

ROBBERS
ROOST
P. 14

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Collier's

THE NATIONAL WEEKLY

Girl Missing
A short story by
George Weston



More than 2,250,000 Circulation



Next Week

IF YOU buy your Collier's at the news-stand and arrive too late for next week's copy you will have been sufficiently warned, at least, that it is to contain the first part of Erich Maria Remarque's new novel, "The Road Back." Therefore, we formally absolve ourselves from blame. It was mentioned here last week and in this very issue, on page 50, you will find a special, illustrated de luxe (to borrow an adjective from the book trade) announcement of the event.

Having thus done our duty there remains only our public prediction of a great popular success for the serial and a last bit of advice to procrastinating purchasers: Step lively.

SOMETIMES we are fatuous enough to believe that courtship and marriage are matters we know all about. We have even been known to give unsolicited advice to callow young persons afflicted with romantic tendencies. But now and then we see or read something which brings us up with a jolt and we realize dimly that no one will ever know all about love. There is something to be learned even from the way a man and woman go about the romantically unpromising business of extracting a midnight snack from the refrigerator. Jimmy Gardiner and Constance Trenholme, who had suffered from the traditional unsmoothness of the love path, discovered that truth by peeking in at a kitchen window. What they saw and what it meant you can learn, as we did, from Lucian Cary's gay story "Food After Midnight."



GANGSTERS and racketeers (not always synonymous) give the city of Milwaukee the run-around. Milwaukee is hard-boiled with criminals but, while the formula is simple, too many cities in America are prevented by political corruption from using the same method. Criminals nowadays have, or can buy, influential friends.

We asked William G. Shepherd to go to Milwaukee and find out why holdups on its streets are rare, why burglary insurance rates there are lower than in any other city. He tells about it in "Gunmen Dodge This City."

ROB WAGNER, in "Talkie Troubles," tells the diverting story of the gift of tongues in Hollywood. He explains things you may have been wondering about.

WALTER DAVENPORT introduces you to Huey Long, the fast-talking, fast-thinking, utterly unconventional governor of Louisiana. A breezy fellow, the Big Noise in his state, caught for examination in "Yes, Your Excellency."

THERE are short stories by Don Marquis, John B. Kennedy, William MacHarg. Grantland Rice and the politically wise Gentleman at the Keyhole, the Short Short Story and Zane Grey's big Western thriller—a generous, plum-pudding sort of issue. Take them one at a time.

Collier's

THE NATIONAL WEEKLY

THIS WEEK

December 6, 1930

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Any Week

WHAT a man is Mr. Otis Muller, who writes from Colorado that he reads all the popular magazines and finds that Collier's is the only one that inspires him to argue.

"You're always stirring me up," says he. "The others give me the idea that they are afraid of hurting my feelings. So they don't print anything for fear of making a reader mad. But you don't seem to give a darn. Keep it up. It keeps me young."



"MY SISTER and I," writes Mrs. Eugenia Burr Kelly of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, "were trying hard to kill a fly in our living-room. It was the only one there but was so agile it eluded both of us. Father, who was deep in Collier's, became annoyed. He got up, folded his magazine, murdered the fly with one wallop of it and returned to his reading. We've never seen him drive nails with Collier's but we bet he could."

WE LEFT the "u" out of the word labor in P. G. Wodehouse's "Big Money" and were admonished by Mrs. Paul Muller. But to our defense comes the erudite Mr. C. A. Castle of New York, saying:

"It seems you are having trouble with the absence of 'u' in 'color,' 'labor,' et cetera. When a Rhodes scholar at Oxford I had frequently the same discussion. We Americans regularly answered the Britishers by saying we preferred to be purists and follow the original Latin, which is precisely 'color,' 'labor,' et cetera. The 'u,' as research reveals, seems to have crept in via low Gallic; i. e., the Latin of the uneducated Roman soldier."

THANK heaven, that's settled. It permits us to inform you that Mr. Harold Geiken of Dayton, Ohio, is on the verge of "getting plain tired" of all this nonsense in the Eastern newspapers about Albie Booth of Yale when Harry Newman is playing quarterback for Michigan. Mr. Geiken assures us that Mr. Newman is so much better than Mr. Booth in everything from hip-swinging through broken fields to chapel singing that it's sickening.

MRS. ELEANOR CARL KLEMM (Republican) of Cleveland insists that we know of a horrid predicament her party had to squirm out of during the late campaign. One of Dr. Fess' virtually indispensable lieutenants became so fed up on something or other that he not only joined the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment but got thoroughly saturated with Ohio corn. The Anti-Saloon League insisted that the intoxicated leader be excommunicated, arrested and jailed. The Republican organization didn't dare do anything but silently deplore. But fortunately for everybody but the hero of the problem he visited one too many speak-easies, caught pneumonia and thereby opened the way for the party to bundle him off to a hospital with instructions to keep him there until after election.



At a second glance Jim saw that Hays had been gagged and his face was so contorted by rage that it appeared scarcely human

The Story Thus Far:

HAVING fled to Utah in order (so he says) to escape the long arm of the law, a young Westerner who gives his name as Jim Wall gets a job at the Star Ranch.

To his amazement Jim finds that practically all the employees at the Star are desperadoes! The explanation, however, is simple: Having found himself surrounded by gunmen and cattle rustlers, Bernie Herrick, the wealthy Englishman who owns the ranch, has hired them to ensure himself against their depredations.

Hank Hays, the superintendent, confides in Jim: tells him how he, Hays, and his followers are plotting to rob Herrick and desert him. And presently Jim finds himself, much against his will, a member of Hank Hays' gang.

Helen Herrick, Bernie's sister, comes out from England for a visit. She is young, cultured and beautiful. Soon Jim is madly in love with her; to his horror he observes that Hays, too, seems deeply interested.

Jim knows he can never hope to marry Helen. So when Hays informs him that, as all of Herrick's cattle have been stolen and sold, get-away day has arrived he decides to accompany the robbers. With the other members of the gang he rides away from the ranch.

A short time later the party is joined by Hays and Sparrowhawk Latimer, an aide. A girl is riding between them. It is—Helen Herrick. They have kidnapped her!

Hays announces that he will hold the girl for ransom; and, realizing the hopelessness of his position, Jim makes no protest. At the earliest opportunity, however, he tells Helen of his love and vows that he will save her.

A rival gang—led by one Bill Heeseman, Hays' bitterest enemy, who had planned likewise to kidnap the girl—rides up and a running battle ensues, after which Hays leads his party to "Robbers' Roost," a secret retreat, to which access is extremely difficult. . . . Sparrowhawk Latimer, wounded in the battle, dies. Before he passes away he informs Jim and Smoky that Hays had robbed both the girl and her brother—that the scoundrel is interested not in the ransom but in Helen Herrick!

Gradually the bandits begin to realize that Hays has deceived them.

Robbers' Roost

By Zane Grey

IX

THE season of storms arrived and showers of rain fell almost every day. Dust cleared out of the air; the heat diminished; and flowers and grass sprang up out of the earth.

One day, when Jim was returning to camp, somewhat before sunset, he heard a shot. It startled him. Gun shots, except his own while hunting rabbits and antelope, had been marked by their absence. And this one either had a spiteful ring or so it sounded to Jim's sensitive ears. He listened for others. None came.

The moment he entered the oval, to see Hays striding for the cabin, his hair standing up, and his men grouped outside of the camp shelter, Jim knew that there had been trouble. It had been long in coming, but it had arrived. Jim hoped Hays had not shot Smoky or Happy Jack. Any one of the others would be one less.

Presently Smoky detached himself from the group and came to meet Jim.

"What now, Smoky?"

"Hank did fer Brad."

"How? Why? . . . You don't mean Hays beat Lincoln to a gun?"

"He did, Jim. By Gawd he did!" ejaculated Slocum, his eyes gleaming strangely. "But Hank was at the end of the table an' had a free throw. You know thet bench Jack fixed on the side next to the fire? Wal, Brad was sittin' on it an' his gun bumped the table. Thet gave Hank the edge. He bored Brad. I was the only feller who seen it. The rest was duckin' to beat hell."

"What was it about, Smoky?"

"Wal, Brad has been gittin' sorer every day, an' today we cleaned him. Hank had a bad run, too. But you know he was way ahead, an' most on Brad's money. Brad opened up on Hank, no doubt meanin' to call him fer fair. But Brad didn't git goin' good before Hank hissed an' went fer his gun."

"Smoky, he had his mind made up," declared Jim, tensely.

"Shore. Thet's the queer part of it. Hank was not goin' to let Brad spit out much. . . . An', friend Jim, thet's a hunch fer us."

"You and me?"

"So I take it."

"Hays can't beat me to a gun," rejoined Jim, with a cold ring in his voice.

"Nor me either. Thet's a safe bet."

"Does Hays know that?"

"Wal, he orter know it, leastways about me," replied Smoky, in perplexity. "But he's grown so cocky lately thet mebbe he's damn' fool enough not to believe it."

"Shall I call him out?"

"Hell, no," flashed Smoky, with a passionate gesture. "After all, Brad was to blame. . . . But, Jim, I jest can't advise you no more. We both gotta paddle our own canoes."

"Well, I'm not so squeamish," declared Jim, with meaning. "I like you, Smoky; I reckon you're the one real, square man in this bunch. And if you want my advice you're welcome to it."

"Jim, I've sorta cottoned to you," admitted Smoky. "But, honest to Gawd, I'm afeared to ask you anythin'."

"What're you afraid of, Smoky?"

"I don't know. Mebbe it's a queer hunch Hank has busted up over this gurl."

They reached the camp. Lincoln lay face down over the table, his right arm hanging low, his gun lying near his hand.

"Wonder who'll go next?" queried Mac, gloomily, twisting his lean hands. "Lend a hand, some of you," ordered Slocum, peremptorily.

They carried Lincoln, face down, across the oval to the lower side of the cottonwood grove, and in half an hour he had been consigned to the earth, and his possessions divided among the men who had buried him.

"Grave number two?" speculated Smoky. "Fellers, it runs in my mind thet Robbers' Roost in these next twenty years will be sprinkled all over with graves."

"How so, when nobody has any idee where it is?"

"Heeseman will find it, an' Morley, an' after them many more," concluded Slocum, prophetically.

"Let's rustle out of the damned hole," suggested Bridges.

IT WAS dark by the time Happy Jack called them to supper. Jim carried over an armload of brush to make a bright fire. By its flare Hays was seen approaching, and when he drew near he said: "Jim, did they tell you straight how I come to draw on Brad?"

"Reckon they did," replied Jim, coldly. "Anythin' to say?"

"No. I don't see how you could have acted any differently."

"Wal, you've coppered it with the ace. The second Brad jumped me I seen in his eyes he meant to egg me on to draw. So I did it quick. . . . Jack, what you got fer supper?"

By tacit consent and without a single word the men avoided Happy Jack's

table that night and ate around the camp fire. Hays stood up, Smoky sat on a stone, Jim knelt on one knee, and the others adopted characteristic poses reminiscent of the trail.

"Cool after the rain," remarked Hays, after he had finished. And he took up a blazing fagot of wood. "Reckon I'll make a little fire fer my lady prisoner."

He stalked away, waving the fagot to keep it ablaze.

"I call thet nervy," declared Smoky. "What you think, Jim?"

"Just a bluff. Watch him."

"Hank's gone dotty," snorted Happy Jack. "Thet gurl hates his very guts."

"Men, what this Herrick girl thinks or feels is nothing to Hays," chimed in Jim, ringingly.

"I seen her last night when he called me to fetch her supper," said Jack. "Fust time I'd had a peek at her face lately. Seemed a ghost of thet other gurl."

"Yes, and you fellows saw only a ghost of the money Hays got from the Herricks," retorted Jim, divining the moment for revelation had come.

An angry roar arose. Smoky threw up his hands and left the camp fire. Then Jim, in brief, cold terms, exposed the machinations of their chief. After the first outburst they accepted the disclosure in astounded and ominous silence. Jim left the poison to brew and paced off into the darkness.

The fire Hays had built in front of the shelter cast a bright light, showing the girl walking to and fro. Jim kept in the shadow of the cliff and stole within a couple of hundred feet, then sat down on the grassy bench. If the girl spoke, when Hays brought her food, it was too low to hear. Jim quivered when she faced in his direction and at the end of her short walk gazed across

at the camp fire. It was too long a gaze to be casual.

Jim had a feeling that he could not much longer stay his hand. Right then if he had seen Hays as much as touch the girl he would have shot him, and risked having it out with the men. But the chief sat there, a fading figure in the dusk. Finally Helen went into her tent. Jim grasped at that break in the tension of the hour and stole away to his bed. Tomorrow! He could wait through tomorrow. There would be a row and anything might happen. Hays was in no mood to tolerate inquiry or criticism. Most of them all, he had answered to a vitriolic devastation of character through crime. He wanted that money, that which he had kept, and all of theirs. He wanted it for more than gambling. Robbers' Roost was a hiding place only; Utah had grown too small for him. So Jim Wall's divining mind whirled on, until slumber claimed him.

SOME time during the night Jim was awakened. As he lay there, eyes open, a soft hand touched his cheek and a whisper brought him wide awake, transfixed and thrilling.

"Jim! . . . Wake up. It is I."

Helen knelt beside him. Jim sat up with a violent start.

"You! . . . What is it? Has that devil—"

"Hush! Not so loud. Nothing has happened. . . . But I couldn't sleep—and I must talk to you—or go out of my mind."

In the starlight her face had the same pearl-white tint as the clouds, and her eyes were like great black gulfs peering down upon him. After a moment he could see more clearly.

"All—right. Talk—but it's risky," he whispered huskily. His hand rested

upon the blanket. She put hers on it, as if in her earnestness to assure him of her presence and her feeling.

She bent lower, so that her face was closer, and she could whisper very softly:

"First I want to tell you how cruelly it has come home to me—my ignorance, my failure to believe and trust you, even after you—so—so rudely insulted me that day up on the mountain trail. If I had only had faith in you then! It's too late. But I want you to know I have the faith *now*."

"Thanks. I'm glad, though I didn't kiss you—handle you that day—just to frighten you. I fell!"

"I don't believe that altogether. No matter. If I had listened to you I would not now be in this terrible predicament. The fear and the suspense are wearing me out."

"But you are well—all right still? . . . He has not harmed you? Helen!"

"No, he has not harmed me, and I am not ill. I'm losing flesh because I can't eat. But that's nothing. . . . Lately I don't sleep because I'm horribly afraid he will come—and—smother me—or choke me—so I can't cry out. I've slept some in the daytime. . . . Jim, the thing is I—can't stand it much longer." Jim smothered a violent curse. "He has not tried—lately," she went on. "I swore I would jump over the cliff. I think I frightened him. But I can see—I can feel—Oh, Jim, for God's sake, do something to end—this horror—"

She leaned or fell forward in the weakness of the moment, her head against him. He stroked it gently, his reaction as far from that passionate and mocking embrace at Star Ranch as could have been possible.

"Helen, don't—give up," he replied. "You have been brave. And it has

gone—better than we could hope. . . . Only a little while longer!"

"We might steal away—now."

"Yes. I've thought of that. But only to get lost and starve—or die of thirst in these brakes."

"That almost—would be better—for me."

"If you can't stick it out we'll plan and go—say tomorrow night. We must have food, horses. . . . It's only honest, though, to tell you the chances are a hundred to one against us. . . . We've got an even break if we wait."

"How can you—think that?"

"THIS gang is about ready to go up in smoke. There'll be a terrible fight. Hays surely will be killed. And just as surely, more than he. That will leave a proposition I can handle without risk to you."

"Even then—we still have to find a way out of this awful place."

"Yes, but I'd have time, and I could pack water and food. . . . Helen, trust me, it's the best plan."

"If you take me back to my brother, I'll give you the ransom."

"Don't insult me," he replied, bitterly.

At that she drew up suddenly, and threw her hair back from her face. "Forgive me. . . . You see, I have lost my mind. That never occurred to me before. But I'll reward you in some way."

"To have saved you will be all the reward I ask—and more than I deserve. . . . You have forgotten that I love you."

"Yes—I had," she whispered. Her great eyes studied him in the starlight, as if the fact had a vastly different significance here than it had had at Star Ranch.

"The proof of it is that I'm one of

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Cold terror assailed Jim Wall. That was Hays crawling upon them with a gun in his hand

Illustrated
by
Harold
Von
Schmidt

Robbers' Roost

Continued from page 15

this robber gang—yet ready to betray them—kill their chief and any or all of them. Except Smoky. I've worked on him so that he's our friend. He is a real man, as you'll see when the break comes. . . . If you were American, you'd be human enough to grasp the situation and help me through with it."

"I am human and I—I've as much courage as any American girl," she flashed, stung by his caustic words. "You—you talk of love as freely as you Westerners talk of horses—guns—death. . . . But surely you don't mean that it's because you love me you'll save me?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"I cannot believe you. . . . I never accepted you as a desperado."

"Miss Herrick, all that doesn't matter," he rejoined, almost coldly. "We are wasting time—risking much—"

"I don't care. That is *why* I had to come to you. I knelt here for moments before awakening you. It helped me somehow—and it is easing my nerves to talk."

"Well, talk then. But make it low. . . . You must have crept very softly to my side. I sleep with one eye open."

"Indeed you don't. Both yours were tight shut—"

SUDDENLY she stiffened, no doubt at the slight sound that had checked her speech. She put a hand over his lips and stared at him with wide vague eyes.

Over her shoulder Jim's eye was arrested by a glint of starlight upon a bright object on the ground. Above and behind it a shape, darker than the dark background, gradually took the outline of a man on hands and knees. Cold terror assailed Jim Wall, despite his iron nerve. That was Hays crawling upon them with a gun in his hand. A bursting tide of blood through Jim's veins paralleled the lightning flash of his thoughts. Death for both of them was terribly close. His gun was under his pillow. Helen knelt between him and the robber. A move of even the slightest kind would be fatal. Cunning must take precedence of action. He swerved his rigid gaze from the humped black form to Helen's face. It was white as marble in moonlight. Her eyes showed the tremendous strain under which she labored. In that instant she could almost read his very thoughts. Her fingers still crossed his lips and Hays had begun to tremble.

"It's Hays," he whispered, scarcely audibly. "Follow me—now." Then, exerting all his will to speak naturally, he said aloud: "No, Miss Herrick, I'm sorry, but I can't oblige you. I don't approve of Hays' kidnapping you, but it's done. And I'm a member of his band. I would not think of going against him, let alone trying to run off with you."

There was a tense silence, fraught with much apprehension for Jim. Would she be able to play up to him? There was just a chance that Hays had not heard any of their whispers, in which case it was possible to deceive him. Helen comprehended. It was Jim Wall's privilege then to see the reaction of a woman at a perilous moment.

"I'll give you the ransom money," she said, quite clearly, and certainly most persuasively. "My brother will reward you otherwise."

"You can't bribe me," he rejoined. "And I wouldn't advise you to try it on Smoky or any of the others."

"Hays may have had only money in his mind at first, but now—"

"Don't move, Jim!" came a low, hard voice from the shadow.

Helen gave a little gasp and sagged on her knees. Jim waited a moment.

"I won't, Hank," he replied.

Then Hays' tall form loomed black above the rise of ground. He strode forward. If he had sheathed his gun Jim would have made short work of that interview. But he held it half leveled, glancing darkly in the starlight.

The robber chief gazed down upon Jim and Helen. His features were indistinguishable, but the poise of his head was expressive enough. Still Jim sensed that he had been misled.

"You cat!" he declared, roughly. "If I ketch you again—tryin' to bribe any of my outfit—I'll treat you so you won't want to go back to your baby-faced brother. . . . Now you git to your tent!"

Helen rose unsteadily and vanished in the gloom.

"Jim Wall, you ain't been with me long, an' I don't know you, but I'm takin' this deal to heart," Hays said slowly. "I'm much obliged. I reckon you're the only man in the outfit who could of withstood that woman."

"No, you're wrong, Hank. Smoky wouldn't have listened to her. And I'm sure the others would have stood pat."

"My faith was damn' near gone."

"That's in you, Hank. You've no call to lose it. You've about split your gang over this woman."

"Wal, I'm not askin' judgments from you or any of the outfit," growled the chief, gloomily. "You'll all be good an' glad to git your share of the ransom."

"The thing is—boss—will we get it?"

Hays made a violent move, like a striking snake. "What you mean by that?"

"I'm askin' you."

"Air you insinuat'in' you mightn't git yours?" demanded Hays. And Jim, used for years to sense peril, divined he was not far from death then. He had not moved a hand since Hays' arrival. If he had had his gun within reach he would have ended that argument. But the chances were too greatly in Hays' favor. Wit and cunning must see him through. He could feel how intensely the chief wanted to know what Jim knew.

"No. You might say I was askin' for all of us," replied Jim, curtly.

"Wal, I'll git the outfit together an' do some askin' myself."

"It's a good idea. It *might* prevent the split—provided you divide the money you stole from Herrick."

"I'll wring that white cat's neck," hissed the robber.

"You're wrong, boss. She didn't tell me. She doesn't know you robbed her brother. Sparrow confessed before he died."

HAYS swore a mighty oath. "An' he squealed?"

"Yes. To Smoky an' me. We kept it secret until we had to tell. They *knew* somethin' was wrong."

"All the time you knowed!" There was something pathetic in the fallen chieftain's shame and amaze. By this he seemed to realize his crime.

"You see, Hank, how your outfit has stood by you, even in your guilt."

"Ahuh! . . . If it ain't too late—I'll make amends," he rejoined hoarsely, and stalked away in the darkness.

Jim lay back on his blankets with a weight of oppression removed. He had saved himself for the hour, but what would the outcome be? After deliberation it seemed he had put Hays in a corner from which there could be no retreat.

Jim had breakfast before the other men were up. It still wanted half an hour till sunrise. This was the beautiful time of day. Jim hurried away on scout duty before Hays and his accusers had assembled at the camp fire.

With rifle in hand Jim headed toward the western exit. Not until he was out in the valley did he realize that he carried his rifle. The fact surprised him. There was plenty of fresh meat in camp. He had no idea of hunting. That act had been instinctive and it puzzled him. But there was a release of a clamped tension within. This day would see events and he felt almost elated.

Perhaps that had something to do with a singular sense of the mounting beauty of the morning, of the magnified solitude, of the rarefied atmosphere that gave the buttes and mountains a most deceiving nearness. The outside world of Utah seemed to be encroaching upon this wilderness of canyon brakes.

THE sun was still beneath the rim of the escarpments in the east, but its approach was heralded by a magnificent glory of red and gold, of flushed peaks and rose-shrouded mesas, of burning faces of the zigzag walls along distant ramparts.

Jim had never before been high up here at such an early hour. Any man would have been struck by the spectacle. He felt that if he were to die that day he would be leaving earth without having fully realized its sublimity, its mystery, its solemn warning, its inscrutable promise. And there ran through his mind a thought of how Miss Herrick would have reveled in this glorious scene.

"Well, I am loco," he soliloquized, blankly, suddenly brought up sharply by the absurd reflection. Excitement and emotion had reacted so powerfully upon him that he was not himself. Right then he made the stern decision that when he started back to camp, to face Hays again, he would be a thousand times his old self.

The sun shelter he had erected had once before toppled over and this morning he found it again flat, except one of the poles. Jim gathered up the dry brush and made a seat and back rest of it. He did not inquire into his premonition that the shelter had served its turn. Then he sat down to watch.

It was as if he had never seen a sunrise. There was no comparing it with any other he could recall. And one magnifying look through the field of vision was more than enough. Nature's exaggeration of color and loveliness and transparency and vastness was too great even for the normal gaze of man.

But that superlative grandeur passed, leaving something Jim could accept and gloat over as actual.

From this lofty perch he gazed with narrowed eyes across the shaded hollow below, into which no ray of sun had yet penetrated. The black mouth of the gorge yawned hungrily. Above it on all sides spread the gray and red rock ridges, dotted with dwarf cedars, with white washes between, and on to spotted red ragged hummocks that fringed a green level, yellow with sunflowers, which led to an abrupt break into a canyon. The walls showed brown, rust-colored, hard as iron, with dark lines and shadows, beyond which stood up the pyramids and bluffs of the brakes. Here gloomed suggested depths and corrugated slopes, then the infinitely wild, obscure, stratified space terminating in the Henry Mountains, looming colossal

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(Continued from page 29)

in the lilac light of morning, ghostly, black, unscalable, piercing the pale blue sky.

Loneliness was paramount. There was no sound—only an immense silence. No life at all! Not a winged creature hovering over that ghastly region! But over this scene of desolation slowly spread the solemn blight of heating, blazing sun, soon to mantle all in illusive copper haze.

Before that hour arrived Jim Wall took up the field-glass. Below in the camp the men were lazily stirring to a late breakfast. The door of the cabin was open. A glint of gold crossed the dark aperture. Then the tall form of Hays stalked out. He yawned. He stretched wide his long arms. His ruddy face gleamed in the glass to that sight. Wall's whole being leaped.

"By God!" his voice rang out. "Hays, that's your last morning's stretch. . . . Before this day's done you'll stretch forever!"

Let his men have their hour, thought Jim darkly, but if they did not mete out justice to their chief the end was nevertheless fixed and unalterable.

Jim settled back and raised the field-glass more from habit than any semblance of the old watchfulness. There was nothing to see but the stark denudation of the brakes.

Suddenly into Jim's magnified circle of vision crept dark objects—a long line of them.

He was so startled that the glass wavered out of line. He moved it to and fro, searching. What could that have been? An error of sight, a line of cedars, a conception of idle mind!

"There!" he breathed. He had caught it again. Not cedars—not brush, but moving objects! . . . "By heaven!" he muttered. "Am I dotty?"

Horses! A line of dark horses! His straining eyes blurred. He lowered the glass with shaking hands. "So help me—it looks like riders!"

A THIRD time Jim caught the objects. He froze the glass on them. Horses and riders—horses with packs! A bursting gush of hot blood ran all through him. The expected pursuit, now long neglected, almost forgotten, had materialized. It looked like Heeseeman's outfit, at least three miles away, approaching slowly by a route far to the south of that over which Hays had come.

"About three miles," muttered Jim. "Coming slow. They're lost. . . . But that wash they're in heads into the Hays trail. . . . If they strike that they'll come fast. Not enough rain yet to wash out our tracks. We've not time to pack and ride out. . . . By thunder, they've cornered us! Now, Hank Hays—"

Jim took one more straining look. No hope! It was a big outfit and not traveling so slowly, either. The leader bestrode a black horse. Jim remembered that horse. Snatching up his rifle he slung the field-glass over his shoulder and ran down off the bluff to the slope. It occurred to him to locate Hays' horses. He sighted some—six, seven, eight—the others were not visible. Hays would range like a madman. Then Jim tore down the slope with giant strides. Reaching the valley floor he ran along the wash, through the entrance into the oval and once on the grass he fairly flew the remaining distance to camp.

To his profound amaze he espied Hays bound hand and foot, with a stick behind him and through his elbows. The robber sat in an uncomfortable posture against the woodpile. At a second glance Jim saw that Hays had been gagged and his face was so contorted by rage that it appeared scarcely human.

"What the hell!" cried Jim, breaking out of his bewilderment.

Hays gave vent to an inarticulate sound, but it was expressive. Jim wheeled to stalk under the shack, his hand on his gun, as if he half expected Heeseeman to have arrived before him. To his further amaze Miss Herrick was sitting at the rude table, eating breakfast. A big gun, that Jim recognized as Hays' property, lay conspicuously in front of her. Happy Jack, whistling as usual, was serving her.

"What does this mean?" demanded Jim.

"Ask the men," she replied, curtly.

Outside and below the shack sat Smoky on a rock, with the others standing near. They all had the appearance of having been swayed profoundly.

"Maw'nin', Jim," drawled Smoky, with a grin. "You see we've got a new chief."

"Who hawg-tied the boss?"

"Reckon I did—with a little help."

"What for?"

"Damn' if I know. Our lady prisoner made me do it."

"MISS HERRICK forced you to tie Hays up?" queried Jim, trying to conceal his exultation.

"I should shiver she did. Stuck Hays' hair-trigger gun—cocked—right into my belly, an' says: 'Will you tie this villain—an' swear by your honor not to release him or allow any of these other men to do so—or will you have me shoot you?'"

"How'd she get that gun?"

"Wal, she snatched it quicker'n lightnin', thet's how. An' when she cocked it with both hands it went off bang! The bullet went between Hank's legs. Tickled him. You can see the hole in his pants. Scared? My Gawd, you never see a man so scared. Thet gurl, cool as a cucumber, cocked the gun again, an' held Hays up—then all of us."

"We was sittin' at the table. She made us all stand, hands high, an' then she performed thet little trick with Hank's gun agin my gizzard. Jim, I hope to die if I didn't go cold an' stiff. But I promised on my word of honor—as a robber—thet I'd tie Hank up, an' make the other fellers play square. It was so funny, too, thet I near bust. Hays, soon as he was helpless, got over his scare, an' then was he mad! I reckon no one on this earth ever saw a madder man. He cussed so terrible thet she made me gag him."

"Well, I'll be—blowed!" gasped Jim.

"No wonder. We was wuss. We'd had breakfast, an' Hank was tryin' to face us fellers. I'll say he came clean, Jim. He divided all the money he got from Herrick an' his sister, an' the gold things an' diamonds. 'Fellers,' he said, 'I could lie an' say I meant to give this to you later. But I'm not built thet way. I double-crossed you all—first time in my life. I meant to keep it all, an' the ransom fer the girl. But now there won't be no ransom, for I'm not goin' to give her up. She's mine, an' I can do as I want, an' if any of you don't like it you can make your kick now.' . . . Wal, we was so plumb flabbergasted thet we didn't see the gurl, who came close on the sun side of Happy's shelter. She heard the whole damn' show. . . . Jim, I wish you could have seen her when she stepped up to Hank. I don't know what did it—mebbe her eyes—but he shore wilted. It was then she snatched his gun."

"So that's the deal!" ejaculated Jim.

"What are you going to do?"

"Don't ask me. I gave my word an' I'll keep it. Fer thet matter the rest of our outfit air fer the gurl, ransom or no ransom."

Suddenly Jim awoke out of his stupefaction to remember the approach of Heeseeman.

"Smoky, I know what you're all going to do, and that's fight," he flashed,

curtly. "I was so surprised I forgot. Heeseeman's outfit is coming. I sighted them perhaps three miles. Traveling slow, but sure. We've no time to pack an' get away. We've got to find the best place to stand an' fight, an' pack our stuff into it pronto."

"Heeseeman!" cried Smoky, coolly. "So it's come. I reckoned on thet. Git busy, men."

Jim strode under the shelter to face Miss Herrick. She had heard, for she was white.

"We're all but surprised by Heeseeman's outfit," he said, abruptly. "We must fight. You will be worse off if you fall into their hands. I'm sorry I must release Hays. We need him."

"Too late!" she exclaimed.

"Pack your things quickly and hurry over to the cave on this side." Then Jim picked up Hays' gun from the table and ran out. First he removed the gag, and then in terse terms he stated the situation. Next he released the robber from his painful fix and handed him the gun.

"Heeseeman, huh! Wal, so be it!" Hays said, facing Jim with an air of finality that intimated relief.

"How far are they away?" Hays then asked.

"Two miles."

"Gawd Almighty! Where? Which way air they—comin'?"

Facing south, Jim pointed. "Little west—of south. They're in a—wash that'll head—into the trail we made."

"I know thet. But it's rough before it heads in. We've got half an hour—mebbe. Did you think to look fer the hosses?"

"Eight horses in the—valley. Others not in sight."

"You —!" cursed Hays, suddenly furious. "Fine scout you air. How come you didn't spy them soon enough fer us to rustle out of hyar?"

"I couldn't have seen them half a mile sooner," snapped Jim. "They came out from behind a bank."

"Hell's fire! Tell thet to me? You was sleepin'."

"You're a liar," flashed Jim, leaping clear of the others. "Open your trap to me again like that!"

"Say, it's you who'll shet his trap," replied Hays, stridently. "Or you'll git a dose of the medicine I gave Brad Lincoln."

"Not from you—you yellow dog of a woman thief!"

SMOKY SLOCUM ran out in time to get in front of Jim.

"Hyar! Hyar!" he called, piercingly. "Is this a time fer us to fight each other? Cool down, Jim. Make allowance fer Hays. He's wuss'n drunk."

"I don't care a damn if there're ten outfits on our trail. He can't talk to me that way. . . . And, Smoky, I reckon you're presuming on friendship."

"Shore I am," returned Slocum, hurriedly. "I'll not do it again, Jim. Hays is what you called him. But leave your dispute till we settle with Heeseeman."

"All right. You're talking sense," replied Jim. He had been quick to grasp the opening made by Hays. "There must be ten riders in Heeseeman's outfit."

"Wal, thet suits me," rejoined the robber, harshly.

"Now think fast," snapped Smoky.

Hays pulled himself together. "Mac, you an' Jeff run like hell to fetch what hosses you can find quick. . . . Jack, you an' Smoky an' Wall hustle the grub, cook kit, packs an' beds into thet cave across the wash. I'll git up high an' watch. When I yell, dig fer cover."

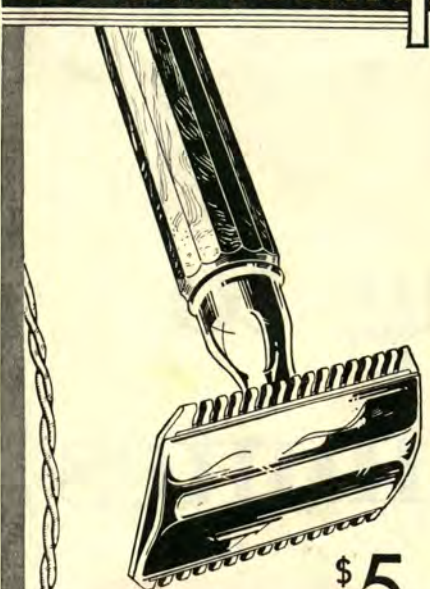
"You aimin' to fight or run?" queried Smoky.

"We might git packed light, if some-thin' holds them up. But we can't leave (Continued on page 32)

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the way we come in. Dirty Devil too high. Heeseman has stumbled on the next best way. If we had plenty of time. . . . But rustle, everybody."

Mac and Jeff were already in lumbering flight up the oval. And Happy Jack, not concerned enough to stop his whistling, was sacking his utensils. Hays made for the notch in the bluff west of the cabin. Jim sprang into action, while Smoky dashed off toward the cottonwood grove.

Upon Jim's first return trip from the cave he encountered the girl burdened with her effects.

"Helen, I'll carry that. Hurry. We've no time to lose."

At the back of the cave there was a crack deep enough to protect Helen. He directed her to hide inside and await developments.

"Jim—promise me you'll shoot me—before letting Hays or any of them—get me."

He considered that a moment, then answered, "I promise."

Her reply was incoherent though couched in passionate tones. Jim ran on toward the camp, resolving to withhold a shell in his rifle and to keep a sharp watch on Hays.

The next quarter of an hour was filled with strenuous and unceasing action. Their united efforts collected all the supplies, utensils, saddles and packs, and several of the beds in the three-cornered cave back and to one side of the shack. A huge slab of stone lay across the top of this triangular notch in the cliff. The wall had been hollowed by the action of water. A small stream flowed out from the base of the wall. At the extreme apex of the notch there was an opening, but hidden from above by thick bushes. Also bushes of the same kind screened the west side of this notch. Beyond the shack and in close around the opposite corner a corral had been built under that shelving wall. It was the best place for defense in the oval, and Jim believed Hays' outfit could hold it indefinitely, though they couldn't save the horses. If it came to a siege they could be released.

SMOKY came panting in with Hays' pack, and started off again.

"That's enough, Smoky," called Jim. Slocum returned. "Nothin' left—'cept Hank's bed," he panted. "I—couldn't—locate thet."

"Listen!"

"What do you hear?"

"Hosses."

"Sure, I catch it. . . . Which way?"

"Damn' if I can tell."

"Grab a rifle. Seems to me if Hays was up on top somewhere he'd hear horses before we could—in that direction."

"Shore. Must be Mac an' Jeff." Smoky had guessed correctly. Half a dozen horses appeared tearing over rocks and through brush into the oval, with the two men, riding bareback, in close pursuit.

Then above the noise rose Hays' stentorian voice: "Ride! Ride fer camp! . . . Let the hosses go!"

The robber chieftain came plunging down the gap. He was warning Mac and Jeff. There must have been more danger for them, on the moment, than for him.

"Jim, keep your eye peeled on thet cliff," said Smoky, and stole forward under cover of the brush.

Presently a white puff of smoke showed above the ragged rim. Spang! The fight was on. One of Hays' men—Bridges—let out a hoarse bawl and

swayed over, almost losing his balance. Jim looked no more at him, but concentrated his gaze on the rim. Another puff of white! Something dark—a man's slouch hat—bobbed up. Jim's rifle, already raised, swerved a trifle—cracked. The hat went flying.

"Wal, if thet bird didn't have it on a stick he got scalped, I'll gamble," observed Smoky, which remark attested to his keen sight.

THE horses came over the bench, frightened, but not stampeding, and Mac drove them into the corral. This was around the corner from the range of the sharpshooter on the rim. Bridges, reeling on the horse, followed Mac, who ran out of the corral to catch him as he fell. Then, as they came along close to the wall, Hays arrived, puffing, from the other direction.

"Heeseman—with his outfit—nine in all," he heaved. "They're scatterin' to surround the roost. . . . But they can't cross—below us—an' across there it's—out of range. . . . We're all right."

"Yes, we air! Haw! Haw!" ejaculated Smoky, glaring back.

Mac half carried the bulky Bridges into the safety zone and let him down on the ground with his head on a bed roll.

"Where's he shot?" demanded Hays. "I seen thet feller who did it jest a little too late."

"Through the belly."

"Hank, I'm done fer," said Bridges.

"Lemme see." And the leader, kneeling beside Bridges, tore open his bloody shirt. He had been shot in the back, the bullet going clear through. "Wal, I should smile. Say your prayers, Jeff. . . . Somebody take his gun."

"Take it yourself, Hays," rejoined Mac, sullenly.

"Hank, you go hide with your lady prisoner an' we'll do the fightin'," added Slocum, who had crawled back from the edge of the brush.

"Hide! What'n hell's eatin' you?" roared the chief.

"You know what, you —."

"Hays, we'd a damn' sight rather die fightin' than owe our lives to one bullet of yours," said Happy Jack, in a cold contempt Jim had not thought possible of the man.

"Wal, I'll take you up," rasped Hays, after a moment of assimilation. He had degenerated to a point where he let passion sway him utterly.

"You stay here, Hays," ordered Jim,

hotly. "You got us in this mix. You lied and cheated. You betrayed us. And you'll fight, by heaven! Unless you're as much of a coward as you are betrayer."

The chief grew livid where he had been gray. Only then had he grasped the significance of this fiery scorn of his comrades.

"You all double-crossed me!"

"Shore. Same as you did us. If we git through this deal, which I've a hunch we never will, there'll come a reckonin' with me, Hank Hays."

"I meant to make a clean breast of it—divvy all the money," said Hays, in a strangled voice. "But I got crazy about the gurl. I couldn't think of nothin' else."

"Haw! Haw! fer thet first crack an' okay on the second. . . . Now!"

A bullet thudded into the wall, followed by the report of a rifle.

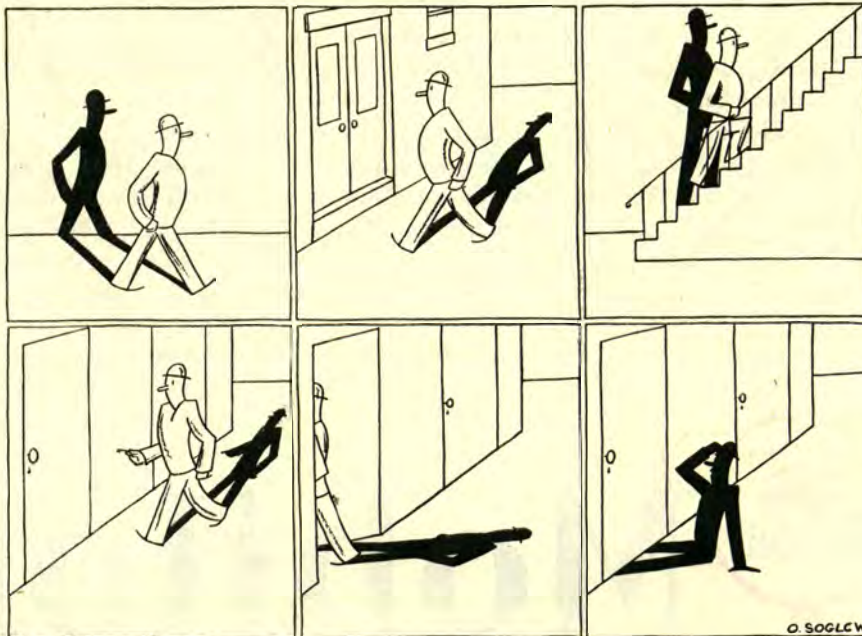
"Duck back! Thet was from somewhere else," shouted Hays.

THEY dove twenty feet farther back.

Here they were apparently safe, except from the grassy ridge of the oval in front, which it was unlikely any sharpshooters could reach in daylight. Smoky peeped around the west corner, Mac round the one opposite. Hays knelt on one knee, rifle in hands, peering out. Jim went back to the apex of the notch, and bracing one foot in each side, clinging with one free hand, got up to a shelf from which he could peep out of the hole. He was exceedingly wary. In front was thick, low brush; on his right a thinner fringe, and the left was open. The rocky ground ridged away from the oval and the deep gorge below. A sharp scrutiny in that direction failed to discover any of the attackers Hays had affirmed were attempting to surround the oval. But there might have been some crawling behind the rocks or down the fissures.

After a careful study Jim crept out into the brush, stirred by a renewal of firing from the west rim. Wisps of white cloud, thinning on the light wind, located the positions of the shooters. First Jim peered through the growth of brush directly in front. He did not espy any men, but half a mile over the hummocky rocks he saw a little cove full of horses. The packs had not yet been removed from some of them, nor saddles from the others. Heeseman had come to make a siege of it.

(To be continued next week)



O. SOGLEW