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Alexander Fraser**

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BULLDOG CARNEY

By W. A. Fraser

1919

BULLDOG CARNEY

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I.—BULLDOG CARNEY

I've thought it over many ways and I'm going to tell this story as it happened, for I believe the reader will feel he is getting a true picture of things as they were but will not be again. A little padding up of the love interest, a little spilling of blood, would, perhaps, make it stronger technically, but would it lessen his faith that the curious thing happened? It's beyond me to know—I write it as it was.

To begin at the beginning, Cameron was peeved. He was rather a diffident chap, never merging harmoniously into the western atmosphere; what saved him from rude knocks was the fact that he was lean of speech. He stood on the board sidewalk in front of the Alberta Hotel and gazed dejectedly across a trench of black mud that represented the main street. He hated the sight of squalid, ramshackle Edmonton, but still more did he dislike the turmoil that was within the hotel.

A lean-faced man, with small piercing gray eyes, had ridden his buckskin cayuse into the bar and was buying. Nagel's furtrading men, topping off their spree in town before the long trip to Great Slave Lake, were enthusiastically, vociferously naming their tippie. A freighter, Billy the Piper, was playing the "Arkansaw Traveller" on a tin whistle.

When the gray-eyed man on the buckskin pushed his way into the bar, the whistle had almost clattered to the floor from the piper's hand; then he gasped, so low that no one heard him, "By cripes! Bulldog Carney!" There was apprehension trembling in his hushed voice. Well he knew that if he had clarioned the name something would have happened Billy the Piper. A quick furtive look darting over the faces of his companions told him that no one else had recognized the horseman.

Outside, Cameron, irritated by the rasping tin whistle groaned, "My God! a land of bums!" Three days he had waited to pick up a man to replace a member of his gang down at Fort Victor who had taken a sudden chill through intercepting a plug of cold lead.

Diagonally across the lane of ooze two men waded and clambered to the board sidewalk just beside Cameron to stamp the muck from their boots. One of the two, Cayuse Gray, spoke:

"This feller'll pull his freight with you, boss, if terms is right; he's a hell of a worker."

Half turning, Cameron's Scotch eyes took keen cognizance of the "feller": a shudder twitched his shoulders. He had never seen a more wolfish face set atop a man's neck. It was a sinister face; not the thin, vulpine sneak visage of a thief, but lowering; black sullen eyes peered boldly up from under shaggy brows that almost met a mop of black hair, the forehead was so low. It was a hungry face, as if its owner had a standing account against the world. But Cameron wanted a strong worker, and his business instinct found strength and endurance in that heavy-shouldered frame, and strong, wide-set legs.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Jack Wolf," the man answered.

The questioner shivered; it was as if the speaker had named the thought that was in his mind.

Cayuse Gray tongued a chew of tobacco into his cheek, spat, and added, "Jack the Wolf is what he gets most oftenest."

"From damn broncho-headed fools," Wolf retorted angrily.

At that instant a strangling Salvation Army band tramped around the corner into Jasper Avenue, and, forming a circle, cut loose with brass and tambourine. As the wail from the instruments went up the men in the bar, led by Billy the Piper, swarmed out.

A half-breed roared out a profane parody on the Salvation hymn:—

"There are flies on you, and there're flies on
me,
But there ain't no flies on Je-e-e-sus."

This crude humor appealed to the men who had issued from the bar; they shouted in delight.

A girl who had started forward with her tambourine to collect stood aghast at the profanity, her blue eyes wide in horror.

The breed broke into a drunken laugh: "That's damn fine new songs for de Army bums, Miss," he jeered.

The buckskin cayuse, whose mouse-colored muzzle had been sticking through the door, now pushed to the sidewalk, and his rider, stooping his lithe figure, took the right ear of the breed in lean bony fingers with a grip that suggested he was squeezing a lemon. "You dirty swine!" he snarled; "you're insulting the two greatest things on earth—God and a woman. Apologize, you hound!"

Probably the breed would have capitulated readily, but his river-mates' ears were not in a death grip, and they were bellicose with bad liquor. There was an angry yell of defiance; events moved with alacrity. Profanity, the passionate profanity of anger, smote the air; a beer bottle hurtled through the open door, missed its mark,—the man on the buckskin,—but, end on, found a bull's-eye between the Wolf's shoulder blades, and that gentleman dove parabolically into the black mud of Jasper Avenue.

A silence smote the Salvation Army band. Like the Arab it folded its instruments and stole away.

A Mounted Policeman, attracted by the clamour, reined his horse to the sidewalk to quiet with a few words of admonition this bar-room row. He slipped from the saddle; but at the second step forward he checked as the thin face of the horseman turned and the steel-gray eyes met his own. "Get down off that cayuse, Bulldog Carney,—I want you!" he commanded in sharp clicking tones.

Happenings followed this. There was the bark of a 6-gun, a flash, the Policeman's horse jerked his head

spasmodically, a little jet of red spurted from his forehead, and he collapsed, his knees burrowing into the black mud and as the buckskin cleared the sidewalk in a leap, the half-breed, two steel-like fingers in his shirt band, was swung behind the rider.

With a spring like a panther the policeman reached his fallen horse, but as he swung his gun from its holster he held it poised silent; to shoot was to kill the breed.

Fifty yards down the street Carney dumped his burden into a deep puddle, and with a ringing cry of defiance sped away. Half-a-dozen guns were out and barking vainly after the escaping man.

Carney cut down the bush-road that wound its sinuous way to the river flat, some two hundred feet below the town level. The ferry, swinging from the steel hawser, that stretched across the river, was snuggling the bank.

"Some luck," the rider of the buckskin chuckled. To the ferryman he said in a crisp voice: "Cut her out; I'm in a hurry!"

The ferryman grinned. "For one passenger, eh? Might you happen to be the Gov'nor General, by any chanct?"

Carney's handy gun held its ominous eye on the boatman, and its owner answered, "I happen to be a man in a hell of a hurry. If you want to travel with me get busy."

The thin lips of the speaker had puckered till they resembled a slit in a dried orange. The small gray eyes were barely discernible between the halfclosed lids; there was something devilish compelling in that lean parchment face; it told of demoniac concentration in the brain behind.

The ferryman knew. With a pole he swung the stern of the flat barge down stream, the iron pulleys on the cable whined a screeching protest, the hawsers creaked, the swift current wedged against the tangented side of the ferry, and swiftly Bulldog Carney and his buckskin were shot across the muddy old Saskatchewan.

On the other side he handed the boatman a five-dollar bill, and with a grim smile said: "Take a little stroll with me to the top of the hill; there's some drunken bums across there whose company I don't want."

At the top of the south bank Carney mounted his buckskin and melted away into the poplar-covered landscape; stepped out of the story for the time being.

Back at the Alberta the general assembly was rearranging itself. The Mounted Policeman, now set afoot by the death of his horse, had hurried down to the barracks to report; possibly to follow up Carney's trail with a new mount.

The half-breed had come back from the puddle a thing of black ooze and profanity.

Jack the Wolf, having dug the mud from his eyes, and ears, and neck band, was in the hotel making terms with Cameron for the summer's work at Fort Victor.

Billy the Piper was revealing intimate history of Bulldog Carney. From said narrative it appeared that Bulldog was as humorous a bandit as ever slit a throat. Billy had freighted whisky for Carney when that gentleman was king of the booze runners.

"Why didn't you spill the beans, Billy?" Nagel queried; "there's a thousand on Carney's head all the time. We'd 've tied him horn and hoof and copped the dough."

"Dif'rent here," the Piper growled; "I've saw a man flick his gun and pot at Carney when Bulldog told him to throw up his hands, and all that cuss did was laugh and thrown his own gun up coverin' the other broncho; but it was enough—the other guy's hands went up too quick. If I'd set the pack on him, havin' so to speak no just cause, well, Nagel, you'd been lookin' round for another freighter. He's the queerest cuss I ever stacked up agen. It kinder seems as if jokes is his religion; an' when he's out to play he's plumb hostile. Don't monkey none with his game, is my advice to you fellers." Nagel stepped to the door, thrust his swarthy face through it, and, seeing that the policeman had gone, came back to the bar and said: "Boys, the drinks is on me cause I see a man, a real man."

He poured whisky into a glass and waited with it held high till the others had done likewise; then he said in a voice that vibrated with admiration:

"Here's to Bulldog Carney! Gad, I love a man! When that damn trooper calls him, what does he do? You or me would 've quit cold or plugged Mister Khaki-jacket—we'd had to. Not so Bulldog. He thinks with his nut, and both hands, and both feet; I don't need to tell you boys what happened; you see it, and it were done pretty. Here's to Bulldog Carney!" Nagel held his hand out to the Piper: "Shake, Billy. If you'd give that cuss away I'd 've kicked you into kingdom come, knowin' him as I do now."

The population of Fort Victor, drawing the color line, was four people: the Hudson's Bay Factor, a missionary minister and his wife, and a school teacher, Lucy Black. Half-breeds and Indians came and went, constituting a floating population; Cam-aron and his men were temporary citizens.

Lucy Black was lathy of construction, several years past her girlhood, and not an animated girl. She was a professional religionist. If there were seeming voids in her life they were filled with this dominating passion of moral reclamation; if she worked without enthusiasm she made up for it in insistent persistence. It was as if a diluted strain of the old Inquisition had percolated down through the blood of centuries and found a subdued existence in this pale-haired, blue-eyed woman.

When Cameron brought Jack the Wolf to Fort Victor it was evident to the little teacher that he was morally an Augean stable: a man who wandered in mental darkness; his soul was dying for want of spiritual nourishment.

On the seventy-mile ride in the Red River buck-board from Edmonton to Fort Victor the morose wolf had punctuated every remark with virile oaths, their original angularity suggesting that his meditative moments were spent in coining appropriate expressions for his perfervid view of life. Twice Cameron's blood had surged hot as the Wolf, at some trifling perversity of the horses, had struck viciously.

Perhaps it was the very soullessness of the Wolf that roused the religious fanaticism of the little school teacher; or perhaps it was that strange contrariness in nature that causes the widely divergent to lean each otherward. At any rate a miracle grew in Fort Victor. Jack the Wolf and the little teacher strolled

together in the evening as the great sun swept down over the rolling prairie to the west; and sometimes the full-faced moon, topping the poplar bluffs to the east, found Jack slouching at Lucy's feet while she, sitting on a camp stool, talked Bible to him.

At first Cameron rubbed his eyes as if his Scotch vision had somehow gone a-gley; but, gradually, whatever incongruity had manifested at first died away.

As a worker Wolf was wonderful; his thirst for toil was like his thirst for moral betterment—insatiable. The missionary in a chat with Cameron explained it very succinctly: Wolf, like many other Westerners, had never had a chance to know the difference between right and wrong; but the One who missed not the sparrow's fall had led him to the port of salvation, Fort Victor—Glory to God! The poor fellow's very wickedness was but the result of neglect. Lucy was the worker in the Lord's vineyard who had been chosen to lead this man into a better life.

It did seem very simple, very all right. Tough characters were always being saved all over the world—regenerated, metamorphosed, and who was Jack the Wolf that he should be excluded from salvation.

At any rate Cameron's survey gang, vitalized by the abnormal energy of Wolf, became a high-powered machine.

The half-breeds, when couraged by bad liquor, shed their religion and became barbaric, vulgarly vicious. The missionary had always waited until this condition had passed, then remonstrance and a gift of bacon with, perhaps, a bag of flour, had brought repentance. This method Jack the Wolf declared was all wrong; the breeds were like train-dogs, he affirmed, and should be taught respect for God's agents in a proper muscular manner. So the first time three French half-breeds, enthusiastically drunk, invaded the little log schoolhouse and declared school was out, sending the teacher home with tears of shame in her blue eyes, Jack reestablished the dignity of the church by generously walloping the three backsliders.

It is wonderful how the solitude of waste places will blossom the most ordinary woman into a flower of delight to the masculine eye; and the lean, anaemic, scrawny-haired school teacher had held as admirers all of Cameron's gang, and one Sergeant Heath of the Mounted Police whom she had known in the Klondike, and who had lately come to Edmonton. With her negative nature she had appreciated them pretty much equally; but when the business of salvaging this prairie derelict came to hand the others were practically ignored.

For two months Fort Victor was thus; the Wolf always the willing worker and well on the way, seemingly, to redemption.

Cameron's foreman, Bill Slade, a much-whiskered, wise old man, was the only one of little faith. Once he said to Cameron:

"I don't like it none too much; it takes no end of worry to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear; Jack has blossomed too quick; he's a booze fighter, and that kind always laps up mental stimulants to keep the blue devils away."

"You're doing the lad an injustice, I think," Cameron said. "I was prejudiced myself at first."

Slade pulled a heavy hand three times down his big beard, spat a shaft of tobacco juice, took his hat off, straightened out a couple of dents in it, and put it back on his head:

"You best stick to that prejudice feeling, Boss—first guesses about a feller most gener'ly pans out pretty fair. And I'd keep an eye kinder skinned if you have any fuss with Jack; I see him look at you once or twice when you corrected his way of doin' things."

Cameron laughed.

"'Tain't no laughin' matter, Boss. When a feller's been used to cussin' like hell he can't keep healthy bottlin' it up. And all that dirtiness that's in the Wolf 'll bust out some day same's you touched a match to a tin of powder; he'll throw back."

"There's nobody to worry about except the little school teacher," Cameron said meditatively.

This time it was Slade who chuckled. "The school-mam's as safe as houses. She ain't got a pint of red blood in 'em blue veins of hers, 'tain't nothin' but vinegar. Jack's just tryin' to sober up on her religion, that's all; it kind of makes him forget horse stealin' an' such while he makes a stake workin' here."

Then one morning Jack had passed into perihelion.

Cameron took his double-barreled shot gun, meaning to pick up some prairie chicken while he was out looking over his men's work. As he passed the shack where his men bunked he noticed the door open. This was careless, for train dogs were always prowling about for just such a chance for loot. He stepped through the door and took a peep into the other room. There sat the Wolf at a pine table playing solitaire.

"What's the matter?" the Scotchman asked. "I've quit," the Wolf answered surlily.

"Quit?" Cameron queried. "The gang can't carry on without a chain man."

"I don't care a damn. It don't make no dif'rence to me. I'm sick of that tough bunch—swearin' and cussin', and tellin' smutty stories all day; a man can't keep decent in that outfit."

"Ma God!" Startled by this, Cameron harked back to his most expressive Scotch.

"You needn't swear 'bout it, Boss; you yourself ain't never give me no square deal; you've treated me like a breed."

This palpable lie fired Cameron's Scotch blood; also the malignant look that Slade had seen was now in the wolfish eyes. It was a murder look, enhanced by the hypocritical attitude Jack had taken.

"You're a scoundrel!" Cameron blurted; "I wouldn't keep you on the work. The sooner Fort Victor is shut of you the better for all hands, especially the women folks. You're a scoundrel."

Jack sprang to his feet; his hand went back to a hip pocket; but his blazing wolfish eyes were looking into the muzzle of the double-barrel gun that Cameron had swung straight from his hip, both fingers on the triggers.

"Put your hands flat on the table, you blackguard," Cameron commanded. "If I weren't a married man I'd blow the top of your head off; you're no good on earth; you'd be better dead, but my wife would worry

because I did the deed."

The Wolf's empty hand had come forward and was placed, palm downward, on the table.

"Now, you hound, you're just a bluffer. I'll show you what I think of you. I'm going to turn my back, walk out, and send a breed up to Fort Saskatchewan for a policeman to gather you in."

Cameron dropped the muzzle of his gun, turned on his heel and started out.

"Come back and settle with me," the Wolf demanded.

"I'll settle with you in jail, you blackguard!" Cameron threw over his shoulder, stalking on.

Plodding along, not without nervous twitchings of apprehension, the Scotchman heard behind him the voice of the Wolf saying, "Don't do that, Mr. Cameron; I flew off the handle and so did you, but I didn't mean nothin'."

Cameron, ignoring the Wolf's plea, went along to his shack and wrote a note, the ugly visage of the Wolf hovering at the open door. He was humbled, beaten. Gun-play in Montana, where the Wolf had left a bad record, was one thing, but with a cordon of Mounted Police between him and the border it was a different matter; also he was wanted for a more serious crime than a threat to shoot, and once in the toils this might crop up. So he pleaded. But Cameron was obdurate; the Wolf had no right to stick up his work and quit at a moment's notice.

Then Jack had an inspiration. He brought Lucy Black. Like woman of all time her faith having been given she stood pat, a flush rouging her bleached cheeks as, earnest in her mission, she pleaded for the "wayward boy," as she euphemistically designated this coyote. Cameron was to let him go to lead the better life; thrown into the pen of the police barracks, among bad characters, he would become contaminated. The police had always persecuted her Jack.

Cameron mentally exclaimed again, "Ma God!" as he saw tears in the neutral blue-tinted eyes. Indeed it was time that the Wolf sought a new runway. He had a curious Scotch reverence for women, and was almost reconciled to the loss of a man over the breaking up of this situation.

Jack was paid the wages due; but at his request for a horse to take him back to Edmonton the Scotchman laughed. "I'm not making presents of horses to-day," he said; "and I'll take good care that nobody else here is shy a horse when you go, Jack. You'll take the hoof express—it's good enough for you."

So the Wolf tramped out of Fort Victor with a pack slung over his shoulder; and the next day Sergeant Heath swung into town looking very debonaire in his khaki, sitting atop the bright blood-bay police horse.

He hunted up Cameron, saying: "You've a man here that I want—Jack Wolf. They've found his prospecting partner dead up on the Smoky River, with a bullet hole in the back of his head. We want Jack at Edmonton to explain."

"He's gone."

"Gone! When?"

"Yesterday."

The Sergeant stared helplessly at the Scotchman. A light dawned upon Cameron. "Did you, by any chance, send word that you were coming?" he asked.

"I'll be back, mister," and Heath darted from the shack, swung to his saddle, and galloped toward the little log school house.

Cameron waited. In half an hour the Sergeant was back, a troubled look in his face.

"I'll tell you," he said dejectedly, "women are hell; they ought to be interned when there's business on."

"The little school teacher?"

"The little fool!"

"You trusted her and wrote you were coming, eh?"

"I did."

"Then, my friend, I'm afraid you were the foolish one."

"How was I to know that rustler had been 'making bad medicine'—had put the evil eye on Lucy? Gad, man, she's plumb locoed; she stuck up for him; spun me the most glimmering tale—she's got a dime novel skinned four ways of the pack. According to her the police stood in with Bulldog Carney on a train holdup, and made this poor innocent lamb the goat. They persecuted him, and he had to flee. Now he's given his heart to God, and has gone away to buy a ranch and send for Lucy, where the two of them are to live happy ever after."

"Ma God!" the Scotchman cried with vehemence.

"That bean-headed affair in calico gave him five hundred she's pinched up against her chest for years."

Cameron gasped and stared blankly; even his reverent exclamatory standby seemed inadequate.

"What time yesterday did the Wolf pull out?" the Sergeant asked.

"About three o'clock."

"Afoot?"

"Yes."

"He'll rustle a cayuse the first chance he gets, but if he stays afoot he'll hit Edmonton to-night, seventy miles."

"To catch the morning train for Calgary," Cameron suggested.

"You don't know the Wolf, Boss; he's got his namesake of the forest skinned to death when it comes to covering up his trail—no train for him now that he knows I'm on his track; he'll just touch civilization for grub till he makes the border for Montana. I've got to get him. If you'll stake me to a fill-up of bacon and a chew of oats for the horse I'll eat and pull out."

In an hour Sergeant Heath shook hands with Cameron saying: "If you'll just not say a word about how that cuss got the message I'll be much obliged. It would break me if it dribbled to headquarters."

Then he rode down the ribbon of roadway that wound to the river bed, forded the old Saskatchewan that was at its summer depth, mounted the south bank and disappeared.

When Jack the Wolf left Fort Victor he headed straight for a little log shack, across the river, where Descoign, a French half-breed, lived. The family was away berry picking, and Jack twisted a rope into an Indian bridle and borrowed a cayuse from the log corral. The cayuse was some devil, and that evening, thirty miles south, he chewed loose the rope hobble on his two front feet, and left the Wolf afoot.

Luck set in against Jack just there, for he found no more borrowable horses till he came to where the trail forked ten miles short of Fort Saskatchewan. To the right, running southwest, lay the well beaten trail that passed through Fort Saskatchewan to cross the river and on to Edmonton. The trail that switched to the left, running southeast, was the old, now rarely-used one that stretched away hundreds of miles to Winnipeg.

The Wolf was a veritable Indian in his slow cunning; a gambler where money was the stake, but where his freedom, perhaps his life, was involved he could wait, and wait, and play the game more than safe. The Winnipeg trail would be deserted—Jack knew that; a man could travel it the round of the clock and meet nobody, most like. Seventy miles beyond he could leave it, and heading due west, strike the Calgary railroad and board a train at some small station. No notice would be taken of him, for trappers, prospectors, men from distant ranches, morose, untalkative men, were always drifting toward the rails, coming up out of the silent solitudes of the wastes, unquestioned and unquestioning.

The Wolf knew that he would be followed; he knew that Sergeant Heath would pull out on his trail and follow relentlessly, seeking the glory of capturing his man single-handed. That was the *esprit de corps* of these riders of the prairies, and Heath was, *par excellence*, large in conceit.

A sinister sneer lifted the upper lip of the trailing man until his strong teeth glistened like veritable wolf fangs. He had full confidence in his ability to outguess Sergeant Heath or any other Mounted Policeman.

He had stopped at the fork of the trail long enough to light his pipe, looking down the Fort Saskatchewan-Edmonton road thinking. He knew the old Winnipeg trail ran approximately ten or twelve miles east of the railroad south for a hundred miles or more; where it crossed a trail running into Red Deer, half-way between Edmonton and Calgary, it was about ten miles east of that town.

He swung his blanket pack to his back and stepped blithely along the Edmonton chocolate-colored highway muttering: "You red-coated snobs, you're waiting for Jack. A nice baited trap. And behind, herding me in, my brave Sergeant. Well, I'm coming."

Where there was a matrix of black mud he took care to leave a footprint; where there was dust he walked in it, in one or the other of the ever persisting two furrow-like paths that had been worn through the strong prairie turf by the hammering hoofs of two horses abreast, and grinding wheels of wagon and buckboard. For two miles he followed the trail till he sighted a shack with a man chopping in the front yard. Here the Wolf went in and begged some matches and a drink of milk; incidentally he asked how far it was to Edmonton. Then he went back to the trail—still toward Edmonton. The Wolf had plenty of matches, and he didn't need the milk, but the man would tell Sergeant Heath when he came along of the one he had seen heading for Edmonton.

For a quarter of a mile Jack walked on the turf beside the road, twice putting down a foot in the dust to make a print; then he walked on the road for a short distance and again took to the turf. He saw a rig coming from behind, and popped into a cover of poplar bushes until it had passed. Then he went back to the road and left prints of his feet in the black soft dust, that would indicate that he had climbed into a waggon here from behind. This accomplished he turned east across the prairie, reaching the old Winnipeg trail, a mile away; then he turned south.

At noon he came to a little lake and ate his bacon raw, not risking the smoke of a fire; then on in that tireless Indian plod—toes in, and head hung forward, that is so easy on the working joints—hour after hour; it was not a walk, it was more like the dog-trot of a cayuse, easy springing short steps, always on the balls of his wide strong feet.

At five he ate again, then on. He travelled till midnight, the shadowy gloom having blurred his path at ten o'clock. Then he slept in a thick clump of saskatoon bushes.

At three it was daylight, and screened as he was and thirsting for his drink of hot tea, he built a small fire and brewed the inspiring beverage. On forked sticks he broiled some bacon; then on again.

All day he travelled. In the afternoon elation began to creep into his veins; he was well past Edmonton now. At night he would take the dipper on his right hand and cut across the prairie straight west; by morning he would reach steel; the train leaving Edmonton would come along about ten, and he would be in Calgary that night. Then he could go east, or west, or south to the Montana border by rail. Heath would go on to Edmonton; the police would spend two or three days searching all the shacks and Indian and half-breed camps, and they would watch the daily outgoing train.

There was one chance that they might wire Calgary to look out for him; but there was no course open without some risk of capture; he was up against that possibility. It was a gamble, and he was playing his hand the best he knew how. Even approaching Calgary he would swing from the train on some grade, and work his way into town at night to a shack where Montana Dick lived. Dick would know what was doing.

Toward evening the trail gradually swung to the east skirting muskeg country. At first the Wolf took little notice of the angle of detour; he was thankful he followed a trail, for trails never led one into impassable country; the muskeg would run out and the trail swing west again. But for two hours he plugged along, quickening his pace, for he realized now that he was covering miles which had to be made up when he swung west again.

Perhaps it was the depressing continuance of the desolate muskeg through which the shadowy figures of startled hares darted that cast the tiring man into foreboding. Into his furtive mind crept a suspicion that he was being trailed. So insidiously had this dread birthed that at first it was simply worry, a feeling as if the tremendous void of the prairie was closing in on him, that now and then a white boulder ahead was a crouching wolf. He shivered, shook his wide shoulders and cursed. It was that he was tiring, perhaps.

Then suddenly the thing took form, mental form—something *was* on his trail. This primitive creature was like an Indian—gifted with the sixth sense that knows when somebody is coming though he may be a day's march away; the mental wireless that animals possess. He tried to laugh it off; to dissipate the unrest with blasphemy; but it wouldn't down.

The prairie was like a huge platter, everything stood out against the luminous evening sky like the sails of a ship at sea. If it were Heath trailing, and that man saw him, he would never reach the railroad. His footprints lay along the trail, for it was hard going on the heavily-grassed turf. To cut across the muskeg that stretched for miles would trap him. In the morning light the Sergeant would discover that his tracks had disappeared, and would know just where he had gone. Being mounted the Sergeant would soon make up for the few hours of darkness—would reach the railway and wire down the line.

The Wolf plodded on for half a mile, then he left the trail where the ground was rolling, cut east for five hundred yards, and circled back. On the top of a cut-bank that was fringed with wolf willow he crouched to watch. The sun had slipped through purple clouds, and dropping below them into a sea of greenish-yellow space, had bathed in blood the whole mass of tessellated vapour; suddenly outlined against this glorious background a horse and man silhouetted, the stiff erect seat in the saddle, the docked tail of the horse, square cut at the hocks, told the watcher that it was a policeman.

When the rider had passed the Wolf trailed him, keeping east of the road where his visibility was low against the darkening side of the vast dome. Half a mile beyond where the Wolf had turned, the Sergeant stopped, dismounted, and, leading the horse, with head low hung searched the trail for the tracks that had now disappeared. Approaching night, coming first over the prairie, had blurred it into a gigantic rug of sombre hue. The trail was like a softened stripe; footprints might be there, merged into the pattern till they were indiscernible.

A small oval lake showed in the edge of the muskeg beside the trail, its sides festooned by strong-growing blue-joint, wild oats, wolf willow, saskatoon bushes, and silver-leafed poplar. Ducks, startled from their nests, floating nests built of interwoven rush leaves and grass, rose in circling flights, uttering plaintive rebukes. Three giant sandhill cranes flopped their sail-like wings, folded their long spindle shanks straight out behind, and soared away like kites.

Crouched back beside the trail the Wolf watched and waited. He knew what the Sergeant would do; having lost the trail of his quarry he would camp there, beside good water, tether his horse to the picket-pin by the hackamore rope, eat, and sleep till daylight, which would come about three o'clock; then he would cast about for the Wolf's tracks, gallop along the southern trail, and when he did not pick them up would surmise that Jack had cut across the muskeg land; then he would round the southern end of the swamp and head for the railway.

"I must get him," the Wolf muttered mercilessly; "gentle him if I can, if not—get him."

He saw the Sergeant unsaddle his horse, picket him, and eat a cold meal; this rather than beacon his presence by a glimmering fire.

The Wolf, belly to earth, wormed closer, slithering over the gillardias, crunching their yellow blooms beneath his evil body, his revolver held between his strong teeth as his grimy paws felt the ground for twigs that might crack.

If the Sergeant would unbuckle his revolver belt, and perhaps go down to the water for a drink, or even to the horse that was at the far end of the picket line, his nose buried deep in the succulent wild-pea vine, then the Wolf would rush his man, and the Sergeant, disarmed, would throw up his hands.

The Wolf did not want on his head the death of a Mounted Policeman, for then the "Redcoats" would trail him to all corners of the earth. All his life there would be someone on his trail. It was too big a price. Even if the murder thought had been paramount, in that dim light the first shot meant not overmuch.

So Jack waited. Once the horse threw up his head, cocked his ears fretfully, and stood like a bronze statue; then he blew a breath of discontent through his spread nostrils, and again buried his muzzle in the pea vine and sweet-grass.

Heath had seen this movement of the horse and ceased cutting at the plug of tobacco with which he was filling his pipe; he stood up, and searched with his eyes the mysterious gloomed prairie.

The Wolf, flat to earth, scarce breathed.

The Sergeant snuffed out the match hidden in his cupped hands over the bowl, put the pipe in his pocket, and, revolver in hand, walked in a narrow circle; slowly, stealthily, stopping every few feet to listen; not daring to go too far lest the man he was after might be hidden somewhere and cut out his horse. He passed within ten feet of where the Wolf lay, just a gray mound against the gray turf.

The Sergeant went back to his blanket and with his saddle for a pillow lay down, the tiny glow of his pipe showing the Wolf that he smoked. He had not removed his pistol belt.

The Wolf lying there commenced to think grimly how easy it would be to kill the policeman as he slept; to wiggle, snake-like to within a few feet and then the shot. But killing was a losing game, the blundering trick of a man who easily lost control; the absolutely last resort when a man was cornered beyond escape and saw a long term at Stony Mountain ahead of him, or the gallows. The Wolf would wait till all the advantage was with him. Besides, the horse was like a watch-dog. The Wolf was down wind from them now, but if he moved enough to rouse the horse, or the wind shifted—no, he would wait. In the morning the Sergeant, less wary in the daylight, might give him his chance.

Fortunately it was late in the summer and that terrible pest, the mosquito, had run his course.

The Wolf slipped back a few yards deeper into the scrub, and, tired, slept. He knew that at the first wash of gray in the eastern sky the ducks would wake him. He slept like an animal, scarce slipping from consciousness; a stamp of the horse's hoof on the sounding turf bringing him wide awake. Once a gopher raced across his legs, and he all but sprang to his feet thinking the Sergeant had grappled with him. Again a great horned owl at a twist of Jack's head as he dreamed, swooped silently and struck, thinking it a hare.

Brought out of his sleep by the myriad noises of the waterfowl the Wolf knew that night was past, and the

dice of chance were about to be thrown. He crept back to where the Sergeant was in full view, the horse, his sides ballooned by the great feed of sweet-pea vine, lay at rest, his muzzle on the earth, his drooped ears showing that he slept.

Waked by the harsh cry of a loon that swept by rending the air with his death-like scream, the Sergeant sat bolt upright and rubbed his eyes sleepily. He rose, stretched his arms above his head, and stood for a minute looking off toward the eastern sky that was now taking on a rose tint. The horse, with a little snort, canted to his feet and sniffed toward the water; the Sergeant pulled the picket-pin and led him to the lake for a drink.

Hungrily the Wolf looked at the carbine that lay across the saddle, but the Sergeant watered his horse without passing behind the bushes. It was a chance; but still the Wolf waited, thinking, "I want an ace in the hole when I play this hand."

Sergeant Heath slipped the picket-pin back into the turf, saddled his horse, and stood mentally debating something. Evidently the something had to do with Jack's whereabouts, for Heath next climbed a short distance up a poplar, and with his field glasses scanned the surrounding prairie. This seemed to satisfy him; he dropped back to earth, gathered some dry poplar branches and built a little fire; hanging by a forked stick he drove in the ground his copper tea pail half full of water.

Then the thing the Wolf had half expectantly waited for happened. The Sergeant took off his revolver belt, his khaki coat, rolled up the sleeves of his gray flannel shirt, turned down its collar, took a piece of soap and a towel from the roll of his blanket and went to the water to wash away the black dust of the prairie trail that was thick and heavy on his face and in his hair. Eyes and ears full of suds, splashing and blowing water, the noise of the Wolf's rapid creep to the fire was unheard.

When the Sergeant, leisurely drying his face on the towel, stood up and turned about he was looking into the yawning maw of his own heavy police revolver, and the Wolf was saying: "Come here beside the fire and strip to the buff—I want them duds. There won't nothin' happen you unless you get hostile, then you'll get yours too damn quick. Just do as you're told and don't make no fool play; I'm in a hurry."

Of course the Sergeant, not being an imbecile, obeyed.

"Now get up in that tree and stay there while I dress," the Wolf ordered. In three minutes he was arrayed in the habiliments of Sergeant Heath; then he said, "Come down and put on my shirt."

In the pocket of the khaki coat that the Wolf now wore were a pair of steel handcuffs; he tossed them to the man in the shirt commanding, "Click these on."

"I say," the Sergeant expostulated, "can't I have the pants and the coat and your boots?"

The Wolf sneered: "Dif'rent here my bounder; I got to make a get-away. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you your choice of three ways: I'll stake you to the clothes, bind and gag you; or I'll rip one of these .44 plugs through you; or I'll let you run foot loose with a shirt on your back; I reckon you won't go far on this wire grass in bare feet."

"I don't walk on my pants."

"That's just what you would do; the pants and coat would cut up into about four pairs of moccasins; they'd be as good as duffel cloth."

"I'll starve."

"That's your look-out. You'd lie awake nights worrying about where Jack Wolf would get a dinner—I guess not. I ought to shoot you. The damn police are nothin' but a lot of dirty dogs anyway. Get busy and cook grub for two—bacon and tea, while I sit here holdin' this gun on you."

The Sergeant was a grotesque figure cooking with the manacles on his wrists, and clad only in a shirt.

When they had eaten the Wolf bridled the horse, curled up the picket line and tied it to the saddle horn, rolled the blanket and with the carbine strapped it to the saddle, also his own blanket.

"I'm goin' to grubstake you," he said, "leave you rations for three days; that's more than you'd do for me. I'll turn your horse loose near steel, I ain't horse stealin', myself—I'm only borrowin'."

When he was ready to mount a thought struck the Wolf. It could hardly be pity for the forlorn condition of Heath; it must have been cunning—a play against the off chance of the Sergeant being picked up by somebody that day. He said:

"You fellers in the force pull a gag that you keep your word, don't you?"

"We try to."

"I'll give you another chance, then. I don't want to see nobody put in a hole when there ain't no call for it. If you give me your word, on the honor of a Mounted Policeman, swear it, that you'll give me four days' start before you squeal I'll stake you to the clothes and boots; then you can get out in two days and be none the worse."

"I'll see you in hell first. A Mounted Policeman doesn't compromise with a horse thief—with a skunk who steals a working girl's money."

"You'll keep palaverin' till I blow the top of your head off," the Wolf snarled. "You'll look sweet trampin' in to some town in about a week askin' somebody to file off the handcuffs Jack the Wolf snapped on you, won't you?"

"I won't get any place in a week with these handcuffs on," the Sergeant objected; "even if a pack of coyotes tackled me I couldn't protect myself."

The Wolf pondered this. If he could get away without it he didn't want the death of a man on his hands—there was nothing in it. So he unlocked the handcuffs, dangled them in his fingers debatingly, and then threw them far out into the bushes, saying, with a leer; "I might get stuck up by somebody, and if they clamped these on to me it would make a get-away harder."

"Give me some matches," pleaded the Sergeant.

With this request the Wolf complied saying, "I don't want to do nothin' mean unless it helps me out of a hole."

Then Jack swung to the saddle and continued on the trail. For four miles he rode, wondering at the persistence of the muskeg. But now he had a horse and twenty-four hours ahead before train time; he should worry.

Another four miles, and to the south he could see a line of low rolling hills that meant the end of the swamps. Even where he rode the prairie rose and fell, the trail dipping into hollows, on its rise to sweep over higher land. Perhaps some of these ridges ran right through the muskegs; but there was no hurry.

Suddenly as the Wolf breasted an upland he saw a man leisurely cinching a saddle on a buckskin horse.

"Hell!" the Wolf growled as he swung his mounts, "that's the buckskin that I see at the Alberta; that's Bulldog; I don't want no mix-up with him."

He clattered down to the hollow he had left, and raced for the hiding screen of the bushed muskeg. He was almost certain Carney had not seen him, for the other had given no sign; he would wait in the cover until Carney had gone; perhaps he could keep right on across the bad lands, for his horse, as yet, sunk but hoof deep. He drew rein in thick cover and waited.

Suddenly the horse threw up his head, curved his neck backward, cocked his ears and whinnied. The Wolf could hear a splashing, sucking sound of hoofs back on the tell-tale trail he had left.

With a curse he drove his spurs into the horse's flanks, and the startled animal sprang from the cutting rowels, the ooze throwing up in a shower.

A dozen yards and the horse stumbled, almost coming to his knees; he recovered at the lash of Jack's quirt, and struggled on; now going half the depth of his cannon bones in the yielding muck, he was floundering like a drunken man; in ten feet his legs went to the knees.

Quirt and spur drove him a few feet; then he lurched heavily, and with a writhing struggle against the sucking sands stood trembling; from his spread mouth came a scream of terror—he knew.

And now the Wolf knew. With terrifying dread he remembered—he had ridden into the "Lakes of the Shifting Sands." This was the country they were in and he had forgotten. The sweat of fear stood out on the low forehead; all the tales that he had heard of men who had disappeared from off the face of the earth, swallowed up in these quicksands, came back to him with numbing force. To spring from the horse meant but two or three wallowing strides and then to be sucked down in the claiming quicksands.

The horse's belly was against the black muck. The Wolf had drawn his feet up; he gave a cry for help. A voice answered, and twisting his head about he saw, twenty yards away, Carney on the buckskin. About the man's thin lips a smile hovered. He sneered:

"You're up against it, Mister Policeman; what name'll I turn in back at barracks?"

Jack knew that it was Carney, and that Carney might know Heath by sight, so he lied:

"I'm Sergeant Phillips; for God's sake help me out."

Bulldog sneered. "Why should I—God doesn't love a sneaking police hound."

The Wolf pleaded, for his horse was gradually sinking; his struggles now stilled for the beast knew that he was doomed.

"All right," Carney said suddenly. "One condition—never mind, I'll save you first—there isn't too much time. Now break your gun, empty the cartridges out and drop it back into the holster," he commanded. "Unslung your picket line, fasten it under your armpits, and if I can get my cow-rope to you tie the two together."

He slipped from the saddle and led the horse as far out as he dared, seemingly having found firmer ground a little to one side. Then taking his cow-rope, he worked his way still farther out, placing his feet on the tufted grass that stuck up in little mounds through the treacherous ooze. Then calling, "Look out!" he swung the rope. The Wolf caught it at the first throw and tied his own to it. Carney worked his way back, looped the rope over the horn, swung to the saddle, and calling, "Flop over on your belly—look out!" he started his horse, veritably towing the Wolf to safe ground.

The rope slacked; the Wolf, though half smothered with muck, drew his revolver and tried to slip two cartridges into the cylinder.

A sharp voice cried, "Stop that, you swine!" and raising his eyes he was gazing into Carney's gun. "Come up here on the dry ground," the latter commanded. "Stand there, unbuckle your belt and let it drop. Now take ten paces straight ahead." Carney salvaged the weapon and belt of cartridges.

"Build a fire, quick!" he next ordered, leaning casually against his horse, one hand resting on the butt of his revolver.

He tossed a couple of dry matches to the Wolf when the latter had built a little mound of dry poplar twigs and birch bark.

When the fire was going Carney said: "Peel your coat and dry it; stand close to the fire so your pants dry too—I want that suit."

The Wolf was startled. Was retribution so hot on his trail? Was Carney about to set him afoot just as he had set afoot Sergeant Heath? His two hundred dollars and Lucy Black's five hundred were in the pocket of that coat also. As he took it off he turned it upside down, hoping for a chance to slip the parcel of money to the ground unnoticed of his captor.

"Throw the jacket here," Carney commanded; "seems to be papers in the pocket."

When the coat had been tossed to him, Carney sat down on a fallen tree, took from it two packets—one of papers, and another wrapped in strong paper. He opened the papers, reading them with one eye while with the other he watched the man by the fire. Presently he sneered: "Say, you're some liar—even for a government hound; your name's not Phillips, it's Heath. You're the waster who fooled the little girl at Golden. You're the bounder who came down from the Klondike to gather Bulldog Carney in; you shot off your mouth all along the line that you were going to take him singlehanded. You bet a man in Edmonton a hundred you'd tie him hoof and horn. Well, you lose, for I'm going to rope you first, see? Turn you over to the Government tied up like a bag of spuds; that's just what I'm going to do, Sergeant Liar. I'm going to break you for the sake

of that little girl at Golden, for she was my friend and I'm Bulldog Carney. Soon as that suit is dried a bit you'll strip and pass it over; then you'll get into my togs and I'm going to turn you over to the police as Bulldog Carney.

"D'you get me, kid?" Carney chuckled. "That'll break you, won't it, Mister Sergeant Heath? You can't stay in the Force a joke; you'll never live it down if you live to be a thousand—you've boasted too much."

The Wolf had remained silent—waiting. He had an advantage if his captor did not know him. Now he was frightened; to be turned in at Edmonton by Carney was as bad as being taken by Sergeant Heath.

"You can't pull that stuff, Carney," he objected; "the minute I tell them who I am and who you are they'll grab you too quick. They'll know me; perhaps some of them'll know you."

A sneering "Ha!" came from between the thin lips of the man on the log. "Not where we're going they won't, Sergeant. I know a little place over on the rail"—and he jerked his thumb toward the west—"where there's two policemen that don't know much of anything; they've never seen either of us. You ain't been at Edmonton more'n a couple of months since you came from the Klondike. But they do know that Bulldog Carney is wanted at Calgary and that there's a thousand dollars to the man that brings him in."

At this the Wolf pricked his ears; he saw light—a flood of it. If this thing went through, and he was sent on to Calgary as Bulldog Carney, he would be turned loose at once as not being the man. The police at Calgary had cause to know just what Carney looked like for he had been in their clutches and escaped.

But Jack must bluff—appear to be the angry Sergeant. So he said: "They'll know me at Calgary, and you'll get hell for this."

Now Carney laughed out joyously. "I don't give a damn if they do. Can't you get it through your wooden police head that I just want this little pleasantry driven home so that you're the goat of that nanny band, the Mounted Police; then you'll send in your papers and go back to the farm?"

As Carney talked he had opened the paper packet. Now he gave a crisp "Hello! what have we here?" as a sheaf of bills appeared.

The Wolf had been watching for Carney's eyes to leave him for five seconds. One hand rested in his trousers pocket. He drew it out and dropped a knife, treading it into the sand and ashes.

"Seven hundred," Bulldog continued. "Rather a tidy sum for a policeman to be toting. Is this police money?"

The Wolf hesitated; it was a delicate situation. Jack wanted that money but a slip might ruin his escape. If Bulldog suspected that Jack was not a policeman he would jump to the conclusion that he had killed the owner of the horse and clothes. Also Carney would not believe that a policeman on duty wandered about with seven hundred in his pocket; if Jack claimed it all Carney would say he lied and keep it as Government money.

"Five hundred is Government money I was bringin' in from a post, and two hundred is my own," he answered.

"I'll keep the Government money," Bulldog said crisply; "the Government robbed me of my ranch—said I had no title. And I'll keep yours, too; it's coming to you."

"If luck strings with you, Carney, and you get away with this dirty trick, what you say'll make good—I'll have to quit the Force; an' I want to get home down east. Give me a chance; let me have my own two hundred."

"I think you're lying—a man in the Force doesn't get two hundred ahead, not honest. But I'll toss you whether I give you one hundred or two," Carney said, taking a half dollar from his pocket. "Call!" and he spun it in the air.

"Heads!" the Wolf cried.

The coin fell tails up. "Here's your hundred," and Bulldog passed the bills to their owner.

"I see here," he continued, "your order to arrest Bulldog Carney. Well, you've made good, haven't you. And here's another for Jack the Wolf; you missed him, didn't you? Where's he—what's he done lately? He played me a dirty trick once; tipped off the police as to where they'd get me. I never saw him, but if you could stake me to a sight of the Wolf I'd give you this six hundred. He's the real hound that I've got a low down grudge against. What's his description—what does he look like?"

"He's a tall slim chap—looks like a breed, 'cause he's got nigger blood in him," the Wolf lied.

"I'll get him some day," Carney said; "and now them duds are about cooked—peel!"

The Wolf stripped, gray shirt and all.

"Now step back fifteen paces while I make my toilet," Carney commanded, toying with his 6-gun in the way of emphasis.

In two minutes he was transformed into Sergeant Heath of the N. W. M. P., revolver belt and all. He threw his own clothes to the Wolf, and lighted his pipe.

When Jack had dressed Carney said: "I saved your life, so I don't want you to make me throw it away again. I don't want a muss when I turn you over to the police in the morning. There ain't much chance they'd listen to you if you put up a holler that you were Sergeant Heath—they'd laugh at you, but if they did make a break at me there's be shooting, and you'd sure be plumb in line of a careless bullet—see? I'm going to stay close to you till you're on that train."

Of course this was just what the Wolf wanted; to go down the line as Bulldog Carney, handcuffed to a policeman, would be like a passport for Jack the Wolf. Nobody would even speak to him—the policeman would see to that.

"You're dead set on putting this crazy thing through, are you?" he asked.

"You bet I am—I'd rather work this racket than go to my own wedding."

"Well, so's you won't think your damn threat to shoot keeps me mum, I'll just tell you that if you get that far with it I ain't going to give myself away. You've called the turn, Carney; I'd be a joke even if I only got as far as the first barracks a prisoner. If I go in as Bulldog Carney I won't come out as Sergeant Heath—I'll disappear as Mister Somebody. I'm sick of the Force anyway. They'll never know what happened Sergeant

Heath from me—I couldn't stand the guying. But if I ever stack up against you, Carney, I'll kill you for it." This last was pure bluff—for fear Carney's suspicions might be aroused by the other's ready compliance.

Carney scowled; then he laughed, sneering: "I've heard women talk like that in the dance halls. You cook some bacon and tea at that fire—then we'll pull out."

As the Wolf knelt beside the fire to blow the embers into a blaze he found a chance to slip the knife he had buried into his pocket.

When they had eaten they took the trail, heading south to pass the lower end of the great muskegs. Carney rode the buckskin, and the Wolf strode along in front, his mind possessed of elation at the prospect of being helped out of the country, and depression over the loss of his money. Curiously the loss of his own one hundred seemed a greater enormity than that of the school teacher's five hundred. That money had been easily come by, but he had toiled a month for the hundred. What right had Carney to steal his labor—to rob a workman. As they plugged along mile after mile, a fierce determination to get the money back took possession of Jack.

If he could get it he could get the horse. He would fix Bulldog some way so that the latter would not stop him. He must have the clothes, too. The khaki suit obsessed him; it was a red flag to his hot mind.

They spelled and ate in the early evening; and when they started for another hour's tramp Carney tied his cow-ropes tightly about the Wolf's waist, saying: "If you'd tried to cut out in these gloomy hills I'd be peeved. Just keep that line taut in front of the buckskin and there won't be no argument."

In an hour Carney called a halt, saying: "We'll camp by this bit of water, and hit the trail in the early morning. We ain't more than ten miles from steel, and we'll make some place before train time." Carney had both the police picket line and his own. He drove a picket in the ground, looped the line that was about the Wolf's waist over it, and said.

"I don't want to be suspicious of a mate jumping me in the dark, so I'll sleep across this line and you'll keep to the other end of it; if you so much as wink at it I guess I'll wake. I've got a bad conscience and sleep light. We'll build a fire and you'll keep to the other side of it same's we were neighbors in a city and didn't know each other."

Twice, as they ate, Carney caught a sullen, vicious look in Jack's eyes. It was as clearly a murder look as he had ever seen; and more than once he had faced eyes that thirsted for his life. He wondered at the psychology of it; it was not like his idea of Sergeant Heath. From what he had been told of that policeman he had fancied him a vain, swaggering chap who had had his ego fattened by the three stripes on his arm. He determined to take a few extra precautions, for he did not wish to lie awake.

"We'll turn in," he said when they had eaten; "I'll hobble you, same's a shy cayuse, for fear you'd walk in your sleep, Sergeant."

He bound the Wolf's ankles, and tied his wrists behind his back, saying, as he knotted the rope, "What the devil did you do with your handcuffs—thought you johnnies always had a pair in your pocket?"

"They were in the saddle holster and went down with my horse," the Wolf lied.

Carney's nerves were of steel, his brain worked with exquisite precision. When it told him there was nothing to fear, that his precautions had made all things safe, his mind rested, untortured by jerky nerves; so in five minutes he slept.

The Wolf mastered his weariness and lay awake, waiting to carry out the something that had been in his mind. Six hundred dollars was a stake to play for; also clad once again in the police suit, with the buckskin to carry him to the railroad, he could get away; money was always a good thing to bribe his way through. Never once had he put his hand in the pocket where lay the knife he had secreted at the time he had changed clothes with Carney, as he trailed hour after hour in front of the buckskin. He knew that Carney was just the cool-nerved man that would sleep—not lie awake through fear over nothing.

In the way of test he shuffled his feet and drew from the half-dried grass a rasping sound. It partly disturbed the sleeper; he changed the steady rhythm of his breathing; he even drew a heavy-sighing breath; had he been lying awake watching the Wolf he would have stilled his breathing to listen.

The Wolf waited until the rhythmic breaths of the sleeper told that he had lapsed again into the deeper sleep. Slowly, silently the Wolf worked his hands to the side pocket, drew out the knife and cut the cords that bound his wrists. It took time, for he worked with caution. Then he waited. The buckskin, his nose deep in the grass, blew the pollen of the flowered carpet from his nostrils.

Carney stirred and raised his head. The buckskin blew through his nostrils again, ending with a luxurious sigh of content; then was heard the clip-clip of his strong teeth scything the grass. Carney, recognizing what had waked him, turned over and slept again.

Ten minutes, and the Wolf, drawing up his feet slowly, silently, sawed through the rope on his ankles. Then with spread fingers he searched the grass for a stone the size of a goose egg, beside which he had purposely lain down. When his fingers touched it he unknotted the handkerchief that had been part of Carney's make-up and which was now about his neck, and in one corner tied the stone, fastening the other end about his wrist. Now he had a slung-shot that with one blow would render the other man helpless.

Then he commenced his crawl.

A pale, watery, three-quarter moon had climbed listlessly up the eastern sky changing the sombre prairie into a vast spirit land, draping with ghostly garments bush and shrub.

Purposely Carney had tethered the buckskin down wind from where he and the Wolf lay. Jack had not read anything out of this action, but Carney knew the sensitive wariness of his horse,—the scent of the stranger in his nostrils would keep him restless, and any unusual move on the part of the prisoner would agitate the buckskin. Also he had only pretended to drive the picket pin at some distance away; in the dark he had trailed it back and worked it into the loose soil at his very feet. This was more a move of habitual care than a belief that the bound man could work his way, creeping and rolling, to the picket-pin, pull it, and get away with the horse.

At the Wolf's first move the buckskin threw up his head, and, with ears cocked forward, studied the shifting blurred shadow. Perhaps it was the scent of his master's clothes which the Wolf wore that agitated his mind, that cast him to wondering whether his master was moving about; or, perhaps as animals instinctively have a nervous dread of a vicious man he distrusted the stranger; perhaps, in the dim uncertain light, his prairie dread came back to him and he thought it a wolf that had crept into camp. He took a step forward; then another, shaking his head irritably. A vibration trembled along the picket line that now lay across Carney's foot and he stirred restlessly.

The Wolf flattened himself to earth and snored. Five minutes he waited, cursing softly the restless horse. Then again he moved, so slowly that even the watchful animal scarce detected it.

He was debating two plans: a swift rush and a swing of his slung shot, or the silent approach. The former meant inevitably the death of one or the other—the crushed skull of Carney, or, if the latter were by any chance awake, a bullet through the Wolf. He could feel his heart pounding against the turf as he scraped along, inch by inch. A bare ten feet, and he could put his hand on the butt of Carney's gun and snatch it from the holster; if he missed, then the slung shot.

The horse, roused, was growing more restless, more inquisitive. Sometimes he took an impatient snap at the grass with his teeth; but only to throw his head up again, take a step forward, shake his head, and exhale a whistling breath.

Now the Wolf had squirmed his body five feet forward. Another yard and he could reach the pistol; and there was no sign that Carney had wakened—just the steady breathing of a sleeping man.

The Wolf lay perfectly still for ten seconds, for the buckskin seemingly had quieted; he was standing, his head low hung, as if he slept on his feet.

Carney's face was toward the creeping man and was in shadow. Another yard, and now slowly the Wolf gathered his legs under him till he rested like a sprinter ready for a spring; his left hand crept forward toward the pistol stock that was within reach; the stone-laden handkerchief was twisted about the two first fingers of his right.

Yes, Carney slept.

As the Wolf's finger tips slid along the pistol butt the wrist was seized in fingers of steel, he was twisted almost face to earth, and the butt of Carney's own gun, in the latter's right hand, clipped him over the eye and he slipped into dreamland. When he came to workmen were riveting a boiler in the top of his head; somebody with an augur was boring a hole in his forehead; he had been asleep for ages and had wakened in a strange land. He sat up groggily and stared vacantly at a man who sat beside a camp fire smoking a pipe. Over the camp fire a copper kettle hung and a scent of broiling bacon came to his nostrils. The man beside the fire took the pipe from his mouth and said: "I hoped I had cracked your skull, you swine. Where did you pick up that thug trick of a stone in the handkerchief? As you are troubled with insomnia we'll hit the trail again."

With the picket line around his waist once more Jack trudged ahead of the buckskin, in the night gloom the shadowy cavalcade cutting a strange, weird figure as though a boat were being towed across sleeping waters.

The Wolf, groggy from the blow that had almost cracked his skull, was wobbly on his legs—his feet were heavy as though he wore a diver's leaden boots. As he waded through a patch of wild rose the briars clung to his legs, and, half dazed he cried out, thinking he struggled in the shifting sands.

"Shut up!" The words clipped from the thin lips of the rider behind.

They dipped into a hollow and the played-out man went half to his knees in the morass. A few lurching steps and overstrained nature broke; he collapsed like a jointed doll—he toppled head first into the mire and lay there.

The buckskin plunged forward in the treacherous going, and the bag of a man was skidded to firm ground by the picket line, where he sat wiping the mud from his face, and looking very all in.

Carney slipped to the ground and stood beside his captive. "You're soft, my bucko—I knew Sergeant Heath had a yellow streak," he sneered; "boasters generally have. I guess we'll rest till daylight. I've a way of hobbling a bad man that'll hold you this time, I fancy."

He drove the picket-pin of the rope that tethered the buckskin, and ten feet away he drove the other picket pin. He made the Wolf lie on his side and fastened him by a wrist to each peg so that one arm was behind and one in front.

Carney chuckled as he surveyed the spread-eagle man: "You'll find some trouble getting out of that, my bucko; you can't get your hands together and you can't get your teeth at either rope. Now I *will* have a sleep."

The Wolf was in a state of half coma; even untethered he probably would have slept like a log; and Carney was tired; he, too, slumbered, the soft stealing gray of the early morning not bringing him back out of the valley of rest till a glint of sunlight throwing over the prairie grass touched his eyes, and the warmth gradually pushed the lids back.

He rose, built a fire, and finding water made a pot of tea. Then he saddled the buckskin, and untethered the Wolf, saying: "We'll eat a bite and pull out."

The rest and sleep had refreshed the Wolf, and he plodded on in front of the buckskin feeling that though his money was gone his chances of escape were good.

At eight o'clock the square forms of log shacks leaning groggily against a sloping hill came into view; it was Hobbema; and, swinging a little to the left, in an hour they were close to the Post.

Carney knew where the police shack lay, and skirting the town he drew up in front of a log shack, an iron-barred window at the end proclaiming it was the Barracks. He slipped from the saddle, dropped the rein over his horse's head, and said quietly to the Wolf: "Knock on the door, open it, and step inside," the muzzle of his gun emphasizing the command.

He followed close at the Wolf's heels, standing in the open door as the latter entered. He had expected to see perhaps one, not more than two constables, but at a little square table three men in khaki sat eating

breakfast.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Carney said cheerily; "I've brought you a prisoner, Bulldog Carney."

The one who sat at table with his back to the door turned his head at this; then he sprang to his feet, peered into the prisoner's face and laughed.

"Bulldog nothing, Sergeant; you've bagged the Wolf."

The speaker thrust his face almost into the Wolf's. "Where's my uniform—where's my horse? I've got you now—set me afoot to starve, would you, you damn thief—you murderer! Where's the five hundred dollars you stole from the little teacher at Fort Victor?"

He was trembling with passion; words flew from his lips like bullets from a gatling—it was a torrent.

But fast as the accusation had come, into Carney's quick mind flashed the truth—the speaker was Sergeant Heath. The game was up. Still it was amusing. What a devilish droll blunder he had made. His hands crept quietly to his two guns, the police gun in the belt and his own beneath the khaki coat.

Also the Wolf knew his game was up. His blood surged hot at the thought that Carney's meddling had trapped him. He was caught, but the author of his evil luck should not escape.

"*That's Bulldog Carney!*" he cried fiercely; "don't let him get away."

Startled, the two constables at the table sprang to their feet.

A sharp, crisp voice said: "The first man that reaches for a gun drops." They were covered by two guns held in the steady hands of the man whose small gray eyes watched from out narrowed lids.

"I'll make you a present of the Wolf," Carney said quietly; "I thought I had Sergeant Heath. I could almost forgive this man, if he weren't such a skunk, for doing the job for me. Now I want you chaps to pass, one by one, into the pen," and he nodded toward a heavy wooden door that led from the room they were in to the other room that had been fitted up as a cell. "I see your carbines and gunbelts on the rack—you really should have been properly in uniform by this time; I'll dump them out on the prairie somewhere, and you'll find them in the course of a day or so. Step in, boys, and you go first, Wolf."

When the four men had passed through the door Carney dropped the heavy wooden bar into place, turned the key in the padlock, gathered up the fire arms, mounted the buckskin, and rode into the west.

A week later the little school teacher at Fort Victor received through the mail a packet that contained five hundred dollars, and this note:—

Dear Miss Black:—

I am sending you the five hundred dollars that you bet on a bad man. No woman can afford to bet on even a *good* man. Stick to the kids, for I've heard they love you. If those Indians hadn't picked up Sergeant Heath and got him to Hobbema before I got away with your money I wouldn't have known, and you'd have lost out.

Yours delightedly,

Bulldog Carney.

II.—BULLDOG CARNEY'S ALIBI

A day's trail north from where Idaho and Montana come together on the Canadian border, fumed and fretted Bucking Horse River. Its nomenclature was a little bit of all right, for from the minute it trickled from a huge blue-green glacier up in the Selkirks till it fell into the Kootenay, it bucked its way over, under, and around rock-cliffs, and areas of stolid mountain sides that still held gigantic pine and cedar.

It had ripped from the bowels of a mountain pebbles of gold, and the town of Bucking Horse was the home of men who had come at the call of the yellow god.

When Bulldog Carney struck Bucking Horse it was a sick town, decrepid, suffering from premature old age, for most of the mines had petered out.

One hotel, the Gold Nugget, still clung to its perch on a hillside, looking like a bird cage hung from a balcony.

Carney had known its proprietor, Seth Long, in the Cour d'Alene: Seth and Jeanette Holt; in the way of disapproval Seth, for he was a skidder; Jeanette with a manly regard, for she was as much on the level as a gyroscope.

Carney was not after gold that is battled from obdurate rocks with drill and shovel. He was a gallant knight of the road—a free lance of adventure; considering that a man had better lie in bed and dream than win money by dreary unexciting toil. His lithe six foot of sinewy anatomy, the calm, keen, gray eye, the splendid cool insulated nerve and sweet courage, the curious streaks of chivalry, all these would have perished tied to routine. Like "Bucking Horse" his name, "Bulldog" Carney, was an inspiration.

He had ridden his famous buckskin, Pat, up from the Montana border, mentally surveying his desire, a route for running into the free and United States opium without the little formality of paying Uncle Sam the exorbitant and unnatural duty. That was why he first came to Bucking Horse.

The second day after his arrival Seth Long bought for a few hundred dollars the Little Widow mine that was almost like a back yard to the hotel. People laughed, for it was a worked-out proposition; when he put a gang of men to work, pushing on the long drift, they laughed again. When Seth threw up his hands declaring that the Little Widow was no good, those who had laughed told him that they had known it all the time.

But what they didn't know was that the long drift in the mine now ran on until it was directly under the Gold Nugget hotel.

It was Carney who had worked that out, and Seth and his hotel were established as a clearing station for the opium that was shipped in by train from Vancouver in tins labelled "Peaches," "Salmon," or any old thing. It was stored in the mine and taken from there by pack-train down to the border, and switched across at Bailey's Ferry, the U. S. customs officers at that point being nice lovable chaps; or sometimes it crossed the Kootenay in a small boat at night.

Bulldog supervised that end of the business, bringing the heavy payments in gold back to Bucking Horse on a laden mule behind his buckskin; then the gold was expressed by train to the head office of this delightful trading company in Vancouver.

This endeavor ran along smoothly, for the whole mining West was one gigantic union, standing "agin the government"—any old government, U. S. or Canadian.

Carney's enterprise was practically legitimized by public opinion; besides there was the compelling matter of Bulldog's proficiency in looking after himself. People had grown into the habit of leaving him alone.

The Mounted Police more or less supervised the region, and sometimes one of them would be in Bucking Horse for a few days, and sometimes the town would be its own custodian.

One autumn evening Carney rode up the Bucking Horse valley at his horse's heels a mule that carried twenty thousand dollars in gold slung from either side of a pack saddle.

Carney went straight to the little railway station, and expressed the gold to Vancouver, getting the agent's assurance that it would go out on the night train which went through at one o'clock. Then he rode back to the Gold Nugget and put his horse and mule in the stable.

As he pushed open the front door of the hotel he figuratively stepped into a family row, a row so self-centered that the parties interested were unaware of his entrance.

A small bar occupied one corner of the dim-lighted room, and behind this Seth Long leaned back against the bottle rack, with arms folded across his big chest, puffing at a thick cigar. Facing him, with elbows on the bar, a man was talking volubly, anger speeding up his vocalization.

Beside the man stood Jeanette Holt, fire flashing from her black eyes, and her nostrils dilated with passion. She interrupted the voluble one:

"Yes, Seth, I did slap this cheap affair, Jack Wolf, fair across the ugly mouth, and I'll do it again!"

Seth tongued the cigar to one corner of his ample lips, and drawled: "That's a woman's privilege, Jack, if a feller's give her just cause for action You ain't got no kick comin', I reckon, 'cause this little woman ain't one to fly off the handle for nothin'."

"Nothin', Seth? I guess when I tell you what got her dander up you'll figger you've got another think comin'. You're like a good many men I see—you're bein' stung. That smooth proposition, Bulldog Carney, is stingin' you right here in your own nest."

Biff!

That was the lady's hand, flat open, impinged on the speaker's cheek.

The Wolf sprang back with an oath, put his hand to his cheek, and turned to Seth with a volley of denunciation starting from his lips. At a look that swept over the proprietor's face he turned, stared, and stifling an oath dropped a hand subconsciously to the butt of his gun.

Bulldog Carney had stepped quickly across the room, and was now at his side, saying:

"So you're here, Jack the Wolf, eh? I thought I had rid civilization of your ugly presence when I turned you over to the police at Hobbema for murdering your mate."

"That was a trumped-up charge," the Wolf stammered.

"Ah! I see—acquitted! I can guess it in once. Nobody saw you put that little round hole in the back of Alberta Bill's head—not even Bill; and he was dead and couldn't talk."

Carney's gray eyes travelled up and down the Wolf's form in a cold, searching manner; then he added, with the same aggravating drawl: "You put your hands up on the bar, same as you were set when I came in, or something will happen. I've got a proposition."

The Wolf hesitated; but Bulldog's right hand rested carelessly on his belt. Slowly the Wolf lifted his arm till his fingers touched the wooden rail, saying, surlily:

"I ain't got no truck with you; I don't want no proposition from a man that plays into the hands of the damn police."

"You can cut out the rough stuff, Wolf, while there's a lady present."

Carney deliberately turned his shoulder to the scowling man, and said, "How d'you do, Miss Holt?" touching his hat. Then he added, "Seth, locate a bottle on the bar and deal glasses all round."

As Long deftly twirled little heavy-bottomed glasses along the plank as though he were dealing cards, Carney turned, surveyed the room, and addressing a man who sat in a heavy wooden chair beside a square box-stove, said: "Join up, stranger—we're going to liquidate."

The man addressed came forward, and lined up the other side of Jack Wolf.

"Cayuse Braun, Mr. Carney," Seth lisped past his fat cigar as he shoved a black bottle toward Bulldog.

"The gents first," the latter intimated.

The bottle was slid down to Cayuse, who filled his glass and passed it back to Wolf. The latter carried it irritably past him without filling his glass.

"Help yourself, Wolf." It was a command, not an invitation, in Carney's voice.

"I'm not drinkin'," Jack snarled.

"Yes, you are. I've got a toast that's got to be unanimous."

Seth, with a wink at Wolf, tipped the bottle and half filled the latter's glass, saying, "Be a sport, Jack."

As he turned to hand the bottle to Carney he arched his eyebrows at Jeanette, and the girl slipped quietly away.

Bulldog raised his glass of whisky, and said: "Gents, we're going to drink to the squarest little woman it has ever been my good fortune to run across. Here's to Miss Jeanette Holt, the truest pal that Seth Long ever had—*Miss Jeanette* Cayuse and Seth tossed off their liquor, but the Wolf did not touch his glass.

"You drink to that toast dam quick, Jack Wolf!" and Carney's voice was deadly.

The room had grown still. One, two, three, a wooden clock on the shelf behind the bar ticked off the seconds in the heavy quiet; and in a far corner the piping of a stray cricket sounded like the drool of a parrari.

There was a click of a latch, a muffled scrape as the outer door pushed open. This seemed to break the holding spell of fear that was over the Wolf. "I'll see you in hell, Bulldog Carney, before I drink with you or a girl that——"

The whisky that was in Carney's glass shot fair into the speaker's open mouth. As his hand jumped to his gun the wrist was seized with a loosening twist, and the heel of Bulldog's open right hand caught him under the chin with a force that fair lifted him from his feet to drop on the back of his head.

A man wearing a brass-buttoned khaki jacket with blue trousers down which ran wide yellow stripes, darted from where he had stood at the door, put his hand on Bulldog's shoulder, and said:

"You're under arrest in the Queen's name, Bulldog Carney!"

Carney reached down and picked up the Wolf's gun that lay where it had fallen from his twisted hand, and passed it to Seth without comment. Then he looked the man in the khaki coat up and down and coolly asked. "Are you anybody in particular, stranger?"

"I'm Sergeant Black of the Mounted Police."

"You amuse me, Sergeant; you're unusual, even for a member of that joke bank, the Mounted."

"Fine!" the Sergeant sneered, subdued anger in his voice; "I'll entertain you for several days over in the pen."

"On what grounds?"

"You'll find out."

"Yes, and now, declare yourself!"

"We don't allow, rough house, gun play, and knocking people down, in Bucking Horse," the Sergeant retorted; "assault means the pen when I'm here."

"Then take that thing," and Bulldog jerked a thumb toward Jack Wolf, who stood at a far corner of the bar whispering with Cayuse.

"I'll take you, Bulldog Carney."

"Not if that's all you've got as reason," and Carney, either hand clasping his slim waist, the palms resting on his hips, eyed the Sergeant, a faint smile lifting his tawny mustache.

"You're wanted, Bulldog Carney, and you know it. I've been waiting a chance to rope you; now I've got you, and you're coming along. There's a thousand on you over in Calgary; and you've been running coke over the line."

"Oh! that's it, eh? Well, Sergeant, in plain English you're a tenderfoot to not know that the Alberta thing doesn't hold in British Columbia. You'll find that out when you wire headquarters for instructions, which you will, of course. I think it's easier for me, my dear Sergeant, to let you get this tangle straightened out by going with you than to kick you into the street; then they would have something on me—something because I'd mussed up the uniform."

"Carney ain't had no supper, Sergeant," Seth declared; "and I'll go bail——"

"I'm not takin' bail; and you can send his supper over to the lock-up."

The Sergeant had drawn from his pocket a pair of handcuffs.

Carney grinned.

"Put them back in your pocket, Sergeant," he advised. "I said I'd go with you; but if you try to clamp those things on, the trouble is all your own." Black looked into the gray eyes and hesitated; then even his duty-befogged mind realized that he would take too big a chance by insisting. He held out his hand toward Carney's gun, and the latter turned it over to him. Then the two, the Sergeant's hand slipped through Carney's arm, passed out.

Just around the corner was the police barracks, a square log shack divided by a partition. One room was used as an office, and contained a bunk; the other room had been built as a cell, and a heavy wooden door that carried a bar and strong lock gave entrance. There was one small window safeguarded by iron bars firmly embedded in the logs. Into this bull-pen, as it was called, Black ushered Carney by the light of a candle. There was a wooden bunk in one end, the sole furniture.

"Neat, but not over decorated," Carney commented as he surveyed the bare interior. "No wonder, with such surroundings, my dear Sergeant, you fellows are angular."

"I've heard, Bulldog, that you fancied yourself a superior sort."

"Not at all, Sergeant; you have my entire sympathy."

The Sergeant sniffed. "If they give you three years at Stony Mountain perhaps you'll drop some of that side."

Carney sat down on the side of the bed, took a cigarette case from his pocket and asked, "Do you allow smoking here? It won't fume up your curtains, will it?"

"It's against the regulations, but you smoke if you want to."

Carney's supper was brought in and when he had eaten it Sergeant Black went into the cell, saying: "You're a pretty slippery customer, Bulldog—I ought to put the bangles on you for the night." Rather irrelevantly, and with a quizzical smile, Carney asked, "Have you read 'Les Miserables,' Sergeant?"

"I ain't read a paper in a month—I've been too busy."

"It isn't a paper, it's a story."

"I ain't got no time for readin' magazines either."

"This is a story that was written long ago by a Frenchman," Carney persisted.

"Then I don't want to read it. The trickiest damn bunch that ever come into these mountains are them Johnnie Crapeaus from Quebec—they're more damn trouble to the police than so many Injuns." The soft quizzical voice of Carney interrupted Black gently. "You put me in mind of a character in that story, Sergeant; he was the best drawn, if I might discriminate over a great story."

This allusion touched Black's vanity, and drew him to ask, "What did he do—how am I like him?" He eyed Carney suspiciously.

"The character I liked in 'Les Miserables' was a policeman, like yourself, and his mind was only capable of containing the one idea—duty. It was a fetish with him; he was a fanatic."

"You're damn funny, Bulldog, ain't you? What I ought to do is slip the bangles on you and leave you in the dark."

"If you could. I give you full permission to try, Sergeant; if you can clamp them on me there won't be any hard feelings, and the first time I meet you on the trail I won't set you afoot."

Carney had risen to his feet, ostensibly to throw his cigarette through the bars of the open window.

Black stood glowering at him. He knew Carney's reputation well enough to know that to try to handcuff him meant a fight—a fight over nothing; and unless he used a gun he might possibly get the worst of it.

"It would only be spite work," Carney declared presently; "these logs would hold anybody, and you know it."

In spite of his rough manner the Sergeant rather admired Bulldog's gentlemanly independence, the quiet way in which he had submitted to arrest; it would be a feather in his cap that, single-handed, he had locked the famous Bulldog up. His better sense told him to leave well enough alone.

"Yes," he said grudgingly, "I guess these walls will hold you. I'll be sleeping in the other room, a reception committee if you have callers."

"Thanks, Sergeant. I take it all back. Leave me a candle, and give me something to read."

Black pondered over this; but Carney's allusion to the policeman in "Les Miserables" had had an effect. He brought from the other room a couple of magazines and a candle, went out, and locked the door.

Carney pulled off his boots, stretched himself on the bunk and read. He could hear Sergeant Black fussing at a table in the outer room; then the Sergeant went out and Carney knew that he had gone to send a wire to Major Silver for instructions about his captive. After a time he came back. About ten o'clock Carney heard the policeman's boots drop on the floor, his bunk creak, and knew that the representative of the law had retired. A vagrant thought traversed his mind that the heavy-dispositioned, phlegmatic policeman would be a sound sleeper once oblivious. However, that didn't matter, there was no necessity for escape.

Carney himself dozed over a wordy story, only to be suddenly awakened by a noise at his elbow. Wary, through the vicissitudes of his order of life he sat up wide awake, ready for action. Then by the light of the sputtering candle he saw his magazine sprawling on the floor, and knew he had been awakened by its fall. His bunk had creaked; but listening, no sound reached his ears from the other room, except certain stertorous breathings. He had guessed right, Sergeant Black was an honest sleeper, one of Shakespeare's full-paunched kind.

Carney blew out the candle; and now, perversely, his mind refused to cuddle down and rest, but took up the matter of Jack the Wolf's presence. He hated to know that such an evil beast was even indirectly associated with Seth, who was easily led. His concern was not over Seth so much as over Jeanette.

He lay wide awake in the dark for an hour; then a faint noise came from the barred window; it was a measured, methodical click-click-click of a pebble tapping on iron.

With the stealthiness of a cat he left the bunk, so gently that no tell-tale sound rose from its boards, and softly stepping to the window thrust the fingers of one hand between the bars.

A soft warm hand grasped his, and he felt the smooth sides of a folded paper. As he gave the hand a reassuring pressure, his knuckles were tapped gently by something hard. He transferred the paper to his other hand, and reaching out again, something was thrust into it, that when he lifted it within he found was a strong screw-driver.

He crept back to his bunk, slipped the screwdriver between the blankets, and standing by the door listened for ten seconds; then a faint gurgling breath told him that Black slept.

Making a hiding canopy of his blanket, he lighted his candle, unfolded the paper, and read:

"Two planks, north end, fastened with screws. Below is tunnel that leads to the mine. Will meet you there. Come soon. Important."

There was no name signed, but Carney knew it was Jeanette's writing.

He blew out the candle and stepping softly to the other end of the pen knelt down, and with his fingertips searched the ends of the two planks nearest the log wall. At first he was baffled, his fingers finding the flat heads of ordinary nails; but presently he discovered that these heads were dummies, half an inch long. Suddenly a board rapped in the other room. He had just time to slip back to his bunk when a key clinked in the lock, and a light glinted through a chink as the door opened.

As if suddenly startled from sleep, Carney called out: "Who's that—what do you want?"

The Sergeant peered in and answered, "Nothing! thought I heard you moving about. Are you all right, Carney?"

He swept the pen with his candle, noted Carney's boots on the floor, and, satisfied, closed the door and went back to his bunk.

This interruption rather pleased Carney; he felt that it was a somnolent sense of duty, responsibility, that had wakened Black. Now that he had investigated and found everything all right he would probably sleep soundly for hours.

Carney waited ten minutes. The Sergeant's bunk had given a note of complaint as its occupant turned over; now it was still. Taking his boots in his hand he crept back to the end of the pen and rapidly, noiselessly, withdrew the screw-nails from both ends of two planks. Then he crept back to the door and listened; the other room was silent save for the same little sleep breathings he had heard before.

With the screw-driver he lifted the planks, slipped through the opening, all in the dark, and drew the planks back into place over his head. He had to crouch in the little tunnel.

Pulling on his boots, on hands and knees he crawled through the small tunnel for fifty yards. Then he came to stope timbers stood on end, and turning these to one side found himself in what he knew must be a cross-cut from the main drift that ran between the mine opening and the hotel.

As he stood up in this he heard a faint whistle, and whispered, "Jeanette."

The girl came forward in the dark, her hand touching his arm.

"I'm so glad," she whispered. "We'd better stand here in the dark, for I have something serious to tell you."

Then in a low tone the girl said:

"The Wolf and Cayuse Braun are going to hold up the train to-night, just at the end of the trestle, and rob the express car."

"Is Seth in it?"

"Yes, he's standing in, but he isn't going to help on the job. The Wolf is going to board the train at the station, and enter the express car when the train is creeping over the trestle. He's got a bar and rope for fastening the door of the car behind the express car. When the engine reaches the other side Cayuse will jump it, hold up the engineer, and make him stop the train long enough to throw the gold off while the other cars are still on the trestle; then the Wolf will jump off, and Cayuse will force the engineer to carry the train on, and he will drop off on the up-grade, half a mile beyond."

"Old stuff, but rather effective," Carney commented; "they'll get away with it, I believe."

"I listened to them planning the whole thing out," Jeanette confessed, "and they didn't know I could hear them."

"What about this little tunnel under the jail—that's a new one on me?"

"Seth had it dug, pretending he was looking for gold; but the men who dug it didn't know that it led under the jail, and he finished it himself, fixed the planks, and all. You see when the police go away they leave the keys with Seth in case any sudden trouble comes up. Nobody knows about it but Seth."

There was a tang of regret in Carney's voice as he said:

"Seth is playing it pretty low down, Jeanette; he's practically stealing from his pals. I put twenty thousand in gold in to-night to go by that train, coke money; he knows it, and that's what these thieves are after."

"Surely Seth wouldn't do that, Bulldog—steal from his partners!"

"Well, not quite, Jeanette. He figures that the express company is responsible, will have to make good, and that my people will get their money back; but all the same, it's kind of like that—it's rotten!"

"What am I to do, Bulldog? I can't peach, can I—not on Seth—not while I'm living with him? And he's been kind of good to me, too. He ain't—well, once I thought he was all right, but since I knew you it's been different. I've stuck to him—you know, Bulldog, how straight I've been—but a thief!"

"No, you can't give Seth away, Jeanette," Carney broke in, for the girl's voice carried a tremble.

"I think they had planned, that you being here in Bucking Horse, the police would kind of throw the blame of this thing on you. Then your being arrested upset that. What am I to do, Bulldog? Will you speak to Seth and stop it?"

"No. He'd know you had told me, and your life with him would be just hell. Besides, girl, I'm in jail."

"But you're free now—you'll go away."

"Let me think a minute, Jeanette."

As he stood pondering, there was the glint of a light, a faint rose flicker on the wall and flooring of the cross-cut they stood in, and they saw, passing along the main drift, Seth, the Wolf, and Cayuse Braun.

The girl clutched Carney's arm and whispered, "There they go. Seth is going out with them, but he'll come back and stay in the hotel while they pull the job off."

The passing of the three men seemed to have galvanized Carney into action, fructified in his mind some plan, for he said:

"You come back to the hotel, Jeanette, and say nothing—I will see what I can do."

"And Seth—you won't—"

"Plug him for his treachery? No, because of you he's quite safe. Don't bother your pretty little head about it."

The girl's hand that had rested all this time on Carney's arm was trembling. Suddenly she said, brokenly, hesitatingly, just as a school-girl might have blundered over wording the grand passion: "Bulldog, do you know how much I like you? Have you ever thought of it at all, wondered?"

"Yes, many times, girl; how could I help it? You come pretty near to being the finest girl I ever knew."

"But we've never talked about it, have we, Bulldog?"

"No; why should we? Different men have different ideas about those things. Seth can't see that because that gold was ours in the gang, he shouldn't steal it; that's one kind of man. I'm different."

"You mean that I'm like the gold?"

"Yes, I guess that's what I mean. You see, well—you know what I mean, Jeanette."

"But you like me?"

"So much that I want to keep you good enough to like."

"Would it be playing the game crooked, Bulldog, if you—if I kissed you?"

"Not wrong for you to do it, Jeanette, because you don't know how to do what I call wrong, but I'm afraid I couldn't square it with myself. Don't get this wrong, girl, it sounds a little too holy, put just that way. I've kissed many a fellow's girl, but I don't want to kiss you, being Seth's girl, and that isn't because of Seth, either. Can you untangle that—get what I mean?"

"I get it, Bulldog. You are some man, some man!"

There was a catch in the girl's voice; she took her hand from Carney's arm and drew the back of it irritably across her eyes; then she said in a steadier voice: "Good night, man—I'm going back." Together they felt their way along the cross-cut, and when they came to the main drift, Carney said: "I'm going out through the hotel, Jeanette, if there's nobody about; I want to get my horse from the stable. When we come to the cellar you go ahead and clear the way for me."

The passage from the drift through the cellar led up into a little store-room at the back of the hotel; and through this Carney passed out to the stable where he saddled his buckskin, transferring to his belt a gun that was in a pocket of the saddle. Then he fastened to the horn the two bags that had been on the pack mule. Leading the buckskin out he avoided the street, cut down the hillside, and skirted the turbulent Bucking Horse.

A half moon hung high in a deep-blue sky that in both sides was bitten by the jagged rock teeth of the Rockies. The long curving wooden trestle looked like the skeleton of some gigantic serpent in the faint moonlight, its head resting on the left bank of the Bucking Horse, half a mile from where the few lights of the mining town glimmered, and its tail coming back to the same side of the stream after traversing two short kinks. It looked so inadequate, so frail in the night light to carry the huge Mogul engine with its trailing cars. No wonder the train went over it at a snail's pace, just the pace to invite a highwayman's attention.

And with the engine stopped with a pistol at the engineer's head what chance that anyone would drop from the train to the trestle to hurry to his assistance.

Carney admitted to himself that the hold-up was fairly well planned, and no doubt would go through unless — At this juncture of thought Carney chuckled. The little unforeseen something that was always popping into the plans of crooks might eventuate. When he came to thick scrub growth Carney dismounted, and led the buckskin whispering, "Steady, Pat—easy, my boy!"

The buckskin knew that he must make no noisy slip—that there was no hurry. He and Carney had chummed together for three years, the man talking to him as though he had a knowledge of what his master said, and he, understanding much of the import if not the uttered signs.

Sometimes going down a declivity the horse's soft muzzle was over Carney's shoulder, the flexible upper lip snuggling his neck or cheek; and sometimes as they went up again Carney's arm was over the buckskin's withers and they walked like two men arm in arm.

They went through the scrubby bush in the noiseless way of wary deer; no telltale stone was thrust loose to go tinkling down the hillside; they trod on no dried brush to break with snapping noise.

Presently Carney dropped the rein from over the horse's head to the ground, took his lariat from the saddle-horn, hung the two pack-bags over his shoulder, and whispering, "Wait here, Patsy boy," slipped through the brush and wormed his way cautiously to a huge boulder a hundred feet from the trestle. There he sat down, his back against the rock, and his eye on the blobs of yellow light that was Bucking Horse town. Presently from beyond the rock carried to his listening ears the clink of an iron-shod hoof against a stone, and he heard a suppressed, "Damn!"

"Coming, I guess," he muttered to himself.

The heavy booming whistle of the giant Mogul up on the Divide came hoarsely down the Bucking Horse Pass, and then a great blaring yellow-red eye gleamed on the mountain side as if some Cyclops forced his angry way down into the valley. A bell clanged irritably as the Mogul rocked in its swift glide down the curved grade; there was the screeching grind of airbrakes gripping at iron wheels; a mighty sigh as the compressed air seethed from opened valves at their release when the train stood at rest beside the little log station of Bucking Horse.

He could see, like the green eye of some serpent, the conductor's lantern gyrate across the platform; even the subdued muffled noise of packages thrust into the express car carried to the listener's ear. Then the little green eye blinked a command to start, the bell clanged, the Mogul coughed as it strained to its task, the drivers gripped at steel rails and slipped, the Mogul's heart beating a tattoo of gasping breaths; then came the grinding rasp of wheel flange against steel as the heavy train careened on the curve, and now the timbers of the trestle were whining a protest like the twang of loose strings on a harp.

Carney turned on his hands and knees and, creeping around to the far side of the rock, saw dimly in the faint moonlight the figure of a man huddled in a little rounded heap twenty feet from the rails. In his hand the barrel of a gun glinted once as the moon touched it.

Slowly, like some ponderous animal, the Mogul crept over the trestle! it was like a huge centipede slipping along the dead limb of a tree.

When the engine reached the solid bank the crouched figure sprang to the steps of the cab and was lost to view. A sharp word of command carried to Carney's ear; he heard the clanging clamp of the air brakes; the stertorous breath of the Mogul ceased; the train stood still, all behind the express car still on the trestle.

Then a square of yellow light shone where the car door had slid open, and within stood a masked man, a gun in either hand; in one corner, with hands above his head, and face to the wall, stood a second man, while a third was taking from an iron safe little canvas bags and dropping them through the open door.

Carney held three loops of the lariat in his right hand, and the balance in his left; now he slipped from the rock, darted to the side of the car and waited.

He heard a man say, "That's all!" Then a voice that he knew as Jack the Wolf's commanded, "Face to the wall! I've got your guns, and if you move I'll plug you!"

The Wolf appeared at the open door, where he fired one shot as a signal to Cayuse; there was the hiss and clang of releasing brakes and gasps from the starting engine. At that instant the lariat zipped from a graceful sweep of Carney's hand to float like a ring of smoke over the head of Jack the Wolf, and he was jerked to earth. Half stunned by the fall he was pinned there as though a grizzly had fallen upon him.

The attack was so sudden, so unexpected, that he was tied and helpless with hardly any semblance of a fight, where he lay watching the tail end of the train slipping off into the gloomed pass, and the man who had bound him as he nimbly gathered up the bags of loot.

Carney was in a hurry; he wanted to get away before the return Cayuse. Of course if Cayuse came back too soon so much the worse for Cayuse, but shooting a man was something to be avoided.

He was hampered a little due either to the Wolf's rapacity, or the express messenger's eagerness to obey, for in addition to the twenty thousand dollars there were four other plump bags of gold. But Carney, having secured the lot, hurried to his horse, dropped the pack bags astride the saddle, mounted, and made his way to the Little Widow mine. He had small fear that the two men would think of looking in that direction for the man who had robbed them; even if they did he had a good start for it would take time to untie the Wolf and get their one horse. Also he had the Wolf's guns.

He rode into the mine, dismounted, took the loot to a cross-cut that ran off the long drift and dropped it into a sump hole that was full of water, sliding in on top rock debris. Then he unsaddled the buckskin, tied him, and hurried along the drift and crawled his way through the small tunnel back to jail. There he threw himself on the bunk, and, chuckling, fell into a virtuous sleep.

He was wakened at daybreak by Sergeant Black who said cheerfully, "You're in luck, Bulldog."

"Honored, I should say, if you allude to our association."

The Sergeant groped silently through this, then, evidently missing the sarcasm, added, "The midnight was held up last night at the trestle, and if you'd been outside I guess you'd been pipped as the angel."

"Thanks for your foresight, friend—that is, if you knew it was coming off. Tell me how your friend worked it."

Sergeant Black told what Carney already knew so well, and when he had finished the latter said: "Even if I hadn't this good alibi nobody would say I had anything to do with it, for I distrust man so thoroughly that I never have a companion in any little joke I put over."

"I couldn't do anything in the dark," the Sergeant resumed, in an apologetic way, "so I'm going out to trail the robbers now."

He looked at Carney shiftingly, scratched an ear with a forefinger, and then said: "The express company has wired a reward of a thousand dollars for the robbers, and another thousand for the recovery of the money."

"Go to it, Sergeant," Carney laughed; "get that capital, then go east to Lake Erie and start a bean farm."

Black grinned tolerantly. "If you'll join up, Bulldog, we could run them two down."

"No, thanks; I like it here."

"I'm going to turn you out, Bulldog—set you free."

"And I'm going to insist on a hearing. I'll take those stripes off your arm for playing the fool." The Sergeant drew from his pocket a telegram and passed it to Carney. It was from Major Silver at Golden, and ran:

"Get Carney to help locate robbers. He knows the game. Express company offers two thousand."

"Where's the other telegram?" Carney asked, a twinkle in his eye.

"What other one?"

"The one in answer to yours asking for instructions over my arrest."

The Sergeant looked at Carney out of confused, astonished eyes; then he admitted: "The Major advises we can't hold you in B. C. on the Alberta case. But what about joining in the hunt? You've worked with the police before."

"Twice; because a woman was getting the worst of it in each case. But I'm no sleuth for the official robber—he's fair game."

"You won't take the trail with me then, Carney?"

"No, I won't; not to run down the hold-up men—that's your job. But you can tell your penny-in-the-slot company, that piking corporation that offers thousand dollars for the recovery of twenty or thirty thousand, that when they're ready to pay five thousand dollars' reward for the gold I'll see if I can lead them to it. Now, my dear Sergeant, if you'll oblige me with my gun I'd like to saunter over to the hotel for breakfast."

"I'll go with you," Sergeant Black said, "I haven't had mine yet."

Jeanette was in the front room of the hotel as the two men entered. Her face went white when she saw Carney seemingly in the custody of the policeman. He stopped to speak to her, and Black, going through to the dining room saw the Wolf and Cayuse Braun at a table. He had these two under suspicion, for the Wolf had a record with the police.

He closed the door and, standing in front of it, said: "I'm going to arrest you two men for the train robbery last night. When you finish your breakfast I want you to come quietly over to the lock-up till this thing is investigated."

The Wolf laughed derisively. "What're you doin' here, Sergeant—why ain't you out on the trail chasin' Bulldog Carney?"

The Sergeant stared. "Bulldog Carney?" he queried; "what's he got to do with it?"

"Everything. It's a God's certainty that he pulled this hold-up off when he escaped last night."

The Sergeant gasped. What was the Wolf talking about. He turned, opened the door and called, "Carney, come here and listen to Jack Wolf tell how you robbed the train!"

At this the Wolf bent across the table and whispered hoarsely, "Christ! Bulldog has snitched—he's give us away! I thought he'd clear out when he got the gold. And he knowed me last night when we clinched. And his horse was gone from the stable this morning!"

As the two men sprang to their feet, the Sergeant whirled at the rasp of their chairs on the floor, and reached for his gun. But Cayuse's gun was out, there was a roaring bark in the walled room, a tongue of fire, a puff of smoke, and the Sergeant dropped.

As he fell, from just behind him Carney's gun sent a leaden pellet that drilled a little round hole fair in the center of Cayuse's forehead, and he collapsed, a red jet of blood spurting over the floor.

In the turmoil the Wolf slipped through a door that was close to where he sat, sped along the hall into the storeroom, and down to the mine chamber.

With a look at Cayuse that told he was dead, Carney dropped his pistol back into the holster, and telling Seth, who had rushed in, to hurry for a doctor, took the Sergeant in his arms like a baby child carried him upstairs to a bed, Jeanette showing the way.

As they waited for the doctor Carney said: "He's shot through the shoulder; he'll be all right."

"What's going to happen over this, Bulldog?" Jeanette asked.

"Cayuse Braun has passed to the Happy Hunting Ground—he can't talk; Seth, of course, won't; and the Wolf will never stop running till he hits the border. I had a dream last night, Jeanette, that somebody gave me five thousand dollars easy money. If it comes true, my dear girl, I'm going to put it in your name so Seth can't throw you down hard if he ever takes a notion to."

Carney's dream came true at the full of the moon.

III.—OWNERS UP

Clatawa had put racing in Walla Walla in cold storage.

You can't have any kind of sport with one individual, horse or man, and Clatawa had beaten everything so decisively that the gamblers sat down with blank faces and asked, "What's the use?"

Horse racing had been a civic institution, a daily round of joyous thrills—a commendable medium for the circulation of gold. The Nez Perces Indians, who owned that garden of Eden, the Palouse country, and were rich, would troop into Walla Walla long rolls of twenty-dollar gold pieces plugged into a snake-like skin till the thing resembled a black sausage, and bet the coins as though they were nickels.

It was a lovely town, with its straggling clap-boarded buildings, its U. S. Cavalry post, its wide-open dance halls and gambling palaces; it was a live town was Walla Walla, squatting there in the center of a great luxuriant plain twenty miles or more from the Columbia and Snake Rivers.

Snaky Dick had roped a big bay with black points that was lord of a harem of wild mares; he had speed and stamina, and also brains; so they named him "Clatawa," that is, "The-one-who-goes-quick." When Clatawa found that men were not terrible creatures he chummed in, and enjoyed the gambling, and the racing, and the high living like any other creature of brains.

He was about three-quarter warm blood. How the mixture nobody knew. Some half-bred mare, carrying a foal, had, perhaps, escaped from one of the great breeding ranches, such as the "Scissors Brand Ranch" where the sires were thoroughbred, and dropped her baby in the herd. And the colt, not being raced to death as a two-year-old, had grown into a big, upstanding bay, with perfect unblemished bone, lungs like a blacksmith's bellows and sinews that played through unruptured sheaths. His courage, too, had not been broken by the whip and spur of pin-head jocks. There was just one rift in the lute, that dilution of cold blood. He wasn't a thoroughbred, and until his measure was taken, until some other equine looked him in the eye as they fought it out stride for stride, no man could just say what the cold blood would do; it was so apt to quit.

At first Walla Walla rejoiced when Snaky Dick commenced to make the Nez Perces horses look like pack mules; but now had come the time when there was no one to fight the "champ," and the game was on the hog, as Iron Jaw Blake declared.

Then Iron Jaw and Snaggle Tooth Boone, and

Death-on-the-trail Carson formed themselves into a committee of three to ameliorate the monotony.

They were a picturesque trio. Carson was a sombre individual, architecturally resembling a leafless gaunt-limbed pine, for he lacked but a scant half inch of being seven feet of bone and whip-cord.

Years before he had gone out over the trail that wound among sage bush and pink-flowered ball cactus up into the Bitter Root Mountains with "Irish" Fagan. Months after he came back alone; more sombre, more gaunt, more sparing of speech, and had offered casually the statement that "Fagan met death on the trail." This laconic epitome of a gigantic event had crystallized into a moniker for Carson, and he became solely "Death-on-the-trail."

Snaggle Tooth Boone had a wolf-like fang on the very doorstep of his upper jaw, so it required no powerful inventive faculty to rechristen him with aptitude.

Blake was not only iron-jawed physically, but all his dealings were of the bullheaded order; finesse was as

foreign to Iron Jaw as caviare to a Siwash.

So this triumvirate of decorative citizens, with Iron Jaw as penman, wrote to Reilly at Portland, Oregon, to send in a horse good enough to beat Clatawa, and a jock to ride him. Iron Jaw's directions were specific, lengthy; going into detail. He knew that a thoroughbred, even a selling plater, would be good enough to take the measure of any cross-bred horse, no matter how good the latter apparently was, running in scrub races. He also knew the value of weight as a handicap, and the Walla Walla races were all matches, catch-weights up. So he wrote to Reilly to send him a tall, slim rider who could pad up with clothes and look the part of an able-bodied cow puncher.

It was a pleasing line of endeavor to Reilly—he just loved that sort of thing; trimming "come-ons" was right in his mitt. He fulfilled the commission to perfection, sending up, by the flat river steamer, the *Maid of Palouse*, what appeared to be an ordinary black ranch cow-pony in charge of "Texas Sam," a cow puncher. From Lewiston, the head of navigation, Texas Sam rode his horse behind the old Concord coach over the twenty-five miles of trail to Walla Walla.

The endeavor had gone through with swift smoothness. Nobody but Iron Jaw, Death-on-the-trail, and Snaggle Tooth knew of the possibilities that lurked in the long chapp-legged Texas Jim and the thin rakish black horse that he called Horned Toad.

As one spreads bait as a decoy, Sam was given money to flash, and instructed in the art of fool talk.

Iron Jaw was banker in this game; while Snaggle Tooth ran the wheel and faro lay-out in the Del Monte saloon. So, when Texas dribbled a thousand dollars across the table, "bucking the tiger," it was show money; a thousand that Iron Jaw had passed him earlier in the evening, and which Snaggle Tooth would pass back to its owner in the morning.

There was no hurry to spring the trap. Texas

Sam allowed that he himself was an uncurried wild horse from the great desert; that he was all wool and a yard wide; that he could lick his fighting weight in wild cats; and bet on anything he fancied till the cows came home with their tails between their legs. And all the time he drank: he would drink with anybody, and anybody might drink with him. This was no piking game, for the three students of get-it-in-big-wads had declared for a coup that would cause Walla Walla to stand up on its hind legs and howl.

Of course Snaky Dick and his clique cast covetous eyes on the bank roll that Texas showed an inkling of when he flashed his gold. That Texas had a horse was the key to the whole situation: a horse that he was never tired of describing as the king-pin cow-pony from Kalamazoo to Kamschatka; a spring-heeled antelope that could run rings around any cayuse that had ever looked through a halter.

But Snaky Dick went slow. Some night when Texas was full of hop he'd rush him for a match. Indeed the Clatawa crowd had the money ready to plunk down when the psychological pitch of Sam's Dutch courage had arrived.

It was all going swimmingly, both ends of Walla Walla being played against the middle, so to speak, when the "unknown quantity" drifted into the game.

A tall, lithe man, with small placid gray eyes set in a tanned face, rode up out of the sage brush astride a buckskin horse on his way to Walla Walla. He looked like a casual cow-puncher riding into town with the laudable purpose of tying the faro outfit hoof and horn, and, incidentally, showing what could be done to a bar when a man was in earnest and had the mazuma.

As the buckskin leisurely loped down the trail-road that ran from the cavalry barracks to the heart of Walla Walla, his rider became aware of turmoil in the suburbs. In front of a neat little cottage, the windows of which held flowers partly shrouded by lace curtains, a lathy individual, standing beside a rakish black horse, was orating with Bacchanalian vehemence. Gathered from his blasphemous narrative he knew chronologically the past history of a small pretty woman with peroxidized hair, who stood in the open door. He must have enlarged on the sophistication of her past life, for the little lady, with a crisp oath, called the declaimer a liar and a seven-times misplaced offspring.

The rider of the buckskin checked his horse, threw his right leg loosely over the saddle, and restfully contemplated the exciting film.

The irate and also inebriated man knew that he had drawn on his imagination, but to be told in plain words that he was a liar peeved him. With an ugly oath he swung his quirt and sprang forward, as if he would bring its lash down on the décolletéd shoulders of the woman.

At that instant something that looked like a boy shot through the door as though thrust from a catapult, and landed, head on, in the bread basket of the cantankerous one, carrying him off his feet.

The man on the buckskin chuckled, and slipped to the ground.

But the boy had shot his bolt, so to speak; the big man he had tumbled so neatly, soon turned him, and, rising, was about to drive a boot into the little fellow's rib. I say about to, for just then certain fingers of steel twined themselves in his red neckerchief, he was yanked volte face, and a fist drove into his midriff.

Of course his animosity switched to the newcomer; but as he essayed a grapple the driving fist caught him quite neatly on the northeast corner of his jaw. He sat down, the goggle stare in his eyes suggesting that he contemplated a trip to dreamland.

The little woman now darted forward, crying in a voice whose gladsomeness swam in tears: "Bulldog Carney! You always man—you beaut!" She would have twined her arms about Bulldog, but the placid gray eyes, so full of quiet aloofness, checked her.

But the man's voice was soft and gentle as he said: "The same Bulldog, Molly, girl. Glad I happened along."

He turned to the quarrelsome one who had staggered to his feet: "You ride away before I get cross; you smell like the corpse of a dead booze-fighter!"

The man addressed looked into the gray eyes switched on his own for inspection; then he turned, mounted the black, and throwing over his shoulder, "I'll get you for this, Mister Butter-in!" rode away.

The other party to the rough-and-tumble, winded, had erected his five feet of length, and with a palm

pressed against his chest was emitting between wheezy coughs picturesque words of ecomium upon Bulldog, not without derogatory reflections upon the man who had ridden away.

In the midst of this vocal cocktail he broke off suddenly to exclaim in astonishment:

"Holy Gawd!"

Then he scuttled past Carney, slipped a finger through the ring of the buckskin's snaffle and peered into the horse's face as if he had found a long-lost friend.

Perhaps the buckskin remembered him too, for he pressed a velvet, mouse-colored muzzle against the lad's cheek and whispered something.

The little man ran a hand up and down the horse's canon-bones with the inquisitiveness of a blind man reading raised print.

Then he turned to Carney who had been chatting with Molly—in full dignity of Walla Walla nomenclature Molly B'Damn—and asked: "Where the hell d'you get Waster?"

A faint smile twitched the owner's tawny mustache, chased away by a little cloud of anger, for in that land of many horse stealings to ask a man how he had come by his horse savoured of discourtesy. But it was only a little wizen-faced, flat-chested friend of Molly B'Damn's; so Carney smiled again, and answered by asking:

"Gentle-voiced kidaloon, explain what you mean by the Waster. That chum of mine's name is Pat—Patsy boy, often enough."

"Pat nothin'! nor Percy, nor Willie; he's just plain old Waster that I won the Ranch Stakes on in Butte, four years ago."

"Guess again, kid," Carney suggested.

"Holy Mike! Say, boss, if you could think like you can punch you'd be all right. That's Waster. Listen, Mister Cowboy, while I tell you 'bout his friends and relatives. He's by Gambler's Money out of Scotch Lassie, whose breedin' runs back to Prince Charlie: Gambler's Money was by Counterfeit, he by Spendthrift, and Spendthrift's sire was imported Australian, whose grandsire was the English horse, Melbourne. D'you get that, sage-brush rider?"

"I hear sounds. Tinkle again, little man."

Molly laughed, her white teeth and honest blue eyes discounting the chemically yellow hair until the face looked good.

The little man stretched out an arm, at the end of it a thin finger levelled at the buckskin's head: "Have you ever took notice of them lop ears?"

"Once—which was continuous."

"And you thought there was a jackass strain in him, eh?"

"Pat looked good to me all the time, ears and all."

"Well, them sloppy listeners are a throw-back to Melbourne, he was like that. I've read he was a mean-lookin' cuss, with weak knees; but he was all horse: and ain't Waster got bad knees? And don't he get that buckskin from Spendthrift who was a chestnut, same's his dad, Australian?" This seemed a direct query for he broke off to cough.

"Go on, lad——"

"Excuse me, sorry"—Molly was speaking—"this is Billy MacKay. My old school chum, Bessie, his sister, wished him on me a month ago to see what God's country could do for that busted chest."

The little man was impatient over the switch to himself—the horse was the thing.

"If it wasn't for them dicky forelegs—Gawd! what a horse Waster'd been. And if his owner, Leatherhead Mike Doyle, had kept the weight offen him he'd've stood up anyway, for he was the truest thing. Say, Bulldog,—don't mind me, I like that name, it talks good,—Waster didn't need no blinkers he didn't need no spurs; he didn't need no whip—I'd as lief hit a child with the bud as hit him. He'd just break his hear tryin'. Waster was Leather-head's meal ticket, dicky knees and all, till he threw a splint. It was the weight that broke him down; a hundred and thirty-six pounds the handicapper give him in the Gold Range Stakes at a mile and a quarter; at that he was leadin' into the stretch and finished, fightin', on three legs. He was beat, of course; and Leatherhead was broke, and I never see Waster again. A trombone player in a beer garden would have known the little cuss with them hot-jointed knees couldn't pack weight, and would 've scratched him."

Carney put a hand caressingly on Jockey Mackay's shoulder, saying: "You stand pat with me, kid—your heart is about human, I guess. What was that hostile person's game?"

Molly explained with a certain amount of asperity:

"He comes here to-day, Bulldog—Well, you know——"

Carney nodded placidly.

"He'd seen me down in the Del Monte joint, and thought—well, he was filled up on Chinese rum. He wasn't none too much like a man in anything he said or done, but I was standin' for him so long as he don't get plumb Injun."

"Injun? Cripes! An Injun's a drugstore gent compared to that stiff, Slimy Red," Billy objected.

"Yes, that's what started it, Bulldog,—Billy knew him."

"Knew him—huh! Slimy Red was the crookedest rider that ever throwed a leg over a horse. He used to give his own father the wrong steer and laugh when the old man's money was burnt up on a horse that finished in the ruck."

"He comes in here palmin' off the moniker of Texas Sam, a big ranch guy that sees blood on the moon when he's out for a time," Molly helped with.

"I didn't know him at first," the little man admitted, "his face bein' a garden of black alfalfa, till I sees that the crop is red for half an inch above the surface where it had pushed through the dye. Then he says, 'I'll bet my left eye agin' your big toe,' and I'm on, for that's a great sayin' with Slimy Red Smith—he was Slimy Red

hissself. And politely, not givin' the game away, but callin' him 'Texas,' I suggests that me and Molly is goin' to sing hymns for a bit, and that he'd best push on."

"Soon's Billy warbles, 'Good-bye, stranger,'" Molly laughed, "this Texas person goes up in the air. Well, you see the finish, Bulldog."

The little man had wrestled a coughing spell into subjection and with apparent inconsistency asked, "Did you ever hear of it rainin' bullfrogs, Mr. Carney?"

Carney nodded, a suspicion flashing upon him that the weak chest was twin brother to a weak brain in Billy the Jock.

"Well, it's been rainin' discard race-horses about Walla Walla."

"Much of a storm?"

"They're comin' kind of thick. There's yours, Waster, and Slimy Red has got Ding Dong; he's out of Weddin' Bells by Tambourine."

"Are you in a hurry, Bulldog?" Molly asked, fancying that Carney's well-known courtesy was perhaps the father of his apparent interest.

"I was, Molly, till I saw you," he answered graciously, a gentle smile lighting up his stern features.

"Oh, you gentleman knight of the road—always the silver-tongued Bulldog. There's a bottle inside with a gold necktie on it, waitin' for a real man to pull the cork. Come on, kid Billy."

The boy looked at Carney, and the latter said;

"It's been a full moon since I pattered with anybody about anything but fat pork and sundown. We'll accept the little lady's invitation."

"I can give Waster four quarts of oats, Mr. Carney; I've been ridin' in the way of a cure."

Carney laughed. "You're a sure little bit of all right, kid; the horse first when it comes to grub—that's me; but I'll feed Pat when he's bedded for the night."

Inside the cottage Molly and Bulldog jaunted back over the life trail upon which they had met at different times and in divers places.

But Jockey Mackay had been thrown back into his life's environment at sight of Waster. He was as full of racing as the wine bottle was full of bubbles; like the wine he effervesced.

"You been here in Walla Walla before?" he asked Carney, breaking in on the memory of a funny something that had happened when Molly and Bulldog were both in Denver.

"Some time since," Carney replied.

"D'you know about Clatawa?"

"Is it a mine or a cocktail, Billy?"

"Clatawa's a horse."

"I might have known," Carney murmured resignedly.

Then the little man narrated of Clatawa, and the fatuous belief Walla Walla held that a horse with cold blood in his veins could gallop fast enough to keep himself warm. He waxed indignant over this, declaring that boneheads that held such crazy ideas ought to be bled white, that is in a monetary way.

Carney, being a Chevalier d'industrie, had a keen nose for oblique enterprises, but up to the present he had enjoyed the little man's chatter simply because he loved horses himself; but at this, the Clatawa disease, He pricked his ears.

"What is your unsavory acquaintance, Slimy Red, doing here with Ding Dong?" he asked.

A cunning smile twisted the lad's bluish lips as he lighted a cigarette.

"Slimy Red is padded," he vouchsafed after a puff at the cigarette.

"Padded!" Molly exclaimed, her blue eyes rounding.

"Sure thing. That herrin' gut can ride at a hundred and twenty pounds. He's a steeplechase jock, gener'ly, though he's good on the flat, too. He's got a couple of sweaters on under that corduroy jacket to make him look big."

Carney laughed. "That explains something. When I pushed my fist against his stomach I thought it had gone clean through—it sank to the wrist; it was just as though I had punched a bag of feathers."

"But the upper cut was all right, Mr. Carney; it was a lallapaloosa."

"Why all the clothes?" Molly asked.

"I've been dopin' it out," the boy answered. "It's all match races here, catch weights; there ain't one of them could ride a flat car without givin' it the slows, but they know what weight is in a race; they know you can pile enough on to bring a cart horse and a winner of the Brooklyn Handicap together."

"I see," Carney said contemplatively; "Slimy Red, if he makes a match, figures to get a big pull in the weights."

"Sure thing, Mike; Walla Walla will bet the family plate on Clatawa; they'll go down hook, line, and sinker, and then some. They'll fall for the clothes and think Slimy weighs a hundred and seventy. D'you get it?"

"Fancy I do," Carney chuckled. "The avaricious Mister Red is probably here on a missionary venture; he aims to separate these godless ones from the root of evil through having a trained thoroughbred, and an ample pull in the weight."

"Now you're talkin'," Jockey Mackay declared. Then he relapsed into a meditative silence, sipping his wine as he correlated several possibilities suggested by the rainfall of racing horses in Walla Walla.

Carney and Molly drifted into desultory talk again.

After a time Billy spoke.

"It ain't on the cards that a lot of money is comin' to Slimy Red—he don't deserve it; he ought to be trimmed

hissself."

"He sure ought," Molly corroborated.

"Hell!" the little man exclaimed; "nobody could never trim Red, 'cause he never had nothin'. I got it! Somebody in Walla Walla is the angel; and Red'll get a rakeoff. He don't own Ding Dong; he couldn't own a lead pad; booze gets his."

"Billy," Molly's face went serious; "I can guess it in once—Iron Jaw! Oh, gee! I've been blind. Iron Jaw, and Snaggle Tooth, and Death-on-the-trail ain't men to cotton to a coot like Slimy Red; they're gamblers, and don't stand for anything that ain't a man, only just while they take his roll. They've been nursin' this four-flusher. It's been, 'Hello, Texas!' and 'Have a drink, Texas.' I've got it."

"Fancy you have, Molly," Bulldog submitted. "Gawd! that's the combination," Billy declared. "I was right."

"And Iron Jaw has got a down on Snaky Dick that owns Clatawa over some bad splits in bets," Molly added.

"The old game," Carney laughed. "When thieves fall out honest men win a bet. It would appear from the evidence that Iron Jaw Blake—I know his method of old—has sent out and got some one to ship in a horse and rider to trim Clatawa, and turn an honest penny."

"You're gettin' warm, Bulldog, as we used to say in that child's game," Molly declared. "I know the pippin; one Reilly, at Portland. I heard Iron Jaw and this Texas talkin' about him."

Carney turned toward the little man. "What are we going to do about it, Billy—do we draw cards?"

Billy sprang from his chair, and paced the floor excitedly. "Holy Mike! there never was such a chance. Waster can trim Ding Dong to a certainty at a mile and a quarter. See, Bulldog, that's his distance; he's a stayer from Stayville; but he can't pack weight—don't forget that. If you rode him—let's see——"

The little man stood back and eyed critically the tall package of bone and muscle, that while it suggested no surplus flesh, would weigh well.

"You're a hundred and seventy-five pounds, and you ride in one of 'em rockin' chairs that'll tip the beam at forty pounds. What chance? Slimy 'll have a five-pound saddle; he could weigh in, saddle and all, a hundred and twenty-five. You'd be takin' on a handicap of ninety pounds. What chance?"

"I might get an Indian boy," Carney suggested. "You might get a doll or a pet monkey," Billy sneered. "What chance?"

"And they all work for Iron Jaw," Molly advised; "they'd blow; he'd bribe them to pull the horse."

"What chance?" Billy repeated with the mournful persistency of a parrot. "Guess I'll go out and tell Waster to forget he's a gentleman and go on pluggin' among the sage brush as a cow-pony." Carney rose when Billy had gone, saying, "Fancy I'll drift on to the rest joint, Molly. I rather want to hold converse with a certain man while the seein's good, if he's about."

"Good-bye, Bulldog," Molly answered, and her blue eyes followed the figure that slipped so gracefully through the door, their depths holding a look that was beautiful in its honest admiration. "God!" she whispered; "why do women like him—gee!" Billy was tickling a lop ear on the buckskin. "Mr. Carney," he said in a low voice, one eye on the cabin door, "you heard what Molly said about Bessie wishin' me on her, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Let me give you the straight info. Molly sent the money to Bessie to bring me here; we was both broke. Then I found out Bessie had been gettin' it for a year from her, 'cause I was sick and couldn't ride. I hadn't saved none, thinkin' I'd got Rockefeller skinned to death as a money-getter. It was the wastin' to make weight that got me. I don't have to sweat off flesh now," he added pathetically; "I'm a hundred and two."

"That's Molly Bur-dan" (her right name) "all over—I know her. But don't worry kid. I haven't got anybody to look after, and having money and no use for it makes me lonesome. You give me Bessie's address, and don't tout off Molly that you're doing it."

"I can get the money myself, Mr. Carney—you just listen now. I didn't spring it inside 'cause Molly'd get hot under the collar; she'd say that if I rode in a race I'd bust a lung. Gee! ridin' to me is just like goin' by-bye in a hammock; it'd do me good."

Carney put a hand gently on the boy's shoulder, saying: "The size of the package doesn't mean much when it comes to being a man, does it, kid? Spring it; get it off your chest."

Billy made a horseshoe in the sand with the toe of his boot meditatively; then said:

"Slimy Red, of course, will be lookin' for a match for Ding Dong. Most of the races here is sprints, the old Texas game of half-a-mile, and weight don't cut much ice that distance. He'll make it for a mile, or a mile-and-a-quarter, 'cause Ding Dong could stay that distance pretty well himself. If you was to match Waster against the black, and let me ride him, I'd bring home the bacon. He's a fourteen pound better horse than Ding Dong ever was; a handicapper would separate them that much on their form. Gee! I forgot somethin'," and Billy, a shame-faced look in his eyes, gazed helplessly at Bulldog.

"What was it dropped out of your think-pan, kid?"

"The roll. I've been makin' a noise like a man with a bank behind him. A match ain't like where a feller can go into the bettin' ring if he knows a couple of hundred-to-one chances and parley a shoe-string into a block of city houses; a match is even money, just about. And to win a big stake you've got to have the long green."

"How much, Billy?"

"Well, the Iron Jaw bunch, bein' whisky men and gamblers, naturally would stand to lose twenty thousand, at least."

"I could manage it in a couple of days, Billy, by keeping the wires hot."

"Before I forget it, Mr. Carney, if you do buck this crowd make it catch weights. Slimy Red don't own a hair in Ding Dong's tail, of course, but he'll have a bill of sale right enough showin' he's the owner, and as he can ride light they'll word it, 'owners up'."

Carney was thinking fast, and a glint of light shot athwart his placid gray eyes.

"Happy thought, Kid; we'll string with them on that; we'll make it owners up."

"I said catch weights," Billy snapped irritably. Carney answered with only a quizzical smile, and the boy, turning, walked around the horse eyeing him from every angle. He lifted first one foot and then the others, examining them critically, pressing a thumb into the frogs. He pinched with thumb and forefinger the tendons of both forelegs; he squeezed the horse's windpipe till the latter coughed; then he said:

"Please, Mr. Carney, mount and give him half a furlong at top speed, finishin' up here. Make him break as quick as you can till I see if he's got the slows."

As obedient as a servant Bulldog swung to the saddle, centered the buckskin down the road, wheeled, brought the horse to a standstill, and then, with a shake of the rein and a cry of encouragement, came tearing back, the pound of the horse's hoofs on the turf palpitating the air like the roll of a kettle-drum.

"Great!" the boy commented when Carney, having gently eased the horse down, returned. "He's the same old Waster; he flattens out in that stride of his till he looks like a pony. His flanks ain't pumpin' none. He'll do; he's had lots of work—he's in better condition than Ding Dong, 'cause Slimy Red's been puttin' in most of his trainin' time at the bar. I got a three-pound saddle in my trunk that I won the 'Kenner Stakes' at Saratoga on. Slimy Red will be givin' me about ten pounds if you make the match catch weights; it'll be a cinch—like gettin' money from home. But don't tell Molly."

"We'll split fifty-fifty," Carney said.

"Nothin' doin', Mister Mug; you cop the coin for yourself—how much are you goin' to bet?"

"Five or ten thousand."

"Well, you give me ten per cent of the five thousand—five hundred bucks, if we win. That'll square Molly's bill for bringin' me up here."

"Come inside, kid," Carney said; "I want to write out something."

Inside Carney said, "Molly, I'm going to give Pat to Billy for a riding horse——"

"What?"

But Billy's gasp of astonishment was choked by a frowning wink of one of Bulldog's gray eyes.

"Pat's getting a little old for the hard knocks I have to give a horse," Carney resumed; "that's partly what I came to Walla Walla for, to get a young horse. Let me have a sheet of paper and a pen; it doesn't do for a man to own a horse in this country without handy evidence as how he came by him; and though this is a gift I'm going to make it out in the form of a bill of sale."

Carney drew up a simple bill of sale, stating, that for one dollar, paid in hand, he transferred his buckskin horse "Pat" to William Mackay. Molly signed it as witness.

"I'll have to keep Pat for a day or two till I get a new pony." Bulldog declared; "also rather think I'll leave this bill of sale with a friend in town for safe keeping, Billy might lose it," and a wink closed one of the gray eyes that were turned on the boy's face.

As Carney sat the buckskin outside, he whispered, "Do you get it, Billy—owners up?"

"Gee! I get you."

The little man had been mystified.

"Don't be in a hurry over the race," he advised; "make it for one week away. That'll give me a chance to give Waster a few lessons in breakin' to bring him back to the old days. I'll put a heavy blanket about his neck for a gallop or two and sweat some of the fat off his pipes. I can get a set of racin' plates made for him, too, for a pound off his feet is four pounds off his back. We'll give him all the fine touches, Mr. Carney, and Waster 'll do his part."

The little man watched the buckskin lope down toward Walla Walla, then he turned in to the cottage where he was greeted by Molly.

"Ain't Bulldog some man, Billy?"

"Will you tell me something, Molly?" the boy asked hesitatingly.

"Shoot," she commanded.

"Is he—was he—the man—Bessie told me something?"

"There ain't no woman on God's footstool, Billy, can say Bulldog Carney was the man that fell down. That's why we all like him. There ain't a woman on the Gold Coast that ever lamped Bulldog that wouldn't stake him if she had to put her sparklers in hock. And there ain't a man that knows him that'll try to put one over—'tain't healthy. He's got a temper as sweet as a bull pup's, but he's lightnin' when he starts. He don't cotton to no girl, 'cause he was once engaged to one of the sweetest you ever see, Billy."

"Did she die, Molly?"

"The other man did! And nothin' was done to Bulldog 'cause it was comin' to the hound."

Carney rode on till he came to the Mountain House. Here he was at home for the proprietor was an old Gold Range friend.

First he saw that the buckskin had a worthy supper, then he ate his own.

When it had grown dark and the gleaming lights of the Del Monte Saloon were throwing their radiancy out into the street, he put the bridle on his buckskin and rode to the house of "Teddy the Leaper," who was Sheriff of Shoshone County.

The sheriff welcomed Carney with a differential friendship that showed they stood well together as man to man; for though Bulldog's reputation varied in different places, and with different people, it stood strongest with those who had known him longest, and who, like most men of the West, were apt to judge men from their own experience.

Teddy the Leaper admired Bulldog Carney the man; he would have staked his life on anything Carney told him. Officially, as sheriff, the County of Shoshone was his bailiwick, and the County of Shoshone held nothing

on its records against Carney. "Always a gentleman," was Teddy's summing up of Bulldog Carney.

Carney drew an envelope from his pocket, saying: "Will you take care of this for me, Sheriff? Inside is a bill of sale of my horse."

"What, Bulldog—the buckskin?" Teddy's eyes searched the speaker's face; it was unbelievable. A light dawned upon the sheriff; Bulldog had put many a practical joke over—he was kidding. Teddy laughed.

"Bulldog," he said, "I've heard that you was English, a son of one of them bloated lords, but faith it's Irish you are. You've as much humor as you've nerve—you're Irish."

"There's also a note in that envelope"—Carney ignored the chaff—"that directs you to pay over to a little lad that's up against it out at Molly's place, any money that might happen to be in your hands if I suddenly—well, if I didn't need it—see?"

"I'll do that, Bulldog."

"Think you'll be at the Del Monte to-night, Sheriff?" Carney asked casually.

Teddy's Irish eyes flashed a quizzical look on the speaker; then he answered diplomatically: "There ain't no call why I got to be there—lest I'm sent for, and I ain't as spry gettin' around as I was when I made that record of forty-six feet for the hop-step-and-jump. If you've got anything to settle, go ahead."

Carney rippled one of his low musical laughs: "I'd like to line you up at the bar, Sheriff, for a thimbleful of poison."

Teddy's eyes again sought the speaker's mental pockets, but the placid face showed no warrant for expected trouble. The Sheriff coughed, then ventured:

"If you're goin' to stack up agin odds, Bulldog, I'll dress for the occasion; I don't gener'ly go 'round hostile draped."

Again Carney laughed. "You might bring a roomy pocket, Sheriff; it might so turn out that I'd like you to hold a few eagle birds till such times as they're right and proper the property of another man or myself. Does that put any kink in your code?"

"Not when I act for you, Bulldog; 'cause it'll be on the level: I'll be there."

Next Carney rode to the Del Monte; and hitching the buckskin to a post, he adjusted his belt till the butt of his gun lay true to the drop of his hand.

As he entered the saloon slowly, his gray eyes flashed over the bar and a group of men on the right of the gaming tables, for there was one man perhaps in Walla Walla he wanted to see before the other saw him. It wasn't Slimy Red—it was a tougher man.

Iron Jaw was leaning against the bar talking to Death-on-the-trail, and behind the bar Snaggle Tooth Boone stood listening to the conversation.

As Carney entered a quick look of apprehension showed for an instant in Iron Jaw's heavy-browed eyes; then a smile of greeting curled his coarse lips. He held out a hand, saying: "Glad to see you, Old Timer. You seem conditioned. Know Carson?"

"Yes."

Carney shook hands with the two men, and reached across to clasp Boone's paw, adding: "We'll sample the goods, Snaggle Tooth."

Boone winced at the appellation, for Carney did not smile; there was even the suspicion of a sneer on the lean face.

"How is Walla Walla?" Carney queried, as the four glasses were held toward each other in salute. "Racing relieved by a little gun argument once in a while, I suppose. Chief Joseph threatening to let his Nez Perces loose on you?"

"Racin' is on the hog," Iron Jaw growled. "There's a bum over yonder pikin' agin the Wheel that's been stung by the racin' bug, but when he calls for a show-down some of 'em will trim him. Hear that?"

Iron Jaw held up a thumb, and they could hear a thin strident voice babbling:

"Walla Walla's a nursery for tin horn sports. There ain't a man here got anythin' but a goose liver pumpin' his system, and a length of rubber hose up his back holdin' his ribs."

Somebody objected; and the voice, that Carney recognized as Texas Sam's snarled:

"Five birds of liberty! You call that bettin'—a hundred iron men?"

"Want to see him?" Iron Jaw queried. "I can't place him. Texas Sam he comes here as; seems to be well fixed; but he's a booze fighter. I guess that's what gives him dreams."

Quiescently Bulldog followed the lead of Iron Jaw and Death-on-the-trail across the room where, with his back to the door, at a roulette table sat Texas Sam. He was winning; three stacks of chips rose to a toppling height at his right hand.

Carney noticed from the color that they were five dollar chips. Knowing from Molly that Texas was a stool pigeon he understood the philosophy of the high-priced counters. It was easier to keep tally on what he drew and what he turned back in after the game, for the losings and the winnings were all a bluff, and the money furnished him for the show had to be accounted for. Iron Jaw trusted no man. "The game's like roundin' up a bunch of cows heavy in calf," Texas was saying as they approached; "it's too damn slow. I want action."

He placed five chips on the thirteen as the croupier spun the wheel, bleating:

"Hoodoo thirteen's my lucky number. I was whelped on Friday the thirteenth, at thirteen o'clock—as you old leatherheads make it, one A.M." The little ivory ball skipped and hopped as it slid down from the smooth plane of the wheel to the number chambers. It almost settled into one, and then, as if agitated by some unseen devil of perversity, rolled over the thin wall and lay, like a bird's egg, in a black nest that was number "13."

"By a nose!" Texas exulted. "Do I win, Judge?" The croupier's face was as expressionless as the silver veil of Mahmoud as he built into pillars over eight hundred dollars in chips, and shoved them across the board to

Texas.

The noisy one swept them to the side of the table, and called for a drink.

It was a curiously diversified interest that centered on this play of the uncouth Texas. Iron Jaw and Death-on-the-trail viewed it with apathetic interest, much as a trainer might watch a pupil punching the bag—it didn't mean anything.

Carney, too, knowing its farcical value, looked on, waiting for his opportunity.

Snaky Dick sat across the table from Texas, dribbling a few fifty-cent chips here and there amongst the numbers, also waiting. To him the play was real; he had seen it in reality a thousand times—a man loaded with bad liquor and in possession of money running the gamut. Behind Snaky Dick sat others of the Clatawa clique waiting for his lead. Their money was ready to cinch the match as soon as made.

Iron Jaw watched Snaky Dick furtively; the time seemed ripening. They had arranged, through some little vagaries of the wheel, vagaries that could be brought out by the assistance of the croupier, that apparently Texas should make a killing.

Now the croupier called out: "Make your bets, gentlemen." He gave the wheel a send-off with finger and thumb, his droning voice singing the cadence of: "Hurry up, gentlemen! Make your bets while the merry-go-round plays on."

"For a repeat," Texas shrilled, dropping the chips one after another on to the thirteen square until they stood like a candle. Impatiently the croupier checked him:

"Mind the limit, Mister."

"When I play the sky's my limit," Texas answered.

"Not here," the croupier admonished, sweeping three-quarters of the ivory discs from thirteen.

The little ball of peripatetic fate that had held on its erratic way during this, now settled down into a compartment painted green.

"Double zero!" the croupier remarked, and swept the table bare.

Texas cursed. "There ain't no double zero in racin'; there ain't no green-eyed horse runnin' for the the track—everybody's got a chance. Here! I'm goin' to cash in."

He shoved the ivory chips irritably across the table, and the croupier, stacking them in his board, said: "A thousand and fifty."

As methodically as he had built up the chips, from a drawer he erected little golden plinths of twenty-dollar pieces, and with both hands pushed them toward the winner. .

Texas put the palm of his hand on the shiny mound, saying:

"I'm goin' to orate; I'm gettin' plumb hide-bound 'cause of this long sleep in Walla Walla. To-morrow I'm pullin' my freight down the trail to the outside where men is. But these yellor-throated singin' birds says I got a cow-hocked whang-doodle on four hoofs named Horned Toad that can outrun anything that eats with molars in Walla Walla, from a grasshopper's jump to four miles. Now I've said it, ladies—who's next?"

A quiet voice at his elbow answered almost plaintively: "If you will take your paw off those yellow boys I'll bury them twice."

At the sound of that drawling voice Texas sprang to his feet, whirled, and seeing Carney, struck at him viciously. Carney simply bent his lithe body, and the next instant Iron Jaw had Texas by the throat, shaking him like a rat.

"You damn locoed fool!" he swore; "what d'you mean?—what d'you mean?" each query being emphasized by a vigorous shake.

"He simply means," explained Carney, "that he's a cheap bluffer—a wind gambler. When he's called he quits. That's just what I thought."

"Give him a chance, Blake," Death-on-the-trail interposed; "let go!"

Iron Jaw pressed Texas back into his chair, saying:

"You've got too much booze. If you want to bet on your horse sit there and cut out this Injun stuff." Snaky Dick had jumped to his feet, startled by the fact that Carney was about to break in on his preserve. Now he said: "If Texas is pinin' for a race Clatawa is waitin'—so is his backin'."

Carney turned his gray eyes on the speaker: "There's a rule in this country, Snaky, that when two men have got a discussion on, others keep out. I've undertaken to call this jack rabbit's bluff, and he makes good, or takes his noisy organ away to play it outside of Walla Walla."

Texas Sam had received a thumb in the rib from Iron Jaw that meant, "Go ahead," so he said, surlily: "There's my money on the table. Anybody can come in—the game's wide open."

"That being so," Carney drawled, "there's a little buckskin horse tied to the post outside, that's carried me for three years around this land of delight, and he looks good to me."

He unslung from his waist a leather roll, and dropped its snake-like body across the Texas coin, saying:

"There's two thousand in twenties, and if this cheap-singing person sees the raise, it goes for a race at a mile-and-a-quarter between the little buckskin outside and this cow-hocked mule he sings about."

"I want to see this damn buckskin," Texas objected.

"You don't need to worry," Iron Jaw commented; "the horse is pretty nigh as well known as Bulldog."

But Texas, having been born in a very nest of iniquity, having been stable boy, tout, half-mile-track ringer, and runner for a wire-tapping bunch, was naturally suspicious.

"I don't match against an unknown," he objected; "let me lamp this Flyin' Dutchman of the Plains; it may be Salvator for all I know."

"Let him get out the door," Carney sneered; "it will be good-bye—we'll never see him again."

"And if we don't," Snaky Dick interposed, "I'll cover your money, Carney."

Bulldog swung the gray eyes, and levelled them at the red-and-yellow streaked beads that did seeing duty in Snaky's face:

"You ever hear about the gent who was kicked out of Paradise and told to go scoot along on his belly for butting in?" Then he followed the little crowd at Texas Sam's heels.

In the yellow glare of the Del Monte lights the buckskin looked very little like a race horse. He stood about fifteen and a quarter hands, looking not much more than a pony, as, half asleep, he had relaxed his body; the lop ears hanging almost at right angles to his lean bony head suggested humor more than speed. He stood "over" on his front legs, a habit contracted when he favoured the weak knees. As he was a gelding his neck was thin, so far removed from a crest that it was almost ewe-like; his tremendous width of rump caused the hip bones to project, suggesting an archaic design of equine structure. The direct lamplight threw cavernous shadows all over his lean form.

Texas Sam shot one rapid look of appraisal over the sleepy little horse; then he laughed.

"Pinch me, Iron Jaw!" he cried; "am I ridin' on the tail board of an overland bus seein' things in the desert, and hearin' wings?"

He pointed a forefinger at the buckskin. "Is that the lopin' jack-rabbit that runs for your money?" he queried of Carney.

"That horse's name is Pat," Bulldog answered quietly, "and we've been pals so long that when any yapping coyote snaps at him I most naturally kick the brute out of the way. But that's the horse, Buckskin Pat, that my money says can outrun, for a mile-and-a-quarter, the horse you describe as a cow-hocked cow-pony, the same being, I take it, the horse you scooted away on when I palmed you on the mouth this morning."

Texas Sam was naturally of a vicious temper, and this allusion caused him to flare up again, as Carney meant it to. But Iron Jaw whirled him around, saying:

"Cut out the man end of it—let's get down to cases. We ain't had a live 'hoss race for so long that I most forget what it looks like. If you two mean business come inside and put up your bets, gentlemen."

Iron Jaw abrogated to himself the duty of Master of Ceremonies. First he set his croupier to work counting the gold of Texas Sam and Bulldog Carney. There were an even hundred twenty-dollar gold pieces in the belt Carney had thrown on the table.

"You're shy on the raise," Iron Jaw remarked, winking at Texas.

"I'll see his raise," the latter growled. "You've got more'n that of mine in your safe, Iron Jaw, so stack 'em up for me till they're level. I might as well win somethin' worth while—there won't be no fun in the race. That jack—that buckskin,—he checked himself—"won't make me go fast enough to know I'm in the saddle."

"You let me in that and I'll furnish the speed," Snaky Dick could not resist the temptation to clutch at the money he saw slipping away from him. "Make it a three-cornered sweep, Mr. Carney," he pleaded; "I'll ante."

"It would be some race," Iron Jaw encouraged; "some race, boys. I've seen the little buckskin amble. I don't know nothin' about this Texas person's caravan, but Clatawa, for a sauce bottle that holds both warm and cold blood, ain't so slow—he ain't so slow, gents."

The idea caught on; everybody in the saloon rose to the occasion. Yells of, "Make it a sweep! Let Clatawa in! Wake up old Walla Walla with something worth while!" came from many throats.

Bulldog seemed to debate the matter, a smile twitching his drab mustache.

"I've said it," Texas cried; "she's wide open. Anybody that's got a pet eagle he thinks can fly faster'n my cow-pony can run, can enter him. There ain't no one barred, and the limit's up where the pines point to."

Snaky Dick had edged around the table till he stood close beside Bulldog, where he whispered: "Let me in, Carney; I've been layin' for this flannel-mouth. I don't want to see him get away with Walla Walla money. You save your stake with me, if I'm in."

Carney pushed the little wizen-face speaker away, saying:

"Any kind of a talking bird can swing in on a winning if he's got a copper-riveted, cinch bet. But sport, as I understand it, gentlemen, consists in providing excitement, taking on long chances."

"That's Bulldog talkin'," somebody interrupted; and they all cheered.

"That being acknowledged," Carney resumed, "I feel like stealing candy from a blind kid when I crowd in on this Texas person. A yellow man wouldn't know how to own a real horse; that money on the table is, so to speak, mine now; but as Snaky Dick is panting to make it a real race, purely out of a kindly feeling for Walla Walla sports, I'm going to let him draw cards. Clatawa is welcome."

"The drinks is on the house when I hear a wolf howl like that!" Snaggle Tooth yelled. "Crowd up, gentlemen—the drinks is on the house! Old Walla Walla is goin' to sit up and take notice; Bulldog is some live wire."

Chairs were thrust back; men crowded the bar; liquors were tossed off. Sheriff Teddy the Leaper, who had come in, felt his arm touched by Carney, and inclining his head to a gentle pull at his coat-sleeve, he heard the latter whisper, "Stake holder for my sake." That was all.

Then the crowd swarmed back to the table where the croupier had remained beside the mound of gold.

"You give Jim, there, a receipt for a thousand, and he'll pass it out," Iron Jaw told Texas.

Jim the croupier took from the safe behind him rolls of twenty-dollar gold pieces and stood them up in Texas's pile. He removed a few coins, saying, "The pot is right, gentlemen; two thousand apiece."

"Hold on," Snaky Dick cried; "it ain't called yet—I draw cards."

"Not till you see the bet and the raise," Carney objected. "Nobody whispers his way into this game; it's for blood."

"Give me a cheque book, Snaggle Tooth," Snaky pleaded.

"Flimsies don't go," Carney objected.

"Nothin' but the coin weighs in agin me," Texas agreed; "put up the dough-boys or keep out."

Snaky was in despair. Here was just the softest spot in all the world, and without the cash he couldn't get

in.

"Will you cash my cheque?" he asked Iron Jaw.

"If Baker'll O.K. it I figger you must have the stuff in his bank—it'll be good enough for me," Iron Jaw replied.

There was a little parley between Snaky Dick, his associates, and Baker, who was a private banker. The cheque was made out, endorsed, and cashed from the gambling funds, Iron Jaw being a partner of Snaggle Tooth's in this commercial enterprise.

When the pot was complete, six thousand on the table, Texas said:

"We've got to have a stakeholder; put the money in Blake's hands—does that go?"

Snaky Dick coughed, and hesitated. He had no suspicion that Iron Jaw had any interest with Texas Sam, but knowing the man as he did, he felt sure that before the race was run Iron Jaw and Snaggle Tooth would be in the game up to the eyes.

The drawling voice of Carney broke the little hush that followed this request.

"You're from the outside, Texas; you know all about your own horse, and that lets you out. The selecting of a stakeholder, and such, most properly belongs to Walla Walla, that is to say, such of us interested as more or less live here. The Sheriff of Shoshone, who is present, if he'll oblige, is the man that holds my money, and yours, too, unless you want to crawfish. Does that suit you, Snaky?"

"It does," the latter answered cheerfully, for, fully believing that Clatawa was going to show a clean pair of heels to the other horses, he wanted the money where he could get it without gun-play.

"That's settled, then," Carney said blithely, ignoring Texas completely. He turned to Teddy the Leaper: "Will you oblige, Sheriff?"

The Sheriff was agreeable, saying that as soon as they had completed details they would take the money over to Baker's bank and lock it up in the safe, Baker promising to take charge of it, even if it were at night.

"Just repeat the conditions of the match," the Sheriff said, and he drew from his pocket a note book and pencil.

Carney seized the opportunity to say:

"A three-cornered race between the buckskin gelding Pat, the black gelding Horned Toad, and the bay horse Clatawa at one mile and a quarter. The stake, two thousand dollars a corner; winner take all. To be run one week from to-day."

"Is that right, gentlemen?" the Sheriff asked; "all agreed?"

"Owners up—this is a gentleman's race," Texas snapped.

"Satisfactory?" the Sheriff asked, his eyes on Carney.

The latter nodded; and Iron Jaw winked at Snaggle Tooth.

Snaky Dick could scarce credit his ears; surely the gods were looking with favor upon his fortunes; the other riders would be giving him many pounds in this self-accepted handicap.

At Sheriff Teddy's suggestion the gold was carried over to Baker's bank, a stone building almost opposite the Del Monte; the bag containing it was sealed and placed in a big safe, Baker giving the Sheriff a receipt for six thousand dollars.

Then they went back to the Del Monte for target practise at the bottle, each man implicated buying ammunition.

At this time Carney had taken the buckskin to his stable, going back to the saloon.

Snaggle Tooth made a short patriotic speech, the burden of which was that the saloon was full of men of eager habit who had not had a chance to sit into the game, and to ameliorate the condition of these mournful mavericks he would sell pools on the race, for the mere honorarium of five per cent.

Fever was in the men's blood; if he had suggested twenty per cent it would have gone.

Snaggle Tooth took up his position behind a faro table and called out:

"The pool is open, with Clatawa, Horned Toad, and Pat in the box. What am I bid for first choice?"

"Twenty dollars," a voice cried.

"Thirty," another said.

"Forty."

"Fifty."

A dry rasp that suggested an alkaline throat squeaked: "A hundred. Is this a horse race, or are we dribblin' into the plate at the synagogue?"

"Sold!" Snaggle Tooth yapped, knowing well that excitement begat quick action. "Which cayuse do you favor, plunger?"

"The range horse, Clatawa."

The croupier at Snaggle Tooth's elbow took the bidder's live twenty-dollar gold pieces and passed him a slip with Clatawa's name on it.

"A hundred dollars in the box and second choice for sale," Snaggle Tooth drawled, his prominent fang gleaming in the lamp light as he mouthed the words.

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty was bid like the quick popping of a machine gun; at seventy-five the bids hung fire, and the auctioneer, thumping the table with his bony fist, snapped, "Sold! Name your jack rabbit."

"Horned Toad!" came from the bidder of the seventy-five.

"A hundred and seventy-five in the box," Snaggle Tooth droned, "and the buckskin for sale. What about it, you pikers—what about it?"

There seemed to be nothing about it, unless silence was something. The hush seemed to dampen the

gambling spirit.

"What!" yelled Snaggle Tooth; "two thousand golden bucks staked on the horse now, and no tinhorn with sand enough in his gizzard to open his trap. This is a race, not a funeral—who's dead? Bulldog, you laid even money; here's a hundred and seventy-five goin' a-beggin'. Ain't you got a chance?"

"Ten dollars!" Carney bid as if driven into it.

"Ten dollars, ten dollars bid for the buckskin; a hundred and seventy-five in the box, and ten dollars bid for the buckskin. Sold!"

The first pool was followed by others, one after another: the roulette table, the keno game, and faro were in the discard—their tables were deserted.

It soon became evident that Clatawa was a hot favorite; the public's money was all for the Walla Walla champion.

Noting this, the Horned Toad trio hung back, bidding less. Clatawa was selling for a hundred, Horned Toad about fifty, and the buckskin sometimes knocked down at ten to Carney, or sometimes bid up to twenty by someone tempted by the odds.

At last Carney slipped quietly away, having bought at least twenty pools that stood him between three and four thousand to a matter of two hundred.

In the morning he rode the buckskin out to Molly's cottage and turned him over to Billy.

The boy's voice trembled with delight when he was told of what had taken place.

"Gee! now I will get well," he said; "I'll beat the bug out now—I'll have heart. You see, Mr. Carney, I got set down in California a year ago. It wasn't my fault; I was ridin' for Timberleg Harley, and he give the horse a bucket of water before the race; he didn't want to win—was lettin' the horse run for Sweeney, layin' for a big price later on. He had an interest in a book, and they took liberties with the horse's odds—he was favorite. He didn't dare tell me anything about it, the hound. When I found the horse couldn't raise a gallop, hangin' in my hands like a sea lion, I didn't ride him out, thinkin' he'd broke down. They had me up in the Judges' Stand, and sent for the books. It looked bad. Timberleg got off by swearin' I'd pulled the horse to let the other one win; swore that I stood in with the book that overlaid him. I was give the gate, and it just broke my heart. I was weak from wastin' anyway. And you can't beat the bug out if your heart's soft; the bug'll win—it's a hundred-to-one on him. First thing I'm goin' to give Waster a ball to clean him out, give him a bran mash, too. He must be like a currycomb inside, grass and hay and everything here is full of this damn cactus. A week ain't much to ready up a horse for a race, but he ain't got no fat to work off, and he knows the game. In a week he'll be as spry as a kitten. I'll just play with him. I'll bunk with him, too. If Slimy Red got wise to anything he'd slip him a twig of locoe, or put a sponge up his nose. Do you know what that thief did once, Mr. Carney? He was a moonlighter; he sneaked the favorite for a race that was to be run next day out of his stall at night and galloped him four miles with about a hundred and sixty in the saddle. That settled the favorite; he run his race same's if he was pullin' a hearse.

"That's a good idea, Billy. There's half-a-dozen Slimy Reds in Walla Walla: it's a good idea, only I'll do the sleeping with the buckskin. I'd be lonesome away from him."

The boy objected, but Carney was firm.

Billy was not only a good rider, but he was a man of much brains. There was little of the art of training that he did not know, for his father had been a trainer before him—he had been brought up in a stable.

Fortunately the buckskin's working life had left little to be desired in the way of conditioning; it was just that the sinews and muscles might have become case-hardened, more the muscles of endurance than activity.

But then the race was over a distance, a mile-and-a-quarter, where the endurance of the thoroughbred would tell over Clatawa. Indeed, full of the contempt which a racing man has for a cold-blooded horse, Billy did not consider Clatawa in the race at all.

"That part of it is just found money," he assured Carney. "Clatawa will go off with a burst of speed like those Texas half-milers, and he'll commence to die at the mile; he hasn't a chance."

As to Ding Dong it was simply a question of whether the black had improved and Waster gone back enough, through being thrown out of training, to bring the two together. Anywhere near alike in condition Waster was a fourteen-pound better horse than Ding Dong. It might be that now, his legs sounder than they had ever been when he was racing, Waster might run the best mile-and-a-quarter of his life.

Of course this might not be possible in a three-quarter sprint, for, at that terrific rate of going, running it from end to end at top speed, a certain nervous or muscular system would be called upon that had practically become atrophied through the more leisure ways of the trail work.

The little man pondered over these many things just as a man of commerce might mentally canvas great markets, conveying his point of view to Carney generally. He would map out the race as they sat together in the evening.

"Of course Snaky Dick will shoot out from the crack of the pistol, and try to open up a gap that'll break our hearts. He won't dare to pull Clatawa in behind; a cold-blooded horse's got the heart of a chicken—he'd quit. Slimy'll carry Ding Dong along at a rate he knows will leave him enough for a strong run home; but he'll think that he's only got Clatawa to beat and he'll pull out of his pace—he'll keep within strikin' distance of Clatawa. I'll let them go on. I know 'bout how fast Waster can run that mile-and-a-quarter from end to end. Don't you worry if you see me ten lengths out of it at the mile. Waster won all his races comin' through his horses from behind—'cause he's game. When Clatawa cracks, and I'm not up, Slimy'll stop ridin' he'll let his horse down thinkin' he's won. You'll see, Mr. Carney. If a quarter-of-a-mile from the finish post I'm within three lengths of Ding Dong and not drivin' him you can take all the money in sight. I'll tell you somethin' else, Mr. Carney; if I'm up with Ding Dong, and Slimy Red thinks I've got him, he'll try a foul."

"Glad you mentioned it, little man," Carney remarked drily.

The buckskin was given a long steady gallop the day after he had received the ball of physic; then for three days he was given short sprinting runs and a little practise at breaking from the gun. Two days before the

race he was given a mile and a quarter at a little under full speed; rated as though he were in a race, the last half a topping gallop. He showed little distress, and cleaned up his oats an hour later after he had been cooled out. Billy was in an ecstasy of happy content.

Nobody who was a judge of a horse's pace had seen Waster gallop his trial over the full course, for the boy had arranged it cleverly. Texas Sam and Snaky Dick both worked their horses in the morning, and sometimes gave them a slow gallop in the evening. Billy knew that at the first peep of day some of the Clatawa people would be on the track, so he waited that morning until everybody had gone home to breakfast, thinking all the gallops were over; then he slipped on to the course and covered the mile-and-a-quarter without being seen.

The course was a straightaway, one hundred feet wide, lying outside of the town on the open plain, and running parallel to the one long street. The finish post was opposite the heart of the town.

The week was one long betting carnival; one heard nothing but betting jargon. It was horse morning, noon, and night.

Carney had acquired another riding horse, and the Horned Toad cabal laughed cynically at his seriousness. Iron Jaw could not understand it, for Bulldog had a reputation for cleverness; but here he was acting like a tenderfoot. Once or twice a suspicion flashed across his mind that perhaps Bulldog had discovered something, and meant to call them after they had won the race. But there was Clatawa; there was nothing to cover up in his case, and surely Carney didn't think he could beat the bay with his buckskin. Besides they weren't racing under Jockey Club rules. They hadn't guaranteed anything; Carney had matched his horse against the black, and there he was; names didn't count—the horse was the thing.

Molly had heard about the match and had grown suspicious over Billy's active participation, fearing it might bring on a hemorrhage if he rode a punishing race. When she taxed Billy with this he pleaded so hard for a chance to help out, assuring Molly that Waster would run his own race, and would need little help from him, that she yielded. When she talked to Bulldog about it he told her he was going to give the whole stake to Billy, the four thousand, if he won it.

And then came the day of the great match. From the time the first golden shafts of sunlight had streamed over the Bitter Root Mountains, picking out the forms of Walla Walla's structures, that looked so like a mighty pack of wolves sleeping in the plain, till well on into the afternoon, the border town had been in a ferment. What mattered whether there was gold in the Coeur d'Alene or not; whether the Nez Percés were good Presbyterians under the leadership, physically, of Chief Joseph, and spiritually, Missionary Mackay, was of no moment. A man lay cold in death, a plug of lead somewhere in his chest, the result of a gambling row, but the morrow would be soon enough to investigate; to-day was *the* day—the day of the race; minor business was suspended.

It made men thirsty this hot, parching anticipation; women had a desire for finery. Doors stood open, for the dwellers could not sit, but prowled in and out, watching the slow, loitering clock hands for four o'clock.

One phrase was on everybody's lips: "I'll take that bet."

Numerically the followers of Clatawa were in the majority; but there was a weight of metal behind Horned Toad that steadied the market; it came from a mysterious source. Texas Sam had been played for a blatant fool; nobody had seen Horned Toad show a performance that would warrant backing.

The little buckskin was looked upon as a sacrifice to his owner's well-known determination, his wild gambling spirit, that once roused, could not be bluffed. They pitied Carney because they liked him; but what was the use of stringing with a man who held the weakest hand? And yet when somebody, growing rash, offered ten to one against the buckskin, a man, quite as calm and serene as Bulldog Carney himself, looking like a placer miner who worked a rocker on some bend of the Columbia, would say, diffidently, "I'll take that bet." And he would make good—one yellow eagle or fifty. It was almost ominous, the quiet seriousness of this man who said his name was Oregon, just Oregon.

"Talk of gamblers," Iron Jaw said with a spluttering laugh, and he pointed to the street where little knots of people stood, close packed against some two, who, money in hand, were backing their faith. Then the fatty laugh chilled into a coldblooded sneer:

"Snaggle Tooth, we'll learn these tin-horns somethin'; tomorrow your safe won't be big enough to hold it. But, say, don't let that Texas brayin' ass have no more booze."

"If you ask me, Blake, I think he's yeller. He's plumb babyfied now because of Carney—sober he'd quit."

"Carney won't turn a hair when we win."

"Course he won't. But you can't get that into Texas's noodle with a funnel—he's hoodooed; wants me to plant a couple of gun men at the finish for fear Bulldog'll grab him."

"Look here, Snaggle, that coyote—hell! I know the breed of them outlaws, they'd rather win a race crooked than by their horse gallopin' in front—he just can't trust himself; he's afraid he'll foul the others when the chance flashes on him. You just tell him that we can't stand to kiss twenty thousand good-bye because of any Injun trick; the Sheriff wouldn't stand for it for a minute; he'd turn the money over to the horse that he thought ought to get it, quick as a wolf'd grab a calf by the throat."

That was the atmosphere on that sweet-breathed August day in the archaic town of Walla Walla.

It was a perfectly conceived race; three men in it and each one confident that he held a royal flush; each one certain that, bar crooked work, he could win.

The sporting Commandant of the U. S. Cavalry troop had been appointed judge of the finish at the Sheriff's suggestion; and another officer was to fire the starting gun.

It was a springy turf course; just the going to suit Waster, whose legs had been dicky. On a hard course, built up of clay and sand, guiltless of turf, the fierce hammering of the hoofs might even yet heat up his joints, though they looked sound; his clutching hoofs might cup out unrooted earth and bow a tendon.

An hour before race time people had flocked out to the goal where would be settled the ownership of thousands of dollars by the gallant steed that first caught the judge's eye as he flashed past the post. Even

Lieutenant Governor Moore was there; that magnificent Nez Percés, Chief Joseph, sat his half-blooded horse a six-foot-three bronze Apollo, every inch a king in his beaded buckskins and his eagle feathers. The picture was Homeric, grand; and behind the canvas was the subtle duplicity of gold worshipers.

At half-past three a hush fell over the chattering, betting, vociferating throng, as the judge, a tall soldierly figure of a man, called:

"Bring out the horses for this race: it is time to go to the post!"

Clatawa was the first to push from behind the throng to the course where the judge stood. He was a beautiful, high-spirited bay with black points, and a broad line of white, starting from a star in his forehead, ran down his somewhat Roman nose. Two men led him, one on either side, and a blanket covered his form.

Then Horned Toad was led forward by a stable man; beneath a loose blanket showed the outlines of a small saddle. The horse walked with the unconcerned step of one accustomed to crowds, and noise, and blare. Beside him strode Texas Sam, a long coat draping his form.

Behind Horned Toad came the buckskin, at his heels Bulldog Carney, and beside Carney a figure that might have been an eager boy out for the holiday. The buckskin walked with the same indifference Horned Toad had shown.

As he was brought to a stand he lifted his long lean neck, threw up the flopped ears, spread his nostrils, and with big bright eyes gazed far down the track, so like a huge ribbon laid out on the plain, as if wondering where was the circular course he loved so well. He knew it was a race—that he was going to battle with those of his own kind. The tight cinching of the little saddle on his back, the bandages on his shins, the sponging out of his mouth, the little sprinting gallops he had had—all these touches had brought back to his memory the game his rich warm, thoroughbred blood loved. His very tail was arched with the thrill of it.

"Mount your horses; it is time to go to the post!" Judge Cummings called, watch in hand.

The blanket was swept from Clatawa's back, showing nothing but a wide, padded surcingle, with a little pocket either side for his rider's feet. And Snaky Dick, dropping his coat, stood almost as scantily attired; a pair of buckskin trunks being the only garment that marked his brown, monkeylike form.

Horned Toad carried a racing saddle, and from a shaffle bit the reins ran through the steel rings of a martingale.

At this Carney smiled, and more than one in the crowd wondered at this get-up for a supposed cow-pony.

Then when Texas threw his long coat to a stable man, and stood up a slim lath of a man, clad in light racing boots, thin white tight-fitting racing breeches and a loose silk jacket, people stared again. It was as if, by necromancy, he'd suddenly wasted from off his bones forty pounds of flesh.

But there was still further magic waiting the curious throng, for now the buckskin, stripped of his blanket, showed atop his well-ribbed back a tiny matter of pigskin that looked like a huge postage stamp. And the little figure of a man, one foot in Carney's hand, was lifted lightly to the saddle, where he sat in attire the duplicate of Texas Sam's.

With a bellow of rage Iron Jaw pushed forward, crying:

"Hold, there! What th' hell are you doin' on that horse, you damn runt? Get down!"

He reached a huge paw to the rider's thigh, as though he would yank him out of the saddle.

His fingers had scarce touched the boy's leg when his hands were thrown up in the air, and he reeled back from a scimitar-like cut on his wind-pipe from the flat open hand of Carney, and choking, sputtering an oath of raging astonishment, he found himself looking into the bore of a gun, and heard a voice that almost hissed in its constrained passion:

"You coarse butcher! You touch that boy and you'll wake up in hell. Now stand back and make to Judge Cummings any complaint you have."

Snaggle Tooth and Death-on-the-trail had pushed to Iron Jaw's side, their hands on their guns, and Carney, full of a passion rare with him, turned on them:

"Draw, if you want that, or lift your hands, damn quick!"

Surlily they dropped their half-drawn guns back into their pig-skin pockets. And Oregon, who had thrust forward, drew close to the two and said something in a low voice that brought a bitter look of hatred into the face of Snaggle Tooth.

But Oregon looked him in the eye and said audibly: "That's the last call to chuck—don't forget."

Iron Jaw was now appealing to the judge:

"This match was for owners up."

He beckoned forward the stakeholder:

"Ain't that so, Sheriff—owners up?"

"That was the agreement," Teddy sustained. "Wasn't that the bargain, Carney?" Iron Jaw asked, turning on Bulldog.

"It was."

"Then what th' hell 're you doin' afoot—and that monkey up?" And Iron Jaw jerked a thumb viciously over his shoulder at the little man on Waster.

Carney's head lifted, and the bony contour of his lower jaw thrust out like the ram of a destroyer: "Mr. Blake," he said quietly, "don't use any foul words when you speak to me—we're not good enough pals for that; if you do I'll ram those crooked teeth of yours down your throat. Secondly, that's the owner of the buckskin sitting on his back. But the owner of Horned Toad is sitting in a chair down in Portland, a man named Reilly, and that thing on Ding Dong's back is Slimy Red, a man who has been warned off every track in the West. He doesn't own a hair in the horse's tail."

Iron Jaw's face paled with a sudden compelling thought that Carney, knowing all this, and still betting his money, held cards to beat him.

The judge now asked: "Do you object to the rider of Horned Toad, Mr. Carney?"

"No, sir—let him ride. I'm not trying to win their money on a technicality, but on a horse."

"Well, the agreement was owners up, you admit?"

"I do," Carney answered.

"Did this boy on the buckskin's back own him when the match was made?"

"He did."

"Is there any proof of the transaction, the sale?" Major Cummings asked.

"Let me have that envelope I asked you to keep," Carney said, addressing the sheriff.

When Teddy drew from a pocket the sealed envelope, Carney tore it open, and passed to the judge the bill of sale to MacKay of the buckskin. Its date showed that it had been executed the day the match was made, and Teddy, when questioned, said he had received it on that date, and before the match was made.

"It was a plant," Iron Jaw objected; "that proves it. Why did he put it in the sheriff's hands—why didn't the boy keep it—it was his?"

"Because I had a hunch I was going up against a bunch of crooks," Carney answered suavely; "crooks who played win, tie, or wrangle, and knew they would claim the date was forged when they were beat at their own game. And there was another reason."

Carney drew a second paper from the envelope, and passed it to the Judge. It was a brief note stating that if anything happened Carney his money, if the buckskin won, was to be turned over to the owner, Billy MacKay.

When the judge lifted his eyes Carney said, with an apologetic little smile: "You see, the boy's got the bug, and he's up against it. Molly Burdan is keeping both him and his sister, and she can't afford it."

Major Cummings coughed; and there was a little husky rasp in his voice as he said, quietly:

"The objection to the rider of the buckskin horse is disallowed. This paper proves he is the legitimate owner and entitled to ride. Go down to the post."

A yell of delight went up from many throats. The men of Walla Walla, and the riders of the plains who had trooped in, were sports; they grasped the idea that the gambling clique had been caught at their own game; that the intrepid Bulldog had put one over on them. Besides, now they could see that the race was for blood. The heavy betting had started more than one whisper that perhaps it was a bluff; some of the Clatawa people believing in the invincibility of their horse, had hinted that perhaps there was a job on for the two other horses to foul Clatawa and one of them go on and win; though few would admit that Carney would be party to cold-decking the public.

But accident had thrown the cards all on the table; it was to be a race to the finish, and the stakes represented real money.

Before they could start quite openly Carney stepped close to the rider of Horned Toad, and said, in even tones:

"Slimy Red, if you pull any dirty work I'll be here at the finish waiting for you. If you can win, win; but ride straight, or you'll never ride again."

"I'll be hangin' round the finish post, too," Oregon muttered abstractedly, but both Iron Jaw and Snaggle Tooth could hear him.

The three horses passed down the course, Clatawa sidling like a boat in a choppy sea, champing at his bit irritably, flecks of white froth snapping from his lips, and his tail twitching and swishing, indicating his excitable temperament; Horned Toad and Waster walked with that springy lift to the pasterns that indicated the perfection of breeding. Indians and cowboys raced up and down the plain, either side of the course, on their ponies, bandying words in a very ecstasy of delight. Old Walla Walla had come into its own; the greatest sport on earth was on in all its glory.

After a time the three horses were seen to turn far down the course; they criss-crossed, and wove in and out a few times as they were being placed by the starter. The excitable Clatawa was giving trouble; sometimes he reared straight up; then, with a few bucking jumps, fought for his head. But the sinewy Snaky Dick was always his master.

Atop the little buckskin the boy was scarce discernible at that distance, as he sat low crouched over his horse's wither. Almost like an equine statue stood Waster, so still, so sleepy-like, that those who had taken long odds about him felt a depression.

Horned Toad was scarcely still for an instant; his wary rider, Texas, was keeping him on his toes—not letting him chill out; but, like the buckskin's jockey, his eye was always on the man with the gun. They were old hands at the game, both of them; they paid little attention to the antics of Clatawa—the starter was the whole works.

Clatawa had broken away to be pulled up in thirty yards. Now, as he came back, his wily rider wheeled him suddenly short of the starting line, and the thing that he had cunningly planned came off. The starter, finger on trigger, was mentally pulled out of himself by this; his finger gripped spasmodically; those at the finish post saw a puff of smoke, and a white-nosed horse, well out in front, off to a flying start.

The backers of Clatawa yelled in delight.

"Good old Snaky Dick!" some one cried.

"Clatawa beat the gun!" another roared.

"They'll never catch him!—never catch him! He'll win off by himself!" was droned.

Behind, seemingly together, half the width of the track separating them, galloped the black and the buckskin. It looked as if Waster raced alone, as if he had lost his rider, so low along his wither and neck lay the boy, his weight eased high from the short stirrups. A hand on either side of the lean neck, he seemed a part of his mount. He was saying, "Ste-a-dy boy! stead-d-dy boy! stead-d-dy boy!" a soft, low monotonous sing-song through his clinched teeth, his crouch discounting the handicap of a strong wind that was blowing down

the track.

He could feel the piece of smooth-moving machinery under him flatten out in a long rhythmic stride, and his heart sang, for he knew it was the old Waster he had ridden to victory more than once; that same powerful stride that ate up the course with little friction. He was rating his horse. "Clatawa will come back," he kept thinking: "Clatawa will come back!"

He himself, who had ridden hundreds of races, and working gallops and trials beyond count, knew that the chestnut was rating along of his own knowledge at a pace that would cover the mile-and-a-quarter in under 2.12. Methodically he was running his race. Clatawa was sprinting; he had cut out at a gait that would carry him a mile, if he could keep it up, close to 1.40. Too fast, for the track was slow, being turf.

He watched Homed Toad; that was what he had to beat, he knew.

Texas had reasoned somewhat along the same lines; but his brain was more flighty. As Clatawa opened a gap of a dozen lengths, running like a wild horse, Texas grew anxious; he shook up his mount and increased his pace.

The buckskin reached into his bridle at this, as though he coaxed for a little more speed, but the boy called, "Steady, lad, steady!" and let Horned Toad creep away a length, two lengths; and always in front the white-faced horse, Clatawa, was galloping on and on with a high deer-like lope that was impressive.

At the finish post people were acclaiming the name of Clatawa. They could see the little buckskin trailing fifteen lengths behind, and Horned Toad was between the two.

Carney watched the race stoically. It was being run just as Billy had forecasted; there was nothing in this to shake his faith.

Somebody cried out: "Buckskin's out of it! I'll lay a thousand to a hundred against him."

"I'll take it," Carney declared.

"I'll lay the same," Snaggle Tooth yelled.

"You're on," came from Carney.

And even as they bet the buckskin had lost a length.

Half-a-mile had been covered by the horses; three-quarters; and now it seemed to the watchers that the black was creeping up on Clatawa, the latter's rider, who had been almost invisible, riding Indian fashion lying along the back of his horse, was now in view; his shoulders were up. Surely a quirt had switched the air once.

Yes, the Toad was creeping up—his rider was making his run; they could see Texas's arms sway as he shook up his mount.

Why was the boy on the little buckskin riding like one asleep? Had he lost his whip—had he given up all idea of winning?

They were at the mile: but a short quarter away.

A moan went up from many throats, mixed with hoarse curses, for Clatawa was plainly in trouble; he was floundering; the monkey man on his back was playing the quirt against his ribs, the gyrations checking the horse instead of helping him.

And the Toad, galloping true and straight, was but a length behind.

Watching this battle, almost in hushed silence, gasping in the smothered tenseness, the throng went mentally blind to the little buckskin. Now somebody cried:

"God! look at the other one comin'! Look at him—lo-ook at him, men!"

His voice ran up the scale to a shrill scream. Other eyes lengthened their vision, and their owners gasped.

Clatawa seemed to be running backwards, so fast the little buckskin raced by him as he dropped out of it, beaten.

And Horned Toad was but three lengths in front now. Three lengths? It was two—it was one. Now the buckskin's nose rose and fell on the black's quarters; now the mouse-coloured muzzle was at his girth; now their heads rose and fell together, as, stride for stride, they battled for the lead: Texas driving his mount with whip and spur, cutting the flanks of his horse with cruel blows in a frantic endeavor to lift him home a winner.

How still the boy sat Waster; how well he must know that he had the race won to nurse him like a babe. No swaying of the body to throw him out of stride; no flash of the whip to startle him—to break his heart; the brave little horse was doing it all himself. And the boy, creature of brains, was wise enough to sit still.

They could hear the pound of hoofs on the turf like the beat of twin drums; they could see the eager strife in the faces of the two brave, stout-hearted thoroughbreds; and then the buckskin's head nodding in front; his lean neck was clear of the black and he was galloping straight as an arrow.

"The Toad is beat!" went up from a dozen throats. "The buckskin wins—the buckskin wins!" became a clamor.

Pandemonium broke loose. It was stilled by a demoniac cry, a curse, from some strong-voiced man. The black had swerved full in on to the buckskin; they saw Texas clutch at the rider. Curses; cries of "Foul!" rose; it was an angry roar like caged animals at war.

Carney, watching, found his fingers rubbing the butt of his gun. The buckskin had been thrown out of his stride in the collision: he stumbled; his head shot down—almost to his knees he went: then he was galloping again, the two horses locked together.

Fifty feet away from the finish post they were locked: twenty feet.

The cries of the throng were hushed; they scarce breathed.

Locked together they passed the post, the buckskin's neck in front. Their speed had been checked; in a dozen yards they were stopped, and the boy pitched headlong from the buckskin's back, one foot still tangled in the martingale of Horned Toad.

Men closed in frantically. A man—it was Oregon—twisted Carney's gun skyward crying: "Leave that coyote to the boys."

He was right. In vain Iron Jaw and Death-on-the-trail sought to battle back the tense-faced men who reached for Texas. Iron Jaw and Death-on-the-trail were swallowed up in a seething mass of clamoring devils. Gun play was out of the question: humans were like herrings packed in a barrel.

Major Cummings, cool and quick-witted, had called shrilly "Troopers!" and a little cordon of men in cavalry uniform had Texas in the centre of a guarding circle.

Carney, on his knees beside the boy, was guarding the lad from the mad, trampling, fighting men; striking with the butt of his pistol. And then a woman's shrill voice rose clear above the tumult, crying:

"Back, you cowards—you brutes: the boy is dying: give him room—give him air!"

Her bleached hair was down her back; her silk finery was torn like a battered flag; for she had fought her way through the crowd to the boy's side.

"Don't lift him—he's got a hemorrhage!" she shrieked, as Carney put his arms beneath the little lad. "Drive the men back—give him air!" she commanded; and turned Billy flat on his back, tearing from her shoulders a rich scarf to place beneath his head. The lad's lips, coated with red froth, twitched in a weak smile; he reached out a thin hand, and Molly, sitting at his head, drew it into her lap.

"Just lie still, Billy. You'll be all right, boy; just lie still; don't speak," she admonished.

She could hear the lad's throat click, click, click at each breath, the ominous tick tick, of "the bug's" work; and at each half-stifled cough the red-tinged yeasty sputum bubbled up from the life well.

The fighting clamor was dying down; shamefaced men were widening the circle about the lad and Molly.

The judge's voice was heard saying:

"The buckskin won the race, gentlemen." And he added, strong condemnation in his voice: "If Horned Toad had been first I would have disqualified him: it was a deliberate foul."

The cavalry men had got Texas away, mounted, and rushed him out to the barracks for protection.

"Get a stretcher, someone, please," Molly asked of the crowd. "Billy will be all right, but we must keep him flat on his back.

"You'll be all right, Billy," she added, bending her head till her lips touched the boy's forehead, and her mass of peroxidized hair hid the hot tears that fell from the blue eyes that many thought only capable of cupidity and guile.

IV.—THE GOLD WOLF

All day long Bulldog Carney had found, where the trail was soft, the odd imprint of that goblined inturned hoof. All day in the saddle, riding a trail that winds in and out among rocks, and trees, and cliffs monotonously similar, the hush of the everlasting hills holding in subjection man's soul, the towering giants of embattled rocks thrusting up towards God's dome pigmying to nothingness that rat, a man, produces a comatose condition of mind; man becomes a child, incapable of little beyond the recognition of trivial things; the erratic swoop of a bird, the sudden roar of a cataract, the dirge-like sigh of wind through the harp of a giant pine.

And so, curiously, Bulldog's fancy had toyed aimlessly with the history of the cayuse that owned that inturned left forefoot. Always where the hoof's imprint lay was the flat track of a miner's boot, the hob nails denting the black earth with stolid persistency. But the owner of the miner's boot seemed of little moment; it was the abnormal hoof that, by a strange perversity, haunted Carney.

The man was probably a placer miner coming down out of the Eagle Hills, leading a pack pony that carried his duffel and, perhaps, a small fortune in gold. Of course, like Carney, he was heading for steel, for the town of Bucking Horse.

Toward evening, as Carney rode down a winding trail that led to the ford of Singing Water, rounding an abrupt turn the mouth of a huge cave yawned in the side of a cliff away to his left. Something of life had melted into its dark shadow that had the semblance of a man; or it might have been a bear or a wolf. Lower down in the valley that was called the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge, his buckskin shied, and with a snort of fear left the trail and elliptically came back to it twenty yards beyond.

In the centre of the ellipse, on the trail, stood a gaunt form, a huge dog-wolf. He was a sinister figure, his snarling lips curled back from strong yellow fangs, his wide powerful head low hung, and the black bristles on his back erect in challenge.

The whole thing was weird, uncanny; a single wolf to stand his ground in daylight was unusual.

Instinctively Bulldog reined in the buckskin, and half turning in the saddle, with something of a shudder, searched the ground at the wolf's feet dreading to find something. But there was nothing.

The dog-wolf, with a snarling twist of his head, sprang into the bushes just as Carney dropped a hand to his gun; his quick eye had seen the movement.

Carney had meant to camp just beyond the ford of Singing Water, but the usually placid buckskin was fretful, nervous.

A haunting something was in the air; Carney, himself, felt it. The sudden apparition of the wolf could not account for this mental unrest, either in man or beast, for they were both inured to the trail, and a wolf meant

little beyond a skulking beast that a pistol shot would drive away.

High above the rider towered Old Squaw Mountain. It was like a battered feudal castle, on its upper reaches turret and tower and bastion catching vagrant shafts of gold and green, as, beyond, in the far west, a flaming sun slid down behind the Selkirks. Where he rode in the twisted valley a chill had struck the air, suggesting vaults, dungeons; the giant ferns hung heavy like the plumes of knights drooping with the death dew. A reaching stretch of salmon bushes studded with myriad berries that gleamed like topaz jewels hedged on both sides the purling, frothing stream that still held the green tint of its glacier birth.

Many times in his opium running Carney had swung along this wild trail almost unconscious of the way, his mind travelling far afield; now back to the old days of club life; to the years of army routine; to the bright and happy scenes where rich-gowned women and cultured men laughed and bantered with him. At times it was the newer rough life of the West; the ever-present warfare of man against man; the yesterday where he had won, or the to-morrow where he might cast a losing hazard—where the dice might turn groggily from a six-spotted side to a deuce, and the thrower take a fall.

But to-night, as he rode, something of depression, of a narrow environment, of an evil one, was astride the withers of his horse; the mountains seemed to close in and oppress him. The buckskin, too, swung his heavy lop ears irritably back and forth, back and forth. Sometimes one ear was pricked forward as though its owner searched the beyond, the now glooming valley that, at a little distance, was but a blur, the other ear held backward as though it would drink in the sounds of pursuit.

Pursuit! that was the very thing; instinctively the rider turned in his saddle, one hand on the horn, and held his piercing gray eyes on the back trail, searching for the embodiment of this phantasy. The unrest had developed that far into conception, something evil hovered on his trail, man or beast. But he saw nothing but the swaying kaleidoscope of tumbling forest shadows; rocks that, half gloomed, took fantastic forms; bushes that swayed with the rolling gait of a grizzly.

The buckskin had quickened his pace as if, tired though he was, he would go on beyond that valley of fear before they camped.

Where the trail skirted the brink of a cliff that had a drop of fifty feet, Carney felt the horse tremble, and saw him hug the inner wall; and, when they had rounded the point, the buckskin, with a snort of relief, clamped the snaffle in his teeth and broke into a canter.

"I wonder—by Jove!" and Bulldog, pulling the buckskin to a stand, slipped from his back, and searched the black-loamed trail.

"I believe you're right, Pat," he said, addressing the buckskin; "something happened back there." He walked for a dozen paces ahead of the horse, his keen gray eyes on the earth. He stopped and rubbed his chin, thinking—thinking aloud.

"There are tracks, Patsy boy—moccasins; but we've lost our gunboat-footed friend. What do you make of that, Patsy—gone over the cliff? But that damn wolf's pugs are here; he's travelled up and down. By gad! two of them!"

Then, in silence, Carney moved along the way, searching and pondering; cast into a curious, superstitious mood that he could not shake off. The intumed hoof-print had vanished, so the owner of the big feet that carried hob-nailed boots did not ride.

Each time that Carney stopped to bend down in study of the trail the buckskin pushed at him fretfully with his soft muzzle and rattled the snaffle against his bridle teeth.

At last Carney stroked the animal's head reassuringly, saying: "You're quite right, pal—it's none of our business. Besides, we're a pair of old grannies imagining things."

But as he lifted to the saddle, Bulldog, like the horse, felt a compelling inclination to go beyond the Valley of the Grizzly's Bridge to camp for the night.

Even as they climbed to a higher level of flat land, from back on the trail that was now lost in the deepening gloom, came the howl of a wolf; and then, from somewhere beyond floated the answering call of the dog-wolf's mate—a whimpering, hungry note in her weird wail.

"Bleat, damn you!" Carney cursed softly; "if you bother us I'll sit by with a gun and watch Patsy boy kick you to death."

As if some genii of the hills had taken up and sent on silent waves his challenge, there came filtering through the pines and birch a snarling yelp.

"By gad!" and Carney cocked his ear, pulling the horse to a stand.

Then in the heavy silence of the wooded hills he pushed on again muttering, "There's something wrong about that wolf howl—it's different."

Where a big pine had showered the earth with cones till the covering was soft, and deep, and springy, and odorous like a perfumed mattress of velvet, he hesitated; but the buckskin, in the finer animal reasoning, pleaded with little impatient steps and shakes of the head that they push on.

Carney yielded, saying softly: "Go on, kiddie boy; peace of mind is good dope for a sleep."

So it was ten o'clock when the two travellers, Carney and Pat, camped in an open, where the moon, like a silver mirror, bathed the earth in reassuring light. Here the buckskin had come to a halt, filled his lungs with the perfumed air in deep draughts, and turning his head half round had waited for his partner to dismount.

It was curious this man of steel nerve and flawless courage feeling at all the guidance of unknown threatenings, unexplainable disquietude. He did not even build a fire; but choosing a place where the grass was rich he spread his blanket beside the horse's picket pin.

Bulldog's life had provided him with different sleeping moods; it was a curious subconscious matter of mental adjustment before he slipped away from the land of knowing. Sometimes he could sleep like a tired laborer, heavily, unresponsive to the noise of turmoil; at other times, when deep sleep might cost him his life, his senses hovered so close to consciousness that a dried leaf scurrying before the wind would call him to alert action. So now he lay on his blanket, sometimes over the border of spirit land, and sometimes conscious

of the buckskin's pull at the crisp grass. Once he came wide awake, with no movement but the lifting of his eyelids. He had heard nothing; and now the gray eyes, searching the moonlit plain, saw nothing. Yet within was a full consciousness that there was something—not close, but hovering there beyond.

The buckskin also knew. He had been lying down, but with a snort of discontent his forequarters went up and he canted to his feet with a spring of wariness. Perhaps it was the wolves.

But after a little Carney knew it was not the wolves; they, cunning devils, would have circled beyond his vision, and the buckskin, with his delicate scent, would have swung his head the full circle of the compass; but he stood facing down the back trail; the thing was there, watching.

After that Carney slept again, lighter if possible, thankful that he had yielded to the wisdom of the horse and sought the open.

Half a dozen times there was this gentle transition from the sleep that was hardly a sleep, to a full acute wakening. And then the paling sky told that night was slipping off to the western ranges, and that beyond the Rockies, to the east, day was sleepily travelling in from the plains.

The horse was again feeding; and Carney, shaking off the lethargy of his broken sleep, gathered some dried stunted bushes, and, building a little fire, made a pot of tea; confiding to the buckskin as he mounted that he considered himself no end of a superstitious ass to have bothered over a nothing.

Not far from where Carney had camped the trail he followed turned to the left to sweep around a mountain, and here it joined, for a time, the trail running from Fort Steel west toward the Kootenay. The sun, topping the Rockies, had lifted from the earth the graying shadows, and now Carney saw, as he thought, the hoof-prints of the day before.

There was a feeling of relief with this discovery. There had been a morbid disquiet in his mind; a mental conviction that something had happened to that intoed cayuse and his huge-footed owner. Now all the weird fancies of the night had been just a vagary of mind. Where the trail was earthed, holding clear impressions, he dismounted, and walked ahead of the buckskin, reading the lettered clay. Here and there was imprinted a moccasined foot; once there was the impression of boots; but they were not the huge imprints of hob-nailed soles. They showed that a man had dismounted, and then mounted again; and the cayuse had not an inturned left forefoot; also the toe wall of one hind foot was badly broken. His stride was longer, too; he did not walk with the short step of a pack pony.

The indefinable depression took possession of Bulldog again; he tried to shake it off—it was childish. The huge-footed one perhaps was a prospector, and had wandered up into some one of the gulches looking for gold. That was objecting Reason formulating an hypothesis.

Then presently Carney discovered the confusing element of the same cayuse tracks heading the other way, as if the man on horseback had travelled both up and down the trail.

Where the Bucking Horse trail left the Kootenay trail after circling the mountain, Carney saw that the hoof prints continued toward Kootenay. And there were a myriad of tracks; many mounted men had swung from the Bucking Horse trail to the Kootenay path; they had gone and returned, for the hoof prints that toed toward Bucking Horse lay on top.

This also was strange; men did not ride out from the sleepy old town in a troop like cavalry. There was but one explanation, the explanation of the West—those mounted men had ridden after somebody—had trailed somebody who was wanted quick.

This crescendo to his associated train of thought obliterated mentally the goblin-footed cayuse, the huge hob-nailed boot, the something at the cliff, the hovering oppression of the night—everything.

Carney closed his mind to the torturing riddle and rode, sometimes humming an Irish ballad of Mangin's.

It was late afternoon when he rode into Bucking Horse; and Bucking Horse was in a ferment.

Seth Long's hotel, the Gold Nugget, was the cauldron in which the waters of unrest seethed.

A lynching was in a state of almost completion, with Jeanette Holt's brother, Harry, elected to play the leading part of the lynched. Through the deference paid to his well-known activity when hostile events were afoot, Carney was cordially drawn into the maelstrom of ugly-tempered men.

Jeanette's brother may be said to have suffered from a preponderance of opinion against him, for only Jeanette, and with less energy, Seth Long, were on his side. All Bucking Horse, angry Bucking Horse, was for stringing him up *tout de suite*. The times were propitious for this entertainment, for Sergeant Black, of the Mounted Police, was over at Fort Steel, or somewhere else on patrol, and the law was in the keeping of the mob.

Ostensibly Carney ranged himself on the side of law and order. That is what he meant when, leaning carelessly against the Nugget bar, one hand on his hip, chummily close to the butt of his six-gun, he said:

"This town had got a pretty good name, as towns go in the mountains, and my idea of a man that's too handy at the lynch game is that he's a pretty poor sport."

"How's that, Bulldog?" Kootenay Jim snapped.

"He's a poor sport," Carney drawled, "because he's got a hundred to one the best of it—first, last, and always; he isn't in any danger when he starts, because it's a hundred men to one poor devil, who, generally, isn't armed, and he knows that at the finish his mates will perjure themselves to save their own necks. I've seen one or two lynch mobs and they were generally egged on by men who were yellow."

Carney's gray eyes looked out over the room full of angry men with a quiet thoughtful steadiness that forced home the conviction that he was wording a logic he would demonstrate. No other man in that room could have stood up against that plank bar and declared himself without being called quick.

"You hear fust what this rat done, Bulldog, then we'll hear what you've got to say," Kootenay growled.

"That's well spoken, Kootenay," Bulldog answered. "I'm fresh in off the trail, and perhaps I'm quieter than the rest of you, but first, being fresh in off the trail, there's a little custom to be observed."

With a sweep of his hand Carney waved a salute to a line of bottles behind the bar.

Jeanette, standing in the open door that led from the bar to the dining-room, gripping the door till her nails sank into the pine, felt hot tears gush into her eyes. How wise, how cool, this brave Bulldog that she loved so well. She had had no chance to plead with him for help. He had just come into that murder-crazed throng, and the words had been hurled at him from a dozen mouths that her brother Harry—Harry the waster, the no-good, the gambler—had been found to be the man who had murdered returning miners on the trail for their gold, and that they were going to string him up.

And now there he stood, her god of a man, Bulldog Carney, ranged on her side, calm, and brave. It was the first glint of hope since they had brought her brother in, bound to the back of a cayuse. She had pushed her way amongst the men, but they were like wolves; she had pleaded and begged for delay, but the evidence was so overwhelming; absolutely hopeless it had appeared. But now something whispered "Hope".

It was curious the quieting effect that single drink at the bar had; the magnetism of Carney seemed to envelop the men, to make them reasonable. Ordinarily they were reasonable men. Bulldog knew this, and he played the card of reason.

For the two or three gun men—Kootenay Jim, John of Slocan, and Denver Ike—Carney had his own terrible personality and his six-gun; he could deal with those three toughs if necessary.

"Now tell me, boys, what started this hellery," Carney asked when they had drunk.

The story was fired at him; if a voice hesitated, another took up the narrative.

Miners returning from the gold field up in the Eagle Hills had mysteriously disappeared, never turning up at Bucking Horse. A man would have left the Eagle Hills, and somebody drifting in from the same place later on, would ask for him at Bucking Horse—nobody had seen him.

Then one after another two skeletons had been found on the trail; the bodies had been devoured by wolves.

"And wolves don't eat gold—not what you'd notice, as a steady chuck," Kootenay Jim yelled.

"Men wolves do," Carney thrust back, and his gray eyes said plainly, "That's your food, Jim."

"Meanin' what by that, pard?" Kootenay snarled, his face evil in a threat.

"Just what the words convey—you sort them out, Kootenay."

But Miner Graham interposed. "We got kinder leary about this wolf game, Carney, 'cause they ain't bothered nobody else 'cept men packin' in their winnin's from the Eagle Hills; and four days ago Caribou Dave—here he is sittin' right here—he arrives packin' Fourteen-foot Johnson—that is, all that's left of Fourteen-foot."

"Johnson was my pal," Caribou Dave interrupted, a quaver in his voice, "and he leaves the Eagle Nest two days ahead of me, packin' a big clean-up of gold on a cayuse. He was goin' to mooch aroun' Buckin' Horse till I creeps in afoot, then we was goin' out. We been together a good many years, ol' Fourteen-foot and me."

Something seemed to break in Caribou's voice and Graham added: "Dave finds his mate at the foot of a cliff."

Carney started; and instinctively Kootenay's hand dropped to his gun, thinking something was going to happen.

"I dunno just what makes me look there for Fourteen-foot, Bulldog," Caribou Dave explained. "I was comin' along the trail seein' the marks of 'em damn big feet of his, and they looked good to me—I guess I was gettin' kinder homesick for him; when I'd camp I'd go out and paw 'em tracks; 'twas kinder like shakin' hands. We been together a good many years, buckin' the mountains and the plains, and sometimes havin' a bit of fun. I'm comin' along, as I says, and I sees a kinder scrimmage like, as if his old tan-colored cayuse had got gay, or took the blind staggers, or somethin'; there was a lot of tracks. But I give up thinkin' it out, 'cause I knowed if the damn cayuse had jack-rabbit any, Fourteen-foot'd pick him and his load up and carry him. Then I see some wolf tracks—dang near as big as a steer's they was—and I figger Fourteen-foot's had a set-to with a couple of 'em timber coyotes and lammed hell's delight out of 'em, 'cause he could've done it. Then I'm follerin' the cayuse's trail agen, pickin' it up here and there, and all at onct it jumps me that the big feet is missin'. Sure I natural figger Johnson's got mussed up a bit with the wolves and is ridin'; but there's the dang wolf tracks agen. And some moccasin feet has been passin' along, too. Then the hoss tracks cuts out just same's if he'd spread his wings and gone up in the air—they just ain't."

"Then Caribou gets a hunch and goes back and peeks over the cliff," Miner Graham added, for old David had stopped speaking to bite viciously at a black plug of tobacco to hide his feelings.

"I dunno what made me do it," Caribou interrupted; "it was just same's Fourteen-foot's callin' me. There ain't nobody can make me believe that if two men paddles together twenty years, had their little fights, and show-downs, and still sticks, that one of 'em is going to cut clean out just 'cause he goes over the Big Divide—'tain't natural. I tell you, boys, Fourteen-foot's callin' me—that's what he is, when I goes back."

Then Graham had to take up the narrative, for Caribou, heading straight for the bar, pointed dumbly at a black bottle.

"Yes, Carney," Graham said, "Caribou packs into Buckin' Horse on his back what was left of Fourteen-foot, and there wasn't no gold and no sign of the cayuse. Then we swarms out, a few of us, and picks up cayuse tracks most partic'lar where the Eagle Hills trail hits the trail for Kootenay. And when we overhaul the cayuse that's layin' down 'em tracks it's Fourteen-foot's hawse, and a-ridin' him is Harry Holt."

"And he's got the gold you was talkin' 'bout wolves eatin', Bulldog," Kootenay Jim said with a sneer. "He was hangin' 'round here busted, cleaned to the bone, and there he's a-ridin' Fourteen-foot's cayuse, with lots of gold."

"That's the whole case then, is it, boys?" Carney asked quietly.

"Ain't it enough?" Kootenay Jim snarled.

"No, it isn't. You were tried for murder once yourself, Kootenay, and you got off, though everybody knew it was the dead man's money in your pocket. You got off because nobody saw you kill the man, and the circumstantial evidence gave you the benefit of the doubt."

"I ain't bein' tried for this, Bulldog. Your bringin' up old scores might get you in wrong."

"You're not being tried, Kootenay, but another man is, and I say he's got to have a fair chance. You bring him here, boys, and let me hear his story; that's only fair, men amongst men. Because I give you fair warning, boys, if this lynching goes through, and you're in wrong, I'm going to denounce you; not one of you will get away—*not one!*"

"We'll bring him, Bulldog," Graham said; "what you say is only fair, but swing he will."

Jeanette's brother had been locked in the pen in the log police barracks. He was brought into the Gold Nugget, and his defence was what might be called powerfully weak. It was simply a statement that he had bought the cayuse from an Indian on the trail outside Bucking Horse. He refused to say where he had got the gold, simply declaring that he had killed nobody, had never seen Fourteen-foot Johnson, and knew nothing about the murder..

Something in the earnestness of the man convinced Carney that he was innocent. However, that was, so far as Carney's action was concerned, a minor matter; it was Jeanette's brother, and he was going to save him from being lynched if he had to fight the roomful of men—there was no doubt whatever about that in his mind.

"I can't say, boys," Carney began, "that you can be blamed for thinking you've got the right man."

"That's what we figgered," Graham declared.

"But you've not gone far enough in sifting the evidence if you sure don't want to lynch an innocent man. The only evidence you have is that you caught Flarry on Johnson's cayuse. How do you know it's Johnson's cayuse?"

"Caribou says it is," Graham answered.

"And Harry says it was an Indian's cayuse," Carney affirmed.

"He most natural just ordinar'ly lies about it," Kootenay ventured viciously.

"Where's the cayuse?" Carney asked.

"Out in the stable," two or three voices answered.

"I want to see him. Mind, boys, I'm working for you as much as for that poor devil you want to string up, because if you get the wrong man I'm going to denounce you, that's as sure as God made little apples."

His quiet earnestness was compelling. All the fierce heat of passion had gone from the men; there still remained the grim determination that, convinced they were right, nothing but the death of some of them would check. But somehow they felt that the logic of conviction would swing even Carney to their side.

So, without even a word from a leader, they all thronged out to the stable yard; the cayuse was brought forth, and, at Bulldog's request, led up and down the yard, his hoofs leaving an imprint in the bare clay at every step. It was the footprints alone that interested Carney. He studied them intently, a horrible dread in his heart as he searched for that goblined hoof that inturned. But the two forefeet left saucer-like imprints, that, though they were both slightly intoed, as is the way of a cayuse, neither was like the curious goblined track that had so fastened on his fancy out in the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge.

And also there was the broken toe wall of the hind foot that he had seen on the newer trail.

He turned to Caribou Dave, asking, "What makes you think this is Johnson's pack horse?"

"There ain't no thinkin' 'bout it," Caribou answered with asperity. "When I see my boots I don't *think* they're mine, I just most natur'ly figger they are and pull 'em on. I'd know that dun-colored rat if I see him in a wild herd."

"And yet," Carney objected in an even tone, "this isn't the cayuse that Johnson toted out his duffel from the Eagle Hills on."

A cackle issued from Kootenay Jim's long, scraggy neck:

"That settles it, boys; Bulldog passes the buck and the game's over. Caribou is just an ord'nary liar, 'cordin' to Judge Carney."

"Caribou is perfectly honest in his belief," Carney declared. "There isn't more than half a dozen colors for horses, and there are a good many thousand horses in this territory, so a great many of them are the same color. And the general structure of different cayuses is as similar as so many wheelbarrows. That brand on his shoulder may be a C, or a new moon, or a flapjack."

He turned to Caribou: "What brand had Fourteen-foot's cayuse?"

"I don't know," the old chap answered surlily, "but it was there same place it's restin' now—it ain't shifted none since you fingered it."

"That won't do, boys," Carney said; "if Caribou can't swear to a horse's brand, how can he swear to the beast?"

"And if Fourteen-foot'd come back and stand up here and swear it was his hawse, that wouldn't do either, would it, Bulldog?" And Kootenay cackled.

"Johnson wouldn't say so—he'd know better. His cayuse had a club foot, an inturned left forefoot. I picked it up, here and there, for miles back on the trail, sometimes fair on top of Johnson's big boot track, and sometimes Johnson's were on top when he travelled behind."

The men stared; and Graham asked: "What do you say to that, Caribou? Did you ever map out Fourteen-foot's cayuse—what his travellers was like?"

"I never looked at his feet—there wasn't no reason to; I was minin'."

"There's another little test we can make," Carney suggested. "Have you got any of Johnson's belongings—a coat?"

"We got his coat," Graham answered; "it was pretty bad wrecked with the wolves, and we kinder fixed the remains up decent in a suit of store clothes." At Carney's request the coat was brought, a rough Mackinaw, and from one of the men present he got a miner's magnifying glass, saying, as he examined the coat:

"This ought, naturally, to be pretty well filled with hairs from that cayuse of Johnson's; and while two horses may look alike, there's generally a difference in the hair."

Carney's surmise proved correct; dozens of short hairs were imbedded in the coat, principally in the sleeves. Then hair was plucked from many different parts of the cayuse's body, and the two lots were viewed through the glass. They were different. The hair on the cayuse standing in the yard was coarser, redder, longer, for its Indian owner had let it run like a wild goat; and Fourteen-foot had given his cayuse considerable attention. There were also some white hairs in the coat warp, and on this cayuse there was not a single white hair to be seen.

When questioned Caribou would not emphatically declare that there had not been a star or a white stripe in the forehead of Johnson's horse.

These things caused one or two of the men to waver, for if it were not Johnson's cayuse, if Caribou were mistaken, there was no direct evidence to connect Harry Holt with the murder.

Kootenay Jim objected that the examination of the hair was nothing; that Carney, like a clever lawyer, was trying to get the murderer off on a technicality. As to the club foot they had only Carney's guess, whereas Caribou had never seen any club foot on Johnson's horse.

"We can prove that part of it," Graham said; "we can go back on the trail and see what Bulldog seen."

Half a dozen men approved this, saying: "We'll put off the hangin' and go back."

But Carney objected.

When he did so Kootenay Jim and John from Slocan raised a howl of derision, Kootenay saying: "When we calls his bluff he throws his hand in the discard. There ain't no club foot anywheres; it's just a game to gain time to give this coyote, Holt, a chance to make a get-away. We're bein' buffaloeed—we're wastin' time. We gets a murderer on a murdered man's hawse, with the gold in his pockets, and Bulldog Carney puts some hawse hairs under a glass, hands out a pipe dream bout some ghost tracks back on the trail, and reaches out to grab the pot. Hell! you'd think we was a damn lot of tender-feet."

This harangue had an effect on the angry men, but seemingly none whatever upon Bulldog, for he said quietly:

"I don't want a troop of men to go back on the trail just now, because I'm going out myself to bring the murderer in. I can get him alone, for if he does see me he won't think that I'm after him, simply that I'm trailing. But if a party goes they'll never see him. He's a clever devil, and will make his get-away. All I want on this evidence is that you hold Holt till I get back. I'll bring the foreleg of that cayuse with a club foot, for there's no doubt the murderer made sure that the wolves got him too."

They had worked back into the hotel by now, and, inside, Kootenay Jim and his two cronies had each taken a big drink of whisky, whispering together as they drank.

As Carney and Graham entered, Kootenay's shrill voice was saying:

"We're bein' flim-flammed—played for a lot of kids. There ain't been a damn thing 'cept lookin' at some hawse hairs through a glass. Men has been murdered on the trail, and who done it—somebody. Caribou's mate was murdered, and we find his gold on a man that was stony broke here, was bummin' on the town, spongin' on Seth Long; he hadn't two bits. And 'cause his sister stands well with Bulldog he palms this three-card trick with hawse hairs, and we got to let the murderer go."

"You lie, Kootenay!" The words had come from Jeanette. "My brother wouldn't tell you where he got the gold—he'd let you hang him first; but I will tell. I took it out of Seth's safe and gave it to him to get out of the country, because I knew that you and those two other hounds, Slocan and Denver, would murder him some night because he knocked you down for insulting me."

"That's a lie!" Kootenay screamed; "you and Bulldog 're runnin' mates and you've put this up." There was a cry of warning from Slocan, and Kootenay whirled, drawing his gun. As he did so his arm dropped and his gun clattered to the floor, for Carney's bullet had splintered its butt, incidentally clipping away a finger. And the same weapon in Carney's hand was covering Slocan and Denver as they stood side by side, their backs to the bar.

No one spoke; almost absolute stillness hung in the air for five seconds. Half the men in the room had drawn, but no one pulled a trigger—no one spoke.

It was Carney who broke the silence:

"Jeanette, bind that hound's hand up; and you, Seth, send for the doctor—I guess he's too much of a man to be in this gang."

A wave of relief swept over the room; men coughed or spat as the tension slipped, dropping their guns back into holsters.

Kootenay Jim, cowed by the damaged hand, holding it in his left, followed Jeanette out of the room.

As the girl disappeared Harry Holt, who had stood between the two men, his wrists bound behind his back, said:

"My sister told a lie to shield me. I stole the gold myself from Seth's safe. I wanted to get out of this hell hole 'cause I knew I'd got to kill Kootenay or he'd get me. That's why I didn't tell before where the gold come from."

"Here, Seth," Carney called as Long came back into the room, "you missed any gold—what do you know about Holt's story that he got the gold from your safe?"

"I ain't looked—I don't keep no close track of what's in that iron box; I jus' keep the key, and a couple of bags might get lifted and I wouldn't know. If Jeanette took a bag or two to stake her brother, I guess she's got a right to, 'cause we're pardners in all I got."

"I took the key when Seth was sleeping," Harry declared. "Jeanette didn't know I was going to take it."

"But your sister claims she took it, so how'd she say that if it isn't a frame-up?" Graham asked.

"I told her just as I was pullin' out, so she wouldn't let Seth get in wrong by blamin' her or somebody else."

"Don't you see, boys," Carney interposed, "if you'd swung off this man, and all this was proved afterwards, you'd be in wrong? You didn't find on Harry a tenth of the gold Fourteen-foot likely had."

"That skunk hid it," Caribou declared; "he just kept enough to get out with."

Poor old Caribou was thirsting for revenge; in his narrowed hate he would have been satisfied if the party had pulled a perfect stranger off a passing train and lynched him; it would have been a *quid pro quo*. He felt that he was being cheated by the superior cleverness of Bulldog Carney. He had seen miners beaten out of their just gold claims by professional sharks; the fine reasoning, the microscopic evidence of the hairs, the intoed hoof, all these things were beyond him. He was honest in his conviction that the cayuse was Johnson's, and feared that the man who had killed his friend would slip through their fingers.

"It's just like this, boys," he said, "me and Fourteen-foot was together so long that if he was away somewhere I'd know he was comin' back a day afore he hit camp—I'd feel it, same's I turned back on the trail there and found him all chawed up by the wolves. There wasn't no reason to look over that cliff only ol' Fourteen-foot a-callin' me. And now he's a-tellin' me inside that that skunk there murdered him when he wasn't lookin'. And if you chaps ain't got the sand to push this to a finish I'll get the man that killed Fourteen-foot; he won't never get away. If you boys is just a pack of coyotes that howls good and plenty till somebody calls 'em, and is goin' to slink away with your tails between your legs for fear you'll be rounded up for the lynchin', you can turn this murderer loose right now—you don't need to worry what'll happen to him. I'll be too danged lonesome without Fourteen-foot to figger what's comin' to me. Turn him loose—take the hobbles off him. You fellers go home and pull your blankets over your heads so's you won't see no ghosts."

Carney's sharp gray eyes watched the old fanatic's every move; he let him talk till he had exhausted himself with his passionate words; then he said:

"Caribou, you're some man. You'd go through a whole tribe of Indians for a chum. You believe you're right, and that's just what I'm trying to do in this, find out who is right—we don't want to wrong anybody. You can come back on the trail with me, and I'll show you the club-footed tracks; I'll let you help me get the right man."

The old chap turned his humpy shoulders, and looked at Carney out of bleary, weasel eyes set beneath shaggy brows; then he shrilled:

"I'll see you in hell fust; I've heerd o' you, Bulldog; I've heerd you had a wolverine skinned seven ways of the jack for tricks, and by the rings on a Big Horn I believe it. You know that while I'm here that jack rabbit ain't goin' to get away—and he ain't; you can bet your soul on that, Bulldog. We'd go out on the trail and we'd find that Wie-sah-ke-chack, the Indian's devil, had stole 'em pipe-dream, club-footed tracks, and when we come back the man that killed my chum, old Fourteen-foot, would be down somewhere where a smart-Aleck lawyer'd get him off."

It took an hour of cool reasoning on the part of Carney to extract from that roomful of men a promise that they would give Holt three days of respite, Carney giving his word that he would not send out any information to the police but would devote the time to bringing in the murderer.

Kootenay Jim had had his wound dressed. He was in an ugly mood over the shooting, but the saner members of the lynching party felt that he had brought the quarrel on himself; that he had turned so viciously on Jeanette, whom they all liked, caused the men to feel that he had got pretty much his just deserts. He had drawn his gun first, and when a man does that he's got to take the consequences. He was a gambler, and a gambler generally had to abide by the gambling chance in gun play as well as by the fall of a card.

But Carney had work to do, and he was just brave enough to not be foolhardy. He knew that the three toughs would waylay him in the dark without compunction. They were now thirsting not only for young Holt's life, but his. So, saying openly that he would start in the morning, when it was dark he slipped through the back entrance of the hotel to the stable, and led his buckskin out through a corral and by a back way to the tunnel entrance of the abandoned Little Widow mine. Here he left the horse and returned to the hotel, set up the drinks, and loafed about for a time, generally giving the three desperadoes the impression that he was camped for the night in the Gold Nugget, though Graham, in whom he had confided, knew different.

Presently he slipped away, and Jeanette, who had got the key from Seth, unlocked the door that led down to the long communicating drift, at the other end of which was the opening to the Little Widow mine.

Jeanette closed the door and followed Carney down the stairway. At the foot of the stairs he turned, saying: "You shouldn't do this."

"Why, Bulldog?"

"Well, you saw why this afternoon. Kootenay Jim has got an arm in a sling because he can't understand. Men as a rule don't understand much about women, so a woman has always got to wear armor."

"But we understand, Bulldog; and Seth does."

"Yes, girl, we understand; but Seth can only understand the evident. You clamber up the stairs quick."

"My God! Bulldog, see what you're doing for me now. You never would stand for Harry yourself."

"If he'd been my brother I should, just as you have, girl."

"That's it, Bulldog, you're doing all this, standing there holding up a mob of angry men, because he's *my* brother."

"You called the turn, Jeanette."

"And all I can do, all I can say is, *thank you*. Is that all?"

"That's all, girl. It's more than enough."

He put a strong hand on her arm, almost shook her, saying with an earnestness that the playful tone hardly masked:

"When you've got a true friend let him do all the friending—then you'll hold him; the minute you try to rearrange his life you start backing the losing card. Now, good-bye, girl; I've got work to do. I'll bring in that wolf of the trail; I've got him marked down in a cave—I'll get him. You tell that pin-headed brother of yours to stand pat. And if Kootenay starts any deviltry go straight to Graham. Good-bye."

Cool fingers touched the girl on the forehead; then she stood alone watching the figure slipping down the gloomed passage of the drift, lighted candle in hand.

Carney led his buckskin from the mine tunnel, climbed the hillside to a back trail, and mounting, rode silently at a walk till the yellow blobs of light that was Bucking Horse lay behind him. Then at a little hunch of his heels the horse broke into a shuffling trot.

It was near midnight when he camped; both he and the buckskin had eaten robustly back at the Gold Nugget Hotel, and Carney, making the horse lie down by tapping him gently on the shins with his quirt, rolled himself in his blanket and slept close beside the buckskin—they were like two men in a huge bed.

All next day he rode, stopping twice to let the buckskin feed, and eating a dry meal himself, building no fire. He had a conviction that the murderer of the gold hunters made the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge his stalking ground. And if the devil who stalked these returning miners was still there he felt certain that he would get him.

There had been nothing to rouse the murderer's suspicion that these men were known to have been murdered.

A sort of fatality hangs over a man who once starts in on a crime of that sort; he becomes like a man who handles dynamite—careless, possessed of a sense of security, of fatalism. Carney had found all desperadoes that way, each murder had made them more sure of themselves, it generally had been so easy.

Caribou Dave had probably passed without being seen by the murderer; indeed he had passed that point early in the morning, probably while the ghoul of the trail slept; the murderer would reason that if there was any suspicion in Bucking Horse that miners had been made away with, a posse would have come riding over the back trail, and the murderer would have ample knowledge of their approach.

To a depraved mind, such as his, there was a terrible fascination in this killing of men, and capturing their gold; he would keep at it like a gambler who has struck a big winning streak; he would pile up gold, probably in the cave Carney had seen the mouth of, even if it were more than he could take away. It was the curse of the lust of gold, and, once started, the devilish murder lust.

Carney had an advantage. He was looking for a man in a certain locality, and the man, not knowing of his approach, not dreading it, would be watching the trail in the other direction for victims. Even if he had met him full on the trail Carney would have passed the time of day and ridden on, as if going up into the Eagle Hills. And no doubt the murderer would let him pass without action. It was only returning miners he was interested in. Yes, Carney had an advantage, and if the man were still there he would get him.

His plan was to ride the buckskin to within a short distance of where the murders had been committed, which was evidently in the neighborhood of the cliff at the bottom of which Fourteen-foot Johnson had been found, and go forward on foot until he had thoroughly reconnoitered the ground. He felt that he would catch sight of the murderer somewhere between that point and the cave, for he was convinced that the cave was the home of this trail devil.

The uncanny event of the wolves was not so simple. The curious tone of the wolf's howl had suggested a wild dog—that is, a creature that was half dog, half wolf; either whelped that way in the forests, or a train dog that had escaped. Even a fanciful weird thought entered Carney's mind that the murderer might be on terms of dominion over this half-wild pair; they might know him well enough to leave him alone, and yet devour his victims. This was conjecture, rather far-fetched, but still not impossible. An Indian's train dogs would obey their master, but pull down a white man quick enough if he were helpless.

However, the man was the thing.

The sun was dipping behind the jagged fringe of mountain tops to the west when Carney slipped down into the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge, and, fording the stream, rode on to within a hundred and fifty yards of the spot where his buckskin had shied from the trail two days before.

Dismounting, he took off his coat and draping it over the horse's neck said: "Now you're anchored, Patsy—stand steady."

Then he unbuckled the snaffle bit and rein from the bridle and wound the rein about his waist. Carney knew that the horse, not hampered by a dangling rein to catch in his legs or be seized by a man, would protect himself. No man but Carney could saddle the buckskin or mount him unless he was roped or thrown; and his hind feet were as deft as the fists of a boxer.

Then he moved steadily along the trail, finding here and there the imprint of moccasined feet that had passed over the trail since he had. There were the fresh pugs of two wolves, the dog-wolf's paws enormous.

Carney's idea was to examine closely the trail that ran by the cliff to where his horse had shied from the path in the hope of finding perhaps the evidences of struggle, patches of blood soaked into the brown earth, and then pass on to where he could command a view of the cave mouth. If the murderer had his habitat there he would be almost certain to show himself at that hour, either returning from up the trail where he might have been on the lookout for approaching victims, or to issue from the cave for water or firewood for his evening meal. Just what he should do Carney had not quite determined. First he would stalk the man in hopes of finding out something that was conclusive.

If the murderer were hiding in the cave the gold would almost certainly be there.

That was the order of events, so to speak, when Carney, hand on gun, and eyes fixed ahead on the trail, came to the spot where the wolf had stood at bay. The trail took a twist, a projecting rock bellied it into a little turn, and a fallen birch lay across it, half smothered in a lake of leaves and brush.

As Carney stepped over the birch there was a crashing clamp of iron, and the powerful jaws of a bear trap closed on his leg with such numbing force that he almost went out. His brain swirled; there were roaring noises in his head, an excruciating grind on his leg.

His senses steadying, his first cogent thought was that the bone was smashed; but a limb of the birch, caught in the jaws, squelched to splinters, had saved the bone; this and his breeches and heavy socks in the legs of his strong riding boots.

As if the snapping steel had carried down the valley, the evening stillness was rent by the yelping howl of a wolf beyond where the cave hung on the hillside. There was something demoniac in this, suggesting to the half-dazed man that the wolf stood as sentry.

The utter helplessness of his position came to him with full force; he could no more open the jaws of that double-springed trap than he could crash the door of a safe. And a glance showed him that the trap was fastened by a chain at either end to stout-growing trees. It was a man-trap; if it had been for a bear it would be fastened to a piece of loose log.

The fiendish devilry of the man who had set it was evident. The whole vile scheme flashed upon Carney; it was set where the trail narrowed before it wound down to the gorge, and the man caught in it could be killed by a club, or left to be devoured by the wolves. A pistol might protect him for a little short time against the wolves, but that even could be easily wheedled out of a man caught by the murderer coming with a pretense of helping him.

Suddenly a voice fell on Carney's ear:

"Throw your gun out on the trail in front of you! I've got you covered, Bulldog, and you haven't got a chance on earth."

Now Carney could make out a pistol, a man's head, and a crooked arm projecting from beside a tree twenty yards along the trail.

"Throw out the gun, and I'll parley with you!" the voice added.

Carney recognized the voice as that of Jack the Wolf, and he knew that the offered parley was only a blind, a trick to get his gun away so that he would be a quick victim for the wolves; that would save a shooting. Sometimes an imbedded bullet told the absolute tale of murder.

"There's nothing doing in that line, Jack the Wolf," Carney answered; "you can shoot and be damned to you! I'd rather die that way than be torn to pieces by the wolves."

Jack the Wolf seemed to debate this matter behind the tree; then he said: "It's your own fault if you get into my bear trap, Bulldog; I ain't invited you in. I've been watchin' you for the last hour, and I've been a-wonderin' just what your little game was. Me and you ain't good 'nough friends for me to step up there to help you out, and you got a gun on you. You throw it out and I'll parley. If you'll agree to certain things, I'll spring that trap, and you can ride away, 'cause I guess you'll keep your word. I don't want to kill nobody, I don't."

The argument was specious. If Carney had not known Jack the Wolf as absolutely bloodthirsty, he might have taken a chance and thrown the gun.

"You know perfectly well, Jack the Wolf, that if you came to help me out, and I shot you, I'd be committing suicide, so you're lying."

"You mean you won't give up the gun?"

"No."

"Well, keep it, damn you! Them wolves knows a thing or two. One of 'em knows pretty near as much about guns as you do. They'll just sit off there in the dark and laugh at you till you drop; then you'll never wake up. You think it over, Bulldog, I'm——"

The speaker's voice was drowned by the howl of the wolf a short distance down the valley.

"D'you hear him, Bulldog?" Jack queried when the howls had died down. "They get your number on the wind and they're sayin' you're their meat. You think over my proposition while I go down and gather in your buckskin; he looks good to me for a get-away. You let me know when I come back what you'll do, 'cause 'em wolves is in a hurry—they're hungry; and I guess your leg ain't none too comfortable."

Then there was silence, and Carney knew that Jack the Wolf was circling through the bush to where his horse stood, keeping out of range as he travelled.

Carney knew that the buckskin would put up a fight; his instinct would tell him that Jack the Wolf was evil. The howling wolf would also have raised the horse's mettle; but he himself was in the awkward position of being a loser, whether man or horse won.

From where he was trapped the buckskin was in view. Carney saw his head go up, the lop ears throw forward in rigid listening, and he could see, beyond, off to the right, the skulking form of Jack slipping from tree to tree so as to keep the buckskin between him and Carney.

Now the horse turned his arched neck and snorted. Carney whipped out his gun, a double purpose in his mind. If Jack the Wolf offered a fair mark he would try a shot, though at a hundred and fifty yards it would be a chance; and he must harbor his cartridges for the wolves; the second purpose was that the shot would rouse the buckskin with a knowledge that there was a battle on.

Jack the Wolf came to the trail beyond the horse and was now slowly approaching, speaking in coaxing terms. The horse, warily alert, was shaking his head; then he pawed at the earth like an angry bull.

Ten yards from the horse Jack stood still, his eye noticing that the bridle rein and bit were missing. Carney saw him uncoil from his waist an ordinary packing rope; it was not a lariat, being short. With this in a hand held behind his back, Jack, with short steps, moved slowly toward the buckskin, trying to soothe the wary animal with soft speech.

Ten feet from the horse he stood again, and Carney knew what that meant—a little quick dash in to twist the rope about the horse's head, or seize him by the nostrils. Also the buckskin knew. He turned his rump to the man, threw back his ears, and lashed out with his hind feet as a warning to the horse thief. The coat had slipped from his neck to the ground.

Jack the Wolf tried circling tactics, trying to gentle the horse into a sense of security with soothing words. Once, thinking he had a chance, he sprang for the horse's head, only to escape those lightning heels by the narrowest margin; at that instant Carney fired, but his bullet missed, and Jack, startled, stood back, planning sulkily.

Carney saw him thread out his rope with the noose end in his right hand, and circle again. Then the hand with a half-circle sent the loop swishing through the air, and at the first cast it went over the buckskin's head.

Carney had been waiting for this. He whistled shrilly the signal that always brought the buckskin to his side.

Jack had started to work his way up the rope, hand over hand, but at the well-known signal the horse whirled, the rope slipped through Jack's sweaty hands, a loop of it caught his leg, and he was thrown. The buckskin, strung to a high nervous tension, answered his master's signal at a gallop, and the rope, fastened to Jack's waist, dragged him as though he hung from a runaway horse with a foot in the stirrup. His body struck rocks, trees, roots; it jiggered about on the rough earth like a cork, for the noose had slipped back to the buckskin's shoulders.

Just as the horse reached Carney, Jack the Wolf's two legs straddled a slim tree and the body wedged there. Carney snapped his fingers, but as the horse stepped forward the rope tightened, the body was fast.

"Damned if I want to tear the cuss to pieces, Patsy," he said, drawing forth his pocket knife. He just managed by reaching out with his long arm, to cut the rope, and the horse thrust his velvet muzzle against his master's cheek, as if he would say, "Now, old pal, we're all right—don't worry."

Bulldog understood the reassurance and, patting the broad wise forehead, answered: "We can play the wolves together, Pat—I'm glad you're here. It's a hundred to one on us yet." Then a halfsmothered oath startled the horse, for, at a twist, a shoot of agony raced along the vibrant nerves to Carney's brain.

In the subsidence of strife Carney was cognizant of the night shadows that had crept along the valley; it would soon be dark. Perhaps he could build a little fire; it would keep the wolves at bay, for in the darkness they would come; it would give him a circle of light, and a target when the light fell on their snarling faces.

Bending gingerly down he found in the big bed of leaves a network of dead branches that Jack the Wolf had cunningly placed there to hold the leaves. There was within reach on the dead birch some of its silver parchment-like bark. With his cowboy hat he brushed the leaves away from about his limbs, then taking off his belt he lowered himself gingerly to his free knee and built a little mound of sticks and bark against the birch log. Then he put his hand in a pocket for matches—every pocket; he had not one match; they were in his coat lying down somewhere on the trail. He looked longingly at the body lying wedged against the tree; Jack would have matches, for no man travelled the wilds without the means to a fire. But matches in New York were about as accessible as any that might be in the dead man's pockets.

Philosophic thought with one leg in a bear trap is practically impossible, and Carney's arraignment of tantalizing Fate was inelegant. As if Fate resented this, Fate, or something, cast into the trapped man's mind a magical inspiration—a vital grievance. His mind, acute because of his dilemma and pain, must have wandered far ahead of his cognizance, for a sane plan of escape lay evident. If he had a fire he could heat the steel springs of that trap. The leaves of the spring were thin, depending upon that elusive quality, the steel's temper, for strength. If he could heat the steel, even to a dull red, the temper would leave it as a spirit forsakes a body, and the spring would bend like cardboard.

"And I haven't got a damn match," Carney wailed. Then he looked at the body. "But you've got them——"

He grasped the buckskin's headpiece and drew him forward a pace; then he unslung his picket line and made a throw for Jack the Wolf's head. If he could yank the body around, the wedged legs would clear.

Throwing a lariat at a man lying groggily flat, with one of the thrower's legs in a bear trap, was a new one on Carney—it was some test.

Once he muttered grimly, from between set teeth: "If my leg holds out I'll get him yet, Patsy."

Then he threw the lariat again, only to drag the noose hopelessly off the head that seemed glued to the ground, the dim light blurring form and earth into a shadow from which thrust, indistinctly, the pale face that carried a crimson mark from forehead to chin.

He had made a dozen casts, all futile, the noose sometimes catching slightly at the shaggy head, even causing it to roll weirdly, as if the man were not dead but dodging the rope. As Carney slid the noose from his hand to float gracefully out toward the body his eye caught the dim form of the dog-wolf, just beyond, his slobbering jaws parted, giving him the grinning aspect of a laughing hyena. Carney snatched the rope and dropped his hand to his gun, but the wolf was quicker than the man—he was gone. A curious thing had happened, though, for that erratic twist of the rope had spiraled the noose beneath Jack the Wolf's chin, and gently, vibrantly tightening the slip, Carney found it hold. Then, hand over hand, he hauled the body to the birch log, and, without ceremony, searched it for matches. He found them, wrapped in an oilskin in a pocket of Jack's shirt. He noticed, casually, that Jack's gun had been torn from its belt during the owner's rough voyage.

The finding of the matches was like an anesthetic to the agony of the clamp on his leg. He chuckled, saying, "Patsy, it's a million to one on us; they can't beat us, old pard."

He transferred his faggots and birch bark to the loops of the springs, one pile at either end of the trap, and touched a match to them.

The acrid smoke almost stifled him; sparks burnt his hands, and his wrists, and his face; the jaws of the trap commenced to catch the heat as it travelled along the conducting steel, and he was threatened with the fact that he might burn his leg off. With his knife he dug up the black moist earth beneath the leaves, and dribbled it on to the heating jaws.

Carney was so intent on his manifold duties that he had practically forgotten Jack the Wolf; but as he turned his face from an inspection of a spring that was reddening, he saw a pair of black vicious eyes watching him, and a hand reaching for his gun belt that lay across the birch log.

The hands of both men grasped the belt at the same moment, and a terrible struggle ensued. Carney was handicapped by the trap, which seemed to bite into his leg as if it were one of the wolves fighting Jack's battle; and Jack the Wolf showed, by his vain efforts to rise, that his legs had been made almost useless in that drag by the horse.

Carney had in one hand a stout stick with which he had been adjusting his fire, and he brought this down on the other's wrist, almost shattering the bone. With a cry of pain Jack the Wolf released his grasp of the belt, and Carney, pulling the gun, covered him, saying:

"Hoped you were dead, Jack the Murderer! Now turn face down on this log, with your hands behind your back, till I hobble you."

"I can spring that trap with a lever and let you out," Jack offered.

"Don't need you—I'm going to see you hanged and don't want to be under any obligation to you, murderer; turn over quick or I'll kill you now—my leg is on fire."

Jack the Wolf knew that a man with a bear trap on his leg and a gun in his hand was not a man to trifle with, so he obeyed.

When Jack's wrists were tied with the picket line, Carney took a loop about the prisoner's legs; then he turned to his fires.

The struggle had turned the steel springs from the fires; but in the twisting one of them had been bent so that its ring had slipped down from the jaws. Now Carney heaped both fires under the other spring and soon it was so hot that, when balancing his weight on the leg in the trap, he placed his other foot on it and shifted his weight, the strip of steel went down like paper. He was free.

At first Carney could not bear his weight on the mangled leg; it felt as if it had been asleep for ages; the blood rushing through the released veins pricked like a tattooing needle. He took off his boot and massaged the limb, Jack eyeing this proceeding sardonically. The two wolves hovered beyond the firelight, snuffing and yapping.

When he could hobble on the injured limb Carney put the bit and bridle rein back on the buckskin, and turning to Jack, unwound the picket line from his legs, saying, "Get up and lead the way to that cave!"

"I can't walk, Bulldog," Jack protested; "my leg's half broke."

"Take your choice—get on your legs, or I'll tie you up and leave you for the wolves," Carney snapped.

Jack the Wolf knew his Bulldog Carney well. As he rose groggily to his feet, Carney lifted to the saddle, holding the loose end of the picket line that was fastened to Jack's wrists, and said:

"Go on in front; if you try any tricks I'll put a bullet through you—this sore leg's got me peeved."

At the cave Carney found, as he expected, several little canvas bags of gold, and other odds and ends such as a murderer too often, and also foolishly, will garner from his victims. But he also found something he had not expected to find—the cayuse that had belonged to Fourteen-foot Johnson, for Jack the Wolf had preserved the cayuse to pack out his wealth.

Next morning, no chance of action having come to Jack the Wolf through the night, for he had lain tied up like a turkey that is to be roasted, he started on the pilgrimage to Bucking Horse, astride Fourteen-foot Johnson's cayuse, with both feet tied beneath that sombre animal's belly. Carney landed him and the gold in that astonished berg.

And in the fullness of time something very serious happened the enterprising man of the bear trap.

V.—SEVEN BLUE DOVES

They had not been playing more than half an hour when Bulldog Carney felt there was something wrong with the game. Perhaps it was that he was overtired—that he should have taken advantage of the first bed he had seen in a month, for he had just come in off the trail to Bucking Horse, the little, old, worn-out, mining town, perched high in the Rockies on the Canadian side of the border.

From the very first he had been possessed of a mental unrest not habitual with him at poker. His adventurous spirit had always found a risk, a high stake, an absolute sedative; it steadied his nerve—gave him a concentrated enjoyment of pulled-together mental force. But to-night there was a scent of evil in the room.

A curious room, too, in which to be playing a game of poker for high stakes, for it was the Mounted Police shack at Bucking Horse. But Sergeant Black was away on patrol, or over at Fort Steel, and at such times the key of the log barracks was left with Seth Long at his hotel, the Gold Nugget. And it was Seth who had suggested that they play in the police shack rather than in a room of the hotel.

Carney could not explain to himself why the distrust, why the feeling that everything was not on the level; but he had a curious conviction that some one in the party knew every time he drew cards just what was in his hand; that some one always overmastered him; and this was a new sensation to Bulldog, for if there ever was a poker face he owned it. His steel-gray eyes were as steady, as submerged to his will, as the green on a forest tree. And as to the science of the game, with its substructure of nerve, he possessed it *in excelsis*.

He watched each successive dealer of the cards unobtrusively; watched hand after hand dealt, and knew that every card had been slipped from the top; that the shuffle had been clean, a whispering riffle without catch or trick, and the same pack was on the table that they had started with. He had not lost anything to speak of—and here was the hitch, the enigma of it. Once he felt that a better hand than his own had been deliberately laid down when he had raised; another time he had been called when a raise would have cost him dear, for he was overheld; twice he had been raised out of it before the draw. He felt that this had been done simply to keep him out of those hands, and both times the Stranger had lost heavily.

Seth Long had won; but to suspicion that Seth Long could manipulate a card was to imagine a glacier

dancing a can-can. Seth was all thumbs; his mind, so to speak, was all thumbs.

Cranford, the Mining Engineer, was different.

He was mentality personified; that curious type, high velocity delicately balanced, his physical structure of the flexible tenuous quality of spring steel. He might be a dangerous man if roused. Beneath the large dome of his thin Italian-pale face were dreamy black eyes. He was hard to place. He was a mining engineer without a mine to manage. He was somewhat of a promoter—of restless activity. He was in Bucking Horse on some sort of a mine deal about which Carney knew nothing. If he had been a gambler Carney would have considered him the author of the unrest that hung so evilly over the game.

Shipley was a bird of passage, at present nesting in the Gold Nugget Hotel. Carney knew of him just as a machinery man, a seller of compressed-air drills, etc., on commission. He was also a gambler in mine shares, for during the game he had told of a clean-up he had made on the "Gray Goose" stock. The Gray Goose Mine was an ill-favored bird, for its stock had had a crooked manipulation. Shipley's face was not confidence-inspiring; its general contour suggested the head piece of a hawk, with its avaricious curve to the beak. His metallic eyes were querulous; holding little of the human look. His hands had caught Carney's eye when he came into the shack first and drew off a pair of gloves. The fingers were long, and flexible, and soft-skinned. The gloves were the disquieting exhibit, for Carney had known gamblers who wore kid coverings on their hands habitually to preserve the sensitiveness of their finger tips. He also had known gamblers who, ostensibly, had a reputable occupation.

If the Stranger had been winning Carney would not have been so ready to eliminate him as the villain of the play. He was almost more difficult to allocate than Cranford. He was well dressed—too well dressed for unobservation. His name was Hadley, and he was from New York. Beyond the fact that he had six thousand dollars in Seth Long's iron box, and drank somewhat persistently, little was known of him. His conversation was almost entirely limited to a boyish smile, and an invitation to anybody and everybody to "have a small sensation," said sensation being a drink. Once his reticence slipped a cog, and he said something about a gold mine up in the hills that a man, Tacoma Jack, was going to sell him. That was what the six thousand was for; he was going to look at it with Tacoma, and if it were as represented, make the first payment when they returned.

Watching the Stranger riffle the cards and deal them with the quiet easy grace of a club-man, the sensitive tapering fingers slipping the paste boards across the table as softly as the falling of flower petals, Carney was tempted to doubt, but lifting his gray eyes to the smooth face, the boyish smile laying bare an even set of white teeth, he changed, muttering inwardly, "Too much class."

It was puzzling; there was something wrong; the game was too erratic for finished poker players; the spirit of uncertainty possessed them all; the drawing to fill was unethical, wayward. Even when Carney had laboriously built up a queen-full, inwardly something whispered, "What's the use? If there are better cards out you'll lose; if not you'll win little."

Carney's own fingers were receptive, and he had carefully passed them over the smooth surface of the cards many times; he could swear there was no mark of identification, no pin pricks. The pattern on the back of the cards could contain no geometric key, for it was remarkably simple: seven blue doves were in flight across a blue background that was cross hatched and sprayed with leaves.

Then, all at once, he discovered something. The curve of the doves' wings were all alike—almost. In a dozen hands he had it. It was an artistic vagary; the right wing of the middle dove was the thousandth part of an inch more acutely angled on the ace; on the king the right wing of the second dove to the left.

It would have taken a tuition of probably three days for a man to memorize the whole system, but it was there—which was the main thing. And the next most important factor was that somebody at the table knew the system. Who was it?

Seth had won; but a strong run of luck could have accounted for that, and Seth as a gambler was a joke. The Stranger, if he were a super-crook, hiding behind that juvenile smile, would be quite capable of this interesting chicanery—but he had lost.

Cranford, the Engineer, who had played with the consistent conservativeness of a man sitting in bad luck, was two hundred loser. The man of machinery, Shipley, was two hundred to the good; he had played a forcing game, and but for having had two flushes beaten by Seth would have been a bigger winner. These two flushes had troubled Carney, for Shipley had drawn two cards each hand. Either he was in great luck, or knew something.

Carney debated this extraordinary thing. His courage was so exquisite that he never made a mistake through over-zealousness in the fomenting of trouble; the easy way was always the brave way, he believed. In the West there was no better key to let loose locked-up passion than to accuse men of cheating at cards; it was the last ditch at which even cowards drew and shot. He took a handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his eyes, and dropped it into his lap. At the next hand he looked at his cards, ran them together on the very edge of the table, dropped one into the handkerchief, placed the other four, neatly compacted, into the discard, and said, "I'm out!"

Then he wiped his eyes again with the handkerchief, and put it back in his pocket.

At the third deal somebody discovered that the pack was shy—a card was missing. Investigation showed that it was the ace of hearts.

A search on the floor failed to discover the ace.

The irritation caused by this incident was subdued.

"I'll slip over to the hotel and get another pack,"

Seth Long suggested, gathering up the cards and putting them in his pocket.

From the time Carney had discovered the erratic curve to the doves' wings he had been wanting to ask, "Who owns these cards?" but had realized that it would have led to other things. Now the query had answered itself—they were Seth's, evidently.

This decided Carney, and he said, "I'm tired—I've had a long ride to-day."

He stacked up his chips and added: "I'm shy a hundred."

He slid five twenty-dollar gold pieces on to the table, and stood up, yawning.

"I think I'll quit, too," Cranford said. "I've played like a wooden man. To tell you the truth, I haven't enjoyed the game—don't know what's the matter with me."

"I'm winner," Shipley declared, "so I'll stick with the game; but right now I'd rather shove the two hundred into a pot and cut for it than turn another card, for to play one round with a card shy is a hoodoo to me. I've got a superstition about it. It's come my way twice, and each time there's been hell."

The boyish smile that had been hovering about Hadley's lips suddenly gave place to a hard sneer, and he said: "I'm loser and I don't want to quit. The game is young, and, gentlemen, you know what that means."

Shipley's black brows drew together, and he turned on the speaker:

"I haven't got your money, mister; your losin' has been to Seth. I don't like your yap a little bit. I'll cut the cards cold for a thousand now, or I'll make you a present of the two hundred if you need it."

Carney's quiet voice hushed into nothingness a damn that had issued from Hadley's lips; he was saying: "You two gentlemen can't quarrel over a game of cards that I've sat in; I don't think you want to, anyway. We'd better just put the game off till to-morrow night."

"We can't do that," Seth objected; "I've won Mr. Hadley's money, and if he wants to play I've got to stay with him. We'll square up and start fresh. Anybody wants to draw cards sets in; them as don't, quits."

"I've got to have my wallet out of your box, Seth, if we're to settle now; besides I want another sensation—this bottle's dry," Hadley advised.

"I'll bring over the cards, your wad, and another bottle," Long said as he rose.

In three or four minutes he was back again, pulled the cork from a bottle of Scotch whisky, and they all drank.

Then, after passing a leather wallet over to Hadley, he totaled up the accounts.

Hadley was twelve hundred loser.

He took from the wallet this amount in large bills, passed them to Seth, and handed the wallet back, saying, with the boy's smile on his lips, "Here, banker, put that back in your pocket—you're responsible. There's forty-eight hundred there now. If I put it in my pocket I'll probably forget it, and hang the coat on my bedpost."

Seth passed two hundred across to Shipley, saying, "That squares you."

Cranford had shoved his chips in with an I. O. U. for two hundred dollars, saying, "I'll pay that tomorrow. I feel as if I had been pallbearer at a funeral. When a man is gloomy he shouldn't sit into any game bigger than checkers."

Seth now drew from a pocket two packs of cards—the blue-doved cards and a red pack; then he returned the blue cards to his pocket.

Carney viewed this performance curiously. He had been wondering intently whether the new pack would be the same as the one with the blue doves. The red cards carried a different design, a simple leafy scroll, and Carney washed his mind of the whole oblique thing, mentally absolving himself from further interest.

Seth shuffled the new cards, face up, to take out the joker; having found it, he tore the card in two, threw it on the floor, and asked, "Now, who's in?"

"I'll play for one hour," Shipley said, with an aggressive crispness; "then I quit, win or lose; if that doesn't go I'll put the two hundred on the table to Mr. Hadley's one hundred, and cut for the pot." Curiously this only raised the boy's smile on Hadley's face, but inflamed Seth. He turned on Shipley with a coarse raging:

"You talk like a man lookin' for trouble, mister. Why the hell don't you sit into the game or take your little bag of marbles and run away home."

"I'm going," Carney declared noisily. "My advice to you gentlemen is to cut out the unpleasantness, and play the game."

Somewhat sullenly Shipley checked an angry retort that had risen to his lips, and, reaching for the rack of poker chips, started to build a little pile in front of him.

Cranford followed Carney out, and though his shack lay in the other direction, walked with the latter to the Gold Nugget. Cranford was in a most depressed mood; he admitted this.

"There was something wrong about that game, Carney," he asserted. "I knew you felt it—that's why you quit. I was to go up to Bald Rock on the night train to make a little payment in the morning to secure some claims, but now I don't know. I'm sore on myself for sitting in. I guess I've got the gambling bug in me as big as a woodchuck; I'm easy when I hear the click of poker chips. I lose two hundred there, and while, generally, it's not more than a piker's bet on anything, just now I'm trying to put something over in the way of a deal, and I'm runnin' kind of close to the wind, financially. That two hundred may—hell! don't think me a squealer, Bulldog. Good night, Bulldog."

Carney stood for ten seconds watching Cranford's back till it merged into the blur of the night. Then he entered the hotel, almost colliding with Jeanette Holt, who put a hand on his arm and drew him into the dining-room to a seat at a little table.

"Where's Seth?" she asked.

"Over at the police shack."

"Poker?"

Carney nodded.

"Mr. Hadley there?"

Again Carney nodded. Then he asked, "Why, Jeanette?"

"I don't quite know," she answered wearily. "Seth's moral fibre—if he has any—is becoming like a worn-out spring in a clock." Then her dark eyes searched Carney's placid gray eyes, and she asked, "Were you playing?"

"Yes."

The girl drew her hand across her eyes as if she were groping, not for ideas, but for vocal vehicle. "And you left before the game was over—why?"

"Tired."

Jeanette put her hand on Carney's that was lying on the table. "Was Seth cheating?"

"Why do you ask that, Jeanette?"

"I'll tell you. He's been playing by himself in his room for two or three days. He's got a pack of cards that I think are crooked."

"What is this Shipley like, Jeanette? Do you suppose that he brought Seth those cards?"

"I don't know," the girl answered; "I don't like him. He and Seth have played together once or twice."

"They have! Look here, Jeanette, you must keep what I am going to tell you absolutely to yourself, for I may be entirely wrong in my guess. There was a marked pack in the game, and I think Seth owned it. This Shipley acted very like a man who was running a bluff of being angry. He and Seth had some words over nothing. It seems to me the quarrel was too gratuitous to be genuine."

"You think, Bulldog, that Shipley and Seth worked together to win Hadley's money—he had six thousand in Seth's strong box?"

"I can't go that far, even to you, Jeanette. But to-morrow Seth has got to give back to Hadley whatever he has won. I've got one of the cards in my pocket, and that will be enough."

"But if he divides with Shipley?"

"Shipley will have to cough up the stolen money, too, because then the conspiracy will be proven."

"Yes, Bulldog. I guess if you just tell them to hand the money back, there'll be no argument. I can go to bed now and sleep," she added, patting Carney's hand with her slim fingers. "You see, if Seth got that stranger's money away it wouldn't worry him—the moral aspect, I mean; but somehow it makes it terrible for me. It's discovering small evil in a man—petty larceny, sneak thieving—that pours sand into a woman's soul. Good night, Bulldog. I think if I were only your sister I'd be quite satisfied—quite."

"You are," Carney said, rising; "we are seven—and you are the other six, Jeanette."

As a rule nothing outside of a tangible actuality, such as danger that had to be guarded against, kept Carney from desired slumber; but after he had turned out his light he lay wide awake for half an hour, his soul full of the abhorrent repugnance of Seth's stealing.

Carney's code was such that he could shake heartily by the hand, or drink with, a man who had held up a train, or fought (even to the death of someone) the Police over a matter of whisky or opium running, if that man were above petty larceny, above stealing from a man who had confidence in him. He lay there suffused with the grim satisfaction of knowing how completely Seth, and possibly Shipley, would be nonplussed when they were forced on the morrow to give up their ill-gotten gains. That would be a matter purely between Carney and Seth. The problem of how he would return the loot to Hadley without telling him of the marked pack, was not yet solved. Indeed, this little mental exercise, like counting sheep, led Carney off into the halls of slumber.

He was brought back from the rest cavern by something that left him sitting bolt upright in bed, correlating the disturbing something with known remembrances of the noise.

"Yes, by gad, it was a shot!"

He was out of bed and at the window. He could have sworn that a shadow had flitted in the dim moonlight along the roadway that lay beyond the police shack; it was so possible this aftermath of card cheating, a shot and someone fleeing. It was a subconscious conviction that caused him to precipitate himself into his clothes, and slip his gun belt about his waist.

In the hall he met Jeanette, her great mass of black hair rippling over the shoulders, from which draped a kimono. The lamp in her hand enhanced the ghastly look of horror that was over her drawn face.

"What's wrong, Jeanette—was it a shot?"

"Yes! I've looked into Seth's room—he's not there!"

Without speaking Carney tapped on a door almost opposite his own; there was no answer, and he swung it open. Then he closed it and whispered: "Hadley's not in, either; fancy they're still playing." Jeanette pointed a finger to a door farther down the hall. Carney understood. Again he tapped on this door, opened it, peered in, closed it, and coming back to Jeanette whispered: "Shipley's not there. Fancy it must be all right—they're still playing. I'll go over to the shack."

"I'll wait till you come back, Bulldog. It isn't all right. I never felt so oppressed in my life. I know something dreadful has happened—I know it." Carney touched his fingers gently to the girl's arm, and manufacturing a smile of reassurance, said blithely: "You've eaten a slab of bacon, *à la* fry-pan, girl." Then he was gone.

As he rounded the hotel corner he could see a lighted lamp in a window of the police shack. This was curious; it hurried his pace, for they were not playing at the table.

He threw open the shack door, and stood just within, looking at what he knew was a dead man—Seth Long sprawled on his back on the floor where he had tumbled from a chair. His shirt front was crimson with blood, just over the heart.

There was no evidence of a struggle; just the chair across the table from where Seth had sat was ominously pushed back a little. The red-backed cards were resting on the corner of the table neatly gathered into a pack.

Cool-brained Carney stood just within the door, mentally photographing the interior. The killing had not

been over a game that was in progress, unless the murderer, with super-cunning, had rearranged the tableau.

Carney stepped to beside the dead man. Seth's pistol lay close to his outstretched right hand. Carney picked it up, and broke the cartridges from the cylinder; one was empty; the barrel of the gun was foul.

Seth's shirt was black and singed; the weapon that killed him had been held close.

Carney's brain, running with the swift, silent velocity of a spinning top, queried: Was the killer so super-clever that he had discharged Seth's gun to make it appear suicide?

Subconsciously the marked cards that probably had led up to this murder governed Carney's next move. He thrust his hand in the pocket of the coat where Seth had put the discarded pack—it was gone. He felt the other pocket—the pack was not there. A quick look over the room, table and all, failed to locate the missing cards. He felt the inside pocket of the coat for the leather wallet that contained Hadley's money—there was no wallet.

At that instant a sinister feeling of evil caused Carney to stiffen, his eyes to set in a look of wariness; at the soft click of a boot against a stone his gun was out and, without rising, he whipped about.

The flickering uncertain lamplight picked out from the gloom of the night in the open doorway the face of Shipley. Perhaps it was the goblin light, or fear, or malignant satisfaction that caused Shipley's face to appear grotesquely contorted; his eyes were either gloating, or imbecile-tinged by horror.

"My God! what's happened, Carney?" he asked. "Don't cover me, I—I——"

"Come into the light, then," Carney commanded.

In silent obedience Shipley stepped into the room, and Carney, passing to the door, peered out. Then he closed it, and dropped his gun back into his belt.

"What's happened?" Shipley repeated. And the other, listening with intensity, noticed that the speaker's voice trembled.

"Where have you come from just now?" Carney asked, ignoring the question.

Shipley drew a hand across his eyes, as if he would compel back his wandering thoughts, or would blot out the horror of that blood-smeared figure on the floor.

"I went for a walk," he answered.

"Why—when?" Carney snapped imperiously.

"I quit the game half an hour ago, and thought I'd walk over to Cranford's house; the smoking and the drinks had given me a headache."

"Why to Cranford's house?"

Shipley threw his head up as if he were about to resent the crisp cross-examining, but Bulldog's gray eyes, always compelling, were now fierce.

"Well,"—Shipley coughed—"I didn't like the looks of the game to-night; that ace being shy—— Didn't you feel there was something not on the level?"

"I didn't take that walk to Cranford's!". The deadliness that had been in the gray eyes was in the voice now.

"I thought that if Cranford was still up I'd talk it over with him; he'd lost, and I fancied he was sore on the game."

"What did Cranford say?"

"I didn't see him. I tapped on his door, and as he didn't answer I—I thought he was asleep and came back. I saw the door open here, and——"

Shipley hesitated.

"Did you leave Seth and Hadley playing?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't see either of them again?"

"No."

"Did you hear a shot?" and Carney pointed toward the blood-stained shirt.

Shipley looked at Carney and seemed to hesitate. "I heard something ten minutes ago, but thought it was a door slamming. Where's Hadley—have you seen him? Were you here when this was done?"

"Come on," Carney said, "we'll go back to the hotel and round up Hadley."

As they went out Carney locked the door, the key being still in the lock.

When the two men entered the Gold Nugget, Carney stepped behind the bar and turned up a wall lamp that was burning low. As he faced about he gave a start, and then hurried across the room to where a figure huddled in one of the big wooden arm chairs. It was Hadley—sound asleep, or pretending to be.

When Carney shook him the sleeper scrambled drunkenly to his feet blinking. Then the boy smile flitted foolishly over his lips, and he mumbled: "I say, how long've I been asleep—where's Seth?"

"What are you doing here asleep?" Carney asked, the crisp incisiveness of his voice wakening completely the rather fogged man.

"I sat down to wait for Seth. Guess the whisky made me sleepy—had a little too much of it."

"Where did you leave Seth—how long ago?"

"Over at the police shack; we quit the game and Seth said he'd tidy up for fear the Sergeant'd be back in the morning—throw out the empty bottles, and pick up the cigar stubs and matches, kind of tidy up. I came on to go to bed and——" Hadley spoke haltingly, as though his memory of his progress was still befogged—"when I got here I remembered that he'd got my wallet, and thought I'd sit down and wait so's to be sure he didn't forget to put it back in the iron box."

"Did you have a row with Seth when you broke up the game?"

Hadley flushed. He was in a slightly stupid condition. During his nap the whisky had sullenly subsided, leaving him a touch maudlin, surly.

"I don't see what right you've got to ask that; I guess that's a matter between two men."

Carney fastened his piercing eyes on the speaker's, and shot out with startling suddenness: "Seth Long has been murdered—do you know that?"

"What—what—what're you saying?"

Hadley's mouth remained open; it was like the gaping mouth of a gasping fish; his eyes had been startled into a wide horrified wonder look.

"Seth—murdered!" then he grinned foolishly. "By God! you Westerners pull some rough stuff. That's not good form to spring a joke like that; I'm a tenderfoot, but——"

"Stop it!" Carney snarled; "do you think I'm a damned fool. Seth has been shot through the heart, and you were the last man with him. I want from you all you know. We've got to catch the right man, not the wrong man—do you get that, Hadley?" The fierceness of this toned the man with a hang-over, cleared his fuzzy brain.

"My God! I don't know anything about it. I left Seth Long at the police shack, and I don't know anything more about him."

There was a step on the stairway. Carney turned as Jeanette came through the door. He went to meet her, and turned her back into the hall where he said: "Steady yourself, girl. Something has happened."

"I know—I heard you; I'm steady." She put her hand in his, and he pressed it reassuringly. Then he whispered:

"I'm going to leave you with these two men while I get Dr. Anderson, and I want you to see if either of these men leaves the room, or attempts to hide anything—I can't search them. Do you understand, Jeanette?"

"Yes."

He came back to the room with the girl and said:

"I'm going for the coroner, Dr. Anderson, and for your own sakes, gentlemen, I'll ask you to wait here in this room—it will be better."

Then he was gone.

In twenty minutes he was back with Dr. Anderson. On their way to the hotel Carney and the Doctor had gone into the police shack to make certain, through medical examination, that Seth was dead.

Upon their entry Jeanette had gone upstairs, the Doctor suggesting this.

Dr. Anderson was a Scotchman, absolute, with all that the name implies in canny conservative stubborn adherence to things as they are; the apparent consistencies.

Here was a man murdered in cold blood; he was the only one to be considered; he was the wronged party; the others were to be viewed with suspicion until by process of elimination they had been cleared of guilt. So there was no doubt whatever but that Carney had as good a claim as any of them to the title of assassin.

In the flurry of it all Carney had not thought of this.

When the three stories had been told, Dr. Anderson said:

"Sergeant Black will be back to-morrow, I think; then we'll take action. I'd advise you gentlemen to remain *in statu quo*, if I might use the term. There's one thing that ought to be done, though; I think you'll agree with me that it is advisable for each man's sake. A wallet with a large sum of money has disappeared from the murdered man's pocket, and as each one of you will be more or less under suspicion—I'm speaking now just in the way of forecasting what that unsympathetic individual, the law, will do—it would be as well for each of you to submit to a search of your person. I have no authority to demand this, but it's expedient."

To this the three agreed; Hadley, with a sort of repugnance, and Shipley with, perhaps, an overzealous compliance, Carney thought. There was no trace of the wallet.

Carney had said nothing about the missing cards, but neither were they found.

No pistol was found on Hadley, but a short-barreled gun was discovered in Shipley's hip pocket.

The Doctor broke the weapon, and his eyebrows drew down in a frown ominously—there was an empty chamber in the cylinder.

"There're only five bullets here," he said, his keen eyes resting on Shipley's face.

"Yes, I always load it that way, leaving the hammer at the empty chamber, so that if it falls and strikes on the hammer it can't explode."

With an "Ugh-huh!" Anderson looked through the barrel. It was of an indeterminate murkiness; this might be due to not having been cleaned for a long time, or a recent discharge.

"I'd better retain this gun, if you don't mind," he said.

Shipley agreed to this readily. Then he said, in a hesitating, apologetic way that was really more irritating than if he had blurted it out: "Mr. Carney, as I have stated, was discovered by me standing over the dead man with a gun in his hand. I think as this point will certainly be brought up at any examination, that Mr. Carney, in justice to himself, should let the Doctor examine his weapon to see that it has not lately been discharged."

Carney started, for he fancied there was a direct implication in this. But the Doctor spoke quickly, brusquely. "Most certainly he should—I clean forgot it."

Carney drew the gun from its leather pocket, broke it, and six lead-nosed .45 shells rolled on the table; not one of the shells had lost its bullet. He passed the gun to Dr. Anderson, who, pointing it toward the light, looked through the barrel.

"As bright as a silver dollar," he commented, relief in his voice; "I'm glad we thought of this." Carney slipped the shells back into the cylinder, and dropped the gun into its holster without comment.

Then the Doctor said: "We can't do anything to-night—we'll only obliterate any tracks and lose good clues."

We'll take it up in the morning. You men have got to clear yourselves, so I'd just rest quiet, if I were you. If we go poking about we'll have the whole town about our ears. I'm glad that nobody thought it worth while to investigate if they heard the shot."

"A shot in Bucking Horse doesn't mean much," Carney said, "just a drunken miner, or an Indian playing brave."

It seemed to Carney that Anderson had rather hurried the closing out of the matter, that is, temporarily. It occurred to him that the Scotchman's herring-hued eyes were asking him to acquiesce in what was being done.

Carney lingered when Shipley and Hadley had gone to bed.

The Scotch Doctor had filled a pipe, and Bulldog noticed that as he puffed vigorously at its stem his eyes had wandered several times to the platoon of black bottles ranged with military precision behind the bar.

"I'm tired over this devilish thing," Carney remarked casually, and passing behind the bar he brought out a bottle and two glasses, adding, "Would you mind joining?"

"I'd like it, man. Good whisky is like good law—a wee bit of it is very fine, too much of it is as bad as roguery."

The Doctor quaffed with zest the liquid, wiped his lips with a florid red handkerchief, took a puff at the evil-smelling pipe, and said:

"Court's over! A minute ago I was 'Jeffries, the Hangin' Judge,' and to-morrow, as coroner, I'll be as veecious no doubt; now, *ad interim* (the Doctor was fond of a legal phrase), I'm going to talk to you, Bulldog, as man to man, because I want your help to pin the right devil. And besides, I have a soft spot in my heart for Jeanette—perhaps it's just her Scotch name, I'm not sayin'. In the first place, Bulldog, has it struck you that you're in fair runnin' to be selected as the man that killed Seth?"

Carney laughed; then he looked quizzically at the speaker; but he could see that the latter was in deadly earnest.

"Mind," the Doctor resumed, "personally I know you didn't do it; that's because I know you devilish well—you're too big for such small-brained acts. But the law is a godless machine; its way is like the way of a brick mason—facts are the bricks that make the structure."

"But the law always searches for the motive, and why should I kill Seth, who was more or less a friend?"

"All the worse. As a matter of fact there are more slayings over strained friendships than over the acquisition of gold. But don't you remember what that foul-mouthed brute, Kootenay Jim, said when Jeanette's brother was near lynched?"

Carney stared; then a little flush crept over his lean tanned face:

"You mean, Doctor, about Jeanette and myself?"

"Aye."

Carney nodded, holding himself silent in suppressed bitterness.

"The same evil mouths will repeat that, Bulldog. And here are the bricks for the law's building. Shipley will swear that he found you bending over the murdered man with a gun in one hand searching his pockets. And I noticed, though I didn't speak of it, there was blood on your hands."

Startled, Carney looked at his fingers; they were blood-stained. Then he drew his gun, saying, "God! and there's blood on this thing, too!"

"There is; I saw it on the butt. And though you broke it here before us to-night to show that it hadn't been discharged, Sergeant Black, while he's thickheaded, will perhaps have wit enough to say that you were off by yourself when you came for me, and could have cleaned house."

"And that swine, Shipley—do you suppose he thought of that, too?"

"I think he did: I did at the time, though I said nothing. You see, Carney, innocent or guilty, he naturally wants to clear himself, and he took a chance. If he's innocent he may really think that you killed Seth, and hoped to find the proof of it in a smudged gun and an empty shell; and if he's guilty, he was directing suspicion towards you, knowing that the clean gun would be nothing in your favor at the examination as you had had the opportunity to put it right. I don't like the incident, nor the man's spirit, but it proves nothing for or against him. I expect he's clever enough to know that the last man seen with a murdered man is, *de facto*, the slayer."

"As to the matter of the gun," Carney said, "I've an idea Seth was killed with his own gun. He was in a grouchy mood to-night—he always was a damn fool—and he may have pulled his gun, in his usual bluffing way, and the other party twisted it out of his hand and shot him. I only heard one shot." Carney remained silent for a full minute; then he said: "One doesn't care to bring a good woman's name into anything that's evil, but I fancy I'd better tell you: Jeanette was wakened by the shot that wakened me, and we talked in the hall before I went over to the police shack."

"That'll be valuable evidence to establish your alibi, Bulldog—in the eyes of the law, in the eyes of the law."

Then the Doctor puffed moodily at his pipe, and Carney could read the writing on the wall in the irritable little balloons of smoke that went up, the Doctor's unexpressed meaning that gossips would say Jeanette had sworn falsely to clear him. Anderson resumed:

"Hadley was evidently the last man playing cards with Seth, and there was considerable money at stake; that he was still up when the murder was discovered—these things are against him. Supposing he did shoot Seth, he might have come to the hotel and, seeing a light in the upper hall and hearing Jeanette moving about, might have sat in that dark corner till things had quieted down before going to his room."

"Hadley isn't the kind to commit murder."

"To-night he was another kind of man—he was pretty drunk; and the man that's drunk is like an engine that had lost the governing balls—he has lost control. And the shock of the murder may have sobered him enough to make him a bit cautious."

"But Shipley was out, too," Carney objected. "Aye, he was; and he's got a devilish lame story about going to see Cranford. I don't like his face—' it's avariciously vicious—he's greedy. But the law can't hang a man for having a bad face; it takes little stock in the physiologist's point of view." Carney sat thinking hard. The full significance of the attached possibilities had been put clearly before him by the astute, canny Scotchman, and he realized that it was friendship. He was certain the Doctor suspected Shipley.

"I wanted to get shut of yon two," the Doctor added, presently, "for you're the man that needs to get this cleared up, and you're the man can do it, even as you caught Jack the Wolf. Is there any clue that we can follow up before the trail gets cold?"

"There is, Doctor. There was a pack of marked cards in Seth's pocket, and they're gone."

"The man that has that pack is the murderer," Dr. Anderson declared emphatically.

"He is."

"And the wallet."

"Yes."

Then Carney explained to the Doctor that the marked pack had, evidently belonged to Seth, and told of the change in cards, and the possibility that Shipley had stood in with Seth on the winnings, letting the latter do all the dirty work, perhaps helping Seth's game along by raising the bet when he knew that Seth held the winning cards.

Again the Doctor consulted his old briar pipe; then he said: "Either Shipley or somebody was in collusion with Seth, you think?"

"Yes."

"If we could get that man—?"

"Look here, Doctor," and Carney put his hand on the other's knee, "whoever has got that money will not try to take it out over the railroad, for it was in fifty-dollar bills of the Bank of Toronto."

"I comprehend: the wires, and the police at every important point; a search. Aye, aye! What'll he do, Bulldog?"

"He'll go out over the thieves' highway, down the border trail to Montana or Idaho."

"My guidness! I think you're right. Perhaps before morning somebody may be headin' south with the loot. If it's Shipley—I mean, anybody—he may have a colleague to take the money down over the border."

"Yes, the money; he'll not try to handle it in Canada for fear of being trapped on the numbers."

"So you might not get the murderer after all," Anderson said, meditatively; "just an accomplice who wouldn't squeal."

"No; not with the money alone on him we wouldn't have just what I want, but when we get a man with the marked pack in his pocket that's the murderer. It was devilish fatalism that made him take that pack, like a man will cling to an old pocket-knife; they're the tools of his trade, so to speak. And here in the mountains he could not handily come by another pack, perhaps."

"I comprehend. If the slayer goes down that trail he'll have the marked cards with him still, but if he sends an accomplice the man'll just have the money on him. Very logical, Bulldog."

Twice as they had talked Carney had stepped quickly, silently, to the door at the foot of the stairway and listened; now he came back, and lowering his voice, said: "I get you, Doctor; it's devilish square of you. I'm clear of this thing, I fancy, as you say, in the eye of the law, but for a good woman's sake I've got to get the murderer."

"It would be commendable, Carney, if you can."

"Well, then, give these other men plenty of rope."

"I comprehend," and Dr. Anderson nodded his head.

"I've got a man—'Oregon' he's known as—down at Big Horn Crossing; he's there for my work; I'm going to pull out to-night and tell 'Oregon' to search every man that rides the border trail going south."

"I don't know whether I can give you the proper authority, Bulldog—I'll look it up with the town clerk."

Carney laughed, a soft, throaty chuckle of honest amusement.

Piqued, the Doctor said irritably, "You're thinking, Bulldog, that the little town clerk and myself are somewhat of a joke as representing authority, eh?"

"No, indeed, Doctor. I was thinking of 'Oregon.' He's got his authority for everything, got it right in his belt; he'll search his man first and explain afterwards; and when he gets the right man he'll bring him in. First, I'm going to make a cast around the police shack with a lantern. Even by its light I may pick up some information. I'll get Jeanette to stake me to a couple of days' grub; I'll take some oats for the buckskin and be back in three days."

"I'll wait here till you have a look," the Doctor declared; "there might be some clue you'd be leaving with me to follow up."

Carney secured a reflector lantern from a back room and, first kneeling down, examined the footsteps that had been left in the soft black earth around the police shack door. He seemed to discover a trail, for he skirted the building, stooping down with the lantern held close to the ground, and once more knelt under a back window. Here there were tracks of a heavy foot; some that indicated that a man had stood for some time there; that sometimes he had been peering in the window, the toe prints almost touching the wall. There were two deeply indented heel marks as if somebody had dropped from the window.

Carney put up his hand and tested the lower half of the sash. He could shove it up quite easily. Next he drew a sheet of paper from his pocket—it was really an old letter—and with his pocket-knife cut it to fit a footprint that was in the earth. Then he returned to the front door, and with his paper gauge tested the different foot imprints, following them a piece as they lead away from the shack. He stood up and rubbed his chin thoughtfully, his brows drawn into a heavy frown of reflection, ending by starting off at a fast pace that

carried him to the edge of the little town.

In front of a small log shack he stooped and compared the paper in his hand with some footprints. He seemed puzzled, for there were different boot tracks, and the one—the latest, he judged, for they topped the others—was toeing away from the shack.

He straightened up and knocked on the door.

There was no answer. He knocked again loudly; no answer. He shook the door by the iron handle until the latch clattered like a castanet; there was no sound from within. He stepped to a window, tapped on it and called, "Cranford, Cranford!" The gloomed stillness of the shack convinced him that Cranford had gone—perhaps, as he had intimated, to Bald Rock.

He went back and fitted the paper into the topmost tracks, those heading away from the shack. The paper did not seem to fit—not quite; in fact, the other track was closer to the paper gauge.

Back at the hotel he related to Dr. Anderson the result of his trailing.

When he spoke of Cranford's absence from the shack, the Doctor involuntarily exclaimed: "My God! that does complicate matters. I was thinking we might get a double hitch on yon Shipley by proving from Cranford he hadn't been near the latter's shack. But now it involves Cranford, if he's gone. He's an unlucky devil, that, and I know, on the quiet, that he's likely to get in trouble over some payments on a mine,—they're threatening a suit for misappropriation of funds or something."

"You see, Doctor," Carney said, "the sooner I block the likely get-away game the better."

"Yes. You pull out as soon as you like. I'll have a search for Cranford, and I'll generally keep things in shape till Sergeant Black comes—likely to-morrow he'll be here. I'll hold an inquest and, of course, the verdict will be 'by someone unknown.' I'll say that you've gone to hurry in Sergeant Black."

When the Doctor had gone Carney went upstairs to where Jeanette was waiting for him in the little front sitting room.

With her there was little beyond just the horror of the terrible ending to it. Her life with Seth Long had been a curious one, curious in its absolute emptiness of everything but just an arrangement. There was no affection, no pretense of it. She was like a niece, or even a daughter, to Seth; their relationship had been practically on that basis. Her father had been a partner of Long in some of his enterprises, enterprises that had never been much of anything beyond final failure. When his partner had died Seth had assumed charge of the girl. It was perhaps the one redeeming feature in Seth's ordinary useless life.

Now Jeanette and Carney hardly touched on the past which they both knew so well, or the future about which, just now, they knew nothing.

Carney explained, as delicately as he could, the situation; the desirability of his clearing his name absolutely, independent of her evidence, by finding the murderer. He really held in his mind a somewhat nebulous theory. He had not confided this fully to Dr. Anderson, nor did he now to Jeanette; just told her that he was going away for two or three days and would be supposed to have gone after the Mounted Policeman.

He told her about the disappearance of the marked pack, and explained how much depended upon the discovery of its present possessor.

Second Part

It was within an hour of daybreak when Carney, astride his buckskin, slipped quietly out of Bucking Horse, and took the trail that skirted the tortuous stream toward the south. He had had no sleep, but that didn't matter; for two or three days and nights at a stretch he could go without sleep when necessary. Perhaps when he spelled for breakfast, as the buckskin fed on the now drying autumn grass, he would snatch a brief half hour of slumber, and again at noon; that would be quite enough.

When the light became strong he examined the trail. There were several tracks, cayuse tracks, the larger footprints of what were called bronchos, the track of pack mules; they were coming and going. But they were cold trails, seemingly not one fresh. Little cobwebs, like gossamer wings, stretched across the sunken bowl-like indentations, and dew sparkled on the silver mesh like jewels in the morning sun.

It was quite ten o'clock when Carney discovered the footprints of a pony that were evidently fresh; here and there the outcopped black earth where the cayuse had cantered glistened fresh in the sunlight.

Carney could not say just where the cayuse had struck the trail he was on. It gave him a depressed feeling. Perhaps the rider carried the loot, and had circled to escape interception. But when Carney came to the cross trail that ran from Fort Steel to Kootenay the cayuse tracks turned to the right toward Kootenay, and he felt a conviction that the rider was not associated with the murder. With that start he would be heading for across the border; he would not make for a Canadian town where he would be in touch with the wires.

Along the border trail there were no fresh tracks.

It was toward evening when Carney passed through the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge—past the gruesome place where Fourteen-foot Johnson had been killed by Jack the Wolf; past where he himself had been caught in the bear trap.

The buckskin remembered it all; he was in a hurry to get beyond it; he clattered over the narrow, winding, up-and-down footpath with the eager hasty step of a fleeing goat, his head swinging nervously, his big lop ears weaving back and forth in apprehension.

Well beyond the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge, past the dark maw of the cave in which Jack the Wolf had hidden the stolen gold, Carney went, camping in the valley, that had now broadened out, when its holding walls of mountain sides had blanketed the light so that he travelled along an obliterated trail, obliterated to all but the buckskin's finer sense of perception.

At the first graying of the eastern sky he was up, and after a snatch of breakfast for himself and the buckskin, hurrying south again. No one had passed in the night for Carney had slept on one side of the trail while the horse fed or rested on the other, with a picket line stretched between them: and there were no fresh tracks.

At two o'clock he came to the little log shack just this side of the U. S. border where Oregon kept his

solitary ward. Nobody had passed, Oregon advised; and Carney gave the old man his instructions, which were to search any passer, and if he had the fifty-dollar bills or the marked cards, hobble him and bring him back to Bucking Horse.

Over a pan of bacon and a pot of strong tea Oregon reported to his superior all the details of their own endeavor, which, in truth, was opium running. That was his office, to drift across the line casually, back and forth, as a prospector, and keep posted as to customs officers; who they were, where the kind-hearted ones were, and where the fanatical ones were; for once Carney had been ambushed, practically illegally, five miles within Canadian territory, and had had to fight his way out, leaving twenty thousand dollars' worth of opium in the hand of a tyrannical customs department.

At four o'clock Carney sat the buckskin, and reached down to grasp the hand of his lieutenant.

"I'll tell you, Bulldog," the latter said, swinging his eyes down the valley toward the southwest, "there's somethin' brewin' in the way of weather. My hip is pickin' a quarrel with that flat-nosed bit of lead that's been nestin' in a j'int, until I just natural feel as if somebody'd fresh plugged me."

Carney laughed, for the day was glorious. The valley bed through which wandered, now sluggishly, a green-tinted stream, lay like a glorious oriental rug, its colors rich-tinted by the warm flood of golden light that hung in the cedar and pine perfumed air. The lower reaches of the hills on either side were crimson, and gold, and pink, and purple, and emerald green, all softened into a gentle maze-like tapestry where the gaillardias and monkshood and wolf-willow and salmonberry and saskatoon bushes caressed each other in luxurious profusion, their floral bloom preserved in autumn tawny richness by the dry mountain air.

And this splendor of God's artistry, this wondrous great tapestry, was hung against the sombre green wall of a pine and fir forest that zigzagged and stood in blocks all up the mountain side like the design of some giant cubist.

Carney laughed and swung his gloved hand in a semicircle of derision.

"It's purty," Oregon said, "it's purty, but I've seen a purty woman, all smilin' too, break out in a hell of a temper afore you could say 'hands up.' My hip don't never make no mistakes, 'cause it ain't got no fancies. It's a-comin'. You ride like hell, Carney; it's a-comin'. Say, Bulldog, look at that," and Oregon's long, lean, not over-clean finger pointed to the buckskin's head; "he knows as well as I do that the Old Man of the Mountains is cookin' up somethin'. See 'em mule lugs of his—see the white of that eye? And he ain't takin' in no purty scenery, he's lookin' over his shoulder down off there," and Oregon stretched a long arm toward the west, toward the home of the blue-green mountains of ice, the glaciers.

"It's too early for a blizzard," Carney contended. "It might be, if they run on schedule time like the trains, but they don't. I froze to death once in one in September. I come back to life again, 'cause I'd been good always; and perhaps, Bulldog, your record mightn't let you out if you got caught between here and Buckin' Horse in a real he-game of snow hell'ry. The trail runs mostly up narrow valleys that would pile twenty feet deep, and I reckon, though you don't care overmuch yourself what gener'ly happens, you don't want to give the buckskin a raw deal by gettin' him into any fool finish. He knows; he wants to get to a nice little silk-lined sleepin' box afore this snoozer hits the mountains. Good-bye, Bulldog, and ride like hell—the buckskin won't mind; let him run the show—he knows, the clever little cuss."

Carney's slim fingers, though steel, were almost welded together in the heat of the squeeze they got in Oregon's bear-trap of a paw.

The trail here was like a prairie road for the valley was flat, and the buckskin accentuated his apprehensive eagerness by whisking away at a sharp canter. Carney could hear, from over his shoulder, the croaking bellow of Oregon who had noticed this: "He knows, Bulldog. Leave him alone. Let him run things hisself!"

Though Carney had laughed at Oregon's gloomy forecast, he knew the old man was weather-wise, that a lifetime spent in the hills and the wide places of earth had tutored him to the varying moods of the elements; that his super-sense was akin to the subtle understanding of animals. So he rode late into the night, sometimes sleeping in the saddle, as the buckskin, with loose rein, picked his way up hill and down dale and along the brink of gorges with the surefootedness of a big-horn. He camped beneath a giant pine whose fallen cones and needles had spread a luxurious mattress, and whose balsam, all unstoppered, floated in the air, a perfume that was like a balm of life.

Almost across the trail Carney slept lest the bearer of the loot might slip by in the night.

He had lain down with one gray blanket over him; he had gone to sleep with a delicious sense of warmth and cosiness; he woke shivering. His eyes opened to a gray light, a faint gray, the steeliness that filtered down into the gloomed valley from a paling sky. A day was being born; the night was dying.

An appalling hush was in the air; the valley was as devoid of sound as though the very trees had died in the night; as if the air itself had been sucked out from between the hills, leaving a void.

The buckskin was up and picking at the tender shoots of a young birch. It had been a half-whinnying snort from the horse that had wakened Carney, for now he repeated it, and threw his head up, the lop ears cocked as though he listened for some break in the horrible stillness, watched for something that was creeping stealthily over the mountains from the west.

Carney wet the palm of his hand and held it up. It chilled as though it had been dipped in evaporating spirits. Looking at the buckskin Oregon's croak came back:

"He knows: ride like hell, Bulldog!"

Carney rose, and poured a little feed of oats from his bag on a corner of his blanket for the horse. He built a fire and brewed in a copper pot his tea. Once the shaft of smoke that spiraled lazily upward flickered and swished flat like a streaming whisp of hair; and above, high up in the giant pine harp, a minor string wailed a thin tremulous note. The gray of the morning that had been growing bright now gloomed again as though night had fled backwards before the thing that was in the mountains to the west.

The buckskin shivered; the hairs of his coat stood on end like fur in a bitter cold day; he snapped at the oats as though he bit at the neck of a stallion; he crushed them in his strong jaws as though he were famished, or ate to save them from a thief.

In five minutes the strings of the giant harp above Carney's head were playing a dirge; the smoke of his fire swirled, and the blaze darted here and there angrily, like the tongue of a serpent. From far across the valley, from somewhere in the rocky caverns of the mighty hills, came the heavy moans of genii. It was hardly a noise, it was a great oppression, a manifestation of turmoil, of the turmoil of God's majesty, His creation in travail.

Carney quaffed the scalding tea, and raced with the buckskin in the eating of his food. He became a living thermometer; his chilling blood told him that the temperature was going down, down, down. The day before he had ridden with his coat hung to the horn of his saddle; now a vagrant thought flashed to his buffalo coat in his room at the Gold Nugget.

He saddled the buckskin, and the horse, at the pinch of the cinch, turned from his oats that were only half eaten, and held up his head for the bit.

Carney strapped his dunnage to the back of the saddle, mounted, and the buckskin, with a snort of relief, took the trail with eager steps. It wound down to the valley here toward the west, and little needles stabbed at the rider's eyes and cheeks as though the air were filled with indiscernible diamond dust. It stung; it burned his nostrils; it seemed to penetrate the horse's lungs, for he gave a snorting cough.

And now the full orchestra of the hills was filling the valleys and the canyons with an overture, as if perched on the snowed slope of Squaw Mountain was the hydraulicon of Vitruvius, a torrent raging its many throats into unearthly dirge.

Carney's brain vibrated with this presage of the something that had thrilled his horse. In his ears the wailing, sighing, reverberating music seemed to carry as refrain the words of Oregon: "Ride like hell, Carney! Ride like hell!"

And, as if the command were within the buckskin's knowing, he raced where the path was good; and where it was bad he scrambled over the stones and shelving rocks and projecting roots with catlike haste.

In Carney's mind was the cave, the worked-out mine tunnel that drove into the mountain side; the cave that Jack the Wolf had homed in when he murdered the men on the trail; it was two hours beyond. If he could make that he and the buckskin would be safe, for the horse could enter it too.

In the thought of saving his life the buckskin occupied a dual place; that's what Oregon had said; he had no right to jeopardize the gallant little steed that had saved him more than once with fleet heel and stout heart.

He patted the eager straining neck in front of him, and, though he spoke aloud, his voice was little more in that valley of echo and reverberation than a whisper: "Good Patsy boy, we'll make it. Don't fret yourself tired, old sport; we'll make it—the cave."

The horse seemed to swing his head reassuringly as though he, too, had in his heart the undying courage that nothing daunted.

Now the invisible cutting dust that had scorched Carney's face had taken visible form; it was like fierce-driven flour. Across the valley the towering hills were blurred shapes. Carney's eyelashes were frozen ridges above his eyes; his breath floated away in little clouds of ice; the buckskin coat of the horse had turned to gray.

Sometimes at the turn of a cliff was a false lull as if the storm had been stayed; and then in twenty yards the doors of the frozen north swung again and icy fingers of death gripped man and beast.

And all the time the white prisms were growing larger; closer objects were being blotted out; the prison walls of ice were coming closer; it was more difficult to breathe; his life blood was growing sluggish; a chill was suggesting indifference—why fight?

The horse's feet were muffled by the ghastly white rug, the blizzard was spreading over the earth that the day before had been a cloth of gold; it was like a winding sheet.

Carney could feel the brave little beast falter and lurch as the merciless snow clutched at his legs where it had swirled into billows.

To the man direction was lost—it was like being above the clouds; but the buckskin held on his way straight and true; fighting, fighting, making the glorious fight that is without fear. To stop, to falter, meant death; the buckskin knew it; but he was tiring.

Carney unslung his picket line, put the loop around his chest below his arms, fastened it to the saddle horn, leaving a play of eight feet, and slipping to the ground, clutched the horse's tail, and patted him on the rump. The buckskin knew; he had checked for five seconds; now he went on again, the weight off his back being a relief.

The change was good. Carney had felt the chill of death creeping over him in the saddle; the deadly chill, the palpitating of the chest that precluded a false warmth that meant the end, the sleep of death. Now the exertion winned his blood; it brought the battling back.

Time, too, like direction, was a haze in the man's mind. Two hours away the cave had been, and surely they had struggled on hour after hour. It scarce mattered; to draw forth his watch and look was a waste of energy, the vital energy that weighed against his death; an ounce of it wasted was folly; just on through the enveloping curtain of that white wall.

Carney had meant to remount the horse when he was warmer, when he himself was tiring; but it would be murder, murder of the little hero that had fought his battles ever since they had been together. The buckskin's flanks were pumping spasmodically, like the sides of a bellows; his withers drooped; his head was low hung; he looked lean and small—scarce mightier than a jack rabbit, knee deep in the shifting sea of snow.

But the cave must be near. Carney found himself repeating these words: "The cave is near, the cave is near, Patsy; on, boy—the cave is near." His mind dwelt on the wood that he had left in the cave when he took Jack the Wolf to Bucking Horse; of how cosy it would be with a bright fire going, and the baffled blizzard howling without. Yes, he would make it. Was his life, so full of the wild adventures that he had always won out on, to be blotted by just a snowstorm, just cold?

He took a lofty stand against this. He was possessed of a feeling that it was a combat between the crude

elements and his vital force of mental stamina. If he kept up his courage he would win out, as he always had. It was just Excelsior and Success, just—

There was a swirl of oblivion; he had flown through space and collided with another world; there had been some sort of a gross shock; he was alone, floating through space, and passing through snowladen clouds. There was a restful exhilaration, such as he had felt once when passing under an anesthetic—Nirvana.

Then the cold snout of some abnormal creature in these regions of the beyond pressed against his face. Gradually, as though waking from a dream—it was the muzzle of the buckskin nosing him back to consciousness. He struggled painfully to his feet. How heavy his legs were; at the bottom of them were leaden-soled diver's boots. His brain, not more than half clearing at that, he realized that he and the buckskin had slid from a treacherous shelf of rock, and fallen a dozen feet; the snow, unwittingly kind, catching them in a lap of feathery softness. But for the gallant horse he would have lain there, never to rise again of his own volition.

They scrambled back to the trail, he and the little horse, and they were going forward. Oregon's command was working out—"Let the buckskin have his own way."

If they had been out on the prairie undoubtedly they would have gone around in a circle—in fact, Carney once had done so—and the cold would have been more intense, the sweep of the wind more life-sapping; but here in the valleys in places the snow piled deeper; it was like surf rolling up in billows; it took the life force out of man and horse.

Carney was so wearied by the sustained struggle that was like a man battling the waves, half the time beneath the waters, that his flagged senses became atrophied, numbed, scarce tabulating anything but the fact that they still held on toward the cave.

Then he heard a bell. Curious that. Was it all a dream—or was this the real thing; that he was in a merry party, a sleighing party—that they were going to a ball in a stone palace? He could hear a sleigh bell.

Then he was nice and warm. He stretched himself lazily. It was a dream—he was waking.

When he opened his eyes he saw a fire, and the flickering firelight played on stone walls. Beside the fire was sitting a man; behind him something stamped on the stone floor.

He turned his head and saw the buckskin asleep on his feet with low-hung head.

"How d'you feel, Stranger?" the man at the fire asked, rising up, and coming to his side.

Carney stared; he was supposed to be back there fighting a blizzard. And now, remembrance, coursing with languorous speed through his mind, he was in the cave where he had held Jack the Wolf a prisoner.

He sat up and pondered this with groggy slowness.

"Some horse, that, Stranger." The man's voice that had sounded thinly sinister had a humanized tone as he said this.

Carney's tongue was dry, puckered from the lowered vitality. He tried to answer, and the man, noting this, said: "Take your time, Mister. You're makin' the grade all right, all right. I knowed you was just asleep. Try this dope."

He poured some hot tea into a tin cup. It tonicized the tired Carney; it was like oil on the dry bearings of a delicate machine.

"Some April shower," the man said, piling wood on the fire. "I heerd a horse neigh—it was kind of a squeal, and my bronch havin' drifted out to sea ahead of this damn gale, I thinks he's come back. I heerd his bell, and I makes a fight with ol' white whiskers—'twan't more'n 'bout ten yards at that—and there's that danged rat of yours, and he won't come in to the warm 'cause you'd got pinned agin a boulder and snow; he seemed to know that if he pulled too hard he'd break your danged neck. Then we got you in—that's all. Some horse!"

This and the warmth and the tonic tea brought Carney up to date. He held out his hand.

But a curious metamorphosis in the man startled Carney. He turned surlily to shake up the fire, throwing over his shoulder: "I ain't done nothin'; you've got to thank that little jack rabbit fer pullin' you through. I went out after my own bronch."

"But ain't I all right, Stranger?" Carney asked gently, for he had met many men in the waste places with just this curious antipathy to an unknown. Oregon was like that. Men living in the wide outside became like outcast buffalo bulls, in their supersensitiveness—every man was an enemy till he proved himself.

The man straightened up, and his eyes that were set too close together each side of the fin-like nose rested on Carney in a squinting look of distrust.

"I ain't never knowed but one man was *all right*, and the Mounted Police hounded him till he give up."

The cave man turned the stem of the pipe he had been smoking toward the horse. "That buckskin with the mule ears belongs to Bulldog Carney. Are you him, or are you a hawse thief?"

"How do you know the horse?"

"I got reason a-plenty to know him. He cleaned me out in Walla Walla when he beat Clatawa; and I guess you're the racin' shark that cold-decked us boys with this ringer."

Now Bulldog knew why the aversion.

"I'm Carney," he 'admitted; "but it was the gamblers put up the job; I just beat them out."

"Where d'you come from now?" the cave man asked.

"Bailey's Ferry," Carney answered in oblique precaution. He noticed that the other hung with peculiar intensity on his answer.

"How long was you fightin' that blizzard?"

"Since daylight—when I broke camp." Carney looked at his watch; it was three o'clock. "How long have I been here?"

"A couple of hours. Was you runnin' booze or hop, Bulldog?"

Carney started. Perhaps the cave man was conveying a covert threat, an intimation that he might inform on

him. "Don't let's talk shop," he answered.

"I ain't got no sore spots on my hide," the other sneered; "I'm an ord'nary damn fool of a gold chaser, and I've been up in the Eagle Hills trailin' a ledge of auriferous quartz that's buck-jumpin' acrost the mountains so damn fast I never got a chanct to rope it. I'd a-stuck her out if the chuck hadn't petered. When I'd just got enough sowbelly to see me to the outside I pulled my freight. That's me, Goldbug Dave."

The other's statement flashed into Carney's mind a sudden disturbing thought—*food!* He, himself, had about one day's supply—had he it? He turned to his dunnage and saddle that lay where they had been tossed by the cave man when he had stripped them from the horse. His bacon and bannock were gone!

Wheeling, he asked, "Did you see anything of my grub?"

"All that was on your bronch is there, Bulldog. I don't rob no man's cache. And all I got's here," he held up in one hand a slab of bacon, about four pounds in weight, and in the other a drill bag, in its bottom a round bulge of flour the size of a cocoa-nut "That's got to get me to Bailey's Ferry," he added as he dropped them back at the head of his blankets.

A subconscious presentment of trouble caused Carney, through force of habit, to caress the place where his gun should have been—the pigskin pocket was empty.

The other man bared his teeth; it was like the quiver of a wolf's lip. "Your Gatt must've kicked out back there in the snow; I see it was gone."

Bulldog knew this was a lie; he knew the cave man had taken his gun. He ran his eye over his host's physical exhibit—when the time came he would get his gun back or appropriate the one so in evidence in the other's belt. He went back to his dunnage, a thought of the buckskin in his mind; to his joy he found the horse's oats safe in the bag. This fastened the idea he had that the other had stolen his food, for his bacon and bannock had been in the same bag, they could hardly have worked out and the oats remain.

He sat down again, and mentally arranged the situation. He could hear outside the blizzard still raging; he could see in the opening the swirling snow that indeed had gradually raised a barrier, a white gate to their chamber. This kept the intense cold out, a cold that was at least fifty below zero. The snow would lie in the valleys through which the trail wound twenty feet deep in places. They had no snowshoes; he had no food; and Goldbug Dave's store was only sufficient for a week with two men eating it.

He knew that there was something in Dave's mind; either a bargain, or a fight for the food. They might be imprisoned for a month; a chinook wind might come up the next day, or the day following that would melt the snow with its soft warm kiss like rain washes a street.

Carney was not hungry; the strain had left him fagged—he was hungry only for rest; and the buckskin, he knew, felt the same desire.

He lay down, and had slept two hours when he was wakened by the sweet perfume of frying pork.

Casually he noticed that but one slice of bacon lay in the pan. He watched the cook turn it over and over with the point of his hunting knife, cooking it slowly, economically, hoarding every drop of its vital fat. When the bacon was cooked the chef lifted it out on the point of his knife and stirred some flour into the gravy, adding water, preparing that well-known delicacy of the trail known as slumgullion.

Dave withdrew the pan and let it rest on the stone floor just beside the fire; then he looked across at Carney, and, catching the gray of his opened eyes, worded the foreboding thought that had been in Carney's mind before he fell asleep.

"I ain't got no call to give you a show-down on this, Bulldog, but I'm goin' to. When I snaked you in here that didn't cost me nothin'; anyways you was down and out for the count. Now you've come back it ain't up to me to throw my chanct away by de-clarin' you in on this grub; I'd be a damn fool to do it—I'd be just playin' agin myself."

Then he spat in the fire and held the pan over its blaze to warm the slimy mixture.

Carney remained silent, and his host, as if making out a case for himself continued: "We may be bottled up here for a week, or a month. Two men ain't got no chanct on that grub-pile, no chanct."

"Why don't you eat it then?" and Carney sat up. "I could, 'cause it's mine; but I got a proposition to make—you can take it or leave it."

"Spit it out."

"It's just this"—the fox eyes shifted uneasily to the little buckskin, and then back to Carney's face—"I'll share this grub if, when it's gone, you cut in with the bronch."

Carney shivered at this, inwardly; facially he didn't twitch an eye; his features were as immobile as though he had just filled a royal flush. The proposition sounded as cold-blooded as if the other man had asked him to slit the throat of a brother for a cannibalistic orgy.

"It's only ord'nary hawse sense," Dave added when Carney did not speak; "kept in the snow that meat'd last us a month. Feelin's don't count when a man's playin' fer his life, and that's what we're doin'."

"I don't dispute the sense of your proposition, my kind friend," Carney said in a well-mastered voice: "I'm not hungry just now, and I'll think it over. I've got a sneaking regard for the little buckskin, but, of course, if I don't get out he'd starve to death anyway."

"Take your time," and the owner of the pan pulled it between his legs, ate the slice of bacon, and with a tin spoon lapped up the glutinous mess.

Carney watched this performance, smothering the anger and hunger that were now battling in him. It was a one-sided argument; the other man had a gun, and Carney knew that he would use it the minute his store of provisions were gone—perhaps before that. And Carney was determined to make the discussion more equitable. Once he could put a hand on the dictator, the lop-sided argument would true itself up. As to killing the little buckskin that had saved his life—bah! the very idea of it made his fingers twitch for a grasp of the other's windpipe.

For a long time Carney sat moodily turning over in his mind something; and the other man, having lighted

his pipe, sat back against the wall of the cave smoking.

At last Carney spoke. "There's a way out of this."

"Yes, if a chinook blows up Kettlebelly Valley—there ain't no other way. The manna days is all gone by."

"There's another way. This is an old worked-out mine we're in, the Lost Ledge Mine."

"She's worked out, right enough. There never was nothin' but a few stringers of gold—they soon petered out."

"When the men who were working this mine pulled out they left a lot of heavy truck behind," Carney continued. "There's a forge, coal, tools, and, what I'm thinking of, half a dozen sets of horse snowshoes back there. I could put a set of those snowshoes on the buckskin and make Bucking Horse in three or four days. He wore them down in the Cour d'Alene."

"If you had the grub," Dave snapped; "where're you goin' to get that?"

"Half of what you've got would keep me up that long on short rations."

"And what about me—where do I come in on givin' you half my grub?"

"The other half would keep you alive till I could bring a rescue party on snowshoes and dog-train." Dave sucked at his pipe, pondering this proposition in silence; then he said, as if having made up his mind to do a generous act: "I'll cut the cards with you—your bronch agin half my chuck. If you win you can try this fool trick, if I win the bronch is mine to do the same thing, or use him to keep us both alive till a chinook blows up."

From an inside pocket of his coat he brought forth a pack of cards, and slid them apart, fan-shaped, on the corner of his blanket.

Carney was almost startled into a betrayal. On the backs of the cards winged *seven blue doves*. It was the pack that had been stolen from Seth Long's pocket, and the man that sat behind them was the murderer of Seth Long, Carney knew. Yes, it was the same pack; there was the same slight variation of the wings. In a second Carney had mastered himself.

"I guess it's fair," he said hesitatingly; "let me think it over—I'm fond of that little cuss, but I guess a man's life comes first."

He sat looking into the fire thinking, and if Dave had been a mind reader the gun in his belt would have covered Carney for the latter was thinking, "There are three aces in that pack and the fourth is in my pocket."

Then he spoke, shifting closer to the blanket on which the other sat:

"I'll cut!"

"Draw a card, then," Dave commanded, touching the strung-out pack.

Carney could see the acute-angled wings of the middle dove on a card; he turned it up—it was the ace of diamonds.

"Some draw!" Dave declared. Then he deftly flipped over the ace of spades, adding: "Horse and horse, Bulldog; draw agin."

"Shuffle and spread-eagle them again, for luck," Carney suggested.

Dave gathered the cards, gave them a riffle, and swept them along the blanket in a tenuous stream.

Carney edged closer to the ribbon of blue-doved cards; and the owner of them, a sneer on his lips, craned his head and shoulders forward in a gambler's eagerness.

Intensity, too, seemed to claim Bulldog; he rested his elbows on his knees and scanned the cards as if he hesitated over the risk. There, a little to the right, he discovered the third ace, the only one in the pack. If he turned that Dave could not tie him again. He knew that the minute he turned over that card the cave-man would know that he had been double-crossed in his sure thing; his gun would be thrust into Carney's face; perhaps—once a killer always a killer—he would not hesitate but would kill.

So Carney let his right hand hover carelessly a little beyond the ace, while his left crept closer to Dave's right wrist.

"Why don't you draw your card?" Dave snarled. "What're you——"

Carney's right hand flopped over the ace of clubs, and in the same split second his left closed like the jaws of a vise on Dave's wrist.

"Turn over a card with your left hand, quick!" he commanded.

Dave, as if in the act of obeying, reached for his gun with the left hand, but a twist of the imprisoned wrist, almost tearing his arm from the shoulder socket, turned him on his back, and his gun was whisked from its pigskin pocket by Carney.

Then Bulldog released the wrist and commanded: "Draw that card, quick, or I'll plug you; then we'll talk!"

Sullenly the other turned the card: as if in mockery it was a "jack."

"You lose," Carney declared. "Now sit back there against the wall."

Cursing Bulldog for a cold-deck sharp, the other sullenly obeyed.

Then Carney turned up the end of Dave's blanket and found, as he knew he should, Hadley's plethoric wallet, and his own six-gun. This proceeding had hushed the other man's profane denunciation; his eyes held a foreboding look.

Carney stepped back to the fire, saying:

"You're Tacoma Jack—you're the man that staked Seth Long to this marked pack." He drew from his pocket the ace of hearts and held it up to Tacoma's astonished view. "Here's the missing ace."

He put it back in his pocket and resumed: "That was to rob Hadley, when you found he was leaving the money in Seth's strong box while he went with you up into the hills to look at a mine that didn't exist. If he had taken the money with him he would have been killed instead of Seth. When the game was over that night, Seth signaled you with a lamp in the window, and when you went in to settle with him the sight of the money

was too much, and you plugged him."

"It's a damn lie! I was up in the mountains and don't know nothin' about it."

"You were standing at that back window of the police shack when Seth and Hadley were playing alone, and when you shot Seth you were smooth enough not to open the front door for fear some one might be coming and see you, but jumped from the back window."

Carney took from his pocket the paper templet he had made of the tracks in the mud.

"I see from the soles of your gum-shoe packs that this gets you." He held it up.

"It's all a damned pack of lies, Bulldog; you've been chewin' your own hop. Who's goin' to swaller that guff?"

Carney had expected this. He knew Tacoma was of the determined one-idea type; lacking absolute eye-witness evidence he would deny complicity even with a rope around his neck. He realized that with the valley lying twenty feet deep in snow he couldn't take Tacoma to Bucking Horse; in fact with him that was not the real desired point. If Carney had been a Mounted Policeman the honor of the force would have demanded that he give up his life trying to land his prisoner; but he was a private individual, trying to keep clean the name of a woman he had a high regard for—Jeanette Holt. He wanted a written confession from this man. Bringing in the stolen money and the cards wouldn't be enough; it might be said that he, himself, had taken these two things and returned them.

Even the punishment of Tacoma didn't interest him vitally. Two thieves had combined to rob a stranger, and over a division of the spoil one had been killed—it was not, vitally, Carney's funeral.

Now to gain the confession he stretched a point, saying:

"They believe Seth Long. He says you shot him." Startled out of his cunning, Tacoma blundered: "That's a damn lie—Seth's as dead's a herrin'!"

"How do you know, Tacoma?" and Carney smiled.

The other, stunned by his foolish break, spluttered sullenly, "You said so yourself."

"Seth's dead now, Tacoma, but you were in too much of a hurry to make your get-away. Dr. Anderson and I found him alive, and he said that you, Tacoma Jack, shot him. That's why I pulled out on this trail."

The two men sat in silence for a little. Tacoma knew that Carney was driving at something; he knew that Carney could not take him to Bucking Horse with the trail as it was; the buckskin would have all he could do to carry one man, and without huge moose-hunting snowshoes no man could make half a mile of that trail.

Carney broke the silence: "You made a one-sided proposition, Tacoma, when you had the drop on me; now I'm going to deal. I'd take you in if I didn't value the little buckskin more than your carcass; I don't give a damn whether you're hanged or die here. I'm going to cut from that slab of bacon six slices. That'll keep you alive for six days with a little flour I'll leave you. I can make Bucking Horse in three days at most with snowshoes on the buckskin; then I'll come back for you with a dogtrain and a couple of men on snowshoes. You've got a gambling chance; it's like filling a bob-tailed flush—but I'm going to let you draw. If the chinook comes up the valley kissing this snow before I get back you'll get away; I'd give even a wolf a fighting chance. But I've got to clear a good woman's name; get that, Tacoma!" and Carney tapped the cards with a forefinger in emphasis. "You've got to sign a confession here in my notebook that you killed Seth Long."

"I'll see you in hell first! It's a damn trap—I didn't kill him!" %

"As you like. Then you lose your bet on the chinook right now; for I take the money, your gun, your boots, and *all the grub*."

As Carney with slow deliberation stated the terms Tacoma's heart sank lower and lower as each article of life saving was specified.

"Take your choice, quick!" Carney resumed; "a grub stake for you, and you bet on the chinook if you sign the confession; if you refuse I make a cleanup. You starve to death here, or die on the trail, even if the chinook comes in two or three days." There was an ominous silence. Carney broke it, saying, a sharp determination in his voice: "Decide quick, for I'm going to hobble you."

Tacoma knew Bulldog's reputation; he knew he was up against it. If Carney took the food—and he would—he had no chance. The alternative was his only hope.

"I'll sign—I got to!" he said, surlily; "you write and I'll tell just how it happened."

"You write it yourself—I won't take a chance on you: you'd swear I forged your signature, but a man can't forge a whole letter."

He tossed his notebook and pencil over to the other.

When Tacoma tossed it back with a snarling oath, Carney, keeping one eye on the other man, read it. It was a statement that Seth Long and Tacoma Jack had quarreled over the money; that Seth, being half drunk, had pulled his gun; that Tacoma had seized Seth's hand across the table, and in the struggle Seth had been shot with his own gun.

Carney closed the notebook and put it in his pocket, saying: "This may be true, Tacoma, or it may not. Personally I've got what I want. If you're laughing down in your chest that you've put one over on Bulldog Carney, forget it. To keep you from making any fool play that might make me plug you I'm going to hobble you. When I pull out in the morning I'll turn you loose."

Carney was an artist at twisting a rope security about a man, and Tacoma, placed in the helpless condition of a swathed babe, Carney proceeded to cook himself a nice little dinner off the latter's bacon. Then he rubbed down the buckskin, melted some snow for a drink for the horse, gave him a feed of oats, and stretched himself on the opposite side of the fire from Tacoma, saying: "You're on your good behavior, for the minute you start anything you lose your bet on the chinook."

In the morning when Carney opened his eyes daylight was streaming in through the cave mouth. He blinked wonderingly; the snow wall that had all but closed the entrance had sagged down like a weary man that had huddled to sleep; and the air that swept in through the opening was soft and balmy, like the gentle

breeze of a May day.

Carney rose and pushed his way through the little mound of wet, soggy snow and gazed down the valley. The giant pines that had drooped beneath the weight of their white mantles were now dropping to earth huge masses of snow; the sky above was blue and suffused with gold from a climbing sun. Rocks on the hillside thrust through the white sheet black, wet, gnarled faces, and in the bottom of the valley the stream was gorged with snow-water.

A hundred yards down the trail, where a huge snow bank leaned against a cliff, the head and neck of a horse stood stiff and rigid out of the white mass. About the neck was a leather strap from which hung a cow-bell. It was Tacoma's cayuse frozen stiff, and the bell was the bell that Carney had heard as he was slipping off into dreamland behind the little buckskin.

Carney turned back to where the other man lay, his furtive eyes peeping out from above his blanket—they were like rat eyes.

"You win your bet, Tacoma," Carney said; "the chinook is here."

Tacoma had known; he had smelt it; but he had lain there, fear in his heart that now, when it was possible, Bulldog would take him in to Bucking Horse.

"The bargain stands, don't it, Bulldog?" he asked: "I win on the chinook, don't I?"

"You do, Tacoma. Bulldog Carney's stock in trade is that he keeps his word."

"Yes, I've heard you was some man, Bulldog. If I'd knew you'd pulled into Buckin' Horse that day, and was in the game I guess I'd a-played my hand dif'rent—p'raps it's kind of lucky for you I didn't know all that when I drug you in out of the blizzard."

Carney waited a day for the snow to melt before the hot chinook. It was just before he left that Tacoma asked, like a boy begging for a bite from an apple: "Will you give me back them cards, Bulldog—I'd be kind of lost without them when I'm alone if I didn't have 'em to riffle."

"If I gave you the cards, Tacoma, you'd never make the border; Oregon is waiting down at Bighorn to rope a man with a pack of cards in his pocket that's got seven blue doves on the back; and I'm not going to cold-deck you. After you pass Oregon you take your own chances of them getting you."

VI.—EVIL SPIRITS

The Rockies, their towering white domes like sheets of ivory inlaid with blue and green, the glacier gems, looked down upon the Vermillion Range, and the Vermillion looked down upon the sienna prairie in which was Fort Calbert, as Marathon might have looked down upon the sea.

In Fort Calbert the Victoria Hotel, monument to the prodigality of Remittance Men, held its gray stone body in aloofment from the surrounding boxlike structures of the town.

In a front room of the Victoria six men sat around an oak table upon which was enthroned a five-gallon keg with a spigot in its end. It was an occasion.

Liquor was prohibited in Alberta, but the little joker in the law was that a white citizen, in good standing, might obtain a permit for the importation of five gallons.

Jack Enders held the patent right that made the keg on the table possible.

Five of the six were Remittance Men, the sixth man, Bulldog Carney, in some particulars, was different. His lean, tanned face suggested attainment; the gray, restful eyes held power and absolute fearlessness; they looked out from under light tawny eyebrows like the eyes of an eagle.

Like Aladdin's lamp, the amber fluid that trickled through the spigot transported, mentally, the Englishmen back to the Old Land. It was always that way with them when there was a shatterment of the caste shell, an effacement of the hauteur; then they damned the uncouth West as a St. Helena, and blabbed of "Old London."

A blond giant, FitzHerbert, was saying: "Jack Enders, here, is in no end of a fazzle; his pater is coming out uninvited, and Jack has a floaty idea that the old gent will want to see that ranch."

"The ranch that the Victoria's worthy drayman, worthy Enders, is supposed to have acquired with the several remittances dear pater has remitted," Harden explained to Carney.

"Oh, Lord! you fellows!" Enders moaned.

His desolated groan was drowned by a droning call that floated in from the roadway; it was a weird drool—the droning, hoarse note of a tug's whistle.

Harden sprang to his feet crying: "St. Ives! a Thames 'Puffing Billy'! Oh, heavens! it makes me homesick."

Harden had named it; it was the absolute warning note of a busy, pudgy little Thames tug.

Some of them went over the table in their eagerness to investigate. Outside they stood aghast in silent wonderment; the hot, scorching sun lay like a yellow flame across the most archaic, disreputable caravan of one that had ever cast its disconsolate shadow upon the main street. A dejected, piebald cayuse hung limply between the shafts of a Red River cart whose appearance suggested that it had been constructed from broken bits of the ark. In the cart sat a weary semblance of humanity.

The man's face and hands were encrusted with a plastic mixture of dust and sweat till he looked like a lamellar creature—an armadillo. He turned small sullen eyes, in which was an impatient, querulous look,

upon the six.

"It's a Trappist monk from the merry temple of Chartreuse," FitzHerbert declared solemnly.

"Do it again, bargee," Harden begged; "blow your horn, O Gabriel—there's vintage inside; one blast to warm the cockles of our hearts and we'll set you happy."

The little eyes of the charioteer fastened upon Harden with his cogent proposition; he made a trumpet of his palms, and blew the tug boat blast. He did it sadly, as though it were an occupation.

But Enders, with a spring, was in the cart. He picked up the slight figure and tossed it to the blond giant, who, catching the thing of buckskin and leather chapps, turned back into the bar.

"Sit you there, foghorn," FitzHerbert said, as he lowered the unresisting guest to a chair.

The guest's eyes had grown large with the confirmatory evidence of a keg; the spiggot fascinated him; it was like a crystal to a gazer. He shoved out a dry furred tongue and peeled from his lips the rim of lava that darkened their pale contours.

Harden had replenished the glasses, and the one he passed to the prodigal was the fated calf—it was full.

The guest raised the glass till the sunlight, slanting through a window, threw life into the amber fluid, and gazed lovingly upon it.

"Oh, my aunt!" Harden bantered; "the man who has come up out of the stillness has a toast." The little man coughed, and from the flat chest floated up through thin tubes a voice that was soft and cultured as it wafted to their astonished ears: "Gentlemen, the Queen."

FitzHerbert, who had been in the Guards before something had happened, started. It was the toast of a vice-president of an officer's mess at dinner.

The six sprang to their feet, carried aloft their glasses, drank, and sat down again in silence. Fitz-Herbert's big voice had a husk in it as he asked, "Where is the regimental band, sir?"

The little man's shoulders twitched as he answered: "The band is outside: we'll have the bandmaster in for a glass of wine, presently."

"By George!" FitzHerbert gasped, for he knew this was a custom at mess; and Carney, who also knew, gazed at the little man, and his gray eyes that were thought hard, had gone blue.

"Now," Harden declared, "if somebody should dribble in who could give us twelve booms from 'Big Ben,' we'd have a perfect ecstasy of the blues."

At that two men came in through the front door, their scarlet tunics showing blood red in the glint of sunshine that played about their shoulders.

"Oh, you, Sergeant Jerry Platt!" the blond giant cried; "here is where the regulations bear heavy on a man, for we can't invite you to join up."

The Sergeant laughed. "You bad boys; if somebody hasn't a permit for this I'll have to run you all in."

Platt's companion, Corporal McBane, lengthened his dour face and added: "Drinkin' unlawful whisky is a dreadful sin."

"Shut your eyes, you two chaps, and open your mouths," FitzHerbert bantered; "that wouldn't be taking a drink."

"Let me see the permit," Platt asked, ignoring the chaff.

When he had examined the official script he said, "Sorry, gentlemen, to have troubled you."

As the two policemen turned away Platt nodded to Carney, the jovial cast of his countenance passing into a slightly cynical transition.

"Good fellows," Harden remarked; "our Scotch friend had tears of regret standing in his eyes at sight of the keg."

"Yes, and they have a beastly task," FitzHerbert declared; "this liquor law is all wrong. To keep it from the Indians white men out here have to be treated like babes or prisoners. That's why everybody is against the police when the law interferes with just rights, but with them when they're putting down crime."

"The worst part of it is," Carney added, "that sometimes a bull-headed man who has all the instincts of a thief catcher becomes a sergeant in the force, and can't interpret the law with any human intelligence. Fortunately, it's only one once in a while."

The ragged stranger shook himself out of the gentle state of quiescent restfulness the whisky had produced to say: "There will be a freshet of this stuff in Fort Calbert in a few days."

"Put me down for a barrel, O joyful stranger," FitzHerbert exclaimed eagerly.

Carney's gray eyes had widened a little at the stranger's statement.

"You can apply to Superintendent Kane," the little man answered; "he will have the handling of it, I fancy—a carload."

FitzHerbert's blue eyes searched Carney's, but the latter sat as if playing poker.

"Tell us about it, man," Enders suggested.

"I pulled into Fort Calbert this morning," the other contributed, "and a jocular constable took me to the Fort as a vagrant."

"Your equipage was against you," Enders advised. "Don't think anything of that," FitzHerbert said; "the hobos have been running neck-and-neck with the gophers about here; they burned up five freight cars in two weeks. The police have been shaken up over it by the O.C."

The little man drew from a pocket of his coat a bag of gold, and clapped it gently on the table.

"You had your credentials," and FitzHerbert nodded.

"I'd been washing gold down on the bars at Victoria. It was this way. I have a farm there, and last year I put in thirty acres of oats. It was a rotten crop and I didn't cut it. This year it came up a volunteer crop—a splendid one; I sold it to Major Grisbold, at Fort Saskatchewan, standing. Now I'm on my holidays, just a little

pleasure jaunt."

"The constable took you to the Fort?" FitzHerbert suggested, for the little man's mind had returned to the convivial association of his glass.

"By Jove! forgive me, gentlemen—about the whisky: While I was waiting for an audience with the Polica *Ogema* I heard, through an open door, a pow-wow over a telegram that had just come. Its general statement was that whisky was being loaded at Winnipeg on car 6100 for delivery at Bald Rock. The Major gave the Sergeant orders to seize the car here."

"Who owns the whisky?" FitzHerbert asked.

"I heard the O.C. say, 'It's that damn Bulldog Carney again!' so I suppose——"

The speaker's eyes opened in wondering perplexity at the blizzard of merriment that cut off his supposition; neither could he understand why FitzHerbert clapped a hand on his shoulder and cried, "Old top, you're a joy!"

The laughter had but died down when Carney rose, and, addressing the little man, held out his hand, saying: "I'm *very* glad to have met you, sir." Then he was gone.

"I like that man," the derelict declared. "What's his name—you didn't introduce me?"

"That gentleman is Mr. Bulldog Carney," FitzHerbert answered solemnly.

"Oh, I say!" the other gasped.

"Don't worry; you've probably done him a good turn," FitzHerbert answered.

The stranger blinked his solemn eyes as if debating something; then he related: "My name is Reginald Llewellyn Fordyce-Anstruther; from An-struther Hall one can drive a golf ball into either one of three counties—Surrey, Sussex, or Kent."

In retaliation each of the five presented himself at decorous length.

From the Victoria Carney strolled to the railway station and sent a telegram to John Arliss at Winnipeg. It was an ordinary ranch-type of message, about a registered bull that was being shipped. In the evening he had an answer to the effect that the bull would be well looked after.

Then Sergeant Jerry Platt paid several visits daily to the railway station for little chats with a constable who patrolled its platform from morning till night.

On the sixth day a gigantic, black-headed, drab snake crawled across the prairie from the east, and toward its tail one joint of the vertebras was numbered 6100.

Sergeant Jerry was on hand, and his eye brightened; the advice the Major had received was reliable, evidently.

The station master knew nothing about the car; it was through freight—not for Fort Calbert.

Bulldog Carney had wandered unobtrusively down to the station; a dry smile hovered about his lips as he listened to the argument between the amiable Jerry and the rather important magnate of the C. P. R.

"Lovely!" he muttered once to himself as he wandered closer to the discussion.

It was a case of when great bodies collide. The C. P. R. was a mighty force, and its agents sometimes felt the tremendousness of their power: the Mounted Police were not accustomed to being balked when they issued an order.

Jerry wanted the seals broken on the car. This the agent flatly refused to do; rules were rules, and he only took orders, re railroad matters, from his superior officer.

Jerry was firm; but the famous Jerry Platt smile never left his face for long. "There's booze in that car, Mr. Craig," he declared.

"How do you know?" the station agent retorted.

"Perhaps we got the info from Bulldog Carney, there," and Jerry laughed.

Perhaps Bulldog had been waiting for a legitimate opening, for he jumped:

"I think it is altogether incredible, Sergeant Jerry," he answered; "Ottawa would never let that much liquor get out of Ontario—they have use for it down that way."

"It's booze," Jerry asserted flatly; "and I'm going to tell you something on the level, Bulldog. You're a hell of a nice fellow, but if I get the evidence I expect to get you'll go into the pen just as though I never set eyes on you."

Carney laughed. "When you say the word, Jerry, and I can't make a get-away, I'm yours without trouble. But I don't mind laying you a bet of ten dollars that somebody's been pulling your Superintendent's leg. A carload of whisky is simply preposterous."

This little by-play had given Sergeant Platt time for a second thought. He could see that the agent was one of those duty-set men, and would not break the seal of the car; and without authority he did not care to take it on himself.

"Look here, Craig," he said, "cut that car off. I'll get the O.C. to come down; in the meantime you might wire your divisional point how to act. We've simply got to detain the car even if we use force; but I don't want to get you into trouble."

A look of pleasure suffused Carney's face; for or against him, he admired brains in a man. And Jerry's determination and bravery were also well known. He turned to the station master saying:

"I don't want to horn in on this round-up, Craig, but I fancy that's the proper way. I've a curiosity to see just what is in that car."

Sergeant Platt waited patiently; and the conductor of the freight train was now on the platform asking for his "line clear."

Craig was up against a new situation. His company was powerful, and would back him up if he were absolutely in the right, but they also expected of a man a certain amount of intelligence plus his orders; they

didn't encourage friction between their employees and the Mounted.

"Cut off 6100, Jim, and run her into the sidin'," he said curtly to the conductor. And as a panacea to his capitulation he added: "If you've got somebody else's freight there, Jerry, I'd advise you to apply for a job as brakeman, you're so damned fond of runnin' the C. P. R."

Platt laughed and, turning to the constable, said: "Gallop down to the Fort, report to the O.C., and ask him for a written order to break the seals on this car, as the agent refuses to."

So 6100 was lanced from the drab snake's body, and then the reptile crawled up the grade toward the foothills, the tail-end joint, the caboose, flicking about derisively as it hobbled over the uneven track.

An inkling of what was on had come to the ears of the citizens; casually the worthy people sauntered down to the station. They were thirsty souls, for permits did not grow on every lamp post. That a whole carload of whisky had been seized bred a demoralizing thirst. It was doomed, of course, to be poured out on the parched earth, but the event had an attraction like a funeral.

EVIL SPIRITS

At the end of half an hour the constable returned, not only with a written order, but accompanied by Major Kane himself. Behind came a heavy police wagon, drawn by an upstanding pair of bays.

The Major was a jaunty, wiry little man; his braided cap, cocked at a defiant angle on his grizzled head, suggested the comb of a Black-Red, a game cock. He had originally been a sergeant in the Imperial forces, and in his speech there was the savor of London fog.

"What's this, my good man?" The words popped from his thin lips as he addressed the agent. "You should have broken the seals on that car: do so now!"

"You'll take the responsibility, then, sir," Craig answered.

"My word! we're always doing that, always—that's what we're here for, to take responsibility; the Force is noted for it."

There was an ominous squint in the little man's eye, which was fastened on Carney rather than the agent, as he said this. Now, led by the Major, a procession headed for the car of interest.

The station agent clipped the seal wire, and as the door was slid open, the sunlight streaming in picked out the goodly forms of several oak barrels.

The Major's lips clipped out a sharp "Ha!" and Sergeant Jerry grinned at Bulldog Carney.

It must be confessed that Bulldog's gray eyes held a trifle of astonishment over this exhibit.

At a command two constables had popped into the car, and the Major, turning to Sergeant Jerry, said, "Back the wagon up, Sergeant, and take this stuff to the fort."

The station master interposed: "I think, Major, that if you're seizing this stuff as liquor you'd better make sure. Them bar'ls looks a bit too greasy and dirty to be whisky bar'ls."

"Just a clever little covering up of the trail by a foxy whisky-runner," the Major said pleasantly, and let his shrewd eyes almost wink at Carney. "But I'll humor you, Mr. Craig. Have one of your section-men bring a sledge and we'll knock in the head of a barrel; it's got to be destroyed; the devilish stuff gives us trouble enough."

One of the yard-men brought a sledge; a barrel was rolled out, stood on end, and the yard-man swung his heavy, long-nosed spike-driving sledge. At the second blow it went through, and a little fountain of syrup fluttered up like a spray of gold in the sunlight.

"Oh, my aunt!" FitzHerbert exclaimed; "you've struck it sweet this time, Major."

A little group of Sarcees who had viewed with apathetic indifference the turmoil of the whites, swarmed forward like so many bees, dipped their dirty fingers in the treacle, and lapped it off with grunts of appreciation. It was Long Dog-leg who grunted: "Heap big chief, Redcoat man! Him damn good; break him more!"

"Dump out another barrel," the nettled Major commanded.

This oaken casket when shattered by the sledge cast oil on the troubled waters—literally, for it contained good healthy kerosene.

The citizens yelped with delight. Dog-leg begged the Major not to waste these things of an Indian's desire, but give them to his tribe.

The station agent, realizing that he had been on the winning horse in his objection, could not resist a little crow. "Well, Major, you've roped something at last. For the next thirty days I can sit up nights answering correspondence. The man that owns this car of groceries will want to know what the hell the company's up to broaching his goods. The Superintendent of the Western Division will want to know why I side-track freight billed through Fort Calbert. You said you'd take responsibility, but you've given me a big lot of work, and I ain't none too well paid as it is. Somebody's doublecrossed you."

"And, by George! I'll keep after that somebody till I get him, if I have to follow him to the North Pole!" Major Kane answered crossly.

Then the constables investigated the car's interior. There were barrels of sugar, biscuit, bundles of brooms, boxes of salt cod, tins of peas, beans—in fact the car's interior was a replica of a well-ordered grocery store rather than the duplicate of a barroom.

The Major was mystified. They certainly had got the car that had been wired on by the Secret Intelligence Department as containing whisky.

He had no word of another car; what could he do? Beyond Fort Calbert were several small places on the line where there were neither police nor men who either feared or were friendly to the law. He turned to the station master, saying:

"Craig, can't you wire ahead and see if you can get that car of whisky cut off? I believe it's on that train."

"How'd I know what car to cut out; besides, I've no jurisdiction outside my own station. As it is, the company'll have a bill of damages to pay, and, of course, somebody on a three-legged stool at head office'll try to cut it out of my pay. You'd better have your men put those packages back in the car, so I can seal it up. I'm going in to wire the Superintendent of the Western Division at Winnipeg to report the whole thing to your Commissioner at Regina."

Some Stoney Indians, with the Sarcees, watched sadly the return of the broken barrels of desire to the car; not since they had looted the H. B. Coy's store at Fort Platt had there been such a pleasing prospect of something for nothing.

The constables mounted their horses and with the police wagon departed.

Sergeant Jerry Platt, in a little detour passed close to Carney, saying, as he slacked his pace: "Bulldog, you're too damn hot for this country; Montana, I would suggest as a wider field. But we'll get the goods on you yet, old top."

"Then Montana might prove attractive, dear Jerry."

The Major walked away stiffly, pondering over this mixed-up affair. He would wire to one of his outposts up in the hills; but he was handicapped by his now want of data. With whisky as the bone of contention everybody's hand would be against the force—the very train men, if they could get away with it.

Carney had viewed the incident with complacency. If 6100 contained groceries then the other car, for there was one, had got safely through with its holding of liquor. Carney had known before his telegram was sent that Jack Arliss was shipping two cars—one of goods and one of whisky; one consigned to John Ross, and one to Dan Stewart; and John Ross was also of the gang, though ostensibly an industrious storekeeper in the next town to Bald Rock, Dan Stewart's habitat. Of course, neither car would be billed as liquor. How Arliss had double-crossed the police, either by shifting the goods or juggling the shipping bills, did not matter.

Carney's telegram telling Arliss that the police at Fort Calbert were going to seize 6100 made it a sure thing for that gentleman to shoot through the whisky under another number, and a day ahead of the suspected car.

Back at the Fort, Major Kane called in Sergeant Jerry for a consultation. Jerry had been in the force for many years; he had risen from the position of scout and knew every trick and curve of the game; besides, which was almost a greater asset, he was liked of the citizens.

"Bulldog 'illstay right here," he advised; "he's got brains, the cool kind that don't sputter in the pan. It wouldn't do a bit of good to round him up, for we haven't got a thing on him—not a thing. He's so well liked that nobody'll give him away; he plays the game like Robin Hood used to. Dan Stewart 'll handle this stuff; but till you've clapped your hands on somebody with the goods we'll be guessing. A lot of it'll be run into the plains—there isn't a rancher wouldn't buy a barrel of it, and swear he'd never heard of it. Every white man is against this law, sir. They don't think Carney's breakin' the law."

The Major pondered a little, then he said: "Instruct the Sergeant Major to send out a patrol up toward the foothills, with orders to get some of this consignment, and some of the runners at any cost."

So that night a patrol rode into the western gloom.

Next day, as Sergeant Jerry strolled out of the stockade gate, he was accosted by a French halfbreed, who intimated that for a matter of ten dollars, paid in hand, he would tell Jerry where he could nab a big lot of whisky as it was being run the following night.

The informant refused Jerry's invitation to accompany him to the Commanding Officer. To insist would only frighten him, and a frightened breed always lied; so Jerry, taking a gambling chance, passed over the ten, and learned that in the night a whisky caravan would come along the trail that crossed the ford at Whispering Water heading for Fort Calbert itself.

This was quite in keeping with Carney's audacity; and Jerry, still wondering that anybody would give away Bulldog, carried the information to the Major.

"We'll have to act on it," Major Kane declared? "sometimes a breed will sell his own wife for a slab of bacon."

When night had settled down over the prairie Sergeant Jerry Platt, Corporal McBane, and three constables rode quietly through the gates, and, skirting the west wall of the stockade, drifted away to the southwest.

At ten o'clock the police were snugly hidden in the heavy willow bush of a little valley through which rippled Whispering Water; their horses had been taken back on the trail by one constable. A bull's-eye lantern fastened to a stake just topped a rock. In this position, when the slide was pulled, its rays would light up the trail where it dipped from the cut-bank to the stream.

They lay for an hour in the little bluff of willows. A moon that had hung in the western sky wandering lazily toward the distant saw-toothed ridge of the Rockies, had passed behind the gigantic stone wall, and a sombre gloom had obliterated the uneven edge of the cut-bank. In the belly of the valley it was just a well of blackness, cut at times by a penciled line of silver where the waters swirled around a cutting rock. The stillness was oppressive for the air was dead; no winger of the night passed; no animal of the prairie, gopher or coyote, disturbed the solemn hush; nobody spoke; in each one's mind was the unworded thought that they waited for a man that was known to be without fear, a man to whom odds meant little or nothing.

As they lay chest to earth in the heavy grass Corporal McBane pivoted his body on elbows close to Sergeant Jerry and whispered: "I'm glad, man, you suggested the flare. In the dark, wi' promiscuous shootin', there might be killin', and I'd no like to pot Bulldog myself', even if he is a whisky runner."

Jerry laughed a soft, throaty chuckle. "You'd have a fine chance, Mac, with that old .44 Enfield pepper-box against Carney with his .45 Colt; he just plays it like a girl fingerin' the keys of a piano; those gray cat-eyes of his can see in the dark."

"Well, wi' the flare on him he'll quit. It's only damn fools that won't wait for a better chance."

"We had him once before," Jerry said reflectively, "and he gave us the slip; just for the joke of it, too, for it was that train hold-up, and it was proved after he had nothing to do with it. But listen to this, Scottie, we both

like Bulldog, but if he bucks us, we belong to the Force."

"Aye, I'm aware of it, Sergeant; and Bulldog himself wouldn't thank us to spit on our salt. But what makes you think he'll be with this outfit?"

"Because it's just one of his damned mad capers to run it into Fort Calbert under our noses, and he wouldn't ask anyone to run the risk and not be there."

But McBane had a Scotch reluctance to believe in foolish bravado. "It's no sense, Sergeant," he objected, "and Carney's vera clever."

Suddenly, on top of the cut bank where the trail dipped through the sandy wall, something blurred the blue-black sky; there was a heavy, slipping, sliding noise as if a giant sheet of sand-paper were being shoved along the earth. There was the creaking of wood on wood, the dull thump of an axle in a hub; a softened, just perceptible thud, thud of muffled hoofs.

The shuffling noise that was as if some serpent dragged its length over the deep sands of the cut was opposite the armed men when the voice of Sergeant Platt rang out in a sharp command:

"Halt! hands up—you are covered! If you move we fire!"

At the first word, "Halt!" the bull's-eye threw its arrogant glare of light upon the creeping thing of noise. It painted against the cut-bank the bleary-eyed cayuse, the archaic Red River cart, and the unformidable figure of the Honorable Reginald Fordyce-Anstruther—that was all. That is to say, all but five square tins, atop of which sat the outlaw, Reggie.

It was a goblined, pathetically inadequate figure sitting atop the tins, the lean attenuated arms held high as if in beseechment.

Sergeant Jerry cursed softly; then he laughed; and Corporal McBane exclaimed: "Ma God! it's like catchin' a red herrin'."

But Jerry, careful scout, whispered: "Circle to the rear, Corporal; keep out of the light; it may be a blind."

Soon McBane's voice was heard from the cut-bank: "All clear, Sergeant."

Then Sergeant Jerry, stepping into the open, examined the exhibit. Instead of carrying concealed weapons Reggie had a fair load of concealed spirits; he was fully half-drunk. Questions only brought some nebulous answers about the permit being up in Fort Calbert, and that he was bringing in the goods. Even Jerry's proverbial good nature was sorely taxed.

"I'm gettin' fed up on these damned tricks of Bulldog's," he growled, "for that's what it is."

"I'm not sure," McBane objected; "this ninny may ha' blabbed, and yon breed, hearin' it, saw a chance to make a shillin' or two."

However, Reggie, and his cayuse and the whisky were attached and escorted in to barracks.

Perhaps it was the fortifying courage of the whisky the villain had imbibed that caused him to bear up remarkably well under this misfortune of the very great possibility of losing his not-too-valuable outfit; or he may have known of some fairy who would make good his fine.

In the morning the liquor was very formally taken out to the usual sacrifice place, just at the back of the barracks, and in the presence of the Superintendent and a small guard of constables, poured in a gurgling libation upon the thirsting sand-bank of a little ravine. Then the empty tins were tossed disdainfully into the coulee.

Back in the Fort Major Kane said: "This was all a blind, Sergeant Platt; none of the stuff will come down this way—they'll run it up among the miners and lumberjacks. Take Lemoine the scout, and pick up some of the patrol up about the Pass."

In half an hour Sergeant Jerry rode out from the Fort into the west; and by the middle of the afternoon Corporal McBane reported to the O.C. that the few constables remaining in the Fort were drunk—half were in the guard room.

The Major was horrified. Where had the liquor come from? Corporal McBane didn't know.

In his perplexity the Major, stick in hand, stalked angrily to the scene of the morning sacrifice. The mound apparently had not been disturbed. He had a nebulous idea that perhaps the men had chewed up the saturated earth. He jabbed viciously at the spot with his walking stick as if spearing the alcoholic demon. At the third thrust his stick went through, suggesting a hole. With boot and hand the Major sent the sand flying. A foot down he came upon a gunny sack. Beneath this was a neat crosshatching of willow wands resting atop an iron grating that was supported by a tub; a tub boned from the laundry, but the strong odor that struck the Superintendent's nostrils was not suds—it was whisky.

He yanked the tub out of the cavity and kicked it into the coulee. Then he stood up and mopped his perspiring forehead, muttering: "The devils! the cursed stuff! It's that damned outlaw, Bulldog Carney, that's put them up to this. The liquor that poor waster brought in was just a blind, the tip from the half-breed was part of his devilish plot. It's a game to put my men on the blink while he runs that carload."

Rage swirled in the Major's heart as he turned toward the Fort; but before he had reached the gates his sense—and the little man had lots of it—laid embargo on his tongue, and he passed silently to his quarters to sit on the verandah and curse softly to himself.

He was sick of the whole whisky business. He had been in the Mounted from the very first, fifteen years or so of it now. They had not come into the Territories to be pitted against the social desires of the white inhabitants who were in all other things law abiding; but here this very thing took up more than half their time and energy. And it was a losing game with the cunning and desires of a hundred men pitted against every one of his force.

There were rumors that it was soon to be changed—the trade legitimized; that is, for Alberta to the Athabasca border. With a small army of clever whisky traders, no licenses, no supervision against them, it was a matter of impossibility to keep liquor from the half-breeds who were a sort of carry-on station to the Indians.

To trail murderers, gunmen, cattle and horse thieves, day after day across the trackless prairie, or the white sheet-of-snow buried plain, was an exhilarating game—it was something to stimulate the *esprit de corps*; a Mounted Policeman, feeling, when he had landed his man, full reward for all his hardships and danger; but to poke around like an ordinary city sleuth and bag some poor devil of a breed with a bottle of whisky, only to have him up before the magistrate for a small fine was, to say the least, disquieting; it made his men half ashamed of their mission.

Of course the present incident was not petty; it was like Bulldog Carney himself—big; and the Major would have given, right there, a half-year's pay to have bagged Bulldog, and so, perhaps have broken up the ring.

But determined as the force was, the British law was greater still. Without absolute, convicting evidence Carney would have been acquitted, and the Major perhaps censured for making a mistake.

At headquarters was a fixed edict: "Take no position from which you will have to recede," really, "Don't make mistakes."

As the little man sat thinking over these many things, sore at heart at the quirky thrust Fate had dealt him, for he loved the Mounted, loved his duties, loved the very men, until sometimes breaking under the strain of service in the lonely wastes they cracked and a weak streak showed—then he was a tiger, a martinet; no sparing: "Out you go, you hound!" he would snap; "you're a disgrace to the Force, and it's got to be kept clean."

Then "Dismissed" would be written opposite the man's name in the annual report that went from the Commissioner at Regina to the "Comptroller at Ottawa."

Suddenly the chorus of a refrain floated to his ears from the guard house—it was "The Stirrup Cup."

"God, *England!*" the little man groaned. "That's Cavendish singing," he muttered.

How long and broad the highway of life; how human, how weakly human those who travelled it! Cavendish, a younger son of a noble family, a constable at sixty cents a day! They were all like that—not of noble family, but adventurers, roamers, men who had broken the shackles of restraint all over the world. That was largely why they were in the Mounted; certainly not because of the sixty cents a day. And, so, how, even in his bitterness of set-awry-authority, could the incident of the tub be a heinous crime on their part.

"By gad!" and the little man popped from his chair and paced the verandah, crying inwardly: "They're my boys; I'd like to forgive them and shoot Carney—damn him! he's at the bottom of it."

The great arrogant sun, supreme in his regal gold, had slipped down behind the jagged mountain peaks as Carney, on his little buckskin, and the blond giant, FritzHerbert, on a bay, swung at a lope out of Fort Calbert for a breather over the prairie.

As they rode, almost silently, they suddenly heard the shuffling "pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat" of a cayuse, and in a little cloud of white dust to the west there grew to their eyes the blurred form of a horseman that seemed to droop almost to the horn of his saddle.

"A tired nichie," FitzHerbert commented; "he smells sow-belly frying in the town—he hasn't eaten for a moon, I should say."

The dust cloud swirled closer, and Carney's gray eyes picked out the familiar form of Lathy George, one of Dan Stewart's men. The rider yanked his cayuse to a stand when they met, almost reeling from the saddle in exhaustion. The cayuse spread his legs, drooped his head, and the flanks of his lean belly pumped as if his lungs were parched.

"Hello, Bulldog!" then the man looked warily at Carney's companion.

FitzHerbert saw the look and knew from the stranger's physical shatterment that some vital errand had spurred him; so he touched a heel to his bay's flank and moved slowly along the trail.

Then the rider of the cayuse in tired, panting gasps gave Carney his message.

"All right, George," Bulldog commented at the finish; "go to the Victoria, feed your horse, have a good supper, get a room and sleep."

"What'll I do, boss, when I wake up—how long'll I sleep?"

"As long as you like—a week if you want."

"What'll I do then—don't you need me?"

"No, play with your toes if you like."

Lathy George pulled his reeling cayuse together, and pushed on. Carney gave a whistle, and FitzHerbert, wheeling his bay, turned. "I've got to go back to town," Carney said.

"I'll go too," the other volunteered; "this devilish boundlessness is like a painted sky above a painted ocean—it gives me the lonely willies."

"There's hell to pay back yonder," Carney said, jerking a thumb over his shoulder.

"It's always back there, or over yonder—never here when there's any hell to pay," FitzHerbert commented dejectedly; "it's just one long plaintive sabbath."

"I've got to go back to the foothills soon's I've got fixed up," Carney continued.

"Me, too—if there's action there."

"Hardly, my dear boy; it's purely a matter of diplomacy."

"Absolutely, Bulldog; that's why you're going. You're going to kiss somebody on both cheeks, pat him on the back, and say, 'Here's a good cigar for you—you love it. What's happened?'"

"The Stonies are on the war-path."

"Ugly devils—part Sioux. They're hunters—blood letters—first cousins to the Kilkenny cats. In the rebellion, a few years ago, only for the Wood Crees they'd have murdered every white prisoner that came into their hands."

"Yes, they're peppery devils. In the Frog Lake massacre one of them, Itcka, killed a white man or two and was hanged for it."

"What started them now?" FitzHerbert asked. "Whisky."

FitzHerbert stole a glance at Carney's stolid face; then he whistled; Carney's word had been like a gasp of confession, for, undoubtedly, the liquor was from the car.

"How did they make the haul?" he asked.

"The Stonies have just had their Treaty Payment, and there's a new regulation that they may go off the reserve at Morley to make their Fall hunt in the mountains, at this time; they were on their way, under Chief Standing Bear, when they ran into the gent we've just met and his mates in the Vermillion Valley. George was running two loads of whisky up to the lumber camps."

"Great! that combination—lumberjacks, Stonies, and Whisky; it would be as if sheol had opened a chute—there'll be murder."

"I know Standing Bear; he made me a blood brother of his. I did him a bit of a turn. I was coming through the Flathead Valley once, and the old fellow had insulted a grizzly. The grizzly was peeved, for the Stoney had peppered a couple of silly bullets into the brute's shoulder. I happened to get in a lucky shot and stopped the silver-tip when he was about to shampoo old Standing Bear."

"Yes, I heard about that—you and your little buckskin. Say, Bulldog, that little devil must have the pluck of a lion—they say he carried you right up to the grizzly, and you pumped him full of .45's"

"That's just a yarn," Carney asserted; "but, anyway, the Chief and I are good friends. I'm going to pull out and persuade him to go back to the reserve. Jerry Platt has gone down in that direction, and you know what the Sergeant is, Fitz—he'll stack up against that tribe alone; if they're full of fire-water, and have been rowing with the lumberjacks—their squaws will be along, and you know what that means—Jerry stands a mighty good chance of being killed. I feel that it will be sort of my fault."

"It's rotten to go alone, Bulldog. I'll get a dozen of the fellows, and we'll play rugby with those devilish *nichies* if they don't act like gentlemen."

Carney laughed. "If you'd been at Duck Lake or Cut Knife you'd know all about that. Your bally Remittance Men wouldn't have a chance, Fitz—not a chance. It would be a fight—your hot heads would start it—and after the first shot you wouldn't see anything to shoot at; you'd see the red spit of their rifles, and hear the singing note of their bullets. These Stonies are hunters; they can outwit a big-horn in the mountains; first thing he knows of their approach is when he's bowled over."

EVIL SPIRITS

"How are you going to do it then, mister man? Go in and get shot up just because you feel that it's your fault?"

"No, I'm going to try and make good. If I can hook up with Jerry Platt we'll put before them the strongest kind of an argument, the only kind they'll listen to. They'll obey the Police generally, because they know the 'Redcoat' is an agent of the Queen, the White Mother who feeds them; but, being drunk, the young bucks will be hostile—some of them will feel like pulling the White Mother's nose. But Standing Bear has got sense and he promised me when we were made blood brothers that his whole tribe was pledged to me. I'm going down to collect—do you see, Fitz?"

They were riding in to town now, and FitzHerbert made another plea: "Let me go with you, Bulldog. I'm petrified with fanning the air with my eyes, and nothing doing. I sit here in this damned village watching the west wind blow the boulders up the street, and the east wind blow them back again, till they're worn to the size of golf balls. I'm atrophied; my insides are like an enamelled pot from the damned alkaline dust."

"Sorry, my dear boy, but I know what would happen if you went with me. While I'd be holding a pow-wow with Standing Bear one of those boozed Stonies would spit in your eye, and you'd knock him down; then hell would break loose."

"You're generally right, Bulldog, mister some man; none of us have got the cool courage you've got. I guess it's rather moral cowardice. I've seen you stand more abuse than a mule-skinner gives his mule and not lose caste over it." He held out his big hand, saying: "Good luck, old boy! I rather fancy Standing Bear will be back on his reserve or this will be good-bye."

It was dark when Carney rode out of Fort Calbert heading for the heavy gloomed line of the Vermillions. The little buckskin pricked his ears, threw up his head with a playful clamp at the bit, and broke into a long graceful lope; beneath them the chocolate trail swam by like shadow chasing shadow over a mirror. A red-faced moon that had come peeping over Fort Calbert, followed the rider, traversing the blue upturned prairie above, as if it, too, hurried to rebuke with its silent serenity the turbulent ones in the foothills. It cast a mystic, sleepy haze over the plain that lay in restful lethargy, bathed in an atmosphere so peaceful that Carney's mission seemed but the promptings of a phantasmagoria. There was a pungent, acrid taint of burning grass in the sleepy air, and off to the south glinted against the horizon the peeping red eyes of a prairie fire. They were like the rimmed lights of a shore-held city.

The way was always uphill, the low unperceived grade of the prairie uplifting so gradually to the foothills, and the buckskin, as if his instinct told him that their way was long, broke his lope into the easy suffling pace of a cayuse.

Carney, roused from the reverie into which the somnolence of the gentle night had cast him, patted the slim neck approvingly. Then his mind slipped back into a fairy boat that ferried it across leagues of ocean to the land of green hills and oak-hidden castles.

Something of the squalid endeavor ahead bred in his mind a distaste for his life of adventure. Was it good enough? Danger, the pitting of his wits against other wits, carried a savor of excitement that was better than remembering. The foolish past could only be kept in oblivion by action, by strain, by danger, by adventure, by winning out against odds; but the thing ahead—drunken, brawling lumberjacks, and Indians thrust back into primitive savagery because of him, put in his soul a taste of the ashes of regret.

Even the test he was going to put himself to was not enough to deaden this suddenly awakened remorse. To

the blond giant he had minimized the danger, the prospect of conflict, but he knew that he was playing a game with Fate that the roll of the dice would decide. He was going to pit himself against the young bucks of the Stonies. They were an offshoot of the Sioux; in their veins ran fighting blood, the blood of killers; and inflamed by liquor the blood would be the blood of ghazis. It would all depend upon Standing Bear, for Carney could not quit, could not weaken; he must turn them back from the valley of the Vermillion, or remain there with his face upturned to the sky, and his soul seeking the Ferryman at the crossing of the Styx.

He had ridden three hours, scarce conscious of anything but the mental traverse, when the palpitating beat of hoofs pounding the drum-like turf fell upon his ears. From far down the trail to the west came a sound that was like the drum of a mating pheasant's wings.

The trail he rode dipped into a little hollow. Here he slipped from the saddle, led the buckskin to one side, and dropped the bridle rein over his head. Then he took a newspaper from his pocket, canopied it into a little gray mound on the trail, and, drawing his gun, stepped five paces to one side and waited. All this precaution was that he might hold converse with the galloping horseman without the startling semblance of a hold-up; sometimes the too abrupt command to halt meant a pistol shot.

As the pound of the hoofs neared, the rhythmic cadence separated into staccato beats of, "pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat," and Carney muttered: "Rather like a drunken nichie; he's riding hell-bent-for-leather."

Now the racing horseman was close; now he loomed against the sky as he topped the farther bank. Half-way down the dipping trail the cayuse saw the paper mound, and with his prairie bred instinct took it for a crouching wolf. With a squealing snort he swerved, propped, and his rider, in search of equilibrium, shot over his head. As he staggered to his feet a strong hand was on his arm, and a disagreeable cold circle of steel was touching his cheek.

"By gar!" the frightened traveller cried aghast, "don't s'oot me."

Carney laughed, and lowering his gun, said: "Certainly not, boy—just a precaution, that's all. Where are you going?"

"I'm goin' to de Fort, me," the French halfbreed replied. "De Stoney nichies an' de lumberjacks is raise hell; by gar! dere's fine row; dey s'oot de Sergeant, Jerry Platt."

"Where?"

"Jus' by Yellowstone Creek, De Stonies pitch dere tepees dere."

"Where's the Sergeant?"

"I don't know me. He get de bullet in de shoulder, but he swear by *le bon Dieu* dat he'll get hes man, an' mak' de Injun go back to hees reserve. He's hell of brave mans, dat Jerry."

"All right, boy," Carney said; "you ride on to the Fort and tell the Superintendent that Bulldog Carney—"

"Sacre! Bulldog Carney?" The poor breed gasped the words much as if the Devil had clapped him on a shoulder.

"Yes; tell him that Bulldog Carney has gone to help Jerry Platt put the fear of God into those drunken bums. Now pull out."

The breed, who had clung to the bridle rein, mounted his cayuse, crying, as he clattered away: "May de Holy Mudder give you de help, Bulldog, dat's me, Ba'tiste, wish dat."

Then Carney swung to the back of the little buckskin, and pushed on to the help of Jerry Platt.

Dozing in the saddle he rode while the gallant horse ate up mile after mile in that steady, shuffling trot he had learned from his cold-blooded brothers of the plains. The grade was now steeper; they were approaching the foothills that rose at first in undulating mounds like a heavy ground swell; then the ridges commenced to take shape against the sky line, looking like the escarpments of a fort.

The trail Carney followed wound, as he knew, into the Vermillion Valley, at the upper end of which, near the gap, the Indians were encamped on Yellowstone Creek.

The Indians' clock, the long-handled dipper, had swung around the North Star off to Carney's right, and he had tabulated the hours by its sweep. It was near morning he knew, for the handle was climbing up in the east.

Then, faintly at first, there carried to his ears the droning "tump-tump, tump-tump, tump-tump, tump-tump!" of a tom-tom, punctuated at intervals by a shrill, high-pitched sing-song of "Hi-yi, hi-yi, hi-yi, hi-yi!"

Carney pulled his buckskin to a halt, his trained ear interpreted the well-known time that was beaten from the tom-tom—it was the gambling note. That was the Indians all over; when drunk to squat on the ground in a circle, a blanket between them to hide the guessing bean, and one of their number beating an exciting tattoo from a skin-covered hoop, ceasing his flagellation at times to tighten the sagging skin by the heat of a fire.

Carney slipped from the buckskin's back, stripped the saddle off, picketed the horse, and stretched himself on the turf, muttering, as he drifted into quick slumber: "The cold gray light of morning is the birth time of the yellow streak—I'll tackle them then."

The sun was flicking the upper benches of the Vermillion Range when Carney opened his eyes. He sat up and watched the golden light leap down the mountain side from crag to crag as the fount of all this liquid gold climbed majestically the eastern sky. As he stood up the buckskin canted to his feet. Bulldog laid his cheek against the soft mouse-colored nose, and said: "Patsy, old boy, it's business first this morning—we'll eat afterwards; though you've had a fair snack of this jolly buffalo grass, I see from your tummy."

The tom-tom was still troubling the morning air, and the crackle of two or three gunshots came down the valley.

As Carney saddled the buckskin he tried to formulate a plan. There was nothing to plan about; he had no clue to where he might find Platt—that part of it was all chance. Failing to locate the Sergeant he must go on and play his hand alone against the Stonies.

As he rode, the trail wound along the flat bank of a little lake that was like an oval turquoise set in platinum and dull gold. Beyond it skirted the lake's feeder, a rippling stream that threw cascades of pearl tints and

sapphire as it splashed over and against the stubborn rocks. From beyond, on the far side, floated down from green fir-clad slopes the haunting melody of a French-Canadian song. It was like riding into a valley of peace; and just over a jutting point was the droning tom-toms. As Carney rounded the bend in the trail he could see the smoke-stained tepees of the Stonies.

At that instant the valley was filled with the vocal turmoil of yelping, snarling dogs—the pack-dogs of the Indians.

At first Carney thought that he was the incentive to this demonstration; but a quick searching look discovered a khaki-clad figure on a bay police horse, taking a ford of the shallow stream. It was Sergeant Jerry Platt, all alone, save for a half-breed scout that trailed behind.

Pandemonium broke loose in the Indian encampment. Half-naked bucks swarmed in and out among the tepees like rabbits in a muskeg; some of them, still groggy, pitched headlong over a root, or a stone. Many of them raced for their hobbled ponies, and clambered to their backs. Two or three had rushed from their tepees, Winchester in hand, and when they saw the policeman banged at the unoffending sky in the way of bravado.

Carney shook up his mount, and at a smart canter reached the Sergeant just as his horse came up to the level of the trail, fifty yards short of the camp.

Platt's shoulder had been roughly bandaged by the guide, and his left arm was bound across his chest in the way of a sling. The Sergeant's face, that yesterday had been the genial merry face of Jerry, was drawn and haggard; grim determination had buried the boyishness that many had said would never leave him. His blue eyes warmed out of their cold, tired fixity, and his voice essayed some of the old-time recklessness, as he called: "Hello, Bulldog. What in the name of lost mavericks are you doing here—collecting?"

"Came to give you a hand, Jerry."

"A hand, Bulldog?"

"That's the palaver, Jerry. Somebody ran me in the news of this"—he swept an arm toward the tepees—"and I've ridden all night to help bust this hellery. Heard on the trail you'd got pinked."

"Not much—just through the flesh. A couple of drunken lumberjacks potted me from cover. I've been over at the Company's shacks, but I'm pretty sure they've taken cover with the Indians. I'll get them if they're here. But I've got to herd these bronco-headed bucks back to the reserve."

"They'll put up an argument, Sergeant."

"I expect it; but it's got to be done. They'll go back, or Corporal McBane will get a promotion—he's next in line to Jerry Platt."

"Good stuff, Jerry, I'll—"

"Pss-s-ing!"

Bulldog's statement of what he would do was cut short by the whining moan of a bullet cutting the air above their heads. A little cloud of white smoke was spiraling up from the door of a teepee.

"That's bluff," Jerry grunted.

"We've got to move in, Jerry—if we hesitate, after that, they'll buzz like flies. If you start kicking an Indian off the lot keep him moving. I'm under your command; I've sworn myself in, a special; but I know Standing Bear well, and if you'll allow it, I'll make a pow-wow. But I'm in it to the finish, boy."

"Thanks, Bulldog"—they were moving along at a steady walk of the horses toward the tepees—"but you know our way—you've got to stand a lot of dirt; if you don't, Bulldog, and start anything, you'll make me wish you hadn't come. It's better to get wiped out than be known as having lost our heads. D'you get it?"

"I'm on, Jerry."

Carney knew Standing Bear's tepee; it was larger than the others; on its moose-skin cover was painted his caste mark, something meant to represent a hugetoothed grizzly.

But everything animate in the camp was now focused on their advent. The old men of wisdom, the half-naked bucks, squaws, dogs, ponies—it was a shifting, interminably twisting kaleidoscope of gaudy, dragged, vociferous creatures.

A little dry laugh issued from Jerry's lips, and he grunted: "Some circus, Bulldog. Keep an eye skinned that those two skulking Frenchmen don't slip from a tepee."

Standing Bear stood in front of his tepee. He was a big fine-looking Indian. Over his strong Sioux-like features hovered a half-drunken gravity. In one hand he held an eagle's wing, token of chieftainship, and the other hand rested suggestively upon the butt of a .45 revolver.

Carney knew enough Stoney to make himself understood, for he had hunted much with the tribe.

"Ho, Chief of the mighty hunters," he greeted.

"Why does the Redcoat come?" and Standing Bear indicated the Sergeant with a sweep of the eagle wing.

"We come as friends to Chief Standing Bear," Carney answered.

"Huh! the talk is good. The trail is open: now you may pass."

"Not so, Chief," Carney answered softly. "Harm has been done. Two white men, with evil in their hearts against the police of the Great White Mother, whose children the Stonies are, have wounded one of her Redcoat soldiers; and also the White Mother has sent a message by her Redcoat that Standing Bear is to take his braves back to the reserve."

At this the bucks, who had been listening impatiently, broke into a clamor of defiance; the high-pitched battle-cry of "hi-yi, yi-yi, yi-hi!" rose from fifty throats. The mounted braves swirled their ponies, driving them with quirt and heel in a mad pony war-dance. Half-a-dozen times the lean racing cayuses bumped into the mounts of the two white men.

Running Antelope, a Stoney whose always evil face had been made horrible by the sweep of a bear's claws, raced his pony, chest on, against the buckskin, thrust his ugly visage almost into Carney's face, and spat.

Bulldog wiped it off with the barrel of his gun, then dropped the gun back into its holster, saying quietly: "Some day, Running Antelope, I'll cover that stain with your blood."

The Sergeant sat as stolid as a bronze statue. The squaws stood in groups, either side the Chief's tepee, and hurled foul epithets at the two white men. Little copper-skinned imps threw handfuls of sand, and gravel, and bits of turf.

The dogs howled and snapped as they sulked amongst their red masters.

"We will not go back to the reserve, Bulldog," the Chief said with solemn dignity, and held the eagle wing above his head; "it is the time of our hunt, and a new treaty has been made that we go to the hunt when the payment is made. Of the two pale faces that have done evil I know not."

"They are here in the tepees," Bulldog declared. "The tepees are the homes of my tribe, and what is there is there. Go back while the trail is open, Bulldog, you and the Redcoat; my braves may do harm if you remain."

"Chief, we are blood brothers—was it not so spoken?"

"Standing Bear has said that it is so, Bulldog."

"And Standing Bear said that when his white brother asked a gift Standing Bear would hear the words of his brother."

"Standing Bear said that, Bulldog."

"Then, Chief, Bulldog asks the favor, not for himself, but for the good of Standing Bear and his Braves."

"What asks the Bulldog of Standing Bear?"

"That he give into the hand of the White Mother's Redcoat the two *moneas*, the Frenchmen; and that he strike the tepees and command the squaws to load them on the travois, and lead the braves back to the reserve."

Running Antelope pushed himself between Carney and the Chief, and in rapid, fierce language denounced this request to Standing Bear.

A ringing whoop of approval from the bucks greeted Antelope's harrangue.

"My braves will not go back to the reserve, Bulldog," the Chief declared.

"Is Standing Bear Chief of the Stonies?" Carney asked; "or is he an old outcast buffalo bull—and does the herd follow Running Antelope?"

The Chief's face twisted with the shock of this thrust, and Running Antelope scowled and flashed a hunting knife from his belt.

"If Standing Bear is Chief of the Stonies, the White Mother's Redcoat asks him to deliver the two evil *moneas*" Carney added.

Standing Bear seemed to waver; his yellow-streaked black-pointed eyes swept back and forth from the faces of the white men to the faces of the braves.

In a few rapid words Carney explained to Sergeant Platt the situation, saying: "Now is the test, Jerry. We've got to act. I've a hunch the two men you want are in that old blackguard's tepee. Shall I carry out something I mean to do?"

"Don't strike an Indian, Bulldog; don't wound one: anything else goes. If they start shooting, go to it—then we'll fight to the finish."

The Sergeant pulled out his watch, saying: "Give them five minutes to strike the tepees, that may cow them. We've got to keep going."

Standing Bear saw the watch, and asked: "What medicine does the Redcoat make?"

Carney explained that the Sergeant gave him five minutes to strike his tepee as a sign to the others.

"And if Standing Bear says that talk is not good talk, that a Chief of the Stonies is not a dog to be driven from his hunting, what will the Redcoat do?" the Chief asked haughtily.

But Carney simply answered: "Bulldog is the friend of Standing Bear, his blood brother, but at the end of five minutes Bulldog and the White Mother's soldier will lead the Stonies back to the reserve." A quiet followed this; the dreadful heaviness of a sudden stilling of the tumult, for the Chief, raising his eagle wing, had commanded silence.

"Standing Bear will wait to see the medicine making of the Redcoat," he said to Carney.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes, four minutes; the two men sat their horses facing the sullen redskins. A thrilling exhilaration was tingling the nerves of Carney; a test such as this lifted him. And Jerry, as brave as Bulldog, sat throned on his duty, waiting, patient— but it *must* be.

"The five minutes are up," he said, quietly. Carney seemed toying with his lariat idly as he answered: "Put your watch back in your pocket, Jerry, and command, in the Queen's name, Standing Bear to strike his tepee. The authority game, old boy. I'll interpret, and if he doesn't obey I'm going to pull his shack down. Does that go?"

"It does, and the Lord be with us."

Jerry dropped the watch dramatically into his pocket, raised his voice in solemn declamation, and Carney interpreted the command.

The Chief seemed to waver; his eyes were shifty, like the eyes of a wolf that hesitates between a charge and a skulk-away.

"Speak," Carney commanded: "tell your braves to strike their tepees."

"Go back on the trail, Bulldog."

Standing Bear's words were cut short by the zipp of a rope; from Carney's right hand the lariat floated up like the loosening coils of a snake; the noose settled down over the key-pole, and at a pull of the rein the little buckskin raced backward, and the tepee collapsed to earth like a pricked balloon.

This extraordinary, unlooked-for event had the effect of a sudden vivid shaft of lightning from out a

troubled sky. Half paralyzed the Indians stood in gasping suspense, and into the Chief's clever brain flashed the knowledge that all his bluff had failed, that he must yield or take the awful consequence of thrusting his little tribe into a war with the great nation of the palefaces; he must yield or kill, and to kill a Redcoat on duty, or even Bulldog, a paleface who had not struck a tribesman, meant the dreaded punishment of hanging.

The god of chance took the matter out of his hands.

From the entangling folds of the skin tepee two swarthy, flannel-shirted white men wriggled like badgers escaping from a hole, and stood up gazing about in bewilderment. One of them had drawn a gun, and in the hand of the other was a vicious knife.

Sergeant Jerry drew a pair of handcuffs from a pocket, and pushed his bay forward to cut off the retreat of the Frenchmen, commanding: "You are under arrest—hands up!"

As he spoke, with an ugly oath the man with the gun fired. The report was echoed by the crack of Carney's gun and the Frenchman's hand dropped to his side, his pistol clattering to earth.

Sergeant Jerry threw the handcuffs to the man with the knife, saying, sharply: "Shackle yourself by the right wrist to the left wrist of your companion."

The man hesitated, sweeping with his vicious eyes the band of cowed Indians.

One look at the gun in Carney's hands and muttering: "Sacre! dem damn Injuns is coward dogs!" he picked up the chained rings and snapped them on his mate's wrists and his own.

Carney turned to Standing Bear, who stood petrified by the rapidity of events.

"Chief," he said, "with these white outcasts the way is different, they are evil; the Indians are children of the White Mother."

The wily old Chief quickly repudiated the two Frenchmen; he could see that the policeman and Bulldog were not to be bluffed.

"If the two moneas have broken the law, take them," he said magnanimously; "but tell the Redcoat that Standing Bear and his tribe will go from here up into the hills for the hunt, for to return to the reserve would bring hunger to the Stonies when the white rain lies on the ground. Ask the Redcoat to say that this is good, that we may go quickly, and the evil be at an end."

Carney conveyed this to Jerry. It was perhaps the better way, he advised, for the breaking up of the hunt, during which they laid in a stock of meat for the winter, and skins and furs, would be distinct hardship.

"You can take the prisoners in, Sergeant," Carney said, "and I'll stay with Standing Bear till they're up in the mountains away from the lumberjacks."

"They must destroy any whisky they have," Jerry declared.

This the Chief agreed to do.

In half an hour the tepees were all down, packed on the poled travois, blankets and bundles were strapped to the backs of the dogs, and in a struggling line the Stonies were heading for the hills.

Toward the east the two Frenchmen, linked together, plodded sullenly over the trail, and behind them rode Sergeant Jerry and his half-breed scout.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BULLDOG CARNEY ***

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