

Man of the Forest
P. 18

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In This Issue—IRON MEN FOR THE FARM—By Philip S. Rose

THE MAN OF THE FOREST

X (Continued)

WHEN they had hurried supper and Dale had gotten in the horses the sun had set and the valley was shadowing low down while the ramparts were still golden.

The long zigzag trail Dale followed up the slope took nearly an hour to climb, so that when that was surmounted and he led out of the woods twilight had fallen. A rolling park extended as far as Helen could see, bordered by forest that in places sent out straggling stretches of trees. Here and there, like islands, were isolated patches of timber.

At ten thousand feet elevation the twilight of this clear and cold night was a rich and rare atmospheric effect. It looked as if it was seen through perfectly clear smoked glass. Objects were singularly visible, even at long range, and seemed magnified. In the west, where the afterglow of sunset lingered over the dark, ragged, spruce-speared horizon line, there was such a transparent golden line melting into vivid, star-fired blue that Helen could only gaze and gaze in wondering admiration.

Dale spurred his horse into a lope and the spirited mounts of the girls kept up with him. The ground was rough, with tufts of grass growing close together, yet the horses did not stumble. Their action and snorting betrayed excitement. Dale led round several clumps of timber, up a long grassy swale, and then straight westward across an open flat toward where the dark-fringed forest line raised itself wild and clear against the cold sky. It seemed long across that flat, but really was short. Coming to a thin line of trees that led down over a slope to a deeper but still isolated patch of woods, Dale dismounted and tied his horse. When the girls got off he halted their horses also.

"Stick close to me an' put your feet down easy," he whispered. Stepping softly, without the least sound, Dale entered this straggly bit of woods, which appeared to have narrow byways and nooks. Then presently he came to the top of a well-wooded slope, dark as pitch apparently. The slope was soft and springy, easy to step upon without noise. Dale went so cautiously that Helen could not hear him, and sometimes in the gloom she could not see him. At last level ground was reached.

Dale halted, and with a touch brought Helen to a straining pause. He was listening. It seemed wonderful to watch him bend his head and stand as silent and motionless as one of the dark trees.

"He's not there yet," Dale whispered, and he stepped forward very slowly. Helen and Bo began to come up against thin dead branches that were invisible and then cracked. Then Dale knelt down, seeming to melt into the ground.

"You'll have to crawl," he whispered.

Gradually the woodlightened. They were nearing the edge of the park. Helen now saw a strip of open with a high black wall of spruce beyond. Dale crawled on farther, halting at length between two tree trunks at the edge of the wood.

"Come up beside me," he whispered.

Helen crawled on, and presently Bo was beside her, panting, with pale face and great staring eyes, plain to be seen in the wan light.

"Moon's comin' up. We're just in time. The old grizzly's not there yet, but I see coyotes. Look."

Dale pointed across the open neck of park to a dim, blurred patch standing apart some little distance from the black wall.

"That's the dead horse," whispered Dale. "An' if you watch close you can see the coyotes. They're gray, an' they move. . . . Can't you hear them?"

Helen's excited ears, so full of throbs and imaginings, presently registered low snaps and snarls. Bo gave her arm a squeeze.

"I hear them. They're fighting," she panted, and drew a long, full breath of unutterable excitement.

"Keep quiet now an' watch an' listen," said the hunter.

Slowly the black ragged forest line seemed to grow blacker and lift; slowly the gray neck of park lightened under some invisible influence; slowly the stars paled and the sky filmed over. Somewhere the moon was rising. And slowly that vague blurred patch grew a little clearer.

Through the tips of the spruce, now seen to be rather close at hand, shone a slender

By Zane Grey, Author of Wildfire

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON



It Was This Swift Ride, the Horses Neck and Neck, That Completed the Slow, Insidious Work of Years

silver crescent moon, darkening, hiding, shining again, climbing until its exquisite sickle point topped the trees, and then magically it cleared them, radiant and cold. While the eastern black wall shaded still blacker the park blanched and the border line opposite began to stand out as trees.

"Look! Look!" cried Bo, very low, as she pointed.

"Not so loud," whispered Dale.

"But I see something!"

"Keep quiet," he admonished.

Helen, in the direction Bo pointed, could not see anything but moon-blanching bare ground, rising close at hand to a little ridge.

"Lie still," whispered Dale. "I'm goin' to crawl round to get a look from another angle. I'll be right back."

He moved noiselessly backward and disappeared. With him gone Helen felt a palpitating of her heart and a prickling of her skin.

"Oh, my! Nell! Look!" whispered Bo in fright. "I know I saw something."

On top of the little ridge a round object moved slowly, getting farther out into the light. Helen watched with suspended breath. It moved out to be silhouetted against the sky—apparently a huge round bristling animal, frosty in color. Helen's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. That frosty color proved the thing to be a grizzly bear. One instant it seemed huge—the next small; then close at hand—and far away. It swerved to come directly toward them.

Suddenly Helen realized that the beast was not a dozen yards distant. She was just beginning a new experience—a real and

horrifying terror in which her blood curdled, her heart gave a tremendous leap and then stood still, and she wanted to fly but was rooted to the spot—when Dale returned to her side.

"That's a pesky porcupine," he whispered. "Almost crawled over you. He sure would have stuck you full of quills."

Whereupon he threw a stick at the animal. It bounced straight up and turned round with startling quickness, giving forth a rattling sound, then crawling out of sight.

"Por-cu-pine!" whispered Bo. "It might as well have been an elephant!"

Helen uttered a long eloquent sigh. She would not have cared to describe her emotions at sight of a harmless hedgehog.

"Listen!" warned Dale, very low. His big hand closed over Helen's gauntleted one. "There you have the real cry of the wild."

Sharp and cold on the night air split the cry of a wolf, distant yet wonderfully distinct. How wild and mournful and hungry! How marvelously pure! Helen shuddered through all her frame with the thrill of its music, the wild and unutterable and deep emotions it aroused.

The cry was not repeated. The coyotes were still. And a silence fell, absolutely unbroken.

Dale nudged Helen and then reached over to give Bo a tap. He was peering keenly ahead and his strained intensity could be felt. Helen looked with all her might and saw the shadowy gray forms of the coyotes skulk away out of the moonlight into the gloom of the woods, where they disappeared. Not only Dale's intensity but the

very silence, the wildness of the moment and place, seemed fraught with wonderful potency. Bo must have felt it, too, for she was trembling all over, holding tightly to Helen and breathing quick and fast.

"A-huh!" muttered Dale under his breath.

Helen caught the relief and certainty in his exclamation, and she divined something of what the moment must have been to a hunter.

Then her roving, alert glance was arrested by a looming gray shadow coming out of the forest. It moved, but surely that huge thing could not be a bear. It passed out of gloom into silver moonlight. Helen's heart bounded. For it was a great, frosty-coated bear lumbering along toward the dead horse. Instinctively Helen's hand sought the arm of the hunter. It felt like iron under a rippling surface. The touch eased away the oppression over her lungs, the tightness of her throat. What must have been fear left her, and only a powerful excitement remained.

In the moonlight the grizzly looked of immense size and that wild park with the gloomy blackness of forest furnished a fit setting for him. Helen's quick mind, so taken up with emotions, still had a thought for the wonder and the meaning of that scene. She wanted the bear killed, yet that seemed a pity.

He had a wagging, rolling, slow walk and took several moments to reach his quarry. When at length he reached it he walked round with sniffs plainly heard and then a cross growl. Evidently he had discovered that his meal had been messed over. As a whole the big bear could be seen distinctly, but only in outline and color. The distance was perhaps two hundred yards. Then it looked as if he had begun to tug at the carcass. Indeed he was dragging it, very slowly but surely.

"Look at that!" whispered Dale. "If he ain't strong! . . . Reckon I'll have to stop him."

The grizzly, however, stopped of his own accord, just outside of the shadow line of the forest. Then, hunched in a big frosty heap over his prey, he began to tear and rend.

"Jess was a mighty good horse," muttered Dale grimly; "too good to make a meal for a hog silvertip."

Then the hunter silently rose to a kneeling position, swinging the rifle in front of him. He glanced up into the low branches of the tree overhead.

"Girls, there's no tellin' what a grizzly will do. If I yell you climb up this tree, an' do it quick."

With that he leveled the rifle, resting his left elbow on his knee. The front end of the rifle, reaching out of the shade, shone silver in the moonlight. Man and weapon became as still as stone. Helen held her breath. But Dale relaxed, lowering the barrel.

"Can't see the sights very well," he whispered, shaking his head. "Remember now—if I yell you climb!"

Again he aimed and slowly grew rigid. Helen could not take her fascinated eyes off him. He knelt bareheaded and in the shadow she could make out the gleam of his clear-cut profile, stern and cold.

A streak of fire and a heavy report startled her. Shifting her glance she saw the bear lurch with convulsive action, rearing on his hind legs. Loud clicking snaps must have been a clashing of his jaws in rage. But there was no other sound. Then again Dale's heavy gun boomed. Helen heard the singular spitting thud of striking lead. The bear went down with a flop, as if he had been dealt a terrific blow. But just as quickly he was up on all fours and began to whirl with hoarse, savage bawls of agony and fury.

His action quickly carried him out of the moonlight into the shadow, where he disappeared. There the bawls gave place to gnashing snarls, and crashings in the brush, and snapping of branches as he made his way into the forest.

"Sure he's mad," said Dale, rising to his feet. "An' I reckon hard hit. But I won't follow him to-night."

Both the girls got up, and Helen found she was shaky on her feet and very cold.

"Oh-h, wasn't it won-wonder-ful!" cried Bo.

"Are you scared?—your teeth are chattering," queried Dale.

"I'm cold."

"Well, it sure is cold all right," he responded. "Now the fun's over you'll feel it. . . . Nell, you're froze too?"

Helen nodded. She was indeed as cold as she had ever been before. But that did not prevent a strange warmth along her veins and a quickened pulse, the cause of which she did not conjecture.

"Let's rustle," said Dale, and led the way out of the wood and skirted its edge round to the slope. There they climbed to the flat and went through the straggling line of trees to where the horses were tethered.

Up here the wind began to blow, not hard through the forest, but still strong and steady out in the open, and bitterly cold. Dale helped Bo to mount and then Helen.

"I'm—numb," she said. "I'll fall off—sure."

"No. You'll be warm in a jiffy," he replied, "because we'll ride some goin' back. Let your horse pick the way an' you hang on."

With Ranger's first jump Helen's blood began to run. Out he shot, his lean dark head beside Dale's horse. The wild park lay clear and bright in the moonlight, with strange silvery radiance on the grass. The patches of timber, like spired black islands in a moon-blanch lake, seemed to harbor shadows and places for bears to hide, ready to spring out. As Helen neared each little grove her pulses shook and her heart beat. Half a mile of rapid riding burned out the cold. Coming up that park the ride had been long; going back was as short as it was thrilling. In Helen experiences gathered realization slowly; and it was this swift ride, the horses neck and neck, and all the wildness and beauty, that completed the slow, insidious work of years. The tears of excitement froze on her cheeks and her heart heaved full. All that pertained to this night got into her blood. It was only to feel, to live now, but it could be understood and remembered forever afterward.

Dale's horse, a little in advance, sailed over a ditch. Ranger made a splendid leap, but he alighted among some grassy tufts and fell. Helen shot over his head. She struck lengthwise, her arms stretched, and slid hard to a shocking impact that stunned her.

Bo's scream rang in her ears; she felt the wet grass under her face and then the strong hands that lifted her. Dale loomed over her, bending down to look into her face; Bo was clutching her with frantic hands. And Helen could only gasp. Her breast seemed caved in. The need to breathe was torture.

"Nell, you're not hurt. You fell light, like a feather. All grass here. . . . You can't be hurt!" said Dale sharply.

His anxious voice penetrated beyond her hearing and his strong hands went swiftly over her arms and shoulders, feeling for broken bones.

"Just had the wind knocked out of you," went on Dale. "It feels awful, but it's nothin'."

Helen got a little air that was like hot pin points in her lungs, and then a deeper breath, and then full gasping respiration.

"I guess—I'm not hurt—not a bit," she choked out.

"You sure had a header. Never saw a prettier spill. Ranger doesn't do that often. I reckon we were travelin' too fast. But it was fun, don't you think?"

It was Bo who answered: "Oh, glorious! . . . But I was scared."

Dale still held Helen's hands. She released them, while looking up at him. The moment was realization for her of what for days had been a vague, sweet uncertainty becoming near and strange, disturbing and present. This accident had been a sudden violent end to the wonderful ride. But its effect, the knowledge of what had got into her blood, would never change. And inseparable from it was this man of the forest.

XI

THE next morning Helen was awakened by what she imagined had been a dream of someone shouting. With a start she sat up. The sunshine showed pink and gold on the ragged spruce line of the mountain rims. Bo was on her knees, braiding her hair with shaking hands and at the same time trying to peep out.

And the echoes of a ringing cry were cracking back from the cliffs. That had been Dale's voice.

"Nell! Nell! Wake up!" called Bo wildly. "Oh, someone's come! Horses and men!"

Helen got to her knees and peered out over Bo's shoulder. Dale, standing tall and striking beside the camp fire, was waving his sombrero. Away down the open edge of the park came a string of pack burros with mounted men behind. In the foremost rider Helen recognized Roy Beeman.

"That first one's Roy!" she exclaimed. "I'd never forget him on a horse."

Bo, it must mean Uncle Al's come!"

"Sure! We're born lucky. Here we are safe and sound—and all this grand camp trip. . . . Look at the cowboys. . . . Look! Oh, maybe this isn't great!" babbled Bo.

Dale wheeled to see the girls peeping out. "It's time you're up!" he called. "Your Uncle Al is here."

For an instant after Helen sank back out of Dale's sight she sat there perfectly motionless, so struck was she by the singular tone of Dale's voice. She imagined that he regretted what this visiting cavalcade of horsemen meant—they had come to take her to her ranch in Pine. Helen's heart suddenly began to beat fast, but thickly, as if muffled within her breast.

"Hurry now, girls," called Dale.

Bo was already out, kneeling on the flat stone at the little brook, splashing water in a great hurry. Helen's hands trembled so that she could scarcely lace her boots or brush her hair, and she was long behind Bo in making herself presentable. When Helen stepped out a short, powerfully built man in coarse garb and heavy boots stood holding Bo's hands.

"Wal—wal! You favor the Rayners," he was saying. "I remember your dad, an' a fine feller he was."

Beside them stood Dale and Roy, and beyond was a group of horses and riders.

"Uncle, here comes Nell," said Bo softly.

"Aw!" The old cattleman breathed hard, as he turned.

Helen hurried. She had not expected to remember this uncle, but one look into the brown, beaming face, with the blue eyes flashing, yet sad, and she recognized him, at the same instant recalling her mother.

He held out his arms to receive her. "Nell Auchincloss all over again!" he exclaimed in deep voice as he kissed her.

"I'd have known you anywhere Uncle Al! I remember you—though I was only four."

"Wal, wal, that's fine," he replied. "I remember you straddled my knee once, an' your hair was bright an' curly. It ain't neither now."

Sixteen years! An' you're twenty now? What a fine broad-shouldered girl you are! An', Nell, you're the handsomest Auchincloss I ever seen!"

Helen found herself blushing, and withdrew her

hands from his as Roy stepped forward to pay his respects. He stood bareheaded, lean and tall, with neither his clear eyes nor his still face nor the proffered hand expressing anything of the proved quality of fidelity, of achievement that Helen sensed in him.

"Howdy, Miss Helen—howdy, Bo," he said. "You both look fine an' brown."

"I reckon I was shore slow rustlin' your Uncle Al up here. But I was figgerin' you'd like Milt's camp for a while."

"We shore did like it very much," replied Bo archly.



Helen Checked Ranger So as to Have a Moment's Gaze Down Into the Park

me. . . . An' I'm ashamed of my hard feelin's, an' here's my hand."

"Thanks, Al," replied Dale with his fleeting smile, and he met the proffered hand. "Now, will you be makin' camp here?"

"Wal, no. I'll rest a bit, an' you can pack the girls' outfit. Then we'll go. Sure you're goin' with us?"

"I'll call the girls to breakfast," replied Dale, and he moved away without answering Auchincloss's query.

Helen divined that Dale did not mean to go down to Pine with them, and the knowledge gave her a blank feeling of surprise. Had she expected him to go?

"Come here, Jeff," called Al to one of his men.

A short, bowlegged horseman with dusty garb and sun-bleached face hobbled forth from the group. He was not young, but he had a boyish grin and bright little eyes. Awkwardly he doffed his slouch sombrero.

"Jeff, shake hands with my nieces," said Al. "This's Helen, an' your boss from now on. An' this's Bo, fer short. Her name was Nancy, but when she lay a baby in her cradle I called her Bo-Peep, an' the name's stuck. . . . Girls, this here's my foreman, Jeff Mulvey, who's been with me twenty years."

The introduction caused embarrassment to all three principals, particularly to Jeff. "Jeff, throw the packs an' saddles fer a rest," was Al's order to his foreman.

"Nell, reckon you'll have fun bossin' thet outfit," chuckled Al. "None of 'em's got a wife. Lot of scalawags they are—no women would have them!"

"Uncle, I hope I'll never have to be their boss," replied Helen.

"Wal, you're goin' to be, right off," declared Al. "They ain't a bad lot after all. An' I got a likely new man."

With that he turned to Bo, and after studying her pretty face he asked in an apparently severe tone: "Did you send a cowboy named Carmichael to ask me for a job?"

Bo looked quite startled. "Carmichael! Why, Uncle, I never heard that name before," she replied bewilderedly.

"A-huh! Reckoned the young rascal was lyin'," said Auchincloss. "But I liked the feller's looks an' so let him stay."

Then the rancher turned to the group of lounging riders.

"Las Vegas, come here," he ordered in a loud voice.

Helen thrilled at sight of a tall, superbly built cowboy reluctantly detaching himself from the group. He had a red-bronzed

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Again He Aimed and Slowly Grew Rigid. Helen Could Not Take Her Fascinated Eyes Off Him

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The Man of the Forest

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face, young like a boy's. Helen recognized it, and the flowing red scarf, and the swinging gun, and the slow, spur-clinking gait. No other than Bo's Las Vegas cowboy admirer!

Then Helen flashed a look at Bo, which look gave her a delicious and almost irresistible desire to laugh. That young lady also recognized the reluctant individual approaching with flushed and downcast face. Helen recorded her first experience of Bo's utter discomfiture. Bo turned white—then as red as a rose.

"Say, my niece said she never heard of the name Carmichael," declared Al severely as the cowboy halted before him. Helen knew her uncle had the repute of dealing hard with his men, but here she was reassured and pleased at the twinkle in his eye.

"Shore, boss, I can't help that," drawled the cowboy. "It's good old Texas stock."

He did not appear shamefaced now, but just as cool, easy, clear-eyed and lazy as the day Helen had liked his warm young face and intent gaze.

"Texas! You fellows from the Panhandle are always hollerin' Texas. I never seen that Texans had anyone else beat—say, from Missouri," returned Al testily.

Carmichael maintained a discreet silence, and carefully avoided looking at the girls.

"Wal, reckon we'll all call you Las Vegas anyway," continued the rancher. "Didn't you say my niece sent you to me for a job?"

Whereupon Carmichael's easy manner vanished. "Now, boss, shore my memory's pore," he said. "I only says —"

"Don't tell me that. My memory's not p-o-r-e," replied Al, mimicking the drawl. "What you said was that my niece would speak a good word for you."

Here Carmichael stole a timid glance at Bo, the result of which was to render him utterly crestfallen. Not improbably he had taken Bo's expression to mean something it did not, for Helen read it as a mingling of consternation and fright. Her eyes were big and blazing; a red spot was growing in each cheek as she gathered strength from his confusion.

"Wal, didn't you?" demanded Al.

From the glance the old rancher shot from the cowboy to the others of his employ it seemed to Helen that they were having fun at Carmichael's expense.

"Yes, sir, I did," suddenly replied the cowboy.

"A-huh! All right, here's my niece. Now see that she speaks the good word."

Carmichael looked at Bo and Bo looked at him. Their glances were strange, wondering, and they grew shy. Bo dropped hers. The cowboy apparently forgot what had been demanded of him.

Helen put a hand on the old rancher's arm. "Uncle, what happened was my fault," she said. "The train stopped at Las Vegas. This young man saw us at the open window. He must have guessed we were lonely, homesick girls, getting lost in the West. For he spoke to us—nice and friendly. He knew of you. And he asked, in what I took for fun, if we thought you would give him a job. And I replied, just to tease Bo, that she would surely speak a good word for him."

"Haw! Haw! So that's it," replied Al, and he turned to Bo with merry eyes. "Wal, I kept this here Las Vegas Carmichael on his say-so. Come on with your good word, unless you want to see him lose his job."

Bo did not grasp her uncle's bantering because she was seriously gazing at the cowboy. But she had grasped something. "He—he was the very first person—out West—to speak kindly to us," she said, facing her uncle.

"Wal, that's a pretty good word, but it ain't enough," responded Al.

Subdued laughter came from the listening group. Carmichael shifted from side to side.

"He—he looks as if he might ride a horse well," ventured Bo.

"Best hossman I ever seen," agreed Al heartily.

"And—and shoot," added Bo hopefully. "Bo, he packs that gun low, like Jim Wilson an' all them Texas gun fighters. Reckon that ain't no good word."

"Then—I'll vouch for him," said Bo with finality.

"Thet settles it." Auchincloss turned to the cowboy: "Las Vegas, you're a stranger

to us. But you're welcome to a place in the outfit, an' I hope you won't never disappoint us."

Auchincloss's tone, passing from jest to earnest, betrayed to Helen the old rancher's need of new and true men and hinted of trying days to come.

Carmichael stood before Bo, sombrero in hand, rolling it round and round, manifestly bursting with words he could not speak. And the girl looked very young and sweet with her flushed face and shining eyes. Helen saw in the moment more than that little by-play of confusion.

"Miss—Miss Rayner—I shore—am obliged," he stammered presently.

"You're very welcome," she replied softly.

"I—I got on the next train," he added.

When he said that Bo was looking straight at him, but she seemed not to have heard.

"What's your name?" suddenly she asked.

"Carmichael."

"I heard that. But didn't Uncle call you Las Vegas?"

"Shore. But it wasn't my fault. Thet cow-punchin' outfit saddled it on me, right off. They don't know no better. Shore I jest won't answer to thet handle."

Now—Miss Bo—my real name is Tom."

"I simply could not call you any name but Las Vegas," replied Bo very sweetly.

"But, beggin' your pardon, I—I don't like thet," blustered Carmichael.

"People often get called names they don't like," she said with deep intent.

The cowboy blushed scarlet. Helen, as well as he, got Bo's inference to that last audacious epithet he had boldly called out as the train was leaving Las Vegas. She also sensed something of the disaster in store for Mr. Carmichael. Just then the embarrassed young man was saved by Dale's call to the girls to come to breakfast.

That meal, the last for Helen in Paradise Park, gave rise to a strange and inexplicable restraint. She had little to say. Bo was in the highest spirits, teasing the pets, joking with her uncle and Roy, and even poking fun at Dale. The hunter seemed somewhat somber. Roy was his usual dry, genial self. And Auchincloss, who sat near by, was an interested spectator. When Tom put in an appearance, lounging with his feline grace into the camp, as if he knew he was a privileged pet, the rancher could scarcely contain himself.

"Dale, it's thet cougar!" he ejaculated.

"Sure, that's Tom."

"He ought to be corralled or chained. I've no use for cougars," protested Al.

"Tom is as tame an' safe as a kitten."

"A-huh! Wal, you tell thet to the girls if you like. But not me! I'm an old hoss, I am."

"Uncle Al, Tom sleeps curled up at the foot of my bed," said Bo.

"Aw, what?"

"Honest Injun," she responded. "Nell, isn't it so?"

Helen smilingly nodded her corroboration. Then Bo called Tom to her and made him lie with his head on his stretched paws, right beside her, and beg for bits to eat.

"Wal, I'd never have believed thet!" exclaimed Al. "Hope you don't fetch the yaller rascal down to Pine."

"I won't."

"What'll you do with this menagerie?" Dale regarded the rancher attentively.

"Reckon, Al, I'll take care of them."

"But you're goin' down to my ranch."

"What for?"

Al scratched his head and gazed perplexedly at the hunter. "Wal, ain't it customary to visit friends?"

"Thanks, Al. Next time I ride down Pine way—in the spring perhaps—I'll run over an' see how you are."

"Spring!" ejaculated Auchincloss. Then he shook his head sadly and a far-away look filmed his eyes. "Reckon you'd call some late?"

"Al, you'll get well now. These girls now, they'll cure you. Reckon I never saw you look so good."

Auchincloss did not press his point further at that time, but after the meal, when the other men came to see Dale's camp and pets, Helen's quick ears caught the renewal of the subject.

"I'm askin' you, will you come?" Auchincloss said, low and eagerly.

"No. I wouldn't fit in down there," replied Dale.

"Milt, talk sense. You can't go on forever huntin' bear an' tamin' cats," protested the old rancher.

"Why not?" asked the hunter thoughtfully.

Auchincloss stood up and shaking himself as if to ward off his testy temper, he put a hand on Dale's arm.

"One reason is you're needed in Pine."

"How? Who needs me?"

"I do. I'm playin' out fast. An' Beasley's my enemy. The ranch an' all I got will go to Nell. The ranch will have to be run by a man an' held by a man. Do you savvy? It's a big job. An' I'm offerin' to make you my foreman right now."

"Al, you sort of take my breath," replied Dale. "An' I'm sure grateful. But the fact is even if I could handle the job I—I don't believe I'd want to."

"Make yourself want to, then. The't'd soon come. You'd get interested. This country will develop. I seen the't years ago. The Government is goin' to chase the Apaches out of here. Soon homesteaders will be flockin' in. Big future, Dale. You want to get in now. An' —"

Here Auchincloss hesitated, then spoke lower. "An' take your chance with the girl! . . . I'll be on your side."

A slight vibrating start ran over Dale's stalwart form. "Al, you're plumb dotty!" he exclaimed.

"Dotty! Me? Dotty!" ejaculated Auchincloss. Then he swore. "In a minit I'll tell you what you are."

"But, Al, that talk's so—so—like an old fool's."

"A-huh! An' why so?"

"Because that wonderful girl would never look at me," Dale replied simply.

"I seen her lookin' already," declared Al bluntly.

Dale shook his head, as if arguing with the old rancher was hopeless.

"Never mind the't," went on Al. "Mebbe I am a dotty old fool—specially for takin' a shine to you. But I say again, will you come down to Pine an' be my foreman?"

"No," replied Dale.

"Milt, I've no son—an' I'm—afraid of Beasley." This was uttered in an agitated whisper.

"Al, you make me ashamed," said Dale hoarsely. "I can't come. I've no nerve."

"You've no what?"

"Al, I don't know what's wrong with me. But I'm afraid I'd find out if I came down there."

"A-huh! It's the girl!"

"I don't know, but I'm afraid so. An' I won't come."

"Aw, yes, you will —"

Helen rose with beating heart and tingling ears and moved away out of hearing. She had listened too long to what had not been intended for her ears, yet she could not be sorry. She walked a few rods along the brook, out from under the pines, and stood in the open edge of the park. The following moments were the happiest she had spent in Paradise Park and the profoundest of her whole life.

Presently her uncle called her. "Nell, this here hunter wants to give you the't black hoss. An' I say you take him."

"Ranger deserves better care than I can give him," said Dale. "He runs free in

the woods most of the time. I'd be obliged if she'd have him."

Bo swept a saucy glance from Dale to her sister. "Sure she'll have Ranger. Just offer him to me!"

Dale stood there expectantly, holding a blanket in his hand, ready to saddle the horse. Carmichael walked round Ranger with that appraising eye so keen in cowboys.

"Las Vegas, do you know anything about horses?" asked Bo.

"Me! Wal, if you ever buy or trade a hoss you shore have me there," replied Carmichael.

"What do you think of Ranger?" went on Bo.

"Shore I'd buy him sudden if I could."

"Mr. Las Vegas, you're too late," asserted Helen as she advanced to lay a hand on the horse. "Ranger is mine."

Dale smoothed out the blanket, and folding it he threw it over the horse; then with one powerful swing he set the saddle in place.

"Thank you very much for him," said Helen softly.

"You're welcome, an' I'm sure glad," responded Dale; then after a few deft strong pulls at the straps he continued:

"There, he's ready for you."

"Are you going down to Pine with us?"

"No."

"But you will come soon?"

"Hardly before spring."

"Spring! . . . That is a long time. Won't you come to see me sooner than that?"

"If I can get down to Pine."

"Thank you. All's well then. . . . My friend, good-by."

"Good-by," he said, clasping her hand.

His glance was clear, warm, beautiful, yet it was sad.

Auchincloss's hearty voice broke the spell. Then Helen saw that the others were mounted. Bo had ridden up close; and her face was earnest and happy and grieved all at once as she bade good-by to Dale. The pack burros were hobbling along toward the green slope. Helen was the last to mount, but Roy was the last to leave the hunter.

It was a merry, singing train that climbed that brown, odorless trail under the dark spruces. Helen assuredly was happy, yet a pang abided in her breast.

She remembered that halfway up the slope there was a turn in the trail where it came out upon an open bluff. The time seemed long, but at last she got there. And she checked Ranger so as to have a moment's gaze down into the park.

It yawned there, a dark-green and bright-gold gulf, asleep under a westering sun, exquisite, wild, lonesome. Then she saw Dale standing in the open space between the pines and the spruces. He waved to her. And she returned the salute.

Roy caught up with her then and halted his horse. He waved his sombrero to Dale and let out a piercing yell that awoke the sleeping echoes, splitting strangely from cliff to cliff.

"Shore Milt never knowed what it was to be lonesome," said Roy, as if thinking aloud. "But he'll know now."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

CHAFF

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Cotton—Capitalist or Thief?

(Concluded from Page 13)

goods, and to do much of the selling themselves.

Similarly, the by-products have received due attention. A use has been found for every part of a product that once was thrown away. Like the meat packers, the oil mills permit nothing to be wasted. A few years ago cottonseed hulls were sold with much of the lint adhering. But the nation needed the linters for guncotton, and the past year saw most of the cottonseed thoroughly de-linted, almost as bald as an apple seed or a chufa.

But King Cotton's business still lacks that final refinement characteristic of all highly efficient industries. I refer to looking ahead to insure a continuous supply of raw materials, to teaching the public to use its products intelligently, and to casting a weather eye to the welfare of its workers.

The supply of nitrogen, so all-important to cotton, is at the present time very limited. All of the nitrate of soda, which comes from Chile, is needed for ammunition. Next to cottonseed meal, it has been our main reliance. It is estimated that the supply of nitrates from Chile will be exhausted by 1925. We have not at the present time any plants in the United States for extracting it from the atmosphere.

Yet, until the embargo went into effect, we were continuing to send away meal to the four corners of the globe. We have no right to squander King Cotton's resources, and waste the funds he has left in trust. To bury it in the soil as fertilizer may be necessary now, because of the lack of nitrogen, but a supply from other sources must be provided, so that we can get both the feed and fertilizer values of cottonseed meal, as do the farmers of Europe.

Can we grow cotton in the South without dissipating our agricultural resources? We can. The solution of the whole problem is more and better livestock in the South, and more silos. Silage and cottonseed meal can hardly be equaled for economical production of beef and butterfat. And the South realizes it. The cotton states are traveling livestockward with seven-league boots, evincing none of that apathy, inertia and indolence with which they are painted by popular fancy.

Two Pounds a Day Per Animal

Even at the present time, the South can feed every ton of cottonseed meal produced from an average cotton crop, and keep the fertility on the farms that produced it. In the eleven cotton states there are 4,660,000 dairy cows, 6,500,000 horses and mules, 11,426,000 cattle—a total of 22,586,000 head of livestock. If each animal were fed two pounds of cottonseed meal a day, all the meal would be consumed, protein would be furnished at a lower cost a pound than any other feed, and the fertility returned via the manure.

I do not deplore the amount of the South's annual fertilizer bill. It is simply good business to convert plant food, which is comparatively cheap, into human food, which is high in price. Let the South use fertilizer—more than ever to keep pace with our increasing food demands, but let it use cottonseed meal as feed. Then, the fertilizer applied will not simply pay back to the soil what the cotton crop extracted; it will do more than maintain a respectable fertility. It will mean bigger yields to the acre. It will be possible to grow more cotton on less acreage, to keep more livestock, to build up fertility, to make more money.

All farmers cannot raise livestock profitably. The tenant problem makes the livestock régime impossible for many. But the fact remains that there are enough stock in the South to consume the meal. Many can increase their herds of dairy and beef cattle and realize both the feed and fertilizer value of the meal.

Every bale of cotton takes away 450 pounds of meal. The farmer who keeps enough stock to feed three pounds a day, or half a ton a year, for every bale of cotton his land produced, who cares for the manure properly, has a rational system for maintaining fertility.

In the beginning of this article I said that there was another reason, besides the virginity of their soils, for the small fertilizer bill of Texas and Oklahoma. The answer is livestock. The Oklahomans and Texans are breeding beef cattle and feeding the meal instead of interring it in the ground. Their expenditure on each acre for plant food is far less than that of many states that never grew a stalk of cotton.

Our Dependence Upon Other Nations

There is a broader view to the question than mere profit. The war found us independent of foreign nations for food, but very dependent upon them for the plant-food with which that food is produced. Chile was supplying us almost half our nitrogen, and we were utterly dependent upon Germany for potash when the war taught us the folly of relying upon foreign, and possibly at times unfriendly, sources of supply.

Germany's war-making ability has largely been due to her being almost self-supporting. She produces her own nitrogen from the air, her own phosphoric acid and her own potash. Nor does she squander the fertility of her crops. Her potatoes are largely exported as alcohol and starch, her beets as sugar, so that fertility is conserved. Much fertility went into Germany, but none left her except mineral fertilizers, of which she had more than an adequate supply.

If Germany grew cotton, my opinion is that it would be somewhat of a curiosity outside the confines of her borders.

Cotton—the slacker, the soil robber! How many anathemas, how many erroneous epithets, how many misnomers have been hurled at its hoary head! Like many big men who do things that stagger the imagination, it has been the target for assiduous assaults. Quietly, year after year, it has been giving, in addition to clothing and the sinews of war, the equivalent of three billion pounds of hog lard, and 10,694,500 pounds of wheat flour. It has provided food not only for itself but for other American crops as well. It gives profits that run into ten figures, out of air and water. It places foreign nations in our debt.

For my part, I deny the accusation that cotton is a soil robber and a food thief. It does not sell the South's birthright, its fertility, for a pottage of dollars and cents. It is being used this year to make more than \$2,500,000,000, and every year it pays the loan in full. But we of the South, and I speak as a member of the family, as it were, by not using the meal as feed and keeping it in the South, are not making proper use of the benefits that cotton bestows.

We have been squandering, without adequate additional sources of supply in view, the food that sustains its life.

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