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The COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

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Oh, for the Words!

—Leslie Thrasher

Beginning—THE MAN OF THE FOREST—By Zane Grey

THE MAN OF THE FOREST

By Zane Grey, Author of *Wildfire*

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON

AT SUNSET hour the forest was still, lonely, sweet with tang of fir and spruce, blazing in gold and red and green; and the man who glided on under the great trees seemed to blend with the colors and, disappearing, to have become a part of the wild woodland.

Old Baldy, highest of the White Mountains, stood up round and bare, rimmed bright gold in the last glow of the setting sun. Then, as the fire dropped behind the domed peak, a change, a cold and darkening blight, passed down the black, spear-pointed slopes over all that mountain world.

It was a wild, richly timbered and abundantly watered region of dark forests and grassy parks, ten thousand feet above sea level, isolated on all sides by the southern Arizona desert—the virgin home of elk and deer, of bear and lion, of wolf and fox, and the birth-place as well as the hiding place of the fierce Apache.

September in that latitude was marked by the sudden cool night breeze following shortly after sundown. Twilight appeared to come on its wings, as did faint sounds not distinguishable before in the stillness.

Milt Dale, man of the forest, halted at the edge of a timbered ridge to listen and to watch. Beneath him lay a narrow valley, open and grassy, from which rose a faint low murmur of running water. Its music was pierced and marred by the wild staccato yelp of a hunting coyote. From overhead in the giant fir came a twittering and rustling of grouse settling for the night, and from across the valley drifted the last low calls of wild turkeys going to roost.

To Dale's keen ear these sounds were all they should have been, betokening an unchanged serenity of forest land. He was glad, for he had expected to hear the clip-clop of white men's horses, which in those fastnesses was hateful to him. He and the Indian were friends. That fierce foe had no enmity toward the lone hunter. But there hid somewhere in the forest a gang of bad men, sheep thieves, whom Dale did not want to meet.

As he started out upon the slope a sudden flaring of the afterglow of sunset flooded down from Old Baldy, filling the valley with lights and shadows, yellow and blue, like the radiance of the sky. The pools in the curves of the brook shone darkly bright. Dale's gaze swept up and down the valley, and then tried to pierce the black shadows across the brook where the wall of spruce stood up, its speared and spiked crest against the pale clouds. The wind began to moan in the trees and there was a feeling of rain in the air. Dale, striking a trail, turned his back to the fading afterglow and strode down the valley.

With night at hand and a rainstorm brewing he did not head for his own camp, some miles distant, but directed his steps toward an old log cabin. When he reached it darkness had almost set in. He approached with caution. This cabin, like the few others scattered in the valleys, might harbor Indians or a bear or a panther. Nothing, however, appeared to be there. Then Dale studied the clouds driving across the sky and he felt the cool dampness of a fine misty rain on his face. It would rain off and on during the night. Whereupon he entered the cabin.

The next moment he heard quick hoof beats of trotting horses. Peering out he saw dim moving forms in the darkness, quite close at hand. They had approached against the wind so that sound had been deadened. Five horses with riders Dale made out—saw them loom close. Then he heard rough voices. Quickly he turned to feel in the

dark for a ladder he knew led to a loft; and finding it he quickly mounted, taking care not to make a noise with his rifle, and lay down upon the floor of brush and poles. Scarcely had he done so when heavy steps, with the accompaniment of clinking spurs, passed through the door below into the cabin.

"Wal, Beasley, are you here?" queried a loud voice.

There was no reply. The man below growled under his breath, and again the spurs jingled.

"Fellers, Beasley ain't here yet," he called. "Put the hosses under the shed. We'll wait."

"Wait!" came a harsh reply. "Mebbe all night—an' we got nuthin' to eat."

"Shut up, Moze. Reckon you're no good fer anythin' but eatin'. Put them hosses away an' some of you rustle firewood in here."

Low-muttered curses mingled with dull thuds of hoofs and strain of leather and heave of tired horses. Another shuffling, clinking footstep entered the cabin.

"Snake, it'd been sense to fetch a pack along," drawled this newcomer.

"Reckon so, Jim. But we didn't, an' what's the use hollerin'. Beasley won't keep us waitin' long."

Dale, lying still and prone, felt a slow start in all his blood—a thrilling wave. That deep-voiced man below was Snake Anson, the worst and most dangerous character of the region; and the others undoubtedly composed his gang, long notorious in that sparsely settled country. And the Beasley mentioned was one of the biggest two ranchers and sheep raisers of the White Mountain ranges.

What was the meaning of a rendezvous between Snake Anson and Beasley? Milt Dale answered that question to Beasley's discredit; and many strange matters pertaining to sheep and herders, always a mystery to the little village of Pine, now became as clear as daylight.

Other men entered the cabin. "It ain't agoin' to rain much," said one.

Then came a crash of wood thrown to the ground.

"Jim, hyar's a chunk of pine log, dry as punk," said another.

Rustlings and slow footsteps, and then heavy thuds attested to the probability that Jim was knocking the end of a log



Dale Was Glad, for He Had Expected to Hear the Clip-Clop of White Men's Horses

upon the ground to split off a corner whereby a handful of dry splinters could be procured.

"Snake, lemme your pipe an' I'll hev a fire."

"Wal, I want my terbacco an' I ain't carin' about no fire," replied Snake.

"Reckon you're the meanest cuss in these woods," drawled Jim.

Sharp click of steel or flint, many times, and then a sound of hard blowing and sputtering told of Jim's efforts to start a fire. Presently the pitchy blackness of the cabin changed; there came a little crackling of wood and the rustle of flame, and then a steadily growing roar.

As it chanced, Dale lay face down upon the floor of the loft, and right near his eyes there were cracks between the boughs. When the fire blazed up he was fairly well able to see the men below. The only one he had ever seen was Jim Wilson, who had been well known at Pine before Snake Anson was ever heard of. Jim was the best of a bad lot, and he had friends among honest people. It was rumored that he and Snake did not pull well together.

"Fire feels good," said the burly Moze, broad and black-visaged. "Fall's sure a-comin'. . . . Now if we only had some grub!"

"Moze, there's a hunk of deer meat in my saddle bag, an' if you git it you can have half," spoke up another voice.

Moze shuffled out with alacrity.

In the firelight Snake Anson's face looked lean and serpentlike; his eyes glittered, and his long neck and all of his long length carried out the analogy of his name.

"Snake, what's this here deal with Beasley?" inquired Jim.

"Reckon you'll learn when I do," replied the leader. He appeared tired and thoughtful.

"Ain't we done away with enough of them poor greaser herders—fer nothin'?" queried the youngest of the gang, a boy in years, whose hard, bitter lips and hungry eyes somehow set him apart from his comrades.

"You're dead right, Burt—an' thet's my stand," replied the man who had sent Moze out.

"Snake, snow'll be flyin' round these woods before long," said Jim Wilson. "Are we goin' to winter down in the Tonto Basin or over on the Gila?"

"Reckon we'll do some tall ridin' before we strike south," replied Snake gruffly.

At this juncture Moze returned. "Boss, I heerd a hoss comin' up the trail," he said.

Snake rose and stood at the door, listening. Outside the wind moaned fitfully and scattering raindrops spattered upon the cabin. "Ahuh!" exclaimed Snake in relief.

Silence ensued then for a moment, at the end of which interval Dale heard a rapid clip-clop on the rocky trail outside. The men below shuffled uneasily, but none of them spoke. The fire crackled cheerily. Snake Anson stepped back from before the door with an action that expressed both doubt and caution.

The trotting horse had halted outside.

"Ho there inside!" called a voice from the darkness.

"Ho yourself!" replied Anson.

"That you, Snake?" quickly followed the query.

"Reckon so," returned Anson, who now showed himself.

The newcomer entered. He was a large man, wearing a slicker that shone wet in the firelight. His sombrero, pulled well

down, shadowed his face, so that the upper half of his features might as well have been masked. He had a black drooping mustache and a chin like a rock. A potential force, matured and powerful, seemed to be wrapped in his movements.

"Hullo, Snake. Hullo, Wilson," he said. "I've backed out on the other deal. Sent for you on another little matter—particular private."

Here he indicated with a significant gesture that Snake's men were to leave.

"Ahuh!" ejaculated Anson dubiously. Then he turned abruptly: "Moze, you an' Shady an' Burt go wait outside. Reckon this ain't the deal I expected. An' you can saddle the hosses."

The three members of the gang filed out, all glancing keenly at the stranger, who had moved back into the shadow.

"All right now, Beasley," said Anson, low-voiced. "What's your game? Jim here is in on my deals."

Beasley came forward to the fire, stretching his hands to the blaze. "Nothin' to do with sheep," he replied.

"Wal, I reckoned not," assented the other. "An' say, whatever your game is, I ain't likin' the way you kept me waitin' an' ridin' round. We waited near all day at Big Spring. Then thet greaser rode up an' sent us here. We're a long way from camp, with no grub an' no blankets."

"I won't keep you long," said Beasley. "But even if I did you'd not mind—when I tell you this deal concerns Al Auchincloss, the man who made an outlaw of you!"

Anson's sudden action seemed a leap of his whole frame. Wilson, likewise, bent forward eagerly. Beasley glanced at the door—then began to whisper:

"Old Auchincloss is on his last legs. He's goin' to croak. He sent back to Missouri for a niece—a young girl—an' he means to leave his ranches an' sheep—all his stock—to her. Seems he has no one else. . . . Them ranches—an' all them sheep an' hosses! You know me an' Al were pardners in sheep raisin' for years. He swore I cheated him an' he threw me out. An' all these years I've been swearin' he did me dirt—owed me sheep an' money. I've got as many friends in Pine, an' all the way down the trail, as Auchincloss has. An', Snake, see here—"

He paused to draw a deep breath and his big hands trembled over the blaze. Anson leaned forward, like a serpent ready to strike, and Jim Wilson was as tense with his divination of the plot at hand.

"See here," panted Beasley. "The girl's due to arrive at Magdalena on the sixteenth. That's a week from to-morrow. She'll take the stage to Snowdrop, where some of Auchincloss's men will meet her with a team."

"Ahuh!" grunted Anson as Beasley halted again. "An' what of all thet?"

"She mustn't never get to Snowdrop!"

"You want me to hold up the stage—an' get the girl?"

"Exactly."

"Wal, an' what then?"

"Make off with her! . . . She disappears. That's your affair. . . . I'll press my claims on Auchincloss—hound him—an' be ready when he croaks to take over his property. Then the girl can come back, for all I care. You an' Wilson fix up the deal between you. If you have to let the gang in on it, don't give them any hunch as to who an' what. This'll make you a rich stake. An' when it's paid you strike for new territory."

"That might be wise," muttered Snake Anson. "Beasley, the weak point in your game is the uncertainty of life. Old Al is tough. He may fool you."

"Auchincloss is a dyin' man," declared Beasley with such positiveness that it could not be doubted.

"Wal, he sure wasn't plumb hearty when I last seen him. . . . Beasley, in case I play your game, how'm I to know that girl?"

"Her name's Helen Rayner," replied Beasley eagerly. "She's twenty years old. All of them Auchinclosses was handsome, an' they say she's the handsomest."

"Ahuh! . . . Beasley, this's sure a bigger deal—an' one I ain't fancyin'. . . . But I never doubted your word. . . . Come on an' talk out. What's in it for me?"

"Don't let anyone in on this. You two can hold up the stage. Why, it was never held up. . . . But you want to mask. How about ten thousand sheep—or what they bring at Phoenix in gold?"

Jim Wilson whistled low.

"An' leave for new territory?" repeated Snake Anson under his breath.

"You've said it."

"Wal, I ain't fancyin' the girl end of this deal, but you can count on me. . . . September sixteenth, at Magdalena—an' her name's Helen—an' she's handsome."

"Yes. My herders will begin drivin' south in about two weeks. Later, if the weather holds good, send me word by one of them an' I'll meet you."

Beasley spread his hands once more over the blaze, pulled on his gloves and pulled down his sombrero, and with abrupt word of parting strode out into the night.

"Jim, what do you make of him?" queried Snake Anson.

"Pard, he's got us beat two ways for Sunday," replied Wilson.

"Ahuh! . . . Wal, let's get back to camp." And he led the way out.

Low voices drifted into the cabin, then came snorts of horses and striking hoofs, and after that a steady trot, gradually ceasing. Once more the moan of wind and the soft patter of rain filled the forest stillness.

II

MILT DALE quietly sat up to gaze with thoughtful eyes into the gloom. He was thirty years old. When a boy of fourteen he had run off from his school and home in Iowa. Joining a wagon train of pioneers he had been one of the first to see log cabins built on the slopes of the White Mountains. But he had not taken kindly to farming or sheep raising or monotonous home toil; and for twelve years he had lived in the forest, with only infrequent visits to Pine and Show Down and Snowdrop. This wandering forest life of his did not indicate that he did not care for the villagers—for he did care, and he was welcome everywhere—but that he loved wild life and solitude and beauty with the primitive, instinctive force of a savage.

And this night he had stumbled upon a dark plot against the only one of all the honest white people in that region whom he could not call a friend.

"That man Beasley!" he soliloquized. "Beasley in cahoots with Snake Anson! . . . Well, he was right. Al Auchincloss is on his last legs. Poor old man! When I tell him he'll never believe me, that's sure!"

Discovery of the plot meant to Dale that he must hurry down to Pine.

"A girl—Helen Rayner—twenty years old," he mused. "Beasley wants her made off with. . . . That means worse than killed!"

Dale accepted facts of life with the equanimity and fatality acquired by one long versed in the cruel annals of forest lore. Bad men worked their evil just as

savage wolves relayed a deer. He had shot wolves for that trick. With men, good or bad, he had not clashed. Old women and children appealed to him, but he had never had any interest in girls.

The image of this Helen Rayner came strangely to Dale; and he suddenly realized that he meant somehow to circumvent Beasley; not to befriend old Al Auchincloss, but for the sake of the girl. Probably she was already on her way west, alone, eager, hopeful of a future home. How little people guessed what awaited them at a journey's end! Many trails ended abruptly in the forest—and only trained woodsmen could read the tragedy.

"Strange how I cut across country today from Spruce Swamp," reflected Dale. Circumstances, movements, usually were not strange to him. His methods and habits were seldom changed by chance. The matter, then, of his turning off a course, out of his way, for no apparent reason, and of his having overheard a plot singularly involving a young girl, was indeed an adventure to provoke thought. It provoked more, for Dale grew conscious of an unfamiliar, smoldering heat along his veins. He, who had little to do with the strife of men, and nothing to do with anger, felt his blood grow hot at the cowardly trap laid for an innocent girl.

"Old Al won't listen to me," pondered Dale. "An' even if he did he wouldn't believe me. Maybe nobody will. . . . All the same Snake Anson won't get that girl."

With these last words Dale satisfied himself of his own position and his pondering ceased. Taking his rifle he descended from the loft and peered out of the door. The night had grown darker, windier, cooler; broken clouds were scudding across the sky; only a few stars showed; fine rain was blowing from the northwest; and the forest seemed full of a low dull roar.

"Reckon I'd better hang up here," he said, and turned to the fire. The coals were red now. From the depths of his hunting

coat he procured a little bag of salt and some strips of dried meat. These strips he laid for a moment on the hot embers until they began to sizzle and curl; then with a sharpened stick he removed them and ate like a hungry hunter grateful for a little.

He sat on a block of wood with his palms spread to the dying warmth of the fire and his eyes fixed upon the changing, glowing, golden embers. Outside the wind continued to rise and the moan of the forest increased to a roar. Dale felt the comfortable warmth stealing over him, drowsily lulling; and he heard the storm wind in the trees, now like a waterfall, and anon like a retreating army, and again low and sad; and he saw pictures in the glowing embers, strange as dreams.

Presently he rose and, climbing to the loft, stretched himself out and soon fell asleep.

When the gray dawn broke he was on his way, cross country, to the village of Pine. During the night the wind had shifted and the rain had ceased. A suspicion of frost shone on the grass in open places. All was gray—the parks, the glades; and deeper, darker gray marked the aisles of the forest. Shadows lurked under the trees and the silence seemed consistent with spectral forms. Then the east kindled, the gray lightened, the dreaming woodland awoke to the far-reaching rays of a bursting red sun.

This was always the happiest moment of Dale's lonely days, as sunset was his saddest. He responded, and there was something in his blood that answered the whistle of a stag from a near-by ridge. His strides were long, noiseless, and they left dark traces where his feet brushed the dew-laden grass.

Dale pursued a zigzag course over the ridges, to escape the hardest climbing, but the "senacas," those parklike meadows so named by Mexican sheep herders, were as round and level as if they had been made by man in beautiful contrast to the dark-green, rough and rugged ridges. Both open

senaca and dense-wooded ridge showed to his quick eye an abundance of game. The cracking of twigs and disappearing flash of gray among the spruces, a round black lumbering object, a twittering in the brush, and stealthy steps—all were easy signs for Dale to read. Once, as he noiselessly emerged into a little glade, he spied a red fox stalking some quarry, which, as he advanced, proved to be a flock of partridges. They whirled up, brushing the branches, and the fox trotted away. In every senaca Dale encountered wild turkeys feeding on the seeds of the high grass.

It had always been his custom, on his visits to Pine, to kill and pack fresh meat down to several old friends who were glad to give him lodging. And hurried though he was now he did not intend to make an exception of this trip.

At length he got down into the pine belt where the great gnarled yellow trees soared aloft, stately and aloof from one another, and the ground was a brown, odorous, springy mat of pine-needles, level as a floor. Squirrels watched him from all round, scurrying away at his near approach—tiny brown, light-striped squirrels, and larger ones, russet colored, and the splendid dark grays, with their white bushy tails and plumed ears.

This belt of pine ended abruptly upon wide, gray, rolling, open land, almost like a prairie, with foothills lifting near and far and the red-gold blaze of aspen thickets catching the morning sun. Here Dale flushed a flock of wild turkeys, upward of forty in number; their subdued color of gray flecked with white and their graceful sleek build showed them to be hens. There was not a gobbler in the flock. They began to run pell-mell out into the grass until only their heads appeared bobbing along, and finally disappeared.

Dale caught a glimpse of skulking coyotes that evidently had been stalking the turkeys, and as they saw him and darted into the timber he took a quick shot at the hindmost. His bullet struck low, as he had meant it to, but too low, and the coyote got only a dusting of earth and pine needles thrown up in his face. This frightened him, so that he leaped aside blindly and butted into a tree, rolled over, gained his feet and then the cover of the forest. Dale was amused at this.

He crossed the wide grassy plain and struck another gradual descent where aspens and pines crowded a shallow ravine and warm, sunlit glades bordered along a sparkling brook. Here he heard a turkey gobble, and that was a signal for him to change his course and make a crouching, silent detour round a clump of aspens.

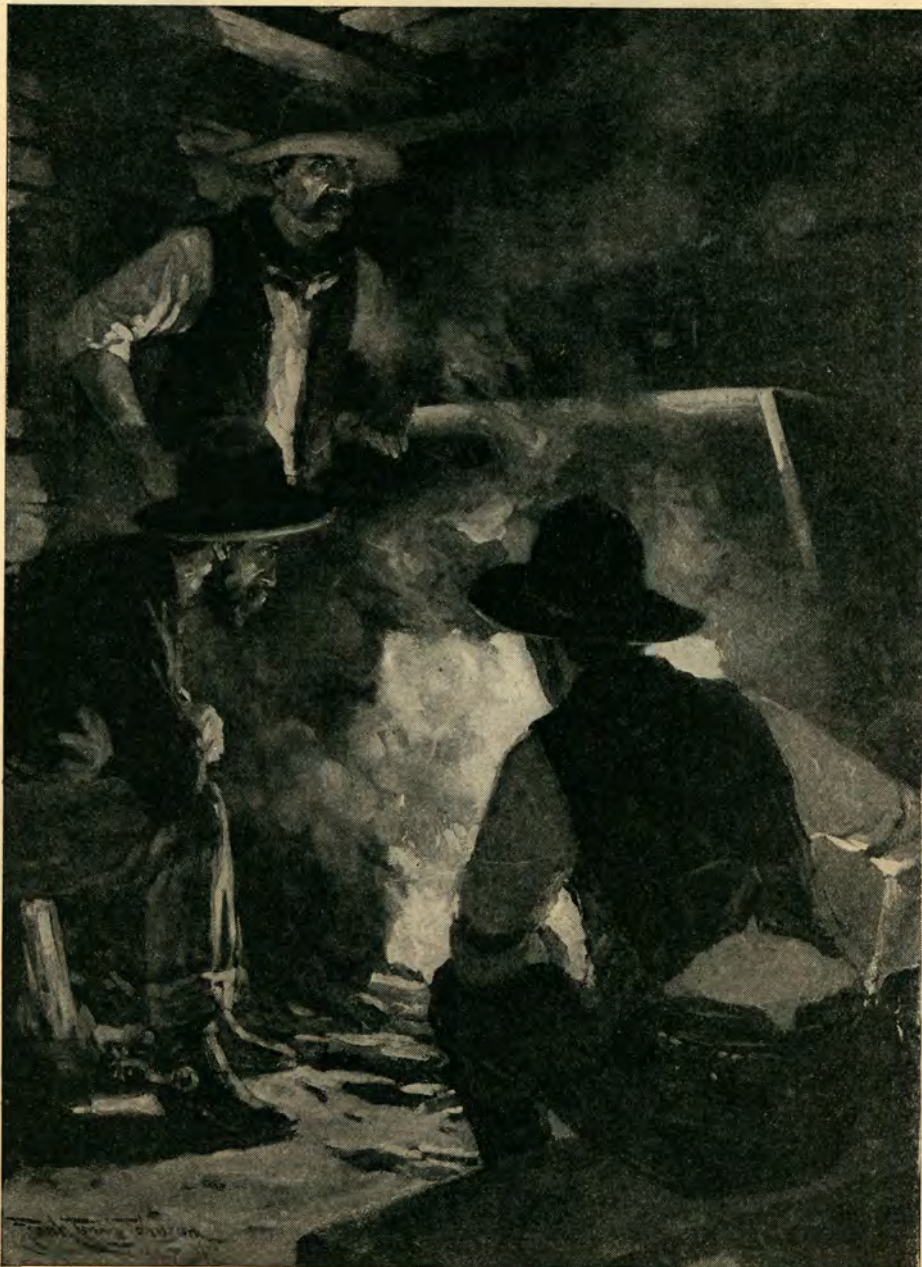
In a sunny patch of grass a dozen or more big gobblers stood, all suspiciously facing in his direction, heads erect with that wild aspect peculiar to their species. Old wild turkey gobblers were the most difficult game to stalk. Dale shot two of them. The others began to run like ostriches, thudding over the ground, spreading their wings, and with that running start launched their heavy bodies into whirling flight. They flew low, at about the height of a man from the grass, and vanished in the woods.

Dale threw the two turkeys over his shoulder and went on his way. Soon he came to a break in the forest level, from which he gazed down a league-long slope of pine and cedar out upon the bare glistening desert stretching away endlessly, rolling out to the dim dark horizon line.

The little hamlet of Pine lay on the last level of sparsely timbered forest. A road, running parallel with a dark-watered, swiftly flowing stream, divided the cluster of log cabins from which columns of blue smoke drifted lazily aloft. Fields of corn and fields of oats, yellow in the sunlight, surrounded the village, and green pastures dotted with horses and cattle reached away to the denser woodland. This site appeared to be a natural clearing, for there was no evidence of cut timber. The scene was rather too wild to be pastoral, but it was serene, tranquil, giving the impression of a remote community, prosperous and happy, drifting along the peaceful tenor of sequestered lives.

Dale halted before a neat little log cabin and little patch of garden bordered with sunflowers. His call was answered by an old woman, gray and bent, but remarkably spry, who appeared at the door. "Why, land's sakes, if it ain't Milt Dale!" she exclaimed in welcome.

(Continued on Page 34)



In the Firelight Snake Anson's Face Looked Lean and Serpentine—Carrying Out the Analogy of His Name

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The Man of the Forest

(Continued from Page 7)

"Reckon it's me, Mrs. Cass," he replied.
"An' I've brought you a turkey."

"Milt, you're that good boy who never
forgot old Widow Cass. . . . What a
gobbler! First one I've seen this fall. My
man Tom used to fetch home gobblers like
thet. Come right in. You air hungry, I
know. Now, son, when last did you eat a
fresh egg or a flapjack?"

"You should remember," he answered,
laughing, as he followed her into a small
clean kitchen.

"Laws a'me! An' thet's months ago,"
she replied, shaking her gray head. "Milt,
you should give up thet wild life—an' marry
an' have a home."

"You always tell me that."

"Yes, an' I'll see you do it yet.
Now you set there, an' pretty soon I'll give
you thet to eat which'll make your mouth
water."

"What's the news, Auntie?" he asked.
"Nary news in this dead place. Why, no-
body's been to Snowdrop in two weeks! . . .
Sary Jones died, poor old soul—she's better
off—an' one of my cows run away. Milt,
she's wild when she gits loose in the woods.
An' you'll have to track her, 'cause nobody
else can. An' John Dakker's heifer was
killed by a lion, an' Lem Harden's fast
hoss—you know his favorite—was stole by
hoss thieves. Lem is jest crazy. An' that re-
minds me, Milt, where's your big Ranger—
thet you'd never sell or lend?"

"My horses are up in the woods, Auntie;
safe, I reckon, from hoss thieves."

"Well, thet's a blessin'. We've had some
stock stole this summer, Milt, an' no mis-
take."

Thus, while preparing a meal for Dale,
the old woman went on recounting all that
had happened in the little village since his
last visit. Dale enjoyed her gossip and
quaint philosophy, and it was exceedingly
good to sit at her table. In his opinion no-
where else could there have been such but-
ter and cream, such ham and eggs. Besides,
she always had apple pie, it seemed, at any
time he happened in; and apple pie was
one of Dale's few regrets while up in the
lonely forest.

"How's old Al Auchincloss?" presently
inquired Dale.

"Poorly—poorly," sighed Mrs. Cass.
"But he tramps an' rides round same as
ever. Al's not long for this world. . . .
An', Milt, thet reminds me—there's the
biggest news you ever heard."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Dale, to
encourage the excited old woman.

"Al has sent back to St. Joe for his niece,
Helen Rayner. She's to inherit all his prop-
erty. We've heard much of her—a purty lass,
they say. . . . Now, Milt Dale, here's
your chance. Stay out of the woods an' go
to work. . . . You can marry that girl!"

"No chance for me, Auntie," replied
Dale, smiling.

The old woman snorted. "Much you
know! Any girl would have you, Milt Dale,
if you'd only throw a 'kerchief."

"Me! An' why, Auntie?" he queried,
half amused, half thoughtful. When he got
back to civilization he always had to adjust
his thoughts to the ideas of people.

"Why? I declare, Milt, you live so in
the woods you're like a boy of ten—an'
then sometimes as old as the hills. . . .
There's no young man to compare with you
hereabouts. An' this girl, she'll have all the
spunk of the Auchinclosses."

"Then maybe she'd not be such a catch
after all," replied Dale.

"Wal, you've no cause to love them,
thet's sure. But, Milt, the Auchincloss
women are always good wives."

"Dear Auntie, you're dreamin'," said
Dale soberly. "I want no wife. I'm
happy in the woods."

"Air you goin' to live like an Injun all
your days, Milt Dale?" she queried
sharply.

"I hope an' pray so."

"You ought to be ashamed! But some
lass will change you, boy, an' mebbe it'll be
this Helen Rayner. I hope an' pray so, to
thet."

"Auntie, supposin' she did change me.
She'd never change old Al. He hates me,
you know."

"Wal, I ain't so sure, Milt. I met Al the
other day. He inquired for you, an' said
you was wild. But he reckoned men like
you was good for pioneer settlements.
Goodness knows the good turns you've
done this village! Milt, old Al doesn't

approve of your wild life, but he never had
no hard feelin's till that tame lion of yours
killed so many of his sheep."

"Auntie, I don't believe Tom ever killed
Al's sheep," declared Dale positively.

"Wal, Al thinks so, an' many other peo-
ple," replied Mrs. Cass, shaking her gray
head doubtfully. "You never swore he
didn't. An' there was them two sheep
herders who did swear they seen him."

"They only saw a cougar. An' they were
so scared they ran."

"Who wouldn't? Thet big beast is
enough to scare anyone. For land's sakes,
don't ever fetch him down here again! I'll
never forgit the time you did. All the folks
an' children an' hosses in Pine broke an'
run thet day."

"Yes, but Tom wasn't to blame. Auntie,
he's the tamest of my pets. Didn't he try
to put his head on your lap an' lick your
hand?"

"Wal, Milt, I ain't gainsayin' your
cougar pet didn't act better'n a lot of peo-
ple I know. Fer he did. But the looks of
him an' what's been said was enough fer me."

"An' what's all that, Auntie?"

"They say he's wild when out of your
sight. An' thet he'd trail an' kill anythin'
you put him after."

"I trained him to be just that way."

"Wal, leave Tom to home up in the
woods when you visit us."

Dale finished his hearty meal and lis-
tened a while longer to the old woman's talk,
then taking his rifle and the other turkey he
bade her good-by. She followed him out.

"Now, Milt, you'll come soon again,
won't you—just to see Al's niece, who'll be
here in a week?"

"I reckon I'll drop in some day. . . .
Auntie, have you seen my friends, the
Mormon boys?"

"No, I ain't seen them, an' don't want
to," she retorted. "Milt Dale, if anyone
ever coralls you it'll be Mormons."

"Don't worry, Auntie. I like those boys.
They often see me up in the woods an' ask
me to help them track a hoss or help kill
some fresh meat."

"They're workin' for Beasley now."

"Is that so?" rejoined Dale with a sud-
den start. "An' what doin'?"

"Beasley is gettin' so rich he's buildin' a
fence, an' didn't have enough help. So I
hear."

"Beasley gettin' rich!" repeated Dale
thoughtfully. "More sheep an' horses an'
cattle than ever, I reckon?"

"Laws a'me! Why, Milt, Beasley ain't
any idee what he owns. Yes, he's the big-
gest man in these parts, since poor old Al's
took to failin'. I reckon Al's health ain't
none improved by Beasley's success.
They've had some bitter quarrels lately, so
I hear. Al ain't what he was."

Dale bade good-by again to his old friend
and strode away, thoughtful and serious.
Beasley would not only be difficult to cir-
cumvent but he would be dangerous to op-
pose. There did not appear much doubt of
his driving his way roughshod to the domi-
nance of affairs there in Pine.

Dale, passing down the road, began to
meet acquaintances, who had hearty wel-
come for his presence and interest in his
doings, so that his pondering was inter-
rupted for the time being. He carried the
turkey to another old friend, and when he
left her house he went on to the village store.
This was a large log cabin, roughly covered
with clapboard, with a wide plank plat-
form in front and a hitching rail in the road.
Several horses were standing there and a
group of lazy shirt-sleeved loungers.

"I'll be dog-goned if it ain't Milt Dale!"
exclaimed one.

"Howdy, Milt, old buckskin! Right down
glad to see you," greeted another.

"Hello, Dale! You air shore good for
sore eyes," drawled still another.

After a long period of absence Dale al-
ways experienced a singular warmth of
feeling when he met these acquaintances.
It faded quickly when he got back to the
intimacy of his woodland, and that was be-
cause the people of Pine, with few excep-
tions, though they liked him and greatly
admired his outdoor wisdom, regarded him
as a sort of nonentity.

Presently Beasley strode down the
street; when about to enter the store he
espied Dale.

"Hullo there, Milt," he called cordially
as he came forward with extended hand.

(Continued on Page 36)



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(Continued from Page 34)

His greeting was sincere, but the lightning glance he shot at Dale was not born of his pleasure. Seen in daylight Beasley was a big, bold, bluff man, with strong, dark features. His aggressive presence suggested that he was a good friend and a bad enemy. Dale shook hands with him. "How are you, Beasley?"

"Ain't complainin', Milt, though I got more work than I can rustle. Reckon you wouldn't take a job bossin' my sheep herders?"

"Reckon I wouldn't," replied Dale.

"Thanks all the same."

"Where're you headin' from?"

"Cross country from my camp," replied Dale, rather evasively.

"Your camp. Nobody ever found that yet," declared Beasley gruffly.

"It's up there," said Dale.

"Reckon you've got that cougar chained in your cabin door?" queried Beasley, and there was a barely distinguishable shudder of his muscular frame.

"Tom ain't chained. An' I haven't no cabin, Beasley."

"You mean to tell me that big brute stays in your camp without bein' hog-tied or corralled?" demanded Beasley.

"Sure he does."

"Beats me! But then I'm queer on cougars. I've had many a cougar trail me at night. Ain't sayin' I was scared. But I don't care for that brand of varmint. . . . Milt, you goin' to stay down a while?"

"Yes, I'll hang round some."

"Come over to the ranch. Glad to see you any time. Some old huntin' pard of yours are workin' for me."

"Thanks, Beasley. I reckon I'll come." Beasley turned away and took a step, and then, as if with an afterthought, he wheeled again.

"Suppose you've heard about old Al Auchincloss bein' near petered out?" queried Beasley. A strong, ponderous cast of thought seemed to emanate from his features.

"Widow Cass was tellin' me all the news. Too bad about old Al!" replied Dale.

"Sure is! He's done for. An' I'm sorry—though Al's never been square —"

"Beasley," interrupted Dale quickly, "you can't say that to me. Al Auchincloss always was the whitest an' squarest man in this sheep country."

Beasley gave Dale a fleeting, dark glance. "Dale, what you think ain't goin' to influence feelin' on this range," returned Beasley deliberately. "You live in the woods an' —"

"Reckon livin' in the woods I might think—an' know a whole lot," interposed Dale, just as deliberately. The group of men exchanged surprised glances. And Beasley did not conceal a puzzled surprise. "About what now?" he asked bluntly. "Why, about what's goin' on in Pine," replied Dale.

Some of the men laughed. "Shore lots goin' on—an' no mistake," put in Lem Harden.

Probably the keen Beasley had never before considered Milt Dale as a responsible person; certainly never one in any way to cross his trail. But on the instant perhaps some instinct was born, or he divined an antagonism in Dale that was both surprising and perplexing.

"Dale, I've differences with Al Auchincloss—have had them for years," said Beasley. "Much of what he owns is mine. An' it's goin' to come to me. Now I reckon people will be takin' sides—some fer me an' some fer Al. Most are fer me. . . . Where do you stand? Al Auchincloss never had no use fer you, an' besides he's a dyin' man. Are you goin' on his side?"

"Yes, I reckon I am."

"Wal, I'm glad you've declared yourself," rejoined Beasley shortly, and he strode away with the gait of a man who would brush any obstacle from his path.

"Milt, that's bad—makin' Beasley sore at you," said Lem Harden. "He's on the way to boss this outfit."

"That was white of Milt to stick up fer poor old Al," declared Lem's brother.

Dale broke away from them and wended a thoughtful way down the road. The burden of what he knew about Beasley weighed less heavily upon him, and the close-lipped course he had decided upon appeared wiser. He needed to think before undertaking to call upon old Al Auchincloss; and to that end he sought an hour's seclusion under the pines.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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A Second-Wind Success

(Concluded from Page 13)

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The annihilation of orchards ceased; order came out of chaos; smiles succeeded scowls; baskets replaced boxes, and the infant industry of peach production came back.

In 1915 nearly 200 carloads of peaches were shipped East, and nearly as many more in mixed fruits were shipped to dealers in the Intermountain Region. The results were satisfactory to the growers, though not so satisfactory as they would have been had all the growers of the two great valleys been in the organization. Some of the Box Elder men and all the Salt Lake Valley men were in no organization, and many sold to visiting buyers as low as fifty-five cents a bushel when the association was selling at eighty-five.

Mr. Watson says: "With almost everything the farmer sells—grain, hay, roots or fruits—he invariably asks 'What're you paying to-day?' He lets the other man fix his price. Cutting away below our prices this year will surely make it mighty difficult if not impossible to get our figure another year, unless we can get them all into the association."

Nineteen sixteen saw few peaches in Utah. A freeze-up, later than ever before recorded, took all fruit except in a very few small orchards. This year, with a surety of an enormous crop, the association has fixed its price at eighty-five cents a bushel, as before, and is getting it, although its membership has not largely increased. Of a total crop of probably more than a quarter of a million bushels in the two valleys, the association is handling less than one-half. The remainder is sold by the individual growers, every man competing with his neighbor, shipping on chance to unknown commission men and dealers, to unknown markets, and without one glimmer of knowledge of the conditions that obtain in those markets.

Ignoring proper grading and proper packaging, without knowledge of the proper routing of shipments, these men are gambling against stacked cards, and cursing the results. Perhaps they will soon realize that letting the other fellow spend their profits—or feeding good peaches to hogs—is not good horse trading. Then they'll come into the coöperative fold.

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