

Man of the Forest
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In This Issue—WHAT'S IN COLD STORAGE—By John E. Pickett

THE MAN OF THE FOREST

XIV

WHEN spring came at last and the willows drooped green and fresh over the brook and the range rang with bray of burro and whistle of stallion, old Al Auchincloss had been a month in his grave.

To Helen it seemed longer. The month had been crowded with work. The uncle had not been forgotten, but the innumerable restrictions to development and progress were no longer manifest. Beasley had not presented himself or any claim upon Helen; and she, gathering confidence day by day, began to believe all that purport of trouble had been exaggerated.

In this time she had come to love her work and all that pertained to it. The estate was large. She had no accurate knowledge of how many acres she owned, but it was more than two thousand. The fine old rambling ranch house, set like a fort on the last of the foothills; corrals and fields and barns and meadows, the rolling green range beyond; innumerable sheep, horses, cattle—all these now belonged to Helen, to her ever-wondering realization and ever-growing joy. Still, she was afraid to let herself go and be perfectly happy. Always there was the fear that had been too deep and strong to forget so soon.

This bright fresh morning in March Helen came out upon the porch to revel a little in the warmth of sunshine and the crisp, pine-scented wind that swept down from the mountains. There was never a morning that she did not gaze mountainward, trying to see, with a folly she realized, if the snow had melted more perceptibly away on the bold white ridge. For all she could see it had not melted an inch, and she would not confess why she sighed. The desert had become green and fresh, stretching away there far below her range, growing dark and purple in the distance, with vague buttes rising. The air was full of sound—notes of blackbirds, and the baas of sheep, and blasts from the corrals, and the clatter of light hoofs on the court.

Bo was riding in from the stables. Helen loved to watch her on one of those fiery little mustangs, but the sight was likewise given to rouse apprehensions. This morning Bo appeared particularly bent on frightening Helen. Down the lane Carmichael appeared waving his arms; and Helen at once connected him with Bo's manifest desire to fly away from that particular place.

Since that day a month back, when Bo had confessed her love for Carmichael, she and Helen had not spoken of it or of the cowboy. The boy and girl were still at odds. But this did not worry Helen. Bo had changed much for the better, especially in that she devoted herself to Helen and to her work. Helen knew that all would turn out well in the end, so she had been careful of her rather precarious position between these two young firebrands.

Bo reined in the mustang at the porch steps. She wore a buckskin riding suit which she had made herself, and its soft gray with touches of red beads was mightily becoming to her. Then she had grown considerably during the winter and now looked too flashing and pretty to resemble a boy, yet singularly healthy and strong and lithe. Red spots shone in her cheeks and her eyes held that ever-dangerous blaze.

"Nell, did you give me away to that cowboy?" she demanded.

"Give you away!" exclaimed Helen blankly.

"Yes. You know I told you—a while back—that I was wildly in love with him. Did you give me away—tell on me?"

She might have been furious, but she certainly was not confused.

"Why, Bo! How could you? No, I did not," replied Helen.

"Never gave him a hint?"

By Zane Grey, Author of Wildfire

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON



"Not even a hint. You have my word for that. Why? What's happened?"

"He makes me sick!"

Bo would not say any more, which fact might have been owing to the near approach of the cowboy.

"Mawnin', Miss Nell," he drawled. "I was just tellin' this here Miss Bo-Peep Rayner—"

"Don't call me that!" broke in Bo with fire in her voice.

"Wal, I was just tellin' her thet she wasn't goin' off on any more of them long rides. Honest now, Miss Nell, it ain't safe, an'—"

"You're not my boss," retorted Bo.

"Indeed, sister, I agree with him. You won't obey me."

"Reckon someone's got to be your boss," drawled Carmichael. "Shore I ain't hankerin' for the job. You could ride to kingdom come or off among the Apaches—or

over here a ways"—at this he grinned knowingly—"or anywhere for all I cared. But I'm workin' for Miss Nell, an' she's boss. An' if she says you're not to take them rides you won't. Savvy thet, Miss?"

It was a treat for Helen to see Bo look at the cowboy. "Mis-ter Carmichael, may I ask how you are going to prevent me from riding where I like?"

"Wal, if you're goin' worse locoed this way I'll keep you offen a hoss if I have to rope you an' tie you up. By golly, I will!"

His dry humor was gone and manifestly he meant what he said.

"Wal"—she drawled it very softly and sweetly, but deadly venomous—"if—you—ever—touch—me again!"

At this he flushed, then made a quick passionate gesture with his hand, expressive of heat and shame.

"You an' me will never get along," he said with a dignity full of pathos. "I seen thet a month back when you changed sudden-like to me. But nothin' I say to you has any reckonin' of mine. I'm talkin' for your sister. It's for her sake. An' your own. . . . I never told her an' I never told you thet I've seen Riggs sneak in after you twice on them desert rides. Wal, I tell you now."

The intelligence apparently had not the slightest effect on Bo. But Helen was astonished and alarmed.

"Riggs! Oh, Bo, I've seen him myself—riding round. He does not mean well. You must be careful."

"If I ketch him again," went on Carmichael, with his mouth lining hard, "I'm goin' after him."

Hegave her a cool, intent, piercing look; then he dropped his head and turned away to stride back toward the corrals.

Helen could make little of the manner in which her sister watched the cowboy pass out of sight.

"A month back, when I changed sudden-like," mused Bo. "I wonder what he meant by that. . . . Nell, did I change—right after the talk you had with me about him?"

"Indeed you did, Bo," replied Helen. "But it was for the better. Only he can't see it. How proud and sensitive he is! You wouldn't guess it at first. Bo, your reserve has wounded him more than your flirting. He thinks it's indifference."

"Maybe that'll be good for him," declared Bo. "Does he expect me to fall on his neck? He's that thick-headed! Why, he's the locoed one, not me."

"I'd like to ask you, Bo, if you've seen how he has changed?" queried Helen earnestly. "He's older. He's worried. Ei' her his heart is breaking for you or else he fears trouble for us. I fear it's both. How he watches you! Bo, he knows all you do—where you go. That about Riggs sickens me."

"If Riggs follows me and tries any of his four-flush desperado games he'll have his hands full," said Bo grimly. "And that without my cowboy protector! But I just wish Riggs would do something. Then we'll see what Las Vegas Tom Carmichael cares. Then we'll see!"

Bo bit out the last words passionately and jealously, then she lifted her bridle to the spirited mustang. "Nell, don't you fear for me," she said. "I can take care of myself."

Helen watched her ride away, all but willing to confess that there might be truth in what Bo said. Then Helen went about her work, which consisted of routine duties as well as an earnest study to familiarize herself with continually new and complex conditions of ranch life. Every day brought new problems. She made notes of all that she observed and all that was told her, which task she had found, after a few weeks of trial, was going to be exceedingly valuable to her. She did not intend always to be dependent upon the knowledge of hired men, however faithful they might be.

This morning on her rounds she had expected developments of some kind, owing to the presence of Roy Beeman and two of his brothers, who had arrived yesterday. And she was to discover that Jeff Mulvey, accompanied by six of his coworkers and associates, had deserted her without a word or even sending for their pay. Carmichael had predicted this. Helen had half doubted. It was a relief now to be confronted with facts, however disturbing. She had fortified herself to withstand a great deal more trouble than had happened.

At the gateway of the main corral, a huge inclosure fenced high with peeled logs, she met Roy Beeman, lasso in hand—the same tall, lean, limping figure she remembered so well. Sight of him gave her an inexplicable thrill—a flashing memory of an unforgettable night ride. Roy was to have charge of the horses on the ranch, of which there were several hundred, not counting many lost on range and mountain, or the unbranded colts.

Roy took off his sombrero and greeted her. This Mormon had a courtesy for women that spoke well for him. Helen wished she had more employees like him.

"It's jest as Las Vegas told us it'd be," he said regretfully. "Mulvey an' his pards lit out this mornin'. I'm sorry, Miss Helen. Reckon thet's all because I come over."

"I heard the news," replied Helen. "You needn't be sorry, Roy, for I'm not. I'm glad. I want to know whom I can trust."

"Las Vegas says we're shore in for it now."

"Roy, what do you think?"

"I reckon so. Still Las Vegas is powerful cross these days an' always lookin' on the dark side. With us boys now it's sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. But, Miss Helen, if Beasley forces the deal there will be serious trouble. I've seen thet happen. Four or five years ago Beasley rode some greasers off their farms an' no one ever knowed if he had a just claim."

"Beasley has no claim on my property. My uncle solemnly swore that on his deathbed. And I find nothing in his books or papers of those years when he employed Beasley. In fact Beasley was never uncle's partner. The truth is that my uncle took Beasley up when he was a poor, homeless boy."

"So my old dad says," replied Roy. "But what's right don't always prevail in these parts."



"Wal"—She Drawled it Very Softly, But Deadly Venomous—"If—You—Ever—Touch—Me Again!"

"Roy, you're the keenest man I've met since I came West. Tell me what you think will happen."

Beeman appeared flattered, but he hesitated to reply. Helen had long been aware of the reticence of these outdoor men.

"I reckon you mean cause an' effect, as Milt Dale would say," responded Roy thoughtfully.

"Yes. If Beasley attempts to force me off my ranch what will happen?"

Roy looked up and met her gaze. Helen remembered that singular stillness, intentness of his face.

"Wal, if Dale an' John get here in time I reckon we can bluff thet Beasley outfit."

"You mean my friends—my men would confront Beasley—refuse his demands—and if necessary fight him off?"

"I shore do," replied Roy.

"But suppose you're not all here? Beasley would be smart enough to choose an opportune time. Suppose he did put me off and take possession? What then?"

"Then it'd only be a matter of how soon Dale or Carmichael—or I—got to Beasley."

"Roy! I feared just that. It haunts me. Carmichael asked me to let him go pick a fight with Beasley. Asked me, just as he would ask me about his work! I was shocked. And now you say Dale—and you—"

Helen choked in her agitation.

"Miss Helen, what else could you look for? Las Vegas is in love with Miss Bo. Shore he told me so. An' Dale's in love with you! . . . Why, you couldn't stop them any more'n you could stop the wind from blowin' down a pine, when it got ready. . . . Now it's some different with me. I'm a Mormon an' I'm married. But I'm Dale's pard these many years. An' I care a powerful sight for you an' Miss Bo. So I reckon I'd draw on Beasley the first chance I got."

Helen strove for utterance, but it was denied her. Roy's simple statement of Dale's love had magnified her emotion by completely changing its direction. She forgot what she had felt wretched about. She could not look at Roy.

"Miss Helen, don't feel bad," he said kindly. "Shore you're not to blame. Your comin' West hasn't made any difference in Beasley's fate, except mebbe to hurry it a little. My dad is old, an' when he talks it's like history. He looks back on happenin's. Wal, it's the nature of happenin's thet Beasley passes away before his prime. Them of his breed don't live old in the West. . . . So I reckon you needn't feel bad or worry. You've got friends."

Helen incoherently thanked him, and forgetting her usual round of corrals and stables, she hurried back toward the house, deeply stirred, throbbing and dim-eyed with a feeling she could not control. Roy Beeman had made a statement that had upset her equilibrium. It seemed simple

and natural, yet momentous and staggering. To hear that Dale loved her—to hear it spoken frankly, earnestly by Dale's best friend—was strange, sweet, terrifying. But was it true? Her own consciousness had admitted it. Yet that was vastly different from a man's open statement. No longer was it a dear dream, a secret that seemed hers alone. How she had lived on that secret hidden deep in her breast!

Something burned the dimness from her eyes as she looked toward the mountains and her sight became clear, telescopic with its intensity. Magnificently the mountains loomed. Black inroads and patches on the slopes showed where a few days back all had been white. The snow was melting fast. Dale would soon be free to ride down to Pine. And that was an event Helen prayed for, yet feared as she had never feared anything.

The noonday dinner bell startled Helen from a reverie that was a pleasant aftermath of her unrestraint. How the hours had flown! This morning at least must be credited to indolence.

Bo was not in the dining room or in her own room; nor was she in sight from window or door. This absence had occurred before, but not particularly to disturb Helen. In this instance, however, she grew worried. Her nerves presaged strain. There was an overcharge of sensibility in her feelings or a strange pressure in the very atmosphere.

She ate dinner alone, looking her apprehension, which was not mitigated by the expressive fears of old Maria, the Mexican woman who served her.

After dinner she sent word to Roy and Carmichael that they would better ride out to look for Bo. Then Helen applied herself resolutely to her books until a rapid clatter of hoofs out in the court caused her to hurry to the porch. Roy was riding in.

"Did you find her?" queried Helen hurriedly.

"Wasn't no track or sign of her up the north range," replied Roy as he dismounted and threw his bridle. "An' I was ridin' back to take up her tracks from the corral an' trail her. But I seen Las Vegas comin' an' he waved his sombrero. He was comin' up from the south. There he is now."

Carmichael appeared swinging into the lane. He was mounted on Helen's big black Ranger and he made the dust fly.

"Wal, he's seen her, thet's shore," vouchsafed Roy with relief as Carmichael rode up.

"Miss Nell, she's comin'," said the cowboy as he reined in and slid down with his graceful single motion. Then in a violent action, characteristic of him, he slammed his sombrero down on the porch and threw up both arms: "I've a hunch it's come off!"

"Oh! what?" exclaimed Helen.

"Now, Las Vegas, talk sense," expostulated Roy. "Miss Helen is shore nervous to-day. Has anythin' happened?"

"I reckon, but I don't know what," replied Carmichael, drawing a long breath. "Folks, I must be gettin' old. For I shore felt orful queer till I seen Bo. She was ridin' down the ridge across the valley. Ridin' some fast, too, an' she'll be here right off, if she doesn't stop in the village."

"Wal, I hear her comin' now," said Roy. "An' if you asked me I'd say she was ridin' some fast."

Helen heard the light, swift, rhythmic beat of hoofs, and then out on the curve of the road that led down to Pine she saw Bo's mustang, white with lather, coming on a dead run.

"Las Vegas, do you see any Apaches?" asked Roy quizzingly.

The cowboy made no reply, but he strode out from the porch, directly in front of the mustang. Bo was pulling hard on the bridle and had him slowing down but not controlled. When he reached the house it could easily be seen that Bo had pulled him to the limit of her strength, which was not enough to halt him. Carmichael lunged for the bridle and hauled him to a standstill.

At close sight of Bo, Helen uttered a startled cry. Bo was white; her sombrero was gone and her hair undone; there were blood and dirt on her face; and her riding suit was torn and muddy. She had evidently had a fall. Roy gazed at her in admiring consternation, but Carmichael never looked at her at all. Apparently he was examining the horse.

"Well, help me off—somebody," cried Bo peremptorily. Her voice was weak, but not her spirit.

Roy sprang to help her off, and when she was down it developed that she was lame.

"Oh, Bo! You've had a tumble," exclaimed Helen anxiously, and she ran to assist Roy. They led her up the porch and to the door. There she turned to look at Carmichael, who was still examining the spent mustang.

"Tell him—to come in," she whispered.

"Hey there, Las Vegas," called Roy.

"Rustle hyar, will you?"

When Bo had been led into the sitting room and seated in a chair Carmichael entered. His face was a study as slowly he walked up to Bo.

"Girl, you—ain't hurt?" he asked huskily.

"It's no fault of yours that I'm not crippled—or dead—or worse," retorted Bo. "You said the south range was the only safe ride for me. And there—I—it happened."

She panted a little and her bosom heaved. One of her gauntlets was gone and the bare hand, bruised and bloody, trembled as she held it out.

"Dear, tell us—are you badly hurt?" queried Helen with hurried gentleness.

"Not much. I've had a spill," replied Bo. "But oh! I'm mad—I'm boiling!"

She looked as if she might have exaggerated her doubt of injuries, but certainly she had not overestimated her state of mind. Any blaze Helen had heretofore seen in those quick eyes was tame compared to this one. It actually leaped. Bo was more than pretty then. Manifestly Roy was admiring her looks, but Carmichael saw beyond her charm. And slowly he was growing pale.

"I rode out the south range, as I was told," began Bo, breathing hard and trying to control her feelings. "That's the ride you usually take, Nell, and you bet—if you'd taken it to-day—you'd not be here now."

About three miles out I climbed off the range up that cedar slope. I always keep to high ground. When I got up I saw two horsemen ride out of some broken rocks off to the east. They rode as

if to come between me and home. I didn't like that. I circled south.

"About a mile farther on I spied another horseman and he showed up directly in front of me and came along slow. That I liked still less. It might have been accident, but it looked to me that these riders had some intent. All I could do was head off to the southeast and ride. You bet I did ride. But I got into rough ground where I'd never been before. It was slow going. At last I made the cedars, and here I cut loose, believing I could circle ahead of those strange riders and come round through Pine. I had it wrong."

She hesitated, perhaps for breath, for she had spoken rapidly, or perhaps to get better hold on her subject. Not improbably the effect she was creating on her listeners began to be significant. Roy sat absorbed, perfectly motionless, eyes keen as steel, his mouth open. Carmichael was gazing over Bo's head, out of the window; and it seemed that he must know the rest of her narrative.

Helen knew that her own wide-eyed attention alone would have been an all-compelling inspiration to Bo Rayner.

"Sure I had it wrong," resumed Bo. "Pretty soon I heard a horse behind. I looked back. I saw a big bay riding down on me. Oh, but he was running! He just tore through the cedars. . . . I was scared half out of my senses. But I spurred and beat my mustang. Then began a race! Rough going—thick cedars—washes and gullies! I had to make him run—to keep my saddle—to pick my way. Oh-h-h, but it was glorious! To race for fun, that's one thing; to race for your life is another! My heart was in my mouth—choking me. I couldn't have yelled. I was as cold as ice—dizzy sometimes—blind others. Then my stomach turned—and I couldn't get my breath. Yet the wild thrills I had! . . ."

"But I stuck on and held my own for several miles—to the edge of the cedars. There the big horse gained on me. He came pounding closer—perhaps as close as a hundred yards—I could hear him plain

enough. Then I had my spill. My mustang tripped—threw me way over his head. I hit light but slid far—and that's what scraped me so. I know my knee is raw. . . . When I got to my feet the big horse dashed up, throwing gravel all over me, and his rider jumped off. . . . Now who do you think he was?"

Helen knew, but she did not voice her conviction. Carmichael knew positively, yet he kept silent. Roy was smiling, as if the narrative did not seem so alarming to him.

"Wal, the fact of you bein' here, safe an' sound, sorta makes no difference who thet son of a gun was," he said.

"Riggs! Harve Riggs!" blazed Bo. "The instant I recognized him I got over my scare. And I was so mad I burned all through like fire. I don't know what I said, but it was wild—and it was a whole lot, you bet."

"You sure can ride," he said.

"I demanded why he had dared to chase me, and he said he had an important message for Nell. This was it: 'Tell your sister that Beasley means to put her off an' take the ranch. If she'll marry me I'll block his deal. If she won't marry me I'll go in with Beasley.' Then he told me to hurry home and not to breathe a word to anyone except Nell. Well, here I am—and I seem to have been breathing rather fast."

She looked from Helen to Roy and from Roy to Las Vegas. Her smile was for him, and to anyone not overexcited by her story that smile would have told volumes.

"Wal, I'll be dog-goned!" ejaculated Roy feelingly.

Helen laughed. "Indeed, the working of that man's mind is beyond me. . . . Marry him to save my ranch? I wouldn't marry him to save my life!"

Carmichael suddenly broke his silence: "Bo, did you see the other men?"

"Yes. I was coming to that," she replied. "I caught a glimpse of them back of the cedars. The three were together, or at least three horsemen were there. They had halted behind some trees. Then on the way home I began to think. Even in my fury I had received impressions. Riggs was surprised when I got up. I'll bet he had not expected me to be who I was. He thought I was Nell. . . . I look bigger in this buckskin outfit. My hair was up till I lost my hat, and that was when I had the tumble. He took me for Nell. Another thing I remember—he made some sign, some motion, while I was calling him names, and I believe that was to keep those other men back. . . . I believe Riggs had a plan with those other men to waylay Nell and make off with her. I absolutely know it."

"Bo, you're so—so—you jump at wild ideas so," protested Helen, trying to believe in her own assurance. But inwardly she was trembling.

"Miss Helen, thet ain't a wild idee," said Roy seriously. "I reckon your sister is pretty close on the trail. Las Vegas, don't you savvy it thet way?"

Carmichael's answer was to stalk out of the room.

"Call him back!" cried Helen apprehensively.

"Hold on, boy!" called Roy sharply.

Helen reached the door simultaneously with Roy. The cowboy picked up his sombrero, jammed it on his head, gave his belt a vicious hitch that made the gun sheath jump, and then in one giant step he was astride Ranger.

"Carmichael! Stay!" cried Helen.

The cowboy spurred the black and the stones rang under iron-shod hoofs.

"Bo! Call him back! Please call him back!" importuned Helen in distress.

"I won't!" declared Bo Rayner. Her face shone whiter now and her eyes were like fiery flint. That was her answer to a loving, gentle-hearted sister; that was her answer to the call of the West.

"No use," said Roy quietly. "An' I reckon I'd better trail him up."

He, too, strode out, and mounting his horse galloped swiftly away.

It turned out that Bo was more bruised and scraped and shaken than she had imagined. One knee was rather badly cut, which alone would have kept her from riding again very soon. Helen, who was somewhat skilled at bandaging wounds, worried a great deal over these sundry blotches on Bo's fair skin; and it took considerable time to wash and dress them.

Long after this was done Bo's excitement remained unabated. The whiteness stayed



Bo Was White; Her Sombrero Was Gone and Her Hair Undone

The Man of the Forest

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on her face and the blaze in her eyes. Helen ordered and begged her to go to bed, for the fact was that Bo could not stand up and her hands shook.

"Go to bed? Not much," she said. "I want to know what he does to Riggs."

It was that possibility which held Helen in dreadful suspense. If Carmichael killed Riggs it seemed to Helen that the bottom would drop out of this structure of Western life she had begun to build so earnestly and fearfully. She did not believe he would do so. But the uncertainty was torturing.

"Dear Bo," appealed Helen, "you don't want—oh, do you want Carmichael to—to kill Riggs?"

"No, I don't; but I wouldn't care if he did," replied Bo bluntly.

"Do you think he will?"

"Well, if that cowboy really loves me he read my mind right here before he left," declared Bo. "And he knew what I thought he'd do."

"And what's—that?" faltered Helen.

"I want him to round Riggs up down in the village—somewhere in a crowd. I want Riggs shown up as the coward, braggart, four-flush that he is. And insulted, slapped, kicked—driven out of Pine!"

Her passionate speech still rang through-out the room when there came footsteps on the porch. Helen hurried to raise the bar from the door and open it, just as a tap sounded on the doorpost. Roy's face stood white out of the darkness. His eyes were bright. And his smile made Helen's fearful query needless.

"How are you—all this evenin'?" he drawled as he came in.

A fire blazed on the hearth and a lamp burned on the table. By their light Bo looked white and eager-eyed as she reclined in the big armchair.

"What'd he do?" she asked with all her amazing force.

"Wal, now, ain't you goin' to tell me how you are?"

"Roy, I'm all bunged up. I ought to be in bed. But I just couldn't sleep till I heard what Las Vegas did. I'd forgive anything except his getting drunk."

"Wal, I shore can ease your mind on that," replied Roy. "He never drank a drop."

"Where is he?" asked Bo.

"Who? Riggs? Wal, I don't know. But I reckon he's somewhere out in the woods nursin' himself."

"Not Riggs. First tell me where he is."

"Shore then you must mean Las Vegas. I just left him down at the cabin. He was gettin' ready for bed, early as it is. All tired out he was, an' thet white you wouldn't have knowed him. But he looked happy at thet, an' the last words he said, more to himself than to me I reckon, was 'I'm some locoed gent, but if she doesn't call me Tom now she's no good!'"

Bo actually clapped her hands, notwithstanding that one of them was bandaged.

"Call him Tom? I should smile I will," she declared in delight. "Hurry now; what'd —"

"It's shore powerful strange how he hates thet handle Las Vegas," went on Roy imperturbably.

"Roy, tell me what he did—what Tom did—or I'll scream," cried Bo.

"Miss Helen, did you ever see the likes of thet girl?" asked Roy, appealing to Helen.

"No, Roy, I never did," agreed Helen. "But please—please tell us what has happened."

Roy leaned his lithe tall form against the stone mantelpiece and faced the girls.

"When I rode out after Las Vegas I seen him 'way down the road," began Roy rapidly. "An' I seen another man ridin' down into Pine from the other side. Thet was Riggs, only I didn't know it then. Las Vegas rode up to the store, where some fellars was hangin' round, an' he spoke to them. When I come up they was all headin' for Turner's saloon. I seen a dozen hosses hitched to the rails. Las Vegas rode on. But I got off at Turner's an' went in with the bunch. Whatever it was Las Vegas said to them fellars, shore they didn't give him away."

"Pretty soon more men strolled into Turner's an' there got to be most twenty altogether, I reckon. Jeff Mulvey was there with his pard. They had been drinkin' sorta free. An' I didn't like the way Mulvey watched me. So I went out an' into the

store, but kept a-lookin' for Las Vegas. He wasn't in sight. But I seen Riggs ridin' up. Now Turner's is where Riggs hangs out and does his braggin'. He looked powerful deep an' thoughtful, dismounted slow, without seein' the unusual number of hosses there, an' then he slouched into Turner's. No more'n a minute after Las Vegas rode down there like a streak. An' just as quick he was off an' through thet door."

Roy paused as if to gain force or to choose his words. His tale now appeared all directed to Bo, who gazed at him, spell-bound, a fascinated listener.

"Before I got to Turner's door—an' thet was only a little ways—I heard Las Vegas yell. Did you ever hear him? Wal, he's got the wildest yell of any cow-puncher I ever heard. Quick-like I opened the door an' slipped in. There was Riggs an' Las Vegas alone in the center of the big saloon, with the crowd edgin' to the walls an' slidin' back of the bar. Riggs was whiter'n a dead man. I didn't hear an' I don't know what Las Vegas yelled at him. But Riggs knew, an' so did the gang. All of a sudden every man there shore seen in Las Vegas what Riggs had always bragged he was. Thet time comes to every man like Riggs."

"What'd you call me?" he asked, his jaw shakin'.

"I ain't called you yet," answered Las Vegas. "I just whooped."

"What'd ye want?"

"You scared my girl."

"Who's she?" blustered Riggs, an' he began to take quick looks round. But he never moved a hand. There was somethin' tight about the way he stood. Las Vegas had both arms half out, stretched as if he meant to leap. But he wasn't. I never seen Las Vegas do thet, but when I seen him then I understood it.

"You know. An' you threatened her an' her sister. Go for your gun," called Las Vegas, low an' sharp.

"Thet put the crowd right, an' nobody moved. Riggs turned green then. I almost felt sorry for him. He began to shake so he'd dropped a gun if he had pulled one."

"Hyar, you're off—some mistake—I ain't seen no gurls. I —"

"Shut up an' draw!" yelled Las Vegas. His voice just pierced holes in the roof an' it might have been a bullet from the way Riggs collapsed. Every man seen in a second more thet Riggs wouldn't an' couldn't draw. He was afraid for his life. He was not what he had claimed to be. I don't know if he had any friends there. But in the West good men an' bad men, all alike, have no use for Riggs' kind. An' thet stony quiet broke with a haw-haw. It shore was as pitiful to see Riggs as it was fine to see Las Vegas."

"When he dropped his arms then I knowed there would be no gun play. An' then Las Vegas got red in the face. He slapped Riggs with one hand, then with the other. An' he began to cuss Riggs. I shore never knowed thet nice-spoken Las Vegas Carmichael could use such language. It was a stream of the baddest names known out here, an' lots I never heard of. Now an' then I caught somethin' like low-down an' sneak an' four-flush an' long-haired skunk, but for the most part they was just the cussedest kind of names. An' Las Vegas spouted them till he was black in the face an' foam'n at the mouth an' hoarser'n a bawlin' cow."

"When he got out of breath from cussin' he punched Riggs all about the saloon, threw him outdoors, knocked him down an' kicked him till he got up, an' then kept kickin' him down the road with the whole haw-hawin' gang behind. An' he drove him out of town!"

XV

FOR two days Bo was confined to her bed, suffering considerable pain and subject to fever, during which she talked irrationally. The third day she was better, and, refusing to remain in bed, she hobbled to the sitting room, where she divided her time between staring out of the window toward the corrals and pestering Helen with questions she tried to make appear casual. But Helen saw through her case and was in a state of glee. What she hoped most for was that Carmichael would suddenly develop a little less inclination for Bo. It was that kind of treatment the young lady needed. Helen almost felt tempted to give the cowboy a hint.

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Neither this day nor the next, however, did he put in an appearance at the house, though Helen saw him twice on her rounds. He was busy, as usual, and greeted her as if nothing in particular had happened.

Next day Bo was rather quiet, seeming upon a verge of one of the dispirited spells she got infrequently. Early in the evening, just after the lights had been lit and she had joined Helen in the sitting room, a familiar step sounded on the loose boards of the porch.

Helen went to the door to admit Carmichael. He was clean shaven, dressed in his dark suit, which presented a marked contrast with his riding garb, and he wore a flower in his buttonhole. Nevertheless, despite all this style he seemed more than usually the cool, easy, careless cowboy.

"Evenin', Miss Helen," he said as he stalked in. "Evenin', Miss Bo. How are you-all?"

Helen returned his greeting with a welcoming smile.

"Good evening, Tom," said Bo demurely. That assuredly was the first time she had ever called him Tom. As she spoke she looked distractingly pretty and tantalizing. But if she had calculated to floor Carmichael with the initial, half-promising, wholly mocking use of his name she had reckoned without cause. The cowboy received that greeting as if he had heard her use it a thousand times or had not heard it at all. Helen decided that if he was acting a part he was certainly a clever actor.

"How are you feelin'?" he asked. "I'm better to-day," she replied with downcast eyes. "But I'm lame yet."

"Reckon that bronc piled you up. Miss Helen said there shore wasn't any joke about the cut on your knee. Now a fella's knee is a bad place to hurt if he has to keep on ridin'."

"Oh, I'll be well soon. I want to thank you for giving Riggs what he deserved."

"Aw, you heard about that," replied Carmichael with a wave of his hand to make light of it. "Nothin' much. It had to be done. An' shore I was afraid of Roy. He'd been bad. An' so would any of the other boys. I'm sorta lookin' out for all of them, you know, actin' as Miss Helen's foreman now."

Helen was unutterably tickled. The effect of his speech upon Bo was stupendous. He had disarmed her. She looked startled, hurt, wistful, and finally sweetly defiant.

"But you told Riggs I was your girl!" Thus Bo unmasked her battery.

"Shore. I had to say that. I had to make it strong before that gang. I reckon it was presumin' of me, an' I shore apologize."

Bo stared at him, and then, giving a little gasp, she drooped.

"Wal, I just run in to say howdy an' to inquire after you-all," said Carmichael. "I'm goin' to the dance, an' as Flo lives out of town I'd shore better rustle. . . . Good-night, Miss Bo; I hope you'll be ridin' Sam soon. An' good-night, Miss Helen."

The instant he had departed Bo's transformation was tragic. "Flo! He meant Flo Stubbs—that ugly, crossed-eyed, bold little frump!"

"Bo!" expostulated Helen. "The young lady is not beautiful, I grant, but she's very nice and pleasant. I like her."

"Nell Rayner, men are no good! And cowboys are the worst!" declared Bo.

"Why didn't you appreciate Tom when you had him?" asked Helen.

Bo had been growing furious, but now the allusion, in past tense, to the conquest she had suddenly and amazingly found dear quite broke her spirit. It was a very pale, unsteady and miserable girl who avoided Helen's gaze and left the room.

Late the next afternoon, at Helen's leisure hour, when she and Bo were in the sitting room, horses tramped into the court and footsteps mounted the porch. Opening to a loud knock Helen was surprised to see Beasley. And out in the court were several mounted horsemen. Helen's heart sank. This visit indeed had been foreshadowed.

"Afternoon, Miss Rayner," said Beasley, doffing his sombrero. "I've called on a little business deal. Will you see me?"

Helen acknowledged his greeting while she thought rapidly. She might just as well see

him and have that inevitable interview done with. "Come in," she said.

"I'd called sooner, but I was waitin' for old Jose, the Mexican who herded for me when I was pardner to your uncle," said Beasley, and he sat down to put his huge gloved hands on his knees.

"Yes?" queried Helen.

"Jose rustled over from Magdalena, an' now I can back up my claim. . . . Miss Rayner, this hyar ranch ought to be mine an' is mine. It wasn't so big or so well stocked when Al Auchincloss beat me out of it. I reckon I'll allow for that. I've papers, an' old Jose for witness. An' I calculate you'll pay me eighty thousand dollars or else I'll take over the ranch."

Beasley spoke in an ordinary matter-of-fact tone that certainly seemed sincere, and his manner was blunt but perfectly natural.

"Mr. Beasley, your claim is no news to me," responded Helen quietly. "I've heard about it. And I questioned my uncle. He swore on his deathbed that he did not owe you a dollar. Indeed, he claimed the indebtedness was yours to him. I could find nothing in his papers. So I must repudiate your claim. I will not take it seriously."

"Miss Rayner, I can't blame you for takin' Al's word against mine," said Beasley. "An' your stand is natural. But you're a stranger here an' you know nothin' of stock deals in these ranges. It ain't fair to speak bad of the dead, but the truth is that Al Auchincloss got his start by stealin' sheep an' unbranded cattle. That was the start of every rancher I know. It was mine. An' we none of us ever thought of it as rustlin'."

Helen could only stare her surprise and doubt at this statement.

"Talk's cheap anywhere, an' in the West talk ain't much at all," continued Beasley. "I'm no talker. I jest want to tell my case an' make a deal if you'll have it. I can prove more in black an' white, an' with witness, than you can. That's my case. The deal I'd make is this: Let's marry an' settle a bad deal that way."

The man's direct assumption, absolutely without a qualifying consideration for her woman's attitude, was amazing, ignorant and base; but Helen was so well prepared for it that she hid her disgust.

"Thank you, Mr. Beasley. But I can't accept your offer," she replied.

"Would you take time an' consider?" he asked, spreading wide his huge gloved hands.

"Absolutely no."

Beasley rose to his feet. He showed no disappointment or chagrin, but the bold pleasantness left his face. And slight as that change was it stripped him of the only redeeming quality he showed.

"That means I'll force you to pay me the eighty thousand or put you off," he said.

"Mr. Beasley, even if I owed you that, how could I raise so enormous a sum? I don't owe it. And I certainly won't be put off my property. You can't put me off."

"An' why can't I?" he demanded with lowering dark gaze.

"Because your claim is dishonest. And I can prove it," declared Helen forcibly.

"Who're you goin' to prove it to—that I'm dishonest?"

"To my men—to your men—to the people of Pine—to everybody. There's not a person who won't believe me."

"An' how're you goin' to prove all that?" he growled.

"Mr. Beasley, do you remember last fall when you met Snake Anson with his gang up in the woods—and hired him to make off with me?" asked Helen in swift ringing words.

The dark olive of Beasley's bold face shaded to a dirty white.

"Wha-at?" he jerked out hoarsely.

"I see you remember. Well, Milt Dale was hidden in the loft of that cabin where you met Anson. He heard every word of your deal with the outlaw."

Beasley swung his arm in sudden violence so hard that he flung his glove to the floor. As he stooped to snatch it up he uttered a hiss. Then, stalking to the door, he jerked it open and, going out, slammed it behind him. His loud voice, hoarse with passion, preceded the scrape and crack of hoofs.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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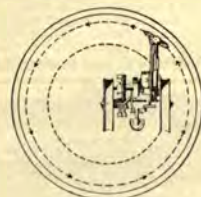
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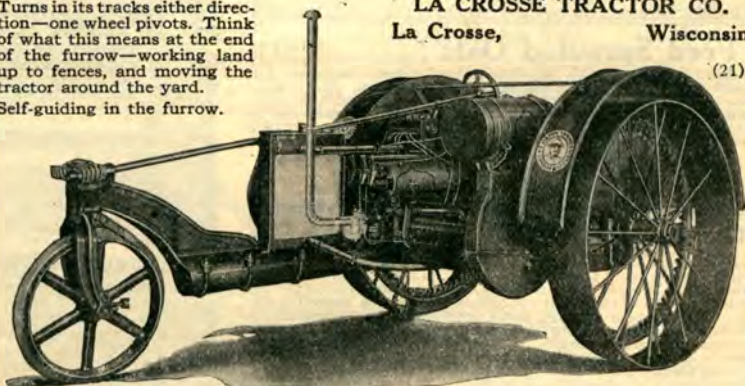
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When Milk Gets to Town

(Concluded from Page 13)

of these investigational commissions are finding out, there is about as much room for changes at the distributing end and better chances for getting results in a hurry.

Not many weeks ago Mr. Hoover said that "America has been supporting the most expensive food-distribution system in the history of the world, and statistics prove it." That statement was not directed at any particular class of dealers, but beyond question it includes milk distributors.

One of the classic examples of economic waste is the one brought out by an investigation several years ago in Rochester. The system in use there is the system still in use in most cities. There has been some consolidation of companies, but the example will serve. Comparisons were made to show what might be done under a better system of delivery that cut out duplications. It was found that about ninety men could do the work that was being done by 350. The investigator figured that fifty horses and twenty-five horse-drawn trucks could replace 380 horses and 305 wagons.

But the most striking saving suggested was in miles traveled to supply all the families of the city with milk. The actual mileage traveled by the wagons was 2509; the new system would have cut it to 300 miles. The daily cost of distribution could have been cut from \$2000 to \$600.

It is obvious that a big saving in horses and wagons means a big reduction in investment. The Rochester report said that if such wastes were eliminated better milk could be sold for two cents less a quart.

There are 510 miles of streets in Washington, D. C. The Dairy Division of the United States Department of Agriculture made an investigation of the milk business in the district and found that the 250 milk wagons traveled 4775 miles. Some wagons covered thirty miles and some of them only ten. Considering the distance traveled these 250 wagons might have supplied several cities the size of Washington.

A special milk committee in Ottawa, Canada, recently called the distributors of that city together to find out what could be done to cut the cost of milk. The consensus of opinion was that if a concentrated delivery system were adopted one cent could be cut from the price. They said wagons should carry 400 instead of 200 quarts and advocated dividing cities into zones so that each large distributor could take care of that section at the lowest cost.

What London Has Done

Wherever you turn now you find discussion of the cost of milk and proposed methods for reducing it. The newspapers have been full of suggestions, directed not as usual at the producers, but toward the distributor. I find this in a Chicago daily:

"The absurd waste of endless deliveries by rival distributors has long been a matter of comment. Real light, however, lately has been obtained upon the possibility of saving. At the instigation of the Council of National Defense forty-seven towns and cities of less than 200,000 population began experiments in coöperative delivery. In thirty places success was reported. The saving varies from forty to fifty per cent of the operating cost and the capital invested. In one city eleven men, fourteen horses and one car replaced twenty-one men, thirty-two horses and four cars."

One of the recent reports issued by the Department of Commerce says that London is to have a \$20,000,000 milk combine. This is in answer to the demand for more efficient distribution. The objects are:

"To economize by unity of effort the material and labor which is now expended in an extremely wasteful manner every day and all the year round on the distribution and delivery of milk. Even in time of peace it is obvious to the most casual observer that, in consequence of numerous firms delivering their milk morning and afternoon in practically every street of any length, the labor necessary is doubled or trebled by the fact that two, three or half a dozen men and vehicles are occupied in doing what one, or at most two persons and one vehicle could do equally well. Even among the joint-stock companies with large returns it is quite usual for overlapping to take place as a matter of course, and in the keen competition for new business comparatively great distances are covered in the delivery of milk, which frequently takes place miles away from the source of supply. Were it not that consumers have always been accustomed to seeing this kind of thing go on, the lack of system and waste of time and energy would appear, as it truly is, a great commercial folly and a way how not to do it."

Why Not a City Job?

War forced this big change in conducting conservative London's milk business. It ought to force some improvements here if common sense doesn't bring them about before the pressure of war is more keenly felt. The solution is concentration of the business. How it is to be brought about I don't presume to say.

However, we must recognize milk distribution as a public utility. The commission appointed by the governors of Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland recommends "that all milk distributors and milk-distributive plants be hereafter regarded as quasi public businesses and subject to governmental regulation the same as other quasi public concerns." A number of reasons were given to back up this stand.

Nobody is more thoroughly convinced of the need for improvement than is the wide-awake dealer himself. But if you suggest such a thing as municipal distribution or that a delivery company might handle the milk of all the plants he immediately becomes pessimistic. He says the idea of a city's handling such business is repugnant to the American public.

As one man said to me: "This is a free country, where every man is supposed to have an opportunity to go into any business that appeals to him. Is it right in a democratic country to give the business to one concern or to take it away from all of them and let the city do it?"

This was a distributor who had told me there was little but loss in the business. Perhaps he feels that concentration of the business is progressing rapidly and his company will soon have a zone all to itself.

But to get back to the question of a municipal milk business. Is there any reason why a city cannot handle milk as well as electricity, water or gas? Cities have facilities for transportation that might help a good deal in cutting costs. For instance, subways, elevated roads and surface lines, which are practically idle in the night, might be used to advantage.

It looks as if the problem would finally be solved without any government interference, city or any other kind; but it's a slow process, this killing off of the inefficient dealers. The public is getting pretty touchy on the milk question and something must be done soon to cool the price thermometer.



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