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BARGAIN DAY IN MONTANA

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WILD HORSE MESA

By Zane Grey

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK B. HOFFMAN

HERE'S how the story begins: Now that his brother Chess boyishly resents his guiding hand, Chane Weymer is foot-loose. So this outstanding figure among the bold wild-horse wranglers comes to the Utah cañon country to buy mustangs from Toddy Nokin, Piute chief. But the real lure is Panguitch, mighty wild stallion, whose refuge is unscaled Wild Horse Mesa. To Chane's camp come three strange riders, whose leader calls himself Bud McPherson. Later a fourth, Manerube, also out of food, appears. He taunts Chane with being a squaw man because of the kindness Weymer has shown to Indian girls, among them Sosie, daughter of Toddy, who has been educated in a government school. Weymer forces Manerube to back down and warns him not to molest the girl.

Chane had lost a favorite horse and felt he could never care for another. But he tries old Brutus, a horse recently secured, and finds him a splendid animal. He rides to Toddy's corral and buys the ponies. The chief confirms the suspicions Chane feels of his four uninvited guests, so he decides to strike out without delay for the nearest town. Toddy and his sons will accompany him part of the way. Then Chane encounters Manerube with Sosie mounted behind him. He is abducting the girl. Chane halts them, pulls Manerube from his saddle and thrashes him soundly.

III

SUE MELBERNE'S father would never have allowed her to come on this wild-horse hunting expedition if he had not calculated on finding a new country where he could homestead. Back there at St. George she had heard her father say to Loughbridge, his partner in this venture, "You know, Jim, I've shore got to take root in new soil."

This significant remark had remained in Sue's mind, like others that had struck her strangely since her return from school in Silver City. Her father was always looking for someone to come unexpectedly, so it seemed. There had been some reason for him to leave the South, then Silver City, then Vegas and lastly St. George. Sue did not want to dwell on the meaning of this. She had been born in Texas, and she had lived long enough in the West to know Westerners.

The pursuit of wild horses had a remarkable fascination for Sue, but she hated the brutality. She loved to see and watch wild horses, not to capture them. Then the camp life, the riding and packing from place to place, the days in the open country—Utah in its beautiful, wild carved-stone majesty—coming after her four years at school in a bustling town, had irresistible appeal for her.

There had been a chance for her to remain at St. George, teaching a school where most of the children were Mormons. She did not dislike Mormons particularly, but she had no wish to live alone among them. On the other hand the prospect held out by her father had not at first struck Sue as alluring. But she had decided to try it, to be with her father and younger brother. Sue's mother was dead, and her father had married again while she was attending school, a circumstance she had not hailed with joy. It had turned out, however, that her stepmother was a

clever and lovable woman, who had certainly been good to her father.

Therefore, Sue, who had undertaken the trip out of love for father and brother and a longing for experience in the desert, found in a few weeks that she was fitting admirably and happily into this nomad life of wild-horse wrangling. She was young, healthy, strong; she could ride a horse and cook a meal over a camp fire; she found in herself a surprising response to all that was characteristic of primitive life in the open. Still she held most tenaciously to her few worldly possessions—dresses, pictures, books—things that had been a part of her development at school.

MELBERNE'S outfit was not a large one, as wild-horse hunting outfits were considered, but as he and his partner, Loughbridge, had brought their womenfolk and the necessary teamsters, wagons, camp equipment, supplies, all together they made quite a party. If a desirable country were found, with abundant grass and water, Loughbridge would be willing to homestead a ranch along with Melberne. Their main idea, then, was really not alone the capturing and marketing of wild horses. In the interest, however, of that pursuit it was necessary to keep within one day's travel of the railroad. Melberne was shipping carloads of unbroken horses to St. Louis. In considerable numbers, at thirteen dollars a head, he could make money. But he was not striking any country rich in ranching possibilities.

It was on an afternoon of September that the Melberne outfit halted at the head of Stark Valley, thirty miles from the railroad.

Sue had heard the men talking about this valley, and all the ride down from the divide to the welcome grove of cottonwood trees below, she had gazed and gazed. Utah had been strikingly beautiful with its pink cliffs, wide plains of white sage, rugged black mountains, and then the colorful stone-monumented desert. This valley was something to make her catch her breath.

She estimated it to be twenty miles wide and eighty long. Really it seemed small, set down in a vast panorama, with a ragged black range of mountains on one side, an endless

waving green rise of land sweeping to a horizon on the other. Far beyond the long length of this valley stood what appeared a flat mountain, very lofty, with red walls now sunlit, and a level black top. It was so different from any landmark Sue had ever seen that she was forcibly struck with it. It had a strange impelling beauty.

"Dad, what's that mountain?" asked Sue, pointing.

Her father, a stalwart man, turned from his task of unhitching a team to answer Sue. He had gray, penetrating, tired eyes that held a smile for her.

"Shore I don't know," he replied. "See heah, Alonzo, what's that flat mountain yonder?"

Alonzo was a halfbreed Mexican *vaquero*, guide to the outfit, and reputed to be the best wrangler in Utah. He was a slim lithe rider, very light of build yet muscular, and he had a sharp, smooth, dark face, and eyes of piercing black. He gazed a moment down the valley.

"Wild Horse Mesa," he replied briefly.

"Reckon I ought to have known, considerin' all I've heard," said Melberne. "Sue, that's not a mountain, but a mesa. Biggest mesa in Utah. It's a refuge for wild horses, so the Mormons say. An' no white men have set foot on it."

"Wild Horse Mesa!" exclaimed Sue. "How beautiful—and wild! So far away. . . . It's good there's a place where horses are safe."

"Wal, lass, there'll shore be a lot of wild horses safe for a long time," said her father as he surveyed the valley. "This country is full of them. Look! I see hundreds of wild horses now."

Sue focused her dreamy gaze and was surprised and thrilled to see bands of horses dotting the valley. They appeared to be of all colors, and grew in numbers until they faded in the gray haze.

"THEY'LL shore be the devil to catch," continued Melberne as his keen eye swept the valley. It was a vast green hollow, treeless, stoneless, with its monotony broken only by the bands of horses and pale gleams of winding streams.

"Dad, we're to make permanent camp here, didn't you say?" asked Sue.

"Yep, an' right glad I am," he rejoined heartily. "We've shore been on the go, with no chance to make you womenfolk comfortable. Heah we can make a fine camp. Plenty of grass, water, wood an' meat. This grove is in a protected place too. We'll be heah days, an' maybe weeks. I'm shore goin' to trap a great bunch of wild horses."

Many experienced hands made short work of pitching camp. Before the sun set tents were up, fires were blazing, blue smoke was curling upward through the golden-green leaves of the cottonwoods; the fragrant steam of hot biscuits, venison, coffee permeated the cool air.

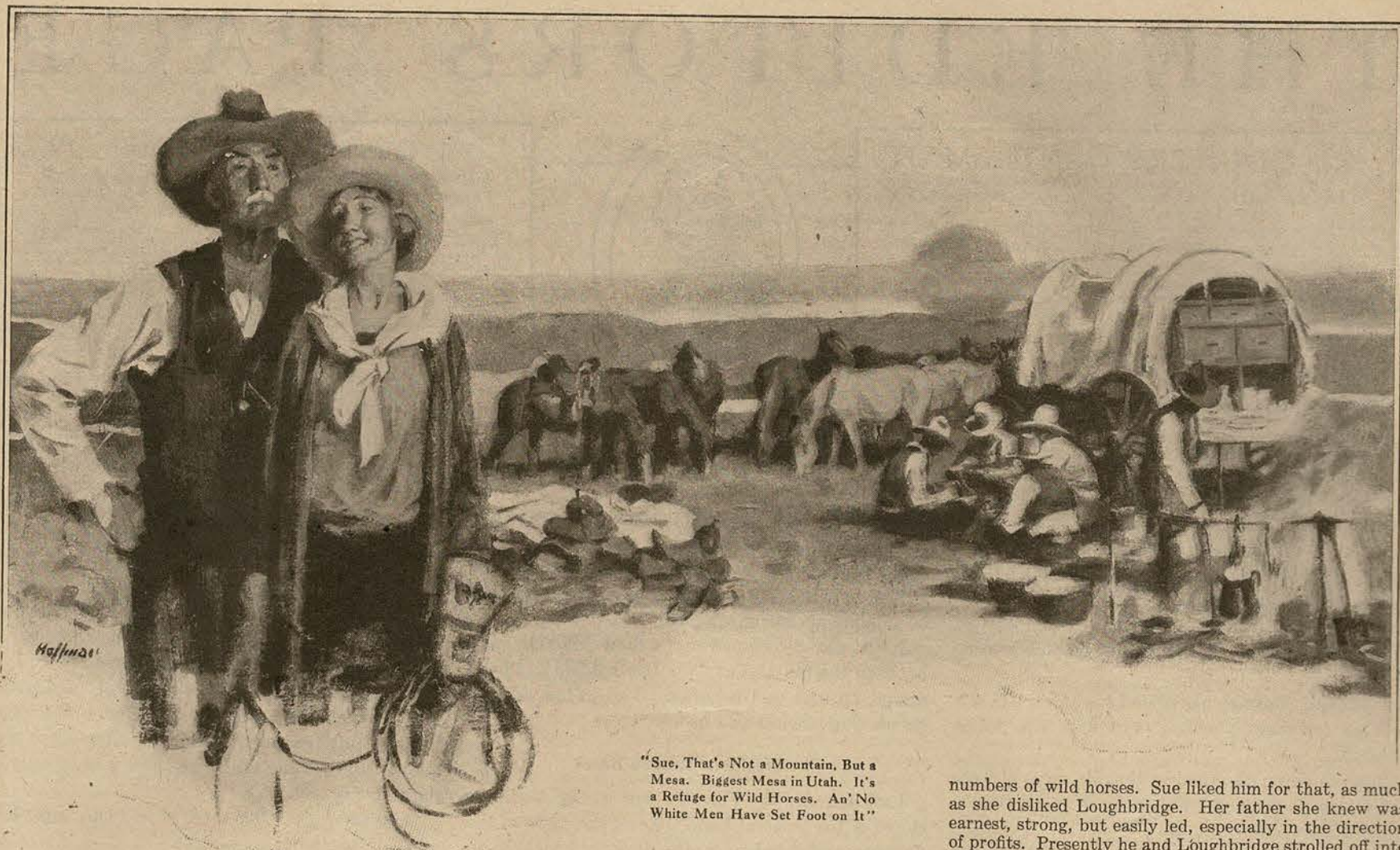
"I refuse to call out that cowboy slogan," announced Mrs. Melberne cheerfully, "but I say come to supper."

SHE was a short, stout, pleasant-faced little woman, just now ruddy from the fire heat. Her helper, Mrs. Loughbridge, afforded a marked contrast in both appearance and manner.

Young Chess Weymer, who was always offering gallant little



What Was She Going to Meet Out Here in Wild Utah? Of Late Sue's Hours, Even Her Dreams, Had Been Vaguely Haunted



"Sue, That's Not a Mountain, But a Mesa. Biggest Mesa in Utah. It's a Refuge for Wild Horses. An' No White Men Have Set Foot on It"

courtesies to Sue and to Ora Loughbridge, lifted a seat from one of the wagons and placed it conveniently out of line of the blowing camp-fire smoke.

"There, girls, have a seat," he said in his rich bass voice.

Sue complied with a nod of thanks, and seated herself with burdened tin plate in one hand and a cup in the other. But Ora did not get up from where she sat on the ground. She was a dark-eyed handsome girl, and just now rather sullen of face.

"Come, have a seat, Ora," called Chess.

She flashed him an illuminating look. "Chess, I wouldn't deprive you of such a chance," she said with sarcasm.

"Oh, well, if you won't, I will," replied Chess, and seated himself beside Sue.

Sue rather enjoyed the situation. Ora had been plainly captivated by this good-looking boy, who showed a preference for Sue's society. He was a clean-cut lad of eighteen, brown of face and eye, and possessed of a fine frank countenance, singularly winning. At St. George, where he had joined the caravan, he had appeared to be a wild, happy youngster, not above drinking and fighting, and utterly unable to resist the girls. Sue liked his company so long as he did not grow oversentimental. She was two years older than Chess, and in her mind vastly more mature.

Everybody was hungry after the long ride, and ate without conversing. This meal hour and the camp-fire hour afterward were about the only opportunities Sue had to observe the men all together, and she made the most of them.

THE wranglers of the outfit were a continual source of delight to her. There were six of these employed by her father.

Alonzo, the halfbreed, was the most fascinating, by reason of the knowledge he could impart. Utah, a wild-horse wrangler, was probably a Mormon, though he never admitted that—a sharp-featured, stone-faced young man, long, slim, bow-legged, hard as rock, and awkward on his feet. He somehow resembled the desert. Tway Miller appeared to be a cowboy who had abandoned cattle riding because he hated wire fences. He was a tough, wiry little rider, dusty always, ragged and shiny, and he had a face like the bark of a tree. He got his name Tway from a habit he had of stuttering, something his comrades took fiendish glee in making him do. Bonny was a stalwart Irishman, sandy bearded and haired, freckle faced, and he possessed a wonderful deep bass voice, the solemnity of which suited his big light blue eyes. His age was about thirty, and he had been ten years in America. His one dislike, it appeared, was anything in the shape of a town.

Jake, a man of years and experience, possessed a heavy square frame that had begun to show the wear of time. He was bald. His round brown face was a wrinkled record of all the vicissitudes of life, not one of which had embittered him. Everything ill had happened to Jake. He had once had wife, children, home, prosperity, position, all of which had gone with the years. Yet he was the most cheerful and unselfish and helpful of men. If anyone wanted a service he ran to Jake. And Jake would say, "Why, sure. I'll be glad to do it." Jake had been engaged, as had the others, to chase wild horses, and between times help at all jobs. But it turned out that his active riding days were past. It tortured him, racked his bones to ride all day even on a trotting horse. As teamster, however, cook and handy man round camp he was incomparable.

The last of this sextet, so interesting to Sue, was a tenderfoot they had named Captain Bunk. The sea to him had been what the desert was to the riders. Somehow he had drifted to Utah. His talk about boats, engines, ships, his bunk mates had earned him the sobriquet of Captain Bunk. He had a face as large as a ham, bright red, an enormous nose that never got over sunburn, and eyes and lips that always showed the effect of the dry winds of the desert.

SUPPER had long passed and the sun was setting when the chores of these men had been completed for the day. Sue stopped a moment, on her way out to find some quiet outlook, there to watch and dream as was her habit, and listened to the camp-fire conversation.

"How many wild horses in the valley?" inquired her father eagerly.

"Reckon I seen five thousand," replied Loughbridge, holding up his field glasses.

"By thunder, that's great news!" declared Melberne, clapping his hands. "Now to plan some kind of a trap to catch five hundred—a thousand at one clip!"

"Reckon you're locoed, Mel," declared his partner. "If we could ketch a hundred at once I'd be satisfied. What's the use ketchin' so many when we can only drive a few to the railroad?"

"Wal, that's so. But we've got to learn a way to catch a bunch an' drive them too. Alonzo says he has seen that done, but it kills a lot of horses. An' he won't tell me."

Like a majority of the real wild-horse wranglers, Alonzo had a love for all horses. Melberne was not a hard man, but he was keen to acquire money. Loughbridge would have been glad to sacrifice any number of horses, just so long as he saved enough to make a rich stake. He argued with the reticent Mexican, but to no avail. Alonzo would not reveal the secret of how to capture and drive large

numbers of wild horses. Sue liked him for that, as much as she disliked Loughbridge. Her father she knew was earnest, strong, but easily led, especially in the direction of profits. Presently he and Loughbridge strolled off into the grove, evidently to talk alone. Whereupon the conversation grew loquacious and general.

Sue lingered near until her presence became rather obvious to the bantering riders; then she strolled farther on, to the edge of the cottonwood grove, where she found a seat on a log.

The sun had set. The valley was full of purple shadows, and far beyond them rose the dim strange bulk of Wild Horse Mesa. How vast and open this Utah wilderness! Reluctantly she confessed its beauty, its appeal to the depths of her, its all-satisfying, inexplicable charm.

A footfall on the leaves roused Sue. Turning, she saw Chess coming, a smile on his frank face.

"Sue, may I sit with you?" he asked.

"Yes—if you'll be a good boy and fetch my coat. It's on the wagon tongue."

"Sue, I'd get anything for you," he said, and turned away.

PRESENTLY he returned with the coat and held it for her. Chess had thoughtful, courteous little ways that pleased Sue.

"Sue, you take me for such a boy!" he expostulated, as he sat Indian fashion with his legs crossed. He was bare-headed, and his curly brown locks had a glint of gold.

"Of course I do. You're only eighteen," replied Sue.

"Sure. But I'm a man. I had that out with my brother Chane. I feel old as the hills. And Sue, you'll only be twenty next month. You're no Methuselum, or whatever they called him."

"Well, suppose I am only twenty. That is very much older than you."

"Sue, I can't see it. . . . I'm sure old enough to—to be in love with you," he rejoined, his voice lowering at the last.

She regarded him disapprovingly, not quite sure that there was not more earnestness or something different about him today.

"Chess, when did you say the same thing to Ora?" she queried.

"I—I never said it," he denied stoutly, but a flush tinged his healthy cheek.

"Don't fib—you know you did," retorted Sue, shaking her finger at him. "You've made love to Ora."

"Yes, I did, at first—same as I have to all the girls. I reckon I just couldn't help that. I always liked girls. . . . Ora, now, she's pretty and clever, but she—I—I don't like to say anything about a girl, but, Sue, she's catty."

Sue merely looked at Chess, trying to hide the fact that she knew this well enough. Chess was laboring under some stress.

"Ora's catty. She's spiteful. She says things about you I don't like, Sue. That's about settled her with me."

(Continued on Page 25)

Are pipe-smokers less selfish than other people?

A lot of evidence points
that way—maybe some
reader can explain it

One can't imagine an ordinary citizen going about telling all his friends where he bought the suit that fits him so well or urging upon his acquaintances the merits of a certain make of shoes—but it's different with pipe-smokers and their tobacco.

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Wild Horse Mesa

(Continued from Page 11)

"Any jealous girl is that way, you know. Jealousy is the hatefulest feeling. Don't be hard on Ora. She —"

"Ahuh! All right, but she can't talk to me about you," he declared. "And you didn't let me say what—what I wanted to."

"No? Well, get it over then."

"I can prove I wasn't in earnest with Ora—and all the girls you hint of."

"Oh, you can!" murmured Sue, wanting to laugh.

"I never asked Ora—or any of them—to marry me," he declared in solemn triumph.

This liberated Sue's laugh, but it was not hearty. His earnestness touched her. "You never asked me either," she retorted, and then could have bit her tongue.

"No, but I'm asking you now."

"Chess!" exclaimed Sue, aghast.

"You needn't be so surprised. I mean it. I'm old enough to love you—and big enough to work for you. I've thought it all out. You're too wonderful a girl to mind my being poor—you're —"

"My dear boy, don't say any more," interrupted Sue, forced to gravity. His clean brown face had turned white. "I'm sorry I teased you—didn't take you seriously. But—Chess, I feel like—like a mother to you. I can't marry you, boy."

"Why—not?" he asked, swallowing hard.

"Because I don't love you," replied Sue.

"I KNEW that, but I—I hoped you might come to it," he said, bravely struggling with his emotions.

Sue watched him. She saw Chess fight down his cherished dream. Then it seemed he turned to her with a stranger earnestness, with more eloquent eyes and eager lips.

"All right, Sue. I'll take my medicine," he said hurriedly. "But I want to ask you something just as important."

"What is it?" she asked curiously.

"If you won't marry me will you wait for my brother Chane? . . . You can't help but love him!"

"Why, Chess, . . ." murmured Sue, and then she halted. She had never been quite so astounded in her life.

"Chane has gone to the Indian reservation—over the cañons," went on Chess. "He went to buy horses to sell to the Mormons. I wanted to go but he wouldn't let me. He tried to make me stay at my job in St. George. But I saw you—and I asked your dad for work, so I could be near you. . . . Now Chane, as soon as he gets rid of those horses he'll be hitting my trail. He always hunts me up. He thinks I'm still a boy. He still calls me Boy Blue. He's afraid I'm going to the bad. . . . Well, when he finds me he'll see you, and he'll fall in love with you. Chane never fell in love with a girl, to my knowledge. But you're the sweetest, wonderfulest girl in the world. He just can't help himself. . . . And then I could have you for a sister."

THE swift words rushed out in a torrent, and the simplicity of them touched Sue to the heart.

"I—I'll be your sister anyhow," said Sue, trying to think of something to say that would not hurt him. She sensed a singular relation between him and this older brother who called him Boy Blue.

"Sue, you just can't help but love Chane," began Chess, his face lighting. "But any girl would love Chane. I've never been anywhere with him—where there was a girl—that she didn't fall in love with him. Without his even looking at her!"

"Indeed! Well, this brother of yours must be a—quite a fellow," replied Sue.

"What's he like?"

"Oh, Chane's grand," burst out Chess, thus encouraged. "He's tall and dark, and say! he looks right through you. Chane's got the sweetest, gentlest disposition. But he's a fighter. It's because of his kindness that he's always getting into fights. He's had some worse than fist fights, I'm sorry to say. He hates cattle and loves horses. I guess the Weymers were all horse lovers. My father was born in Kentucky. Chane never settles down. He goes more and more to the wild places. He's a lonely sort of fellow—gets restless where there're lots of people. Somebody

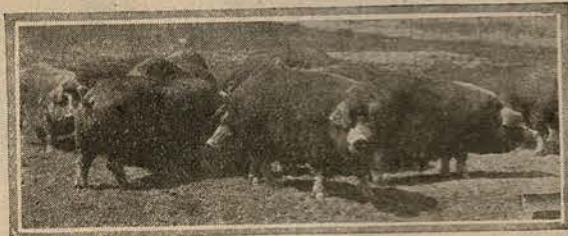
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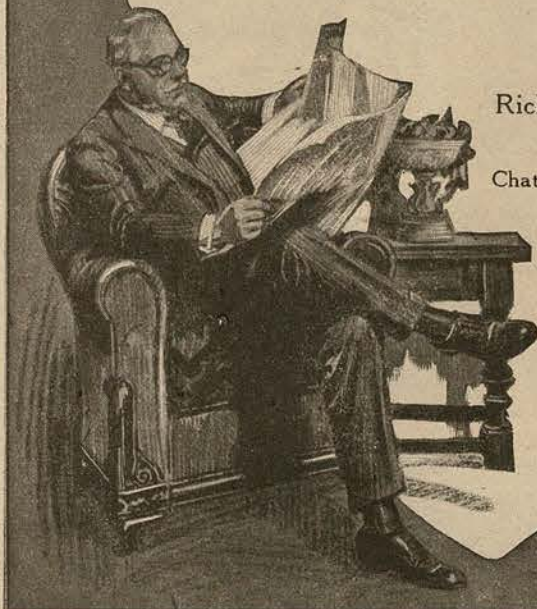
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will get into trouble and then Chane takes up that trouble. He'd never have any trouble if he'd keep away from people—and me. I'm always in hot water, then sooner or later Chane rides up and gets me out of it."

"Is this brother a wild-horse hunter?" "Chane's been everything, but he loves horses best. They don't have to be wild. They just have to be horses, tame or wild, good or bad, young or old. But I reckon lately the wild-horse wrangling has gotten more into Chane. It's been sort of a fever across Nevada and Utah, you know. Two years ago he saw that great wild stallion, Panguitch. Chane was actually dotty over that wild horse."

"Just wait till you meet him. Just wait till you see him handle horses."

"Very well, Chess, I'll try to possess my soul in peace—till Chane trails you up," replied Sue, laughing gayly. "Good-night now. I'm sorry if I hurt you—yet I'm glad you told me about yourself—and Chane."

Sue left him sitting there in the dusk, and returned camp-fireward. But she did not tarry in the ruddy circle, nor did she go to her tent. She went off alone into the deep shadow of the cottonwoods.

She had been strangely, profoundly stirred, and could not grasp just why. In spite of her common sense and her appreciation of Chess' boyish sentiment, there had come into her mind a sudden strange establishment between her vague dream hero and this lonely desert rider, this horse lover so eloquently portrayed by his adoring brother. Sue scouted the inception. But it was there.

IV

THE settling of Melberne's outfit into permanent camp at Stark Valley was characterized by the advent of perfect weather, a welcome change from the storms and winds of the past weeks. It seemed the wonderful Indian summer of Utah smiled its golden purple-hazed welcome. It made camp life a joy. Sue heard Loughbridge say that they might expect such weather to last for a month and possibly longer.

Melberne was not an experienced wild-horse hunter. This game was comparatively new to him. But he had great force and energy, and he could handle men. The riders would not take orders from Loughbridge.

"Wal, men, we're heah," announced Melberne cheerfully, after breakfast that first morning at Stark Valley. "An' now let's rustle. I'm not goin' to drive this valley till I've a plan mapped out. Some way to trap a lot of horses. I'll ride with Alonzo an' Jim down into the valley an' get the lay of the land. Reckon I can give you all plenty to do. Jake, you keep charge of camp an' help the womenfolks. Build a stone oven, make a stand for the big kettle, pack water, an' whatever offers. Captain, saddle your horse an' snake in a lot of dead hard wood. My boy Tommy will help you saw it. He just loves the end of a crosscut saw. Ha! Ha! An' Miller, you an' Utah ride up into some of them cañons that open into the valley. Take stock of any place where there's signs of wild horses. Chess, you like to hunt. Now we're out of meat, an' I look to you as provider. Don't hunt alone. Take Bonny with you. There shore ought to be lots of game heah."

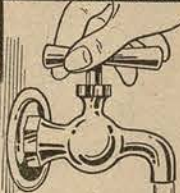
HE RODE in just before dark, dusty and weary, but so elated over his day's experience that he had to talk before he could eat. He had seen thousands of wild horses that apparently had never been chased, so tame were they.

"If there were only trees or brush down in the valley we could cut them, and drag them into long fences leading to a trap!" he ejaculated. "What a haul we'd make! But there's not a tree in this heah valley, so far as we rode. . . . Sue, I saw a sorrel today—the finest piece of horseflesh I ever beheld. He was light color, not red or brown, but something between. A stallion with mane and tail that 'most swept the ground. He had a whole bunch of bays and blacks. As we rode toward them he drove them on. They shore wasn't bad scared."

"Dad, you may give him to me," replied Sue, thrilled by his excitement.

Utah had discovered a drove of wild mules. They were in a natural trap; and it was his opinion they could be caught in one day.

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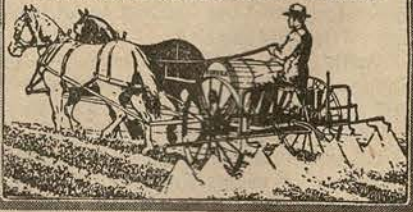
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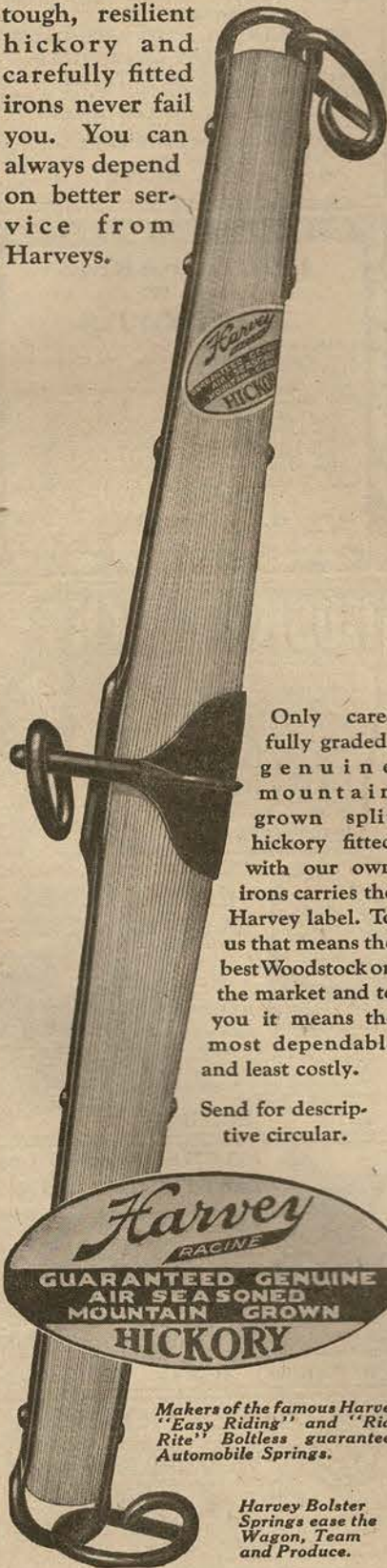
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Sue rode far and high one afternoon, accompanied by Ora and Chess, who, however, were more interested with other things than scenery or Indian summer. Chess had been complimented on his successful hunting and was eager to win more commendation. Ora was mostly concerned with Chess, and liked the hunting only because it furnished means to ride with him. They left Sue on a high open point.

Dismounting to await their return, Sue found a comfortable seat and gave herself up to the solitude and loneliness of the surrounding hills, and the wonder of the purple open beneath her.

What lay and appeared and hid beyond that level range land was the thing which drew and claimed Sue's gaze. It was the cañon country of Utah. Long had she heard of it, and now it seemed to spread out before her, a vast shadowy region of rock—domes, spurs, peaks, bluffs, reaching escarpments, lines of cleavage, endless scalloped marching rocks; and rising grandly out of that chaos of colored rock the red-walled, black-tipped, flat-topped mountain that was Wild Horse Mesa.

THE rock wilderness emphasized by this isolated tableland called forth feelings which were strange and unintelligible to Sue. Was it just the beauty, the loneliness and majesty of Nature that had come to arrest her thought and trouble her soul? What was she going to meet out here in wild Utah? Of late her working hours, her idle hours, even her dreams, her walks and rides and rests, had been vaguely haunted by the shadow of a mood that did not wholly break upon her consciousness.

At last Sue confessed to her heart that she must be in love. It became a thought, amazing, ridiculous, inconceivable. It could not be supported by any facts. With whom could she be in love? Not Chess or Utah or any of the riders! Could it be with herself or life or this magnificent wilderness, or the Nature that brooded there so solemnly? Sue tried to recall the dream hero, knight, lover that had been an evolution of her fairy-tale days, but he did not suit her new and masterful image. The new one seemed like this country, hard, untamed, exacting, dominating.

"But it's only an idea!" burst out Sue, ashamed, astounded. Then there flashed into her mind what the boy Chess Weymer had said about his brother Chane: "You can't help but love him!"

Sue waited long for Ora and Chess, and at length they appeared, riding under the trees, close together, without any game. Sue had a suspicion that they were holding hands just as they rode out of the timber. She mounted her pony and started down the winding descent of the ridge.

"SOME stranger in camp," spoke up Chess quickly as they rode into the back of the cottonwood grove. Sue sustained a little shock of excitement. What if it might be Chane Weymer! She saw a muddy, weary pack horse, sagging under a bedraggled pack. But trees obstructed her view of the rider.

Ora headed her horse for the quarters of the Loughbridges and Sue turned for her tent. It might have been that she paid the least bit more attention than usual to her appearance. Still, though she liked the more serviceable and comfortable garb of men for riding or roughing it, she had always, when possible, given preference to feminine dress. Sue sat down to await the supper call. Presently there came a rustling footfall outside.

"Sue, I yelled once supper is ready," called Chess. "I'll bet my horse to your spurs that you've been doing the same as Ora."

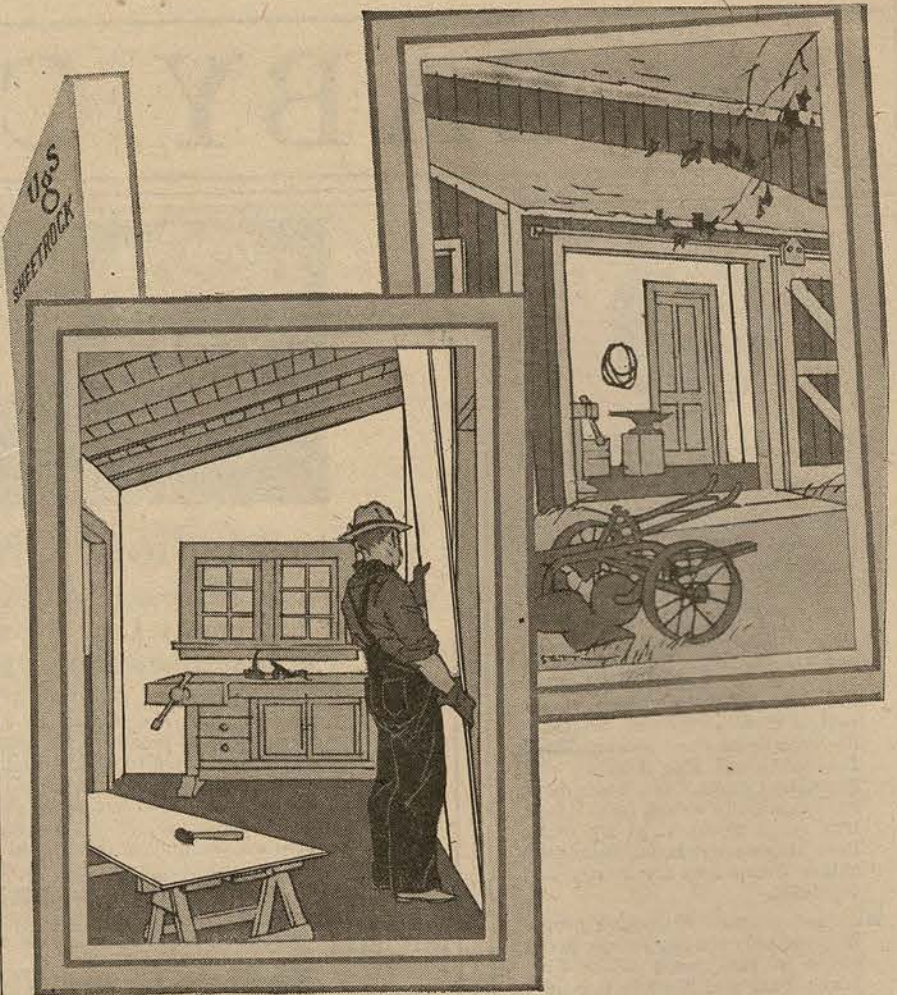
"What's that?" asked Sue, as she spread the flaps of her tent and came forth.

"Aw, Sue!" he ejaculated, staring at her. His handsome boyish face expressed both delight and regret. "I never saw you—so—so sweet. . . . All for the stranger! Ora primped up too."

"Well, who's the stranger?" demanded Sue.

"Ahuh! Well, his name's Manerube—Bent Manerube. How's that for a handle? He's a horse wrangler from Nevada. Husky, good-looking chap. He's just in from the Piute country, across the cañons. Sure looked like he'd been riding rough."

(TO BE CONTINUED)



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