred and—Why, man, you're crazy! How's that?"

"Ask those strikers of mine," came the answer, accompanied by a chuckle. "Great weather, isn't it? How is veal selling to-day?"

"But look a-here, Vance, let me have the calf, anyway. You owe me that much," the fat Bockus protested.

"All right. Send out for him, though," said the cattleman.

It happened that Bockus despatched a youth with a pair of mules hitched to a wagon, for the calf. He was a wily urchin, and a glance satisfied him that Molly's son could be taken from her only by craft. Accordingly he loafed all of one forenoon in the horse pasture with his wagon close at hand, and when the unsuspecting Jersey strayed off some hundreds of yards to secure better grazing, he made a sudden descent upon the white-face, locked his fingers about its nose

so that the calf could not utter a sound, threw and tied him, then heaved the outraged victim into the wagon and made off. Molly returned shortly, and missing the apple of her eye, set out on a search of the immediate vicinity. In the distance a wagon raised the dust of the Blackwater trail, going rapidly. The boy did not feel any too secure even with a fence between them, and lashed his mules, shrilling oaths at the gawky beasts.

The cow brought up at the fence, every sense on the alert to detect the presence of the calf in the fast-disappearing vehicle. Some subtle intuition told Molly he was there, and she retreated a few steps. Then, with a crash, she went through the four strands of wire, and, with a long gash in her left shoulder dripping blood, started after them at a swinging trot.

Brother Ducey was conducting an open-air revival service among the mining population of Blackwater. He was a powerful exhorter, was the brother, and, as most of his congregation were women, with a sprinkling of men who would presently go on the night shift six hundred feet into the bowels of the earth, his picture of a lurid, living perdition had them swaying and rocking on the benches. Their groans and lamentations rolled up the street.

"You're all a-going to hell!" he shouted. "Your feet are on the hot bricks now. Hell is—" And, again— "Hell—"

Brother Ducey broke off and glared wrathfully at an imp of a boy who drove a clanking wagon at top speed completely around the meeting-place, making for the slaughter-house beyond.

Then Molly arrived and took no such devious route. She went straight through the congregation, overturning the mourners' bench, and, unable to differentiate between friends and foes, headed for the rostrum. Brother Ducey waved his arms wildly and squalled "Shoo!" But, as Molly would not "shoo," he scaled a tree with the speed of a lizard, from which vantage-point he besought somebody to shoot the animal.

The Jersey did not pause to trifle with these hysterical worshipers. Her business was to find her baby, and she was almost up with him. In truth, the cow was an awesome sight as she charged anew after the wagon, the blood trailing from her shoulder, froth flaking her muzzle. Evidently the butcher's assistant found her so.

"I can't beat her to the gate!" he gasped, with a glance backward.

Whereupon he wheeled again and galloped his team in front of Bockus' store. There he abandoned them, springing through the door just as Molly swept down the road. The calf bawled a greeting and the Jersey began to circle the wagon, occasionally prodding at the mules just to be on the safe side in the event of their having had anything to do with this theft. They kicked at her in return, but did not offer to run away.

"Somebody rope her! Somebody rope her!" Bockus cried, dancing up and down in his shop. "No, don't shoot. Them locoed Tumbling K's will wipe out the town if you do."

Alas, there was nobody in Blackwater competent to do it. They were a peaceful, industrious mining folk, and a cow was a dubious thing to them, to be handled respectfully in the best of moods. And an enraged animal like Molly! Blackwater suspended business, shut up shop, and hid indoors or took refuge on the roof.

From time to time Molly abandoned the wagon temporarily to seek revenge where it might be given to her. In this way she made forays over half the town, and put Bill Terry, the postmaster, through a new plate-glass window that Tom Zeigler had imported at enormous expense. Tom swore that Vance would have to pay for it.

"Send for one of them fool cowboys!" Bockus screamed, after an hour of this.

His boy stole forth on an emaciated pony, and, eluding the cow by a burst of speed, brought Blackwater's prayerful appeal to the Tumbling K headquarters.

We rode in and roped Molly. Then certain of us did some trafficking with Bockus, Big John laying down the terms, with the result that the cord around the calf's legs was loosed and he was restored to his mother.

All the blind savagery was departed from Molly now. She sauntered over to a patch of grass and began to eat, with the calf at her heels, and the stare she turned on the citizens of Blackwater was noncommittal, even kindly.

Her departure took on something of the character of a pageant. Brother Ducey was induced to make an oration—or he could not be restrained—at any rate, Brother Ducey delivered a speech setting forth the extraordinary qualities of the cow. It was really a remarkable tribute, but all the notice Molly took was to flick one ear as she masticated a bunch of grass.

"And, brethern and sisters, what does this brave creature teach us? Hey?" he demanded, in conclusion.

"I dunno," mumbled a gentleman at whom he was staring, in a hopeless tone.

"I ask you-all ag'in, what she done taught us when she come a-seeking of her young in the very heart of our meetin'? Why, it's plain as the mole on Lon Rainey's face," cried Brother Ducey. "I forgive her a-chasing of me up that cottonwood,—it's a right good thing it was so handy,—and Miz Ducey kin sew the pants. But what did this noble animal show? Jist what I was praying of you-all to reveal, brethern and sisters. She showed love and devotion, and a generous sacrifice for somebody else besides her own self. That's what she done showed. You-all do likewise. Brother Perry will now pass the hat."

We took Molly back to the Tumbling K and turned her into the horse pasture. She came peaceably enough, six of us acting as escort of honor. She is there now, followed everywhere she goes by a husky red calf with a white face. Molly is firmly persuaded that he is her son and the pride of the range.

VII
THE BABY AND THE PUMA

The wagon jolted and whined over rough ground, winding among giant pines. Off to the right followed a tawny shape, flitting from blotch of shadow to screening bush, blending with the blurred outlines of tree and rock. The moon was hidden and Brother Schoonover drove with circumspection, lest his ark and all his possessions be wrecked in the wilderness.

"Doggone that moon. It ain't never working when you need it right bad," cried Brother Schoonover, cracking his whip. "That limb was like to blind me. Stead-ay, Glossy. Now, girl—now."

The puma crouched flat on hearing the voice. Then the wagon drew out of sight beyond a tope of trees and he sprang to the shelter of a mesquite. There he peered again at the nester's outfit going down the valley through the dark. It labored heavily; Brother Schoonover's tones reached him, raised in sharp rebuke of the mare; and presently he slunk in pursuit.

Don't imagine that Bowallopus—such was he dubbed from that night of adventure—was stalking prey. Nothing was farther removed from his purpose. He was dreadfully afraid, but curiosity overrode fear! Time and again he halted to abandon the game and go about the serious things of life, but could not. The wagon and its inmates had him fast.

Bowallopus was not even hungry, but he trailed along in rear. Perhaps there lurked a sneaking hope far back in that hard skull of his that something might transpire toward the further easement of his stomach, but it never for a moment dulled his caution.

The nester whistled at the mare and urged her forward, and twice the harsh scream of the brakes stayed Bowallopus rigid in his tracks. It should not be held against Brother Schoonover that he forgot on three occasions the Biblical limitations as regards profane words, because the night was deceptive and he was far from water. All he had on earth was with him there in the wagon, and he could descry no suitable place to camp. The family spring-bed was slung from ropes off the floor under the arched canvas top, and on it his wife slept. Curled warmly in the hollow of her arm was the baby. Sometimes the lurchings of their home rolled him quite away from her side, to return him on the rebound. He slept placidly, being a seasoned traveler.

Just before descending a gulch to cross a dried creek-bed, Brother Schoonover drove slap against a large rock, being now far off any trails. The wagon careened to the point of overturning and the baby slid from his mother's arms. Mrs. Schoonover had raised the canvas for purposes of ventilation—she suffered from an affection of the lungs—and he shot downward through the hole.

Being utterly helpless, he was unhurt. He hit the ground lightly and the wheel missed him a full half-inch.

Of course the shock woke the baby, but he was so astonished for a minute that he could only hold his breath ready for what might befall. When he did let out a yell, the wagon was thumping over the stones, with the driver standing up to beat the mare, and the couple in it could not have heard a steam calliope ten yards off.

Bowallopus vanished when the brown bundle dropped. A hundred paces and he halted in a thicket, arrested by a gurgling treble cry. The puma had seen children before, playing near the shack of a Mexican woodchopper, and he knew that note of distress. Very cautiously he crept back and began to circle.

> The felidae steal upon their prey noiselessly, treading on the soft elastic pads of the soles of the feet, without risk of betrayal from the rustle caused by non-retractile claws. When within a short distance, they crouch and spring, bounding many times their length upon their unsuspecting victims, which, borne down by the descending weight of the fierce foe, are at once fastened upon by the deadly grip of the well-armed jaw and by the united action of eighteen fully-extended piercing claws.

So says an old school book—or it may be an ancient natural history—and it is very illuminating and authoritative. But it happens that Bowallopus belonged to a class of felidae which does not prey upon man or the children of men, and he did none of these things. He waited until the groaning of the wagon died away, his head up, keen for sound or sight of danger. A puma relies more on his ears and eyes than on his nose to apprise him of enemy or victim. Then he went forward stealthily, moving in a wide semicircle.

The baby threshed about with his chubby arms and howled, whereat Bowallopus shrank back, hissing like an enraged gander, his tail lashing from side to side. Perhaps the threatening noise chilled the boy to silence; at any rate he broke off in his wail and lay quiet. The lion went nearer. He stood above the brown bundle, his muscles ready for combat or instant flight, and eyed it suspiciously. Much as a house cat would pick up a questionable bit of loot from the floor, Bowallopus seized the dress in his teeth and lifted the baby. Schoonover, Jr., waved a pudgy hand in lively terror and slapped the beast on the nose. Horribly surprised, Bowallopus dropped him and sprang back. Then he gathered himself to leap.

“Hi!” yelled Brother Schoonover.

The lion snarled as he turned to flee, but the nester had stopped in his run and was down on one knee. Bowallopus cleared the distance between him and some brush with a magnificent, sinuous jump, but as he went, a crashing sound smote his ears and sharp burning pains ripped along loins and back. Brother Schoonover had loaded his old smooth-bore with bird-shot that day to the end that he might

pot a dog-rabbit or a brace of wild doves for supper, and Bowallopus received the entire charge.

Without paying the slightest heed to the fleeing puma, the nester threw down his weapon and clasped his son. Instantly the baby shrieked his loudest, and "God, he ain't hurt a bit," cried Brother Schoonover in a great voice. He was shaking like a cottonwood leaf and his fright impelled the child to further outcry, so contagious is fear. And now Mrs. Schoonover came running, unable to remain longer in the wagon with bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh lying helpless somewhere in the dark along the trail—she could see him dead. She prayed audibly as she ran.

"Give him to me," she said, snatching the baby from his sire as though he had been much to blame.

"It weren't my fault, Sally Jo," he protested.

"You drive most awful reckless, Brother Schoonover," returned his wife, and hugged her son closer.

"He ain't hurt a mite. Just scared," she announced, after a wondrous inspection by touch of hand. "Something done tore his dress."

"A big ol' line had him, Sally Jo," the nester exclaimed. "I swan he was a monster. He went a-smashing up among the bushes and rocks."

"You didn't kill him? You done let him go and he most had eat our child?" shrilled Mrs. Schoonover.

"I reckon I done missed, Sally Jo. There, there, girl—it's all right now. You cain't hurt a line with birdshot. It won't even tickle him. This here shot would bounce off'n a kitten's hide, this here would."

They went back to the wagon, Mrs. Schoonover carrying the baby. The nester opined that he had had enough of driving for one night and they would camp here.

"It's hard on Glossy, but I'll go find her water first thing in the morning"—he poked a finger playfully among his son's ribs—"So that ol' line was like to git you, boy? Ol' Bowallopus was a-looking you over for a meal?"

Brother Schoonover hobbled the mare and they went to rest.

Bowallopus lay on a flat rock amid the lower ridges next day, sunning himself. He was not far from home and felt perfectly secure. In a gulch, washed out by floods numberless generations ago, was a large hole that led into a shallow cave. There was in front a sandstone ledge much to the beast's liking, and here the puma resided, as a stinging odor proclaimed.

He was very handsome, was Bowallopus. On his side, he measured eight feet ten inches from the tip of his nose to tip of tail, and his weight could not have been less than two hundred and forty pounds. Just now the superb richness of his reddish brown coat was marred by unsightly clots in the region of his rump, and he was constantly reminded thereof by a gnawing and itching of innumerable tiny spots. The irritation meant that the wounds were healing, but Bowallopus's

temper was very bad nevertheless. He licked his sores tenderly and settled himself to bask in the glare, lids drooping.

Five miles away, Brother Schoonover was digging with might and main into the side of a low hill, for he had found a spring bubbling from the rock and was now engaged in fashioning a dugout for a home.

Bowallopus went up the valley early that evening, being minded to kill. And before darkness closed down he arrived at a butte about three miles from his lair.

The huge cat crawled warily to a ledge and composed himself to wait. At the other side of the butte vague figures were moving, and Bowallopus could hear plainly the crisp munching of grass. These were the range mares wearing the Anvil brand, and he had taken toll of their young many times before. In the position he had selected they could not wind him; and along the base of the butte ran a trail down which the mares went to drink.

The sun sank back of the mountains. A big roan stallion which ruled the band gave over eating and lay down to roll. Invigorated by this exercise, he whinnied joyously and started for the pool. One mare, with her colt, followed at his heels. The others began to close in, slowly, then in groups, until they were moving in loose array towards water. The leader picked the butte trail, paused to pull a tempting tuft, and rounded a bend. Then he snorted an alarm and swerved outward.

Bowallopus let him go—he was too formidable for attack—but the mare and her colt were below him. On the stallion's warning he hurled himself downward, a yellow streak in the gloom, and bore the luckless colt to the ground. The crunch of its broken spine was drowned in the rumble of flying hoofs. Bowallopus gripped his prey by the neck and started homewards. Twice he was compelled to stop to obtain a fresh hold, but he dragged the carcass to the washout.

It happened that he made a foray early one evening to Wolf Creek in quest of a deer.

Sometimes, if he were exceedingly crafty, and wind and bough of tree were right, he could slay when a deer stole timidly to drink. Bowallopus went down the valley, alert and noiseless as was his wont. Suddenly he stiffened, the hairs on neck and back pringling.

Here was a fence. There could be no doubt of that. It was a very crude contrivance of one strand of wire, but he could see the posts standing in a ghostly, wavering line. Bowallopus walked along it, tensely expectant. In the distance a tiny light shone like a fallen star, and Bowallopus paused often to stare. This was the lantern in Brother Schoonover's house. He had fenced a quarter-section, or had enclosed it sufficiently to conform with the law, and now occupied a one-roomed dugout constructed of logs and earth. The Brother was fully determined to prove up on this claim, and already indulged in dreams of how the place would look when green under Kaffir corn, and a red-roofed house on the hill back of them. He had longed all his life for a house with a red roof, for it could be descried so far and looked so cheery.

The puma made the circuit of the place and watched and listened. Presently the light went out and all was still. He did not tarry long, being seized of a feeling of unrest. All heart for the hunt was gone from him and he struck northward, intent on putting distance between himself and this newest invader of his domain. While the dark was yet young, he scaled a pine tree—a tree bole was to the lion as greensward to the antelope—and sat comfortably on a thick limb. Once he tilted his nose and sent his screech vibrating to the topmost hills. It was a rending cry like the scream of a woman in mortal pain—no animal but a horse in its death agony can produce a sound more terrifying. After a while he descended and went northward once more; but there was no yowling from Bowallopus now. He had to find something to eat, and stealth alone could accomplish that end.

Yet he was back at the fence next night and on many nights succeeding. The dugout and its dwellers recurred again and again to tempt his curiosity, however far he raided. Bowallopus had no desire to forage there, but he simply could not keep away. And gradually the feeling of anxiety over their presence became a fixed dread, an obsession.

Brother Schoonover acquired a dog from a passing Mexican freighter and owned the mongrel for exactly seven days and six nights. Most of that period was spent by the canine back of the shack, tied to a post. Then he was released and ventured too far in the dusk, and Bowallopus gathered him in. When the nester found the remains he forgot all about the spirit of kindly charity for which he had been so strong in a two days' debate with Brother Ducey in Texas, and railed against all created things save those man had domesticated.

After this episode Bowallopus absented himself from the vicinity of the Schoonover home for a space. He went up into the mountains, where he contrived to get considerable veal and young beef. Winter was coming upon the land and a calf did not hug his mother's side so closely of a night, being grown and prideful.

In the sheen of a late November gloaming, he dropped from a jutting rock on the rim of The Hatter and padded along a burro trail. This was the way down the big mountain which the woodchoppers took; thence they drove their patient beasts of burden seventy long miles to town. Bowallopus slunk beside the well-worn path, one eye cocked for trouble. He was ferociously hungry; his stomach clamored for food; and at sight of a scurrying jackrabbit, a peculiar pulsating ache started back of his jowl.

Abruptly he drew back and flopped downward behind a thorny bush. Below, on the shoulder of The Hatter, clung a shack of boughs and sod. A man was even then hammering on its roof, while a woman passed him up bits of old tin. Half way between the puma and the hut, a small boy was toiling under a pile of fagots, tied over his back.

All this Bowallopus saw, but what interested him most was an object nearer at hand. Not twenty feet away a Mexican baby played in the dirt, crowing with delight over possession of a captive lizard. The child was perhaps two years old and much too naked for that time of year, but she was hearty and cared naught for

that. Her brother had brought her up the trail, leaving her to amuse herself as best she might whilst he gathered firewood. Naturally he forgot all about the toddler, the job not being to his liking.

Bowallopus listened and watched and waited. The baby rolled in the dust. The man and woman were busily engaged and the boy had been sent to fetch a bucket of water. A bull-bat flew over the puma's head. A hush crept over The Hatter.

It may be that he shut his eyes when he launched himself and struck, though she was so very, very little. There was no cry to betray—only the throaty snarls of the puma, now turned mankiller and more horribly afraid and fearfully daring than he had ever been in his life.

"A big ol' mountain line done eat a Mexican baby up yonder," Brother Schoonover reported to his wife.

"You keep buckshot in that gun, Brother Schoonover; do you hear? Oh, my li'l' lamb! What if that wicked lion had eat you up?" Her son did not appear at all disturbed by the speculation, but thumped on her breast with his fists.

There was a tremendous to-do up and down the country for eighty leagues. The manager of the Anvil offered a hundred dollars reward for the murderer's hide and the cowboys of the region blazed away at every bobcat that showed a hair within their line of vision. Even Richter's sheep herders bestirred themselves to set traps, but all to no avail. And the victim being a native child, the killing soon ceased to be a live topic.

The winter arrived in the wake of a norther. It blustered for a fortnight, then set in to be bitterly cold. Bowallopus fared well, and grew ever more malignant and furtive. One rib was cracked owing to misjudgment of distance, but accidents are likely to occur to the best of hunters. In diving from a tree for the back of a colt, he missed and came down close to the mare. In a flash he gathered himself and leaped again, but the mother's heels crashed full on his side and she went away at full speed, her son running a good second. On another occasion a young bull caught him with a headlong rush, unprepared on his kill, and would have made short work with so excellent a start, had not Bowallopus sought safety in the fleetness of his legs. He was a sapient animal and knew when he had enough.

Spring came at last, and Bowallopus had a fight. It was a family affair—his wife was not wholly blameless—and it is better for all concerned to say only that he came off the victor. A young puma had wandered into his ridges from the south and west, and he never went back. When a mountain lion does fight, it is worth going many miles to see.

Some years it will rain so hard in this part of the cow country that the nesters can but sit and watch their puny efforts at raising corn seep away; but the cattle rejoice exceedingly. It must be admitted, however, that this happens extremely seldom. Generally the land bakes under cloudless skies from February to June and the earth opens in cracks, as though gasping for breath.

Brother Schoonover broke his ground and planned to raise a bumper crop of corn, the signs being propitious. He made two trips to town, three days each way

by wagon, in order to make all ready. Bowallopus used often to see him toiling long after sunset; the puma spent many hours of the dark in sinister vigil beyond the fence, where he could see the light burning steadily in the dugout. Again he would prowl completely around the claim, keeping always off the wire, for that solitary strand was associated with man. Once he topped the hill back of the home in late afternoon, though it was seldom he went abroad in daylight, and hid behind a boulder. The Schoonover baby was crawling near the door, on hands and knees. Bowallopus never once removed his gaze from him in a full hour.

His own domestic affairs had progressed of late. Three sons had been born to his wife, who hid them on a day when she detected a certain glint in her lord's eyes. Bowallopus discovered their hiding-place and slew the cubs and ate them.

Rain should have fallen in June, but it did not. July passed, and the country quivered under a white ball that was the sun. The cattle gave up the hopeless fight. In the valley the air reeked of carcasses. Brother Schoonover finished a weary day in his waste fields in August, and said to his wife:

"Well, Sally Jo, I reckon we'll be moving agin."

"No, no; don't say so. Have we really got to go, Jed? We're always moving. This is a right cruel country, ain't it, Jed? Nowhere for a person to get along nice and quiet."

He made no reply, but picked his son from the floor and set him on his knee. Then he stared out over his bare acres and began to laugh.

"Don't," she entreated. "That's awful. It ain't so bad as that, Jed."

"We've done nothing but move for six years, Sally Jo. Or I reckon it's nearer eight, counting them over in the Nations? And I made certain this place would do and we'd have a home."

"Jed," she said, putting a hand awkwardly on his shoulder. "Can't we stay? Ain't there no way? Perhaps you could get a job somewhere—with the Anvil boys. Oh, anything, so's we don't have to move again. It'll be so soon now. I'll never live through it, I know."

He eyed her anxiously, dandling the baby the while.

"That's one of the reasons," he said. "You ought to be near where a doctor can be got handy, Sally Jo. No, we'll have to give this up. I'll take you back to my folks for the winter. We ought for to be there anyway. The ol' man, he's getting feeble, and first thing we know, he'll be leaving that farm to Sam instead of me, Sally Jo. Cheer up, girl; we'll find another place."

"All right," she returned hopelessly.

Two nights later they made camp among giant pines in the valley. The mare grazed near, hobbled to prevent her straying. Brother Schoonover lighted the fire and his wife cooked supper of bacon and bread and coffee. That must suffice until they reached town—and afterwards, more of the same diet, for the family treasury was down to eleven dollars.

They washed the pots and tin plates, and put the baby to bed in the wagon. Then the couple knelt down and Brother Schoonover offered up a prayer. He

always prayed to his Maker in a loud voice before retiring, invoking benedictions on the entire world and all the dwellers thereon. Only two exceptions did he ever make and he made those religiously—nothing could induce him to intercede for reigning monarchs, and he made special mention of the Republican party only that they might be excluded from the general benefits to accrue.

When they were rising to their feet, Sally Jo clutched her husband's arm.

"What's that, Jed? There—back of them mesquite."

"I cain't see nothing. Where?"

"Don't you see? Look along my finger. There, it's moving again. It looks like a dog, Jed."

Her husband saw now and sucked in his breath. Off to the right a tawny shape flitted from blotch of shadow to screening bush, blending with the blurred outline of tree and rock.

"Hush," he cautioned, tiptoeing to the wagon.

The reliable smooth-bore lay on the seat. Brother Schoonover slipped the shell out without a sound and put in another loaded with buckshot. That done, he lay down under the wagon and pretended to be asleep, but the gun protruded through the spokes of a wheel and the Brother occasionally sighted along the barrel. It was dark, but there was a pale glow from the stars, which would suffice for the work in hand.

"When he gits in line with that pine tree," he murmured.

A mountain lion was circling the camp. He had stumbled upon the nester's outfit by chance and had no business there, but curiosity beat down doubts and caution. He had glimpsed the baby near the fire and had cringed to earth momentarily. Now, he was the more eager. The sight of the couple on their knees and the man's harsh tones drove him back a few yards, and he had inadvertently moved from shadow while one might count three; but now all was quiet. He lay in the gloom surveying the camp. The mare cropped the grass noisily on the far side and the puma determined to take a closer look over there.

He emerged so eerily from nowhere that Brother Schoonover almost doubted his senses when he saw a head and neck between the sights in line with the tree. There was a flash and a terrific roar. Brother Schoonover was knocked backward by the kick of the gun, and his wife cried out. The baby awoke and squalled in affright.

The puma made a convulsive leap high into the air, hitting out blindly with his mighty paws. He came down with claws tearing into the earth, and whirled about and crouched to meet the unseen enemy. Mrs. Schoonover cowered in the wagon, covering the baby's head with her apron that he might not hear the uproar.

"I got you, hey?" Brother Schoonover shouted, furiously elated. "Well, here's another of the same kind."

He held the gun firmly against his shoulder and sent a charge straight between the eyes glaring at him like two living coals. The puma lurched forward and stretched out. He coughed once, his muscles jerking; then stiffened.

In the morning, a mountain lion lay on the edge of camp, his hide riddled with shot. Still, he was very handsome. He measured eight feet ten inches from the tip of his nose to tip of tail, and his weight could not have been less than two hundred and forty pounds.

While his mother prepared breakfast and his father watered and harnessed the mare, the Schoonover baby inspected the creature. He pulled its ears and kicked it with fine deliberation on the point of the nose.

"Do you aim to leave it here, Brother Schoonover?" his wife asked, when they were ready to set forward.

"Shore. The hide ain't no good at this season. And he's shot all to bits. Do you know, Sally Jo, I got a idea this is the same ol' mountain line what found our son? It's like he's the same one that eat the pore li'l' Mexican, too, don't you reckon? Ol' Bowallopus?"

"It wouldn't surprise me none," she answered, and shuddered. Her husband spurned the carcass with his boot.

They got under way. High up in the sky appeared two black specks. Brother Schoonover pointed to them.

"They'll rip him to pieces in no time. But we'll keep the claws and whiskers and the end of his tail for the baby to play with. Hey, Sally Jo?"

The specks grew larger. Soon they showed as birds, hovering on effortless wings above the camping ground. Brother Schoonover whacked the mare in high glee, and they set out again on their pilgrimage.

Before they had gone half a mile, the buzzards shot from the blue vault to earth.

VIII
THE MANKILLER

All this happened in the Bad Year, which was not so many months ago. The outfit issued daily from their camps—riding bog, skinning cattle and driving in the helpless to the home pastures to be fed on oil-cake and alfalfa. The cows were walking skeletons, wild of eye, ready to wheel in impotent anger on their rescuers; or sinking weakly to the ground at the least urging, never to rise again. Every creek was dry. Springs that were held eternal became slimy mudholes and a trap. A well-grown man could easily step across the San Pedro, oozing sluggishly past mauled carcasses.

Wherever one rode he found bones of hapless creatures, or starved cows stretched flat on their sides, waiting for death to end their sufferings. And the flies settled in sickening, heaving clusters. Each mire held its victim. Wobbly-legged calves wandered over the range, crying for mothers that could never come. And the sun blazed down out of a pale sky.

Even the saving mesquite in the draws and on the ridges was failing as sustenance; of grass there was none. The country lay bleak and gasping from Tombstone to the border. Not even a desert cow, accustomed to slake her water hunger by chewing cactus, could have long survived such blighting months. How we prayed for rain!

Manuel Salazar gave heed to the comet where he lay on his tarp, and crossed himself to avert the death-curse which was come upon the land. This weird luminary portended dire events and Manuel began, like a prudent man, to take thought of his religion. There might be nothing in religion, as Chico contended; but a man never knows, and it is the part of wisdom to be on the safe side.

Then, one evening, when the mountains were taking on their blue sheen and the beauty of these vast stretches smote one with a feeling akin to pain, Archie Smith rode up to headquarters and tossed a human hand on the porch.

"Found it in the far corner of the Zacaton Bottom," he said.

Jim Floyd recognized it at once by the triangular scar on the palm. The hand had been gnawed off cleanly at the wrist. Floyd wrapped the gruesome thing in a sack, wishful to give it decent interment when opportunity should offer.

"It's ol' man Greer's," he said. "You remember ol' man Greer? He used to dig postholes for the Lazy L. Where's the rest of him, Smith?"

"I aim to go and see. Ki-yotes eat him up, don't you reckon, Jim?"

"It sure looks that way. Pore ol' Greer—he could dig postholes right quick," the boss answered.

What Archie found of the digger of postholes established nothing of the manner of death. Both arms were gone and wolves had dragged the body; hence,

there was no real argument against the theory that old man Greer, who indulged a taste for *tequila*, had sustained a fall from his horse and had perished miserably within sight of the ranch. Yet Archie found this hard to believe. Wolves do not crush in the skull of a man, and it was the cowboy's conviction that anyone could fall off Hardtimes, the digger's mount, twice or thrice a day with no other injury than the blow to his pride.

Two days later Manuel Salazar brought in Greer's horse, shockingly gaunt and worried, and swelled as to the head. But what interested the outfit, when the saddle and bridle had been removed from Hardtimes, were long, parallel wales along neck and flank. Archie pronounced them to be the marks of a horse's teeth.

"That don't show anything. He wandered off and got into a fight with another horse," Floyd asserted. "Yes, sir; it's like that he done just that."

After which he dismissed the unfortunate Greer from his mind. The outfit shook its head and expressed sorrow for the lonely digger, but opined that his fate surely went to show how injurious steady application to *tequila* could be, more especially in cruel weather. The Mexicans, and the nesters in outlying parts, were not satisfied with the explanation put forward. They discussed the mystery during protracted pauses in work and in the dark of the night. When two men met on a trail and halted to pass the time of day, old man Greer was the subject of talk. There were rumors of a snug fortune the digger had amassed and buried—sixty-six thousand dollars in gold, it was. Joe Toole, who made a nice, comfortable living by systematic theft of calves from the cattle company, did not hesitate to hint that Greer had died a victim to its professional gun-fighter for reasons best known to the rich corporation; but, then, Joe was prejudiced. Soon the death grew to a murder, and no man not of white blood would ride the Zacaton Bottom after nightfall.

Tommy Floyd talked of these and other matters to his father as the boss was feeding Apache.

"Pshaw!" Floyd said contemptuously. "Don't you put no stock in them stories, Tommy, boy. Some people in this here country can smell a skunk when they sight a dead tree."

"But what do you guess killed him, Dad?"

"I don't know, son. I sure wish I did," was the troubled reply.

He punched Apache in the ribs to make him move over. The huge jack laid back his ears and his tail whisked threateningly, but he gave place with an awkward flop, and Floyd laughed. Others might fear Apache, but he knew there was not the least particle of viciousness lurking in that hammerlike head. Of all the ranch possessions—blooded horses, thoroughbred Herefords and cowponies—he liked the jack best. It pandered to his vanity that others should avoid the monster, or approach him in diffidence, with suspicion and anxiety; and, in truth, Apache's appearance was sufficiently appalling. Great as was his blue-gray bulk, it was dwarfed by the ponderous head; his knees were large and bulbous, and when he opened his mouth to bray, laying bare the powerful teeth, Apache was a

spectacle to scare the intrepid. Horses would run at sight of him; an entire pasture would squeal with fear and flee on his approach. Yet there was not a gentler animal to handle in the million acres of the company's range.

Toward the fag-end of a day Tommy was eating *panocha* on the steps of the porch, a favorite diversion with him. While removing some particles thereof from his cheek, in the region of his ear, he espied his father riding homeward from the Zacaton Bottom. Something in the way the boss swayed in the saddle brought Tommy's head up alertly. Floyd was clinging to the horn and the reins trailed on the ground. The boy threw his crust away and ran to meet him. A dozen yards from the house the horse stopped, as though he knew that the end of the journey had come for his master.

"That black devil, Tommy!" his father gasped, and lurched outward and to the ground.

Two of the boys came running and bore Floyd to his bed. That he had contrived to ride home filled them with wonder at his endurance and fortitude—nearly the whole of his right side was torn away, one arm swung limply, and there were ragged cuts on the head. Tommy hovered near, crying to him to open his eyes.

The boss never regained consciousness, and died at midnight.

A Mexican doctor was summoned from a border village—his American competitor was off in the Dragoons, assisting at an increase to the population. After a minute examination the man of medicine announced that five ribs were broken. It was his opinion that Señor Floyd had met with an accident, from the effects of which he had passed away. Nobody was inclined to dispute this finding.

"Something done tromped him," Dan Harkey asserted. "It's like one of them bulls got into the Bottom and went for him when he got down to drink."

"No," said Archie positively; "a bull couldn't have tore him up that way. It looks to me like teeth done that."

Then Tommy awoke from the benumbed state in which he had moved since the tragedy and repeated his father's dying words. They were very simple of interpretation. A black man had drifted into the country from eastern Texas, and lived, an outcast, on a place not fifteen miles from headquarters. It was well known that Floyd had had trouble with him, being possessed of an aggressive contempt for negroes, and twice had made threats to run the newcomer off.

"A nigrah could easy have beat him up thataway," Dan declared. "A nigrah could do most anything. Yes, sir; he beat him to death—that's what he done. It's like he used that old hoe of his'n."

Word of the killing flew over the land in the marvelous fashion news is carried in the cow-country. Within twelve hours men knew of it in the most remote cañons of the Huachucas, and a party of nine set forth from headquarters. But somebody had carried warning, for the lonely hut was untenanted and the door swung loose on its rawhide hinges.

They buried Floyd on top of a hill where the wind had a free sweep, and piled a few stones atop. Tommy fashioned a cross out of two rough boards; and the boss sleeps there to-day. The sheriff was deeply stirred and had notices posted throughout the territory.

$250 REWARD

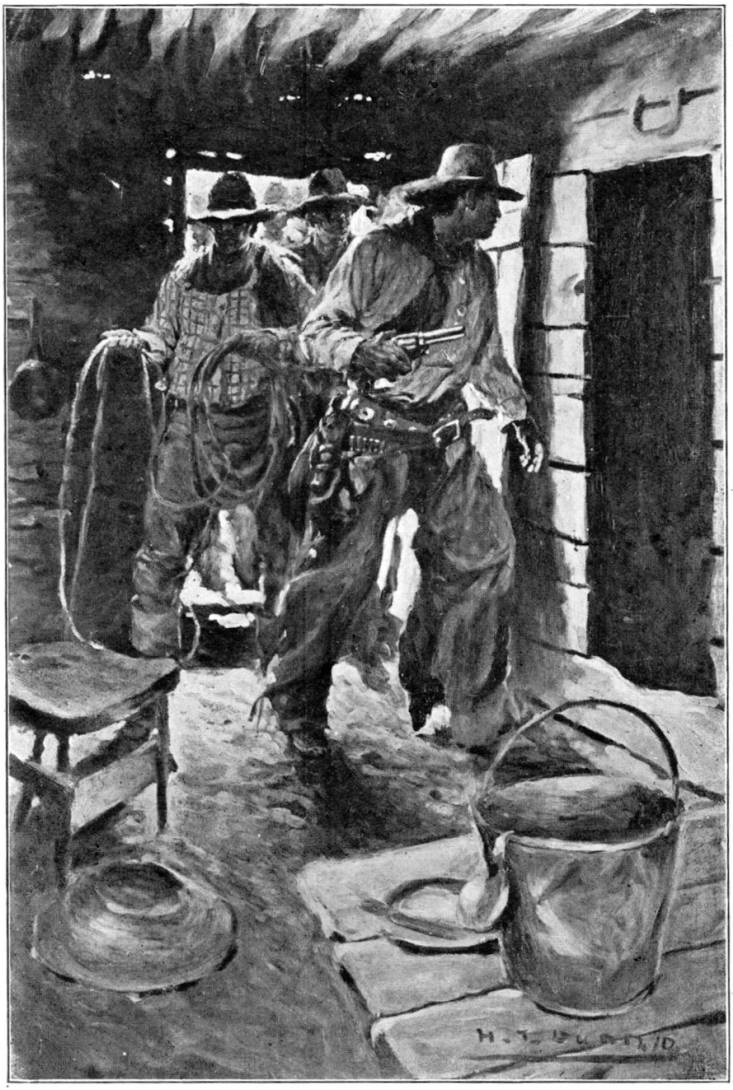
For the arrest, dead or alive, of the man who brutally murdered James Floyd, boss of the Tumbling K, sixteen miles from here, some time yesterday evening. This man is supposed to be a negro; about forty years of age; black; about six feet in height and weighing close to two hundred pounds. Has a razor scar above the left ear.

He has in his possession a .35 caliber autoloading rifle, No. 5096, and a .32-30 pistol. He may be riding a sorrel horse with a roached mane, branded 93 on left hip.

This crime is one of the most dastardly in the criminal annals of the Territory, and I earnestly urge every officer and other person receiving this circular to do everything in his power to effect the capture of this human fiend.

The above reward is only a preliminary reward, which may be increased later to one thousand dollars, when the governor, with whom the matter will be taken up, is heard from.

Wire me if any suspect is arrested, or if any information is obtained whatever concerning this negro, at my expense.



"*The lonely hut was untenanted*"

Two months passed, and nothing was heard or seen of the black man. The rains held off. North and east the ranges were deluged. A blight appeared to have fallen upon the Tumbling K. The land grew a shade grayer, the dust spurts whirled in gleeful, savage dance, and the cattle gave up the effort of living and lay down to die. All that the boys could do was to distribute salt and feed and work frantically to maintain the water supply. The emaciated brutes would eat of the oil-cake and hay, and sweat profusely on the nose, then stiffen out and expire with a sigh. Those that clung to life carried swollen under-jaws from the strain of tearing at the short grass.

“Poor bastard!” Archie grunted, tailing up a cow he had already helped to her feet three times. “It fair makes a man sick at the stummick to see ’em. Here, you doggone ol’ she-devil! Why don’t you try for to help yourself? Up you come! That’s it; try to hook me.”

It was no use. He shot her where she lay, and skinned her. Then, with the wet hide dragging at the end of a rope and her calf thrown over the fork of the saddle, he set out for headquarters. The orphan was a lusty youngster, and Archie made him many promises, accompanied by many strange oaths.

“Li’l’ dogy,” he said, “I’ll find a mammy for you to-night if I have to tie up the old milch cow. Do you think you can suck a milch cow, dogy? Sure you can. Man alive, feel of him kick! He’s a stout rascal. You’ll be a fine steer some day, dogy.”

On a black-dark night flames leaped above the rim of the mountain, and the Tumbling K were roused from bed to go forth with wet sacks, and rage in their hearts, for the scum of humanity who would fire a range. Twenty-six hours in the saddle and six more fighting the leaping, treacherous enemy; then two hours of sweating sleep on saddle-blankets beside their hobbled horses, and back a score of miles on desperate trails for fresh mounts—three separate times they beat out the blaze with sacks and back-firing. Once more, rising heavy-lidded and dripping from the stupor of utter exhaustion, they saw it licking hungrily through the Gap. No unlucky cigarette-stub thrown amid parched grass, no abandoned campfire, had done this. It was the deliberate work of an enemy.

Orders came to move the cattle down into the valley, lest they perish to the last horn, to the last torn hoof.

“It’ll take you three days to move ’em ten miles,” the manager said; “but never mind. Ease ’em. Ease ’em careful. The man who yells at a cow, or pushes her along, gets his time right there. The only real way to handle cattle is to let ’em do what they want and work ’em as you can. Think that over, boys.”

Manuel Salazar remembered this warning as he moved his tired horse at a snail’s pace behind a bunch of sick ones in the Zacaton Bottom. Manuel made twenty dollars a month with consummate ease, working only seven days in the week and only thirteen hours a day; and he would not throw his job away lightly. Therefore he permitted the gaunt cows to straggle as pleased them, humming to himself while they nibbled at tufts here and there. If one turned its head to look at him it fell from sheer weakness; therefore he held aloof. So the sad procession crept along.

It was in Manuel’s mind to save a mile by moving the bunch through the horse pasture. He put them through the gate with no trouble and was dreamily planning how he might steal back a hair rope Chico had stolen from him, when the quirt slipped out of his fingers. The vaquero got down to pick it from the ground.

“Hi! Hi!” he yelled in panic, and ducked just in time.

A black shape towered above him, striking with forefeet, reaching for the nimble Manuel with its teeth. Its mouth yawned agape; Salazar swore he could have rammed a lard bucket into it. The vaquero swerved from under the deadly hoofs and hit out blindly with the quirt. The stallion screamed his rage for the first time and lunged at him, head swinging low, the lips flicking back from the ferocious teeth. Manuel seized a stone, put to his hand by the blessed saints, and hurled it with precision, striking the horse on the nose. Midnight blared from pain and shook his royal mane in fury, but the shock stayed him and Salazar gained his horse.

"Now," he yelled, pulling his gun and maneuvering his mount that he might be ready to flee, "come on, you! You want to fight? That's music to me."

But Midnight did not want to fight. He had employed craft in stealing upon the man, and now he moved off sulkily, the whites of his eyes rolled back, a thin stream of blood trickling from his muzzle. Salazar longed to shoot holes through his shiny black hide, but contented himself with abuse instead. Was not the stallion worth five thousand dollars? Who was he—Manuel, a poor vaquero—to be considered in the same thought with so noble a beast?

"Tommy," he said as he unsaddled at headquarters, "I've found who killed your pore father. Yes, and old man Greer, too. Don't look so pale, Tommy."

Tommy stalked into the manager's office next forenoon, a very solemn and very determined, if a short and somewhat dirty figure. He was white under his freckles, and he talked through his teeth, jerkily, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on the manager's face.

"Midnight!" the manager exclaimed. "Nonsense! Why, he wouldn't harm a fly. That horse would never kill a man. He's worth five thousand dollars. Since we got him from Kentucky, two years ago, a woman could handle him, Tommy, boy. Salazar must have been teasing him. You'll have to look somewhere else, Tommy."

"You mean you ain't going to do nothing, Mr. Chalmers?" Tommy asked in a dry voice.

"Of course not. Midnight? Impossible. Why, that horse is worth five thousand dollars. He couldn't have done it."

Tommy went back home very slowly. That night he sat beside Manuel's candle and cleaned and oiled a sawed-off .25-30 rifle, inherited from the man who slept on the hill. Salazar smoked lazily and watched him through drooping lids. The boy finished his task and leaned forward on the stool, staring at the tiny flame, the weapon across his knees.

Of what avail to shoot Midnight? Of course it would be easy. Tommy had acquired some degree of skill by blowing the heads off chickens whenever any were desired for the dinner-table, and he felt assured that at two hundred yards he could pick off the stallion with one pressure of his finger. It would be mere child's work to distinguish Midnight from the mares, even on the murkiest night. But, after all—had the stallion done the killing? He had only Manuel's experience

and suspicions to go on. Moreover, if he took punishment into his own hands they might throw him into a jail. Midnight was worth five thousand dollars: assuredly Mr. Chalmers would cast Tommy out into the world to shift for himself. He put the rifle back under his bunk.

Very discreetly Tommy entered the horse pasture at sunup—he had been unable to sleep for scheming—and made his way down the mile-long fence toward the corner where the mares usually grazed at that hour. He had a six-shooter in his pocket for an emergency, but he hoped that he would not use it. Midnight sighted him and stood rigid a full minute, twenty paces in advance of the mares, gazing at the boy. He was a regal animal; Tommy thought he had never seen so glorious a horse. Then the stallion advanced with mincing steps, his head bobbing, the ears laid back. He sidled nearer, without haste, whinnying softly. The boy waited until he was a dozen feet distant, then threw himself flat and rolled under the barbed-wire fence. With a rending scream Midnight reared and plunged for him, his forefeet battering the ground where Tommy had fallen. He tore at the earth in discomfiture and wrath, and raved up and down on the other side of the fence, his nostrils flaring, his eyes a glare of demoniacal hate. Tommy surveyed him in deathly quiet.

The dark came warm, with puffs of hot wind, so that the Tumbling K men reviled the discomfort joyously, since it presaged rain. So long as the cold nights endured there could be no relief. Tommy slipped from the bunkhouse for a breath of air, though it was past bedtime and they had told him to turn in.

"Apache!" he called in a low tone, gliding into the stall.

The jack cocked his monstrous ears and listened, knowing well the voice. Tommy put a halter over his head and opened the stall door. It was gnawed and scarred by Apache's teeth and hoofs, and the boy wrenched it from the hinges and laid it aslant on the ground.

"You done bust your way out, Apache," he whispered. "You hear me, you ol' devil?"

He led him out into the corral and thence into the lane, talking softly as they went. Apache raised his nose and sniffed of the wind. When they reached the horse pasture the boy tore out the strands of wire at a spot near the corner of the fence.

"You was fond of my Dad, wasn't you, Apache?" Tommy quavered, working with nervous fingers to unbuckle the halter. "Then go to it."

The jack required no bidding. He wrenched free and stepped carefully over the wire into Midnight's domain. Apache never did anything in ill-judged haste. A blur, two hundred yards off, attracted him and he headed toward it eagerly. A moment, and he stopped; then went forward with caution.

Midnight had seen him coming. He trotted out from his band of mares and halted expectantly. Next instant he had recognized Apache for what he was, and shrilled a challenge. The jack brayed like a fiend and went forward slowly to meet him.

Now, a capable jack can whip any stallion that ever breathed. It is really an education to watch a jack like the mighty Apache fight. There exists the same difference between the methods of a stallion and a jack as between those of a nervous amateur boxer and the seasoned champion. A jack has no fear that anyone can detect, and is practically insensible to pain. One can see at a glance what an advantage this gives him over an opponent with any lingering predilection for longevity.

Also, a jack never fights for glory, never fights for the gallery. His sole object is to win. Wherefore, no idle and frivolous prancing about for him—no swift rush in, a blind striking with hoofs, a tearing with the teeth, then out again. A jack is not constructed that way. Fighting is a business—a serious, albeit a pleasurable, business; and he attends to that side of it with passionate singleness of purpose. He will watch his opportunity with the alert coolness of the professional, wasting not an ounce of energy. When the opening comes he goes to it like the stroke of a rattler, gets his grip and shuts his eyes and hangs on. There is considerable of the bulldog in a jack, and if he is to be gotten off at all, one must pry him off with a crowbar; in fact, next to a Shetland stallion, which is the darlingest little fighter that ever tore at an enemy's ribs, nothing more instructive can be witnessed than a full-sized jack in a fair field and no interruptions.

Apache had fought before—many, many times. Therefore he made for the foe with circumspection, his head jerking sideways, his tail tucked, ears laid flat on his neck, and his feet barely touching the ground, so lightly did his tense muscles carry him. One evil eye measured the giant horse with venomous composure.

Vastly different was Midnight's attack. The stallion had pluck to spare, but his temper was overhasty and his skill slight. Rage forever clouded his judgment in encounter. He had learned only one plan of battle and that was to rush and bear down his opponent. There was his rival. He would kill him. Midnight's was a simple creed.

His harsh scream rent the night silence, and the fight was on. Another horse would have circled so formidable an adversary in an endeavor to create an opening, but the black's temper was too imperious for delay. Straight was his rush. He bore down on the jack at the top of his speed, his wonderful, supple body a-quiver with eagerness and anger.

Then Apache did a remarkable thing—a thing almost human in ingenuity. What Apache didn't know about fighting is best forgotten. Swerving ever so slightly as the black came, he lunged to meet him, crashing shoulder to shoulder with all the strength of his tough sinews behind the impact. Hit sideways, taken off his balance, the force of Midnight's own charge contributed to his overthrow. Down he tumbled, scrambling with his feet as he fell. Before his body touched the ground, the jack whirled and lashed with both heels into his sides. With the same appalling speed, Apache drove for the throat of his prostrate enemy, secured his grip and shut his eyes, wrenching frenziedly from side to side and upward.

It is well not to tell further what Apache did to the mankiller. A jack has about as much sense of mercy as he has of fear, and he has never been taught any rules of warfare. When he gets his enemy where his enemy would like to get him, he does his utmost to obliterate him from the face of the earth. So it was that next day the Tumbling K men were barely able to recognize the Kentucky stallion in the torn, broken, black pulp they found in the horse pasture.

All night long Apache brayed and screeched. The noise of his triumph would set a soul to quaking. It pierced Manuel's dreams and he muttered in his sleep a prayer for protection from the Evil One. The jack pranced around and around his victim, and up and down the pasture, wild with the joy of battle, magnificent in his superb strength and the pride of victory. Toward dawn he abandoned the carcass and drove off the terror-stricken mares as the just spoils of the conqueror.

Big white clouds boiled up back of the mountains that afternoon, with a stiff wind from the southeast behind them; and at sunset the heavens opened of their blessed treasure. Manuel and Tommy lay in the bunkhouse listening to the thunder of rain on the sod roof. A burro came to the door and poked his patient head inside, seeking warmth and a friendly dry spot.

"Come in!" cried Manuel cheerily. "Take a chair. Tommy, give him your bed. Ain't that music, though? Hark! Oh, the cattle! Can't you see them soaking in it, boy?"

A yellow mongrel ousted the doubtful burro from the doorway and began nosing about for a place to rest his uneasy rump. The roof was leaking in strong, hearty streams, and Salazar sprawled on his back, letting the water run on to his chest. He was smiling placidly. Tommy snuggled into the blankets and pictured to himself a new land of much grass, and clear-eyed, contented cows and high-tailed calves.

"The curse is lifted," Manuel observed piously. "Yes, sir. The dear God sent the jack to kill that stallion. How else could it be? What do you think, Tommy, boy?"

"I reckon so," said Tommy.

IX
NEUTRIA

My name is Neutria. It means Beaver, and they gave it me because I tuck my tail. Nobody but Chappo ever called me a pretty horse, but Chappo once said in my hearing that my ugly roan hide covered more beauty than all the girls of Sonora possessed; and Chappo really knew everything worth knowing.

He was not my first master. There was another, to speak of whom is pain—a tall man, with only one eye, and a long, sandy mustache, stained of the tobacco he chewed perpetually. This person owned my mother and we lived in a small pasture among the lesser hills of the San José range. What he did to sustain life was never quite plain to us, because the land he held remained uncultivated and he spent much time by himself in his dirty shack, drinking from a demijohn which he kept hidden under some sacks in a corner. Oftentimes he would come from his drinking and drive us into a corral he had constructed of ocatilla. There he would beat my mother, and chase us about and about. I was very young then and he spared me. She was terribly afraid of him, and whenever he roared at her, even though it was in the sixty-acre field, where he could be evaded, she fell to trembling and would walk falteringly to the halter he held out.

There were nights when he forgot us entirely and left us in a small wooden pen, without anything to eat or drink. Occasionally a calf was dragged up and shoved in with us, and it would bawl for a day and a night for the mother from whose side it had been torn. After a while he would brand the little creature with his own mark of the inverted pitchfork. In this manner he gathered a respectable bunch of cattle, though I know of two cows only which he ever bought.

This is not the place to tell how he broke me to the saddle. He made me obey him, but he did not break my spirit, even though my sides were bloody from his savage anger. Although Sloan branded all else he could get, on me he never put the iron.

"What for you haven't got the Pitchfork on that li'l' horse, Sloan?" a cowboy asked him one day at Buzzard's Feast.

"He don't need it, this hoss don't. He's so doggone ornery nobody'd steal him," said my master.

Later I heard the other—a roaring, swaggering boy, with a kind eye and soothing hands—tell a friend that the only animal Sloan did not brand was the one which he owned legally.

Whenever the strength was in me, I fought him. He was a powerful man, with a punishing knee-grip and a poise that was almost unshakable, whatever his condition. But oppression begets cunning, and ride as he might, there were times when I could hurl him off. If a horse take thought when he starts his pitch, instead

of bucking in blind, raving anger, there is a chance that he will have the victory. I mastered a trick of rocketing straight into the air and whirling about back under the rider, before my feet touched the ground. This is difficult, but imparts a really terrific shock; even Sloan could not withstand it. Of course he would beat and spur me almost to death when he was able to walk again. If that method of fighting him failed, there was another, dangerous to horse and rider alike. I would rear high, with my head thrown back, whereupon Sloan would kick his feet free of the stirrups lest he be caught under me when I toppled. Then, before he could recover, my head would shoot down between my forelegs and once more I would go to pitching. It was very efficacious, this stratagem, and the pleasure of it was much enhanced if the ground was rocky or there were cactus and mesquite into which he could be flung.

In spite of the endless cruelty to which Sloan subjected me, he taught me much. Whatever else he might be, he was a cowman; but he knew and practiced a lot that no honest cowman should know. Sometimes he would reverse the shoes on my feet that the impress on the ground might appear to be a trail leading in the opposite direction to his line of travel. He rode much at night, so that I became expert at picking my way down rock-cluttered declivities in the blackest of the dark. Once when he fled before a body of horsemen which had discovered three calves hogtied in a box cañon, I managed to distance them. Thereupon he alighted and muffled my hoofs with gunny-sacks, that he might follow a stony creek-bed without sound.

"Damn, but you kin climb out when you want to," he said grudgingly, when we were safe at home.

Because I learned quickly and never forgot, Sloan held his hand from killing me in any of his outbursts of rage. At least a dozen times did he tie me fast to a snubbing-post and belabor my head and neck and ribs with a stout club, until I grew sick from pain and my glazing eyes warned him that he had touched the limit of my endurance. Then he would desist, for I was of value to him. These fits of frenzy were occasioned by the most trifling happenings. Perhaps when he came to drive in my mother and me, we did not move fast enough—she was growing very old—or she exhibited a too great fear. Then he would rope us and proceed to torture until his temper waned.

I come now to the time he killed my mother and I won a brief freedom. The weather had been murderously hot. From January to July no drop of rain fell and our hills grew sullenly naked and brown. Sloan's spring ceased its flow. He did not discover that for two days, being stupefied, and we were terribly wasted when he turned us out to find water for ourselves.

There was no grass. The earth showed gray as the rocks and as bare, and the rocks gave back the heat in shimmering waves. Where the ground had cracked under the sun, giant fissures gaped for the feet of the unwary. Five miles from home we saw some cows stumbling hopelessly out of a cañon and learned that there, too, the water had failed. Their dried skins drew tight over their bones and

the panic of desperation glared from their eyes. One prodded at my mother as we passed, refusing to give place as cattle do to horses, then sank weakly to the ground. Later she stretched out on her side, and we knew that the end was near.

Turkey buzzards strutted everywhere, gorged to apathy. They would cluster on a carcass, unwinking and insolent, and watch us nosing in quest of a bite to eat. Fires had ravaged the lower ridges, and trees and brush were stripped clean. To remain here meant slow death, and we fared higher.

We met with cattle on the upper slopes, spent and picking their path with care. A heifer slipped and rolled downward almost beneath our feet. There were many orphan calves, bawling impotently against echoing cañons' walls, and carrion-crows hung soundlessly in flocks, their shadows flitting swiftly over the earth in front of us. We came on the body of a horse at a dried waterhole. He had plunged from a ledge in his exhaustion, to die helplessly in sight of the place he sought. Crows had torn out the eyes.

But I would not let my mother become disheartened. All these creatures were moving downward, and some propelling force has always driven me upward in time of stress. So I led her far among the peaks. It was desolate enough, of a certainty—so barren that my poor, tottering mother wanted to go back, though she knew well that the homeward stretch was beyond her strength—but I urged her forward.

We came at last to four peaks, away up in those mountains, and threading a defile, emerged into a cuplike draw among them; and there were mesquite in profusion and many green things. And more precious than all, a tiny spring bubbled behind a boulder at the north end. It would not water more than four head, but it sufficed, and we tarried on its edge all of one evening.

For forty days we stayed in our random home and gained in flesh and in strength. Then, one hot, sticky evening, great banks of mist surged upward and massed around our beloved peaks, and the rain broke from the press and drenched the hills. We turned our backs to the driving torrents, clamped our tails and let the cool water soak into our crackling hides.

What a difference in the land when the sun showed again, clear and warm! It was as a dead thing come to life. Tender shoots thrust their heads above the hard ground; the trees stopped their complaints, and nodded and rustled jauntily to a southwest breeze, for the sap stirred within them and soon they would put forth new leaves. A ground squirrel emerged from a hole, blinked impudently at us, and then dashed off across the rocks, reckless from sheer joy of being alive. We sniffed of the good, fresh wind and headed for the lower reaches, for there would be rare grazing now that the rains had washed the valleys. Thus we came to live close to our old home.

Sloan came riding on an October day.

"Crackee, but you two is fat," he shouted gleefully.

He had a new horse, a high, long-backed sorrel with the legs of a racer. I knew the breed,—a steel-dust valley horse, built for speed and helpless as a

wagon among our crags. Sloan drove us in and got down to put a halter on the mare.

My mother had never concealed her dread of him. It moved him always to an excess of fury, but she had learned terror in youth and it held her through all her years. Now she snorted, her limbs a-tremble, and drew back. The sweat stood out on her muzzle and dyed her neck.

"What," Sloan bellowed, "you ol' she-devil, you ain't learned to quit dodging yet? Then, by God, I'll learn you."

He swung a breast-yoke with all his force, smashing my mother squarely between the ears. The mare gave a moan, a long sigh, and sank slowly to the ground, the eyelids flickering. I saw her legs stiffen.

He kicked her where she lay and started for me, but I rushed by him, lashing with my shoeless heels as I went. They caught him full in the chest. I can hear yet the grunt he gave at the impact; then over he went.

He had put up only two bars of the corral gate. I took them with a rush and headed for the high hills. Sloan scrambled to his feet, coughing and swearing, and ran to the sorrel. In the saddle, he fired twice, but though the bullets slashed the ground ahead of me, I never wavered. He let out a shout and spurred after, making ready his rope as he came. It made my blood dance to see these futile efforts. For a valley horse is to a mountain horse as a house kitten is to a wild-cat. It is true that an exceptional valley horse, if turned loose in the hills young enough, may in three years' time develop into a fair mountain pony—with good schooling, that is. Even then he will lack something of our depth of chest and perfection of feet. But put a valley horse, green, in the mountains, and he will stand and shiver and sweat, not daring to venture. So I was elated when Sloan came pounding behind, knowing full well that the sorrel could never follow where I would lead.

The chase led up a rocky cañon filled with post-oak, along a mesa, through a gap, skirted a summit, and dipped downward into another cañon. Now we were straightened out for my familiar peaks. Suddenly I became aware that the pursuers had dropped back, and, easing in my run, I saw Sloan beating the sorrel over the head with his rope. He was ever thus, blaming his mount on the least excuse.

Two days and a night I fled. Of course it was necessary to pause for a few hours to eat grass and to drink, but fear of Sloan kept me moving. I struck south, then westward. Fences delayed my flight considerably in the valleys, but I had had experience with them, and roamed along until I discovered a spot where the wires were partially down and could be jumped, or until I found a watergap. I suppose I covered one hundred and sixty miles, but not all in a straight line by any means, and at sundown of the second day I was in a goodly range of hills. Here I rested.

A band of bronchos wandered into a draw where I fed that night, and I joined them. We roved where we willed, and the rain fell abundantly and the grass was

green and plentiful.

Why is it one can never be entirely happy? If one be breast-high in succulent zacaton, a fly will mar the feast. I have observed a mare in a field of alfalfa, neglecting what she could have without effort, to stretch unavailingly through the fence after a tuft of tough Johnson-grass; in fact, I have done that myself. Here was I with millions of virgin acres in which to wander; all I could eat; agreeable companions. Yet I pined to hear a man's voice. That sounds inexplicable, but it is the truth. Even Sloan's harsh bass tones would have been welcome, after six months of freedom. Man's companionship had been bred in me, and though his presence might bring terror, yet I longed for it, and the master-grip of his hand.

Winter passed and the long, dry season opened in a blaze of heat. A horseman bore down on us one day, from the south, and we massed swiftly for escape. Within a mile, two more riders appeared, and my companions increased their pace to a gallop. Only I, of all the band, knew what this meant. The others were bronchos who had never felt the rope and they ran blindly, ignorant of the cordon closing in from every direction. But I was cleverer. Suddenly darting from the herd, I sped within sixty feet of a cowboy—not close enough for his loop—and gained the mouth of a cañon. Up this I spurted, the rider in hot chase.

How often are pride and conceit confounded. The cañon narrowed—narrowed to sheer walls fifty feet apart—and there ahead of me, blocking my path, was a cliff of red-streaked rock. Water trickled down its face. That much I perceived, and then it rushed upon me that the race was run. I turned short about and tried to go by him as I had passed Sloan, but he threw his rope and caught me cleanly. Sloan had taught me the lesson of the rope—taught it in bitter vindictiveness—and I followed my captor without struggle.

"Done got a maverick," he announced, when he rejoined his comrades.

"He's been rode before, Chappo," another said. "Look at the way he follows. And there's been a cinch sore on his left side. Look."

"I cain't see it," Chappo said obstinately. "He's a maverick, I'm a-telling you. And he's my horse, because I done found him."

When he had me in the corral at headquarters, Chappo walked fearlessly to my head. Of course I began to quiver, for well I knew what this portended.

"You pore son-of-a-gun," he muttered, and stopped. "So he done beat you over the haid?"

He scratched my ears and rubbed my head lightly between the eyes. All the while, he talked to me in a low tone, with a sort of laugh behind it. Chappo was a small man, no higher than a fence post, but there was something in his touch that made me fear and yet want him to keep on rubbing. When he attempted to put the bridle on, I stood rigid, expectant. Surely the beating would come now. It did not. Instead, he said, "You ol' rascal, you," and jabbed me in the ribs with his thumb. Now, here is a curious thing. A man can jab you with his thumb so that it hurts, and he can jab you in the same place with the same force and it will only tickle

pleasantly. Everything depends on the spirit in which it is done. Chappo's thumb was very agreeable and I laid back my ears and pretended to nip at him.

"I'll top you," he said, "and then I'll put the Box C on you."

It amused me vastly to hear this mite of a man tell so confidently how he would ride me, when even the terrible Sloan could not keep the saddle at times. Just to scare him, I bowed my back when he slapped the blanket on. Then I rolled my eyes backward to note the effect. He was grinning, actually grinning—and his hat did not show above my withers. Next, he threw on the saddle, and the curve in my spine was unmistakable; but he merely hummed a tune and began to cinch me tightly, with careless freedom, just as if we had been friends all our years. It surprised me so much that I suffered his impertinence in quiet.

There were some cowboys on the fence, watching.

"Want me to ear him, Chappo?" one asked.

"No-oo. Me and him's friends already. Ain't we?" He made me walk a few steps, still grinning as he inspected the significant upward tilt of the saddle. "Look at his tail, boys. We'll shore have to call him Beaver."

"Call him Neutria," one cried.

My new master nodded and then stood directly in front. I tried to look away, but his eyes drew mine in spite of me, and when he backed off, I followed, though he exerted no pressure on the bit. There was nothing hard and there was nothing mean in those eyes; a devil lurked in Sloan's. Chappo's were clear and very good-natured, yet oddly compelling.

"That's all right," he said. "Now we know each other, me and you, Neutria."

He pulled my head around by the cheek of the bridle and next moment was atop. I remained motionless. The grip of his knees was curiously at variance with his bulk: somehow that grip raised a doubt in my mind that I could shed him.

Next second I was pitching, more from force of habit than from any wish to hurt this youth. What was the matter? No spurs gored my sides; I felt no sting of quirt. Instead, Chappo merely swayed in the saddle and he whooped me on to further effort, hitting my shoulders gleefully with his hat. This was too much—a wight of one hundred and twenty pounds to make game of me! I paused for breath and to gather strength.

"Hey, you ain't quitting?" he inquired. "Wipe her up, li'l' feller. Fly at it."

After that it was imperative I should do my best—Sloan could never have kept his seat when I let myself loose to his challenge. Every trick his brutality had taught me I employed, and only once did Chappo waver. He was riding on his spurs now, yet he had to grab desperately for the horn; but he righted himself with a laugh and renewed his yelling. At last I was compelled to stop.

"You're shore a dandy, Neutria," he panted. "Let's call it an even break."

That suited me admirably. It would have been a shame to injure the boy.

I never pitched with Chappo again. He was always kind to me, save once only. That was when he placed the Box C on my left hip with a red-hot iron. It

pained horribly, but I realized that all horses had to go through this ordeal and that Chappo did not mean to be brutal.

What times we had that summer and autumn! It was a year of frequent rains, and horses and cattle were sleek and fat and rollicking. Chappo and I would go out from camp twice each week and prowl the mountains the livelong day. Perhaps a long-eared calf would be roused up—he is one that has escaped branding—and my master would settle himself and take down his rope even as I flashed in pursuit, over rocks and brush, down cañons' sides, up cliffs, shooting through defiles. It is something to be a mountain horse, though it is I who say it; no other horse in the world could have carried Chappo at full speed where I carried him after mavericks. And he never faltered.

"Wherever you put your doggone feet is good enough for me, Neutria," he said once, at the bottom of a perilous descent.

Chappo was an excellent cowhand, more skilled than Sloan. He would seldom miss a throw in the wildest country, and when he had the calf roped, down he would jump and hogtie it before one could count thirty. Then I would fall to grazing while he built a fire, heated his running-iron and put the company brand on the captive. There were days when we caught four or five in this manner. It was glorious sport.

And then, of course, there was the fall roundup, when all our riders—twenty-two in number—swept the range in daily drives. We collected more than nineteen thousand head of cattle; some of the long-horned steers Chappo and I brought in had not set eyes on a man since they were suckling calves. It was good to chase these outlaws, they being stout and hearty on the rope, and it nerved me to see Chappo's fearlessness and confidence. He would tie to one of the big brutes without hesitation, whatever the nature of the ground, trusting implicitly to me to throw it. If a steer had dragged me down, it would have meant maiming for Chappo and me, so I was ever on my guard. I always contrived to throw them, even though some weighed two hundred pounds heavier than I.

I was Chappo's top horse—that is to say, his best saddler. Consequently it was me he rode to town on the rare occasions he could get there. I took the best of care of him.

On one occasion when he had spent an entire morning in town visiting various places of call with friends, Chappo bet fifty dollars I could throw an enormous bull they had in a feeding-pen. It was an intensely foolish wager; besides, he hadn't the money, and was earning only forty dollars a month. The sight of this bull—a Hereford—appalled me for a moment, for he was a monstrous fellow, blocky and solid; but Chappo patted my neck and whispered to me, and when he let his noose fly, I darted off with taut muscles, unafraid, yet ready for the tremendous jar that would come with the tightened rope. What a giant he was! When he lunged, the girth nearly cut me in two, and for the fraction of a second I thought my feet would fly from under me and that Chappo would be ignominiously prostrated in the dust. Then, at the critical moment, we gave him

slack, let him run to the end of it, wheeled like a striking snake, and with a cunning heave, flopped him ponderously on the ground. It broke his neck and they put Chappo in the calaboose. The boss got him out only after much ceremony and considerable loose talk and the payment of moneys.

Chappo dearly loved to go to town. He was always in excellent humor on these trips and would attempt feats that reflected more credit on his stoutness of heart than on his head. On a night, he tried to make me climb the steps of the hotel veranda and enter the bar. Had it been anyone but Chappo, I would have pitched him off without more ado, such was the childishness of this display. But because it was Chappo and I could feel from his legs that all was not right with him, I meekly ascended the steps and walked into the bar, taking heed where I placed my feet. A crowd of loafers cheered me and filled a large bowl, that I might drink, but Chappo would have none of this.

He sang much on the road back to camp. It was dark as a panther's lair. Chappo would hum and drone a few lines, then relapse into abrupt silences. I kept every sense alert, for his safety depended on me. Once, when he sagged in the saddle, I stopped until he got settled again. After that he rode with firmer seat, but his good humor seemed to have vanished. We reached a point where a cow trail, a mere thread so faint that it was barely discernible, led off from the main trail.

"Here, you," Chappo said, jerking me about, "who's running this show? Hey? Doggone your fat haid. This is a cut-off."

The trail was new to me, but I took it obediently. It led in the general direction of camp, but became vaguer as we proceeded. Finally it merged into the brown of a hillside.

"Hell!" Chappo exclaimed. "Where's that cussed trail gone to, Neutria? Well, let's hit across country, boy. What's twenty miles between two of us?"

We struck over a hill at a trot. Suddenly my heart gave a leap and every hair on my body seemed to tingle. Just in time I sat back on my haunches. Chappo swore and struck me sharply with the spur.

"What's the matter with you, you ol' rascal? I swan. . . . Seen a skunk?" he cried.

I began to shiver, and that sobered him. It was too dark to make out anything and he lighted a match. A gulf yawned beneath us, where the hill dropped away to a jumble of rocks. Chappo sucked in his breath and let the match fall. Then he turned me around.

"Neutria," was all he said, but let his hand rest for a long minute on my withers.

We were following the Gap trail on a day in late autumn when, in rounding a bend, we almost collided with a rider.

"Hel-lo," came in surprised accents. It was Sloan, on his sorrel.

"Howdy," Chappo said. "Nice and cool, ain't it?"

"Whose hoss is that?"

“He’s my horse. Finest cowhorse in these here mountains.” Chappo would often boast thus. It was unwise, but it made me very proud nevertheless.

“Huh-huh. And who might you be?”

“The Emp’ror of Rooshia.”

“Sure. You might be, but you ain’t. You got papers for this here hoss?”

“No, I ain’t got no papers for him. Don’t you see the Box C on him? That’s papers enough.” Chappo was careless and bold, but I knew he was anxious.

“You got to have papers in Mexico. That’s my hoss, son.”

“Yes?” said Chappo. “Where’s your papers, then?”

“I kin prove he’s mine,” Sloan said evenly. “I’ll be obliged for that hoss, pardner.”

My master thought a moment. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Sloan.”

“Yes? I’ve heard of you, Sloan. The company knows you, too. There ain’t no use in gitting mad. Let’s talk business.”

“All right, son. But that’s my hoss and I’ll be obliged for him.”

“Sloan, I’m going to tell you about Neutria here. I caught him with a bunch of bronchos. He was a maverick, so I done put my brand on him. What’ll you take for him?”

“I won’t take nothing.” I recognized that surly bass growl. He had been drinking.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do. To save trouble, I’ll buy him off’n you. Me and him is friends. So I’ll give you seventy-five dollars gold for this here li’l’ horse. That’s a good price, Sloan. I’ll raise the money in a week.”

“No, you won’t, young feller. You won’t give me seventy-five dollars, nor you won’t give me seventy-five thousand dollars. That’s my hoss. I won’t sell him. Him and me’s got a li’l’ account to square up, and—”

“Then it’s up to you to prove he’s yours,” Chappo answered. I scarcely knew his voice, it had gone so hard and cold.

“You don’t believe this hoss is mine?”

“Not me. You rustle calves, Sloan, and—”

“I love a thief,” Sloan said, “but I hate a liar.”

What happened then was beyond my powers of perception. I felt Chappo reach to his hip. There was a flash that singed my face, and Sloan sat his sorrel with a smoking six-shooter in his hand. My master tumbled sideways, twisting the saddle as he fell, and struck the ground on his shoulders.

“Don’t shoot, Sloan,” he begged, “I ain’t got my gun. You’ve done for me anyway. Don’t.”

But Sloan slued his horse that he might obtain a clear shot, and pulled twice on him with deliberate aim.

“Now,” he cried clutching my reins, “now I’ll settle with you.”

I reared straight up and plunged forward at him. The headstall snapped and the bit dropped from my mouth. With the smack of my shod hoofs on his flank,

the sorrel began to pitch, and Sloan dropped his gun.

With that I ran—ran as I had never run before in my life. When utterly worn out, I slowed to a walk and endeavored to rid myself of the saddle, which galled me badly. For a long time it resisted every effort, but I did not despair. Chappo's fall had turned it underneath my belly and there it was in reach of my hind feet. Before dawn I had kicked and torn the thing from my sides, and was free and unencumbered.

Why tell of my frantic wanderings during the next two days? The spot where my master had fallen drew me irresistibly. I could not leave; but I feared Sloan more than ever and spent the hours in cautious circlings of the vicinity of the Gap. At last I could bear it no longer.

The moon was shining as I lightly trod the Gap trail. Going warily as a coyote, I was brought to a standstill by a strong taint. I sniffed and was fearfully expectant, but still advanced. Something was swinging from the lowest limb of an elm. A rope creaked mournfully to the swinging. I snorted and made a circuit of the thing, approaching gingerly. A gust of wind turned the object, so that the moon lighted its every line.

It was Sloan.

A hundred yards beyond, I came on a small pile of rocks. They had laid Chappo where he fell. Above the rocks was a rude cross, fashioned of mesquite boughs.

I am a free rover now. Sometimes I run with the wild horses. Again I go off for solitary pilgrimages into the mountain fastnesses.

Often I steal back at night to the Gap trail. And there, beside the pile of stones and the cross, I whinny—whinny again. But Chappo never answers.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Archaic spellings and hyphenation have been retained. Inconsistencies in hyphenation have been retained. Obvious typesetting errors have been corrected without note.

[The end of *The Untamed* by George Pattullo]