

Man of the Forest
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The COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

The OLDEST AGRICULTURAL JOURNAL in the WORLD



This Issue—HELP WANTED!—By John E. Pickett

THE MAN OF THE FOREST

XX

LISTEN!" Anson whispered tensely. His poise was motionless, his eyes roved everywhere. He held up a shaking, bludgy finger to command silence.

A third and stranger sound accompanied the low, weird moan of the wind and the hollow mockery of the brook—and it seemed a barely perceptible, exquisitely delicate wail or whine. It filled in the lulls between the other sounds.

"If that's some varmint, he's close," whispered Anson.

"But shore it's far off," said Wilson.

Shady Jones and Moze divided their opinions in the same way.

All breathed freer when the wail ceased, relaxing to their former lounging positions round the fire. An impenetrable wall of blackness circled the pale space lighted by the camp fire; and this circle contained the dark group of men in the center, the dying camp fire, and a few spectral trunks of pines and the tethered horses out on the outer edge. The horses scarcely moved from their tracks, and their erect, alert heads attested to their sensitiveness to the peculiarities of the night.

Then, in an unusually quiet lull, the strange sound gradually rose to a wailing whine.

"It's that crazy wench cryin'," declared the outlaw leader.

Apparently his allies accepted that statement with as much relief as they had expressed at the termination of the sound.

"Shore that must be it," agreed Jim Wilson gravely.

"We'll git a lot of sleep with that gurl whinin' all night," growled Shady Jones.

"She gives me the creeps," said Moze.

Wilson got up to resume his pondering walk, head bent, hands behind his back—a grim, realistic figure of perturbation.

"Jim, set down. You make me nervous," said Anson, irritably.

Wilson actually laughed, but low, as if to keep his strange mirth well confined. "Snake, I'll bet you my hoss an' my gun agin a biscuit that in about six seconds more or less I'll be stampedin' like them hosses."

Anson's lean jaw dropped. The other two outlaws stared with round eyes. Wilson was not drunk, they evidently knew; but what he really was appeared a mystery.

"Jim Wilson, are you showin' yellow?" queried Anson hoarsely.

"Mebbe. But listen heah. . . . Snake, you've seen an' heard people croak?"

"You mean cash in—die?"

"Shore."

"Wal, yes—a couple or so," replied Anson grimly.

"But you never seen no one die of shock—of an orful scare?"

"No, I reckon I never did."

"I have. An' that's what's ailin' Jim Wilson." And he resumed his dogged steps.

Anson and his two comrades exchanged bewildered glances with one another. "A-huh! Say, what's that got to do with us hyar?" asked Anson presently.

"That gurl is dyin'!" retorted Wilson, in a voice crackling like a whip.

The three outlaws stiffened in their seats, incredulous, yet irresistibly swayed by emotions that stirred to this dark, lonely, ill-omened hour.

By Zane Grey, Author of Wildfire

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON

Wilson trudged to the edge of the lighted circle, muttering to himself, and came back again; then he trudged farther, this time almost out of sight, but only to return; the third time he vanished in the impenetrable wall of night. The three men scarcely moved a muscle as they watched the place where he had disappeared. In a few moments he came stumbling back.

"Shore she's almost gone," he said dismally. "It took my nerve, but I felt of her face. . . . That orful wail is her breath chokin' in her throat. . . . Like a death rattle, only long instead of short."

"Wal, if she's gotta croak it's good she gits it over quick," replied Anson. "I ain't hed sleep for three nights. . . . An' what I need is whisky."

"Snake, that's truth you're spoutin'," remarked Shady Jones morosely.

The direction of sound in the glen was difficult to be assured of, but any man not stirred to a high pitch of excitement could have told that the difference in volume of this strange wail must have been caused by different distances and positions from whence it came. Also when it was loudest it was most like a whine. But these outlaws heard with their consciences.

At last it ceased abruptly.

Wilson again left the group to be swallowed up by the night. His absence was longer than usual, but he returned hurriedly.

"She's daid!" he exclaimed solemnly. "That innocent kid—who never harmed no one—an' who'd make any man better fer seein' her—she's daid! . . . Anson, you've shore a heap to answer fer when your time comes."

"What's eatin' you?" demanded the leader angrily. "Her blood ain't on my hands."

"It shore is!" shouted Wilson, shaking his hand at Anson. "An' you'll hev to take your medicine. I felt that comin' all along. An' I feel some more."

"Aw! She's jest gone to sleep," declared Anson, shaking his long frame as he rose. "Gimme a light."

"Boss, you're plumb off to go near a dead gurl that's jest died crazy," protested Shady Jones.

"Off! Haw! Haw! Who ain't off in this outfit, I'd like to know?" Anson possessed himself of a stick, blazing at one end, and with this he stalked off toward the lean-to where the girl was supposed to be dead. His gaunt figure, lighted by the torch, certainly fitted the weird, black surroundings. And it was seen that once near the girl's shelter he proceeded more slowly until he halted. He bent to peer inside.

"She's gone!" he yelled in harsh, shaken accents.

Then the torch burned out, leaving only a red glow. He whirled it about, but the blaze did not rekindle. His comrades, peering intently, lost sight of his tall form and the end of the red-ended stick. Darkness like pitch swallowed him. For a moment no sound intervened. Again the moan of wind, the strange little, mocking, hollow roar dominated the place. Then there came a rush of something, perhaps of air, like the soft swishing of spruce branches swinging aside. Dull, thudding footsteps followed it. Anson came running back. His aspect was wild, his face pale, his eyes gleamed with a fierce light. He had drawn his gun.

"Did—ye—see er hear—anythin'?" he panted, peering back, then all round, and at last at his men.

"No. An' I shore was lookin' an' listenin'," replied Wilson.

"Boss, there wasn't nothin'," declared Moze.

"I ain't so sartin," said Shady Jones with doubtful, staring eyes. "I sure do believe I heard a rustlin'."

"She wasn't there!" ejaculated Anson in wondering awe. "She's gone! . . . My torch went out. I couldn't see. An' jest then I felt somethin' was passin'. Fast! I jerked round. All was black, an' yet if I didn't see a big gray streak I'm crazier'n thet gurl. But I couldn't swear to anythin' but a rushin' of wind. I felt thet."

"Gone!" exclaimed Wilson in great alarm. "Fellars, if that's so then mebbe she wasn't daid an' she wandered off. . . . But she was daid! Her heart hed quit beatin'. I'll swear to thet."

"I move to break camp," said Shady Jones gruffly, and he stood up. Moze seconded that move by an expressive flash of his black visage.

"Jim, if she's dead—an' gone—what's come off?" huskily asked Anson. "It only seems thet way. We're all worked up. . . . Let's talk sense."

"Anson, shore there's a heap you an' me don't know," replied Wilson. "The world come to an end once. Wal, it can come to another end. . . . I tell you I ain't surprised —"

"Thar!" cried Anson, whirling, with his gun leaping out.

Something huge, shadowy, gray against the black, rushed behind the men and trees; and following it came a perceptible acceleration of the air.

"Shore, Snake, there wasn't nothin'," said Wilson presently.

"I heerd," whispered Shady Jones.

"It was only a breeze blowin' thet smoke," rejoined Moze.

"I'd bet my soul somethin' went back of me," declared Anson, glaring into the void. "Listen an' let's make shore," suggested Wilson.

The guilty, agitated faces of the outlaws showed plain enough in the flickering light for each to see a convicting dread in his fellow. Like statues they stood, watching and listening.

Few sounds stirred in the strange silence. Now and then the horses heaved heavily but stood still; a dismal, dreary note of the wind in the pines vied with a hollow laugh of the brook. And these low sounds only fastened attention upon the quality of the silence. A breathing, lonely spirit of solitude permeated the black dell. Like a pit of unplumbed depths the dark night yawned.

Suddenly the surcharged air split to a short piercing scream. Anson's big horse stood straight up, pawing the air, and came down with a crash. The other horses shook with terror.

"Wasn't—thet—a cougar?" whispered Anson thickly.

"Thet was a woman's scream," replied Wilson, and he appeared to be shaking like a leaf in the wind.

"Then—I figgered right—the kid's still alive—wandin' round—an' she let out thet orful scream," said Anson.

"Wanderin' round, yes—but she's daid!"

"It ain't possible!"

"Wal, if she ain't wanderin' round daid she's almost daid," replied Wilson. And he began to whisper to himself: "If I'd only knowed what thet deal meant I'd hev plugged Beasley instead of listenin'. . . . An' I ought to hev knocked thet kid on the head an' made sartin she'd croaked. If she goes screamin' round thet way —"

His voice failed as there rose a thin, splitting, high-pointed shriek, somewhat resembling the first scream, only less wild. It came apparently from the cliff.

From another point in the pitch-black glen rose the wailing, terrible cry of a woman in agony. Wild, haunting, mournful wail!

Anson's horse, loosing the halter, plunged back, almost falling over a slight depression in the rocky ground. The outlaw caught him and dragged him nearer the fire. The other horses stood shaking and straining. Moze ran between them and held them. Shady Jones threw green brush on the fire. With sputter and crackle a blaze started, showing Wilson standing tragically, his arms out, facing the black shadows.

The strange live shriek was not repeated. But the cry like that of a woman in her



death throes pierced the silence again. It left a quivering ring that softly died away. Then the stillness clamped down once more and the darkness seemed to thicken. The men waited, but when they had begun to relax the cry burst out appallingly close, right behind the trees.

It was human—the personification of pain and terror—the tremendous struggle of precious life against horrible death. So pure, so exquisite, so wonderful was the cry that the listeners writhed as if they saw an innocent, tender, beautiful girl torn frightfully before their eyes. It was full of suspense; it thrilled for death; its marvelous potency was the wild note—that beautiful and ghastly note of self-preservation.

In sheer desperation the outlaw leader fired his gun at the black wall whence the cry came. Then he had to fight his horse to keep him from plunging away. Following the shot was an interval of silence; the horses became tractable; the men gathered closer to the fire, with the halters still held firmly.

"If it was a cougar—thet'd scare him off," said Anson.

"Shore, but it ain't a cougar," replied Wilson. "Wait an' see!"

They all waited, listening with ears turned to different points, eyes roving everywhere, afraid of their very shadows. Once more the moan of wind, the mockery of brook, deep gurgle, laugh and babble dominated the silence of the glen.

"Boss, let's shake this spooky hole," whispered Moze.

The suggestion attracted Anson and he pondered it while slowly shaking his head. Then he replied: "We've only three hosses. An' mine'll take ridin', after them squalls. We've got packs too."

"No matter. Let's go. I'll walk an' lead the way," said Moze eagerly. "I got sharp eyes. You fellars can ride an' carry a pack. We'll git out of here an' come back in daylight fer the rest of the outfit."

"Anson, I'm keen fer thet myself," declared Shady Jones.

"Jim, what d'ye say to thet?" queried Anson. "Rustlin' out of this black hole?"

"Shore it's a grand idee," agreed Wilson.

"Thet was a cougar," avowed Anson, gathering courage as the silence remained unbroken. "But jest the same it was as tough on me as if it hed been a woman screamin'."

"Snake, shore you seen a woman heah lately?" deliberately asked Wilson.

"Reckon I did. Thet kid," replied Anson dubiously.

"Wal, you seen her go crazy, didn't you?"

"Yes."

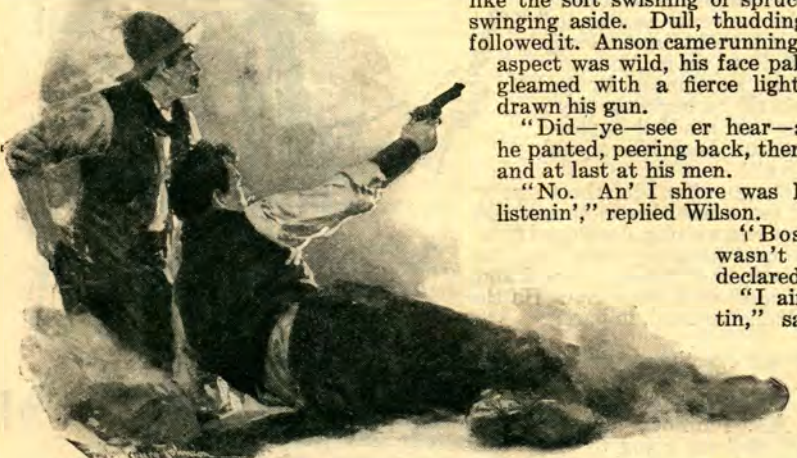
"An' she wasn't heah when you went huntin' fer her?"

"Correct."

"Wal, if thet's so what do you want to blab about cougars fer?"

Wilson's argument seemed incontestable. Shady and Moze nodded gloomily and shifted restlessly from foot to foot. Anson dropped his head. "No matter—if we only don't hear —" He began suddenly to grow mute.

Right upon them, from some place, just out of the circle of light, rose a scream, by



Anson, Prostrate as He Was, Drew His Gun and Shot Moze

reason of its proximity the most piercing and agonizing yet heard, simply petrifying the group until the peal passed. Anson's huge horse reared and with a snort of terror lunged in a tremendous leap, straight out. He struck Anson with thudding impact, knocking him over the rocks into the depression back of the camp fire and plunging after him. Wilson had made a flying leap just in time to avoid being struck, and he turned to see Anson go down. There came a crash, a groan, and then the strike and pound of hoofs as the horse struggled up. Apparently he had rolled over his master.

"Help, fellars!" yelled Wilson, quick to leap down over the little bank and in the dim light to grasp the halter. The three men dragged the horse out and securely tied him close to a tree. That done they peered down into the depression. Anson's form could just barely be distinguished in the gloom. He lay stretched out. Another groan escaped him.

"I'm scared he's hurt," said Wilson. "Hoss rolled right on top of him. An' thet hoss's heavy," declared Moze. They got down and knelt beside their leader. In the darkness his face looked dull and gray. His breathing was not right. "Snake, old man—you ain't—hurt?" asked Wilson with a tremor in his voice. Receiving no reply he said to his comrades: "Lay hold an' we'll heft him up where we can see."

The three men carefully lifted Anson up on the bank and laid him near the fire in the light. He was conscious. His face was ghastly. Blood showed on his lips.

Wilson knelt beside him. The other outlaws stood. And on the instant rose that terrible, distressing scream of acute agony. Shady Jones whispered something to Moze. Then they stood up, gazing down at their fallen leader.

"Tell me where you're hurt," asked Wilson.

"He smashed—my chest," said Anson in a broken, strangled whisper.

Wilson's deft hands opened the outlaw's shirt and felt of his chest.

"No. Shore your breast bone ain't smashed," replied Wilson hopefully. And he began to run his hand round one side of Anson's body and then the other. Abruptly he stopped, averted his gaze, then slowly ran the hand all along that side. Anson's ribs had been broken and crushed in by the weight of the horse. He was bleeding at the mouth, and his slow, painful expulsions of breath brought a bloody froth, which showed that the broken bones had penetrated the lungs—an injury sooner or later fatal!

"Pard, you busted a rib or two," said Wilson.

"Aw, Jim—it must be—wuss'n thet!" he whispered. "I'm—in orful—pain. An' I can't—git any—breath."

"Mebbe you'll be better," said Wilson with a cheerfulness his face belied.

Moze bent close over Anson, took a short scrutiny of that ghastly face, at the blood-stained lips, and the lean hands plucking at nothing. Then he jerked erect:

"Shady, he's goin' to cash. Let's clear out of this."

"I'm yours pertickler previous," replied Jones.

Both turned away. They untied the two horses and led them up to where the saddles lay. Swiftly the blankets went on, swiftly the saddles swung up, swiftly the cinches snapped. Anson lay gazing up at Wilson, comprehending this move. And Wilson stood strangely grim and silent, somehow detached coldly from that self of the past few hours.

"Shady, you grab some bread an' I'll pack a hunk of meat," said Moze. Both men came near the fire, into the light within ten feet of where the leader lay.

"Fellars you ain't—slopin'?" he whispered in husky amaze.

"Boss, we air thet same. We can't do you no good an' this hole ain't healthy," replied Moze.

Shady Jones swung himself astride his horse, all about him sharp, eager, strung.

"Moze, I'll tote the grub an' you lead out of hyar till we git past the wust timber," he said.

"Aw, Moze—you wouldn't leave—Jim hyar—alone," implored Anson.

"I've hed enough of this hole," Moze retorted.

"But, Moze—it ain't square," panted Anson. "Jim wouldn't—leave me. I'd stick—by you. . . . I'll make it—all up to you."

"Snake, you're goin' to cash," sardonically returned Moze.

A current leaped all through Anson's stretched frame. His ghastly face blazed. That was the great and the terrible moment that Wilson had known would come, by one means or another.

Anson, prostrate as he was, swiftly drew his gun and shot Moze. Without sound or movement of hand Moze fell. The plunge of Shady's horse caused Anson's second shot to miss. A quick third shot brought no apparent result but Shady's cursing resort to his own weapon. He tried to aim from his plunging horse. His bullets spat-tered dust and gravel over Anson. Then Wilson's long arm stretched and his heavy gun banged. Shady collapsed in the saddle, and the frightened horse, throwing him, plunged out of the circle of light. Thudding hoofs, crashings of brush, quickly ceased.

"Jim—did you—git him?" whispered Anson.

"Shore did, Snake," was the halting response. Jim Wilson must have sustained a sick shudder as he replied. He folded a blanket and put it under Anson's head.

"Jim—my feet—air orful cold."

"Wal, it's gittin' chilly," replied Wilson, and taking a second blanket he laid that over Anson's limbs. "Snake, I'm feared Shady hit you once."

"A-huh! But not so I'd care—much—if I hed—no wuss hurt."

"You lay still now. Reckon Shady's hoss stopped out heah a ways. An' I'll see."

"Jim—I ain't heerd—thet scream fer—a little."

"Shore it's gone. . . . Reckon now thet was a cougar."

"I knowed it!"

Wilson stalked away into the darkness. That inky wall did not seem so impenetrable and black after he had gotten out of the circle of light. He proceeded carefully and did not make any missteps. He groped from tree to tree toward the cliff and presently brought up against a huge, flat rock, as high as his head. Here the darkness was blackest, yet he was able to see a light form on the rock.

"Miss, are you there—all right?" he called softly.

"Yes, but I'm scared to death," she whispered in reply.

"Shore it wound up sudden. Come now. I reckon your trouble's over."

He helped her off the rock and, finding her unsteady on her feet, he supported her with one arm and held the other out in front of him to feel for objects. Foot by foot they worked out from under the dense shadow of the cliff, following the course of the little brook. It babbled and gurgled, and almost drowned the low whistle Wilson sent out. The girl dragged heavily upon him now, evidently weakening. At length he reached the little open patch at the head of the ravine. Halting here he whistled. An answer came from somewhere behind him and to the right. Wilson waited with the girl hanging on his arm.

"Dale's heah," he said. "An' don't you keel over now—after the nerve you hed."

A swishing of brush; a step; a soft padded footfall; a looming, dark figure and a long, low, gray shape stealthily moving—it was the last of these that made Wilson jump.

"Wilson!" came Dale's subdued voice.

"Heah. I've got her, Dale. Safe an' sound," replied Wilson, stepping toward the tall form. And he put the drooping girl into Dale's arms.

"Bo! Bo! You're all right?" Dale's deep voice was tremulous.

She roused up to seize him and to utter little cries of joy. "Oh, Dale! . . . I'm ready to drop now. . . . Hasn't it been a night—an adventure? . . . I'm well—safe—sound. . . . Dale, we owe it to Jim Wilson."

"Bo, I—we'll all thank him—all our lives," replied Dale. "Wilson, you're a man! . . . If you'll shake that gang —"

"Dale, shore there ain't much of a gang left, unless you let Burt git away," replied Wilson.

"I didn't kill him—or hurt him. But I scared him so I'll bet he's runnin' yet. . . . Wilson, did all the shootin' mean a fight?"

"Tolerable."

"Oh, Dale, it was terrible. I saw it all. I —"

"Wal, miss, you can tell him after I go. . . . I'm wishin' you good luck."

His voice was a cool, easy drawl, slightly tremulous.

The girl's face flashed white in the gloom. She pressed against the outlaw—wringing his hands.

"Heaven help you, Jim Wilson! You are from Texas! . . . I'll remember you—pray for you—all my life!"

Wilson moved away, out toward the pale glow of light under the black pines.

XXI

AS HELEN RAYNER watched Dale ride away on a quest that was perilous to him and that meant almost life or death for her, it was surpassing strange that she

could think of nothing except the thrilling, tumultuous moment when she had put her arms round his neck.

It did not matter that Dale—splendid fellow that he was—had made the ensuing moment free of shame by taking her action as sisterly; the fact that she had actually done it was enough. How utterly impossible for her to anticipate her impulses or to understand them once they were acted upon! Confounding and terrible realization then was that, if Dale returned with her sister, Helen knew she would do the same thing over again!

"If I do I won't be two-faced about it," she soliloquized, and a hot blush flamed her cheeks.

She watched Dale until he rode out of sight. Then worry and dread replaced this other confusing emotion and she turned to the business of meeting events. Before supper she packed her valuables and books, papers and clothes together with Bo's and had them in readiness so if she was forced to vacate the premises she would have her personal possessions.

The Mormon boys and several others of her trusted men slept in their tarpaulin beds on the porch of the ranch house that night, so that Helen at least would not be surprised. But the day came with its manifold duties undisturbed by any event. And it passed slowly with the leaden feet of listening, watching vigilance.

Carmichael did not come back, nor was there news of him to be had. The last known of him had been late the afternoon of the preceding day, when a sheep herder had seen him far out on the north range headed for the hills. The Beemans reported that Roy's condition had improved, and also that there was a subdued excitement of suspense down in the village.

This second lonely night was almost unendurable for Helen. When she slept it was to dream horrible dreams; when she lay awake it was to have her heart leap to her throat at a rustle of leaves near the window and to lie in torture of imagination as to poor Bo's plight. A thousand times Helen said to herself that Beasley could have had the ranch and welcome, if only Bo had been spared.

Daylight was not attended by so many fears; there were things to do that demanded attention. And thus it was that the next morning, shortly before noon, she was recalled to her perplexities by a shouting out at the corrals and a galloping of horses somewhere near. From the window she saw a big smoke.

"Fire! That must be one of the barns—the old one, farthest out," she said, gazing out of the window. "Some careless Mexican with his everlasting cigarette!"

Helen resisted an impulse to go out and see what had happened. She had decided to stay in the house. But when footsteps sounded on the porch and a rap on the door she unhesitatingly opened it. Four Mexicans stood close. One of them, quick as thought, flashed a hand in to grasp her, and in a single motion pulled her across the threshold.

"No hurt Señora," he said, and pointed—making motions she must go.

Helen did not need to be told what this visit meant. Many as her conjectures had been, however, she had not thought of Beasley's subjecting her to this outrage. And her blood boiled.

"How dare you!" she said, trembling in her effort to control her temper. But class, authority, voice availed nothing with these swarthy Mexicans. They grinned.

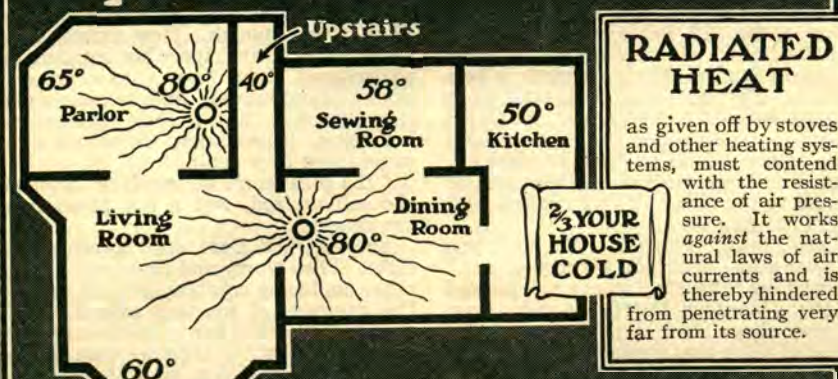
Another one laid hold of Helen with a dirty brown hand. She shrank from the contact.

"Let go!" she burst out furiously. And instinctively she began to struggle to free herself. Then they all laid hold of her. Helen's dignity might never have been! A burning, choking rush of blood was her first acquaintance with the terrible passion of anger that was her inheritance from the Auchinclosses. She who had resolved never



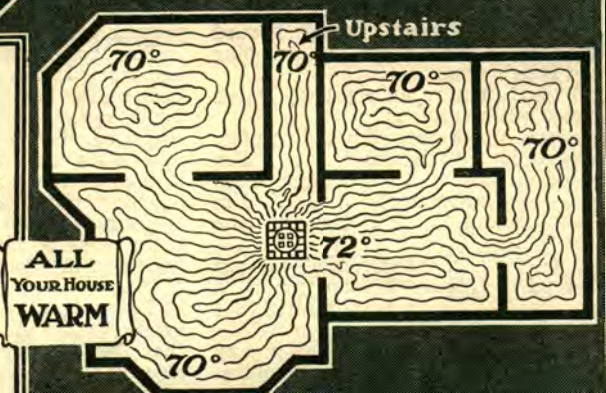
Anson's Aspect Was Wild, His Face Pale. "Did—Ye—See or Hear—Anythin'?" He Panted, Peering Back

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to lay herself open to indignity now fought like a tigress.

The Mexicans, jabbering in their excitement, had all they could do, until they lifted her bodily from the porch. They handled her as if she had been a half-empty sack of corn. One holding each hand and foot they packed her, with dress disarranged and half torn off, down the path to the lane and down the lane to the road. There they stood her upright and pushed her off her property.

Through half-blind eyes Helen saw them, guarding the gateway, ready to prevent her entrance. She staggered down the road to the village. It seemed she made her way through a red dimness; that the distance to Mrs. Cass's cottage was insurmountable. But she got there, to stagger up the path, to hear the old woman's cry. Dizzy, faint, sick, with a blackness enveloping all she looked at, Helen felt herself led into the sitting room and placed in the big chair.

Presently sight and clearness of mind returned to her. She saw Roy, white as a sheet, questioning her with terrible eyes. The old woman hung murmuring over her, trying to comfort her as well as to fasten the disordered dress.

"Four greasers—packed me down—the hill—threw me off my ranch—into the road!" panted Helen.

She seemed to tell this also to her own consciousness and to realize the mighty wave of anger that shook her whole body.

"If I'd known—I would have killed them!"

She exclaimed that, full-voiced and hard, with dry hot eyes on her friends. Roy reached out to take her hand, speaking huskily. Helen did not distinguish what he said. The frightened old woman knelt, with unsteady fingers, fumbling over the rents in Helen's dress. The moment came when Helen's quivering began to subside, when her blood quieted to let reason sway, when she began to do battle with her rage and slowly to take fearful stock of this consuming passion that had been a sleeping tigress in her veins.

"Oh, Miss Helen, you looked so terrible, I made sure you was hurted," the old woman was saying.

Helen gazed strangely at her bruised wrists, at the one stocking that hung down over her shoe top, at the rent that had bared her shoulder to the profane gaze of those grinning, beady-eyed Mexicans.

"My body's not hurt," she whispered.

Roy had lost some of his whiteness and where his eyes had been fierce they were now kind.

"Wal, Miss Nell, it's lucky no harm's done. . . . Now if you'll only see this whole deal clear! . . . Not let it spoil your sweet way of lookin' an' hopin'! If you can only see what's raw in this West—an' love it jest the same!"

Helen only half divined his meaning, but that was enough for a future reflection. The West was beautiful, but hard. In the faces of these friends she began to see the meaning of the keen, sloping lines and shadows of pain, of a lean, naked truth, cut as from marble.

"For the land's sakes, tell us all about it," importuned Mrs. Cass.

Whereupon Helen shut her eyes and told the brief narrative of her expulsion from her home.

"Shore we all expected thet," said Roy. "An' it's jest as well you're here with a whole skin. Beasley's in possession now, an' I reckon we'd all sooner hev you away from thet ranch."

"But, Roy, I won't let Beasley stay there!" cried Helen.

"Miss Nell, shore by the time this here Pine has growed big enough fer law you'll hev gray in thet pretty hair. You can't put Beasley off with your honest an' rightful claim. Al Auchincloss was a hard driver. He made enemies an' he made some he didn't kill. The evil men do lives after them. An' you've got to suffer fer Al's sins, though Al was as good as any man who ever prospered in these parts."

"Oh, what can I do? I won't give up! I've been robbed. Can't the people help me? Must I meekly sit with my hands crossed while that half-breed thief—Oh, it's unbelievable!"

"I reckon you'll jest hev to be patient fer a few days," said Roy calmly. "It'll all come right in the end."

"Roy! You've had this deal, as you call it, all worked out in mind for a long time!" exclaimed Helen.

"Shore, an' I ain't missed a reckonin' yet."

"Then what will happen—in a few days?"

"Nell Rayner, are you goin' to hev some spunk an' not lose your nerve again, or are you goin' to go wild out of your head?" he demanded.

"I'll try to be brave, but—but I must be prepared," she replied tremulously.

"Wal, there's Dale an' Las Vegas an' me fer Beasley to reckon with. An', Miss Nell, his chances fer long life are as pore as his chances fer heaven!"

"But, Roy, I don't believe in deliberate taking of life," replied Helen, shuddering. "I won't allow it. . . . And then think—Dale, all of you in danger!"

"Girl, how're you ever goin' to help yourself? Shore, you might hold Dale back, if you love him, an' swear you won't give yourself to him. . . . But not Dale nor you—nor Bo—nor love can ever stop thet cowboy Las Vegas!"

"Oh, if Dale brings Bo back to me what will I care for my ranch?" murmured Helen.

"Reckon you'll only begin to care when thet happens. Your big hunter has got to be put to work," replied Roy with his keen smile.

Before noon that day the baggage Helen had packed at home was left on the porch of Widow Cass's cottage, and Helen's anxious need of the hour was satisfied. She was made as comfortable as possible in the old woman's one spare room and there she set herself the task of fortitude and endurance.

To her surprise many of Mrs. Cass's neighbors came unobtrusively to the back door of the little cottage and made sympathetic inquiries. They appeared a subdued and apprehensive group, and whispered to one another as they left. Helen gathered from their visits a conviction that the wives of the men dominated by Beasley believed no good could come of this high-handed taking over of the ranch. Indeed Helen found at the end of the day that a real new strength had been born of her misfortune.

The next day Roy informed her that his brother John had come down the preceding night with the news of Beasley's descent upon the ranch.

Not a shot had been fired, he reported, and the only damage done was that of the burning of a hay-filled barn. This had been set on fire to attract Helen's men to one spot, where Beasley had ridden down upon them with three times their number. He had boldly ordered them off the land, unless they wanted to acknowledge him boss and remain there in his service.

The three Beemans had stayed, having planned that just in this event they might be valuable to Helen's interests. Beasley had ridden down into Pine the same as upon any other day. Roy also reported news which had come in that morning, how Beasley's crowd had celebrated the night before.

The second and third and fourth days endlessly wore away; and Helen believed they had made her old. At night she lay awake most of the time, thinking and praying; but during the afternoon she got some sleep. She could think of nothing and talk of nothing except her sister and Dale's chances of saving her.

"Well, shore you pay Dale a pore compliment," finally protested the patient Roy. "I tell you Milt Dale can do anythin' he wants to do in the woods. You can believe thet. . . . But I reckon he'll run chances after he comes back."

This significant speech thrilled Helen with its assurance of hope and made her blood curdle at the implied peril awaiting the hunter.

On the afternoon of the fifth day Helen was abruptly awakened from her nap. The sun had almost set. She heard voices—the shrill cackling notes of old Mrs. Cass, high in excitement; a deep voice that made Helen tingle all over; a girl's laugh, broken but happy. There were footsteps and stamping of hoofs.

Dale had brought Bo back! Helen knew it. She grew very weak and had to fight herself to stand erect. Her heart began to pound in her very ears. A sweet and perfect joy suddenly flooded her soul. Then, suddenly alive with sheer, mad, physical gladness, she rushed out.

She was just in time to see Roy Beeman stalk out as if he had never been shot and with a yell greet a big, gray-clad, gray-faced man—Dale.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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Playing the Red Apple Game

(Concluded from Page 11)

for 1917 the publication of the confidential report. And last season it proved out remarkably well. With only one or two exceptions and with the further exception of perhaps fifteen or twenty of the smaller selling organizations whose cooperation the local government men did not have time personally to solicit, every apple-shipping organization of the Pacific Northwest has cooperated in furnishing detailed information for the 1917 "confidential price bulletin." About 100 copies of this report were being mailed out at the time of my last visit to the Spokane office of the Bureau of Markets.

Everywhere one may see evidence of this confidential market report. "See, I am reading my Bible," said a Seattle apple salesman. Another apple man, on starting for a side trip down to the Rogue River Valley, in Southern Oregon, telegraphed for the prompt forwarding of his confidential apple price list. In Portland an apple salesman, whose organization is not a member of the Fruit Growers' Agency, exhibited his confidential price list and asked:

"Why isn't this real apple cooperation?"

So it is. And, from the layman's viewpoint, one wonders why the apple men can't, in the same spirit, smooth out a lot of their troubles.

"The Fruit Growers' Agency did start out brisk enough," said one apple man. "Last year we spent considerable money in maintaining working headquarters—until our president, Major Paul H. Weyrauch, was called to the colors. This year our nominal membership and our apple tonnage have greatly increased, but—"

"But that's the way we apple men always do," he laughed, in continuing. "There comes a bad apple year, and we resolve and appeal and organize. Then comes a good apple year—and we forget it all. This, you understand, has been a good apple year."

Another apple man told me a story with a moral. He related his experiences in a national organization of specialized business men:

"At first we always elected as our executive officers the men who were most busy with their own business. But we never got results. We never got real results from our organization until we hired a big man to devote all his time—big enough to pull down \$15,000 a year. Then, when there was anything to be done, when we wanted to be heard at Washington, D. C., we had somebody to send."

The apple men realize that they still have a good many big common problems ahead of them. One of the tests of the size of an apple-selling organization is whether it can maintain a special man "to fight the railroads." All the larger agencies have such a man. Yet a single, strong, central traffic bureau could handle many of the common transportation problems, and much more efficiently. Car shortage is a common problem. Often, during the past season, apples in a car have been worth from twenty-five to thirty-five cents a box more than apples not in a car. This season it has been necessary for the apple men to ship a large percentage of their fruit in box cars—adapted with false floors and other changes at a cost of twenty-five to thirty dollars a car, not to mention the expense of sending along attendants to watch the oil heaters that must be kept burning.

Likewise, apple boxes are a common problem. War-labor conditions and the

exceptional demands for the cheaper grades of lumber this year jumped apple-box prices from ten and a half cents to eighteen and twenty cents, and up to twenty-two cents in some sections. Even at this inflated price there was a threatened apple-box famine. It was necessary for state food commissioners to act, to call hasty state and interstate meetings, for they feared a wholesale loss of fruit. There was considerable loss, regardless. Because of this lack of boxes, coupled with the fact of insufficient home-storage capacity in many sections, tons of commercial apples were frozen on the trees. This apple-box mix-up was due quite largely to the lack of complete and reliable crop estimates, and to the fact that the apple men did not send in their orders ahead. The mills could have supplied plenty of boxes in plenty of time had they had a working schedule of orders ahead.

"One of the important things that a good, vigorous organization like the Fruit Growers' Agency could do," said an apple manager to me, "would be to station special men at each of the principal apple valleys of the Northwest to keep up-to-date fruit-crop estimates. Such estimates would be of immense value. They would give us something accurate to work on in getting and in properly distributing our boxes and our cars. And in working our marketing campaigns."

Marketing campaigns! This is the big hope, the ideal ahead of the defenders of the Fruit Growers' Agency. There has been little system in the past in box-apple marketing. The usual method has been to shoot everything to the big cities. But, even here, some of these city markets have not been systematically cultivated and held. The small towns over the United States have been scarcely touched. Figures have been compiled to show that, of the 35,085 towns in the United States of over 3000 population, last year's crop of Northwest box apples was sold in car lots in only 611 of them. In Ohio only ten different towns received direct shipments of Northwest box apples—and Ohio has 117 towns of more than 3000 population.

A few boxes of apples did reach some of these other towns—yes. But not in car lots; which means that the consumer of these apples was forced to pay the added cost of two extra cartages, extra freight and an extra dealer's profit. These items, summed together, totaled probably seventy-five cents a box.

"My hope of the Fruit Growers' Agency," said the manager of one of the largest apple-selling companies, "is that it may grow strong enough to make markets. We need an organization big enough to drop fifty to a hundred cars of our fancy apples in the South—give them away, if necessary, in carrying out a thorough educational campaign. We apple people of the Northwest need an organization strong enough to keep a man in China for a year, if necessary; strong enough to have our man in South America; to establish permanent agents at practically all the gateway ports, in all the big cities of the world in our market-making campaign."

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